

SUN TIME IN THE DESERT

Palm Springs turned clocks ahead 1 hour to boost business

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"I looked at my watch, which goes very well, and found that it was but six o'clock; and still thinking it something extraordinary that the sun should rise so early, I looked into the almanac, where I found it to be the hour given for his rising on that day. I looked forward too, and found he was to rise still earlier every day towards the end of June; and that no time during the year he retarded his rising so long as till eight o'clock. Your readers, who with me have never seen any sign of sunshine before noon, and seldom regard the astronomical part of the almanac, will be as much astonished as I was, when they hear of his rising so early; and especially when I assure them, that he gives light as soon as he rises. I am convinced of this."

Benjamin Franklin was astonished early one morning having failed to close his shutters upon retiring to bed the night before. Franklin, like the whole of Parisian society was used to staying up late and sleeping until noon, never seeing the light of day before then.

Franklin claimed that a noted philosopher assured him that he was most certainly mistaken, for it was well known that "there could be no light abroad at that hour." His windows had not let the light in, but the shutters being open, had let the darkness out.

Astonished to see the sun at six o'clock, he concluded he was wasting some six hours of daylight snoozing, requiring the expensive use of candlelight during the night by which to work and read. "This event has given rise in my mind to several serious and important reflections."

At the age of 78, in an amusing letter to a Paris newspaper and in some jest, Franklin conceived of "saving daylight" by altering the hands of the clock in the spring as the hour of dawning becomes too early.

Years later, reflecting in his autobiography, Franklin wrote, "For in walking thro' the Strand and Fleet Street one morning at seven o'clock, I observed there was not one shop open tho it had been daylight and the sun up above three hours - the inhabitants of London choosing voluntarily to live much by candlelight and sleep by sunshine, and yet often complaining a little absurdly of the duty on candles and the high price of tallow."

Like much of modern life, Daylight Saving Time, sprung from the imagination and musings of Benjamin Franklin. The history of the adoption of his notion is fascinating. But in Palm Springs, it was the switch back to Standard Time each November that proved historic.

In November the sun begins to slip behind Mount San Jacinto earlier and earlier each day, casting a shadow on the desert below. Sunshine is the reason tourists have come to the desert for the last century.

Desert days in winter are warm and



Tourists enjoyed warm winters poolside thanks to "Sun Time." PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Palm Canyon Drive at Night, Palm Springs, California

Twilight descends on Palm Canyon Drive as the sun slips behind Mount San Jacinto.

consist of floating in the pool, playing tennis, horseback riding and shopping along Palm Canyon Drive. But when the sun disappears behind the mountain tourists scurry back to their hotel rooms. Local merchants have bemoaned this tourist pattern believing that the shopping day is severely shortened when the sun sets early.

In 1946, the Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce, like Benjamin Franklin be-

fore it, proposed a solution. Merchants approached the Palm Springs City Council with an idea for what they called "Sun Time."

The chamber reported that hotel and business owners were overwhelmingly in favor of a time change. Opposition was voiced by the bus line, freight lines, and similar transportation entities stating that this conflict in time between the city of Palm Springs and the rest of the world would cause too much confusion.

Local residents were overwhelmingly in favor of the proposition and they packed a public hearing. When the chairman of the general committee asked attendees of the public hearing if they were in favor of the measure, a majority rose to their feet.

He reported the results to the councilmen at the next meeting of the City Council and they voted 6-1 to authorize Mayor Clarence Hyde to proclaim that clocks in the city of Palm Springs be turned ahead one hour on Nov. 17, for a trial period of 120 days. Members of the City Council said that the only way to see if Sun Time would work was to give it an honest try.

The council directed that four signs would be erected at the major entrances to town advising visitors to advance their clocks by one hour if they were coming into the city and move their clocks back if they were leaving.

Local artist Earl Cordrey was asked to prepare the signs.

The State Board of Equalization declared that taverns and cocktail lounges in Palm Springs had to operate within Pacific Standard Time. Bars in Los Angeles and surrounding territories closed at midnight and the same was expected of bars in Palm Springs. Once Sun Time was implemented, bars in Palm Springs could operate until 1 a.m. but they could not reopen before 9 a.m.



Desert denizens Barbara Foster and Bill Foster were married on Sun Time, making her parents late to the ceremony.

The Desert School District adopted Sun Time only after Miss Katherine Finchy announced that the board was going to take a poll of parents.

Postcards were sent home. Parents were overwhelmingly in support of the measure and the school district adopted Sun Time.

Immediately the Chamber of Commerce received congratulatory messages from all over the country. Charles Horrworth, the vice president of the American Hotel Association said, "Why should the mountains, no matter how beautiful, be permitted to deny you an extra hour of sunshine when a quick twist of the wrist as applied to the clock will do the trick. I am gloating over the fact that five weeks from today I will be soaking up that extra hour of sunshine there in Palm Springs."

Merchants and residents were just as exuberant. And the little village of Palm Springs changed to Sun Time and was a small island in the ocean of Pacific Standard Time.

But, it wasn't so easy to swim against the tide.

Visitors missed the signs at the entrance to town. Bus, rail and airline officials, as well as the telephone company, kept two sets of clocks, one on Sun Time and one on Pacific Standard Time. Tourists missed their buses or trains.

Even local residents were confused. Barbara and Bill Foster were married on Nov. 26, 1946, and her parents were late to the ceremony having forgotten to change their clocks to Sun Time!

By January 1947, after only 51 days into the trial of Sun Time, the Chamber of Commerce asked the City Council to rescind the Sun Time proclamation stating that hotel and business owners, residents and tourists were experiencing mass confusion negotiating the time difference.



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