

Brown: Cowboy's Sweetheart

A "Cowboy's Sweetheart": Kathy Dell's Musical Career in the Crossroads Region of South

Mel Brown



The history of American country music is often thought of in terms of its many stars. But for every performer who has made it big in Nashville, New York, or Hollywood, there are many other singers, songwriters, and musicians with equal or even greater talent who never became famous but who had the same dedication, commitment, and desire to entertain as their better-known colleagues. The role of these less-well-known artists in the nation's musical history is as worthy of documentation as any, since they are perhaps the real heartbeat of the music.

Cindy Walker, Texas Ruby, Laura Lee McBride, Charline Arthur, Goldie Hill, Jeannie C. Riley, Tanya Tucker, and Barbara Mandrell are among those Texas women often acknowledged for their special contributions to the history of country music in their home state. Kathy Dell, although much less famous, should also be recognized, for she, too, was a pioneering woman of country music in the post-1945 era. Dell was not well-known statewide during her career, but in the area of South Texas made up of the broad Coastal Bend and the multi-county "Crossroads" regions south of San Antonio, she was a very popular and influential performer for nearly a half-century.¹

Dell's importance to the state's musical history lies in her pioneering spirit and in her many unconventional accomplishments, all done well before the flowering of the modern feminist movement. She was a strong-willed, self-directed woman who broke ground in significant cultural ways while finding relative success in two male-dominated professions, first as a rodeo star and then as a country musician and bandleader.

Two particular aspects stand out in Dell's unique story: first, she was a self-made musician and bandleader in a male-dominated industry that routinely expected deference from its women. In contrast to so many other female artists in country music after World War II, no ambitious father, husband, or manager pushed her along her career path. Instead, Dell chose for herself

the conditions under which she would pursue her musical aspirations. As importantly, Dell was one of the first "Anglo" country artists to incorporate non-Anglo musicians and musical styles into her act. As early as the mid-1980s, she added Mexican-American musicians to her bands and blended *música tejana* (Texas-Mexican music) into her repertoire. She also sought out gigs at predominantly Mexican-American venues and adapted her shows accordingly. As a result, Dell's musical groups came to represent models of cultural diversity that were quite rare among her country music contemporaries.²

For those unfamiliar with the hundreds of beer joints, ethnic dance halls, American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars lodges, chili cook offs, or any of the Catholic or Lutheran church festivals of South Texas during the 1960s through 1980s,

friends. Her favorite movies by far were Westerns, in which she got to see and hear some of Hollywood's most popular singing cowboys perform.³

Dell's early interest in music may have come from her father, who played drums for the municipal band in a town long noted for its rousing brass bands, classic string ensembles, and orchestras of varying sizes. Music was no doubt played and enjoyed publicly during Cuero's earliest days, but the town began to develop a regional reputation for a rich and eclectic music scene in the mid-1860s. By the early 1900s, several ten-to-fifteen-piece local bands were taking turns leading Mayfest parades or performing Sunday afternoon concerts in the City Park.⁴

German immigrants, who began to settle in DeWitt County just before the Civil War, brought with them a strong musical

Dell entertained thousands of fans for more than four decades across South Texas but never, as the saying goes, "made it big."

Kathy Dell might be a largely unknown figure. Despite her lack of widespread name recognition outside of the Southwest, she was a very talented Texan who devoted most of her life to the public performance of country music. Indeed, Dell entertained thousands of fans for more than four decades across South Texas but never, as the saying goes, "made it big."

As a highly-motivated person who accomplished goals that many women of her generation did not consider appropriate, much less attainable at that time, Dell carved out a career that lasted nearly 50 years, first as a local radio celebrity, then a rodeo star, and eventually as a regionally-popular country music performer. She also formed and managed her own country music groups, booked all their jobs, fronted the bands, drove the tour bus, sewed most of the stage costumes, played guitar, and sang the majority of the band's songs. In doing all this, Dell promoted equality for women and breached specific cultural boundaries with her strong business skills, her fine voice, and her commanding stage presence.

Katherine Mae Dell (Doehl) was born to Walter and Willie Mae Doehl on July 9, 1932, in Cuero, Texas — the "Crossroads" region of DeWitt, Gonzales, Goliad, and Lavaca counties. From an early age, "Katie" was fascinated by the cowboy *mythos* portrayed in popular movies, music, and literature — not surprisingly, since there were authentic cowboys working on the many nearby cattle ranches. As a child, she preferred playing with cap pistols instead of dolls, and she liked to wear cowboy hats and boots rather than the more typical girl's bonnets and shoes of the era. Described as a "tomboy" by many, Dell preferred catching armadillos with her cousins to having tea parties with

heritage and soon took their place alongside other groups in creating a dynamic and diverse musical environment around Cuero. Most local historians now regard the period from 1890 to 1941 as the community's "Golden Age of Bands and Musicales." This era featured brass bands, minstrel shows, orchestral balls, grand and light opera concerts, sacred chorales, and dance bands. A regional big city newspaper once wrote "that for a town of less than 10,000 people, Cuero is second to none in musical artistry."⁵

It was into this rich and varied musical environment that Dell was born. During her early childhood, cowboy songs had a particularly important influence on her. She listened to many popular radio broadcasts, including those from WBAP, a Fort Worth station whose 1923 *Barn Dance* program would inspire later country music radio shows, including The Grand Ole Opry. By the late 1940s, KRLD in Dallas was airing the *Big D Jamboree*, from Ed McLemore's cavernous "Sportatorium," featuring a number of the country's most popular artists. Dell also grew up hearing "America's number one singing cowgirl," Patsy Montana, performing her famous theme song, "I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart," on the powerful Mexican border radio station, XERA, located in Villa Acuña just across the Rio Grande from Del Rio, Texas. Dell would later adopt the song as her own signature tune when she became a local radio personality at age sixteen.⁶

Commercial radio and what is now called country music, both of which appeared nationally during the early 1920s, have long had a symbiotic relationship through which many musicians have been able to build successful careers, often as part of a larger

marketing strategy tied to selling products and services. On March 1, 1949, during Dell's senior year in high school, commercial radio finally came to Cuero with the first locally-owned and operated 500-watt station, KCFH, the town's day-time only Liberty Network. As a matter of fact, Dell helped to launch the station with her own musical show, prompting early announcers to call her "The Sweet Sixteen Singing Sweetheart of KCFH" and to joke that KCFH stood for "Katie Comes from Here." For three years, Dell performed a fifteen-minute broadcast, six days a week, beginning at 7:00 a.m. and featuring her rendition of "I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart," complete with yodeling. She usually followed this with many of her other favorite western-themed songs, including "Old Cowhand from the Rio Grande," "Little Joe the Wrangler," and "Out on the Texas Plains."⁷

