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SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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Name of Informant WILLIAM A. HIXSON

Address R.R. 4 - Box 599 Rapid City

Date of Interview 25 Jul 73

Name of Researcher E. Hausle

Others Present -----

Location of Interview SDSM & T campus

Added Notes: Dr. Hixson is head of electrical engineering at SDSM & T

SUBJECT HEADINGS UNDER WHICH YOU FEEL THIS INTERVIEW SHOULD BE FILED:

Clean up and restoration of home following 1972 flood; future plans to move house to new location; the uncertainty of what would happen to the area; number of original homes and the number now occupied; the need for uniform disaster legislation; lack of mental and emotional problems and the reason

SEE FIRST INTERVIEW
#554

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON INFORMANT

Age Sex County

Socio-economic Status

Occupation

Education

Religion

Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota

Where?

From Where?

Number of Moves in South Dakota

Reasons for Moves

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Q. Rapid City, South Dakota, July 25, 1973, Earl Hausle interviewing Bill Hixson. Bill, what did you do as far as your home was concerned following the flood last year?

A. Well, immediately after the flood and, uh, after we'd taken care of the problems involved of, uh, finding my mother and stepfather and the funerals, we, uh, went back to our home and with the help of our four teenage children and many of their friends proceeded to clean it up. Uh, this involved about, oh, probably three or four weeks of hard work just mopping mud and, uh, then we had some pumps going and the well cleaned out so we could wash down in interior of the house. This was our first step. Uh, we knew at that time that we planned on remaining in the area, we wanted to restore our house and move back in. So, uh, we proceeded to do just that and, uh, with the help of the kids, uh, we did get it cleaned up quite rapidly. Uh, we had to rebuild part of the house. The structural damage on the house was rather minimal. Uh, the Mennonite group that came in that was helping the restoration of the flood area were a tremendous help to us. They had some carpenters and, uh, they, uh, rebuilt the base kitchen cabinets for our kitchen. That was the only thing we had to rebuild inside the house. Uh, other than that we hired one carpenter for about two days and the rest of the work on the restoration of the house we did ourselves. The, uh, four teenage kids and my wife and myself.

Q. What kind of a structure is the house?

A. It's a wood framed structure with log siding. Uh, rather heavy massive rock fireplace and rock foundations and the reason the house withstood the flood so well was that, uh, the, uh, _____ where they fit the foundation, uh, someone had thought to pour concrete between each _____ where it's giving it tremendous lateral strength. Uh, the main structural damage

in the house itself was that of breaking out the, uh, picture windows in the front and rear and so what happened is the water just swept through the house taking all the furniture on the first floor and everything with it.

Q. Give the location of your house. Would you?

A. Uh, the house is located in an area called the Braeburn Addition, uh, just about a mile above the fish hatchery west of Rapid City. Location is about 30 feet, uh, from Rapid Creek. We're right on a creek bay. And the height of the water through our area was estimated to be 22 feet above normal. The, uh, water within the house, which sets on a fairly high foundation, came up to I would say probably 6½ feet through the first floor of the house.

Q. A good, good many of the homes in that area were completely destroyed, were they not?

A. That's correct, uh, particularly the newer homes that were built, uh, away from the creek bank. I think the older homes, uh, probably by virtue of two things, uh, one--they were constructed of heavier material, differently than newer homes are and, secondly--they were located amongst mature tree which would break the force and, uh, stop some of the debris from knocking the homes out. I think these are the reasons. The older homes were safe.

Q. Where did you live while you were cleaning up your home?

A. Well, the, uh, first few weeks and this would be between June 9 and July 4, uh, we borrowed a trailer from some good friends of ours, which was a small trailer and moved it up to the Lyle's place_____ These were, uh, west of town on the Sheridan Lake road. Uh, we stayed there, oh, probably about three weeks. Uh, what happened was on July 3 and July 4 our home was looted. Looters came in and apparently they had a truck 'cause they just backed it

