

THE BRASELL HANGINGS

By Donald E. Spurlock

Siftings from Putnam County, Tennessee

By Mary Hopson

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<http://www.ajlambert.com>

One of the most intriguing occurrences in the history of Putnam County involved the arrest, trials, and public execution of Joseph and George Brassell, on March 27, 1878. It intrigues primarily because of the coincidences involved. Second, the mysteries of this violent conspiracy have never fully been answered. And finally, the attitudes of this community toward crime and morality are perhaps the most vivid aspect of the entire affair.

The public hanging of Joseph (Joe) and George (Teek) Brassell was the consequence of a conspiracy gone bad between Joe and George, and at least three other men which occurred during the evening of 29 November, 1875.

During the process of carrying out their scheme of crime and violence two other innocent men who were brothers were also murdered. The first, Russell Allison was shot during an attempted robbery of the inn where he resided. He died about thirty-six hours later. The second, John Allison brother to the younger Russell, had been deputized as a posse member to capture and arrest the Brassell brothers. While attempting to subdue Teek, John was also shot and died of his wounds early the following morning.

On 27 March, 1878, after having exhausted every appeal Joe and Teek Brassell were publicly hanged together on the same scaffold within one mile of the courthouse as the death warrant demanded. At 1:30 p.m. the rope which supported a trapdoor upon which the brothers stood, was cut with a hatchet. After eleven minutes Joseph and George Brassell paid their debts to society the State of Tennessee, and the good people of Putnam County, for the crime of murder in the first degree.

Joe and Teek Brassell were born in Kentucky. Joe was born around 1853; Teek, around 1855. The Brassell family moved from Kentucky to Dixon Springs, in Smith County, Tennessee, in the 1850's. During the 1860's the family again relocated to a farm in the Gentry community near what is now the town of Baxter, Tennessee. At that time, Putnam County was of notorious reputation as a haven of lawlessness for every known type of outlaw, murderer, and lawbreaker. The county held this reputation up until the railroad arrived and the town of Baxter was permanently established and settled.

Nine miles west of the city of Cookeville, the Nashville road was intersected by the old Sparta road. Approximately two to three hundred yards from this intersection stood Allison's Stand. Also, about one and one-half to two miles in

the direction of Sparta, lived the family of Egbert H. and Mary P. Brassell, the parents of nine children including Joe and Teek. This inn was a well known establishment and served many people in the western end of the county as well as many traveler's who were making their way through the foothills of the Cumberland mountains. It was here that the murder of Russell Allison occurred.

The story of the murder of Russell and John Allison begins at sundown on the evening of 29 November 1875. Dobson Johnson and Doll Bates, from DeKalb County, were en route to Putnam County, when they met Joe Brassell some time between sundown and dark, coming up the Nashville road.

Apparently the men knew one another. Bates and Johnson were instructed to go to Jim Brassell's home (the older brother of Joe and Teek, and the fifth conspirator) who lived near by, and wait for him to return. After obtaining something to drink from the family still-house Joe also found Teek there and together they made their way to Jim Brassell's house. It was there that Joe and Teek, along with Jim their older brother, Bates, and Johnson, all conspired to commit robbery.

The conspirators was to rob Allison's Stand of a supposed four thousand dollars, six hundred of which was hidden in a clock. In addition, Mr. William J. Isbell, trustee and tax collector for Putnam County, was expected that night at the inn also. It was common knowledge that Mr. Isbell frequently stayed at the inn when his duties required overnight travel in the western end of the county. It was also generally understood that Mr. Isbell carried large sums of money on his person. As it happened, however, Mr. Isbell became ill and did not make it to Allison's place that night but stayed the night at Indian Creek instead.

The conspirators agreed to rob the inn and Mr. Isbell. Jim, feeling not quite right about the whole affair, returned home with the excuse that his wife would become suspicious. He did, however, encourage the other four. Joe, Teek, Bates and Johnson proceeded to their father's home where they obtained disguises, blacking to put on their faces, and pistols. The four then made their way to the inn.

Russell Allison, recognizing his former schoolmates outside by voice, let the men in after they caused a great commotion in the yard. When Russell saw the men were armed, he began to scuffle with Joe who was the first through the door. Joe shot Russell in the bowels.

Finding neither the money nor Mr. Isbell, the four men retreated. Bates and Johnson returned to DeKalb County while Joe and Teek returned to the still house. Just after dark on 30 November 1875, a posse arrived at the still house to arrest the murderers. John Allison, the elder brother of Russell, who had been deputized found Joe lying down. Teek was missing but soon appeared. When Allison confronted the Brassells about killing Russell, a scuffle began and again,

just as before, John Allison was shot in the bowels within an inch of where his younger brother had been wounded. He died the following day. Ironically John and Russell Allison died exactly one day apart, within an hour of each other, having been murdered by two other brothers.

The Brassells were arrested and conveyed by horseback to the jail in Cookeville. Due to the concern for their safety they stayed only one week at Cookeville, after which they were transferred to Nashville for safe keeping until the Grand Jury proceedings commenced on 14 February 1876.

After their indictment for murder, their arraignment followed on 21 February 1876, at which time they pleaded not guilty. The trial was continued until the June term of criminal court, 1876. Their trial was continued on three additional occasions. Finally, their case was fully tried during the June term of 1877.

The entire trial lasted one week. It commenced on Saturday, 23 June, 1877, and ended on Saturday, 30 June, 1877. At the conclusion, the Brassells were found guilty and were sentenced to death by hanging.

Following their conviction Joe and Teek appealed their case to Supreme Court of Tennessee. Appearing in person in Nashville, their conviction was upheld by the Supreme Court on 2 February, 1878. Their appeal appears in volume 2, Shannon's Tennessee Cases, Braswell vs. State, pages 596-606. They were conveyed back to Cookeville on 23 March, 1878, to await execution.

While awaiting execution in Cookeville, Joe and Teek had over one thousand visitors. They talked at length with a newspaper reporter from the Nashville Daily American, who documented much of their lives and criminal activity. On 17 March, 1878, both Joe and Teek were baptized into the Methodist Church.

Before leaving Nashville, they attempted to poison their guards with arsenic which had been smuggled to them.

