

CHAPTER 6

## **SETH PERRY HANNA**

**By Robert M. Howard**

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By reason of his life-long participation in ranching, Seth Hanna has become a staunch believer in the freedom of operation that it purports. Of pioneer parents -- and although the youngest of four brothers -- he has achieved a position that places him on a pedestal among contemporaries.

From what he has acquired by years of hard work, he has "plowed back" a unique philosophy of life!

"I came to the Sandhills from Custer county with my parents at the age of two (1894)," Seth Hanna will tell you. The region and the way of life required that the children learn to ride a horse shortly after they learned to walk. So, the four brothers -- Don, George, Jim and Seth -- fit into the pattern of the era with an early knowledge of horsemanship and its application to the cattle business.

The father, John Milton Hanna in the prior employ of Stemm and Rankin in central Nebraska, achieved an early working knowledge of cattle raising. In striking out on his own initiative, "Milt" Hanna would go to Montana and Oregon to buy cattle on the conservative price side, ship them to the Sandhills for pasture, and then sell them on cornbelt markets.

### **Mother Pitched In**

During the absent occasions of the head of the household, the mother, Della, through her tireless and diligent efforts as an example, inspired her quartet of young boys to assume a reasonable share of home responsibilities. While she performed the routine tasks of cooking, washing, patching and darning clothes, filling lamps and washing chimneys, and supervising the cleaning of wild ducks and grouse that the boys hunted to supplement the regular victuals, Della Hanna was nevertheless at a high pitch of usefulness when the boys needed her to help tend the difficult birth of a calf.

Mother Hanna was always on call to assist ailing neighbors, as well as being midwife for some who had homesteaded near the Hanna place.

For a time following the family's arrival in the North Seneca country, Milt Hanna arranged for a teacher to come and stay with his family and expound knowledge on a private basis to the four boys and their sister, Maude. This practice was terminated when the two older brothers, Don and George went to town to high school. The senior Hanna family member joined neighbors in a small community school and continued without an organized district.

A customary procedure at the early Hanna ranch was explained by Seth Hanna:

"Jim and I usually had to haul hay to a small herd of cattle before going to school, the school being about three miles from the house. We would then put the team on an old spring wagon, get sister Maude and rush off to school."

### **Wonderful Neighbors**

Seth Hanna harbors pleasant memories of a "wonderful lot of neighbors, as only those old pioneers knew how to be. Many of the older ones have gone to that great beyond -- also a few of the younger ones."

"To the northwest were the Andrews families, Ben and John; also the Murphys -- but Mr. and Mrs. Murphy were aged at the time. On west were the Anders and Long families and north the old Long Place with Mrs. Long, a widow, but six of thirteen children were still at home. East of them were McNitt Brothers, who were bachelors, but later Barney married Mary Murphy.

'South of McNitts were Spencers, Hohstatt and Merz; to the southwest were Knudsen and Gregory, Charlie Townsend and Wood families.

"We were surrounded with the finest neighbors who ever blessed a community, but many of them were from four to ten miles distant.

### **Dry Land vs. Wet Land**

"It is a sad commentary to the situation that some of the good folks operated on all dry land and the rest of our neighbors and ourselves were fortunate to have had hay meadows that seldom failed to provide hay for winter."

Seth Hanna and his brother, Jim, earned some money during the winter months by trapping. Muskrat skins at the time, were bringing around ten to thirty cents; mink, \$1.50 to \$3.00, Hanna recalls.

"Dad put a taboo on killing badgers as they lived on prairie dogs and gophers. We kept

some hounds and also an old mongrel shepard dog named "Fritz". There were many rattlesnakes in the country at that time and Fritz really understood killing them. The dog's main attribute was in being a wonderful cow dog, always working their heels. He also helped wrangle the horses."

The Hanna boys, raised on horseback, were interested in becoming top bronc stompers.

"On Sundays, during the summer months, we assembled at the Longs, Gregorys, Spencers and many other places to break out bad horses. The older boys, Don, George and Jim became quite proficient in staying up there on the hurricane deck, but I always bucked off. Don succeeded winning the championship bronc riding at a large rodeo at Grand Island, but shortly thereafter, he bucked off at our local Brownlee Fourth of July celebration."

