

Washington Irving

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Washington Irving



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Born: April 3, 1783
Seneca, New York, United States

Died: November 28, 1859 (aged 76)

Occupation: Short story writer, essayist, biographer

Washington Irving (April 3, 1783 – November

28, 1859) was an American author of the early 19th century. Best known for his short stories *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip van Winkle* (both of which appear in his book *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*), he was also a prolific essayist, biographer and historian. His works include biographies of George Washington and Muhammad, and histories of 15th century Spain dealing with subjects such as Columbus, the Moors, and the Alhambra.

Irving and James Fenimore Cooper were the first American writers to earn acclaim in Europe, and Irving is said to have encouraged authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Edgar Allan Poe. Irving was also the U.S. minister to Spain 1842–1846.

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Biography

Irving's parents were William Irving, originally of Shapinsay, Orkney, and Sarah (née Sanders). They were married in 1761, while William was serving as a petty officer in the British Navy. By the time Washington was born, William was settled in Manhattan, and part of that city's vibrant small merchant class. Several of Washington Irving's older brothers themselves became active New York merchants, and they encouraged their younger brother's literary aspirations. By 1804 he was contributing theatrical reviews and humorous sketches to various periodicals. His first book was *A History of New-York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, by *Diedrich Knickerbocker* (1809), a sly satire on self-important local history. The surname of Diedrich Knickerbocker, the fictional narrator of this and other Irving works, became a nickname for Manhattanites in general ^[1].

Like many merchants and many New Yorkers, Irving originally opposed the War of 1812, but the

British attack on Washington, D.C. in 1814 convinced him to enlist. He served on the staff of Daniel Tompkins, governor of New York and commander of the New York State Militia, and saw action along the Great Lakes. The War was disastrous for many American merchants, including Irving's family, and in mid-1815 he left for England to attempt to salvage the family trading company. He remained in Europe for the next seventeen years.

A lawyer, Irving was a member of the American diplomatic staff in Britain and in Spain. He spoke fluent Spanish, which served him well in his writings on that country, and he could read several other languages, including German and Dutch.

Irving left for
Europe in 1815.

In 1819-1820 he published *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, which includes his best known stories, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip van Winkle*. During this stay in Europe he was a member of the American Legation to Britain but in his spare time he traveled to the continent and widely read Dutch and German folk tales. The pieces for *The Sketch Book* were originally written by Irving in Europe and were sent to his publishers

in New York for publication in periodicals in the U.S. While in England, his sketches were published in book form by British publishers without his permission and from then on he published in Europe and the U.S. concurrently to protect his copyright.



A Younger Washington Irving

Rip Van Winkle was written overnight while Irving was staying with his sister Sarah and her husband, Henry van Wart in Birmingham, England, a place that also inspired some of his other works. *Bracebridge Hall* or *The Humorists*, *A Medley* is based on Aston Hall there.

Irving published *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* in 1828, the *Conquest of Granada* a year later, and the *Voyages of the*

Companions of Columbus in 1831. These works are a mixture of history and fiction, a genre now called romantic history – Irving based them on extensive research in the Spanish archives, but also added imaginative elements aimed at sharpening the story. The first of these works is the source of the durable myth that medieval Europeans believed the earth was flat. Irving left Spain in 1829 to accept a position in the US Embassy in London. While serving there he wrote *Tales of the Alhambra*, which was published concurrently in England and the United States. (The actual title is more lengthy, as its contents amounted to a collection of sketches. In 1851 he wrote an “Author’s Revised Edition,” also entitled *Tales of the Alhambra*.)

Irving returned to the United States in 1832 and traveled on the Western frontier in the 1830s (with Charles La Trobe^[2] for some time) and recorded his glimpses of Western tribes in *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835). He spoke against the mishandling of relations with the Native American tribes by Europeans and Americans:

“ It has been the lot of the
unfortunate aborigines of America,

in the early periods of colonization, to be doubly wronged by the white men. They have been dispossessed of their hereditary possessions by mercenary and frequently wanton warfare, and their characters have been traduced by bigoted and interested writers.

”

The beginning of *Prairies* Chapter 10 includes the following, interpreted by some literary critics to be a comment on concerns about his public persona:

“ We send our youth abroad to grow luxurious and effeminate in Europe; it appears to me, that a previous tour on the prairies would be more likely to produce that manliness, simplicity, and self-dependence, most in unison with our political institutions.

”

Irving is also the author of *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* and *Astoria* and used firsthand accounts of these American west journeys, although most readers continue to believe they are "embellished" history.



Sunnyside: Irving's famous home in Tarrytown,
New York.

His second Western book was *Astoria*; he wrote it during a six-month stay with the then-retired John Jacob Astor. It was a worshipful account of Astor's attempt to establish a fur trading colony at present-day Astoria, Oregon. The three "Western" books were designed to put to rest the notion that Irving's time in England and Spain had made him more European than American. *Legends of the Conquest of Spain* was published in 1835.

