**Irving, Washington (1783 - 1859)**

**Definition:** *Irving, Washington* from *Philip’s Encyclopedia*

US essayist and short-story writer. He wrote the burlesque *History of New York* (1809) under the pseudonym Dietrich Knickerbocker. He is most famous for the stories *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, which were written during his 17 years in Europe. He returned to the USA in 1832, where his continuing literary output included *Astoria* (1836).

**Summary Article:** *Irving, Washington*

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

1783–1859, American author and diplomat, b. New York City. Irving was one of the first Americans to be recognized abroad as a man of letters, and he was a literary idol at home.

**Early Life and Work**

While he studied law, Irving amused himself by writing for periodicals such essays on New York society and the theater as the *Letters of Jonathan Oldstyle, Gent.* (1802–3). From 1804 to 1806 his older brothers financed his tour of France and Italy. On his return he joined William Irving and J. K. Paulding in publishing *Salmagundi; or, The Whim-Whams and Opinions of Launcelot Langstaff & Others* (1807–8), a series of humorous and satirical essays. Under the pseudonym Diedrich Knickerbocker, he published *A History of New York* (1809), a satire that has been called the first great book of comic literature written by an American. Purporting to be a scholarly account of the Dutch occupation of the New World, the book is a burlesque of history books as well as a satire of politics in his own time.

**Later Life and Mature Work**

Irving went to England in 1815 to run the Liverpool branch of the family hardware business, but could not save it when the whole firm failed. Thereupon, with the encouragement of Walter Scott, Irving turned definitely to literature. The stories (including “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”), collected in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (London, 1820), appeared serially in New York in 1819–20; their enthusiastic reception made Irving the best-known figure in American literature both at home and abroad. *Bracebridge Hall* (1822), the next volume of essays, although inferior to the previous book, was well received. However, his *Tales of a Traveller* (1824), written after visits to Germany and France, was a failure.

Irving became a diplomatic attaché at the American embassy in Madrid in 1826. There he produced his biography of Columbus (1828), largely based on the work of the Spanish historian Navarrete; *The Conquest of Granada* (1829), a romantic narrative; and the soft, casually charming Spanish sketches of *The Alhambra* (1832). After a short period at the American legation in London, he returned to New York. In search of colorful material, he made a journey to the frontier and wrote about the American West in *A Tour of the Prairies* (1835). From records furnished by John Jacob Astor, he wrote *Astoria* (1836), with Pierre Irving, and *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, U.S.A.* (1837).

Irving subsequently established himself at his estate, Sunnyside, near Tarrytown, N.Y., until he was sent

https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/irving_washington_1783_1859
to Madrid as American minister to Spain (1842–46). Once more at Sunnyside, he wrote a biography of Goldsmith (1849) and the miscellaneous sketches called \textit{Wolfert's Roost} (1855) and labored at his biography of George Washington (5 vol., 1855–59), which he completed just before his death.

Irving was master of a graceful and unobtrusively sophisticated prose style. A gentle but effective satirist, he was the creator of a few widely loved essays and tales that have made his name endure.

\textbf{Bibliography}

Irving's journals were edited by W. P. Trent and G. S. Hellman (3 vol., 1919, repr. 1970);

\textit{The Western Journals} (1944) by McDermott, J. F. .

See also his life and letters by P. M. Irving (4 vol., 1864; repr. 1967);

biographies by S. T. Williams (2 vol., 1935; repr. 1971).

C. D. Warner (1981), and A. Burstein (2007);

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA