

# PAM PURYEAR

1943 - 2005

Pamela Ashworth Puryear was born December 22, 1943, in Navasota, Texas, to Laura Lott Puryear and the late Orville Puryear who recently had perished in the line of military duty. She was raised in a multi generational environment as a Southern Belle, a manner which followed her through life. Pam graduated from Lamar University and lacked only a thesis to complete the M.A. in History at Texas A&M. She briefly taught English and journalism at El Campo and Anderson, retiring to Navasota to pursue a rich life of creative and scholarly activity.

Her scholarly activity includes co-authorship with Nath Winfield of *Sandbars and Sternwheelers: Steam Navigation on the Brazos* (Texas A&M University Press, 1976), which is cited in international research on transportation, rivers and ecology, and is a reference noted in the *Handbook of Texas Online*. Her illustrated monograph, *Dressing Victorian: Being a Brief Overview of Women's Victorian Clothing in Texas, 1837-1900?* (1987), appears in bibliographies of historical dress. Pam's other publications include articles in the *Heritage Rose Foundation News* on using willow water to root rose cuttings and on cultivating roses from seeds. She spoke at numerous garden organizations and venues including the Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Garden.

Pam was one of the original three founders of the "Texas Rose Rustlers" and is credited with locating heritage Texas roses given the names "Pam's Pink" and "Climbing Lady Pamela." Through her pioneering effort she helped collect in Navasota the "Martha Gonzalez," a semi-double red China rose, and in Anderson, the "Mary Minor," later identified as the "Souvenir de la Malmaison. The story of the "Martha Gonzalez" rose: "Martha Gonzales" is a found rose with a truly heart-warming story behind it. As the story has been passed down to me, Pam Puryear, a well known Texas Rose Rustler, and Dallas rosarian Joe Woodward were rose rustling. While they were driving in when they spotted the roses in the yard of a lady named Martha Gonzales while still a block away. Mrs. Gonzales kindly let them take cuttings of her 'Old Blush' and 'Mrs. Dudley Cross' specimens. Joe Woodward insisted that they should also take cuttings of the "little red China" rose, although Pam was not particularly enthusiastic about it. Well, the "little red China" rose turned out to be a treasure. When Pam returned the next year for some more cuttings, the house seemed to be vacant, the rose was gone and it seemed that Martha Gonzales had passed away! But that is not the end of the story. In the fall of 1999, I was contacted by the granddaughter of Martha Gonzales who had seen this web page and wanted to know if I had a picture of Martha Gonzales (the woman, not the rose). I sent a picture and

learned that Martha Gonzales was still alive. Martha Gonzales was told that her little rose had become really famous. She passed away the spring of 2000, but her name lives on in this wonderful little rose that was snatched just in time from oblivion and possible extinction."

Thomas Christopher's *In Search of Lost Roses* credits her with finding a 19th century Belgium specimen, "Marie van Houtte." He also describes how Pam carried an old cavalry saber while out rose hunting to ward off snakes. He writes about finding this-now-his-favorite rose with Pam: "One of my favorite old roses is the "Hole Rose," a vigorous shrub that bears pale yellow blossoms touched with a blush of pink. It was discovered by Pamela Puryear, a founder of the Texas Rose Rustlers, growing up through the weeds in the yard of an abandoned cottage in Navasota, Texas. I helped Pam to collect cuttings from this bush to share with the other rustlers at the annual old rose rustle. Later, we learned that this shrub was actually a specimen of a tea rose of 1871 from Belgium, 'Marie van Houtte.' How this exotic shrub found its way to rural Texas and survived a century of Texan summers I cannot imagine." Thomas Christopher describes Pam as "certainly one of the most colorful, a well-educated but reclusive Texan lady who lived in a crumbling mansion her grandfather had built according to a pattern purchased from a magazine."

The New York Times reviewer of that book must have had Pam in mind when she writes: "What sticks in the mind...is stories he tells and the people he's met, researched, or gone to look for--the mad, passionate, wildly uncompromising people, fixed on a flower." Ken Druse in *The Collector's Garden* describes Pam as a passionate gardening extremist who turned a particular species of plant into a mission in life. Dr. William C. Welch in *Antique Roses for the South* generously recognizes her expertise and research skills in historical gardening, and includes a picture of her with close friend Greg Grant "rustling" cuttings of a "Canary Island Rose" in San Antonio during the mid-1980's. She was also an official judge for the Search for the San Antonio Rose as described at:

[http://www.plantanswers.com/garden\\_column/oct04/3.htm](http://www.plantanswers.com/garden_column/oct04/3.htm)

Recognized for her rosarian skills, Pam was one of the official judges sponsored by a major corporation to identify and award a prize for the "genuine" San Antonio rose. Roses were not her only horticultural discoveries. Other flowers found in her own yard bear her name. A climbing pink and gold extremely floriferous honeysuckle, "Pam's Pink," is commercially available. See:

<http://www.vintagerosery.com/roses/pampink.htm>

Also available commercially now is a large flowered red-and-gold columbine, named "Blazing Stars Columbine," with the scientific Latin name "Aquilegia x puryearana," recognized as an excellent cut flower and for attracting hummingbirds. (See:

[http://www.plantanswers.com/arcadia\\_pages/bs\\_columbine.htm](http://www.plantanswers.com/arcadia_pages/bs_columbine.htm)

She is also "rumored" to have a great deal to do with the creation of the Pink Bluebonnet Legend as seen at:

<http://www.plantanswers.com/parsons/BLUEBONN.htm>

Pam's creativity was not limited to gardening. She painted oversized murals, created unique ceramic mead wrist cups, and wove or embroidered heraldic tapestry. She illuminated her own English genealogy research with detailed heraldry and coats of arms, a service which she provided for free to her friends. Her other interests include making jewelry from semi-precious stones, and crafting period costumes. She is warmly remembered by friends for her creative theme parties, such as the tea parties to craft multi-dimensional Valentines, and birthday parties like one featuring the Loch Ness monster cake. Childhood friends from the Vacation Bible School at the First Presbyterian Church of Navasota recall her summer 1955 cinematographic epic filmed at the rapids on the Brazos River, a realistic re-creation of "The Parting of the Red Sea."

She was a fourth-generation member of the First Presbyterian Church, Navasota, where she shared her artistic talent with the Bible School and sang in the Choir. She belonged to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas and provided programs for countless civic and gardening organizations around the State, and was Troop Leader for several Girl Scout and Campfire Girls. She was a founding member of the Navasota Heritage Home Tour and Nostalgia Days as well as The Pioneer Plant Society. Pam is survived by a number of cousins, lifelong friends, colleagues from the world of ornamental heritage flowers, and caring friends from the First Presbyterian Church of Huntsville who helped her through her final years. Pam was passionate about our Texas and Southern gardening heritage and was highly successful in motivating others to explore plants and gardens important to their own families and communities. She leaves behind an enduring legacy of "found flowers," some of which bear her name, and an impact on heritage gardening which will continue to attest to her pioneering spirit, generosity, energy and creativity.

*Posted 28 March, 2005. Communicated by Dr. Jerry Parsons, Texas Cooperative Extension.*