

August 13

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Dr. Charles F. Brooks,  
Secretary, American Meteorological Society,  
tells of:

EIGHTEEN-HUNDRED-AND-FROZE-TO-DEATH

Early in the year when announcement was made of continued abnormal warmth in the Arctic Ocean and the arrival of unprecedented vast masses of ice in the North Atlantic, the weather alarmist dwelt with relish on the possibility of a repetition of the famous summer of "eighteen-hundred-and-froze-to-death", meaning the year 1816, the summer of which was filled with strange, disastrous contrasts of weather, from 100 in the shade to snowstorms. Looking backward, the alarmist has the solace of knowing that the present summer in eastern North America has had certain points in common with that of more than a century ago, when crops failed because of excessive cold weather which, however, was punctuated with hot spells of terrific intensity.

In 1816, according to Perley's Historic Storms of New England, about May 23 three hot days occurred which gave Salem, Mass., the hottest weather in 10 years, 101 degrees. On June 5 it was again hot in Salem, the mercury rising to 92. But the next morning it was 43 degrees, and there were snow flurries in parts of Massachusetts. On the 7th snow covered the ground at Newton, Mass., and was a foot deep in Williamstown, Mass. Yet on June 22-24 came three days of 93, 101, and 100 degrees in Salem. Then followed more cold weather.

This summer, likewise, has had its cool weather and hot spells. There was even snow reported in July in the Berkshires and in the Canadian northwest. The hot waves of June 4-6 and June 19-21 were much the same as those of 1816. The dryness of the air coming off the cold waters of the enlarged and well-iced Labrador current, the abnormally cold Great Lakes, and presumably the Hudson Bay as well, has curtailed cloudiness. As long as the winds blew from off the cold water the weather stayed cool in spite of the sunshine. But when the wind shifted to a westerly direction the temperature bounded up as the hot air was transported from the center of the continent, which had been out of the reach of the coolness of the east winds, but had not escaped their dryness.

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(Tomorrow: Weight of Rainfall)