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SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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Name of Informant Maurice Olsen
Address 939 St. Louis, Rapid City, South Dakota
Date of Interview July 12, 1972
Name of Researcher O. A. Rothlisberger
Others Present _____
Location of Interview 939 St Louis, Rapid City, South Dakota
Added Notes _____

Subject Headings under which you feel this interview should be filed:

Flood damage to novelty and souvineer business.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age c. 48 Sex Male County Pennington
Socio-economic status Middle
Occupation Distributing wholesale souvineers/Western novelty and souvineers
Education _____
Religion _____
Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota _____
Where? _____
From Where? _____
Number of Moves in South Dakota _____ Reasons for moves: _____

MO No. it's the east side of the building , over here, which was a couple feet higher than

OR O. A. Rothlisberger, South Dakota State Oral History Project, South Dakota State Historical Society, July 12, 1972 . Would you state your name, sir?

MO My name is Maurice Olson.

OR All right, and your address here?

MO Yes, this is 939 St. Louis.

OR This is your place of business.

MO Yes, ~~939 St. Louis~~

OR 939 St. Louis, Rapid City, South Dakota, and what is your business sir?

MO My business is distributing wholesale novelties and souvineers.

OR You are about, how far, this is right on the creek?

MO Right on the creek.

OR And were you down here at your place of business that afternoon and night of June 9th?

MO Yes, we heard the creek was gonna rise, so we stayed down and did some work. It came up some, and didn't seem to , so we went home, we lived out near Canyon Lake in a high area.

OR I see. You were safe in your house ..

MO Safe in the house. We got a heavy rain at home, a very heavy rain. The apartment that we live in is new, and we worked to keep the water from coming in the back door. I estimated that there was four or five inches of rain out there, and at that point it concerned me about what was going to happen here. So it was after dark, my wife stayed home and I came back down to the ware huse. We're located right off West Boulevard within about 75 feet of the creek. The area outside is about light as day with those bright lights on the bridge, so I went up to the top of the steps where we have a window and I watched the creek rise. There was a new rataining wall, a little dike, maybe 2 feet higher than the road area, and the water started to come over the dike, first thing I saw was a boat comeo down, aluminum boat, and it lodged on top of the dike, then it bounced over the dike and under my display trailer which was parked ~~outside~~ out front. I'd parked my car on the east side of the building..

OR Was that the creek side?

MO No, it's the east side of the building , over here, which was a couple feet higher than I normally do , and I got concerned about my car, so I took it across the street which is about a block away, Lumber Company, and put it on the railraod track, which was the highest point in the area. I came back to the warehouse, wame in the back door, looked out the window, my trailer was gone, the water was rising over the road. I picked up a couple of things from the office , carried them upstairs, came down, and the water was coming in under the front door.

OR I see, now, your trailer was swpet away, that was.. a house trailer..

MO It was a house trailer,display trailer.

OR Oh, yeah, I see.

MO I then headed for the back door, this large (receiving) door, and the water was about a half a foot from coming in there, I closed the door and I started back for my car, which was across Omaha. Now, this whole incident didn't take any longer than it's taking me to relate it to youx. The water was coming so fast down Omaha that I couldn't cross it. When I come back and looked out the window and saw that my trailer was gone, I saw^u two story white house come down the creek and crash into the bridge.

OR The bridge is..

MO Right out here.

OR Right out here.

MO I thought sure that the house took the bridge out, because it actually pulled it right around the bridge. And then the lights started to spark, in the transformer over there, it was at that time that I left and went out the back door. Pulled the back door down and started...

OR Overhead garage..

MO Overhead garage receiving and shipping doo.r .

OR Yes, I see.

MO But I started over across Omaha to my car, but I couldn't make it,. In the meantime, the debris and the houses and the trialers on the west side of West Boulevard came under the bridge and formed a dam. So approach to the bridge, we were protected by that approach, but all the trailers and the trees and the houses that piled into the

MO bridge, formed a dam, and the water surged around.

OR Surged around..

MO Around towards Omaha Street south. I then went upstream parallel with the creek in the lee of the trailers and the bridge approach, and I cut across West Boulevard and the ~~hixx~~ highest ground that I could find was next to Harvey's Rock Shop. There's a little ^{Concrete} house there, there's about a four foot basement jutting out of the ground.

OR The approximate address of that would be..

MO Oh, roughly, ten something, 1012 or 1015..

OR Omaha.

MO Omaha, right. And I spent the next 3 or 4 hours in that house on the main floor. The, or the cars ~~and~~, debris were flowing down Omaha.

