

March 8, 2008

EDITORIAL NOTEBOOK

Of Cannon Fire and Daylight Saving Time

By [MAURA J. CASEY](#)

Benjamin Franklin was wrong. Or maybe not. The sage of Philadelphia conceived of a system similar to daylight saving time in 1784 while serving as America's first ambassador to France. In a letter to the editor of the Paris Journal, he estimated that the simple act of awakening at sunrise and retiring at sunset in the months between spring and fall would result in an annual saving of a little more than 64 million pounds in candle wax for Paris's residents.

Conserving energy has always been the object of daylight saving time, of course. Yet Matthew Kotchen, a professor of environmental economics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Laura Grant, a doctoral student, argued in a recent study that it may increase residential electricity demand.

They studied 7 million electric bills over three years in Indiana where for decades 77 counties chose to skip the spring ahead and fall behind. In 2006, the State Legislature ended the boycott, and the Hoosiers seem to have the last laugh. Against intuition and contrary to the entire point of government policy, the study found that daylight saving time resulted in an \$8.6 million increase in spending on residential electricity.

But don't count out Ben. Those Indiana residents used more power, but for heat and air conditioning — something far beyond the capabilities of 18th-century tallow. The researchers found that the power used for lighting declined significantly in every month but October. Mr. Franklin proposed ending the program on Sept. 20.

Mr. Franklin, brilliant as he was, hardly envisioned Nintendos and computers, big-screen televisions and dishwashers. He wanted, he wrote, the "pure light of the sun" to help him escape the "smokey, unwholesome and enormously expensive light of candles."

He never took his idea too seriously. In the same letter he suggested that, if necessary, cannons be shot off at sunrise to ensure that laggards get out of bed, and described a friend's insistence that opening the shutters to greet the dawn lets out the darkness rather than bringing in the light.

Adding more light, of course, makes many people feel better. At this time of year, the early sun that moved Franklin, and now makes my basil branch out from its pot on my kitchen window, is a sweet sign that late winter's days are numbered. Maybe cannons are called for after all — to celebrate.

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