Joseph Mills Hanson Collection (H74-017)

Family Members

Joseph Randall Hanson

Joseph Randall Hanson, Dakota pioneer, was born April 29, 1836 in Lancaster, New Hampshire, a descendant of John Hanson, delegate to Congress under the Articles of Confederation from 1781-1783. Joseph Randall received his education in Lancaster and Salem, Massachusetts. In 1856, he moved to Chicago to live and work with his brother, Frank, who owned a furniture business and mill, moving within one year to Minnesota continuing in the furniture trade. Shortly thereafter, he and three companions with an ox team headed for Dakota Territory where local history places him as the second white pioneer to arrive in the Dakotas. Just before the president's assassination, Lincoln appointed him as Indian Agent over the Lower Brule Agency, which became the Upper Missouri Sioux Agency. His appointment was reaffirmed in the Johnson administration and continued until 1870. During his time over the Lower Brule, he attempted to teach the Native Americans farming, as a way of life and to prevent starvation on the reservations.

Joseph R. Hanson contributed much to Yankton and Dakota history. In 1862, he became chief clerk of the territorial legislature, serving for two years, and afterwards represented Yankton County in the fourth session of the territorial legislature. He was a member of the first constitutional convention held in Sioux Falls in 1885 and also held the position of territorial auditor and advocate judge. He was among the prominent men in the Yankton area that secured the first railway line in the territory, the Dakota Southern. He was a member of a surveying commission for mapping out a government road. Hanson County is named after Joseph R.

Mr. Hanson established a real estate business in Yankton on Third Street, one-time sole owner and a short time in partnership with J. McIntyre. The first telegraph of Yankton located its office within the confined of J. R.'s real estate business and when the telegraph office faltered, J. R. became its receivership. He served as a colonel in the Home Guards, a military organization formed to protect citizens of the area and led a group in the construction of the Old Yankton Stockade.

He married Annie Mills North, a New York native, on October 30, 1872, at her family home in Jamaica, New York. Annie met Joseph two years before when she and a few friends visited Dakota believing the climate would improve her health. They also spent time together in Washington, D.C., while Annie resided with her brother, Abe Mills. Joseph was in D.C. on Indian Agency business. Joseph Randall and Annie settled in Yankton where they purchased a 200-acre farm outside of town known as Prospect Place and a townhouse on Capitol Street. Joseph was a long-time member of the Masons. He died February 6, 1917.

Annie Mills Hanson

Annie Mills Hanson was born July 12, 1840 in New York City. Her early life was spent living with her parents, Abraham Mills and Ellen Lott Mills in New York City and spending summers in Jamaica, Long Island. Annie, the eldest of three, had two brothers, Abraham Gilbert and Stephen Lott. She attended St. Thomas Hall, Flushing Long Island, the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, and continued her music studies in New Haven, Connecticut and a finishing school in Washington, D.C. It was probably in Connecticut that she met her first husband, Wills North. No marriage date or location has been found. They were married only a short time before his sudden death in 1866. In 1871, she was engaged to George Curly of Washington, D.C. while at the same time considering marriage to J. R.

After her marriage to J. R., Annie lived at the St. Charles Hotel in Yankton before their brick farmhouse was completed at Prospect Place. Talented musically and devoutly religious, she directed church music, was soloist and sang in the choir at Christ's Episcopal Church. She also taught Sunday school. Annie was a charter member of the Nineteenth Century Club and superintendent of the woman's building of the State Fair held in Yankton in 1896 and 1897. She was a charter member of the Women's Auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Auxiliary of the American Legion.

Annie played a significant role at the beginning of Joseph's writing career. She assisted him with editing, typing, and revising his stories, poems, and articles as well as submitting them to publishers for consideration. She had a few of her own stories published in religious newsletters. Annie devoted her whole life to Joseph's happiness and well-being. Joe described his mother as less than average height with reddish hair.

Although of strong character, Annie suffered frequent bouts of painful inflammation ("neuralgia") and occasional debilitating headaches. She often sought healing therapy in hot springs baths, in the early 1880s traveling all the way to Colorado with little Joseph. She turned to Christian Science late in her life for additional healing and spirituality. While Joseph spent two years in France during World War I, Annie lived at the Unity Universal Church's headquarters in Kansas City.

Annie died at the Sacred Heart Hospital in Yankton on August 21, 1923. She is buried next to J. R. in Yankton Cemetery.

Frances Johnson Hanson

Frances Johnson Hanson was born in Holden, Missouri, on June 25, 1883, the only daughter and surviving child of Dr. M. V. and Matilda Johnson. She graduated from Lindenwood College in St. Charles, Missouri where she taught expression. A mutual friend introduced Frances to Joseph at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. They became engaged the following year and were married on June 2, 1909 at her mother's home in Holden. Her father had died the previous year. Following a wedding trip, Frances and Joseph settled at

Prospect Place in July. Frances's widowed mother moved to South Dakota to live with them for a short time.

