

**“Why the Weather?”**  
**syndicated weather statements**  
**by Charles F. Brooks, Charles F. Talman,**  
**and Alfred H. Thiessen**

**Doria B. Grimes**  
**NOAA Central Library**  
**National Oceanographic Data Center**  
**National Environmental Satellite, Data, and**  
**Information Service**  
**March 6, 2008**

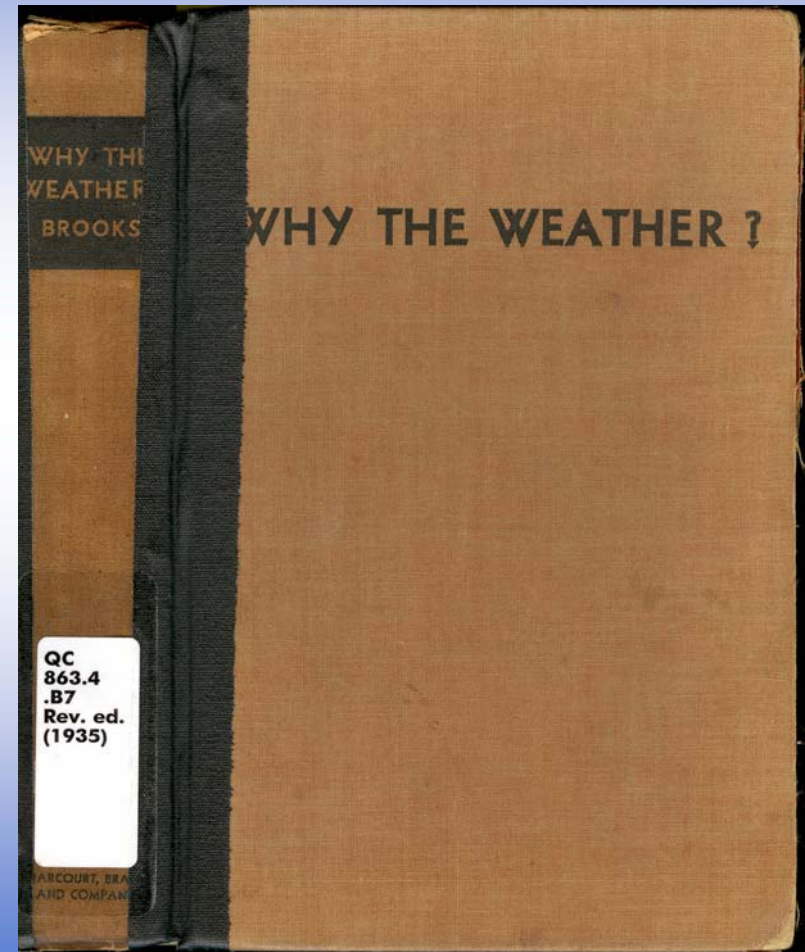


# Charles Franklin Brooks, 1891-1958



# Background Information – Charles F. Brooks

- By-product of explanations of the weather to classes in meteorology at Clark University.
- Syndicated by Science Service, Inc.  
[www.sciserv.org](http://www.sciserv.org)
- Brooks contributed from May 12, 1923 – April 23, 1927.
- Later compiled into a book ***Why the Weather***, 1924, rev. 1935.





