

PROGRAM.....

Chats by the Weather Man.

Wed. Feb. 16.

RELEASE.....

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(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

ANNOUNCEMENT: Floods -- river stages -- snowfall service: -- That's what the Weather Man is going to chat about this evening. The U. S. Department of Agriculture releases the Weather Man's Chat every Wednesday, through Station \_\_\_\_\_.

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"There's a story in this letter", the Weather Man told me, as he took an official-appearing paper from his desk. "A story of a service that's taken for granted in the Bureau's River and Flood Service. The kind of work the men in the Service do quite often. This letter's from the Nashville Gas and Heating Company. You know they had a flood down in Nashville not so long ago."

"What does the letter say?" I asked.

"Let's read part of it", he answered. "It says here:

"I want to take this opportunity to thank you and your organization for the helpful and needed assistance you rendered us, almost hourly, during the period of rising waters which wrought such havoc and destruction in Nashville recently. I give credit to your warnings the fact that we were able to maintain our gas service without interruption.

"While all of our large high pressure mains, leaving our plant, were covered with from 2 to 14 feet of water, your advance warnings enabled us....to supply the city with gas continuously, and without anyone being aware of the fact that the supply might have been cut off at any moment....Our loss therefore was very small but might have been of a most disastrous nature, if we had not been constantly advised by your Department...."

"Sounds pretty good to me", I said, "but it must be rather an unusual case",

"Not at all", the Weather Man replied, folding the letter, "just the usual thing during flood season. It isn't a case of complimenting ourselves. One of the main duties of the Weather Bureau is to maintain a river and flood forecast service which covers practically the whole United States. You probably thought that the Bureau's activities are confined to forecasting the weather from day to day. That is only one important part of the work. The large River and Flood Service, covering the ice reporting and snowfall services, does a day by day work for industry, farmers, and the general population in the localities involved, that is mighty important."

"Let's hear about it", I said.

"Let me begin with an interesting case", The Weather Man settled himself in his chair. Then he pointed to the large map at his right. "See that map.

Notice all the colored pins on it? Those pins show our activities at a glance."

I turned and looked at the map of the United States. It was literally studded with pins with red, green, pink, white, buff and other-colored heads.

"Those pins show the extent of our flood, snowfall, and ice services", he continued. "Notice the sweep of the pins east of the Mississippi River? That indicates the flood areas. We divide the United States into 66 districts. There are about 1,000 stations scattered over the Nation. We have meteorologists at each district station, and there are observers of one kind or another at all the stations. The districts covering the Ohio, Cumberland, and Tennessee rivers -- and the Mississippi river -- are among the most important. Now let's take a particular case.

"You'll remember the flood at the lower end of the Mississippi about February 1st, no doubt. Well, Weather Bureau men were able to forecast that flood from 10 days to 3 or 4 weeks ahead of time. They were able to forecast the time of the flood, and the extent of it as well.

"Let's trace that flood down. Of course, up in the smaller streams and rivers -- in the more hilly country where the water flows faster, and where numbers of small streams contribute to the quantity of water in the main stream -- we can't predict so far ahead. There was a damaging flood last December along the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers. About 9,000 people were left homeless for the time being and the property damage amounted to about 3 million dollars. That same flood was passing Vicksburg, Mississippi, January 29. We predicted it several days ahead. The Pittsburg flood, of January 22nd, passed Louisville about January 29th -- and passed down the river, moderating as it went. About the best we can do at Pittsburg is to forecast floods about 18 hours to a day in advance. As the rising waters go along down the river, it becomes possible for weather men to predict the coming flood farther and farther ahead and with more and more accuracy. A forecast of high water made 18 to 24 hours ahead at Pittsburg is a good average, but the same flood may be predicted with accuracy from 5 to 6 days ahead at Cincinnati. Our men forecast exactly the height of the high water at Cincinnati January 27th, which totaled 59 feet. It is an ordinary occurrence to forecast high water from 2 to 4 weeks ahead at New Orleans. You see, the rising waters pass on down the river, and as they move along, our observers measure and observe the movement and telegraph ahead."

The Weather Man paused a moment and looked out of the window at the falling rain. "This is just about the time of year when our flood and river service is kept busiest", he declared. "Down South, you know, thousands of cattle are pastured in the swamp lands where they can feed throughout the year unless they're driven out by floods. Floods in that section are rather frequent. So we issue flood warnings often. The warnings enable the farmer to drive his cattle to higher ground and to provide food for them while the high water covers the pastures. Some years ago, before we organized the flood service, a great many cattle were drowned every year. Now losses of this kind are rare and very small." Frequently in the late Summer or early Fall, some crops are left standing in the low lands. Flood warnings, issued some days ahead, sent the farmers to the fields to harvest their endangered crops."

"How does the river and flood service help the water traffic along the rivers? I wanted to know.

"In many ways. The loading of boats depends on the stage of the water in navigable rivers, you see. Low water means light cargoes and delay, -- with resulting decreases in receipts, and increases in expense. The warnings are followed by freight companies and manufacturing industries in loading their river barges so that loss from either low or high water to freight is seldom and light."

"You mentioned the snowfall service, I believe", I suggested.

"Yes. That is a definite branch of the weather service", replied the Weather Man. "We have men in the field, especially in the mountain regions of the West, who measure the snowfall in the mountains and translate it into its water equivalent. This is done in the late Winter and early Spring. Farmers adjust their crop plantings according to the quantity of irrigation water the snow forecasts tell them they will have during the growing season. We also measure the ice depth and the kind of ice on rivers for the aid of shipping interests and power companies operating along the streams."

"How much does this service cost the taxpayers of the country a year?" I asked as I prepared to take my leave.

"The total cost of the operation of the river and flood service per year is less than 2 mills for each person in the United States", replied the Weather Man, "but the farmers, business, and the people as a whole are saved millions of dollars loss as well as the loss of thousands of lives and shattered hopes."

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ANNOUNCEMENT: You have been listening to the Weather Man's regular Wednesday evening chat from Station \_\_\_\_\_. This is one of our daily features from the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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# **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

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