SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Library Cataloguing Service Data

Name of informant	Larry M. Lewis
Address	2404 Waverly, Rapid City, South Dakota
Date of Interview	June 28, 1972
Name of Researcher	0. A. Rothlisberger
Others Present	Offices of Lewis and Kirkeby Real Estate, 728 Blvd, Rapid City.
Location of Interview	
Added Notes	
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Subject Headings under which you feel this interview should be filed:

Rapid City flood victim. Good tape. Mr. Lewis' comments concerning allegedly

inadequate warming are quite interesting.

Demographic Information on Informant

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Q. Mr. Lewis' property and house at 728 Rap. . .correction, Mr. Lewis' house

and property at 2404 Waverly Drive, Rpaid City was located within the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter of section 9, township 1 north, range

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My name is Larry Lewis, my family and I lived at 2404 Waverly $\mathbf{L}\mathbf{L}$ Drive, and a family of three children and of course my wife. We had myoed to that area, because we did want to be near the creek and it was a beautiful area, and we had not given any real serious consideration as to the problem of flooding there, because it was a beautful area, and then, never particularly had those problems in recent years. On the evening of June 9, which was the date of the flood, we had apent a quiet early evening at home, having dinner and then taking a drive around the south west part of town in the rain. We rather enjoy riding in the rain. When we came . . , mundrove back hom e, which would have been probably between 8 and 9 o'clock that night, we had known, there had been considerable amount of rain. And we did turn on the radio and f.V., to get any reports that there might be. There was water running in our street in front, at the time, which was not particularly unusual for Rapid City, as Rapid City does not have storm sewer systems, so a lot of your drainage, is carried by the street drainage. As the evening progresssed , there became more water in the street, and in our general area, The flood reports over the radio, I considered to be farily normal, stating that was flooding on Rapid, in the Rapid Creek area. Please do not drive on the west side of town. And later on, probably in the 9:30 vicinity, they asked for boats of over 35 horsepower motors, to go up to Canyon Lake area, to help out, One of the things that bothers me is we'd received work via way of the newspapers, several days later, that the city officials and other officials were aware that water was going over Canyon Lake Dame about 45 minutes before it actually broke. And yet, they did not notify the people of the seriousness of this situation, in fact they must have underestiBlack Hills Project

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mated the seriousness of the situation themselves, or I am sure LLthey would have taken measures, for e, emergency evacuation of the whole area, This was not done. They continued with just flodding warnings along Rapid Creek, so many people like my family and many of the neighbors around us, were more concerned with things like our belongings and our furniture, and perhaps a little water in our living room, than we were for our actual lives, If we had known that the dam would be going out, or that there was a wall of water, we would have been long-gone towards high-waters. We didn't realize the predicament that we were in until the water in the street which had been like ankle or slightly above, started coming up on the lawn, and started rising quite quickly then.I would say within 10 minutes that it was up around the knees, and peebty forceful and shortly thereafter, there it was like in the waist in the streets around and we were isolated on our particular block by Rapid Creek and one of side of the street right in front of us, and then another rather strong current behind us. So when I recognized the true danger, it was too late for us to evacuate either by car or on foot. As the evening went on, it's amazing how the relative values of things change. In the early flooding stage, we were worried about things like water running in our car floor mats in the street, so we moved them up, in fact, moved them on the front lawn. My wife, was concenred about making tracks on the front lawn. It progressed along to the point where we were worried about water in our garage, so we put books and things like that up. Soon were we worried about furniture in the house, so we put the T.V. and that, other things up on top of the kitchen cabinets and counters. But, not, relatively a few minutes later, we were worried about the cars going, soon thereafter we were

from the main floor, and it was soon thereafter, that the water on and wahhed all of the gurniture out. Ενεrything was completely gone did break out all of the windows, ämcluding the front picture window floor again because it was then full of water, and the water itself shoudd say, and needless to say, we didn't go down on the first widdows, the wall just underneath him caved in, or broke in, I several steps down the stairs to go down stairs and break out the however, as my odder brother, a gentleman 35 years old, was taking water would flow through, and release some pressure on the house, to go down and break out the windows of the house, so that the A occurred to us that at that point that it would be wise, • Krors of the door, even on the high side. And we rushed up to the second we saw water spraying in all the way around the seams the garage, of our two story home. And as we went by the then closed door to of the house then, scampered and hurried up to the second floor house. And of course, and those of us that were on the first floor was about probably about 4 feet high on the garage side of the in from the pressure of the water which, I believe, at that time door from the house to the garage, the far wall of garage, caved garage, and bring in 5 life jackets. And as he was closing the life jackets out of the garage, which, and he did go out to the so I told my oldest boy whose l4, to get the tor our lives. and I recognized then that, we would soon in about, and fighting minutes of each other. And I, we were in the house at the time, two cars that were in the front driveway were swept away, just short pesiod of time after it was up to the knees in the front worried for our lives. And as time progressed, it was just a worried about the house going, and of course, finally we were TT Fage 11 620#

