

Ralph Kerwinieo, One of Milwaukee's Most Charming Women

Forgotten Stories has blogged before about a same sex marriage in the 1850's (see here: <https://forgottenstories.net/2012/04/16/americas-first-same-sex-marriage/>). The story of Cora Anderson, alias Ralph Kerwinieo popped across our radar screens the other day, and given yesterday's announcement, we felt obliged to share it.



Cora Anderson told Idah M'Glone Gibson the difficulties she and her roommate had borne when they finished nursing school in 1902. "As girls working outside the home we had been subject to all sorts of overtures from all kinds and conditions of men...We wanted to live honest lives and become respected citizens of the community."

So, Cora came up with a solution. "If I assumed men's clothes, I would be better able to obtain work, and as a 'man' I could protect my 'wife' from insult. The compact we entered into as unthinkly as most marriages are." Well, the masquerade went off without a hitch. Cora and her purported wife, Marie White, set up themselves up in Cleveland, Ohio, where Cora, styling herself Ralph Kerwinieo, went to work as a bellboy at the Hollenden Hotel. A few years later, they decamped to Milwaukee, and Ralph took a job at the Plankinton Hotel. "We furnished our little flat" said Ralph, "and to the world we were Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Kerwinieo."

"In a short time, I thought of myself as a man, and it never entered my mind that I was any different than the men around me with whom I laughed, joked, worked, and played my part." Yet, it seems she played her part a little too well for Marie Smith/Mrs. Kerwinieo. Her husband began spending time in barber shops, and pool rooms. News of occasional flirtations with other women reached her. Ralph grew coarse in his language.

Then, in late 1913, after 11 years of presenting themselves to the world as Kerwinieos, things came to a head. At a dance hall during a night out with the boys, Ralph met Dorothy Kienowski, very pretty and very blonde. "It was love at first sight on my part" said Dorothy, "and we became engaged. I grew tired of the life at home and told Ralph he must marry me at once or it was all off...he went out and procured the [marriage certificate] and we were married by Edward J. Burke, justice of the peace."

This did not sit too well with Marie White, and she decided to reveal the truth about Ralph. As Ralph told it, "Miss Marie White told my employer my secret in revenge for my leaving the house, but my employer was game and never gave the story away for two months – not until Miss White, finding my employer was not going to do anything, tipped it off to the police." A complaint was filed for disorderly conduct, and Cora Anderson found herself brought before Judge Page.



Both sides presented many witnesses, but the highlight of the trial happened when the bench questioned the arresting officer:

Page: "While in male attire, how did she act?"

Policeman: "Like a perfect gentlemen."

Laughter ensued. A few hours later, the Judge allowed Cora to go free, with an order that she wear women's clothes in the future.

"I am determined to stand by him and be his chum, even if I couldn't be his



wife." said Dorothy.

Above we have Cora/Ralph as a man and as a women. The wives are below, with Marie to the left, and Dorothy to the right. Consensus here t Forgotten Stories is that Dorothy is kind of cute. Ralph had good taste.

