

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SYMBOLS USED BY THE WEATHERMAN

While the symbols used by astronomers to denote the planets and their configurations, the signs of the zodiac, etc., are tolerably familiar to the world at large, those used by meteorologists are much less widely known.

The earliest symbols for representing states of the weather, such as rain, snow, lightning and the like, are probably those found in European rural almanacs of several centuries ago. They were devised for furnishing weather predictions to people who could not read. A set of symbols used in keeping weather observations appears in a work by Musschenbroek, published in 1729. Several other collections of weather symbols were introduced during the eighteenth century; some were very elaborate. For example, J. L. Boekmann, of Karlsruhe, Germany, devised a set of 100 symbols, of which 21 were for recording different kinds of lightning!

The first set of symbols extensively used for recording the weather was that drawn up by Hemmer for the international organization known as the Meteorological Society of the Palatinate; two of whose observers kept records in America before the Revolutionary War.

A set of meteorological symbols now used throughout the world was adopted by the congress of meteorologists held in Vienna in 1873. A few additions have been made since that date. Besides these international symbols, a great many symbols are used in the records and publications of particular countries. In the aggregate they number several hundred. A large collection of them was published in the Monthly Weather Review (Washington) for May, 1916.

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