

**Oral History Interview of  
Gary Sanders**

**Interviewed by: Monte Monroe  
April 16, 2011  
Anson, Texas**

**Part of the:  
*Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball***

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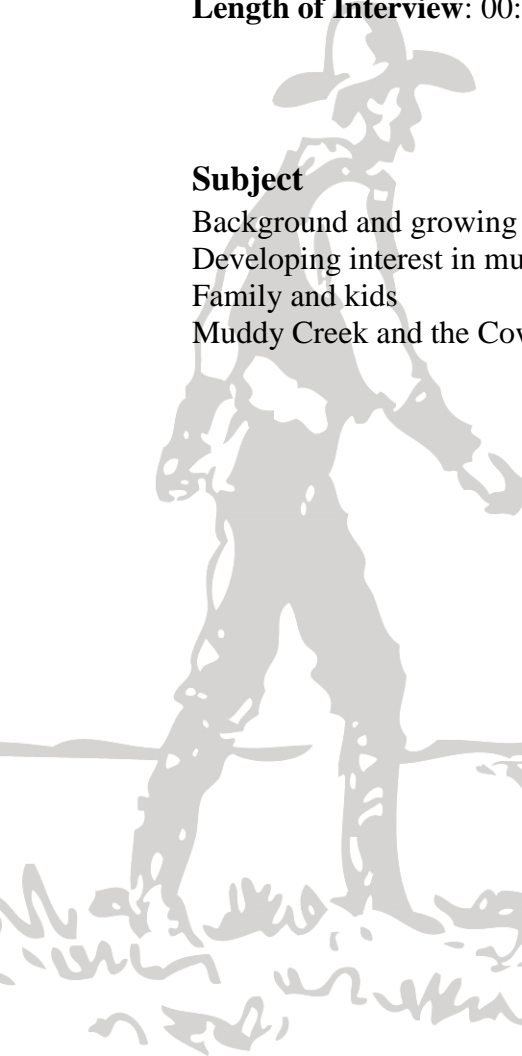
## Interview Series Background:

This collection features interviews related to the Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball in Anson, Texas. Topics covered include the traditions associated with the ball, the leadership within the Cowboys' Christmas Ball Association, music and Michael Martin Murphey, and the way in which the ball has changed over the years.

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Gary Sanders. Sanders talks about growing up in Taylor County and how his interest in music developed during his school years. Sanders also discusses his aspirations for the Cowboy Christmas Ball and his experience playing at the ball with the band Muddy Creek.

**Length of Interview:** 00:19:09



Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Background and growing up	5	00:00:00
Developing interest in music	8	00:05:57
Family and kids	10	00:09:36
Muddy Creek and the Cowboy Christmas Ball	10	00:11:45

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Anson, Texas, cowboy poetry, dance halls, folklore and traditions, holiday traditions, Jones County, Texas, West Texas music

**Monte Monroe (MM):**

This is Monte Monroe, and I am in Anson, Texas, at the event center of the Cowboy Christmas Ball. It is April 16, 2011. I am here today with Gary, and Gary, if you would be so kind as to give me your full name, your nickname if any, your date and place of birth.

**Gary Sanders (GS):**

Thank you, Gary Sanders, 12-8-53, Stephens County, Texas.

MM:

Okay, very good. Gary, what are your parents' names? Your father first.

GS:

Gary G. Sanders and Hazel Lavina, she was a Duckworth.

MM:

Okay a Duckworth, okay and do you know where they were born?

GS:

In Stephens County.

MM:

They were both born in Stephens County, okay. Do you know how they met each other?

GS:

Just raised up together.

MM:

Okay raised up together. All right, what about your grandparents' names start out with your father's side first?

GS:

Garfield Sanders and Rosie, her last name was—I can't think of her maiden name, but Rosie Sanders. She was born in Hamlin, and he was born in around Eastland County.

MM:

Okay very good. Now that's on your father's side. What about your mother's side?

GS:

My mother's side, my grandmother's name was Viola May Pierce, and she was born in Eastland County. My grandfather's name was Leslie Franklin Duckworth, and he was born in Stephens County.

MM:

Okay very good. What do your parents and your grandparents do? Or what did they do?

GS:

Farming and oil field.

MM:

Okay, farming and oil field. Now were they oil field workers? Did they own oil wells?

GS:

There was one oil well on the Duckworth home place, but my grandpa, he was just an oilfield worker.

MM:

Okay, a wildcatter or just a worker?

GS:

A driller.

