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The Mitchell Area Historical Society (MAHS)
& The Mitchell Area Genealogical Society (MAGS)

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Once upon a time in law enforcement

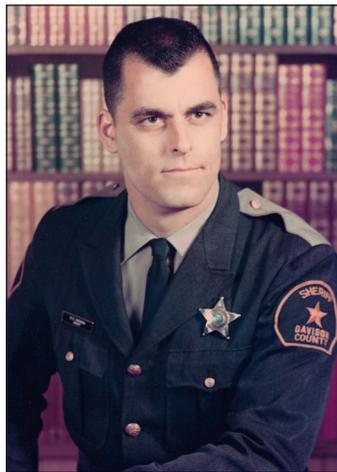
Lyle Swenson's story of progress in the Davison County Sheriff's Office

By Lyle Swenson
MAHS President

"Once Upon A Time" was the heading on many historical stories in the past, and I suppose I could start my law enforcement career story in the same way. It all started on March 9, 1961, as it was my first day with the Davison County Sheriff's Office and Sheriff George Carstens.

Prior to this I was employed by the SD Department of Highways located in Mitchell as a parts room manager. We supplied auto and truck parts, snowplow parts and repairs, highway salt and most anything else they might need in a seventeen-county area. In that time period all highway employees worked under the State Highway Commission, a highly political system led by the governor! When the Democratic Governor Ralph Herse, running for his second two-year term, was defeated, the state employees were all terminated! My last day was March 8, 1961. No reason was given, just DONE!

I was looking for work and George Carstens was looking for a deputy. The job had very poor pay at \$275 a month with a \$50 added amount for car expense because I had to fur-



nish my own vehicle. At the time I took the job I was driving a 1955 Cadillac but later had to get a Rambler for my use.

On my first day I received everything I would need to carry out my duties, a badge and a set of keys. The badge gave me the authority to do the job as I was not sworn in by anyone.

The key was to the gun cabinet; this I remember the most.

When the cabinet was opened, I was told that there were some handguns on the top shelf. If I found one that worked, I could carry it! Now understand, he did not ask if I knew how to use one or if I had ever fired one. The top shelf had a dozen old military Smith and Wesson .38 caliber handguns that had

been cleaned of cosmoline (Vaseline-type preservative that was used to preserve firearms) and stored there. I had no training except the location of the guns and possession of my badge. Later, I realized that I needed training and had to go find it to learn how to do my job.

This short review of the office and the on-the-job training stirred my desires to do the job better and at some point, be the Sheriff. In February 1964 George told me that he would not seek another term after 15 years of service for he and Martha. Then in April 1964, just two months after his retirement announcement, he died very suddenly. Martha, his wife, was appointed to complete his term through December 1964.

On the very day that George announced his decision to the public, I announced that I would be a candidate for Sheriff. My long-time friend from high school days, Wally Overbaugh, was a disk jockey for the local radio station and assisted me in making the announcement. A former deputy for George contacted me that night and wanted me to back out. He proposed that he would keep me on as a deputy.

I said, "No, thank you. Let's let the election settle the issue."

A city police officer later announced his intention to seek the office. A Republican candidate who had run two years before against George and had come the closest to defeating him also came out for the office.

During the campaign, questions arose about my age of 29. I had a salesman come in one day and ask to see the sheriff.

I told him, "You are looking at him."

His response, "Can't be because the sheriffs I know are older and fat and you are neither!"

After a few laughs we got down to business. On another occasion, Bud Homan, a county commissioner, told me that he was hearing that I was too young, also. His argument to them was, "Well, who is doing the job now?" As the deputy, I did almost everything.

We hired Sam Addy, a fairly new Mitchell city policeman, part-time to help with transporting prisoners.

During the summer we ended up with a murder in Mitchell that took a great deal of time and effort to get a conviction leaving little time for campaigning.

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Genealogy Corner

By *Beth Vlasman Walz*
MAGS President

Hello! As I write this genealogy corner, we are currently still social distancing and the CRC has just opened to the public. We (genealogy enthusiasts) have not let COVID issues stop us from researching, catching up on scanning, filing, planning our next genealogy excursion, etc.

The genealogy society here is undergoing a few CHANGES.

The officers have made the decision to combine the program nights and business meeting nights. When we can resume meetings, we will be holding the meeting/program nights on the fourth Monday of the month.

The business meeting will be held at 6 p.m. and the programs will be held at 7 p.m. You are welcome at either or both times. We hope this new schedule will encourage attendance to both the business meeting and the program.

We do not have a schedule of programs yet but will begin with the ones previously scheduled. These were on our agenda prior to the COVID shut down. We will let you know via email when we are resuming meetings and programing.

- Getting the Rest of the Gold out of the Google Gold Mine for Genealogists - BYU
- Are These Really My Ancestors? - The Barefoot Genealogist
- Scrapbooking Your Genealogy

Stay healthy and we hope to see you soon!

CRC honors law enforcement

This year the CRC is honoring the Law Enforcement division of Public Safety. Our plans were scheduled for May, but that all changed with covid-19, so we are planning our event for later this year. We plan to display Lyle's extensive collection of law enforcement patches and other memorabilia.

