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Nikolayev

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(54) **DATA GENERATING DEVICE FOR BULK VENDING MACHINES**

(75) Inventor: **Nikolay Nikolayev**, Flushing, NY (US)

(73) Assignee: **Nova Resolution Industries, Inc.**, Bronx, NY (US)

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This patent is subject to a terminal disclaimer.

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(22) Filed: **Oct. 18, 1999**

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(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 09/174,785, filed on Oct. 19, 1998, now Pat. No. 6,050,385.

(51) **Int. Cl.**[7] **G07F 5/02**; G07F 11/00

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **194/202**; 194/239; 194/255; 221/7

(58) **Field of Search** 194/236, 237, 194/239, 243, 255, 292, 202; 221/7; 453/32

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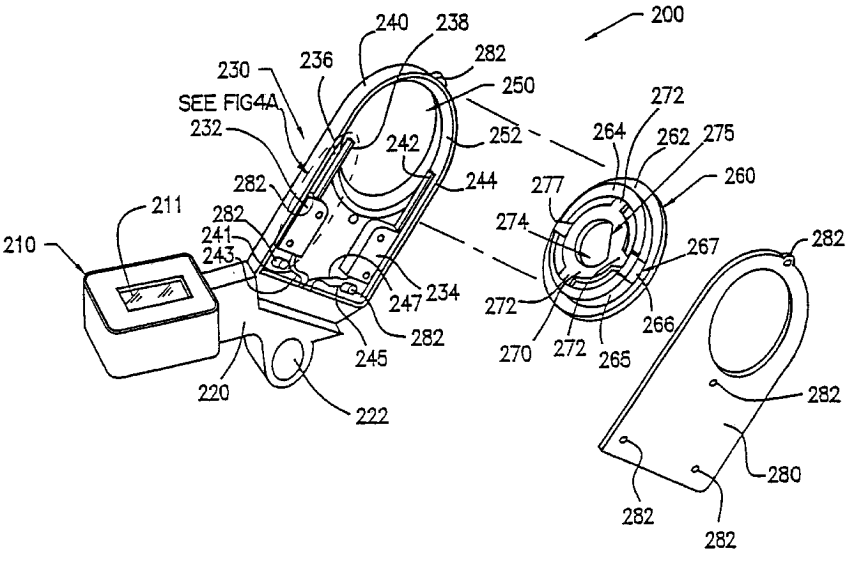
Primary Examiner—Robert P. Olszewski
Assistant Examiner—Bryan Jaketic
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—Michael R. Gilman; Kaplan & Gilman, LLP

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A data generating device **300** for use in combination with a coin mechanism **100** of a bulk vending machine **10**, is provided. The combination uses a standard coin mechanism of a bulk vending machine, which in its normal operation is received into an opening in the bulk vending machine. The coin mechanism has a selectively rotatable shaft **110** extending axially therefrom, which has mounted therearound, a portion of the data generating device. The data generating device has a contact switch assembly **230**, comprising a first pair of spaced-apart wires **236**/**238** at a first location of the switch assembly, the first pair of wires connected to a data compilation/transfer device **310** by a lead wire **241** and to a capacitor by another lead wire **243**, a second pair of spaced-apart wires **242**/**244** at a second location of the switch assembly, the second pair of wires connected at least to the capacitor by yet another lead wire **247**, a selectively rotatable element **260** having a metal strip **266** attached thereto, the metal strip able to connect both of the wires of both of the first and second pairs of the spaced-apart wires at separate and distinct positions during the selective rotation of the selectively rotatable element, wherein the shaft causes the selectively rotatable element to rotate bringing the metal strip first in contact with the first pair of spaced-apart wires and then in contact with the second pair of spaced-apart wires, thereby causing the compilation of data.

