



ASTORIA (A Western Classic): True Life Tale of the Dangerous and Daring Enterprise beyond the Rocky Mountains

Washington Irving

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This carefully crafted ebook is formatted for your eReader with a functional and detailed table of contents. "Astoria" tells the story of survival and the difficulties faced by the people who undertook the tremendous Oregon Trail in 1810-1812 encountering harsh environment and hostile native Indians and still carrying on with their journeys. This is the founding story of Astoria and the people who made it possible...

Excerpt:

"Two leading objects of commercial gain have given birth to wide and daring enterprise in the early history of the Americas; the precious metals of the South, and the rich peltries of the North..."

Washington Irving (1783–1859) was an American short story writer, essayist, biographer, historian, and diplomat of the early 19th century.

ASTORIA (A Western Classic): True Life Tale of the Dangerous and Daring Enterprise beyond the Rocky Mountains Details

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From Reader Review ASTORIA (A Western Classic): True Life Tale of the Dangerous and Daring Enterprise beyond the Rocky Mountains for online ebook

Ronald says

Facinating narrative of the Astor Expedition, some 15 years after the Lewis and Clark Expedition of Discovery.

The book is considerably more detailed than the most recent "Astoria" book by Peter Stark, as one might expect, since Washington Irving's account of the enterprise is richly informed by the actual journals of the participants. Furthermore, he wrote the book at Astor's request and while he was a guest in the home of John Astor himself.

What exquisite detail of the expedition's daily tribulations is portrayed in this account, and what informative context of the terrain and the various tribes encountered by the overland contingent.

This book has several editions, of which some are in two or three separate volumes while this edition is a single volume; and the library's description doesn't distinguish among them, making it difficult to order the correct item.

Gabriel says

Perhaps this was a commercial hack job - but it was a commercial hackjob written by one of my favorites and it covers life in early 19th century Northwestern America like nothing I've come across yet. Irving and his nephew had massive access to journals and materials relating to John Jacob Astor's failed attempt to corner the NW fur trade for American in 1812. Damn glad i read this.

Misfit says

Washington Irving wrote about this? Free on Kindle, plus free download at Project G.
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1371>

Laura says

Free download available at Project Gutenberg.

Brittany Pelly says

This is a great resource for a history paper I am writing as I begin my graduate work. While it took me some time and I often had to read a few pages over again, once I focused this was interesting to see how individuals lived in what seems, such a long time ago.

John Jenkins says

The book describes the people and events related to the establishment of Fort Astoria as a fur trading center in 1811. Much of the book is devoted to chronicling trips financed by John Jacob Astor by sea and by land to and from this location near the mouth of the Columbia River. The hardships endured and the resourcefulness displayed by these pioneers are amazing. Washington Irving was asked to write this book by Mr. Astor, who provided the author with a lot of correspondence and other information to consolidate and organize. The author gives a lot of praise to Mr. Astor, who was a friend of his, but representatives of Mr. Astor who made questionable business decisions that seemed inconsistent with his vision are sharply criticized. The author is clearly biased in his treatment of Mr. Astor; but most, if not all, of the praise appears to be warranted.

The wonderful Kindle search tool enables the reader to determine that this book uses the word "savage" 204 times and the word "savages" 107 times to refer to the Sioux, Crow and other tribes of Native Americans. This would not be considered politically correct today, but it is clear that Mr. Irving is treating Native Americans fairly. They are described in numerous anecdotes; when they do something noble or unselfish, they are praised, and when they do something devious, they are criticized.

Although the book was written 177 years ago, it is very readable. I had to look up a few more words than normal because sometimes Mr. Irving uses words differently than we do today (an example is tarpaulin, which Mr. Irving uses as a synonym for sailor), but his style is very enjoyable. It is an entertaining and positive reflection of his times that he completely refrains from using four-letter words except for two occasions, "D-d" and "D-n," when he was quoting people. I like his use of "amalgamate" as a euphemism, and I like the way he skillfully uses Biblical references and metaphors.

Cynthia Moore says

Very informative, enjoyable, colorful and a pleasure to read

Rose says

I absolutely LOVED this book! Such a fascinating time in history, and gave me so much food for thought!

Sharon says

very good

E. says

I ran across this book in the visitor center bookshop at Sunnyside, Washington Irving's home on the Hudson River near Tarrytown, NY. We connect Irving with Rip Van Winkle, Diedrich Knickerbocker, and Spanish stories, so I was surprised he had written anything about the Pacific Northwest. Having visited Astoria, Oregon, and having just corresponded about it with a bibliophile friend, I picked up the book.

It turns out that Irving had had an interest in the American west for most of his life. As a young man, he spent some time in Montreal, in the company of fur merchants and the voyageurs who fanned out from Montreal to the Great Lakes and beyond. This book may have been one of the first works of non-fiction to have been commissioned by a wealthy business owner. In the 1830's, John Jacob Astor asked Irving to write a book about his short-lived trading base near the mouth of the Columbia River, which existed from 1811 to 1813, and was subsequently surrendered to the British before the War of 1812 ended. Astor gave Irving access to all the Astoria papers, and the efficient novelist hired his nephew Pierre Irving to summarize the documents and find the "good" parts for his uncle. The result is a detailed, chronological history of the sea voyage which established Astoria, and the difficult overland expedition which reached it after much difficulty. Astor, already well on his way to becoming the richest man in the world, did not venture to Astoria, but he bankrolled the whole effort, and followed it with great interest. The book is evidence of his strong identification with the failed project. The Astoria episode did contribute to geographic knowledge of the Rockies and the Northwest, and the native American tribes there at the time.

