

Old-time five & dime still alive and doing well

By Byron Crawford

Columbian, The Courier-Journal
Can an old-fashioned dime store survive in today's mega-market maze of Wal-Marts and glitzy shopping malls?

Hiatt's 5&10, a Rockcastle County landmark since the 1930s, is a ghost of Christmas past, to be sure. But it also proof that with sound management, a good location and the right stuff, even your grandmother's favorite small-town dime store of half a century ago can remain a friendly fixture on the corner of a new millennium.

"I've been coming here ever since I was a little bitty girl, and that's a long time," said Mary Ann Bullock, who had brought her 7- and 10-year-old granddaughters to the store to buy a present.

Billy Hiatt, 72, a former school-teacher who has owned the store for the past 40 years, doesn't have any closely guarded secrets for success—just some good old common-sense marketing techniques.

"We still have the basic items that you'd find in a 5 and 10, but I've had to diversify into higher-priced merchandise in the last three or four years," he said. "We still have toys, housewares and sewing notions, but we've added Fenton Art Glass, Boyd Bears and other giftware."

THE OLD CANDY scale still sits atop the candy case in front of the store's center aisle, but jewelry and other gift items have replaced the chocolate-covered peanuts, orange slices and coconut bonbons—now sold in prepackaged assortments.

Most of the store's fixtures date back to 1961, shortly after Hiatt took over the business that his father-in-law, O.V. Hilton, had operated since World War II.

"In the heyday of the store... we were between the courthouse, the post office and drugstore—and the two largest groceries in town were just up the street—so we had all the traffic in the county, you might say," Hiatt recalled. "At one time, you practically had to push people out of

the way on the streets here on Saturday."

The arrival of Dollar Stores, and later Wal-Mart and Kmart, took a toll on Hiatt's business for several years.

But his profits now are at a 20-year high, thanks mostly to his quality gift line—which he buys from suppliers that are too small to accommodate a big chain's sales volume.

Red Radio Flyer wagons are still parked on a shelf in the corner, right next to several rolls of oil cloth, and sleds are still propped against the storefront outside on snowy days.

THE COZY CHARM of the place has been discovered over the years by several generations of new customers who wandered off nearby Interstate 75 and wound up in the little store at the corner of Main and Church streets.

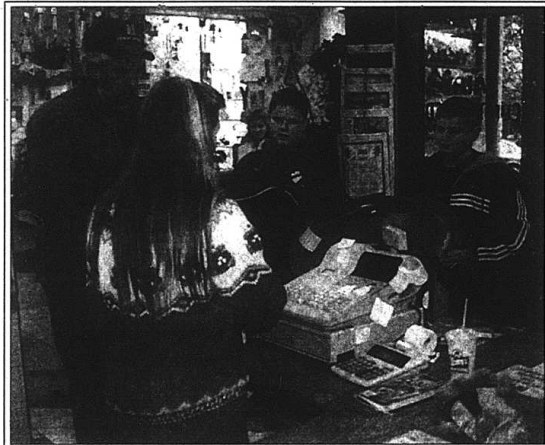
One couple from Canada confessed to speeding all the way from Florida so they could reach Hiatt's 5&10 before it closed. And three women drove all the way from Ma-

son, Ohio, just to buy quilt kits from Hiatt's.

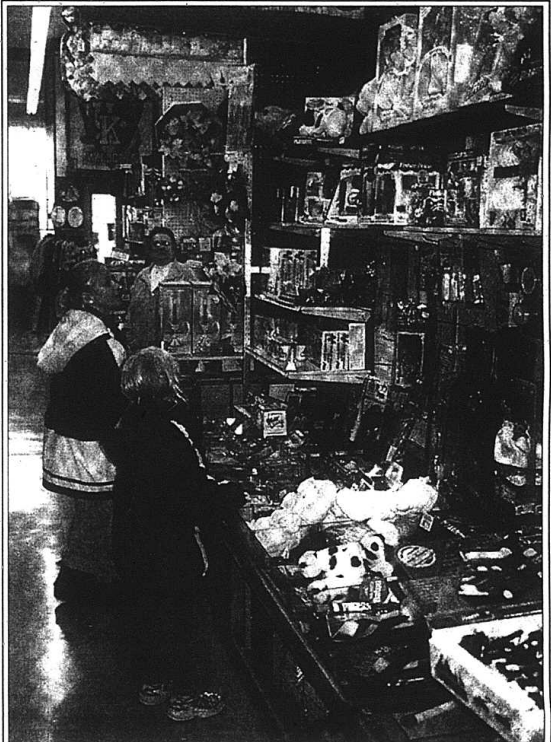
Over the years, Billy Hiatt could have written a book about all the events that have happened in the old dime store.

"A farmer bought a lamp for a Christmas present, and I asked if he'd like to have it gift-wrapped," Hiatt remembers. "He said, 'No, I'm just going to give it to my wife.'"

Originally published in The Courier-Journal 12/6/00. Reprinted with permission of The Courier-Journal.



Jenny Martin operates the cash register as Travis Powell, right, and Wesley McHargue bought some new snow sleds with Wesley's father, Howard. The arrival of bigger chain stores took a toll on Hiatt's business for several years, but profits now are at a 20-year high, thanks mostly to a quality gift line.



Courtney Bullock, 10, looked at toys with her sister Kristin, 7, at Hiatt's 5&10 in Mt. Vernon as their grandmother, Mary Ann Bullock, stood nearby. The store has been in operation since 1930s.

The Top Reasons to Stay in Rockcastle County for Your Health Care.



George W. Griffith, M.D., F.A.A.P.P.

With a degree from the University of Louisville, Dr. Griffith chose to return to his hometown to practice family medicine.

"Rockcastle County is a great place to live because you can receive the benefits of a small town and get you're close to a big city."

Kimberly Cornelius, M.D.

A Rockcastle County native, Dr. Cornelius is the Medical Director of the hospital. She received her degree from the University of Louisville. Her specialty is pediatrics.

"I love the personal touch and dedication the staff give to the patients. We treat them like family."

William P. McElwain, M.D.

Dr. McElwain lives in Mt. Vernon and received his degree from the University of Louisville to practice preventive and family medicine.

"Rockcastle Hospital provides quality medical care with a small town community atmosphere."

James M. Stern, M.D.

Dr. Stern, originally from London, graduated from Jefferson Medical College. His practice is general surgery.

"I enjoy the cooperative spirit here among very capable personnel."

William Don Dooley, M.D.

Dr. Dooley was born in Middletown, Ohio and received his degree from the University of Cincinnati to practice radiology.

"I practically grew up in Rockcastle County. My grandmother owned a store in Clinton."

Michael David Hamilton, M.D.

A Mt. Vernon native, Dr. Hamilton practices family medicine. He received his degree from the University of Kentucky.

"I chose Rockcastle Hospital because I saw a need I could fill for the community, and also because this is home for my wife and me."

Tony Arvin, M.D.

With a degree from the University of Kentucky, Dr. Arvin returned to his hometown to continue his father's practice of family medicine.

"I'm looking forward to continuing the tradition of high-quality care to the community of Rockcastle County."

Karen B. Saylor, M.D.

Dr. Saylor, originally from Mt. Vernon, graduated from the University of Kentucky. She specializes in pediatrics and internal medicine.

"I've always wanted to serve people in the area where I grew up."

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