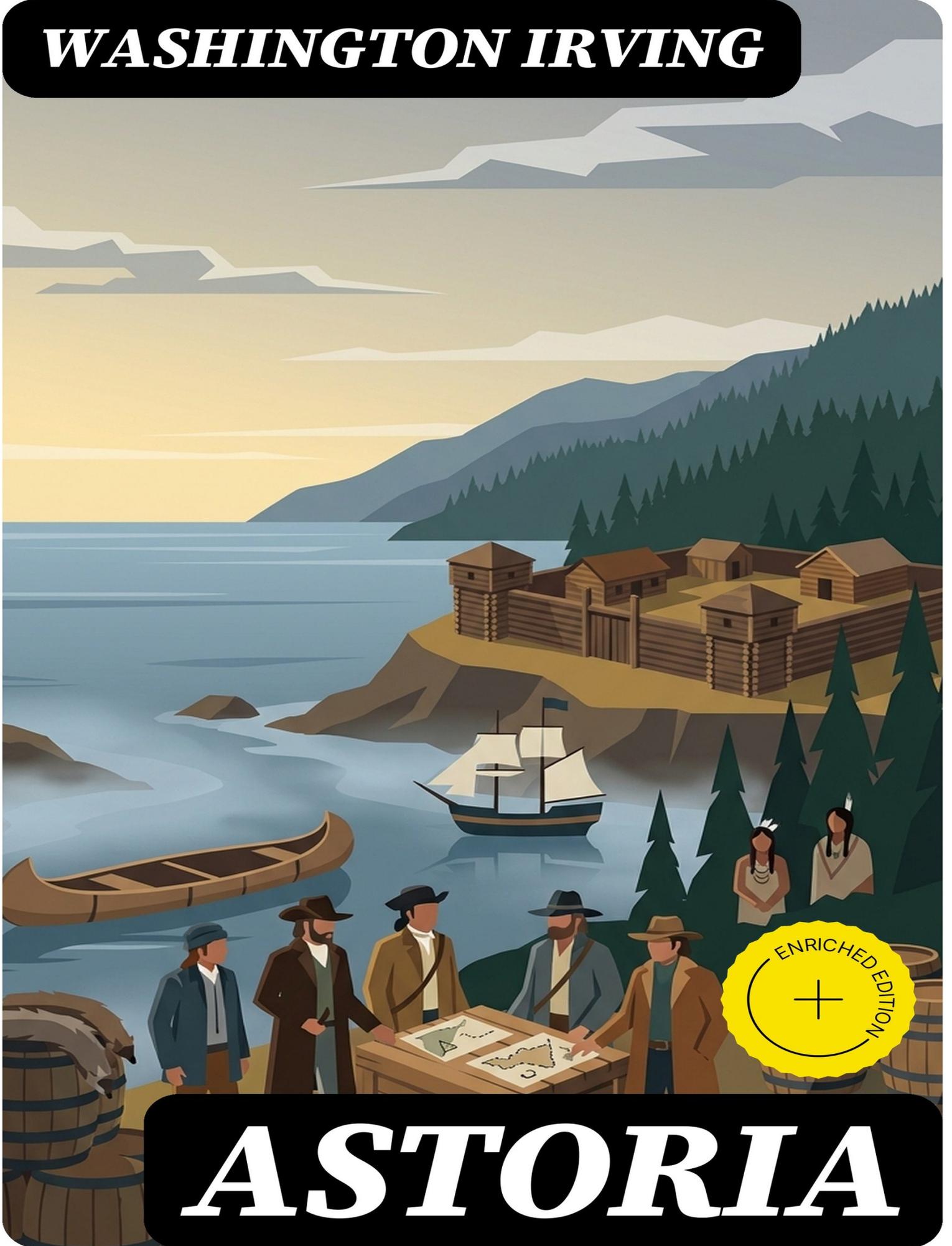


WASHINGTON IRVING



ASTORIA

Washington Irving

Astoria

Enriched edition. A Western

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Kenneth Gale

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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[Historical Context](#)

[Author Biography](#)

[Astoria](#)

[Analysis](#)

[Reflection](#)

[Memorable Quotes](#)

[Notes](#)

Introduction

[Table of Contents](#)

Ambition drives men across oceans and mountains while uncertainty shadows every mile. In *Astoria*, Washington Irving traces the hazards that attend large designs, showing how commerce, geography, and human resolve intersect at the farthest edges of a young nation's reach. The book's energy comes from the tension between meticulous planning and the unpredictability of the world—storms, distances, rivals, and the sheer scale of the continent. Without announcing heroes or villains, Irving places enterprise itself at the center, letting risk, calculation, and contingency contend on equal terms. The result is a narrative where every decision bears weight and every mile demands proof of purpose.