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LLthe inside of the house was probably 7 feet deep, up the to the ceiling in places, but on the back water, it was 7 feet deep, and on the outside the water appeared to be up over, and was up over the first floor, so I would guess it was between 8 and 10 feet deep at times, and it was rushing extrementy hard. I could reach out of the second story window and touch the water. And I would say at this point, the time was somewhere shortly after 11 100 o'clock. And we did have flashlights, rather strong flashlight up there and candles, and we watched from our second story window a number of homes come down the rushing waters, and from upstream. The first big one we saw that was still relatively intact, just walked **pight** over and crushed the trees, that had been several feet, several hundred feet, excuse me, from our back door. And one of the main streams was 200 feet behind our back yard. A couple of blocks up stream from us, the Rapid Creek normally makes and "S" curve, but this night it didn't make the "S" curve, it kept straight on, going straight. And soon, the homes on the half a block behind us were swept away, One of them was just picked up and floated intact downstream. TWO others seemed to disintegrate,, right at the time, and were jut completely smashed. And when we waw the last one go, and were quite sure that ours was soon on the list to go because it seemed to be shuddering and shimminng, and we could hear the 2x4's cracking and smapping on the lower level. At htat point, we were considering actually going in the water, from the back around the front side of the house where the currentwas not as strong, and trying to make a swim for some higher trees, 'cause we were con coerned that if our home just disintegrated like some of the others, we would be trapped under the rough, and never make it out

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- LLWe did have life jackets on however, we decided that we would ride out the house as long as possible. And when our house did start to go , we would jump from the windows that we had broekn out and make a chance at it at that time. We kept a watch out fhe front and back, for any large debris, or particularly houses, that might be crashing into ours because that's what seemed to move things in a hurry, and seemed to demolish other homes. We saw one coming towards our neighbor's house which was upstream, and the house did slice it right in half, crushing one half of it, and go by the back of our house, approximately 50 feet from ours and slice off our other neighbor's garage without even slowing up. The neighbor's house upstream that had just been cut in haffl, the balance of it started moving towards us, and finally took off and we at that point, that it would probably hit us, and take us with it. So we got peepared to jump as it was coming towards us, but it jammed into two large, farily large trees on that side of our hospe, and jammed in there, and as it was a big house, that jammed in there, it started catching debris, such as two fairly large trees that caught on it, and and this total combination dirverted the water, one of the main forces of water around us, rather than towards and over us. And I feel this was the primary reason why our house did remain, and didn't did not get washed away. Had our house gone I'm sure that it would have taken our next door neighbors house with it, which is just downstream about 15 feet, and there were, I believe, about seven people in that home also, which was a two-story home, And we kept a pretty close watch thereafter on the house that had A
 - And we kept a pretty close watch therearter on the house that had jammed abainst the trees and saved us, and also on the water level. About 12:30, we fett that we were relatively safe and the high dnager point was over , because we were kind of sure that the

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 \mathbf{LL} house that had jammed in there was not going any farther and that our house would not go. However, we used the remaining tree as a measuring point and kept an eve on the water level, And between 12:30 and 1:30, the water level seemed to go down about a foot, or possibly slightly more. About 1:30, is our guesses were right, it rasied a little bit, probably three to six inches, we thought, and of course, this concerned us very much, that we might be getting additional waters coming down or perhaps Pactola or some other dam had given way. But that didn't last too long, and the water, slowly, and I say that, I mean it, slowly went down thereafter. We thought that once the big force went by that it would go down quite rapidly, but it took most of the night for the water to go down, and by daybreak, we could actually go out on the island of Bebris that had been build up around our house, and worlk around, and daybreak was about 5:00 o'clock, however there was still a heavy current both in Rapid Creek in front of us and the street in front of us, and this deviding stream that separated us in the back that had taken so many homes, was still running rapid current, And all that morning, they tried to get boats across, or people on lines across, but were unable to do so. Several rather large fellows with ropes to them tried to wade across to our rescue, but they were swept downstream, and had to be pulled in by theri) rope. Fianly at 2:00 &'clock the next afternoon, they took us out by boat across Rapid Creek, the boat was attached to a cable spanning the Creek, and they were able to takk us out that way. There were interest, many interesting stories of neighbors who had gotten trapped in similar situations as ours, jsut not being aware of the real

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daager we were in. They had all more or less taken the attitude \mathbf{LL} or felt the same thing we did, that even if flood conditions existed, they were concerned about furniture and things in their house, and what might be considered rpitine flooking, just a foot or two of water in your living room. These people had they been notibeed of emergency evacuation, (Notices), would certainly have left as soon as they received that word that the lives were in danger, and we would have also. One of the neighbors, just across the street from us, had to go to their attic, the water was, covered the entire first floor, and he could feel the water against his body, and they werettrapped in the attic, unable to break the roof of the house off, out, so they could get up on the roof. And of course, they spent a rather terrifying night, in that predicament. Another neighbor across the way, spent the night in their house, in a back bedroom, where the water did not actually rush throught, but had hack, backed up, to the point it was up to her neck, and this was a older wojman, probably about seventy years old in there, with a sixteen year old retarded grandchild, granddaughter, and this elderly woman had the forethought to put her daughter on the mattress and the mattress floated in there and she helped hold it up for most of the evening. Fottunately, they both lived. However, all of our neighbors were not that fortunate; we had five of, six of our immediate neighbors die as a result of nextingx not being as lucky and fortunate as we were. We had other neighbors whose homes were swept away, and several of them were swept away, but did manage to live by grabbing trees downstream or something like And of course, by the grace of God, we were saved. And that. we would urge that any communities in the future not, not underBlack Hills Project

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LL estimate the danger and the power of water, and don't hesitate to warn the people when it is evident that their lives can be in danger.

Thank you.

OR Mr, Lewis' property and house at728, Rap, coprection, Mr. Lewis' house and property at 2404 Waverly Drive, Rapid City was located within the southwest gaurter of the northeast quarter of section 9, township 1 north, range east.