Back in the Cookeville jail they sawed the chain to their cell door in half and attempted a jail break. An alert guard foiled their attempt after hearing the chain drop to the floor. Joe and Teek upon being discovered in the hallway offered to shake the jailer's hand but he refused. After their escape attempt they were put in twenty-three pound shackles. Even with these precautions Teek was able to use one of the links to pry apart the shackles and attempted to crawl under the floor. He was thwarted, however, when he became hung between the bars protruding underneath the floor in only four and one-half inches of crawl space.

They wrote letters in invisible writing. They even claimed they could weaken any bar in the jail with some homemade remedy composed of sulphur. It is not known whether they ever actually tried this. Thus, Joe and Teek spent their last days in the Cookeville jail until the day of 27 March, 1878.

That day was very chilly in Cookeville. The streets were crowded with thousands very early who had come from all around and by every imaginable means to witness the hanging of Joe and Teek. Those who had nothing to ride walked. Newspaper reports from that day estimate the crowd in Cookeville at between ten and twenty thousand.

At 11:00 o'clock Joe and Teek were placed in a wagon containing their coffins, upon which they were seated and were escorted by two hundred armed guards to the scaffold located on Billy Goat hill, close to the present Clover Avenue apartments. Their sister Amanda followed close behind the wagon. They arrived at the scaffold at about 11:30 a.m. The gallows had been constructed as prescribed by law within one mile of the courthouse. It was built of building lumber and sturdy beams similar to railroad ties. The distinguishing characteristic of this gallows, however, was the two trapdoors rather than one. The execution was set for 1:00 p.m.

They were taken from the wagon and allowed to hug their sister. They requested she not witness the execution and she complied. They mounted the scaffold and were seated. Preachers shouted sermons of warning to the crown. Other sang spiritual hymns, while yet others led prayers.

As 1:00 o'clock approached the men were prepared for death. They were allowed to speak to the crowd, which they did, warning them of the evils of alcohol. Their hands and ankles were tied securely. Hoods, which in this case were white, were placed over their heads. They wanted again to speak to the crowd for a few minutes. This request was granted and the hoods removed. Again they warned the crowd to live uprightly.

About the time Mr. Isbell approached the brothers and begged them to confess their crimes. Joe confessed, but Teek remained obstinate, maintaining his innocence. Mr. Isbell then left the scaffold. Teek never confessed. As 1:30 approached the men were again made ready for death.

Sheriff Campbell J. Bohannon left the scaffold and assumed his position with hatchet in hand beside the rope which held the trapdoor on which Joe and Teek stood. Both men expressed great anxiety over whether they would fall far enough to break their necks. With only five minutes left, Sheriff Bohannon called out each minute to the brothers as it passed. With only thirty seconds left Joe said goodbye to Sheriff Bohannon. The sheriff responded, "Goodbye, Joe."

At precisely 1:30 o'clock Sheriff Bohannon said, "Look out, boys,..." Teek spoke his last words, "Lord, have mercy on those who swore my life away." Joe's last words were, "Lord Jesus, be with me."

When Sheriff Bohannon cut the rope, Joseph Lewis Brassell and George Andrew Brassell fell three feet, their necks being broken. Muscular contraction was minimal and lasted only one and one-half minutes, after which all signs of life were gone except a feeble beat of Joe's pulse. As the weight of the bodies pulled the twisted rope taut, it caused the bodies to spin for a few seconds. When the bodies stopped spinning they came to rest facing each other. After eleven minutes all signs of life were completely gone.

Doctor Lansden of Cookeville and Doctor A.H. King of Chestnut mound, the attending physicians, examined the bodies of the hanged men and pronounced them dead.

At 1:45 o'clock, the bodies of Joe and Teek were cut down and placed in their coffins, and the bodies were then delivered to Amanda Brassell and another brother of Joe and Teek.

The brothers were interred at the Brassell Family Cemetery which is located adjacent to Upperman High School at Baxter, Tennessee. The cemetery is surrounded by a chain-link fence about five feet high. The stone of Joe and Teek is still visible. It sits under a large cedar tree at the front of the cemetery. It is broken off at an angle, yet the partial dates and the word "both" can still be read.

This hanging attracted the attention of the eastern half of the country. The New York Times were enthralled by his execution. At least three major newspapers covered the event.

Although this is a rather dark chapter in our county history, it occupies a legitimate and distinctive place. In spite of the unanswered question, the unsolved mysteries, the different ironies surrounding it, and the distasteful subject matter, it should bind us to a continued effort to study and learn from our local history.

*Reuben Brassell or Braswell, came from North Carolina to the Mine Lick country about 1824. There must have been some connection between this family and the family of the brothers who were hanged in Putnam County in 1878 since Egbert and Mary P. Brassell, the parents of Teke Brassell and Joe Brassell, who were living in Smith County, TN, in 1860, had a son named Reuben J. Brassell. *Pictorial History of Putnam County, Tennessee – And the Settlers Came...pg. 11*

William Allison, from Boonesboro, Orange Co., NC, a son of Lt. Joseph Allison and Jane Donaldson Allison, settled on Cane Creek where the bridge crosses going to Luke's sawmill. He had a son, Joseph Allison who married Eliza Lyon Rhea, daughter of William Rhea who was called "Hog Joe" because he had so many hogs. Joe lived near Baxter and was the father of Robert Steward Allison and several other children. Two of the children, John Allison and Russell Allison, were killed by Joe and Teke Brassell. * *See Allison – Maddux Story*

Dr. Terry Corrects Brassell Story
Herald Citizen – December 26, 1979

Dr. Fred Terry, Cookeville physician, has called to give additional information and to correct some information used in previous stories about the hanging of the Brassell brothers in 1878.

Dr. Terry said the man the Brassell brothers were convicted of killing, Russell Allison, was not a tax collector as we reported in a November 25 story but was, in fact, the proprietor of Allison's Stand Inn at Gentry on the old Walton Road.

Dr. Terry said it was generally understood and maybe told by one of the alleged participants in the crime that their intended was not Allison but was the county trustee, William Jefferson Isbell, Dr. Terry's grandfather.

William Jefferson Isbell, according to the doctor, had gone to Buffalo Valley to collect taxes and was scheduled to stop to stay overnight at the Allison Stand on November 29, 1875.

William Jefferson Isbell, riding on horseback, was not feeling so well or some reason and decided to stop and spend the night with a family he knew on Indian Creek.

