

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF STANDARD TIME IN THE UNITED STATES, 1883-1983

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On the 18th November, 1883, at noon, on the 75th meridian west of Greenwich, Standard Railway Time went into effect in the United States, replacing a multitude of "local time" systems across the country. "Local time" was based on solar time, and the bewildering variety of these systems placed heavy demands on the railroads and confused the public.

It was the railroads' insistence on a unified timekeeping system that made Standard Time possible. In 1830, railroad lines in the United States totalled 23 miles; in 1880 there were 93,000 miles in operation. The co-operation of the two principal organizations dealing with timetables, the General Time Convention and the Southern Railway Time Convention, initiated a study by W. F. Allen, Secretary of the General Time Convention, of a uniform time system. Allen's report was presented in April 1883; it was accepted by both railroad organizations; and on the 18th November, 1883, the system of five time zones, based on principal meridians, Intercolonial, Eastern, Central, Mountain, and Pacific Time, became the timekeeping norm for the country.

Congress, in 1966, enacted the Uniform Time Act now regulating the United States. It recognizes eight time zones in areas that are part of the United States: Atlantic, Eastern, Central, Mountain, Pacific, Yukon, Alaska-Hawaii, and Bering Time.