

Clatsop Edition

ASTORIA

By

WASHINGTON IRVING

Illustrations by Harold Cramer Smith

BINFORDS & MORT, Publishers
Portland, Oregon

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

IN THE COURSE of occasional visits to Canada many years since, I became intimately acquainted with some of the principal partners of the great Northwest Fur Company, who at that time lived in genial style at Montreal, and kept almost open house for the stranger. At their hospitable boards I occasionally met with partners, and clerks, and hardy fur traders from the interior posts; men who had passed years remote from civilized society, among distant and savage tribes, and who had wonders to recount of their wide and wild peregrinations, their hunting exploits, and their perilous adventures and hair-breadth escapes among the Indians. I was at an age when imagination lends its coloring to everything, and the stories of these Sinbads of the wilderness made the life of a trapper and fur trader perfect romance to me. I even meditated at one time a visit to the remote posts of the company in the boats which annually ascended the lakes and rivers, being thereto invited by one of the partners; and I have ever since regretted that I was prevented by circumstances from carrying my intention into effect. From those early impressions, the grand enterprise of the great fur companies, and the hazardous errantry of their associates in the wild parts of our vast continent, have always been themes of charmed interest to me; and I have felt anxious to get at the details of their adventurous expeditions among the savage tribes that peopled the depths of the wilderness.

About two years ago, not long after my return from a tour upon the prairies of the far West, I had a conversation with my friend, Mr. John Jacob Astor, relative to that portion of our country, and to the adventurous traders to Santa Fe and the Columbia. This led him to advert to a great enterprise set on foot and conducted by him, between twenty and thirty years since, having for its object to carry the fur trade across the Rocky Mountains, and to sweep the shores of the Pacific.

Finding that I took an interest in the subject, he expressed a regret that the true nature and extent of his enterprise and its national character and importance had never been understood, and a wish that I would undertake to give an account of it. The suggestion struck upon the chord of early associations already vibrating in my mind. It occurred to me that a work of this kind might comprise a variety of those curious details, so interesting to me, illustrative of the fur trade; of its remote and adventurous enterprises, and of the various people, and tribes, and castes, and characters, civilized and savage, affected by its operations. The journals, and letters, also, of the adventurers by sea and land employed by Mr. Astor in his comprehensive project, might throw light upon portions of our country quite out of the track of ordinary travel, and as yet but little known. I therefore felt disposed to undertake the task, provided documents of sufficient extent and minuteness could be furnished to me. All the papers relative to the enterprise were accordingly submitted to my inspection. Among them were journals and letters narrating expeditions by sea, and journeys to and fro across the Rocky Mountains by routes before untravelled, together with documents illustrative of savage and colonial life on the borders of the Pacific. With such material in hand, I undertook the work. The trouble of rummaging among business papers, and of collecting and collating facts from amidst tedious and commonplace details, was spared me by my nephew, Pierre M. Irving, who acted as my pioneer, and to whom I am greatly indebted for smoothing my path and lightening my labors.

As the journals, on which I chiefly depended, had been kept by men of business, intent upon the main object of the enterprise, and but little versed in science, or curious about matters not immediately bearing upon their interest, and as they were written often in moments of fatigue or hurry, amid the inconveniences of wild encampments, they were often meagre in their details, furnishing hints to provoke rather than narratives to satisfy inquiry. I have, therefore, availed myself occasionally of collateral lights supplied by the published journals of other travellers who have visited the scenes described: such as Messrs.

Lewis and Clarke, Bradbury, Breckenridge, Long, Franchere, and Ross Cox, and make a general acknowledgment of aid received from these quarters.

The work I here present to the public, is necessarily of a rambling and somewhat disjointed nature, comprising various expeditions and adventures by land and sea. The facts, however, will prove to be linked and banded together by one grand scheme, devised and conducted by a master spirit; one set of characters, also, continues throughout, appearing occasionally, though sometimes at long intervals, and the whole enterprise winds up by a regular catastrophe; so that the work, without any labored attempt at artificial construction, actually possesses much of that unity so much sought after in works of fiction, and considered so important to the interests of every history.

IRVING'S WRITING OF *ASTORIA*

By ALFRED POWERS

THE BOOK was John Jacob Astor's idea. Who should write it was his idea. "Washington Irving" it should be — Astor spoke with a brogue and still spoke with it after he had made twenty million.

At the time *Astoria* duly became a book project, Astor was the richest man in America; Washington Irving was the republic's most eminent author.

When the nation's Midas and the nation's Homer made a literary deal, the people talked, they talked a lot, and what they said was that the latter was given a scandalously large amount for writing the book. They overestimated the price Astor would judge necessary to secure an amiable chronicle of his ill-fated undertaking at the mouth of the Columbia. They overestimated what so naturally a complaisant man as Irving would charge for lending his reputation, his exuberant fancy, and his elegant style to an amiable account.

