

CHAPTER 4

GEORGE PARKER HANNA

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"Jim Laughran told me several years ago that in 1892 he rode up to Dad's ranch and that I wanted to ride his horse. He placed me on the horse and was talking to my father when the horse ran off for the sod barn..... The horse beat Laughran and Dad to the barn and when they overtook him he stuck by the saddle horn which was higher than the door -- thus saving my life for the first time at three!"

This is one of the experiences chronicled by George P; Hanna, Cherry County rancher, in his memoirs covering seventy-three years of life that constitute a fascinating segment of Sandhill history.

John Milton Hanna homesteaded with his brother, Jim, both of Fontanelle, Iowa -- on homesteads on the Middle Loup river north east of Anselmo. Four boys were born on the homestead to "Milt" and Della Hanna; the oldest, Don Emerson (1887), the youngest, Seth Perry (1892) his immediate senior, James Leon (1890), and the second oldest, George Parker, whose wail announced his arrival April 14, 1889. The latter was so-christened after his two pioneer grandfathers, John Parker Hanna and George Hazen. George Hazen freighted with ox team to the Black Hills, when Kearney was the end of the Union Pacific.

John Parker Hanna's brother, William crossed the plains to California in 1849, during the Gold Rush. Due to illness he died that same year.

The Early Years

In 1894, Milt Hanna sold his holdings on the Loup and moved to Anselmo where George attended school at the age of 5. This was an important year in another respect for the pioneering Hanna family. On Christmas Day Della Hanna gave birth to twins, Claude and Maude.

The father had leased the Bull Ranch east of Norway from Caleb Stem. The following spring George attended his second year of school at Norway where the family lived upstairs in the section house.

In the spring of 1895 the Milt Hanna family moved to a place on Calf Creek owned by Julius Heckman. This five-room frame house burned and the enlarged family finished the summer in a sod hen-house and a tent. In the fall they went on west up Calf Creek about five miles and built a three-room sod house....curtains divided the rooms and May Dill Riggs taught school in one of the bedrooms.

Perhaps the next earliest experience of "cowboying", compared to the Jim Laughran incident, was that at about eight when with his brother Don, George rode bareback and loose-herded 200 head of Southern steers. "Don used to leg me up on my horse and when Don's horse put its head down he would throw his leg over its neck and up he'd go," our subject mused.

Jim, though younger, wanted to night herd at five, but after dark came to the house crying, "I don't want to night herd at night; I want to night herd in the daytime!" The Hannas shipped by driving to Seneca. It was relatively easy because of the cattle being loose herded all summer.

In the fall of 1897 George boarded with Mr. and Mrs. Irve Mecure at Seneca and the following summer Milt Hanna rented a house in Omaha to further his children's education. This was during the Exposition and street cars traversed Sixteenth Street making trips to the fair grounds. Tragedy struck the Hanna family one day when Jim and Claude were hit by a street car. Jim was hospitalized several weeks and the twin, Claude, died the same night as the accident.

After Jim was released from the hospital, the mother refused to live in Omaha anymore and the family returned to Seneca where the children went to school.

Milt Hanna traded in cattle and bought a half interest in a store at Seneca. The cattle enterprise often consisted of trainloads purchased in Washington, Oregon and Montana during the years, 1898-1904, and shipped into the Sandhills of Nebraska. His son said he would express the cash money out, make the trip himself, then buy a good horse and scurry the country buying the cattle by the head.

In 1902 the Hanna family rented a house in Broken Bow and the children went to school there. The following year, Milt Hanna purchased the Bob Miller ranch north of Seneca. The family lived in a sod house there until 1910. All of them welcomed the spring of 1906 after a long severe winter, George recalled, when cattle froze or drifted in the blizzards.

The four brothers shared a shotgun. They kept the gun until one missed a shot, and Seth proved the strongest competition, keeping the gun for weeks.

The fall of 1906 found George Hanna attending Mullen high school -- perhaps the first term -- that was taught by Prof. A. J. Humphrey, a graduate law student from Broken Bow, who afterwards was married to one of the grade school teachers, Clara Jeffers. Five who went through the eighth grade together were Edna Hatch, Grave Cleavenger, Elsie Bratt, Louis Lowe and George Hanna.

In the fall of 1907, while Milt Hanna and Harve Andrews of Anselmo debated about buying the Pass Ranch, the son George went to Anselmo to attend school. His chores consisted of 200 hogs to feed and water, eight cows to milk, Saturday -- picking corn and Sundays -- riding windmills. These "diversions" prompted the youth to quit school soon because he didn't like the "exercise" involved in corn picking.

