

There is no such person as Rip Van Winkle. This fact may not shock you but it would have stunned many in 1860s America. So alive is Rip in art and literature since his creation by Washington Irving in 1821 that even today some are still surprised to learn that the sleepy Dutchman is more myth than man. That's because many of America's finest writers, artists, and illustrators have done their best to keep him alive, in our imaginations and in our hearts.

As a symbol of America, Rip goes to sleep henpecked by Europe, who doubles for Dame Van Winkle in Irving's humorous story. He awakens, however, minus Mrs. Winkle, whom we're told has died a convenient death, to a new world of bright promise and dark premonitions. Perhaps it was of intimations of Little Big Horn, the extinction of the buffalo and the disappearance of the American wilderness that Rip dreamed during his long, murky sleep. Irving himself remains silent on the question. But is this the way other artists and writers have envisioned Rip since his first appearance almost two centuries ago?

In 1838, Asher Durand, an artist of the Hudson River School, worked on a painting entitled Rip Van Winkle's Introduction to the Crew of Hedrick Hudson, in the Catskill Mountains for his patron Ogden Haggerty. Unlike Irving's mythic legend, Durand's painting has thus far been lost to time. A single entry in the notebook of fellow artist and Hudson River School founder Thomas Cole is all that remains of it today. The image itself has been left by time to our imaginations. Not so in the case of many other notable American authors, artists and illustrators, all of whom were fascinated with the figure of Rip; the most notable among them are Herman Melville, John Rogers, Joseph Jefferson, Arthur Rackham and N.C. Wyeth.



In 1890, just a year before his death as an embittered, unsung genius of nineteenth century letters, Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick*, put together a loosely thematic collection of poems, "Weeds and Wildings," among them a curious prose essay-cum-poem entitled "Rip Van Winkle's Lila." It's the artist in Rip that Melville celebrates in his poem, for it's the appearance of the lila, which we're told Rip himself planted long ago, that finally endows his hometown with a beauty and enchantment that blossoms "Like that first Paradise embowered."

Today, thanks to "poor-good-for-nothing Rip," Palenville, Greene County, NY is still remembered as the sleepy Dutchman's fictional hometown, a fact that Irving neither conformed nor denied in his lifetime. Interestingly, Palenville was the seat of one of America's earliest art colonies and a favorite haunt of Thomas Cole and other leading painters of the Hudson River School, some of whom stayed at country homes and inns in the hamlet while visiting the area. Art transforms: Is that what Irving—through Rip—is trying to tell us?

Almost twenty years earlier than Melville's poem, sculptor John Rogers, whose prized creations adorned thousands of ordinary mantelpieces in America, found inspiration in the figure of Rip. Dubbed "the Artist of the Common People," Rogers' sculptures drew their inspiration from literature. So it's no wonder that in the summer of 1869, after having attended a performance of Joseph Jefferson's Rip Van Winkle, Rogers was himself inspired to create what would eventually become one of his most popular sculptures, Rip Van Winkle at Home. Price, \$12.

Two other Rip sculptures followed. Rip Van Winkle on the Mountain depicts Joseph Jefferson as Rip and a young member of Jefferson's company, William Seymour, as a pestering gnome. Rip Van Winkle Returned, the rarest today, was the last of Rogers' illustrations of Joseph Jefferson in his most famous role.

It depicts a harried Rip, dazed in wonderment. As with the first, these two sculptures retailed at \$12 each. Offered as a set, they could also be purchased individually. All three remained in Rogers' stock until the end of his career in 1891. "Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle! To actor Joseph Jefferson there was magic in the sound of the name as he heard it repeated each night on the stage. "An American story by an American author" was how he described Irving's masterpiece after having performed it for over thirty years to packed houses. Never mind that Irving had used as the major source for his "American story" a little known German folktale about a goat-herder, Peter Klaus, who falls asleep in the Fythausen mountains, only to awaken, gray-bearded, twenty years later to find his fowling piece rusted and his dog gone.

The idea of acting Rip came to Jefferson in the summer of 1859. "I had arranged to board with my family at a queer old Dutch farmhouse in Paradise Valley, at the foot of Pocono Mountain in Pennsylvania. A ridge of hills covered with tall hemlocks surrounds the vale, and numerous trout-streams wind through the meadows and tumble over rocks. Stray farms are scattered through the valley, and the few old Dutchmen and their families who till the soil were born upon it; there and only there they have ever lived. The scene was wild, the air was fresh, and the board was cheap. What could the light heart and purse of a poor actor ask for more than this?"

