

Milton Hanna

Born

12 JAN 1842, Etna Township, Licking Co, Ohio

Entered Service – Civil War

15 July 1861

Henderson, Sibley County, Minnesota

Company H

Minnesota 2nd Infantry

Citation for Medal of Honor

"Was one of detachment of 16 men who heroically defended a wagon train against the attack of 125 cavalry, repulsed the attack, and saved the train."

Died

21 JAN 1913

Minnehaha Soldier's Home, Minneapolis, Minnesota



Early Years

Milton Hanna, the ninth child of James and Nancy (Bowden) Hanna, was born on 12 January 1842 in Etna Twsp, Licking Co, Ohio. In those days' large families were common in farming families and the Hanna family was no exception. Milton was the 9th child born to his Scotch-Irish father and his Pennsylvania-Dutch mother. (1) The family eventually grew to include four boys and nine girls.

The James Hanna family arrived in the Mankato area on the 16th of April 1853, five years before statehood was granted to Minnesota. To provide living quarters for his family, James Hanna purchased a warehouse that was being built by a local flour company and finished it for their use. James Hanna continued to farm in Minnesota and he was also active in community affairs. He organized the first Sunday School in the area in June 1853 in his home and taught by one of his older daughters, Sarah. This is considered the precursor of the present Presbyterian Church in Mankato. By July 1853, James Hanna had added a room onto his home to serve as a school which was also taught by daughter, Sarah. There were twenty-four scholars in this first classroom in Mankato which probably included eleven-year-old Milton. (3) Unfortunately, James Hanna died on 15 May 1855 at the age of 53 in Mankato. Shortly after her husband's death, Nancy (Bowden) Hanna had pre-empted a tract of *government* land and become an owner of a 132 acre farm. She continued to live in Mankato until her death in 1875. (4)

Milton Hanna's education was begun in Ohio and continued in the schools of Blue Earth County until his father died when he was almost 13 years of age. After James Hanna's' death, Milton's formal education came to an end as it was necessary for him to earn his own livelihood which he did by following farming pursuits. He was 19 when the civil war began and he was among the first to offer his services to his country.

The War Years

Milton Hanna enlisted as a private in Company H, 2nd Minnesota Infantry on 22 Jun 1861 in Henderson, Sibley Co., Minnesota. He soon marched south where his regiment was engaged at Mills Springs, KY and Shiloh, TN. He took part in the siege of Corinth, MS and fought at Perryville, KY. His regiment chased General Bragg through Tennessee engaging in battles at Stone River, Shelbyville and Tullahoma and in Chickamauga, Georgia. (5)

It was right after the battle of Stone River that Milton Hanna and 14 other men from the 2nd Minnesota Infantry demonstrated outstanding bravery and for which eight received the Medal of Honor. According to historian Roger Norland as reported in the Mankato Free Press, "It was Feb 15, 1863 in Tennessee. A group of men went to forage for food for their mules. They stumbled upon a corncrib and began to load up its contents when Confederate soldiers surprised them. Greatly outnumbered and essentially surrounded, the men hid in the crib and opened fire. By the time the rest of the Union group appeared to help, over 100 Confederate soldiers were firing at the men. The men crawled out of the crib and continued to fight. They captured three Confederate soldiers, rounded up seven of their horses and confiscated many weapons. The Confederates retreated, leaving three wounded Union soldiers and a dead mule." (6)

Hanna was seriously wounded at the battle of Chickamauga which took place on September 19 & 20th, 1863, but he re-enlisted on the 15th of Dec 1863. He was in Atlanta during the one hundred days' fighting and then accompanied Sherman on his march to the sea. (7) Milton Hanna was also there when Sherman marched his 65,000 troops down Pennsylvania Avenue during the Grand Review organized by President Johnson for May 23 and 24, 1865 which was an unofficial close to the Civil War. There was quite a contrast between the polished troops of General Meade on the first day of the Review with their precision marching and Sherman's on the second day. Sherman's troops were returning from their march through Georgia and the Carolinas and were sunburned, tattered and lean but even though they marched with less precision, it was with a bravado that thrilled the crowd. Sherman later spoke of the experience as "the happiest and most satisfactory moment of my life." (8)

Hanna was a Sergeant when he was mustered out on the 11 July 1865 at Louisville, Kentucky having served the whole war. He received an honorable discharge on 21 July 1865 at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. Due to an oversight, Milton Hanna did not receive his Medal of Honor until 1897. (9)