CHARLES FITZHUGH TALMAN, 1874-1936

## **Charles Fitzhugh Talman 1874 - 1936**

**First person “in charge” of the  
Weather Bureau Library.**

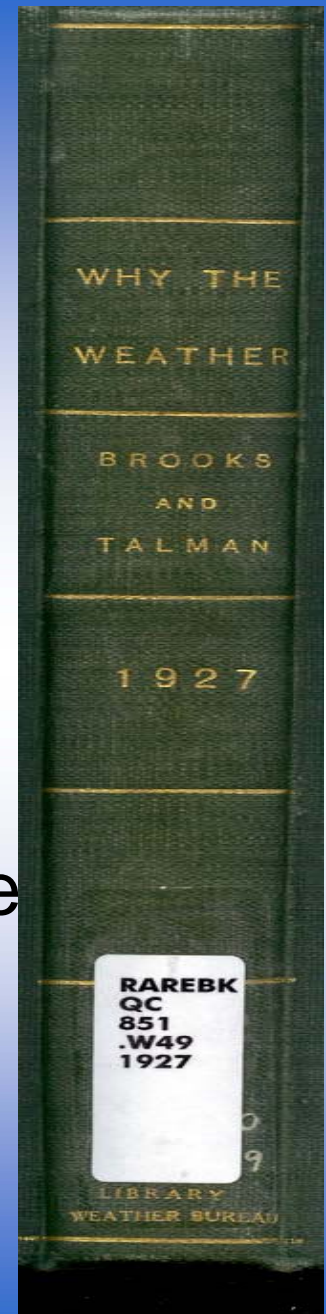
**Contributed to *Why the Weather*  
from April 25, 1927 to Dec. 24,  
1935.**

**“....By Charles Fitzhugh Talman  
Authority on Meteorology”**

# Alfred Henry Thiessen, 1872 -

- Successor to Charles Fitzhugh Talman.
- Contributed from January 1, 1938 to April 5, 1941.
- Retired from Weather Bureau April 30, 1942
- “...By Major A. H. Thiessen”
- Completed the *Weather Glossary* (1946) which he dedicated to Talman.

- NOAA Central Library's Collection are copies of the typed transcripts from May 1923 through April 1941.
- 16 bound volumes of single-paged daily explanations.
- Each page has been imaged into a pdf file at 300 dpi, b &w.
- <http://docs.lib.noaa.gov/rescue/whytheweather/1923/19230521.pdf>
- Permission granted by Science Service.



Released on receipt  
but intended for use  
July 8, 1927

A Science Service Feature

! WHY THE WEATHER !

Mailed July 1, 1927

By Charles PittsHugh Talman  
Authority on Meteorology

THE GOVERNMENT'S WEATHER LIBRARY

Washington is a city of libraries. Besides the huge Library of Congress, there are special libraries, many of large size, devoted to various branches of knowledge. Books on meteorology and climatology, gathered from every part of the world, are assembled in the library of the Weather Bureau, which contains about 46,000 volumes. It is the largest library of its kind in existence.

A considerable part of this literature is not duplicated anywhere else in the United States. For example, the library has complete bound files of the daily weather maps published in all countries. Some of these files run back sixty or seventy years. There is a vast collection of works containing the detailed records of weather and climate for all parts of the globe. Some of these are the publications of foreign meteorological services and some come from a variety of other sources. A bewildering assortment of languages is represented.

Of course the library includes all the treatises on meteorology and its various branches that have appeared anywhere in the world, so far as the bureau has been able to secure copies of them. The oldest book in the collection is a black-letter edition of a Latin work on meteorology by Albertus Magnus, published in 1494.

About one-third of the collection consists of the bound files of scientific journals devoted to meteorology and kindred subjects.

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

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





# NOAA Central Library

National Oceanographic Data Center

[Contact Us](#) [NOAA Libraries' Catalog](#) [Ask-A-Librarian](#) [A-Z Index](#)



You are Here: [Library Home](#) > [Collections](#) > [Imaged Documents and Maps](#) > **Why the Weather?**

## Why the Weather?

### Publication History

Charles Franklin Brooks, the founder and Secretary of the American Meteorological Society, composed daily public service announcements for the Science Service beginning in May 1923. These daily meteorological miscellany were also authored by Charles Fitzhugh Talman (1927-1935) and Alfred H. Thiessen (1938-1941). The essays were designed to present meteorology to the general public, by radio and newspapers, using clear and simple explanations of weather facts, phenomena and proverbs. "Beware of weather proverbs" wrote Brooks on May 28, 1923, "or better still, pick the true ones and throw aside those which have not been proved..." such as, "Thunder does not sour milk!"

### Scope of coverage

The NOAA Central Library maintains a set of these mimeographed sheets beginning with No. 1, May 1923, and continuing through April 1941.

