

Topics

Passages

An Extra Moment

It has been a lovely month, the best June we remember in a long time. There have been more of those warm, bright blue mornings that have not yet sunk into languor, and fewer chill, damp reminders of April's false hopes or May's cautious flowering. This has been a June of those rare, perfect days that James Russell Lowell captured forever, "when we cannot help knowing that the skies are clear and the grass is growing." And this June brings a bonus — one extra second.

For Lowell, "Heaven tried the earth if it be in tune," but for science, the only way to keep it in tune with its "spin rate" is to add a "leap second" to the month. This is measured not by the swelling of buds, but by atomic clocks.

At midnight Tuesday, Coordinated Universal Time, the successor to Greenwich Mean Time, will make the

adjustment that will keep the year accurate to the billionth of a second. That accuracy is necessary for such things as the radio waves that bring color images to television; it will never be noticed or announced by Lowell's seasonal celebrants, the small bird in the sun, or the bold chanticleer. For the rest of us, it means one extra illusory moment to savor the fleeting, seasonal illusion that all's right with the world.

Marked Time

Before the fiscal crisis of 1975, New York's Bureau of the Budget was General Staff to the city government. Its officials tramped the corridors of city departments, scrutinized their books, tyrannized hiring and carried themselves as though, like Bismarck's officers, they had red stripes running down their trousers.

Fiscal ruin turned the bureau to less obvious responsibilities. It took on the name of Management as well as Budget and became the solid line of defense against over-spending the city's fiscal plan.

And there has been no more striking symbol of the quiet professionalism of the new bureau than its chief since 1978, James Brigham. He had left a Morgan Guaranty Trust Company vice presidency at the age of 32. He talked softly, had a quiet but thorough grasp of the city expenses and income and, without ever playing the martinet, imposed fiscal discipline not only on the city departments, but on City Hall itself.

This week, Mr. Brigham will leave New York to help manage a family business in the Midwest. Its trade is industrial markings. In just a little over three years, Mr. Brigham made an unforgettable mark on New York's government.