As it turned out, this earliest American industrial history of importance earned a great deal more money in ordinary royalties than it received in subsidy from Astor.

All in all, Irving got handsome returns for *Astoria*, especially in view of the enchanting spread of a dollar in 1836. General rumor has it that the Astor fee was \$5,000; Irving's nephew declared that Astor paid him nothing; Irving himself beat around the bush in denials but didn't choose to make the actual contract public. During the preliminary negotiations he wrote to his nephew in 1834 that Astor would "pay liberally for time and trouble."

During Irving's lifetime his income from *Astoria* was as nearly as can be figured out as follows:

Fee from Astor (as rumored)	\$5,000
Town lots from Astor (though Irving's nephew said the author bought these)	
Free room and board for weeks at a time at Astor's mansion at Hell Gate	
Royalties from the first American edition.....	4,000
Royalties from the first English edition.....	2,500
Prorata royalties from the 15-volume edition of his works published by George P. Putnam in 1848-1849, (one- fifteenth of \$88,000)	5,866
Royalties from three German editions, two French, and one each in Dutch and Swedish.....	

Interesting is all the reproachful hullabaloo at a celebrated author's writing a book for a multimillionaire. Over in England patrons had been quite the thing for a long time. It seemed to be taken somewhat for granted that he had sold his literary integrity down the river. Said James Fenimore Cooper, as full of spleen as of genius, "Columbus and John Jacob Astor! I daresay Irving will make the last the greatest man." Years later Hubert Howe Bancroft declared that there runs through *Astoria* a "current of unqualified sycophancy, trickery, sentimentality, and maudlin praise." Critical writers on American literature have followed one another in a kind of refrain of disparagement of it as hack work. V. L. Parrington did not find in it creative imagination or high drama; "on every page one is conscious of the professional man of letters faithfully doing this day's allotment."

In fact, Irving did not do it as a dreary task at all. He labored at it with immense enthusiasm. It was one of his works that brought him into a renaissance of his powers. He was only 52 and 53 years old when he wrote *Astoria*, but at that time there was no psychology of adult education to proclaim that a man's capacity for learning and for skills might well increase into the middle fifties. Irving found a lot of zest gone out of him. He had a disturbing sense of obsolescence. He had returned to America after seventeen years absence abroad and had found himself much of a stranger to the country. Cooper, after writing adventure, had made the mistake of writing about manners upon his return. Irving, who had dealt with manners, now more wisely turned to adventure. A seventeen-year alien would be under no

particular handicap in writing about the West. His three western books — *A Tour of the Prairies*, *Astoria*, and *Captain Bonneville* — gave him back the zest he had lost. He said that in one month at Astor's mansion he had turned out more work than he had ever done before in his life in the same length of time. He felt a literary rejuvenation. Astor helped to keep him lighted up; he talked and talked with the old fur patriarch who at 72 and 73 still had vital impact a-plenty. All the makers of literature books notwithstanding, Irving was far from being a droopy, tired daily stinter in the period of about a year he spent on *Astoria*. He was buoyant and felt a new flow of energy. In addition to the intrinsic interest of the subject, there was this reassurance of his literary powers which *Astoria* was strongly giving him.

In the introduction to *Astoria* in the collected works published in 1848-1849, Irving tells how he came to undertake the book. As a young man he had visited with the partners of the Northwest Fur Company in Montreal and had been a guest at the famous Beaver Club. He even meditated a visit to "the remote posts of the company" and "ever since regretted" that circumstances had prevented him from doing it. So Astor's suggestion "struck upon the chord of early associations". Of the conversation with Astor he says:

Finding that I took an interest in the subject, he expressed a regret that the true nature and extent of his enterprise and its national character and importance had never been understood. . . . It occurred to me that a work of this kind might comprise a variety of those curious details, so interesting to me, illustrative of the fur trade. . . . The journals, and letters also, of the adventures by sea and land employed by Mr. Astor in his comprehensive project, might throw light upon portions of our country quite out of the track of ordinary travel, and yet but little known. I therefore felt disposed to undertake the task, provided documents of sufficient extent and minuteness could be furnished me.

He explained the situation more fully and informally in two letters to his nephew, Pierre Munro Irving, living at the time in Jacksonville, Illinois, who was wanted for the necessary research — "the trouble of rummaging among business papers, and of collecting and collating facts from amidst tedious and commonplace details."

New York, September 15, 1834.

MY DEAR PIERRE:—

... John Jacob Astor is extremely desirous of having a work written on the subject of his settlement of Astoria, at the mouth of the Columbia River. ...

The old gentleman has applied to me repeatedly in the matter, offering to furnish abundance of materials in letters, journals, and verbal narratives, and to pay liberally for time and trouble. I have felt aware that a work might be written on the subject, full of curious and entertaining matter. ...