As a young man, Seth Hanna worked three years in the old Uhler Store at Seneca. H. D. Uhler and Tom McCawley were associated in the thriving business firm that included ranch supplies and machinery. While the store occupied the first floor, an upstairs provided a place for the IOOF Lodge. Seth Hanna affirms that in those days of the 1911-14 years. Seneca "drew from quite a large territory" and that his wage of \$50 per month was based on "unlimited hours". Seneca also had six passenger trains a day, Hanna also volunteered, as well as a Roundhouse, three hotels and a 24 hour restaurant.

Working at the Seneca store was also Fern Stephenson of Mullen. Born in Hooker county, Fern had gone to the Mullen town school, her father being a pioneer business man there. He was Edward Z. Stephenson who later had the livery barn in Mullen and was county sheriff. Stephenson married Margaret Ann Brannon from Morgan county, West Virginia, in Broken Bow and moved to the area that was to become Mullen, when the railroad ended at Anselmo.

Fern has two older sisters -- Euna, who became Mrs. Roscoe Parrish (deceased) of Seneca and Ona who is the widow of the late Dr. D. A. Walker, Mullen.

It was Christmas Day, 1914 that Fern and Seth were married at the Parrish home at Seneca, also Seth's sister, Maude and Ned Brown.

### **From Stemm & Rankin**

One time during the State's Centennial in 1967, in recounting the arrival of early Sandhills people to the north Seneca country, Seth Hanna compared the coming of his father's family with that of others in the region, with the following account:

“I came to the Sandhills from Custer county with my parents at the age of two (1895). Dad had previously lived in the area and was employed by the Bar Seven Ranch for a time. He and his brother, Jim, came out from Iowa with two train loads of cows that were unloaded at Brady on the Union Pacific Railroad. They helped drive the cattle overland to a place below Norway that was known as the Bull ranch.

“The place was named that because in those times, the large cattle operators put up and fed hay only to their bulls and horses.

“Heavy losses were incurred in these first cows, as they came from sheltered farms and were known as Iowa doggies.

“The Bar Seven was owned by the Rankin Live Stock Company, and Caleb Stemm was the foreman and manager. Their head office was in Missouri. Dad and my Uncle Jim Hanna, John Carney, Fred Troop, Charles Hoyt, Ed Cooper, Nels Rowlie, Pete Rousch and Bill Sims were a few of their early-day employees, I remember.

“Shortly after we came to the Sandhills and settled northeast of Seneca about 15 miles, our little house burned down. We had no place to stay and went over to the William Merz and Ed Cooper places. We stayed with these folks until my father could borrow a tent from the Higgins Brothers on the old Box T ranch. As soon as the horse tent was set up, we moved in and remained until building a sod house.

“Our new house was farther up Calf Creek Valley, around 12 miles north and a little west of Seneca.

“One of the earliest settlers of the Seneca area was John Carney. He made three trail herd drives from Texas and later worked on the old Bar Seven, then settled in Seneca. He was roundhouse foreman on the railroad when I was a small boy. He also operated a place east of Seneca and had a small herd of good roan Hereford cattle. John Carney’s oldest girl, Dai, was the first baby born in Thomas county.

“James Crawford and wife and son Albert were early 1888 settlers in the Seneca area. They owned a small ranch about 2 1/2 miles north of Seneca and operated a livery stable and grocery store. Mrs. Anna Anderson is a daughter of Albert Crawford’s and operated the old Crawford holdings with her son, Dale. Another son Dwayne lives a few miles north in Cherry county. Robert Crawford and wife with three children came to Seneca in 1891 and settled five miles northwest of Seneca. One son Harry is still living in Seneca.

## **Irrigation System**

“Pete Grier came about the same time as Crawfords and operated a ranch down the river a couple of miles. At one time he constructed an irrigation system for his ranch on the north side of the river and turned the water out of the river and into a ditch with a water wheel. The old ranch is operated by Stanley Barent, and owned by Maude Grier of Minatare.