All other CRC events have been cancelled. We'll keep you informed when our activities begin again.

Once upon a time ...

But in the end, we were very successful in both the primary race in June and the general election in November 1964 when we more than doubled our two opponents in the primary, as well as, the general election. Yes, indeed, the voters were very kind to me as I went the next 22 years, five 2-year terms and three 4-year terms with no opposition! The last three terms I did have opposition but was successful until I resigned in 1997 to accept the appointment as United States Marshall for the District of South Dakota. I served five years retiring in 2002.

The 1986 election was my closest call to re-election when a deputy who had resigned previously came out and did very well, but we did win. He came back four years later, but I won very decisively. In 1996 my last election was not even close as a Mitchell police officer filed a petition to run on the very last day that he could file at 5 p.m. on the Independent ticket. It was a very big win and a few days later he informed me that I would never see his name on a ballot again. He was done. Unless you have been through an election that involves your livelihood, you don't know the anguish that candidates go through prior to the elections. My friends kept telling me not to worry as it would be an easy win, but until the final vote tally was in, I was always worried.

The Sheriff's apartment was on the fourth floor of the courthouse next to the jail. George and his wife Martha lived in this apartment. After George's passing, Irene and I offered to move in as we felt it was no place for Martha to be alone. We knew it was iffy because if I was defeated in the election, we would have to move out! We lived in the jail apartment for about three years and paid \$50 per month rent. Just think, \$50 rent, free water and heat all so I could be on call 24 hours a day every day, 365 days a year. In 1967 our first child was on the way and the jail apartment was

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no place to raise a baby. I told the commissioners we would be moving out. They wanted to know what I was going to do as they thought the sheriff had to live there! I told them I guess we will have to hire someone, and they finally agreed.

Apartment living next door to the jail was a rude awakening even though we had stayed a time or two when the Carstens left town for a short time. If I got called out at night, Irene was there alone to oversee any problems that might arise. It didn't matter if I had been out all night on a call, we still had to be up to feed the prisoners, etc. Entertainment might include watching black and white TV with rabbit ears antenna, which was poor at best, having friends over to play cards or going to a movie which was another ordeal. I shake my head today about leaving the building for two or three hours with no one to respond in case of fire or illness!! I guess we didn't think about it as that was the way it was done before us, but boy were we ever lucky that no bad incidents occurred. As I later learned sheriffs across the country in small counties like ours did the same thing.

We had a dog, so we had to learn apartment living with a pet. Going out to do her thing was easy because "Tags" liked riding the elevator; going out often became a thing for her. During the summer we were favored with a band concert on Friday evenings by the Municipal Band. Of course, we had ring-side seats as our apartment was directly above the bandstand.

The jail was built in 1933 and was secure if operated properly. It did have problems now and then, so I had to learn the tricks of the trade about the building so to speak. The elevator was a Godsend for getting back and forth, but every so often we found someone wandering around. We had to get the elevator keyed so only authorized people got to the fourth floor.

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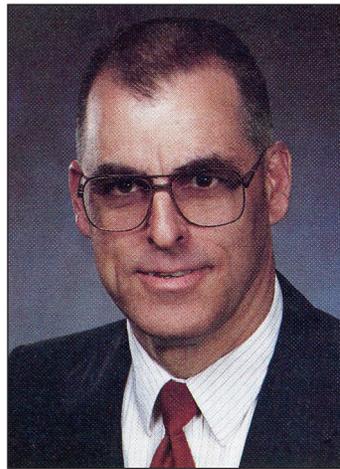
Once upon a time ...

If the elevator became stuck between floors with someone in it, we had a process to make entry into the top of the car to remove them. Those people who had been stuck were usually panicky by the time we got them out. Communication on the fourth floor could also present a challenge. We had no two-way radio capability on the fourth floor, so we constantly depended on the Mitchell PD for getting timely messages after hours and weekends. Eventually we resolved these problems, but it always took money!

Another of the problems we had to endure was a poorly operated boiler system. Steam heat was used, and the new custodian/jail officer/retired plumber told the county board that the boiler was being operated backwards.

The boiler was nearly full of water with little room left for steam, just backward of what it should have been - nearly full of steam with just a little water. The offices and apartment were always hot, even in the winter, so we had to open windows to tolerate it. This also dried the air out big time which dried us out. During the summer the custodian replaced all the radiator valves throughout the building allowing the boiler to operate at full efficiency as it was designed to do.

Another plumbing problem was getting hot water to the jail kitchen, showers and apartment. You could be taking a shower and if anyone flushed a toilet anywhere in the building, you were either frozen quickly



or scalded. I found a control valve that would keep the water temp constant without fluctuation. The commissioners winced at the cost of over \$100, but it made life on the fourth floor much more tolerable. All this created a better workplace as well as saving the taxpayer money.

One evening a trooper brought in a drunk driver. After booking him in, we took the elevator to the fourth floor; as I was unlocking the outer door to the jail, I saw the prisoner's fist coming at me, as I turned out to avoid the blow, I broke the key off in the door. The prisoner missed me but lost his balance, due mostly to his intoxication, fell down the stairs all the way to the landing.