William Jefferson Isbell, having collected a considerable amount of money on his round, was then the intended victim not to kill but to rob, Dr. Terry said.

He said the men who killed Allison entered the stand with their faces blackened looking for Isbell. In their search for him, they were not recognized by Allison who called out their names, "Joe and Teek," and was shot.

Dr. Terry said a woman in the room was shot at but, falling back behind a bed, was assumed killed and left unhurt.

Though she did not know the Brassells, she was able to tell the sheriff the names called out by the slain Allison, giving the sheriff an identification clue.

Dr. Terry said both his mother and father attended the hanging in March 1878 in south Cookeville in the vicinity of Billy Goat hill.

Isbell owned and operated the Isbell Hotel on the courthouse square at about where Mills Furniture Store is located.

BOOK: THE ALLISON FAMILY OF ORANGE COUNTY, N.C.
THE BRASSELL HANGINGS

<http://www.tcarden.com/tree/ensor/Hangings.html>

<http://www.tcarden.com/tree/ensor/Isbell.htm>



Mytle Isbell Whitson. (Mrs. John Holland). She was the daughter of Mr. & Mrs. William J. Isbell who operated the Isbell Hotel. Picture courtesy of Mrs. Robert W. Lowe, Sr. – taken from the book "Pictorial history of Putnam Co., TN" by 1st American Bank of Cookeville, TN – pg. 156.

Allison Stand Inn was owned by James Livingston Isbell and Angeline (Beasley) Allison Isbell, James 3rd wife, who was the remarried widow of the Inn's former proprietor, Joseph Steward "Hog Joe" Allison. Located at the corner of the Nashville Road, now Highway 70, and the old Sparta road, the Inn stood about two to three miles from Jim Brassell's home near what is now the Double Springs community, and it provided food and shelter for travelers passing through the area. James Livingston Isbell – b. September 16, 1815 in Adair Co., KY - d. April 26, 1880 in Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN. Buried: Cookeville City Cemetery, Cookeville, TN. He married 1st Rebecca Jones, daughter of Alfred Jones and Elizabeth Nichols. He married 2nd Melvina Mitchell, February 27, 1851 in White Co, TN. He married 3rd Angeline (Beasley) Allison. Angeline (Beasley) Allison Isbell was 1st married to Joseph Allison "Hog Joe".

*See Chapter 1 for Joseph Allison "Hog Joe".

William Jefferson Isbell – b. 23 December 1840, Buffalo Valley, Jackson Co., TN – d. 20 March 1895, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN – s/o James Livingston Isbell & Rebecca Jones. md 1st 3 February 1861, Sara M. Cameron, md 2nd 1 August 1867, Laurel Hill, DeKalb Co., TN, Amanda Helen Starnes – b. 29 January 1849 – d. 30 August 1913 in Putnam Co. TN. Daughter of Charles Starnes and Nancy Rafferty.

William Jefferson Isbell – Buried: +Cookeville City Cemetery, Cookeville, TN along side his wife Amanda Helen (Starnes) Isabelle. In 1869 he along with Captain Prettyman Jones and Prettyman Puckett were trustees of the Methodist Church. In 1870 Census of Putnam Co. he was in District 9, and is listed as a school teacher. He owned the Isbell Hotel in Cookeville, TN. In 1880 Census of Putnam Co., TN he was in District 1, and was the Putnam Co., Court Clerk. Later he was the County Trustee.



William Jefferson Isbell followed James M. McKinney as Proprietor of Cookeville's first hotel renaming it the Isbell Hotel by 1886 on the south side of the Putnam County courthouse square on the lot now occupied by Mills Furniture Co. The old hotel was operated by the family of William Jefferson Isbell, Putnam County trustee and county court clerk for some years.

A partial list of the people in the photo includes, standing on lower porch, from left, "Aunt Ranie," Hattie Isbell (married a Wade), Mary Ann Isbell (married Nackils), Mrs. Amanda Helen Starnes Isbell, Dora Isbell (married Simon M. Ensor), William Jefferson Isbell, Myrtle Isbell (married John Holland Whitson), Sofronia Jones (married Will Draper and was the mother of Mrs. John McCawle), Nancy Melvina Isbell (married J.W. H. Terry and was the mother of Dr. Fred Terry), Lillie Martin Isbell (married Perler) and Anderson Sloan; top row, the only ones identified are second from right, holding wash bowl, Fate Isbell, father of Mrs. Herman Proffitt; and the third from the right, Ferrell Starnes, brother of Mrs. William Jefferson Isbell. All of the others are unknown.

Photo courtesy of Mrs. Fred Terry was in the "Pictorial History of Putnam County Tennessee" 1988. Pg. 53

William Allison, from Boonesboro, Orange Co., NC, a son of Lt. Joseph Allison and Jane Donaldson Allison, settled on Cane Creek where the bridge crosses going to Luke's sawmill. He had a son, Joseph Allison who married 1st Eliza Lyon Rhea, daughter of William Rhea. Married 2nd md Angeline Beasley. Joseph was called "Hog Joe" because he had so many hogs. Joe lived near Baxter and was the father of Robert Steward Allison and several other children. Two of the children, John Allison and Russell Allison, were killed by Joe and Teke Brassell. * See *Allison – Maddux Story*

Allison, Joseph Stewart "Hog Joe" – Chapter 1

b. 22 January 1812 - d. 19 November 1873, Putnam Co., TN
 s/o Lt. William Allison – b. ca. 1780 – md 13 June 1807, Orange County, NC
 & Margaret Stewart – b. 1785, Orange County, NC –
 d. 28 July 1845, White County, TN – d/o Robert & Ann Stewart
William married in the name of Ellison.

md 4 October 1834, **Eliza Lyon Rhea**

b. 16 July 1817, TN – d. 9 November 1866 –
 d/o William Pryor & Mary Ann (Whitson) Rhea
 md 2nd Angeline Beasley – md later James "Jim" Livingston Isbell
Was called "Hog Joe" because he had so many hogs.

