Mammatus Clouds at Sunset and in a Storm

This spectacular image, from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's photo library, gives us a view of mammatus clouds at sunset.

The photo was taken in Hobart, Oklahoma on the 14th of May in 1977. It is the time of year when severe weather—like tornadoes—occurs in Oklahoma.

What are mammatus clouds? We get the definition from the National Weather Service:

> *Rounded, smooth, sack-like protrusions hanging from the underside of a cloud (usually a thunderstorm anvil). Mammatus clouds often accompany severe thunderstorms, but do not produce severe weather; they may accompany non-severe storms as well.*

What is really interesting about mammatus clouds is that they appear to be upside down. In fact, they are, as we learn from the National Weather Service:

> *While associated with thunderstorms, they* [mammatus clouds] *are not necessarily an indicator of severe weather. Mammatus results from the sinking of moist air into dry air. It is in essence an upside down cloud. The sharp boundary of mammatus is much like the sharp boundary of a rising cumulonimbus cloud before an anvil has formed.*

Click on the top image for a truly stunning view.

Credits:

Top image: Image ID: nssl0131, NOAA's National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL) Collection.
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In-text images from the National Weather Service.

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Media Stream

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