

Parking and Parking Meters

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City Manager John E. Kane deposited the first nickel in a parking meter which went into use here for the first time Friday, June 29, 1956. The picture appeared in The Whitehall Forum, on Thursday, July 5, 1956.

Colby Street is not your average small town main street. Around 1913 it was part of a pioneering tourist road known as the West Michigan Pike. In the 1920s it was part of M-11. As a part of the state highway system, it has to follow certain rules. In 1932, the state paved Colby street at an estimated cost of \$45,000, with Whitehall paying \$11,132.88 as their share. At the time, diagonal parking was allowed.

Parallel parking went into effect in Whitehall on Friday, September 29, 1939. The decision was made in conformity with the new uniform Michigan State traffic law. The state regulation prohibits parking on all state trunk lines. Parallel lines were drawn on the pavement about 5 feet from the curb to show motorists where the parking lane was. A number of residents were pleased with the change because the extra width gave the appearance of the street being wider. But merchants and other residents pointed out that the parking was reduced by half.

In June 1943 a one-hour parking limit on Colby and First streets and Mears Avenue went into effect. Parking hours were from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Checking was conducted by the Marshall from time to time as ordered by the city council.

In August 1945, two parking spaces in front of Pitkin's were designated as a "non-parking area". This space allowed the Greyhound bus to stop without interfering with the south-bound traffic.

In May 1948 came the possibility that parking meters might be tried as an answer to the Whitehall business district parking problem. It was estimated that 87 meters would be needed on Colby from the tunnel to Division Street and from Hanson to Spring streets. No immediate action was taken.

In July 1949 the same meter salesman who sold the Whitehall city fathers on the parking meter idea also came to Montague. However, the representative was not even allowed time to present a proposal to the Montague Council. Mayor Scharmer and the Council members informed him it would be a waste of his time and theirs.

In 1952 off-street parking was created by the Kroger store off Division. At the time, Kroger was located where Hunts/Gil-Roy's Hardware is now located.

December 1953 some parking solutions were suggested: Marking cars at irregular intervals; hard surfacing one block along Mears & Division and have it marked out in regular parking spaces; cut out every other tree along Division for half a block south of Colby in order to provide more space; remove old city garage to provide for a public parking lot.

In October 1954, talks continued about meters. It was thought they would discourage merchants and employees from parking on the streets all day, but it might also encourage shoppers to go elsewhere.

At issue – all day parking by clerks working in local stores; all day parking by people working in Muskegon who drive here to catch the bus and leave their cars parked on the street.

An item from July 1955 indicated that \$2,000 of Civic Fund money would be used for a downpayment on the house and lot owned by the Gee Estate on Mears south of Connell's Market. The total cost to move the house and convert the lot into off-street parking, connecting with Kroger parking lot, and creating a parking belt across the full width from Mears to Division was \$10,000.

In June 1956 the issue of parking meters came up again in Montague with a request by the Park-o-Meter Co. which installed the meters in Whitehall and was soundly defeated. At the time, there were three off-street parking lots which would park 70 to 80 cars. While the parking lot next to the Post Office was limited to one hour, there was no limit in the other two lots. It's unclear where those other two lots were located.

In January 1961, 'Freeloaders' who park their cars all day in so-called loading zones become the target of a city survey. Two of the four loading spaces in the city lot off Mears were replaced with 12-minute meters.

In March 1961 the heads of the parking meters were removed and all during the month parking was available anywhere in the downtown area without paying.

On September 28, 1961, Free Parking was planned in the downtown. A new parking area was created on the north side of Colby street behind Klinefelter's Variety and Dowker's Drugs. The meters in the municipal lot south of Colby Street behind Modern Appliance, Parsons and A&P were removed from the present lot for a period of one year. Meters, however, were not taken off of Colby street.

December 1961 was designated Free Parking month and meter heads were covered with jackets. During the first couple of days, eight jackets were stolen off the meter heads. Jim Hill, Sgt. of the Whitehall Police Department at the time reminded the pranksters that it would be considered more than just a prank if they were caught, and they would be charged with stealing public property. Customers complained to merchants about the parking meters when they should have taken the complaints to the city.

Finally, in June 1973, the meters on Colby Street and Mears Avenue were removed and a 2-hour parking limit was placed on all vehicle parking spaces.

Meanwhile, over in Montague, a proposed \$650,000 parking deck was shelved in May 1983. The proposal was to create a parking deck in the former Miller's Thrift-T supermarket parking lot. This deck would really not have been of any help to the business. In fact, Miller's would have to be closed during the estimated 3 to 6-month construction period and the deck would shield the store from the view of passing motorists.

An alternative was a lot on Water Street from Miller's lot to Ohrenberger's Service Station near the light. This plan necessitated the relocation of the former A&P auto parts and Meyer's Well Drilling. The east side of the Ferry Street buildings would need to be rehabbed also. In the end, neither plan was approved nor carried out.

* For those too young to remember some of the places mentioned in this article, or for those who will read it in years to come, the current businesses as of today have been identified. Connell's Market is now Northland Insurance Company. Klinefelter's Variety and Dowker's Drugs is now Bell's Clearance Center and ACWL-Nuveen. Miller's Thrift-T supermarket is now North Grove Brewers.