

At night Virginia Street, the main stem, tries to live up to the city's famous slogan.

# SEPARATION CENTER

Each year people from every state in the Union flock to Reno, some to be parted from their spouses, others merely from their dollars

by **FRED SCHWED, JR.**

WHEN A PERSON SAYS "RENO," he may be referring to a small city where more than thirty thousand people live and work; or to "Reno," a word with a special meaning which is understood wherever the English language is spoken and in most cases where it is not.

Reno—the Place—is dramatically situated. A parched desert, beautiful and terrible and lifeless, stretches for hundreds of miles to its east; and only two miles to its west rise the sheer green slopes of the Sierra Nevadas, with their mountain flowers, deer, and fine trout streams. Reno—the Word—is not a place at all. It is the prefix in Mr. Winchell's words "renobound" and "renovated." It is used in unpleasant conversations that begin, "I tell you, I simply cannot stand it any longer."

The good citizens of Reno lead a somewhat schizophrenic existence. They live in an at-

tractive town which is full of things to be proud of. They also performe live with the word "Reno." They owe their fame to that word, and the respectability of that word is much debated. Without the word, their city could not be much known or pondered by the other people of the earth. They would enjoy the unenjoyable privacy of other American places of similar dimensions.

It is divorce, naturally, that has chiefly made Reno internationally famous. Yet for the visitor it is the least striking phenomenon, simply because it is mostly invisible. Applicants for divorce look the same as other people. If you occasionally see a woman weeping into her beer it may be because her decree is going to be granted tomorrow, or was turned down, or it may be for any of the other divers reasons that women weep.

Though mostly invisible, divorce in Reno is not inaudible. You do not have to be in the

city long before some lady will divulge a round-by-round recital of all that led up to the unhappy event. Partly she will be under the pitiful illusion that nothing like this ever happened to anyone before, and that therefore it is interesting; partly it is a restatement, to herself, that she was not to blame. Women who have somebody eagerly waiting to marry them are understandably more serene than the others. (Men apply for divorce, too, but rarely. Few men can take the time off. But sometimes, for emotional or other reasons, it seems wiser for the man to apply, since his wife might not go through with it, perhaps at the last minute.)

Nevada's first requirement for divorce is what lawyers smugly refer to as a "legal fiction": six weeks' steady residence in Nevada, attested to, honestly enough, by a witness who is paid five dollars so to attest. After this a

*Photographs by Ernest Kleinberg*



**1** Bonnie Richardson and wealthy New Yorker William Richardson decided to part amicably after nearly ten years of marriage (and two children). Her decree required six lawyers and \$4700.

mild sort of perjury is committed when the applicant mumbles, in reply to the judge's mumble, that she does intend to continue residence in Nevada. The whole thing is much less a question of *how* you lived with your spouse during your married years than *where* you lived during the last forty-two days.

Reno divorces are most frequently granted on the grounds of mental cruelty. Typical statements made by divorce seekers include, "He was rude to my mother," and, "When he went away on his trips he would never take me along." These trifling complaints are common because there is no necessity for stronger testimony. The only real point at issue is "residence," and that, of course, Nevada makes easy.

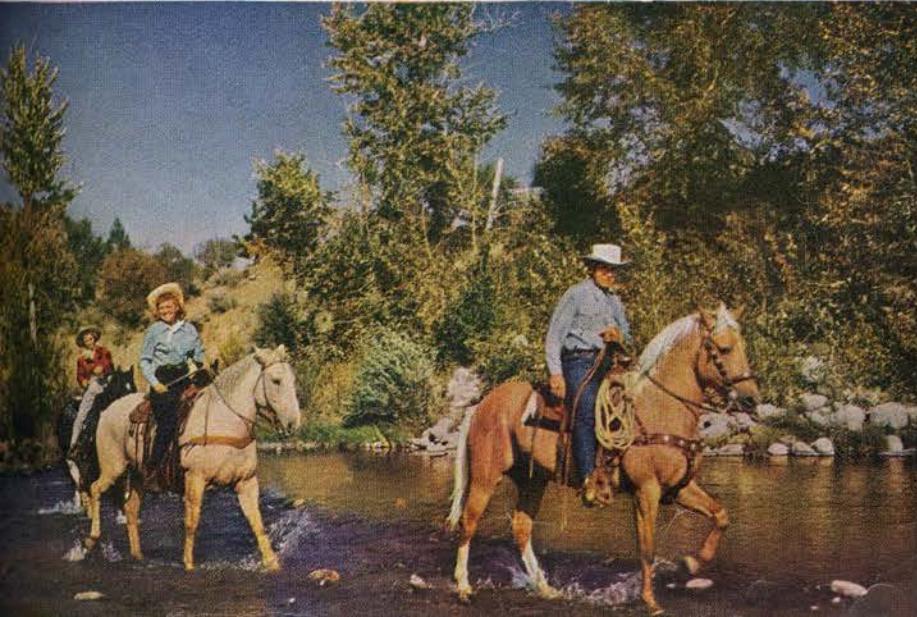
(Continued on Page 101)



**2** Bonnie arrived stylishly in Reno by luxury air liner and was greeted warmly by friends.

Bonnie Richardson takes "the cure" the easy way—with all expenses paid by her "ex"

**3** Bonnie stayed at Jack Fugitt's Donner Trail Ranch, where, for \$100 a week, she got meals, cocktails around the fire at sundown, and trail riding.