### How to locate daily essays on *Why the Weather?*





## **A**

[Abbe, Cleveland -- Fog Drip](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, November 21, 1927

[Abbe, Cleveland -- Heavy Air](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, April 18, 1929

[Abbe, Cleveland -- Old Probabilities](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, May 2, 1927

[Abbot, C. G. -- South African Observatory](#), Charles F. Brooks, February 21, 1927

[Abercromby, Ralph -- Weather Odyssey](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, December 8, 1927

[Acclimatization](#), Charles F. Brooks, May 30, 1925

[Acclimatization In The Wet Tropics](#), Charles F. Brooks, August 12, 1926

[Action Aloft](#), Charles F. Brooks, March 15, 1927

[Action Centers of Word Weather](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, September 26, 1927

[Addison And the Great Storm \(1704\)](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, November 29, 1929

[Advertising -- Weather And Advertising](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, October 3, 1927

[Advertising -- Weather Forecasts And Advertising](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, December 4, 1929

[Aerology](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, November 30, 1927

[Aerology](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, August 5, 1927

[Aeronautical Meteorology](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, December 9, 1929

[Aeronautical Weather Services](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, June 18, 1927

[Afterglow](#), Charles F. Brooks, June 27, 1924

[Air](#), Charles F. Brooks, January 15, 1926

[Air -- About Air](#), C. Fitzhugh Talman, June 8, 1927

[Air -- Air As A Great Heat Engine](#), Charles F. Brooks, April 15, 1924

**Beware of weather proverbs or better still,  
pick the true ones and throw aside those  
which have not been proved...**

**Charles F. Brooks – May 28, 1923**

# February 2

## Candlemas Day

- Ancient Romans selected the date to burn candles to the Goddess Februa...
  - “If Candlemas be fair and clear  
There’ll be twa winters in the year”
- Evolved into the legend of the groundhog.
- “Any one particular day cannot indicate the weather of the weeks to follow..”–
  - Charles F. Brooks, no. 226,  
2/1/24



# February 2

## Candlemas Day a.k.a. Groundhog Day

- The Weather Bureau investigated...
- Mr. F.W. Seward analyzed 9 years of data from Feb. 2 to March 15.
- “So Mr. Groundhog is denounced as a false prophet as well as a pest ... 2/1/1926.
- Yearly contributions with variations – 50/50 chance



The Zuni Indians were scientifically correct...

“When the sun is in his house, it will rain soon.”

**Another Ancient Saying...**

“The bigger the ring,  
The nearer the wet.”



... Charles F. Brooks, No. 13, May 26, 1923



# Dust Devils

The Apache Indians created dust-spouts by burning spines of cactus. Used as signals, enough heat was obtained to start the whirling updraught.

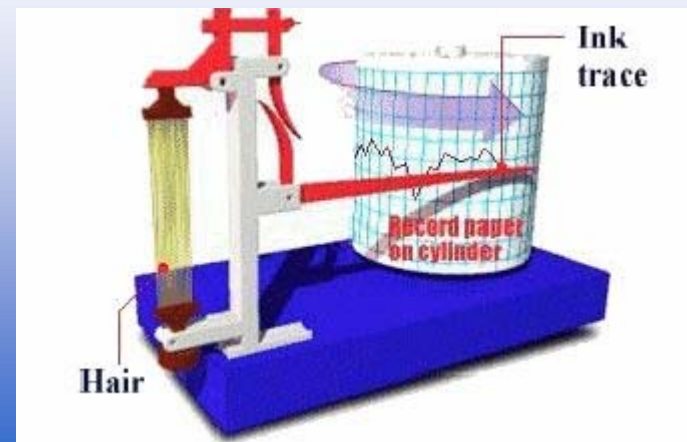
...Charles F. Brooks,  
No. 100, Sept. 5, 1923



# When Scalps are Wet...

- Well-founded American Indian proverb:  
“When the locks turn damp in the scalp house, surely it will rain.”
- “Hygrometer uses human hair to detect the presence or absence of moisture.”

