

SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

NAME OF INFORMANT

Wilson, Swander, Loucks, Hausle

ADDRESS

Pennington County

DATE OF INTERVIEW

13 Jun 72

NAME OF RESEARCHER

Earl Hausle

OTHERS PRESENT

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW

ADDED NOTES:

Tape number 0630

SEQUENCE LISTING OF SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS INTERVIEW:

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON INFORMANT

AGE

SEX

COUNTY

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

OCCUPATION

EDUCATION

RELIGION

DATE FAMILY ARRIVED IN SOUTH DAKOTA

WHERE?

FROM WHERE?

NUMBER OF MOVES IN SOUTH DAKOTA

REASONS FOR MOVES

PERSONS FOR MOLES

NUMBER OF MOLES IN SOUTH DAKOTA

FROM AGENCIES

AGENCIES

EVER KNOWN REVEALED IN SOUTH DAKOTA

RELIGION

EDUCATION

OCCUPATION

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

AGE

SEX

COLOR

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON INFORMANTS

SEQUENCE LISTING OF SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS INTERVIEW:

FIELD NOTES:

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW

OTHER PERSONS

NAME OF INVESTIGATOR

DATE OF INTERVIEW

ADDRESS

NAME OF INFORMANT

AW DH 1. Testing... Today is June 13, 1972, we've just completed a very extensive helicopter survey from the area from east of Rapid City through up to Pactola and it appears that the thing we have to look for now is ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ to be very careful not to miss these items as far as government aid and restoring most of extensive damage that we have observed.

EH 2.

AW 1. Quite a few of the bridges are now out of service. I count at least 17 major bridges down, it appears that right here in Rapid City, our biggest problem is getting back up the bridges, getting highways and streets cleaned up, make every effort we can to get all these government agencies possible to come in here and get all the possible assistance and funds from them at this time. We should do this immediately because I feel that if we allow this ~~go~~ to go on for over a period of two to three weeks, the government will become very disinterested, they'll move out and we'll be left holding the bag, so to speak, and it looks like this position we are in right now, is a lot more damage and a lot more cost further, had ~~xxx~~ earlier anticipated.

CS This is Charlie Swander, I've just finished the tour of, on the helicopter over the city and up to Pactola. It's, attempting to assess what the cause is, it would appear to me that most work could be done on developing a (channel), now, Al Wilson has spoken to you about what we should do now, I'm thinking about the future. What can we do to keep this from happening again. Actually, ~~xxxxx~~ at Canyon Lake, the dam didn't go out, it was the retaining wall that had been built, just a dirt, earth wall that has been there for many, many years and had been well-established as being safe. But of course the big damage was done north of, or above the Canyon Lake Dam as well as below, so that the dam going out was not too much of a factor. And I'm afraid that we'll have to consider keeping housing from building right down on the creek again and possibly deepening or raising the sides of the channel, the creek so it'll carry more water. Wherever water has spread over a wide area, it's where it's been diverted by debris piling up against bridges, or in the case of the dam, if you could eliminate that piling up of debris, you would have eliminated quite a bit of the overflow and the widespread water damage that developed below that debris. The devastation of course, is almost indescribable,

CS and I won't attempt to.

BL It seems to me that as I viewed this from the helicopter, that it seems so , so much more widespread and so ... more involved than I had ever dreamed, and I think what has surprised me the most ~~a~~ is how they're, the people were able to get out as many as made it. I do feel that we have to as fast to restore it and do everything possible to prevent any situation such as this reoccurring. At least in these dimensions.

EH The last ward you heard was that of Fifth ward Councilwoman Bonita Loucks. Al Wilson, Second Ward Councilman was the first speaker; And Charles Swander from the Third Ward, of course identified himself as he talked. This is Earl Hausle. The recording of the other three speakers was made immediately after our landing in the helicopter at Camp Rapid as we drove back toward Civil Defense Headquarters at the Pennington County Courthouse in my Bronco. The helicopteer tour which we~~a~~ had was a very extensive one; we left Camp Rapid and flew toward the downtown area over across the gap making numerous circles back and forth across various areas of devastation. We went on below the city, beyond the city limits, below the Pennington County Fairgrounds and down the valley aways , then came back and re-surveyed the area, then proceeded toward Canyon Lake, made numerous circles over that area of very heavy devastation, then flew on up over Dark Canyon past Hisega, past Big Bend, on up Rapid Creek up to Pactola Dam. Then went north over 385 over to what I believe is called Deer Creek at least over to the highway 40, whereit joins 385, we came down highway 40 which is this samd Deer Creeek drainage, and Deer Creek, of course, carried a lot of water in this area, a lot of areas along it were devastated by the flood, it washed out highway 40 just below the road that turns off to the forest service work center and Deer Creek came on down and caused ~~xxxx~~ rather heavy damage to the houses just above Johnson's (Siding, sighting) where it emptied into Rapdi Creek and added to the flow of water that that creek was already carrying. We also flew north of Johnson's siding up past Norris Peak Lodge up on that~~drainage~~ drainage aways, that ~~xx~~ very small little tributar of Rapid Creek which is, carries only a trickle even most of the time, obviously also carried a fair sized torrent of water for such a small stream. At this point, the bridge just below Johnsons (Siding, Sighting) is

