

THE PENALTY FOR MURDER  
New York Times, 29 March 1878, p. 5, col. 5

A double hanging in Tennessee, George and Joseph Brassell executed for the murder of Russell and Claude Allison - - 10,000 persons present - - A history of the crime and the trial of the murderers - - Affecting sense at the gallows. (Special Dispatch to the New York Time.)

NASHVILLE – March 28, - - The hanging of (G)eorge (A)ndrew and (J)oseph (L)ewis Brassell at Cookeville, Putnam County, yesterday, for the murder of Russell and Claude Allison (*John James Allison not Claude Allison*), was witnessed by 10,000 people, who began to arrive in town before daylight. The scaffold stood in a field one mile from Cookeville, and was a very rude structure.

The arrival of the murderous upon the scene was awaited with considerable impatience. Sheriff Bohannon took the prisoners from the jail at 10 o'clock and when they were seated upon their coffins in a wagon the vehicle was driven to the gallows, guarded by 200 heavily-armed men. Following the vehicle was the sister of the doomed men. The gallows was reached at 11:30. As the wagon stopped beside it, Miss Brassell rode up to her brothers, and throwing her arms around Joseph's neck wept bitterly. He was deeply affected, and requested her not to witness the hanging, a request which she complied with. The Brassells alighted and walked up the steps of the scaffold without displaying the slightest emotion. They seated themselves in chairs which had been placed there for them, and calmly looked around. Rev. T. S. McFerran read the third chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and Rev. T. S. McFerran prayed and delivered an address to the young men present. Remarks of a similar nature were made by Sheriff Bohannon, after which the Brassells were asked if they were ready to die, to which they replied affirmatively. The boomed brothers then addressed the crowd briefly, bidding them beware of evil association whiskey. They asked to be executed at 1 o'clock, and after the death-warrant had been read, and they were prepared for their fate they kissed each other several times. They were deeply affected, as were also the spectators. The prisoners soon changed their minds, and requested to be allowed to live until the last possible moment. Their caps were removed, and Joseph confessed that he had murdered Russell Allison, implicating Johnson, Bates, and another whose name he declined to divulge. George asserted his innocence, saying that his life was sworn, away. The bade all farewell, and, the caps being readjusted, the Sheriff, at their request, announced the arrival of each minute and the last half minute. He cut the rope at 1:30 o'clock, and the Brassells fell three feet, their necks being broken. They were pronounced dead 11 minutes later, and were cut down at 1:45. The bodies were placed in coffins and delivered to their friends. None of the members of the family witnessed the execution.

George Andrew Brassell and Joseph Lewis Brassell were born in Kentucky, but their parents removed from the Blue Grass State to Tennessee, and settled in Putnam County. The former was 21 years old, and the latter 23. They were very ignorant, having been reared in the backwoods, and led a somewhat dissolute life. They engaged in the manufacture of illicit whiskey, which business they conducted for years. Upon several

occasions they were surprised by officials connected with the Internal Revenue Department, but managed to elude the clutches of the law. The father, step-mother, sister, and four brothers are still living. The story of the crime is as follows:

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of November, 1875, about midnight, the Brassells entered the yard in front of the residence of Allison (*John James Allison*), and in a manner that was rude and boisterous demanded admittance on the pretext that they were hungry and desired to partake of supper. Allison was sleeping in the upper story of the house while his step-mother and another lady were slumbering below. All were aroused from sleep by the loud and unusual noise, and the women became very much alarmed. Allison recognized the turbulent voices as those of the Brassells who had been his schoolmates. Not suspecting that the nocturnal visit boded ill, he explained to the female members of the household that the noise was created by the Brassells, who meant no harm. Arising from his couch Allison went down stairs, lighted a candle, and opened the door. The Brassells walked into the house and created a great deal of consternation therein, their faces being blackened and their persons disguised in other ways. W. P. Bates, and a man named Johnson, their confederates remained outside where they intended to stay until the Brassells returned or summoned them to their assistance. A few minutes after the advent of the Brassells into the building George seized Allison who resisted and finally caught hold of a revolver which his antagonist had drawn. He held it with a firm grasp and begged George to stop laying violent hands upon him. The person addressed refused to comply, and commanded Allison to cease holding the pistol. At this juncture Joseph Brassell declared that he would make Allison release his grasp upon the weapon and instantly fired at him. Allison ran through the dining-room, and as she fled Joseph fired at him. Several leaden messengers were sent in the direction of the women in the bed, but fortunately none took effect. The Brassells then departed, firing two or three times in the yard.

