

THE PALIMPSEST

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The Weather

Since 1838, when Theodore S. Parvin began making systematic observations of eastern Iowa's weather, many new instruments and techniques have been developed which have enabled modern weather bureaus to chart and predict climatological conditions more accurately. In 1955 a new 72-inch radar antenna made it possible for the six observers at the Des Moines weather station to plot the course of storms throughout Iowa and to give residents in the path of severe disturbances several hours advance warning.

On the night of July 9-10 the radar sets showed thunderstorms converging on Sioux City. Over six inches of rain fell in that area within four hours. Although there was no flooding from streams, some 700 homes and many stores suffered heavy water damage. Total loss was estimated at \$1,500,000. Fortunately this was the most severe storm to hit the state during the year. For once Iowa got through a year without any serious losses due to tornadoes or floods.

A combination of high temperatures and low precipitation, however, caused far more damage than any storms or floods could inflict. For the fourth year in a row thermometers registered above normal readings. It was slight comfort to those who suffered through the summer months to learn that the average annual temperature for the state was the lowest in the four-year period.

Beginning on July 26, the mercury went above 100 in most of the state for ten straight days. On July 30, Sac City had a temperature of 109, a figure which was repeated there and at Onawa on the following day. These were the hottest readings reported in the entire country on these days. This heat wave, the most prolonged at such high temperatures since 1936, was broken by the arrival of cool air from Canada on August 4, but before it passed some 31 deaths were blamed on the weather.

Iowans continued to suffer from the heat throughout July and August. July was the fourth hottest month since state records began to be kept in 1873. Only July of 1936 and 1901, and August in 1947 had higher average temperatures. Glenwood had only three days during the month when the thermometer did not climb above 90. August was the fifth hottest August on record. Missouri Valley equalled the year's high reading with 109 on August 27. As late as September 15, Sac City was recording a temperature of 101.

While city dwellers sweltered, farmers watched their crops dry up. The year was one of the driest on record. Only in February and April did precipitation average above normal. Beginning in May all the state received less than normal amounts of rainfall every month for the rest of the year. June was cooler than usual but dry, and prospects loomed for a bumper crop of corn and soybeans. But the very hot, dry, and frequently windy weather of July and August wrecked havoc with crops, especially in the western part of the state. During August alone corn prospects dropped an estimated 140,000,000 bushels, representing a dollar loss of around \$200,000,000. The moisture content of corn on November 20 was the third driest in the 28 years records had been kept. The state's corn crop when finally harvested was 12 per cent less than in 1954 and 8 per cent below the ten-year average. Soybean production was the poorest since 1947.

Tests by Iowa State College agronomists on November 1 showed soil in parts of western Iowa contained virtually no moisture as far down as five feet. November provided no relief for these farmers, as the state received only 13 per cent of its normal precipitation for that month. It was the driest November since 1914, while December was the driest since 1929.

Once again, as wells and ponds ran dry, farmers in southwestern Iowa were forced to haul

water from nearby communities. With new industries entering the state at an increasing rate the question of water rights and priorities also entered the discussion of Iowa's water problem. In addition, the rapid expansion in the use of air conditioning presented a new and vast drain on the water supplies of towns and cities. To study some of these matters the General Assembly appointed a special committee headed by Representative Wendell Pendleton of Storm Lake. It was hoped that the committee's investigations would pave the way for legal clarification of drainage and water rights.

GEORGE S. MAY