

# Building a museum 'country store' to preserve a collection

BY ELSA VERBYLA

Ray Hunley of Mathews has built something close to his heart and history: a room in the Mathews Historical Museum to house his father's country store collection.

A grand opening is expected in early summer, said museum president Tom Robinson.

Tommy Hunley, longtime meter reader for the Virginia Electric and Power Company, now Dominion, visited every corner of Mathews County during his 36 years on the road. When he retired in 1987, he estimated he had driven 800,000 miles in Mathews, Gloucester, King and Queen, and King William counties. Most of his time was spent in Mathews.

In several interviews with the Gazette-Journal, Hunley told how his work took him to community stores, and how much he enjoyed them. "I would just sit down and drink a Pepsi-Cola and talk with the old storekeeper," Hunley said. "It was almost a demand for every commu-

nity to have one."

Early in the 20th century, country stores were truly gathering places and news central for communities. Few people had telephones, few had automobiles, but one could walk just about a mile, sit for a spell, and learn everything that was going on.

In fact, candidates for public office in that time often advertised when they would be visiting community stores, as the best opportunity for voters (all men ... this was before women had the right to vote) could get to know them.

As the years went by, community post offices closed, and after those, most of the old stores closed too. Hunley purchased many of his store artifacts as they shut down.

And then, he rebuilt a country store on his home property adjacent to Thomas Hunter Middle School. A newspaper article from 1983 said, "Tommy's General Store has been operating in Mathews Court House for more than three years and has not sold one item ..."

Tommy's General Store is not really a store, but more of a museum. Hunley said he set it up to remind people "of days when you bought a Coke for a nickel and men sat on the porch or around a potbelly stove, ate peanuts, chewed tobacco and told lies to one another until nine or ten and then went home."

The collection includes many items straight from and typical of a country store: tobacco cutter, coffee grinder, oyster cans, candy case, and scales.

Tommy Hunley died in 2005 and his wife Doris in 2016. Their sons Ray and Sam placed their father's



PHOTO BY NANCY TWIGG

Ray Hunley works on building a space in the Mathews Historical Museum for his father Tommy's collection of country store items.

SEE PRESERVING HISTORY, PAGE 15C

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# PRESERVING HISTORY: *Building a replica*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14C)  
collection on permanent loan with the museum, and now Ray, a former longtime commissioner of the revenue in Mathews, has fitted out one room in the museum to display large portions of his father's collection.

Hunley, assisted by his wife Kathy and daughter Lesley, has built shelving, installed a countertop from Pinero Post Office, the old post office enclosure from Diggs, a new floor, a wall to close off the area from another room, and painted ev-

everything. Now he is stocking the shelves. Ray estimated he is using about 70 percent of his father's collection, minus duplicates, and keeping more items in reserve for rotation.  
"Everything I pick up has a memory of him," Hunley

said.  
There is another real connection of the family to the museum building, which was constructed in 1936 as an automobile dealership.

Shortly after Ray was born, Tommy Hunley left his job as a mechanic at Twigg Motor Company and got a job  
SEE PRESERVING HISTORY, PAGE 16C



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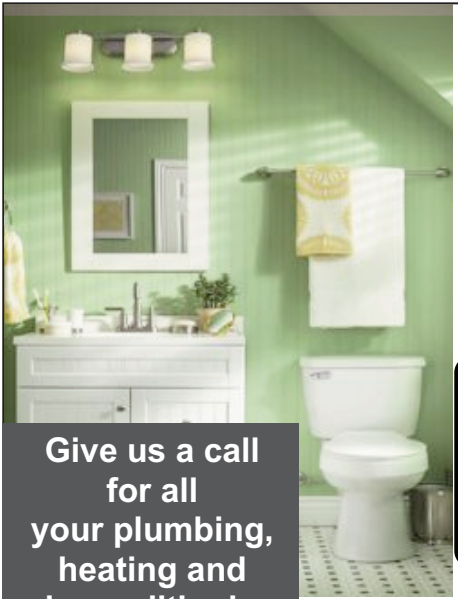
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BOARD OF FISHERIES.  
I do all in my power to aid the "State Board of Fisheries."  
The term of the present expires next Spring, and in the "Board" have a "Fish Commissioner," with duties and which will prove more effective and give better satisfaction to the people, and accomplish better results. I will do all I have this change.  
FISHERY INDUSTRY.

### PUBLIC SPEAKING.

I will address the Democrats of Mathews county at the following places on the dates named below—

L. S. White's store, Saturday, July 1, at 7.30 P. M.

Hugh Hudgins' store, Wednesday, July 5, at 7.30 P. M.

Labans, Saturday, July 8, at 7.30 P. M.

Cobbs Creek, Thursday, July 13, at 7.30 P. M.

Grinnell & Hutson's store, Saturday, July 15, at 7.30 P. M.

It is my intention to reply to an article published in the Mathews Tribune over the signature of James N. Stubbs, criticising my official record in the Senate of Virginia, and I invite him to be present.

