

The Valley Road of Virginia: History and Landscape, 1700-2000

“Paving the Way’ for the Valley Road: Preservation Strategies for a Cultural Landscape”

Saturday, June 5, 2004, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Moderator and Discussant: Geraldine W. Kiefer, Assistant Professor of Art History, Shenandoah University

Precis for Session

Defined by Warren R. Hofstra and George F. Thompson as a “landscape of history and culture,” the Valley Road is a cultural resource whose multi-layered topography encompasses American peoples and cultures from prehistory to the present. A stratigraphic “sample” of the road would include sediments and traces of travel by Native American tribes, Early American colonists, early and mid-19th-century westward directed pioneers, Civil War officers and regiments, turn-of-the-century travelers and tourists, 20th-century motorists, and untold quantities of commercial, public, household and military goods and materiel. The ruts of the Valley Road run silent and deep with the stories of the hundreds and thousands who have used it; tracked it; built homes, businesses, camps and towns alongside it; and called it home.

Today Route 11 is still a major highway and a viable alternative route to Interstate 81, for both business and leisure travelers. Its corridors provide gateways for accessing the historic towns, villages and battlefields of the Shenandoah Valley, and thus are key attractors for historical tourism. There is no question that the Valley Road is a cultural and more specifically a vernacular landscape, according to definitions established by the National Park Service and the National Register of Historic Places: one of many “landscapes. . . that evolved through use by the people whose activities or occupancy shaped that landscape. . . . a single property such as a farm or a collection of properties” (“Issues Paper” 3). Route 11 also fits the National Task Force for Historic Roads’ definition of cultural routes and corridors: “now in automobile use, [having] undergone significant changes and modifications. . . leading to multiple layers of development, providing interesting historical juxtapositions, and a challenge for preservationists” (Mariott 16)

According to Paul Daniel Marriott, “Recognizing you have a historic road requires little more than sensitivity and awareness; knowing what to do to ensure its preservation, however, can be daunting. Where do you begin?” (21) A key start and the nub of this conference is defining and documenting Valley Road history. Of equal importance are the following, addressed by this panel of national, regional and local experts: first, *becoming familiar* with the purposes and values of historic road designation, as well as definitions and qualifications for National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads; secondly, *becoming energized* through success stories generated by communities and stakeholders along historic corridors; and thirdly, *becoming focused* on possibilities and strategies for Route 11.

Works cited:

“Issues Paper: Cultural Landscapes,”

http://inetdocs.loudoun.gov/revisedcop/docs/preservationpla /issues_culturallandsca/office2k/offic...

Mariott, Paul Daniel. *Saving Historic Roads: Design and Policy Guidelines*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998.

Panelists:

1. Paul Daniel Marriott, Principal, Paul Daniel Marriott and Associates; prior Director, Rural Heritage/Historic Roads Program, National Trust for Historic Preservation
“An Overview of America’s Historic Roads”

Increasingly Americans are realizing that roads are historic resources. From Native American roads to

colonial routes, turnpikes, parkways and the Interstate system (yes the Interstates!), individuals, communities and agencies are looking more carefully at the history of physical connection. When looking at historic roads, we must ask ourselves, what were the compelling reasons behind the use, alteration or construction of a particular route? What were the technologies or politics behind the road? Getting apples to market on a macadam road or importing French paving technology to secure the newly acquired lands of the Louisiana Purchase?

There are three types of historic roads: aesthetic, engineered and cultural. From these "types" infinite responses result based on topography, technology, finance, policy, political will and vision. The results have been as extreme as masterworks such as Skyline Drive and as ordinary as the grid pattern of a rural town. Recognizing that a road is historic--knowing its reason for being--is the first step towards identifying the tools and strategies available for its preservation, management and interpretation.