Children of Joseph Stewart "Hog Joe" & Eliza Lyon (Rhea) Allison:

- ...William Newton Allison – b. 2 December 1835, Humphreys Co., TN –
 d. 6 April 1905 – Buried: Vittitoe Cemetery near Whiteright, Grayson Co., TX
 md 31 December 1865, Martha Ann Maxwell –
 b. 3 April 1845 – d. 11 October 1870 –
 d/o David Wood Maxwell Sr. & Mary Elizabeth Shanks
- ...Robert Steward Allison – b. 14 October 1837, TN – md Mary E. Lowe
 md 29 May 1881, Putnam Co., TN, Catherine Kesiah Marthella Ann McCaleb
- ...Bird Rhea Allison – b. 15 January 1840 – d. *Died in California of T.B.*
- ...Margaret E. Allison – b. 26 March 1842 – md John Gille
- ...James Calvin Allison – b. 30 July 1843 or 1844 – d. 2 December 1875
- ...**John James Allison** – b. 16 August 1845, White Co., TN –

d. 2 December 1875, Putnam Co., TN –
 Buried: Rhea Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN
 md 18 January, 1866, Leann P. Maxwell – Buried: Rhea Cemetery, TN
 md Melvina Mitchell
Shot & killed by George Andrew "Teek" Brassell, brother of Joe Brassell.
Family records of Wanda Phillips,,1213 N. Chukar Lane, Midland, TX.
 ...Mary Ann Allison – b. 30 April 1848, TN – d. 30 September 1891-
 md ca. 1872, Gideon Anderson
 ...Issac D. Allison – b. 13 February 1852
 ...Pleasant Julius Allison – b. 12 November 1854, Putnam Co., TN,
 d. 21 February 1894, Putnam Co., TN – md 18 January 1884,
 Virginia "Jennie" Catherine Ensor
 ...**Russell N. Allison** – b. 10 December 1856 – d. 1 December 1875, TN
Shot & killed by Joseph Lewis "Joe" Brassell, brother of Teek Brassell.
Never married.
Family records of Wanda Phillips,,1213 N. Chukar Lane, Midland, TX.
 Buried: Rhea Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN
 ...Joseph C. Allison – b. 30 March 1859

EARLY PAPER HERE PUBLISHED DRAWINGS OF HANGED BRASSELLS:

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: By Paul Oldham, Herald-Citizen Staff Writer.

On March 27, 1878, somewhere in south Cookeville near the present South Walnut Avenue on Billy Goat Hill, the Brassell brothers of Baxter were hanged for murder – said to have been in the only legal execution ever carried out in Putnam County.



Joseph Lewis "Joe" Brassell, 23, and George Andrew "Teek" Brassell, 20, were hanged until dead for the Nov. 29, 1875, murder of Russell Allison. They had been tried and convicted by a jury.

Pictures from an old newspaper account of the hanging found in the Tennessee Tech Museum and information with the pictures declares the crowd was perhaps the largest crowd ever in Putnam County, variously estimated at from ten to fifteen thousand people by old citizens

The pictures with accompanying information were contributed to the museum by Lewis D. Johnson.

(Pictured: Joseph Lewis "Joe" Brassell)



The museum file states, "This shocking crime occurred at the Allison place, a well-known stand on the Walton Road, about one mile from Baxter, on the night of Nov. 29th, 1875.

"Dop Johnson and Doll Bates were along and the latter was sentenced to twenty-one years in the penitentiary. Johnson made a full confession, and escaped prosecution.

"The Brassell brothers are buried in an old cemetery at the rear of the present Baxter High School.

(Pictured: George Andrew "Teek" Brassell).

(Note: An account by Paul Oldham of the renowned execution, which has received persistent publicity over the years, was published in the Herald-Citizen on Nov. 25).

Brassell Brothers Tombstones

Joseph and George Brassell. Joe was born around 1853; Teek, around 1855.

The brothers were interred at the Brassell Family Cemetery which is located adjacent to Upperman High School at Baxter, Tennessee. The cemetery is surrounded by a wood fence about five feet high. The stone of Joe and Teek is still visible. It sits under a large cedar tree at the front of the cemetery. It is broken off at an angle, yet the partial dates and the word "both" can still be read.

March 27, 1878 they were executed for the murders of Russell Allison & John Allison, brothers.



Joseph Lewis "Joe" Brassell
b. ca. 1853, KY
d. 27 March 1878, Putnam Co., TN



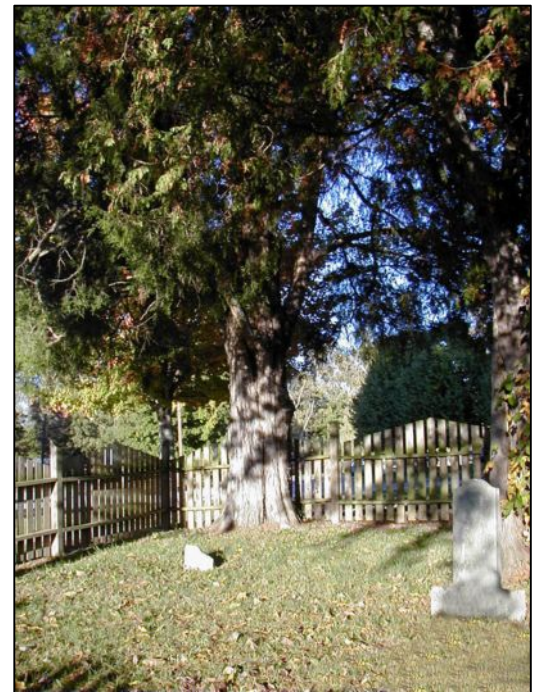
*God gave, He took, He will restore
He doth all things well.*



George Andrew "Teek" Brassell
b. ca. 1855, KY
d. 27 March 1878, Putnam Co., TN



James Thomas Bullock, 1857-1920, was the son of Thomas R. Bullock and Naomia Brown Bullock. He was married to Mary Lou Bohannon, daughter of Campbell Bohannon and Rossa Henry Bohannon. Campbell Bohannon was Sheriff of Putnam County and assisted in the hanging of the Brassell brothers. Seated from the left is: Alice Burgess Bullock, Harvey Bullock, James Thomas Bullock, Mary Lou Bohannon holding Stella Bullock. Standing from the left: Rosa Bullock, Opher Bullock, John Burgess, Opal Bullock Burgess, and C.J. Bullock. Most of the Bullocks are buried in the Salem Cemetery. There are three cemeteries on the Falling Water River about 1-2 miles apart where a number of the Bohannons were buried. Most of them were farmers since there was no industry of speak of in those days. Courtesy Rozelle Huddleston Nash.



