

Comment by the Editor

RAIN AND SHINE

"How do you like the weather?"

"Is it cold enough for you?"

"They say these sultry nights will make the corn grow."

"Anything blow down at your house last night?"

What a common topic of conversation the weather is! Wherever you go, whomever you meet, talk is likely to begin with a question or comment about the sunshine, storms, or temperature. Everybody is interested in the weather.

Just as the sky with its stars is always above us and the earth beneath, so the conditions of climate always surround us. People can no more ignore the weather than they can fail to see the other works of nature about them. Directly or indirectly the weather affects every one. Rain and shine make crops grow, but floods and drought destroy them and then people go hungry. The wind carries away smoke and brings relief from sultry days, but blowing hard and laden with snow or dust it causes suffering and often death.

Read the diaries of Iowa pioneers and you will

find that every day the weather was mentioned. Perhaps a single word, like blizzard, hail, or cloudburst, described the source of a tragedy. The loss of a whole year's work might be put in the statement, "Wind and rain; small grain down." It was not for lack of something else to write about that records of the daily temperature were kept. To the early settlers the weather was more important than neighborhood gossip or personal opinions.

In the letters that the Iowa pioneers wrote to their friends and in the guide books that were published for the benefit of immigrants, the changing seasons were often described. "Winter is generally dry, cold and bracing", wrote Albert M. Lea in 1836. "The waters are all bridged with ice; the snow is frequently deep enough to afford good sleighing, and it is considered the best season for traveling." Another writer portrayed winter as a time for hunting, quilting parties, and fun that usually lasted from December to March.

About spring there was difference of opinion. Some thought April was a gloomy month, full of wind and rain and cloudy skies. Others noticed the sunny days and watched the carpet of the prairie turn green, saw the leaves come out, and smelled the fragrance of spring blossoms.

Summers, they said, were warm but not too hot.

Sultry spells were relieved by gentle breezes and refreshing showers. For several weeks during July and August in 1835 an exploring party of soldiers rode across the prairie through grass six feet high and did not mind the heat.

Of all the seasons, however, autumn has always been thought to be the most beautiful. From the end of August to December the sky is clear and the air is fresh. Day after day for weeks during the calm period called Indian summer the sun is veiled in light haze, "while the forests are tinged with the most gorgeous hues, imparting to all nature something of the enchantments of fairy-land." Gradually these golden days fade into winter.

More precisely, according to official records, the average annual temperature in Iowa is about 48° above zero. In the summer the thermometer readings average approximately 72° and in the winter 22°. May 3rd is the average date of the last killing frost in the spring, while the first in the fall is most likely to come on October 5th. The wind blows from the northwest most of the year at about eight miles an hour, but in the summer it shifts to the south and brings the rain clouds. About thirty-two inches of water falls annually in the form of rain and snow. On three-fifths of the days in a normal year the sun shines clearly.

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