Frances suffered many years from Addison's Disease. The family believed that the South Dakota climate would benefit her health. However, during the winter of 1911, she contracted a severe cold form which she never fully recovered. She left Yankton early in March 1912 to visit her mother in Holden and to escape the winter weather. Despite the move, Frances's health deteriorated necessitating an admission to a sanitarium. She was diagnosed with tuberculosis at the sanitarium, and the disease had progressed to her lungs. She died at her mother's home on April 13, 1912 and is buried in Holden. Joseph was devastated by his loss and it was only his writing that enabled him to recover.

Abraham Gilbert Mills

Abraham Gilbert Mills, born on March 12, 1842, lived in New York for most of his life. He graduated from George Washington Law School in Washington, D.C. but never practiced law. During the Civil War he enlisted as a private in the 5th New York Volunteers in 1862, elevated to 2nd lieutenant before his discharge. Abe had a great love for baseball during the war, and was part of the Second Duryee Zouaves, which played in the Union regiment games at Hilton Head, South Carolina, in 1862. Following the Civil War, he was employed as Chief Clerk for the Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury. Leaving that position, Abe joined the National League Baseball organization in Washington, D.C., later moving with the organization to Chicago. He was appointed commissioner of the National League in 1882 and served two years. In 1906, he published a treatise on the origins of the game, giving credit to Abner Doubleday, a treatise that has since been reputed. He joined the Hale Elevator Company in Chicago after leaving the National League and from there he was employed with the Otis Elevator Company as salesman. He transferred to New York as senior vice president of sales and remained with Otis for over fifty years.

Abe married Mary Chase, a great-great granddaughter of Samuel Chase, one of the first justices of the U.S. Supreme Court. They had three daughters, Frances, Ellen, and Mary Jr. (nicknamed Mamie after her mother). Joseph had a close relationship with all members of the Mills family, spending holidays and summers with them while attending St. John's. Joseph sought Uncle Abe's advice quite often and corresponded regularly with his three cousins. Abe financially supported the Hansons over the years as J.R.'s real estate business failed to maintain a constant income.

Ellen married Frank Jewitt Mather, Jr., a descendant of Cotton Mather, an art professor and historian for Princeton University. Mary married Harvey Lyall, a prominent architect in New York. Frances was active with the Red Cross in Europe prior to U.S. involvement in World War I. Abe died in August 1929, seven years after his wife's death.

Rosamond Brighton Wellington Hanson

Rosamond Brighton Wellington was born October 13, 1901 in Swansea, Massachusetts. She received her early education in Massachusetts and graduated with a bachelor's degree in music from Lake Erie College in Painesville, Ohio. After college, Rosamond worked in publicity as a college, university and hospital fundraiser. Yankton College employed her during the fall of 1925. She married Joseph on April 26, 1926 in New York City in the Chapel of St. Martin of Tours at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Before arriving in Yankton, she and Joe visited with his cousins, Daisy and Edmund Harts in Chicago. The Hansons lived in Yankton in the bungalow on Capitol Street. Joe tried unsuccessfully to farm and continue his writing career. In 1930, they ceded the unprofitability of farming and moved in with Rosamond's mother in Swansea. While in Yankton, Rosamond was a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Rosamond was herself an accomplished writer and editor, employed as editor of the Manassas Messenger Journal for a number of years. She had many occupations throughout her long life. She was an insurance agent for North American Assurance Society of Richmond, taught piano and played piano for ballet and tap-dancing classes, taught school in Virginia, and conducted a business of her own. She was active in many civic organizations in St. Petersburg and Manassas. Following Joseph's death in 1960, Rosamond remained in Manassas until her death April 1, 1991. She is interred next to Joseph.

Ellen Lott Mills

Ellen Lott Mills, mother of Annie, Abe, and Stephen, was born in New York on December 12, 1802, of Dutch descent. She married Abraham Mills in December 1839, a fairly wealthy lumber mill and retail store owner. She was devoutly religious and instilled this devotion in her daughter, Annie. After her husband's death in 1848, Ellen continued to live in Jamaica, New York, spending time with her son, Abe, in Washington, D.C. and New York City. She died March 11, 1883.

Stephen Lott Mills

Stephen Lott Mills, born in New York in 1847, can be considered a drifter. He lived in New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Omaha, San Francisco, Osawatomie (Kansas), Kansas City (Missouri), and Montana, much of the time employed by various railroads. He was married to Lulu Shankland in 1888, who had been reared by her uncle, S. T. Shankland, an executive with the Missouri Pacific Railway Lines. Together they had one son, Samuel, and three daughters, Lucy, Elizabeth, and Grace. Religious differences between Lulu's tyrannical uncle and caused Steve and Lulu to separate in 1900. She remained in Osawatomie, managing rental properties and raising their children, while Steve moved to Chicago. Stephen left Chicago in the spring of 1906 to seek his fortune in Central America, visiting Ecuador before settling in Panama. He died of yellow fever while working on the Panama Canal in 1906.