

Purviance, Samuel Densmore ^[1]

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by William C. Fields, 1994

7 Jan. 1774–ca. 1806

Samuel Densmore Purviance, lawyer, state legislator, and congressman, was born at his family's home, Castle Fin House on Masonboro Sound, [New Hanover County](#) ^[2], near [Wilmington](#) ^[3], one of five children of Colonel William and Eleanor Purviance. In about 1754 William Purviance and two brothers, Samuel Densmore and Robert, had migrated to America from Ireland. William Settled in New Hanover County and his brothers in Baltimore, Md. They were grandsons of Jacques de Purviance, of Royan, Saintonge, France, a [Huguenot](#) ^[4] who fled after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and settled in Ireland near the village of Castle Finn in County Donegal, Ulster.

Samuel D. Purviance was educated in a private school and later studied law. In January 1795 he was admitted to the bar by the [Cumberland County](#) ^[5] Court and began to practice in [Fayetteville](#) ^[6]. As the owner of a plantation on the west side of the [Cape Fear River](#) ^[7] below Fayetteville, he also engaged in farming. In 1798 Purviance was elected to the North Carolina [House of Commons](#) ^[8], serving also in 1799. He won a seat in the state senate in 1801 and remained for one term. As a Federalist he was elected to the [Eighth U.S. Congress](#) ^[9], where he also served a single term in the House of Representatives from 1803 to 1805.

The exact circumstances of his death are not known. According to a letter written in 1859 by his son, Henry E., he died "somewhere on the Red River, Arkansas, about 1806 or 7."

In about 1792 he married Mary Brownlow (1775–23 Jan. 1801), daughter of John and Rebecca Evans Brownlow, of Fayetteville. They had four children: Julia Brownlow (died in infancy), Harry Edward (b. 19 Mar. 1794), Catherine Eleanor (b. 1796, m. Lawrence Fitzharris), and Mary (b. 1801, m. William Tams) of Philadelphia.

References:

Biog. Dir. Am. Cong. (1961).

Cumberland County Wills and Court Minutes (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Genealogical information in the files of Mrs. Ida B. Kellam, Wilmington.

Additional Resources:

"Purviance, Samuel Dinsmore, (1774 - 1806)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=P000577> ^[9] (accessed May 19, 2014).

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