

Myth 152: □ Divorcing in Minden

by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

When one thinks of celebrities getting "quickie" divorces, Reno comes to mind, or perhaps Las Vegas. However, during the time the Silver State was known world-wide for its migratory divorce business, the rich and famous, including motion picture and television stars, also found their way to other county seats of government to "untie the knot." The Douglas County seat of Minden is a case in point.

Silent-screen actress and producer Mary Pickford's Minden divorce in 1920 has received considerable attention over the years. On the other hand, few people are aware that actress and director Ida Lupino was divorced there in 1951.



The fifteen-year-old London-born child-star moved to Hollywood in 1933. Lupino's career spanned forty-eight years and included acting in fifty-nine films and directing eight others.

She was among the first female directors in Hollywood and became the first woman to direct herself in a major feature film.

She also appeared in fifty-eight TV episodes and directed fifty others.

According to biographer William Donati, "Lupino became the only woman ever to direct an episode of the famous *Twilight Zone*" in 1964.

Other directorial credits include episodes of *Have Gun Will Travel*, *The Untouchables*, *The Fugitive*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, and *Gilligan's Island*.

Lupino may have been the first married female character to retain her own name ("Eve Drake") in a television series when she co-starred in 1957-58 with real-life husband Howard Duff ("Howard Adams") in CBS's *Mr. Adams and Eve*, based in part on the two stars' actual experiences as a married couple.



Lupino married three times. Her divorce from second husband, producer and writer, Collier Young, brought the Hollywood star to Glenbrook, Lake Tahoe, on September 7, 1951.

Pregnant with actor Howard Duff's child, Lupino decided to divorce Young after less than three years of marriage.

She brought her close friend writer Diane Meredith along so both the women could get a Nevada divorce while working on a movie script.

Duff, well-known at the time as radio's private eye Sam Spade, accompanied them on the trip and periodically visited Lupino during her six weeks residency.

Lupino leased Sawmill Harbor, a rustic lakeside house where actress Rita Hayworth had stayed earlier that year while pursuing a divorce from Prince Aly Khan.

It took four days for the press to discover that Lupino was in Douglas County. By that time, Lupino and Meredith were spending time with Clark Gable who was at Glenbrook intending to divorce his fourth wife Lady Sylvia Ashley.

On September 30, Lupino, Gable, and Meredith were among a "Galaxy of Stars" at the launching of a 1951 anti-communist "Crusade for Freedom" campaign in the Reno High School gymnasium. The rally in support of Radio Free Europe included Gable auctioning a "silver brick" for \$800 to hotel magnate Charles Mapes, Jr. Lupino presented the fund-raising brick to Mapes.

The 1500 people in attendance also witnessed Lupino and Gable outside the new high school releasing two giant balloons bearing anti-communist messages.

A week later Lupino travelled to the Wagon Wheel Club at Stateline, Lake Tahoe, where Secretary of State John Koontz presented her with a scroll recognizing the actress-director as a new citizen of Nevada. Attendees at the dinner event included Harvey Gross, owner of the Wagon Wheel, and Lupino's mother and aunt.



On October 20, Lupino was granted a divorce by Judge Clark J. Guild in the same Minden courtroom where Mary Pickford received her divorce decree from actor Owen Moore 31 years earlier. The next day, Judge Guild, who had presided in the Carson City divorce of actors Carole Lombard and William Powell in 1933, conducted the wedding ceremony between Ida Lupino and Howard Duff at Glenbrook. Clark Gable attended the reception.

Lupino gave birth to Bridget Mirella Duff on April 23, 1952. Her tumultuous marriage to Howard Duff lasted until 1984. She died on August 3, 1995, and today her legacy in the motion picture industry has been virtually forgotten.

Photo credits:

Top: the rustic Glenbrook house known as Sawmill Harbor, where Lupino completed her required 6-week residency. n.d. Photo courtesy of Bob Jepson.

Middle: Ida Lupino is officially greeted as a new citizen of Nevada by Secretary of State John Koontz (l), while Harvey Gross (center), owner of the Wagon Wheel Club at Stateline, Nevada, watches. *Nevada State Journal*, October 9, 1951.

Bottom: Ida Lupino and actor Howard Duff pose for a closeup following their marriage at Glenbrook. *Reno Evening Gazette*, October 22, 1951.

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