

Honeymoon in Omaha

By the Nebraska State Historical Society

“No other department in the court house offers such an excellent field for the study of human nature as the marriage license bureau,” wrote an observant Omaha Daily Bee reporter on Jan. 10, 1900, “and the man who issues the permits to wed has opportunity to observe the grave, the gay, the poor, the rich, the cultured, the uncouth, and, in fact, every type of humanity.” The reporter’s observations are of particular interest during June, a month traditional for weddings.

The Bee noted, “A man with ordinary talent for observation and who has had a few months’ court house experience can spot a marriage license purchaser half a block away.” The prospective groom “invariably displays awkwardness as he announces his business.

Women who appear at the marriage license bureau are not nearly so bashful nor so awkward as the men. Women as a rule have a sort of a well-what-are-you-going-to-do-about-it manner of appearing before the license clerk.”

Marriage license applicants, noted the reporter, seemed preoccupied with their appearance: “The average young man will rub his hands over his hair, and the women make an effort to straighten their hats.” Women had another concern: “When it comes to revealing the secret of her age, most young women object. But the marriage license clerk tells them that it is an official requirement, and rather than forgo matrimonial bliss they blushing respond.

“In the matter of age, some queer unions take place. Only a few days ago a beardless boy of 23 secured license to marry a woman whose age was given as 46. They came from a town in the interior of the state. The young man made no explanation of his strange choice—they seldom do explain in such cases. The clerk issued the license as though 46 and 23 were lucky numbers. The young man was flashily dressed, and his bright new Christmas necktie and his shining tan gloves proclaimed him the dude of the town whence he came.”

The Bee noted that Omaha was a popular destination for marrying couples: “Many young persons, and not a few old ones, living in remote parts of this and adjoining states, fancy that it adds to the happiness of the occasion to have the marriage take place in a big town, therefore they come to Omaha.

This class of seekers after matrimony usually have the ceremony performed by the county judge, and thus save themselves the trouble of wandering about the city in search of a minister. After they are married they generally take the first train back home, and the villagers accredit them with having enjoyed the luxury of a bridal tour.”