From Corridor to Metaphor: Images of the Valley Road 1860-1930

I. Making Way for Tourism: The Valley Road in the 1840s and 1850s

During the heyday of the American "Grand Tour," the Shenandoah Valley and its major roads were integrated into newly constructed and expanding corridors, including roads, railways, and their respective image structures. The latter consisted primarily of pictorial albums, books, and serialized magazine articles created, illustrated and marketed to prosperous middle-class audiences. Color lithography and wood engraving were the major image-duplicating processes.

The messages encoded in these images formed part of a literate discourse shaping travel and the purchase of travel literature. Adapted from 18th- and early-19th-century travel accounts, this literate discourse relied on the reader's ability to "encode" or associate the image—to react to it in a way that other readers could re-verify and understand. The view from a peak in the Valley, for example, would be described and appreciated in terms of the sublime and the picturesque—larger-than-life, energy-enhancing, danger-defying, and threatening; yet easily compressed into a picture whose composition tamed and framed those energies and dangers, centering and miniaturizing them as medallions of memory.

Throughout these pictorially framed and textually dense images, the Valley existed and was represented as a "consumable" identity. This was not simply a geographical, geological, or even cultural identity, but a confluence or junction structured out of singular sites, views, tours, resorts, and travel itineraries. The key vantage points, pictorial parentheses enclosing the Valley experience, were the Natural Bridge at the southern (Lexington) end and Jefferson's Rock at the northern (Harper's Ferry) end. Between them and extending well to the east and west of the Valley Road were the natural springs and their attendant resorts (Burner's and White Sulphur Springs, for example), Weyer's Cave and its attendant tours, the Chimneys, the Peaks of Otter, the Fortsmouth passing into the Massanutten range, and the Great Valley itself.

What is interesting and worthy of speculation is that the Valley Road does not figure as a *pictorially* articulated component of these images and discourses; it figures as a literary embellishment and framework. There are three key reasons for this omission. First, the appreciation of American images in the antebellum period was predicated on literary comprehension and comprehensiveness; pictures embellished and quantified texts, but did not replace them. Reading Porte Crayon's 1853 anecdotal narrative of a journey with his cousins, initiated "up the Valley turnpike as fast as the horses can trot on a bright frosty morning," for example, was sufficient to picture the Road as a transportation corridor to and interval between significant viewpoints, land formations, distinguished institutions, and resorts—not to mention a host of exciting experiences. Secondly, the Valley Road was not a major scenic point in and of itself; essentially it was understood, experienced, and read as the quickest and most efficient way to get from "here" to "there." Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, antebellum tourism allied itself with the railroads and pictured them—scenery, tracks, and trains—as *the* sublime and picturesque experiences to be captured, thence treasured.

The Valley Road *as picture* would not figure until the Civil War, when the Road became a vital knowledge base and artery for rapid Confederate movements, and a veritable trap and sticking point for the Federals who lacked intimate knowledge of its territory and connectors. For Northern artists and publishers, including Porte Crayon—chronicler/journalist turned captain/engineer, the Great Valley Turnpike and its "narrow passages" became both a verbal and visual metaphor.

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II. Mapping, Pathfinding, Territorializing, Reenacting: The Valley Road and the Civil War, ca. 1860-1890

The Valley Road "came into its own" in imagery of and promulgated by the Civil War. Histories of the conflict state its strategic importance (for the Confederacy) and power (for the Union): as a corridor for the movement of troops down the Valley to threaten Washington, and as a granary for the provision of grain and other crops from abundantly supplied and supplying Valley farmers. The most intriguing images of the Road, such as C.S.A. topographer Jedediah Hotchkiss's "personalized" map of First Kernstown, upon which the very spot where Jackson slept that night (March 23, 1862) is reverently marked (cover page), bypass these bare-fact meanings in order to delve into more metaphorical territories of war. This is evidenced in a pair of Valley views, an unsigned landscape of 1861 published in *Harper's Weekly,* and a variant on it by Harry Fenn of ca. 1864 published in the first volume of Horace Greeley's *American Conflict.* Both feature a proverbial country road cleaving the Massanutten or, alternatively, North Mountain. This road serves first as a picturesque and leisurely avenue of vision to the winding river beyond; secondly, as a sublime standpoint for measuring the distant peak against the sky; and thirdly, as a "bi-directional" beltway—towards war for troops being called to duty in 1861, and towards peace for a pastoral flock of sheep being herded into line in 1864. Military readiness and threat in 1861 (Confederate troops converging for active duty, pictured for Northern readers anxious for on-the-spot news) give way to post-military reverie and welcome in 1864 (the bastion of the Confederacy pictured for a new crop of Northern readers and tourists eager to recapture, among other sentiments, "Old Virginia."). Showing the metaphorical changeability of the concept "Shenandoah Valley Road," these and other Valley views also imply that the Valley Road itself could be read in variant—bidirectional and multidirectional—ways.