Charles F. Brooks, July 9, 1923



# St. Swithin's Day – July 15

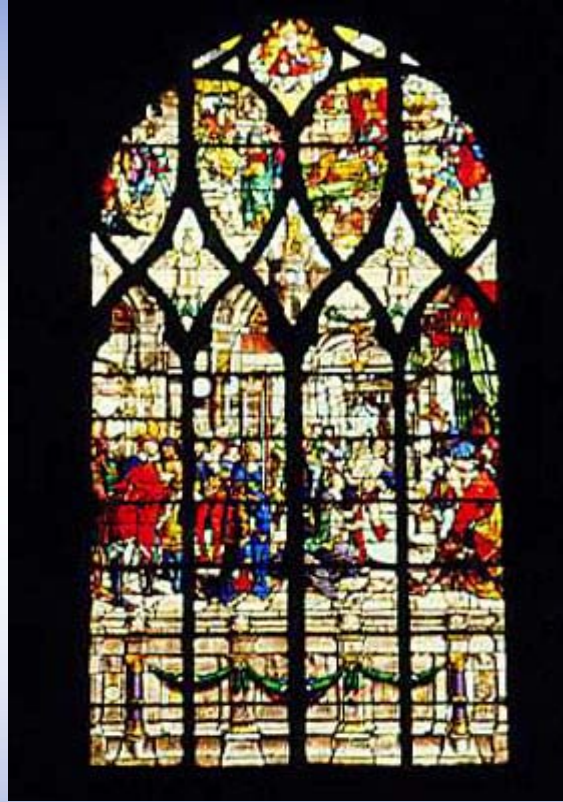
**“St. Swithin's Day, if thou dost rain,  
For forty days it will remain.”**



**Charles F. Brooks,  
No. 367, July 15, 1924**



## More Wet Weather Saints



**40 days of rain**

**St. Medard – June 8    St. Gervais & St. Protais – June 19**

**Charles Fitzhugh Talman – July 20, 1927**

**Ice Saints – Memertus, Pancras, Servatius, and Boniface are held responsible for the cold weather – Charles F. Brooks, May 11, 1925**

No. 411

A Science Service Feature

Sept. 4

1 WHY THE WEATHER ?

By Dr. Charles F. Brooks,  
of Clark University.

ST. ELMO'S FIRE

Under stormy conditions, a small electrical brush discharge sometimes takes place from points connected with the earth into the air, the mariner's St. Elmo's fire. Not being very brilliant, it is most commonly observed at night, when the appearance of luminous spots and jets of flame on mast heads and rigging gives a weird and spectral effect. On high mountains such discharges are particularly well developed, especially in snowstorms. Sometimes the hissing sound of the discharge may be heard, even when the "fire" is invisible. On the mountain top, the head of an observer or a stick held aloft may become luminous, playing the part of the usual ship's mast. As the amount of electricity involved is very small, perhaps one ampere per square meter of surface, there is no danger in experiencing the dreaded St. Elmo's fire, though a discharge taking place from the body causes a slight tingling sensation.

Some extreme instances of such discharges are occasionally reported from the Great Plains. During some dust storms the discharges from ponies' ears and riders' heads become fearsome. Cowboys on such occasions have even thrown their revolvers to the ground to avoid possible discharge.

-----  
(Tomorrow: Mountain Sickness)

All rights reserved by Science Service

Science Service,  
B and 21st Sts.,  
Washington, D.C.

# “Wet” and “Dry” Moon Fallacy

- When the crescent tips downward, it is a “wet” moon.
- If the crescent points upward, it is a “dry” moon.
- **False proverb** – if the believers would take the opportunity to scan the weather records...



**Charles F. Brooks, no. 30, June 15, 1923**

- Two known versions that contradict each other.
- No such uniformity of weather.



