

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections



82

**1. Name**

historic Charles Murtha House and Brick Kiln

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number West Main Street \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Elk Point \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district First

state South Dakota code 46 county Union code 127

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Curtiss L. and Diana Nelson

street & number P.O. Box 726, Southview Development

city, town Elk Point \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state South Dakota

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Union County Courthouse

street & number 201 East Main Street

city, town Elk Point \_\_\_\_\_ state South Dakota

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

Union and Lincoln County  
title Historic Sites Survey \_\_\_\_\_ has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date Summer 1980 \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Historical Preservation Center

city, town Vermillion \_\_\_\_\_ state South Dakota

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed	(foundation)	date <u>March 1980</u>

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The two-acre Murtha site is comprised of three standing structures and the foundation of the brick kiln. Building materials include frame, bricks manufactured on the site and bricks from the Holman company of Sergeant Bluff, Iowa which is near Sioux City, Iowa. The site is located east of the town of Elk Point.

House: The main block of the house is a two-story "cube" house with a rectangular projecting bay on the front facade. Constructed of frame and veneered in brick, the house was laid originally on a stone foundation. When the house was moved, it was placed on a cement block foundation and the stone was used to face the foundation. Covered in a pyramidal roof, the house has a hipped roof on the front bay. The house uses two types of brick and architectural features. While the rear cube portion uses Murtha bricks, which are more porous and irregular, laid in six course American bond, the front bay is surfaced with a more smooth and dense brick, which is laid in running stretcher bond. Also, the rear portion of the house has double header, jack arches over the windows, while the front, stone lintels. The front has a large, picture window, more commonly associated with a later period than the narrow, double-hung, sash windows. Chimneys are placed in the east slope of the roof between the dining and kitchen areas and in the rear kitchen. In addition a semi-octagonal bay marks the rear parlor or dining room on the east facade. The cube section of the house is composed in two bays on the side facades and three on the front and rear; the projecting bay is one bay on the side and two across the front. A window lights the loft attic in the front gable, which has wood shingles. Wood shingles also cover the roof, and a plain wide wooden cornice surrounds the house.

The present owners moved the house approximately 75 feet north on the site. When the house was constructed, it was in the road right-of-way and in recent years a freeway was built nearby. The house was abutted up against the exit ramp and the owners both feared damage to the house and wished to have more privacy. Located on the same lot and oriented in the same manner as before, little of the historic significance has been affected.

Barn: This frame structure appears to have been built in the early 20th century. Rather small in scale, it is probable the barn was built as a garage or stable for pet horses or a few cows. Shed additions are abutted on the east and west walls. The barn is a Shawver truss frame with gambrel roof.

Root cellar: Built into the ground and covered over with a mound of earth, the root cellar has a series of steps leading downward into a 15-20 foot, brick vaulted arch room. The bricks are heat scored and appear to have been made by the Holman brick company, others are Murtha.

Brick Kiln: See sketch map. This beehive kiln measures 40 feet in diameter with the interior space measuring 34-35 feet in diameter. Of the known kilns in South Dakota, all appear to have been beehive. The Murtha kiln had two exterior chimneys. Two exhaust channels cross north-south across the floor which is four feet below present ground level. Banded with metal supports, the kiln has four feeder ports and six hearths with sack walls. Murtha brick is used in the kiln, as foundations for the outbuildings and in the house. Higher quality Holman brick is used in the hearth area. Although oral sources suggest that there were three kilns, no evidence of the others were found.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1867-1897

**Builder/Architect**

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Significant in the areas of settlement and early industry, the Murtha kiln was the second or third brick manufacturer in the state and is the only kiln which has been excavated and examined. The kiln and house represent the only known surviving example of a territorial period, family industry site.

