

How much does Farmer's Almanac know?

By SHIRLEY KAHAN

We can safely predict that spring is on its way. Beyond that, though, we are hesitant, because the science of long-range weather predictions is not an exact one.

Nevertheless, predictions on weather constantly rain on us from many sources and many people take them to heart.

Last fall, you will remember, we were warned of a cold winter. The mystic word came from field and stream where apparently the fish were diving deeper, the rabbits huddling up and outdoor persons wearing thicker-than-usual down jackets.

The Old Farmer's Almanac also promised an exceptionally cold period in the Midwest starting the last week of January and extending through February.

Big deal. It's not too hard to forecast a cold winter for this part of the country. But few are as daring as the Farmer's Almanac to put it down in black and white to be checked later for accuracy.

While many seers broadcast widely their successful prophecy about that big winter storm, few of them announce their failures.

FA also proclaims its successes. But its failures are available to anyone willing to plunk down the money to buy a copy of this 187-year-old publication.

Since this is the year of the Global Weather Experiment involving the countries of the world in a combined effort to improve long-range weather forecasting, it might be in the spirit of the time to see how accurate FA was in its January and February weather estimates.

THERE WERE NOT precise enough to base your life on its general predictions are as vague as the weather. Profit from following its predictions about a date for skating, washing the car or taking a long trip. The day in day prophecies for those two months missed more than they hit.

Zeroing in on the big memorable events of this winter, it is even evident that FA gave an advance word to Chicagoans about the blizzard that was to dump 20.7 inches of snow on them Jan. 13. Nor did it provide sufficient information to residents of New York, Washington and Baltimore that a big one was on its way Feb. 19.

The magazine was much more successful in its predictions about what was to prove to be the coldest February in the Detroit area in 107 years.

In making its annual prognostications, FA divides the country into regions. The Chicago-Southern Great Lakes area is called Region 9. It includes the bottom half of the Lower Peninsula.

Before it gets into the nitty gritty, day-to-day information, FA offers its readers a weather summary for the area. It was here that it warned of that exceptionally cold period that was to begin the last week of January and continue through February.

It added this puzzling sentence: "Snowfall will be greater than usual, at though overall seasonal precipitation will be deficient." One would think that more snow would equal more precipitation rather than less.

The chosen FA came to an accurate heavy weather prophecy was a "near blizzard" estimate for Jan. 20-27. With the truth had been a two-hour wet snow, hardly a near blizzard, on Jan. 20 that because of water then pouring, the snow didn't linger.

Also contrary to FA's expectations, January went out like a pussy cat with highs in the 30s rather than the exceptional cold FA forecast for that week.

Happily for the almanac, the publication's crystal forecast sharpened, and February's frigid follies were pinpointed more accurately.

Give or take a few degrees, FA was almost right on the button with its promise of a very cold Feb. 1-4. Very cold it was, with a wind chill factor of 23 degrees below zero on Feb. 4.

It was on the money Feb. 10-11 with another "very cold." You'd better believe it.

But fact and forecast parted company Feb. 12-14 when the almanac crystal-balled a "light snow, drifting; some sun." Mother Nature had not finished with her cold kick because Feb. 12 had a low of eight above and a wind chill of 10 below. It was zero on Feb. 13, and the almanac's snow turned up right on schedule Feb. 14.

The magazine was right again for Feb. 15 and 16, as a home chiller arrived. However, on Feb. 17 when the wind chill factor was 24 below and the mercury at seven below zero, FA had only "moderate snow" listed in the report.

A cold wave was predicted for Feb. 20-24 that on Feb. 20 had a low of one above, but a high of 31, which turned into a winter "heat wave," lifting the mercury up to 45 above on Feb. 23. But FA quickly caught on to the temperature change and correctly picked "gradual warming" as its end-of-month guess.

THE SNOWFALL THAT smothered the nation's capital and caused a blizzard of looting in Baltimore highlights one of the main problems in the almanac forecasts. It is one of degree. It forecast "snow changing to rain," and that is exactly what happened.

Brooks said Ford & Taylor's profile have been "exceptional." For its rose 25 percent in my first year with the company and 25 per cent the second year. Brooks has been chairman and chief operating officer for 30 months.

"We exceeded the plan in two stores but not in the third. Our three stores together exceeded our plan," Brooks said.

He referred to the stores at Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi; Lakeside in Sterling Heights and Fairlane in Dearborn. But he declined to say which two had exceeded "the plan," how well they had done individually and collectively, and what soft spots there might be.

The company's goal was known to be sales of \$100 a square foot. Each store has 123,000 square feet. That multiplies to a target of \$35.9 million for the year March 6, 1978 to March 5, 1979 in the metropolitan area.

Brooks said the company is proceeding with plans for a fourth store, at Briarwood Mall in Ann Arbor, but no others "at this point."

Associated Dry Goods has about 150 stores nationwide. Industry analysts say profit margins are tight and growth moderate for the company as a whole. Besides the 29 Lord & Taylor outlets, Associated owns Siz, Baer & Fuller, Joseph Horne Co., Stewart & Co., J.W. Robinson Co., Sibley, Lindsay & Co. and Denver Dry Goods, along with smaller outlets.

Associated's sales for the year ended Jan. 31 were about \$1.57 billion, but no breakdown between the divisions is available.

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