

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed June 3, 1932

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HAIL-RODS

While the lightning-rod, with ample scientific authority back of it, is a familiar institution throughout the civilized world, the once almost equally common "hail-rod" is now nearly extinct. The idea of erecting such rods dates back to the latter part of the eighteenth century. Originally the rods were metal-tipped wooden poles, connected with the ground by a cord or wire. They were placed in fields and vineyards, where it was believed that they prevented the fall of hail by drawing the electricity out of the clouds.

This device, though reported on unfavorably by the French Academy of Sciences, gained great popularity throughout southern and central Europe. One of its advocates, writing in 1827, states that more than a million of the rods were at that time in use in France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Bavaria and the Rhine country.

Their vogue subsequently waned, but toward the end of the nineteenth century a new kind of hail-rod came into favor in France. This was essentially a very large lightning-rod of copper, grounded by means of a broad copper conductor. Such rods were installed in some cases on steeples or other tall edifices, including the Eiffel Tower, and in other cases on tall steel towers especially erected to support them. They were called "electric Niagaras," because, according to their enthusiastic and none too scientific promoters, they drew down "torrents" of electricity from the sky. Why such a process should be expected to have any effect on hailstorms nobody seems to have explained.

The "Niagaras" were very popular before the world war, but little has been heard about them in recent years. .

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