

Museum News: Samuel A. Purinton – Big Businessman

By CW (Bill) Smith

Like Robert Paxton, S. A. Purinton was one of four sheep men who were the first to settle in the Terrell County area in the 1880s. Of course, at the time it was part of Pecos County, and it was not until 1905 that Terrell County separated itself from Pecos County and organized as its own entity.

According to R. D. Holt, chronicler of West Texas history and a former Sanderson resident, "During the pioneer days, there were four men who blazed the way for the sheep business in the Sanderson region. These were Charles Downie, A. G. Anderson, S. F. Purinton and Robert Paxton. Around these sturdy figures grew up the business, to a considerable extent, that made this portion of Texas noted as a sheep country, and they stood shoulder to shoulder during those turbulent days when running sheep had its hardships and hazards. The country had outlaws and petty sheep thieves. Law was administered with rifle, pistol and rope." ("Early-day Stockmen of the Lower Trans-Pecos," *Cattleman* November, 1937.)



San Antonio home of the Purintons, built in 1908 as a family get-away. Photos of Sam, Bina and their children were not available.

Like Paxton, most of Purinton's ranch was located in Pecos County, even after Terrell County was organized. A difference for Purinton was that he ran cattle as well as sheep. Like Paxton, however, the Terrell County history book does not have much historical information about Purinton before he came west about 1883.

Although genealogical records are thin, Samuel A. Purinton was born most likely in Cumberland, Maine on March 20, 1835, to Richard and Mary LeGrow Purinton, who were farmers. He was one of at least five children and the only son. His sisters, Miranda and Emily are listed as milliners (dressmakers) in the 1860 census, and Harriet is listed as a school teacher. His father, Richard, was born in Maine in 1799 and passed away in 1867 at Cumberland Maine. He was the grandson and great grandson of the first settlers of Windham, Maine. Sam's mother died in 1838 when he was just three years old, and his father married Lucy Nason Purinton (1808-1886) and had one more daughter, Mary, who is also listed in the 1860 census as a school teacher.

S. A. Purinton came to Bexar County, Texas about 1876, at the age of 41. He married Jacobina N. Purinton in the late 1870s in San Antonio. They had a son, Edgar Richard Purinton, who was born in 1883 and was an inspector for the US Public Health Service in San Antonio. He married Flora Stiller in San Antonio in 1908, who was born in 1888 in Texas. Sam and Bina had a daughter, Glenn E. Purinton, who married Arthur L. Mason in San Antonio in 1918.

It was in Bexar County that the Purintons set up a residence and a sheep ranch. The Bexar County tax rolls show that S. A. Purinton owned property in Bexar County from 1882 to 1884, and probably before and after that. The 1880 Bexar County census shows that Sam and wife Bina lived with three shepherds and their families, suggesting that the census was done in the country, on Purinton's sheep ranch.

Ever the businessman with an eye on the future, Sam came to Pecos County about 1883 and set up another ranch outside of Longfellow, Texas, raising sheep, cattle and horses. His ranch in Pecos County was plagued by drought and scarcity of water, but he and Bina came on a regular basis and stayed for long periods of time, going back to San Antonio to visit family and to take a rest.

Mary Downie, sister of Charles Downie, in her reminiscences in the Terrell County history book (*Terrell County Its Past Its People*, Anchor Press, San Angelo: 1976) remembered some colorful characters who worked for the Purintons on the Longfellow ranch. "I recall Mary Brinck, helper and companion of Mrs. Purinton, and One-Armed

Miller, handy man." Poochie Quigg, in his reminiscences of the Fenleys in the history book, recalled that Allie Davis, a Marathon, Texas pioneer, worked for the Purintons. He also hired Mexican nationals to herd the sheep. As he always ran a large herd of horses and cattle, he needed cowboys as wranglers. Oscar Coleman was the Purinton "cow boss" in the mid-1890s.

Purinton was a very successful livestock man. Article after article in the local newspapers reported multiple train car loads of cattle and sheep. The *San Antonio Express* in 1906 made this statement about Purinton: "...Mr. S. A. Purinton of Longfellow, Texas, secured ten head of stock rams at a cost of \$1100, two of which cost him \$500. Mr. Purinton is one of the best known wool growers in Southwest Texas, and is at present in the city." The *El Paso Herald* in a 1910 article said, "S. A. Purinton shipped a solid train load of cattle to Oklahoma with Fort Worth privilege. There were 33 car loads in the train, mostly big steers...Mr. Purinton will ship another train load in a few days."

In the late 1890s, Sam was made a very lucrative proposition for his ranch. He sold all his property and livestock to T. M. Pyle, father of the legendary Buck Pyle, in 1900, but reserved his ranch home near Longfellow. Pyle was putting together the Purinton and the Paxton, along with property in Brewster County, to eventually create the West-Pyle Cattle Company.

But, Sam was not out of the ranching business. He is listed on the Brewster County tax rolls from 1901 to 1910, with property and large, but varying numbers of horses, sheep and miscellaneous (goats, poultry?)

Sam Purinton was more than just a good livestock man. He also was interested in local affairs and regularly wrote to area papers supporting people running for office and dispensing his words of wisdom. He also served Pecos County as an early county commissioner from the late 1880s into the 1890s.

By 1911, when Sam was 76 years old and in waning health, he sold off his properties and retired to 123 Mistletoe Avenue in San Antonio, a six-bedroom home they had built in 1909 as a family retreat. He suffered from memory loss with advancing age. Sam died on September 21, 1914 while visiting his old Longfellow ranch home. At the time of his death, he was worth two or three million dollars...a very successful businessman, indeed. His wife, Bina, had passed away earlier on December 30, 1913. The services were held from the home of Mrs. L. G. Stiller, Edgar's mother-in-law. Pall bearers included Charles Downie and other Terrell and Brewster County ranchers. The Purintons are buried in the Mission Burial Park South in San Antonio.

The *Fort Stockton Pioneer* published his obituary in the September 25, 1914 edition, and made the following statement: "No man ever lived in the county, who stood higher as a man of honor and integrity. He was well known all over southwest Texas and his death will be regretted by all the old pioneer citizens of the section of the state." He was a man of honor and integrity...and an astute businessman who came to the area with only the shirt on his back, and made a fortune creating his West Texas dream.