Parking Meter Encyclopedia Article

Parking Meter

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In ancient Greece, Hero of Alexandria used simple machines to create many ingenious devices, among them a device that raised a lever when a coin or token was dropped against the opposite side of the fulcrum. The lever opened a valve and delivered a cup of holy water to anyone who dropped a coin. Centuries later, two men in Oklahoma used the same principle to create the parking meter, one of the earliest traffic control devices.

As early as the 1920s, automobiles were causing congestion in larger cities. Not only were narrow streets filled with moving traffic, but cars parked along curbs and in front of stores added to the congestion. Shoppers often had to walk many blocks to get to a store because parking spaces were so scarce.

Carlton C. Magee, editor of the Oklahoma City *Daily News* and member of the chamber of commerce traffic committee, became concerned with this parking problem. He proposed a device to "charge" people for parking spaces. Magee presented his idea to mechanical engineering professor Gerald A. Hale at Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College. Hale became so interested in the project that he quit his job to perfect the mechanism and enter a partnership with Magee. In December 1932, Magee applied for a patent on the parking meter.

On July 16, 1935, the citizens of Oklahoma City found meters installed on one side of the street. Spaces on the free side of the block quickly filled up as usual. Spaces with meters were still available when stores opened but they too filled up. Unlike the unmetered side, however, these spaces had a constant turnover. After three days, merchants on the free side of the street petitioned city council for meters. Other cities were not so open to the idea of paying for parking spaces. In Mobile, Alabama, and Carthage, Texas, vigilante committees tried to destroy the parking meters.

Following World War II, the number of automobiles increased and so did the demand for parking meters. These machines now help solve traffic and parking problems in major cities throughout the world. Convenient parking is now available for handicapped citizens, to allow them easier access to facilities. While most of these meters still resemble Magee's original design, newer electronic models are also available.