Astoria is the work of Washington Irving, one of the earliest American authors to gain international recognition, published in 1836 after his return to the United States. Commissioned by the merchant John Jacob Astor, Irving drew on company records, journals, and testimony from participants to assemble a comprehensive account. He did not travel with the expeditions, but instead practiced a then-novel form of literary history that wove archival materials into a unified narrative. The composition belongs to the mid-1830s, yet its subject lies a generation earlier, in the formative years when American commercial ambition sought a line to the Pacific.

The book's premise is direct and compelling: Astor aimed to establish a Pacific Coast trading post and a supply network that linked the interior of North America to global markets. To accomplish this, a sea voyage would approach from the south Pacific, while an overland expedition

attempted a transcontinental crossing through the interior in the early 1810s. The plan depended on coordination across vast distances, on relationships with existing fur-trade networks, and on the sheer endurance of those involved. Irving's narrative begins with this vision and follows its early stages without preempting outcomes or revealing later turns.

Astoria holds classic status because it expanded the possibilities of American prose at a formative moment. Known for short fiction and sketches, Irving here demonstrated that literary art could shape documentary history without sacrificing factual rigor. The book helped popularize the American West as a subject worthy of sustained literary treatment, not mere anecdote. Its enduring themes—ambition, risk, and the demands of environment—speak across centuries, while its clear structure and measured tone give readers a stable vantage from which to consider volatile events. As a foundational text of exploration literature, it has remained in print and in conversation.

Irving's craft is evident in the balance between panoramic survey and close focus. He sets scenes with an eye for terrain, weather, and distance, yet he also attends to the logistics of travel, the calculations of supply, and the pressures of leadership. His method transforms piles of memoranda and journals into a continuous story with discernible arcs, without abandoning the complexity of sources. The prose is steady rather than sensational, anchoring dramatic episodes in context. Readers encounter not only strenuous journeys but also the day-by-day mechanics that make or break a long-range enterprise.

Astoria is also a study in systems: rivers, mountain corridors, shipping routes, seasons, and lines of communication. Delays ripple outward, misjudgments multiply, and small margins become decisive. By tracking these contingencies, Irving reveals how large ventures rest

on fragile chains of cause and effect. He presents geography as an actor, not a backdrop—a set of real constraints that require prudence and adaptability. The book thus illuminates the perennial problem of scale: how to extend a commercial design across distances that strain planning, endurance, and the ability to respond when events outrun intentions.

The narrative attends to existing trade networks and the necessity of cooperation on the ground. Irving describes encounters within a multilayered world of trappers, traders, and Indigenous communities whose knowledge of terrain and resources was essential to movement and exchange. Without reducing complexities to a single perspective, he notes the interdependence that such ventures demanded. The book does not rely on romanticization; it recognizes that communication, negotiation, and local expertise were vital. By situating enterprise within this web, *Astoria* underscores the importance—and difficulty—of navigating relationships as carefully as rivers and mountain passes.

Astoria situates North American ambitions within global currents. Maritime routes had to reckon with long passages, shifting weather, and the timing of ports, while overland parties contended with continental distances. The venture took shape amid international competition in the fur trade, with multiple companies pursuing overlapping interests along the interior and on the coast. Irving's narrative makes clear that distant decisions in cities and counting houses carried consequences thousands of miles away. The book's scope, from boardroom strategy to frontier camp, gives readers a coherent view of how global commerce and local circumstance meet.

As a literary achievement, *Astoria* helped solidify an American tradition of narrative history that reads with the momentum of travel writing while maintaining documentary grounding. Later writers exploring the West found a precedent in Irving's synthesis of research and storytelling—

a model in which archival fidelity and narrative clarity reinforce each other. The book showed that episodes of exploration and trade could sustain a full-scale historical narrative aimed at a general audience. In doing so, it opened space for subsequent works that treat movement across the continent as both factual record and national imagination.

The themes that animate Astoria have not dimmed. Readers witness leadership tested by distance, ventures exposed to the friction of reality, and plans remade by weather, supply, and chance. The book asks how much foresight can achieve, and where adaptability must take over. It also explores the moral texture of enterprise: the responsibilities that accompany profit, the obligations inherent in contact, and the costs of misjudgment. Irving does not sermonize; he arranges the materials so that patterns become visible. This restraint allows the themes to surface naturally and to invite reflection rather than decree.