After Dell's broadcast each morning, she went to class at Cuero High School, where she played trumpet and French horn in the "Gobbler" band. Her band director, George Bodenmiller, who doubled as KCFH's program director, knew her as one of many musically-talented Cuero youngsters. The radio station's inaugural broadcast at the Rialto Theater on Main Street also featured nine-year-old piano prodigy, Charles Prause, as well as Ben E. Prause's Turkey Trotters Band. The latter was an offshoot of the Ben B. Prause Orchestra, which was extremely popular throughout the Texas Crossroads and Coastal Bend area during the big band swing era of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.⁸

Some of Dell's other musical influences included the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers. Dell once told a local reporter that she recalled often cranking up the family's old Victrola in order to play records, especially two of her Carter Family favorites, "We

for the small but busy Cuero Taxi Company. Her cab-driving job and frequent radio broadcasts soon made the spirited young woman familiar to most of Cuero's citizens. For the next three years, she continued to broadcast her morning radio show from the small studio next to the transmission tower out on the Victoria highway. Sponsored by Ferguson's Five & Dime Store on three of those mornings, she earned \$5 per show — \$15 for 45 minutes of programming per week.¹⁰ Cuero's KCFH began its broadcast day at 6:00 a.m., playing cowboy tunes on a show called the "Record Rodeo." Dell was next with her "Liberty Jamboree." Thirty minutes of news followed, and then the younger brother of western swing pioneer Bob Wills, Johnnie Lee Wills and His Boys, rounded out the hour using pre-recorded performances, or "transcriptions," including the band's Top Ten country hit "Rag Mop."¹¹

Dell's youthful radio experience gave her a taste for show business that lasted a lifetime and even helped earn her a spot on regional television. "Red River" Dave McEnery, San Antonio's prolific singer, songwriter, and cowboy movie star, brought his stage show to Cuero's Rialto Theater on a Saturday in 1950. Following his performance, Dell approached him, stuck out her hand, and said "Howdy sir, I'm Katie Doehl and I play guitar and sing on the radio!"¹² The affable McEnery was so impressed with the young singer that he invited her to be on his new live-music program, which aired on WOAI-TV, the Alamo City's first television station. Despite a successful TV debut, Dell remained unimpressed with this new broadcast medium and returned to Cuero still committed to performing primarily on radio.¹³

Dell, who already had taken the first few steps toward a musical

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Reap as We Sow" and "Wabash Cannonball." In addition to the Carters, Dell listened frequently to Jimmie Rodgers, from whom she learned to yodel, a talent for which she later became well-known. Rodgers's songs, "Any Old Time" and "The Yodeling Ranger," were among her favorites. Dell taught herself to play the guitar, using first a cigar box model that her dad helped fashion. As she later recalled, "I always had an interest in music and got me a book on the guitar and just figured it out."⁹ By the time of her 1949 radio debut, her father had bought her a Sears Silvertone guitar, which, at the time, was a very popular model for beginners because of its sturdy construction and low price.

After graduating from high school in May 1949, Dell took an unusual job for a sixteen-year-old girl when she began driving

career, soon became involved in yet another profession that was very unusual for women and one that helped shape her music in many ways. During her late teens, Dell's fascination with all things "cowboy" led her to begin working as a rodeo "cowgirl," through which she learned to ride bulls and broncos and to perform trick riding. By 1950, she had become well-known on the All Girls Pro-Rodeo circuit across Texas and other western states, and, in 1952, she won second place in the national All Girls Bull Riding Championship held in Tulsa, Oklahoma.¹⁴

Dell learned most of her riding skills from Lucyle Cowey, a world champion rodeo rider and wild-west show star from Cuero, who became Dell's mentor and close friend. Much like her protégé, Cowey, a consummate horse rider and performer,

certainly was an "unconventional" woman in many ways. Married more than a dozen times, Cowey was the All Around Women's Rodeo Grand Champion in the mid-1930s, as well as the Women's Saddle Bronc Champion from 1951 to 1957. As a pilot during World War II, she also flew bombers to Great Britain for the U.S. Air Transport Auxiliary.¹⁵

Inspired by Cowey's determination to excel in areas not commonly accessible to most women, Dell continued to compete on the rugged and sometimes dangerous rodeo circuit. She also began to hone her musical performances until she became a featured act at a variety of larger venues, often using her "singing cowgirl" persona on local radio programs to promote herself throughout the regional circuit. Dell once told the Cuero newspaper, "They would interview some of the cowgirls and some of the top champions on the radio and I'd sing a few songs." In particular, her yodeling in "I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart" was always a crowd pleaser, and Dell began to increasingly enjoy performing in front of large audiences.¹⁶

In 1953, Dell and Cowey spent several months living at Cowey's horse ranch near Bandera, the "Cowboy Capital of the World," located one hour northwest of San Antonio in the heart of the Texas Hill Country. While there, they kept busy performing at rodeos and Wild West shows on nearby "dude ranches." They also spent some time in Bandera's rowdy saloons and colorful nightclubs, including the Cabaret and the Silver Spur, which, in its heyday, hosted Bob Wills, Ernest Tubbs, Adolph Hofner, and other top country performers of the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁷

Music gradually became more important to Dell than horse riding, especially during the rodeo's off-season, when she spent more time at home. During the mid-1950s, she began to perform as a guest singer with several local bands, as well as with some that were touring through the area. It was around this time that she changed her stage name from Katie Doehl to Kathy Dell, since many people found the name Doehl hard to pronounce, and she considered "Katie" to be more of a "child's" name.¹⁸

In mid-1954, Ellis Fellers, a young bass player from Cuero who was playing with an Austin-based country band, the Colorado River Boys, asked Dell to join him on the 100-mile drive up to the capital, so she could perform there with his band on weekends. By then, her singing and yodeling were well-developed following her three-year stint on KCFH radio, along with her frequent rodeo performances. Never short of self-confidence, Dell sang and played guitar with the Colorado River Boys for nearly six months at some of the most popular country music clubs in Austin, including the Skyline Club, Dessau Hall, the Split Rail, the Corral, Hill Top Inn, and the Wagon Wheel. With her numerous appearances throughout the Austin area, Dell made an important transition from being a solo performer to fronting an entire band.¹⁹

In early 1955, Dell began to sit in occasionally with the

Southernaires, a Cuero-based honky-tonk group that performed throughout South Texas. By then, large, multi-instrumental western swing ensembles — so popular in country music during the 1930s and 1940s — were being replaced by smaller bands as the result of rising costs and changing tastes among country music audiences brought on by post-war urbanization and the growing popularity of rock and roll. As Rusty Locke, a steel guitarist and former member of the Texas Top Hands, explained, "rock and roll and drive-in movies hurt the [western swing] band business at that time."²⁰

By the early 1950s, there were hundreds of beer joints across southern Texas that had plenty of space for the more compact honky-tonk bands. Often comprised of four to six musicians, these bands usually featured an electric lead or steel guitar rather than the traditional fiddle of previous years. Honky-tonk music became popular among audiences who patronized the many taverns, roadhouses, and rural dance halls of the region. As author Rick Koster says, honky tonk music "provided countless three-minute soundtracks to a beer soaked generation of hard-livin', hard-workin' folks of decidedly rural and conservative demeanor."²¹

