

Memoirs – Lydia Brown Hanna (input by Sherman D. Hanna from typed pages, July, 2011)



Estelle Emily Austin married Charles Rhoades Brown, in San Angelo, Texas, in 1891. On April 1st of the following year their first daughter was born. A rather cruel joke on the father, as he, as did most men at that time, wanted a son. Therefore, by my birth on April Fool's Day the pattern was set – six girls, with one poor little boy born right in the middle!



My father took me with him, so he told me, from the time I was in diapers, whenever he could. Especially when he made “calls” on Sundays and holidays. A favorite place was St.

Mary's Infirmary, where he was much loved by the nuns. The Mother Superior had a cork arm, by which I was terrified. She always served tea and cake, which I refused if she handed it to me and I could see the cork hand. My father and mother rather spoiled me, I guess, and I do know I was much of a brat in those years.

We went to our first school in the neighborhood – Mrs. Huffmaster and her daughter Helen taught the girls who lived nearby – my cousin Alice Sweeney among them. Miss Helen taught us music. I do not know just when I started Public School, probably after the 1900 storm. I believe I was in fourth grade perhaps.

All of the Austin's were musical, and Mama played the piano and sang all the time and had me singing also. In fact my first "public appearance" was at a school meeting where I sang (at about eight or ten years old) "Brahms' Lullaby" Many years later I heard Mme. Schumann-Heink sing it – and felt a kinship – and a desire to sing as she did – which I never lost to this day.

In "Ave. L. school" later on, perhaps in sixth or seventh grade we had poems assigned to us to be memorized and recited in class. Mine was "The Cloud"¹ by Percy Bysshe Shelley – which I gave word for word with no self-consciousness until the last few words – do any of you know what they are? Well, I'll tell you and you can imagine the difficulty I had – tho no one knew it I am sure. Quote:

Like a child from the womb,
like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again.

I had learned from Mama what a womb was – but doubt many of the class knew – even if they listened and weren't all asleep by then!

¹ <http://www.bartleby.com/41/517.html> (Added by SH, July 2011)

When my mother died, in 1905, I was thirteen. She died of excessive child-bearing – regardless of the medical term, and left Estelle Rose only a week old. A home without a mother is a poor place. No matter how many others may try to help, or how many are hired to handle things, the lack of a mother of small children is a tragic situation. At my age, I reacted in such a way that a convent was indicated – and there I went – and loved every minute of it.

I was only allowed to stay one year, as my father's 33rd degree Masonic soul was filled with all sorts of prejudices – in spite of his calls (as I have related above) to the infirmary. A strange paradox which I never fully understood. He simply refused to allow me to return next term – afraid I'd be converted!

Therefore, to school I went – and never did any real good, except in English and history; failed consistently in anything resembling mathematical.

When I was fifteen a stepmother was installed, whom we called "Mother Hunt" – her name being Elizabeth Hunt. I will not go into any details concerning that episode, as a book could be written that no one (save those who lived through those years) would ever believe.

I lived in a vacuum – a sort of trance, hardened on the outside to the unusual and often terribly upsetting events that occurred, not only to me but to the younger children, relatives on both sides, and to our poor, spoiled father.

At sixteen I attended St. Mary's in Dalla for a year – an Episcopal girls school. And when it came time to plan for the next year, my stepmother said I couldn't go anywhere – I must stay home and help raise the younger children. Therefore, I never graduated from high school – which didn't really matter much in those days, as girls were supposed to make their debut at eighteen, and marry as soon as possible.

The summer (after my seventeenth birthday in April at St. Mary's) I met Parker.

His mother and mine had known each other since girlhood. They lived in the same part of town and attended the Presbyterian Church. If she (Frances Griffin) knew my father I do not know, probably did, in a vague sort of way.