He seemed to feel no pain, so we checked him over, took him back up the stairs and put him in jail with no after-effects.

Oh, yes, I did have to replace the broken key from my own money!

We hosted a Swenson family reunion at the courthouse. The bandstand on the northside of the building was the dining

area and the kids had a fun time running and playing in the yard. In the evening the family went to Wally's Photo Studio for family pictures.

While we were away, the police department brought in a very intoxicated female drunk driver. I don't recall who we had watching the jail while we were gone, but did we have a stinking mess on our return. It seems the prisoner had filled her pants and lost it all the way to the cell block. Oh, the joys of a jail officer trying to clean up that mess!

One of the hardest rules to learn and teach was to not trust prisoners, no matter how nice they were. As I said the jail was reasonably secure if you followed the rules of operation, but when you did not, you usually had trouble. Most of the time, if prisoners escaped, it was human error and not the jail that was responsible.

Contraband items in the jail were always an issue. One of the ways prisoners got contraband into the jail was to somehow get string. They would weight it so they could toss it out the east window where one of their friends on the ground would attach the contraband (i.e. cigarettes, hacksaw blades, etc.) and the prisoner could pull it up.

This failed most of the time because there were too many corners and hang-ups; the merchandise never made it all way up to the window to be retrieved.

The windows had to be opened to make it tolerable because there was no AC in the jail.

Eventually a heavy wire

mesh was put over the bars to solve this issue. The prisoners were always trying to beat the system; it became a game to stay ahead of them.

An event that will forever be burned into our memories happened one evening while we were living there. Every once in a while, Irene and I would go to a movie. On this particular night we left, and upon our return I went over to the jail block to lock down the cells for the night. Inmates' individual cell doors were not locked during the day so that they could take advantage of the day room that had a radio and bolted picnic table available in the jail block area.

At night the inmates were to be in their cells and the cell doors would be locked with a lever from the outside of the jail block.

This night upon closing the cell doors, I decided to go into the jail block and check things out. Earlier that day I had put the mop bucket with ringer and mop in the jail block so inmates could clean. I forgot to go back and take it out!

After entering the jail block, an inmate jumped out from a side wall with an 18" piece of 3/4" pipe (handle from the mop ringer) in one hand and a can of pepper that had been on the picnic table for seasoning of meals in the other and started to swing the pipe towards me.

I screamed at him and backed out of this door, slamming it shut and at the same time reached around to the control box hitting the lever that locked the interior door.

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Monsters of the Prairie

Sometimes we forget what a blessing an early warning system gives to those of us who live in tornado country. Even with the early warnings, sometimes we get caught by these monster storms. Tornadoes destroy millions of dollars of property, take lives and create many hours of anxiety every year in the United States.

South Dakotans are among those threatened each year. The Argus Leader in June of 2019 reported that, "Since 1950, when agencies began documenting tornado data regularly, South Dakota tornadoes have killed 18, injured 465 and caused over \$300 million in property and crop damage." Adding to these figures are the millions of dollars in damage from the tornadoes that hit Sioux Falls in September of 2019.

Citizens of the United States have always been interested in observing and documenting the weather. Many of the early founders kept records about the weather and developed instruments to do just that; it is reported that George Washington recorded weather information the day before he died.

Concerns over the impact of weather have not lessened. According to United States History.com, "Early Weather Bureau forecasters were not permitted to issue tornado forecasts for fear of causing panic. The ability to make accurate forecasts of severe storms was made possible with the development of modern methods of upper air



SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION SHOP at Fourth and Ohlman in Mitchell was destroyed in the 1962 tornado.

observation and air-mass analysis."

In 1962 South Dakota was hit with a series of storms that changed the lives of some families forever. Senator Karl Mundt introduced S. 132 to establish a National Weather Council that would study causes of storms, make predictions, and possibly influence the weather to aid citizens in dealing with adverse weather. Although a separate entity was not established, many of the ideas and concerns raised by this issue have been incorporated into the National Weather Service. Senator Mundt had read into the record an article dealing with the tornadoes that hit South Dakota, including the area around Ethan, Roswell and Lake Andes in 1962. The following is an excerpt from the Congressional Record: Proceeding and Debates of the United States Congress,

April 1, 1963, pages 5263-5265, volume 109, Part 4:

"TORNADO"

Mr. Mundt. Mr. President, weather, good and bad, is a vital force affecting all of us. Most of the time we do notice the weather. When we do it is usually because weather is a cause of some discomfort.

But on occasion the weather, or the forces of nature which determine our weather, get out of hand.

And we experience disastrous results.

In my part of the country - South Dakota - the weather "got out of hand" last May. We are located on the fringe area of tornado alley. But last May it seemed as if our State became the heart of this vast area subjected to the summer tornadoes which have been a source of much concern.

The story of what happened last May is reported

in the April 1963 issue of the Reader's Digest. The author is Helen Rezatto, freelance writer and part-time English instructor at South Dakota State College.

I bring this article before the Senate as a matter of interest pertaining to a measure which I have introduced. This bill is S. 132 and its purpose is to establish a National Weather Council.

