Stand beside the river at Mobridge, South Dakota most any day--Summer or Winter--and chances are you'll see Winston Hall, at 75, holding his rendezvous with the wide Missouri. From Spring, when the ice breaks up, until Winter, when it freezes, Winston swims. Here the water is clear and cold, winding its way from the high country of Wyoming and Montana to its meeting with the Gulf of Mexico in South Louisiana. In Winter Winston skates--often four or five miles a day.

An uncommon routine by an uncommon man. But not out of character. People here are pioneers, with a history of heartiness and a spirit of accomplishment. They adapted as they came; and they assumed ruggedness and attitudes to match the country.

It was the Dakotas that attracted the Halls--Winston's parents. They knew people already there, and they came from England to settle near their friends in this brand new land of untold opportunity. It was 1911, Winston was two-and-one half; the Indian lands were opened to white settlers; and a newly built railroad bridge spanned the river.

They first came to Philadelphia and their South Dakota friends met them. They travelled together, by rail to Sioux City, Iowa, then by wagon from Sioux City across the Indian territory to Mobridge. Winston remembers. And those first impressions were indelibly written in his mind. The thunder and lightning were so intense! Much more violent than he'd known in England.

"It was indeed a lustier land to which the settlers had come," says Sauer, as he wrote about the settlements in North America, "a land of hotter summers and colder winters, of brighter and hotter sun and more tempestuous rain." Such could be said about Dakota.

Many were afraid, and they stayed behind. The land was too level; there were too few friendly trees; and the shade and water too scarce.

The adventurous, the curious, the hearty eased into it. They followed the familiar rivers, searched out the openings, and built their homes. They adapted. Houses were built of sod instead of logs; cow chips and twisted grass fueled the fires; and wells were dug with pick and shovel.

In all probability, they didn't come to farm. They expected to make money in almost any other way but farming. The threat of starvation, however, made farming a necessary but unplanned adaptation.

There are great extremes, most certainly. It gets hot in Mobridge--hitting the 100 degree mark plenty of times; and it gets cold--often dropping to minus-twenty. Usually it's windy.

Weather isn't just a topic of conversation. It's life-giving and life-taking. It demands a healthy respect at least.

They came to Mobridge where the river is wide. Here it bends gently around the city--now home for nearly 5,000 people--before flowing into Oahe Lake, one of the many stop-go-stop-go reservoirs on the upper Missouri.

On the other side--the west bank--lie the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Indian Reservations--and the grave of Sitting Bull.

It is here the High Plains begin. Really begin. And here, weather is the starting subject in lots of conversations. Physiologists say the climate is healthy--that it forces the body to exercise its natural powers of adaptation. Maybe so. And maybe people, like water flowing through subterranean strata, assume the characteristics of their surroundings.
As the years came and went, the boy, Winston, became a man. Some times were good—others not so good. It was during a not-so-good time in 1939 that Winston and brother, Willis, began taking weather observations for the (then) Weather Bureau.

They took over a job already started, and succeeded six others who, each in his own time, observed the weather from 1911 (the year Winston came to South Dakota) until 1939. Each three hours—eight times in every twenty four—they recorded the weather at Mobridge, and gave the information to the weather office at Bismarck, North Dakota. It was a precious commodity, and they made the only observations in the vast prairie between Bismarck and Pierre. The agreement was in Willis' name, and the income—about 25 cents for each observation—was a welcome addition to the family's income.

By 1941, Winston had married the girl next door—Josephine. Josephine's father worked in the rail post office and after transferring from Minneapolis, rode the trains out of Mobridge to sort the mail. Josephine and Winston had been childhood sweethearts, and their marriage was no surprise.

As newlyweds, Winston and Josephine took over the observations completely. Money was scarce, and Willis had other things to do. Every three hours, on the dot, the Mobridge observation was sent to Bismarck.

Then, in 1942, with the world at war, Winston and Josephine decided he should join the Army Air Corps. With money borrowed for a train ticket, Winston went to Omaha to sign up; and Josephine went about earning dollars to repay the loan.

But the Mobridge weather observations didn't end when Winston went to war. Josephine kept the watch, along with a little help from some high school girls who lived with her. There were other accomplishments too—results of efforts that took a real pioneering spirit. In Winston's absence, Josephine learned to fly an airplane; she taught weather observations to pilots; she worked as a rural mail carrier—and she paid the loan that bought Winston's train ticket! And a particularly frustrating incident with the Army is recalled. Winston submitted their original marriage license as evidence that Josephine was entitled to an allotment. The Army lost it. Eventually, with the help of other evidence, the allotment came through. But the marriage license was never recovered.

From 1942 until 1945 Winston was away—serving as a weather observer in the Army Air Corps. Then—in 1945—the war was over! Winston came home!