Here let me put in a bit about the Browns, tho' there is a little told of them in various books and histories of Galveston. My grandfather came to Galveston from New York State, where, I was told, he had been in on the building of the Erie Canal, and had known Malloney² (who had the shipping line of steamers that plied from Galveston to New York City. Just of how James Moreau Brown made his fortune I am not thoroughly aware. I do know he had his finger in practically everything that went on at that time. There were many men in that day and time who were "on the make," and took advantage of every opportunity that arose.



His family lived in luxury; traveled extensively; and Europe was as familiar to them as was New York, where they went practically every year. My Aunt Bettie spent many years in Europe, studying art, and my father, as a young man went along to "chaperone" her. He once said to me that he "was known all over Europe as Bettie Brown's brother"; and he filled in his time with all sorts of things such as collecting cameos, studying German and French, and trying out the study for a Catholic priesthood. As I grew up, I spent a great deal of time at my Grandmother's house, and even went on trips with her and Aunt Bettie.

² Lydia circled the name and wrote a question mark, so the spelling is uncertain. (SH)

A consequence of all the traveling, jewels, etc. was the money evaporating after my Grandfather's death. Our Uncle, John Stoddard Brown, tried to run the wholesale hardware store (the first in Texas) that was one of my Grandfather's projects, but made a colossal mess of it, and in the last few years before I married, he was ostracized by his family and never entered the home (Ashton Villa) again. Tho' I had to say it, truth must be served, occasionally, and so the fact is one can see how foolish they were – "Ashton Villa," yet! Also, none of the three sons ever made any money for themselves – sad to relate.

Due to many things, especially transportation, and the grade school system, until one got to high school the separate parts of town were almost unaware of each other, especially among the younger generation. As I had only one year at Ball High School, I never met Parker, as he had taken entrance exams at fifteen and entered Texas A&M. He was, and is, an exceptionally bright person, and tho' young, in years, was able to cope with the situation that most young boys would not (nor could now) be able to handle. After his first year, he was never home again save very briefly; and that when he had typhoid fever at eighteen. In other words, he was "weaned" early and being of a rather stubborn disposition (also having money at his disposal) could fight his own way and not expect anything much from his parents. I am sure they worried about him, but never interfered in his life – then or later. It takes a very special sort of boy to do as he did, and to stay as decent, clean and honest as he was. All these were traits I recognized and made the most of.

I finally saw him and got a mutual friend to introduce us – much to his confusion.

Such a quiet, shy boy, so different in every way from most of those I knew, that I made up my mind then and there concerning him and "our future," tho I was seventeen and he eighteen at the time.

All the boys I knew then, and in the three years to follow, were rich, spoiled, gamblers, drinkers, and I am sure not “virgins,” and I refused to even consider them in my future plans. It was known by all of them that I intended to marry Parker, and tho’ I had many “beaux” as they were then known, and made my debut and had a gay and lovely time, this one plan never faltered.

My life at home was, as I have stated, not happy, but I forgot most of it as soon as I was out of the house. Parker’s first plan was to go to Washington State and raise polo ponies and that sounded marvelously attractive to me; tho’ what it would entail, or where the money was to come from, I had no idea. As he has told you, we finally did get married – and I went west with him. My stepmother had given me to understand, in no uncertain terms that I was now a HANNA – and consequently I never visited my own home again nor saw my sisters, brother, or father. But the blessed Hannas made me one of their own, and I took full advantage of it, believe me. I am sure there were many times Mother and Father Hanna could have gladly returned me to Mother Hunt, but they never hinted at it, and I am eternally grateful to them for the love and tolerance I basked in all the years.

Being in a state of euphoria, the ranch³ was “romantic” – and tho’ I had to learn to cook on a coal range and wash with a scrub-board, I really didn’t care a bit. I sailed blithely along, like the proverbial grasshopper, and took life as it came with no complaints, and very few, if any worries.

