

SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Library Cataloguing Service Data

Name of informant Howard Scott

Address 2944 W. St. Ann Street, Rapid City, South Dakota

Date of Interview July 5, 1972

Name of Researcher John Watterson

Others Present Mrs. Howard Scott

Location of Interview 2944 W. St. Ann Street

Added Notes _____

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

Subject's house flooded; Meadowbrook and extent of damage; Thoughts on financing.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age 48 Sex Male County Pennington

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 move(s): _____

- Q. This is John Watterson, July 6, 1972...July 5, and I'm talking with Mr. Howard Scott at his house, 2944 St. Ann. Let me locate that. Mr. Scott lives in the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 10, Township 1 North, Range 7 East.
- A. And that will record like it is now?
- Q. Mmm-hmm.
- A. Well, my name is Howard Scott, I live at--or used to live, rather--at 2944 West St. Ann Street in Rapid City, South Dakota. On June the ninth in the evening we had a...well, maybe I should explain a little bit first. I work for Northwestern Bell Telephone Company and I belong to a telephone pioneer organization and this organization was having an annual dinner at which they change officers of the local council. This dinner was over in the east part of Rapid City. We were over there at about 6 o'clock, had dinner there and the program of change of officers, and so on; and during this program an announcement came downstairs into the dining room that Spring Creek was flooding, there was a flash flood on Spring Creek, I believe.
- Q. About what time was that?
- A. Oh, I would say this was somewhere around 7:30. About that time, I believe, 7:30, quarter to 8. And 'course people began to get a little nervous, and we did have an opportunity to look outside; it was just dark, it was raining and black clouds everywhere. And then the program continued, some of the people left--a few--we continued the program and then they brought another announcement and then said that it was raining in other places and flash flooding was occurring, and they finished the program.

Q. Where is Spring Creek?

A. Spring Creek is south of Rapid City approximately, oh, I suppose, overland maybe five miles, something like that; but by road possibly a little farther. And it is the next drainage--major drainage--running somewhat east and west to the south of Rapid City. The Rapid City drainage is Rapid Creek, as everyone knows, I guess.

Q. Yeah.

A. So about 8 or 8:30--I suppose 8:30, possibly--we came home. It had quit raining, we changed clothes and were watching television and we have two children, we have two girls, they were both at home at the time--one is a college student, the other one just graduated from high school here in Rapid City. We watched television and they had some news strips on there about flash flooding and not to drive around and so on, but no, no major warning. Apparently, they...at least this seemed to be absent to us, that there was, there (wasn't) _____ afterwards, after the fact--naturally, think back about it--but it quit raining, and we walked down to the creek from our house which is a little over two blocks away. Walked down there and looked at it at 32nd Street and it was possibly an elevation a couple of feet or three feet below 32nd Street at that time; and we walked north along 32nd to the bridge, which is another long block, or it's a block and a half. The bridge of Jackson Boulevard across that creek. And the water there was flowing up, up near the bridge, it wasn't going over it or anything like that or even bumping into it yet. But below the bridge some of the houses there had water up, right up to their back doors, some of the buildings that were built near the creek. Well, then, we looked at this; and at the same time, we noticed

to the west lightning and real heavy, dark clouds and lighter clouds back of it where the lightning was occurring. And it looked bad, had tails on them, you know, kind of a ragged-looking cloud, and down quite low. We didn't like the looks of that exactly and we came back up to the house, told the kids about this, and there were some of the neighbor kids in, and one of the girls, her boyfriend was over here with us. So they all walked down and looked at the creek.

Q. About what time was that?

A. I suppose that must have been around 9 o'clock, someplace in there. And then we happened to talk to some friends on the telephone up in Rapid Canyon below Big Bend, between Big Bend and Hisega, which is on the Thunderhead Falls Road, is a common name for it now. We talked to her and she said it was raining hard up there. And we understood her to say that one of the bridges on the creek was out--on the road crossing the creek--was out at that time. Up to this point, we could talk about going back over to this, this pioneer doings over there, and we knew some of the people that were up here from Omaha and we wanted to visit with them; but somehow or other, luckily, we decided not to. The more of these reports we got, the more we stayed home. We talked to some people that lived closer to Canyon Lake than we do, and one report he told us the paddleboats from Canyon Lake were going by. And this kind of indicated that things were not gonna turn out very well. I don't really recall all of the events, but someplace around 10 o'clock, 10:30, approximately between 10:30 and 11, we decided to get some stuff out of the basement.

Q. Incidentally, when you were down at Rapid Creek, was that water, or down looking, was that water out of the channel of Rapid Creek that was flooding those houses..

A. Yes, it was.

Q. I see, I see.

A. But the fact that it wasn't raining, we thought maybe this was the high water, you see. In fact, we found out later that several people in Cleghorn Canyon thought the same thing. And were not pleasantly surprised. Anyway, we moved some things out of the basement, and as we moved the last of the items, things were moving quite quickly here. I guess I should back up a little bit. Some of the neighbors, neighbors across the street to the south of us across St. Ann Street--West St. Ann Street--were gone and we were watching their house for them. This was this house over here, went over there and I wore knee boots getting over there, and I got a little water in the tops of them crossing the street at that time. And that was probably in the neighborhood of 10 o'clock. And checked their window curtain and drapes and so on to make sure their windows weren't leaking, because it was raining here then. And came back over and we moved some of the stuff up out of the basement, and the last thing downstairs I noticed this floor drain, the sewer started coming up. And at that same time, some of the kids up here mentioned that the street was really running. So we looked out and it was coming right up here; it didn't seem to be rising fast, but each time we looked, we noticed a change in it. And I had no idea how many inches it raised in a given time or anything, but all of this last ten minutes probably was, I suppose, the water could easily have raised six inches at least. Possibly more.