Brassell Family Cemetery located adjacent to Upperman High School at Baxter, Putnam Co., TN.

Source: Lean An Ear : Chapter 5, pg. 52 by Homer D Kemp: One strong tradition insists upon Teke's innocence; several witnesses at the hanging assert that his denial of guilt on the gallows was thoroughly convincing. One variant in this tradition even suggest that Teke was covering up for his sister who committed the murder dressed as a man.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BRASWELL NAME

The BRASWELL name, according to records, is of Scottish origin. Webster's dictionary states the word "brae" means a hill or slopping bank. The word "well" means a spring or source of water.

<http://www.videoranch.net/sect-one.htm>

"Following the Braswells on the Move Westward in America" by Roy Bennett Braswell, PH. D.

(**Egbert Hickman Brassell**, b. 7 January 1817, Putnam Co., TN – d. 9 March 1899, md **Mary Lail (Baker) Brassell**, b. 7 December 1823 – d. 18 March 1908, Putnam Co., TN, d/o **George Baker** (1779-1838) & **Mary Lail**. Egbert Hickman Brassell, s/o **Orren Braswell/Braswell** (1790-1827) & **Pherebe Evans** (1794-1852).

Children of Egbert Hickman Braswell/Brassell & Mary L. Baker

Tennessee, b. ca. 1848, TN

William, b. ca. 1844, TN

Reuben J. (James/Jim), b. 27 November 1845, TN – d. 30 March 1926, Putnam Co., TN, married Harriet Zenira (Dowell) Brassell, b. 12 Oct. 1853, TN – d. 10 March 1922, both buried in Odd Fellows Cemetery, TN.

Zachariah T., b. ca. 1851, KY

Luiza, b. ca. 1853, KY

Joseph Lewis "Joe", b. ca. 1853, KY – d. 27 March 1878

George Andrew "Teek", b. ca. 1855, KY – d. 27 March 1878

Amanda, b. 19 February 1856, TN – d. 24 May 1934 married James "Jim" Prentice

BRASSELL GRAVEYARD

Located in Baxter Putnam Co., TN on the site of the old Baxter Seminary School.

(top of stone missing) 27 March 18

James P. Brassell b. 20 October 1871 – d. 5 January 1880

Nathan Cox b. 17 April 1845, TN - d. 21 September 1919 (stone broken in two)

***N. M. Cox Passes Away** -- Nathan M. Cox died at his home in Baxter last Sunday afternoon, after a brief illness, and was laid to rest in the Baxter cemetery on Monday evening. Mr. Cox was about 74 years old and served in the Confederate Army. He was an uncle of Jas. N. Cox of this city. He is survived by his wife, they having no children. *Putnam County Herald*, Cookeville TN

This cemetery was listed in "Following the Braswells on the Move Westward in America"

E. H. Braswell	b. 7 January 1817	d. 9 March 1899	'Gone But Not Forgotten'
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Mary L. Braswell	b. 7 December 1823	d. 18 March 1908	
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Nathan M. Cox	b. 17 April 1845	d. 21 September 1919	(<i>Nathan Montgomery Cox</i>)
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James P. Brassell	b. 20 October 1871	d. 5 January 1880	(<i>Joseph Lewis Brassell's son</i>)
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James P. Brassell died of pneumonia at age nine).

Joseph Lewis "Joe" Brassell	b. ca. 1853	d. 27 March 1878	(hanged)
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George Andrew "Teek" Brassell	b. ca. 1855	d. 27 March 1878	(hanged)
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ODDFELLOWS CEMETERY

James "Jim" Prentice	b. ca. 1853, TN	d. 3 August 1933 - Age 80 yrs. old
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(*James "Jim" Prentice, s/o Robert Prentice & Elizabeth (probably) Kirkland.*)

Amanda (Brassell) Prentice	b. 19 February 1856, TN	d. 24 May 1934
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1870 census 1st Civil Dist., Carthage, Smith Co., TN

Line: 9 Dwl: 46 Family: 47

William Brassell 26 M W Married (Oct. 1869) House Carpenter (value of personal estate, 300) TN

Bettie E. Brassell 26 F W Married (Oct. 1869) Keeping House TN

James R. Brassell 25 M W Farmer (value of real estate, 700) (value of personal estate, 300) TN
(James Reuben Brassell is living with his brother William Brassell, son of Egbert H. & Mary L. (Baker) Braswell/Brassell).

1870 census 7th Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 7 Family: 7

Brassell, E. H. 53 M W Carpenter (value of real estate, 500) (value of personal estate, 550) NC
(Elbert H. Brassell)

Brassell, Mary 46 F W Keeping House TN *(Mary L. Brassell)*

Brassell, Zachariah T. 21 M W Works Farm KY

Brassell, Luiza 16 F W At Home KY

Brassell, Joseph 14 M W Works Farm KY *(Joseph Lewis "Joe" Brassell)*

Brassell, George A. 13 M W At Home KY *(George Andrew "Teek" Brassell)*

Brassell, Amanda 11 F W At Home TN *(Amanda Brassell md Nathan Cox)*

Brassell, Samuel 8 M W TN

Census Place: 1880 District 7, Putnam Co., Tennessee

Line: 9 Dwl: 24 Family: 25

Source: FHL Film 1255275 National Archives Film T9-1275 Page 144D

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
Egbert BRASSELL	Self		M	M	W	63 NC
Occ: Carpenter	Fa: NC	Mo: NC				
Mary BRASSELL	Wife		F	M	W	57 TN
Occ: Keeping House	Fa: NC	Mo: TN				
Samuel BRASSELL	Son		M	S	W	18 TN
Occ: Blacksmith	Fa: NC	Mo: TN				

Census Place: 1880 District 7, Putnam Co., Tennessee

Line: 12 Dwl: 25 Family: 26

Source: FHL Film 1255275 National Archives Film T9-1275 Page 144D

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
James BRASSELL	Self		M	M	W	36 TN
	Fa: NC	Mo: TN				

(James Reuben Brassell, s/o Egbert H. Egbert H. & Mary L. (Baker) Braswell/Brassell)

Harriet BRASSELL	Wife		F	M	W	25 TN
Occ: Keeping House	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				

Robert BRASSELL	Son		M	S	W	5 TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				

Claud BRASSELL	Son		M	S	W	3 TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				

Daisy BRASSELL	Dau		F	S	W	2 TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				

Census Place: 1880 District 11, Putnam Co., Tennessee

Source: FHL Film 1255275 National Archives Film T9-1275 Page 162C

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
William BRASSELL	Self		M	M	W	36 TN
Occ: Miller	Fa: NC	Mo: TN				
Elizabeth BRASSELL	Wife		F	M	W	35 TN
Occ: Keeps House	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				

1900 census 8th Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 41 Family: 41

Nathan Cox Head 55 M W b. April 1845 M (16 yrs. md) TN KY VA
(Nathan Montgomery Cox, s/o Nathaniel M. and Eliza S. (Cason) Cox)

Amanda Cox Wife 42 F W b. February 1858 M (16 yrs. md)



James P. Brassell's tombstone.