Frances was born on February 16, 1913. Mother (Hanna) had come up to the ranch earlier, and we had hired a nurse, also. As the snow was very deep, the water frozen, and roads

³ See Parker Hanna Senior’s memoirs (to be posted later) for details on the ranch. (SH)

fast becoming impassable, Uncle Sam⁴ came out several days before, so as to be on hand. We had a lovely, cozy time. Martha, Parker's sister, was with Mother, as she hadn't yet started school. Don't ask me to recall how we took care of the extra people, because I do now know. Uncle John, Parker's brother, was still there, but he lived in the original dugout, and a bed for me had been put in the living room where it was warm. The two bedrooms were unheated and we had a kerosene stove in the bathroom. The only water was in the tank in the kitchen, but clean snow was brought in for drinking, coffee, etc. Now-a-days girls would be panicky over such primitive arrangements, but as usual, I was as calm as tho' I were in a fine hospital. Didn't have a worry in the world: I let the rest of them do that!



Frances was a miracle and a marvel – to me the first, most beautiful, and perfect of human beings. When I asked the nurse one day -- “Isn't she beautiful?” Her reply (and a sensible one, I must confess) “Well, to a mother, yes: to me she's just a baby like any other.” How little she knew, an Irish old maid, she couldn't possibly understand and never did.

We had a few friends in Canyon, due to Uncle Sam's popularity; and soon we made more, tho' they really meant little to me --- then, or later. My main interest was the countryside and my desire to be accepted by our widely separated neighbors. They looked at us as “foreigners” and Uncle John dubbed us as “The Duke” and Duchess of Umbarger” -- I always

⁴ As noted later in Lydia's memoirs, Uncle Sam, Sam Griffin, was Mother Hanna's younger brother. (SH)

hoped our neighbors would never hear his title for us. Most of our contacts were in town; and we often went to Amarillo; tho' there was very little pavement anywhere we managed a few trips now and then.

When Frances was still under a year, Uncle Sam told me I was again pregnant. Fine – I wanted 8 children, because I just plain loved children.

We didn't tell the family as I knew Mother would worry, and Uncle Sam kept the secret also. (Sam Griffin, M.D., was Mother Hanna's younger brother.)

This time it was summer – and very hot, and VERY wet, for a change.

Jim, another of Parker's brothers, was there visiting – a young boy in the teens, and was very concerned over the situation. The roads were practically impassable, again – but this time it was mud. We had hired a woman to help, and she got there, some way or another.

Bettie was another miracle – so fat and pretty – and Frances adored her, as we all did. We named her Bettie Brown for my Aunt.

Jack Fish was Parker's roommate and friend from A&M. Jack came when Bettie was about two weeks old, and he came in a rainstorm, on horseback, and got completely lost way south of us somewhere, but someone set him straight and he arrived, as a complete surprise.

The next company to arrive was my brother Taylor – and by the way, he never returned to the home in Galveston, either.

Mother and Father were really happy when they received the wire announcing Bettie's arrival – but were also happy, and glad it was all over.

The things we did and the constant array of guests was really fantastic. Girls I had known in school at Dallas; and never saw again afterwards, tho' they stayed weeks with us. It was a crazy crowd of young people who loved life and enjoyed everything about it.

Jack's sister and mother came the summer of 1912, and his mother stayed all winter – as did Taylor, my brother.

Soon I knew there would be another child, due in the spring of 1916 – but this time Mother found out (I've forgotten how) and so I took the two little girls to Galveston as ordered by Mother and Father.



Therefore, Parker D. Hanna, Jr. was the only one born “properly, in a hospital.” In St. Mary’s Infirmary, where the same Mother Superior was at the head – and she laughed at me when she showed me the cork hand of which I had been so afraid as a child. We stayed in Galveston six weeks, and how the family stood it, I’ll never know.

