

GENERAL NOTES

THE BEGINNING OF THE ASTRONOMICAL DAY

As our readers know, the astronomical day begins at noon, twelve hours after the beginning of the civil day.

For several decades a proposal to have the astronomical day begin at midnight has received serious consideration.

Following the lead of the Royal Astronomical Society of London, the American Astronomical Society in 1917 appointed a committee to consider and report upon the proposal. This committee consists of Professor W. S. Eichelberger, Professor of Mathematics in charge of the American Ephemeris and Nautical Almanac, Chairman, and of Directors Frost and Campbell, of the Yerkes and Lick Observatories.

The committee reported in August, 1918, to the American Astronomical Society in favor of the proposal, provided a decision to this end could be reached by the several governments interested. The Astronomical Society formally approved of the report and it was forwarded to the officers of the Royal Astronomical Society as an expression of American astronomical opinion—the prevailing but not unanimous opinion.

The recommendation that the astronomical day coincide with the civil day was accompanied by an expression of opinion that all changes in time systems whose desirability within the next half century can now be foreseen ought to occur at one and the same time. In order to adopt a round-number date for the change which could always be remembered without effort, to give time for further consideration, and to accommodate the preparation of the various nautical almanacs, it was recommended that the change take effect on January 1, 1925.

There appear to be no seriously inconvenient consequences of the proposed change, even in the debated matter of the Julian day reckoning. It will merely be necessary to remember that 0.5 day should be added to every Julian date prior to 1925 when comparing observing times before 1925 with observing times following January 1, 1925.

The opinion of practical navigators as to the desirability of the change appears to be almost unanimous in its favor.

It does not seem that further action can be profitably taken until the policies of the astronomers and navigators of other nations shall have been expressed.

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