OR Were there any others there with you, other..?

MO Yes, there was, oh, 8 or 9 people, and some young people, and they commented on that there was an elderly woman next door about 90. And her house was about 4 feet lower than where we were, and a couple of the young fellas went over and broke into the house and forcibly ~~sawed her~~ carried her into the house where we stayed.

OR You say forcibly, didn't she want to leave?

MO She didn't want to leave the house, had to break the door down in order to get in, and just ahead of that, a couple of the fellas had gone down to the corner and got a gal that was pregnant and brought her also up to this house. In the meantime there was a couple of people from the trailer court ~~a~~ right down on the creek on the

OR

MO Well, whatever it is right back here, it's on the, on the southeast corner of West Boulevard.

OR Of West Boulevard, I see.

MO Be right across West Boulevard.

OR There aren't any trailers there now.

MO No, they're all gone. So I spent the next four hours there and I kept looking at the trees, trying to decide which one to climb. And the water came up about a foot and ~~a~~ half, and there was about a foot and a half more before it'd have been on the main floor.

MO But at that point the water leveled off and then started to drop.

OR When were you able to get back here to your place of business?

MO When the water dropped I went across the street to the next building over there where the patrols operate, protection patrol, night patrol, have you talked to those people over there?

OR No.

MO That would be very worthwhile, because there's maybe , oh, 8 or 10 men, and see, they handle protection for businesses, short wave radio and they were in communication with some of their men, some of them were there..

OR Is this sort of like a, like a private detective..

MO Yeah, private detective agency, it's right on the corner over here, they'd have a lot of information ..

OR We certainly will, we certainly will.

MO I went out there, had a cup of coffee, wrung out my clothes, and they told me how they had managed to get across the bridge and I went home ~~wixx~~ about 3 in the morning, cause my wife didn't know..

OR No, I.. where you were, and she knew , of course, where your place of business was in the danger area. You went home..

MO I went home to where I lived over in Canyon Lake.

OR Uh-huh, about 3 o'clock in the morning.

MO About 3 o'clock in the morning.

OR When were you able to come back down to your Business?

MO I was back down here right after dawn. At about oh, six o'clock, five:thirty. And the water had receded, so it was about even with the bottom steps put front .

OR How high did the water get..

MO In this building?

OR Yes.

MO It was five and a half feet.

OR Five and a half feet.

MO You can see the water line right htere.

MOR You can see the water line..

MO well, actually, the water line is , you can .

OR Right, right here.

MO -Yeah, right where your, a little lower than that. Right there, right there, yeah, right there. Yeah, about five and a half feet.

OR

MO It's interesting to see that happen, a concrete building with a metal front door, and no windows on this building. The door opened out, and the front door held; the back door popped open, the back receiving door popped open; the quonset ~~was~~ building next door, which is about a foot lower than this, has a metal door on it, and that was forced open and, in a v-shape. And the water actually entered the building from downstream and went upstream. a quart of oil, a quart motor oil, that sitting right by the back door, and I found that in the front closet, upstream. In the meantime, when the water receded, it took practically everything movable out of here. It carried cups and saucers which were in cases, out the door, and cups, being if they're upside down, held enough water so they'd float out, it took all the wood shelves, it took all the fixtures, I had paper tape, ^{filament} tape sitting on the shelf, ~~five by five~~ side by side, the paper tape disappeared and the filament tape was sitting exactly as I'd left it.

OR Is that right. Could you describe further the structure, we're in the main structure.

MO Were in the main structure.

OR Concrete building.

MO Concrete block building.

OR And on, off to the side here, adjoining this is a quonset hut.

MO It's a metal quonset hut, with a concrete floor, was built about 20 years ago, and in 1964, the addition that we're now standing in, the new concrete block addition, was added. In '70, the office on the front was put on, and there was a second floor over the entire structure.

OR I see. Now, did you have any structural damage other than the doors that you'd referred to as the doors that were...

MO The, yes, we've had quite a bit of damage where it wasn't concrete, all the inside doors

Mo were ripped off the hinges by by the force of the water moving around within the building. The plaster, the panelling, all of that type of thing will have to be replaced cause it's all warped.

OR Was your automobile saved sir?

MO automobile safe, it was up high and dry, the water came partially up the wheels, but ~~and~~ damage .

OR Now, when you were here ~~xxxx~~on, when you were here or in the little building, little house down the street here that night, say there were houses, trailer houses , cars...

MO Trailer houses, cars, automobiles, volskwagens, moving along.

