

## Mull's Store

Founded: 1894

Location: 6779 East State Road 160, South Boston

Robert J. Mull opened a general merchandise store in South Boston in 1894. It offered groceries, household goods, animal feed, and seed products and served as a community center for the small village. Mull, however, was not a typical entrepreneur for the nineteenth century—he did not start his general merchandise business until he was fifty years old.

Mull, a Washington County native, grew up on a farm. In 1863, at the age of seventeen, he joined the Union army. He was injured when the train he was riding on fell through a bridge in Alabama, and he was given an honorable discharge some months later. After his marriage to Martha Blackenbaker in 1867, he moved out of his parents' home and began farming his own land. Purportedly, several of his friends tried to dissuade him from opening a store so late in life. He may have heeded their advice, at least in part, because he held on to more than 360 acres of farmland, even after his new trade proved to be a success. For a time, in the 1910s, he also acted as the town's postmaster and distributed mail at his store.

Mull's only son, Willis B., took over the enterprise in 1918. Like his father, Willis had also started his working life as a farmer. In 1921 he started a new business, an automobile garage, but it did not prove to be a financial success. Willis and his wife, Della McClellan Mull, raised their son Roscoe on their farm. Besides milking the cows and tending to other chores, Roscoe also helped in the store as a young man. He became

the proprietor of the store in 1931. Roscoe and his wife, Estelle May Motsinger Mull, also a native of Washington County, ran the business together until after World War II.

Elgin Mull, Roscoe and Estelle's son, assumed ownership of the store after his honorable discharge from the United States military following World War II. After his marriage to Marjorie Nelson, the couple operated the store together. Elgin's father and mother continued to work in the business until their deaths in 1954 and 1971, respectively. The store never relocated, but in 1959 a crew moved the building sixty feet back from Highway 160. During the time they owned the business, Elgin and Marjorie strove to meet the needs of the small South Boston community. The store acted as a collection point for memorial contributions and Elgin helped found the Franklin Township Fire Department. By the 1980s the business had changed somewhat from the 1940s; dry goods, such as beans, coffee, and rice, were no longer sold in bulk, the mail could no longer be picked up at the store, and the couple sold more soda, hardware, and snacks than anything else.

The couple's son Dale and daughters Mary and Carol worked in the store for a time. Dale worked there between 1979 and 1987 but later decided not to buy the business from his parents. In July 1996, after fifty years of ownership, the Mulls sold the store to Irvin Nicholson, Sr., and his son Irvin Nicholson, Jr. The Nicholsons kept the name Mull's and continued to run the business in 1999.