The chief reason assigned for the commission of the deed was the fact that being thwarted in their intention to rob the Tax Collector of Putnam County, who was expected to be found at the house where Allison lived, they killed Allison in order to prevent him from informing the authorities of their conduct. The Collector was the son of the owner of the house where the deceased met his untimely fate, and as he often called at the place during the night the Brassells conspired with Bates and Johnson to rob him.

Being mortally wounded Allison made a dying declaration in which he asserted most positively that the Brassells were the persons who attacked and shot him. After living till the following day the wounded man died. Warrants were issued in a day or two for the arrest of the murderers and their confederates. Claude Allison (*John James Allison*) a brother of the victim, was deputized to arrest them. Learning that George Brassell was at a distillery in the neighborhood, he proceeded to the establishment where he found the object of his search. While attempting to take him into custody, George threw his arms around Allison, held him tightly, and sent a bullet through his side. The wounded man died on the following day.

The four men were finally arrested and placed on trial in the Putnam County Circuit Court. Bates applied for a severance, which was granted, and Johnson turned State's evidence. When placed on the witness stand he gave a detailed and circumstantial account of a formal conspiracy entered into between himself, the Brassells, and Bates, on the night of the murder, to go to the house where the homicide was committed for the purpose of robbing the Tax Collector who was expected there that night. It was stated by one of the parties to the conspiracy that there would be \$1,000 in the house, and that \$600 of the amount was hidden in a clock. This narrative of all the particulars of the expedition, the transactions at the house, and of the circumstances that occurred afterward, was so closely and thoroughly confirmed by other undoubted testimony that it was impossible to doubt or discredit it. The Brassells endeavored to prove an alibi, but were unsuccessful. Among other witnesses who testified thereto was the sister-in-law of the prisoners and the wife of James Brassell. She stated that one of the prisoners lodged at her house on the night in question and that her husband was cognizant of his presence. The husband was not introduced as a witness, however, and no reason was assigned for his non-introduction. Under these circumstances the court charged the jury that wherever pertinent and material evidence by which an alibi might, if true, have been supported was withheld, it was a circumstance against the truth of the alleged alibi. It was proved that the prisoners were armed with deadly weapons after the murder that they avowed their determination not to be arrested and that they did resist arrest. The result of the trial was the conviction of the accused of murder in the first degree. They were sentenced to be hanged and appealed to the Supreme Court. After the conclusion of the case, George was arraigned for the murder of Claude and sentenced to imprisonment for 20 years. The subsequent action of the Supreme Court rendered their sentence of no avail however.

After carefully considering the testimony, this tribunal decided that the prisoners were guilty and affirmed the decision of the lower court. The opinion was delivered on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of February by Judge Snead, one of the ablest jurists in Tennessee. When sentence was pronounced upon them the doomed men exhibited much agitation and asserted their innocence. They were remanded to jail, where they remained until the night of the 21<sup>st</sup> inst., when they were placed on board a steamer and conveyed to a point on the Upper Cumberland River where they landed and were taken to Cookeville by Sheriff Woodall and a strong guard. They were visited by several thousand people while in jail and having professed religion were baptized and received into the Methodist Church on the 17<sup>th</sup> inst. They were deeply affected, but declared that they were not guilty.

Johnson is still at large, and Bates has departed for a more congenial crime forfeiting a bond of \$5,000 given for his appearance at the next term of the Circuit Court for trial on the charge of complicity in the crime that was partly atoned for yesterday.