By the time Dell started performing in country bands, honky tonk was the favored genre of bar patrons and audiences across Texas. Honky tonk songs, which have been noted for their tendency to address certain socio-cultural themes, often focus on such rural or urban working-class concerns as loneliness, lost love, infidelity, divorce, and attempts to cope with such problems by turning to liquor. Al Dexter, of Jacksonville, Texas, was one of the first to use the term "honky tonk" in a song title when he released "Honky Tonk Blues" in 1937. Soon, the label "honky tonk" was being applied not only to the roadhouses and neighborhood bars in which this type of music was played, but also to the music itself.²²

In early 1956, after gaining honky-tonk experience with the Colorado River Boys and the Southernaires, Dell organized a band of her own, the Square D Ranch Hands, which had its first paying job at the popular White Leghorn Inn in Westhoff, north of Cuero on U.S. Highway 87. Dell quickly became known for her heartfelt and soulful renditions of certain honky-tonk songs, but since she was still performing on the rodeo circuit, she also kept singing the old cowboy songs. With Dell's ever-popular "I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart" as her theme song, the Square D Ranch Hands remained popular throughout the region for the next fifteen years. As band leader, Dell played guitar and sang, backed by Ed Kinney on the fiddle, Ellis Fellers on electric bass, and Vernon Whitehead on steel guitar. She once told a reporter, "Western Music is really folk music, simple and sentimental with a strong dance beat which explains why it has appeal all over the country."²³

As bookings increased and she gained more experience as a bandleader, Dell soon hired a drummer and another lead

guitarist named Johnny Naunheim, a friend from Cuero. Except for a brief stint in the U.S. Army from 1959 to 1960, Naunheim would perform in every band Dell led during the next four decades. Other personnel came and went, but Naunheim became a constant fixture in Dell's life. Although they never married, they were nearly inseparable as friends for more than 40 years.²⁴ Naunheim stood next to Dell on stages large and small across the Coastal Plains from Houston to Corpus Christi, north to San Antonio, westward to Uvalde, up to Bandera, and then back home to Cuero. In slow times, they often performed as a duo in tiny clubs or for weddings, birthday parties, and other private celebrations. More often, though, they fronted for as many as six players in bands that became well-known throughout the region for their lively, upbeat performances.²⁵

Naunheim was unwaveringly loyal to Dell, at times protecting her from unruly honky-tonk crowds. Former drummer Richard Faircloth recalls one such occasion when Dell was harassed by a drunken audience member:

One time we were performing near Port Lavaca to an Indianola Beach crowd just outside a small beer joint named Ruby's. There was this one guy who kept steadily coming up to the front of the little bandstand and bugging Kathy to play a request. He must have got anxious because he finally reached up and grabbed Kathy's guitar. That pulled her head down due to the strap around her neck and Johnny reacted without missing a lick. Well, Johnny was playing a dang ol' Gibson Les Paul guitar at that time and he just took that big ol' guitar and bopped that guy on top of his head with that guitar. And the guy of course backed off. Of course it was kind of loud comin' through the amplifier but it backed that ol' boy off!"²⁶

Dell's bands played sets made up mainly of country classics mixed with current hits. She never wrote an original song but chose instead to deliver popular material to the best of her



*The Square D Ranch Hands, circa 1960.
(L-R) Johnny Naunheim, Glen Halmark, Kathy Dell, and "Lefty" Heine. Photo courtesy of Dorothy Allsbrook.*

band's ability. A representative play list of Dell's included "Walk On By," "San Antonio Rose," "Fraulein," "Together Again," "Almost Persuaded," "Jole Blonde," "Hey Baby, Que Paso?" "Johnny B. Good," "Gimme That Old Time Rock and Roll," "Achy Breaky Heart," "Red Sails In the Sunset," "Sentimental Journey," "Harbor Lights," "Cattle Call," "Out On the Texas Plains," and many others from across genres and time periods. By the mid 1960s, Dell had also become well-known for her ability to sing like Patsy Cline when performing such hits as "I Fall to Pieces" and "Walkin' After Midnight." In general, Dell always kept abreast of current hit songs and popular trends so as to accommodate the wide range of patrons who came to the clubs and halls to hear live dance music.

Dell's bands also kept their repertoire filled with such waltzes and polkas as "Westphalia Waltz," "Julaida Polka," "Shiner Song," "Red and White Polka," and others. These songs were always in demand, especially in the Crossroads region of Texas, which had been settled largely by German, Czech, and Polish immigrants in the nineteenth century. Dell's mixed ethnic heritage of German and Polish, or "Pollander," as she sometimes called it, assured that her bands were proficient at playing polkas and waltzes for the myriad of ethnic venues in the region.²⁷

The many ethnic dance halls constructed throughout Central and South Texas beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century provided plenty of venues for Dell's bands. The popular wooden structures were built in rural and small-town Texas by a variety of German, Czech, and Polish groups, including *Schützen Vereine* (shooting clubs), such fraternal lodges as the Sons of Hermann, and such societies as the KJT (Catholic Union of Texas) and the SPJST (Slavonic Benevolent Order of the State of Texas). At one time or another, Dell's bands played the dance halls at Lenz, Lindenau, Nordheim, Schroeder, Westphalia, Gruenau, Westhoff, as well as other sites in nearby Golly, Shiloh, Cheapside, Arneckeville, and Mission Valley. They also performed in most of the halls, clubs, and beer joints in the neighboring towns of Yoakum, Gonzales, Yorktown, Refugio, Goliad, Victoria, Beeville, and others further away in Corpus Christi and San Antonio.²⁸

Dell's eclectic repertoire worked well for 40 years, as her various bands stayed busy playing an average of two to three nights per week, and sometimes as many as five or six. She handled all the bookings and was apparently quite good at marketing herself, as indicated by the sheer number of venues and events, both large and small, at which she played over the years. There is little doubt that Dell's musical diversity helped land her bands many jobs, since they could play some rock and roll, rhythm and blues, pop tunes, or even ethnic folk music as needed. Despite covering such a broad range of material, Dell and her band mates rarely rehearsed, since frequent gigs provided ample opportunity to practice.²⁹

Dell was first and foremost a professional who honored her performance commitments. Former drummer, Richard Faircloth, related an anecdote that exemplifies her professionalism. She had booked the band for a Saturday night gig in late January at the Lenz Dance Hall about 40 miles west of Cuero in Karnes County. However, the weather turned bad that weekend, as temperatures plummeted into the teens. Nevertheless, Dell drove the bus and got the band to Lenz before the appointed hour.³⁰ As sleet began to fall outside, the band started on schedule at exactly 6:00 p.m., playing six or seven songs to the only other person there, the hall manager with whom Dell had booked the show. The manager had decided to open on the off chance that others might show up in spite of the weather. Determined to fulfill its professional obligation, the band braved the frigid temperatures for approximately half an hour, as Johnny Naunheim played lead guitar with gloved hands. However, when no one else showed up, Dell closed the show and drove the bus back to Cuero in a freezing rain.³¹

At a time when women were expected to defer to men, Dell managed all the business details of her bands' performances in a confident and non-deferential manner. A few times, she and "the boys" arrived for the contracted job to find another band already there due to an accidental double booking. Not one to be intimidated, she would stand firm and insist that a so-called "battle of the bands" be held. This usually meant that both groups played sets and then split the door proceeds. On occasion, a true band battle occurred in which the audience voted with voices, boots, and applause for the group they preferred. Either way, both bands got paid something in spite of any errors that may have been made by the club's management.

