

Facts were confused in story of rape in 1907

Readers who take a look at life in Bloomington at the turn of the century may be surprised at some of its aspects. Today, the title "professor" implies that that person teaches at a university or college. Actually, the "Professor" W.O. Bohannon who was accused of raping Nettie Northcott, taught at Bloomington High School in 1907. It was customary for high school teachers to be called professors, too.

Another rather startling thing appearing in the Bloomington *Weekly Courier* of July 12, 1907, was that the young woman's name was published. It is unlikely that once the charge had been made against Bohannon, she had a choice in the matter. Editors of the local newspapers would not have been able to resist the commercial possibilities of printing all of the particulars.

It was certainly so in the Bohannon-Northcott case. No matter that some of the particulars had been so hastily assembled by the reporter that a few essential allegations by the newspaper turned out to be incorrect.



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

Before relating some of the testimony at the preliminary trial of Bohannon, it would be useful to take a look at who the principals were. The "professor" had indeed received his bachelor's degree from Indiana University, where he majored in English and was involved in some activities, including the Married Folks Club.

Nettie Northcott was finishing high school. The 1900 Bloomington city directory indicates that she once lived with her mother and at least one brother on East Second Street, but the *Weekly Courier*, alleged that she and the family lived on Third Street.

As the preliminary trial began on July 16, Bohannon was described in the newspaper

headline as a "Despoiler of a Virtuous Maiden's Honor . . ." Readers may also have recalled that the July 12 edition of the *Weekly Courier* said, "Miss Northcott's story is that Bohannon had represented that he loved her only and that he would get a divorce from his wife and marry her. The two families have been on intimate terms and it is said that Bohannon had paid unusual attention to Miss Northcott, even in the presence of his wife."

In describing the evening of the "rape," Nettie Northcott told the mayor, who was presiding in city court, that she had borrowed Bohannon's fountain pen and went to the IU Library with the intention of meeting him there to return the pen. Later as they strolled through the center of the campus, she alleged that he threw her down three times and then overpowered her. "He ruined me against my will."

She related that she had spent a sleepless night and went to the family doctor the next morning. She continued, "I was advised by my physician to return to the cam-

pus and get some medicine that Bohannon promised to give me. He put the medicine and a note in my umbrella, and I gave them to the doctor. I did this in order to get more evidence against Bohannon."

When J.E. Henley, Bohannon's attorney began cross-examination of Northcott, it was interrupted several times by Ira Batman, who was representing the young woman. The cross-examination revealed that there had been a pattern of meeting between the married man and Northcott, and she admitted, "He seemed to have an influence over me, and my mind was blank so that I could not comprehend the situation. . . . I did not tell him that he ought not to act so. . . . It never occurred to me to scream for help."

As for the medicine, she told the mayor, "The night of July 8th, he promised to bring me some medicine. He told me not to take the medicine at once as it would kill me, and he would get the directions later, so that I could take it in safety."

Next week: The conclusion of the case.

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