Notes of Clarence Everett Sewell:

Picture of the house George Andrew & Joseph "Joe" Lewis Brassell killed John James Allison the son of Joseph Stewart Allison in an attempted robbery. Located on Old Walton Road near Baxter, Putnam Co., TN. November 29, 1875.

Craven Houston Maddux, born in Frazier Co., VA raised this log house on Walton Road near Baxter. This picture was made long after the house had been deserted. Joseph Stewart "Hog Joe" Allison bought this place about 3,000 acres. Deed was made by S. H. Maddux as administrator of his father's estate. There is no record of this transaction as this land was then in Jackson Co., TN and the record was possibly destroyed by fire.

Picture courtesy of Clarence Everett Sewell, s/o James Nixon Sewell & Cora Gentry. Clarence Sewell lives in Baxter, Putnam Co., TN, he is married to Marie Maddux, d/o Willard Maddux & Mildred Amonett. Willard Maddux, s/o Joe Maddux & Lena "Leener" "Muddie" Scruggs.

This picture was hanging in one of three original log cabins located on the property of Clarence Everett Sewell.

**Source:** Allison Connections by Della P. Franklin, 1988

Pg. 7: **JOSEPH STEWART ALLISON**, known as Hog Joe, was born 22 January 1812, married **ELIZA LYONS RHEA**, 4 October 1834 in White County, TN. She was a **d/o William "Billy" and Mary Ann "Polly" (Whitson) Rhea**, born 16 July 1817. Her father lived at what is now known as the Joe Scott farm in Putnam County, TN. She died 9 November 1866, and was buried in Rhea Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN. Joseph Stewart Allison was the **s/o William and Margaret (Stewart) Allison**.

Joseph "Joe" was remarried on 22 October 1868 to **ANGELINE BEASLEY**. Joe owned a large farm just outside Baxter, TN at what was later known as the Doctor Millis place. It was here at his home that his sons lost their lives at the hands of the Braswell brother in 1875, two years after their father's death. Joe was known as Hog Joe because he owned such a large number of hogs, which inhabited the "Big Woods" at that time. And also to distinguish him from his cousin Joe Allison. Joe died 19 November 1873, buried in the Rhea Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN. **After his death his widow Angeline was married to James "Jim" Livingston Isbell, father of William Jefferson Isbell, who was Tax Collector at the time of the Allison brothers death.** Joe had eleven children.

Pg. 7: **RUSSELL M. ALLISON**, born 13 December 1856, died at the hands of Joe and Teke Braswell, 1 December 1875 at the home.

Pg. 20: **JOHN JAMES ALLISON**, born 16 August 1845, s/o **Joseph Stewart "Hog Joe" Allison and Eliza Lyon Rhea**. John James Allison married **LEE ANN P. MAXWELL**, 18 JANUARY 1866. She was the d/o **Amos and Mary Maxwell**, born 28 September 1843. John died 2 December 1875 when he was shot by Joe Braswell as he along with a posse approached the scene of a whiskey still which Joe and other members of his family were operating. The posse had come to the Braswell "still" intending to arrest Joe and Teke Braswell for the shooting of John's brother, Russell the night before. John died instantly, Russell, who had been shot the night before in his home die at about the same time as John. John was buried in the Rhea Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN. Lee Ann never remarried. She died 22 October 1915. Also buried in Rhea Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN. John had four children.

