

KANSAS CITY
Society for Suppression
OF
Commercialized Vice

INCORPORATED

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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY
DECEMBER 8, 1922

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NINTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Mainly through the persistent efforts of our organization the Missouri legislature finally passed an injunction and abatement law in 1921. It went into effect in June of the same year. Its operation is giving the beneficial results that have been secured in other states and is proving a most formidable weapon for the suppression of commercialized vice.

The principal work of the Society during the last year has been the suppression of commercialized vice under the operation of the injunction and abatement law. As was anticipated before the law was secured it is necessary to apply for injunctions only in exceptional cases. Suspicious places are investigated and when undoubted evidence of prostitution is found the owner is notified and asked to "institute correctional measures." We have had very satisfactory co-operation from the owners of real estate.

During the year, the owners of 46 buildings or apartments have been advised of the illegal use of their property. In 25 cases satisfactory results have been secured; in eight cases the adjustments have not been wholly satisfactory; in seven cases the work is now in process of adjustment; and in six cases the situation is not known to warrant further work at this time.

No. 1. The first use of the injunction and abatement law was against the property of Annie Chambers. Her immoral resort had been in operation almost without interruption for 40 years. Judge Southern granted an injunction which was violated. A jail sentence followed and the place was closed. Later, the building was opened as a rooming house under bond to be kept respectable. We have secured no evidence to the contrary. (This injunction was secured through the Law Enforcement Association.)

No. 2. An injunction was contemplated against this old time resort. The agent learned of the proposed action, expressed surprise at the use to which the place was put, and promptly locked up the place. The property was opened later with only men roomers. Repeated investigation reveals no bad tenantry.

No. 3. A Fifteenth street hotel was a rendezvous for underworld characters. The owners were warned and later the place was sold. We have no further evidence of immorality at that place.

No. 4. The proprietors of a building occupied by a careless tenant were notified of the use to which the place was put. They took the matter up vigorously with the two women tenants who came to our office and made all manner of protestations that they would run a decent place. They were not wholly successful in doing this and were again notified. The place is in a bad locality with the probability that it is not yet wholly free from improper conduct.

No. 5. Evidence against a piece of rental property was referred to the owner who reported that he had sold the place and that the property was then vacant.

No. 6. The owner of this property, when notified, referred to the woman tenant who reported to the office and denied any knowledge of the improper use of her rooms. She gave positive assurance that nothing of the kind would take place in her establishment. But solicitation was again detected from the window; the owner was again notified and the landlady again appeared at the office and with tears in her eyes protested her innocence. However, the evidence against her was so conclusive that she was ordered by the owner to vacate.

No. 7. This place was a small hotel, improperly operated. The owner was located in Iowa, who assured us that his place "would be operated in strict accordance with the law." Our latest investigation shows nothing irregular about the place.

No. 8. The owner of this property has not been located. It is probable that the place is not what it should be but is not operated with its old time affrontery.

No. 9. This property is a good sized rooming house in the heart of the city. Last April it was operated as an old time assignation house.

The owners were located in Kentucky and notified. The agent shortly afterward called at the office and said the objectionable tenants would be removed. This was done and no immoral conduct has since been observed at that place.

No. 10. A large North Side hotel was used for improper purposes. The owner of the building was notified and the lessee appeared shortly at the office. He said he would do all in his power to operate the hotel on the right basis and asked our co-operation, when we found anything wrong. He is evidently making good his promise.

No. 11. A vile negro resort. Upon notification the

owner appeared at the office and said, he would discharge his tenant. This he did but the new one was fully as bad as the old one. The county prosecutor was asked to apply for an injunction but the owner said he would lock up the place and the injunction proceedings were suspended. The place is now occupied by negroes but we have no evidence of improper conduct there.

No. 12. This property is a small down town hotel used frequently as an assignation house. The owner was notified but we have had no response. This place needs continued attention.

No. 13. An assignation house was operated over a large store in the North Side. This was without the knowledge of the proprietor whose store was closed evenings. When the information was given him he said he would not stand for such a place and would do anything we asked to get it right. He said, however, that his woman tenant had made most earnest promises to run the place straight and that she would keep only men roomers. It was recommended that the woman be allowed to remain under strict surveillance. This was to give the woman another chance and because it is much better to have a person of that character closely watched by the proprietor than it would be to turn her out and have to do the work over again in another locality. The later results have justified the wisdom of the decision.

No. 14. An immoral house on East Sixth street was occupied by negroes. Investigation revealed that it was owned by the city. An assistant city counselor took vigorous means to have it vacated but was not wholly successful. Later, upon a second complaint, the city authorities tore down the building.

No. 15. This property is occupied by immoral tenants, but definite evidence is hard to get. The owner has not yet been notified because of that fact. It is under surveillance.

No. 16. This was a low negro resort. Warnings appeared of no avail and the prosecutor was asked to use our abundant evidence in getting an injunction on the property. This brought the proprietor to terms and he promised to do anything we asked. His colored tenant came to the office, promised to have only men roomers, to provide each with a key and to keep the place locked. The promise of the colored woman was not kept and the owner has again been notified of the conditions.

No. 17. A north side negro resort. The owner, upon notification, protested that she would not allow a bad house to be operated and yet failed to vacate the premises. The place is not cleaned up and an injunction has been applied for.