The Post War Years

After the war, Mr. Hanna returned to Mankato where on 01 Nov 1869 he married Miss Louise N. Purrier. The couple had two children, but unfortunately both predeceased them. (10) Kitty was only five when she died and James L. died at the age of thirty-one. James had married Gertrude Corp and they had three daughters; Gladys, Doris and Louise. (11)

Evidently Mr. Hanna was a gregarious man with many friends. "He was a man who devoted his life to make others happy." (12) For a while he ran a grocery store on South Front Street that was a mecca for chess and checker players with Mr. Hanna himself being a worthy opponent of all challengers. Later he had a bakery and grocery store that was a favorite for his fellow G. A. R. members of the Wilkin Post No 19 G.A. R. In an article appearing in the Mankato Free Press in 1936, Mr. Hanna related to the reporter that he had

three gold awards of which he was proud. The first was a gold ring that was presented to him by the members of Excelsior Hose Company No. 1 of Mankato fire department for his long and efficient services of twenty-seven years. The second was a medal he received by unanimous vote of Wilkin Post G.A.R. for being one of their most active members. The third was his Medal of Honor. (13)

Louise Purrier Hanna outlived her husband by over three years, but she was not in the good health required to care for him during his last years. He died on 21 Jan 1913 in the Minnehaha Soldiers Home in Minneapolis. He had remained in Mankato until a week or so before his death when his friends moved him to the home hoping that he would receive the care he needed to improve his health. (14)

Hanna was buried in Glenwood Cemetery in Mankato. It was not until 1999 that Milton Hanna's grave was marked to identify the fact that he had received the Medal of Honor. Marlin Peterson, a local member of the Army Reserve who served in the Gulf War, is a history buff. He had read of the surprise battle that Milton Hanna participated and for which he received the Medal of Honor. Visiting the cemetery, Peterson found the grave marker of Milton Hanna to be faded, chipped and spotted with mildew. There was no mention of his receiving the Medal of Honor. Mr. Peterson tried to contact living relatives, but finding no one, he took it upon himself to obtain from the Veteran's Services a marker that denotes Milton Hanna's Company, year of birth and death and the fact that he was a Medal of Honor recipient. This marker now stands beside his original one. (15)

Compiled by Beth Cooper Zimmer
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Sources

- "Answered His Last Roll Call," Mankato Review, 22 Jan 1913.
- "Death Summons Mr. Hanna," Mankato Review, 10 Aug 1913
- "First Church Services and Pioneer School Class, Held in James Hanna Home, 1853," Mankato Free Press, 21 Jun 1927.
- "The Grand Review of Armies," Civil War Trust, <http://www.civilwar.org/education/history>
- "Grand Review of the Armies, May 23-24, 1865" Shotguns' home of the American Civil War, www.civilwarhome.com/grandreview.html
- Hughes, Thomas, *History of Blue Earth County*, Volume 2, page 419.
- "Marking their mettle with honor," Mankato Free Press, 31 Mar 1999.
- "Milton Hanna, Civil War Hero, Cited On Field For Bravery" Mankato Free Press, 11 Mar 1936: 19:2
- "Mrs. W. A. Beach Dies Here Today, Services Saturday." Mankato Free Press, 9 Oct ~ 1952
- "Taps Are Sounded for Milton Hanna, Veteran," Mankato Free Press, 22 Jan 1913
- US and State Census records

EndNotes

- (1) *History of Blue Earth County, Minnesota, Volume II, page 419*
- (2) Ibid, Volume II, page 419
- (3) "First Church Services and Pioneer School Class, Held in James Hanna home, 1853"
- (4) *History of Blue Earth County, Minnesota, Volume II, page 419*
- (5) "Answered His Last Roll Call"
- (6) "Marking their mettle with honor"
- (7) "Answered His Last Roll Call"
- (8) Grand Review of the Armies Shoguns' home of the American Civil War
- (9) *History of Blue Earth County, Minnesota, Volume II, page 419*
- (10) Ibid
- (11) "Mrs. W. A. Beach Dies Here today; Services Saturday"
- (12) "Taps Are Sounded for Milton Hanna, Veteran"
- (13) "Milton Hanna, Civil War Hero, Cited on Field for Bravery"
- (14) "Answered His Last Roll Call"
- (15) Marking their mettle with honor"