

# Christoph Buys Ballot Biography

## Christoph Buys Ballot

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# Biography

Christoph Hendrick Diederik Buys Ballot was one of the pioneers of weather forecasting. He made use of the newly invented telegraph to gather weather observations from stations many miles apart, then attempted to understand large scale weather phenomena, such as winds and storms. His studies of the variation of atmospheric pressure from one station to the next led to the formulation of a law that bears his name.

Buys Ballot was born in 1817 in Kloetinge, the Netherlands. He was the son of Anthony Jacobus Buys Ballot, a Dutch Reformed minister, and Geertruida Françoise Lix Raaven. He studied mineralogy, geology and theoretical chemistry, and was professor of mathematics and later of physics at the University of Utrecht for most of his life.

Buys Ballot became interested in meteorology just as the telegraph was being established as a system of instant communication. Starting in the early 1850s, he faithfully recorded weather data as it came over the wires. He noticed that certain patterns of atmospheric pressure differences between one town and the next could be associated with particular wind directions. These observations ultimately led him to propose Buys Ballot's Law, which states that if one stands with the wind to his back, the lowest air pressure will be to the left. He went on to participate in the Royal Academy of Sciences in Amsterdam, the Royal Belgian Academy and the International Meteorological Committee in Vienna, of which he was chairman from 1873 to 1879.

Buys Ballot was much more an observer than a theoretician. Even the law that is named for him was first discovered by the German Heinrich Brandes in 1790. However, Buys Ballot refined the law and distributed it to the mariners for navigational use while he was at the Dutch Royal Academy. For his work in advancing our ability to understand and predict the behavior of wind, Buys Ballot is remembered as an early leader in the field of meteorology.