48 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



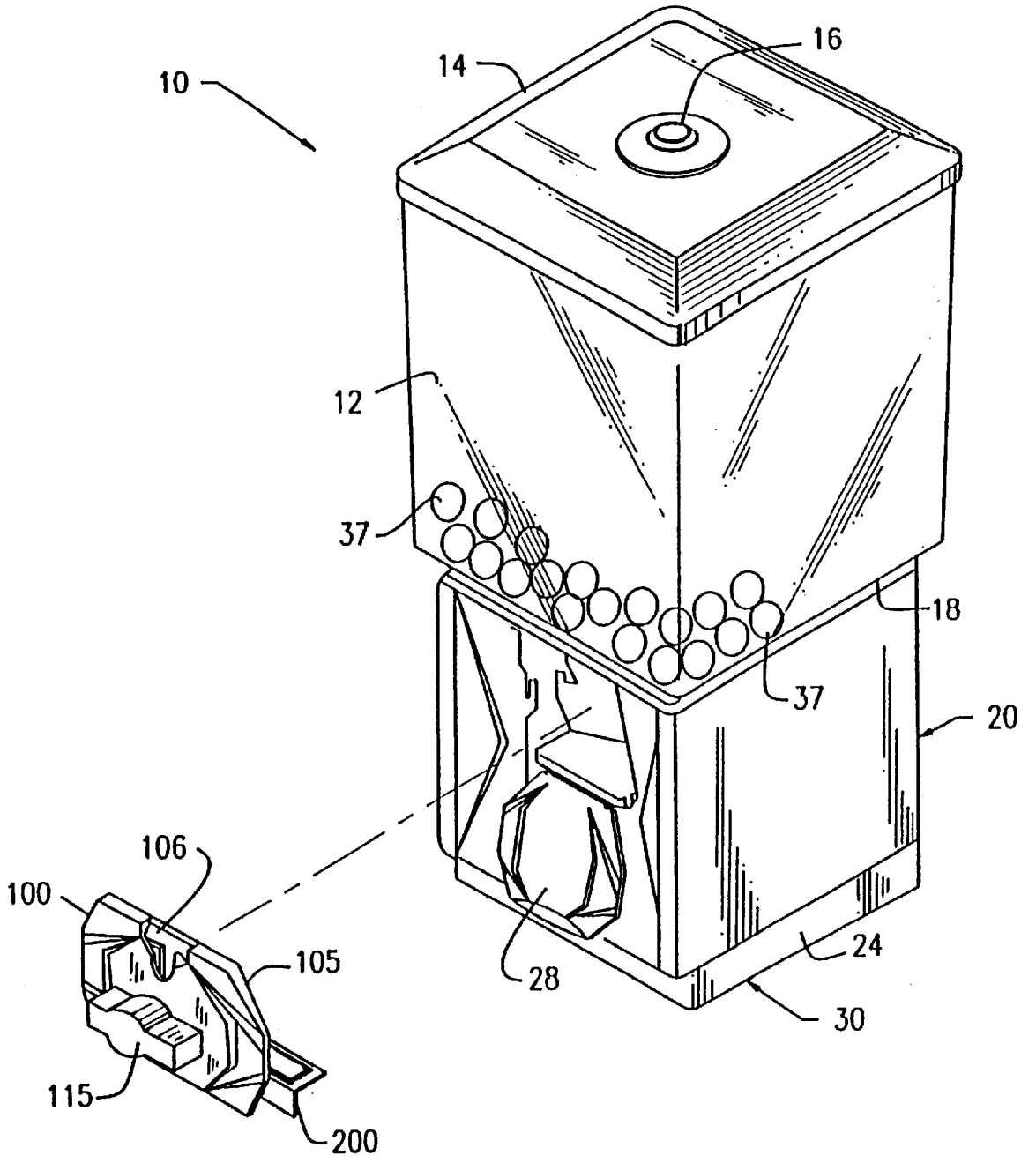


FIG. 1

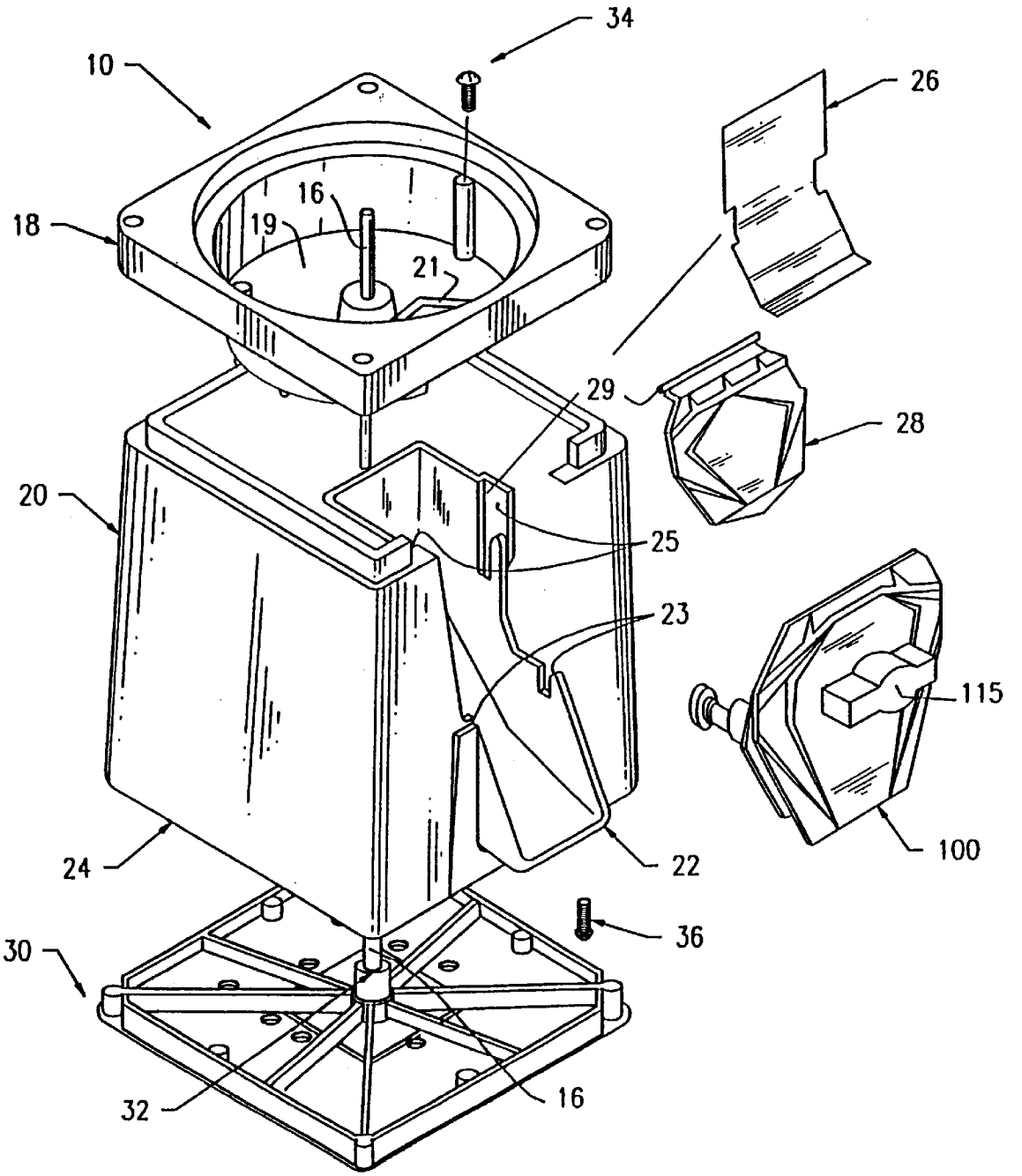
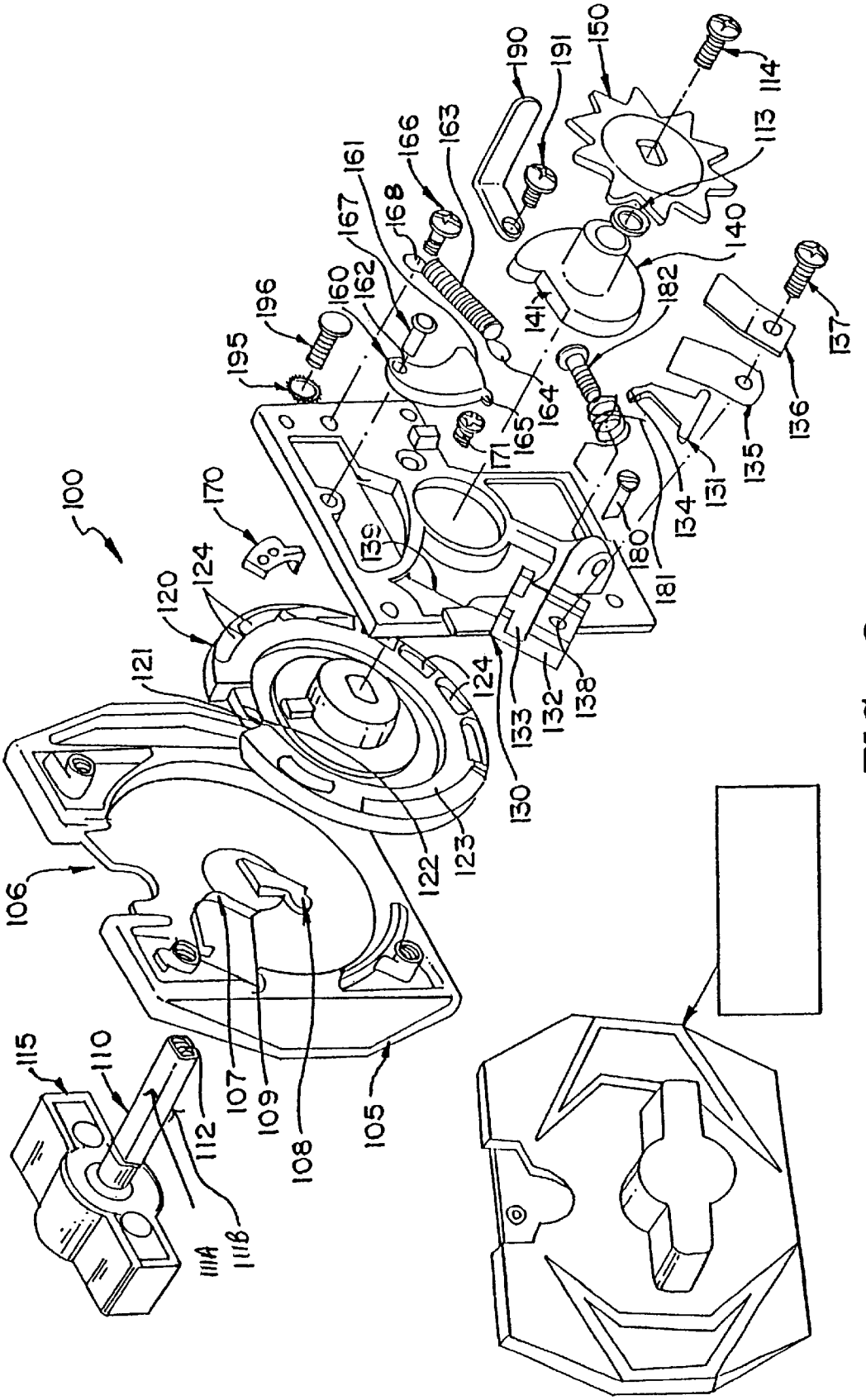


FIG. 2


100
106
105
107
108
109
110
111A
111B
112
115
120
121
122
123
124
130
131
132
133
134
135
136
137
138
140
141
150
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182
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191
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196

