

Prescott History In A Minute

“Did You Know?” Series



James Dodson: The Unheralded Lawman Who Tamed Whiskey Row

- James Dodson served as deputy sheriff, chief of police or city marshal, constable, tax collector and even dog catcher from at least 1877-1890, and again in 1892.
- Dodson’s tenure as lawman corresponded with a period of growth and prosperity for Prescott.
- James Dodson was the great-grandson of Daniel Boone. He was born and raised in Clay County, Missouri, and was childhood friends with Frank and Jesse James. With Frank (and later Jesse), Dodson joined and fought with Quantrill’s Raiders during the Civil War along the Kansas/Missouri border.
- While enforcing law in Prescott, Dodson used a Colt .45 initially given to his sister by Jesse James. He also carried a pearl-handled Bowie knife. However, he made many arrests using only his fists.
- Some historians believe Dodson had six notches on his .45 pistol. Three can be accounted for while he enforced law in Prescott. Dodson himself could not recall if it was three or four.
- In July 1881, Dodson subjugated outlaw John Quincy Murphy by skillfully inflicting with his Bowie knife “thirteen severe but not dangerous cuts.”
- In April 1882, Dodson shot and killed notorious highwayman Joseph Banks after an incident in Whiskey Row’s Keg Saloon
- James died in Phoenix in 1907. The Phoenix Republican wrote, “He was one of those strenuous and daring creations of frontier life whose deeds romancing writers are wont to surround with mountain ranges of fiction.”
- Images Courtesy of Sharlot Hall Museum.
- by Brad Courtney for the Prescott Western Heritage Foundation, Inc.