Dell occasionally encountered prejudice along the way, but she usually overcame it or simply ignored it. Some male bar owners would not book her bands, and some male musicians refused to play with her, because they could not accept having a woman in charge. Dell did not hesitate to fire a band member if his actions hurt the band's performance or overall reputation. Naunheim remembers a gig at which a band member, who fancied himself a "ladies man," got the entire group into trouble by flirting with a married woman during the evening's performance. As the band packed up to leave after the show, they discovered that every tire on their van, including the spare, had been slashed, leaving them stranded 40 miles from home at 2:00 in the morning. Believing that the husband had done this as a result of the improper behavior of her drummer, Dell fired him rather than jeopardize the entire group's safety and standing in the local community.³²

Thanks to Dell's reputation as a dynamic and reliable entertainer, her band enjoyed some long-lasting gigs. For over seven years in the 1970s, for example, her group played a regular Thursday night job in Port Lavaca at an upscale cocktail

lounge, the Santa Maria Club. Another popular venue in which they performed for several years was Booth's Trading Post, well-known for its barbecue, near Richmond west of Houston. Booth's was owned and operated by Agnes Booth, a colorful, eccentric rancher famous for herding cattle while driving a Cadillac. Although it started as a barbecue joint, Booth's opened its dance floor in 1965 and began hiring local bands, which soon attracted hundreds of dancers every Saturday night from May through September.³³

Kathy Dell's band became a favorite of Booth's for one important reason — they came to play. Dell's group usually performed an opening set that lasted 90 minutes, took a fifteen-minute break, played an hour more, took another break, and then played until closing time. As Booth once remarked, "I brought in a few big name bands but folks around here just didn't like them. Those bands take a 20-minute break every half hour. When folks come here they want to dance, not listen to the juke box half the night."³⁴ In part because of Kathy Dell's popularity, the Saturday night dances at Booth's Trading Post eventually became as famous as the barbecue. At Booth's and many other venues across South and South Central Texas, Dell was a dynamic performer whose diverse skills and strong work ethic made her an important figure in the region's musical community.

Over the years, Dell performed with some well-known figures in country music. In the early 1960s, Bob Wills once invited her on stage to play with his Texas Playboys. At that time Wills and his Texas Playboys performed regularly at the Lone Star Club in Port Lavaca, where Dell's bands also played on occasion. She and the band also frequently backed up touring acts that performed at local dance halls, including James O'Gwynn, a Houston Hometown Jamboree and Louisiana Hayride veteran known as "The Smilin' Irishman." O'Gwynn was a singer-songwriter who had several hit tunes, such as "Talk to Me,

Lonesome Heart" and "House of Blue Lovers" in the early 1960s. In addition, Dell played for Frankie Miller, a successful country singer from nearby Victoria, who had the 1959 hit single "Blackland Farmer." The Square D Ranch Hands also backed Charlie Walker of Copeville, Texas, who performed on the Grand Ole Opry and in Las Vegas nightclubs. Dell and her band usually performed with Walker at Schroeder Hall, one of the best-known dance halls in the Crossroads region.³⁵

Another favorite venue for Dell's band was the dance hall at Beeville's Chase Field Naval Air Station. It was there in 1963 that they performed with Willie Nelson, who had penned the hits "Funny How Time Slips Away," "Hello Walls," and "Crazy." Nelson was playing to a large audience in the Enlisted Men's Club, while Dell was on stage in the Chief Petty Officers Club located in the same building. During one of his breaks, Nelson wandered into the smaller venue, where he found the Square D Ranch Hands playing and asked if he could sit in, much to the band's and the audiences' surprise and delight. Naunheim handed his Fender Jaguar guitar to Nelson, who then joined Dell for a short set along with her cousin, Jimmy Lane, on drums. Nelson played "Wildwood Flower" and then "Hello Walls," plus two other songs with Dell on vocals and rhythm guitar.³⁶

Throughout the entire time that Dell was performing professionally, she also continued to work a regular "day" job, managing a western goods and clothing store, along with a small liquor store owned by her father in Cuero. In 1968, she began managing the Cuero Music Company for its original owner, local musician Richard Faircloth. He later opened a second store in Beeville, and then, in 1976, sold Dell the Cuero business, which she operated until 2001.³⁷

In 1969, Dell and Naunheim joined Faircloth's band, the Country Kings, forming a new group known as "Kathy Dell with The Country Kings." She then purchased a customized



Kathy Dell and the Country Kings at the Cuero National Guard Armory auditorium, circa 1970. (L-R) Jim Loving, Johnny Naunheim, Richard Faircloth, Kathy Dell, and Jerry Hamp. Photo courtesy of Dorothy Allsbrook.



The Country Kings in front of their 1948 General Motors custom coach, a.k.a. "the Freight Train." (L-R) Jim Loving, Richard Faircloth, Pee Wee Pittman, Johnny Naunheim, Don Crockett, and Kathy Dell, 1973. Photo courtesy of Dorothy Allsbrook.

General Motors bus from long-time Central Texas bandleader James Arthur Heap. Heap and his Taylor, Texas-based group, Jimmy Heap and the Melody Masters, had toured all over the state since forming in 1946. The popular Heap band, well-known "from the dance halls of Texas to the nightclubs of Nevada," had hits with such songs as "The Wild Side of Life" and "Release Me," which charted in the Top Five in 1953. Heap's tour bus had become a familiar sight in South Texas, but now it would be emblazoned with the new name "Kathy Dell with the Country Kings."³⁸

The newly-formed band soon began touring in style. Heap had customized the GM bus by having several seats removed and six bunk beds installed. These modifications made traveling to jobs more comfortable than ever before for the Country Kings, but it also had a downside, as Dell would learn. Accustomed to being in charge, she regularly insisted on driving the large coach herself and once said "It was like a freight train and I did all the driving. I was scared to let them ol' boys drive." Only once did she let another band member drive the bus. Unfortunately, he became lost and got the bus stuck late at night on a narrow rural road not wide enough to turn around on.³⁹