Brick manufacturing began in South Dakota in the 1860s, one source suggests in Yankton, another in Vermillion. In 1861 the Vermillion brick company opened and in 1867 the Elk Point brick kiln began operation. Mr. Fairchild, the owner, had opened the first store, Fairchild and Green, in 1865 in Elk Point. The town of Elk Point was surveyed in 1861 and incorporated the following year. In 1867 Fairchild sold his share of the store and started his brick company. The clay in South Dakota was of poor quality and firing was uncertain. So, while Fairchild and Murtha do not appear as brick manufacturers in the 1881 business directory, it is probable that they were not a large concern, but rather provided brick on request for foundations and outbuildings in the area.

Two mortgages dating from 1873 and 1887 suggest that Charles Murtha purchased the site in 1873 and improved or expanded the property in 1887. It appears that the house was built between 1887 and 1897 of Murtha brick. Murtha employed his two sons, Harold and Robert, who became skilled bricklayers. The Murtha kiln was actively used until the Second World War. Brick making was a seasonal industry, in fact, neighbors remember the kiln being used for ice storage. Therefore, other employment was needed for the winter months and eventually Robert and Harold took their skills to Sioux City.

Brick making was always a small industry for South Dakota. Many enterprises were like the Murtha's, family owned and operated. In later years when transportation improved, these small businesses could not compete with a superior product. For example, while there were 24 brick companies in 1900, by 1905 none were active enough to be counted in the census. Some, like Murtha's were probably active from time to time.

The Murtha site represents one of the earliest enterprises in the town of Elk Point. In addition, it is a rare, surviving example of the first phase of industrial activity in the state. The excavation, supervised by the Historical Preservation Center's historical archaeologist, Steve Ruple, was a dig by amateurs. The intent was to gather information on this kiln to help in the study of other brick manufacturers in the state. The excavation has added to the understanding of 19th century brick making in South Dakota.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

UNIT NOT RECORDED  
UNIT NOT RECORDED

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2

Quadrangle name Elk Point

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A 

1	4	6	8	9	0	6	0	4	7	2	8	8	2	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

**Verbal boundary description and justification** The site lies in the Wagner Tract No. 1 of the City of Elk Point, lying in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 13, and NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 24, Township 91-North, Range 50 West, of the 5th P.M., Elk Point. The site is bounded on the east by a stream, on the north by plowed fields, on the south by the edge of the road, and on the west by industrial buildings and paved parking lot of the adjacent property.  
**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries**

state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Curtiss and Diana Nelson

technical editing: Carolyn Torma, Steve Ruple  
Historical Preservation Center  
USD, Vermillion, SD 57069  
date 9 Oct 81 (605-677-5317)

organization

street & number Box 726, Southview Development

telephone 605-356-3228 or 356-2615

city or town Elk Point

state South Dakota

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*James R. Fishburn*

title Director, Office of Cultural Preservation

date 01/5/82

For HCPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*William H. Brannan* date 1/82

