

KANSAS CITY

# Society for Suppression

OF

# Commercialized Vice

INCORPORATED

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E. T. BRIGHAM, Vice-President

NAT SPENCER, Secretary

PRESTON DOBBIN, Treasurer

## REPORT OF SECRETARY

OCTOBER, 30, 1928.

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## REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE SOCIETY FOR SUPPRESSION OF COMMERCIALIZED VICE

To the Directors:

I herewith present my fifteenth annual report as secretary of the Society. Many changes have taken place during the fifteen years that our organization has been fighting vice in Kansas City. While the present situation is bad, conditions are better than they were fifteen years ago. Then, prostitution was recognized as an inevitable institution. Its victims were regularly fined and then tolerated till the next pay day. We now have no officially recognized red light district. We have an abbreviated form of the injunction and abatement law which is effective when officials can be induced to use it. It is believed that our citizens would not now tolerate the return of official recognition of a bawdy house district with its implied public partnership in prostitution.

### **Indecent Literature**

Our preceding year's work in the suppression of indecent literature remains effective. As far as known the news stands have discontinued the sale of the objectionable magazines and we have the assurance of the distributing agencies that they will not return.

We have not yet been able to overcome the display of pictures of nearly nude women in the advertisements of shows. The exhibition of these salacious pictures is not confined to the lower type of shows. The pernicious influence of such pictures lies in their tendency to lower the moral sensibilities of our city.

A life size picture of a practically nude woman was one of the evidences given in court against the notorious Carrie Finnell show, but the conviction secured in the North Side Municipal Court *was* dismissed in the appeal to the criminal court.

### **The Injunction and Abatement Law**

The Missouri Injunction and abatement law permits injunctions but does not allow locking up the premises used for prostitution. Effective injunctions were secured on six pieces of

property under the administration of the last prosecuting attorney but the present prosecutor has refused to use this means of closing houses of prostitution. As this law is the most effective weapon yet devised for the suppression of prostitution, its non-use in Kansas City has seriously handicapped our fight against bawdy houses.

Injunctions are effective without locking up the premises because a circuit judge may assess severe penalties for their violation. He may give heavy fines or send the violator to jail. Such penalties may be more severe than locking up a building. The owner does not want to face the possibility of going to jail and so the injunction is effective without a padlock.

### The Police **and** the Courts

When our investigation shows the location of a house of prostitution the case is reported to the Chief of Police. We ask that the police get their own evidence which is ordinarily easily obtainable. When arrests are made accompanied by the evidence convictions usually follow; where the alleged prostitutes are brought into court without the evidence the cases are usually dismissed.

Just now the political campaign is playing havoc with the enforcement of law against prostitutes. The police management and the North Side Court, where most of the vice cases go, are from opposing political parties. It is claimed on one hand that arrests are made for political purposes; on the other hand that dismissals are made in court for the same reason. This regrettable situation has resulted in the practical suspension of the enforcement of law against prostitutes. It is hoped that this is a temporary situation.

Until the present political situation came, a fairly good system was in at least partial operation. When alleged prostitutes were brought into court the judge committed them to the general hospital for medical examination. If found diseased they were sent to the woman's reformatory at the Municipal Farm. Medical authorities state that treatment for such diseases should take several months. A weakness here is that on an average the diseased women are discharged in about ten or twelve days. But even with this practice of insufficient time for treatment, it is *a* step in the right direction. The system when properly executed will be a strong deterrent for prostitution. When the political campaign is over it is

hoped that the plan will again be put into operation.

During the year our organization has reported one hundred and sixty places of prostitution to the police, the majority of which are repeaters. Many places have been repeatedly reported and yet the places operate persistently. The operation of the injunction and abatement law would take care of such persistent violations, but its use has been denied by those who could make it effective.

### **Repeaters, Worst Violators**

One family shows the bad police record of forty-six arrests of members of the family or of frequenters or inmates of the place they keep. The family "home" is still in operation though solicitation from the windows and porch is more or less guarded. Arrests in this family have been made for gambling, larceny, sale of morphine, assault, investigation, vagrancy, suspected holdup, liquor still, soliciting from porch, keeping bawdy house, frequenting bawdy house and inmate of bawdy house.

The fact that this notorious family can continue to operate its infamous place shows the necessity of the suppression of habitual criminals. It is probably true that the greater number of all kinds of crimes are committed by repeaters. The penitentiary should contain all those who are convicted of serious offenses for a second or third time.

### **The Suppression of Indecent Shows**

The statement was made at one of the indecent play houses in Kansas City that their attendance was 20,000 persons each week. Making due allowance for this extravagant claim, it shows the extent of the influence of such play houses. The vile jokes, indecent exposures and sensual dances contribute to moral delinquency. The "Mutual Burlesquer," the house organ of the Gayety theatre says: "The result of keeping close 'tab' on the class of regular attendants at our theatres during the past six weeks shows the patronage of as many women as men, as well as great numbers of children."

Our Society has secured the co-operation of many fine citizens who have been willing to attend these outrageous exhibitions and to appear in court to testify to their nefarious character. Following are some verbatim reports from these investigators.

"I was surprised and shocked at the nature of the

show." "The more licentious the act the greater the applause." "Running through the whole show there was continuous smutty and risqué talk." "It was a combination of dances, comedy and stage scenes, all of which more or less carried the sensuous appeal." "A vile, vulgar show, a hideous sight." "Degrading to the morals of any community." "Words fail me to describe either the dance or its effect." "I cannot tell it as awful as it was." "The show was vile in the extreme." "Grossly sensual and vulgar." "It was Hell broke loose."

Believing that these degenerating influences are direct sources of moral disaster, our society has paid particular attention to their suppression.

### The Carrie Finnell Case

One of the most indecent shows of the past year was that presented by Carrie Finnell's company. She was arrested together with the local manager of the place and several of her troupe. The local manager and Carrie Finnell were fined \$100.00 each by Judge Carlin P. Smith in the North Side Court. The case was appealed to the criminal court. Judge Ralph S. Latshaw dismissed the case on the ground that the information for the arrest was not properly drawn; the different clauses of the information should have been connected by "and" instead of separated by "or."

Although our case met with a legal defeat it resulted in a moral victory. The arrested parties doubtless spent several hundred dollars in defending the case and it is not probable that Carrie Finnell will again bring her company to Kansas City.

### Responsibility for Indecent Shows

There is a three fold responsibility for the continuance of indecent shows; (1) the state courts, (2) the city manager and (3) the police. The state courts were appealed to for an injunction against the Gayety theatre for conducting a public nuisance. Judge Latshaw admitted that it was within the province of the court to grant an injunction but refused to consider the evidence that it was a public nuisance.

The City Manager agreed that the conditions were bad, and that arrests should be made but positively refused to order the arrests.

Having failed to secure co-operation through the state courts and the city manager our Society turned to the police where we have received cooperation.

The plays presented in more than one theatre this fall have been of a character that should be permitted in no self respecting community. 26.5 per cent of our charity fund goes toward preventing juvenile delinquency and taking care of it after it occurs. Yet our city has been permitted those influences that directly contribute toward it.

Our organization invites the co-operation of all who want to work with us in making Kansas City a better place in which to live.

NAT SPENCER,  
Secretary.

**Our work Is sustained by voluntary subscrip' tions. Financial assistance is asked from those who wish to help improve the health and morals of our city.**