As the result of rising fuel prices in the mid-1970s, Dell sold the bus in order to help finance her second record. Dell and Naunheim had already made one 45 rpm record in the fall of 1969, using Faircloth's Country Kings band. Produced by a small San Antonio label, Brazos Records, it featured the song, "You've Still Got a Place in My Heart," an old hit written by Leon Payne, "The Blind Balladeer" from Alba, Texas. The B-side featured one of Naunheim's original compositions, "Footprints

on the Moon." Both sides received some local radio airplay, but the record was never a commercial success.⁴⁰

In December 1974, Dell found an opportunity to record with the Cherokee Cowboys, Texas-born singing star Ray Price's former band, now led by guitarist Charlie Harris. The group, at that time based in San Antonio, hired itself out to anyone willing to pay to record with them. This arrangement had obvious drawbacks, but it kept the musicians busy while generating additional revenue between bigger jobs. On December 28, 1974, the Cherokee Cowboys, along with producer Jerry Connell, drove to Beeville for a recording session with Dell, who had booked time in a four-track studio called the Attic. The only such studio in the area, the Attic was located above a music store owned by her drummer, Richard Faircloth, and was operated by Harry Linder, a local electronics technician from nearby Chase Field Naval Air Station.⁴¹

The Cherokee Cowboys, considered to be among the top sidemen available in country music at the time, were not looking forward to the recording session, but they needed the money. Their recent recording experiences with amateurs who simply wanted to make a "demo" and pay for the prestige of playing with the renowned band had been disappointing. Cherokee Records producer, Jerry Connell, recalled that on the drive to Beeville for the recording session, the consensus of the band was that Dell, a "hick from Cuero," would be just another untalented amateur.⁴²

Soon after the recording session began, however, the band's assessment of Dell quickly changed. During the first warm-up song, bassist Peter Burke stopped playing abruptly and

announced that they should start over. Impressed by how good Dell sounded, he said, "Man, this gal can swing it!" The session took more than five hours, as Dell and the others worked to get the best possible sound they could. On a hunch, producer Jerry Connell had brought along a trio of backup vocalists. Dale Diser and his wife, June, along with Jeanette Kamack, provided solid harmonies behind Dell's soulful singing. The group recorded "It's Over," a song written by Jo Dell Gannon, a Beeville schoolteacher. After the recording session, Connell sent the master tape to San Antonio "to be mixed down from four channels to two for stereo," and he placed an order for one thousand copies of the 45 rpm to be made on the Cherokee Records label.⁴³

As soon as the newly-pressed records arrived a few weeks later, Dell began mailing copies to radio disc jockeys throughout South Texas. She sold others at gigs, gave some away to club owners, and placed others in local jukeboxes. "It's Over" got regional

Although she never became famous nationally, Dell continued to be popular regionally, and she promoted her Texas heritage proudly. At times, she performed with an ad hoc group called Texas Heritage, which reflected her eclectic tastes and her willingness to embrace people and music from other ethnic groups. At a typical performance, Texas Heritage would play "Pollander" waltzes and schottisches and Texas "two-step" shuffles, along with Tex-Mex songs and almost anything else audiences requested. Through it all, she still considered herself primarily a country artist, and she often used the motto "Proudly Keeping the Country in Texas" on posters and handbills promoting her upcoming performances.⁴⁶

Perhaps nothing pleased Kathy Dell more than those occasions in which she was able to combine her cowgirl skills with her musical talent at public performances. Her bands entertained hundreds of revelers at Cuero's annual Turkey Trot street dances,

Through it all, she still considered herself primarily a country artist, and she often used the motto "Proudly Keeping the Country in Texas" on posters and handbills promoting her upcoming performances.

radio airplay in the following months, and fans started requesting it at area dance halls when Dell and the Country Kings played. On hearing the four tracks done at the recording session, Texas music historian Kevin Coffey recently commented:

Dell has a strong voice — and she's so typically Texan a stylist. A really nice, cutting voice. You hear it and the band and think of a time and place. And by that I don't mean it's dated, because it's pretty timeless stuff. But there were a lot of working bands like that in those days, way before it became cool to be 'retro'... bands that basically ignored the national trends and just played tough, Texas dance hall music, somewhere between western swing and pretty hard core country. That's sort of what I thought when I heard it...that area, that style. Tough, very Texan, and pretty irresistible.⁴⁴

Except for occasions when Dell backed others during Attic recording sessions, the four 45 rpm sides that she recorded with the Cherokee Cowboys make up her total commercial output. She never made an album, because it was too expensive, and she never received an offer to sign a contract with an established recording company. She once traveled to Nashville for a long-scheduled meeting with a record producer, but at the last moment canceled because of a family emergency back in Cuero.⁴⁵

and she played for large groups of trail riders that camped near Cuero on their way to the San Antonio Livestock Show and Rodeo every February. Each year, Dell would saddle up her Palomino gelding, Pevo, and join the trail riders, entertaining them along the way with nightly shows that allowed the riders to unwind from the day's long journey. These long rides on horseback with chuck wagons, buckboards, and nightly campfires gave Dell a chance to revisit the cowgirl lifestyle that she loved so much and to entertain entire groups of men, women, and children with her cowboy songs, yodeling, and dance music, for which she had become well-known throughout the region.⁴⁷

Along with friend and former rodeo colleague, Jackie Flowers, Dell regularly attended the induction ceremonies hosted annually by the Cowgirl Hall of Fame and Museum, at that time located in Hereford, Texas. In 1987, following the Hall of Fame's induction of Patsy Montana, Dell's childhood singing idol, Dell, prompted by Flowers, took the stage with guitar in hand to sing her borrowed signature song, "I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart."⁴⁸ Although Dell had sung the tune countless times before, this time she was doing it for the woman who had written it and made it famous so many years earlier. Midway through Dell's performance, Montana rose from her seat to stand before the low stage directly in front of her. When Dell finished singing, Montana took the microphone and told the audience that Dell's impressive rendition had made Montana feel as if she had actually experienced seeing herself perform the popular tune.⁴⁹

By the mid-1970s, Dell was incorporating more elements of Tejano music into her performances in order to attract an ever wider audience. In 1976, after Richard Faircloth and the Country Kings went their own way, she formed a new band called Rawhide, the English translation of *cuero*, as a way to honor her home town. After performing at annual *pachangas* sponsored by two Mexican-American Catholic churches — Our Lady of Guadalupe in Cuero and Our Lady of Sorrows in Victoria — Dell hired a new drummer and bass player who were members of those congregations. By playing these day-long gatherings, which featured food booths, games, music, dancing, and other activities, Rawhide quickly expanded its fan base and soon began performing elsewhere throughout the Mexican-American community.⁵⁰

Among other events, Rawhide played at several *quinceañeras*, the traditional social debut for fifteen-year-old Mexican-American girls. These often were large celebrations that began with a solemn, wedding-like chapel ceremony followed by a reception for family and friends. Always lively, these parties include food, music, and dancing and may go on for

