

CHAPTER 7

MAUDE S. HANNA

By Maude E. "Betty" Brown

Twins Maude and Claude proved to be a thrilling Christmas present for their parents, Della and John M. (for Milt) Hanna. First, because they'd expected one baby but had two. And further after having sired four study sons prior to this birth, they finally had a daughter. The twins made their appearance on Christmas Day, 1894, in Anselmo, Nebraska.

This family of six children and their parents moved about the Sandhills for the next few years following Milt's early attempts to become a rancher. At one point they lived in a sod house away from any small town and a tutor was hired to teach the younger children.

While the family was living in Omaha in 1898, twin Claude was struck by a streetcar and never recovered. This reduced the family to five offspring. Daughter was the "baby" and spoiled by her four brothers and doting parents.

When Maude was ready for high school, Milt and Della decided to send her to the Sacred Heart Academy in Omaha for four years. During that time she converted to Catholicism.

When she returned to Seneca she fell in love with Frederick E. Brown, a young man editing the local paper (in partnership with her brother George!). After a brief engagement, Maude

and Ned were married in Seneca on Christmas Day, 1914. Her brother Seth married Fern Stephenson that same day but in a different church, and then both couples left together on the train for their honeymoons in Lincoln and Omaha.

Since Maude was never fond of her name nor that of Rebecca (so often shortened to Becky), she planned to have her



*Maude S. Brown at Brownlee about 1920
Note the Parsonage house, and the Don and Wynona Hanna house in the near background and the 2 room schoolhouse in the distant background.*

daughter baptized Elizabeth as well, but somehow the records were mixed up and the baptismal record reads “Maude Rebecca Marie Brown!” Mother Maude added Elizabeth on her own and thereafter the child was dubbed Betty.

Their son, John Milton Brown (named after Milt Hanna) was born in Seneca on November 29, 1915. And daughter Maude Rebecca (named by Ned after the baby’s mother and his mother!) came along January 6, 1917.

The Ned Browns lived in several towns including Seneca, Thedford, Hyannis and Alliance during their four years of marriage. When Della Hanna passed away in 1919 and Maude’s marriage was falling apart, Milt asked Maude and the two children to live with him, much of the time in Brownlee.

The Browns and Milt travel

Prior to Della’s passing Milt had traveled several times to northern Alberta to lay claim to some homestead land and persuaded his son Jim to go into business. They settled in the town of Spirit River (where Milt owned a house and where Della had spent some time as well). Jim and his

wife Alta settled near Rycroft, about 25 miles from Spirit River, cleared virgin land from trees and muskeg and began to establish a wheat farm.

Grandad Hanna divided his time between the Sandhills, northern Alberta and a southern state for the winter months. Usually Maude and her children accompanied him. All this travel and exposure to various countries/states/habitats were educational for them but it also meant that they seldom felt they had “roots” in any one local. It was not unusual for the



*Brownlee school about 1923
“Betty” Brown in center foreground.*

foursome to spend the summer and early fall in the Spirit River area, back (by rail) to Cherry County for six or eight weeks (the kiddies attended school in either Brownlee or one of the country schools close to a Hanna ranch) and then on to, say, Corpus Christi for the winter (via automobile). Then back to the hills for a brief stay and on up to summer in the Peace River country again.

During these visits to Spirit River, Maude became acquainted with George C. Garnett, a widower 19 years her senior, who wheat-farmed within a few miles of the town. He also was employed by the Alberta Pool Elevators at that location. His job was to evaluate the caliber of the grain brought in by the farmers and pay them accordingly. He proposed marriage and offered to build a home in Spirit River. Maude was not sure she should leave her father but did agree to spend a year there.

In the interim, Grandad Milt had been captivated by a visitor to the Brownlee area, a Mrs. Nancy Leap of Kansas City, and sister of Mrs. Lizzie Pound. The two were very compatible and after several months of romancing they decided to marry and to continue his itinerant existence....to warmer climes for the winter months and back to the Sandhills or to northern Alberta for the summers, visiting Jim and Alta and Maude and the children.