Daddy (Parker) came down right after Pat was born, to see his son – and when I saw the shape he was in I was horrified. He had helped fight a big prairie fire and got a splinter of some sort in his finger. It had become infected and Uncle Sam had operated on it. As there were no antibiotics in those days, and no hospital in Canyon, it was pretty awful experience all around. His hand was in a terrible shape, and Dr. Randall took over the situation and it soon began to heal – tho’ he has to this day, the crooked finger with which you are all familiar. Daddy went on back to the ranch, and when I was finally allowed to go myself, Margaret came too, to help me with the three of you. She spent most of that summer there, and Jack Figh and Taylor would

come and go – they would all have jobs here and there, but come “home” whenever they cared to do so.

By that time we were on good terms with the few neighbors near us – I enjoyed the contact with the women tho’ they never understood me, I’m sure.

Their days and weeks were laid out and the pattern followed faithfully.

Monday, wash, Tuesday, iron, Wednesday and Thursday were the days to wash windows and mend; Friday, clean house;

Saturday, bake (and I mean bake – bread, cakes, pies, etc.)

And if I wanted to do my chores in a more haphazard way, and when it was convenient, I did. If I preferred playing with children, or reading a book, I did it. I fear my housekeeping was not of the best, but no one seemed to mind, least of all Daddy, and he was the one to be pleased, I felt. Someone told me women who had housekeeping manias were all Yankees – and our neighbors were all from the Middle West and the North.

I had no piano, but I sang all day long. We had a “Victrola” and fine records of all the famous artists from the very first, and I sang many a duet with Alma Gluck, and Louise Homes and Madam Schuman-Heink with no one to hear but children and the open prairies. Daddy has said he’d listen while working in the fields and would know all was well, and I was happy so long as I sang as I did.

Aunt Bettie finally heard I had no piano, and sent me \$1,000 to buy one.⁵ So, I left, by myself, on the Santa Fe train and went to Amarillo and spent \$999 on a player piano, from which we all had a great deal of pleasure.

⁵ \$1,000 in 1916 is equivalent to \$20,708 in 2011 in terms of the overall CPI (SH)

War loomed. Taylor and Jack both left to enlist. Jack in the Army, as he had a commission from A&M; Taylor into the Navy, as he'd been in something in Galveston comparable to R.O.T.C, I guess.

Then, sure enough, I was pregnant again – and it was 1917 and Margaret was to be married.⁶ So, I said I wasn't going to Galveston, and Daddy took Frances and Bettie and went. The “story” was that I had to keep Pat and stay with the ranch, as we had neighbors to look after it who would be at the house with me.

When John came in October we had another rainy spell. (How and why I do not know as we were usually in a drought and praying for rain.) But, just let me have a baby, and “the rains came!” The woman we hired got someone in Canyon to drive her out, in a buggy! – and they got lost and she was late arriving. Uncle Sam's car got stuck and Daddy had to go after him; and it was cold as blazes, tho' only October. Uncle Sam was in uniform, ready to go to the Service, but he delivered John without even wearing a white coat! By this time I was an expert in this business of childbearing, and all the preliminaries of sterilizing, and getting everything in proper order. And that's when I began helping deliver the neighbors' children. The year before I had helped Uncle Sam deliver a premature girl for John and Lizzie Straub; and was due to help deliver another when our John was about two weeks old. This child of the Straub's was a boy, and as we had hired John Straub to help on the ranch, they were living in the dug-out where we began our married lives. So, I was able to attend the “borning,” and go back and forth with no trouble. Other neighbors began calling on me, but I managed to get out of most by saying I simply couldn't leave the family. Later, in the early 20's I did help one of the Beckman's when

⁶ Parker's sister Margaret Edmonia Hanna, born Dec. 5, 1894. She was graduated from Mary Baldwin, Va., majoring in piano. On Sept. 5, 1917 she was married in the First Presbyterian Church at Galveston. (SH)

their first child arrived, but by then I was really not physically, nor emotionally able to keep it up.

Pat
Hanna,
age 5?