up. Uh, we had salvaged a lot of material on our second floor. This was not touched by the flood waters and, uh, these two nights in a row indicated to us that if we were going to save anything, we would have to move back to our property in the Braeburn Addition. So we took this small trailer, put it down, uh, on our lot right beside the house. So we did our cooking and eating in the trailer and then we have two upstairs bedrooms and we slept in the upstairs bedrooms. Uh, this was pretty much the end of looting in the area because there's only one entrance to the Braeburn Addition and as long as someone was living down there, we would check pretty carefully as to who was coming in and leaving, and I hadn't heard of any looting after we moved in. Uh, one other couple followed suit about two weeks later, the Snidigers leaving down stream from us, about three houses. They, also, moved a trailer in and worked at cleaning up their house. Our present lands, are you interested in those, what we're going to do. We've there, of course, for a year and have completely, uh, renovated the house. Uh, we, we redecorated it entirely inside, refurnished it and so it's, uh, it's the ways we want it. We have a little bit more work to do in refurnishing but it's, it's all completed. Uh, probably our total cost in, uh, repairing the structure itself, redecorating and so on would be in the order of \$5,000. Uh, this does not include any labor because my wife and I and kids have done all of this ourselves. We have been waiting to determine what they are going to do with the Braeburn Addition area, whether will annex it to the city or whether it will be declared flood plane. Well, it's been so long and no decisions have been made and we are eligible for an SBA loan. So we have finally come to the conclusion that, that we think they are going to flood

plane the area, call it flood planing. This means we could not reconstruct our garage or, uh, redo the landscaping. So we bought lots, uh, west of town on the Sheridan Lake Road, uh, 2½ acres in a timber area and, uh, now we are going to move our home to that area and feel that, uh, if we can't live by the creek, uh, an area in the forrest would be next best and we're really looking forward to the move. We'd really prefer to stay by the stream but feel that there's no real chance of staying there. And, uh, the reason that we have to hurry on this move now is that, uh, the SBA loan will not be available to us after December 19 so everything must be completed by that date.

Q. Uh, you, you say you would be willing to by the creek you'd be willing to risk another flood?

A. Yes, uh, that the risk is rather minimal and again, uh, we feel that since we are aware that, uh, a flood at such a magnitude as we presently had could occur again that, uh, we certainly would get out and all we'd be risking really would be a financial loss and, uh, this is a gamble, you risk it up in a forrest fire or up in the hills. Uh, I don't think our risk is any greater along the creek than it will be of a forrest fire up in the hills.

Q. When you're talking about moving, you're talking, talking about physically moving the present structure.

A. That's correct. Uh-huh. Yep. Everything will be moved except the rock work which will have to be replaced and both the front and back steps, uh, which are using, these are beautiful rock work. So, uh, yeh, we move the structure.

Q. Uh, having been outside the city limits and therefore, outside the Urban

Renewal area, you mentioned that, uh, you haven't been able to tell what's actually going to happen up there. No decisions have been made. You have mentioned help by the Mennonites. Did you take advantage of or were you able to get help from, from any other source of any kind?

- A. Uh, no, with the exception, of course, of the SBA, uh, loan on personal property \$5,000 for given us. And, then, naturally with the disaster loss return of, uh, income tax money to us as a result of the disaster.
- Q. Or maybe I should have put the question another way. Did you seek help from any other agencies except, say SBA, for example?
- A. Uh, yes, right after the flood, uh, we went to the Red Cross office to, uh, help us in, uh, replacing some of the clothing that was lost, uh, bed and mattresses. Uh, things of this nature. So, yes, we did have help from the Red Cross and they were just really magnificent in, uh, turning out and helping the people in the area at that time.
- Q. Now how long was it before you actually started, uh, completely living in your own home again instead of, uh, the trailer and the home when you were.....
- A. I would guess it would be, let me see now, it would be about the middle of August that we returned the trailer to the owners and we're completely living in our own. Uh, remembering at that time we had a camp stove to cook over. We didn't have the range in or any of these things yet but, uh, we were living.
- Q. What kind of, uh, you had, of course, the loss of, uh, uh, part of your family. Uh, what kind of emotional impact has this had on, on your own family--your wife, yourself, and your children, the flood and the loss of flood ones and so on?
- A. Well, I would say that, uh, probably not as much as one might expect because

