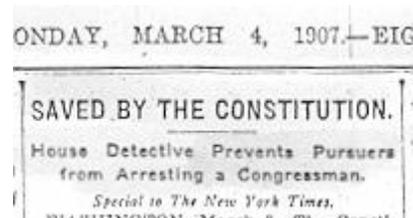


## Myth #116: Congressman Clarence Van Duzer's Troubles by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

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Political scandal has rocked the U.S. Congress off and on since its inception, occasionally resulting in members of Congress spending time in prison. No member of Nevada's congressional delegation has ever been sentenced to prison. Clarence Van Duzer, however, was fortunate to escape that fate despite being implicated in bogus mining ventures.



"The Constitution of the United States to-day came to the rescue of Clarence Dunn Van Duzer, Representative in Congress from Nevada," wrote *The New York Times* in a front page story on March 4, 1907. Van Duzer, absent from his office for over a year, had returned to Washington, D.C. on his last day in office to sign a pay warrant for his mileage in the amount of \$1,100. An attempt to forcibly arrest Van Duzer on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol was thwarted by a Capitol police officer who claimed that the U.S. Constitution prevented a member of Congress from being arrested. Van Duzer disappeared without collecting his money.

At one time Van Duzer was the fair-haired boy in Nevada Democratic politics. His Congressional biography and obituary claim he was a Nevada native son born near Mountain City in northern Elko County on May 4, 1866.

Van Duzer was living in Berkeley, California, by 1880. After attending the University of California, he graduated in the first class from Nevada State University in Reno, in 1889. His student record noted that he was born in Idaho City, Idaho, on May 4, 1864.

U.S. Representative Francis Newlands, a Democrat, recognized Van Duzer's talent, hired him as his private secretary, and took him to Washington, D.C. Van Duzer graduated from Georgetown University Law School in 1893. Before returning to Nevada in 1897, he served as Nevada's State Land Agent for over five years, a governor's appointment.

Van Duzer's political career skyrocketed after he was admitted to the State Bar in September 1898. Elected Humboldt County District Attorney the same year, he ran for the State Assembly in 1900 as a Democrat. Van Duzer easily won the race and was appointed Speaker. When his mentor Congressman Newlands ran for the U.S. Senate in 1902, the Silver-Democrats picked Van Duzer to run for Nevada's lone house seat. Now calling himself a native Nevadan, Van Duzer scored his third political victory in six years and returned to Washington, D.C.

Like his father before him who established the Van Duzer mining district in Elko County in 1869, son Clarence was obsessed with mining and getting rich. He had pursued a number of mining ventures while living in Winnemucca and Golconda and also published three magazines--*The Nevada Magazine*, *Nevada Miner*, and *Mining and Industrial Review*.

The *Reno Evening Gazette* and other Republican newspapers throughout the state began tracking Van Duzer's corporate ventures in 1903. During his reelection campaign in 1904, he was dogged by stories characterizing his New England-Tonopah Mining Company as a wildcat operation that had fleeced its investors out of tens of thousands of dollars. Despite the negative headlines and accusations, Van Duzer squeaked out a victory and survived an election challenge to return to the House for a second term.

There was talk of Van Duzer running for Governor in early 1906. However, a law suit filed in Washington, D.C., by an elderly woman charging the congressman with fraud helped bring his political career to an abrupt end. Many of the Democratic newspapers in Nevada now turned against the once rising political star. In June, Van Duzer announced he would not seek reelection.

Writer, journalist, and Democratic war-horse Sam Davis savaged the errant politician in a Carson City *Appeal* editorial. "The exit of Clarence Van Duzer from public life was emphasized by having to resort to the protection afforded the dome of the capitol at Washington to congressmen who desire to escape the payment of their just debts," Davis wrote. "He has been openly accused of selling these worthless stocks

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and paying a few dividends out of the proceeds. He misrepresented his state and disgraced his party," Davis charged. "It will take Nevada a long time to recover from the black eye he has given our political reputation and our mining industry."

Stories of Van Duzer's arrest in Pittsburgh in 1909 for failing to pay a bill; his arrest in Baltimore in 1917 for bilking farmers in a mining scam; his disappearance from York, Pennsylvania, after promoting get-rich-quick schemes and passing bad checks in 1921; and his arrest for passing bad checks in Wartburg, Tennessee, in 1922 found their way into Nevada newspapers.

At some point, Van Duzer stopped his scheming. He moved to Passaic, New Jersey, to practice law, work as an internal revenue department deputy, and, in 1931, even considered running for Congress again. The *New York Times* noted his death on September 28, 1947. Van Duzer's cremated remains were scattered over the Humboldt River near Winnemucca.

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