**4** Gambling is possible almost anywhere in Reno, at gaming houses, night clubs, bars, even drugstores. Bonnie tries roulette in a hotel.





**5** Reno offers ample diversion for divorce seekers, a policy calculated more for profit than altruism. Here Bonnie dances with a local cattle heir.



**6** Day before the divorce of one of his guests becomes final, Jack Fugitt throws a cocktail-and-dinner party. This was Bonnie's "graduation night."

It's all over after six weeks in Reno (at about \$1200) and ten minutes in court



**7** After "graduation party" Bonnie, in her huge, canopied bed at Donner Trail Ranch, writes to her children—Billy, aged eight, and Pamela, six.



**8** Following a brief visit to court, Bonnie is handed her decree by Clerk Harry K. Brown. He and another clerk record about 10,500 decrees a year.

(Continued from Page 99) However, Nevada divorces are not invariably iron-clad. The ramifications of divorce laws and the situations that may result from divorce are so complex that it is bootless for one layman to attempt explaining them to another. A fairly safe generalization is that if your spouse does not object to your obtaining a divorce you have a much better chance than if your spouse does object. But even then you are not on certain ground because of conflicting state laws. Mr. Justice Black of the United States Supreme Court once pronounced: ". . . a divorced person's liberty . . . hinges on his ability to guess at what may ultimately be the legal and factual conclusions resulting from the consideration of two of the most uncertain word symbols in all the judicial lexicon, *jurisdiction* and *domicile*."

#### The Drama of Divorce

It surprises most visitors to learn what a tiny part of Reno's population at any given time comprises divorce applicants. (Three times as many marriages are performed yearly, as Reno folk are quick to tell you. Reno is a mighty easy place to get married, which is yet another of her many allurements.) Every day a new crop of six-week "residents" matures. The great majority of these, despite their testimony to the contrary, then get out of town like so many whippets. This is no reflection on the charms and hospitality of the city; there are more than a few permanent and happy residents who found the community only because they came there for divorces. But in general, the divorced, especially the women, are not good Reno boosters. A person's memories of a locality are formed only to a limited extent by the scenery, climate and accommodations. You can have a peach of a time on a sand bar in the right company. By the same token, not many women who were divorced in Reno remember the city with fondness. A divorce, even when it is eagerly sought, is still the formal recording of a personal catastrophe.

I shall not soon forget a little pageant in which I had an unheroic part. Harry the Cowhand (who runs a dude ranch) and I were escorting a pretty young woman on the last hundred yards of her first marriage. It was the late lunch hour; Virginia Street, the main drag, was crowded, and in the pitiless sunlight which was bouncing off the pavements it suddenly became apparent that our charming charge was about to burst out crying. While I was desperately trying to imagine what Ronald Colman would do in such a situation, I heard Harry take over.

"Come on, pigeon," he said out of the corner of his mouth, as though he were talking to a well-beloved but extremely fractious filly, "blow your nose. Remember our motto: 'Tis better to have loved and lost—than never to have been a guest at Pyramid Lake Ranch."

This and a few similar endearments rallied her across the Truckee River, past the drugstores full of slot machines, and up the easy slope of the courthouse steps. But in the vaulted lobby it looked as though another collapse were imminent.

"What a coincidence!" exclaimed Harry, registering stage astonishment. "Right there is a long-distance telephone! Call up your old man and tell him you just changed your mind."

At that moment her lawyer arrived in the brisk manner which is proper for these melancholy occasions. In five minutes, without any unsightly waterworks, she was a "free woman"—whatever that means.

She did not kiss the courthouse pillar or throw her wedding ring into the river, or even momentarily consider doing either. (Neither do most other women, without a press agent's encouragement.)

Divorce applicants mostly live in boardinghouses, and the more affluent live on dude ranches; but there is confusion about these terms. A boardinghouse which is right in town cannot call itself anything fancier than a boardinghouse, but many of the boardinghouses at the edge of town call themselves ranches, though they have little more resemblance to what Easterners think of as a ranch than to a subway station. Some of them are pleasant enough places; they're just not ranches.

By whatever name, the most important element is incalculable in advance—what sort of people are going to be there during your particular six weeks? A lone neurotic person—if neurotic enough—can considerably sour up a whole houseful of pleasanter people. There is a sign of quiet eloquence posted in the living room of one of the ranches. It reads: Why Be Difficult—When With a Little More Effort You Can Be Impossible?

The question is often asked: What is a woman to do with forty-two days, completely wrenched out of the normal routine of her life? The answers are various.

A few, a very few, behave terribly, and usually are, as the old song states, "more to be pitied than censured." For collateral reading on this point see certain Sunday newspaper supplements.

