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### Irving's Income as a Diplomat

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## IRVING'S INCOME AS A DIPLOMAT

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Although Washington Irving earned his living primarily by his writing, his income from his service as a diplomat supported him when his literary earnings were slow or non-existent. His nephew and biographer, Pierre Munroe Irving, who has itemized the receipts from the sale of his copy-righted writings from *Knickerbocker's History of New York* to the *Life of George Washington* and the collected editions published by G. P. Putnam, has arrived at a total of \$205,383.34 by the time of Irving's death in November 1859. An additional \$34,237.03 accrued from sales during the next four years.<sup>1</sup> Since P. M. Irving did not include income from Irving's journalistic writing for the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Analectic Magazine*, and the *Knickerbocker Magazine* and payments for other volumes not included in the tally, we can assume that his literary earnings probably totaled about \$250,000. Irving, it is apparent, deserves the distinction of being called the first successful professional writer in America.<sup>2</sup>

It is not my purpose here to discuss Irving's literary income, but rather to examine those two periods of his life when he was an employee of the United States Government, first, in a junior capacity as secretary of the London Legation from 1829 to 1831 and briefly as acting chargé, and second, in the responsible role of United States Minister to Spain from 1842 to 1846. During these periods Irving was preoccupied with diplomatic responsibilities; and although he finished revising and touching up *The Alhambra* during his London tour of duty, he had little time for steady or concentrated literary work. These terms of diplomatic services were separated by a decade in which Irving returned to authorship and established himself as an effective chronicler of American exploration and commercial enterprise.

Irving did not deliberately seek out government service. The first job resulted when his relatives and friends, afraid that he was idling away his time in Spain, procured for him the position of Secretary of the U. S. Legation in London. Being informed of his appointment, Irving left the romantic setting of Granada and the Alhambra for London, where he settled into the routine of the diplomatic post for two years. Likewise, he did not solicit the position as Minister to Spain.

Daniel Webster, Secretary of State under President Tyler, found Irving's long residence in Europe and his familiarity with the Spanish language and customs to be assets, and so he offered the writer the position in February 1842.

Let us examine more closely the financial aspects of Irving's diplomatic service and begin with a consideration of the sources which provide the information about remuneration for his work for the government between July 1829 and September 1831 and between February 1842 and July 1846. Among the documents in the National Archives are the records of the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury, who was in charge of accounting for the funds expended in foreign diplomatic posts. Another copy of these accounts is to be found in the archives of the Department of State. From these we ascertain the extent and the categories of Irving's remuneration during these periods. Additional details about his finances can be gleaned from two account books which he kept during his stay in Madrid. Some of the entries in one relate to personal investments<sup>3</sup> while others provide information about receipts and expenditures connected with his official duties. The other account book provides details about Irving's personal expenditures during his voyage to England, his stays in London and Paris, and his passage to Madrid, as well as an itemized listing of money disbursed for personal and household expenses and rental charges for the remainder of 1842 in Madrid. With these documents, then, we can study Irving's finances during his diplomatic service.

In 1829 Irving's brothers in business in America, disturbed by his seeming idleness and lack of purpose, arranged for his appointment as secretary of the United State Legation in London, a position which he accepted at a salary of \$2,000 a year.<sup>4</sup> Irving's pay started on 22 July 1829, the day he sent his letter of acceptance to Louis McLane, the American Minister in London. The salary as secretary continued to 20 September 1831, when Irving resigned. During this period he received \$4,331.52. From 18 June to 20 September 1831, he served as *chargé d'affaires* and received an additional allowance of \$646.35 for the three months and three days when he was responsible for the Legation. Moreover, he was allowed one-quarter of his annual salary as *chargé* (\$1,125) to cover the costs of returning to New York and \$421.48 for such contingent expenses as postage, portorage, presentation fees, clerk and messenger wages, books, office rent, and candles during his tenure as *chargé*. For his service as secretary and *chargé*, then, Irving received a total of \$6,524.35. In addition, he was allowed to claim the

sum of \$44.22 for expenses incurred in securing the exequatur for Robert Monroe Harrison, United States consul in Jamaica.<sup>5</sup>

Between 26 October 1829 and 26 September 1831, Irving drew upon Baring Brothers & Co., London bankers, for \$5,427.37. According to the report of the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury, Irving received \$1,326.87 after his accounts were settled, this sum being the difference between his drafts on Baring Brothers and the total of his salary at the London Legation and other claims against the United States government.