George Hanna is generous in his praise for his brother Don as a "real bronc buster". He recalled a rodeo at Grand Island in 1908. Nealy White of Hyannis was the choice to win the saddle as top prize and Pat Welch of the Spade Ranch was predicted a close second. "Don drew 'Calamity Jane' and when she took off with him he yelled and threw away the reins," George explained. "The ride obviously pleased the crowd, and cheerers -- among them Captain Hardy of Hyannis -- were of the same accord, "Give him the saddle!"

In 1909 Milt Hanna and Harve Andrews bought the Pass Ranch from the Standard Cattle Company, or Hundred and One Ranch of Nebraska, as it was also called. It seemed to George then that when chip-picking time, hoeing corn and hauling hay rolled around, he and Seth got those jobs while Jim and Don cowboied. So the observing youth went to Seneca and worked for Simon Peter Elude at the livery barn. One of the other jobs was driving salesman from town to town.

An interesting episode was related by the Cherry County rancher when he worked for Emmett Nutter who had a store and bank and leased the Red Ranch east of Seneca. The experience pertained to George's assistance with handling 236 head of wild horses trapped in Nevada and bought by Nutter at four dollars each, "after these horses were turned out of the stockyards they were in every garden and yard in North Platte before heading north," Hanna amusedly explained.

"We were going fine, when reaching the river bridge a driver with a buggy approached from the north," he went on. "I motioned him to go back."

“He came on though and when he met this wave of horseflesh, he had horses between his driving team, horses under his neckyoke, horses under his horse’s bellies, horses under the buggy and horses in the buggy seat. The last I saw of him he was clinging to the brace from the bridge pier that held the guard rail to the bridge!”

In 1910, George Hanna was associated with his brother Don in ranching at Bar H west of Swan Lake (north of Seneca). When Milt Hanna and Andrews decided to sell the Pass Ranch to Hanna’s sons, George got the East Valley and some hard valley land to the north which he later sold to Les Hensley. Agnes did not want to live on the ranch and she and George continued to live in town.

Earlier, other of the Milt Hanna children married, In 1911, Don married Wynona Severance; Jim married Alta Story, daughter of Brownlee merchant A. B. Story; Seth’s wife was Fern Stephenson and Maude married F. E. “Ned” Brown. The latter couple moved to Alliance after Ned sold the Ashby paper to the Grant County Tribune at Hyannis. Ned had first published the Thomas County Clipper at Seneca. He set the type and George Hanna, associated with him, sold the advertising and set up the ads. They started a paper at Ashby to publish the final proofs of the homesteaders of the reserve that had been opened south of Ashby.

“I traded my share of the Ashby paper for Ned’s share in the Clipper,” Hanna mused, “and as printers were hard to get I had to learn to set type.”

In 1914 George Hanna married Agnes McLamyra, whose father was Robert McLamyra, a Seneca school teacher. The couple was married at the Catholic Church in Alliance by the Reverend Peter Donnelly. The groom traded a half-section of land for a house in Seneca and Agnes taught school and learned to set type. Continuing a natural interest in livestock, George traded horses, mules and cattle when such opportunities presented themselves.

World War I Hits and Tragedy Strikes

In 1917, George Hanna registered for the military draft. His number came up early and he was among one of the first contingents to be sent to Camp Funston.

To be near him, his wife Agnes came to live at Manhattan, Kansas, and on March 25, 1918, gave birth to a nine-pound boy. “Agnes wanted to, and did name him George Parker Hanna, Jr.,” the father divulged. She said, “You are going over there and may not come back, so I want to keep a George P. Hanna with me always.”

George went back to camp knowing that everything was fine. However, on March 27, his

wife developed a high fever and was diagnosed with scarlet fever. The baby was taken from her and she was placed in isolation. George was sent to a detention camp near Fort Riley to make sure he did not contact the disease. Complications developed with Agnes Hanna and she died April 20, 1918.

George Hanna was left a widower on his way to France and a tiny baby with no mother. He delivered the baby to grandparents McLamyra and buried his wife Agnes at Broken Bow. The simple inscription on her marker reads: "Agnes McLamyra, wife of George P. Hanna, 1892-1918."

The Cherry County rancher reflected in later years that Agnes was a mother so short a time, but that she would have been proud to know the ultimate success of the son she bore.

George Hanna was given a ten-day furlough to perform these grievous duties. After the burial, he moved his deceased wife's parents to Seneca into a house he owned, wished them the best of luck and headed back to his army unit.

On May 21, 1918, the Eighty-Ninth Division shipped out of Camp Funston and its personnel, among whom George Hanna was a member, was on its way to the port of embarkation.

"At Camp Mills (Long Island, N.Y.) we got our last physical examination," the Valentine rancher recalled, "and while going through this line, a medical officer told me I had a hernia on the right side. "Hell no," I said, "it's not a hernia and it has never bothered me." The officer thought I should go to a hospital and have it repaired. I could have agreed, but as I had nothing left to go back to, I felt I would like to go along with the boys I knew, so we compromised and I was allowed to stay in the 355th Infantry.

