

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE BERKS COUNTY WEATHER PROPHEETS

Now is the time of year when, in days gone by, the weather prophets of Berks County, Pennsylvania, were said to meet in annual convention and decide whether the succeeding winter would be mild or severe.

There is nothing more entertaining in the literature of weather folklore than the reports of these reputed gatherings, as published in circumstantial detail in New York and Philadelphia newspapers of some twenty years ago. The prophets were all mentioned by name, and each was stated to have his favorite method of prognostication. Besides those who swore by the familiar goosebone, there were some who trusted to the thickness of corn husks, the size of squirrels' winter stores, the dates when muskrats built their houses, or the depth to which groundhogs burrowed in the ground.

In the year 1912 a Government weather station was established at Reading, the county-seat. The local prognosticators were reported to be up in arms about this invasion of their territory.

Exchange editors gleefully spread abroad the stories of the Berks County predictions, and they were probably taken seriously by millions of newspaper readers but there was not a word of truth in any of them. The clever Munchausen who concocted these fantastic tales was - and is - a Reading newspaperman, Mr. Albert N. Burkholder.

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