FIG. 3

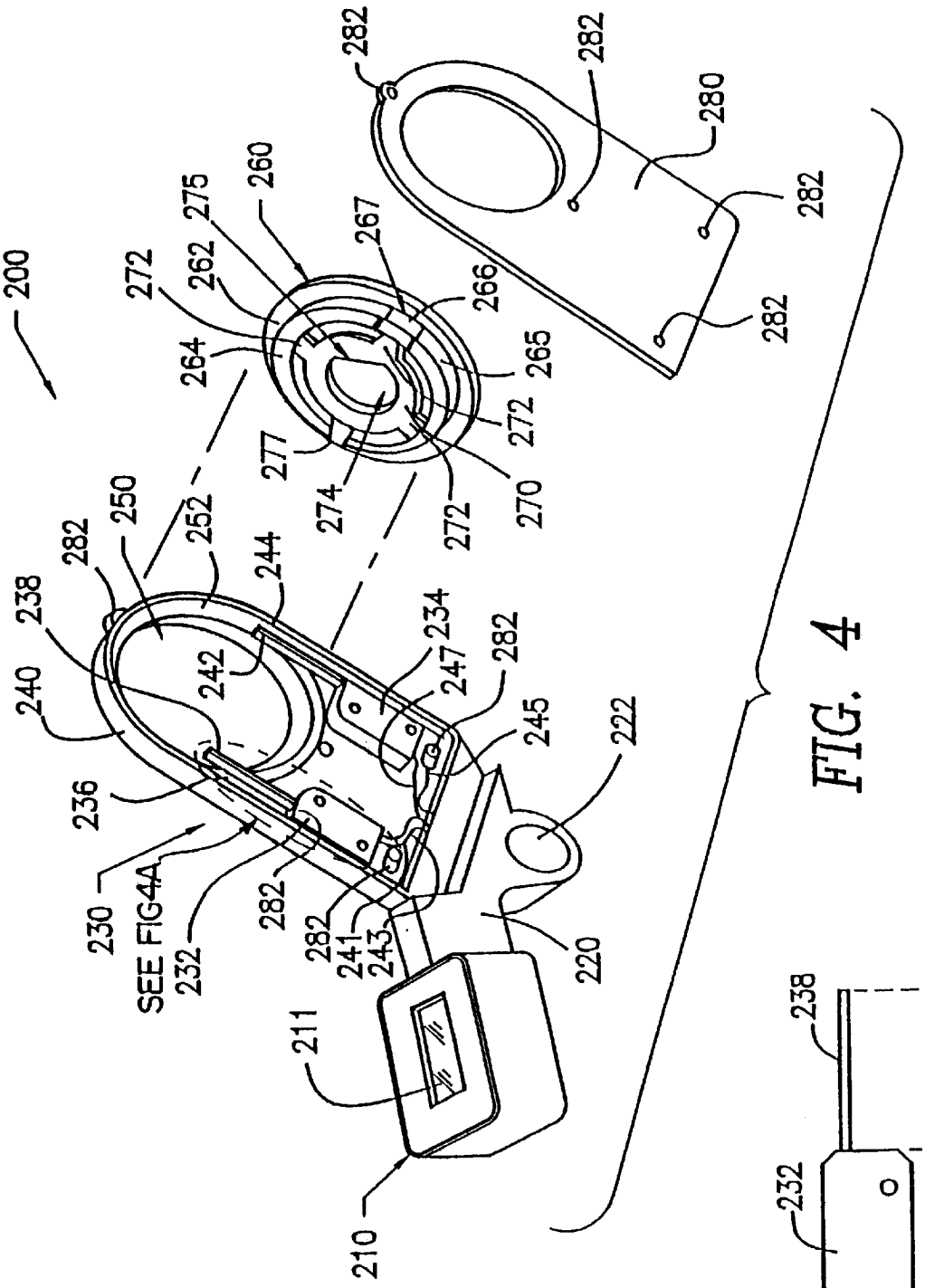
200
210
211
220
222
230
232
234
236
238
240
241
242
243
244
245
247
250
252
260
262
264
265
266
267
270
272
274
275
277
280
282
SEE FIG4A

FIG. 4

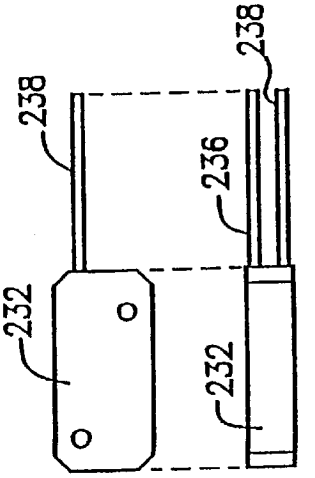
238
236
232
232
238

FIG. 4A

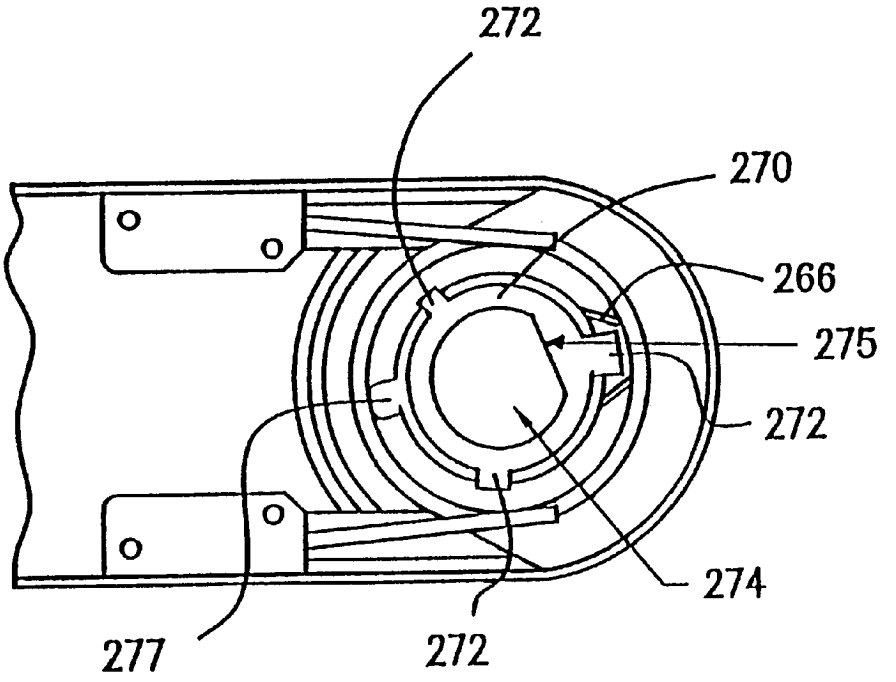
272
270
266
275
272
274
277
272

FIG. 5

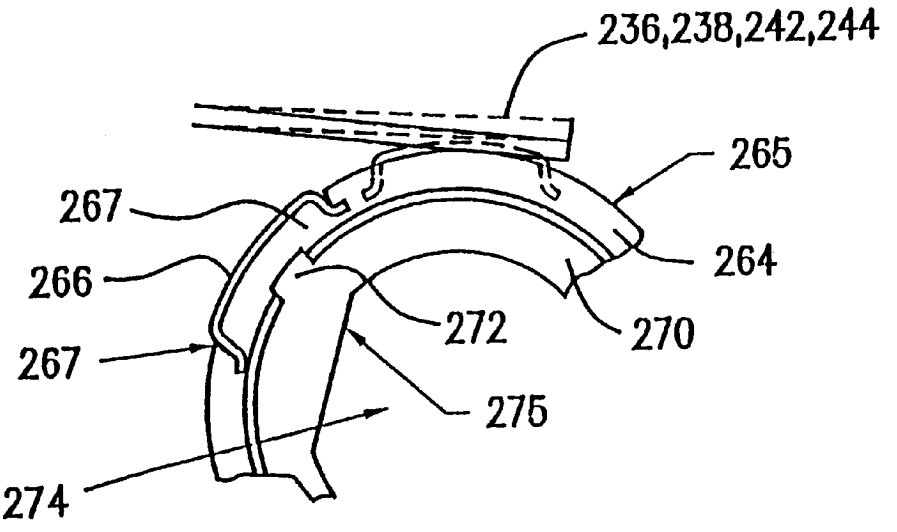
236,238,242,244
265
267
264
266
272
270
267
275
274

