

July 1, 1888

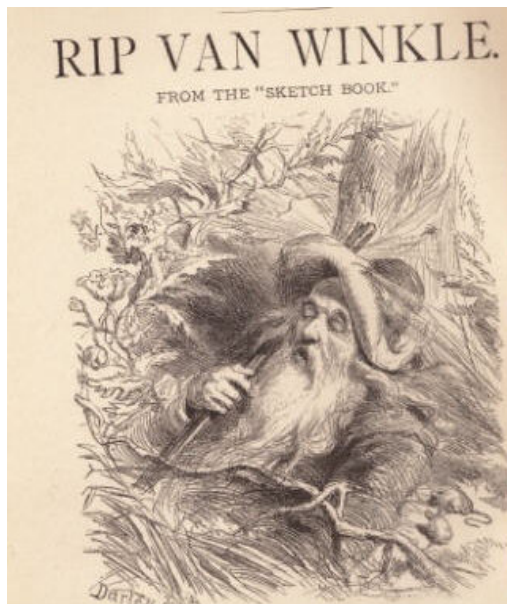
Nine-year old Tonia Craddock tore slowly at the plain paper wrapping. In those days children didn't get as many birthday presents as you do today, so she wanted to make it last. What she found inside the paper was a brand-new book from her father. It had several engraving illustrations through out the book and the cover was a drawing of a man being chased by a headless horseman holding a pumpkin. It was etched in shiny gold that announced "*Legend of Sleepy Hollow.*"

"Thank you, Poppa, it's beautiful. I can't wait until I can take it to school and show it to the teacher."

"You're welcome, child," replied her father Dave Craddock, a slender man of 46 with a long dark beard that was beginning to turn gray, "I believe that you'll find some pictures in there that look familiar."



Tonia flipped through the book and looked at the



etchings. Some of them did look a lot like the hills and woods surrounding her home, although once of them had a picture of what looked like a bay leading to the ocean. She found one of some children that she thought looked like her and her brothers and sisters. When she turned to the back page where there was an advertisement for another book in the same series, she laughed and said, "Look, Poppa, there you are in the book, except that his beard is longer and white!"

"He does, doesn't he? Except that he's a much older man."

Tonia's mother Lizzie came over and looked at the picture. "Your father may look like that by the time you're able to actually read this book, don't you think so, Father?"

"Well, maybe, but the child should have a book of her own. That will encourage

her to learn to read and to enjoy it. That'll be the first book of many for her and she might even keep it for her own children."

1908



Eight-year-old Naomi Johnson was going to visit her grandfather Craddock. Her mother Tonia walked with her up the Baileyton Road past the church and then up the hill past where the old Meetinghouse had stood. That's where her mother had gone to school and to church until it burned down about ten years before Naomi was born. The early

pioneers had built it over a hundred years ago and sometimes people still wanted to be buried in the graveyard there. Naomi's parents had shown her many times where the old log building had stood and told her what it looked like.

Today Naomi was carrying the book that her mother had given her. Mother had told her that Grandfather could read it to her while she and Grandmother Craddock were visiting.

When they got to the Craddock house Naomi ran and jumped in Grandfather's lap. They were sitting in the parlor, a big room with green and silver wallpaper and polished floors and ceilings that Naomi thought was the prettiest room she'd ever seen. Tonia went to find her mother in the loom room. It was called that because there was a big loom where Grandmother made rugs and other weavings.



"Be sure and look in the back of the book," Tonia told Naomi as she left, "I think you'll find some people that look familiar."

"Look, Grandfather, there's a woman that looks like Grandmother working on a spinning wheel. Do you suppose that she has a loom room, too? And look there, that girl looks like me with her long thick brown hair!" She tugged at her hair, being careful



not to disturb the big bow that Mother loved to make for her to wear.

“Why yes, child, I can see the resemblance. She looks a lot like your mother did at that age too.”

Naomi turned the page, “Look, Grandfather! You’re in the book too. There’s a man sleeping with a long white beard like yours. Was he in the War too?”

