

Nickel's golden age was far from penny ante

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

In an age when a wooden nickel would probably be made of Formica, it's hard to conjure up some excitement over the demise of the five cent piece.

Instead of earnest warnings to beware of wooden nickels, vocal singers now strut off the coast-of-living with a resigned, "It's only a nickel."

Even five and dime store owners realize the nickel has passed its heyday.

"There's not much you can get for a nickel," said Mrs. Helen Clark, owner of the Ben Franklin five and dime in Farmington Hills.

Most of the items in the five and dime cost more than ten cents, she admitted.

It's a far cry from the lofty position occupied by the five cent coin in the 1940s.

Thirty years ago when padded shoulders were fashionable for the first time, a nickel helped a housewife buy a roll of toilet paper or a bar of soap.

A bottle of pop was five cents. Add two cents to that and the thrifty shopper could bring home the bread for seven cents.

Gum and candy bars enticed youngsters for a nickel.

IF MAGAZINES WERE preferred to chocolate, five cents would do the trick.

One nickel bought one-third of a loaf of bread. For five cents, a thirsty traveler

was half way to buying a cup of coffee.

A nickel was only half of a panhandler's plea of "buddy can you spare a dime?"

And young fashionables could buy a card of bobby pins for 10 cents, or two nickels.

Budget conscious shoppers could keep track of their purchases with a pencil sold for five cents. Sometimes, pencils went two for five cents.

But domestic memories of the '40s aren't worth a plug nickel today unless fashion or scandal is being considered.

From the quest for a good nickel cigar to the conquest of space, the five cent piece has joined the penny in solo buying power.

Although there are nickel cigars available, they usually come in packages rather than single helpings. And smokers can still search for a good five cent cigar.

"It's quite smokeable," said Jerry Sebastian, owner of Sebastian's cigar and tobacco shops in Farmington Hills and Rochester.

ALTHOUGH SMOKERS MIGHT debate the merits of Sebastian's defense of the five cent cigar, they can still buy five boxes of matches for a nickel. But pipe nails will cost a little more. Once the smoker's tool sold for

five cents. But now, it's on the shelves for 19 cents, according to Sebastian.

AFTER 23 YEARS in the dime store business, Mrs. Clark has seen prices go up for such services as shipping. Help is harder to find and harder to keep.

And shop lifting is a real problem in both the city and the suburbs, says Mrs. Clark. All of this raises prices.

The rising costs make it harder for small businesses to stay in the black.

"It's getting impossible to stay in business. You have to have diversity to stay in business, these days," she said.

Changing times have reflected themselves in the price tags on Mrs. Clark's shelves, too.

The nickel has been relegated to the candy counter. That last bastion of five cent buying power offers bubble gum, candy, small toys and lollipops.

Old favorites like Mary Jane candies, which were two for one cent are now two cents but they still can be bought for less than five cents.

One nickel will buy five gumballs. And it will allow some young adventurer to take a chance at gaining a snappy little toy from the gumball machine.

Twenty years ago the same nickel bought a Halloween mask. Now it

takes 14 cents more to buy the same item.

But youngsters intent on giving grow-ups the creeps can invest a nickel in monster rings, which feature

spiders entwined around dismembered fingers.

Three nickels gets you a package of Kees bubblegum cards. Got six nickels and two pennies? A package of ten crayons is yours.

New metropark looms on horizon

By LEM MESEE

Outdoors writer

North Oakland County residents will want to keep an eye on the progress of Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority's latest project.

North Branch Metropark is expected to be open to the public some time in 1979. It's located on the north branch of the Clinton River in Ray Township of Macomb County.

It will cover 3,000 acres between 26 and 31 Mile Roads lying in a north-westerly direction. At that size, it has about as much land area as Kensington and Stony Creek metroparks.

The announcement was made recently by Thomas S. Welsh, Macomb County's public works commissioner who represents that area on the HCMA board.

Welsh said HCMA has already acquired 1,500 acres for North Branch. The rest will be added over the next "several years," as funds become available.

First open will be several picnic and playground areas.

HCMA Chief Planner Daniel R. Duncan said shelters, water and sanitary facilities will be installed at the same time on a site between 27 1/2 and 29 Mile roads.

Future development will probably include more picnic grounds and playgrounds, interior park roads, swimming pool and bathhouse, games areas and a golf course.



Another purpose will be to preserve the flood plain and scenic beauty of the Clinton River, a popular canoeing water.

THERE'S STILL time to attend tonight's waterfowl identification class from 7-9 p.m. at the Multi-Lakes Conservation Association, on Newton Road, Walled Lake. Call Bob Herbert at 624-2853 for registration information.

This is the second in a series of three weekly classes. It will help the hunter improve his bag limit and save off-limits ducks.

The classes are sponsored by the Oakland-Wetlands chapter of the Michigan Duck Hunters Association.

KENSINGTON Metropark has two good programs for nature lovers this weekend.

At 9 a.m. Saturday, the nature center will be the site for a 90-minute program entitled "Acting Like an Animal." It will look at some of the familiar animals around the nature center and how their behavior helps them survive.

At 10 a.m. Sunday, the Island Queen excursion boat will make a one-hour fall nature cruise to look at fall colors and migrating wildlife.

The nature center program is free. The boat trip costs \$1. This is in addition to park admission of \$1 per car or \$5 for the season.

Call the park office at 685-1561 for advance registration.

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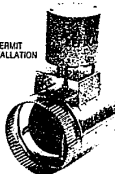
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Ex-principal is new aide at Oakland U.

Dana P. Whitmer has joined the Oakland University administrative staff as a part-time special assistant to president Donald D. O'Dowd.

Whitmer retired this spring after 24 years as superintendent of Pontiac schools. He will work with high school counselors to encourage applications to the university.

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