By including these musicians and this more ethnically-diverse music in its repertoire, Rawhide helped to break new ground by promoting the cultural cross-fertilization of Texas music. Taking this eclectic mix even further, Dell eventually hired another Mexican-American drummer, David Aguayo, who added a rock-and-roll dimension to the band and even performed a "Fats" Domino medley. Although Dell's rural audiences wanted a more traditional country sound, her urban audiences were very accepting of the cross-cultural approach that the band took in its performances. Somehow, Dell managed to balance these diverse tastes, and Rawhide remained a favorite at both traditional country venues, as well as at Mexican-American festivals, weddings, and *quinceañeras*.⁵³

Dell toured with her band regularly from the late 1950s well into the 1980s, playing not only paying gigs, but also putting on free shows at public schools, senior citizen events, nursing homes, retirement and birthday parties, and local benefits for charitable causes. Perhaps most fittingly, the final job her band was scheduled to play happened to be at her church's annual picnic. Dell had grown up in Saint Michael's Catholic Church

44

Among other events, Rawhide played at several quinceañeras, the traditional social debut for fifteen-year-old Mexican-American girls.

hours. Rawhide also played at wedding receptions, as well as anniversary and birthday parties organized by members of the Mexican-American Catholic congregations in Cuero and Victoria. For many of these performances, Dell hired Cuero bassist, Tony Gonzales, who specialized in singing the hits of country superstar Johnny Rodriguez, from Sabinal, Texas, including "You Always Come Back To Hurting Me," "That's The Way Love Goes," and "Just Get Up And Close The Door." Gonzales, who, like Rodriguez, easily alternated between singing in English and Spanish, soon became a popular addition to the band, especially for the many appearances the group made at events within the Mexican-American community.⁵¹

Rawhide also played a number of other Mexican-American songs, including "Alla en el Rancho Grande." This was a traditional ballad that had been recorded by a number of artists, including a San Benito, Texas-born singer named Baldemar Huerta. Huerta, who used the stage name "Freddy Fender," began his career in 1961 singing rock and roll as the "Bebop Kid." He went on to have two No. 1 country hits in 1975 with "Before the Next Teardrop Falls" and its follow-up, "Wasted Days And Wasted Nights." Because Kathy Dell's new drummer, Damacio Lopez, looked and sounded very much like Freddy Fender, he sang many of the star's hits when Dell's group performed.⁵²

of Cuero and attended regularly throughout her life until health problems prevented her from going.⁵⁴

Dell continued performing into the mid-1990s, playing duet shows on occasion with her closest friend and guitarist, Johnny Naunheim. On October 17 and 18, 1998, however, a natural disaster helped put an end to her musical career. That weekend a massive rain storm brought a catastrophic deluge to a number of towns along the Guadalupe River flood plain, including Cuero, where nearly two feet of rain fell overnight. Along with countless other homes in the area, the first floor of the Dell family home was under water for several days. All of Dell's audio equipment, guitars, songbooks, and costumes were destroyed. The devastating losses included most of her old rodeo gear, outfits, saddles, and tack, as well, since they were stored in a nearby out-building. Fortunately, she had kept some items at the music store in town where they were safe. These included her well-worn Silvertone guitar, a photo album, a few newspaper clippings, and a handful of event posters from her music and rodeo careers. These material losses certainly were difficult, but the emotional impact on the flood's survivors, including Dell, also was devastating.⁵⁵

Despite the challenges, Dell stayed busy operating the Cuero Music Company and driving every weekday morning to nearby

Westhoff for the U. S. Postal Service to deliver and pick up mail for the tiny hamlet and its rural residents. The job paid a modest stipend and helped keep her occupied, but the flood had taken an immeasurable emotional and physical toll. Health problems increased for Dell as high blood pressure and "rodeo knees" plagued her. Her last musical appearance was in June 2000 for the Pilgrim Country Opry in Gonzales. She sang, "I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart" and "Out on the Texas Plains," both of which "brought forth cheers and much applause."⁵⁶

Ask nearly anyone in the Crossroads region over the age of 30 if they have ever heard of Kathy Dell, and you are likely to get a smile, nod, and maybe a story or two. Recollections of her might include hearing her yodel a cowboy tune on the radio when they were kids or dancing to her band at the Turkey Trot street dances. Others might recall a *pachanga* when she and the band played authentic Tex-Mex songs to the smell of mesquite-smoked barbecue or steamy homemade tamales. Some might reminisce about sipping cold Lone Star long necks at Schroeder Hall while an energetic Dell band serenaded dancers with a smooth Texas-Czech waltz. Still others might remember hearing her belt out hardcore honky-tonk tunes for weary oil field workers and sun-burned shrimpers at raunchy little dives like the Snake Pit in

Port Lavaca or the Hi-Fi Club near Victoria.⁵⁷

Toward the end of her life, Kathy Dell did begin to receive public recognition for her long career in entertainment. In spring 2004, the Chisholm Trail Heritage Museum in Cuero honored Dell by hosting an exhibition of archival rodeo photography, which included a number of pictures from Dell's riding career along with some of her mementos from those years. The Cuero State Bank also officially recognized Dell and her many accomplishments with a public ceremony and reception.

Tragically, a pair of strokes in late 2005 left Dell in a Cuero nursing home, essentially unresponsive and unable to communicate. The ever-loyal Johnny Naunheim sat with her daily while close cousins also visited her regularly. On occasion, former band members and fans stopped by to say hello. The light that burned brightly in Dell for so long finally went out on October 29, 2007, but memories of it still shine in the faces of those who knew her and especially the many fortunate ones who experienced her dynamic live performances. In spite of a lack of fame in the conventional sense, this singular woman bequeathed significant social and cultural legacies to Texas and its music history over a lifetime of dedicated public performances. She helped to break new ground for Texas women in the world of music.★

Notes

1. For a collection of interviews with many contemporary women in Texas music, see Kathleen Hudson, *Women in Texas Music: Stories and Songs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).
2. As Guadalupe San Miguel explains in, *Tejano Proud: Tex-Mex Music in the Twentieth Century* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 5, "Tejano is a particular form of border music. Its unique sounds were created or performed by Tejanos living along the Rio Grande border, and by those on the metaphorical border of two distinct cultural worlds. The concept of the border in this study includes two dimensions, physical and metaphysical." Like its broader American counterpart, Texas music has historically enjoyed the commingling of its ethnic influences. Those most notable contributing Central Texas cultures have been Anglo, Czech/German, African American, and Mexican American. Paula Felps, *Lone Stars and Legends: The Story of Texas Music* (Plano, Texas: Republic of Texas Press, 2001), 193. For an overview of the ethnic roots of Texas music history, see Gary Hartman, "The Roots Run Deep: An Overview of Texas Music History," in Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht, eds., *The Roots of Texas Music* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 3-36.
3. Dorothy Alsbrook, interview with author, March 4, 2006, Cuero, Texas; Katherine Williams, interview with author, March 4, 2006, Cuero, Texas, and Margaret Ellinghausen, interview with author, March 4, 2006, Cuero, Texas.
4. DeWitt County Historical Commission, *The History of DeWitt County, Texas*, (Dallas: Curtiss Media Corporation, 1991), 119.
5. Quoted in *ibid.*
6. Larry Willoughby, *Texas Rhythm, Texas Rhyme* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1984), 18. From 1931 to 1940, the 500,000 watt, Rio Grande border radio station, XERA, was owned and operated by Dr. John R. Brinkley's Villa Acuña Broadcasting Company. The powerful station broadcast some of America's most beloved country music entertainers throughout the 1930s, including Patsy Montana, the Carter Family, and many others. On the history of border radio, see Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford, *Border Radio: Quacks, Yodelers, Pitchmen, Psychics, and Other Amazing Broadcasters of the American Airwaves*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).
7. "KCFH Holds Initial Broadcast," *Cuero Record*, (March 2, 1949), 1; Author's interview with John Naunheim, March 3, 2006, Cuero, Texas. Bill C. Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 199, points out that by 1949 radio shows using live country performers were broadcast on at least 650 stations in the United States.