“The first general store was operated by Talbot and Gallup. They came to Seneca from the St. Joseph, Missouri area and they also ran cattle south of town. Geo. Gallup was the cattleman of the pair.

“James Melvin was an early resident of Thomas county and lived several miles down river from Seneca. Hugh Benton was an early resident and was the section boss at Norway for many years. Purdums were early residents of Norway community, a son Earl residing at Seneca.

“Welchs, Postens and Mercures were also among the early day residents. They all settled up the river above Seneca in Hooker county. James Cleary came soon after and later married a Welch girl. A daughter, Beth Jeffords, resides in Seneca and served as postmistress for a number of years. Wm. Hardy came early and lived on the place occupied by his nephew, (the late) Clint Hardy.

Seth Hanna said he realized there are many other pioneers in the Thedford and Halsey communities, many of whom he is not familiar. Those early-day people farmed to provide feed for their stock as few people had money, Hanna points out.

“The great majority was poor, but they had faith and determination that eventually brought success to them. While of course, many of them did not live to reap the success personally, their children have inherited their holdings and increased them, until our Thomas county people now enjoy a fair measure of prosperity.”

## **Home with Four Children**

Fern and Seth Hanna chose a combination of their respective mothers's names for their first living child. The couple had lost its first baby at birth. However, three days before Christmas in 1918, Seth shoveled deep snow to help bring the doctor to his young wife. The delivery was that of Margaret Della, born at her maternal grandmother's home, four miles west of Seneca.

The second child of the Hannas bore the name of his pioneer paternal grandfather, John

Milton II, more affectionately known as “Jack”, was born November 20, 1920.

Bonnie Rosalie came to the Hanna household June 21, 1926; and last to join the family was the daughter, Ulala, born April 7, 1930.

All four attended country school in Cherry county, Margaret riding some four miles with her brother, Jack, to the District 113 school. As the oldest in the family she attended one year of high school in Brownlee, one year in Valentine. All the girls graduated at Mullen High School. Jack went to high school in Mullen and at the Nebraska School of Agriculture at Curtis. Ulala also attended Brownell Hall, Wesleyan and Chadron State. Both Margaret and Bonnie taught one year of school. As young children, all attended the Congregational Church at Brownlee.

### **Old Families Unite**

Margaret was the first of the Seth Hanna children to marry. In 1936 she became the wife of Darwin Mercure, whose roots had been in Mullen from childhood. The first year together, they lived in Denver and afterwards, in Mullen where two sons, Ronald Seth (1939) and Norris Dean (1941) were born to them. The couple refers to a “second family” -- a daughter, Twyla Fern, a 1968 Mullen high school graduate, and Steven Joe a Mullen high school junior during the 1968–69 year.

Darwin’s father, Nelson, homesteaded in Hooker county, but died when the son was two. His mother, Josephine, then widowed, later married her late husband’s brother, who is also deceased. Mrs. Mercure, now residing in Oshkosh, had served as Hooker county superintendent 14 years.

At the present, Darwin and Margaret lease 5500 acres of the Seth Hanna land located about 20 miles west of the Brownlee turnoff from Highway 83. Getting into ranching with her father, soon after their marriage, the couple helped Seth on the Triple L and later leased the Jim Hanna ranch at Wood Lake for 10 years.

The Seth Hanna’s son, “Jack”, spent his lifetime in the cattle business and in partnership with his father. He married Maxine Warner in 1940 and the couple had one son, John Milton III. The couple divorced and Jack married Doris Stone in 1947 and two children were born to the union -- Jodine Sue and Jeri Ann. The first-named, John Milton Hanna III, attended Wentworth Military School, graduated from the Nebraska School of Agriculture, Curtis and served four years in the U. S. Navy. A boy who has a gifted voice for singing, John III resides in Denver where he is presently furthering his education.

Bonnie, second daughter of Seth and Fern Hanna, married Harley Nutter at Broken Bow on May 20, 1944 and they have ranched on Hanna land a number of years. The couple's first son, Larry, died; there is a married son, Douglas; and a daughter Teresa at home.

