



Ruby Coffey (above) is a lifetime member of Mountain Top Church who was born and raised in the Love area. Ruby, 92, attended the Ivy Hill School in the holler where she was born and remembers walking to Henry Everitt's store in Love to spend the night with his daughter, Annie.

Love, Virginia

The rustic mountain village known as 'Cupid's Correspondence Capital.'



Visitors and many locals, who have lived in the vicinity their entire lives, have never been to the tiny mountain hamlet of Love or even know its exact location.

Those of us who live here joke that "Welcome to Love" and "Come back soon" are printed on the same sign. With a population fluctuating at just under 100, Love is easily missed by those hurrying to another destination.

About 12 miles south of Lyndhurst and paralleling the Blue Ridge Parkway at the junction of milepost 16 and Route 814, the uppermost village was once a bustling community.

Encompassing a 3-mile stretch of road from the top of the mountain to the bottom, including the outlying areas of Chicken Holler and Campbell's Mountain, Love has been inhabited by hearty Scots/Irish immigrants who settled in the Blue Ridge in the 1700s. Members of the Sneed, Hewitt, Coffey, Everitt, Arnold, Hatter and Henderson families lived in rustic cabins dotting the perimeter of Love, which is located in both Nelson and Augusta counties.

Older residents can remember their parents and grandparents buying and

trading at several country stores that served the community. My husband's mother, Annie Coffey, traded chicken eggs and fresh-churned butter for coffee, baking powder and anything else the family didn't produce. Most of the people in Love were subsistence farmers, growing vegetables in the rocky mountain soil and keeping hogs and chickens for meat and eggs along with several cows for milk.

Vegetables and fruits were preserved for the winter by canning, drying and sometimes burying in the earth. Root cellars were dug out of steep mountainsides and lined with rock, housing the foodstuffs on wooden shelves and in bins. In the fall months when apples were plentiful, folks got together and boiled them down into thick apple butter made in a large copper kettle over an open fire. The butter was then put in crocks, covered and kept in a cool place where a portion could be dipped out anytime it was needed.

Before refrigeration, a springhouse or simple spring box served as a way of keeping milk and other perishables cold. They were constructed over the tops of mountain springs, where water constantly



Above: A picturesque cabin in Love.

Right: The Smith family at their Royal Oaks Country Store. Below: Mountain Top Christian Church, which has been in existence since the 1800s, continues to hold Sunday services.



In 1894, the U.S. Postal Service was pushing for a shorter name, since Meadow Mountain required too much space on the postal stamp. Sometime that year, Postmaster Hugh Coffey's young daughter, Lovey, died of typhoid fever; so, in her memory, the village was renamed Love.

flowed through. Milk, cream and hand-churned butter were kept in crocks or glass vessels submerged in the ice-cold water for freshness. As a child, my husband Billy remembers loving nothing better than going to the family spring and upending a crock to drink clabbered milk, for which he had a special fondness.

In years past, the community boasted several general merchandise stores, three churches, two one-room schoolhouses, a blacksmith shop, a sawmill and a grist mill where people could get their grain ground into meal. Today, the village is sparsely populated compared to 100 years ago, and Royal Oaks cabin rentals, owned by the Smith family, is its only commerce.

Mountain Top Christian Church, which has been in existence since the 1800s, continues to hold Sunday services with many faithful members. One lifetime member is Ruby Coffey, who was born and raised in the Love area. Ruby, 92, attended the Ivy Hill School in the holler where she was born and remembers walking to Henry Everitt's store in Love to spend the night with his daughter, Annie. In later years when Ruby purchased her first car, she lovingly washed it in the shallow

waters of Pannell Branch, which flowed across the road.

Today, mail is delivered from nearby Lyndhurst, but years ago Love's claim to fame was the post office where people brought their letters and their valentines for the coveted "Love" postmark on the envelope. More than once Ruby walked to the post office and blew the whistle hanging at the door, summoning the postmaster for her mail.

