

"Married When Unconscious?"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

Carroll's judicial history is liberally sprinkled with interesting court cases. A simple charge of non-support against a recently married husband in 1921 resulted in a novel defense as reported in the December 23, 1921 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"MARRIED WHEN UNCONSCIOUS

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GEORGE W. OWINGS TO ANSWER NON-SUPPORT CHARGE — UNAWARE OF HIS WEDDING—
THE BRIDE, MISS BLUM, DENIES MR. OWINGS' CHARGES

At the present term of the Circuit Court for Carroll county George W. Owings, a hospital attendant, was indicted on a charge of non-support of his wife, Clara Blum Owings. He has not as yet been tried, but out of his indictment has come one of the most novel suits ever docketed in this State.

By his attorneys, Bond & Parks, Owings has filed in the Equity court, a bill of complaint asking for annulment of the marriage. The bill alleges that, without Owings' knowledge or consent, Clara Helen Blum in person procured the marriage license from the Clerk of the Circuit Court for Carroll county; that Owings at that time was visiting at the home of George A. Shipley, a retired farmer, near this city, that he was called in the night on July 25 last, by the brothers of Miss Blum and other persons, who demanded that he go with them to marry her; that he refused and tried to escape; that they seized him and struck him on the head with some metal implement, rendering him unconscious; that he did not recover or realize what was going on until he found himself near midnight at Westminster in an automobile, and was informed that he had been married to Miss Blum; that afterwards he was informed that her brothers and other parties accompanying them had conveyed him and Miss Blum in two automobiles to Westminster, where Rev. R. N. Edwards, pastor of Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, performed the marriage ceremony; that he was then taken from Westminster toward Miss Blum's home, but on the way managed to escape; that he has never in any way ratified the marriage nor lived with Miss Blum as her husband.

Mrs. Owings, by her attorneys, Theodore F Brown and Edward O. Weant, has filed her answer denying all the allegations of the bill of complaint except as to the fact of the marriage. She declares that she procured the license at the request of Owings: that the marriage was entered into in accordance with an engagement existing for several months, that the marriage was the free and voluntary act of Owings, and that after the ceremony they went to her home, where they spent the night; that the next day her husband left home, promising to return on the following Wednesday, saying he was going to his work in Baltimore county; but that since that time he has refused to discharge his marital obligations, and has brought the suit for annulment for the purpose of evading them.

The county marriage license records show that Miss Blum did procure the license, giving the groom's age as 28 years and her own as 21. The clergyman who performed the ceremony says he noticed nothing of an unusual character attending the directors."

The Owings case was tried in February 1922 and the results were briefly reported in the February 23rd issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"The February term of the Circuit Court for Carroll county, opened Monday with Chief Judge William H. Thomas on the bench.

The first case called was that of George W. Owings vs. Clara Blum Owings, tried before Judge Thomas; the verdict was for Mrs. Owings, Mr. Owings sued for the annulment of his marriage to Miss Clara H. Blum, who he was married to by Rev. R. N. Edwards, pastor of Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church on July 25. The Court refused his petition and also found a verdict against him for non-support. Weant & Brown represented defendant; Bond & Parke for plaintiff."

Photo caption: The Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church in Westminster was the scene of a 1921 wedding that resulted in a novel court case. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.