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

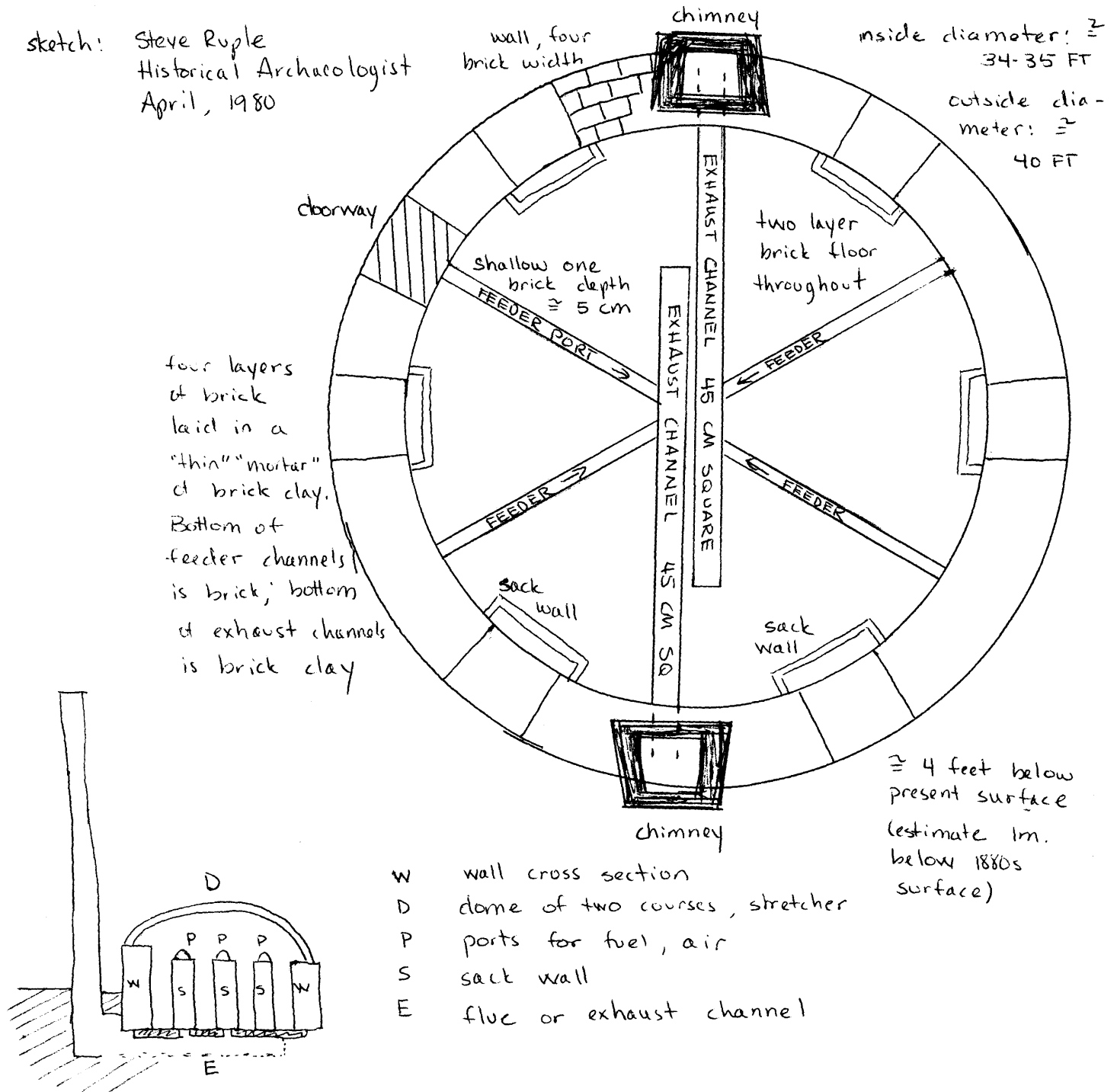
**FOR NPS USE ONLY**  
RECEIVED JAN 12 1982  
DATE ENTERED FEB 1 1982

Charles Murtha Brick Kiln and House

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

sketch: Steve Ruple  
Historical Archaeologist  
April, 1980



- W wall cross section
- D dome of two courses, stretcher
- P ports for fuel, air
- S sack wall
- E flue or exhaust channel

