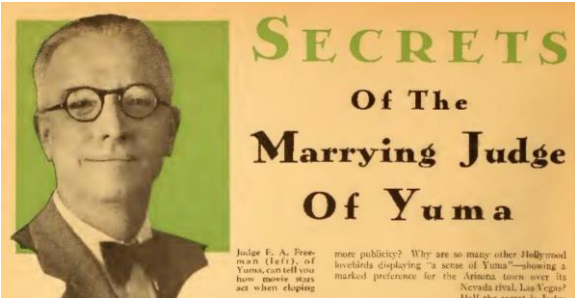
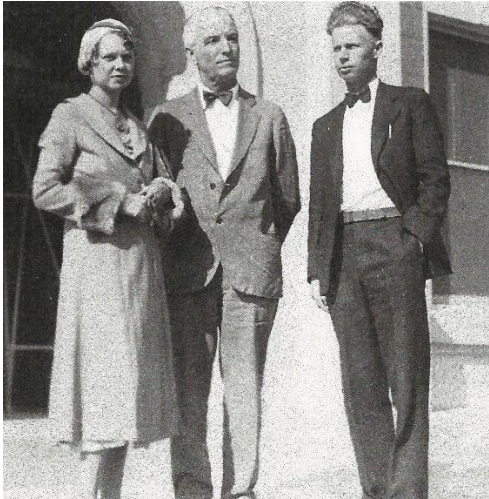


# Yuma's "Marrying Judges" +

## Earl Freeman, Justice of the Peace



Motion Picture magazine – March 1932



Freeman (center) with newspaper reporter Katherine Long and court clerk Don Wisener

Earl Freeman was elected as Yuma's Justice of the Peace in 1926, one year before the passage of a "gin marriage" law in California imposing a three day waiting period which did not exist in Arizona. This law sent thousands of California couples to Yuma annually for "quickie" marriages; Earl Freeman estimated that by the time he stepped down in 1936, he had married 26,000 couples. The "marrying judge" achieved national notoriety due to the many high profile Hollywood stars he married: Gloria Swanson, Errol Flynn, Tom Mix, Mary Astor, Claudette Colbert and many more.

## Ed Winn, Justice of the Peace



ELECTRIC SIGN ATTRACTS BRIDAL COUPLES  
Justice Winn of Yuma is pretty proud of his Neon sign which attracts bridal parties to his house after dark. Installation of the advertising sign was made shortly after he succeeded Justice Earl Freeman as the marrying justice of the Sunshine City. Times 10/10/38

Ed Winn's tenure as Justice of the Peace lasted from 1937-1940. The photo above indicates why the J.P. position was highly prized. By making themselves available for marriages 24 hours a day, the justices could earn a great deal of extra income.

## R.H. Lutes, Justice of the Peace



WASHING MACH—WEDDINGS 1954 YUMA CITY-COUNTY CLASSIFIED DIRECTORY

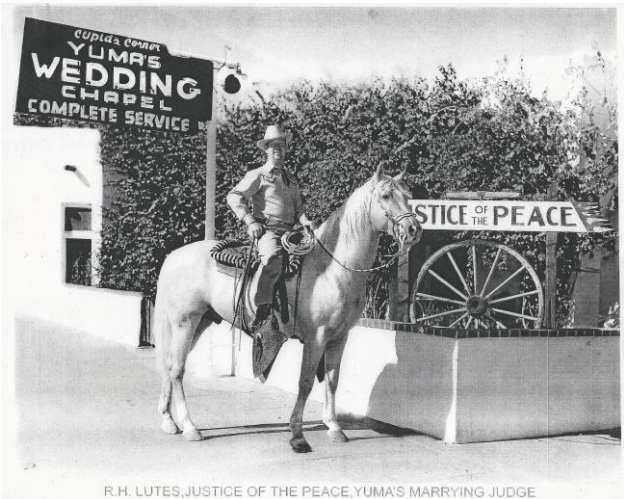
Complete Wedding Arrangements  
Hammond Organ — Corsages  
**License Secured — Day or Night**  
Phone for Free Transportation