Q. Really? Coming up, that meant it was up on the side of the house.

A. It wasn't up on the side of the house, it was right up to our garage door which was up in the driveway, and that probably meant an elevation rise of about, oh,

from the gutter line up there must have been somewhere in the neighborhood of two feet. Maybe not quite. But at that point the sewer was coming up and Argyle Street--just two houses away from us or one house beyond us--was running and it appeared to be, when I looked at it, I can just imagine it running about like that, maybe twenty miles an hour or something like that. A full stream. Couple of cars in front of the house on the street had floated or turned around in the street. So this meant the water was getting pretty deep out there. We then grabbed our coats, the dog, transistor radio, a camera, a jug of coffee--of all things--and filed out the back door into the backyard away from the flood and across to the east of the house; and as we went through the hedge at the end of the house, the water was probably about six or eight inches above our knees. Probably halfway to, oh, and to our hips, and then we went out across the neighbor's yard and up the sidewalk to the east which is gently rising as it goes. Then we went up about four houses, and we were out of the flood, we were out of the water at that point. Well, as we know, the water came up farther after we left.

Q. Which way was the water flowing?

A. Flowing from south to north, directly.

Q. Into your house.

A. Into the house, yes, and across West St. Anne Street. Not with it, but perpendicular to it and from south to north. Apparently, from what we've been able to decide since then, has come around Meadowbrook School and then flowed directly north, getting back to, trying to get back to Rapid Creek again.

Q. Oh, I see.

A. And as we left here, there wasn't any damage, we heard water running as we left the house which might have indicated possibly some of it getting in the basement or something, but... Well, then we walked to the east and farther east, probably about four blocks to some friends' house on Sheridan Lake Drive. Spent an hour and a half or so there. And the rest of the family stayed, and I asked John-- John Bowers were the people's names that we stayed with--I asked him to come back down with me. And we came back and I can't tell you the times, I suppose around 11:15 when we left here, 11:10, someplace in there. And probably about, possibly 1 o'clock, 12:30 to 1 when we came back. The water had been up and down, it was not in the living room of the house. It had been approximately 16 inches deep and things were, as you might expect, in a turmoil. Things were upset; the carpet with huge bulges in it with air trying to escape. Just a lousy mess, and looked in the basement, and, and it was the same way. We had flashlights, we went around through the house. And coming across the street though--this might be interesting--we waded west on St. Ann Street on the south side because we felt the water might be a little less deep over there and just before we reached our house, we were on the sidewalk, and the water was so swift on the sidewalk coming from the south crossing the sidewalk that you couldn't stand up. So we walked up along the hedge to the south closer to the houses, and then crossed the water where it was not so deep over into the, in the lee side of this house across from us and there was a pickup truck parked out here with the horn blaring constantly--it'd shorted out--and I decided to wade right straight across the street. And at that time the water came up, oh, on my chest. Just...didn't, I didn't seem to want to float, I could still keep my feet on the ground. And then

up on the step, and the step then was out of the water, it wasn't it wasn't standing in water at that point, but it was just about at that point. We came in, looked around, we heard some people, we thought hollering for help, and the more we listened, we decided it was, and we went back out, went in the back yard. And our neighbors had taken refuge in a poplar tree. And we went back there, waded across the back yard--which was probably about knee deep at that time--and helped them down out of the tree. One lady was hurt a little; well, in fact, her leg was quite badly bruised. One of the backyard fences had fallen on it. Helped her in here and then we brought the rest of them into our kitchen, not knowing that our house was probably less safe than their own because our foundation, which we found out later, had caved in, a good share of it. And we eventually, then...while we were doing that, the water receded about eight inches. He went up and got his pickup and brought it down closer to the house at that time, we took this one lady in a chair, carried her out to the front step and two fellows came along with a little flat-bottom boat. We put her, chair and all, in the boat and floated her out and up the street for about one house to where we reached the, where the pickup was, and then transferred her there and then eventually, we took the rest of the family then and went over to Bower's on Sheridan Lake Drive. So the ten of us ended up spending the rest of the night there when we all got up there. Then the next morning after a sleepless two hours...we got back, we got to bed about 3 o'clock--or we layed down, I should say, didn't sleep--back at about 5 and came down here then, surveyed the damage, tried to figure out what we were gonna do next; and I'm not so sure but what three or four weeks later I'm still trying to figure it out. But it's, I've lived in, well,

I've lived in the Black Hills all my life--I was born in Sturgis. And I've lived with Big Bend when I was a youngster and many, many floods have come down Rapid Creek. And I guess in my 48 years I, in the time that I remember, anyway, I don't remember anything this, this severe. Now, some of that time, of course, there weren't this many buildings along the creek or some of the conditions weren't the same; but I don't ever recall of it raining that hard for that long or in that short a period, raining that, putting down that many inches of water.

Q. So you felt reasonably secure in living here.

A. Yes.

Q. How many blocks from the creek, two blocks?

A. Let's see, we're just two houses east of Argyle Street, and Argyle Street, Dunbarton and 32nd Street, and the creek is beyond that; so it's, in normal times, I would say the creek is at least two and a half blocks away. And in elevation, I guess I wouldn't even want to say. Probably not an awful lot. But we've always thought we were far enough to be reasonably safe. We're not, we haven't ever been real keen on living along the creek. I mean, down to where, at least not Rapid Creek, some small stream or something, maybe, but...I guess I might add one thing to, that might be of interest. When we bought this house, or when we built it really, or had it built in 1957, while the basement was being excavated, or the dirt was out of there, I elected to go out in the back yard and dig a well by hand. And I dug down about six or seven feet below the level of the basement floor and reached water at that point. Well, in the digging of this, in the creek (revel), I came up with a pine cone--a wet, soggy pine cone. So it indicated to me that at some time in the past history of this it had certainly been

involved in some sort of a flood.