Some play gin rummy half around the clock. Some find a congenial group of women similarly situated and form warm six-week friendships. A few find a congenial man. Some take six-week courses at the University of Nevada and improve their educations.

#### Ways to Forget

Others take the Scenic Tour, or visit San Francisco in a tearing hurry. (You have to be back in Nevada by midnight the next day or the six weeks is all to do over again.) Some who can afford it (and who are gaited that way) ride and swim and tour and dance and gamble and go to night clubs and cocktail parties and have a dizzy time of it indeed.

Many must get jobs to pay expenses. Being a waitress is a good job because it can be started and stopped promptly. But a headier employment, if you can qualify, is being a "shill" in a gaming room. This means pretending to be a real player, but actually playing with money the house supplies. Not many real players like to start gambling at an empty table, so each shill is supplied with fifteen dollars to start. If she loses it she goes to the



**9** Affixing of white corsage on the courthouse steps means it's all over. And Bonnie, like all new divorcees, feels the inevitable emotional wrench.

**10** Two hours after she has solemnly affirmed in a Nevada court her intention "to become a permanent resident of the State of Nevada and to reside therein," Bonnie Richardson enplanes for New York via Hollywood. Ranchman Jack Fugitt, her host and witness (he testified to seeing her at least once every day for six weeks) sends her aloft with a farewell kiss.





**1** Bunny (Donna Rebecca) Dalton, 21, of Salt Lake City, decided to divorce her husband after one year, for religious and other reasons. Her decree was obtained by one lawyer—for about \$150.

cashier's window and gets another fifteen. If the table begins to fill up with bona-fide speculators she relinquishes her seat. If she wins, she returns her winnings later. She must bet one chip at a time, and never increase the size of her bets. Otherwise the "lookout" man could not keep track of how much she wins or loses. To be a shill you must be nice looking, respectable looking.

Some who do not work their way through the six-week divorce course find it difficult to adjust themselves to life in Reno. The nadir of social adjustment was achieved by a timid woman whose strict parents had terrified her about the pitfalls of wicked Reno. The result was that for the first half of her stay she did not leave her room except to make purchases at a drug or dime store. She was finally rescued by some kindhearted girls who managed to assure her that it was perfectly safe to walk around the city and even to enjoy herself.

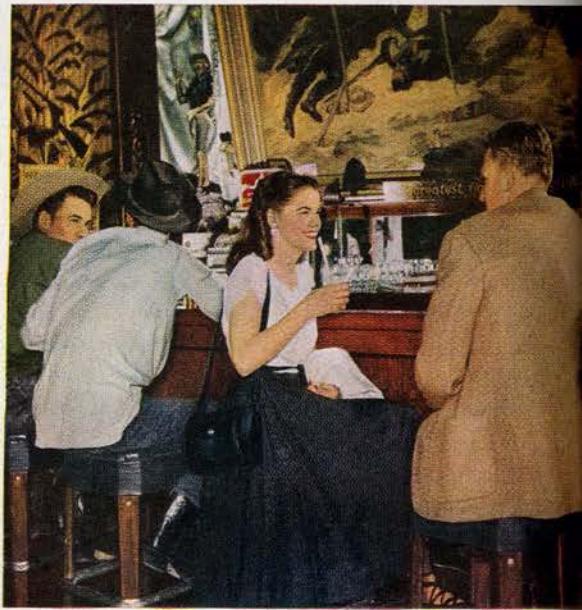
As in many other matters of morality, the American public does not approve of divorce, but it indulges in it freely enough. I like to fancy that the geographic situation of Reno is symbolically suited to the situation. Most divorce applicants come from the East and have to take a long, expensive journey through a vast desert. A journey through a desert carries the suggestion of penance. Thus the trip for a divorce can subconsciously be likened to a sort of Unholy Crusade. (This little fantasy can easily break down, especially if the applicant is whisked to Reno on an air liner with a personable hostess handing out delicious broths and salads.) It goes without saying that the best way yet discovered to avoid the possible unpleasantnesses and heartaches of a Reno divorce is to stay married.

Though divorce in Reno is all but invisible, gambling in Reno is even more visible than the



**2** Bunny earned her bus fare from Salt Lake City; no one met her upon arrival.

## Bunny Dalton takes "the



**6** Bunny met a school friend who bought her a lemonade. She does not smoke or drink.

near-by mountain ranges. The visitor does not become entangled with the mountains so intimately, or so immediately.

Take my case: When I climbed off the dusty train from far-off Chicago, I checked into my hotel and then took a short walk down Virginia Street. It was a little before high noon and the sun blazed from a sky that contained no clouds, and definitely suggested that there had never been a cloud before, and never would be one thereafter.

I shortly came to a large establishment whose neon lights fought a losing contest with the sunshine. The lights spelled Dining, Dancing, Gaming. The word "gaming," to one who has never before seen it thus freely advertised, is about as surprising, or shocking, as if the sign had read Dining, Dancing, Bad Checks Cashed.