it's been such a period of upheaval, such a change. Now, if we'd lost, uh, my parents under normal circumstances, we would have missed them terribly. But as it was, we were so busy reconstructing our own home. Uh, our children pitched in and helped. I think it's been more a period of challenge rather than of, of remorse, of regret you've lost everything in to that period in which we've looked ahead, redo the house to get everything squared away and back to a normal existence again. Uh, there's been a decided change of values, I think, and I think everyone that has been in the flood has experienced this that, uh, financial material things really are not. They don't assume the same importance as they did before the flood. You're more interested in the personal relationships with your wife, your immediate family, your friends, other flood victims and, uh, we find that we are very much closer to people, our neighbors than we had been before. But as far as a, a emotional, uh, depression, things of this nature, they just have not occurred in, in our family.

Q. Uh, do you think there is much likelihood that this will come at some future point when you finally get settled down?

A. No, we're much too busy for that. Uh, my wife is completing her career in nursing. She is finishing her schooling. She'll get her RN by the end of this year. Uh, and of course, my job is quite demanding. It keeps me busy. I enjoy it. Uh, we're looking forward to living in a new location. Uh, the financial loss doesn't really worry us substantially, I mean, we're, we're able to, uh, with the SBA help absorb that in our normal course of events so I would say no, we, uh, we're looking forward to the future with a great deal of anticipation, uh, no regrets over the past, uh, losses and this sort

of thing there, they just do not seemed to play a very important role in our life at the present time.

Q. What has been your situation regard to the, the question of what would be done to the area in which you live.

A. These, this is the one area of frustration and that has not been too severe because we felt, ok, we could spread this out over a two year period. Certainly by the end of two years they would know. And it has only been I would say, well, Number 1, the reason that we were not frustrated by the dragging of it out is because we were so busy restoring the home so that it's livable, nice, redecorated and everything like that. It's has taken most of our energies and time and money to get this done. Uh, now that we're at the point where it is restored, we're ready to begin thinking about building a garage and relandscaping. So that at this period in time, uh, it's quite frustrating not knowing what's going to happen. So we finally made the decision that regardless of what happens to the area, whether it's annexed, whether it's not. Uh, this no longer is a consideration in our plans. We're simply going to move to our new lots. Uh, we can, uh, borrow sufficient money, uh, from SBA at 1% which is a great help to make this move and then if they do come out and take the land, it would be just great if we could get some relocation money and some, uh, money for our property. If they don't come out and take it, permit us to rebuild something down there, well, I think maybe we could rebuild this summer cottage or something like that along the stream so, uh, whichever way it goes, we're going to live with that and not be too concerned about it.

Q. Do you have any particular comment on the, oh, the recovery efforts and so on after the flood by the various governmental units ans so on?

- A. Uh, really nothing but praise. A lot of the people ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ I think have felt that maybe the county commissioners haven't worked as hard or come to, uh, uh, some agreements of furnishing money to the flood victims as they should. But I disagree with this. I think they are a dedicated hard working bunch. They have tried every avenue to get help for the, uh, people in the disaster area. They just have been unable to do it because of the different types of programs available to the county verses the city. And now I think the city is expending every effort to do what they can within the financial, uh, arrangements that they can make. And I think most of us out there feel that everybody has really tried to help us to the greatest extent they can. I-I in listening to the people, sure they would like to see it done a lot faster than it has been and liked to be assured that they will get some return but they know people, the government officials are really trying to help.
- Q. You attended a meeting last night, I believe, on the potential annexation of the area to the city with the hope that the city can use Urban Renewal funds to purchase land and structures and provide the relocation benefits. Uh, can you say something about that meeting?
- A. I think the main thing that came out of that meeting is that the city is very sincere in their efforts in wanting to help. Number 1, the people of that area, and Number 2, to clear a potential danger area in case of another flood. Uh, as Mayor Barnett stated, it's a very, very complex tough problem. Probably one of the toughest that he has faced in his administration. I feel that they will do something, uh, in terms of acquisition of land in the flood way if the Hud program officials in Washington approve such a plan. They are willing to take some of the moneys that they have for the Urban

Renewal within the city, they expend them in this newly acquired land if, if the Hud, uh, program people say that this is okay. Uh, there are a couple of alternatives that came out if they do annex the area and not permitted to include it in the Hud program then they may zone it so that it would, uh, be pretty well cleared of structures ultimately and not pose a serious problem or a threat to Rapid City, uh, or secondly, they may try to, if the term is upon annex, return it to the county instead of continuing, uh, it as city property. So, it's still up in the air and I would expect it to be three to four months before definite decisions are made in this particular program. It is so complex, it's tough to, to come to a decision.