MM:

A driller, okay very good. I'll tell you what, Gary, in the interest of time we're abbreviating things a little bit. Normally we like to have more of a life interview and follow up on some of these things, but tell us a little bit about what your home life was like, what you did growing up, who maybe some of your friends were, if you grew up in a rural area did you have friends and what did y'all do for entertainment or were you involved in sports? Just tell us a little bit about what your life growing up was like.

GS:

Well, coming up just normal kids' life out in the country. On Sunday all the families would get together and us kids, on Saturday night everybody would go coon hunting and come in and like on Saturday afternoon, we'd have opossum sacking contests, all of us kids, and they'd have it fenced in. We moved to Taylor County and Callahan County in '63 when things, like I said, started playing fiddle. Let's see, playing fiddle and mandolin and things and playing dances. I started playing dances in '68 and come up and at first got to play here for the first time in '68, and then played up here with a band called Auctioneers. We backed up Chubby Wise and Clay—

you'll probably interview him, Clay Deatherage—his uncle and I played up on that stage back there in the early seventies backing up Chubby Wise. Like I said, it's just been a normal life.

MM:

Very good, well tell me this, Gary, how'd you get involved in playing the fiddle and the mandolin. That's just not something you just pick up from nowhere. Did your mother or your father or did somebody in church get you involved in doing that or was it just something you had a passion for?

GS:

My grandpa traded a two dollar radio for a fiddle.

MM:

Now which grandfather was this?

GS:

Duckworth.

MM:

Okay.

GS:

He gave it to me and told me, "Here it is." And I started playing.

MM:

And at about what age were you then?

GS:

I was nine years old.

MM:

Nine years old. And you had no musical education whatsoever?

GS:

No, I had a great uncle that played fiddle a long time ago.

MM:

Name who.

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GS:

His name was J. P. Duckworth. As far as showing me or anything, when Papa traded for that fiddle, he just started from there.

MM:

Okay, well how did you educate yourself on the fiddle, just practicing?

GS:

Just listening and playing.

MM:

Okay, what drew you to the Mandolin?

GS:

It tuned the same and like I said, he traded for it, too. Like I said, some people like to go out and play golf and other things, and to me that was just—I didn't like football and baseball, but I liked playing the fiddle because it just keeps you happy.

MM:

Now where did you go to school and high school, and tell me basically where you grew up, who some of your teachers were that might have influenced you and did you take music in school at all?

GS:

I played in the orchestra and I started out—like I said, we moved to Taylor County, and I went to Johnson Elementary. I started playing orchestra in the fourth grade. Dr. Preston was my teacher. He had his doctor's degree, but he taught me, and he was my guider all the way from fourth grade up through high school.

MM:

So you think he was a pretty good mentor for you?

GS:

He was.

MM:

A great influence on you?



GS:

He's the one that taught me how to read music after, but I was playing. He'd always tell me, he said, "That country fiddle playing ain't going to get you nowhere." He didn't know. His idea of playing country music was that overture from the Lone Ranger. That was his idea of country.

MM:

That's very good. And what was Dr. Preston's first name? Do you recall?

GS:

Herbert N. Preston.

MM:

Okay very good. Okay, so you went to high school where?

GS:

Abilene High.

MM:

Abilene High, okay, you didn't happen to know Dale Higginbotham there, did you?

GS:

I remember the name. That was, like I said, a long time ago. I heard the name, but there was so many people at Abilene High. The graduating class there in '72 was like eighteen hundred or something like that, I'm not sure.

MM:

Much more than mine. Anyway, did you go to college? Did you pursue your education at all?

GS:

No sir, I went into plumbing and maintenance work, and I've been doing that ever since.

MM:

Okay so do you own your own plumbing business?

GS:

No sir, I work for Clyde CISD in the maintenance department.

MM:

Very good, very good. Are you involved in any service groups or organizations there in Clyde? Do you do anything in terms of extracurricular activities at church or in the community at all?

GS:

No sir, I go home and I'm raising two grandchildren. I go home and they take a whole lot of time.

MM:

I understand. While we're talking about grandchildren, let's go ahead and ask you, do you have any children and you obviously have children. Give me their names and your grandchildren's names.

GS:

Well, between my Ruthie and I, we have three girls and a boy. That's Robert James Flannigan; he's a step-son, Jackie—I can't think of her name last name right now. She's a step-daughter. Patsy Oleada, she's a step-daughter. Elena Lynne, she was a Freeman and she's a step-daughter. Then my daughter, Essie May Sanders, and each of them—Essie's got three children. There's Monica, she's sixteen, Junior, he's fourteen, Charity's twelve. Then Patsy's got three. Let's see, there's Anthony, Aaron, Anna, Shawna Ruth. Like I said, to keep it kind of short we've got those children and we've got twenty-three grandchildren.

