



**Washington Irving:
An American Original**

by Brian Jay Jones, '89 BA
Arcade Publishing, 2008

Washington
Irving let
it rip

say it
with satire

B Y J A N I C E M Y E R S

Evidently, getting published wasn't much easier in the 19th century than it is today, and it was just as hard to earn a living at it. Author Washington Irving, whom author/alum Brian Jay Jones dubs "an American original," spent much of his life in classic writer's agony, hoping to make a living with his prose. Still, lacking access to such marketing vehicles as the *New York Times* Bestsellers List, he did pretty well for himself: even the least literary among us is familiar with Ichabod Crane, the Headless Horseman, and Rip Van Winkle.

Having been pronounced a "dunce" by his kindergarten teacher was a rather inauspicious beginning for a man who would eventually give "his fledgling nation her very own literature."

Irving was not ambitious by nature, and he spent a good deal of his youth shirking responsibility and flirting with clever young ladies. When he put his mind to it, however, satire dripped off his pen...and into the hearts of his fellow New Yorkers. When, at age 26, he wrote *A History of New York* under the pen name of Diedrich Knickerbocker, Irving became an international celebrity. The word "Knickerbocker" was bestowed on all things New York, which ultimately gave the basketball team their name.

Those of us who remember the golden age of *Mad* magazine (i.e., middle and high school) owe Irving a debt of gratitude. He invented the genre with a magazine called *Salamagundi*. Just like *Mad*, each of the 20 issues of *Salamagundi* was anxiously anticipated by his adoring public, most of whom enjoyed a good joke—provided it wasn't on them.

Although his writing brought him fame, his failure to secure the copyright on *Salamagundi* cost him financially. For the rest of his life, Irving would struggle with the feast/famine cycles of publishing and his public's fickle taste in reading material.

For the "father of American letters," Irving spent a lot of time in Europe. His brothers financed an unheard-of two years of socializing his way across the Continent. A constant theme in Irving's life was the support of his brothers (Ebenezer, Peter and William) for Irving, and vice versa.



Brian Jay Jones

Advances in modern transportation notwithstanding, the world was a lot smaller in the early 19th century. Irving was at one time or another friendly with Martin Van Buren, Andrew

Jackson, James Madison and Aaron Burr. Dickens and Walter Scott were admirers of his work. He had an on-again off-again professional relationship with James Fenimore Cooper. He hobnobbed with royalty as minister to England and Spain. It's interesting to see Irving's life unfold before the backdrop of 19th century history.

As good biographies do, *Washington Irving: An American Original* draws back the velvet curtain to reveal the sensitive, moody Irving and his constant struggle with himself. Later in life, Irving tackled more serious subjects, including a biography of his namesake, George Washington. He also wrote *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*. Both were commercial successes.

The author of this book, Brian Jay Jones, has had a long career in politics. After majoring in history at UNM, he's been a speechwriter, ghostwriter, and policy analyst for two US senators and now works as a writer and sometime policy analyst. This background gives him a unique perspective on a subject that might just as easily have been approached from a literary angle. English majors may wish for a little more dissection of Irving's work in this painstakingly researched biography, but considering the critical role of diplomacy in our highly politicized world, Jones' approach is both refreshing and timely.

album

in the department of molecular and cellular biology at Harvard. Lee lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Phyllis A. Dominguez, '93 BSED, '03 JD, has been appointed to membership in the New Mexico Judicial Performance Evaluation Commission. The Corrales resident is a prosecuting attorney in the felony domestic violence division for the Second Judicial District.

Katie Harris DuBerry, '93 BA, has been promoted to associate creative director at Rick Johnson & Company in Albuquerque.

Rodolfo Parga Jr., '93 JD, has been elected managing shareholder of the Ryley Carlock & Applewhite law firm where he practices commercial litigation. Rudy lives in Denver.

Jennifer Bartlett, '94 BA, has had her first poetry book published by the UNM Press. Its title is *Derivative of the Moving Image*. Jennifer is an instructor at Montclair State University and lives in Brooklyn.

Cecilia Coats, '94 BA, received her MA last summer in intercultural communication from the University of the Pacific. She teaches elementary school in Denver, and specializes in diversity/social justice education.

Teresa C. Gomez, '93 BA, '95 MA, is serving as acting Secretary of Indian Affairs in Santa Fe. Teresa lives at Isleta, New Mexico.

Ned A. Godshall, '94 EMBA, has been selected by the Anderson School of Management Foundation board as a 2008 inductee into the Anderson Hall of Fame. Ned is president and CEO of MesoFuel, in Albuquerque.

Eric Herrera, '94 BBA, has been promoted to principal of REDW The Rogoff Firm in Albuquerque. He is the former senior tax manager.

Linda Lizut Helstern, '95 MA, has been awarded a 2007 Larry W. Remele Memorial Fellowship by the North Dakota Humanities Council for her project "Revisiting Hiroshima, Reclaiming History: Gerald Vizenor's Crossblood Vision and Japanese-American Cultural Exchange." The \$5,000 stipend supports original scholarly research and related public humanities presentations. Linda's first book, *Louis Owens*, was recently published. She is on the English faculty at North Dakota State University.