FIG. 6

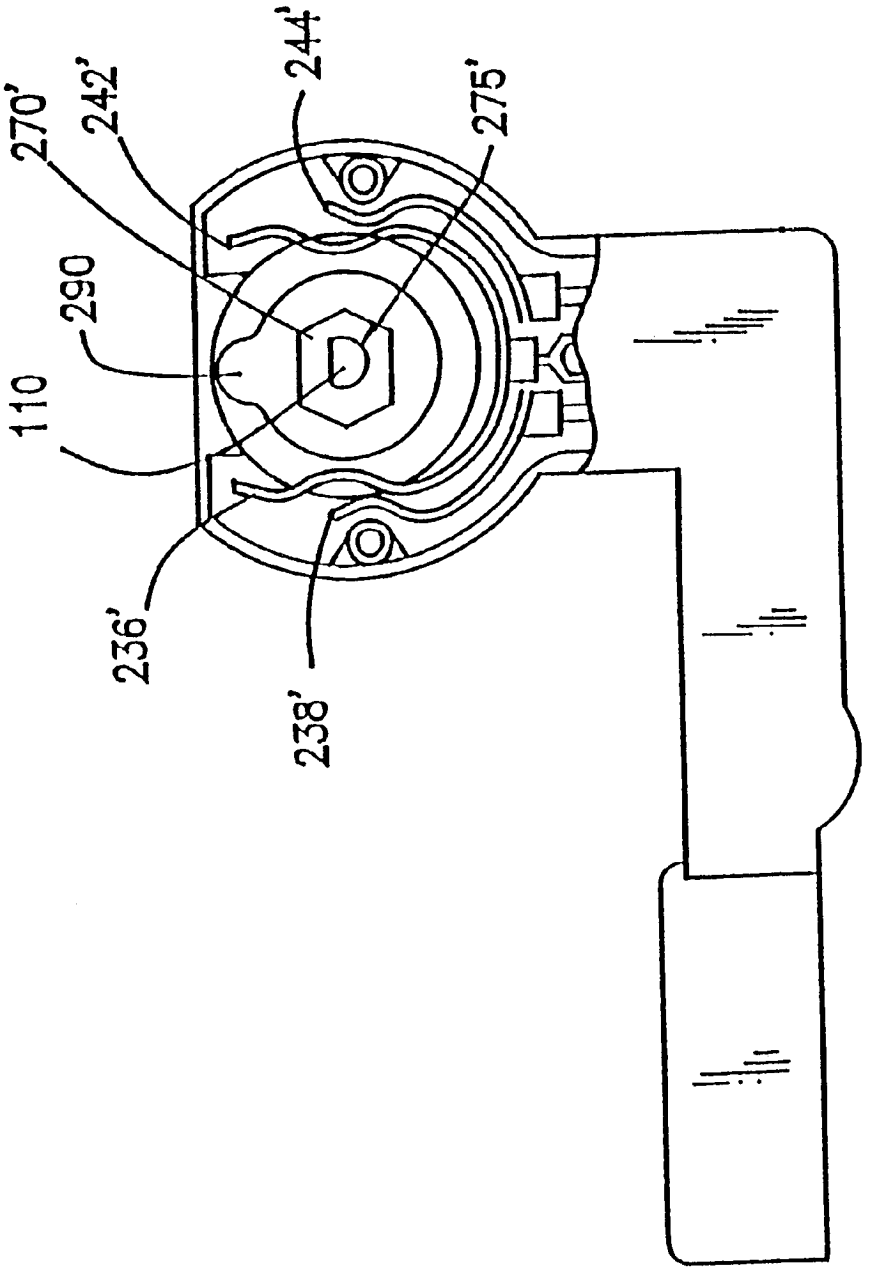

FIG. 7

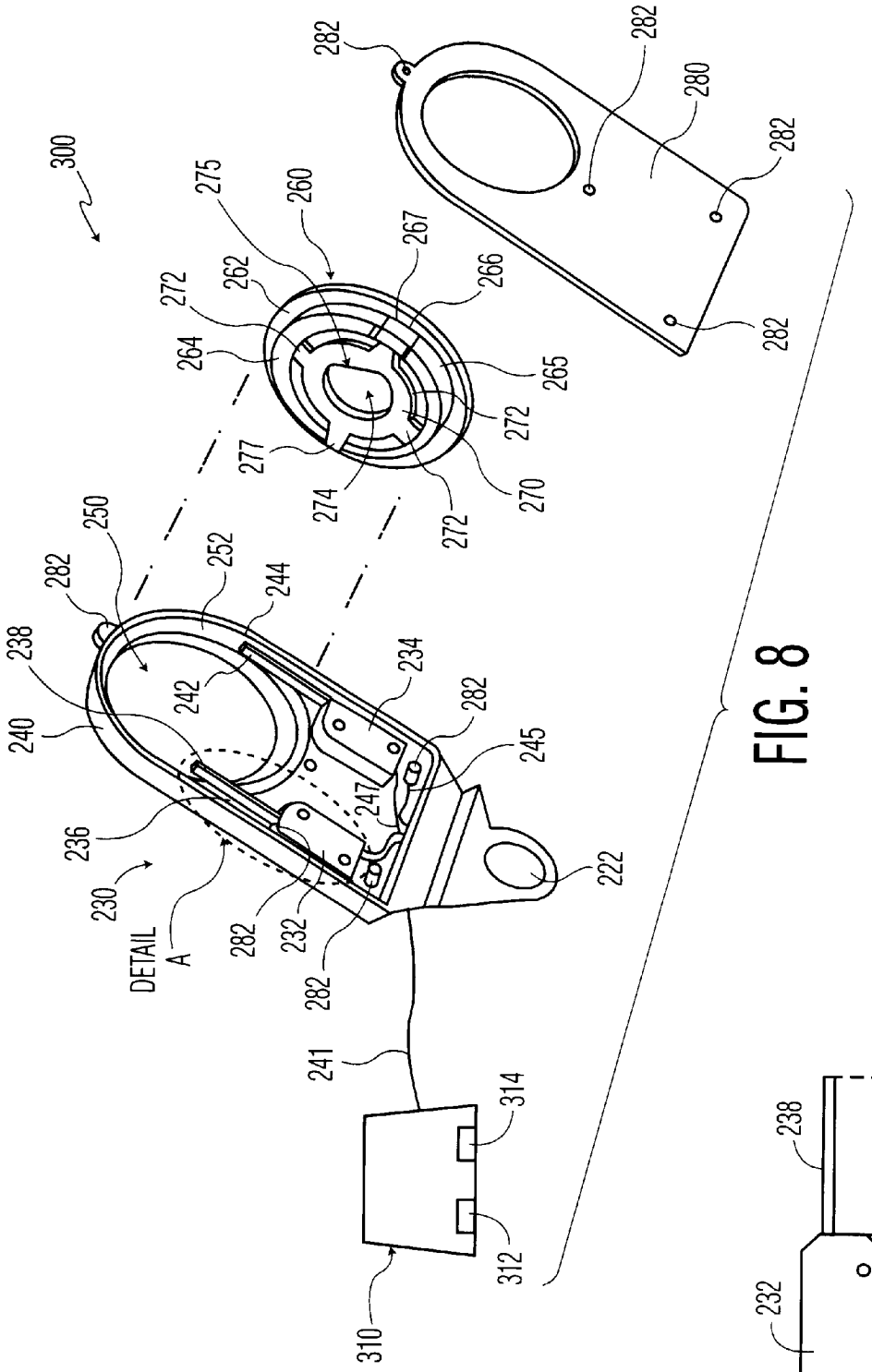
300
275
260
267
262
266
272
264
265
277
274
270
272
250
252
244
282
238
242
234
240
245
247
236
230
DETAIL A
232
222
241
314
312
310
280

FIG. 8

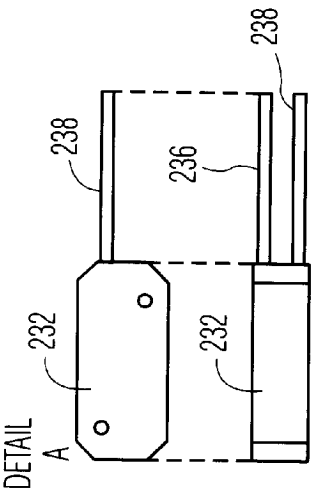
238
236
232
DETAIL A

FIG. 8A

DATA GENERATING DEVICE FOR BULK VENDING MACHINES

This application is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 09/174,785, filed Oct. 19,1998, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,050,385.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to the field of bulk vending machines, and more particularly. to a data generating device for a standard bulk vending machine coin mechanism.

Both vending machines and bulk vending machines are old in the art. Vending machines are normally associated with those machines used for dispensing a particularly chosen item to a user of the machine. For example, a user of a vending machine will insert the required amount of money, represented by coins or bills, into the machine and will then have an opportunity to select from a variety of different items. These items can include different types of snacks (candy bars, potato chips, pretzels, gum, breath mints, etc.), drinks (soda, fruit juices, water, etc.) and ice cream (sandwiches, pops, cones, etc.).