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly employed correspondent/"special artist" Edwin Forbes to capture events in the Valley in 1862, when General T. J. ("Stonewall") Jackson's victories made it a key theater of war. Forbes pictured regions along the Road during General Nathaniel Banks's encampments and movements between First Kernstown and First Winchester (March 23-May 25, 1862); during Generals Nathan Shields's and John Frémont's marches between First Winchester and Cross Keys (May 25-June 8); and as Banks crossed the Massanuttens and the Blue Ridge (July 4-8). In one rollercoaster-like panorama, dated July 4, Banks's wagon trains snake along and string out precariously from an unseen (and unfriendly) valley road; the "Three Sisters" loom as the Road's natural reinforcement behind. In an expansive panorama above Strasburg, numbered for elaboration and labeling of key positions and captioned "The escape of Stonewall Jackson's Army down *[sic]* the valley pike at Strasburg Va," Jackson's trains rapidly scoot along a Pike straightaway while General Bayard's scouts pry over their disappearing prey. (Union troops, attempting to trap Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson before he could retreat up the Valley, found their advances to be too late. "[Forbes] came in sight of the enemy, who were retreating through Strasburg very rapidly, with their baggage trains nearly through" [*Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, June 28, 1862, p. 196]). In both of these images, the Road microcosmically maps and mimics what *Harper's Weekly* called the "theater of war." Forbes's panoramas are more accurately termed "graphic maps" than illustrative art, as the Road carves out what Union troops and Northern readers were led to understand, imagistically as well as strategically, was a new Virginia—not the tourist's landscape of spas, hotels and natural attractions, but a hostile, foreign, and dangerously animated territory.

That the Valley Road's hostility was sparred is seen in a series of closely-timed and spaced illustrations by Forbes, dating June 2 through 8 and appearing in *Leslie's Weekly* of July 1862. They track Frémont up to including June 8, the date of the Battle of Cross Keys, a stunning Confederate victory. Through a veritable storyboard of drawings, published in Leslie's July 5

paper with victory-laden captions, Forbes attempted to re-contextualize the Valley Road and its connectors from a hostile screen to a bee-line pathway, sublimely re-carved by Frémont, who was known nationwide through his Western explorations as "The Pathfinder." Pointing to a sublime Federal victory, as pictorial propaganda promulgated in the face of defeat it was an effective vehicle--a sublime metaphor.

By 1864, the Valley Road had become a territory ripe for a new swell of imagistic and literary conquests; Frank Leslie's and the Harper brothers' special artists territorialized virtually every curve of it between Winchester and Mount Jackson as General Philip Sheridan moved decidedly and ruthlessly against General Jubal Early. In a Western movie-like eyewitness "shot" by Alfred Waud, Union cavalry erupt through gunfire and debris while "chasing the Rebs" as they retreat after Third Winchester (September 19) on the smoke-screened Pike "through Strasburg." Chief among these Valley Road mythographers was *Leslie's* James E. Taylor who strung detailed maps and sketches of battles including Fisher's Hill (September 22), Tom's Brook (October 9), and Cedar Creek (October 19) in a panoramically inclusive image diary. Compiled, embellished, and published by Taylor at the turn of the century, these drawings include detailed portraits of farmhouses, plantations, town squares and even whiskey stills, interspersed with scenic views and a barrage of commentary. In Taylor's drawings the Road cuts deeply into thrusting peaks and clustered hills. Far from being hostile, however, this landscape is virtually replete with the "fruits" of Union possession, including clusters of regimented troops, burnt or destroyed buildings and, most potently telling of all, burning fields and barns—the flaming torchbearers for its course. In a similar manner, *Harpers Weekly*'s Alfred Waud created a series of images in which the Road is paralleled, in a railroad-yard-like territory of parallel tracks, by long lines of mule-driven wagon trains and masses of tents.

