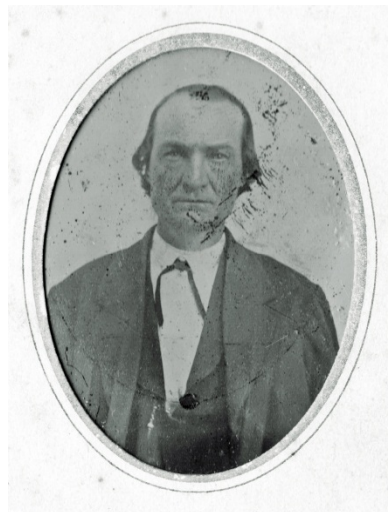


Doctor Phillip Haddox and George Brassell

Why would an armed band of men pull a sickly, forty-nine year old doctor and his son, four days shy of his 22nd birthday, out of their home in the middle night and murder them? No one really knows, and things just happened that way sometimes in the Sutton-Taylor Feud. Perhaps it was even a case of mistaken identity, as there was another Brassell family, with a doctor, in the area.

Dr. Brassell and his wife, Mary Ann were both born in Fayette County, Georgia, in 1827 and 1829, respectively. They had seven children and all of them were born in Fayette County. George, the oldest, was born on September 15, 1854. The others; in order, were Nancy, Theodore, Sylvanus, Martha Jane, Leonard and Jeff Davis.

Dr. Brassell served as a member of the Constitutional Convention in 1866 and on the Georgia legislature in 1868, 1869 and 1870. He suffered with tuberculosis and hoping the Texas climate would bring about an improvement in the Doctor's health, the family moved in 1870 and settled near Shiloh, a small community near Yorktown. This placed them in the center of the Sutton-Taylor Feud.



**Dr. Brassell (Photo courtesy of Scott Maxwell
a descendent of Dr. Brassell)**

On September 18, 1876, Dr. Brassell had made a disposition of his property, gave money to his wife to defray funeral expenses and picked out the site where he would be laid to rest. His tuberculosis was not improving and he knew he had only a short time to live. Around 10:00 p.m. on the 19th, the household was aroused by someone hollering, "Hello." Thinking at first it was a neighbor, they soon realized it was not when the same voice yelled, "Surround the house, boys." A man referred to as "Mr. Sheriff" entered the house and told the Brassell family to not be alarmed and that they were looking for someone who might be in the house. Then the family was ordered to dress and leave the house whereupon "Mr. Sheriff" searched it. Dr. Brassell's son George told the family that three of the men were Bill Meador, Jake Ryan and Joe Sitterle and that he knew all of them. The group asked for directions to a Mr. Ainsworth's place and it was pointed out to them. The posse then placed Dr. Brassell, George and the other two sons,

Sylvanus and Theodore, under arrest and left. Not long after, Mrs. Brassell heard gunfire and Dr. Brassell and George had been murdered while the other two sons managed to jump into the brush and hide out. Theodore managed to reach Mr. Ainsworth's home and informed her of what happened. Theodore and Ainsworth were joined by another neighbor and all returned to the Brassell home where Mary Ann learned she was a widow. She went looking for her men. She soon found her husband, but it took another two hours to find her son, 35 yards away from her husband. The murderers were all Sutton sympathizers, but there was never determined a motive for the double killing. All the members of the gang were identified and arrested by Lieutenant Jesse Leigh "Lee" Hall of the Texas Rangers. Sylvanus swore it was Dave Augustine who shot his father. All seven were indicted, five were freed on technicalities, one was murdered to keep him quiet, and Dave Augustine was the only person ever convicted. But, he went through a real ordeal before he was convicted. His trial was changed from DeWitt to Guadalupe County, where it was dismissed for lack of evidence. Then he was tried in Coleman County and then in Gonzales County. After those two mistrials he was tried in Hays County and another mistrial occurred. At the second trial he was finally convicted. Petitioning the governor for a parole, he stated he had languished in jails for seven years and was an old man near death. He was paroled in 1899 and survived until January 20, 1912.

The Brassell killings brought an end to the shooting in the Sutton-Taylor Feud, but the feud was not considered to be over until the pardon of Augustine in 1899. From the time the first shot was fired until the pardon, three decades had passed and 80 lives were lost

The Brassells are buried in the Upper Yorktown Cemetery in Yorktown DeWitt County, Texas. The GPS coordinates for the cemetery are: N31.44060, W 100.44970.



Brassell family tombstone (author's collection)

Source: *The Taylor-Sutton Feud: The Deadliest Blood Feud in Texas*, by Chuck Pearson