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October 7, 1932

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed September 30, 1932

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FRESH-WATER WATERSPOUTS

Cuttings have reached me from newspapers published at Rochester, Sodus and other places in western New York describing a waterspout -- or, according to some reports, a pair of waterspouts -- seen on Lake Ontario on the morning of September 17. The notable point about these newspaper articles is that they describe the spout as the first ever seen on Lake Ontario and the second on the Great Lakes. This description is in line with the common but erroneous idea that waterspouts are almost entirely confined to the ocean.

A few years ago W.E. Hurd, of the U.S. Weather Bureau, published a valuable summary of information about waterspouts, including some figures, which he stated to be far from complete, concerning the occurrence of these objects on the lakes and rivers of the United States. His enumeration includes 20 on Lake Erie, 4 on Lake Ontario, 1 on Lake Michigan, 1 on Lake Newcomb, N.Y., 2 on Lake Monroe, Fla., 2 on the St. Johns River, Fla., 2 on the Mississippi River, 2 on the Chester River, Md., and 1 each on the St. Lawrence and Potomac Rivers. A spout remarkable for its extreme slenderness in proportion to its great height was seen over the Hudson River near Tarrytown July 16, 1904. Several waterspouts seen on European lakes and rivers are described in the late Alfred Wegener's book on the tornadoes and waterspouts of Europe. Some interesting spouts have been seen on Victoria Nyanza, in Africa. In short, salt water is far indeed from enjoying a monopoly of these whirling columns of cloud and spray.

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