Maude and George Garnett were married in California in 1928. They decided that she and the children should stay in the Bay Area for the rest of that school year, so the children could finish their grade school in that state and then start high school in Alberta. George had arranged for a transfer from the Spirit River area to the Peace River site.

The family settles in Peace River

The town of Peace River was more of a bustling community and provided a more comprehensive school system. George bought a home in Peace River and settled his family in, but he continued to work for the Alberta Pool Elevator for the next ten years at a mere pause-in-the-road community known as Bluesky. While only 60 miles out of Peace River, his assignment had him on call seven days a week. Thus between his job demands and the fact that the road between the two towns was often nonpassable because of snow and weather hazards, he spent more time living a bachelor existence in the actual elevator structure....a lonely life in many ways but he was an avid reader, loved to listen to the radio, had a garden in summer months and a few close friends in nearby farms.

John and Betty started high school in Peace River -- one room, one teacher, with about

thirty students. The Alberta High school system was interesting and challenging. Daily attendance, the completion of homework assignments, monthly report cards had no effect with the student's grade for that year in a particular subject. Final examinations were sent out from the Provincial Department of Education, were completed by the student, sealed and returned to Edmonton for the grading. The school term lasted ten months so in the early spring John and Betty used to get up an hour or so early each school day and start to review the courses from the beginning.

Our one-room teacher was very militaristic about completing any and all homework assignments (and Maude commandeered a nightly study hall under her roof!) so high school was a very serious matter. The only sport was hockey for the young folks who thought nothing of playing in an outdoor rink (night or day) at 30 or 40 below. Just one small wood-heated shack available for skate changes and occasionally getting warm.

The town of Peace River at that time was about 1,000 human souls and a few sleigh dogs. A train, combination of passenger and freight, chugged up from Edmonton twice a week, bringing mail as well. Mail days were most welcome. The post office was the center of conviviality and neighborliness since all mail recipients had to go to the P. O. to collect mail.

While summer months were short in duration the daylight often lasted 20-22 hours. Thus gardens were an important part of each household, growing vegetables and berry fruit a must, to be canned and stored. Citrus and melon fruits were very expensive at the local stores (since they had to be shipped so far by rail) and a definite treat at the dinner table.

Small planes began to deliver mail by the mid-1930's several times a week. The first through-road from Edmonton to Peace River was finally completed in the early '30s. It was a rough and hazardous trail of 350 miles, often through or over muskeg. Venturous folks with a trusty automobile took two days, one way.

Peace River residents were from mixed cultures and countries and yet seemed to fit into the melting pot with ease. No obvious class distinctions. We were all coping with the rugged long winters. No one had much money. During Betty's high school years she only heard of one family "on welfare". Except for three churches, it was a "one of a kind town," with a post office, railroad station, hotel, weekly paper, bakery drug store, one 30-bed hospital, one retail department-type store but several local grocery/meat markets. The town was laid out in a narrow valley and thus it was only about two blocks wide and stretched several miles in length.

The George Garnetts bought a home on top of a hill about a mile from the center of town. Their front porch provided a magnificent view of the Mighty Peace River (often claimed to be as wide as the Mississippi). The road/street up the hill was gravel and often not drivable because of the snow. Very few sidewalks and they were of wood.

Maude settled into the community life of the town. She liked to play cards (especially the game of bridge) and was soon involved in card parties/teas/sponsoring projects for the school children and the like. Few natives called her Mrs. Garnett -- it was usually just "Garnett" or the small kiddies referred to her as "Darnit."

The high school years passed quickly. A definite amount of credits had to be earned to complete high school requirements and if students wished they could take several extra each year. This meant much self-tutoring during the summer (with help from retired teachers and patience of a recent German arrival who "taught" his language in return for meals and kindnesses). Several provincial tests could be taken in the fall. And thus John and Betty were eligible for University education at the ages of 18 and 16 1/2! Much credit was given to George's gentle encouragement and Maude's iron will!

There was no high school graduation ceremony, nor prom, no undue commotion. Just the arrival of those "passing the grade" envelopes from Edmonton.

Higher education for John and Betty

For the first three years of their university life, Maude accompanied her kids to Edmonton and maintained a home for them during the academic year, returning to Peace River for the five month summers. The Garnetts had rented out their home so the family lived in a boarding house or rented whatever space was available for that brief time.