2. Dan Rice, Director, President and CEO, Ohio and Erie Canal Corridor Coalition
"Cruising the Canalways of Success"

Over \$277 million dollars have been invested along the Ohio & Erie Canalway in Cuyahoga, Summit, Stark and Tuscarawas Counties. Through the development of public/private partnerships, the Ohio & Erie Canal Corridor Coalition is stimulating the conservation of natural, historical and recreational resources along the Ohio & Erie Canal from Cleveland to New Philadelphia, Ohio. Through the development of this 110-mile greenway, we are conserving resources, celebrating the heritage of the region and creating a legacy for future generations.

3. Philip Baker, Local Assistance Division, Virginia Department of Transportation
"Designing Designation' for Route 11"

The commonwealth has many miles of roads that traverse areas of exceptional beauty and outstanding historic, scenic, recreational, cultural, natural and archeological interest. In recent years, we have combined roads together in a Scenic highways/Virginia Byways system. The Scenic Roads Map gives official recognition to outstanding qualities of designated roads and, at the same time, encourages local governments to adopt land-use measures to protect these resources for the enjoyment of future generations. The full potential of these highway-related resources can be realized only if localities of the commonwealth are prepared to take the steps necessary to strengthen land use controls and clean up the undesirable elements along Virginia's scenic roads.

The Virginia Byways legislation was designed as a recognition act and as such places no land-use restrictions or controls upon a designated byway corridor. The only provision made in the law is that preference be given ". . . to corridors controlled by zoning or otherwise, so as to reasonably protect the intrinsic qualities of the highway." The full potential of these highway-related resources can be realized only if localities of the commonwealth are prepared to take the steps necessary to strengthen land use controls and clean up the undesirable elements along Virginia's scenic roads.

Possible Issues and Ideas for Discussion:

(from Sharon Hurt Davidson, "Branding America's Byways," Public Roads, May-June 2001, <http://www.tfrc.gov/pubrds/mayjun01/byways.htm>)

National Designation: Where and how does Route 11 "fit" into the six intrinsic qualities* for designation as a National Scenic Byway (meeting at least one of the qualities) or as an All-American Road (meeting all six qualities)? Which of these qualities best describes Route 11 through the Lower Shenandoah Valley?

*archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic

State Designation: Which attributes of Route 11 might qualify it as a State Scenic Byway?

Attributes: What attributes does Route 11 have to make it a distinctive and unique place, or a “collection of diverse and eclectic places, each of which has its own story to tell” (Davidson)?

Benefits: What might be envisioned as the benefits of designation? For Route 11 travelers? For Route 11 stakeholders?

Values: Can the set of *values* adopted for National Scenic Byways be applied to Route 11? According to Davidson, these values include: “patriotic,” “enriched,” “adventuresome,” “important,” “empowered,” and “impassioned.” What other or alternative values can be added to this list?

Personalities: What topographical, cultural, and historical *personalities* might define the Valley Road? According to Davidson, these traits include “ruggedly handsome,” “authentic” “multifaceted,” and “popular,” among others.

Are we on the right “track” in searching for singular values, personalities or essences, or does Route 11 construct a set of diverse attributes or, more concretely, diverse communities? If the latter, how can they be defined and, even more importantly, included in the definition process?

Summary of Session

Dr. Hofstra convened the session and introduced special guest Susan E. Smead, from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. After Ms. Smead’s comments on the resources and expertise of the DHR, Dr. Kiefer introduced the session with a quote from Walt Whitman’s “Song of the Open Road,” then led off with its theme concerning Route 11: preservation and designation visions, ideas and strategies. The session précis was distributed to the audience. Each panelist was introduced, in turn, and each gave an approximately twenty-minute presentation. Dan Marriott and Dan Rice utilized slides to illustrate their points; Phil Baker spoke informally. Following the presentations, discussion and questions were elicited from the audience. A lively 45-minute period of questions, answers and discussion ensued. The traditional “Q & A” was interspersed with audience members responding to one another and the panelists querying the audience. The session closed on a high note: it was heartily recommended that a similar session or forum be scheduled at a future conference, and that a group or committee be formed to study possibilities for analyzing the possibilities for designating, preserving, and/or interpreting Route 11.