J. Boyd Sears.

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Foley's Honey and T... ed many cases of asthma were considered hopeless. Adolph Buesing, 701 St., Davenport Iowa, severe cold contracted years ago was neglected

This clipping from the Mathews Journal of June 29, 1905 shows the country store circuit announced by J. Boyd Sears, candidate for the Virginia Senate.

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# PRESERVING HISTORY: *New exhibit coming to Mathews Museum*

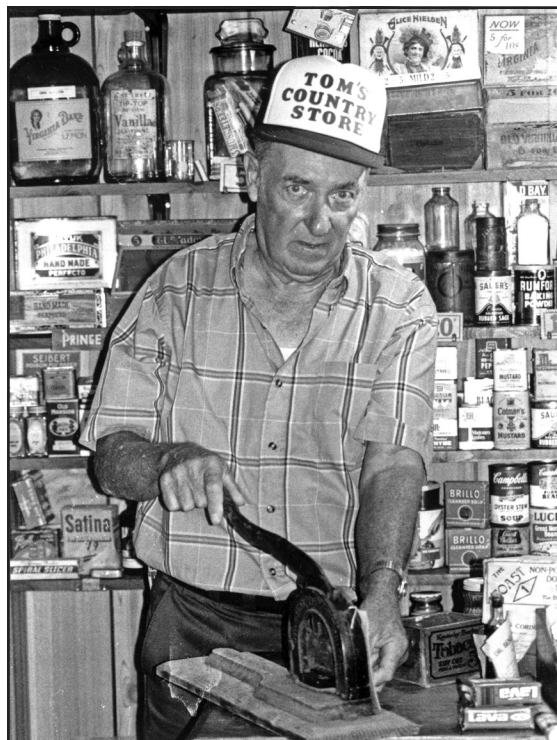
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as a lineman with East Coast Electric, which had an office in the building that now houses the museum. In the first years after World War II, many areas of Mathews County were just getting electricity and linemen were needed for the construction work. East Coast was succeeded by Virginia Power, and Tommy Hunley made the move from lineman to meter reader as the years went by.

His dad collecting in the mid-1960s, Ray said, and by 1980 had moved a one-room building from Cardinal, where two men had lived, to his yard, restored it, and built his store museum there.

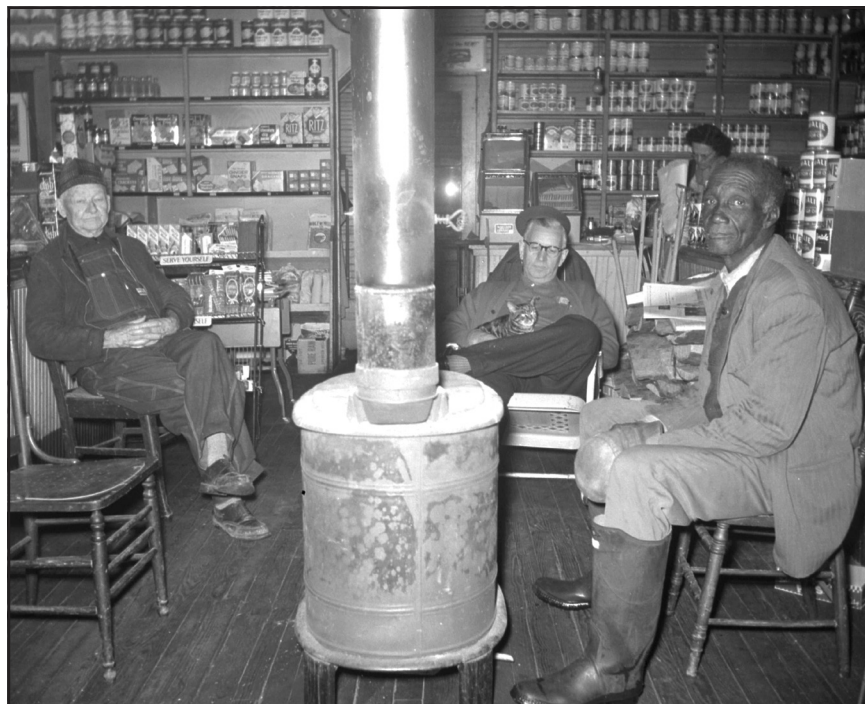
Ray is very pleased his father's memorabilia will be going on display, and said the new exhibit honors "Daddy's dying wish. He said try to keep the collection together. He wanted to save it from a yard sale."

Hunley said the new exhibit is complete. Robinson, the museum president, noted that while a grand opening is being planned, anyone visiting the facility, located at 200 Main Street, is welcome to look at the store exhibit. "I want the museum to be a real place to visit in Mathews."



FILE PHOTO

Tommy Hunley displayed a tobacco cutter in Tom's Country Store for a newspaper article in 1994.



FILE PHOTO

This photo from Gazette-Journal files illustrate how country stores were gathering spots. At Moon Post Office in Mathews in 1956, John R. Diggs, Howard A. Sadler and his cat Ichabod, and Ivey H. Morgan, from left, pass a rainy day around the pot-bellied stove at Mr. Sadler's general store at Moon. Marguerite R. Sadler, postmaster, is behind the counter.

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