First established on April 24, 1894, the Love Post Office was located in the heart of the hamlet known as Meadow Mountain. On May 15 the same year, Hugh Coffey took the oath of office and was sworn in as the new postmaster by Wilson S. Bissell, the acting postmaster general. Within a short time, however, the U.S. Postal Service was pushing for a shorter name, since Meadow Mountain required too much space on the postal stamp. Sometime that same year, Coffey's young daughter, Lovey, died of typhoid fever; so, in her memory, the village was renamed Love.

Originally the office was incorporated into the general store that Hugh Coffey owned and operated. Although the exact

date is not known, this store later burned down and was never rebuilt. Coffey retired after 25 years of service and on Feb. 28, 1919, Gordon Everitt was appointed to the office of postmaster by Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson.

The new office was then set up inside Everitt's private residence and general store, much like Coffey's before him. In the late 1920s, Gordon married Pearl Allen, a much-respected schoolteacher in the area, and she became not only his wife but his assistant as well. In addition to their postal duties, the Everitts operated both a sawmill and a gristmill, and many times were outside when folks came by to pick up their mail. They found a simple solution to this problem by hanging a police whistle on a long chain outside the store. One shrill blast on the whistle told the postmaster he had a customer waiting.

The post office itself was a humble affair. It consisted of a corner of the store that had wooden slats built around it, with a small slot to pass the mail through. Pigeonholes housed each resident's mail, but no box numbers or names were printed on them. Gordon and Pearl knew everyone by name, so they had their own



Clockwise, from upper left: The old Love Post Office; interior of Gordon Everitt's store with post office slots at right; Postmaster Gordon Everitt and wife, Pearl; Andy Arnold, early rural route carrier; homemade, hand-lettered post office sign. Center: 1942 postmark of Love, Virginia.

system of sorting, all done by heart.

The Love office served folks in the village as well as the surrounding areas of Campbell's Mountain, Chicken Holler and Reed's Gap. A simple hand-lettered sign announced that this, indeed, was the Love branch of the United States Postal Service.

In its 50 years of existence, Hugh Coffey and Gordon Everitt were Love's only postmasters and there was also only a handful of rural route carriers who served during that time. The carriers, in the order they worked, were Peter Coffey, F. E. Campbell, Columbus "Lum" Hatter and Andy Arnold.

Of these men, Andy Arnold carried the mail the longest. For 37 years, Arnold made the long trip to the Lyndhurst station for the incoming mail pickup. Since he lived in the Love area, he would take the outgoing mail to Lyndhurst at 6 a.m. and return to the Love Post Office around noon. When the weather turned sour in the winter months, he left his Model A Ford at home and rode his horse or walked up the last steep grade to the post office. The old phrase, "Neither rain, nor sleet, nor snow can keep the postman

from making his appointed rounds," was probably dedicated to hearty souls like Andy Arnold who carried the early mail.

The Love Post Office was classified as a fourth-class letter office and the postmaster was paid by the number of cancellations that went under his rubber stamp. Around Feb. 14, an influx of cards and letters arrived, many of them valentines going to sweethearts with the "Love" postmark stamped on them, lending a romantic air to mail going out that particular day.

In 1939, a big change occurred when construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway was underway and severed the tranquility of the quiet mountain people who had lived their lives isolated from the onslaught of progress and the eyes of the world.

Many did not believe a roadway could be carved out of the rocky mountainsides, but once the work began, a lot of men found employment that provided their families with a regular paycheck. This was a real boon for people who up to that time made a living farming. But with the added income came a restlessness of spirit to be

more connected to the outside world, and young people began leaving the mountains, seeking jobs elsewhere for a seemingly better life.

When the Parkway came through the Love area, the post office had a rush of new business as a delivery point for workers on the construction crews. But by the middle 1940s, the demand for rural post offices began to decline with the population, and in 1944 the postmaster general came to Love one last time to collect the government stamp and postal scales that had served the community for 50 years.

When he left, he closed the door on an era where a man could be called in from the fields with a whistle and folks could get their letters and their hearts filled ... with LOVE. ■

Lynn Coffey published the Backroads newspaper for 25 years and is the author of five books about the Appalachian people and their disappearing culture. Her books may be viewed on her website at: backroadsbooks.com.