A Cowboy on Duty in Europe

"On June 4th, we were shipped to Hoboken, New Jersey, where we boarded the White Star Liner "Baltic", a British craft, that had been remodeled into a troop carrier, and some 5,000 of us were packed into this old boat, like sardines in a can."

"Upon docking (in the British Isles) we were all on board and given one more meal of rabbit, then marched off the boat in formation, where we were given an engraved greeting card from the King of England embossed with the Coat of Arms."

On June 23, Mr. Hanna's outfit loaded out of Southampton and by small craft went to

LeHavre, France. His memories further convey World War I experiences:

“The French people were very glad to see us. It seemed to give them new hope and as we marched through the streets they would run along beside us and give every soldier a flower. Some could talk English, but we knew the others wished us well, too.”

“On June 23, we became charter members of the ‘Forty and Eight’! The box cars we were loaded into were marked, ‘Forty Soldiers or Eight Horses’, so you know they were very small.”

“On July 14, Bastille Day, the French entertained us with some of their troops and band singing. One soldier who lived in Grande and was back home on a pass, kissed several of us boys on each cheek and wished us luck. A few days later he was reported killed in action.”

On July 18, George Hanna was sent on detached service to the railhead of Raemacourt on supply salvage duty and later to the narrow gauge railhead of Menil La Tour. He contracted the Asiatic flu and many were dying of the disease. George remained at his bunk because of crowded hospitals. He slowly recovered and assumed his former assignment. His recollections continue:

“The 89th Division was perhaps the first division to establish what was called an advance ration dump. All supplies from the railhead were hauled to a ration dump between the infantry and artillery, and there, dispersed to each company. If a company’s ration were lost, they could be duplicated in a few hours. This method proved very efficient and only one day during the whole Argonne drive did we fail to make company issue. Many Company kitchens were behind the ration dump.”

Mr. Hanna summed up the major conflicts of the war as he experienced them with this sober thought:

“Our American troops were not pansies. After sixty days in mud and blood, the only person they smiled at was the doughboy next to them, who fired and got his man first.”

In later stages, Mr. Hanna was assigned to direct vehicle traffic and to assist prisoners of war -- and French civilians -- who had been held by the Germans, back from the front, to the towns where they once lived. “As tough as I was,” he explained, “in the instances of many bedraggled civilians returning to their old homes, I couldn’t keep a tear from running

down my cheek, knowing they were headed back to communities that were now rubble heaps.”

As a sequel to the Armistice, General Pershing picked the 89th Division of Hanna’s to be one of the ten divisions to go into Germany as part of the Army of Occupation.

During his duty in Germany, the following episode took place and is related by Mr. Hanna:

“A French company of soldiers came through Bitburg, and stopping, lined up all the Germans available and made them stand at attention while they played, Marseilles, their national anthem. One little twelve-year-old boy forgot to remove his hat and a French Lieutenant walked over and slapped him out of line. A tough cowboy, from Wyoming, who was acting as Military Police, could not stand to see a child abused, so he took a poke at the officer and floored him. The French Captain who was mounted on a horse, spurred his horse over, trying to draw his saber to cut down this M.P. He never got his saber from the scabbard. This cowpoke had a six-shooter in his ribs, and he lined up and ran the whole company of French troops out of Bitburg. We never asked the Germans to stand at attention while we played the Star Spangled Banner. In fact, I don’t believe I ever heard it played while we were in Germany.”

On January 24, 1919, Hanna was ordered to Saarburg, to take over the clothing warehouse for the unit and was billeted at the home of the assistant burgomaster and butcher, who did killing of livestock and issued it to the German people on their ration cards. He used a couple rooms next to the slaughter house to store and issue clothing and equipment.

On one occasion when George Hanna took a three-day pass to visit Paris, the contingent on leave returned to the depot where the train was waiting to take the group back to Germany and the Army of Occupation Mr. Hanna relates the episode as follows:

“There were more soldiers than were expected and we had to crowd twelve or fifteen in the compartments suitable for eight, but we were told that at a rail terminal about forty miles out, we could get more coaches. When we got there the railhead Captain informed us there were no more coaches available. However, he had two coaches loaded with German Prisoners of War he was adding to our train.”

“Some of the boys asked him why he didn’t give the Germans the box cars and give us the coaches. His answer was, ‘dammed if he was going to change them now.’ About twenty of those tough boys, who had cut their way through Argonne with their bayonets, surrounded

this railhead Captain and said, ‘Dammed if you don’t,’ and he did! So we rode the rest of the way in coaches with nothing to mar our happiness.”

Finally on May 6, 1919, Mr. Hanna’s division was relieved of occupation duty and proceeded to Brest where the soldiers loaded aboard the converted German luxury ship the Leviathan.

