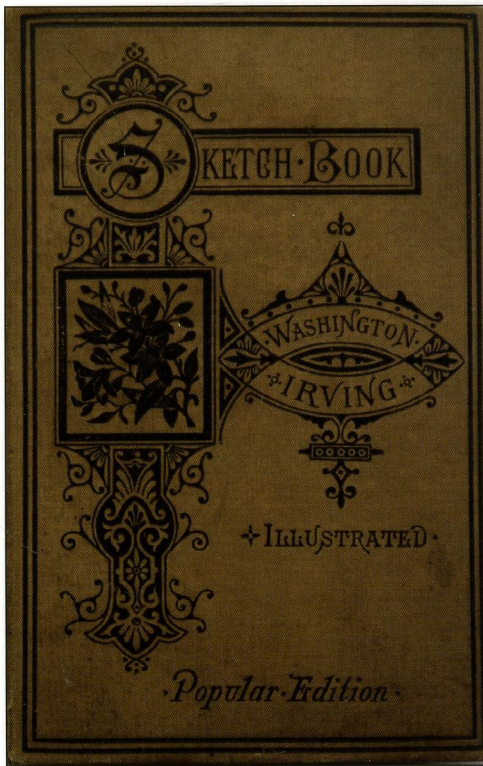


When
SLEEPY HOLLOW
Came to St. Louis



Washington Irving (1783–1859) wrote short stories, essays, and biographies throughout his life. He and James Fenimore Cooper were the first American writers to gain acclaim in Europe. Irving's interests compelled him to write about a wide array of topics including biographies of George Washington and Mohammad, the Moors, and fifteenth-century Spain. *(Image: Library of Congress)*



The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent., published in 1819 and 1820, included some of Irving's best-known short stories. Both "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle" first appeared among the 34 essays and stories in *Sketch Book*. (Image: Little Otsu)

With the new television series *Sleepy Hollow*, there's a lot of talk about headless horsemen these days. And with reason—Washington Irving's story of a headless horseman chasing Ichabod Crane in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (first published in 1820) remains a classic. In fact, Irving's influence reached all the way to St. Louis during his lifetime.

Just months after returning to the United States after living in Europe for some 17 years, Irving traveled West, including two days in St. Louis in September 1832. Despite struggles traveling the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers—his steamboat ran aground twice and was hit by a racing *Yellow Stone*—he wrote his sister that, "I have been charmed with the grand scenery of these two mighty rivers."

It was a short trip, a stopover on the way west with Henry Leavitt Ellsworth, who was heading a commission appointed by Andrew Jackson to survey western lands to relocate Native American tribes through the Indian Removal Act, which led to the Trail of Tears later in the decade. Irving struggled to understand the nature of Indian relations as he pondered the recently captured Sauk Chief Black Hawk: "I find it extremely difficult, even when so near the seat of action, to get at the right story of these feuds between the white and red men, and my sympathies

go strongly with the latter."

Irving traveled to Jefferson Barracks to view Black Hawk, now "an old man, upward of seventy, emaciated and enfeebled by the sufferings he has experienced, and by a touch of cholera."

More importantly, he traveled into the country to visit Indian Commissioner William Clark, the former explorer and territorial governor, "a fine healthy robust man—tall," Irving said, and seeming younger than his 62 years. He dined with Clark ("good—but rustic") and brought up the subject of Clark's slaves.

Irving's notes are the only record we have about York, Clark's slave who accompanied the Corps of Discovery to the Pacific. Clark said he eventually freed three of his slaves, setting up each one in a business or farm; York had a drayage business, hauling stuff short distances. Irving said that Clark noted "they all repented and wanted to come back."

At least according to Clark, York's business didn't pan out, telling perhaps more about Clark's views about race than anything. The business failed because of York's failings, Clark thought: he couldn't get up early enough, kept his horses in ill health, and after two died he sold the rest but was swindled. Irving says that Clark heard that York had said, "Damn this freedom. I have never had a happy day since I got it." En route to St. Louis, Clark said, York died of cholera.