... it has occurred to me that you might be disposed to take the matter in hand; to collate the various documents, collect verbal information, and reduce the whole to such form I might be able to dress it up advantageously, and with little labor, for the press.

... The old gentleman caught at the idea, and begged me to write to you immediately.

Pierre wrote back to his uncle on October 5 that he would be interested in the research job if Astor would pay him \$2,000. Then, on October 29, Irving wrote Pierre again and told him, in passing on Astor's urgency, to hop the next bus.

MY DEAR PIERRE:—

... I have since had a definite conversation with Mr. Astor and fixed your compensation at *three thousand* dollars.

Now for the nature of the work. ... My present idea is to call the work by the general name of *Astoria*. ... under this head to give not merely a history of his great colonial and commercial enterprise, and the fortunes of his colony, but a body of information concerning the whole region beyond the Rocky Mountains, on the borders of the Columbia River. ... I think in this way, a rich and varied work may be formed, entertaining and instructive, and laying open scenes in the wild life of that adventurous region which would possess the charm of freshness and novelty. You would be required to look over the various papers, letters and journals in the possession of Mr. Astor, written by various persons who have been in his employ, to draw anecdotes and descriptions from him, and from Northwest traders who occasionally visit him; to forage among various works in French and English that have been published relative to these regions, and thus to draw together and arrange into some kind of form a great body of facts. ... When your work is thus crudely prepared I will take it in hand.

... Mr. Astor has taken a house in town ... and ... would wish you to reside with him. ...

Mr. Astor has all his papers arranged, so that you would be able to get to work immediately. ... If you determine to come, you have better put your portmanteau in the first stage coach, and come as promptly as possible.

Instead of the house in town, the mansion at Hell Gate became the place where *Astoria* was processed. The researcher, Pierre

Munro Irving, was thirty-one years old and a graduate of Columbia College. He had studied law but had an Irving predilection for literature and not only in the matter of *Astoria* but in many ways was a factotum for his famous uncle. In the Astor household was Fitz-Greene Halleck, aged 44, with a big reputation as a poet in those days. His "Marco Bozzaris" was for a long time an elocution favorite in America. He was Astor's confidential clerk and wasn't kept so busy that he didn't have much time for poetry. It seems not to have occurred either to Astor or to him that he might have been the proper one to write *Astoria*.

Pierre proved to be a prodigious worker. He spent his hours with the documents. Irving and Astor talked and talked. When the records turned up the name of somebody that could throw additional light on the subject, the executive Astor saw that he was made to yield the information. At Astor's board, as Irving elegantly put it, with his legs under Astor's table, as Bancroft expressed it, the author of *Astoria* interviewed "various persons of adventurous turn, some of whom had been engaged in his own great undertaking." Among these was Captain Bonneville who was the means of getting another book as a by-product of the *Astoria* assignment.

Irving has left a calendar of the progress of the work:

April 17, 1835—Pierre Munro is busily engaged gathering material together. . . . I have not taken hold of the subject yet.

May 16—I am now engaged in the work on the subject of Mr. Astor's great enterprise: and I am much mistaken if I do not make it a very rich, curious, and unusual work.

June 10—I have commenced and rough-cast several of the chapters, and have no doubt I shall make a rich and taking work of it.

September 26,—For upwards of a month past I have been quartered at Hellgate with Mr. Astor, and I have not had so quiet and delightful a rest since I have been in America. . . . I have written more since I have been here than I have ever done in the same space of time. Within the last month I have written more than a volume, and have got within a half dozen chapters of the end of my work. . . . Of course there will be much to be done afterward in extending some facts, touching up others, enriching and embellishing.

February 16, 1836—I am giving my last handling to the Astor work. It is this handling which, like the touching and toning of a picture, gives the richest effects.

In the beginning he may have looked upon the book as a perfunctory task, but not after he got into it, as his remarks indicate.

Irving has come in for a good deal of harsh attention on two other scores — he borrowed right and left, sometimes verbatim, without giving credit; and he passed off fancy for fact.

He tossed off his authorities in half a sentence, to make one gasp who is accustomed to the long bibliographies and profuse notes of modern scholarship. In his introduction he admits he was indebted to Franchere, who was chief clerk at Astoria and author of his *Narrative* in French, but Bancroft pitches into Irving for the way he avoided mention of Franchere in the body of his work, alluding to him as “one of the clerks,” “some men were sent.”

From Bradbury he took, and took almost literally, the story of John Colter's escape from the Indians. From Lewis and Clark, occasionally in the Lewis and Clark language, he secured his descriptions of the Clatsops, Chinooks, and Cathlamets.