The apogee of the Valley Road as image was its starring role as the "avenue" of Sheridan's Ride of October 19, 1864, one of the most dramatically, if obsessively, memorialized romances of the conflict. Sheridan churns up and out of the Pike on the Alfred Waud-drawn November 5 cover of *Harper's Weekly*, the same time frame of the publication of T. Buchanan Read's stirringly sentimental narrative poem, "Sheridan's Ride." In 1871, Read set the General astride his horse and the Pike again in his gravity-defying equestrian portrait. Following close upon their heels were the artists working for the postbellum picture industry, churning both Pike and purses with prints, lantern slides and postcards, including at least one ten-card series showing clips of Sheridan on the Road between Winchester and Middletown—bringing it home at five-mile intervals. Each "Ride," more dramatic and visually opulent than the last, churned up the Valley Road once more as it became the unacknowledged best supporting actor of the re-visualized Civil War.*

The final chapters of this saga were written and drawn not specifically for the pictorial weeklies and their image-hungry buyers and subscribers, but by and for veterans' albums and scrapbooks. Stops along the Valley Road were photographed during veteran excursions to the old battlefields in the 1880s; published in memoirs and pamphlets from the 1880s into the early twentieth century; and re-drawn as engravings for *The Century*'s four-volume compendium, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (1887-88), a visual and literary barrage of officer-written articles, footnotes, addenda, and cross-listed verifications. This was neither Sheridan's Ride nor Jackson's campaign, but a theater of remembrance. It promoted a rutted macadamized road, in evident disrepair, from supporting to star actor. Imaginatively taking the place of the camera-toting veterans, readers of these pictures embedded themselves in the Pike's pavement and ruts, marched with their old regiments and, cued by additional battlefield views, turned aside to tunnel into tall grass, overgrown river banks, and hillside fortifications so as to uncover and sequester shells, earthworks and significant fords. Although the veterans' textual reports were weighty and verbose, arguably their pictures, supplemented by elaborately re-engraved period drawings, carried even greater heft.

Significantly, just as the Road became mightily memorialized at the turn of the twentieth century,

it was superseded as a power image by a reconstructed and expanded railway empire, fueled by heavy industry (coal). Tracks were refurbished, extended, and controlled by the Shenandoah Valley Railroad, The Norfolk & Western (which acquired the SVRR), and the Baltimore & Ohio. These parallel tracks, paralleling the Valley Road, were themselves folded into a new empire of illustrated literature, geared not only for industrialists, speculators and other investors, but for a new generation of tourists. (The major illustrated landscape publication of this era was *Picturesque America* of 1872-74, followed by a host of sumptuous picture books through the 1880s. Two of these are represented in the exhibition). As the Valley returned to a picturesque and sublime view—a freshly and nationally conceived bit of Picturesque America viewed from the railway car—the Road retreated to the wings of memory. However, it would be resuscitated in the decades after 1900, under the wheels and from the windows of the automobile.

*The following account from a Winchester guidebook of 1908 and pictured in period postcards, is worthy of quotation in full:

> . . . [A]bout two miles from Winchester, the Cedar Creek grade intersects the pike. Here stands a very interesting and historic toll-gate. This is the oldest gate on the pike and the same family has been taking the toll since 1840 when the gate was built. It was here that Charlotte Hillman, a young and beautiful girl, held up Sheridan's army and insisted upon the usual tribute of toll. When Sheridan and his staff, heading the army, reached the toll-gate, the toll-pole was down and guarded by Miss Hillman, who demanded toll. Sheridan paid his toll and his staff followed his example. "But," said Sheridan as he passed through the gate, "I cannot vouch for my army." When the common soldiery came up Mill Hillman raised the poll, but stood at her post all day long cutting a notch in the toll-pole for every ten soldiers who passed the gate. After the war was over Miss Hillman counted the notches in the toll-pole and sent her bill to Washington. The bill was promptly paid. This lady kept the toll-gate until her death a few years ago and her son now takes the toll (L. Adolph Richards, *Winchester Virginia: Historical and Pictorial*. Winchester, Virginia: The Eddy Press Corporation, 1908, p. 17).