WOAI, San Antonio's powerful 50,000 watt commercial radio station which began operations in September of 1922, blanketed much of South/Central Texas with its broadcast signal. The marriage of country music and live performance broadcasts culminated politically in the upset election of border radio huckster and swing band promoter, W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel. By exploiting his radio broadcast popularity, he was elected governor of Texas in 1938 and 1940 then U. S. Senator in 1941.

8. "KCFH Holds Initial Broadcast," *Cuero Record*, March 2, 1949, 1; DeWitt County Historical Commission, *The History of DeWitt County*, 119.
9. Dell quoted in "Singing Cowgirl's Rodeo Days," *The Victoria Advocate*, May 15, 1988, 6.
10. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006. In Greg Bowen, "Rodeo Rider, Country Singer," *Cuero Record*, August 6, 1983, 5, Dell reportedly noted that local girls who worked in that same dime store also made \$15 but for working eight hours a day, five days a week.
11. Ivan M. Tribe, "Johnnie Lee Wills," in Barry McCloud, ed., *Definitive Country*, The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Country Music and Its Performers (New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 1995), 887.
12. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006.
13. On Red River Dave, see Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, 299, and Felps, *Lone Stars and Legends*, 90.
14. For a brief overview of the history of the Girl's Rodeo Association, which began in 1948 and is now called the Women's Professional Rodeo Association, see Mary Lou LeCompte, "Women's Professional Rodeo Association," Handbook of Texas Online, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles>, and the association's website, <http://www.wpra.com/wprahistory>.
15. "Lucyle Cowey Holds World Title As Saddle Bronc Rider," *Cuero Record*, November 15, 1951; author's interview with John Naunheim, March 3, 2006. Cowey's past career as a pilot impressed Dell so much that she took flying lessons for a while. It was costly, so she learned enough to fly the solo, cross-country requirement for a license and then quit. Dell had proved to herself that she could become a pilot if she wanted to, and that was apparently enough for her.
16. Jackie Hayden Flowers, interview with author, February 26, 2006, Boerne, Texas; Dell quoted in "Rodeo Rider, Country Singer," *Cuero Record*, August 6, 1983.
17. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006. On Texas "dude ranches," see Diana J. Kleiner, "Dude Ranching," Handbook of Texas Online, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles>.
18. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006.
19. Ellis Fellers, telephone interview with author, April 1, 2006, Austin, Texas. Since the historic Victor recording session of the Carter Family in 1927, female vocalists had become an integral and accepted part of "hillbilly," or country, music. As a result, the practiced and confident Dell was an easy fit with the Colorado River Boys. Austin's own Dolores and the Blue Bonnet Boys had previously been very popular in that area, thus providing Dell with a local role model and inspiration. See Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: The Saga of Women in Country Music* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1993), 34. At the end of the nineteenth century, Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show alumnus Billy McGinty started one of the first cowboy bands to feature a female singer, his wife, Mollie. In doing so, he launched an innovation which began a long tradition that produced many now-famous cowgirl music stars, such as Patsy Montana, Texas Ruby, Dale Evans, and others.
20. Jean A. Boyd, *The Jazz of the Southwest: An Oral History of Western Swing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 31; Locke quoted in Geronimo Trevino III, *Dance Halls and Last Calls: A History of Texas Country Music* (Plano, Texas: Republic of Texas Press, 2002), 165.
21. *Ibid.*, 26; Rick Koster, *Texas Music* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1998), 20. On the growing popularity of honky-tonks during the Great Depression, see Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, 153-154.
22. Janet Bird, "Al Dexter," in Barry McCloud, ed., *Definitive Country: The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Country Music and Its Performers* (New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 1995), 229. Ernest Tubb, favorite son of Crisp, Texas, made honky-tonk songs even more popular during World War II with no fewer than eight Top Five hits, including "Walking the Floor Over You," "Soldier's Last Letter," "Tomorrow Never Comes" and "It's Been So Long Darling." See Barry McCloud, "Ernest Tubb," in McCloud, ed., *Definitive Country*, 118-119. The 1950s are regarded as the golden age of honky-tonk music as represented by Hank Williams and other well-known singers, including Texans Floyd Tillman, Lefty Frizzell, and George Jones. Williams personified the post-war style with his mournful voice and lyrics of tragedy, infidelity, and loss. For a brief discussion of his life and career, see Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, 239-243.
23. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006; Dell quoted in "Kathy Dell...Not Yet A Cowboy's Sweetheart," *Cuero Record*, August 11, 1964, 1.
24. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006. Dell remained primarily dedicated to her parents and continued to care for them in the family homestead until both passed away in the late 1980s.
25. A few Dell band performances were recorded live on cassette tapes which are now in the author's possession. These tapes capture her on-stage personality, revealing how interactive she was with her audiences.
26. Richard Faircloth, interview with author, March 17, 2006, Victoria, Texas.
27. Dell used the term, "Pollander," during a special performance held for her 40th birthday and Fourth of July party at her Cuero home on July 4, 1972. Cassette tape in author's possession.
28. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006.

During an automobile ride with Mr. Naunheim to visit some of the sites where the Dell bands played over the years, I was amazed at the number of venues he showed me in just one afternoon of travel in the rural vicinity of Cuero alone.

29. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006.
30. Richard Faircloth, interview with author, March 17, 2006.
31. Ibid.
32. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006. Dell was tested on another job by a hard-drinking steel guitarist who joined the group briefly. He was a good musician, but during a job at the Kenedy VFW Hall, he drank whiskey throughout the first two sets and soon became careless in his playing. When Dell unplugged his amplifier in the middle of a song, he walked off the bandstand, went to the bar adjoining the dance floor, and continued to drink. As he got more obnoxious, the hall manager called the sheriff, who arrested and jailed the drunken musician. That ended his time with the Dell band, as she tolerated no such behavior. Richard Faircloth, interview with author, March 17, 2006.
33. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006; Jennifer McDowell, "Booth's Trading Post," *Texas Highways* (Austin: Texas Department of Transportation, August, 1981), 44.
34. Quoted in McDowell, "Booth's Trading Post," 44; John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006.
35. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006; Barry McCloud, "James O'Gwynn," in McCloud, ed., *Definitive Country*, 597; Ivan M. Tribe, "Frankie Miller," in McCloud, ed., *Definitive Country*, 542; Trevino, *Dance Halls and Last Calls*, 203. Schroeder Hall's list of performers reads like a country music hall of fame. The historic 6,000 square foot dance floor, built in 1935, has hosted Bob Wills, Ray Price, Mel Tillis, Faron Young, Willie Nelson, and many others. Located about fifteen miles east of Goliad, it still hosts top performers on weekends. Yorktown's Cotton Patch Club was another large dance hall where the early Square D Ranch Hands were popular.
36. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006.
37. Richard Faircloth, interview with author, March 17, 2006. It was in the Cuero Music Company that my daughter and I met Katherine Dell by sheer chance during a spring break trip to the coast in March, 1999. On the wall behind the counter of this small store were a few photographs of Dell the bull rider and Country Kings band leader. Following a short conversation about her rodeo and music careers, Dell closed the shop for lunch and we drove back to Austin with a copy of her 45 record in hand. The brief visit inspired the research that led to this article.
38. Ivan M. Tribe, "Jimmy Heap," in McCloud, ed., *Definitive Country*, 379.
39. Butch Keith, telephone interview with author, April 3, 2006; Dell quoted in "Singing Cowgirl's Rodeo Days," *The Victoria Advocate*, May 15, 1988, 7. On that occasion, the band had finished a job at The Wagon Wheel, a club near Canyon Dam above New Braunfels. Dell was unusually tired, so fiddle player "Dutch" Wells took the driver's seat while everyone else climbed into a bunk to sleep. Wells drove for awhile, but then stopped the bus and began yelling for Dell to drive. He had taken a wrong fork off the notoriously twisted and curved River Road between New Braunfels and Canyon Lake. With Naunheim walking behind as a guide, Dell reversed the bus down the lane until she could turn it around. She then drove the big bus all the way home to Cuero while the band members slept. Richard Faircloth, interview with author, March 17, 2006.
40. Richard Faircloth, interview with author, March 17, 2006; Barry McCloud, "Leon Payne," in McCloud, ed., *Definitive Country*, 1995, 627. Payne, born in 1917, had become one of the state's most prolific song writers by the time of his death in 1969. A 1935 graduate of the Texas State School for the Blind in Austin, he worked with Bob Wills and many others. Payne purportedly wrote several thousand songs in his career, several of which were hits that either he or other artists recorded.
41. Jerry Connell, interview with author, March 11, 2006; Judy Telge, "Recording Scene Brings Talent," *Bee County Independent*, January 9, 1975, 3. By then, Price had moved from a classic honky-tonk style toward one using core band members along with orchestras supplied locally per play date. Requiring twenty or more musicians made him harder to book, so there were simply fewer jobs for Price at the time. Rich Kienzle, *Southwest Shuffle: Pioneers of Honky Tonk, Western Swing and Country Jazz* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 178.
42. Jerry Connell, interview with author, March 11, 2006; Telge, "Recording Scene Brings Talent," 3. The highly regarded band was comprised of well-known steel guitarist Jimmy Day, who had originally played for Elvis Presley, fiddler Cal Berry, a former member of San Antonio's legendary Texas Top Hands, and band leader/guitarist Charlie Harris, bassist Pete Burke, and percussionist Bob Collins.
43. Jerry Connell, interview with author, March 11, 2006; Telge, "Recording Scene Brings Talent," 3.
44. Kevin Coffey e-mail to author, March 28, 2006. Fortunately, a handful of the old 45s survived in the Dell family. A copy is now archived in the Center for Texas Music History, Texas State University-San Marcos.
45. Dorothy Alsbrook, interview with author, March 4, 2006.
46. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006; Kathy Dell poster, Texas Heritage Show, Cuero American Legion Hall, Saturday, April 7th, 1982 (original poster in author's possession).
47. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006.
48. Jackie Hayden Flowers, interview with author, February 26, 2006; Judith Karst, "Girls With Grit," *Texas Highways Magazine* (Austin: Texas Department of Transportation, August, 1989), 30. In 2002, the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame relocated to Fort Worth.

49. Jackie Hayden Flowers, interview with author, February 26, 2006.
50. As Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, 152, points out, "Musicians who hoped to prosper playing for dances in the broad territory extending south, east, and west from Austin, Texas, learned quickly that they must be prepared to play anything from "Alla en el Rancho Grande" and "Herr Schmidt" to "Jole Blon" and "Cotton Eyed Joe."
51. Ramiro Burr, "Rodriguez, Johnny," *The Billboard Guide to Tejano and Regional Mexican Music* (New York: Billboard Books, 1999), 180, points out that Rodriguez, despite the popular impact of Freddy Fender's 1975 country hit, "Before the Next Teardrop Falls," was "the first Mexican-American country superstar." "You Always Come Back to Hurting Me," released by Rodriguez on Mercury Records, hit Number One on the Billboard Top Country Singles Sales chart in March, 1973.
52. Ramiro Burr, "Fender, Freddy," *The Billboard Guide to Tejano and Regional Mexican Music*, 91. Fender became one of the first of only a few successful Mexican-American crossover artists in the mid-1970s. He began his singing career in the Rio Grande Valley by covering Elvis Presley's hits in Spanish. San Miguel, *Tejano Proud*, 71. San Antonio-born Leonardo "Flaco" Jiménez, a conjunto accordionist, entered the small circle of other major Tejano crossover musicians when he joined folk guitarist, Ry Cooder, on his 1976 album, *Chicken Skin Music*. Ramiro Burr, "Flaco Jiménez," *The Billboard Guide to Tejano and Regional Mexican Music*, 119-120.
53. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006. The Tejano/Anglo music fusion that began in South Texas during the late 1950s and 1960s initially took place in rock and roll or rhythm and blues, but as the music of Fender and Rodriguez indicates, it later shaped country music, too. San Miguel, *Tejano Proud*, 71. On similar lyrical themes in honky tonk and rural-based conjunto music, see Dan W. Dickey, "Música Norteña," Handbook of Texas Online, www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/MM/xbm1.html.
54. D. Alsbrook, K. Williams, and M. Ellinghausen, interviews with author, March 4, 2006. According to rodeo cohort and life-long friend, Jackie Hayden Flowers, Dell's deep religious faith was the bedrock upon which her personal life and twin careers were founded. Regardless of fatigue, injury, or weather, Dell faithfully attended church every Sunday morning whenever she was on the road. Jackie Hayden Flowers, interview with author, February 26, 2006.
55. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006.
56. Gonzales *Inquirer*, "A Welcome Surprise," June 16, 2000, 14; John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006.
57. John Naunheim, interview with author, March 3, 2006.