**Charles F. Talman, August 30, 1928**

# Weather Uninfluenced By Moon

**“The moon and the weather  
May change together,  
But a change in the moon,  
Does not change the weather.”**

**“The doggerel is absolutely true.”  
--- Charles F. Brooks  
no. 112, Sept. 19, 1923**

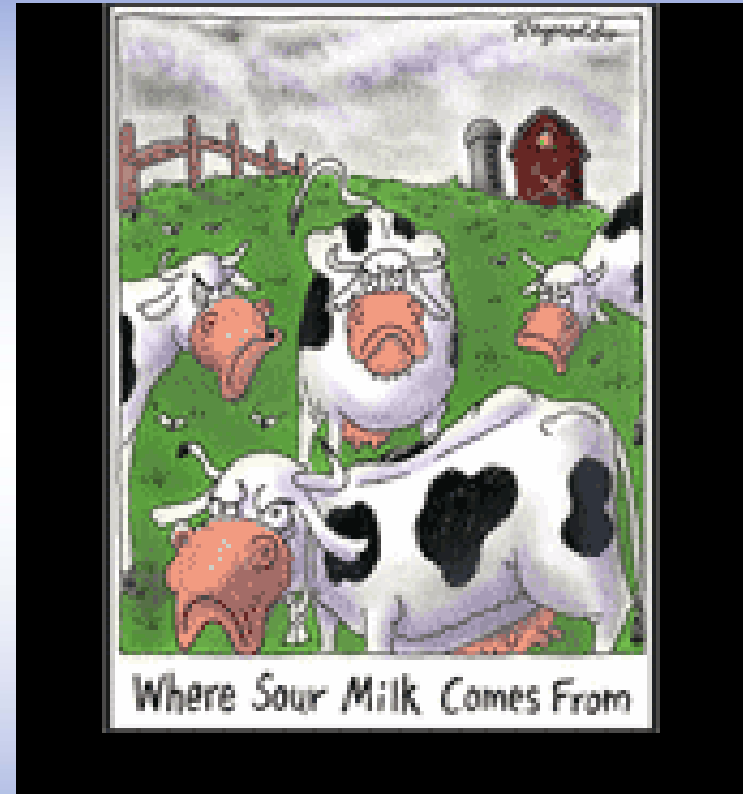
# Thunder Does Not Sour Milk

- Hot, moist weather favors bacterial growth and the spoiling of food by evening.
- Late afternoon or evening thunderstorms
- Process of souring has been going on all day.
- Wrong conclusion.

**Charles F. Brooks, no. 47, July 5, 1923**

- Belief old and widespread
- Subject of considerable scientific investigation by A. Trillat
- U.S.D.A. process of sultry weather

**Charles F. Talman, June 27, 1928**



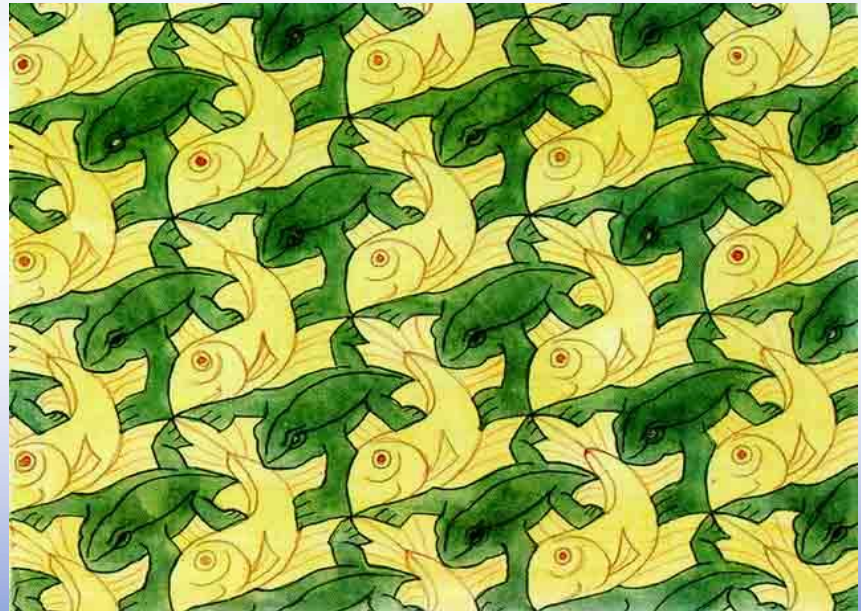
# Raining Cats and Dogs...

It doesn't really, but ...



# Raining Cats and Dogs...

It doesn't really, but ...  
sometimes it does rain  
fishes and frogs...



