A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SNOW CRYSTALS

If you would see snow crystals at their best, catch some of the flakes that fall at the beginning of a snow storm or when there is little wind. Snow crystals are easily broken in their descent, or sometimes they are partially melted or evaporated, or they may adhere together in large flakes, so that perfect single crystals are not always to be found. Professor Talman of the Weather Bureau library tells us that as early as the 16th century a learned Swedish historian made drawings of snow crystals, but now micro-photographs make possible a fuller appreciation of the marvelous beauty and symmetry of snow crystals even in some of their finest details. W. A. Bentley of Jericho, Vermont, has made an extensive collection of these snow crystal photographs -- each with its own individuality.

Small snow crystals such as hexagonal plates are typical of relatively cold dry weather. The largest and most elaborate branching forms generally occur with surface temperatures near freezing. All are alike in being built on a plan of 6 sides or 6 rays. Snow flakes may start high aloft as tiny ice disks or needles so small as to be hardly visible to an aviator. These minute particles on falling to lower, moister regions serve as centers for the growing flakes.

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