Two notable strictures on his playing fast and loose with fact are from Franchere and Bancroft. On this basis, rather than because of the cavalier way the borrowings from him were unacknowledged, Franchere got out an English edition of his *Narrative*, in the preface of which he said:

The re-perusal of *Astoria* by Washington Irving inspired me with an additional motive for giving my book in an English dress. Without disparagement to Mr. Irving's literary fame, I may venture to say that I found in his work inaccuracies, misstatements (unintentional of course), and a want of chronological order, which struck forcibly one so familiar with the events themselves.

Bancroft handles him less gently. In a number of passages in his *History of the Northwest Coast* he speaks with satire and indignation of Irving and Irvings's statements in his famous book on the Astor enterprise:

In his *Astoria*, Mr. Irving lays himself open to the severest criticism . . . writing with Mr. Astor at his elbow we find flung in from one end of the book to the other, slurs and innuendos upon the character of the Scotch partners, the Northwest Company, and everybody except Mr. Irving and Mr. Astor. . . . What shall we say of a writer who so mixed personal feelings with his facts and fictions?

Irving seems to accept the wildest freaks of fancy and to retail them as sober reality . . . their unwritten tales he garnishes to the full power of his imagination. . . . Many of the stories told in *Astoria* and *Bonneville's Adventures* I have seen in narration printed before Irving's works were written.

In this fatal disaster of the *Tonquin* . . . Irving . . . gives wings to his brilliant imagination. . . . First he invents names for the chief Indian characters; the interpreter he calls Lamazee, which is the first Chehalis word I have ever encountered with a "z" in it. . . . It is astonishing, this intimate knowledge of the individual members of a band of savages of whose very tribal name and habitat he is entirely ignorant! . . . One can but admire the facility with which this charming author sends seven men into the rigging, instead of five, in order that he may have two more to graphically kill . . . as there are many who have all their lives regarded Irving's *Astoria* as true history, it is but my duty to inform them that many of its most brilliant passages are pure fiction.

Over against these indictments are some findings by J. Neilson Barry of Portland, Oregon, who has done much in the Pacific Northwest in the way of searching out historic spots. He was able to identify places from Irving's descriptions of them in *Astoria*.

Bancroft, coming at a later period when documentation had become a more formal practice in history writing, failed to grant a sufficient license to Irving's own terms of being a free and easy forager among other works—using Pierre's transcripts and Pierre with a quick eye being able to get everything interesting from an authority except the authority's name. And Bancroft, in his peevishness over these secondary sources, failed to give credit to Irving's immense service in extracting the important and dramatic substance from the Astor archives, to which he had completely full access, to which no other writer has had any access at all, and which are now lost, plus all the fur-trade participants from whom he drew anecdotes and descriptions, what he called "verbal narratives," which otherwise would not ordinarily have got beyond the verbal.

Astoria was published in October, 1836, by Carey, Lea and Blanchard, in Philadelphia. Its full title was *Astoria, or Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains*. It was printed in two volumes. The first edition was bound in three, perhaps four, colors of cloth — red figured, light blue, and brown. The Hun-

tington Library, California, has one in green cloth, which may, however, have time-toned from the blue. Five thousand copies were issued. Six years later, by 1842, it was out of print.

Simultaneously, Richard Bentley of London published it in three volumes. Three of the German editions were printed in 1837; the fourth in 1910. The Swedish and Dutch editions were also put out in 1837. The two Paris editions came later, in 1839 and 1843.

When George P. Putnam issued a collection of Irving's works in fifteen volumes from July, 1848, to November, 1849, the New York *Tribune* called them "The most tasteful and elegant books which have ever issued from the American press." In the collection *Astoria* was one volume, 519 pages, in format actually just so-so.

In 1897 G. P. Putnam's Sons put it out in two illustrated volumes, called the Tacoma Edition. The illustrations were from Zogbaum, Catlin, Church, Eaton, Davis, Held, and Clement, plus photographs and sketches.

Irving gave his nephew Pierre an extra thousand dollars, over and above Astor's three thousand, because he had done so fine a job of research — a fine job indeed, for he was the one who extracted from other books all that material which got tucked neatly away in *Astoria* without credit and sometimes without being done over in Irving's elegant phrases. No wonder that the London *Spectator* could say on October 22, 1836: "The author, with peculiar felicity, has retained the raciness of his authorities."

Well-a-day that the raciness should have been thus come by, but, after all, we have it now only because of Irving and his light-fingered nephew Pierre. The books whence were extracted the raciness are all dead, dead; and ask any scholar if he knows where the Astor records are today. How very much that otherwise would have been lost has been preserved for a hundred and fourteen years in *Astoria*—and in this bright new edition, printed in Astoria land itself, there is secured for another long while the "spirit extracted from the Astor archives" with "their dregs and dry matter" thrown off.

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