

# Sleepy Hollow Cemetery

By J. W. Henson

Driving north along Federal Highway 9 just outside of Tarrytown, New York one comes to the Old Dutch Church and Burying Grounds, and the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery on the right hand side of the highway. The Hudson River flows just to the west and on through New York City to the ocean. This part of the river was called the Tappen Zee by the Dutch. It was in this setting that Washington Irving (1783-1859) wrote two of his most famous stories. His "Rip Van Winkle" and the "Headless Horseman" became literary classics.

We parked along the Pocantico River behind the Old Dutch Church flaunting a No Parking sign that threatened the towing of our vehicle. We were enchanted with the ancient cemetery and church, and stepped onto its grounds with a reverence of demeanor. The blend of antiquity with the roar of jet aircraft overhead and the blare of automobile horns on the highway have not lessened the charm of those sacred haunts. Gone is the old gristmill on the Pocantico whose wheel gave the distinctive flutter throughout the neighborhood. Gone are the children swimming and fishing in the shaded waters of the stream

A grounds keeper was fast asleep in the bed of an old wooden wheelbarrow at the open door of the maintenance shed within the cemetery. The soft pleasant sunshine was illuminating his whole being. His brogans met a rolled up pair of overall legs, and his white beard rested gently upon his bibbed apparel. The bill of a cap shaded his eyes from the sun as he enjoyed his repose. Strong arms stretched from beneath a heavy, long sleeved shirt whose cuffs were turned a couple of times. He was the embodiment of Rip Van Winkle sleeping away all time. The area had its effects upon him even amid the hustle and bustle of modern life.

Washington Irving sleeps just at the head of the cemetery in Yore Grove, where he can look down upon the graves of the Van Warts, Van Tassels, Buckhouts, and many another names in the Old Dutch Burying Ground. People were being buried in this cemetery as early as 1650. The church was built in 1697, and is one of America's oldest. It is built of stone and brick. The brick were brought from the Netherlands because Americans at that time had not developed the art of brick making. The Church has been renovated a couple of times over the years, and gone are the weather vane perched upon the steeple, and the furniture within so vividly described by Washington Irving.

To the north of the Old Dutch Burying grounds is the modern cemetery of Sleepy Hollow. It was renamed "Sleepy Hollow Cemetery" from "Tarrytown Cemetery" when Washington Irving suggested the more natural name in a letter to Mr. Lewis Gaylord Clark. There is an Irving burial plot in the end of the cemetery that joins the Old Dutch Burying Grounds. It is within this wrought iron fence and gate that Washington Irving is buried. He was one of the first American authors to be taken seriously in both Europe and America. Many other famous people are buried along the street and among the trees of this hilly cemetery. There are the graves of the Andrew Carnegie family with the servants who were part of their household. Samuel Gompers, Major Bowes, William Rockefeller, Walter Chrysler, and many others are buried within its confines.

The cemetery covers about 100 acres, and has over forty thousand burials within its grounds.

As we left the hallowed spot and returned to our untowed, and unticketed vehicle, the old caretaker was still sound asleep . . . or was he dead? .. We should like to have asked him some questions, but he was unconscious of our coming and going, and to the world about him.

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