Approaching Astoria today, readers can expect a carefully paced account that moves between sea and land, strategy and day-to-day effort. The story introduces planners in offices and travelers on trails, gives a sense of the landscapes crossed, and keeps the machinery of trade in view. Irving's measured narration avoids sensational detail without dulling the stakes. Even without foreknowledge of outcomes, the setup provides all the tension necessary: coordination across two hemispheres, tight schedules, thin margins, and unknown terrains. The book offers both a primer on logistical thinking and a meditation on endurance under constraint.

Astoria endures because it illuminates a perennial human endeavor: to extend networks of exchange across limits of knowledge, distance, and time. Its questions resonate in an age of global supply chains and rapid communication, where coordination still falters and judgment remains essential. Irving's narrative reminds us that bold undertakings depend

on people, places, and the patient work of adaptation. As a classic of American letters, it offers both an absorbing story and a framework for thinking about ambition and its risks. In its clarity and scope, the book retains contemporary relevance and lasting appeal.

Synopsis

[Table of Contents](#)

Astoria, or Anecdotes of an Enterprise beyond the Rocky Mountains (1836) by Washington Irving is a narrative history of John Jacob Astor's early nineteenth-century attempt to found a transcontinental fur-trading network reaching the Pacific. Encouraged by Astor and based on company papers and firsthand journals, Irving's account combines documentary detail with a polished travel narrative. Rather than a fictional romance, it reconstructs the planning and execution of the Pacific Fur Company's venture, tracing simultaneous movements by sea and overland. The book situates the enterprise within the broader history of exploration and commerce in the North American Northwest, framing ambition against distance, risk, and uncertain sovereignty.

Irving begins with Astor's commercial vision. Seeking to link the rich fur grounds of the interior to markets in Canton through a Pacific port, Astor organized the Pacific Fur Company in 1810. His strategy relied on complementary routes: a ship would carry men and supplies to the mouth of the Columbia River to establish a fortified depot, while an overland party would cross from the Mississippi Valley, anchoring the venture in the continental interior. The plan aimed to integrate Native trade, American trappers, and international shipping into a single chain of exchange, reducing reliance on eastern intermediaries and anticipating a westward shift in American commerce.

The maritime narrative follows the company's vessel as it departs the Atlantic seaboard, rounds the tempestuous capes, and threads a global circuit of provisioning and recruitment. Stopovers in the Pacific, including the Sandwich

Islands, supply hands and resources and reveal the multinational character of the labor force. On reaching the Columbia estuary, Irving describes the formidable bar, coastal weather, and the negotiations required to secure local goodwill. Early construction of a trading post proceeds alongside surveying, resource gathering, and the delicate calibration of prices and presents. Maritime leaders weigh coastal prospects for peltry against navigational hazards, always balancing speed, safety, and the company's commercial timetable.

Running in counterpoint, the overland chapters follow the expedition organized from St. Louis under Wilson Price Hunt. Moving up the Missouri and westward beyond established trails, the party confronts open-ended geography: broken plains, unfamiliar river systems, and mountain corridors of uncertain altitude. Irving emphasizes logistical improvisation—pack animals versus canoes, caches versus constant transport—as weather and scarcity drive decisions. Exchanges with plains and plateau nations provide food and direction but also oblige careful diplomacy. The crossing into the Snake River country brings rapids, basalt gorges, and forced dispersals into smaller groups, each calculating rations and routes. The narrative stresses endurance, leadership under strain, and the hazards of fragmentary information.

Throughout, Irving presents sustained encounters with Indigenous nations of the interior and the lower Columbia. He recounts trading protocols, gift giving, and the role of interpreters in preventing misapprehension. The company relies on local knowledge for ferries, portages, and seasonal timing, yet faces periodic breakdowns in trust when past grievances or intertribal tensions surface. Observations of fishing sites, plank houses, and seasonal movements accompany outlines of political authority and kin networks. Irving's perspective is shaped by the era, alternating between admiration for skill and reductive generalization,

but the narrative recognizes that the project hinges on negotiated relationships as much as on maps, muskets, and ledgers.

Competition frames the venture at every stage. Irving situates Astor's design amid prior claims and explorations by Spanish navigators, British traders, Russians in the north, and the transcontinental expedition of Lewis and Clark. The British North West Company deploys its own network of posts and voyageurs across the interior, sending surveyors and traders toward the Columbia watershed. A gathering international crisis culminates in the War of 1812, casting doubt on the security of a remote American foothold reachable principally by sea. Irving charts how news, rumors, and delayed correspondence complicate strategy, as the enterprise must adapt to rivals who can move swiftly along established riverine corridors.

