

## **John Doyle Lee**

John Doyle Lee was born to Ralph and Elizabeth Lee in Kaskaskia, Randolph County, Illinois on October 12, 1812. His mother died when Lee was very young and this led to excessive drinking on the part of his father. He became an early member of the Latter Day Saints (or Mormon) Church, joining about seven years after it was founded by his friend, Joseph Smith. After Smith was murdered, he went to Utah with most of the other Mormons.

There, under directions from Brigham Young, he was instrumental in the formation of several communities and became a successful farmer, rancher and business man in Iron County, Utah. He served as the local bishop and as the Indian Agent to the Paiute Indians. He practiced plural marriages and is reported to have had nineteen wives and sixty-seven children.

In 1857, there were complaints by non-Mormons to the United States Government of excessive church abuse of powers and an outcry against polygamy. As a result, the United States Army sent troops into Utah raising fears within the Mormons of persecution once again. About the same time, a wagon train of emigrants from Arkansas was traveling to California under the leadership of Captains John T. Baker and Alexander Fancher. Jacob Hamblin, the noted Mormon Peacekeeper and owner of the Mountain Meadows grazing rights, invited the wagon train to camp for a while in the safety and security of the meadows.

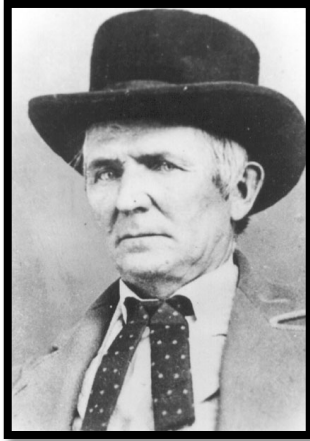
On September 7, 1857, a group of Mormons under the leadership of Lee, and disguised as Paiute Indians, laid siege to the wagon train. Perhaps there were some Indians involved in the tragedy that was to follow. However, Isaac Haight, a stake president and leader of the militia group that joined Lee's group, later reported that the Mormons were unsuccessful in trying to incite the Indians to attack the white settlers. The Paiutes quickly withdrew when they understood what was happening.

After three days of holding the wagon train under siege, Lee approached the emigrants while waving a white flag. The besieged people received him as their savior. He negotiated an end to the hostilities, and in exchange for safe passage through the area the emigrants were to give up all their arms, abandon their wagons, possessions, and cattle and be escorted out of the meadows to safety. The emigrants finally agreed and with each adult and older child escorted by an armed guard, they were marched away. About a mile from the camp, and upon a signal, reportedly given by Lee himself, each guard shot his escort. Besides the men, all of the women and 35 children were murdered in a matter of moments while they thought they were headed for safety. Altogether, over 120 innocent lives were taken in what was the worst massacre in the history of the Oregon and California Trails. Seventeen children under the age of six survived the ordeal. It was thought that children older than six would be able to remember and relate the events that happened that day. Under Federal orders the children were eventually returned to family members in Arkansas. One or more of the children may have remained in Utah.

Some of the children were able to remember some of the events and would later recall seeing the Mormons wearing jewelry and clothing belonging to their parents and recognizing some of their family's possessions.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, church leadership continued their support of Lee for some time. By the late 1860s, he was being harassed by his Mormon neighbors who were also ostracizing his children. In 1870, one Utah newspaper publicly castigated Brigham Young for covering up the massacre. In

the same year, Young excommunicated Lee from the church and exiled him to Arizona.



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In Arizona he settled on the Colorado River and established Lee's Ferry, which is to this day a top resort draw. In 1874, a sheriff went into Arizona and arrested him. He was returned to Utah for a trial which ended without a verdict because the prosecution was actually trying to place the blame for the massacre on Brigham Young rather than Lee. Lee was tried a second time, found guilty and sentenced to death. Offered the choice of hanging, beheading, or a firing squad, he chose the firing squad. Lee was to be the only person ever indicted, convicted, or punished for the 120 murders in the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

Twenty years after the massacre, on March 23, 1877, he was taken back to Mountain Meadows for his execution. Lee faced death bravely, and sitting on the edge of the coffin provided for him he gave instructions to his executioners. Not wanting his body mangled, he raised his arms above his head and said, "Center my heart, boys". The firing squad fired on command, Lee fell quietly back into his coffin with his feet still on the ground. His body was positioned within the coffin and then taken to his final resting place, the Panguitch City Cemetery in Panguitch, Utah.



**Lee sitting on his coffin moments before his execution**



**John Doyle Lee's grave**



**John Doyle Lee's headstone**

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