In contrast, a bulk vending machine does not normally lend itself to giving the user of a machine a choice between the goods to be selected, and is normally operated with coins only. In general, bulk vending machines hold large quantities of a particular type of item (gum balls, nuts, trail mix, toys, balls, etc.) in a large top mounted receptacle. By placing a coin into the coin mechanism of the bulk vending machine, and turning the handle, one, or a handful, of the items within the receptacle are dispensed down a chute for receipt by the user. In these machines, no choice has been given to the user, and the user will receive whichever item, or items, are next in line to be dispensed. Parents will now clearly understand the distinction between vending machines and bulk vending machines; vending machines give their child a choice and the child walks away happy and content, while bulk vending machines distribute what they want to the awaiting hands of the child, and no matter how much screaming and ranting by the child, he/she will have to eat the blue gum ball, even though he/she really wanted a green gum ball.

Another important distinction between vending machines and bulk vending machines, is that vending machines are normally AC powered units which are plugged into a wall outlet, while bulk vending machines are almost never electrically powered. This makes bulk vending machines safer to use, and allows for their placement in any location.

In the history of the bulk vending industry there has been no effective way of (1) counting the money received into bulk vending machines or (2) displaying that information in a format which is easy to use and manipulate.

Today's standard methods for determining the amount of vends which have occurred, and the coins inserted into a given machine during a certain period of time, are by hand-held coin counters and weight scales. These methods make the collection process very time consuming and leave no hope for any sense of security, nor for the possibility of building any kind of financial history for the particular machine by the owner or lease holder of the machine.

As is evidenced by the counting mechanisms of U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,201,396, 4,392,564, 4,376,479,4,369,442,4,216,461 and 4,143,749, the prior art discloses attempts to insert counters, usually into vending machines, but sometimes into bulk vending machines. These prior art counters have the disadvantages of requiring a separate AC power source and the need of an associated power converter to provide the low voltage power needed to the meter. These prior art counters also disclose mechanisms having computers attached thereto, mechanisms for determining the value of the coins deposited, and mechanisms for counting the value of the items exiting the machine. All of these counters are hindered by deficiencies in size, power source and the complicated nature of their operation.

Additional prior art is U.S. Pat. No. 3,783,986 to Bolen, which shows a complicated counter for bulk vending machines, wherein the counter is specifically not attached to the coin mechanism of the machine, which requires a hole to be cut into the back of the machine, and which, while being a good attempt to resolve an industry-wide problem, nevertheless has a counter which is too far removed from, and connected by too many gears to, the coin mechanism.

The bulk vending industry is, despite the Bolen counter, still crying out for a small, self powered (not requiring an external AC power source) counting mechanism for its bulk vending machines. Accordingly, it would be desirable to provide a coin mechanism and/or coin mechanism and data generating device combination for a bulk vending machine which, preferably, needs no external AC power source, is sized so as to fit within the restricted space limitations of a bulk vending machine without needing to cut a hole in the machine, is accurate, is easily read, is not able to be tampered with, is easily installed and maintained, and is capable of allowing the user to download the data for use in spreadsheet-like print outs.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with the invention, a data generating device for use in combination with a coin mechanism of a bulk vending machine is provided.

The combination uses a standard coin mechanism of a bulk vending machine which in its normal operation is received into an opening in the bulk vending machine, and a data generating device in working relation with the coin mechanism. The coin mechanism has a selectively rotatable shaft extending axially therefrom which has mounted therearound. a portion of the data generating device. The data generating device has a contact switch assembly, comprising a first pair of spaced-apart wires at a first location of the switch assembly, the first pair of wires connected to a data compilation/transfer device by a lead wire and to a capacitor by another lead wire, a second pair of spaced-apart wires at a second location of the switch assembly, the second pair of wires connected at least to the capacitor by yet another lead wire, a selectively rotatable element having a metal strip attached thereto, the metal strip able to connect both of the wires of both of the first and second pairs of the spaced-apart wires at separate and distinct positions during the selective rotation of the selectively rotatable element, wherein the shaft causes the selectively rotatable element to rotate bringing the metal strip first in contact with the first pair of spaced-apart wires and then in contact with the second pair of spaced-apart wires, thereby causing the compilation of data.

Accordingly, it is an object of the invention to improve a standard bulk vending machine coin mechanism by placing it in combination with a data generating device.

Still another object of the invention is to improve a standard bulk vending machine coin mechanism through placement of the combination coin mechanism and data generating device within the limited space provided in a bulk vending machine.

Still a further object of the invention is to provide security and peace of mind to the owner/lease holder of bulk vending machines by enabling them to have independent, accurate and non-tamperable results of the counting of coins deposited into a bulk vending machines.

Other objects of the invention will in part be obvious and will in part be apparent from the following description.

The invention accordingly comprises assemblies possessing the features, properties and the relation of components which will be exemplified in the products hereinafter described, and the scope of the invention will be indicated in the claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a fuller understanding of the invention, reference is made to the following description taken in connection with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. **1** is a perspective view of a bulk vending machine with an exploded view of the placement of the coin counter/combination coin mechanism and coin counter;

FIG. **2** is an exploded perspective view of a second embodiment of a bulk vending machine;

FIG. **3** is an exploded perspective view of the workings of a bulk vending machine coin mechanism;

FIG. **4** is an exploded perspective view of a counter assembly made in accordance with the invention;

FIG. **5** is a top plan view of the contact switch mechanism of the invention;

FIG. **6** is a close-up top plan view of contact being made in the switch mechanism of FIG. **5**,

FIG. **7** is a top plan view of another embodiment of the switch mechanism of the counter; and

FIG. **8** is an exploded perspective view of another embodiment of the counter assembly made in accordance with the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring first to FIGS. **1** and **2**, two different, although very similar looking and functioning, bulk vending machines are shown at **10**. For purposes of this application, bulk vending machines **10** of FIGS. **1** and **2**, will be considered equivalent. Together they show a machine, having a top bulk receptacle **12** having a lid **14** and a bolt **16**. The base of both machines **10** have a hopper **18**, a body **20**, a dispensing chute **22**, a coin retainer base **24**, a chute shield **26**, a chute cover **28** and a coin mechanism **100**.

In general, machine **10** has a base **30** into which bolt **16** extends to be secured by nut **32**.

Receptacle **12** is held to hopper **18** by screws **34**. Coin retainer **24** is held to the bottom of base **20** by screws **36**. Chute shield **26** is secured onto chute **22** in notches **25**, while chute cover **28** is rotatingly secured to chute **22** by rod **29** of cover **28** resting within notches **23** of chute **22**.

Hopper **18** has a base **19** into which dispensing materials (for example, gum balls **37**, see FIG. **1**) are placed.

Hopper **18** has an opening **21** extending through base **19**. Opening **21** is the passageway through which gum balls **37** pass to exit machine **10** through chute **22**. As will be discussed in more detail below with regard to FIG. **3**, coin mechanism **100** has a sprocket **150**, which when rotated due to a user of machine **10** turning handle **115** of coin mechanism **100**, causes a product wheel (not shown) to rotate. The product wheel has at least one opening which for each rotation of handle **115** corresponds with opening **21** of hopper **18**, to allow for dispensing of one gum ball **37**, or multiple quantities of such items as nuts, trail mix, M&Ms, etc.

Turning now to FIG. **3**, an exploded view of a standard coin mechanism for a bulk vending machine is shown at **100**. It is to be understood that the use of differently constructed coin mechanisms is anticipated by the invention.

Coin mechanism **100** has a front plate **105**, shaft **110**, handle **115**, coin wheel **120**, back plate **130**, cam **140** and sprocket **150**. Shaft **110** is axially located through all of the stated elements, and secures said elements together through use of threads **112** in shaft **110** and washer **113** and nut **114**. Shaft **110** is also usually shaped in cross-section having at least one flat edge **111**, with the rest being circular in cross-section, while the one of FIG. **3** actually has two such flat edges **111**A and **111**B. At the end of shaft **110**, opposite threads **112**, is handle **115**. As seen earlier in FIGS. **1** and **2**, handle **115** is one of the few parts of coin mechanism **100** which is exterior to bulk vending machine **10**, and is the part that a user of bulk vending machine **10** uses after insertion of coins to receive his/her treat.

Continuing with FIGS. **1** and **3**, front plate **105** of coin mechanism **100** has a coin receiving slot **106**. In use, a user of bulk vending machine **10** inserts a coin (usually a quarter) into slot **106** of front plate **105**. Once the quarter is inserted through slot **106**, it comes to rest within slot **121** of coin wheel **120** (see FIG. **3**), where it sits upon curved ridge **122**. In its position on curved ridge **122**, a quarter will turn with coin wheel **120** when handle **115** is rotated.