EH one of the points where it was obvious what was going to cause a lot of devastation. That bridge on the upstream side, which would be the north side there, was almost completely filled with debris. This caused the water to flow over the road out of its normal channel and damage the homes which are just below Johnson's(siding). As you survey it from the air, you can see the heavy tributary of Rapid Creek, every gulch and gully that leads into the Rapid Creek drainage below Pactola and including Deer Cree, which starts above it of course, carried large amounts of water into Rapid Creek and continually added to that flow of water which became larger and larger as it closed in on Rapid City. The devastation was very heavy in many places, especially where there were obstructions at bridges or other points. Flying over the dam at Canyon Lake, what used to be Canyon Lake and what is now a stream running through a lot of silt, it was apparent that the spillway area heald. That's the area that Charles Swander referred to as the dam because that's the original course of the creek. The levy or dyke or what I would call the ~~entire~~ face of the entire dam, that dirt(rolled) face, part of which broke away, apparently broke away because the water flowed over it , ate the dam out from the opposite side of that which normally holds the water, and of course then it finally broke. This brought a tremendous wall of water down upon teh inhabitants of the area, especially those in the area close to the lake. As it moved down it spread out where it could. but in many places, obviously, debris jammed up against bridges, bridges finally were forced out, but the water was forced out of its normal channel much more by the debris plugging up against the bridges than probably would have been true otherwise. And most of the bridges above the Baken Park shopping center except for the one right at the Baken Park shopping center weredestroyed. As we flew over the area, we observed several temporary bridges which ~~were~~ had put in, been put in mostly by the National Guard, but one appeared to be have put in by possibly by a private construction company so that those citizens isolated on the south side of Rapid Creek could get out. The Jackson park area above Canyon Lake, of course, was completely devastated as well as the area below it; the debris which was stacked against the bridge at Baken Park but a lot of it on the east side of that bridge, was tremendous.

EH I don't know how much lumber from how many houses was stacked there. But the National Guard was moving that out yesterday and this morning primarily with the, a bulldozer. It was just a tremendous pile of lumber. Fortunately it didn't get stacked enough against the bridge or else the bridge was strong enough to hold it and we restored it to use completely this morning. But from the air and the helicopter, one can get a much better picture of the devastation damage, you can see how wide the water spread out in the various areas of Rapid City, you can see the many homes which were, some of them merely pushed off their foundations, some of them floated a long ways from their original locations, one of them of course, which was floated clear on out the Jackson Boulevard, and by the time this tour was made, on Tuesday, several days after the flood had occurred, had ~~xxx~~ of course been pushed off of Jackson Boulevard. But when I drove by that same house, I think it was ^{on} Sunday, on Jackson Boulevard, there was one-way traffic because the house was still sitting on the Boulevard. Some houses were completely washed away; Charles Swander who'd very familiar with that area, cause most of (this) devastation occurred in Ward Three south of Jackson Boulevard, knew many of the residents, could point out from the copter their houses or where their houses had been, including that of Chris Hogan. And Chris' house, of course, apparently with he and his wife in it, was just completely washed away. We could see the foundation, and, of course, their deaths in the flood has been confirmed at this point. As we have at this time confirmed deaths of about 202. There was widespread devastation all the way down to Baken Park, and of course heavy destruction to some of the Baken Park businesses, but particularly to dwellings just across the creek west of Baken Park. The devastation of course, was heavy, also, on down through the rest of Rapid Creek, and as we went down we tried to look for areas where the normal channel had become clogged or blocked by debris and ~~xxxxxx~~ had diverted water in areas where it probably wouldn't normally have gone. All of the railroad bridges of course were taken out in this flood, a lot of railroad track is lying twisted, off the railbed in various areas; but you usually can tell where the water flowed, considerable distances away because of something that blocked the normal channel or provided it a route; the guide building which Charles Swander had

