

The rise and fall of Reno's quickie divorce industry

By Henry Brean, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Long before she became Nevada's first woman in Congress, Barbara Vucanovich boarded a train in New York and headed west on a six-week journey to a fresh start.

There was already a nickname for such a trip. People called it "the Reno cure," but Vucanovich's daughter, Patty Cafferata, doesn't remember her mom ever using that phrase.

Vucanovich, then Barbara Bugden, was one of the hundreds of thousands of people who traveled to Nevada from across the country to take advantage of the state's liberal divorce laws. From 1931 to 1970, the height of the so-called "migratory divorce" trade, more than 325,000 marriages came to an end in the Silver State.

Mella Harmon is a researcher and historical consultant who has been studying divorce in Nevada for almost 20 years.

By 1940, the Silver State accounted for less than one-tenth of a percent of the nation's population but roughly 5 percent of its divorces.

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