Jefferson, too, had been touched by mountain fever. And by the fey spirit of the fairy known as Rip. For over three decades he would delight

Statue by John Rogers



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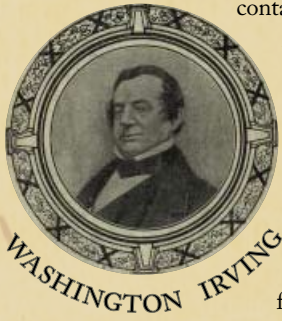
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Rip Van Winkle - Engraving of a drawing by S. Eyttinge, Jr., 1871



Rackham, the artist, knows what Rip, the child-artist, does not know; that there's sometimes a high price to pay for a spirited imagination. In the end, it could be said that Rip Van Winkle, this most American of books, helped popularize Rackham's career in America.

N.C. Wyeth's Rip Van Winkle, on the other hand, is a more kindly figure that Rackham's. True, his eyes reveal that he has gone through an unexplained transformation but the shadows in Weyth's illustration of the older Rip belong to the dusty corners of time and not the cluttered attic of the mind. Published by David McKay in 1921, the book contained 11 handsome illustrations.



Wyeth, who rarely worked in pen and ink, nonetheless employed in his drawings for Rip. Wyeth's son, Andrew, found "great quality" in those pencil drawings but, according to the son, himself an accomplished artist, the father did not. The elder Wyeth's self-criticism notwithstanding, this American classic as illustrated by him is still a collector's treasure.

Will America's marathon sleeper survive the twenty-first century? Only time will tell.



Washington Irving's home in Sunnyside, NY

Rip Van Winkle

HISTORY TRAIL

MAP WITH POINTS OF INTEREST

Courtesy of the
Washington Irving Inn, Hunter, NY

Rip Van Winkle History Trail

"A people need a past in order to have a direction in which to travel." The Catskills once echoed the name of Rip Van Winkle throughout its verdant hills. Fifty years ago visitors to this region were regaled with many incarnations of Rip and his legend: Rip's Rock, Rip's Retreat, Rip Van Winkle Bazaar, Rip's Garage; wherever you looked, there was Rip. A Rip here, a Rip there, Rip predominated everywhere. Following the heyday of the American Tourist

Movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Rip fell asleep once again. That is, until now. The time is right for Washington Irving, creator of Rip Van Winkle and other important American tales, to take his place as the preeminent author of the Catskill High Peaks. This trail is an effort to do just that as well as to preserve the past and to remind today's traveler of the travels and travelers of yesteryear.

7. Washington Irving Inn

Named after distinguished American author Washington Irving, this century-old inn is part of the tradition and charm of the American Tourist Movement, which originated in the 19th century in Catskill High Peaks. Sophisticated travelers can escape everyday life at this Historic Inn, © 1890, in 705,500 acre Catskill State Park and see spectacular Fall foliage in the heart of the "Catskill High Peaks," America's First Wilderness. Minutes from world-class skiing at Hunter & Windham Mountains. **518-589-5560, Rte. 23A, Hunter, NY**
www.washingtonirving.com



5. RIP'S ROCK



According to legend, it is here that Rip Van Winkle laid down to his solemn, two score undisturbed sleep, but not before making merry with the ghost of Henry Hudson and his band of misshapen little men. To find out more about Rip's Rock and other

Rip related sites, visit the Mountain Top Historical Society's Visitors Center in Haines Falls. For more information, contact MTHS at www.mths.org.

9. VAN WINKLE'S RESTAURANT AT THE KAATSKILL MOUNTAIN CLUB

This upscale bistro named after Washington Irving's most famous character, Van Winkle's Restaurant offers wall-to-wall poster-size images of Rip and other Catskills' memorabilia throughout. The restaurant is located in the foothills of Hunter Mountain, home to world class skiing. Van Winkle's Restaurant is located off Route 23A in Hunter Village.

8. RIP'S ROCK (AGAIN)

In early spring 1995, a single 8 ton solid block of bluestone escaped the crusher and found its way to the top of Hunter Mountain—located off Route 23A in the Village of Hunter—to begin its twenty year journey (the same amount of time it took Rip Van Winkle to wake from his deep sleep) to free the life-sized figure of none other than Rip himself from the mountain's native stone. The idea for the sculpture was the Hunter Mountain's own David Sutzky. The sculptor is noted Catskills High Peak artist Kevin VanHentenryck. The sculpture, now 10 years in the making, has proceeded each summer season as part of the summer festival program at Hunter Mountain.

