

A Science Service Feature

Released on receipt  
but intended for use  
January 3, 1929

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed December 27, 1928

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology

THE WORD "BLIZZARD"

No word connected with weather has been the subject of more controversy than "blizzard". It began to be used in its present sense in the middle western United States after the middle of the nineteenth century, after having been used in various other senses in that part of the world and elsewhere. A plausible account of the way it entered the weather vocabulary was published not long ago by A.W. Read, of the University of Missouri.

A newspaper called the Northern Vindicator (now called the Vindicator and Republican) has been published at Estherville, Iowa, since 1868. One of the idlers who hung about the office of this paper in its early days was an odd character known to the community as "Lightnin'" Ellis, his nickname being a jocular allusion to the fact that he was regarded as the slowest man in town. This man had a picturesque lingo of his own, and was in the habit of applying the word "blizzard" to any startling phenomenon of nature. A cold, snow-laden wind struck the town, and the editor of the Vindicator, O.C. Bates, who was also fond of outlandish expressions, wanted a name for it. He called it a "blizzard", and mentioned Ellis as his authority. So we are told, but no copies of the Vindicator containing this supposed first example of the term are now extant. It does, however, appear in the columns of the same newspaper as early as April 23, 1870, and frequently after that date.

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

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