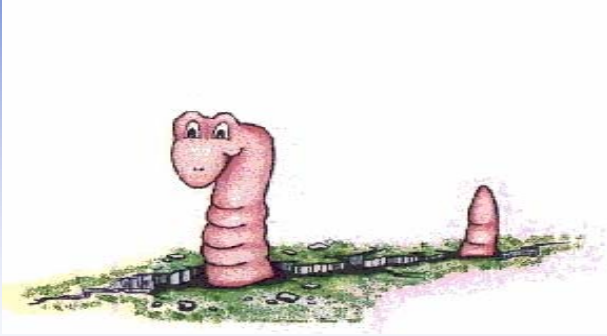
**Charles F. Brooks, no.405, Aug. 28, 1924**

**Charles F. Talman, April 21, 1928**

**Refuted Talman, May 10, 1928**

**Confirmed Talman, Dec. 24, 1929**

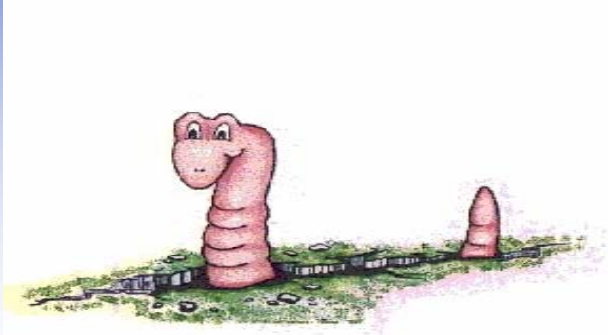
# Raining Cats and Dogs...



**Earthworms**



# Raining Cats and Dogs...

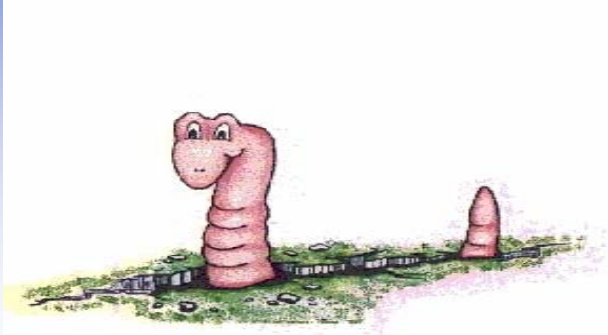


**Earthworms**

**Insects**

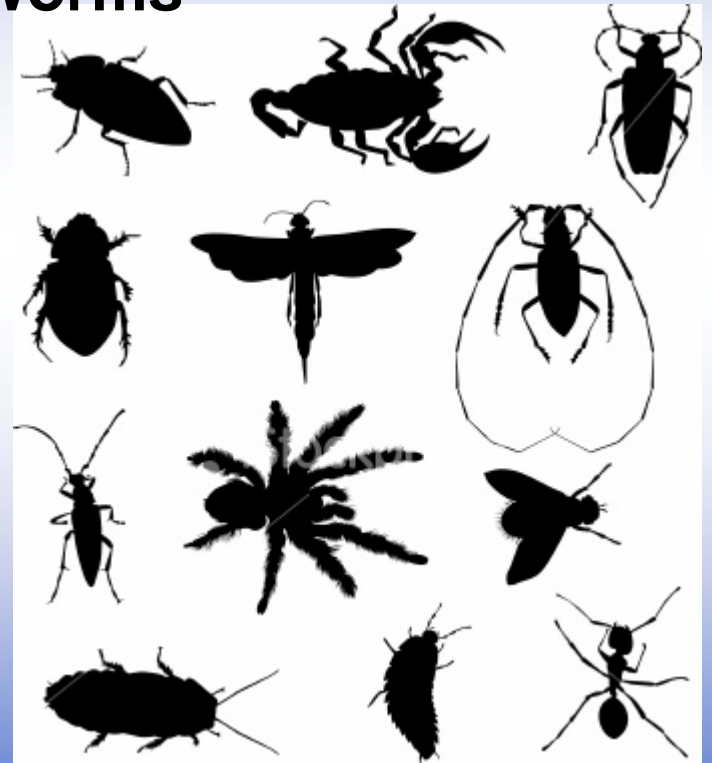


# Raining Cats and Dogs...



**Earthworms**

**Insects**



**even shell fish**

## Official U.S. Weather Bureau Statement

“We have no observations that show just when and where such things were caught up in a storm...”