EH built and owned, was concrete block building was simply washed away down on Omaha Street. And Omaha Street at that point, which is approximately a block west of (East) Boulevard, is a considerable distance from the creek, but the waters were flowing over there strong enough to destroy that cement block building. The devastation of course would be impossible to describe; it would take hours to do that. But the cleanup by this time had proceeded, we could see where the damage had occurred, a lot of it still in evidence. In the areas, however, below Baken Park, the clean up was proceeding because today it was divided, the city was divided into three areas, and those areas were assigned to three contracting groups. Peter Kuwitz had one group and they were headquartered at Baken Park; Summit Construction had another group, excuse me, had another area; and Northwestern Engineering had the other one. And so the clean up which had gone on already on Saturday to some extent, although Saturday was primarily search and rescue, Sunday we were still on search and rescue, but we did do some clean up of course, what we had the equipment, we had lots of men available, Monday we proceeded considerably further with clean up work and today, you could see the tremendous progress that had been made in clean up which was very, very evident if you'd been in the area. Without having flown over it, of course, any of those previous days. So tremendous strides have been made in cleanup. As we made the tour in the helicopter, I have referred to Charlie Swander being able to point out the location where Chris Hogan's house was; as we proceeded toward the Canyon Lake area, I was able to easily spot the house of Dr. Lowell (Deeger), a colleague of mine at the School of Mines, who also perished, apparently along with one of the children, and his house, which was located, it still is standing, of course, on Shore Lake Drive half a block or a block south of Rapid Creek on the corner. You could see the collapsed northern end of the structure, which I assumed from the helicopter was the garage; it was obvious that probably had the family stayed in the upper level of this home, which is almost a three-level home in a sense, they probably would have all survived. However, they attempted to escape and Lowell and one of the children were swept away by the waters. Very near Canyon Lake on Riverdale Drive was the home of another one of my colleagues, Herbert Wise of the mining engineering

EH department, the philosopher among us, I guess, in the field of engineering at the school of Mines, a man who had spent a great deal of time reading and with home I had spent many a pleasurable hour in discussion, whose rye sense of humor I had always enjoyed so much. And who died in this terrible tragedy. I, I didn't know where his house was because he had recently moved into it, but Charlie Swander was able to ~~pick~~ point out Riverdale Drive and teh tremendous destruction there was clearly evident. Of course many of these people had no opportunity, apparently, to escape, not realizing the imminent danger of the flood or of the breaking of the dam that held Canyon Lake. There are of course, a great many printed descriptions of this flood, ~~but~~ ^{that} there are ~~no~~ areas where the water obviously spread as wide as possibly five blocks and perhaps six in some areas, it was , of course, narrower than that in some places depending on the obstructions, the channel, the topography and otehr factors. It's my opinion, as of this moment on the 13th of June, 1972, as a councilman in Rapid City that the city of Rapid City should not allow any further building in the area covered by this flood. I believe that the city, hopefully with the help of the federal government and perhaps the state governmtn ^{would} ~~be able~~ to acquire the land along the banks of Rapid Creek and make it an open space developemtn through the city. I think that this would add to the beauty of the city, the full length of it, east and west, just as our various parks, such as Jackson Park have added to it, or excuse me, I mean the park, that extends approximately from Baken Park up to 32nd Street, up to (\$ioux),. I think that this kidd of a development throughout the entire city would beautify the city, I think it ~~should~~ have a minumum of trees close to the stream because they, they will tend to some extend to collect debris and it'd be obstructions if they are planted in groups and rows and so on, ~~and~~ I think this should befigured out from a scientific and engineering standpoint before any planning is done, and I think this should become an open space as development, the full length of the whole city , Now, of course we had one of these just barely under way in the area between West Boulevard and East Boulevard, but we're going to have to make it much more extenseive. One thing is fortunate, we ~~have~~ already own a considerable part of this land from, from the north side of Rapid Creek from Baken Park to 32nd Street. I believe that it would be irresponsible on thepart of city government

EH to allow buildings to exist in this flood plain area. I think it's a responsibility of government to protect its citizens and especially those citizens who five or ten or fifteen or twenty years from now will not know, will not remember the dangers of living in a low-lying area. I have told people many times and not just because of this flood, but in previous Rapid City floods that I've simply lived in this country too long to build a home in an area that's in a draw or a gully or a drainage of any kind. I simply wouldn't do it because I've observed too many of these floods and the results of too many of them. And as an official elected by the people, I think I have a responsibility, as I think all other councilmen do to take what action~~xxx~~ we can to prevent the buildup in this areas. I would like to turn my attention now briefly to the aftermath of the flood and what action has taken place since then. I moved into action as soon as I could on Saturday morning, confusion reigned, of course, throughout the city; I tried to get someone to ~~listen~~ listen to me all through Saturday morning as I suggested and recommended that we should have asked for a declaration of martial law. I believe that this would have been a helpful thing, I think it was our duty and obligation to do so, we should have brought in as many federal troops as needed under martial law to seal off' and cordon off the devastated area, to secure it , to protect the people and the property within it, to keep out sightseers and looters who did nothing but hamper rescue operations and search operations and to some extent later on the clean up operations. I made that ~~xxxx~~ motion to do that at a councilmeeting on Saturday; it was not supported. The mayor didn't seem to think it was necessary; not enough of the councilmen felt it was. The effort was a little better coordinated on Sunday as we divided the town into areas and councilmen manned command posts the length of the city except for the area above Baken Park which was the responsibility of the National Guard, and the Guard was doing strictly search and rescue and on Sunday that's what the rest of us were doing mainly too, but you had to do some clean u p work to do search and rescue because you had to move car bodies, you had to move trailers, you had to move debris, and of course that required a great deal of heavy equipment. And we were short of some of that equipment on Sunday. We realized that there was a need for much better control; Paul Ness, who had