For the final year, John and Betty lived on the campus in dormitories and Maude remained in Peace River. That previous summer she had purchased a small dress shop from one of the residents and she prepared to enter the ready-to-wear business on a small scale. (The idea being that after her fledglings should leave her nest she'd have a hobby and interest to pursue!) Maude enjoyed her "shoppe" -- while business was often slow, she had many visitors in the office there where she had a rolltop desk and her trusty typewriter.

George Garnett retired to Peace River two years later -- he kept the home fires burning, planned and nursed a large garden (sharing his produce with many neighbors) and acted as chef as well. Both Maude and George loved to read (George read every word Winston Churchill wrote) and between that hobby and their competitive nightly cribbage games life

was very harmonious and peaceful.

Maude assisted an Englishman neighbor (Norman Soars) start a lending library for the community. Located in the center of town in a section of an old building, It soon was a meeting place for both students and adults. Mr. Soars was a “remittance man” from the Old Country (Great Britain) -- that is, he received some sort of compensation from his homeland -- he never did “work” per se but was always busy and charming and spent most of his time encouraging the young folk to read and explore mentally the outside world.

It was in his home that Betty was first introduced to genuine leather-bound volumes of the classics. Mr Soars manned the library most days but otherwise it was on a “trust” deal. that trust was never broken. After the project was underway, mostly by donation from shelves of local residents it was aided financially and with books by traveling Anglican church ladies.

George Garnett wanted to adopt officially John and Betty, which would have automatically made them Canadian citizens. Maude, while appreciating his offer, declined because she did not want them to lose their American citizenship. Further, Betty was planning to teach in Alberta (after one more year at the University) learned that at that time in that Province, teachers were required to be Canadian citizens. Thus, it was decided to send Betty back to Nebraska to complete her education to enable her to teach in the U. S. She attended the State College at Chadron for one year to catch up on American history and to take teaching courses.

John, who had started his college career seeking a degree in agriculture (possibly influenced by Father George) realized after two years that his interests did not lie in that direction. After some parental consultation, he agreed to switch to a Bachelor of Arts and thus brother and sister both graduated in 1936.

After that, the family coffers could not support more than one person’s pursuit of high education at a time and since Betty thought she knew what she wanted to do for a career, was sent to Chadron, Nebr. John spent the year on an undeveloped farm recently acquired by George C. the land needed to be cleared and John and a hired man lived in a bunkhouse with none of what were then even modern conveniences. Cometh spring and John declared “enough” and with his limited funds earned on that farm, he headed for Vancouver...ended up in Bellingham, Washington at a state college taking some journalism courses. After one year there he enlisted in the service at Fort Lewis.

“Being independent”

Betty, in the interim, had secured her first teaching assignment in Cheney, Ne., ten miles out of Lincoln but some of the students had never even ventured to visit their Capital City. Not the best of years in Betty’s memory book -- actually the worst! So close to civilization and yet some family members had intermarried producing what are now called “special children.” Betty had four of those in her class of 28! At \$67.50 per month income, and paying \$50.00 for board and room (sharing the bed and thunder pot with another gal teacher) she entered the “being independent” world.

Two bright spots in that dreary year! One, the Don E. Hanna, Jrs. invited her to be their guest at the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln for a football weekend. The other, an invitation (with railroad fare included) to spend Christmas with Grandad and Aunt Nan in Kansas City.

While Betty had a tentative teaching contract with another small town (at an infinitesimal increase in salary), Seth Hanna and Maude had devised a proposition for her. She would teach the local Seth Hanna country school but include his daughter Bonnie in the ninth grade classes, as well as the two other students, Ukie Hanna and Bryan McLeod. (Betty being an authorized H. S. teacher!)

So while John M was shaping up the military, his sister was enjoying ranch life. Living at the Seth Hanna ranch during the week (school days at the one-room school “up the valley”) and spending the weekends at the Pass Ranch with the Don Hannas I and II.

That same spring, Grandad Hanna became ill and passed away after several months of succumbing to the ravages of old age at his home (Pass Ranch) on April 12, 1940. He was buried in the family Hanna plot in Seneca.