- Q. Very interesting note. To, what do you think is the total extent of the damage to your house? Have you any estimation?
- A. No, we don't have a formal estimate; we have assumed that from pricing what house moving and foundation work that we have so far, thinking about the things that we have lost, that, that structural damage and the things that we would have to do to the house would probably, I don't think it would be repaired for less than seven thousand dollars. And I think by the time we added the things that are lost and damaged, that we would probably--and maybe this is conservative, too--but I'm thinking ten thousand dollars would probably fairly close to, to being an honest figure.
- Q. Are you planning to, to come back here?
- A. Yes, yes. We've been buying this place for 15 years, so to speak, and..
- Q. You have alot of...
- A. We plan on retaining it _____ and we're able to if the condemnation proceedings or taking area doesn't extend this far or whatever the decisions are, we intend to rebuild it and live here.
- Q. I couldn't help but overhear you talking to a person in the garage about the responsibility that the federal government might have for helping flood victims. Do you have any feelings on that that you'd like to express?
- A. Well, yes, I guess I do. I don't, I feel that, that the federal government should not have to support people indiscriminately. I think that people should learn to stand on their own two feet and be reasonably honest about their approach to things and try to do the best they can; but I've always been of the be-

lief that the purpose of government is to do those things for us that we cannot logically do for ourselves, such as collect our taxes that have to be paid to maintain some of these services that we, we need, such as health. Things that people themselves cannot really do--fight our battles for us, provide our armies if we need defense, and so on. Well, when it comes to a natural catastrophe or disaster such as this, I guess I change my thoughts a little bit to the extent that this may be one of those things that we are not able to really combat ourselves. We tried to save our money, as this gentleman mentioned out here. He had his, some of his life savings and invested it in such a fashion that it would supplement his income to where he could retire and live comfortably and not be a burden, possibly, to other people. And now if he has to re-establish his home, why, he might very well have to use some of that money. And I, I feel kind of the same way, you try to accomplish things during your life and you try to get to the point where you won't be a burden on your children, frankly; and by the same token, you don't want to necessarily live off the government. We all are expected to receive Social Security, yes; but then when it comes to a disaster like this where you set out ten thousand dollars all of a sudden--this doesn't sound like alot of money, but ten thousand dollars is probably the difference between a few things of having and not having. So, and other people are far worse shape than we are. We have a house here, we have a building and we're all alive--we're thankful for that. And our building is reasonably on the foundation, even though it did try to float away, and so the repair work to fix it up is minor compared to the people that found their building in their back yard, and later lost it, and maybe owed considerably more money on it than what I do.

- Q. Yeah. So perhaps the government should insure for unforeseen contingencies or for things that can't be insured against.
- A. Well, it isn't practical to insure against, I'm sure of that. Well, this proposal that was out a week ago or so about 90% forgiveness and a 1% interest rate, naturally this sounds like quite a give away in one sense; but on the other hand, this will enable people to build back to where they were prior to the flood and cost them 10% that they will have to pay back--which could be construed to mean betterment to their private property. So this sounded like, to me, a reasonable approach to it. We borrow money at 5 1/8%--which is currently the going arrangement--plus having 25 hundred dollars of it forgiven. This is fine for the people that borrow five thousand dollars. But the man that has been caught in the flood and needs 30 thousand dollars, that 25 hundred dollars becomes a smaller percentage of his, his overall indebtedness than it does the person that might happen to be more fortunate. So I think the percentage of forgiveness is a more equitable method of taking care of something like this for one thing. Whether it be 90% or 70% or 50%, or whatever it might be, but it would give the person with a larger disaster, so to speak, a better chance to recover.
- Q. Yeah. This is kind of a peculiar situation in that respect, isn't it, that the people that seem to have been hit the worst are the people with nicer homes or the people with, with very poor housing. It's sort of a curious mix.
- A. Yes. This probably brings up something else that has been a problem many times since this started, that the guy that has tried to do his best, worked harder, or been luckier--however you want to put it--to be in a financial position to enable himself to be farther in debt or to buy a bigger home or to have more money to go

into an equity basis and thus accomplish a larger loan, then probably bought a more expensive lot down along this bubbling brook; and all of a sudden he finds himself in far worse financial trouble because of it than a man that had a two-bedroom home or a one-bedroom home of an older nature, that he couldn't afford anything greater, and it might have even been on higher ground. So I think you're right, it, well, simply caught rich and poor and old and young and everyone else alike, it really hasn't singled out any one class of people particularly. Everyone has been hurt by it. The man with supposedly more money has been hit harder, yes. Maybe this is an equitable thing, too, in a way. But some of those people also had larger loans, I'm sure. No, this is something that I'm sure none of us here in Rapid City want to see again; and this, we hope our government--which should do some of these things also--will do something to control floods or to channel the creek or meter out flood waters--not in huge amounts, but in small bits--after the flood is over. But after the one that we have just seen, it looks like it could take quite a number of dams to accomplish this because there was a huge amount of water coming down this Rapid Creek or Rapid River. And it was rapid. It had to be, as fast as things moved. Things, I wish we had timed things more than we did, but we were so busy, so interested in things that we didn't look at watches or anything else.

- Q. People try to give estimates of the water flow, and I don't think anybody really can accurately estimate who was themselves involved, because as you say, they weren't thinking about it at the time and give a rough estimate only.
- A. We went up to the south side of Canyon Lake a couple of times now since this, and I'm sure you've been there and seen this huge gash in that dam. And it really is

a huge gash. And you stand on that spillway and look at the chain-link fence that's across the spillway and the debris that's in it, and this makes you pretty sure that the water was between two and three feet deep over the top of the walkway. And then you look out across that dam and see that huge gash in the earth, and I don't know, just maybe 300 feet across and, and the depth of it a least 50 feet deep, plus the pool of water that's now there that you can't tell how far the water has scoured down to the bottom of that structure--or what used to be the structure, anyway--and you think of the huge amount of silt and material that came out of that, plus the amount of water that was impounded at that elevation when it did break. And to us, this simply means that we might not possibly have gotten 16 inches of water in our living room had there not been that pool of water accumulated before it released. Consequently, maybe not this surge, this quick rise in water level that, I'm sure trapped many people, maybe cost some unnecessary lives there. Of course, you shouldn't look at it that way because this is something that people didn't know about. You didn't know you were gonna have this much rain. We don't know that it was going to rain 14 inches in a matter of hours. This is, well, basically, in most of South Dakota, the average annual rainfall--western half of it, anyway--all in a matter of hours. Really not being critical of anything, but it just means that something stronger should have been there than the earthen dam that was if they expected it to hold that water back.