Dave Craddock liked to tell the grandchildren that he’d grown his long beard, which was the custom for the men of his generation, to hide the scar he’d gotten in battle during the Civil War. His wife didn’t approve of this because he’d actually gotten the scar on his face from an accident with a scythe when he was a boy cutting wheat with his father. But the children enjoyed the tale and it did happen during the War, so he answered Naomi, “Probably, but let’s not mention that in front of Grandmother. She doesn’t like to be reminded of those days.”

1938

Young Powell Johnson was complaining to his mother. “I don’t want to go stay at Aunt Tonia’s and Uncle Will’s with Naomi.”

“It can’t be helped, she’s the only one who can look after you while I’m gone to town.”

“I could go with you.”

“Not this time, you’re going to stay with Naomi.”

“But she’s so strict. You have to act just so or she’s on you.”

“That’s because she’s a school teacher. She’s used to making children mind and be quiet.”

“But we’re not even in school! We’re next door.”

“That’s just what’s she used to. Now run along, it won’t be so bad.”

“School teachers! I may have to go stay with her now but I’ll tell you one thing, when I grow up I’m not going to marry one.”

1978



In January a fire had gutted the church where 78-year-old Naomi Johnson had gone all her life. Only a few months later the people of the church had worked hard and had it rebuilt and repaired. Today she was visited by one of the teenagers of the church who often dropped by. They talked about church history and family stories and he'd bring his tape recorder and they'd look through old family pictures. She told him that she'd been considered the church historian for years so she guessed he could take over when

she died since she'd told him about everything she knew.

Today she showed him an old book. She'd found it on the table where she had little Dougie Johnson sit and do lessons whenever Powell and Mary Ann left him there to stay with her. Those old school teacher habits are hard to break.

"Look at this book," she told her visitor, "it's nearly a hundred years old. It was my mother's book when she was little girl and then she gave it to me. Her father gave it to her." She pointed at a picture of an old man with a long white beard in an oval frame hanging on the wall. "That's him, Grandfather Dave Craddock, he got hurt cutting wheat when he was a boy and had a long scar. That's why he said he grew his beard. He never cut it and it just kept getting longer and longer. He lived up the road past the old cemetery in that old green house that was the Matt Cox place. He sold it to Matt Cox and moved off when Grandmother Johnson died. That was a beautiful place. It had some of the prettiest rooms and woodwork that you've ever seen."

"Anyway," she continued, "I hear that you've been put in charge of rebuilding the church library since all of Preacher White's books got smoked up in the fire. The church needs a good library for the children to go to. And it needs books about all sorts of different things because they might need it for school. Here's a check to start buying some books with. And here's your first book to get you started. I think that's real gold

on the cover and some of those pictures look like people that I knew.”

She handed him the book for the new library. It was old and worn, but still in good shape. It had several engraving illustrations through out the book and the cover was a drawing of a man being chased by a headless horseman holding a pumpkin. It was etched in still shiny gold that announced “*Legend of Sleepy Hollow.*”

1988

Doug looked at the old book from the church library. The library had outgrown the little room it had started in and had moved to a bigger room next to it. The book was worn and falling apart at the binding. He looked at the names on the card in the back of the book and thought about all the people who had looked at it over the years. At least five generations of people had read it, but it wasn't in shape to continue circulating so they'd put it with the historical items before it got torn completely apart or thrown away. He thought about the old woman who'd given it to him and then he took it out of the Naomi Johnson library and for the first time in a hundred years no more children would read it and find people they knew in the illustrations.

December 16, 2001

Doug Johnson walked with his family into the church of his childhood. They'd come in from Seattle to visit his mother and help celebrate a wedding anniversary and to see the new children's wing of the church library. His mother had had it redone in memory of his father. He thought about going to church when he was a child, remembering his father Powell and his Grandmother Kate and his cousin Naomi, times that even at his young age seemed very far away.

The dedication service of the Powell Johnson Children's Library was unusual and not what anybody expected, but considering who wrote it that was what they had expected. The fellow who did the special services had been dubbed the unofficial church historian by Naomi Johnson when he was a teenager, and people who carry around old people's memories tend to have a melancholic streak.

The dedication service consisted of Ron Motz, Randy Davenport, Ina Deyton, and

taking turns reading.