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

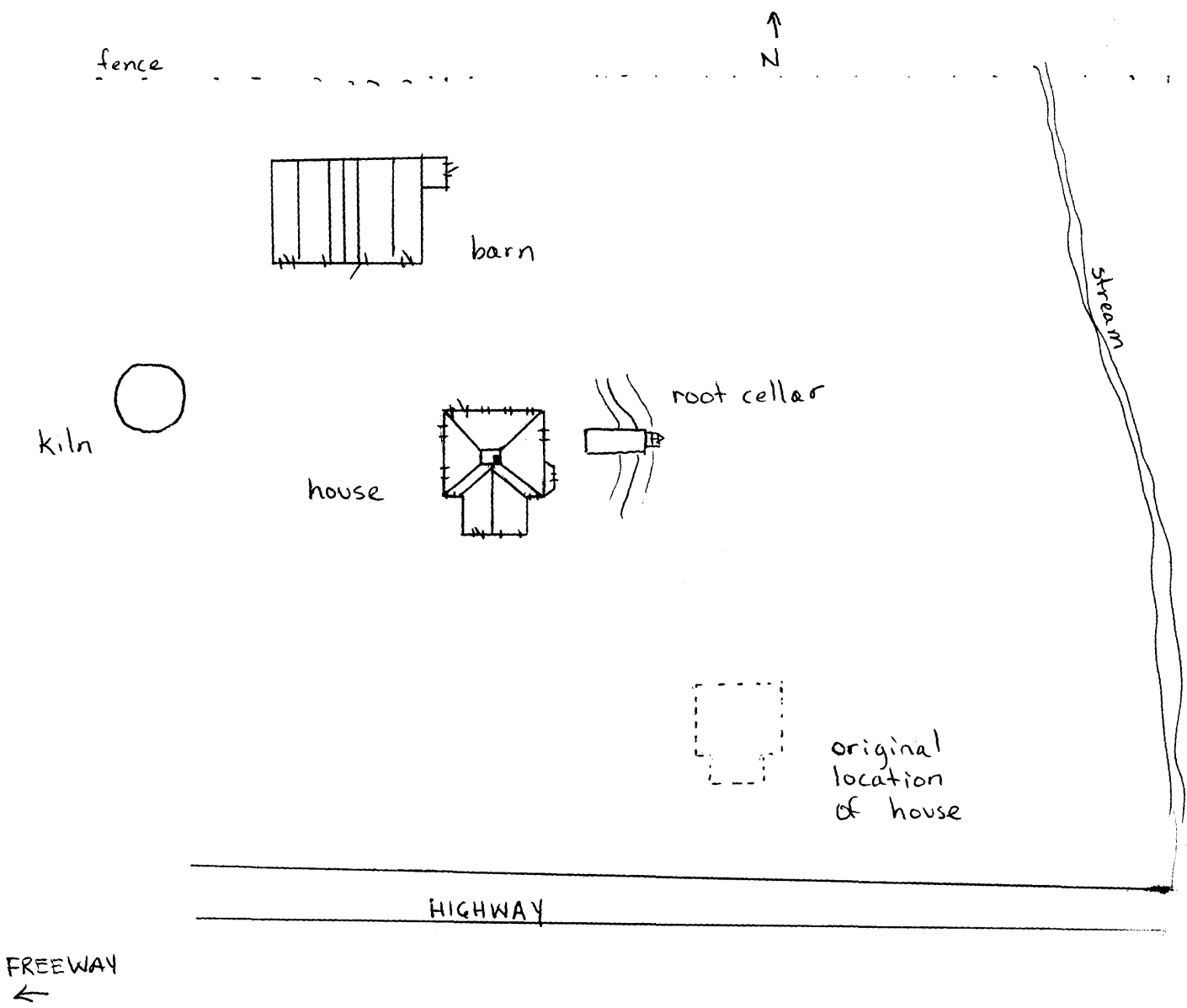
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JAN 12 1982
DATE ENTERED	FEB 1 1982

Charles Maurtha and Brick Kiln

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

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**United States Department of the Interior  
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For HCRS use only

received

date entered

982

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 1

Oral interviews, Harold Murtha, Lucille Wagner, Edward Curry, Tom Gill, March-April, 1980.  
 Parker, Donald D. History of Our Country and State., Brookings, S.D.; South Dakota State University Press, 1959.  
 Fate, W. H. H. ed. Glimpse of the Early Settlement of Union County, 1890-1924, Sioux City, Iowa; Perkins Brothers Co., 1924.  
History of Southeastern Dakota: Its Settlement and Growth. Sioux City, Iowa: Western Publishing Co., 1881.  
 Schell, Herbert S. "South Dakota Manufacturing to 1900." 1955 (No further information.)  
 Steve Ruple, "Report on the Murtha Kiln," draft at Historical Preservation Center, 1980.