As he lay in his bunk and the huge vessel plowed through the sea, the Sandhill cowboy thought about home and penned these impressive lines:

*“I’m Headin’ for Home Tonight
The grass grows tall in the Sandhills land;
The reapers are singing to me.
Only a cowboy could understand,
The places I’m longing to see.
The Guiding Hand that is taking us home,
Are the stars with the gleaming light.
I’ve seen all the world, with a pack on my back,
But I’m headin’ for home tonight.*

*The honk of the goose as he’s headed south,
As I am now headin’ alone;
The bawl of the calf as he calls for his ma,
Are sounds that are callin’ me home.
We’re going home from a land from afar,
No more we’re going to fight.
I’ve stacked my gun on a foreign shore,
And I’m headin’ for home tonight.*

Upon the division’s arrival in New York, Mr. Hanna recalled that the governors from four states were in the welcoming party including Samuel McKelvie of Nebraska.

“Governor McKelvie welcomed us from a platform made of oil barrels and bridge plank,” the Cherry county cattleman recalled. “Our mess kits were filled with ice cream and goodies, and a young actress sang, ‘Out Where the West Begins’, and once again with the thoughts of my beloved country, I couldn’t help brushing a tear from my eye.”

“The 355th Infantry, comprised of three trains, was routed through Omaha, Lincoln, and Beatrice, where we were to parade for the home folks,” Hanna explained.

“Governor McKelvie was in charge of the first train and as we traveled through Indiana, Illinois and Iowa, Sam visited from car to car and he was very pleasant and social with us returning soldiers.

Once back in Camp Funston, “where we had trained and left for foreign service in 1918”, the whole unit was taken out of active duty and “everyone who could write legible was assigned a table and pen to write discharges”.

Back Home Again

Mr. Hanna continued: “Getting back to Seneca I hurried down to my home. I wanted to see the baby who had been left an orphan fifteen months before. George Junior seemed to know that I belonged in the family. When I picked him up and hugged him, he smiled just like his mother when she was pleased. He was a handsome little fellow, with big brown eyes that crinkled at the corners when he smiled....But, it seemed like I could not get over traveling through the house looking for his mother....Somehow I just could not realize that she was gone, and the baby she had borne me, must be raised without her.”

(continued in February issue of Nebraska Cattleman)

When George Hanna returned from military service in World War I, he enjoyed a happy reunion with his baby son; however he found his mother in failing health. The parents, “Milt” and Della Hanna, had moved to Spirit River in the province of Alberta, Canada where Mr. Hanna had bought several wheat farms in the Peace River country. Jim likewise had gone to the same area with his father in 1917.

George, in seeking out his mother discovered she had been operated upon for a malignant tumor and was taking radium treatment. Mrs. Hanna failed to improve over a six months’ period and was staying with her sister, Mrs. Ben Kellogg at Gates, Nebraska. “She developed a turn for the worse,” the son recalls, “and all of us children were called to her bedside where she passed away at the age of fifty and was buried in the lot at Seneca beside her last born baby. In less than two years I had lost my two most loved ones.”

Back to a cattle country and a member of a cattle-minded family, George Hanna felt that his destiny might be in the handling of livestock. His initial efforts, however, resulted in more experience than profit. He relates it this way:

“The year 1919 was one of drouth in Wyoming and many a Wyoming rancher came to the Sandhills and purchased hay to winter his cattle. Hay was selling for twelve dollars per ton in the stack in the Brownlee and Goose Creek Territory.”

“Bill Dixon of Newcastle came into our real estate office looking for hay and told me he would take thirty dollars per head for his cows, with the calves thrown in, rather than ship

them down and try to winter them in Nebraska. He also said if I would buy them, he would guarantee the shipping and if one died in transit, he would refund me the thirty per head paid.”

“That night we headed for Newcastle on train 41 of the Burlington Railroad, and arrived in Newcastle the next morning. Mr. Dixon had his son, who was attending high school, drive us out to the first camp on Lodge Pole Creek where we got a couple horses, shod them, and started out to round up his cow herd. Wyoming has always been open range country and Mr Dixon had three camps – one, on Lodge Pole Creek; one on Black Thunder Creek and one on the Cheyenne River, some fifty miles from Newcastle. We gathered what cattle we could find on the Cheyenne first, then moved them to Black Thunder, where we picked up the U K cattle and drove them to the home ranch at Lodge Pole Creek.”

“After about a week we arrived with most of the U K herd at the ranch on Lodge Pole Creek where, by irrigation Bill had produced a little alfalfa, where he hoped to winter the steers.”

“In cutting out these cows and calves, there were a few sucking yearlings and I asked Mr. Dixon if they went with the cows. He said, ‘Anything suckling goes’. We got some hundred and fifty cows and about eighty calves and put them in a lot to start for Newcastle, some thirty miles away.”