“It is our conviction that the great majority of such reports have no basis of fact...”

If we accept as true any of the reports....these things were caught up somewhere from the surface of the earth...by a violent storm...”

**Showers of Living Creatures**  
**Charles F. Talman**  
**May 10, 1928**

# Lightning Can Strike Twice In the Same Place

- “The Eiffel Tower, a steel structure 1,000 feet high, has been struck often, indeed even *six* times in a single heavy storm.”
- Old adage is “not true”  
Charles F. Brooks, August 18, 1925
- Special wrath of heaven according to the Romans
- Never strikes the laurel, the seal, the eagle.
- Sealskin was worn as a protection against lightning.

Charles F. Talman, April 13, 1928



For release                      By Major A.H. Thiessen  
April 1, 1940                  Science Service Meteorologist

April showers! This phrase has long implied that April is a wet month, and the idea was crystallized in the saying: "April showers bring May flowers." And Chaucer in his Canterbury Tales opens with: "When that Aprille with his shoures..." April generally has good showers both in the United States and in Canada; but the rainfall in May is generally greater except in the plateau region and on the Pacific coast. As for "showers," meaning short, sharp downfalls of rain, they occur oftener in summer months than in April which often has rains of the winter type.

-----

## Other Curious Weather Sayings – 3/27/29

A load of hay passing means fair weather – Massachusetts

Talking of horses is a sign of rain – Labrador

Sparks on the bottom of the tea kettle mean rain – Maine

# Breaking a Drought in China

- Forbids the slaughter of livestock.
- Population goes without meat for three days.
- Processions are formed and a holiday declared to invoke the heavens.
- Sacred iron tablet that brings rain from Hantan, Chili Province, is brought to the desired location.



-- Charles F. Talman  
Authority on Meteorology  
March 28, 1929

# Breaking A Drought In Salvador

## It is Decreed:

Considering that the Supreme Creator has not responded to their prayers ...

- No one will go to mass or say prayers.
- Churches and chapels shall be burned.
- All priests, friars, and nuns shall be beheaded.

Four days after these resolutions, the heaviest rainfall drenched the community.



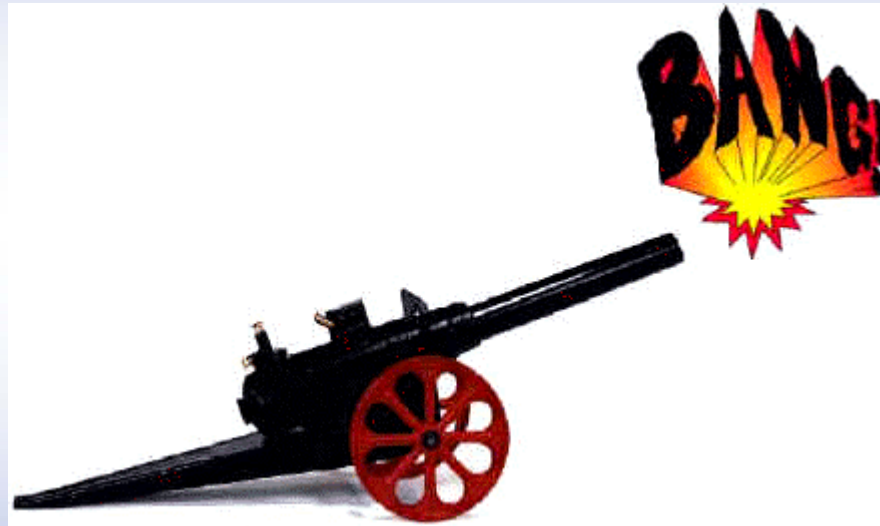
Charles F. Talman  
Authority on Meteorology  
January 9, 1930

Cannons were fired to

-- avert hailstorms in Southern France around 1900

(Sept. 19, 1929)

-- stop a waterspout (Sept. 16, 1929)



The Dakota Indians fought thunder by whopping, yelling, and firing at the rising cloud. (July 22, 1929)



# Weather Basics for the Public

- Why Stars Twinkle – no. 65, July 26, 1923
- Waterspouts are Simply Tornadoes Over Water – 118, Sept. 26, 1923
- How to Use a Weather Map – no. 222, Jan. 28, 1924
- How Icicles Form – no. 239, Feb. 16, 1924
- How Snowflakes Fall – March 6, 1926
- What Makes Highs and Lows – March 10, 1926
- What Makes a Wind? – May 8, 1926
- What is the Temperature? – Oct. 13, 1926
- What is Climate? – June 20, 1928
- What is Hail? – June 23, 1928

No. 239

A Science Service Feature

June 12

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Dr. Charles F. Brooks,  
of Clark University,  
MASS.

