

CLERICAL CARPENTER TO MARRY COL. ASTOR

New York Times

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Rev. Mr. Straight of Providence, R. I., Pauses in Housebuilding to Undertake the Job

VISITED BY ASTOR LAWYER

All Arrangements Said to Have Been Made for a Ceremony at Newport---Colonel and Fiancee Sail

Special to The New York Times

PROVIDENCE, R. I., Sept. 8--After days of effort, during which most of the clergyman of Rhode Island who still marry divorced persons have been canvassed, Richard B. Comstock, attorney, has succeeded in finding a minister who has expressed willingness to marry Col. John Jacob Astor to Miss Madeleine Force. This minister says that arrangements have been made for him to go to Newport to-morrow and that the marriage will take place there.

Col. Astor and Miss Force left New York to-day on the yacht Noma, supposedly for Robbins Island, but the opinion here is that the yacht is really bound for Newport.

The clergyman who is willing to perform the Astor marriage and who is believed here to have been selected to do this is the Rev. Edwin S. Straight, who at one time was pastor of a Free Baptist church in Warren, but at present works at the carpentering trade, but picks up an odd dollar occasionally by performing ministerial duties. In the course of his search for a clergyman to marry his client Mr. Comstock found Mr. Straight, and last Tuesday evening had a conference with him at his home, 74 Dodge Street. On the following day the Rev. Mr. Straight called upon Mr. Comstock. Evidently, however, there were difficulties, for upon returning home Mr. Straight declared that he was afraid he would not be able to perform the ceremony. Just what the hitch was is not known, but it must have been straightened out, for last evening shortly after 8 o'clock Mr. Comstock again visited the Dodge Street residence in an automobile and everything was arranged.

This morning the carpenter-minister declared that all was in readiness for the ceremony, and that he was to leave Providence at 7:30 to-morrow morning for Newport to officiate at the nuptials.

In the last few days Mr. Comstock has been a frequent visitor at the City Hall, and each time his attention has been centred in the Marriage Bureau. This morning he was seen scurrying about the corridors of the building, and it was learned later that he had spent some time with Dr. Eugene P. King, the Assistant Superintendent of Health, discussing Section 22 of the marriage laws of Rhode Island.

This section is the one which provides that in case of a marriage being performed by a person professing to have a license to join persons in marriage, the said marriage shall not be declared void because of lack of jurisdiction on the part of the person performing the ceremony. It also provides that such a marriage shall be perfectly valid, providing that it is lawful in other respects and has been performed with a full belief on the part of the persons so married, or either of them, that they have been lawfully joined in marriage.

This bears directly upon the conditions under which the Rev. Mr. Straight would have to perform the Astor ceremony. Dr. Straight receives his official authority to perform marriages from a town outside Providence, in which he is registered. He has no registration in this city. Some time ago he came to Providence, and it is asserted that his removal from the town of his registration of itself canceled his authority to marry outside that town. Mr. Straight, however, went to the City Hall this afternoon and registered so that he would be legally qualified to perform the ceremony. Any person who shall solemnize a marriage in this State without being properly qualified is subject to a fine of \$500.

Meantime the long-sought clergyman pursues the even tenor of his way, undisturbed by the fact that the eyes of the whole country may be tuned upon him within the next twenty-four hours. Early this morning he went to his daily work as usual and spent part of the day sawing boards for a dwelling on which he has been working at Hampden Meadows.

Mr. Straight is 83 years old, and it was for four or five years in the 70's that he occupied a pastorate. He then went into the building business with John Champlin under the firm name of Straight & Champlin in East Providence, where he lived for many years. For the last twenty years he has been strongly interested in spiritualism, and up to two years ago addressed meetings of that sect. The idea of officiating [sic] at weddings and funerals was suggested to him several years ago, after the death of the Rev. Charles H. Plummer, who was known as the "marrying parson of Providence."

Mr. Plummer got most of the couples who came from out of town, and married many Chinamen to American girls. Some one suggested to Mr. Straight that it might be a good idea for him to get some of that business. Since that time he has been ready to perform wedding ceremonies. He has no scruples against marrying Mr. Astor and Miss Force, and believes that it will be the best job he has had. Because of the close attentions of reporters he left his home in Dodge Street to-night and went to spend the night with a relative.

Courtesy of Mark Baber

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