“While we were on the Cheyenne River Mr. Dixon told me if I would file on a homestead joining his camp, he would give me a hundred dollars per month for looking after his cattle and four thousand dollars for the claim if I wished to sell after proving up. I told him that I regretted it was impossible for me to comply with his offer.”

Dixon and Hanna loaded the cattle in railroad cars at Newcastle and after sustaining a collision with another train at Hemingford, incurring some delay and injury to cattle, proceeded to Seneca where the cattle were unloaded in a foot of snow. Still heavier snow was yet to come and at the Red Ranch east of Seneca, Hanna was unable to maintain the herd without some loss. Viewing the situation years later her confirmed his suspicions that he should have dispatched the cattle directly to the central market, and had he done this, his experience and not the loss would have been greater.

Close to Higgins Family

“The summer of 1920, I hired out to Higgins and McDonald, of the old Carter ranch, to punch cows and ride the mills, looking after some two thousand cattle,” Hanna continued in explaining his budding ranch career.

The George Higgins family was close to the Hannas and when the latter moved to Goose Creek in 1935, the road to the Hannas ran through the Higgins yard. In the declining years of Mr. Higgins life, George would bring him into Valentine. When Jack Higgins (a son) passed away in the winter of 1961, George Hanna was nostalgic because of the long acquaintance and from incidents like this one related by Hanna.

“One time they (the Higgins’) were cutting the hay by the Calf Camp some two miles from the ranch and I rode up, Jack Higgins was chasing a mule around a two-acre lot trying to catch him. Jack’s tongue was hanging out and he was completely exhausted so he asked me to rope the mule. I was riding a big green colt that you watched every minute for fear he might break into and give you, the ride of your life to stay on. So I told him, “Hell, I can’t rope off this horse.” Tommy Higgins’ big black saddle horse was in the corral, all saddled with a brand new carved Frazier saddle that had cost Tommy one hundred and sixty dollars. So Jack said to take Tommy’s horse and catch him. I got on Tommy’s horse and as the mule came down the fence line headed west I was headed east. I dropped a rope over his head and spurred the black horse, expecting to flip-flop this mule and teach him lesson. When he hit the end of the rope, I went sailing through the air twelve or fifteen feet high and a full rope length before I hit the ground. A few minutes later Tommy drove up in the pick-up and Jack showed him the fancy saddle with the rigging torn out like the guts of a horse that had been gored by a bull. Tommy Higgins had one good eye and one glass eye and when he looked at me the glass eye was by far the most sympathetic, and all he could say was, “What in the hell ever possessed you to do it?” I looked Tommy right back in the glass eye and told him he was lucky it was me who got the fall in place of him and that the rigging was just paper!”

After an effort at railroading out of Seneca, George Hanna took his father’s advice and a small amount of capital saying, “You had better buy some cattle and get back in the cow business.”

“Mastin Cox, the banker at Seneca, called me in his office and asked me if I thought I was doing the right thing in buying these cows, which cost then about twenty-eight dollars per head,” Hanna recalled. “As I had some money borrowed from the bank and the cattle market had gone down I told him there was only one way to go and that was up.”

For a time Hanna leased the Henry Faulhaber place north of Brownlee and then later the Joe Leader ranch near Wood Lake, as his cattle herd grew. Just prior to the move to the Faulhaber place, however, George Hanna met and married Myrtle Mickelsen of Omaha. He

met his second wife when she came to teach school between Gilmore McLeod's and his brother Don's ranch on Wamaduze Creek. "She boarded at McLeod's and in looking after my cattle, I always rode by the school and played anti-over with the teacher and kids," he related. The couple was married January 6, 1925.

Four daughters were born to this Hanna household, the first, Kathleen June, making her appearance at Clarkson Hospital in Omaha. Upon her arrival, the happy father gathered a load of fat cows and headed for Omaha to see the "lovely little brown-eyed baby", who was to become the pride of the Brownlee community.

It is perhaps appropriate that in the years to come, the first daughter of Mr. Hanna should marry and raise her family on her father's ranch. Kathleen attended the Nebraska School of Agriculture at Curtis and became a graduate of Kearney State Teachers College, taught at Valentine, Merriman and Thedford. Her husband, who operates the Hanna ranch, is James Drinkwalter. The couple married in 1948, has three children, a daughter Sheila and twins, Jim and Janice.

In the spring of 1927 the Hannas were looking for their second baby and when Dr. Tische of Wood Lake delivered Marylouise in June, it was another "pretty brown-eyed girl", as described by her father. She also attended Kearney college, taught grade school and later married the young stockman George Giles. The couple has two children, Cindy and Alyce Ann, and ranch in the Elsmere community.

"In November of 1928, Doctor Tische and Mrs. Harry McIntyre of Seneca, as mid-wife, brought us another brown-eyed baby girl," George Hanna prompted. "This one was different from the other two as she had yellow hair and perhaps resembled the Mickelsen family more than the Hannas. We christened her Alyce Ann. Difficulty in early diagnosis and treatment of a throat infection resulted in the loss of this little girl and she was laid to rest in the family plot at Wood Lake on November 6, 1931.