This book might well be read after Stephen Ambrose's Lewis & Clark book, *Dauntless Courage*. The maps in the book are few and poor, which is too bad because the names of rivers used by the expedition often do not correspond to modern names. We are reminded of the stamina and tremendous geographic range covered by the early fur traders; how quickly native American tribes adapted to the trading goods and business opportunities brought by the whites; and how even then a global trading pattern had evolved, with ships routinely visiting the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) and China.

Who remembers today that the name of the elegant Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City derives from John Jacob Astor's Rhineland birthplace of Waldorf?

Bob Gustafson says

This was a great story to tell, and Washington Irving was the person to tell it!

Sara says

The combination of "Astoria" and "Washington Irving" really got me excited, enough that this was the first Project Gutenberg book I opened up after I finished downloading approximately a third of their website.

It's not what you think. (It's also extremely long and, Washington Irving or not, could stand some bellicose hacking-up by Raymond Carver's editor.)

It's not the history of Astoria at all, even though that's the subtitle. I'd guesstimate that maybe only two or three chapters of this deal with Astoria at all. It's the story of several groups of adventurers trying to survive their journey across the Rocky Mountains, to and from Astoria.

Granted, there are some really interesting tidbits. And it's incredible to think that western North America could go from what it was in this book to what it is today, in two centuries.

But unless you're rabid about reading everything piece of nineteenth-century survival fiction you can get your hands on... this probably isn't the best one. He goes over three mountainous journeys in great depth, and... almost exactly the same things happen on each journey. Most of characters are almost impossible to tell apart (zero character development for 90% of the folks involved), and so you're basically rereading the same story three times.

It's bizarre to see how "PC" has changed over the centuries, though. The best character (in my opinion, and I think in the opinion of Irving and half the men on the journeys), who was the wife of the interpreter for the group, was never even given a name. She carries her own weight (plus that of two children), performs many feats of daring, and gets the respect of the whole group of hardened trappers, yet she's always referred to as "Pierre Dorion's squaw and her mongrel children." (Or sometimes, to shorten it a bit, just "the half-breed's squaw".

Cuz, y'know... uh... wimmin, yo.

Edward says

"Why are you reading an obscure work by Washington Irving?" a friend asked me. I read it as a followup to Peter Stark's 2016 JOHN JACOB ASTOR AND THOMAS JEFFERSON'S LOST PACIFIC EMPIRE: A STORY OF WEALTH, AMBITION, AND SURVIVAL which I found very interesting.

Part of that interest is that it describes events that took place in the Pacific Northwest where I now live. But one of Stark's sources on which he relied heavily was this early work by Irving, commissioned by John Jacob Astor as a official history of his short-lived attempt to establish a fur-trading post at the mouth of the Columbia River. I was curious to see if this original version revealed anything that Stark's retelling left out.

There are a lot more details than in Stark's book which tends to emphasize high points of Irving's longer accounts of the expeditions to the Columbia, several by sea, and several harrowing overland ordeals from the mid west across the Rockies.

Stark's account of course has the advantage of a nearly 200 year perspective on the doomed "empire". Irving wrote his account for Astor and is obviously partial to Astor in places. Interestingly, Astor tried to get the backing of the American government for his venture, but aside from Jefferson's early enthusiasm, later administrations were not much interested. And, too, they got caught up in the 1812 war with Britain and ignored Astor's pleas for government protection of his ships.

Irving praises Astor for his independent entrepreneurial spirit, "What government failed to effect with all of its patronage and all its agents, was at length brought about by the enterprise and perseverance of a single merchant . . . a man whose name and character are worthy of being enrolled in the history of commerce, as illustrating its noblest aims and soundest maxims. If there were a Business Hall of Fame, Astor would be in

it, at least in Irving's view.

There is an elegiac tone in some of Irving where he laments "things that are fast fading away. The march of mechanical invention is driving everything poetical before it." Steamboats dispelled the wildness and romance of lakes and rivers, the French Canadian "voyageurs," amazingly versatile canoeists, have vanished, and so in the end, did the demand for beaver pelts. Like the buffalo, beavers existed by the millions, and the profits in selling their furry pelts were enormous. But trapping took a deep toll, and in several decades after Irving's 1836 history, beaver fur had been largely replaced by other materials and its value plummeted.

Irving's conclusion matches Stark's - Astoria's enterprise was undone by a lot of unlucky circumstances (ships not appearing on time, Indian difficulties, bad weather, the war with Britain, competition from Canadian trappers, incompetence on the part of managers, , a lack of govt. support). Had Astor's western "empire" succeeded, though, much of western Canada might today be part of the United States.

Matt says

Over the Rocky mountains, up and down the Missouri and Columbia rivers, Indian trade and treachery, shipwrecks and starvation, the cold, cold winters, the desolate plains, and the dreaded grizzly bear--this story follows a group of American pioneers shrugging off hardships of every kind to strike it rich off some beaver skins.

Needless to say, this is not a fast-paced book. It's written as a story rather than a series of journal entries, but there are no maps or pictures and so the reader will get easily lost and turned around in the developments of the different groups winding their way through the neverending countryside. The action is rare enough that at 426 pages I wouldn't recommend it to any but the most hopelessly curious. It certainly would've grabbed the curiosity of its original readers, in 1839, who must have been wide-eyed at the tales of grizzly bears and Indians.

If nothing else, the fluid nature of the relationships between the Americans and the Indians was covered in more eyewitness detail and impartiality than you would get from a history book, and for that I would say it was well worth reading.