In operation, coin mechanism **100** operates as follows:

1. As previously discussed, a coin is placed within slot **106** of front plate **105**, to rest upon curved ridge **122** of slot **121** of coin wheel **120**.
2. Handle **115** is rotated, usually in a clockwise direction, where the coin undergoes its first test of authenticity. The coin first comes into contact with coin pawl spring **107** and coin pawl **108**. As coin wheel **120** is rotated, the coin pushes end **109** of coin pawl spring **107** upward. Assuming the coin has a proper diameter, end **109** of coin pawl spring **107** will sufficiently rise, thereby disengaging coin pawl **108** from locking coin wheel **120** in position. Coin wheel **120** will thereafter be free to continue its rotation.
3. The coin next encounters washer pawl **131**, which is secured within washer pawl mount **132**, having a receiving notch **133**.

Washer pawl **131** is held within slot **133** of mount **132** by washer pawl spring **135**, washer pawl retainer **136** and washer pawl retainer screw **137**. Washer pawl retainer screw **137** screws into mount **132** at threaded opening **138**. When secured in place, washer pawl **131** has its end **134** extending through opening **139** of back plate **130**. While coin pawl **108** was responsible for authenticating the diameter of the coin, washer pawl **131** is the item which authenticates the thickness of the coin.

In operation, end **134** of washer pawl **131** runs against inside surface **123** of coin wheel **120**. As can be seen at slot **121**, with no coin in coin mechanism **100** (if for some reason coin wheel **120** somehow turned passed coin pawl **108**), coin wheel **120** would be prevented from turning further due to end **134** of washer pawl **131** entering into slot **121** of coin wheel **120**. In this position, slot **121** would hit against end **134**, causing coin wheel **120** to halt in its rotation. Similarly, if the thickness of the coin was too thin, end **134** would slide off of surface **123** down to the surface of the coin, and would

again touch part of slot **121**, preventing further rotation of coin wheel **120**. In contrast, if the coin were too thick, end **134** of washer pawl **131** would hit into the edge of the coin, and coin wheel **120** would at that point be prevented from rotating further. Only when the coin is of the proper thickness, will end **134** run smoothly between surface **123** and the surface of the coin, thereby allowing coin wheel **120** to continue its rotation.

4. The final pawl of coin mechanism **100** is return pawl **160**. Return pawl **160** has a bottom side **161** and a substantially curved side **162**. When cam **140** is in its resting position (between uses), it is the position shown in FIG. **3**. In this position, surface **161** of return pawl **160** rests upon flat surface **141** of cam **140**.

Return Pawl **160** is pulled to its at rest position shown in FIG. **3** by spring **163** having first and second loops **164** and **168**. loop **164** is received around protrusion **165** of return pawl **160**, and spring **163** is secured to back plate **130** by screw **166**. Accordingly, tension from spring **163** maintains pawl **160** in its at rest position, as shown in FIG. **8**.

Return pawl **160** is riveted into back plate **130** by return pawl rivet **167**, to enable return pawl **160** to pivot.

5. Attached at the end of shaft **110**, between cam **140** and bolt **114**, is sprocket **150**, which as previously discussed, turns the product wheel (not shown) which allows for the dropping of treats, such as gum balls **37**, from receptacle **12** of bulk vending machine **10** into chute **22** for receipt by a user of machine **10**.

6. Continuing with the progress of the coin as coin wheel **120** rotates, after the, coin passes washer pawl **131**, coin wheel **120** is easily turned until slot **121** is in its starting position aligned with slot **106**. It is in this position where return pawl **160** and cam **140** are in their at rest position, as previously discussed.

However, prior to coin wheel **120** being returned to its starting point, the coin is deflected by coin kickout **170** out from slot **121** and into coin retainer **24**. Coin kickout **170** is secured to back plate **130** through use of screw **171**.

Some final notes regarding the structure of coin mechanism **100**, as shown in FIG. **3**. First, coin wheel **120** has a plurality of notches **124** into which stroke pin **180** are received. The purpose of notches **124** and stroke pin **180** is to prevent coin wheel **120** from being turned counter-clockwise, so that the user can retrieve his/her coin. In particular, you will note that the bottom surfaces of notches **124** are slanted. Accordingly, it is obvious that stroke pin **180** will slide out from notches **124** along the bottoms of notches **124**, from one notch to the next as coin wheel **120** is rotated in a clockwise direction. However, it is equally obvious that stroke pin **180** will hit against the ridges of notches **124**, should the user attempt to rotate coin wheel **120** in a counter-clockwise direction.

Stroke pin **180** is held in place through a slot (not shown) in back plate **130** by a spring **181** and screw **182**.

Next regarding FIG. **3**., coin mechanism **100** is retained within body **20** of bulk vending machine **10** by use of latch **190**, which is secured to back plate **130** by a screw **191**. Latch **190** is selectively rotatable from its locked position (shown in FIG. **3**) to an unlocked position, 90° from the position shown in FIG. **3**. Finally for FIG. **3**, front plate **105** and back plate **130** are secured together through use of washers and bolts **195** and **196**. We turn now to a discussion of counter **200** (as seen in FIGS. **4–6**), and to how counter **200** operates in relation to coin mechanism **100**. Coin counter **200** has a numeric display **210**, preferably having an LCD display **211**, a bracket assembly **220** and a switch **230**. Display **210** is mounted on bracket **220**, as is switch **230**. Switch **230** is connected to display **211** through at least one lead (not shown), which at least one lead is held within bracket assembly **220**.

Bracket **220** is specially designed and configured to fit onto coin mechanism **100**, on back plate **130**, without interfering or in any way hindering the standard operation of coin mechanism **100**. In fact, as will be discussed immediately below, bracket **220**, and therefore counter **200**, are so designed as to allow switch **230** to interact with shaft **110**, and its flat edge(s) **111**, during normal rotation of shaft **110** and the normal operation of coin mechanism **100**.

Bracket **220** is attached to plate **130** of mechanism **100** through use of one of the screws used to make mechanism **100**; screws **137**, **166**,**191** or **196**. Since there are many different coin mechanisms used in the bulk vending industry today, it is anticipated by the invention that any such existing screws of the mechanism can be used to connect counter **200** with the mechanism. It is also anticipated, although less desirable, to add a new screw to the mechanism to attach counter **200** to the mechanism. Whichever screw is used, it is inserted through chamber **222** of bracket **220**.

As seen in FIG. **4**, switch **230** has a main body portion **240**, a rotating contact portion **260** and a cover **280**. Most of body **240**, rotating contact portion **260** and cover **280** are made from extruded or molded plastic, which is strong, cheap to produce, able to be molded/extruded into any shape and light weight; such plastic also does not interfere with the manner of functioning of the counter, as will be discussed below. Cover **280** is attached to body **240** through use of three screws (not shown) insert through screw holes **282**. It is of course anticipated that any number of screws can be used to attach cover **280** to body **240**.

Directing attention now to the inner workings of body **240** of switch **230**, the counter is seen to have two contact switches **232** and **234**. Contact switch **232** has two wire contacts extending therefrom, wires **236** and **238**. Similarly, contact switch **234** has two wire contacts extending therefrom, wires **242** and **244**.

Contact switch **232** of switch **230**, has leads **241** and **243** extending therefrom, which leads are the electrical connections between switch **232** and a capacitor (not shown) and display **210**. Contact switch **234** also has at least one lead **245** extending therefrom, and possibly a second lead **247**, for discharging of the capacitor.

Body **240**, proximate to and substantially around contact switches **232** and **234**, has a lipped opening **250**. Opening **250** has a ledge **252** for rotating receipt thereon of outer flange element **262** of rotating contact portion **260**.

Rotating contact portion **260** is substantially circular in shape, has an outer flange element **262** which is matingly received within opening **250** of body **260**, so that flange **262** is rotatingly received onto ledge **252**. Extending away from flange **262** is an annular ridge **264**. An outside wall **265** of ridge **264** is substantially in contact with all of wires **236**,**238**,**242** and **244** of contact switches **232** and **234**, when rotating contact portion **260** rotates. Accordingly, these wires essentially ride along this wall when portion **260** rotates.

