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A Tale for Two Towns

Sleepy Hollows in New York, Illinois brace for namesake movie

By Peter Denk *Courier News*
STAFF WRITER *11/24/99*

SLEEPY HOLLOW — A new twist on an old tale is affecting two towns in different ways.

Here in Sleepy Hollow, Ill., Tim Burton's movie adaptation of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is a curiosity.

In Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., the setting of Washington Irving's tale of the Headless Horseman, the movie is a mild, but pleasant,

controversy.

"The purists of the Washington Irving saga are disappointed that Tim Burton's movie is not true to the original story," said Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., Mayor Philip Zegarelli. "But it nevertheless bodes well for us because it has brought us a lot of attention."

Burton's version of Sleepy Hollow, which opened last weekend starring Johnny Depp and Christina Ricci, is part horror movie, part mystery. The original was more of a ghost/love story.

Zegarelli said the movie has brought added interest from across the country and the world to his Sleepy Hollow, which is on the Hudson River, 20 miles north of New York City.

"The attention level it has brought on the community has been quite high. A lot of people want to see what the real Sleepy Hollow is like," he said.

Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., deserves and probably

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wants the attention. It is home to many of the landmarks from Irving's story including the Headless Horseman's Bridge, where Ichabod Crane was chased by the Horseman and may or may not have met his fate.

A change of names

Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., is the location of Irving's house and the Old Dutch Cemetery, where the 19th-century American author is buried. The town also boasts a grave bearing the name Katrina Van Tassel, the love interest of Ichabod and town bully Brom Bones.

But Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., was not always called Sleepy Hollow. Founded in the 1650s by Dutch

settlers, it was called North Tarry Town. According to Irving, the town's name was given by local housewives, who said their husbands tended to linger too long in its taverns.

In December 1996, in the wake of the closing of a large General Motors plant, North Tarry Town residents voted to change their town's name to Sleepy Hollow.

"It was a recognition that we live, breath and sleep our history, which is rich around here. We were always sort of known as Sleepy Hollow," Zegarelli said.

Sleepy Hollow, Ill.

Sleepy Hollow, Ill., was founded in the 1950s by Italian Floyd Falese. According to legend, Falese was looking for a peaceful rural home to please his wife.

In 1958, Sleepy Hollow Manor incorporated. The name was

taken from nearby Sleepy Hollow Road, which may or may not have been named after the town in Irving's short story.

Still, the town has embraced its namesake to a degree. Every Halloween, Sleepy Hollow holds a bonfire, and the Headless Horseman charges out of the darkness on a black stallion, usually a horse from a nearby stable.

And while Sleepy Hollow is not suddenly a tourist destination thanks to the new movie, its residents feel some connection to the legend.

"We've played up our tie to the legend over the years, but of course this is not the real Sleepy Hollow and Washington Irving isn't really our town's son," said Sleepy Hollow's Malcolm Morris. "My strongest connection to the legend is the old Disney cartoon — the animated caricature of the

Headless Horseman and Ichabod Crane."

But like some of the residents in her sister city to the east, Sleepy Hollow's Susan Wyatt said she is turned off by Burton's changes, particularly the gory scenes in which the horseman lops off his victims' heads.

"I wouldn't go see it just because I live in Sleepy Hollow. I'd pay more attention to what the story is about," Wyatt said. "I don't like the violence, so I won't go see it."

Still, Beth Ann Nischik, who lived in Sleepy Hollow until recently moving to St. Charles, said she thinks the legend fits Sleepy Hollow.

"I want to see the movie for the terror factor," she said. "Sleepy Hollow Road is spooky at night. It would be the perfect setting for the horseman to ride through."