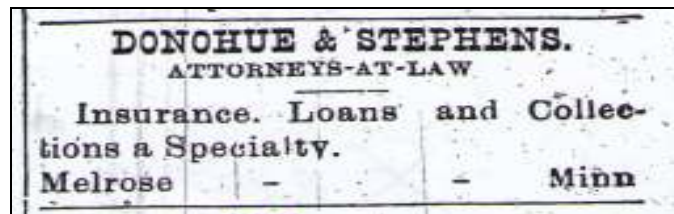


WILLIAM F. DONOHUE

(April 23, 1862 – November 2, 1932)

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William Florence Donohue graduated the University of Minnesota Law Department in 1896, and was admitted to the bar on June 5, 1896.¹ He was thirty-four years old, and recently married. He moved to Melrose, a small town in Stearns County, and formed a partnership with William J. Stephens, a law school classmate, which lasted two decades.² For many years, their business card appeared in the local newspaper:³



Filling a role in municipal affairs expected of lawyers at the time, he became president of the school board and Melrose city attorney.

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ELECTIONS

In 1898, he was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives to represent the Fifty-fourth District that encompassed all of Stearns County except the city of St. Cloud and the towns of St. Cloud and Le Sauk. It was a “top two” election, the results of which were:

¹ *1 Roll of Attorneys: Supreme Court, State of Minnesota, 1858-1970* 39 (State Law Library, 2011).

² The population of Melrose grew from 485 residents in 1890 to 639 in 1895. The Village of Melrose, a separate community, grew from 780 in 1890 to 815 in 1895. 1899 Blue Book, at 539.

³ *The Melrose Beacon*, May 2, 1902, at 4. No other lawyer posted his business card in the *Beacon* at this time, suggesting that the town was too small to support another law firm.

B. M. Anderson.....	880
William F. Donohue (Democrat).....	1,061
Frank Benolken (Democrat).....	2,244 ⁴

He did not seek re-election to the legislature, but instead was elected Stearns County Attorney, and served one term, 1901-1905. For the next few years, he shelved his personal political ambitions while remaining active in the Democratic party. In 1912, he ran for attorney general on the Democratic ticket. He was unopposed in the primary election on September 17, 1912:

Republican

Thomas Fraser.....	56,137
Lyndon A. Smith.....	84,816

Democrat

William F. Donohue.....	25,327
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In the general election on November 5, 1912, he was swamped by former Lieutenant Governor Lyndon Smith:

Lyndon A. Smith (Republican).....	166,950
William F. Donohue (Democrat).....	83,997
J. H. Morse (Prohibition).....	27,140 ⁵

⁴ 1899 Blue Book, at 516. Anderson's party affiliation was not listed. Donohue's biographical sketch appeared in the legislative manual for that term:

William F. Donohue (Democrat) resides at Melrose, and is an attorney at law. He was born at Hudson, Wis., April 23, 1862; moved from there with his parents to New Richmond, Wis., and was educated in the public schools of that city, after which he taught school for several terms; was next employed as a traveling salesman, which occupation he followed for about two years; entered the law department of the State University of this state in the fall of 1894 and graduated from that institution in June, 1896. He was president of the board of education of Melrose and was city attorney of Melrose for two years. He is married.

Id. at 630.

⁵ 1913 Blue Book, at 342-43, 352-53, 506-7 (results of both elections).

In 1916, Donohue ran for Congress in the Sixth Congressional District against Harold Knutson, a Republican, and John Knutsen, a Prohibitionist. On the stump, he reached out to progressives in both parties. In a wide-ranging speech reported in the *St. Cloud Times* three days before the election, he blamed the Republicans for the financial panics in the 19th century, heaped praise on T. R., dissected the 1912 election, listed important legislation passed the previous three years, criticized his own party, and saluted Woodrow Wilson:

In a complete discussion, W. F. Donohue reviewed the legislation enacted by the Democratic party during the three and a half years of the Wilson administration. He stated that the panics since the Civil War, in 1859, 1873, 1884, 1893 and 1907 were directly due to Republican legislation. A Republican president was in office during each of these panics with the exception of the panic of 1893, when Cleveland was president. This panic was directly due to legislation enacted by the previous Republican president.

