

Time Changes

In the days prior to the industrial revolution, time was not as important to the average man as it is today. The majority of men worked in some form of agriculture; consequently they rose with the sun and went to bed when it got dark, hence the old expression "working from kin see to kant see".

During the colonial period, the vast majority of the population lived along the eastern seaboard from Nova Scotia to Georgia, with the Appalachian Range serving as a western barrier. Basically, this is the geographical area that encompasses the Eastern Time Zone. Western expansion began to change that, with each valley or community judging what the time should be at their particular location; the further west one went, the later the sun rose. With transportation as primitive and slow as it was, this did not present problems. The coming of the railroad changed all that, not just because a train could travel many miles in the course of one day, but also because the early railroads used what was called "local time". It was this policy that eventually led to the system to become so cumbersome that it became necessary to create a standardized system of timekeeping.

As can be expected, there was a great amount of confusion on the part of the general public, which necessitated a national educational campaign. To this end, the following article appeared in the *Winsted Herald* of November 2, 1883:

"Change of Time" The day fixed for the change of time in our country is November 18. There are 53 kinds of time now used by the railroads in the United States, and after that date there will be only four kinds of time. They will be: Eastern Time, Central Time, Mountain Time and Western Time.

Eastern Time will be the local time of the seventeenth meridian from Greenwich. The meridian (like all meridians of longitude, running from one pole to the other) passes a few miles east of Philadelphia, so that Eastern Time differs only 38 seconds from Philadelphia local time. Eastern Time will cover a strip 15 degrees wide, extending seven and one half degrees on each side of the seventeenth meridian, reaching from the eastern part of Maine to the vicinity of Detroit. The time in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington and all places in the area will be alike.

Central Time will be the local time of the nineteenth meridian, which passes near St. Louis. This time will prevail over a similar area of 15 degrees of longitude, and will be just one hour slower than Eastern Time.

Mountain Time will cover the area of 15 degrees of longitude next to the west. It will be the local time of the one hundred and fifth meridian, which passes through or near the city of Denver. This time is one hour slower than Central Time, and will extend from Yankton and Austin on the east, to the vicinity of Salt Lake City on the west.

Western Time will be the local time of the one hundred twentieth meridian, and will cover all west of one hundred twelve and one half degrees of longitude and extend some distance into the Pacific.

It would seem necessary on the railroads that some landmarks should indicate these divisions, to enable the traveler to set his watch backward one hour when going west and forward when going east. Minutes and seconds would not change. No doubt watches will be immediately constructed so as to admit of moving the hour hand without disturbing the minute and seconds. It is hoped the change will be universally adopted,

and much lessen the railroad accidents. Local time will still need to be used by observers in our region of Eastern Time. Philadelphia will be 38 seconds slow, New York will be 4 minutes and 4 seconds fast, Boston 15 minutes and 26 seconds fast, Goshen, Connecticut 7 minutes and 10 seconds fast.

A Mr. E. Norton of Goshen supplied this information to the newspapers on October 30, 1883.

The annual spring and autumn ritual that we have of turning our clocks ahead one hour in the springtime and back one hour in the fall had its beginnings during the First World War, when it was thought that by so doing, more productivity could be achieved. Some workers, especially farmers, met it with some strong resistance.

During the 1920s, Colebrook struggled with the system. The problem was that it affected the three schools in town; the school committee for the Colebrook river School voted to implement the time change, while the boards for the Center and Forge schools voted not to implement them. A rather hot debate ensued until finally James O'Neill, who was not only on the town school board, but also had one of the bus routes, pointed out that such a policy was nothing short of complete idiocy. The change, if it was to be a change, had to cover all three schools, or none. Reluctantly, the Center and Forge schools reversed their vote and peace reigned in Colebrook (for a while, at least).

The system was sporadically in use throughout the years until in 1967, when the Uniform Time Act went into effect in the United States. It proclaimed that all states, the District of Columbia and U.S. possessions were to observe Daylight Savings Time starting at 2 AM on the last Sunday in April and ending at 2 AM on the last Sunday in October. Any state could exempt itself by law and a 1972 amendment to the act authorized the states split by time zones to consider that split in exempting themselves. Arizona, Hawaii, part of Indiana, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and American Samoa are now exempt. The Department of Transportation, which oversees the act, has modified some local zone boundaries in Alaska, Florida, Kansas, Michigan and Texas over the last several years. Daylight Savings Time was extended by Congress during 1974 and 1975 to conserve energy, but the country then returned to the previous end-of-April to end-of-October system until 1987, when new legislation went into effect. The new bill, signed by President Reagan on July 8, 1986, moved the start of Daylight Savings Time up to the first Sunday in April, but it did not change the end from the last Sunday in October.