Q. How many homes were in the immediate area where you live?

A. Oh, let's see, there are approximately 29 or 30 in the Braeburn Addition and the _____ right beside us which is across the creek.

Q. And how many people are now living in their homes in that area?

A. Uh, I think there have been 8, 8 people that have come in and, uh, redecorated repaired their homes and they are either living in there or have rented them to someone else. Uh, the home adjacent to ours has not been repaired but the upstairs was undamaged and the lady that owns it has been living upstairs without repairing the bottom part because she is waiting to find out what is going to happen to the area before she puts money into her home.

Q. This, uh, waiting for a decision I suppose it's been one of the big problems that the people in the area have faced.

A. I think this has probably been one of the main frustration of the people that have gone back in to repair their home. Well, I'm sure it has been frustrating and been very, uh, tough for the people that have left and bought new homes, too. But those of us that have spent money and we've had to spend our own

money to repair and, uh, reconstruct our homes. Of course, it's, uh, very important for us to know what they are going to, otherwise, maybe our money has just been wasted and thrown down the drain so to speak. So this has been a real frustration and probably it's the one topic of conversation that always comes up when the group of us get together and we do quite often in that area. We've grown to be quite a close knit group down there. Uh, that's what we are going to, what's going to happen, what have you heard, any decisions been made and, of course, none have yet. They are still attempting to arrive at a decision as to what to do with the area.

- Q. Has this lead you to discuss, uh, any ideas about, uh, that the country should have some kind of a, uh, package of disaster legislation in _____ rather than having to go to various agencies and piece together programs such as Urban Renewal and so on?
- A. Uh, yes, we've discussed this quite a bit and, of course, there are, there's mixed feelings among many of us. Uh, I-I think a number of people feel that, uh, very possibly, if a person is aware that he is living in a potentially dangerous area. Uh, we think maybe he should do this at his own risk. That, uh, maybe it is not up to the federal government to come in and repair, reconstruct, refinance, uh, people that have lost providing they are aware of what they're doing at the time they are doing it. Uh, other sides of the question I say would, would probably be that if your're going to have benefits for a certain group of people, other people in the same circumstances should also have the same benefits available to them. That it seems a little bit unfair to have programs that will help people living within a Urban area where suburban area, these people are excluded from the benefits. So, this type of equalizing legislation I think should be

looked at and, and hopefully remedied for a future disaster type problems.

Q. In terms of the risks that people should assume themselves did, did the people in that area, you or other people you know of, uh, think that it was possible to have a flood of such magnitude?

A. No, we felt it was clearly impossible to have it and probably the biggest surprise that most of us had was that on our homeowners policy we did not have flood insurance. I thought I had it. All those in the area thought they had it. And we were just really, I mean this was not explained to us within our policies. I think we read them carefully, we would have seen it we were excluded from it. But, uh, being just a normal type citizen where you get a coverage on your home, you assumed you're covered on everything. Uh, one of the clauses in there, of course, they should have covered from water damage. I mean, I just extend that, say, well, flood is water damage, sure I'm covered. Well, in terms that is an exclusion.

Q. Do you think that was possibly a factor in why more people didn't buy the special flood insurance which was offered in the area through, through federal legislation?

A. Well, of course, it was not available in our area outside the city limits. It was available only to those within the city limits and again here is another inequality that I think should be, uh, cleared up, that if it's available to suburban people, it ought to be, uh, available to those, I mean urban people, it ought to be available to those in suburban locations.

Q. Has the county taken the necessary steps, do you know, to make it available?

A. No, they have not and the reason for this is that the people that are living in the areas that are prone to flooding are against the zoning that would

be required to make that insurance available to us. For example, none of us could rebuild, reconstruct any of our flood damage property and if it's more than 50% damage. And, uh, this would really make _____ completely worthless to us.

(END OF INTERVIEW)