

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

The Headless Horseman of Spooky Hollow

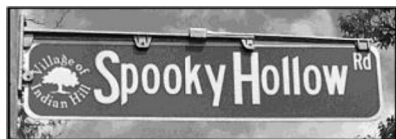
One of America's most popular ghost stories, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" by Washington Irving, originally published in 1820, has enticed readers since the nineteenth century. Its larger than life characters, haunting setting, mysterious specter, and ambiguous ending are part of the nation's Halloween folklore. Here in Indian Hill, part of the eerie tale was reenacted annually in the late twentieth century for trick-or-treaters and their families.

Irving's story took place in a "sequestered glen" named Sleepy Hollow in Tarry Town, NY in 1790. The Dutch inhabitants there believed in bewitchment, and in particular, the legend surrounding the apparition of a figure on horseback without a head who was frequently seen riding at night searching for his missing head. The locals all thought that the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow was the ghost of a Hessian soldier who was decapitated by a cannon ball during the Revolutionary War. Historically, Hessian mercenaries did aid British troops and Loyalists at the Battle of White Plains NY (1776) and later engaged in other battles with American patriots.



A superstitious schoolmaster, Ichabod Crane, moved to Tarry Town from Connecticut. He courted Katrina Van Tassel, the only child of a wealthy farmer. A rival suitor and local hero, Brom Bones, was known for his horsemanship and Herculean appearance. Indeed he was the physical opposite of the gangly Crane. At a lavish party at the Van Tassel castle, following a buffet dinner, music, and dancing, a storytelling session occurred, with several tales about the Headless Horseman. Ichabod Crane, having been rebuffed by Katrina, departed that night and rode away. He viewed what he thought was the Headless Horseman, who threw what seemed to be his head at him, knocking him unconscious and off his horse. The next day, there was no sign of the schoolteacher, just a smashed pumpkin, Ichabod's hat, and a trampled saddle. The rumors of his disappearance by a supernatural specter continued in that New York hamlet for years.

About 100 years later in the Civil War, the 1863 invasion of the Union states known as Morgan's Raid occurred. As Morgan's men cut a swath nearly 1000 miles long into enemy territory with lightning speed, one of the paths taken by some Raiders went through Indian Hill. Legend was that one Raider pillaged a jewel from a Masonic Hall in Indiana. When Morgan learned one of his soldiers had stolen the gem, he ordered the man to return it, as Morgan was a Mason. On the way back, the man was killed, and a myth developed that he returned to Spooky Hollow Road as a headless horseman.



In 1950 Mr. & Mrs. Louis Nippert moved to the property known as Green Acres at 8300 Spooky Hollow Road. An estate of 168 acres, in its earliest day, it had been an 1866 farmhouse for the Barker family, who lived there at the end of the Civil War. Perhaps previous owners of the property passed down this folklore (Morgan's soldier haunting the byway) to the Nipperts. Certainly Spooky Hollow Road is reminiscent of the "drowsy shade" of Sleepy Hollow, NY, as it is off the beaten path, and has a twisting narrow road surrounded by steep hills and tall shade trees. Even its name brings to mind an enchanted area.

Though Louis and Louise Nippert did not have children, the neighborhood had plenty of youths. Just across the road, there were 5 Wulsins, 5 Reeds, and 5 Gambles. According to a 1983 interview with Louise, her husband Louis took it upon himself to reenact the ride of the Headless Horseman on Halloween night. Louis was an accomplished rider and a member of the Camargo Hunt. At dark, he rode down Spooky Hollow Road, cloaked in black, seemingly headless, while carrying a pumpkin atop his saddle. This became widely known in Indian Hill, and friends and neighbors gathered on Spooky Hollow after collecting candy to await the spectacle. It was mesmerizing and evocative of scary legends of yesteryear. Mrs. Nippert recalled 100 children awaiting the apparition on the last night in October. After Mr. Nippert stopped riding, others took on the role of the Headless Horseman in subsequent years, keeping the tradition alive.

The bewitching view of a galloping goblin thrilled Indian Hill families for years. Seeing the specter on Halloween night remained a treasured, haunting memory for all who witnessed the local Headless Horseman.