I turned into the dim interior and viewed a room that was jammed with slot machines and



**3** Bunny took a room in a private home, hired a lawyer (above) and got a job waiting on table.



**4** Among the diners served by Bunny at El Cortez Hotel's exclusive Trocadero was Bonnie Richardson.

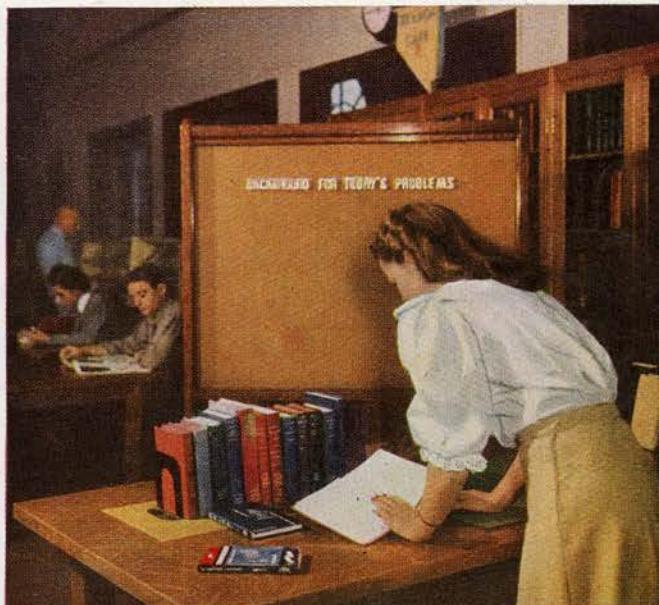


**5** Bunny often took a two-mile bus ride to Lawton's pool for an early dip.

cure" the hard way. With no help from husband, she works to pay for her decree



**7** While in Reno Bunny went to church and Sunday school regularly, as she did back home.



**8** Still hopeful of another, happier marriage, Bunny delved into marital problems at the public library.



**9** Finally free, Bunny gives her lawyer the usual kiss on courthouse steps.

their devotees, yanking the handles in frenzy. A few had even manned two machines and skillfully were yanking and feeding both at the same time. There was a lack of everything one expects in connection with gambling. No one shouted, or even grinned when he won; no one groaned or grimaced when he lost. The slot-machine player, it seems, does not expect to do well, is not surprised when he doesn't, nor elated on those rare occasions when he does. I ordered a drink at a bar beautifully inlaid with twenty-two hundred silver dollars. (They are inlaid in a special plastic; you can't get one of them out with an ice pick. You can count them, though, if you have the patience.)

In change for my ten-dollar bill, the bartender plunked down nine silver dollars. The effect was that of a dump truck unloading bricks. "How about some bills?" I asked.

"I don't think we got any of them in right now," he said in a friendly fashion. Nevadans,

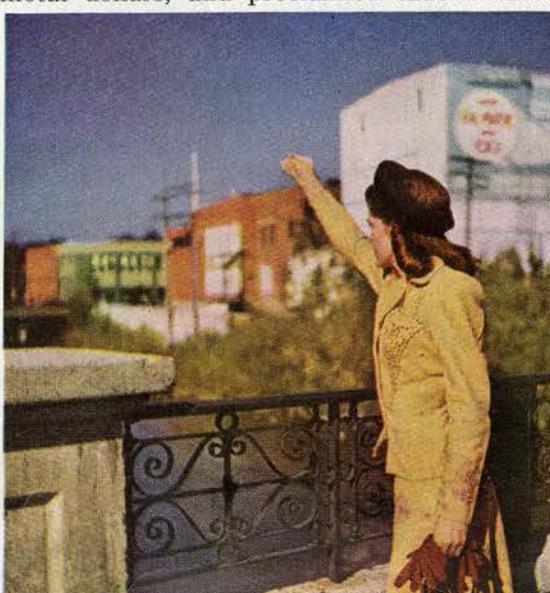
as I was to learn, have a slight grudge against folding money.

Finishing my drink, I overcame my moral scruples briefly. A dollar slot machine was miraculously vacant for a moment. Like everything else in the place it was jammed with metal dollars, and proclaimed that if three