The late Senator Francis Case authored this measure in the last Congress. No action was taken on the bill and I have again introduced it.

A National Weather Council would promote programs of atmospheric, meteorological and weather research to advance and expedite knowledge of the weather, its development and trends, as well as give thorough study to the modification or control programs.

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Monsters of the Prairie ...

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The spine-tingling narrative of Mrs. Rezatto demonstrates, I believe just one of the problems of weather to which such a council could devote its study.

Through the work of such a council it might be possible someday to alleviate the fears of the people of the Midwest over tornadoes through the achievement of some program or some discovery which would stop such a storm before it started.

Experiments have already been made in this direction and I am confident that with the assistance of a council, as outlined in my bill, S. 132, the impossible could very well become the possible in the area of weather control and modification.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to include in the body of RECORD at this point, the story of Mrs. Rezatto appearing in the Reader's Digest.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD as follows:

ONE WEEK OF HORROR ON THE GREAT PLAINS

(By Helen Rezatto)

(For days on end last May one tornado after another rampaged across South Dakota spreading desolation.)

It was raining lightly on May 14, 1962, and spring showers were always welcome on the Great Plains. Farmer Emil Ziebart of Ethan, a town in southwestern SD glanced at the churning clouds massing in the southwest. He decided there was just time to plow another furrow before supper.

Nearing the end of the



THE EMIL ZIEBART FARM near Ethan after the 1962 tornado ripped through the area.

round, he checked the sky again. A grayish-black cloud wall about a half-mile wide loomed over his neighbor's grove. Below it hung a funnel-shaped mass, tapering toward the earth. Then suddenly, as he stared, horrified, the trees disappeared, flicked up as easily as a vacuum cleaner sucks up dust specks.

He jerked the plow from the earth and turned the tractor toward home. Behind him, advancing, the cavernous cloud mouth gaped hungrily.

He jumped from the tractor, raced toward the shelter belt on the west side of his farmyard, dived head-first through the wire fence and grabbed the nearest tree trunk. There was a strange, ominous silence. Emil Ziebart gasped for breath in the weighted, Stygian air. He could hear only the pounding of his heart.

Then there was a stupendous Niagara of sound and he felt a heavy blow on his back. He dug his face into the ground as the tornado roared over him.

Soon the black, omnivorous wall, the pressure, the horrendous noise were gone. Ziebart raised his head slowly.

The top of the tree he was clutching was not there. Uprooted trees lay grotesquely like piles of rotting weeds, their roots hanging limp.

Twisted, spiky pieces of tin, shattered lumber, and overturned corn picker, huge drifts of last year's cornstalks, dead chickens – all lay in chaotic heaps as far as he could see. Beside him was a naked pheasant, only with its remaining neck plumage identifying the lifeless form.

Dazed, Ziebart stood up. He shook his head. Some-

thing was wrong. He must be confused about the directions, he decided. Where was the barn, the silo, the granary, the chickenhouses--all his buildings?

Gone. There was nothing standing, just mountains of debris.

Fearfully, he peered beyond for the house. He saw the remains of the front steps, leading up into empty space. Then he saw his home, completely lifted from the foundation, jammed against the tortured trees, roof fragments dangling pitifully like shattered human limbs. And his family?

He scrambled drunkenly over the littered mess. 'Oh God! They're all dead! It's taken everything. They're gone!' It was the immemorial cry of a man against nature's cruelty.

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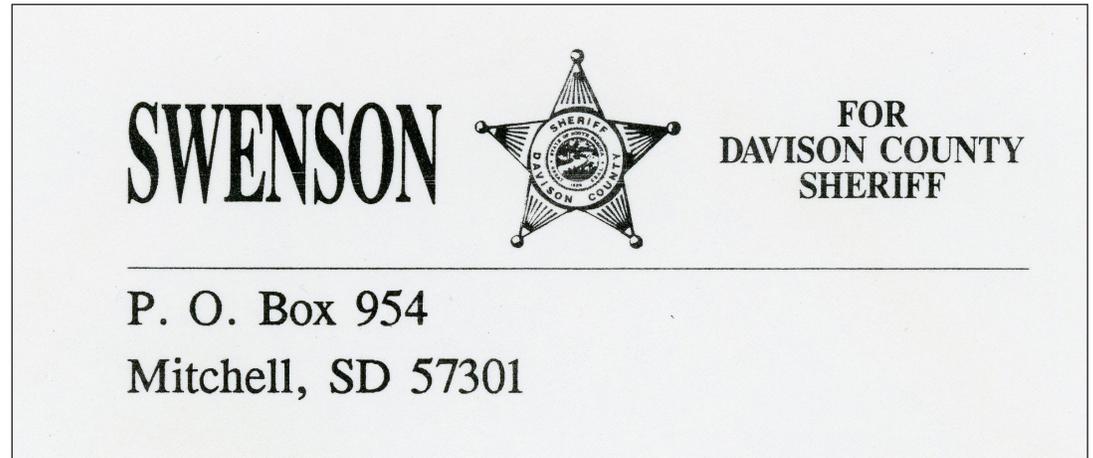
SWENSON USED YARD STICKS with his slogan on them as one of his campaign tools, as shown above. BELOW, Swenson also used personal-

Once upon a time ...

