Washington Irving

Author and editor Washington Irving was born in New York City on April 3, 1783. Irving achieved international fame for his fictional works, including the stories *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, as well as for his biographies and historical writings. Irving served as the United States ambassador to Spain and helped to promote international copyright before his death in 1859.

Perhaps best known for his short stories "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle," Washington Irving was born on April 3, 1783 in New York City, New York, USA. He was one of eleven children born to Scottish-English immigrant parents, William Irving, Sr. and Sarah. He was named Washington after the hero of the American revolution (which had just ended), George Washington, and attended the first presidential inauguration of his namesake in 1789.

Washington Irving was educated privately, studied law, and began to write essays for periodicals. He travelled in France and Italy (1804–6), wrote whimsical journals and letters, then returned to New York City to practice law -- though by his own admission, he was not a good student, and in 1806, he barely passed the bar. He and his brother William Irving and James Kirke Paulding wrote the *Salamagundi* papers (1807–8), a collection of humorous essays. He first became more widely known for his comic work, *A History of New York* (1809), written under the name of "Diedrich Knickerbocker."

In 1815 Irving went to England to work for his brothers' business, and when that failed he composed a collection of stories and essays that became *The Sketch Book*, published under the name "Geoffrey Crayon" (1819–20), which included 'Rip Van Winkle' and ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’. In 1822 he went to the Continent, living in Germany and France for several years, and was then in Spain (1826) and became attache at the US embassy in Madrid. While in Spain he researched for his biography of Christopher Columbus (1828) and his works on Granada (1829) and the Alhambra (1832).

He was secretary of the US legation in London (1829–32), and later returned to Spain as the US ambassador (1842–6), but he spent most of the rest of his life at his estate, ‘Sunnyside’, near Tarrytown, NY, turning out a succession of mainly historical and biographical works, including a five-volume life of George Washington. Although he became a best-selling author, he never really fully developed as a literary talent, he has retained his reputation as the first American man of letters. Irving also advocated for writing as a legitimate career, and argued for stronger laws to protect writers from copyright infringement.

In 1999, director Tim Burton released his film *Sleepy Hollow* based on Washington Irving's story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." The film starred Johnny Depp as police constable Ichabod Crane, who is sent from New York City to investigate a series of murders by a mysterious Headless Horseman.

Works Cited