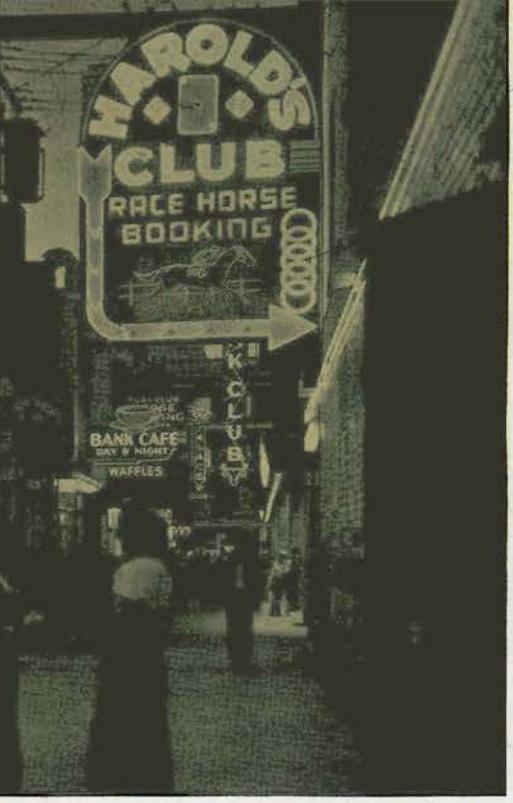
"bars" came up a jack pot of \$175 was guaranteed. I strolled over and insouciantly put in one of my nine dollars. I achieved a "bar," a cherry, a lemon, a whirr and a dull sickening click. I strolled out uninsouciantly. Behind me, the grim orgy continued, completely unheeding what had just happened.

After a very few weeks I came to a different view of the ubiquitous slot machine, and it is only fair to record that also.

The scene of my partial conversion was a dude ranch "trading post," and the time was a



**10** For Bunny, it is not yet farewell to Reno; she must continue working until she's earned her bus fare back to Salt Lake City, where she plans to go to college. Still, a new chapter in her life is about to unfold, and she symbolizes the end of the old one by tossing a 10¢ wedding ring into the Truckee from the Virginia Street Bridge.



Douglas Alley, crammed with gambling clubs, is called the brightest alley in U. S.

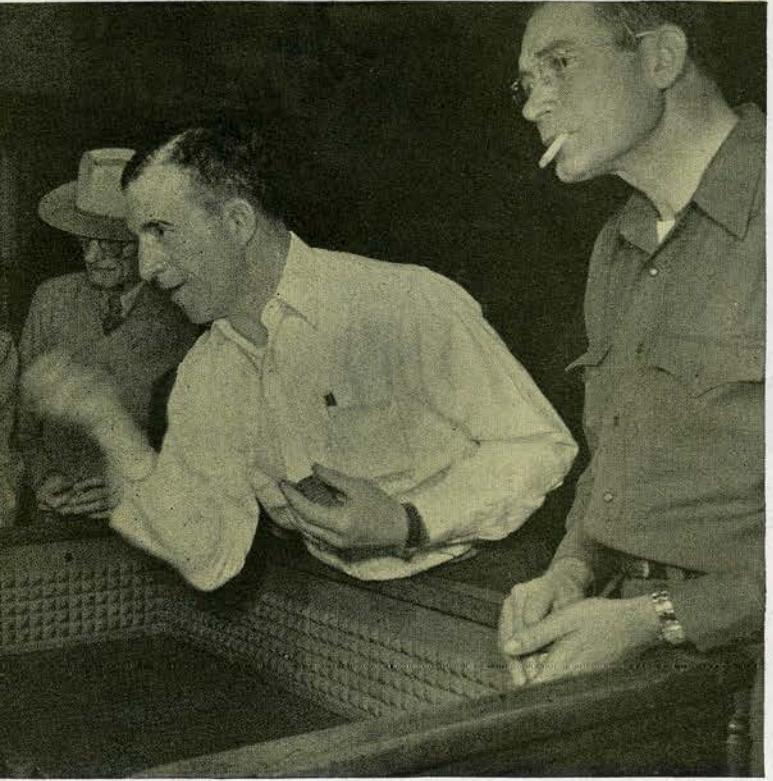


Harold Smith, owner of Harold's Club, checks a poker deck for marked cards. He's hep to every trick.

