

"BUT THE FARMER'S ALMANAC" Farmer's Almanac fails meteorology

By SHERRY 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 ex-act one.

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 bundling up and outdoor persons wearing thickerthan-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.

Bit deal It's not too bard for fearth.

Big deal. It's not too hard to forecast 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 Reather 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 times 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 so vague that you wouldn't profit from referring to them about a date for sking, washing the car or taking a long trip. The day-to-day prophecies for those two months missed more than than the wife.

ing a iong trip, are cay-to-eay propur-cies for those two months missed more than they hit.

Zeroling in on the the big memorable events of this winter, it is soon evident events of this winter, it is soon evident events of this winter, it is soon evident cagoans about the bitzard that two its dump 20.7 inches of snow on them Jan.

Nor did it provide sufficient infor-mation to residents of New York, Washington and Baltimore that a big one was on its way Feb. 19.

The magazine was much more suc-cessful in its predictions about what was to prove to be the coldest Febru-ary in the Detroit area in 107 years.

In making its annual prognostica-tions, 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: Sativalal will be greater than usual shough overall scasonal precipitation will be deficient: "One would think that more snow would equal more precipitation rather than less.

DAY-TO-DAY PREDICTIONS are made in terse, farmer-like phrases, For January, "1-4 very cold, light snow, 5-9 seasonal; snow, heavy west, 10-15 in termittent snow, heavy mest, 10-15 in termittent snow, heavy lest, 20-3 partly cloudy, turning extremely cold." Let's look first at that "intermittant snow" estimate for Jan. 10-15. It simply isn't an adequate description for what happened on Jan. 13 to Chicago. No mere fog creeping in on little cat feet that day.

It was snow roaring in like an elephant bringing drifts, winds and more that 20 inches of snow. The governor called northern Illinois a disaster area.

The snow also piled up a nuch-publi-

called northern Illinois a disaster area. The snow also piled up a much-publicized disaster for Chicago Mayor Bilandic, who was said to have lost a primary election because of poor snow removal skills. It was an important climatic happening for FA to miss. And not just for its Illinois and Michigan readers. Residents of Region 9 living in northern Indiana and Ohio and Southern Wisconsin who waded around in galoshes in 12-16 inches of snow might have appreciated fair warning.

NOR DID THE ALMANAC pick up the cold that followed the big blizzard. Detroil's 11 degrees below zero on Jan. 15 was its coldest day in almost three years. On the same day, Chicago expe-rienced 19 degrees below zero. The closest FA came to an accurate

Detroit had was a two-hour wet snow, hardly a near blizzard, on Jan. 25. But because of warm temperature, the snow didn't linger. Also contrary to FA's expectations, January went out like a passy cat with highs in the 30s rather than the exceptional cold FA foresaw for that week. Happily for the almanae, the publications crystal foresight sharpened, and February's frigid follies were pincited more accurately. Desire the state of t

e 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, driftings some
sum." 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 bone chiller
arrived. However, on Feb. 17 when the
wind chill factor was 26 below and the
mercury at seven below zero, FA had
only "moderate snow" listed in its
report.

"we was predicted for Feb.
20-24. Not so. True, Feb. 20 had a low
to allowe, but a high of 31, which
tutor allowe. But fact the solution of the
23. But FA quickly caption on Feb.
23. But FA quickly caption of the
temperature change and contectly
picked "gradual warming" as its endof-motth guess.

THE SNOWFALL THAT smothered

THE SNOWFALL THAT smothered the nation's capital and caused a blizzard of looting in Baltimore highlights more of the main problems in the almanac forecast's now changing to raim," and that is exactly what happened. But these words gave its east coast reacters no indication that they were taken for ferections winds and 23 inches due for ferections winds and 23 inches

heavy weather prophecy was a "near of snow that ground bureaucratic life blizzard" estimate for Jan. 25-27. What to a standstill.



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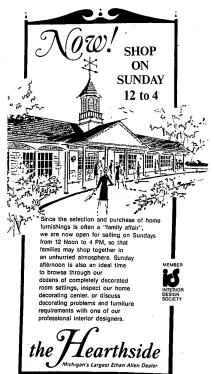
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