Upon his return to New York after a seventeen-year absence, Irving devoted himself to his writing and, later, to the conversion of an old Dutch farmhouse in Tarrytown into his castle on the Hudson which he named Sunnyside. (He modestly called it his "cottage.") The financial panic of 1837 and the expense of remodeling and expanding his rural retreat, plus the falling sales of his writings, left Irving financially pressed by 1841. When Daniel Webster offered him the post of United States Minister to Spain, the ex-diplomat quickly accepted the position<sup>6</sup> and began drawing his annual salary of \$9,000 on 10 February 1842. With no thought of achieving distinction as a diplomat, Irving regarded the appointment primarily as a means of relieving his financial distress and of providing himself with the leisure for pursuing some literary projects in the calm, unhurried atmosphere he associated with Madrid.<sup>7</sup> He did not realize this dream because of the turbulent course of Spanish politics during the intervening years after his departure from the Alhambra in 1829, a period marked by the death of Ferdinand VII and the succession of his under-age daughter Isabella to the throne and by the schemes and plots of Don Carlos, Ferdinand's brother, to seize the reins of power in Spain.

Since Irving's position as minister required him to live in a grand style, he was allowed an additional \$9,000, the equivalent of a year's salary, to outfit himself for the post with proper linen, plate and silver, diplomatic dress, horses and carriage, and servants for his residence. According to the report of the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury, Irving received, in addition, as salary from the government between 10 February 1842 and 31 March 1843, the sum of \$10,250. And he claimed contingent expenses of \$437.58 for postage, newspapers, stationery, gifts to the servants, messengers, and officers of the Queen of Spain, repair of furniture in the Madrid Legation, expenses for the moving of books and furniture, for the building of bookshelves, and for freight

and carriage on newspapers. Moreover, because he had lost money in the sale of his bank drafts to N. M. Rothschild & Son of London, Irving was allowed an extra \$90.00. For this period, then, he was paid the sum of \$19,777.58,<sup>8</sup> an amount which obviously relieved his financial distress, enabled him to support his relatives staying at Sunnyside, and permitted him to live in the manner befitting a diplomat at the Spanish court.

The auditor's report for the year beginning 1 April 1843 shows that Irving was paid \$12,096.27 for salary (including \$2,212.45 carried over from the previous year), \$889.31 for contingencies, and \$169.35 for losses incurred in selling his salary drafts to N. M. Rothschild & Sons.<sup>9</sup> During this time Irving was away from his post from 7 September to 30 November 1843 on a visit to Paris. He had been suffering from a cutaneous complaint which left him very uncomfortable, and he felt that a visit of Sarah Storrow, his favorite niece, and absence from the pressures of diplomacy might restore his health. The vacation and the leave of absence with pay had the desired effect, and he returned to Madrid in much improved health and in better spirits.<sup>10</sup>

During the next fiscal year, Irving's finances remained about the same. According to the audit filed with the State Department, Irving's income included payments of \$10.03 for a balance owed him from the preceding year, \$9,000 for his annual salary, \$1,054.89 for contingent expenses, and \$43.69 for reimbursement of losses on the sale of his drafts for salary. At the end of this period, he still had a balance of \$2,712.28 due him in his account.<sup>11</sup> On 14 July 1844, Irving acknowledged the approval granted by the Secretary of State for a leave of absence for reasons of health,<sup>12</sup> and two weeks later he left Barcelona for visits to Paris and Birmingham.<sup>13</sup> A bilious attack and recurrence of his herpetic disorder delayed his return to Madrid until 17 November 1844.<sup>14</sup> Once again, Irving collected his entire salary during his absence from his diplomatic post.

According to the final statement covering Irving's account from 1 April 1845 to 31 July 1846, he received \$2,712.28 for past balances payable, \$12,008.15 for sixteen months' salary, \$571.91 for contingency expenses, and \$2,250 (the equivalent of salary for three months) for expenses for his return to the United States, plus \$359.75 in the final adjustment of his account with the State Department.<sup>15</sup>

During this period Irving again left his post for visits to Paris and England, departing on 2 September 1845 for some urgent dental work.<sup>16</sup> On 1 October, he informed James Buchanan, the Secretary of

State, that he had had to make a hasty trip to Paris for treatment of his herpetic ailment and that he hoped to return to Madrid in a fortnight.<sup>17</sup> Once again, Irving was delayed by his slow recovery. While he was still in Paris, he was asked by Louis McLane, United States Minister in London and his former superior in the London Legation from 1829 to 1831, to assist in the negotiations with England on the Oregon boundary question.<sup>18</sup> Irving agreed and spent the next five weeks in England in diplomatic discussions and on a visit to his sister in Birmingham.<sup>19</sup>

Certainly Irving's extended absence from Madrid and the continuation of his salary were justified by his need for medical treatment and by his assistance in the negotiations on the Oregon boundary issue. Probably his absences from his official diplomatic duties were no more extensive than those of others in such posts.<sup>20</sup> The fact remains, however, that he was absent more than fifty-three weeks from his post in the four years that he was American minister to Spain, an amount of time paid for vacations and medical leaves which seems very generous even by today's standards.

