

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE EARLY HISTORY OF WEATHER FORECASTS

Scientific weather forecasts depend upon the rapid collection of the reports of meteorological observations taken at places scattered over a wide expanse of territory. This process was not, of course, possible before the invention of the electric telegraph.

The earliest experiments in forecasting with the aid of telegraphic reports were probably those of Prof. Joseph Henry, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, made in 1849. The first national service for storm prediction was established in France in 1855, and was the outcome of an episode of the Crimean War. In November, 1854, a severe storm did much damage to the French and British warships in the Black Sea, as well as to the camps of the forces on land. The French astronomer, Le Verrier, director of the Observatory of Paris, made a study of this storm and came to the conclusion that, with the aid of telegraphic reports, its eastward progress across Europe might have been predicted so that these disasters could have been averted. This idea led to the foundation of the French meteorological service.

In the United States the establishment of a similar service was frequently urged by scientific men, including the famous Lieutenant Maury and Dr. I. A. Lapham, of Wisconsin, and finally, in 1869, an experimental service was established at the Cincinnati Observatory by Prof. Cleveland Abbe, with the aid of the Western Union Telegraphic Company. The United States Government established a service for the country at large in 1870 and attached it to the Signal Corps of the Army, by which it was operated until 1891, when the present Weather Bureau was established.

Official weather forecasts were first issued in Canada in 1876.

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