Betty chose to attend a Business course at Hastings State College and then worked for a Court Reporter for one year, then on to Omaha to be employed by a machinery and supply company. While there she received a maternal plea to come home to Peace River for a year or so from Maude. John had been shipped overseas and she needed the company of her daughter.

Back to Peace River

The “invitation” was double-barrelled because at that time the ALCAN Highway officials had moved into the Peace River area, as a basic starting point to ship supplies up through British Columbia and Alaska to feed the oil pipeline. The contractor, Bechel Price & Callahan was temporarily headquartered in Peace River, in dire need of clerical help but were stymied with

no facilities to house any such personnel. Maude had submitted Betty's resume and immediately BPC offered a position, transportation included by rail, via Minneapolis (their headquarters) and at a considerably higher salary than that prevailed in Omaha. If truth could tell, Betty's outstanding qualifications were not necessarily she had a college degree, with some business world experience, but the fact that she would have housing provided in her family's home.

It was an exciting time the town of Peace River bustled with activity -- trains brought in construction supplies daily, huge trucks started out on the rough road to Norman Wells (N. W. T. -- the next transfer point). The Corps of Engineers arrived to guide the way, local citizens opened up their homes to provide rooms for the imported workers. The official BPF clerical workers toiled in arctic type hutments: the gals wore ski suits, boots and all the necessary accouterments to cope with the relentless cold. (Many a lass, say, from Texas who had come "up north" for a lark, gladly terminated their contract to return to normal-temperature life!)

Betty's career materilizes

Following an 18 month stint in Peace River, Betty was offered a position with the Corps of Engineers in Edmonton. Even Maude considered that location close enough to be near the family for frequent visits back and forth via train. Again, housing was a problem but, through some Peace River connections, Betty was able to rent a room (with kitchen privileges) to "camp out" for two years.

Then through her Corps of Engineers associates, Betty was offered a clerical position as a civilian in Oak Ridge, Tennessee at an unnamed and unspecified government project. Again with transportation provided. That was her "Life and Times" for the next four years. Secrecy was the name of the game. One never discussed one's job assignment with anyone other than immediate associates. Betty utilized each annual leave to visit her parents. Once Maude met her half-way in the Sandhills and another year Maude was able to visit Oak Ridge but never did she know, nor could she find out, "what was cooking."

Following the disclosure of the bombing of Nagasaki, all activity at Oak Ridge was considerably reduced. Betty was offered some type of employment with them in Washington, D. C. but chose to be usurped by the newly appointed director of Monsanto Company's research lab there. Thus, in April 1946, she began a long career with Monsanto.

Brother John weds

In the meantime, Brother John had completed five years in the service overseas and returned to the U. S. He married Bette Jane Meyers, an army nurse, from Laurel, Montana (they were an overseas-in-uniform romance which had begun in Morocco and lasted through occasional meetings until peace was declared in Europe). When they disposed of their uniforms, her's carried the signia of Army Captain which outranked his as Warrant Officer! They settled in Seattle (there was quite a contingent of Peace Riverites there) with John working as a jewelry store clerk and Betty Jane preparing for the birth of their first child, Michael Milton born on November 13, 1946. The second, David Seth Brown, followed on March 23, 1949.

Maude "goes home"

When both her children were living in the Seattle area, Maude spent the month of January (away from those Northern Alberta chills) in that city. Even after the John Brown family moved to New Mexico (1948) she had one more pleasant month there. But the bitter winter weather up north had taken its toll on her -- for several years she suffered from pleurisy and like ailments. In late fall 1949 she went to Seattle for medical advice and treatment but did not seem to respond. She said she'd "like to go home" (meaning the Sandhills) and her Hanna brothers insisted she make the trip. Transported in a train bedroom, accompanied by Nurse Betty, she arrived in Seneca at 6:00 a.m. on November 11 (her brother Seth's birthday) as the guest of Seth and Fern. A few weeks after she was taken to the Valentine hospital where she passed away on December 21, 1949, at the age of 54. She is buried in the Hanna plot in Seneca.

