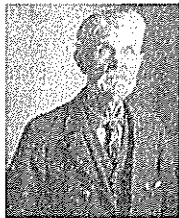


Benjamin Doney: Feisty opponent of Flagstaff power brokers

Slight in build but great in presence, Benjamin S. Doney, Sr. was a rancher and farmer who made an impact on the town council during his brief 1906-1908 tenure.



BEN DONEY, pioneer and former Flagstaff mayor. (Photo courtesy of Arizona Historical Society Flagstaff Pioneer Museum)

Doney, a Civil War veteran who moved to Flagstaff in 1883, was, by Platt Cline's account in "They Came to the Mountain," a pistol: "Doney ... feisty, combative, disruptive and eccentric, led the radical majority. Colorful, outspoken, intolerant of compromise, Doney was also amusing, especially in convivial settings, and enjoyed admiring support among those with real or imagined grievances against prominent citizens. He also loved mischief."

Doney was an opponent to many Flagstaff power players of the time: Riordans, Babbitts, Percival Lowell, Mayor Leo Verkamp. Against the Riordans, he voted to deny payment of \$1.34 (about \$34 in today's dollars) to Arizona Timber & Lumber for lumber to repair the bridge to Milton. Against the Babbitts, he "opposed a request from the Babbitts for a cut in water rates for their new ice plant, an action that might have had

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merit, but then revealed his animosity by ramming through an ordinance revoking Babbitts' franchise for a spur track to their packing house, ice plant and warehouses, and offered a new franchise calling for an excessive daily fee," Cline wrote. "The Babbitts protested, and Doney instituted a suit on behalf of the town, seeking to enjoin Babbitts' use of the spur." (The Babbitts prevailed.)

Mayor Verkamp had three brothers-in-law among the Babbitts and so was not fond of Doney. Likewise, Doney was not fond of Verkamp's Catholicism.

Against Lowell, Doney, on behalf of the town, unsuccessfully sued to overthrow the deeds for land given for the observatory.

And against Edwardian decency, Doney removed controls on saloons, gambling and "bawdy houses." The restraints had

earned Flagstaff, the site of the Normal School, much praise. Doney's act was quickly reversed in 1907, when the territorial legislature unanimously shut down public gambling in Arizona and drew up heavy punishments for violations.

Doney and his cronies then picked up the cause of exposing corruption in town affairs, but an out-of-town auditor found no such evidence. Doney refused to pay the auditor's fee for lack of satisfactory (to him) findings, leaving it to the next council to clear the debt.

Doney's antics were wearing thin with citizens, though. In 1908, he finished in 13th place for re-election.

Still, he was an active Flagstaff character. At age 75, he was a member of Flagstaff's World War I "Home Guard."

Doney made his living just east of town in the countryside that now bears his name. He died there in 1932, at age 89, after a fall.