WHY THE SKY IS BLUE

The blue color of the sky has been ascribed to the actual color of the air, or to the selective scattering of the shorter rays of the spectrum by extremely minute dust particles or the molecules of the gases that compose the atmosphere. As proofs of this explanation are cited the change from a bluish sun and dark, though blue, sky observed from great heights, to a yellowish sun and bright blue sky seen from low elevations. This is because in passing through the atmosphere, the longer wave lengths, yellow and red, are least disturbed and travel straightest. The short wave-length, blue and violet rays, however, are easily interfered with and turned aside by minute particles. The more air the sun's rays penetrate, as when the sun is low, the smaller the proportion of blue light left and, in consequence, the yellower or redder the sun appears. The sky, however, does not necessarily look any bluer with a low sun and it may look greenish white, for the considerable reflection of greens and yellows and also of total sunlight by the larger particles in the atmosphere introduces so much extra light that even the greater amount of scattered blue may form a smaller proportion of the total light from the sky.

-----

(Tomorrow: "Lows" Cooler Than "Highs" in Summer)

All rights reserved by Science Service

Science Service,  
B and G Sts.,  
Washington, D.C.

# Fastest Weather Services in the World

## Making the Weather Map

- Observations are taken every morning and evening at 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. at 300 stations.
- Telegraphed in code to Washington – temperature, barometer reading, fair or cloudy, wind velocity and direction, precipitation.
- One man reads the messages aloud decoding as he goes.
- Staff listen for their part of the message; writing the figures on a great map.
- With the last message, the tables are set up and almost ready to print.
- 1/24/29 – “at least 4 observations and reports a day is likely to become standard practice. C. F Talman
- 2/21/29 – teletyped weather reports



Charles F. Brooks, no. 147, Oct. 30, 1923  
Charles F. Brooks, no. 795, Nov. 27, 1925

# In context of 1920's & Predictions

“With **radio warnings** now available, hurricanes are less of a menace to shipping ...” August 8, 1925

For future Atlantic flights, “weather maps will probably be received on board the plane at intervals of a few hours by a telephotographic process...” July 12, 1927

References to the Titanic....only 14 years ago... April 14, 1925

“New” polar front theory by V. Bjerknes...July 5, 1928

Inaugural weather for March

A Forecast Factory - *Weather Prediction by Numerical Process* by Lewis Fry Richardson, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1922 – Jan. 28, 1926

Teaching of Meteorology – “has never occupied the place it deserves in the curricula of American universities” – Sept. 9, 1927

“..new art of air-conditioning....Feb. 8, 1929

For release            By Major A.E. Thiessen  
Dec. 13, 1939        Science Service Meteorologist

Weather service of the future! If the predictions of all weathermen regarding this question were fulfilled, we would have in 35 or 50 years a weather service as exact as the present time service. Instruments will have been invented to indicate the weather of all parts of the atmosphere over sea and land and the data transmitted at once to all forecasting agencies. Forecasts would then be made available to all activities for a day, week, month or year in advance through press, radio and telephone. One may in that future time take up his telephone, touch the proper button, and the required forecast will immediately be recited by robot information clerks.

---

# Most Frequently Cited References



**Dr. William Jackson Humphreys  
meteorological physicist of the  
Weather Bureau**



**Wilson Alwyn Bentley - Snowflakes**

# “Watch the Weather”

**It is a free show, and will last a life time.**

Dr. Charles F. Brooks

December 11, 1925

# Acknowledgements

- Science Service – for permissions
- NOAA Climate Database Modernization Program
- NODC – programming and scanning assistance
- Library staff for developing the web site, loading and QC of the files