

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, March 19, 2007

Winter Storm and Daylight Saving Time – Time Zones: My experience with time over the years has been of some interest. In fact, the establishment of time zones in this country in the 1880s made it possible for railroad schedules to have some credibility. In the 1930s, when I was young, Wilmington and certain other places, such as Hockessin and Yorklyn in the northern part of the state, observed Daylight Saving Time, but the rest of the state did not. No one in the farming community (even around Hockessin) wanted anything to do with it. Some called it fast time or new time. It went into effect the last Sunday in April and terminated the last Sunday in September. The Penn-Del Twilight League, popular with local trapshooters, began its weekly shoots the first Tuesday after Daylight Time began and usually terminated in early August.

These usually got under way about 5:30 and had three good hours of daylight. We spent several summers in Rehoboth in those days. Weekly and sometimes twice weekly, my father came home to attend bank board meetings in Kennett Square. Since Rehoboth was on Standard Time, he had to leave about 4:45 A.M. in order to be at his meeting by 8:30 D.S.T. War Time, the same as Daylight Saving, began about six weeks after Pearl Harbor in the middle of the winter. I was at Mercersburg Academy that year, and I recall going to the 8:00 A.M. class in the dark. The idea then was two-fold: to save electricity and to give more time in the evening to work victory gardens (small truck patches recommended to raise much-needed food). Much of the garden work would have been done during Daylight Saving Time anyway, but at least War Time made it universal. Later I was told that around New York City, they had double daylight in the summer, but I can't verify that. Most places on earth were an even hour from Greenwich Mean Time, and this was the case in the continental U.S. and Canada.

Hawaii, however, was 2½ hours behind the West Coast. Time was very important in weather forecasting and especially in aerial observing, in both of which I was involved. Number-coded weather reports were sent each hour by teletype from and to reporting stations all over the world, and from planes of reconnaissance squadrons in far-away places. Our B-24 weather plane, flying mostly out of Guam, carried a crew of 10. In the U.S., most of these stations during the war were on air bases, army and navy. The first numbers of each coded message were for the date and time.

When Lincoln left his Springfield, Illinois, home for Washington in 1861, he was scheduled to speak in many cities and towns along the way, sometimes from the back platform of the train and sometimes from a hall or stage in the town itself. People often waited for hours to hear and see the president-elect. Part of the problem was that they didn't know what time it was, and that Lincoln didn't know, either. His most recent speech may have been at a place that was 15 or 20 minutes out of phase with his current one. We have come a long way; we are now set until sometime in November without changing our clocks. The trouble is, the weather outside has not caught on.