

She remembers the  
days of the old  
steam locomotives.

# Memories

By Gladys Avery Cooper

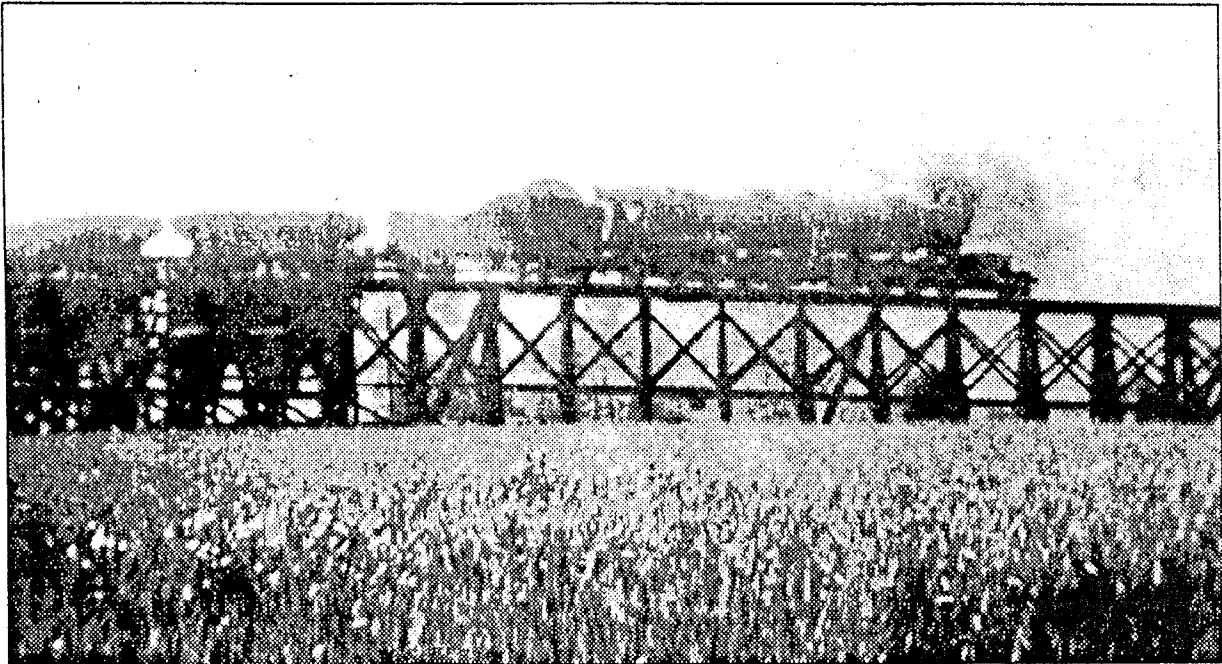
No one seems to recall Avery Station. Clinchfield railroad clings to the foot of Linville Mountain as it winds its way through North Cove valley in McDowell County. But in all the books that have been written about the Clinchfield railroad, the water tank, coal tipple and crude old shed called a depot that made up Avery Station have never been mentioned.

As a child it was my delight to watch the trains from our front porch across the grassy pasture. I loved to see the big steam engines climbing the incline of the coal tipple. The coal would be fed into the storage bins of the coal tipple and later transferred into the tenders of the big engines.

The huge water tank with a capacity of approximately 60,000 gallons stood south of the

coal tipple. The big spout on the tank was lowered as the water filled the storage of the engines. This water and coal gave the engines their source of steam to propel them up and over the mountains and through the many tunnels of the Clinchfield railroad.

Most of the trains on the Clinchfield passing through Avery Station each day were either coal or freight trains. But there were also two passenger



Steam locomotive empties a load at coal tipple.

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trains, one going north in the morning and another going south in the afternoon.