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I then locked the main door, ran to the phone and called the police department for help. I returned to the jail block, and the inmate handed me the pipe and pepper, apologized and returned to his cell. By that time two officers from the police department were at the north door waiting to get in. I used the intercom and told them that I was OK, and the situation was under control. They insisted that they had to see me and verify that I was OK and not a hostage. Lesson learned – use the protected catwalk along the northside of the jail block, do not go in the jail block without assistants! As a side note, the inmate later wrote an apology stating he was sorry for the trouble he had caused.

Another lesson we learned quickly in law enforcement was you never had enough help to do every job, so you depended on your neighboring agencies, police departments and highway patrols in time of need. Hanson County Sheriff Dewey Heineman and Aurora County Sheriff Gerrit Brink were always there when needed and most of the time without being called. On one occasion we had received a mental warrant on an individual here in town. I had dealt with the subject previously and knew it would most likely be a very physical confrontation. I had lined up sever-



al officers to assist us. Sheriff Brink called to offer his services as he was coming over anyway. It was shortly after lunch when we located the man in the Carnegie Library and laid out a plan. I sent Sheriff Brink into the Library to try to get him out under the guise of a long, lost WWII friend.

Once out of the building we thought we could deal with him. Sheriff Brink did a great job convincing him that they in fact knew each other and got him to come outside so they could talk. All was fine until he got out to the main sidewalk and the subject saw me and then the fight was on. He knew he had been had and ran out into the middle of Third Street before I caught him with a big bearhug. All the help ascended on us and we got him off the street into the bank parking lot. Eventually we got the straight jacket on him and we thought we had the problem resolved. We

transferred him into the backseat of my patrol car. He went in on one side and back out of the other. By this time, we had a crowd watching the affair and it wasn't pretty.

Milliken Funeral Home was conducting a funeral across the street in the Methodist Church. Dennis Will happened to look out and see our predicament. He came over and offered their station wagon as a means of transportation to Yankton.

We headed with six officers holding the guy down on his stomach with his legs tied together at the knees and ankles. He kept wanting to turn over on his back, and of course, we wouldn't dare do that as he would have stretched the top out. He was a large man and consequently he was very hard to control. On our arrival at the hospital in Yankton, he turned into a mild mannered individual as he had been there

before and knew the game. When the doctor came out to the car, they were both on a first name basis and there was no fight. We took him to the doorway, then the security ward and we returned home.

Over the years we had numerous violent cases of a similar nature, always difficult to handle. It was the Sheriff's job to transport once the County Court issued the order. It certainly wasn't a job for the faint-hearted. We were often dealing with violent people. We had to protect them from themselves as well as take care of our own personal safety. That 90-mile trip got very long at times!

In those days we might only have 2-3 prisoners in our jail, but as time went by, we started picking up more and more, and it wasn't long before we were full and running over. We could hold 18-20 men and 2 women. It wasn't long



ized envelopes in his campaigns for sheriff of Davison County.

and we were out of room, so expansion increased the women to 6. It started out with the county paying me \$2 per day to feed each prisoner. Because we were the only jail of any size in the area, we housed prisoners for 10 counties at one time or another. We charged other counties \$2 per day and the sheriff got that for feeding. The county got nothing! We soon changed the fee to \$5 per day with county getting some for housing and the sheriff for feeding. Eventually, the county took over all expenses.

When a job requires 24-7 attention, burn out is always a concern and can occur quickly. The sheriff's duties are varied and constant. To start the day, breakfast must be served to inmates before rushing down to the office on the first floor by 8 a.m. Once in the office there are duties to complete. In addition, auto accidents, crimes such as burglary and theft of property must be investigated, and mental health complaints must be checked out.

There were court duties and civil processes to be served. Election days were always busy times for the Sheriff's office every two years. Just prior to election day, a training school was held for the poll workers to explain their duties. Voting supplies and ballot boxes were handed out. Most boxes were left for the sheriff to deliver to the precinct superintendents'

residences throughout the county. Mondays before an election day we were hauling boxes which I quickly observed was wasted time because the superintendents could just as easily have taken them home from the school. It took a while, but we finally got away from that job. It was always a mad dash to get last-minute, absentee ballots delivered to the various precincts by 7 p.m. or they would not take them! The election laws are very clear about this point. At the end of the day, we usually had to split the ballots among the deputies and each head in a different direction to beat the deadline.

When I first was elected to office, almost all positions were two-year terms so you were required to take out a petition after the first of the year, obtain a certain number of signatures of registered voters that said they would support you in the election. I did that five times for the first ten years.

In 1974 the state legislature changed the law raising the term from two years to four years. It seemed we were running for office constantly with two-year terms. Take out petition in January, primary election in June, and then campaign until November election. The following year was free of election activity, but in the next January it was back to election activity all over again.

I ran on the Democratic ticket but always had wonderful support from my re-

publican friends who often told me that I was the only democrat they ever voted for!

The sheriff's salary was set by statute and when I started in 1965, it was \$8,000 per year. I thought that was great because I had never made that much money before. We were paid once a month as were any expenses incurred such as car mileage, feeding the prisoners, etc.