OR Were there any people out in there that you could hear calling for..

MO We were aware of people to the north of us in the creek area, when I left, or while I was there, the fire department was located across the street at the filling station on the southwest corner, and they played their lights on us a good share of the time, and they kept saying" no, no, stay ." We could hear people calling for help occasionally, and then there were two fires. There was a fire in, oh about ~~xx~~ 50 50 yards of our business that had caught fire, and , that was a house, and there was also a fire on the north side of the, the creek , so between the action of (power) the ~~fire~~ station over there and those two fires, we could see quite clearly.

OR Your one of the few, the power was off , now.

MO The power was off.

OR You're one of the few people that had to see other than lightning flashes .

MO Well, in this area there was well, up in that second floor across the street at the the police station there , you could see these fires burning, and went, the fire department finally got a rope across Omaha and tied it to posts and came over , and I ~~xxx~~believe rescued two or three people that were stranded just to the east of building.

OR I see, I see. They were in a tree?

MO They, were, ~~they were~~ in a tree, on a fencepost or in the house, or.. You asked me earlier when I got down here, I got down here just about dawn, I imagine 5:30 or 6 o'clock. And I was able to park out on Omaha and then with hipboots I

MO ~~MO~~walked in, surveyed the damage, noticed the doors were open.

OR And then of course, now , what do you distribute?

MO Souvineers. Souvineers to the gift shops and concessions and..

OR A good bit of your stock was..

MO Well, this is, in this business we a hundred , so ur season starts roughly June 1st, we got our hundred days, we 're at our ~~xxx~~peak stock, we were ready for the season, and I would estimate that, oh, three fourths of what I had went out the door or ruined. There were apparently a lot of chemicals in the water, it did things to our merchandise that water normally won't do, there seemed to be acids or something like that, or maybe it's ~~xx~~ just the natural acid within soil. The mud in here was roughly nine inches thick cleaned out, just now finished cleaning out the last ~~corner~~ to the left about nine inches of mud. And things that you wouldn't think would be ruined , finishes come up some of bronz merchandise, it's got a plating

← on it; bronze is fine, but the plating is coming ~~fx~~ off, it's turning white;

←souvineers aren't necessarily the best quality merchandise, but I figure it's ocst me more to salvage what I've saved than it was worth, the only thing is, I've only got this~~this year~~ year to sell it. ~~Andx~~

OR And when, you have to clean up, when were you able to get back into some sort of business operations?

MO Well, we really are not, we're not functioning yet, the tourist business is ru-ning roughly between a third and a half o ~~w~~ what it did last year at this point out in the trade, and of course our business to equal that because we don't have the merchandise to deliver.

OR Are you, are you in contact, of course, ~~yez~~ with those who~~x~~ are directly in the tourst business?

MO Yes, I've probably seen and talked to most of them.

OR Do they attribute this to the flood, that there is a third to a half of what..

MO Oh, definitely, traffic is off; a few of them, like Rushmore Cave and Wonderland Cave got a road problem; things. People coming, sightseeing going on, maybe they're looking at the damage rather than spending the merchandise and

MO trying to enjoy it.

OR I suppose , yeah. Well, yes. John, do you have...

JW ~~Now~~Just a couple of things, what, have you put any estimate on your property loss here?

MO Well, we've applied for a small business loan, to document what we had, I bought the business last fall, so merchandise inventory and cataloguing and stuff that I bought the small bills that I had , the loss, I would estimate when it's all done is up to 125,000 dollars, and 7, 8000 dollars.

JW Does that include ~~xxx~~ profits, loss profits ?

MO No, I haven't even tried to that.

~~MO~~JW

MO This is all just merchandise loss.

?? But you added stock..

MO added stock into ~~xx~~ it.

JW I was also curious about your observations ~~about~~ of what, of the damage in Canyon Lake , you must have seen a great deal of that, going to and from your residence.

MO Well, we drove the road a couple of times; generally, we Canyon Lake...Boulevard rather . But I

OR Well, all right, thank you then for this interesting and informative tape, thank you very much.

OR Addedna here, Mr. Olson's tape, the informant on this tape, his business, the Western Novelty and Souvineers, located , the map coordinates would be the southeast quarter of the southeast quarter , section 35, township 1 north, range 7 east.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

319 # TAP NUMBER

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ARP

SOUTH DAKOTA

USER	ADDRESS	CHECKED OUT	CHECKED IN
Bat Dawnsnace	#11 McCook Lake	6/8/77	6/8/77