Q. Too much faith, perhaps, on the whole concept of, of dams and earthen dams that, the idea that you're protected if there were a couple of dams up the creek.

A. Yes, when you look out across there, the dam is almost as long as the lake because it wasn't, wasn't built in the narrow part of the valley, it was built a-

cross the valley. And it wasn't intended to be, I don't suppose, a flood control measure of any kind. But it was to be something pretty, and my wife and I, when we were going to high school here, we can remember we used Canyon Lake as a swimming lake. And in recent years it has not become, not been suitable, I should say, for swimming because of pollution or various things that the Health Department declared it unsafe for swimming in that respect; and so it has really been just used for paddleboats and feeding the ducks and looking at, and it was pretty. That we have heard for years that there were some places in the dam that continually seeped. Now whether this was truth or whether there were some built-in gates in there that made people think this was the case, I don't know, but...

- Q. Does raise some questions about, about who was responsible, if the responsibility, and whether the thing could have been prevented, I suppose.
- A. Yeah, and whether these were serious things or whether they were even fact or not. Person probably shouldn't say this unless you know that it...but then it was rumored that...I've heard people say there were some leaks in it but, apparently, never became any worse or anything. And since the flood, we heard that the water overran the dam for some 45 minutes--I don't know whether this is true or not--before it finally broke, before it cut out. But it's evident, looking at the back side of the dam, that water did go over the top or it wouldn't have cut such gorges in the downstream side as there are in a few places there. So... hindsight is always better than foresight, you can look back and say, "Well, this should have been this way and that should have been that way," but we know we got water in our house, we know we got a mess, and those are facts.
- Q. Okay, thank you.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

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A. And as we left here, there wasn't any damage, we heard water running as we left the house which might have indicated possibly some of it getting in the basement or something, but... Well, then we walked to the east and farther east, probably about four blocks to some friends' house on Sheridan Lake Drive. Spent an hour and a half or so there. And the rest of the family stayed, and I asked John-- John Bowers were the people's names that we stayed with--I asked him to come back down with me. And we came back and I can't tell you the times, I suppose around 11:15 when we left here, 11:10, someplace in there. And probably about, possibly 1 o'clock, 12:30 to 1 when we came back. The water had been up and down, it was not in the living room of the house. It had been approximately 16 inches deep and things were, as you might expect, in a turmoil. Things were upset; the carpet with huge bulges in it with air trying to escape. Just a lousy mess, and looked in the basement, and, and it was the same way. We had flashlights, we went around through the house. And coming across the street though--this might be interesting--we waded west on St. Ann Street on the south side because we felt the water might be a little less deep over there and just before we reached our house, we were on the sidewalk, and the water was so swift on the sidewalk coming from the south crossing the sidewalk that you couldn't stand up. So we walked up along the hedge to the south closer to the houses, and then crossed the water where it was not so deep over into the, in the lee side of this house across from us and there was a pickup truck parked out here with the horn blaring constantly--it'd shorted out--and I decided to wade right straight across the street. And at that time the water came up, oh, on my chest. Just...didn't, I didn't seem to want to float, I could still keep my feet on the ground. And then

up on the step, and the step then was out of the water, it wasn't it wasn't standing in water at that point, but it was just about at that point. We came in, looked around, we heard some people, we thought hollering for help, and the more we listened, we decided it was, and we went back out, went in the back yard. And our neighbors had taken refuge in a poplar tree. And we went back there, waded across the back yard--which was probably about knee deep at that time--and helped them down out of the tree. One lady was hurt a little; well, in fact, her leg was quite badly bruised. One of the backyard fences had fallen on it. Helped her in here and then we brought the rest of them into our kitchen, not knowing that our house was probably less safe than their own because our foundation, which we found out later, had caved in, a good share of it. And we eventually, then...while we were doing that, the water receded about eight inches. He went up and got his pickup and brought it down closer to the house at that time, we took this one lady in a chair, carried her out to the front step and two fellows came along with a little flat-bottom boat. We put her, chair and all, in the boat and floated her out and up the street for about one house to where we reached the, where the pickup was, and then transferred her there and then eventually, we took the rest of the family then and went over to Bower's on Sheridan Lake Drive. So the ten of us ended up spending the rest of the night there when we all got up there. Then the next morning after a sleepless two hours...we got back, we got to bed about 3 o'clock--or we layed down, I should say, didn't sleep--back at about 5 and came down here then, surveyed the damage, tried to figure out what we were gonna do next; and I'm not so sure but what three or four weeks later I'm still trying to figure it out. But it's, I've lived in, well,

I've lived in the Black Hills all my life--I was born in Sturgis. And I've lived with Big Bend when I was a youngster and many, many floods have come down Rapid Creek. And I guess in my 48 years I, in the time that I remember, anyway, I don't remember anything this, this severe. Now, some of that time, of course, there weren't this many buildings along the creek or some of the conditions weren't the same; but I don't ever recall of it raining that hard for that long or in that short a period, raining that, putting down that many inches of water.

Q. So you felt reasonably secure in living here.

A. Yes.

Q. How many blocks from the creek, two blocks?

A. Let's see, we're just two houses east of Argyle Street, and Argyle Street, Dunbarton and 32nd Street, and the creek is beyond that; so it's, in normal times, I would say the creek is at least two and a half blocks away. And in elevation, I guess I wouldn't even want to say. Probably not an awful lot. But we've always thought we were far enough to be reasonably safe. We're not, we haven't ever been real keen on living along the creek. I mean, down to where, at least not Rapid Creek, some small stream or something, maybe, but...I guess I might add one thing to, that might be of interest. When we bought this house, or when we built it really, or had it built in 1957, while the basement was being excavated, or the dirt was out of there, I elected to go out in the back yard and dig a well by hand. And I dug down about six or seven feet below the level of the basement floor and reached water at that point. Well, in the digging of this, in the creek (revel), I came up with a pine cone--a wet, soggy pine cone. So it indicated to me that at some time in the past history of this it had certainly been

involved in some sort of a flood.

