

Excerpt from Black Hills Daily Times
Deadwood, Dakota
Sunday, May 20, 1883

In respect to the cause of the recent calamity, we have to differ with those who attribute this destruction of property to a special and angry providence, neither are we convinced that the moral delinquencies of this people, or any portion of them, has brought on this deluge. But we do recognize the folly of ignoring natural laws, and we have realized by dearly bought experience that water, under certain conditions, is an irresistible power. Sad as the lesson has been, we will profit by it. We now sorrowfully realize that it is ultimate destruction to build in or otherwise obstruct the channel of a stream which experience has shown is liable to sudden floods. It is but just to say that many of the buildings destroyed, and which may have indirectly caused the loss of other property, were erected when property speculation was rampant and when the disaster which we now know to be but too certain was only thought possible, but by no means probable. Certain causes have been accumulating which have made this flood more destructive than it otherwise would have been. For some years the beds both of Deadwood and Whitewood creeks, have been obstructed and gradually raised through the accumulation of tailings and refuse from the great quartz mills above us which discharge some hundreds of tons of this matter daily. We have also attempted to confine the stream in a channel entirely too narrow to carry a flood, but as we have never had such a deluge as the recent one, the work was generally regarded as entirely sufficient, therefore in that respect no one can fairly be held to blame. The accumulation of tailings from the mills for some time past has caused some inconveniences in high water, but has resulted in no destruction. When the flood gates of heaven were opened and the heavy snows on the mountain vanished in a night, the obstructed stream burst its channels, overwhelmed all obstacles and carried destruction before it. In any event the damage must have been extensive, but the weight of sand and tailings made destruction more speedy.

At Golden Gate above the mills, which was for the most part washed away, the rain fell as if from a cloud burst. The channel of the creek in many places has been firmly filled in, and the course of the stream turned. Many of our best business houses stand on such ground. The angry stream seemed determined to seek its old bed and ancient channel. To this cause we must attribute the damage done to business houses which were quite a distance from the former course of the creek.

There is no denying the fact that there has been immense damage; the evidences are too obvious to deny it; but though much is lost, all is not lost. Although our citizens are sadly disheartened they do not despair. Hope, energy and the great resources of the country are still left. Upon the present wreck they will arrive to build better and safer than before. Although the lesson is a bitter one it has value, and will be remembered. Locations and buildings purposes that were never regarded as absolutely; the bed of the stream must not be obstructed, or disaster is certain. All lost in this flood is gone beyond recovery or compensation, as there is neither salvage nor insurance. It is capital sunk. Fireproof buildings which would have resisted flames, crumbled before the flood, and it is here the great loss is on goods—a loss entire and total; a destruction unforeseen and wholly unprovided for. (Note: remainder of article is not included.)