At the new post on the lower Columbia, the account turns to practical routines: felling timber, raising palisades, arranging magazines, and scouting upriver avenues. Parties push into tributary systems to cultivate trapping grounds and to engage resident bands, while maritime schedules dictate when supplies and pelts can cycle through the Pacific to Asian markets. The workforce is heterogeneous—Americans, French Canadians, Iroquois, and Hawaiians—requiring flexible leadership, clear incentives, and measured discipline. Irving follows the annual round of hunting, barter, and transport, noting how weather, disease, and interpersonal disputes threaten margins. Bookkeeping, inventory, and barter rates become as consequential as daring or discoveries.

Formally, Irving alternates the sea and land threads, interleaving digressions on earlier voyages, geography, and natural history. Anecdotes of storms, portages, and frontier etiquette punctuate longer explanations of how furs are gathered, graded, and routed through world markets. The author draws on journals and testimony while shaping them

into a continuous story with clear protagonists and recurrent motifs: the perilous river, the treacherous bar, the hidden pass, the rumor-ridden rendezvous. His tone is measured, occasionally embellished, yet anchored by dates, distances, and named locations. This method foregrounds contingency, showing plans repeatedly revised by terrain, season, and the delayed arrival of information.

As the narrative advances into years of mounting uncertainty, Irving underscores the vulnerability of private enterprise at the rim of empire, where geography, diplomacy, and war impinge on profit. Without disclosing the eventual disposition of the establishment or the final balance sheet, he closes by assessing what the attempt revealed about continental routes, the economics of peltry, and the limits of control from afar. Astoria endures less as a tale of triumph or failure than as a foundational case study in early American Pacific ambitions, mapping the interplay of commerce and exploration and leaving a lasting imprint on how the Northwest's opening has been remembered.

Historical Context

[Table of Contents](#)

Washington Irving's *Astoria* is set against the early nineteenth-century contest for the Pacific Northwest, when commerce, imperial claims, and private capital converged. The dominant institutions were chartered fur monopolies like Britain's Hudson's Bay Company, the Montreal-based North West Company, and the American Fur Company founded by John Jacob Astor. Maritime trade was governed abroad by the Qing dynasty's Canton System, while in North America the young United States relied on limited federal regulation and private enterprise. Geography—especially the Columbia River basin and the overland corridors across the Rocky Mountains—framed the narrative. Irving recounts events from roughly 1810 to 1813, but he writes from the vantage of the 1830s, with hindsight about policy and power.

The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 and the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804–1806 supplied maps, ethnographic notes, and geographic intelligence that made later ventures conceivable. American sovereignty claims to the Columbia region also drew on the 1792 entry of Captain Robert Gray into the river that bears his ship's name, alongside British explorations by George Vancouver and earlier Spanish presence. *Astoria* echoes these precedents by emphasizing reconnaissance, river routes, and the practical knowledge needed to cross the continent. The book positions Astor's project as a commercial sequel to exploration, transforming geographic discovery into trade routes and logistical plans adapted to known portages and passes.

A global fur economy underwrote the enterprise. European demand for beaver felt hats peaked in the late

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, while sea otter pelts fetched high prices in Canton. Since the 1780s, American and British ships had plied the Northwest Coast, bartering manufactured goods for pelts and then exchanging furs in China for tea, silks, and porcelain. Under the Canton System, foreign trade was restricted to licensed Chinese intermediaries at Guangzhou, shaping transaction costs and schedules. Astoria reflects this Atlantic-Pacific-Asian triangle, showing how a venture on the Columbia depended on fashion in Europe, prices in China, and sailing seasons determined by winds and currents.

John Jacob Astor's plan, formalized with the Pacific Fur Company in 1810, aimed to fuse maritime and overland supply chains. A fort at the Columbia's mouth—established in 1811 and named Astoria—would anchor coastal trade and outfit interior posts. Ships would round Cape Horn to deliver goods and carry pelts on to Canton, while an overland party would supply the settlement and open a continental corridor. Irving presents Astor as a strategist of private empire, seeking even to coordinate with Russian outposts in Alaska by exchanging provisions for furs. The book treats the plan as sophisticated but structurally exposed to weather, distance, and international politics beyond a single company's control.

Indigenous nations—Chinookan communities near the Columbia estuary, Clatsop and Cathlamet on the lower river, and interior groups such as the Nez Perce and Shoshone—were central to trade and travel. Long-standing Native exchange networks moved shells, foods, and manufactured items well before Euro-American arrival. Tolls, gifts, and protocols governed passage along rivers and portages. Astoria depicts negotiations, guides, and trade diplomacy, though through an early-nineteenth-century lens that reflects contemporary biases. By showing how information, food, and safe conduct depended on Native partnerships, the narrative indirectly documents Indigenous sovereignty

and economic power, even as it reproduces stereotypes that later readers must read critically and historically.

