

Griffiths - Wright Divorce in 1914

When I saw it printed in the Monroe Evening Times on Friday, October 30, 1914 that E. J. Griffiths and his wife had taken separate vacations and arrived home on the noon train that day after three weeks away, I didn't think anything about it. He had made a trip through the East stopping in New York and other points of interest. She had spent the time in St. Paul with her son, Wilson Wright.

The next day Nettie S. Griffiths filed for divorce claiming cruel and inhuman treatment with instances cited in detail. Her son, Colin W. Wright, was a practicing attorney in St. Paul, who with N. O. Barnum, of Hudson, Wisconsin, represented her. Mrs. Griffiths and Colin closed the home on 10th Street and left for St. Paul on Sunday morning. Mr. Griffiths moved his personal effects to the Ludlow Hotel, expressing his hope "that the matter would be fully righted." He said that, "the trouble was due to financial matters in which the son was interested." More was revealed later about this relationship that would enlighten readers.

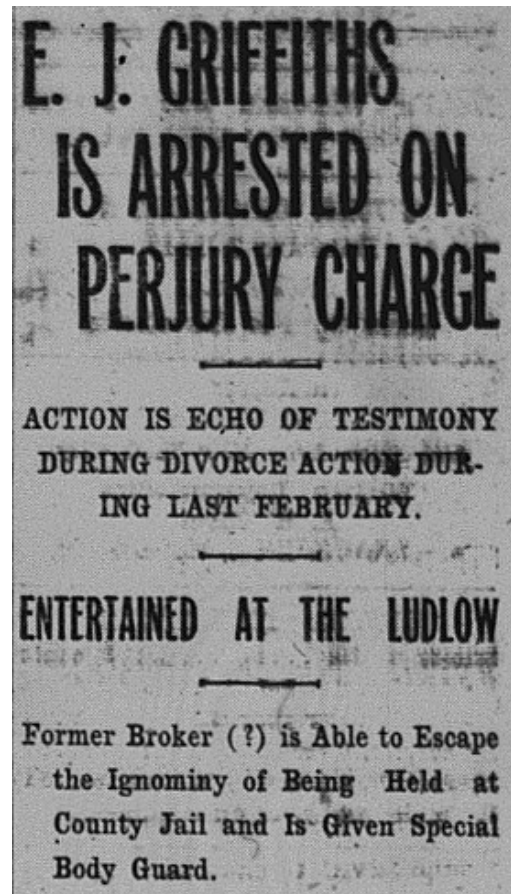
The couple had only been married two years. After their marriage, they only spent time in the Monroe home for brief intervals because they traveled much. They had recently returned from a long stay in California. They were old friends, having grown up in Mineral Point. "Mr. Griffiths, since he came here, always represented himself as a man of means and much real estate."

On November 27, Mr. Griffiths was questioned by the plaintiff before Judge Becker about his past life, means of livelihood, and his financial condition at the time. Griffiths admitted that this was his fourth marriage having divorced his previous wife only five days before this marriage, even though he had been "paying attention" to Mrs. Griffiths for six months. Although he was "uneasy in the witness stand while being sharply prodded, he exhibited little embarrassment, but was short on memory and long on explanation." He was unable to state his income within thousands of dollars and was positive that he had no money at the time.

He had borrowed \$7,700 from his wife, including \$1,000 before they were married, and had none left. All of this money was gone, in addition to \$7,000 of his own, that was spent on living and travel since they were married. He also claimed that he gave her numerous gifts, including diamonds. He had originally represented himself to be worth \$135,000 with an annual income of \$10,000. However, Mr. Griffiths testified he had less than \$100 in money and no property." It was also revealed that Griffiths had been involved in four personal injury suits from which he realized from \$100 to \$350 for each case.

This "case was carried to peaceful settlement in circuit court" at 5:00 p.m. on February 17, 1915. An agreement was reached in a closed session and finalized in open court. Judge Grimm ordered Griffiths to pay \$7,799.12, being the money he had borrowed from her. He said that he would "make an effort to satisfy the judgment in installments." Her former name, Mrs. Nettie Wright, was restored.

News of the settlement did not reach the public until 10:00 the next morning when the case was to be tried. "Interested people of the city began to appear in corridors of the court house and lost no time in seeking the choice seats in the court room. The room was well filled before the news spread through the crowd, and disappointment was not concealed as people left the building."



This was the headline in the Monroe Evening Times on December 8, 1915. Edward J. Griffiths must have been a charming con man who met his match, Nettie Wright, from Monroe.

Mr. Griffiths was escorted back to Monroe from Chicago by Sheriff Matt Solbraa on Tuesday evening, February 7. He was being charged with perjury, having said that he had no money to pay the settlement. It was found that he had money in the Illinois Trust & Savings Bank in Chicago.

“Griffiths is a gentleman prisoner. Far be it from him to be detained in durance vile, if he can prevent it. Sheriff Solbraa, instead of taking him to jail and permitting him to view the world from behind the bars, as would have been the fate of the ordinary mortal, charged with a similar offense, entertained him last evening until the midnight hour. Then I. M. Stauffacher consented to leave his comfortable home and sleep at the Ludlow with Griffiths as his personal charge.” The sheriff defended the holding of Griffiths at the Ludlow by stating that the upper part of the jail was filled and painters were at work in the lower section. Chicago relatives telegraphed money for bonds and Griffiths was released the following Wednesday.

During the time Griffiths was in jail, two summons were served against him. Minnie Wolff sought to recover the \$800 she had loaned the “stock broker.” Her husband, Professor Henry C. Wolff, was also “expected to prove the first move in an alienation of affection suit.”

On Monday night, February 15, Griffiths “safely crossed the state line into Illinois and was able to make connection with a train which will carry him back to his home in a suburb of Chicago. The trip from Monroe to Orangeville was made in a high-powered automobile.” Griffiths had been shocked to see Professor Wolff in the courtroom that day and told the sheriff that he felt that Wolff intended to get him! However, Wolff had paid no attention to Griffiths.

“Griffiths at least deserves to have the public informed that he paid his own hotel bill and the extra expense which was incurred while he was under special guard.” The editor added, “It is expected the lesson taught Griffiths in Monroe will be a valuable one - he is not yet too old to learn.”

I saw nothing more in the newspapers about Griffiths, but Nettie Wright passed away at the age of 64 on July 31, 1923. She died at the home of her brother, Dr. Homer Sylvester, in Madison and was buried in Greenwood Cemetery next to her husband, Colin W. Wright, three days later.