Irving's words were quoted in St. Louis again in 1863, just three years after the grave of William Clark was moved to Bellefontaine Cemetery. In the front of the cemetery's newly published *Rules and Regulations*, the board quoted none other than Washington Irving, the founder of Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Tarrytown, New York, thinking that Irving's sentiments were theirs: "But the grave of those we loved—what a place for meditation! There it is that we call up in long review the whole history of virtue and gentleness." And so Clark and the creator of the headless horseman, or at least his sentiments, were united again.

Washington Irving, *Western Travels*¹

Arrive at St. Louis about 11—sleep on board.

Thursday Sept 13. St. Louis—mixture of French & American character—French billiard room—market-place where some are speaking French, some English—put up at Union Hotel—see Mr. Chouteau pere et fils—Dr. O'Dwyer—Judge Peck—Mr. Bates.

Drive out to Gov. Clark's—cross prairie—flowering & fragrant shrubs—the Gov[ernor's] farm—small cottage—orchard bending & breaking with loads of fruit—negroes with tables under trees preparing meal—fine sitting room air—little negroes whispering & laughing—civil negro major domo who asks to take horses out—invites us to walk in the orchard & spreads table with additional covers—sitting-room—rifle & game bag & c. in corners—Indian calumet over fireplace—remains of fire on hearth, showing that morning has been cool—lovely day—golden sunshine—transparent atmosphere—pure breeze.

Fine nut trees,
 peach trees, grape
 vines, catalpas
 &c. &c. about the
 house—look out
 over rich, level
 plain or prairie—
 green near at
 hand—blue line
 at the horizon—
 universal chirp
 and spinning of
 insects—fertility
 of country—grove
 of walnuts in the
 rear of the house—
 beehives—dove
 cote—canoe—
 Genl arrives on
 horseback with
 dogs—guns. His
 grandson on a
 calico poney
 hallowing &
 laughing—Genl on
 horseback—gun
 on his shoulder—
 cur—house dog—
 bullying setter.

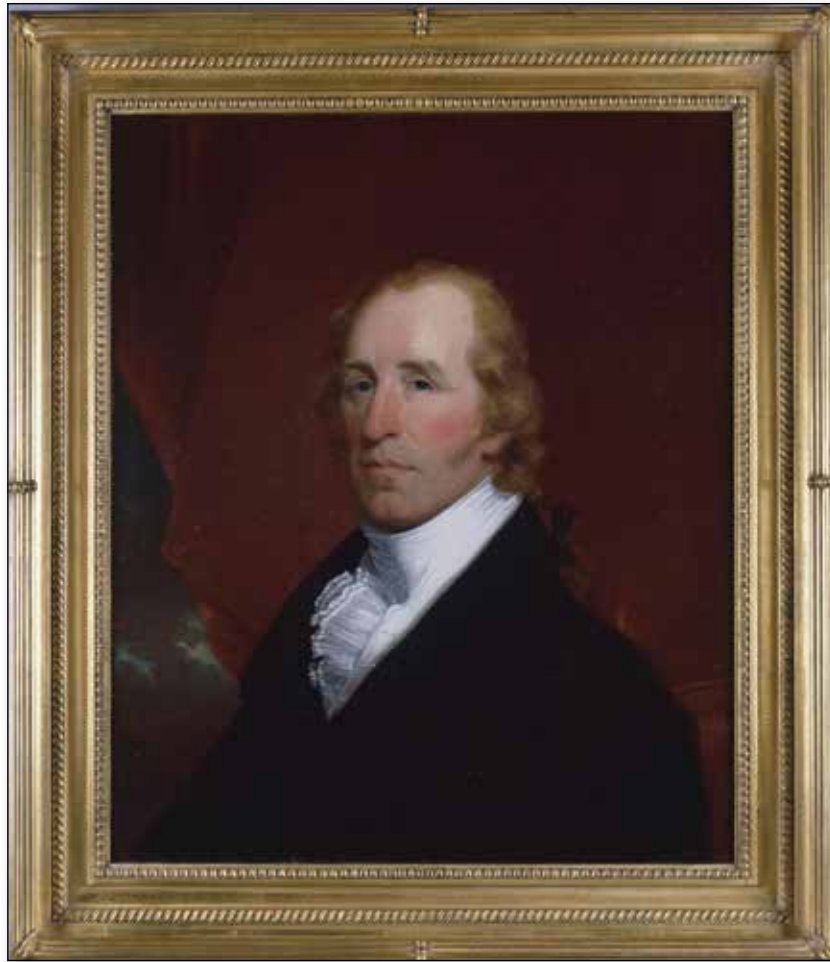
Gov. Clark fine
 healthy robust
 man—tall about
 50—perhaps
 more—his hair,
 originally light,
 now grey—falling
 on his shoulders—
 frank—
 intelligent—his son
 a cadet of W.P. now
 in the army—aid
 de camp to Genl Atkinson.

