

A Science Service Feature

Released on receipt
but intended for use
November 6, 1928

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed October 30, 1928

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology

FRANKLIN'S STORM

Although our ancestors of a century or more ago were familiar with the existence of small whirlwinds, they supposed that the wind in more extensive storms blew in a nearly straight line and that the direction of the wind observed at any particular place was the direction in which the storm was traveling. One of the first persons to dispute this idea was Benjamin Franklin.

One evening in October, 1743, Franklin had planned to observe an eclipse of the moon at Philadelphia, but was prevented from doing so by a "northeast storm"--i. e., a storm beginning with winds from the northeast--the clouds attending which covered the sky at the time of the eclipse. A few days later he was surprised to learn through newspapers and also through correspondence with his brother in Boston, that at the latter place, lying 250 miles northeast of Philadelphia, the eclipse had been well observed before the storm set in. Writing in 1760 of this episode Franklin said:

"When comparing all other accounts I received from the several colonies of the time of beginning of the same storm, and since that of other storms of the same kind, I found the beginning to be always later the farther northeastward." This was a partial anticipation of what was afterward called the Law of Storms, according to which the air in a storm tends to gyrate around a center while the storm as a whole moves forward.

Hence meteorologists look back upon "Franklin's Storm" of 1743 as one of the milestones in the history of their science.

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

SCIENCE SERVICE
21st and B Sts.,
Washington, D. C.