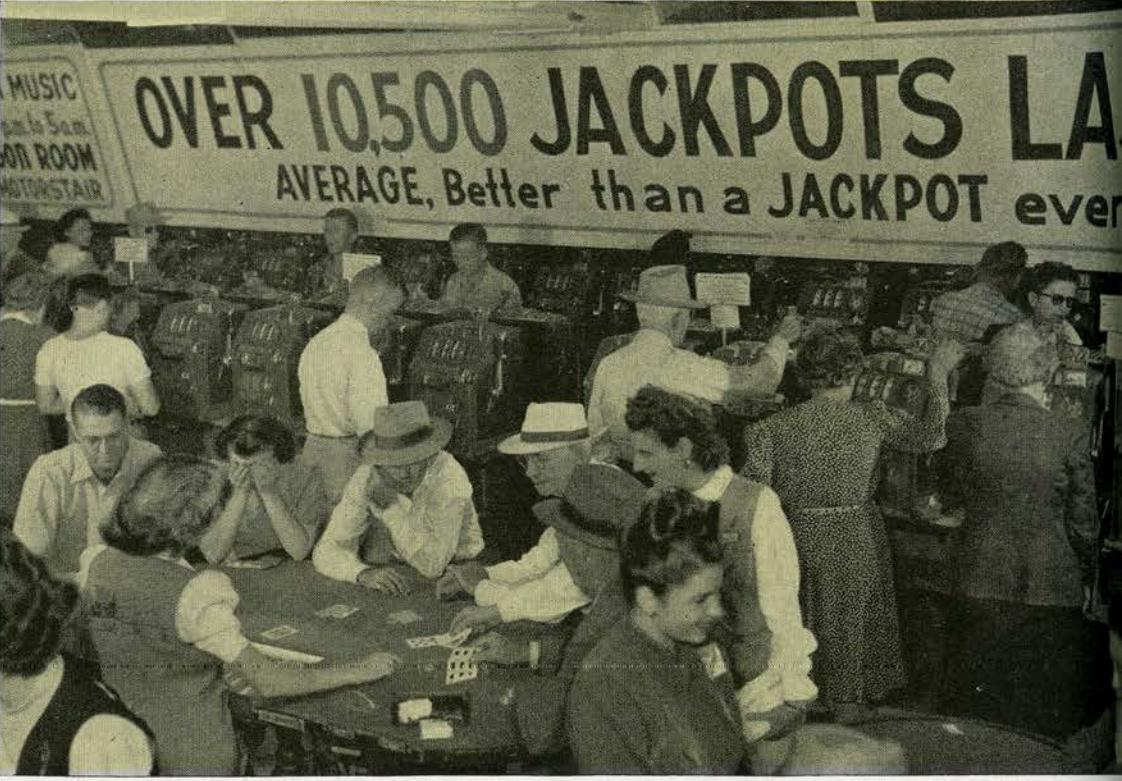


The Palace Club, without a smile in sight. Girl roulette dealers at left earn \$15 per day.

Reno gaming clubs are often dreary, and the players seldom gay-win or lose. Yet such



A craps player sweats out a roll at the Palace Club. Some gamblers call craps the fastest, most brutal game.



This sign extols the generosity of Harold's Club slot machines. Concluding words are "LAST WEEK" and "every minute," but machines are adjusted to favor the house in the long run.

hot Sunday afternoon. Into this little structure—a combination of store, soft-drink parlor and bar—came a sweet and slightly seedy old gentleman. There was nothing unusual about him save that when he moved he clinked a little, but this is not unusual in Reno or its environs. He murmured his greetings with charm, but speedily, for he had just driven across forty miles of desert, and it was quickly apparent that he had not done this to obtain a divorce, a drink or a distant view of rugged peaks. He sat himself down happily before one

of the two nickel slot machines and reached into his pocket for the first handful of nickels.

Some four and a half hours later he hit a jack pot. He beamed all over. Friendly people patted him on the back. He rose from his perch on the stool, went to a table and ordered a bottle of soda pop. The day's sport was over.

It was at this point that a light began to dawn on me. This elderly gent was no gambler, no man greedy for nickels. He was a sportsman enjoying the deep satisfaction of an angler who has landed a wily, oversized bass.

When his admirers had thinned out I sat down with him and stood a round of soft drinks. "Pretty good, hitting that jack pot?" I suggested.

"Sunday before last I hit three of 'em," he stated with quiet pride.

"You like to drive way over here to play this particular machine?"

"Yes, sir, and I'll tell you what it is. This machine is a good loose machine."

"Can you make a profit on a loose machine like this one?"



These men have been playing "21" at the Palace Club for 12 hours straight. The club is Reno's oldest; its 300 employees, including 75 shifters, work on a 3-shift, 24-hour basis, and earn over a million dollars a year.



Covered Wagon Wheel, all plastic, was designed in the Harold's Club shops.

is the lure that Nevada's tax on gambling exceeds all other sources of state revenue



Girl slot-machine player permits a grudging smile; she has just hit the nickel jack pot for \$7.



Some operators believe that drinking and gambling don't mix, but every Reno club sells liquor.



The Palace Club offers 125 opportunities, including 105 slot machines, to lose—or win.

"Oh, no," he said, with an air that came close to being shocked. "Sooner or later you got to feed 'em all back where they came from, and some more too. Thing is, with a loose machine like this a man gets a good playback."

"Playback?"

"Sure, a good playback. You notice how long I was able to play this afternoon? Nigh on five hours, I guess. And I had just so many nickels to start. That loose machine gives me back enough return, often enough, so I can keep playing. You see," his voice becoming

more confidential now, "I'm not as young as I used to be. Gave up riding ten years ago. My eyes ain't so good as they was, nor my hearing neither. I don't get so much pleasure any more from the shows, nor the movies. But a good loose machine like this one here. . . ."

Of course "gaming" in Reno does not consist solely of slot machines. A dozen other games are played by many thousands every night and day in the week.

Bingo, for example, is perhaps as popular as the slot machine. Bingo requires no descrip-

tion. The equipment for bingo vies in lack of beauty with the slot machine.

Horse-race keno is one of the most complex and, to me, the silliest of games. Its popularity lies in the fact that by risking a coin it is perfectly possible to win a thousand dollars or even more. (It is also perfectly possible, as any mathematician will tell you, for a monkey, pounding a typewriter at random, to produce a beautiful poem, but it is terribly unlikely, especially during the first thousand years of his efforts.) (Continued on Page 126)

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### SEPARATION CENTER

(Continued from Page 105)

Roulette is a pastime that has the classic beauty of the Parthenon, and it is very exciting. It also, in this country, has two zeros on the cloth, not a mere one, as in Europe.

