"I found a million dollar baby (in a five and ten cent store)". That's the name and part of the lyrics of a popular 1931 song. It was composed by Harry Warner for Billy Rose's Broadway show, "Crazy Quilt." The million dollar baby was selling china. The song reflects the attachment held at the time for this American institution. Five and ten cent stores are no more, but their present-day equivalents arose in the 1990s in the form of "dollar" stores.

It was in the 1920s that chain retail stores began to sweep the country. They were established in both large and moderate size cities and towns. As Wal-Mart does today, these stores also benefited from volume purchases and uniform marketing. They had evolved from modest beginnings in the late 1870s onward. The antecedents for the 5 and 10¢ stocks may well have been the low cost little items sold by itinerant Eastern European Jewish immigrant peddlers. These traveling salesmen filled the housewife needs in relatively isolated farms and communities prior to paved roads. Improved roads and mass produced automobiles offered people more mobility and promoted the growth of chain stores across the country.

The Butler Brothers began operations in 1877. They founded the Ben Franklin chain in 1920 and became in 1927 the first retailer to put into place a franchise system in which the store was owned by individual proprietors. Sam Walton, the founder of Wal-Mart, got his start by 1962 by owning 15 Ben Franklin Stores.

J. G. McCrory, born John Graham McCrorey, dropped the final "e" in his surname to save money by not paying the cost of the extra letter in his store signs. At its height the company he founded would grow to operate 1,300 stores under its own name as well as T G & Y, McLellan, J. J. Newberry, etc. outlets. It went into bankruptcy in the 1990s.

Sebastian S. Kresge commenced the S. S. Kresge chain of stores which would later transform itself into K-Mart and recently merge with Sears, Roebuck and Company.

W. T. Grant was sort of an upscale five and dime or possibly a downscale department store. Its founder William Thomas Grant (1876-1972) brought it to its height of 1,200 department stores, second only to Sears and second largest in the world. Slower to expand than Kresge, it failed by 1975 in one of the largest bankruptcies of its type.

S. H. Kress and Company started in 1896. Samuel Kress's stores were noted for their fine architecture. Even today the stores, which closed as the chain did in 1981, are being restored and put to other uses in many cities.

Frank and Charles Woolworth began in 1911 with the merging of six chains of existing 5 and 10¢ stores. They succeeded under the F. W. Woolworth Company name by offering discounted merchandise at fixed prices. In fact all of the previously noted companies obtained some degree of critical mass in the 1920s, had uniformity of layout and size, and offered inter-city familiarity similar to fast food chains today. Most also had lunch counters.

It was March 11, 1927 when F. W. Woolworth held its grand opening at 113 W. Jackson Street in downtown Harlingen. It portrayed itself as a 5, 10 and 15¢ store advertising "Nothing sold in this store for more than 15¢." Nine months later (12/7/27) Watters Va-
riety Store, operated by Harlingen residents, was to close its doors. In 1937 Woolworth would have moved again, this time to 105-107 W. Jackson. Competition between the five and dimes would be fierce, so it wasn't long before Woolworth had to contend with look-alikes. In fact, by 1930, when it abandoned its initial location for one at 111 W. Jackson, J. G. McCrory, originally located at 221 North A Street moved in 1931 to 113-115 W. Jackson but was soon to withdraw from the local scene. McLellan Stores Company then moved into this location. This was one of 200 variety stores founded in 1917 by William McLellan. The company went into bankruptcy during the Depression but was later able to emerge from its difficulties. In 1958 it was to merge with McCrory.

While S. H. Kress had, by 1936, opened a store on Elizabeth Street, Brownsville to compete with the nearby Woolworth and W. T. Grant Stores, it was slow to establish itself in Harlingen. Finally in 1942 after the Harlingen Army Airfield became a going entity, it opened a store at 120-121 E. Jackson in order to go head to head with Woolworth and McLellan here. An independent, F. G. Pena, which had a store at 205 South C Street opened at 321 W. Van Buren this same year. Pena hung in for a decade but by 1954 shrank itself to just being a drug store. It took until 1954 before W. T. Grant started building its store here at 110-116 W. Jackson.

Jackson Street was and continued to be to be the locale for "musical chairs" for the stores. In business until 1980 McLellan's Dime Store was to open at 106-108 E. Jackson in its new store in 1958. It had disappeared from its old site in 1955 only to see the site occupied the following year by (F.A. and Jack) Hanshaw's, which had its start in San Benito. Three years later (1959) the brothers opened up what they termed a Super 5¢ and 10¢ store at the new Coronado Village Shopping Mall. By 1966 this had become Weaver's Variety Store while the Hanshaws still retained the downtown store. It began to handle the Ben Franklin line of goods but was closed by 1971.

As the 1970s commenced the 5 and 10¢ stores were under pressure to upgrade their merchandise and expand into a wider range of goods. They were being pushed by "discount" stores. The Gibson Discount Center arrived on the scene on North 77 Sunshine in 1969. In 1971 Diskay Discount Mart opened at 110 W. Jackson and Price's Variety Store at 115 W. Jackson. This same year W. T. Grant left the Harlingen scene forever.

T G & Y Family center opened in the new Sun Valley Shopping Center. Also in the same mall F. W. Woolworth, in an effort to keep abreast of the times, opened one of its numerous Woolco Department Stores. It then closed its downtown store.

In 1980 Winn's (No. 133) was operating in the Treasure Hills Mall at 1514 S. 77 Sunshine Strip. Store No. 7077 K-Mart was erected at 1129 Morgan; a branch of H-E-B was to be constructed next to it. This foretold the closing of Kress downtown by 1981. Additional pressures were put on retailers when supermarkets broadened their inventory from foods, toiletries, and cleaning products to a wide range of items. By 1986 those, such as Krogers, started to become "Family Centers."

Those readers 50 years or older will have fond memories of saving their pennies, so they could purchase something special at the five and dime for their mothers, a favorite teacher, or beau. They will recall such high class (not!) fragrances as "Evening in Paris", notions, handkerchiefs of the lacey kind, and glittery costume jewelry.

The stores had their own unique odors, a mixture of scents from soap to soups, popcorn to peanuts. The red, black and gold enameled signs on the facades were the first invita-
tion to something exotic for youngsters. The large shiny brass cash registers were impressive for their looks and intricacies. If nothing else a few pennies could buy a small brown paper bag of loose, assorted candy. How patient were the sales ladies as little ones pondered the myriad choices available behind the glass case windows.

Other items to be found were holiday specialties, pencils, paper, ink, blotters, crayons, calendars, loose cookies in large glass containers, kitchen utensils, canisters, salt and pepper sets, fabric, hair pins and barrettes, combs and brushes, cheap dishes and flatware, cosmetics, tinny toys, thread, buttons on light cardboard, and much more—all displayed on long rectangle tables. Some stores had a pianist who would play the latest popular hits to entice customers to purchase the sheet music. Equally enticing and fun was the booth where you could take your own picture, usually with a buddy and with resultant silly facial expressions.

While the many 5 and 10¢ stores along Jackson street are now long gone, the facades of the buildings they once occupied give fleeting hints of what they once housed as do the ceiling treatments within. They bring back happy memories of a simpler and slower paced period.