Dinner plentiful—good—hut rustic—fried chicken,
 bacon and grouse, roast beef, roasted potatoes, tomatoes,
 excellent cakes, bread, butter, & c.

Gov. C. gives much excellent information concerning
 Indians.

His slaves—set them free—one he placed at a ferry—
 another on a farm, giving him land, horses, &c.—a third
 he gave a large wagon & team of 6 horses to ply between
 Nashville and Richmond. They all repented & wanted to
 come back.

The waggoner was York, the hero of the Missouri
 expedition & adviser of the Indians. He could not get
 up early enough in the mornng—his horses were ill
 kept—two died—the others grew poor. He sold them,
 was cheated—entered into service—fared ill. “Damn this
 freedom,” said York, “I have never had a happy day since
 I got it.” He determined to go back to his old master—set



By the time Irving met William Clark (1770–1838), the former explorer had gained a certain amount of fame. For a New Yorker like Irving, the presence of slaves was particularly striking. It is clear from Irving’s account that Clark crafted his narrative about York in the context of his views about slaves and African-Americans. (Image: Missouri History Museum)

off for St. Louis,
 but was taken
 with cholera in
 Tennessee &
 died. Some of the
 traders think they
 have met traces of
 York’s crowd, on
 the Missouri.

Returned
 by another route
 escorted by young
 Clark—ride thro
 prairie—flowers—
 waggon—huts,
 etc.—pass by
 a noble farm—
 every thing in
 abundance—pass
 by a circle of
 Indian mounds—
 on one of them
 Genl Ashley has
 built his house
 so as to have the
 summit of it as a
 terrace in the rear.

St. Louis—
 old rackets
 gambling house—
 noise of the cue
 & and the billiard
 ball from morning
 till night—old
 French woman
 accosting each
 other in the street.

Friday Sept
 14. Drive out
 with Judge Peck,
 Judge’s uncle, &

our party to Fort Jefferson to see Black Hawk—ride thro
 open country—formerly forest—drive to Genl Atkinson’s
 quarters.

Black Hawk. old man upwards of 70 with aquiline
 nose—finely formed heard—organs of benevolence—his
 two sons—oldest a fine-looking young man—his brother
 in law the prophet—the little Indian stables.

They are all chained arms & ankles with cannon, but are
 allowed to walk about escorted by soldier.

Old French town nicknamed Vuide Poche—old French
 settlers retain their dress, manners &c.—cared little for
 two or three times a week to dance—very sober and
 temperate tho gay—kept aloof from Americans but begin
 to intermarry with them.

Black Hawk—had a skin of a black hawk in his hand &
 fanned himself with the tail.



Black Hawk (1767–1838) was a famous Sauk born in northwestern Illinois. While the Sauk and Fox tribes had ceded their Illinois lands in an 1804 treaty, they were permitted to use the region until the United States government wanted the land. In the late 1820s, settlers began moving into the area, but Sauks under Black Hawk refused to evacuate the region. After a confrontation in summer 1832 in which hundreds of Native Americans were killed at Bad Axe Creek, Black Hawk and several other Sauk and Fox leaders were captured and imprisoned at Jefferson Barracks. After being transported to Fortress Monroe, Black Hawk returned and told fellow natives that it was futile to resist the Americans since they were so numerous. This image is from Thomas McKenney's *History of the Indian Tribes of North America*. (Image: Missouri History Museum)

ENDNOTES

¹ Excerpt reprinted by permission of the University of Oklahoma Press.