Chuck-luck, or bird cage, is an innocent sort of swindle, much worse than roulette in percentage. The people who play bird cage are those who cannot perceive what is the matter with it as a speculation. But no one ever shoots himself about bird cage.

Other Reno gaming pastimes include poker, twenty-one, faro (the classic Nevada game) and, of course, the best, the fairest, the most tempting and the most brutal game of them all—the ancient and universal game of craps.

While in Reno I was privileged to discuss gaming in general and craps in particular with Raymond I. Smith, father of the proprietor of the most active gambling establishment in the world—probably in the history of the world. He is now an elderly man full of genialities and generosity. He views craps with the warm esteem with which the elder Rockefeller must have viewed oil. "Of course," he said at one point, "all the folks can play slot machine and bingo, and most can learn games like bird cage quick enough. Wish it were that way with craps."

"Do you mean to say that many people don't know how to shoot craps?"

"Oh, yes, you would be surprised how many. They think it would be too difficult for them. Ah," he went on with deep sincerity, "if only everybody could learn to play craps!"

### Billion-Dollar Binge

This gentleman's philanthropies are limited only by his imagination and there is nothing cramped about his imagination. He finances generous scholarships to the University of Nevada, and contributes to a wide assortment of local charities. He always stands ready to make church contributions, but some churches stand aloof from "tainted" money. It was the pastor of a small congregation which had been meeting in private homes who solved this problem most succinctly.

"Yes," he is reported to have said, "we will gladly accept this help. Satan has had the money long enough. Let us see what we can accomplish with it."

There should be enough money for all. Just today an air-mail letter, explaining how much, reached my desk. The letter is from an attorney—one of many Reno philosophers who generously assisted my researches. He quotes figures for me from an article he found in the *Nevada State Journal* (for September, 1948). The *Journal* had estimated the total amount that must have been bet in Nevada during the fiscal year by figuring back from the taxes collected on gambling; these amounted to \$1,403,746. To make an incredible story short, the size of the tax indicates that nearly \$1,500,000,000 was wagered, of which the players must have lost something over \$70,000,000.

"And that, my friend," concludes the letter, "is more money than you and I sometimes make in the course of several years' hard work."

There is one unspectacular major phenomenon in Reno which is generally overlooked: the more than 30,000 men, women and children, who are not directly engaged in what makes Reno famous. These people are neither applicants for divorce, nor the lawyers, judges and clerks who assist the applicants. They do not tend bar or deal faro bank. Nor are they cow pokes with levis on their slender hips, big hats on their untutored heads, engaged in the seasonal and uncertain business of marrying Eastern millionaires while the millionaires are still in a malleable state of mind.

This 90-plus per cent of the citizenry is engaged in just about what the citizens of other American towns are busy at, save manufacturing—there is virtually none of that so far—and deep-sea fishing. Their town is the trading center of the state, and its link with the outside world of commerce. If you want to do business in Nevada you will do it through Reno, for the town is situated where the Truckee River cuts through the sheer mountain range which separates the desert from the rich and foggy coastal slopes of Northern California. If you are a rancher, miner, prospector or timber cutter, and want to send your wares to San Francisco and the West Coast markets, you will cut through the marvelous and difficult Sierras where the Truckee flows. (The Truckee gently knifes through Reno as no other mountain stream ever engages a metropolis. At the precise center of the city the dignified Riverside Hotel is on one bank and the newer and taller Mapes Hotel is across the street and on the other bank. The bridge across the river is busy carrying cars with licenses of diverse states and some foreign countries. Just below that bridge I saw a kid, wading in his khaki pants, catch a trout.)

So here we have all these Renoites engaged in every sort of respectable

occupation you can think of, from counting to zither instruction. There are housewives in the gracious homes of students at the University, kids who hunt and fish, clerks in stores, realty men in the real-estate offices and preachers in the many churches. But the big point about Reno is that no matter what these respectable people are doing—at work or at leisure—they are doing rather better than the average citizens of other towns in less enlightened states. There are comparatively few slums in Reno; there are scarcely any pandemic. And the moving reason behind all the happy matters is that "downtown," the four square blocks of honky-tonks and garish neon lights, where the real Reno resident drops in perhaps half a dozen times a year—or never at all—there are eighteen licensed "gaming" houses, and forty licensed bars. Most are open 168 hours a week. Across a few blocks south, a hundred yards across the purling Truckee, stands the Washoe County Courthouse, where people, some of them wealthy, come from all over to "take the cure." It is in this courthouse that the entire world concurs in the monuments and unconvincing fib that six weeks of enforced, unwilling and (usually) unhappy existence in the State of Nevada constitutes "residence" (a legal term) in the State of Nevada. Briefly, this is the courthouse where they dish out the divorces.

### Silver Rain

The net result, as you scarcely have to be told, is the impingement of a disproportionately large amount of outside money on a limited community. It doesn't matter how moral you are; if you work—or just live—in Reno, some of it will rub off on you. If you are a bootblack you will get, on the average, a bigger tip. If you are a minister you will have to succumb to a heavier collection plate. If you are a loafer you will play golf, free, on a course which has the sort of fairways and greens that in populous centers cost each member \$300 a year.

Never mind about the details which some of the citizens will bat up to you. It is true that the number of bars is strictly limited. It is true that many applicants for divorce are needy folk who have to "work their way," and some pay less than the theoretic minimum of \$150. It is also true that the municipal "take" from licensed gambling is a tiny 2 per cent. (Comes to something between one and two million dollars a year.) There are other extenuating circumstances, but none of them really matters. What does matter is that when it is raining those big silver cartwheels they use out there, some of them will bounce; and don't be too surprised if a few of them bounce

(Continued on Page 128)

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(Continued from Page 126)

into the lap of your aged grandmother. She has only to put out a sign that says Vacancy.

It is this continuous agent shower (just about the only shower they get in that locality) that mildly disturbs the breasts of many Renoites. It certainly is nice to be well-to-do, but just how did they come by this prosperity? The community may be likened to a large and happy family, living in a fine house with many bathrooms and no mortgages. The members of this family are handsome, talented, and engaged in worth-while pursuits; but most of them are vaguely troubled because the original big stake came from an ancestor who put an opium derivative into baby's soothing sirup.

In Reno, no one but a hermit is completely immune to this sort of self-examination. Each citizen must make his own deal with his conscience. How variously the Renoites go about this soul shriving is an interesting study in character—occasionally in lack of it. Nearly all of them are warmly interested in their own moral temperatures. Few take the bland and hypocritical attitude that nothing particularly unusual is going on in their bailiwick.

There are widely differing viewpoints on the divorce, gambling and never-closed-bar business in Reno. There are citizens who state that the legislation permitting all this was put through to bring money to the community; that it has brought it in, in large gobs; and that isn't this just swell? There are more of these cheerful extroverts than you might expect.

### The Side of the Angels

At the other extreme, there are the reformists, and Reno has its share of them, some selfless, some hypocritical. In Reno, obviously, a reformer has something to get his teeth into, though I once heard the mean remark passed that it is easy to vote for reform in Reno because the voter knows mighty well that his vote isn't going to win the election. Thus he can declare himself on the side of the angels while the tainted money rolls in anyway. (One can only wonder, incidentally, how a Reno reformer would like it if he got his way. Suppose he woke up some morning and found that his efforts had been so successful that there was no more easy divorce, that such gambling as went on was conducted in whispers in back rooms, and that liquor could no longer be purchased after 10:00 P.M., and not at all on Sundays. Of course, he would like it fine at first. But how would he like it later when he took a trip and found people in various places asking politely, "Reno? Where's that?"

In between is the viewpoint of some of the more realistic citizens of Reno who insist that easy divorce, open

gambling and never-closed bars stem naturally and properly from the tough, individualistic tradition of our American West. There ought to be some place in the United States, these people say, where a man can do as he darn well pleases as long as it doesn't hurt anyone but himself. "Besides," they explain, "we know how to handle this setup. There are mighty few people out here, and most of us know each other. If anybody tries any rinky-dinks outside what our laws permit, we will run him out of the state."

### Minority Report

Such complacency is challenged by a handful of thoughtful citizens. "Sure," one said to me, "the town is going along fine. She's been doing an acrobatic juggling act for seventeen years now. She lets people indulge in stuff all the rest of the country disapproves. And so far she keeps it all on the up and up. But she could stumble."

"For example, there are no crooked wheels or dice here, but there might be, any minute. Suppose professional gambling hoods moved in from the East. Could we handle them?"

"There are few if any shyster lawyers in the divorce business, and no blackmailers so far as I know, but suppose they start drifting in?"

"It's fun while it lasts, but it's an unnatural setup. It is the rigid policing of what most people think of as wrong in the first place. Sure, most of the visitors who play the games lose what they can afford, or only a little more, and sometimes they win. But that isn't the whole story by any means."

"You've been in most of the clubs," he said, "some of them delightful places. But there is one club which is never publicized. It meets at all hours of the day and night down at the Western Union office. We call it the 'I Wuz Robbed Club.' Its members are all those sad-faced people, many of them women, waiting for money from home to bail them out of town. First they lost a quarter, then they won a dollar and a quarter, then they got excited and lost forty-seven dollars. So now they have to wire for money to someone who doesn't want to send it."

"I know that happens to people in other parts of the country. But in many of those places the police are against gambling, or, at least, are supposed to be against it. My opinion is that there is a large untapped bad conscience here. Just let someone competent come along and head up a reform drive. Not some wild-eyed bug—somebody cool, who knows the score. Then see what happens to Reno."

Thus ends the Minority Report. Nevertheless, Reno the Place continues to thrive on Reno the Word. It still is the world's best-known separation center.

THE END