“During the panic of 1907 we had as our president the only man in the United States who has never made a mistake, Theodore Roosevelt,” said Mr. Donohue. . . .

“During the campaign of 1912 there were three parties in the field commanding prominence. Two of these were progressive parties, the Democratic and the Republican Progressive. The other party was a reactionary or stand-pat Republican party.

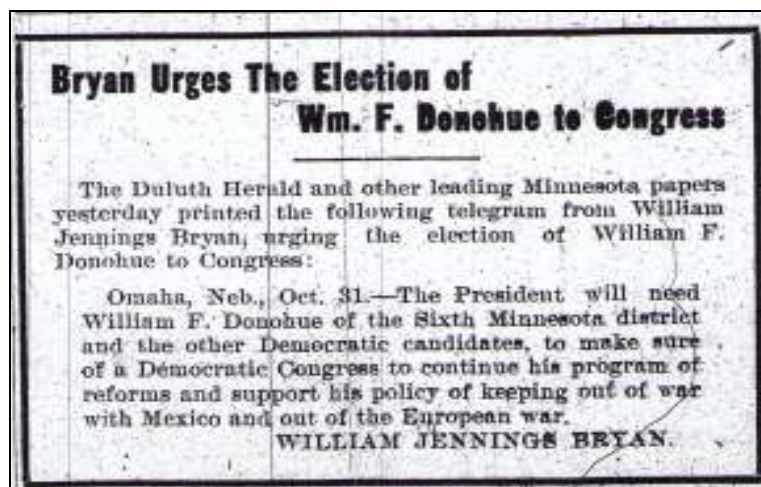
“The two elements of the Republican party differed. Four years ago Roosevelt, then leader of the progressive Republican party, stated that the Republican party was controlled by the reactionary or stand-pat element. It is so controlled today.

“The stand-pat element of the Democratic party four years ago sought control of the party at Baltimore and held this control for some time. Judge Parker was elected as chairman. Champ Clark of Missouri was their candidate for the Democratic nomination. . .”

Mr. Donohue then devoted his discussion to the Sixth congressional district, recalling to the audience the vast natural resources of the eleven counties that comprised the district. He stated that the district was new in development and important legislation was needed to allow the people of the Sixth district to fully realize the great advantages offered them here. . . .

Mr. Donohue closed his eloquent address by paying a fitting tribute to the great President Wilson. “Divine power rules this world. Since the early history, one nation or another was chosen to lead the vanguard. At first Rome was leading all the rest and the Roman citizen possessed all the prowess of the world. Today the United States of America has been chosen to lead the vanguard to the nobler causes. Today, more than at any other time is there danger of being overrun, but every citizen is proud that the United States is leading the vanguard and the President Wilson is leading the United States.”⁶

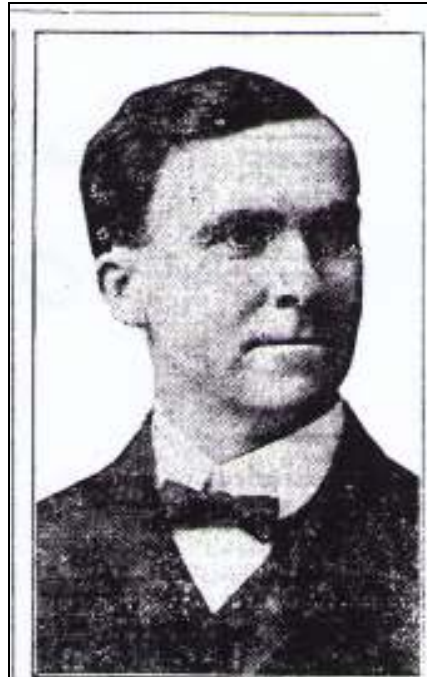
His attempts to broaden his appeal may have been undercut by the dissemination of the following endorsement from former Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, a divisive figure in American politics:⁷



⁶ *St. Cloud Times*, Saturday, November 4, 1916, at 1. The article is headlined, “DONOHUE, LAWLER, HIMSL AND THORSON PLAY BIG GUNS ON G. O. P. ISSUES....Donohue Shows a Remarkable Knowledge of Affairs of Government. States His Position....Asserts Reactionary Element of Democratic Party is in Minority.”