MM:

Oh my goodness. That's quite a herd there, isn't it?

GS:

Yes sir.

MM:

I'll tell you what we're going to do, Gary, cause I can't tell whether this thing's about to go out or not, I'm going to change these batteries here real quick. So we're going to put it on pause.

***Pause in Recording***

MM:

Okay Gary, let's talk a little bit about the Cowboy Christmas Ball. You mentioned that you had been involved as far back as 1968. Can you tell me how you got involved and what was the band that you were with when you first got involved and kind of bring us forward to the current time with Muddy Creek?

GS:

Okay, the first time is L. C. Agnew was playing here. He needed a drummer and I helped him then, and I often tell him, like I said through the years, people have held dances like with Chubby

Wise and J. Davie Bruin and the Auctioneers. Until recently when I started playing with Muddy Creek and like I said, this place has been here a long time. It's—

MM:

How do you see—do you see any changes in the event from 1968 to 2010 when you last played here?

GS:

Oh it's so much that back in the early part of it, people they'd all come up here and just have a good time. The last few years, things have kind of changed and most of the people have passed on like J. L., Juanita, and that's the only change I can think. The style of music that people ask for has changed a little bit.

MM:

In what regard?

GS:

They want more modern, some of them do. Some of them still like the good old western swing that we played, like the Virginia Reels they want to do and stuff like that. Like I said, times are changing and the youngsters, some of them are not into it like we all was.

MM:

If you had your druthers, what would your aspirations for the event be into the future?

GS:

I'd just like to see it keep and stay traditional like it has been all these years because the Cowboy Christmas Ball, it shows the ways of the early days like the forties and on up. If you can keep tradition, and to meet tradition is important that way the younger people can come in and see the way we always do things and carry on a tradition and just keep it. I don't know if you'd call it western or what you'd call it. If you uphold a tradition that way people, you don't lose it. I'm just that way. I don't like to lose tradition.

MM:

What qualities of this event do you think benefit not only Anson, Texas, but people in West Texas, and how do you think it benefits these folks that come from all over the country and even around the world?

GS:

Well, to see how it was. Just like the way the song, you know, and the poem everything goes, to see how people lived and how, you know, oh, I can't think of words to put to it, like the ranch

life and the music we had, you had a fiddle, you maybe have an accordion. People would get together just like getting into somebody's front room and just enjoying yourself. That's what it is, enjoying country life.

MM:

Good, good clean fun I take it. Now, the past two years Muddy Creek has been the backup band here and played with Michael Martin Murphey's group or led in and then followed on the next night on Fridays. Tell us a little bit about yawls experiences with Michael overtime.

GS:

Oh, he is something else. He is a real personable person and he's easy to get along with. I'm not trying to take away from him, but his backup band, Rio Grande, they are some musicians that you wouldn't believe. Mr. Cole, he plays fiddle, and that's where he and I, because we're both fiddle players, get up there and play good old polkas and everything.

MM:

What type of music, you mentioned western swing, but what types of songs do you like to play? Do you like more of the Polka or do you like more of the two step music or does it all just appeal to you?

GS:

It all appeals, whether you're dragging your heel to a polka or getting out there and two stepping, just having a high old time.

MM:

And what do you think most of the participants enjoy? Do you think they enjoy it all or do they get a kick out of one genre versus the other?

GS:

Well, you get out there and you play "Faded Love," okay then people just come off the side and get out there, and then you just turn around from it and hit onto the "Cotton Eyed Joe" and by gosh, the same people just getting out there.

MM:

And getting after it. That's very good. What do you see as the long range future of this event here, Gary? Or what would you like for it to be?

GS:

I'd like to see it continue, that way the children and grandchildren of the future can see the way that we enjoyed ourselves. You don't have to have an Xbox or a TV. You get out there and like I

brought up, on Saturday nights, go coon hunting, okay. This music that we're playing, some people call it classic country music now, but you get out there and just have a ball, I mean, you don't have to have something electronic. That's all I can think of putting things. I'm not a real talker, but—

MM:

I'll bet you're a heck of a player because I've heard you play when I was here last year. Well, thank you so much, Gary. I'll just leave it open with last questions and say this, is there anything else you'd like to share about the Cowboy Christmas Ball or about your life in general that you'd like to share with future generations here?

GS:

All I'd like to say for future generations is if you're missing out on what we do here and the lifestyle we're trying to represent, you're in trouble because you're going to miss out.

MM:

Very good, very good, excellent way to end that.

***End of Recording***

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