#### **1850 census, 13<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., Jackson Co., TN**

**Isbel, James** 34 M W (value of real estate, 300) Farmer TN

**Isbel, Rebecca** 26 F W TN

**Isbel, William** 10 M W TN (*William Jefferson Isbell*)

Isbel, Alfred 8 M W TN

Isbel, John 3 M W TN

Isbel, Nancy 2 F W TN

Jones, Thomas 24 M W Farmer TN

Brewington, Betty 10 F W TN

#### **1860 census 11<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., post office Byrne, Putnam Co., TN**

Dwl: 1343 Family: 1343

**Allison, J. S.** 48 M W Farmer (value of real estate, 2,000) (value of personal estate, 5,000) Farmer NC  
(*Joseph Stewart Allison, s/o William Allison & Margaret Stewart*)

**Allison, Eliza L.** 43 F W TN

(*Eliza Lyons Rhea, d/o William "Billy" Rhea & Mary Ann "Polly" Whitson*)

Allison, William N. 24 M W Farmer TN

Allison, Robert S. 22 m W Farmer

Allison, Bird Rhea 20 M W Farmer

**Allison, John J.** 15 M W Farmer (*John James Allison md Lee Ann Maxwell*)

Allison, Mary A. 12 F W TN

Allison, Isaac D. 9 M W TN

Allison, Pleasant Julius 5 M W TN

**Allison, Russell M.** 3 M W TN (*Russell M. Allison never married*)

Allison, Joseph 1 M W TN

**1860 census 13<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., post office Penkin, Putnam Co., TN**

Dwl: 1008 Family: 1008

**Isbell, James** 45 M W Farmer (value of real estate, 1,000) (value of personal estate, 1,000) Farmer TN  
(*James Livingston Isbell*)

**Isbell, Melvina** 40 F W TN

**Isbell, William J.** 19 M W cripple TN (*William Jefferson Isbell*)

Isbell, Alfred M. 17 M W farmer TN

Isbell, Nancy A. 13 F W TN

Isbell, Mary E. 7 F W TN

Isbell, Washington L. 1/12 M W TN

Willis, Elizabeth 22 F W TN

**1870 census 7<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN**

Dwl: 18 Family: 18

**Allison, J. S.** 57 M W Farmer (value of real estate, 10,000) (value of personal estate, 1,000) Farmer NC  
(*Joseph Stewart Allison, s/o William Allison & Margaret Stewart*)

**Allison, Anjaline** 42 F W Keeps House VA (*Angeline Beasley md 2<sup>nd</sup> James "Jim" Livingston Isbell*)

Allison, Pleasant J. 15 M W Works on Farm TN

**Allison, Russell M.** 13 M W At Home TN

Allison, Joseph 11 M W At Home TN

Allison, Lemuel 18 M B Farmer Laborer VA

**1870 census 9<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN**

Dwl: 10 Family: 10

**Isbell, J. L.** 54 M W Farmer (value of real estate, 4,000) (value of personal estate, 1,000)  
(*James Livingston Isbell*)

**Isbell, Melvina** 49 F W Keeps House TN

(*James Livingston Isbell md 2<sup>nd</sup> Melvina Mitchell*)

Isbell, Nancy A. 21 F W without occupation TN

Isbell, Mary E. 17 F W without occupation TN

Isbell, Washington L. 10 M W At Home TN

Manard, Thomas 16 M W Works Farm TN

Colemon, B. F. 21 M W Farm Laborer TN

**1870 census 9<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN**

Dwl: 11 Family: 11

**Isbell, W. J.** 29 M W School Teacher (value of personal estate, 400) TN  
(*William Jefferson Isbell, s/o James Livingston & Rebecca Isbell*)