Pat and John were both such darling little boys, and full of life and mischief, but, as with the two girls, I enjoyed them and took life pretty much as it came.

All the children got whooping cough, our family and the Straub family --- and what a time we had. Fortunately, it was still summer, and that helped a bit. But, John quit trying to walk, and even to talk, and it seemed to go so much harder with him than the rest. However, the Straub's John died – and tho' I did all I could to help him, by the time the doctor arrived the child was dead. They were so poor (worse off than we were, really), we bought the coffin, and I put some of the nice clothes belonging to our babies on him, and saw he was cared for in a decent way – and went to the funeral at Umbarger.⁷

The weather turned so bad that early winter and cattle prices fell; and also due to the summer draught there was little feed for the stock. So – Daddy, by looking ahead, sent us all to the long-suffering Mother and Father. By Christmas Daddy came down for a few days, but had to return to the ranch. He was hauling feed from Canyon, in a wagon, of course, every other day. He had to walk, as it was too cold otherwise, and that was twelve miles each way!

⁷ Wikipedia: "Eighty people lived in Umbarger in 1930" (SH)

Then came the summer of Annania!! Also my pregnancy with Sweetie. One almost a calamity, the other, as with all my pregnancies, a blessing!

How can I describe Annania?

The Sheriff called me one day and said there was a young Mexican girl wandering around alone – dirty, hungry and homeless. “Knowing your fondness for children, and thinking perhaps you can train her to help you, I thought you might come to town and get her.” So – we did! He knew we would, too.

I had never seen anyone quite like her – and I was appalled at the sight of how dirty she was. She wouldn’t speak any English, and I was determined to clean her up before I did anything else. I was afraid I was a bit rough with her but felt it was necessary. She had to be bathed and her head washed, and fresh clothes put on her first of all. She was a screaming wild thing by the time I tried to undress her, so we compromised and she got in the tub in her underwear, which was unspeakably dirty also. We got her good clothes, and tried to absorb her into the family, but failed, miserably.

Part of it was my fault, I am sure, as she was physically so un-attractive to me, and mentally alien in every respect. Being a Yaqui Indian,⁸ it was born in her; as we know now, they have never been “tamed” and are cruel, and wild to this day. She was spiteful, a liar, and I found out later, a thief. Our friends were afraid of her for my sake – and didn’t want me to be left alone with her. I finally, after nearly two years, told Daddy he’d have to get rid of her, or I might kill her, or she, me. Things had gotten that bad, and when she threw my rings in the coal-burning fireplace (never to be recovered) I was about fed up. Besides, she was not a good influence on the children – or so I felt.

⁸ Note by SH – of course overt racism was very common at the time – and consider that, according to Wikipedia, “On January 8, 1918, the U.S. 10th Cavalry Regiment was involved in firefight with Yaqui Indians just west of Nogales, Arizona.”



When our baby, Virginia Adele (Sweetie) was announced, by wire, to Father and Mother, Father's answer was in poker terms" Three queens and a pair of jacks. A full house is hard to beat. Stand Pat."

I had to start teaching Frances, as she was 7 that February; and we ordered the famous "Calvert School" Method.⁹ For two hours each morning she and I were undisturbed, and the way she learned was amazing. She was reading everything from the newspapers to Mark Twain, and O'Henry to the Encyclopedia Brittanica. When Fall came she went to Galveston to enter a regular school, and was put in the 3rd grade.

Then, I started teaching Bettie – with the same success – she learned as rapidly and read everything. Frances came home in the summer, and Bettie went to Galveston, with the same experience – 3rd grade was her place also.

Next I tried tackling Pat. He was smart, too, but his mind was off with John and Sweetie most of the time and I decided the time had come for a place where schools were available.¹⁰

The end

⁹ Interesting Wikipedia article on the Calvert School material – apparently still being sold.

¹⁰ (SH) I think about 1925 or 1926 they moved to Canadian, Texas, about 138 miles from Canyon, in north Texas.