During Irving's stay with Astor, Benjamin

Bonneville paid a visit. His tales of his three years in Oregon Country were said to have enthralled Irving. A month or two later, when Irving encountered Bonneville in Washington, D.C., Bonneville, struggling to write about his journey, decided instead to sell his maps and notes to Irving for \$1,000. Irving used that material as the basis for his 1837 book *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, which is often considered the best of his three Western books.

Washington's home - Sunnyside - is still standing, just south of the Tappan Zee Bridge in Tarrytown, New York. The original house and the surrounding property were once owned by 18th-century colonialist Wolfert Acker, about whom Irving wrote his sketch *Wolfert's Roost* (the name of the house). The house is now owned and operated as an historic site by Historic Hudson Valley and is open to the public for tours.

Irving popularized the nickname "Gotham" for New York City, later used in Batman comics and movies, and is credited with inventing the expression "the Almighty dollar".

Irving as a

Namesake

Irving's name appears across the United States. The village of Irvington, New York, and the town of Irvington, New Jersey, were named after the author, and also, it is believed, the city of Irving, Texas. Both Washington Street and Irving Street in Birmingham,

Alabama, also bear the author's name. His book *Bracebridge Hall* was the inspiration for the naming of the town of Bracebridge, Ontario. In addition, a library in Los Angeles, California, is named in his honor. Irving Avenue in Port Chester, N.Y., is named after him, as is a condominium townhouse community along this road called Washington Mews, which was built during the



Irving's grave, marked by a flag, in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

1980s. Washington Irving Memorial Park and Arboretum in Bixby, Oklahoma also bears his name.

In Spain, the room at which he stayed in the Alhambra is labelled and referred to as his room and there is a hotel named for him just outside the Alhambra.

The southernmost section of Lexington Avenue in New York City (between 14th and 20th Streets) is named Irving Place, named so after Washington Irving in 1833. A house that stands on the corner of 17th Street and Irving Place is said to have been the one time home of Washington Irving, however that claim seems to have been only a myth ^[3]. Across the street from this house is the Washington Irving High School (New York City). On the corner of 16th Street and 3rd Avenue (one block east of Irving Place), is the Washington Irving House apartment building. In Fremont, California, the districts of Irvington and Washington and their respective high schools (Washington, Irvington) are also named in his honor.

There was also a Washington Irving High School in Clarksburg, West Virginia which was replaced by Robert C. Byrd High School in 1995.

Washington Irving HS — or "WI" as it was called by locals — subsequently became the middle school.

Pen names and associated writings

Geoffrey Crayon

- *Bracebridge Hall*
- *The Devil and Tom Walker*
- *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*
 - “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”
 - “Rip Van Winkle”
- *Tales of a Traveller*

Diedrich Knickerbocker

- *A History of New York*

Jonathan Oldstyle

- *Letters of Jonathan Oldstyle*

Bibliography

- *History, Tales & Sketches: Letters of*

Jonathan Oldstyle, Gent.; Salmagundi; A History of New York; The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. (James W. Tuttleton, ed.) (Library of America, 1983) ISBN 978-0-94045014-1

- *Bracebridge Hall, Tales of a Traveller, The Alhambra* (Andrew Myers, ed.) (Library of America, 1991) ISBN 978-0-94045059-2
- *Three Western Narratives: A Tour on the Prairies, Astoria, The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* (James P. Ronda, ed.) (Library of America, 2004) ISBN 978-1-93108253-2
- *The Life of Washington Irving*, by Stanley T. Williams, 1935.
- “Tales of the Alhambra”, by Washington Irving, ISBN 84-7169-018-7

In other works

In Joseph Heller’s novel *Catch-22*, Yossarian begins signing the name "Washington Irving" for amusement while censoring correspondence, and progresses to its inversion, Irving Washington. Later in the novel the character Major Major Major

follows suit, starting with "Washington Irving", proceeding to "Irving Washington" when that loses its charm, and finally arriving at "John Milton" which is quicker and sounds more incisive.

External links

- Washington Irving: Squire of Sunnyside
- About Washington Irving
- Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, location of Irving burial
- Old Dutch Burying Ground of Sleepy Hollow, setting for portions of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*
- His writings
 - The Fiction of Washington Irving
 - Works by Washington Irving at Project Gutenberg
 - Excerpt from *White on Red*, Irving's temperate and liberal views of native American rights
 - The Adventure of the German Student (short story, full text, from a fan's personal website)
 - *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, from another fan's personal website
 - Free audiobook (Old Christmas) from LibriVox

- The Life of Oliver Goldsmith
- Washington Irving in Birmingham, from that city's website
- Washington Irving at the Internet Movie Database
- The unabridged "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (Episode Number 174) is read in its entirety in Mister Ron's Basement Podcast
- Worldcat Identities page for 'Irving, Washington 1783-1859'

References

1. ^ Oxford English Dictionary
2. ^ Jill Eastwood (1967). La Trobe, Charles Joseph (1801 - 1875). *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 2* 89-93. MUP. Retrieved on 2007-07-13.
3. ^ Gray, Christopher, "The Washington Irving House; Why the Legend of Irving Place Is but a Myth", *The New York Times*, March 13, 1994

Preceded by Aaron Vail	U.S. Minister to Spain 1842–1846	Succeeded by Romulus M. Saunders
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