⁷ *St. Cloud Times*, November 3, 1916, at 1.

Friendly newspapers in the district also published the following profile, which emphasized his personal background, listed the diverse jobs he held before becoming a lawyer, and avoided reciting his positions on the issues of the day:⁸



WILLIAM F. DONOHUE.
Sixth District.

The Sixth district Democrats are backing William F. Donohue of Melrose in one of the warmest congressional scraps that district has ever known. He was born at Hudson, Wis., and spent his boyhood days on a farm near New Richmond, Wis. After an education in the public schools of New Richmond, he taught school for a short period. He next became a traveling salesman and remained at that work for two years. Deciding to turn his talents to the law, Mr. Donohue entered the University of Minnesota and graduated from the law school in June, 1896. He moved at once to Melrose and has been located there since. In the legislature of 1899-1901 he was representative from Stearns county, and from 1901-1905 he was county attorney of Stearns. He was a delegate to the St. Louis convention this summer. For many years he has been president of the Melrose board of education. He is making a whirlwind campaign and is sure of election.

⁸ *Wabasha Herald*, October 12, 1916, at 11.

Although President Wilson lost Minnesota by less than 400 votes to Charles Evans Hughes,⁹ Donohue was soundly defeated by Harold Knutson:

Harold Knutson (Republican).....20,889
 William F. Donohue (Democrat).....13,107
 John Knutsen (Prohibition).....2,766¹⁰

He did not run for office again. Two years later, he moved to St. Cloud and formed a partnership with James J. Quigley, which lasted until his death fourteen years later.

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OBITUARIES

He died on Wednesday, November 2, 1932, at age seventy. *The St. Cloud Daily Times and Journal-Press* carried the story on its front page:

**W. F. Donohue,
 Attorney, Dies
 This Morning**

**Was 70 Years Old Served
 In Democrat Party Posts
 For Many Years**

⁹ The results of the presidential election were:

Charles Evans Hughes (Republican).....179,544
 Woodrow Wilson (Democrat).....179,152
 James Franklin Hanly (Prohibition).....7,793
 Allan L. Benson (Socialist).....20,117
 Arthur E. Reimer (Industrial Labor).....468

¹⁰ Bruce M. White, et al, *Minnesota Votes 100* (Minn. Hist. Soc. Press, 1977).

William F. Donohue, prominent in legal and political circles, died at 3 o'clock this morning in Rochester where he went two weeks ago for medical treatment. The body was brought to St. Cloud today. Funeral arrangements have not been made, but it is probable that the service will be held Saturday at the Cathedral.

Mr. Donohue was born in Hudson, Wisconsin, April 23, 1862, the son of Pete and Johanna Donohue. He attended school in Hudson and later entered the law school at the University of Minnesota where he graduated in 1896. In June of that year he opened an office of the practice of law in Melrose and in August formed a partnership with a classmate, W. J. Stephens, which continued for 20 years. In August 1918 he came to St. Cloud and formed a partnership with James J. Quigley.

Active in Civic Affairs

While in Melrose, Mr. Donohue was active in civic and political life, serving as a member of the school board and also as city attorney. He was elected to the state legislature in 1898 and 1900 was elected county attorney.

During his residence in St. Cloud Mr. Donohue was exceptionally successful in his profession and also as a leader in the ranks of the Democratic party, having served as the Democratic county chairman and likewise as delegate to state and national conventions. He was a delegate to the convention in Houston, Texas, in 1928 and to the convention in Chicago which nominated Franklin D. Roosevelt. At this time he was active in having the regular Democrats seated as delegates, and his activities in behalf of his party enjoyed a close acquaintance with national leaders of the party. He was a member of the state executive committee.