Ulala, whose unique first name is coincidentally the same as that of her cousin Francis' wife, has resided in Chadron for the most part since 1949. She met the man who was to become her husband, while attending Chadron College. In 1950 Ulala married Lawrence L. Madsen, a Chadron man who has become a career railroader. At Green Bay, Wisconsin four years, the couple returned to Chadron where Lawrence has been a conductor on the Chicago & Northwestern. The couple's children are Stephanie, a high school junior, Mark, a freshman and Jed, sixth grade, all in the Chadron public school.

### **“Stock Grower” Interest**

Obviously inspired by the interest in the Nebraska Stock Growers by generations ahead of them, the younger set of Hanna grandchildren have been prominent in Junior Stock Growers activities.

Mercure's son, Ron, was elected president of the Nebraska Junior Stock Growers Association at the senior Association's 75th Anniversary convention at Alliance in June 1964 and served for the forthcoming year. Ron's "Junior of the Month" in November, 1957 was followed by his brother, Norris' in March, 1961, and sister, Twyla's in October, 1968. Twyla received singular honors in 1968 when she was selected "Miss Stock Grower" candidate from Stock Grower Executive Council Dist. 3.

The Nutter's son, Doug, was named "Junior of the Month" in November, 1965 and his interesting account stressed his ability in athletics and rodeoing.

Ron Mercure, Seth Hanna's oldest grandson, has been interested in securing a good education and at the same time keeping close contact with ranching. A participant in high school football, basketball, and track at Valentine while his parents operated on the Jim Hanna ranch, Ron later completed college at Chadron State. While there he met Lenus Taylor of Hot Springs, So. Dak., and the couple was married in 1959. They spent their first years together, in the Wood Lake ranch before returning to Chadron where Ron graduated in August, 1968. The couple has a daughter, Rhonda and two sons, Randall and Richard, and live at Churdan, Iowa where he teaches Junior High Science.

Norris Mercure achieved the honor as "Homecoming King" at Valentine High his senior year. He attended the University of Nebraska one year and on August 25, 1962 married Sharon

Kay Mauch of Valentine. The bride is a nursing graduate of West Nebraska General Hospital at Scottsbluff. After the wedding, the couple resided in Hastings where Norris graduated from college. He is presently a physical therapist at Burlington, Iowa and the couple has two little girls, Kimberly and Kristin.

Doug Nutter and Twyla Mercure each have splendid records emanating from school activities and extending toward young adult interests. Bent on ranching, Doug's long suit has been rodeoing. He's won five all-around championships. He has been an officer in the Nebraska High School Rodeo Association and contested in the "National". On June 1, 1967, Doug married Diedre McCray of Valentine. Doug attended the University of Wyoming the fall term in 1967. They now live at the Nutter ranch and have one child.

Twyla is Seth Hanna's oldest granddaughter. She had a productive high school career and in 1968 became a student in nurse's training at West Nebraska General Hospital.

### **Lodge Activity Important**

Lodge work has had an integral place with Hanna family members. An unusual event occurred on November 14, 1964 when Seth received his 50-year Masonic pin, presented by the same man who gave the similar award to Seth's father.

Seth was Worthy Patron of Sunshine Chapter, Order of Eastern Star No. 261 located at Seneca, and again in 1950. His mother was a charter member of the chapter. His wife was Worthy Matron in 1946; Bonnie Worthy Matron in 1950 (also an OES Grand officer in the Nebraska Grand Chapter in 1954, her title being Grand Ruth); Margaret was installed Worthy Matron in January, 1968 (the chapter had been moved to Thedford), her office having been terminated January 22 of this year; and Ulala also belongs to the same Chapter. Margaret is a member of the Sand Hills Toastmistress Club at Mullen and currently occupies the position of treasurer.

### **Store Business in Seneca**

An interesting sidelight in the lives of Seth and Fern Hanna was their association with the Uhler and McCawley store in Seneca prior to their marriage in 1914. Both worked in the store that, because of its latitude of merchandising, required several employees. The volume of business was one of the factors for the size of the clerking staff and the other was H. D. Uhler's rheumatic condition that restricted his movement about the store premises.