Two account books, one at the New York Public Library and the other in the Barrett Collection at the University of Virginia, provide other, more personal details about Irving's management of his funds during the early part of his service as Minister to Spain. The former provides a detailed accounting of his expenses on his voyage to England, during his stays there and in France, on his trip to Madrid, and during the period when he was getting settled in Madrid. His total outlay, presumably up to 10 October 1842, was \$5,066.36, with many of the items duplicated in the second account book. One entry of particular interest and not repeated is an inventory of 216 bottles of French wine for which he paid \$250.20. In addition, he purchased Aaron Vail's remaining stock for \$167.70, for a total expenditure of \$417.90 for wine. The details in the notebook in the New York Public Library provide us with a precise listing of Irving's expenses in 1842 as he began his diplomatic duties.

The second notebook repeats many of the figures found in the other one, occasionally with slight variations. Since they reveal something about Irving's life style, some of them are itemized here. For example, he spent \$141.46 during his stay in England en route to his post, \$329.06 in France and on his journey to Spain, and an additional \$30.39 for personal expenses in Madrid up to 10 October, 1842. Furnishing his quarters in Madrid included the purchase of furniture for

\$1,000.00 in Paris and for \$608.00 in Madrid, plus \$1,017.40 for household items he bought from his predecessor, Aaron Vail. In addition, Irving paid out \$129.00 for transportation of his effects. Repairs to his apartment in Madrid cost \$21.04, and the carpenter bill for shelves was \$34.00. China purchased from Cavalcante de Albuquerque, the Brazilian Minister, cost \$38.50. Personal expenses for the remainder of the year (presumably from 10 October) were \$98.92; rentals for his living quarters were \$431.30; house expenses were \$554.05; and servants' wages were \$249.06. An indecipherable entry (heat?) for \$1,032.45 and a few miscellaneous expenses bring the total of Irving's disbursements to \$5877.75 for the period ending on 31 December 1842. Many of the items, needed for setting up his residence in Madrid, were one-time expenses. Regrettably, the notebook does not contain detailed accounts of his expenditures for the period from 1843 to 1846. One revealing item for 12 October 1842 indicates that he drew "on Mr. Storrow for fr[ancs] 208.60 for 3½ doz gloves" presumably for use at required diplomatic functions.<sup>21</sup> The other entries relate to drafts made on his salary and contingency accounts with Baring Brothers of London, T. W. Storrow, Jr., of Paris, and Henry O'Shea of Madrid. Incomplete though they are, the figures in these notebooks give us an idea of how Irving spent his money in his early months in Madrid, and they suggest that the allowance of a year's salary for furnishing and outfitting was not excessive.

Irving's ventures into diplomacy enabled him to augment his income sufficiently to relieve himself of any financial anxiety. His duties as minister in Madrid entailed considerable responsibility and delicate decision-making because of the slowness of communication between Madrid and Washington. Without doubt, the pressures and anxiety from these responsibilities caused him health problems, but in all likelihood these problems were no more serious than the ones he experienced during and after the composition of *Bracebridge Hall* in 1822. At that time the nervousness and physical exhaustion associated with meeting the publisher's deadline caused a cutaneous rash which required a long time to heal. In Madrid he had a similar problem, but through leaves of absence, baths, and dutiful medication, he was able to restore his health.

Upon his return to Sunnyside, Irving soon entered into an agreement with George P. Putnam to re-issue his published works in revised form and to complete some other writing projects. From these literary activities he was able to produce a steady income to replace his diplo-

matic salary. It should be emphasized, however, that his salary as United States Minister provided him with funds during a financially lean period. Indeed, it can be unhesitatingly asserted that Irving's service as a diplomat gave him a sense of financial security that enabled him, a man in his mid-sixties, to resume his writing career without debt or financial obligation upon his return to Sunnyside. Within a short period he produced a substantial study of Mohammed and his followers, revised and expanded a biography of Oliver Goldsmith, collected volumes of essays from earlier periodical contributions, revised his earlier published writings, and began serious and steady work on his monumental life of George Washington.

The trials and misgivings experienced while he was earning his salary as a diplomat were more than offset by his skill, tact, and graciousness in dealing with a succession of Spanish politicians and by the sense of satisfaction deriving from the knowledge that he was representing the interests of his country in a constructive way. Thus it seems that both Irving and his country benefited from his diplomatic service and that his salary as minister was money well spent for all parties concerned.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Pierre M. Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving* (New York, 1864), IV, 410-411.

