



# The Alhambra

*Washington Irving*

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## **The Alhambra** Washington Irving

Shortly after completing a biography of Christopher Columbus in 1828, Washington Irving traveled from Madrid, where he had been staying, to Granada, Spain. At first sight, he described it as “a most picturesque and beautiful city, situated in one of the loveliest landscapes that I have ever seen.” Irving was preparing a book called *A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada*, a history of the years 1478–1492, and was continuing his research on the topic. He immediately asked the then-governor of the historic Alhambra Palace as well as the archbishop of Granada for access to the palace, which was granted because of Irving’s celebrity status. Aided by a 35-year-old guide named Mateo Ximenes, Irving was inspired by his experience to write *Tales of the Alhambra*. The book combines description, myth and narrations of real historical events, even up through the destruction of some of the palace’s towers by the French under Count Sebastiani in 1812, and the further damage caused by an earthquake in 1821. Throughout his trip, Washington filled his notebooks and journals with descriptions and observations though he did not believe his writing would ever do it justice. He wrote, “How unworthy is my scribbling of the place.” Irving continued to travel through Spain until he was appointed as secretary of legation at the United States Embassy in London, serving under the incoming minister Louis McLane. He arrived in London by late September 1829.

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