

The Shenandoah Valley

The Shenandoah Valley deserves special attention because it is in this valley that many ancestors of George Robert Miller either settled in or passed through on their way westward, mostly to Kentucky and Illinois.

The Shenandoah Valley itself is loosely defined by the geographic region of western Virginia bounded to the east by the Blue Ridge Mountains, to the west by the Ridge and Valley Appalachian Mountains, to the north by the Potomac River, and to the south by the James River. The Valley gets its name from the river, a tributary of the Potomac that runs through most the valley. The Valley today is typically considered encompassing nine counties, seven in Virginia and two in West Virginia:

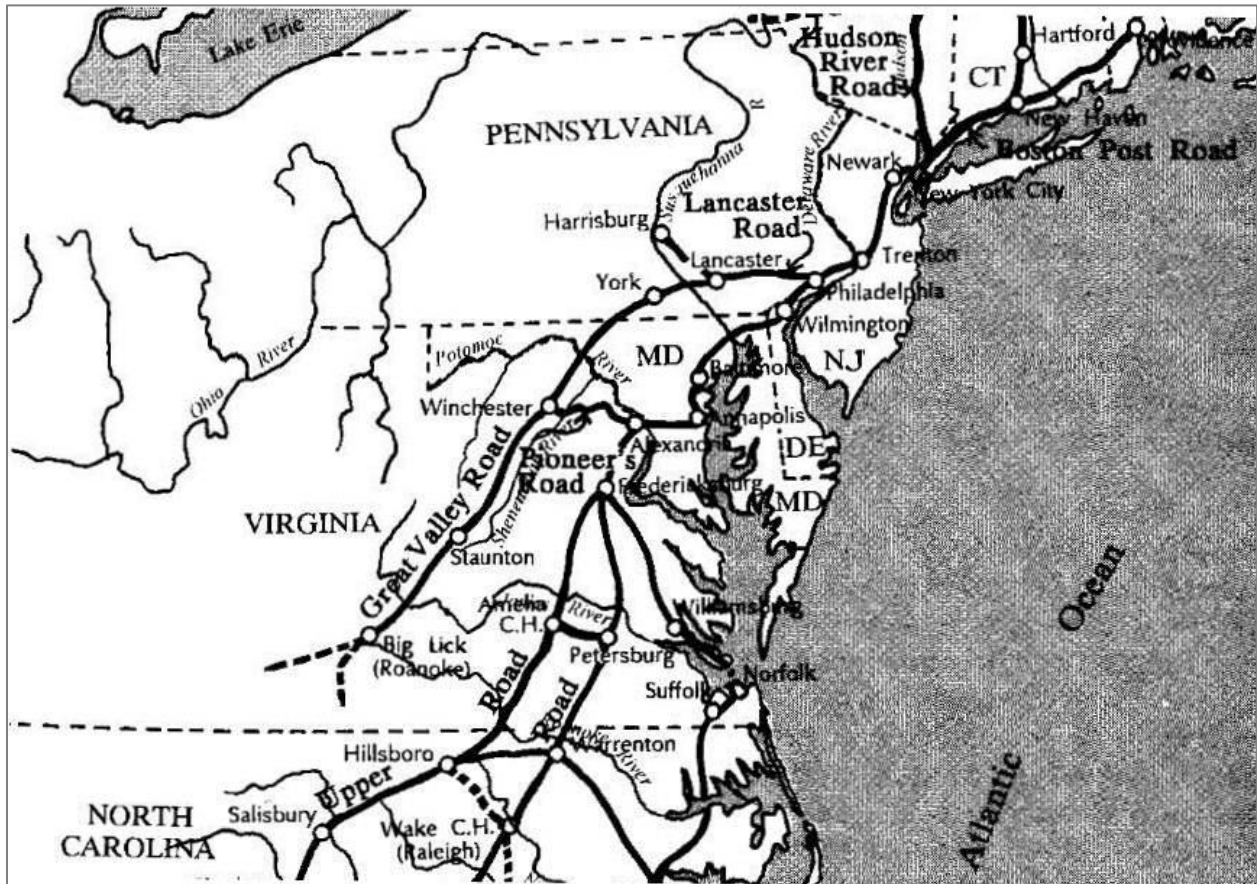
- Frederick County, Virginia
- Clarke County, Virginia
- Warren County, Virginia
- Shenandoah County, Virginia
- Page County, Virginia
- Rockingham County, Virginia
- Augusta County, Virginia
- Berkeley County, West Virginia
- Jefferson County, West Virginia

Probably the two most important cities in the Valley as far as descendants of George Miller are concerned are Harrisonburg and Elkton, a short distance apart at the base of the Massanutten Mountain in what is now Rockingham County. Also important is Frederick County.

The Massanutten is the name of the portion of the Shenandoah Valley lying between the Massanutten Mountain, which splits a section of the Shenandoah Valley in half lengthwise, and the south branch of the Shenandoah River. Today the Massanutten encompasses a large portion of Page County. The Elkton area and Massanutten was one of the first in the Shenandoah Valley to be settled by colonists.

While the Shenandoah Valley was shared by various Native American tribes years before European discovery of North America, initial colonial settlement of the valley was delayed for years by the barrier of the Blue Ridge Mountains. And while various explorers traversed and even mapped the valley in the 1600s and early 1700s, it wasn't until several years following Colonial Lieutenant Governor Spotswood's

1716 legendary Knights of the Golden Horseshoe Expedition¹ into the valley at Swift Run Gap that settlement started in earnest. It was not surprising that the group found the fertile valley ripe with opportunities for settlement.



Map adapted from **Map Guide to American Migration Routes, 1735-1815**, William Dollarhide, Heritage Quest, 1997, page 7

Today the major thoroughfare through the Shenandoah Valley is Interstate 81. However three hundred years ago it started out as the Great Warrior Road, the Long Grey Trail, and later the Great Valley Road or Valley Turnpike. By the 1740s, the Great Valley Road was the scene of large migrations of people into western Virginia, beginning with the Shenandoah Valley itself. Later, this route was called the Great Wagon Road, as wagons of colonists moved through the valley from northern Virginia and Pennsylvania

¹ Virginia Historical Highway Marker, #D10 reads as follows – “On 5 Sept 1716, in this region, it is believed Lieutenant Governor Alexander Spotswood and his party of government officials, gentry, Native Americans, soldiers and servants crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains into the Shenandoah Valley. Their adventure into the western lands began at Germanna in late Aug. and ended when they returned there on 10 Sept. According to legend, Spotswood gave his companions small golden horseshoes on their return and the group became known as the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe. The journey has been fictionalized and mythologized in literature since the 19th century.”

on their way to the backcountry areas of Virginia and even farther westward. This road gave access to the first settlements on the Kanawha River. In the 1740s, the Lancaster Road connected Philadelphia with Winchester, and by the 1750s, the southwestern end of the Road was extended so travelers could head southwest into North Carolina or southwest into eastern Tennessee.

The Shenandoah Valley today