Q. Very interesting note. To, what do you think is the total extent of the damage to your house? Have you any estimation?

A. No, we don't have a formal estimate; we have assumed that from pricing what house moving and foundation work that we have so far, thinking about the things that we have lost, that, that structural damage and the things that we would have to do to the house would probably, I don't think it would be repaired for less than seven thousand dollars. And I think by the time we added the things that are lost and damaged, that we would probably--and maybe this is conservative, too--but I'm thinking ten thousand dollars would probably fairly close to, to being an honest figure.

Q. Are you planning to, to come back here?

A. Yes, yes. We've been buying this place for 15 years, so to speak, and..

Q. You have alot of...

A. We plan on retaining it _____ and we're able to if the condemnation proceedings or taking area doesn't extend this far or whatever the decisions are, we intend to rebuild it and live here.

Q. I couldn't help but overhear you talking to a person in the garage about the responsibility that the federal government might have for helping flood victims. Do you have any feelings on that that you'd like to express?

A. Well, yes, I guess I do. I don't, I feel that, that the federal government should not have to support people indiscriminately. I think that people should learn to stand on their own two feet and be reasonably honest about their approach to things and try to do the best they can; but I've always been of the be-

belief that the purpose of government is to do those things for us that we cannot logically do for ourselves, such as collect our taxes that have to be paid to maintain some of these services that we, we need, such as health. Things that people themselves cannot really do--fight our battles for us, provide our armies if we need defense, and so on. Well, when it comes to a natural catastrophe or disaster such as this, I guess I change my thoughts a little bit to the extent that this may be one of those things that we are not able to really combat ourselves. We tried to save our money, as this gentleman mentioned out here. He had his, some of his life savings and invested it in such a fashion that it would supplement his income to where he could retire and live comfortably and not be a burden, possibly, to other people. And now if he has to re-establish his home, why, he might very well have to use some of that money. And I, I feel kind of the same way, you try to accomplish things during your life and you try to get to the point where you won't be a burden on your children, frankly; and by the same token, you don't want to necessarily live off the government. We all are expected to receive Social Security, yes; but then when it comes to a disaster like this where you set out ten thousand dollars all of a sudden--this doesn't sound like a lot of money, but ten thousand dollars is probably the difference between a few things of having and not having. So, and other people are in far worse shape than we are. We have a house here, we have a building and we're all alive--we're thankful for that. And our building is reasonably on the foundation, even though it did try to float away, and so the repair work to fix it up is minor compared to the people that found their building in their back yard, and later lost it, and maybe owed considerably more money on it than what I do.

- Q. Yeah. So perhaps the government should insure for unforeseen contingencies or for things that can't be insured against.
- A. Well, it isn't practical to insure against, I'm sure of that. Well, this proposal that was out a week ago or so about 90% forgiveness and a 1% interest rate, naturally this sounds like quite a give away in one sense; but on the other hand, this will enable people to build back to where they were prior to the flood and cost them 10% that they will have to pay back--which could be construed to mean betterment to their private property. So this sounded like, to me, a reasonable approach to it. We borrow money at 5 1/8%--which is currently the going arrangement--plus having 25 hundred dollars of it forgiven. This is fine for the people that borrow five thousand dollars. But the man that has been caught in the flood and needs 30 thousand dollars, that 25 hundred dollars becomes a smaller percentage of his, his overall indebtedness than it does the person that might happen to be more fortunate. So I think the percentage of forgiveness is a more equitable method of taking care of something like this for one thing. Whether it be 90% or 70% or 50%, or whatever it might be, but it would give the person with a larger disaster, so to speak, a better chance to recover.
- Q. Yeah. This is kind of a peculiar situation in that respect, isn't it, that the people that seem to have been hit the worst are the people with nicer homes or the people with, with very poor housing. It's sort of a curious mix.
- A. Yes. This probably brings up something else that has been a problem many times since this started, that the guy that has tried to do his best, worked harder, or been luckier--however you want to put it--to be in a financial position to enable himself to be farther in debt or to buy a bigger home or to have more money to go

into an equity basis and thus accomplish a larger loan, then probably bought a more expensive lot down along this bubbling brook; and all of a sudden he finds himself in far worse financial trouble because of it than a man that had a two-bedroom home or a one-bedroom home of an older nature, that he couldn't afford anything greater, and it might have even been on higher ground. So I think you're right, it, well, simply caught rich and poor and old and young and everyone else alike, it really hasn't singled out any one class of people particularly. Everyone has been hurt by it. The man with supposedly more money has been hit harder, yes. Maybe this is an equitable thing, too, in a way. But some of those people also had larger loans, I'm sure. No, this is something that I'm sure none of us here in Rapid City want to see again; and this, we hope our government--which should do some of these things also--will do something to control floods or to channel the creek or meter out flood waters--not in huge amounts, but in small bits--after the flood is over. But after the one that we have just seen, it looks like it could take quite a number of dams to accomplish this because there was a huge amount of water coming down this Rapid Creek or Rapid River. And it was rapid. It had to be, as fast as things moved. Things, I wish we had timed things more than we did, but we were so busy, so interested in things that we didn't look at watches or anything else.