Overland logistics figure prominently. Led by Wilson Price Hunt, the American party left the Missouri frontier in 1811, traversing plains, canyons, and the Rockies with pack animals rather than canoes. Harsh winters, scarce provisions, and uncertain routes defined their ordeal. On the return side of the story, Robert Stuart's 1812-1813 eastbound trek identified South Pass, a broad, relatively gentle crossing of the Continental Divide that later facilitated wagon travel along the Oregon Trail. Irving highlights these practical discoveries less as heroic conquest than as the hard-won outcome of improvisation, local guidance, and incremental knowledge—evidence of how continental transit moved from speculation to workable, if perilous, pathways.

The maritime leg was no less fraught. Rounding Cape Horn subjected vessels to storms and delays; making the Columbia's bar demanded precise timing and piloting. Coastal trade entailed delicate relations with coastal nations whose trading norms and expectations had been shaped by decades of encounters with Europeans and Americans. The loss of the ship *Tonquin* in 1811 off the Vancouver Island region—after a trading dispute that turned violent—underscored the hazards of cultural misunderstanding and the precarity of sea-based supply. Irving situates such episodes as structural risks of the fur-and-China trade, where a single shipwreck or conflict could unravel carefully laid commercial plans.

The War of 1812 transformed risk into crisis. British naval power in the Pacific threatened American shipping, while communications with New York stretched over many months. With resupply uncertain and capture likely, the Pacific Fur Company's assets at Astoria were sold to the North West Company in late 1813; soon after, the British warship *HMS Racoon* arrived and the post was renamed Fort

George. The Treaty of Ghent (1814) ended the war, and a symbolic restoration of American claims at the site occurred in 1818. Irving uses these events to illustrate how private ventures were intrinsically vulnerable to state conflict, regardless of entrepreneurial foresight.

Competition with Canadian firms shaped daily operations. The North West Company had refined an inland brigade system—light canoes, seasonal rendezvous, and mobile posts—that brought furs from the interior to the Pacific and Hudson Bay. Its rivalry with the Hudson's Bay Company culminated in an 1821 merger, after which the enlarged HBC dominated the region. Although this merger postdates Astor's original enterprise, Irving's readers would have known that British-Canadian corporate power prevailed for decades in the Columbia basin. Astoria thus preserves a brief window when an American company tried to insert itself into a field already mastered by experienced, capitalized, and politically connected competitors.

American policy toward the fur trade provided little protective infrastructure. A federal "factory" system, operating government trading posts from 1806 to 1822, aimed to regulate exchange and curb private abuses but proved uncompetitive and was abolished. Licensing and treaty regimes governed legal trade with Native nations, yet enforcement was uneven. By the 1830s, when Irving wrote, Jacksonian political ideals favored limited federal involvement and celebrated self-made enterprise. Astoria reads, in part, as a case study of what private capital could and could not accomplish without naval protection, subsidies, or territorial control—especially when confronting British chartered companies whose privileges conferred legal certainty and logistical depth.

Labor and everyday practice were cosmopolitan. French Canadian voyageurs, Scottish and Anglo-Canadian clerks, Iroquois and other Indigenous trappers, and Hawaiian workers recruited via the Sandwich Islands all staffed posts

and brigades. Trade goods—blankets, kettles, beads, guns, and tobacco—moved alongside pelts. Overland crews relied on pack horses and occasional bullboats; on rivers, they used canoes and bateaux built to local conditions. Flintlock muskets, powder, and shot were standard; food supplies mixed hunted game with purchased roots and fish. Irving's narrative registers this diversity, illustrating how multilingual crews and intercultural knowledge were not incidental but foundational to the making of commerce across the continent.

Technology and information constraints shaped every decision. Navigation depended on sextants, chronometers, and dead reckoning; mapping synthesized British and American surveys, including those disseminated by the Arrowsmith firm. Messages moved at the speed of wind and hoof, and a missed seasonal window could postpone relief by a year. The Columbia's shifting bar and the Snake and Columbia rivers' rapids made transport a technical craft, not merely a matter of will. Astoria repeatedly dwells on reconnaissance: scouting for passes, caching supplies, and establishing depots. These logistical routines—mundane yet decisive—anchor the book's larger themes of ambition bounded by topography and time.