Uhler had come from Lincoln to become a machinist in the round-house at Seneca. He had

been an athletic participant, but in his vocation, become stricken with rheumatism. He then got into the store business and was joined by Tom McCawley, who came down from Hyannis in 1905. McCawley had been in a butcher shop and his father was an early Grant county judge. Tom McCawley's son, Clifford lives in Alliance (1969) and has in his possession a dining room set, table, buffet, etc. and stamped upon the furniture is the imprint of the Seneca store.

When yet a young person in Mullen, Fern Stephenson lost her father. Her mother remarried to Harry McIntyre and twins, Lloyd (deceased) and Floyd (of Lincoln) were born to the couple. The family had residence in Seneca, hence Fern's availability to work in the Uhler-McCawley store. McIntyre was a carpenter of repute and when he poured the concrete sidewalks in Seneca in 1922, one of his helpers was Tom McCawley's son, Clifford. Fern's mother was a person of high respect and notably contributed to the help of the sick and underprivileged, and Fern likewise possesses these attributes.

### **Automobile Dealers**

One of the sidelines of the Uhler and McCawley firm was the dealership in high-wheeled vehicles of the day. McCawley ultimately sold his interest in the store and joined "Milt" Hanna, a pioneer automobile enthusiast, in the garage business and auto dealership in the Seneca area.

"The Hannas were a real good influence in the community and we all liked them a lot," Clifford McCawley volunteered recently during a visit at his home in Alliance. "Seth's part in constructing a fishing lake for children in Seneca as well as a lighted ball diamond are examples of his contribution to community betterment." McCawley added.

Following their wedding on Christmas Day of 1914, Seth and Fern Hanna went on a place ten miles northwest of Brownlee that Seth and brother, Jim, operated together. Jim Hanna decided to move to Canada where he raised wheat for twenty years, returning to Nebraska where he established a ranch at Wood Lake and within visiting distance of his brothers. Seth ultimately sold the place to his brother, Don, and bought land their father had. Later on, Seth moved to the Triple L further northwest of Brownlee.

The Seth Hanna land was to assume the proportions of 15,000 deeded acres, five sections of which are involved in school land leases. Some of the land has now been divided between the children. There are about six sections in Hooker and Thomas counties -- mostly in Hooker -- the county line, a half mile west of the town of Seneca. Considerable of this is

along Highway 2, a point of vantage for Seth from his home in Seneca.

The Hanna brothers' sister, Maude lived the latter part of her life (deceased in 1950) in Seattle, Washington. The brother, George, retired Goose Creek rancher, resides in Valentine and has contributed a notable memoir on his ranching career. In 1968, his son, George Jr., received his Ph. D. degree at the University of Cincinnati and is currently Professor of Civil Engineering and Director of the Water Resources Center at Ohio State.

### **Don in State Legislature**

Don Hanna (1887–1954), Seth's oldest brother, had an outstanding career in public service. From a school board office, to county commissioner, he was elected to the state unicameral legislature, first in 1940, again for two succeeding terms, and again in 1948. When death called him, he was serving on the State Highway Advisory Committee. His widow, Wynona, resides in Valentine. From a leading part in activities of the Nebraska Stock Growers Association, Senator Hanna's sons have likewise been prominent in Stock Grower affairs. His youngest son, Bob, was elected president of the Association, in 1968. Don Jr., of Brownlee, has been chairman of its advisory board. Francis of Thedford is a member of the Nebraska Game Commission.

Rigors of confining ranch life for the Seth Hannas eased considerably, when more than 20 years ago they moved into Seneca. Although Seth prides himself as a "country boy" and he was reluctant to give up the long engaging routines that characterize Sandhill ranching, he and his wife were able to participate more fully in lodge work and they have traveled occasionally to points in Texas, Florida, California and Oregon.