First Ron read, “Today we are having another of those strange moments in our church life, a time when we try to look forward by pausing to look back. In the past two hundred years many people have come and gone in this church and this community. Some have been here and left their names on churches and roads, left families and homes, left farms and communities. Others have left only tombstones or decaying houses and still others lesser reminders than that: an indentation in a field where a road was once cut, initials on a Sycamore tree, a seemingly wild rose along a fencerow or daffodils that bloom each spring to greet a family whose home and even footprints have been washed away by the morning dew and scattered by the afternoon breeze.”

Randy then added, “We all wish to be remembered and remembered kindly and well. Today we’ll pause to remember our friend Powell Johnson, who couldn’t be remembered any other way. We remember a good and gentle man who loved his church and everyone, at least nearly everyone, in it, and certainly all its children. But we don’t do this to give the family an excuse to get together or ourselves an excuse to get sentimental and nostalgic. To do that would be a disservice to our church and all that it represents, for it is a living being that looks forward with a hope and trust that constantly harking back to the ‘good old days’ would betray. We don’t remember Powell today to become wistful and tearful, we remember him because he’s lending his name to the future.”

Then Ron read again. “Powell’s family has provided for the children’s section of the library to be completely overhauled and remodeled, with more books and new furniture and pictures and bright paint. They have done this in Powell’s memory because of his love for all the children. The formerly damp, dark section of basement is now light and inviting because that was how Powell welcomed all the children, teasing and playing, gently correcting with a twinkle, never serious or threatening. Naomi’s section of the library is like her, filled with information and study, full of history and wisdom. And Powell’s section of the library is like him, filled with information but also fun, inviting the children in with furniture just their size and everything within their reach.”

Now it was Ina’s turn. “People like to say that children are the future of the

church, and perhaps that is true. It seems like many of them leave just when they're getting old enough to become part of its present. But children are more than the future or this or any church, and the older I get the more I realize that children are the life and energy of the church and we need to do all we can to encourage them to feel like they're as important here as they are. So today, we dedicate this library wing to them and to all that they add to our church and to our lives. And it wouldn't hurt most of us grown-ups to go wander down there every once in a while, to escape this serious-minded grumpiness that seems to infest us all too often, and to lose ourselves in the bright and cheerful and optimistic world of the children that we spend so much time trying to drag them out of, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. Powell knew that and lived that, maybe we should too."

Randy ended the readings. "Probably no one will be surprised to learn that we're going to end this little dedication service a tad bit unusual. Powell would have hated being the center of all this attention and he would have grown restless with the passages just read and we can all imagine what sort of things he would have already whispered to Mary Ann and Sandra about this dedication service. That's why we're going to end the dedication with a song. Powell loved to sing, but that's not why we're doing it. We're singing this song because it's Christmas time and the birthday calendar wasn't available last week, so we missed recognizing a few birthdays. One of Powell's friends who loved children and music too had a birthday last week, and Powell wouldn't want us to not mention her. Many of us spent our childhood singing with her and listening to her and Verna sing this song. Last Friday was Dell Walker's birthday, so oddly enough we'll end the dedication service of the Powell Johnson Children's Library by standing and singing, 'Beautiful Star of Bethlehem.'"

As they were singing, Doug thought about Dell. When he was little she played for the children's choir and Bible School where he'd first developed a love of music and singing. After the song, his daughter Amelia went forward and presented the preacher with the first new book for her grandfather's children's library. It was a brand new copy of the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, and it was put in the library for the next five generations of children to read and look through and find people they know in the illustrations.

Closing Prayer of the Children's Library Dedication Service:

Lord, here we are again, coming to your house to worship you and to try to serve others in your name. Powell's family has given us this children's library, and we're giving it to you. Use it, and us, to help reach our children for you. Remind us that all the children we encounter are your children, just like we are, and that they need us like we need you. Help us to encourage and teach, to smile more and complain less, and let us never forget that "red or yellow, black or white, they are precious" in your sight. We're your body on the earth, help us to do a better job of being your eyes to see as you see, so that we too can love "all the little children of the world."