Environmental and epidemiological forces underlie the commerce. Beaver populations, shaped by watershed ecology, could be quickly depleted by intensive trapping, forcing longer expeditions for diminishing returns. Sea otter numbers along the coast had already dropped by the early 1800s due to earlier maritime hunts. Epidemics of smallpox and other diseases, introduced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, devastated many Northwest communities, altering trade networks and political balances. Irving's text, though reflecting contemporary understandings, acknowledges depopulation and its consequences for alliance-making and provisioning. The fur trade's apparent abundance was therefore unstable, subject

to ecological limits and demographic shocks beyond any firm's control.

International law and diplomacy were in flux. The Nootka Conventions of the 1790s had opened the Northwest Coast to multiple flags, while the Convention of 1818 instituted joint Anglo-American occupation of the Oregon Country. The Adams-Onís Treaty (1819) set the U.S.-Spanish boundary at the 42nd parallel, shaping claims south of the Columbia. Treaties with Russia in 1824-1825 delimited its southern frontier in Alaska. Irving writes before the Oregon boundary was settled in 1846, situating Astor's venture within overlapping, unsettled jurisdictions. The book thus captures a moment when corporate initiative probed the edges of sovereignty, and national claims were asserted not only by diplomats but by posts, ships, and trade routes.

Financial structures and external shocks determined outcomes. The fur trade ran on credit—advances of goods to trappers, deferred returns from distant markets, and insurance against maritime loss. American commerce had already been buffeted by the Embargo of 1807 and related restrictions, which revealed the exposure of transoceanic trade to policy. War risk premiums, fluctuating prices in Europe and China, and the cost of maintaining inventory thousands of miles from market could erase paper profits. Astoria underscores this arithmetic: an elegant business plan could be undone by a delayed ship, a collapsed price for pelts, or a border seizure, reminding readers how thin the margins of early global trade could be.

Irving's authorship itself belongs to the period's print culture. After years abroad, he returned to the United States in 1832, traveled on the frontier, and published *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835). *Astoria* followed in 1836, drawing on company records supplied by Astor and on published and unpublished accounts by participants, including figures whose narratives later appeared in print, such as Gabriel Franchère and Ross Cox. Soon after, Irving issued *The*

Adventures of Captain Bonneville (1837), further feeding public appetite for Western reportage. His narrative method—blending documentary sources with polished prose—helped naturalize the West as a subject of national history and popular reading.

Culturally, Astoria met a readership primed for tales of enterprise and exploration. Although the specific term “Manifest Destiny” would circulate a decade later, a belief in continental expansion already animated politics and popular discourse. Missionaries, emigrants, and policymakers looked to the Columbia country with growing interest in the 1830s and 1840s. Irving’s book offered a usable past: a dramatic prelude that both celebrated American initiative and warned of overreach. By highlighting reliance on Native diplomacy, exposure to European navies, and the limits of private capital, Astoria functioned as more than adventure—it was a meditation on how a nation might, or might not, extend itself by commerce rather than conquest.

Author Biography

[Table of Contents](#)

Washington Irving (1783–1859) was an American author, essayist, biographer, and diplomat, active from the early republic through the antebellum era. He is widely regarded as the first American writer to win broad international readership and among the earliest to sustain a career primarily through literature. Best known for short fiction and urbane sketches, he helped define the American short story and travel essay, and he popularized elements of regional folklore, especially from New York’s Hudson Valley. His prose style—graceful, gently humorous, and nostalgic—bridged British and American traditions, making him a central figure in establishing American literature’s credibility abroad.

Raised in New York City, Irving read law and was admitted to the bar, though he never practiced extensively, preferring letters and journalism. As a young writer he contributed satirical pieces under the signature Jonathan Oldstyle to a local newspaper, honing a conversational tone allied to eighteenth-century periodical essays. With collaborators he issued *Salmagundi* (1807–1808), a lively miscellany that lampooned city fashions and politics. His early style drew on Addison and Steele, Oliver Goldsmith, and Laurence Sterne, while the city’s Dutch inheritance furnished themes and comic personae. These formative influences shaped his enduring interest in pseudonymous narrators, mock scholarship, and urbane social observation.

In 1809 Irving published *A History of New York* by Diedrich Knickerbocker, a burlesque “history” narrated by a cantankerous antiquarian. The elaborate framing device, including a playful publicity hoax, helped launch the “Knickerbocker” moniker as shorthand for old New York. The

book mixed fanciful episodes with pointed satire of pedantry, civic pretensions, and colonial nostalgia. Its success established Irving as a major humorist and demonstrated his gift for creating narrative voices that blur fact and invention without falsifying historical record. The work's affectionate caricatures of Dutch-American life became a touchstone for New York identity and a template for later regional humor.