Time of meditation stir Seth's innate tendencies for poetic composition and one observation resulted in penning these historic lines:

#### ***THE ALAMO***

*The defenders of the Alamo  
had no fear of death;  
But agreed they'd hold the fort  
Until their last breath.*

*They gave not thought or little heed  
As they passed beyond life's portals;  
They'd be for evermore enshrined  
With America's immortals.*

A distinct degree of sadness permeated the Seth Hanna home when on February 15, 1957, the ranch couple saw their only son, Jack, laid to rest. Jack was associated with his father in the cattle business and had turned thirty-six the previous November. Fortunate is one indeed who can fit words of consolation to a time of sorrow and it was from the deep wells of parental love that inspired Seth to compose the following lines:

***DIVINE HERITAGE***

*When God created heaven  
He made it just for man,  
'Tis a mystery why He did it,  
'Twas just the Divine Plan.*

*He set the stars amidst it  
Where comets circulate,  
And there our spirits go to  
As we leave this earthly state.*

*And so we'll dwell forever,  
in spiritual ecstasy,  
And I trust we'll all be placed there,  
In a golden galaxy.*

*Dear Jack has gone to be there  
Where Angels do hold sway,  
But we know that we'll be meeting him,  
Along the milky way.*

*Though soon now we'll be with him  
Where our spirits dwell apart;  
For as meteors come unto this earth,  
So human souls depart.*

Sadness was again projected among Hanna family members not many months ago when the daughter, Bonnie, lost her life in an auto accident December 18, 1967. The wife of Harley Nutter, Bonnie also left her seven-year-old daughter, Teresa and her married son, Doug. And again Seth Hanna turned to his talent of poetic beauty to express parental sentiments:

*God picked a flower from out of our midst  
To be transplanted in His garden up there,  
A flower that is greatly missed,  
One with a beauty so rare.  
One whose smile could entwine the hearts  
Of the young, the aged and the fair,  
Whose gentle touch of her hand*

*Could impart to you courage in time of despair.  
May her petals of love, beauty, faith and hope  
Sprinkle the star-studded crown  
Guide those she so dearly loved.  
Though the flower is gone from the land down here,  
Roots still remain and enfold the hearts  
Of dear ones far and near,  
To nourish the hope from which it imparts,  
It's not for us to question why,  
For we know she'll be treated with tender care,  
And never again will she know sorrow  
In her heavenly home up there.*

His consternation for others, whether in the family or not, point out Seth Hanna's ideals and these deserve the utmost respect. While the cattle business and its people will continue to motivate his thought -- his attendance at the Nebraska Stock Growers 1968 convention in North Platte, though it has become more difficult for him to get around -- is an example of his interest and determination.

While meager surroundings create an incentive to acquire better things, Seth Hanna has been known to make progress along conservative lines. When he and his wife attained their fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1964, he conjectured that "hard work and economy" had made it possible for the couple to reach "a position of moderately affluent circumstance." And this had to be achieved with but a limited country education and without modern-day ranch operation methods. Seth and Fern Hanna could do it if anyone could....and they did!

(continued by Margaret Mercure)

Seth and Fern lived in their lovely home in Seneca, on the north side of the Middle Loup river -- the former home of Seth's parents, J. M. "Milt" and Della Hanna.

Seth maintained an active interest in the cattle business -- especially looking after the family cattle that were being summered on the Seth Hanna land near to Seneca (both sides of Highway #2, west of Seneca.)

Early in the summer of 1974, Seth became very ill and uncomfortable. He was taken to North Platte by ambulance -- where he was placed in emergency care at the North Platte hospital. His condition did not improve, following surgery -- on August 13, 1974 Seth Perry Hanna departed this life. He was buried in the Hanna Lot at the Seneca Cemetery.

Fern A. Hanna continued living in their home at Seneca -- on a part-time basis for the

Seth Perry Hanna

ensuing 12 to 14 years. She spent three or four winters at Mesa, Arizona -- she lived at the Pawnee Retirement Hotel at North Platte for a year or two. Her last eight years were spent in a private room at Pine View Retirement Home at Valentine.

Her health and general activities declined slowly but steadily -- her mind remained keen and alert to the end of her life, February 6, 1988.

Fern enjoyed the love and affection from all of her family, and she deserved it. Fern was a wonderful wife, mother and grandmother -- she was always very proud of her family.

SETH PERRY HANNA 1892 - 1974

FERN ADDIE HANNA 1895 - 1988