- Q. People try to give estimates of the water flow, and I don't think anybody really can accurately estimate who was themselves involved, because as you say, they weren't thinking about it at the time and give a rough estimate only.
- A. We went up to the south side of Canyon Lake a couple of times now since this, and I'm sure you've been there and seen this huge gash in that dam. And it really is

a huge gash. And you stand on that spillway and look at the chain-link fence that's across the spillway and the debris that's in it, and this makes you pretty sure that the water was between two and three feet deep over the top of the walkway. And then you look out across that dam and see that huge gash in the earth, and I don't know, just maybe 300 feet across and, and the depth of it a least 50 feet deep, plus the pool of water that's now there that you can't tell how far the water has scoured down to the bottom of that structure--or what used to be the structure. anyway--and you think of the huge amount of silt and material that came out of that, plus the amount of water that was impounded at that elevation when it did break. And to us, this simply means that we might not possibly have gotten 16 inches of water in our living room had there not been that pool of water accumulated before it released. Consequently, maybe not this surge, this quick rise in water level that, I'm sure trapped many people, maybe cost some unnecessary lives there. Of course, you shouldn't look at it that way because this is something that people didn't know about. You didn't know you were gonna have this much rain. We don't know that it was going to rain 14 inches in a matter of hours. This is, well, basically, in most of South Dakota, the average annual rainfall--western half of it, anyway--all in a matter of hours. Really not being critical of anything, but it just means that something stronger should have been there than the earthen dam that was if they expected it to hold that water back.

Q. Too much faith, perhaps, on the whole concept of, of dams and earthen dams that, the idea that you're protected if there were a couple of dams up the creek.

A. Yes, when you look out across there, the dam is almost as long as the lake because it wasn't, wasn't built in the narrow part of the valley, it was built a-

cross the valley. And it wasn't intended to be, I don't suppose, a flood control measure of any kind. But it was to be something pretty, and my wife and I, when we were going to high school here, we can remember we used Canyon Lake as a swimming lake. And in recent years it has not become, not been suitable, I should say, for swimming because of pollution or various things that the Health Department declared it unsafe for swimming in that respect; and so it has really been just used for paddleboats and feeding the ducks and looking at, and it was pretty. That we have heard for years that there were some places in the dam that continually seeped. Now whether this was truth or whether there were some built-in gates in there that made people think this was the case, I don't know, but...

- Q. Does raise some questions about, about who was responsible, if the responsibility, and whether the thing could have been prevented, I suppose.
- A. Yeah, and whether these were serious things or whether they were even fact or not. Person probably shouldn't say this unless you know that it...but then it was rumored that...I've heard people say there were some leaks in it but, apparently, never became any worse or anything. And since the flood, we heard that the water overran the dam for some 45 minutes--I don't know whether this is true or not--before it finally broke, before it cut out. But it's evident, looking at the back side of the dam, that water did go over the top or it wouldn't have cut such gorges in the downstream side as there are in a few places there. So... hindsight is always better than foresight, you can look back and say, "Well, this should have been this way and that should have been that way," but we know we got water in our house, we know we got a mess, and those are facts.
- Q. Okay, thank you.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

JW This is John Watterson, July 6, 1972, July 5, and I'm talking with Mr. Howard Scott at his house, 2944 St. Ann. ^{let me locate that.} Mr. Scott lives in the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of section 10, township 1 north, range 7 east.

HWS And that will record like it is now.

JW Mm-hm.

HW Well, my name is Howard Scott, I live at , or used to live rather, at 2944 West St Ann Street in Rapid City South Dakota. On ~~June~~ ^{June} the 9th in the evening, we had a,, well, maybe I should explain a little bit first, I work for Northwestern Bell telephone company, and I belong to a telephone pioneer organization. ^{and} This organization was having an annual dinner at which they change officers of the local council. This dinner was over in the east part of Rapid City. We were over there at about six o'clock, ~~and~~ ^{had} dinner there and the program of change of officers and so on, and during this program an announcement came downstairs into the dining room that Spring Creek was flooding, there was a flash flood on Spring Creek, I believe.

JW About what time was that?

HS Oh, I would say this was somewhere around seven-thirty. About that time, I believe. Seven-thirty, quarter to eight. And 'course people began to get a little nervous, and we did have an opportunity to look outside, it was just dark, it was raining and back clouds everywhere. And then the program continued, some of the people left, a few, we continued the program and then they brought another announcement and then said that it was raining in other places and flash flooding was occurring, and they finished the program.

..

JW Where is Spring Creek?

HS Spring Creek is south of Rapid City approximately, ^{oh,} I suppose, overland maybe 5 miles something like that, ~~but~~ ^{by} but by road possibly a little farther, and it is the next drainage, major drainage running somewhat east and west to the south of Rapid City. The Rapid City drainage is Rapid Creek, as everyone knows, I guess.

JW Yeah.

HS So about 8 or 8:30, I suppose 8:30 possibly, we came home. It had quit raining, we changed clothes and were watching television and we have two children, we have two girls,

HS they were both at home at the time, one is a college student the other one just graduated from high school here in Rapid City. We watched television and they had some news strips on thier about flash flooding and not to drive around and so on, but no, no major warning. ^{Apparently they =} at least this seemed absent to us, that there was, there (wasn't)

afterwards after the fact, naturally, think back about it, but it quit raining, and we walked down to the creek from our house which is a little over 2 blocks away. Walked down there and looked at it at 32nd Street and it was possibly an elevation a couple of feet or three feet below 32nd Street at that time and we walked north along 32nd to the bridge, which is another long ^{block} walk ^{on}, it's a block and a half. The bridge of Jackson Boulevard across that creek. And the water there was flowing up, up near the bridge, it wasn't going over it or anything like that or even bumping into it yet. But below the bridge, some of the houses there ^{had} got water then up, right up to their back doors, some of the buildings that were built near the creek. Well, then, we looked at this, and at the same time we noticed ^{to} ~~xxx~~ the west, lightning and real heavy dark clouds and lighter clouds back of it where the lightning was occurring. ~~Well, then we looked at this, and at the same time.~~ And it looked bad, had tails on them, you know, kind of a ragged ^{looking} ~~flicking~~ cloud, and down quite low. We, didn't like the looks of that exactly, we came back up to the house, told the kids about this and ~~there~~ ⁱⁿ were some of the neighbor kids, and one of the girls, her boyfriend was over here with us. So they all walked down and looked at the creek.

JW About what time was that?