Nathan Montgomery Cox's tombstone

(0 children born, 0 children living) TN NC TN

(Amanda Brassell/Braswell, d/o Egbert H. & Mary Braswell/Brassell)

Mary Braswell Mother-in-Law 76 F W b. December 1823 TN NC NC

1910 census 8th Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 37 Family: 37

Nathan M. Cox Head 64 M1 (25 yrs. md) Lawyer General Practice TN KY VA

Amanda B. Cox Wife 52 F W M1 (25 yrs. md) (0 children born, 0 children living)

Merchant General Store TN NC TN

May Jones Hired Girl 10 F W Servant Private Family TN TN TN

<http://www.ajlambert.com>

1920 census 20th Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN

Line: 35 Dwl: 210 Family: 212

Cox, Amanda B. Head F W 61 Widow TN TN TN

(Amanda (Brassell) Cox Prentice.. She md 1st Nathan Cox – md 2nd James Prentice)

Lee, Owinah (?) Nephew M W 11 Single TN TN TN

1930 census 20th Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN

Line: 9 Dwl: 21 Family: 21

Prentice, James Head M W 78 (19 yrs. old 1st marriage) Merchant Retail Dry Goods TN TN TN

Prentice, Amanda Wife 72 (25 yrs. old 1st marriage) TN TN TN *(Amanda (Brassell) Cox Prentice)*

NATHAN MONTGOMERY COX

4th TENNESSEE BATTALION

CSA

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Born: 17 Apr 1845 in Jackson County, TN

Died: 21 Sep 1919 in Putnam County, TN

Buried: Brassell Cemetery, Putnam County, TN

Parents: Nathaniel M. and Eliza S. (Cason) Cox

Occupation: Lawyer

Married: Amanda Belle Brassell in 25 Dec 1883 in Putnam County, TN

Born: 20 Feb 1858 in Jackson County, TN (Tombstone says 19 Feb 1856)

Died: 24 May 1934 in Putnam County, TN

Buried: Odd Fellows Cemetery, Putnam County, TN

Parents: Egbert H. Brassell/Braswell & Mary (Unknown) Braswell

RELATIVES WHO SERVED

Brother: Captain Robert A. Cox - 3rd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment

Brother: William Cox - 4th Tennessee Cavalry Battalion

MILITARY INFORMATION

4th Tennessee Cavalry Battalion

(also known as Hamilton's or Shaw's Cavalry Battalion)

Company B

ABSTRACT:

- Not on 4th TN Cavalry Roll

PENSION APPLICATION ABSTRACT

S2132

ABSTRACT:

- Filed: 28 Aug 1899
- Accepted
- Residence: Ai, Putnam County
- Member: Company B, 4th TN Battalion, Commanded by J. Shaw
- Wounds: Thrown from a horse while crossing the French Broad River, NC; Ruptured by the saddle
- Enlisted: Sep 1864, 4th TN Battalion Commanded by Jo Shaw, Company B, Captain W. B. Harris
- Wounded on the march from Saltville, VA to TN
- Wife is 40 years old
- No Children
- Size of his family: himself, wife and mother-in-law
- Attest: James M. Vinson & Henry Vinson

Supporting Documents:

- James Vinson (?) - Supports claim
- T. M. Gailbreath (25 Aug 1899) - Supports claim
- Thos. A. Head (5 Sep 1899) - Calls NMC a "conundrum". Brother of Capt. Bob Cox of Gainesboro. **Married a sister of the Braswell's who were hanged at Cookeville**; is considered to be a drunkard.
- Nathan M. Cox (5 Dec 1899) - Lofton Lacy pulled him out from under a horse and carried him to a bank
- M. L. Gore (5 Dec 1899) - Supports claim
- Z. M. Young (5 Dec 1899) - Supports claim
- Nathan M. Cox (6 Dec 1899) - NMC was ruptured during the war.
- N. B. Young (22 Dec 1899) - Why was NMC removed from a roll?
- Z. P. Lee (1 Feb 1900) - Supports claim
- T. J. Williams (19 Feb 1900) - Supports claim

- N. B. Young (26 Apr 1900) - Supports claim
- C. J. Davis (17 Jul 1903) - Supports claim

CENSUS DATA

- **1850 Census:** Jackson County, TN, Page 297
- **1860 Census:**
- **1870 Census:** Jackson County, TN, Page 131
- **1880 Census:** Newton County, MO, Page 551C
- **1900 Census:** Putnam County, TN, 3A
- **1910 Census:** Putnam County, TN, 188B

OBITUARY

Putnam County Herald

N. M. Cox Passes Away -- Nathan M. Cox died at his home in Baxter last Sunday afternoon, after a brief illness, and was laid to rest in the Baxter cemetery on Monday evening. Mr. Cox was about 74 years old and served in the Confederate army, He was an uncle of Jas. N. Cox of this city. He is survived by his wife, they having no children.

ADDITIONAL DATA

Death Certificate: Putnam County, TN (1919) - #468 Nathan M. Cox

TN Confederate Widows Application: #7289 Amanda Belle (Brassell) Cox



Amanda (Brassell) Prentice & her husband James Prentice's tombstones at Odd Fellows Cemetery, Putnam Co. TN.

PUTNAM COUNTY'S ONLY LEGAL EXECUTION BECOMES LEGENDARY:

Brassell brothers hanged here on Billygoat Hill. Joe and Teek convicted in the murder of the Allison brothers, By Tracey LeFevre, Herald-Citizen Staff. Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 19 September 1999.