Married in 1897

Mr. Donohue married Miss Mary Graham on June 2, 1897. Mrs. Donohue survives with seven children: Mrs. Madeline Madigan, St. Cloud; Mrs. Ethel Lerohl, Bovey; Howard J. Donohue. St. Cloud;

Mrs. Alice Virkswager, Sioux City, Ia.; Miss Mary Donohue, St. Cloud; Miss Evelyn Donohue, St. Cloud. He leaves five brothers and sisters: George Donohue, Seattle; Arthur and Miss Sarah Donohue, Portland; Miss Anna L. Donohue, Hollywood; Mrs. John Cunningham, Ceylon, Wis.

Mr. Donohue was a member of the Elks lodge and the Knights of Columbus.¹¹

The next day, the *Melrose Beacon* published his obituary:

**DEATH SUMMONS
PROMINENT CITIZEN**

**Attorney W. F. Donohue, Former
Melrose Resident, Dies Wed-
nesday Morning.**

William F. Donohue, well known attorney of St. Cloud and former resident of Melrose, died early Wednesday morning at Rochester, where he had been taken two weeks ago. The remains were brought to St. Cloud Wednesday and the funeral likely will be held Saturday morning at the Cathedral Catholic Church in St. Cloud.

¹¹ *St. Cloud Daily Times and Daily Journal-Press*, November 2, 1932, at 1. Three days later, the *Times Journal-Press* reported Donohue's funeral:

**Bishop Busch Urges
Value Christian Life
At Donohue Funeral**

The wisdom of leading a Christian life which involves intellect, will and righteousness, was stressed by Most Rev. Joseph F. Busch in his sermon at the funeral mass of William F. Donohue at the Cathedral this morning, with the thought that worldly attainments are in the last analysis temporary and superficial and not of so great consequences as the character of life lived by each individual. Regarding Mr. Donohue, he said the large number of friends present for the funeral rites, testified to the widespread esteem in which he was held.

St. Cloud Daily Times and Journal Press, Saturday, November 5, 1932, at 3 (long list of relatives omitted).

Mr. Donohue was born in Hudson, Wisconsin, April 23, 1862, and was past 70 years of age at his death. He graduated from the law school at the University of Minnesota in 1896. In June that year he came to Melrose and opened a law office. Two months later he formed a partnership with W. J. Stephens which partnership continued for 20 years. In 1918 Mr. Donohue went to St. Cloud and formed the law firm of Donohue and Quigley.

While in Melrose Mr. Donohue was one of our most prominent and highly respected citizens and was very active in the civic welfare of the city. He served as city attorney and member of the school board. He was elected to the state legislature in 1898 and in 1900 was elected county attorney.¹²

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MEMORIAL

In an editorial, the *St. Cloud Times* paid a warm tribute to Donohue:

A LIFE OF FAITHFUL SERVICE

No man of St Cloud and Central Minnesota was more highly esteemed than William F. Donahue. His death in the prime of life, when experience had added to his keen ability, is the passing of one who has maintained the place of leader in this community for a quarter of a century.

His recognized ability brought him a large clientage from Central Minnesota, and his skill as a lawyer won for his clients many notable triumphs.

¹² The Melrose Beacon, November 3, 1932, at 1 (last two paragraphs about political activities and surviving family, taken from *St. Cloud Times*, are omitted).

He has served as representative in the legislature, county attorney, and was high in the councils of his party, having represented it at national conventions, and was a delegate to the last Democratic convention at Chicago.

As an attorney he was painstaking, diligent, studious, and confident. When he appeared in court he knew the facts; and depended upon a proper presentation of the evidence, to serve his clients. He left nothing to chance, and his faithfulness in the preparation of his cases was characteristic of his life as a citizen.

His own convictions were so well established that he never felt the necessity of fortifying them by attacks on other faiths. He had that spirit of calm tolerance that made him a delightful neighbor and a most worthy, helpful citizen.

He filled a big place in the community, with genial fair-mindedness, good fellowship and trustworthiness. His death is a sad loss, and the deepest sympathy is extended to those who intimately shared that life, as wife and children.¹³ ■

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Posted MLHP: September 27, 2013.

¹³ *St. Cloud Daily Times and Daily Journal-Press* (Second Section), November 2, 1932, at 10. His last name is misspelled in the first paragraph of the editorial.