EH worked very hard , pleaded before a council meeting that one person be appointed to control the entire operation so that we could avoid the ~~xxxx~~ ~~xxx~~ conflicts and the problems which were plaguing ^{us} ~~the~~ in getting the job done. This was not done. On i Monday we had a somewhat different plan of action. Construction companies however, had to move their equipment in particularly on Monday, Peter Kuwitz moved into a ~~xxxx~~ certain area, I was attempting to coordinate the area one effort which ranged from the water treatment plant to the ~~xxx~~ West Boulevard Bridge, the west side of the West Boulevard bridge. And I was aided and assisted by Knut Knutson, particularly on Sunday up through most of Monday morning when Ray O'Brien, who happened to come over to the Baken Park area, and I ~~happend~~ ^{found} to find out that he, like Knut Knutson, was a n experienced construction superintendent and (I) took over and thse two gentleman really did a trmendous job in that area. They knew what kind of equipment was needed, how it could be used, and they were just invaluable, they, they did a great deal more than I could have done because I'm not knowledgeable in those areas. Well, on Tuesday we had a somewhat differnt plan of action, we had very poor communications on Monday with headquarters, we were operating almost alone, the only thing that we had ^{that} was the same as the previous day was the same area and the REACT units. On Tuesday the plan changed entirely, we got better organizational structure at Civil Defense Headquarters, the various command posts such as those at Baken Park were phased out, the city was divided and turned over to construction companies, and the Guard continued to work in the area for which they were responsible, but we still weren't fully coordinated and controlled like we should have been; as I advocated (we) be, and I had to , attempt to clarify various ^(snafflers) that were ~~xxxx~~ occured, they quite often (snafflers) in communication. One had to do with food. I came down , left the Baken Park post after being there a short time, getting in touch with Ray O'Brien and telling him waht the plan was that I'd found out from the courthouse, then proceeded to the courthouse, reported ~~xxxx~~ to Pual ~~xxxx~~ Ness, asked Paul in what way I could be of most service. He came down, acquainted me with the organizational structure and asked me to, the first thing he asked me to do was obtain a table which was a very simple and very easy task very quickly

EH of course, then he put me in charge of finding storage. We had three problems in storage, one would be the of the items recovered by people from the flood, this was coordinated through Mr. Childs and through the welfare people, and they're doing a good job on it. The next area concern to us was the storage of massive amounts of aid that were arriving in the area. And I found warehouse space primarily in the public schools, but I found some at the airport, this already of course had been started, and a large amount of storage space had been provided at the request of Ron Stevens by the U.S. Air Base, and so we had a lot of supplies already stored there, but we knew we were gonna need more space. But in the process of this, in calling Dr. Lindley to check storage space from the schools, Lindley had some federal man in his office and there seemed to be a problem with who was going to handle the food distribution which Lindley thought had been taken care of the day before. So we had the man come down along with Charles Steward who's the man in charge of personnel for the Rapid City School System and (Lindley? Little gave) him full authority to do what was needed on the part of the school system, and they've done a magnificent job here in cooperation, I want to say. Another man came down and we found out what we had was a communications breakdown, so the problem was quickly resolved. But this type of thing has continually plagued us, and while I don't think the operation could have been run regardless of organizational structure without some problems, some errors, some mistakes, I just feel that we've had a tremendous amount of confusion, we've changed our plan from day to day and it took us finally till Tuesday to get to one that I think we'll stick with basically from now on. And we should have set this up or it should have been set up ahead of time so that we could have moved into action with this on Saturday. There's no question that had the Civil Defense plan been followed as it's laid out by the manual, that we would have had the kind of coordination that I believe we needed to handle this disaster in a more efficient fashion. And I believe that we'd better take a very close look at this structure and find out why it wasn't followed or if we shouldn't follow it, what it should be replaced with. We should be ready in the case of these disasters to move in with a single command, unified function, the kind of thing that was pointed out...

(End of Tape)