When two Putnam County brothers were convicted of killing two other brothers and were hanged side-by-side atop a gallows erected on Cookeville's Billygoat Hill on March 27, 1878, fact had already begun to acquire the magnitude of legend – and that legend lives on today.

The execution of Joseph Lewis Brassell, 25, and George Andrew “Teek” Brassell, 23, was the only court-ordered public execution ever to occur in Putnam County.

The brothers were charged, found guilty and sentenced to die for the 1875 killing of two other brothers, Russell and John Allison.

And today, more than 125 years later, public interest in the Brassell brothers continues.

“When I was growing up my friends and I used to hear stories about the Brassell brothers’ hanging from an elderly neighbor, Maggie Bilbrey,” said Tommy Bradford, a Putnam County native who teaches English at Upperman High School in Baxter.

“Maggie lived in an old house just off South Willow Ave., and if she herself wasn’t around to attend the hanging, I’m sure her parents were. Her descriptions were so vivid anyway – she could scare us kids half to death,” Bradford said.

Maggie Bilbrey took her stories about the Brassells with her to her grave several years ago, but Tommy Bradford is sometimes still reminded of those tales just by glancing out a classroom window.

That’s because Upperman High is currently located on land that was once the rear part of the Brassell home place, and the family cemetery where Joe and Teek were buried after the hanging – and where part of their tombstone still stands – is located just beside the school.

ROBBERY TURNED MURDER:

It was at the nearby home of their older brother, Jim, that the brothers and two other men, Dobson Johnson and Dol Bates, both from DeKalb County, formulated a plan to rob the Allison Stand Inn on the night of Nov. 29, 1875.

Located at the corner of Nashville road, now Highway 70, and the old Sparta road, the inn stood about two to three miles from Jim Brassell’s home near what is now the Double Springs community, and it provided food and shelter for travelers passing through the area.

The five conspirators began planning to rob the establishment when one of the Brassells said he knew of \$4,000 that was being kept at the inn, \$600 of which was supposedly hidden inside a clock.

And one of the Allison’ expected guests that very night, Jim Brassell allegedly pointed out, was the Putnam County tax collector, or trustee, W. J. Isbell.

Isbell, whom the Brassells believed often carried large sums of money, frequently stayed overnight at the Allison Inn when traveling from Buffalo Valley to Cookeville on his tax-collecting rounds.

The inn was in fact owned by the tax collector’s father, James Isbell, and step-mother, Angeline Allison Isbell, who was the remarried widow of the inn’s former proprietor, Joseph Allison.

That particular night, however, Isbell began to feel sick before he reached the inn and decided to stop for the night with a family who lived on Indian Creek in the western part of the county.

Unaware of the change in the tax collector’s plans, though, the Brassells and other conspirators continued to make arrangements to rob the Allison.

But Jim Brassell eventually excused himself from the plans altogether, saying that a prolonged absence from home might cause his wife to suspect he was up to no good.

“Many people credit Jim for coming up with the whole scheme,” said Donald Spurlock, a Baxter teacher who authored an extensive book about the Allison boys’ killing and the Brassells’ hanging.

“If his brothers and their friends were successful in their robbery attempt, then he might stand a chance of getting some money by convincing them it was his idea. But if they got caught, he could avoid getting in trouble for the crime because staying at home provided an alibi for him. Either way, he was safe,” Spurlock said.

When the two brothers and their two friends left Jim’s house a little while later, they stopped about a quarter-mile up the road at Joe’s and Teek’s parents house to get some supplies, including pistols and a material they could use to blacken their faces to help disguise themselves.

Once armed and disguised, the four men set out walking toward the Allison Inn and arrived at their destination at about midnight.

A two-story double log home, the establishment had an open central hallway that separated the two sections of the house, and the four men milled about the hallway a short time before attempting to awaken the inn keepers.

Awakened by the commotion, Angeline Isbell, who was sleeping downstairs with a young lady, asked the men to identify themselves.

And Teek answered, “It’s Mansfield Howell, by God!”

Angeline said she knew Howell couldn’t be among the four late-night visitors because he didn’t swear, and she called out for her teenage step-son, Russell Allison, who was sleeping in a bedroom upstairs.

Russell, who’d been a schoolmate of the brothers, immediately recognized their voices when he came downstairs and told the women not to be frightened because it was only Joe and Teek Brassell causing the disturbance.

When the teenage boy opened the door, however, Joe and Teek rushed into the room with their pistols drawn, ready to fire.

A scuffle ensued between Russell Allison and Teek, and Joe Brassell began firing at their former schoolmate. One shot missed him and lodged in a ceiling beam, but another stuck the young in the abdomen.

Realizing they had been recognized, the four men abandoned their robbery plans, and as Joe and Teek were leaving with the other two, young Russell Allison told his step-mother, “Angie, I’m shot, and Teek and Joe Brassell are the ones that shot me.”

A doctor was summoned but realized that Russell’s wound would be fatal. He died 36 hours later.

A DEADLY ARREST:

As word spread about the crime in Cookeville the next day, an armed posse was formed to arrest the Brassells, and included in that posse was one of their own brothers, Buck, as well as John Allison, the older brother of the fatally-wounded Russell Allison.

When the posse discovered the Brassell brothers at a still-house on the evening of Nov. 30, 1875, John Allison approached them to accuse them of murdering his brother, and Teek shot him at close range.

John Allison was wounded in the bowels in nearly the same location as his brother’s fatal wound, and the two died almost exactly one day apart.

The Brassell brothers were captured and after being held for a week in the Cookeville jail, they were transferred to a jail in Nashville because Putnam County officials felt they would be safer there.

They were arraigned on murder charges in Putnam Criminal Court on Monday, June 19, 1878, but their case wasn't fully tried until June 1877.

THE MURDER TRIAL:

The trial lasted for exactly a week, and at the end of that time, the jury returned a guilty verdict on both Joe and Teek for the first degree murder of Russell Allison.

Judge N. W. McConnell, who presided over the hearing, informed the brothers that being found guilty of first-degree murder meant a sentence of death by hanging and asked the brothers if they'd like to make statements about the verdict.

Joe remained silent, but Teek answered, "Yes, I'm not guilty."

