

Ferdie J. Deering

Cashless Society, Electronic Living Expected to Become Reality Soon

THE long-talked-about "cashless society" is almost here. Bank debit cards are expected to go into nationwide use soon and the U.S. Mint has recommended abolition of half-dollars and pennies.

A bank debit card instantly transfers funds from a buyer's account to a seller's account. This eliminates need for statements, checkwriting, finance charges, envelopes and postage. Maybe we can learn to get along without money!

Direct deposit of paychecks is spreading, because it is convenient. Social Security payments are transferred from government to recipients' accounts now, reducing risks of delay, theft and loss. Payment of bills by debit card is coming.

Computer coded prices on items at supermarkets and bank debit cards will make it possible for customers to obtain groceries without seeing the money come or seeing it go.

Changes are taking place and demanding such rapid adaptation of individuals that a new word has been coined to describe them — rapidation. It may not protect us from "future shock" but it might help us understand what is happening to us.

We send computerized devices to distant planets to explore where we can't. They return useful information without risk of human lives, and may go beyond limits of human travel.

Opinion polls have become influential in political decisions, television programming and other variables in our lives. Electronic cards could be used to give broader and presumably more reliable reflections of our attitudes.

Scientists have reduced size and

cost of computers, so that countless uses have developed. They can be used to obtain X-rays of cross-sections of the body, called "computed tomography" and some day may provide an artificial system of sight for the blind.

A recent report shows that more than two dozen types of microprocessors are being manufactured at around \$100 each. They are employed to control traffic lights, check fuel economy in cars, run elevators and electronic cash registers, automate washing machines and guide sewing machines.

Farm managers regularly use computerized data showing various options available before making decisions. Schools now permit youngsters to use computers in doing their arithmetic. Secretarial devices can receive dictation and type letters.

Newspapers, including this one, use electronics that enable writers literally to set their stories in type. Some day newspapers may be delivered by computer terminals, capable of making selective printouts to suit subscribers.

People-sized robots won't replace us, because they tend to take on human limitations. Smaller devices work better.

For example, why build a man-sized robot to open a garage door when a hand-held gadget will do? And why bother with a wad of bills or handful of coins when a plastic card can make change more quickly, accurately and safely.

In fact, why go any place or do anything, when you can send a computerized device to do it for you? Are we ready for this stage of electronic living? It's almost here.