

RENO TO STICK BY GUNS ON ITS DIVORCE MILLS

Unmoved by Idaho's Bid for Business.

BY ARTHUR EVANS.

[Chicago Tribune Press Service.]

Reno, Nev., March 11.—[Special.]—The sun never sets on Reno divorces. Persons come here from all parts of the civilized world, and with that comforting thought the chamber of commerce here, flanked by the lawyers, today formally opposed a cut in Nevada's 6 weeks' divorce residence to meet the competition of Idaho, regarded here as a brazen, cheeky interloper upon an established business. Idaho recently cut the residence rule from three months to six weeks.

In the "divorce colony" here to establish a 6 weeks' residence, Reno normally has between 400 and 500 visitors, depending on the season. They are the best spending part of this delightful community in which they have come to reside "permanently," but many with return tickets home in their pockets.

In the telephone book are some 130 lawyers. Almost all handle divorce cases. Leading attorneys say 90 per cent of them depend on the divorce mills for most of their income.

Dozen Get Big Business.

The crème de la crème of the business, however, the big fee and upper crust stuff, goes to less than a dozen lawyers. These have built up connections in New York, California, and other states, and the high pay cases are shot their way. Its similar to the banking business with correspondent banks in the big cities.

The bar association recommends a minimum fee of \$250. If this were in actual practice, it would yield \$750,000 on last year's crop of 3,000 divorces, which if split equally among 125 lawyers would give each an average of \$6,000. But it does not work out with that arithmetical precision. Some cases are taken by young lawyers for \$50 and \$100; some big shots sometimes handle a case for nothing and make it up on the big customers with fees of \$15,000, \$20,000 and higher. "Its like the medical profession," they say.

While some 125 lawyers get the divorces, 52 beauty shops keep the divorcées and the townfolk in form.

About 65 Pct. Are Women.

Leading legal lights estimate that the average age of the divorce seekers is between 28 and 32. About 65 per cent are women, though some lawyers guess it is higher, perhaps 75 per cent.

In most cases, they affirm, it is the first divorce. There are, of course repeaters, habitual divorce seekers. Reno says most of its undesirable ad-

Wins a Divorce

Mrs. Dorothy Todd Williams smiled as she was awarded divorce in court yesterday.

[TRIBUNE Photo.]



Mrs. Dorothy Todd Williams, 23 years old, 4228 Congress street, was granted a divorce from Alex Williams yesterday on the ground of desertion. He left her, she charged, on April 4, 1932, only a week after their marriage. The decree was granted by Judge Philip J. Finnegan in Circuit court.

vertising comes from about 2 per cent, and that the rest of the "colony" lives like the rest of the community and is a welcome addition during the six-weeks' stay.

Some of them go fishing and hunting; some of the wealthy rent expensive homes and live in luxury; some bury themselves under assumed names and live in rooms in the 41 apartment houses here.

The Riverside hotel, finest between Salt Lake City and Sacramento is well filled during the season.

About Living Costs.

Living costs in Reno suit all purses; some get along on \$25 or \$50 a week. About \$100 a week is regarded as a comfortable average, although the silver dollars with which one is loaded down here seem to have faster wings than paper money.

Life on the dude ranches is the favorite with a large part of the colony. They scatter to places like the Monte Cristo, the Olinghouse Dude, the Olds, and the Pyramid to the north, and the Flying N., the Mount Rose, the Washoe Pines, Deadman's and Stevenson's to the south, and elsewhere, where there is riding, motoring, hiking and hill climbing in the sparkling sunshine.

Some of them work, and citizens report cases of well to do men serving as truck drivers to while away the hours. Then there is the legalized open gambling for those who

care for it, and a night life in Reno in a lurid display of Neon signs that blaze like downtown Chicago.

All Part of Civic Build-Up.

The click of the roulette wheels and the whir of the 460 slot machines echo through the town. It's all part of the civic build up, so to speak, to give divorce seekers, tourists and visiting miners, lumberjacks, and ranchers a chance at the more abundant life.

Leading citizens say local folk don't go in much for the gambling, but they seem to be around in numbers in the clubs, and the whole setup with its frontier "live as you please spirit" seems to have developed as part of the Reno divorce mill plant. So here, after yesterday's early perturbation, they are not fearing competition from Boise, Idaho, not even if it throws in as an added attraction a glimpse of Senator William E. Borah, defender of the constitution and "lion of Idaho."

But its a 20,000 city of great contrasts. It has 13 or 17 well filled churches, fine schools and 1,100 university students, and it has 20 well filled gambling joints, often with people three deep around the tables.

Yet there is no rowdiness. Noisiest thing in town is the Truckee river, named after the Indian guide for the Fremont party in 1844, on its 70 mile tumble from Tahoe into pyramid and the steam shovel shoving boulders out of the river for a new bridge.

Has 53 Bars.

For the hungry there are 44 restaurants and for the thirsty 53 bars, but some bars report more soft drinks are sold here than in an ordinary 40,000 city.

Statistical facts, beyond some of the surface ones, are hard to get with accuracy. Between government fig-

ures and the experience of men in the divorce industry there is wide discrepancy. Most of the persons marry again—that's the chief reason they seek Reno. Lawyers say alimony as ordinarily known is a small factor, but where there is property, a settlement generally is made. The courts have an air of ultra delicacy about this—exhibits, such as property settlements may on demand be sealed. Publicity, too, is reduced to a minimum. On demand, cases are heard behind closed doors; spectators and reporters are chased out.

If there is no contest and the defendant is willing to have a formal appearance entered for him, the case can be heard and determined immediately upon the expiration of the six weeks' period. In uncontested cases with no formal appearance entered the time required is six weeks plus thirty days after service of papers.

One Up on Florida.

No corroborating evidence in uncontested cases is required, and here Nevada says it is one up on Florida:

The great cause cited is "extreme cruelty." Of 3,998 divorces in 1932, "extreme cruelty" was charged in 2,767 cases. Desertion and neglect to provide were other main causes. Of 1,519 divorces granted to husbands, none charged adultery, of 2,479 to wives, only five charged adultery.

The government reports say that of 3,989 divorces granted in 1932 in Nevada, 2,277 were contested and 1,712 were uncontested. Lawyers here say this is all wrong and the figures apparently include formal appearances. The great bulk, perhaps 80 to 90 per cent is uncontested, they affirm—it's a chief reason for divorce by the quickest route, they say, to get out of an unhappy marriage and settle down with a new partner. And out here, they will argue by the hour

that Nevada in its handling of the subject is years ahead of other states.

As to the duration of the marriages dissolved by the courts here, the greatest number is after the four year period. Out of the 3,989 divorces in 1932, 2,745 were given persons who had been married more than four years.

The Wedding Ring Story.

Sad, the lawyers say, are the cases of many in the 40's, and pathetic are many of those who come here to break up a quarter century and more of the marital relation. In the boarding houses are sad faced men and women, not the kind that kiss the pillars of Washoe's copper domed

courthouse and smear them with lipstick after getting a divorce, or toss the old wedding ring into the brawling Truckee at the Virginia street bridge.

At one time the Truckee was supposed to hold more wedding rings than the dogs of Venice ever threw into the sea at the wedding of the Adriatic. Leading citizens now say both the kisses and the rings have become myths. A photographer, they say, recently, to get a picture of this ceremony, bought up rings at the 5 and 10 store and got some girls to pose as ring tossers. It's swell advertising, some affirm.