Highlights of Presentations

Dan Marriott itemized categories for designating historic roads, as defined by the National Task Force for Historic Roads within the National Trust for Historic Preservation. They are “aesthetic,” “engineered” and “cultural.” Illustrating these categories with slides of roads throughout the United States, Mr. Marriott noted that historic roads often represent multiple categories—say, aesthetic beauty as well as cultural significance. He highlighted details and patterns that make historic roads worthy of designation. Turning to the designation process, he pinpointed the *Green Book*, published by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (ASHTO), as the key source for beginning an analysis of a historic road, such as Route 11. Foregrounding key issues—context-sensitive design, safety, and interpretation, he concluded his presentation with a “slide show” of the Paris Pike in Kentucky. His key message was that historic roads can be updated and improved to twenty-first-century transportation standards and uses without sacrificing their integrity, if design and aesthetics are brought into play right at the beginning and thence throughout the designation, updating and improvement process.

Dan Rice gave an overview of the Ohio & Erie Canal Coalition, which has generated \$277 million in public-private resources for the preservation and interpretation of a key historic corridor and resource. Mr. Rice applied this success story by stressing that working to preserve historic corridors or road cannot be divorced from vision; planning; grass-roots activism, leadership and commitment; and realization that the preservation process is long-term rather than short-term (a “marathon” rather than a “sprint”). He noted that key questions must be posed right at the start of any serious preservation endeavor: Who cares? So what? What are our goals and outcomes? Considering Route 11, Mr. Rice noted that a key player and central concern is the continuity of Civil War history, as represented by the Shenandoah Valley battlefields. He noted that resources such as this lend themselves not only to interpretation, but to recreation in safe environments and memorable experiences for entire families. Children, he added, constitute our legacy for the future. His key message was that grass-roots leadership—leading to and fostering partnership building among citizen/activist groups, chambers of commerce, CEOs, and elected and appointed state and local officials—is key to a successful “story” for Route 11.

Phil Baker outlined the resources and expertise available from VDOT. He referred the audience to publications available (on the conference handout table) as well as to VDOT itself. He then opened the session to discussion and questions.

Key Points from Panel Q & A and Audience-Panel Discussion

- 1. A vision and strategy for Route 11 should consider issues of roadway, buildings and landscape—a historic “context,” in sum, rather than a “historic road.”**
- 2. Preserving the Valley Road will be a slow process, requiring commitment and continuity.**
- 3. Some structures may be lost. So as not to lose key structures, it is imperative to pinpoint them and strategize ways to save them.**
- 4. Federal and State funding is available for roads that achieve State and National Byway status.**
- 5. Key documents for the preservation process include feasibility studies, design plans, public hearings and above all, a Corridor Management Plan.**
- 6. Proposals for expanding and updating Interstate 81 will have a tremendous impact on Route 11. It is imperative that activism (grass-roots leadership, vision and strategy) be initiated so as to ensure that Route 11 be a key player in this process.**
- 7. Examples of updated turnpikes, with aesthetic qualities preserved and heightened, should be consulted so as to ensure the visual and historic integrity of an “updated” Route 11. Change and heavy traffic can be accommodated in a context-sensitive and aesthetically beautiful program of design.**
- 8. Issues to consider include aesthetic, cultural, environmental, and safety, among others.**
- 9. Resources and agencies in Virginia should be consulted and utilized as much as possible: regional plans; regional planning districts; the comprehensive plans for each locality along Route 11; community development and preservation organizations, and agencies such as the Virginia Transportation Council, the Virginia Department of Transportation, and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.**
- 10. Preserving Route 11 must be proactive, not “local people responding to outside forces.”**

11. A possible "route" for Route 11 is designation as a National Historic Landmark on the National Register of Historic Places.
12. Battlefield preservation and interpretation are key to Route 11 preservation, vision and strategy.
13. The next steps? Recommended were a similar conference and/or session for 2005, and the organization of an activist group. Shenandoah University and particularly the Valley Road book will be key players and documents, respectively, for the continuing life of the Valley Road. "It's more than a scholarly force: it's a 2 x 4."