HS I suppose that must have been around 9 o'clock, someplace in there. And then we happened to ~~talk~~ ^{talk} to some friends on the telephone in Rapid Canyon below Big Bend, between Big Bend and Hisega which is on the (Thunderhead) Falls road, is a common name for it now. We talked to her, and she said it was raining hard up there. And we understood her to say that one of the bridges on the creek was out on the road ~~crossing the creek~~ ^{was out} at that time. Up to this point we could talk about going back over to this, this pioneer doings over there, and we knew some of the ~~x~~ people that were up here from Omaha and we wanted to visit with them, but somehow or other luckily, we decided not to. The

HS more of these reports we got the more we stayed home. We talked to some people that lived closer to Canyon Lake than we do, and one report he told us the paddleboats from Canyon Lake were going by. And this kind of indicated that things were not gonna turn out very well. I don't really recall all of the events, but someplace around ten o'clock, ten-thirty, approximately, between ten-thirty and eleven we decided to get ~~xx~~ some stuff out of the basement.

JW Incidentally, when you were down at Rapid Creek, was that water, or *down looking* was that water out of the channel of Rapid Creek that was flooding those houses, ...

HS Yes, it was.

JW I see. I see.

HS But the fact that it wasn't raining, we thought maybe this was the high water, you see. In fact, we found out later that several people in Cleghorn Canyon thought the same thing. And were not pleasantly surprised. Anyway,, we moved some things out of the basement, and as we moved the last of the items, things were moving quite quickly here. I guess I should back up a little bit. Some of the neighbors, neighbors across the street to the south of us across St. Ann Street, West St. Ann street were gone and we were watching their house for them, ~~that~~ ^{this} was this house over here, went over there and I wore knee boots getting over there, and I got a little water in the tops of them crossing the street at that time. And that was probably in the neighborhood of 10 o'clock. And checked their window curtains, drapes and so on to make sure their windows weren't leaking, because it was raining here then. And came back over and we moved some of the stuff up out of the basement, and the last thing downstairs, I noticed this floor drain, the sewer started coming up. And at that same time some of the kids up here mentioned that the street was really ~~(rocking)~~ ^{running}. So we looked out and it was coming right up here, it didn't seem to be rising fast, but each time we looked, we noticed a change in it. And I had no idea how many inches it raised in a given time or anything, but all of this last ten minutes probably was, I suppose, the water could ~~xxxx~~ easily have raised 6 inches at least. Possibly more.

JW Really? Coming up, that meant it was up on the side of the house.

HS It wasn't up on the side of the house, it was right up to our garage door which was up

HS in the driveway^{ya}, and that probably meant an elevation rise of about, oh , from the gutter line up there must have been somewhere in the neighborhood of two feet. Maybe not quite. But at that point the sewer was coming up and Argyle Street, just two houses away from us or one house beyond us was running and it appeared to be, when I looked at ~~xx~~ it, I can just imagine it running about like that, maybe 20 miles an hour or something like that. A full stream. Couple of cars in front of the house on the street had floated or turned around in the street. So this meant the water was getting pretty deep out there. We then grabbed our coats , the dog, transistor radio, a camera, a jug of coffee of all things and filed out the back door into the backyard away from the flood and across to the east of the house, and as we went through the hedge at the end of the house, the water was probably about 6 or 8 inches above our knees . Probably halfway to, ^{ok. most} our hips, and then we went out across the neighbor's yard and up the sidewalk to the east which is gently rising as it goes. Then we went up about four houses, and we were out of the flood, we were out of the water at that point. Well, as we know, the water came up farther after we left.

JW Which way was the water flowing..

HS Flowing from south to north, directly..

JW Into your house.

HS Into the house, yes and across West St. Anne Street. Not with it but perpendicular to it and from south to north. ~~If~~ ~~And~~ apparently from what we 've been able to decide since then, ~~ok~~ has come around Meadowbrook School and then flowed directly north, getting back to , trying to get back to Rapid Creek again.

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JW I ~~couldn't~~ help but overhear you talking to a person in the garage about the responsibility that the federal government might have for helping flood victims. Do you have any feelings on that that you'd like to express?

HS Well, yes, I guess I do. I don't, I feel that , that the federal government should not have to support people indiscriminately. I think that people should learn to stand on their own two feet and be reasonably honest about their approach to things and try to do the best they can, but I've always been of the belief that the purpose of government is to do those things for us that we cannot logically do for ourselves, such as collect our taxes that have to be paid to maintain some of these services that we , we need, such ad health. Things that people ~~in~~ ^{themselves} cannot really do, fight our battles for us, provide our armies if we so need defenses and so on. Well, when it comes to a natural catastrophe or disaster such as this, I guess I change my thoughts a little bit to the extent that this may be one of those things that we are not able to really combat ourselves. We tried to save our money, as this gentleman mentioned out here. He ^{had} got his,

HS some of this life savings and invested it in such a fashion that it would supplement his income to where he could retire and live comfortably and not be a burden, possibly, to other people. And now if he had to re-establish his ~~home~~ home, why, he might very well have to use some of that money. And I, I feel kind of the same way, you try to accomplish things during your life and you try to get to the point where you won't be a burden on your children, *frankly*, and by the same token you don't want to necessarily live off the government, *we* all are expected to receive social security, yes; but then when it comes to a disaster like this where you set out ten thousand dollars all of a sudden, this doesn't sound like a lot of money, but ten thousand dollars is *probably* ~~practically~~ the difference between a few things of having and not having. So, and other ~~people~~ people are far worse shape than we are. We have a house here, we have a building and we're all alive, we're thankful for that; and our building is reasonably on the foundation, even though it did try to float away, *and* so the repair work to fix it up is minor compared to the people that found their building in their back yard, ~~and~~ later lost it, ~~and~~ maybe owed considerably more money on it than what I do.

JW Yeah. So perhaps the government should insure for unforeseen contingencies or ~~the~~ ^{so} things that can't be insured against.