"In the fall of 1929 we expected our fourth child," Mr. Hanna continued. "As Dr. Tische had answered the call of the grim reaper, we had consulted with Dr. Walker of Mullen and he advised my wife to stay in Seneca with Mrs. McIntyre and he would deliver the baby there." On January 19, 1930, Mr. Hanna received a telephone call at his Wood Lake ranch that a new baby daughter had arrived and was called Dorothy Mae.

One year, all three daughters attended school in the southern part of the state. On week ends, the ranch couple would drive down and visit them, "When all your children are away at

school you get just as homesick to see them as they do you,” Hanna mused. Dorothy, their youngest attended Chadron State Teachers College, met and married a Chadron student, William Parnell. He is now with the National Guard and in charge of maintenance of vehicles at Gering, Chadron and Alliance. The Gering couple has one child.

21 Ranch Purchase Made

When “Milt” Hanna returned to the Nebraska Sandhills from Canada in 1928, he thought his son George ought to own a ranch. “We tried to buy the Leader place and also the south part of the Sauls ranch in Sheridan county, but finally settled by purchasing five thousand acres of the 21 Ranch from J. F. Stott. This ranch was twenty miles southwest of Wood Lake, about half way from Wood Lake to the Brownlee community. In the days when they used freight wagons and horses, the 21 Ranch was where they stopped over night. The buildings were built on the banks of 21 Lake, which contained about eighty acres of water and marsh land.”

Mr. Hanna continued: ‘All during the winter, when nice days came, we moved equipment to our new home some ten miles south and, in the spring of 1929, we moved our cattle, household goods and family to the new ranch. I became postmaster of the Vian post-office which was then at the 21 Ranch.’”

In 1931, the Federal government effected a measure that provided apportionments to purchase sub-marginal lands for migratory waterfowl refuges.

Hanna showed particular interest in making available land that included his ranch as well as neighboring land for a possible migratory preserve. Zealous and sincere in his efforts, he wrote an article that was read in the Halls of Congress and published in the Congressional Record. On November 27, 1934, the federal government accepted Hanna’s offer and designated the acquired wild life resource area as the Sweetwater Game Preserve. As the transfer was being negotiated, Hanna was advised he could continue operating his ranch on the premises until the spring of 1936 if he promised not to shoot or molest any migratory waterfowl. With the transaction obviously materializing, George Hanna again sought a ranch layout and his eyes were focused on the Joe Uehling land on Goose Creek. The land was in the hands of receivers who attempted to get twenty dollars per acre. George offered five dollars; later bought it for \$7.00 per acre.

“Again it was moving time,” the Cherry county cattleman recalled, “and during the fall and winter of 1935 and 1936, we moved all the ranch machinery and equipment to the new home on Goose Creek. In the spring of 1936 we had a new home.”

In 1939, George Hanna purchased the Claude Wales land in Cherry county, consisting of four sections. The next year, the Arthur Fink land from Bensten Brothers of McAllen, Texas, of some five thousands acres.

While the Hanna ranch, in its extended proportions and apparently a “permanent fixture” of the family, entered the decade of 1940–50, some events of the period brought consternation and sorrow to our subject.

“I did not know that my son (George, Jr.) wanted in the army when he asked for two week’s leave and came to visit us at the ranch,” Hanna opined. “When he showed up in uniform, I couldn’t help brushing a tear from my eye, for I had hoped he would stay with the Army Engineers.”

George Hanna Jr., had earlier gone away to attend high school at Chicago’s Hyde Park; and thereafter Armour’s School of Technology in Chicago where he graduated with high honors as a civil engineer. He hired out to a Chicago firm but a few months later, got a fellowship grant from New York University where he taught as a student engineer and graduated from there as a master sanitary engineer. He was then employed to survey runways, taxiways, water and disposal of all air bases in a four–state area. The next step, he applied for a commission in the Army, and this granted he was assigned to the air base at Syracuse, New York, was promoted to captain and transferred to the air base at Ogden, Utah.

While at Syracuse, George Hanna, Jr., met Jane Schindler, daughter of Dr. Walter Schindler, and the couple was married in 1944. Twins, Janet and Judy were born to them at the air base in Ogden. Sixteen years later (1961) Judy was an exchange student at Munich, Germany.

As of the current date, George Jr. teaches at the University of Ohio specializing in water sanitary engineering and many of his students are from foreign countries. He had, in the interim since war service worked in Venezuela with the Creole Oil company for five years.

