

INDIAN SUMMER MOST PECULIAR SEASON OF YEAR

Tradition Alone Takes It Back to Time of Indian Supremacy.

CONFUSION AS TO THE EXACT TIME

Generally Comes the Last of October or First of November, Although Some Claim It is Earlier and Others Later—Tradition as to the Season is Not Confined to the United States.

By Frederic J. Haskin.

With the coming of every autumn come additional references to the beauties of the Indian summer, which is commonly supposed to be a feature of the American climate usually to be found in November. According to popular belief there is a spell of peculiar weather occurring every year which is characterized by three special features—a greater warmth than the preceding days or weeks, by smokiness, and by haziness. It is true that some scientific writers have denied the existence of the increased warmth and have declared that the alleged smokiness is an optical delusion. Nevertheless the popular belief is in favor of the peculiarities described and the term "Indian summer" in America is supposed to account for them.

Despite the prevailing opinion that the term Indian summer is of ancient origin, beginning with the earliest settlers of this country, recent investigations of historical students as to this subject prove that in reality it is less than a century and a half since Indian summer was first mentioned and in the earlier reports of climatic conditions in the new country it did not appear at all. Tradition alone takes it back to the time of the Indians, since in the numerous references to the pleasant weather of the American autumn made by many writers, there are records of less than half a dozen who used the term Indian summer up to the year 1800.

The differences as to the term in the year when the peculiarities of Indian summer are to be looked for, as well as their length of duration, are almost as varied as the opinions of the scientists as to why such peculiarities exist, if indeed they are admitted to exist at all. It has been stated that Indian summer occurs in September, in October, November and even in January; that it lasts from three to four days to as many weeks; that it is peculiar to New England; that it does

not exist in New England at all, and there are plenty of literary authorities to uphold any one of these versions, and so far there is no recognized scientific opinion upon any phase of the subject.

Late in October. It is probable that the most numerous authorities place Indian summer either in late October or in November. Nathaniel Eszthorne wrote on November 8, 1842: "Ever since our return, until today, there has been a succession of genuine Indian summer days, with gentle winds, or none at all, and a misty atmosphere which idealizes all nature, and mild, beneficent sunshine, inviting one to lie down in a nook and forget all earthly care. Today, however, the sky is dark and lowering and occasionally lets fall a few sullen tears. I suppose we must bid farewell to Indian summer now and expect no more tenderness from Mother Nature till next spring will be well advanced."

In 1842 J. P. Watson wrote in the "National Intelligencer" of Philadelphia: "The short season of pleasant weather usually occurring about the middle of November is called Indian summer from the custom of the Indians to avail themselves of this delightful time for the harvesting of their corn, and the tradition is that they were accustomed to say that they always had a second summer of nine days just before the winter set in. It is a bland and genial time in which the birds, insects and plants feel a new creation and sport a short lived summer before they shrink from the rigors of winter's blast. The sky in the meantime is generally filled with a haze of orange and gold, intercepting the direct rays of the sun and yet passing through heat enough to prevent sensations of gloom or chill, while the nights grow sharp and frosty and the necessary fires give cheerful forecast of the social winter evenings ahead." The great fair at Philadelphia was fixed for November with Indian summer in view as this was supposed to give promise of three or four good days for traveling at a time when the only means of journeying was by horse and carriage.

While November is thus specialized as an Indian summer month it is of interest to know that Thoreau alludes to Indian summer weather at other periods. In one of his books he speaks of Indian summer upon different dates running from September 27 to December 31, covering a range of 77 days within 10 years at the locality of Concord. Nothing could show better the elasticity and the absolute indefiniteness of the term in its popular conception.

