

# Weddings, clothes put women on the news pages

Two females made front page news in the *Bloomington Telephone* on Aug. 5, 1911. The entirely different articles probably prompted some heated debates in various households.

A headline, "15-YEAR-OLD GIRL BECOMES A BRIDE," was on top of one story. It began, "There's trouble over the marriage of Miss Mary A. Richardson, of Oolitic, to Ira J. Parker, near Stanford, because the bride is only 15, and a friend, it is said, swore she was 18, and so the license was secured at Bedford."

There was a problem with the law. The *Telephone* helpfully explained that "... the law fixes the age of consent on the part of a girl at sixteen, and provides that a girl must be sixteen before she can be married with the consent of her parents and eighteen before she can enter the matrimonial state without the consent of her parents, yet once married it appears that neither the man nor the girl have violated any law and their marriage is held legal and binding, although the bride may have it set aside on the ground that she is under age."

If the newspaper's readers could have followed that run-on sentence to its conclusion, they would have learned that the person who swore Miss Richardson was chronologically eligible to marry was guilty of perjury. The culprit was Ira Parker's brother-in-law, Cecil



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

Hendrickson.

How could all of this have happened? Mary Richardson took advantage of the absence of her parents. Her father was at work in one of the quarries, and her mother was away from the house picking blackberries. The *Telephone* reported that Mary simply slipped away from the house, which would indicate that she was not coerced into the marriage.

The Richardsons were not resigned to having Parker as a son-in-law. The *Telephone* described what they did next. "Mr. and Mrs. Richardson went to Bedford Wednesday to see what they could do. After a conference with Prosecutor Underwood, it was decided that inasmuch as Parker is immune that Hendrickson should pay penalty, and a warrant was issued for him on a charge of perjury."

The warrant was not served immediately. Apparently, Hendrickson and his wife, who was Parker's sister, were rather hard to find. The *Bloomington Telephone* had lost interest in the story by that time, but it did report on

the back page of the Aug. 17 edition that Hendrickson had been arrested and was in jail at Bedford.

The second story was equally unusual. Ada Wright, age 18, needed to return to Bloomington from St. Louis, Mo., because her mother was ill. The problem was money. As the *Telephone* put it, "Fine clothes and roughing it, or a Pullman sleeper and no clothes?"

The newspaper explained, "She decided in favor of the gorgeous raiment, and in carrying out the last clause of bumming her way to Bloomington, Ind., where her mother lies ill, Wednesday night, was taken in custody when betrayed by her high heels and her mass of light brown hair."

The problem was that Wright worked in a factory that didn't pay very high wages. Continued the *Telephone*, "So, confiding her resolution to no one, she borrowed a pair of blue overalls from her landlady, taking with it a switchman's cap and a black coat. Wednesday, after shipping her new clothes to Bloomington, she put on the man's apparel and started for the North St. Louis railroad yards."

Wright carried a bundle which held a dress and a revolver. But on the way to the railroad yards she encountered a policeman whose name was Dailey.

The giveaway was her feet and her walk. Not only were her feet too small and in high

heels, they were definitely not moving forward in a masculine gait.

Wright tried to enhance her disguise with something else she had brought along with her. Related the *Telephone*, "With elaborate and careless abandon, Ada drew a sack of tobacco and a cigarette paper from her pocket and proceeded to roll a cigarette, thinking to put the tenacious and suspicious patrolman off her track. With a resolute hand she put the cigarette to her mouth, lighted and puffed it."

The whole procedure didn't look very masculine, either. The patrolman walked up to her and grabbed the cap from her head. Her waist-length hair tumbled out and down on her shoulders.

Unrepentant after a night at the police station, Wright said the \$8.43 cents she had in her pocket was for spending money after she got to Bloomington and added, "Besides, the money looks better to me in my pocket book than in the hands of the railroad."

Another surprise awaited her at the police station. When she bought the revolver, she was told that it was loaded. It wasn't.

How did she get home? The *Telephone* neglected to inform its readers of that.

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