Mary Louise Nearly Lost

The severe and nearly fatal, illness of Mr. Hanna’s daughter Marylouise in 1944 was perhaps the most extenuating circumstance that befell the family during the ‘40’s. The Curtis senior, arriving home after graduation, developed a high fever and the Hanna family doctor, Dr. Bill Lear of Ainsworth, came to the ranch three times that week to attend her. What started out as pneumonia turned into emphysema and the 16 year old girl was treated at the Ainsworth Hospital for two months. Penicillin had been used with success by the Army, but was not

available for civilians. An Omaha Doctor arranged for penicillin for Marylouise, and the Army flew it free of charge to the Ainsworth Air Base where Mr. Hanna met the plane. The miracle drug saved the life of the Hanna's second daughter.

Blizzard of '49

Another event of the 1940-50 decade that will always remain in the mind of Rancher Hanna was the blizzard of 1949. His recollection was as follows:

"The second day of the storm (Jan. 3) Douglas Baker (the hired man) and I got most of 300 coming yearlings gathered up, but could not move them against the storm, so I had to cut the fence and turn them into the hill pasture with the cow herd."

"I rode a big powerful horse and would rope and drag from all the snowdrifts, all we could find. Doug would jump off and drive them into the main bunch. The storm was so severe that these yearlings had walked over a snowbank that completely covered a four-wire fence, and then had scattered into an open meadow where many had just drifted under to be found when the snow had melted in the spring. All water tanks had drifted under the snowbanks five or six feet deep and no water was available should they face the storm back to the wells for water. For three days, no effort was made to feed the cattle. We only rode horses, pulling from the snowbanks cattle snowed under."

"The cattle region was declared a disaster area and the Federal Government sent in some fifty bulldozers and scattered them through the area to open roads and open paths to haystacks so ranchers could feed their cattle."

"Some half-dozen bulldozers came from Wood Lake and headquartered at our ranch, opening the roads and bull-dozing from around the haystacks so feed was available for the livestock. These bulldozers worked day and night and covered every ranch from Elsmere to Wood Lake. From Valentine, Cody and Gordon also, were dispatched bulldozers to help open the territory....Groceries and mail were flown in by plane and dropped near the house where we dug them from the snowbanks!....While our livestock loss seemed heavy, I was thankful the land was clear of indebtedness and we did not owe the bank for the cattle; all we had to have was a little more time to restore our loss."

However, on October 10 the following year, Mr. Hanna's wife, Myrtle, was stricken with a paralytic stroke. Dr. Lear flew from Ainsworth and took her to the hospital in an ambulance plane. The family was summoned to her bedside and on October 13, 1950, Mrs. Hanna passed away. Again George Hanna was left and was called upon to bury his wedded partner

for the second time in his life.

Early in 1959, George Hanna learned that the Archie Fink land on Long Lake in Brown county could be purchased. While it cost him twice that of the Goose Creek land, Hanna decided it was a good and safe investment. On May 1, he came into possession of the additional 2,640 acres.

Mr. Hanna has always been one to keep an eye on governmental affairs and the cattle industry that he has loved so long. He has been a member of the Nebraska Stock Growers Association for many years; attended its annual conventions as well as the 1959 convention of the American National Cattlemen's Association held in Omaha.

While perhaps the exuberance of his older brother, Don, in matters political particularly, might tend to relegate George's position, he was eager to see State Senator Don Hanna carry on his activities in the traditions of an individual. When Senator Hanna was stricken with a heart attack at Lincoln, February 10, 1954 George wrote in his memoirs: "Cherry county and the state of Nebraska lost a very capable citizen. He was an economist and had guts enough to voice his opinion and fight for what he thought was right."

It is quite appropriate that George Hanna, interested as he is in regional history, should marry in later years a woman of pioneer stock. Lorena Hitchcock Reginer, to whom George Hanna was married in 1952, was born at Edgemont, So. Dakota and raised near Whitney, Nebraska in Dawes county.

Mrs. Hanna has one son by a previous marriage. He is John Regnier residing at Gainesville, Florida where he is a sanitary engineer. A graduate of the School of Mines at Rapid City, So. Dakota, Regnier was assigned with the DuPont Company at Orange, Texas; later attended Howard Taft Medical Center at Cincinnati; still later reassigned to work at Montgomery, Alabama. His wife is the former Ann Dennis, whom he met in Cincinnati. They were married in 1958.

Occasional visitations with their respective sons continue to be a matter of interest for Mr. and Mrs. Hanna. In November of 1953, the Valentine ranch couple went on a trip to Buffalo, New York and Niagara Falls. George, Jr. and his family lived at the former city. Then in December, 1954, Hanna and his wife went eastward across the country, thence to New Orleans and by plane to Cuba, Jamaica and finally to Caracas, Venezuela where George, Jr. was employed. All during this vastly pleasant trip the senior Mr. Hanna appeared in a Stetson hat and high-heeled boots.

