

## Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar

We know that the Valley Pike Co. was incorporated in 1834 in order to build and provide a safe and comfortable route through the Shenandoah Valley. But what was travel like before that? How would the landscape and Valley towns appear to a stranger? In 1825 His Highness, Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar, passed up the Valley and wrote about his trip. In his book, *A History of Shenandoah County*, historian John Wayland quotes from Bernhard's diary from Nov. 19, 1825:

“From Winchester, we went to Stephensbury, eight miles farther, to Middleton, then to Strasburg, and at last to Woodstock, where we passed the night... We reached our night-quarters in the evening about six o'clock, in a very cold night and a fine moonshine. The places between Winchester and Woodstock were not considerable, except Strasburg, which is more ancient than the others, and appears to have a larger population. The houses are generally of wood and covered with shingles, although a great number of stones are found here. The country became at last very fine. On our left we saw the Blue Ridge.... Another ridge, in a parallel direction with the former, called the Northern Ridge, rose suddenly between us and the Blue Ridge, which soon entirely disappeared. On our right there was another ridge of mountains, it was an arm of the Alleghany Mountains, and we went through a valley at least ten miles wide. The formation of these parallel ridges is very singular, and no instance occurs of it in the other parts of the world.” (Here, of course, the Duke is referring to the appearance of the Massanutten Mt. on his left, which he called the Northern Ridge).....He continues with his account:

“The country was pretty well cultivated, and by the exterior appearance of many country-houses, we were induced to believe their inhabitants enjoyed plenty.... As it appeared, they travel here much on horseback. On account of great distances between the plantations, almost all the ladies can ride on horseback; we met several of them elegantly dressed.”

“We left Woodstock at half past two o'clock in the morning, in a very miserable stage, and proceeded to Staunton, seventy-one miles distant, on a still more rugged road than that of yesterday... The places on our way were mostly insignificant; only Shryock, New Market, Big Spring, and Harrisonburg, deserve to be mentioned”.... (the Shryock referred to here was today's Edinburg)

He mentions that the ordinary stagecoach was pretty much the only alternative to riding horseback. He says “the improvement of stages appears not yet to have extended beyond the Blue Ridge Mts., because we were obliged to be contented with one, which was in every respect very uncomfortable.”

This moment from the past has been presented by the Shenandoah County Historical Society.