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Lady Attends Shaw Trial Because She Is Curious

Another Regular Keeps Autograph Book

By PAUL ATKINSON

"I'm here because I'm curious about what's going on," the elderly lady with the purple lunch bag said Wednesday.

She was sitting in her accustomed third row seat up front at the Clay L. Shaw trial. Asking not to be identified, the lady said she gets to the Criminal Courts building every morning at 7 a.m.—two hours before the trial begins—to be sure she gets the same seat.

A widow, she continued, "My garden is going to pot, and my card-playing is suffering. But I think there should be a standing-room only crowd here every day. People should be interested in what's happening."

Another trial regular is Mrs. Joyce Rehberg, an attractive platinum blonde who keeps an autograph book and copious notes on trial testimony. Why does she come to the trial day in and day out? "This is history happening," she said. "I want to be there."

Asked if she knew Shaw, Mrs. Rehberg said, "No, I didn't until the trial began. I have met him since it started."

PLANS TO WRITE BOOK

Another who preferred not to be named said she has five children who go to school, allowing her to come to the trial. "I am going to write a book on the trial," she said proudly.

"My husband doesn't mind if I come. He takes the children to school and I come to the trial. I go home at night and tell him about the various names of the people in the trial. But he's interested in buying a boat. I guess I get mad at him when he doesn't know the names."

Generally, reporters have found that women spectators far outnumber the men spectators at the trial, sometimes by as much as 10 to 1.

Mrs. Nina Sulzer, who has handled the seating of the

spectators and press, said that most of the spectators get into the courtroom through identification cards issued by the Criminal Sheriff's Office. "We issued 700 of them, about 200 to the press and the rest to spectators," she said.

Some people have been seated this week without cards, she said. "But I have turned some people down simply because I don't want to take the responsibility of having them in the courtroom," she said. Mrs. Sulzer said all of the spectators had routine Bureau of Identification checks run on them before the passes were issued.

CAPACITY OF COURTROOM

Asked if she hadn't "oversold" the capacity of the courtroom — it seats approximately 270 with everyone squeezing nine people to a bench—she said, "Yes, we did, but we asked the people how often they would attend. Most said only occasionally. So we felt we were safe."

After a week of testimony, it is evident that the spectators go for drama. So far, Perry Raymond Russo, the state's star witness in the preliminary hearing, has been the No. 1 "box office attraction"—if he might be called that. Crowds were exceptionally good Monday and Tuesday while he testified, but they immediately dropped off Wednesday morning without him on the stand.

Most of the time, the spectators are friends of officials of the court or the participating attorneys. For instance, Wednesday, though District Attorney Jim Garrison was not at any of the testimony, his wife and four of her friends were occupying front row seats.

With many of the ladies taking down the testimony almost verbatim, newsmen are finding their stories checked carefully for accuracy by the lady spectators.