HS Well, it ~~is~~ isn't practical to insure against, I'm sure of that. Well, this proposal that was out a week ago or so about 90% forgiveness and a 1% interest rate, naturally this sounds like quite a give away in one sense, but on the other hand, this will enable people to build back to where they were prior to the flood and cost them ten% that they would have to pay back, which could be construed to mean ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~their~~ ^{to} private property. So this sounded like, to me, ~~an~~ reasonable approach to it. We borrow money at 5 1/8% which is currently the going arrangement, plus having ~~an~~ 2500 dollars of it forgiven, this is fine for the people that borrow 5000 dollars. But the man that has been caught in the flood and needs 30,000 dollars, that 2500 dollars becomes a smaller percentage of his, his overall indebtedness than it does the person that, might happen to be more fortunate. So I think the percentage of forgiveness is a more equitable method of taking care of something like this, for one thing. Whether it be 90%, ^{or} 70%, ^{or} 50%, or whatever it might be, but it would give the person with a larger disaster, so to speak, ~~it~~

HS a better chance ^{to} to recover[?].

JW Yeah. This is kind of a peculiar situation in that respect, isn't it, that the people that seem to have been hit the worst ~~by the~~ ~~by~~ are the people with nicer homes or the people with , with very poor housing. It's ^{sort} kind of a curious mix.

HS Yes. This probably brings up something else that's ^{was} been ~~bothering me~~ a problem many times since this started, that the guy that has tried to do his best, worked harder, or been luckier, however you want to put it to be in a financial position to enable himself to be farther in debt or to buy a bigger home or to have more money to go into it on an equity basis and thus accomplish a ^{loan} (larger ~~home~~). Then probably bought a more expensive lot down along this bubbling brook, and all of a sudden he finds himself in far worse financial trouble because of ~~it~~ it than a man that had a two bedroom home or one bedroom home of an older nature, that he couldn't afford anything greater, and it might have ~~even~~ been on higher ground. So I think you're right, it, well, simply ^{caught} put, rich and poor and old and young and every one else alike, it really hasn't singled out any one class of people particularly. Everyone has been hurt by it. The man with supposedly more money has been hit harder, yes. ^{maybe} ~~Definitely~~ this is an equitable thing, too, in a way. But some of those people also had larger loans, I'm sure. No, this is something that I'm sure none of us here in Rapid City wants ^{to} see again, and this , we hope our government, which should do some of these things also, will do something to control floods or to channel the creek or meter out flood waters not in huge amounts but in small bits after the flood is over. But after the one that we have just seen, it looks like it could take quite a number of dams to accomplish this because there was a huge amount of water coming down this Rapid Creek or Rapid River. And it was ~~Rapid~~. It had to be, as fast as things moved. Things, I wish we had (timed) things more than we did, but we were so busy, so interested in things that we didn't look at watches or anything else.

JW People try to give estimates of the water flow, and I don't think anyone ^{body} can really accurately estimate who ^{was} were themselves involved, because as you say, they weren't thinking about it at the time and ^{give} rough estimate only.

HS We went up to the south side of Canyon Lake a couple of times now since this, and I'm sure you've been there and seen this huge gash in that dam. And it really is a huge gash,

HS and you stand on that spillway and look at the ^{chain-like} fence that's across the spillway and the debris that's in ~~there~~ it, and this makes you pretty sure that the water was between two and three feet deep over the top of the walkway, and then you look out across that dam and see that huge gash in the earth, and I don't know just maybe three hundred feet across and, and the depth of it at least 50 feet deep, plus the pool of water that's now there that you can't tell how far the water has ^{scoured} down to the bottom of that structure, or what used to be the structure, anyway, and you think of the huge amount of silt and material that came out of that, plus the amount of water that was ~~impounded~~ impounded ^{at} at that elevation when it did break. And to us, this just simply means that we might not possibly have gotten 16 inches of water in our living room had there not been that pool of water accumulated before it released. Consequently, maybe not this surge, this quick rise in water level that, I'm sure trapped many people, maybe cost some unnecessary lives there, of course, ^{you} shouldn't look at it that way because this is something that people didn't know about. You didn't know you were gonna have this much rain. ^{WE} ~~XXX~~ don't know that it was going to rain 14 inches in a matter of hours. ^{Oh} Well, basically in most of South Dakota, the average annual rainfall western half of it anyway, all in a matter of hours. Really not being critical of anything, but it just means that something stronger should have been there than the earthen dam that was if they expected it to hold that water back.

JW Too much ^{faith} perhaps, on the whole concept of, of dams and earthen dams ^{that}, the idea that you're protected if there were a couple of dams up the creek.

HS Yes, when you look out across there, the dam is almost as long as the lake because it wasn't, wasn't built in the narrow part of the valley, it was built across the valley. And it wasn't intended to be, I don't suppose, a flood control measure of any kind. But it was to be something pretty and my wife and I, when we were going to high school here, we can remember we used Canyon Lake as a swimming lake. And in recent years it had not become, not been suitable, I should say, for swimming because of pollution or various things that, ^{or} health department declared it unsafe for swimming in that respect; and so it has really been just used for paddleboats and feeding the ducks and looking

HS at, it was pretty, that we have heard for years that there were some places in the dam that continually seeped. Now (whether *this was* truth) or whether there were some *built-in* gates in there that made people think this was the case, I don't know, but..

JW Does raise some questions about, about who was responsible, if *the* responsibility, and whether the thing could have been prevented, I suppose.

HS Yeah, and whether these were serious things or whether they were even fact or not. Person probably shouldn't say this unless you know *that it ... but then it was rumored that ... I've heard* people say there were some leaks in it but, *apparently,* never became any worse or anything.

and Since the flood, we heard that the water overran the dam for some 45 minutes, I don't know whether this is true or not, before it finally broke, *Before* it cut out. But it's evident, looking at the back side of the dam, that water did go over the top or it wouldn't have cut such gorges *into* the downstream side as there are in a few places there. So.. hindsight is always better than foresight, *you can* look back and say, well, this should have been this way and that should have been that way, but we know we got water in our house, we know we got a mess, and those are facts.

JW Okay, thank you..

(END OF INTERVIEW)