Many stories could be told about happenings in the Sheriff's office that few people know. One day Judge Wuest requested my presence midmorning at a civil court jury trial. He informed me that it was obvious that they did not have a large enough jury pool to select a jury and that I would need to go out in the town and select 20 more jury candidates and have them report to the courtroom at 1 p.m. Now I had never heard of such an ordeal, but I had no alternative but to try as you don't tell a judge no. I went down the street to various businesses, selected folks and told them they were to report to the courtroom by 1 p.m.

Most were very unhappy. I told them that if they failed to appear, they would be held in contempt of court and could go to jail. They all showed up! Over the years I only had to do that twice, thank goodness. Jury selection was another job the public heard little about. Once a year the circuit court would notify

the clerk of courts office with how many possible jury members they might need for the year. The clerk would then assemble a complete list of names, contact the sheriff, treasurer and register of deeds, set a date and we would draw the required number from the total list.

These names were then set aside for future use when trials were set. When a judge was ready for trial work, he would contact the clerk to draw a certain number. The number would be based on the type of charges involved and how well-known the litigants were.

These few stories just skim the top of the countless experiences I had as a sheriff. My time with the Davison County Sheriff's office provided many challenges and taught me memorable life lessons. I made friends in the community and became associated with many top-notch professionals in law enforcement all over the United States with whom I still correspond. My community has treated me well for which I am very grateful. I am happy to have served.

I am recalling in written form more of my adventures and my time as a US Marshall for South Dakota. The hope is to have these done for publication in the next Carnegie Courier of August 2020. Thanks again for the opportunity to serve and be part of the history of Davison County, South Dakota and the United States.

Monsters of the Prairie ...

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Emeline Ziebart had not turned on the radio or TV that May afternoon, and so did not hear the tornado warnings. While her freshly baked banana cake cooled on the kitchen table, she put several loaves of bread into the oven. She noticed it was sprinkling outside. Suddenly an explosive crash startled her. The house shuddered convulsively; windows popped out.

'Tornado!' she shouted. 'Joey! Diane! Run for the basement!'

The three dashed wildly into the basement and crouched beneath the stairs, 7-year-old Joey between his mother and his sister Diane, 17. Instinctively, Mrs. Ziebart pushed Joey down flat, she and Diane protecting his body with theirs. Superhuman powers pressed them viciously against the cement floor.

Then—was it one minute or five—everything was quiet. The tornado had passed over them, its suction taking even their hiding place, the stairs. Above them was the open sky. Wreckage surrounded them—the washing machine, tubs, heavy pipes, severed electric cables, lumber—and mud everywhere. As they clambered out of the basement into the yard, fears flashed through Emeline Ziebart's mind; where was Emil? Crushed beneath the tractor? Dashed to pieces in the field?

Suddenly she saw her husband – and he saw them at the same time. He began to run, stumbling over the rubble. The four met and silently clung to



THE ANTHONY (JIM) SCHOENFELDER FARM west of Ethan after the 1962 tornado.

one another. It was Diane who spoke first; 'Thank God, we're alive.'

Solicitous neighbors drove the Ziebart's to the hospital where they were treated for shock and minor injuries.

They spent a sleepless night with relatives.

Next morning the Ziebart's gazed stricken at the junk yard that once had been their well-kept farm. There was not even a fence; surviving cattle, frightened and injured roamed for miles. In the topsy-turvy house, what furniture was left was broken and covered with filth; in the once shiny steel kitchen the electric stove lay on its side, spilling out the bread which had never baked. Strangely, the banana cake was gone; the pillager had gobbled it but left the pan.

Meanwhile, a few miles northeast, at the Anthony Schoenfelder farm, the

same raging demon completely destroyed every outbuilding, but left the house on its foundation. During the attack, Schoenfelder had held the door closed against the mighty adversary until his wife and 12 children could escape to the basement. Mary Ann, the oldest girl, was planning a June wedding; her wedding dress was snatched from the living room floor, where it had been spread out for alterations, and torn to shreds. The scraps were found entangled in the silo wreckage.

The next day a second twister stalked into tiny Roswell, S. Dak, climaxing a wrathful 100-mile journey.

Heralding its approach, hailstones, large as baseballs, pounded Joseph Hanson's trailer-home. Hanson, a filling-station operator, picked up his two children, Charles, 3, and

Mark, 5, and set them on the couch beside his wife 8 months pregnant. He tried to enfold them all in his arms. Then for an instant he felt weightless—suspended in space. The trailer seemed to flip over and over in slow motion. There was an explosion caused by the vacuum in the vortex of the twister. Everything blew out, including the four people. Hanson picked himself up from the sticky, littered ground. He saw a small human form rolling by like a tumbleweed; frantic, he reached for it. It was Charles, the 3-year-old. Hanson saw Mark, screaming, trying to stand up near a deadly powerline, coiled snake-like on the highway. 'Don't move,' the father shouted. He stood upright, holding one hysterical child. Their shoes were gone, their clothing shredded.

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Monsters of the Prairie ...