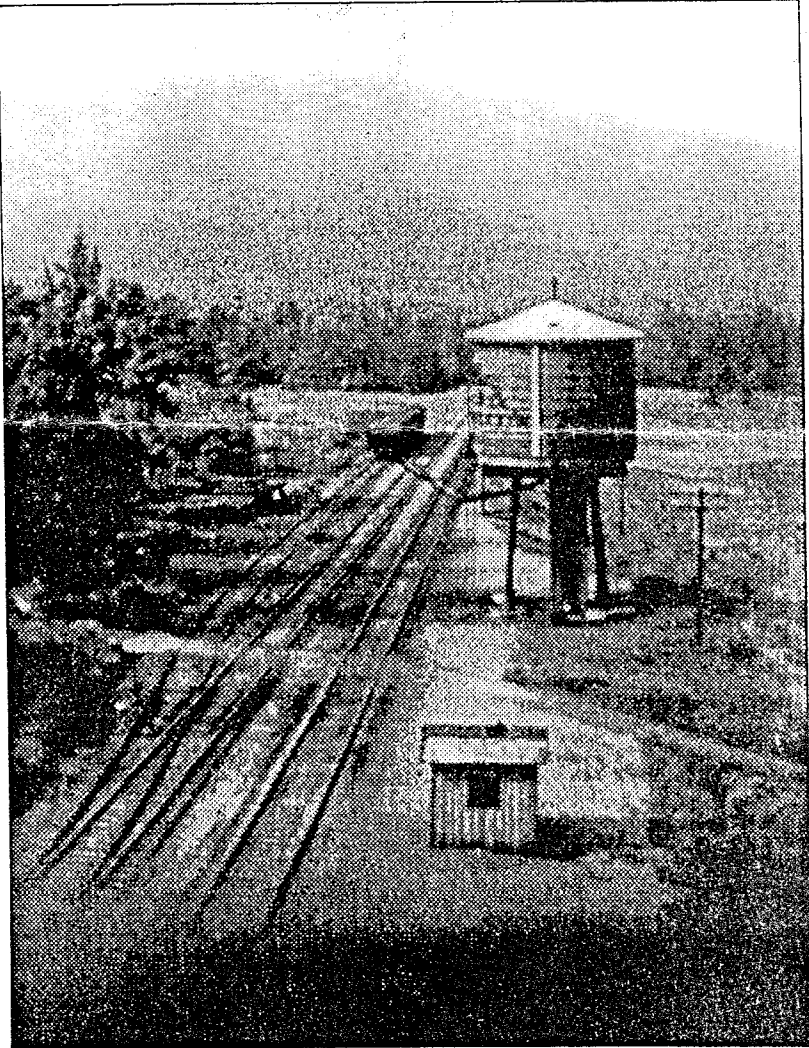
Three toots of the train whistle meant that a passenger was getting off the train at the station, maybe coming only for a short visit with friends or relatives and returning home on the afternoon train.

A crude open shed with a long wooden seat across the back was built to serve as a depot. It was at least a shelter from the wind and rain as the passengers waited for the train. The building was also used by the hobos that would seek a place to rest and build a fire to keep warm in winter.

Work was scarce and hoboing on the freight and coal trains was a fast and free way to travel. In the late 1920's and early 1930's, it was a way of life for men going from place to place either trying to find work or just wandering. They would work for people along the way, cutting wood or doing other odd jobs in exchange for food. Sometimes there was wood to be split for a plate of food and other times the food would be given to them in a paper bag and they would go on their way.

Avery Station was made up of three tracks. There was a main line, a side track and a track for switching or shifting cars. This track was used for loading pulpwood and the loading and unloading other commodities to be shipped out or received into the station.

Many men from the North



**The water tank at Avery Station.**

Cove valley spent their entire working years with the railroad. They performed all types of jobs from engineers to the task of keeping the rails safe for travel.

In fact, one of North Cove's own, in later years became superintendent of the line.

Avery Station has been gone for many years. In the late forties, the big diesel engines came and the passenger trains were discontinued. The coal tipple, water tank and small depot were no longer needed and were all torn down. The only reminder is the concrete structure where the huge water tank once stood.

As the years go by and young

people replace the older generation, so many things are forgotten.

Maybe Avery Station and other forgotten things are not important now, but they are a part of our past and should be remembered as such.

In my memory, I can still hear the puff, puff, puff of the big steam engines and the shrill steam whistle used for their many signals.

Remembering this always reminds me of the Clinchfield railroad (now CSX) and my younger years on the Avery farm, watching the trains at Avery Station.