After traveling to Europe in the 1810s, Irving resided chiefly in Britain, where financial pressures prompted renewed literary effort. *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819–1820) brought him immediate acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic. Its miscellany of essays, travel pieces, and tales introduced Rip Van Winkle and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, stories that fused Old World motifs with Hudson Valley settings. Friendships with British and Scottish writers, notably Sir Walter Scott, encouraged his interest in folklore and picturesque traditions. Subsequent collections—*Bracebridge Hall* (1822) and *Tales of a Traveller* (1824)—consolidated his reputation for polished style, gentle irony, and atmospheric storytelling.

Irving spent significant time in Spain, where he worked in and around U.S. diplomatic circles and gained access to archives and historical materials. This period produced major prose histories: *A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada* (1829), *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828), and the essayistic travel book *The Alhambra* (1832). These volumes blend narrative history with literary description, reflecting both scholarly curiosity and a flair for scene. They broadened his range beyond comic sketches to sustained historical biography and travel writing, and they introduced English-language readers to Spanish subjects during a moment of strong transatlantic interest in medieval and Renaissance Iberia.

Returning to the United States in the early 1830s, Irving turned to American subjects and landscapes. *A Tour on the*

Prairies (1835) recounts his journey on the western plains, while Astoria (1836) narrates the Pacific Northwest fur enterprise associated with John Jacob Astor, and The Adventures of Captain Bonneville (1837) draws on the explorer's papers to depict Rocky Mountain travel. Settling at Sunnyside on the Hudson River, he cultivated a public role as a senior man of letters. His adoption of western materials enlarged the geographical scope of American prose and encouraged readers to imagine the continent's diverse regions as worthy literary terrain.

In the 1840s Irving returned to Spain as United States minister, serving there for several years before resuming literary work at home. Late projects included Mahomet and His Successors (1849–1850), a narrative account of the prophet Muhammad and early caliphs, and the multivolume Life of George Washington (1855–1859), completed shortly before his death. Across satire, tale, travel writing, and biography, his accessible style and framing personae shaped the early American canon and the international reception of U.S. literature. His evocations of Christmas customs, Hudson Valley folklore, and national history continue to influence popular culture, while his stories remain staples of American literary study.

Astoria

Main Table of Contents

Author's Introduction

Chapter I.

Chapter II.

Chapter III.

Chapter IV.

Chapter V.

Chapter VI.

Chapter VII.

Chapter VIII.

Chapter IX.

Chapter X.

Chapter XI.

Chapter XII.

Chapter XIII.

Chapter XIV.

Chapter XV.

Chapter XVI.

Chapter XVII.

Chapter XVIII.

Chapter XIX.

Chapter XX.

Chapter XXI.

Chapter XXII.

Chapter XXIII.

Chapter XXIV.

Chapter XXV.

Chapter XXVI.

Chapter XXVII.

Chapter XXVIII.

Chapter XXIX.

Chapter XXX.

Chapter XXXI.

Chapter XXXII.

Chapter XXXIII.

Chapter XXXIV.

Chapter XXXV.
Chapter XXXVI.
Chapter XXXVII
Chapter XXXVIII.
Chapter XXXIX.
Chapter XL.
Chapter XLI.
Chapter XLII.
Chapter XLIII.
Chapter XLIV.
Chapter XLV.
Chapter XLVI.
Chapter XLVII.
Chapter XLVIII.
Chapter XLIX.
Chapter L.
Chapter LI.
Chapter LII.
Chapter LIII.
Chapter LIV.
Chapter LV.
Chapter LVI.
Chapter LVII.
Chapter LVIII.
Chapter LIX.
Chapter LX.
Chapter LXI.
Appendix

Author's Introduction

[Table of Contents](#)

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^[1], 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 hairbreadth 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

73 The phrase refers to an Otoe (also spelled Otto or Oto) Native American of a Siouan-speaking tribe historically based along the Platte and Missouri River regions. Nineteenth-century travel accounts often use variant spellings; the Otoe people frequently interacted with Euro-American traders and acted as guides or informants to passing expeditions.

74 Astoria was a fur-trading post established by John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company at the mouth of the Columbia River in 1811. It served as the expedition's principal base for inland parties and for collecting pelts for shipment to market.

75 'Chipunnish' is an older transcribed name used in early accounts for the people more widely known today as the Nez Perce (Nimiipuu), an Indigenous nation of the interior Pacific Northwest. The phrase 'Pierced-nose Indians' is a trader's descriptive label from the period and is not a modern ethnographic term.