12. HARDENBURGH HOUSE

The Hardenburgh House was built in 1806 on 1.5 million acres given to Johannes Hardenburgh by Queen Anne in 1708. This early stone dwelling was listed on the National and State Registers in 1994. Located on Route 23 in the Town of Roxbury, Delaware County, on the outskirts of Prattsville, Greene County, this unusual example of Dutch architecture in the Catskill High Peaks is said to be haunted by the ghost of a freed slave who once belonged to land owner Johannes Hardenburgh.



6. TANNERSVILLE

The Painted Village — Mark Twain could be spotted taking a stroll along Main Street at the height of the Victorian era. What was he doing here? Perhaps visiting one of his many friends such as Candace Wheeler or Mary Mapes Dodge who had homes in nearby Onteora Park. Although it is almost certain that Twain did no writing while he was here, one of his most famous quips, "The walls were so thin you could hear them thinking in the other room," was offered by the famous humorist as a description of the Bear & Fox Inn at Onteora Park, which was across from the home in which he stayed and was a place where he and his family often ate.

10. THE EARLY TANNERS: HUNTER VILLAGE SQUARE



You may be surprised to learn that the mountain known as Colonel's Chair, that is part of Hunter Mountain Ski

Bowl, is the very same mountain on which Colonel William Edwards, one of the region's earliest tanners, slew thousands of mighty hemlock trees. Although many modern-day visitors lament the loss of the Catskill High Peaks' first growth forest, they rarely stop to think that this action resulted in a second-growth forest of mixed variety that today is one of the area's fastest growing tourist attractions: Fall Foliage. Colonel Edwards' home is no longer standing, but in its place is the fashionable Hunter Village Square, headquarters of the Catskill Mountain Foundation, the premier cultural and arts center for the Catskill High Peaks. Visit www.catskillmtn.org to learn more.

11. THE EARLY TANNERS: ZADOCK PRATT & PRATT MUSEUM



Although most of us have forgotten Colonel Edwards and his wanton destruction of the first growth forest of the Catskill High Peaks, many of us recall with fondness another Greene County tanner, the Honorable Zadock Pratt, who is also one of the County's Favorite Sons. Pratt was more than a tanner: he was what Emerson called a "Representative Man," helping to pave the way from Catskill Landing to the mountainous region of the Catskill High Peaks in search of a direct trade route for his tanned hides from the Prattsville Tannery, the largest tannery in the world, to the lordly Hudson and beyond. Visit the Pratt Museum on Rte. 23A in Prattsville.

3. THE BRONCK MUSEUM



The Bronck Museum is an excellent way to experience firsthand the early Dutch influence in Greene County. It is from these early colonists that Washington Irving concocted the legend of Rip Van Winkle. The Museum is located on Route 9W, Coxsackie, NY and is open from May 30 to October 31. Call 518-731-6490.

2. THE RIP VAN WINKLE BRIDGE

The Rip Van Winkle Bridge was designed under the auspices of the New



York State public works using \$3.4 million in loans from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, a Depression-era agency. The finished bridge, named after one of Washington Irving's most famous characters, Rip Van Winkle, measures 5,040 feet long. In 1935, bridge workers installed a two-lane roadway and completed construction of a Dutch-colonial-style toll plaza and administration, topped off with stepped gable roof reminiscent of Washington Irving's home, Sunnyside. The Rip Van Winkle Bridge opened officially to traffic on July 2, 1935, at a cost of \$2.4 million taxpayer dollars and three human lives.

4. PALENVILLE: VILLAGE OF FALLING WATERS

The Home of Rip Van Winkle! This small rural village lies along State Route 23A at the base of Kaaterskill Clove. Although others have claimed the distinction, this is the only possible village from which Rip could have made his ascension into the woods, emerging two decades later shorn of the past but sporting a flowing white beard. As a young hiker, Rip bounded up the mountains as a spry subject of King George. Tottering down High Peak as an old man, he found himself to be under the rule of a different George: Revolutionary war hero George Washington. Unbeknownst to Rip, he had slept through the entire War for Independence in Greene County. For tourism information, contact Greene County Department of Tourism, www.discovergreene.com.

1. SUNNYSIDE



Perched proudly on the banks of the Hudson River in Tarrytown, NY, Sunnyside is the creation of American author

Washington Irving. Irving purchased the two-room Dutch farmhouse in 1835 for \$1,800. Over the next decade and a half, the writer with help from his artist friend, George Harvey, redesigned and added to the original early 18th century structure. Together, the two men designed Sunnyside in what is now known as the American Romantic style. Particular interest was paid by Irving to adding historical architectural elements such as a steeped-gable roof and weathervanes, reminiscent of the Dutch homes that Irving had seen as a child growing up in New York City. Call 914-631-8200.