

Excerpt from book by Annie D. Tallent titled:
The Black Hills; or, The last hunting ground of the Dakotahs
Excerpts regarding floods of 1878 and 1883

It was in 1878 that the swollen streams of Deadwood and Whitewood rushed down the gulches and, after uniting their waters below, carried from their foundations a number of small structures that had encroached too closely upon the borders of the latter stream. It would not have been quite so damaging, perhaps, had not a dam that had become gorged above on Whitewood creek given way to the pressure, letting or rather precipitating an avalanche of water which swept in great waves ten or more feet deep down the valley, flooding the buildings on the lower levels, and undermining danger of its toppling over into the turbulent stream.

In connection with this flood an act of heroism is recalled which is worthy of record. When the avalanche of water came, a rather slightly built man was struggling bravely through the water nearly waist deep towards a building near a Deadwood street bridge, in the door of which stood knee-deep in water, a stout woman of 200 pounds avoirdupois, calling lustily for help. Upon reaching the imperiled woman, he clasped his arms around her ample waist, and gallantly but pantingly bore her safely to higher ground, I meanwhile standing on the opposite side of the street in two feet of water laughing heartily at the ludicrous spectacle. That man was a hero, and his name was John Meade, of the firm of Robert Chew & Co., located on Lee street, whom doubtless many of the old-timers will remember. As the incident is not essential to this history the name of the rescued woman is withheld. But I have digressed and will now return to the more important story of the flood of 1883.

It was in the early part of May, 1883, about the usual time for the final breaking up of winter in the Black Hills, that a heavy snowstorm broke over the northern Hills which, supplemented by a warm protracted rain, accelerated the melting of the unusually heavy snows that had accumulated in the mountains during the previous winter, bringing down small rivers of waters through hundreds of gulches and ravines into the main streams, which went coursing madly on down the narrow valleys to the doomed city.

About the middle of May the situation became alarming but nothing could be done to avert the impending calamity, more than to remove valuable property to places of safety. All that day the ever-increasing volume of water came rushing down from above, piling up its freight of trees, roots, branches, lumber, logs, sluice boxes, cordwood, and all sorts of debris against the Lee street bridge, despite the herculean efforts of the citizens at Deadwood to clear the way of obstructions. Towards evening the irresistible current turned and found for itself a new channel through the city. By order of the city authorities a

number of buildings that stood in the track of the water were speedily torn down and removed to prevent its further spread. All the night through, with the appalling roar of the mighty torrent sounding in their ears like a veritable Niagra, the firemen and citizens struggled valiantly to relieve the gorged condition of the channels, while others were engaged in removing valuable property from such buildings as seemed destined to destruction. That was a terrible night, the like of which the people of Deadwood would not care to have repeated.