76 In this context, 'caches' refers to goods or peltries hidden or buried at known locations for safekeeping by fur traders and expedition members. Such buried stores were common in North American fur trade logistics but were vulnerable to discovery or theft, which could seriously disrupt a party's supplies.

77 Old Comcomly was a historical Chinook chief who acted as a prominent intermediary between local tribes and Euro-American traders and explorers (he is known to have met Lewis and Clark). In Astoria he is portrayed accurately as a shrewd leader who allied with the settlers for trade advantages and helped buffer the post from hostile northern visitors.

78 The Isaac Todd was a heavily armed merchant vessel associated with British interests and the rival North West Company; during the War of 1812 it was expected on the Columbia River to help enforce British claims and secure the fur trade against the American Astorians. Its anticipated arrival in the narrative underscores how the global war influenced decisions and anxieties at the remote Pacific outpost.

79 Refers to the Chinookan peoples native to the lower Columbia River region, whose villages and trade networks were critical to the survival of coastal posts like Astoria. In this passage their power to withhold supplies or turn hostile illustrates how Indigenous groups could determine the fate of European and American trading parties in the early 19th-century Pacific Northwest.

80 Pin-money is an archaic term for a small allowance or portion of income reserved for a married woman's personal expenses. Irving invokes "settlements and pin-money" to liken Chinook marriage customs—where gifts and bride-prices were negotiated—to European ideas of marriage settlements and personal allowances.

81 Count Baranoff refers to Alexander (Aleksandr) Baranov, the chief manager (governor) of the Russian-American Company who administered Russian fur-trading colonies in Alaska in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. He oversaw settlements such as Kodiak and Sitka (New Archangel) and was a central figure in the Russian fur trade and colonial administration of that era.

82 The term "prosnics" in the passage is an archaic or colloquial word for carousals or drinking parties; here it denotes large convivial gatherings where heavy drinking and boisterous entertainment took place. In this context it

highlights the social customs and pressure to participate in high-alcohol festivities among traders and officials.

83 He is the American factor (manager) in charge of Astoria on behalf of John Jacob Astor's enterprise, empowered to act if the principal agent (Mr. Hunt) did not return. Contemporaries accused him of negotiating the sale of Astoria's stock to the Northwest Company and later accepting membership in that company, charges he defended by citing the risk of British seizure.

84 The historical Western name for Guangzhou, the principal Chinese port where North American furs—especially high-value sea-otter pelts—were sold to Chinese merchants. Sending furs to Canton was a common strategy to realize higher prices in the China trade rather than selling locally in North America.

85 Refers to Commodore David Porter, a prominent U.S. naval officer during the War of 1812 who conducted operations in the Pacific around 1813 against British merchant and whaling vessels. His actions in the region prompted British naval responses mentioned in the chapter.

86 An archaic term used in 19th-century writings to refer to a Native American woman; today it is widely regarded as derogatory and offensive. The word reflects historical language and attitudes that modern readers should note as culturally insensitive.

87 A 'brig' is a two-masted, square-rigged merchant vessel common in the early 19th century; the Pedler was the specific ship that anchored at the Columbia to carry furs and return Sandwich Islanders to their homes. Its arrival and use in the narrative mark the maritime line of communication connecting Astoria with Pacific islands and the outside world.

88 The 'treaty of Ghent' (signed December 1814 and ratified in early 1815) formally ended the War of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain and restored territories to their prewar status ('status ante bellum'). The passage refers to Astoria reverting to U.S. control under that principle, after which a U.S. naval officer was sent to take formal possession.

89 The American Fur Company was founded by John Jacob Astor in 1808 as a U.S. corporation to compete with British and Canadian fur interests. In the chapter it appears as the petitioner seeking legal permission and government encouragement to supply Indian trade within U.S. boundaries, reflecting its central role in early 19th-century American commercial expansion.

90 This phrase refers to early U.S. trade restrictions limiting commerce with Britain and its territories (notably measures like the Embargo of 1807 and the Non-Intercourse Act of 1809). Such laws complicated efforts to move or reclaim merchandise held in British North America and are cited as a legal obstacle to Astor's retrieval of goods.

91 Fort Vancouver was a large Hudson's Bay Company post established upriver on the Columbia after the HBC abandoned Astoria; it became the company's chief station in the region. The chapter mentions the fort as a strategically placed supply and administrative center built to reduce vulnerability at the coast.

92 "Ashley's company" refers to William H. Ashley's Rocky Mountain Fur Company originating in St. Louis, notable in the 1820s for sponsoring trappers and the annual rendezvous system. The company helped open the trans-mountain fur trade and is credited here with fostering frontier exploration and trapping enterprise.