George's remaining years

George G. kept up the house in Peace River for two years, then sold it and moved to Victoria, B.C. to share a life and home with a widowed brother-in-law. Betty made one trip a month from Seattle to Victoria to visit these two gracious gentleman and was treated like a queen. When the brother-in-law returned to England for a visit and came back with a new bride, George agreed to go to Santa Clara, Ca. (where Betty had just been transferred). And, within a year, when Betty went to St. Louis, again for Monsanto, George followed. And seemed quite content. But that was 1953, the year when all heat and humidity records were broken and George, after nine months of companionable existence there, returned to Victoria....to avoid any such further challenges to his body which preferred cold to hot/humid anytime. He moved into a retirement home there and passed away on December 17, 1955, at the age of 80.

John moves on

John was a salesman for a national pen company for a year or so but made the decision he'd like to be a teacher. So the four Browns packed up and left Seattle for Albuquerque where John attended the university and obtained a degree which authorized him to teach in that state. His next position was as assistant to the County Superintendent of Schools in Gallup, N.M. In that position he had responsibility for trying to improve the educational facilities on the various Indian reservations. Betty Jane worked at the local hospital on weekends and seemingly it was a settled-down family. But restlessness stirred John to quit his security in Gallup and go to St. Thomas, V. I., seeking employment and eventually a place for his family. In 1959 he was picked up on the school system roles as a teacher. Several months later his family joined him. The boys loved island living with much swimming, snorkeling and mostly outdoor activities.

Bette Jane who was beginning to suffer the pains and limitation of rheumatoid arthritis was able to nurse at the local hospital on the night shift (because management always arranged for her to have a sturdy and brawny male aid to handle any lifting, etc.).

John switched from teaching to working for the local paper (he'd always wanted to be a journalist) and for the time everything went well. But family discord began to erode the marriage -- perhaps because of financial insecurity and the lackadaisical atmosphere always present on the island. Betty Jane filed for divorce and left for Montana. David remained on the island to finish his last two years of high school and then joined his mother.

Michael joined the service directly from high school and at the time was in Viet Nam.

Family update

After some six years of working part time and attending college classes on a part time basis as well, David finally received a B. S. Degree in Nursing. He married a nurse (Barbara) and they have three children: Orin Seth, August 27, 1977; Jacob, November 18, 1979 and Jennifer, July 1, 1982. For almost ten years David was an R.N. with the U. S. Army and he did a six-month tour of duty in Korea without his family.) He now resides in Evans, Georgia and is employed as an anesthetist at a Veteran's Hospital.

Michael's tour of service duty lasted three years. Upon his release he attended a state college in Florida on his G. I. Bill and secured a degree in Business Administration. While still a student he married Mitzi and upon graduation was employed by the Commerce Clearing House, Inc. in Washington, D.C. He and Mitzi moved to Falls Church, Va. Their daughter

Maude S. Hanna

Lara was born there on July 27, 1972 and their son, Scott, on April 25, 1977. The Michael Browns were divorced in 1980 and Mitzi married Mr. Ed Giles in Florida. He later adopted the two children, so they are now known as Lara and Scott Giles. Michael has never remarried.

Not too many details are available on John M. Brown after David went to Montana to join his mother. John was hospitalized in the Vet's hospital at San Juan, Puerto Rico and later transferred to the Vet's Hospital at Ft. Sheridan, Wyoming where he passed away and was buried there in 1976.

Bette Jane Brown died January 6, 1993 in Evans, Georgia, where she had been residing with her son David.

Maude E. (Betty) Brown retired in April 1977 after 31 years with Monsanto Company. She lives in a suburb of St. Louis in a small house, usually has a dog for a pet, and has enjoyed retirement. Her hobbies are reading mystery novels and trying to improve her bridge game.

Maude S. Hanna Brown Garnett, even though a resident in Alberta for many years, was an avid American and always proud of her ranching/Sandhill heritage.

When she first moved to Peace River she wrote several articles for the Edmonton Journal on George Garnett. He was a true pioneer--having made the first trip on the river (frozen) route to the Peace River country -- with freight from Edmonton. (Sorry no copies available but Maude did have a by-line!)

MAUDE S. HANNA	1894-1949
GEORGE GARNETT	1875-1955