As is best seen in FIG. **6**, located on and within ridge **264** is a gap **267** in wall **265**. Within gap **267** is a metal strip **266**. Metal strip **266** has a width at least equivalent to the thicknesses of the wire combinations of wires **236**/**238** and **242**/**244**, and the distance between these wire combinations. Accordingly, when rotating contact portion **260** rotates in its usually counterclockwise direction (since handle **115** of coin mechanism **100** usually rotates in a clockwise direction), metal strip **266** will at certain intervals touch both of wire

combinations **236/238** and/or **242/244**; these contacts taking place at different intervals.

When metal strip **266** touches wire combination **236/238**, it closes contact between these normally separated wires, thereby causing counter **200** to increase one increment or numeral, which is shown on display **210**. At the same time as counter **200** increases one increment/numeral, a capacitor (not shown) of the assembly becomes fully charged. It is only after rotating contact portion **260** rotates further so that metal strip **266** then touches wire combination **242/244** will the capacitor be discharged, and thereby allowing the counter to have the ability of achieving another count. In specific, and the purpose of this invention verses that of its parent application (Ser. No. 08/842,677), and verses the improvements of this application's sister application (Ser. No. 09/065,504), is for security against double counts when the user shakes handle **115** or entire machine **10**. In particular, since wire combinations **236/238** and **242/244** are spaced apart, and since the system's capacitor becomes fully charged after wires **236/238** are contacted by metal strip **266**, even if handle **115** is roughly jiggled and/or turned back and forth by a user so that metal strip **266** repeatedly leaves and then re-touches wires **236/238**, only one count will be registered by counter **200**. In addition, and what also helps this double-count protection work, is that coin mechanisms **100** usually are constructed so that after handle **115** turns a certain distance, it cannot go back. Accordingly, if wire combinations **236/238** and **242/244** are separated and placed into two different turning zones of handle **115**, then after discharge of the capacitor (which discharge allows counter **200** to make another count), metal strip **266** would not be able to go back and re-touch wire combination **236/238** to cause a double count. The only place for handle **115** and metal strip **266** to go is back to the beginning position of coin mechanism **100**, where it is then ready to receive another coin and start the process over again.

Addressing another embodiment of counter **200**, we turn attention to counter **300** of FIG. **8**. As can be seen counter **300** is substantially identical in construction to counter **200**. specifically switch **230** and body **240**. but without display **210**. Replacing display **210** is Data Compilation/Transfer Device **310**.

Data Compilation/Transfer Device **310** (hereinafter referred to as "DCTD **310**") in addition to being able to keep track of the number of "vends" for a given bulk vending machine, vending machine, etc. will also be able to story this information on computer chip for later download by the owner/operator. DCTD **310** will also be able to provide other data relevant to the dispensing of "vends" from the machine to an interested owner/operator, such as, day and/or time of particular "vends". particular machine from which the "vend" took place particular location/owner/operator of machine from which each "vend" originated. and allow for multiple hook-up of DCTDs from numerous machines found in one location so as to achieve a report on all "vends."

All of the information available from DCTD **310** will be downloadable through output port **312**. The available downloaded material will be able to be transported into any spreadsheet program available on the market.

DCTD **310** also has an input port **314**, through which the person setting up the mechanism in the vending machine can input data relevant to the particular location/owner/operator. Presumably such inputted information would also be in whole or in part downloaded with the rest of the data so as to make any report issued therefrom as complete as possible.

It is also to be understood from the invention that DCTD **310** is not necessarily an integrally attached component of counter **300**. located within opening **21** of machine **10**. In the alternative DCTD **310** may be connected remotely by long lead wires **241**, or possibly even through radio transmission, to switch **230**. Part of the determination of the location of DCTD **310** will depend upon the user/owner/operator and how he/she will want to access output and input ports **312** and **314**.

Since counter **300** is unchanged in how it interacts with mechanism **100** to achieve counts/generate information, the below discussion regarding counter **200**'s operation relevant to mechanism **100**, pertains directly to how counter **300** would so operate.

To further explain the operation of counter **200** with mechanism **100**, it must be understood that counter **200** is attached onto coin mechanism **100** in such a way that opening **250** of body **240** is received around shaft **110** of mechanism **100**. Body **240** is positioned between either cam **140** and washer **113** of mechanism **100**, or between washer **113** and sprocket **150** of mechanism **100**. Due to the earlier discussed shape of shaft **110**, having one or two flat edge(s) **111**A and/or **111**B, the rotation of shaft **110** causes rotating portion **260** (closed within and between body **240** and cover **280**), to also rotate. This is because (as shown in FIGS. **4–6**), rotating portion **260** has a key **270** attached thereto.

Key **270** is attached to ridge **264** by legs **272**, which preferably fit within receiving slots in ridge **264**. Through the center of rotating portion **260** and key **270** is keyed opening **274**. Keyed opening **274** is substantially circular in shape, but having one flat edge **275**. It is flat edge **275** which interacts with flat edge **111** (**111**A or **111**B) of shaft **110**, and thereby locks the rotation of portion **260** into synchrony with shaft **110** (and therefore handle **115**).

Legs **272** of key **270** can have a length which extends opening **274** and edge **275** away from the main body of portion **260** and body **240** of switch **230**. The purpose of this versatility in length of legs **272** is to allow counter **200** to be adapted to fit onto the many varied sized and shaped coin mechanisms **100** used in the industry.

Further, as seen in FIGS. **4** and **5**, a second keyed opening exists in portion **260**: This second keyed opening is opening **277**, located not in key **270**, but in ridge **264**. Opening **277** is used on some coin mechanisms instead of key **270** (although this does not necessarily mean that key **270** must be removed from portion **260**). In particular, some coin mechanisms do not use a shaft having a flat surface, but instead having a protruding nipple at and near the end of the shaft, in and around the cam/sprocket portion of the mechanism. The subject invention has been adopted to be usable with these types of mechanisms and make use of these nipples by incorporation of opening **277**.

Finally, we turn our attention to the embodiment of FIG. **7**. This embodiment substitutes the construction shown for that of FIGS. **4–6**. In particular, a cam **290** is used to push wire **236'** into wire **238'**, causing the counting and charging of the capacitor. Thereafter, cam **290** rotates and pushes wire **242'** into wire **244'**, causing the capacitor to discharge. The rotation is allowed by shaft **110** and keyed opening **275'** of key **270'**. This embodiment can also have the opening **277** of the prior embodiment.

As seen in the figures, the coin mechanism **100** and coin counter **200** combination are substantially equivalent in size to the coin mechanism **100** by itself. In this way, counter **200** is able to be used within all bulk vending machines, in the limited space provided within body **20**, between chute shield **26** and rear plate **130**.

Since counter **200** is also self-powered by, preferably, a nickel cadmium battery, there is no need to have to position

bulk vending machine **10** near an AC power outlet, and the bulk vending industry can continue its practice of positioning these bulk vending machines at inconvenient locations. The lack of an AC power hook-up to power counter **200** also increases the safety of the apparatus, since there is no possibility of electric shock to the users of the bulk vending machines.

Counter **200** is also positioned and oriented so as to be easily readable during normal collection procedures for bulk vending machines.

It will thus be seen that the objects set forth above, among those made apparent from the preceding description, are efficiently attained, and since certain changes may be made in the above constructions without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention, it is intended that all matter contained in the above description and shown in the accompanying drawings shall be interpreted as illustrative, and not in a limiting sense.

It is also to be understood that the following claims are intended to cover all of the generic and specific features of the invention herein described and all statements of the scope of the invention, which, as a matter of language, might be said to fall therebetween.

What is claimed is:

1. For a bulk vending machine, a combination coin mechanism and data generating device, comprising:

a coin mechanism designed to be partially received into an opening in said bulk vending machine, said coin mechanism comprising a selectively rotatable shaft extending substantially axially therefrom;

a contact switch assembly at least a portion of which is located around a portion of said selectively rotatable shaft; and

a data compilation/transfer device connected to said contact switch assembly, said contact switch assembly, comprising:

a first pair of spaced-apart wires at a first location of said switch assembly;

a second pair of spaced-apart wires at a second location of said switch assembly; and

a selectively rotatable element located substantially between said first and second pairs of spaced-apart wires, comprising a conductive strip, said conductive strip separately contacting both of said first and second pairs of spaced-apart wires when said selectively rotatable element is selectively rotated;

wherein said data compilation/transfer device compiles data at a first contact between said conductive strip and said first pair of spaced-apart wires.

2. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **1**, said first pair of spaced-apart wires connected to said data compilation/transfer device.

3. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **2**, said first pair of spaced-apart wires further connected to a capacitor.

4. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **3**, said second pair of spaced-apart wires connected at least to said capacitor.

5. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **4**, said contact between said conductive strip and said first pair of spaced-apart wires occurring at said first location of said switch assembly, and said contact between said conductive strip and said second pair of spaced-apart wires occurring at said second location of said switch assembly and after said contact between said conductive strip and said first pair of spaced-apart wires.

6. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **4**, wherein said data compilation/transfer device can only compile additional data after said selectively rotatable element rotates, bringing said conductive strip into contact with said second pair of spaced-apart wires.

7. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **6**, comprising a battery connected to said data compilation/transfer device and to said capacitor.

8. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **7**, wherein a circuit is closed at said first contact between said conductive strip and said first pair of spaced-apart wires, causing an electric charge from said battery to cause said data compilation/transfer device to compile data.

9. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **8**, wherein another circuit is closed at said first contact between said conductive strip and said first pair of spaced-apart wires, causing said electric charge from said battery to charge said capacitor.

10. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **9**, wherein said conductive strip contacts said second pair of spaced-apart wires thereby closing yet another circuit, and causing said capacitor to discharge, said discharge of said capacitor enabling said data compilation/transfer device to compile additional data once said conductive strip again contacts said first pair of spaced-apart wires.

11. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **1**, said data compilation/transfer device comprising a data output port.

12. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **1**, said data compilation/transfer device comprising a data input port.

13. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **1**, wherein said selectively rotatable element is located on said portion of said contact switch assembly located around said portion of said selectively rotatable shaft.

14. A counter and data generating assembly, comprising:

a data compilation/transfer device; and

a contact switch assembly, comprising:

a first pair of spaced-apart wires at a first location of said switch assembly;

a second pair of spaced-apart wires at a second location of said switch assembly; and

a selectively rotatable element located substantially between said first and second pairs of spaced-apart wires, comprising a conductive strip, said conductive strip separately contacting both of said first and second pairs of spaced-apart wires when said selectively rotatable element is selectively rotated;

wherein said data compilation/transfer device compiles data at a first contact between said conductive strip and said first pair of spaced-apart wires.

15. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **14**, said first pair of spaced-apart wires connected to said data compilation/transfer device.

16. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **15**, said first pair of spaced-apart wires further connected to a capacitor.

17. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **16**, said second pair of spaced-apart wires connected at least to said capacitor.

18. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **17**, said contact between said conductive strip and said first pair of spaced-apart wires occurring at said first location of said switch assembly, and

said contact between said conductive strip and said second pair of spaced-apart wires occurring at said second location of said switch assembly and after said contact between said conductive strip and said first pair of spaced-apart wires.

19. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **17**, wherein said data compilation/transfer device can only compile additional data after said selectively rotatable element rotates, bringing said conductive strip into contact with said second pair of spaced-apart wires.

20. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **19**, comprising a battery connected to said data compilation/transfer device and to said capacitor.

21. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **20**, wherein a circuit is closed at said first contact between said conductive strip and said first pair of spaced-apart wires, causing an electric charge from said battery to cause said data compilation/transfer device to compile data.

22. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **21**, wherein another circuit is closed at said first contact between said conductive strip and said first pair of spaced-apart wires, causing said electric charge from said battery to charge said capacitor.

23. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **22**, wherein said conductive strip contacts said second pair of spaced-apart wires thereby closing yet another circuit, and causing said capacitor to discharge, said discharge of said capacitor enabling said data compilation/transfer device to compile additional data once said conductive strip again contacts said first pair of spaced-apart wires.

24. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **14**, said data compilation/transfer device comprising a data output port.

25. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **14**, said data compilation/transfer device comprising a data input port.

26. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **14**, wherein said selectively rotatable element is located on said portion of said contact switch assembly located around said portion of said selectively rotatable shaft.

27. For a bulk vending machine, a combination coin mechanism and data generating device, comprising:

a coin mechanism designed to be partially received into an opening in said bulk vending machine, said coin mechanism comprising a selectively rotatable shaft extending substantially axially therefrom;

a contact switch assembly at least a portion of which is located around a portion of said selectively rotatable shaft; and

a data compilation/transfer device connected to said contact switch assembly, said contact switch assembly, comprising:

a first pair of spaced-apart wires at a first location of said switch assembly;

a second pair of spaced-apart wires at a second location of said switch assembly; and

a selectively rotatable cam element located substantially between said first and second pairs of spaced-apart wires;

wherein rotation of said selectively rotatable cam element pushes a first wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires into a first contact with a second wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires, causing said data compilation/transfer device to compile data.

28. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **27**, said second wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires connected to said data compilation/transfer device.

29. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **28**, said second wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires further connected to a capacitor.

30. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **29**, wherein said data compilation/transfer device can only compile additional data after said selectively rotatable cam element further rotates, pushing a first wire of said second pair of spaced-apart wires into contact with a second wire thereof.

31. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **30**, wherein said second wire of said second pair of spaced-apart wires is connected at least to said capacitor.

32. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **31**, further comprising a battery connected to said data compilation/transfer device and to said capacitor.

33. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **32**, wherein a circuit is closed when said selectively rotatably cam element pushes said first wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires into said first contact with said second wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires, causing said data compilation/transfer device to compile data from receipt of an electric charge from said battery.

34. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **33**, wherein another circuit is closed when said selectively rotatably cam element pushes said first wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires into said first contact with said second wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires, causing said electric charge from said battery to charge said capacitor.

35. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **34**, wherein said selectively rotatably cam element pushes said first wire of said second pair of spaced-apart wires into contact with said second wire of said second pair of spaced-apart wires, closing yet another circuit, and causing said capacitor to discharge, said discharge of said capacitor enabling said data compilation/transfer device to compile additional data once said selectively rotatably cam element again pushes said first wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires into contact with said second wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires on its next selective rotation.

36. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **27**, said data compilation/transfer device comprising a data output port.

37. A combination coin mechanism and data generating device as recited in claim **27**, said data compilation/transfer device comprising a data input port.

38. A counter and data generating assembly, comprising:

a data compilation/transfer device; and

a contact switch assembly, comprising:

a first pair of spaced-apart wires at a first location of said switch assembly;

a second pair of spaced-apart wires at a second location of said switch assembly; and

a selectively rotatable cam element located substantially between said first and second pairs of spaced-apart wires;

wherein rotation of said selectively rotatable cam element pushes a first wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires into a first contact with a second wire of

said first pair of spaced-apart wires, causing said data compilation/transfer device to compile data.

39. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **38**, said second wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires connected to said data compilation/transfer device.

40. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **39**, said second wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires further connected to a capacitor.

41. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **40**, wherein said data compilation/transfer device can only compile additional data after said selectively rotatable cam element further rotates, pushing a first wire of said second pair of spaced-apart wires into contact with a second wire thereof.

42. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **40**, wherein said second wire of said second pair of spaced-apart wires is connected at least to said capacitor.

43. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **42**, further comprising a battery connected to said data compilation/transfer device and to said capacitor.

44. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **43**, wherein a circuit is closed when said selectively rotatably cam element pushes said first wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires into said first contact with said second wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires, causing said data compilation/transfer device to compile data from receipt of an electric charge from said battery.

45. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **44**, wherein another circuit is closed when said selectively rotatably cam element pushes said first wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires into said first contact with said second wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires, causing said electric charge from said battery to charge said capacitor.

46. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **45**, wherein said selectively rotatably cam element pushes said first wire of said second pair of spaced-apart wires into contact with said second wire of said second pair of spaced-apart wires, closing yet another circuit, and causing said capacitor to discharge, said discharge of said capacitor enabling said data compilation/transfer device to compile additional data once said selectively rotatably cam element again pushes said first wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires into contact with said second wire of said first pair of spaced-apart wires on its next selective rotation.

47. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **38**, said data compilation/transfer device comprising a data output port.

48. A counter and data generating assembly as recited in claim **38**, said data compilation/transfer device comprising a data input port.

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