

By the Kansas Historical Society

The Rescue of John Doy



The men of the rescue party included (left to right) James B. Abbott, Joshua A. Pike, Jacob Senix, Joseph Gardner, Thomas Simmons, S. J. Willis, Charles Doy (son of John, in the plaid jacket), John E. Stewart, Silas Soule, and George Hay. John Doy is seated because he was weak from his time in jail.

By 1859 the Underground Railroad was busy helping slaves escape through Kansas Territory. Proslavery Missourians, called "border ruffians," continued to pursue them. A group of people in Lawrence realized it was too dangerous for formerly enslaved African Americans to remain in town. They decided to move some of the African Americans to Canada using the Underground Railroad. John Doy was one of the men who volunteered to undertake this task.

Doy was escorting 13 African Americans when he was ambushed and captured by some 20 Missouri ruffians. He was taken to St. Joseph, Missouri, to be held until his trial. The citizens of Lawrence were outraged. After the trial an elaborate plan was put into action to rescue him.

Edward H. Grant, an abolitionist newspaper editor in Missouri, was one of the first to write about the rescue. He published this story in the St. Joseph *Free Democrat*. His article was picked up and published in other antislavery newspapers back East.

The Rescue of Dr. John Doy.

Doy Taken back to Kansas—Curious Proceedings.

A telegram has announced the forcible rescue of Dr. John Doy, of Kansas, from the jail at St. Joseph, Mo. The following particulars are interesting. A St. Joseph correspondent of the St. Louis *Democrat* says:

“Dr. Doy, recently tried in this city for stealing slaves, was last night rescued from the county jail by a party of six men, who came over from Kansas, and immediately returned with him. The night was dark and rainy, when one of the party awoke the jailor and asked him to receive a horse thief just arrested, to keep him till Monday morning for trial. The jailor opened the door, when he was immediately placed under an armed guard, who warned him that an attempt at resistance or alarm would cost him his life. As the prisoners except Doy were threatened with shooting if they attempted an escape or disturbance, Doy was then liberated and left with his rescuers, it is supposed, for Kansas. A party has gone out from here in search of them, but it is not likely to be successful.

Great excitement exists here in consequence, and threats are made against the *Free Democrat*, the editor of which has been ordered to leave the city. What the result will be, the next twenty-four hours will determine.”

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KANSAS HEALTH FOUNDATION