**Isbell, Amanda H.** 21 F W Keeps House TN

Isbell, Nancy M. 2 F W TN

Isbell, James A. 0 M W b. 1/12 May TN

**1870 census 10<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN**

Dwl: 28 Family: 28

**Allison, John** 26 M W (value of real estate, 140) (value of personal estate, 500) TN

**Allison, Leann** 27 F W Keeps House TN

Allison, Mary 3 F W TN

Allison, Joseph 1 M W TN

**Census Place: 1880 District 1, Putnam Co., Tennessee**

Source: FHL Film 1255275 National Archives Film T9-1275 Page 79A

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
<b>William J. ISBELL</b>	Self	M	M	W	39	TN
Occ:	Clerk Of County Ct.		Fa: AL	Mo: TN		
<b>Amda H. ISBELL</b>	Wife	F	M	W	29	TN
Occ:	Keeping House		Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
Nancy M. ISBELL	Dau	F	S	W	11	TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				
James A. ISBELL	Son	M	S	W	10	TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				
Mary A. ISBELL	Dau	F	S	W	8	TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				
Lillie D.M. ISBELL	Dau	F	S	W	5	TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				
Dora A. ISBELL	Dau	F	S	W	2	TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				
Mary ADAMS	Other	F	S	W	22	TN
Occ:	House Keeping		Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
William SHELTON	Other	M	M	W	25	TN
Occ:	Teaching School		Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
Hattie SHELTON	Other	F		W	23	TN
Occ:	Teaching School		Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
Albert SHELTON	Other	M	S	W	1	TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				
Nute BULINGTON	Other	M	S	W	22	TN
Occ:	Student		Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
Joseph PUCKET	Other	M	S	W	22	TN
Occ:	Student		Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
Rebeca IVA	Other	F	S	W	7	TN
Occ:	Nurse		Fa: TN	Mo: TN		

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

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

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
<b>Angelina ISBELLS</b>	Self	F		W	52	VA
Occ:	Farmeress		Fa: ---	Mo: NC		
<i>(James Livingston Isbell md 3<sup>rd</sup> Angeline (Beasley) Allison. Angeline (Beasley) Allison Isbell was 1<sup>st</sup> married to Joseph Allison "Hog Joe").</i>						
Washington ISBELLS	Son	M	S	W	19	TN
Occ:	Works On Farm		Fa: KY	Mo: TN		
Amanda PIPPIN	Other	F	S	W	37	TN
Occ:	House Keeper		Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
Tennessee DAVIS	Other	F	S	W	12	TN
	Fa: ---	Mo: ---				
Isaac BUSSELL	Other	M	S	W	20	TN
Occ:	Works On Farm		Fa: NC	Mo: TN		

Allison Stand Inn was owned by James Livingston Isbell and Angeline (Beasley) Allison Isbell, James 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> **Rebecca Jones**, daughter of Alfred Jones and Elizabeth Nichols.

He married 2<sup>nd</sup> **Melvina Mitchell**, February 27, 1851 in White Co, TN. He married 3<sup>rd</sup> **Angeline (Beasley) Allison**. Angeline (Beasley) Allison Isbell was 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 3 February 1861, **Sara M. Cameron**, md 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>



## SCENE OF THE FIRST MURDER

The men did not go on the main road until within two or three hundred yards of the Isbell residence, which was a double log house with open hallway between. The Brassells took the land, Teek going into the yard in front of the house and Joe following. Teek hollered and said he wanted "supper for four men from the railroad." Mrs. Isbell, who, with a young woman named Amanda Pippin, was sleeping in the lower room, called out to know who was there. The answer came, "Mansfield Howard and three other men, by God." Mrs. Isbell says she knew by the oath that it was not Mansfield Howard, and the fact did not tend to reassure her. Howard did not swear. She screamed with fright, and Russell Allison, her young stepson, who was in the room above, called out to her, "Don't be frightened, it is only Joe and Teek Brassell." By this time the men had stepped upon the porch, and Mrs. Isbell told Russell Allison that he would have to come and let them in. Allison came down, lighted a candle and opened the door. As he did so the two Brassells rushed in, leaving their companions outside. They had their pistols cocked ready for shooting, and as soon as they rushed in, Teek seized Russell, who resisted as much as possible, and exclaimed, "Don't do so, Teek!" Russell got free from the grip of Teek and passed through the west door when Teek fired at him. Joe, in the meantime, had been standing over the affrighted women, and, as Miss Isbell thought that matters were growing serious, she raised up in bed, saw Joe and his pistol pointed at her, then screamed, fell hastily back into the bed and snatched the bed covering over her head. Joe fired into the bed, and the ball fell out of it next morning when it was made up. Blankets and quilts were cut by it in several places.