Divides the Autumn. Among the American writers who have given attention to Indian summer is Wilson Flagg, who in 1857 wrote a poetical description of the autumn, dividing it into three periods beginning with the coloring of the leaves in September constituting the first period, and ending with the third period about the tenth of November, when the frosts have turned the forests into one monotonous brown, after which comes a few mild days which he calls Indian summer. It is rather interesting to note that Flagg changed his views upon this subject, however, since in 1872 he

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wrote: "After the fall of the leaf is completed, then according to tradition comes the Indian summer—a fruitful theme both for poets and philosophical writers, but of which no one knows from experience. It is certain that we have now in the eastern states no regular coming of this delightful term of mildness, this smiling interruption of the melancholy days of autumn. We are occasionally greeted by two or three days which resemble it after the first cool weather of October and these short visits are repeated in some years several times. But a true Indian summer attended with all the peculiar phenomena described by some of our early writers in prose and poetry, rarely accompanies a modern autumn. It has fled from our land before the progress of civilization; it has departed with our primeval forest. If it ever existed, it was a phenomenon produced by some unexplained circumstance attending the universal wooded state of the country that existed for many years after its settlement. The whole continent, at the time of its discovery, was one vast hunting ground where the inhabitants obtained their subsistence from the chase of deer and buffalo. At this period, the climate had not been modified by the operation of man upon the forest. According to apparently authentic accounts, Indian summer did not arrive before November, nor till a series of hard frosts had destroyed the leaves of the forest."

Some sarcastic criticisms have been made regarding Mr. Flagg's assumption of knowledge of primeval climatic conditions of which it is claimed there is no authentic record, and his assumption that the Indian summer is a thing of the past is of course strongly disputed. As a matter of fact, there is not a year when Indian summer is not apparent to thousands of people, and while its exact time is never fixed by the weather bureau, its beauty and attractiveness are acknowledged by millions. Its earmarks are designated by Mrs. Stowe in "Old Time Folks" as follows: "When the apples are all gathered, the cider all made, the yellow pumpkins rolled in from many a hill in furrows of gold, when the corn was husked and the labors of the season were done, the late warm days of the Indian summer came in, dreamy, calm and still, with just enough frost to crisp the ground of a morning, but with warm traces of benignant sunny hours at noon. There came over the community a sort of genial repose, a sense of having accomplished something, and of a new golden mark in the calendar of life and the deacon began to say to the minister of a Sunday, 'I suppose it's about time for the Thanksgiving proclamation to be coming along.'"

The first writer, of which there is any record, to refer to Indian summer was General Josiah Hamar, who in his journal of his expedition against the Maumee Indians in 1790, uses the term three times. This occurred in October, however, the last mention being dated Oct. 31, when he records "Fine, clear weather. Indian summer. Marched and halted a little while at what is called Sugar Camp, from whence to Cassara's creek, branch of the Little Miami." In 1794 Major Ebenezer Denny's military journal also records Indian summer in October and the term is used by two Frenchmen who traveled in America, one of them, Volney, giving considerable attention to the subject as a climatic phenomenon peculiar to America. These seem to be the only known mentions of the term before the year 1800.

Alfred Austin's Poem. Since then, however, almost every writer has used it more or less and its use has not been confined to this country but extended into England and even to other countries. When the late Queen Victoria reached her eightieth birthday, Alfred Austin, the

poet laureate, addressed to her a birthday poem entitled "An Indian Summer," in which are the lines: "Long may the Indian summer of your days, yet linger in the land you love, so well." All of the American poets have used the term frequently although Longfellow and Whittier have perhaps done most to make it familiar.

The origin of the term is much disputed and probably never will be known. One plausible theory is that it came from the harvesting of the Indian maize or corn which was long after the harvest of the European grains. Another is the Indian legend given us by Longfellow in Hiawatha, who describes Shawondasee, the owner of the south wind, whose autumn sigh gave the mild weather and whose smoking tobacco pipe, the smoky haze.

In other nations, however, there is a mild period looked for after the first cold of autumn. This is known by many titles none of which seems to have become so popular as the Indian summer of America. In England it has been known as All-hallow summer. The term St. Martin's summer originated in France, but it is also much used in England and both correspond with the Indian summer of America. The Lombardy peasants expect always a few fine days at the end of October which they call St. Teresa's summer, while the Germans call it Altwäher summer. The Swedes give the title of St. Bridget's summer, the Belgians St. Michael's summer, the Bohemians the summer of St. Wendeslaus and, it is reported, that in the Argentine Republic there is a period of similar weather known as St. John's epure.

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