

**ARE THERE EQUINOCTIAL
STORMS? DEVELOPMENT
OF THE MARINE BAROMETER
IN AMERICAN WATERS**

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Are There Equinoctial Storms? Development of the Marine Barometer in American waters by
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JOHN H. MORRISON

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Equinoctial Storms?

DEVELOPMENT OF THE
MARINE BAROMETER
IN AMERICAN WATERS

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Are There Equinoctial Storms?



THE severe West Indian storms occurring about the time of the spring and autumnal equinoxes have long been the subject of investigation, and the early opinions have been handed down to the present time with many other sayings, like the St. Swithins Day fallacy, from the days of superstition and comparative ignorance of the sciences. They are with us to some extent even at this day, but not of so marked a character nor so broadcast as they were even fifty years ago. They cannot stand the searchlight of investigation, nor the analysis of these storms to a locality at or near the time of the equinoxes, for a long period of years.

Our early education on this subject has no doubt been the reason for entertaining opinions held for so many years. Being handed down from one generation to another with but little thought of their causes, the subject engaged the attention of very few. The "equinoctial gales," so called, were then accepted and recognized as regular visitors to our sea coast cities at stated intervals of the spring and autumn of the year.

That they were a factor then to be recognized and taken into account and that had a firm hold on public opinion in this country can be brought to mind by some persons even at this late day. When preparing to start on a deep sea voyage near the spring or autumn equinox they would be advised that it were more prudent to wait until the equinoctial had passed before sailing, on account of the danger to a vessel running into one of these storms.

Some of the popular sources of information in former days may be quoted from as showing the opinions then entertained on the subject by those well informed. Thus Universal Etymological English Dictionary of 1764 says, "Hurricane; a violent form of wind which often happens in the East and West Indies in September and October, overthrowing trees, houses, and whatsoever is in its way." Hurricanes begin in the North, but turn around, and in a little time veer through all the points of the compass. Dictionary of the English Language, Samuel Johnson, 1768, "Equinoctial Wind" happening about the time of the equinoxes. Falconer's Naval Dictionary, 1804, "Equinoctial Gales"; storms which are observed

generally to take place about the time of the Sun's crossing the equator or equinoctial line, at which time there is equal day and night throughout the world. Mariner's Dictionary or American Seamen's Vocabulary of Technical Terms and Sea Phrases, 1805, "Equinoctial Gales," storms which are observed generally to take place about the time of the Sun's crossing the equator or equinoctial line, at which time there is equal day and night throughout the world; "Hurricanes," a violent and prodigious tempest accompanied with lightning, in which the wind blows from every part of the compass, causing a dangerous agitation in the sea, when the waves break and dash against each other with astonishing fury. Hurricanes are most frequent between the tropics, when they sometimes produce the greatest devastation. They generally take place about the time of the Sun's passing the equinox, i. e., the 21st March and 21st September. Noah Webster in his American Dictionary of 1828 says: "Pertaining to the time when the Sun enters the equinoctial point, as an equinoctial gale or storm, which happens at or near the equinox in any part of the world." In New York daily

newspapers we find the severe storm of September, 1815 reported as "the equinoctial gale." It appears to have extended near the whole length of our eastern seaboard. In September, 1838, "We had throughout yesterday one of the steady, soaking, Northeast rains, which usually precede or attend the autumnal equinox." In September, 1844, "After a dry spell of unusual duration * * * we had a slight shower on Saturday night last, which was succeeded yesterday by a settled rain from the Northeast, a genuine equinoctial, which promises to soak the earth before it ceases." In September, 1853, is recorded, "Wednesday night's gale may be considered as a prelude of the equinoctial storms which are generally attended with more or less disastrous effects." Even as late as 1882 there is stated, "The Equinoctial Storm." "If the storm of the past few days was not the traditional line storm which the scientists inform us does not exist, but which nevertheless appears at just about this portion of the present month, it resembled the genuine article just as closely as was desirable." Of a more recent date there is found "Equinoctial Weather." Though the autumnal equinox is almost due there is no