During several of the more recent years Mr. Hanna has had some adversity with ill health. All summer of 1959, he experienced severe pains in his ribs and back and early symptoms indicated arthritis. But it got to looking more like malignant cancer of the bone and he lost use of the lower extremities of his body. Extended treatment in Omaha however brought desired results and by Christmas he was ambulant and back to his Valentine home.

In 1962, George and Lorena were visiting in northwest Nebraska and a heart flurry caused him to be hospitalized at Crawford for 26 days. Then on July 25, another heart attack sent him to the Valentine hospital for a week.

So, preparatory to my visit at the home last December, I expected to find a fragile George Hanna. My premonition proved erroneous in the later judgment however, for with the geniality there was a hearty and physically robust man. He went about immediately and eagerly showed me the unusual old coin collection and the beautiful arrangement of arrow heads that adorn the walls of the home.

Then to entertain you, if you weren't a bridge player, Mr. Hanna might recite some of his poems. His favorite apparently, and mine too, is "I'm Headin' for Home Tonight", written as he crossed the ocean returning from World War I service.

Another called "Wishes Materialize" was penned in Germany and, in part reads:

*"Now I don't want gold in Alaska,
Just a cow ranch in Nebraska,
with a Herd of White-face steers to ever roam,...
Just a place that I can always call my own."*

In 1959, when the Chicago railroad threatened to, and later did, remove its passenger trains Nos. 13 and 14, Mr. Hanna was inspired to write:

*"Why take old thirteen off the track,
Long has she rolled alone.
She's thirteen when she's going up
and fourteen coming home."*

After the election of John F Kennedy, whom George supported, he wrote the newly-inaugurated president: "With Cape Cod fish and Nebraska beef, I know we will be able to feed the multitude."

Once however, Mr. Hanna impressed with the mystery of child-birth wrote verses entitled "If

You Were There” and these are sample lines:

*“If you were there, that in labor,
she might grasp your hand,
And you would return a little pressure,
so that she would understand;
That still you thought her the fairest of the fair,
And when in need, that you would always be there.”*

The beauty of the George Hanna residence at Christmas is worth a visit in itself. Nativity views and holiday decorations in the yard convey the thoughtful attitude of the stockman. This past year, his son-in-law, Jim Drinkwalter and Elmer Biltoft lent the required manpower to arrange the beautiful displays that attracted young and old alike.

These things of joy and simplicity that delight others seem to characterize George P. Hanna. Distinguished, sensitive and considerate, he cherishes deep reflections. He writes: “In our open ranch country where one spends many hours alone watching the wonderful natures of God develop, you know that the All-Seeing Eye and the Guiding Hand of the universe is present at all times.” For Mr. Hanna, lines by Alfred Caster King are fitting:

*“On the margin of a lakelet,
In the water’s glistening sheen,
I strolled in contemplative mood,
Both pensive and serene.”*

George died March 1, 1970 at the Valentine Hospital after fighting cancer for eleven years.

George continued his interest in baseball even in the years he was ill. He paid for a special parking place between the opponents dugout and home base. He is remembered in town by his enthusiasm and the cowbell he rang during the games.

George voted the Democratic ticket for years, which caused lengthy family discussion between his brothers, Don and Seth, who were staunch Republicans. After Lyndon Johnson became President, he was disillusioned and he changed his party affiliations. George believed the pen was mightier than the sword and so he wrote the following poem:

That L B J Brand

*I was born in old Nebraska, 'twas the year of eighty-nine.
Dad was an early pioneer and my Mother was divine.*

*No Doctor was available, no nurse to give to care,
So she had her babies all alone, in the little cabin there.*

*She raised her little brood of chicks in the good old western way,
She taught them how to ride and rope and also how to pray.*

*And with our slates and pencils, we were taught the three R branch,
Of reading, riting, rithmetic by tutors at the ranch.*

*Thus we grew to early manhood; and we worked from sun to sun,
Trailing up the thin ones; seemed our work was never done.*

*When we thought we were efficient, we straddle the old bay,
And worked for other ranchers to earn a little pay.*

*So we could buy a saddle; not ride bareback anymore,
For our butts were always pimped and our rear end always sore.*

*I worked for many ranchers from Scouts Rest to the Spade,
I have engraved within my brow, all marks and brands they made.*

*And now by working diligent, I've passed beyond the hump,
And I don't want that L B J brand, stamped upon my rump.*

*My time is short; soon I must go beyond the great divide
And leave my children saddled, with a theory that won't ride.*

*So when I reach the Pearly gate, at the top of the golden stair,
I don't want St. Peter to ask me Why, I got that brand stamped there.*

Goose Creek George

George Parker Hanna

GEORGE PARKER HANNA

1889-1970

AGNES MCLAMYRA

1892-1918

MYRTLE MICKELSEN HANNA

1901-1950

LORENA HITCHCOCK REGNIER HANNA