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"One of the oldest known photographs of a tornado. It is probable this image has been doctored from the original. At this time, the oldest known photograph of a tornado was taken on April 26, 1884 at Garnett, Kansas."

<https://www.photolib.noaa.gov/Collections/National-Weather-Service/Meteorological-Monsters/Tornadoes>

His pregnant wife ran barefoot toward the older boy.

The Hansons gathered their scattered family together. Unbelievably, they were all safe. Later pieces of the trailer were found a mile away.

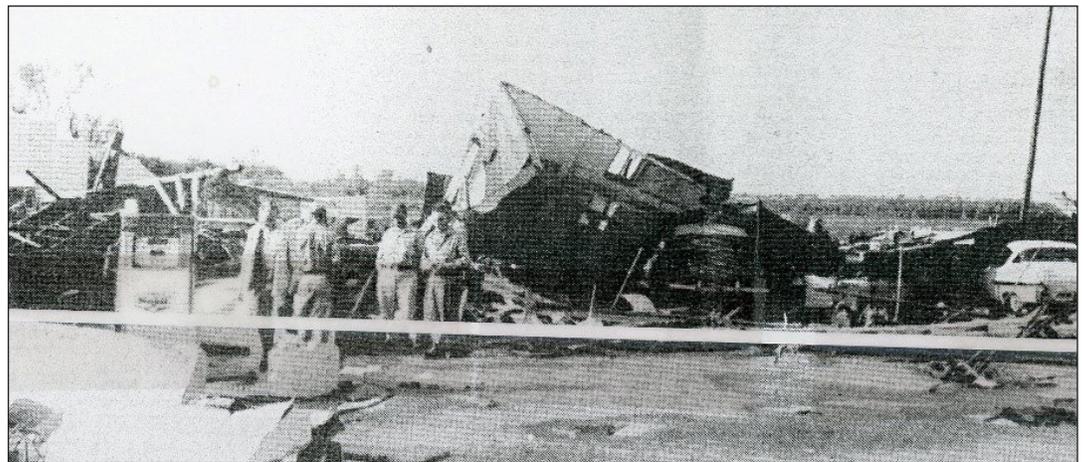
The Ziebart, Schoenfelders plus many more, were victims of a series of giant punches which knocked out southeastern SD during that one week. This area is on the northwest edge of "tornado alley," the boundless reaches of the Great Plains stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada.

Here these violent revolving storms strike more frequently than anywhere else in the world.

A tornado is formed when cold dry air from the West or Northwest moves over warm moist air from the South or Southwest. Under certain conditions this clashing of air masses causes the warm air to rise rapidly, sets up a revolving atmospheric motion (counterclockwise in the



HERBIE'S DINER IN MITCHELL, pictured above before the 1962 tornado. The diner is pictured below, devastated, after the tornado.



Northern Hemisphere). In the center of a tornado the low-pressure area is a partial vacuum. Inside the funnel-shaped cloud, the speed of the whirling wind is estimated to be between 200 and 300 miles per hour. The tornado cloud itself travels relatively slowly, from 20 to 45 miles an hour, usually from the southwest to the northeast.

Because of the extreme wind velocity, violent up-rushing air currents, and the partial vacuum in the vortex, a tornado is capable of fantastic behavior. It can swerve in circles, go straight, U-turn, hop, skip,

jump, or even suddenly disintegrate.

During the week of horror last May, the South Dakota tornadoes descended erratically every day, sometimes ravaging a wide area, sometimes only an isolated section.

On May 21, exactly a week after the first disaster, Emil Ziebart, along with a poultry buyer and some helper, was rounding up his remaining chickens.

When hail and rain torrents slashed at them. Ziebart said, 'Don't worry, a tornado never strikes the same place twice.'

He was wrong.

A funnel slithered toward

them. 'Let's go,' Ziebart yelled.

Jumping into their cars, the men headed north, then east, then back again west, outracing the writhing formation.

Afterwards, they saw that the previously bashed-in combine had been flipped over again, and the 40-foot-long chute had disappeared. Ziebart said grimly, 'Looks like that devil thought he forgot something.'

There is no accounting for the vagaries of these diabolical horrors, ruthless, yet sometimes relenting.

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Monsters of the Prairie ...

A trucker on Highway 47 near Gregory, S.Dak. driving ahead of a serpentine funnel, kept watch in his rear-view mirror as the tornado slashed, hacked and chewed up a quarter mile of asphalt road right behind him—before it veered off into a field.

At Lake Andes, where five funnels were counted in 1 day, the savage foray clawed off part of the schoolhouse roof, crushed the school kitchen and dining room—after school hours. But a gelatin salad, not even quivering, was left intact. Rippling through the kitchen of another house, a twister swept eggs from the refrigerator, smashed them onto the floor, dumped mud inside the box, then slammed the door closed. In a beauty shop the thief sucked bills from a cash-register drawer that had been closed; the money was found two rooms away – but the money drawer was found still closed.

The twisting terrors of the frightful week in May left many homeless, wrecked hundreds of buildings, tore up miles of telephone and power lines, uprooted countless trees, killed many animals. Southeastern South Dakota was faced with a seemingly hopeless cleanup and rebuilding chore.