ALL ARRANGEMENTS DAY OR NITE

DIAL SUNset 3-4301

REFRIGERATED AIR COOLED DRESSING ROOMS

**R. H. Lutes Wedding Chapel**  
Second Chapel Entering Yuma 200 E. 1st



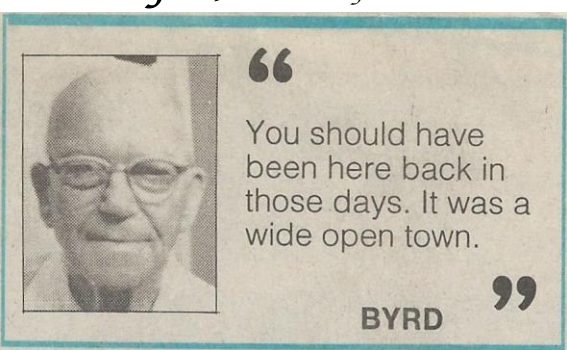
R.H. Lutes, who served as Justice of the Peace from 1940-1950, opened his first wedding chapel in 1941. Lutes' wife and children helped run his hectic "day or nite" operations. Son Bobby recalled in a 1993 interview, "I can remember my dad marrying couples in his bathrobe." After R.H. died in 1962, the Lutes family continued in the wedding business long after all of the other chapels were gone.

## Henry Kelly, Superior Court judge



Henry Kelly, Superior Court judge from 1931-1959, was a major player in Yuma's marriage game due to his ability to quickly marry waiting couples—even when he was presiding over a case! According to long-time reporter Bob Werley, court clerks would pass secret notes to the judge when his matrimonial services were needed. Once notified, Judge Kelly would promptly call for a short recess in order to retreat to his chambers to conduct a discreet three minute marriage ceremony.

## Ersel Byrd, Justice of the Peace

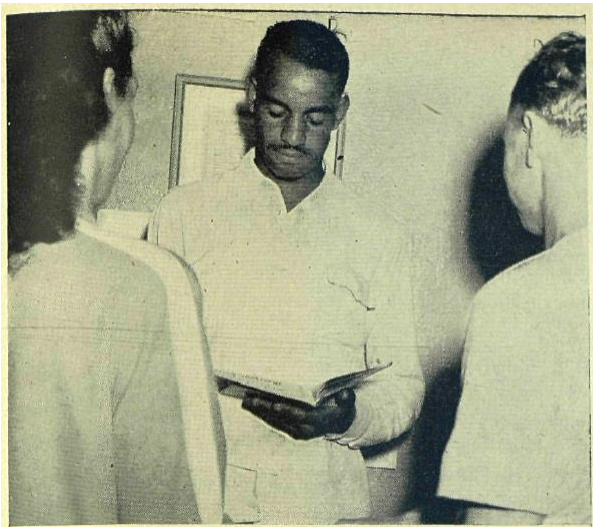


**JUSTICE OF THE PEACE**  
★ ★ ★  
**ERSEL C. BYRD**  
"Be Married by Byrd"

Phone  
Office . . . . SUNset 3-6481  
Residence . . SUNset 3-7191

Ersel Byrd, who defeated R.H. Lutes for Justice of the Peace in 1950, served for 20 years. In a 1991 interview he commented on the frequent late night ceremonies he performed: "I lost a lot of sleep. I had a chair I could sleep in. Weekends is when you were really busy."

## Rev. James Coleman



Marriage ceremony for white couple is performed by Rev. Coleman. He has married hundreds since installing an altar instead of gasoline pumps. Coleman wanted to be an Army chaplain but failed in officer candidate school.



Rev. James Coleman operated his "Famous Drive-In Chapel and Auto Laundry" from the 1940s to 1954. An ordained Baptist minister who owned a variety of Yuma area businesses, James Coleman remained active in Yuma's civic affairs until his death in 2004.