In a separate court proceeding, Teek had been found guilty of murdering Russell Allison's brother, John, and was sentenced to 20 years in prison for that crime.

The death sentence of the more serious Russell Allison case, however, took precedence over Teek's sentence in the John Allison killing.

Of their cohorts, Dol Bates was convicted of a lesser charge in the incident, and Dobson Johnson completely escaped prosecution because he became a witness for the state against the Brassells.

The brothers appealed their case to the Tennessee Supreme Court, but the Putnam court's earlier decision was upheld.

Tennessee Supreme Court Judge John Sneed advised Joe and Teek that they would be held at the Nashville jail until Saturday, March 23, 1878, when they would be moved to the Putnam jail.

Sometime between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Wednesday, March 27, 1878, they were to be taken to a gallows to be erected within a mile of the Putnam County Courthouse and were there to be hanged for their crimes.

As Judge Sneed read the court's opinion, tears began to trickle down Joe's cheeks.

ATTEMPTED BREAKS:

Joe eventually admitted his guilt and joined the Methodist church, but not before he and Teek, who claimed until he died that he was innocent, made several unsuccessful attempts to escape from the cells that held them in Nashville.

Possibly their most unusual attempt happened just before they were to be brought back to Cookeville for their execution, when they somehow managed to have a quarter-ounce of arsenic secretly smuggle into the jail to them.

They planned to put that arsenic into a dozen apples, then give the fruit to the guards as they traveled from Nashville to Cookeville.

Another prisoner, however, revealed the plan, and the Brassells' arsenic was confiscated by deputies.

Earlier, on Christmas Eve 1877, the brothers attempted to escape by sawing through the chain that held their cell door and by overpowering the jail guards once they were free, but several quick-thinking deputies subdued them and put Teek in shackles that weighed 23 pounds.

The prisoner was so determined to get away that he spent all night trying to break the device, and somehow during the night managed to set himself free.

The next morning, guards had to forcefully pull him from beneath the jail floor where he'd crawled into a space of no more than five-inches in depth and badly bruised his face and shoulders on one-and-a-half inch steel rods projecting beneath the floor from the cell above.

AN INNOCENT MAN?

Some have speculated that Teek's determination to escape was so strong because he was indeed innocent of the crime for which he was sentenced to die.

But if Teek didn't accompany Joe and their two friends to the inn where Russell Allison was fatally shot, then who did?

Don Spurlock says his research suggest that the other person, if not Teek, might have been his younger sister, Amanda Brassell, who would have been about 19 at the time of the crime.

"People in that day and age just didn't allow women to be accused of committing crimes. It was out of the question. And to protect his sister's honor, Teek Brassell may very well have died for a crime he didn't commit," Spurlock said.

And while the crowd of people who turned out to witness the execution has been described as perhaps 'the largest ever assembled in Cookeville,' Amanda and possibly a brother were the only two of Joe's and Teek's seven siblings who attended the hanging.

THE EXECUTION:

The execution was two-to-three hour event that began at 11 a.m. on March 27, 1878, when the two brothers were brought from the Putnam jail, led up into a wagon and seated on the freshly-made wooden boxes that would become their caskets.

Riding solemnly on horseback behind the Brassells' wagon down Cookeville streets lined with armed men was their sister, Amanda.

Half an hour after leaving the jail, the procession arrived at its destination – Billygoat Hill.

That's where the specially built double gallows had been erected, and that site today is about where Walnut Ave. and Stout St. intersect.

While the nooses were being prepared for Joe and Teek, Amanda wept bitterly as she dismounted from her horse and embraced her brothers for the last time.

Joe pleaded for her not to watch the hanging, and she apparently obeyed her brother's request and moved to the rear of the crowd.

Although she herself may not have seen the gruesome spectacle, an estimated 8,000 to 15,000 people from Putnam, Smith, Jackson, White, Overton, Fentress, DeKalb, Trousdale and Wilson counties came for the purpose of witnessing it.

And a newspaper reporter from the New York Times was even include in the crowd.

A local watch repairman of the time, D. P. Glenn, is credited with writing 'The Brassell Boys,' a long folk ballad introduced at the hanging and still sung by a few Putnam County people.

But that's not the only ballad inspired by the Brassell boys' legend.

Upperman teacher Tommy Bradford was written his own verse about Joe and Teek, a country song called "wild-eyed Country Boys.'

At 1L30 p.m. on that day, Putnam Sheriff Campbell Bohannon cut the rope that let the gallows platform fall – and in less than two minutes, the bodies of Joe and Teek Brassell appeared to become completely lifeless.

However, a physician, there to make the pronouncement of death still detected a faint pulse in Joe’s wrist.

After a total of 11 minutes, both brothers were pronounced dead.

Their bodies were placed in their caskets and delivered to the brother and sister who’d come to collect their remains.

The bodies of Joe and Teek Brassell were transported by wagon back to their parents’ home, where the caskets were opened for their parents to have one last viewing of their sons before the burial.

FOLKLORE:

Spurlock said he was surprised and somewhat disappointed that his research was unable to uncover any significant ghost stories associated with the event, especially since Teek allegedly died an innocent man.



He suggested, however, that the Brassells might already have had their revenge on Putnam County.

Sometime during the April thunderstorm, shortly after the March execution, lightning reportedly struck the room of the Cookeville church building where Joe’s and Teek’s coffins were constructed.

While that event only reinforced some people’s beliefs that an innocent man had been put to death, that’s actually a mystery that will likely never be solved.

(Pictured: This is a small graveyard which in the last century was on the Brassell family farm and is where Joe and Teek Brassell and others were buried – but today it’s on the Upperman High School (background) property in Baxter. For years

it lay in neglect, and the tombstone of the brothers was broken, only a fragment of it remaining. That part of the inscription reads: “Both...March 27,... God gave, He took, He will restore, He doth all things well.”)

The execution wasn’t as unfortunate for everyone as it was for Joe and Teek.

The man who might have profited most from it sis the stranger who purchased about two dozen identical hatchets from a local hardware store.

He reportedly sold them all for a profit by claiming that each and every one of them was the hatchet Sheriff Bohannon had used to cut the ropes releasing the trapdoors on the gallows.

Which only adds to the lore and the legend.

*Read more about the Hanging of the Brassell brothers at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>