No. 18. A neighbor of No. 17 and practically the same conditions obtain. We have applied to the prosecuting attorney for an injunction.

No. 19. An East Sixth property occupied by negroes. The agents give very satisfactory co-operation and everything possible appears to be done to keep the place straight. We have no information at present against it.

No. 20. This was a McGee street resort. The ownership has not yet been determined and no bad recent evidence is at hand.

No. 21. This place was reputed to be a negro resort but investigation has as yet revealed no irregular conduct.

No. 22. This place is a reputed negro resort. We have not located the owner of the property but have no recent evidence of irregularity.

No. 23. This property contained six separate immoral places. The owner was notified and wanted to know about our evidence which was furnished. He also made an investigation on his own account and found our information correct. He immediately served notices on his tenants to vacate and thanked the Society for calling his attention to the bad situation. He said he would co-operate heartily in cleaning up the neighborhood. The owner has later made good his promises to keep the places clean.

No. 24. A questionable place in a bad locality. Evidence of a definite nature has not yet been secured on this property.

No. 25. This is an East Twelfth street hotel that gives evidence of immoral use. We have not yet taken this up with the owner as we have no late evidence.

No. 26. An East Twelfth street hotel. There were indications of immorality here but we were not able to secure definite evidence.

No. 27. This is an extensive row of rooming houses of immoral occupancy. The owner is getting a new manager and promises to clean up the whole premises. Recent reports show that the property—six apartments—is rented to good tenants. The neighbors who made complaint now say the property is occupied by respectable tenants.

No. 28. A double house of extremely bad reputation on Campbell street. The agents are a reputable firm and have removed some of their tenants. More bad evidence is available, however, and the agent is now notified that it would be a good plan to vacate the whole property and start anew. The agent is giving good co-operation.

No. 29. A negro house of prostitution. The owner at first thought this impossible but said he would not allow it. Open evidence is at least not now available.

No. 30. One of the worst places on Locust street. Notification of the owner brings no response and an injunction has been suggested to the prosecuting attorney. The place is still under suspicion.

No. 31. Another East Sixth street negro resort. The owner thought our evidence incorrect, said he must keep the property rented and that he did not know where he could find church members to occupy his buildings in a negro quarter. Later, however, the objectionable tenant was removed.

No. 32. An old time Broadway resort where a man was murdered some time ago. The place at last investigation had been rid of its objectionable occupant and the place was vacant.

No. 33. Police convictions for immorality have been secured from this place. The owner was notified and thanked the Society for the information. Promises to get rid of the offenders. Very satisfactory co-operation.

No. 34. The owner was notified of the character of the place but has made no response to the Society.

No. 35. A property that has had a bad reputation for years. We are now ascertaining the ownership.

The police officials have been asked to make charges under the ordinances providing for term sentences of immoral characters instead of the vicious fine system. Both police judges have manifested a spirit of co-operation and if reformatory sentences instead of fines are meted out it will have a wholesome effect.

There has existed for many years a bad leakage of criminals from the police courts to the criminal court. It is customary for light fines to be paid and for heavier ones to be appealed to the criminal court. The bond required is twice the amount of the fine. When the case reaches the criminal court in many instances the accused does not appear. The judge

then announces that "the judgment of the lower court is affirmed and the bond is forfeited." The reputed procedure is then to try and get the police to bring in the accused. If the police can't find the accused the bondsmen are then sought. They are supposed to bring appellant into court or pay the bond. However, the bondsmen are not required to pay and the court machinery fails to function. For example—on the 5th day of October the Jackson County Criminal Court had 170 appeal cases from the two municipal courts. These cases accumulated between August 24th and October 5th. Of the 170 cases, 92 were dismissed at the request of the city; 49 cases were continued, six were set for trial and in 23 cases the judgment of the lower court was affirmed and the bonds were declared forfeited, but they were not paid.

A vicious influence on the morals of Kansas City are the "midnight shows" in the Gillis Theatre. Investigations have been made and reports of this place have been brought to the attention of Acting Chief of Police Anderson, who ordered the "mid-night shows" stopped. The display of improper pictures in a Twelfth street show window were referred to the police and promptly discontinued.

The greatest obstacles to moral reform are now third class hotels and automobiles. Without raids it is difficult to get evidence against the hotels. The growing use of automobiles for immoral purposes is an evil yet to be overcome.

Only optimists can remain in the fight against vice. Many are the failures and disappointments and oftentimes progress is slow. But looking back over the nine years the Society has been in existence considerable improvement can be noticed. Recognized red light districts are a rarity rather than regarded as a necessity. The encroachments of venereal disease have been checked. Health propaganda has been effective. About two-thirds of the states have the injunction and abatement law. The same principle is now in effect in anti-liquor legislation. Although we are now in a period of lax law enforcement with the inevitable slump of moral conditions under such circumstances, yet looking back over a period of years there is a marked improvement in the moral condition of Kansas City.

The experience of the past year shows that vice districts can be held in subjection by the vigorous

and persistent use of the injunction and abatement law. If the Society for Suppression of Commercialized Vice had some one who could give his entire time to its work and if we had the funds to pay for more thorough investigation it is not too much to expect that we could close every open house of prostitution in Kansas City.

NAT SPENCER,
Secretary.