



BLUE AND GRAY DISPATCH

A Witness to the 1856 John Brown Patawattomie Creek Massacre in Kansas

By Norm Dasinger

In 1855, sixteen-year-old John C Doyle moved from Chattanooga Tennessee to Kansas Territory with his family. *“Our family consisted of six boys and one girl,”* Mr. Doyle told a reporter from “The Lookout” in 1921. *“My father’s object in going to Kansas was to get a home for us.”* Little did he know that he was about to witness the beginning of “Bleeding Kansas” one of the most horrendous events in American history just prior to the Civil War. In becoming a territory, Kansas was to decide for itself the issue of slavery – with pro and anti-slave factions settling side by side in the new territory causing serious tensions and eventual bloodshed.



Potawattomie Creek

John and his family arrived in what is now Franklin County, Kansas on November 18, 1855 and settled on a claim of one hundred and sixty acres. They built a house, and, in the spring of 1856, they planted their first crop. Everything was quiet and peaceful until the night of May 24th when John Brown, five of his sons, a son in law and two other associates came to the house and demanded admittance. Brown and his followers targeted the Doyle home because John’s father, James, was a known slave supporter. Brown was seeking revenge on the known pro slavery supporters in the area as three days prior, Brown with the larger “Pottawatomie Company” had failed to protect the anti-slave town of Lawrence from being burned by those who supported slavery.

With the knock on the Doyle family door, the Pottawatomie Massacre, as it was to become known, had begun. That night, Brown, his sons and associates murdered five men from three different cabins along Pottawatomie Creek. According to John Doyle, *“When refused entry, they set fire to the house with torches made of prairie hay. To keep us all from being burned to death, my father opened the door. They came in and handcuffed my father and my two older brothers (William and Drury) and started to take me but mother begged them to leave me, as I would be all the protection she would have. Brown told mother they were going to take father and the boys to the army and left the house with them. They took them about three hundred yards from the house and murdered them. My father was shot in the head, my brothers cut to pieces. They left them all dead in a heap. They then went over two miles further and killed two more men by the names of Wilkerson and Sherman. After daylight I went to some neighbor’s houses and got them to come and help bury father and my brothers. Brown said he murdered them on account of being slave holders, but my father had never owned a Negro and never expected to.”*

After the murders, John Doyle, his mother, and the rest of his siblings travelled to Missouri, staying there a short time, and finally getting back to Chattanooga in September of 1856.

When war broke out in 1861, John Doyle signed up to serve with the 2nd Tennessee Cavalry, CSA.

John told this story in 1921. A modest and retiring man anxious to avoid publicity, he gave his account of that night but only on the condition that it not be published until his death. He died in 1922 and his story was published soon after.

He is buried in the Confederate Cemetery in Chattanooga.

This Civil War Dispatch has been brought to you by the Blue and Gray Education Society, a non-profit 501-3C educational organization. Please visit us at www.blueandgrayeducation.org.

Share this email:



[Manage](#) your preferences | [Opt out](#) using TrueRemove®

Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.

View this email [online](#).

P.O. Box 1176
Chatham, VA | 24531 US

This email was sent to .
To continue receiving our emails, add us to your address book.

emma®

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.