Teamwork helped. Food, shelter, clothing, and money were provided for the storm victims. But the greatest comfort of all was the sympathy and kindness given by the fortunate to the less fortunate. When Mary Ann Schoenfelder, the girl who lost her wedding dress, was married last

Sales Slip Of Mitchell Firm Blown 60 Miles

The tornado which struck Mitchell Monday night scattered debris for miles—at least one item was found 60 miles away.

Glo Bottle Gas Company, leveled by Monday night's storm, received a letter from Mrs. R. G. Wilkins of Bancroft, S. D., Thursday, informing them that she had found an unused Glo Bottle Gas sales slip, wet and torn, on the ground in her farm yard Wednesday morning.

Glo Bottle officials said the number on the ticket, indicated the sales slip was in the office building in Mitchell prior to the storm.

The Wilkins farm is one mile east and one mile south of Bancroft—about 60 air miles from Mitchell.

THIS CLIPPING IS FROM *THE DAILY REPUBLIC*, a Mitchell newspaper, dated Friday, May 25, 1962.

June, she wore a wedding gown presented to her by the townspeople of Ethan. Joseph Hanson, whose uninsured trailer blew apart, felt better when the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, neighbors and unknown benefactors gave his family money, clothes, food—even playthings for the two little boys – and paid the first month's rent on a new trailer. Best of all,

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healthy Miss Jo Ann arrived a month later, apparently unruffled by her prenatal experience.

Emil Ziebart sold his remaining livestock, bought a house trailer and moved his family back to the desolate scene of the two tornadoes. His eyes blazed with the indomitable courage of the Dakota pioneer. 'The crops look pretty good—and we're all thankful to the Almighty just to be alive.'

After the week was over, many others felt the same way. A number of clergymen offered grateful thanks to a merciful God for what was an almost unbelievable blessing; Not one person was seriously injured; not one human life was lost."

An uneasy feeling hung over the citizens of the area as conditions continued to brew up a storm. One week after the disasters described by Helen Rizatto, Mitchell felt the wrath of a tornado on May 21, 1962, at 8:37 - 8:42 pm. The swirling mass roughly followed a path down Ohlman Street on the west side of Mitchell.

It was estimated to be about a quarter mile wide and left in its wake 32 injured and \$2.5 million in damages. Fifteen businesses and several homes were destroyed. Huge trees, 40 to 60 feet tall and so wide two men couldn't wrap their arms around them, were uprooted with their roots dangling in the wind. The National Weather Service said that this tornado was an F3 which generated 158 to 206 mph winds.

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THIS PHOTO SHOWS THE TORNADO'S DESTRUCTION along Ohlman Street in Mitchell.

Monsters of the Prairie ...

DeWayne and Evelyn Hohn of 1422 W. Fourth Ave were caught in the storm as they sheltered in their home. DeWayne was hit in the head and suffered a blow requiring 32 stitches from which he never truly recovered. He was eventually placed at the Human Services Center where he died five years later in 1967. The Hohns' two children, 3 years and an infant, were snatched

by the tornado when their house exploded, and they were deposited a block away with only bruises and cuts. Evelyn had been knocked out and when she came to, she was in the street thinking her entire family must be dead. The Hohn family's story was just one of the many harrowing stories from the experience.

The workers at Herbie's Diner had a plan to get into

the walk-in cooler in case of a tornado. This plan was used as the tornado hit; when they crawled from the cooler, they were in an unfamiliar scene. Debris was all around and not a building left intact. A lonely gas pump was left to keep guard in front of the station. It was reported that five people were pulled from the wreckage burned by hot coffee and others escaped to a car and

were OK.

The town supported those hit and helped clean up the damage for many days after. Some businesses rebuilt at the same location and others relocated. Those three to five minutes left fear and anxiety in people who survived the ordeal for many years. The Carnegie Resource Center has more information on the 1962 tornado for those interested in more details.

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Picture Of First MHS Graduating Class Manifests Change In Styles



From the Archives

Styles of sweet girl graduates of 58 years ago were somewhat different than those of today, it is indicated by the above picture of members of the first graduating class of Mitchell high school, June 18, 1886.

Members of the class are: back row, Lillian Payne, Vinie Cooke and May Skinner; front row, Blanche Durell and Mabel Payne.

The only living member of the class is Blanche-Durell Jones, who has been living in Huron at the Marvin Hughitt hotel, but who moved to Minneapolis this week to live with her son.

Mrs. Jones was salutatorian of

the graduating class. Her father was sheriff of Davison county at that time.

The above picture was sent to Supt. J. C. Lindsey by Major O. W. Coursey of Mitchell. Another individual photograph of Mrs. Jones pictures her in her graduation dress, an elaborate white eyelet embroidered, laced trimmed gown, made floor length, with basque waist and full skirt. The sum of \$50 was invested in the gown. Mrs. Jones revealed to Mr. Coursey. More simple and less expensive are the graduation outfits of today, which are rented caps and gowns.

THIS CLIPPING IS FROM THE DAILY REPUBLIC, SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 1944.

Carnegie Resource Center
 119 West Third Avenue
 Mitchell, S.D. 57301