<sup>2</sup> William Charvat (*The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870: The Papers of William Charvat*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli [Columbus, 1968], pp. 68-69) argues that this designation properly belongs to James Fenimore Cooper because "[h]e was...the first writer of imaginative literature to make a living from writing continuously and successfully." Although Charvat excludes Irving and Hawthorne because of their government service, he ignores the fact that Cooper derived part of his support from inherited property and from his wife's assets. Irving, I would emphasize, received the bulk of his income from his writing, and he regarded himself first and foremost as an author. Even in those periods when he was not actively writing and publishing, he was living on the fruits of his authorship. His periods of government service, as I indicate, were brief interruptions (though unquestionably beneficial to him from a financial standpoint) in his long literary career.

<sup>3</sup> An 1845 itemized list of Irving's holdings in western lands and in railroad and bank stock in the account book totals \$2,801.00. On another page he notes that "my interest in lands [in Mississippi and Tennessee] would amount to about \$4,500[.] My share of outstanding debts drawing interest is \$4,500[.] I have received in dividends \$2,562[.]" In 1844 Irving expressed gratitude to Pierre M. Irving for "rak[ing] twenty-one hundred dollars for me out of the ashes and cinders" of his speculation in land in



Green Bay, Wisconsin (24 March 1844; *Letters*, 3: 707-709). Four months later he thanked Pierre for selling "my — shares of — stock for — dollars a share. This is really so much money hauled out of the ashes" (18 July 1844; *Letters*, 3:802). Since Pierre in his protective way has deleted the specific details, it is not possible to ascertain whether or not this is a different transaction or merely another reference to the Green Bay sale. These references do suggest that Pierre was trying to sell his uncle's holdings at a profit.

<sup>4</sup> Washington Irving to Louis McLane, 22 July 1829, in Washington Irving, *Letters*, ed. Ralph M. Aderman, Herbert L. Kleinfeld, and Jennifer S. Banks (Boston, 1979), 2:455.

<sup>5</sup> See Voucher 3099, dated 18 March 1833, 5th Auditor's Office, Treasury Department, Records of U. S. General Accounting Office, National Archives, Record Group 217 (hereafter referred to as NA, RG). The figures in the next paragraph are found in the same document.

<sup>6</sup> Washington Irving to Ebenezer Irving, 10 February 1842, in *Letters*, 3:180.

<sup>7</sup> Washington Irving to Ebenezer Irving, 17 February 1842, in *Letters*, 3:184.

<sup>8</sup> See Voucher 6487, 5th Auditor's Report on Washington Irving's account from 1 April 1842 to 31 March 1843, Treasury Department, NA, RG 217.

<sup>9</sup> See Voucher 6981, dated 4 September 1844, NA RG 217.

<sup>10</sup> See Irving to Sarah Storrow, 6 September 1843, and 1 December 1843, in *Letters*, 3:603, 622.

<sup>11</sup> See Voucher 7462, dated 14 July 1845, NA, RG 217.

<sup>12</sup> See Irving to John C. Calhoun, 14 July 1844, *Letters*, 3:800.

<sup>13</sup> See Irving to Catharine Paris, 28 July 1844, *Letters*, 3:807, 812.

<sup>14</sup> See Irving to John C. Calhoun, 16 October 1844; and to Sarah Storrow, 15 November 1844, *Letters*, 3:823, 827.

<sup>15</sup> See Voucher 8204, dated 5 May 1847, NA, RG 217.

<sup>16</sup> See Irving to Sarah Storrow, 6 September 1845, *Letters*, 3:1029.

<sup>17</sup> Irving to James Buchanan, 1 October 1845, *Letters*, 3:1030.

<sup>18</sup> Irving to James Buchanan, 12 December 1845, *Letters*, 3:1038-39.

<sup>19</sup> See Irving to Sarah Storrow, 2 February 1846; to Pierre M. Irving, 3 February 1846; and to Henry O'Shea, Jr., 10 February 1846, *Letters*, 4:8-11, 18.

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<sup>20</sup> Absenteeism among Cabinet officers in Washington, for example, was a persistent problem. See Leonard D. White, *The Jacksonians, A Study in Administrative History, 1829-1861*, (New York, 1956), pp. 86-87.

<sup>21</sup> Apparently Irving had outfitted himself with diplomatic apparel before he left New York. In London, before being presented to Queen Victoria, he "had to order some addition to my Diplomatic uniform," but these items must have been inconsequential. See Irving to Catharine Paris, 3 May 1842, *Letters*, 3:213.