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III. Driving the Valley Road Home: "Art Work" of the Valley, ca. 1900-1930

This exhibition concludes with a panoply of imagery and literature on the Valley Road dating to the modern period. Substantially replacing paintings and signed illustrations and systematized into series and views in stereocards, postcards, portfolios, illustrated "coffee-table" books, and prints assembled in regional archives, photographs drove the imagery of the Valley Road into the twentieth century. Hand-drawn illustrations survived, however, in the market of Shenandoah sheet music.

Coincidentally with the mass production of automobiles and "motoring" through America, phenomena that peaked in the nineteen twenties but were pictured as early as 1908, the Valley Road became a segment of a new American grand tour, one predicated on "Seeing America First" in one's car (i.e., before going to Europe in an ocean liner). Coincidentally with the incorporation of America and the emergence of a wealthy, cultured elite eager to purchase and collect photographic portfolios, the Valley Road became the subject of a photographic art-based publication industry. Grand and stately views of the great world exhibitions of the period, beginning with the World's Columbian Exposition (1893) and continuing through the world's fairs of Buffalo (1901) and San Francisco (1915), were taken by professional viewmakers and published by national publishing houses. The W. H. Parrish Publishing Company of Chicago, for example, publishers of *Art Work of Scenes in the Valley of Virginia* (1897), also published *Art Work of Cleveland* and *Art Work of Omaha*. In all of these publications, rural and town worlds were refigured as miniature urbanizing scenes, festooned with glorious landscapes for urban-saturated tourists. The Valley Road figured as a grand scenic road in Parrish's *Scenes in the Valley*. But its function had definitively changed from first-generation post-War contexts. Instead of a vehicle of ecstatic mythmaking, directing Sheridan, Jackson and their veterans to the rivers, streams, fords, and battlefields of their youth, it now became a vehicle of pictorial order, the "main street" of each pictured Valley town. Gridding the towns and freezing their inhabitants in micro-scenes of ordered work, in *Scenes in the Valley* the Road exerts control and dignity, but not on its own terms. Significantly, many of the workers in these scenes are African Americans and youths. Women also appear. Gridding them onto the Road in a one-point perspective scenario, Parrish's photographer(s) ordered these potentially disruptive elements into a rigorously controlled picture plane, one that identified youths, manual workers of color, women, the Road, and buildings as equivalent and equivalently controllable by the new professional-managerial business elite.

The other side of the Road as an image structure is what I term a "Valley Vernacular." Fostered if not actually created by Valley historian John W. Wayland and Valley photographer Hugh Morrison, Jr., this archive of photographs is a meld of people, homes, stores, byways, Road-side scenes and enclosed (closely and delicately framed) Civil War sites. Following in the footsteps of Michael Miley, General Lee's photographer and the first major post-bellum encoder of Southwest Virginia byways and scenes, Wayland and Morrison set the Valley Road apart— yes, as a place to drive to and to drive along, but also as a place to experience first hand, on its own terms. Both independently and in collaboration (Morrison's illustrations, collected by Wayland, appear in the latter's books), Wayland and Morrison inflected the Road with their own sense of its living and storied landscape. Wayland's Road at Fisher's Hill, for example, is both a sacred scene and a new, safer road cut. (In the early twenties, the Road was realigned from the northwest to the southeast side of the hill.)** Morrison's Road at Woodstock evolves from a storied, toll-gated turnpike to a homey and lively main street mapped by the establishments of local entrepreneurs.

Making it possible to produce, publish and distribute fine-art photographs, the modern age of industry and mass production encapsulated the Road's new identity as an "art work." Making it possible to read artistically composed photographs as part and parcel of regional identities,

Wayland and Morrison encapsulated the Road's enduring identity as an alluring and conversational place. Significantly, these identities bring images of the Road full circle: from the picturesque and sublime graphics of the 19th century to the grand and the vernacular photo-graphics of the 20th, seasoned with the long-distant yet pictorially fresh tramps of War.

> **Some years ago I entertained the hope of being able to map the Valley Pike from Winchester to Staunton, mile by mile, showing the changes in location at certain places that have been made from time to time, locating the homes and historic landmarks along its course, and recording some of the incidents that have signalized its long and notable history (John W. Wayland, *The Valley Turnpike: Winchester to Staunton and Other Roads*. Vol. VI, Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society. Winchester: Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, 1967, p. 1).