

***Blossoms and Brushstrokes 2005: Art and Apples in the Valley***  
**Board Room Installation: Historic Apple Blossom Post Card Collection and Interpretation**

Final Essay for Art 216, American Art, Shenandoah University

In their studies of art history this spring, my students of American Art focused on American landscape and, in particular, the landscape of the Shenandoah Valley. Examining engravings, prints, paintings and artifacts of visual culture, along with scholarly interpretations of famous North American landscape schools, they studied and applied the curiously enduring concepts of the Sublime, the Picturesque, and the Beautiful. Annexing the Beautiful—the notion that nature is a ravishing, yet refreshing feminine presence—to the Pastoral—the notion that nature harbors peaceful homes—they secured interpretive keys to unlocking the mystery of the “apple blossom festival mystique” in Valley art.

Each student selected a post card from the apple blossom “file” of the Bruce and Geraldine Kiefer Valley Image Collection, framed for display in this exhibition. Their interpretations of these post cards, datable to the Depression and World War II eras, were framed in turn by books and exhibitions on American landscape, the Virginia landscape, and the Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival. Key to their essays was the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century notion of “old Virginia,” a myth of plenty seen through rose (or apple)-colored glasses. Directed to write extended captions, they arrived at singular, yet connective conclusions: that each image was a distinctive and memorable representation, and that what I have termed the “apple blossom mystique” was a blooming, burgeoning, booming, and ripening affirmation—a corrective for want and war, and a stimulant for tourism and travel.

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**Post Cards and Photographs (ca. 1929-1940s): Collection G. W. Kiefer, Winchester, Virginia**  
**(Bruce and Geraldine Kiefer Valley Image Collection)**  
**Framing and Exhibition Design: Geraldine Kiefer**  
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