

# Rip Van Winkle sleeps in city

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A shadow hanging from the front porch of the small white house hangs big eyes. If a person passing should stop, the shadow will bring a neatly dressed, tall, thin man to the door. He answers any

questions.

When he was born in 1896, thousands of books carried his name. Few children or adults hadn't heard Washington Irving's story of a man who slept for twenty years.

And so, his parents soon Rip Van Winkle of 419 N. 27th St. of his fictional counterpart.

However, they never gave him any reason for choosing that particular name.

Some Lincoln residents may remember his car dealership at 17th and O Streets. A neon sign in front featured a white-bearded, reclining man and read "Rip Van Winkle's Auto Exchange."

Van Winkle is never sure what will result from situations where he must deal with people who aren't familiar with him.

#### Trouble with credit

When he shops at local stores where he has credit, he often encounters sales clerks who don't know him.

After giving his name, he gets reactions ranging from anger - "I'm very busy and I don't have time for jokes!" to amusement - "You've got to be kidding!"

Van Winkle must then wait while they check his credit. However, he said this doesn't annoy him because he realizes that they have a job to do and might get in trouble with their superiors if they didn't check.

On the other hand, his unusual name sometimes has been a benefit with strangers.

Once, when driving in California, he committed a minor traffic violation and was immediately stopped by an angry patrolman. But "as soon as he saw the name on my license, he called his partner over and they had a good laugh. Without any more angry words about my driving, he let me go and I heard him say, 'Wait'll we tell the guys at the stationhouse that we stopped Rip Van Winkle today!'"

#### 40 years as dealer

As a car dealer for more than 40 years, he experienced similar encounters on his buying trips to other states.

One incident that he recalls

was in Chicago in 1935 when he was waiting with a load of cars in an alley for another dealer to come and lead him to their destination.

Five police detectives were suspicious and stopped in the alley. One of them came up and asked who he was and what he was doing. As soon as Van Winkle told him his name, the detective grabbed him, pulled him out of the car and threw him in with the other detectives, calling him a "smart aleck."

They took him downtown and shoved the frightened Van Winkle into a cell. About a half an hour later, he was brought before the desk sergeant and was able to prove his identity. He then accepted their apologies and went on his way.

#### Still asleep?

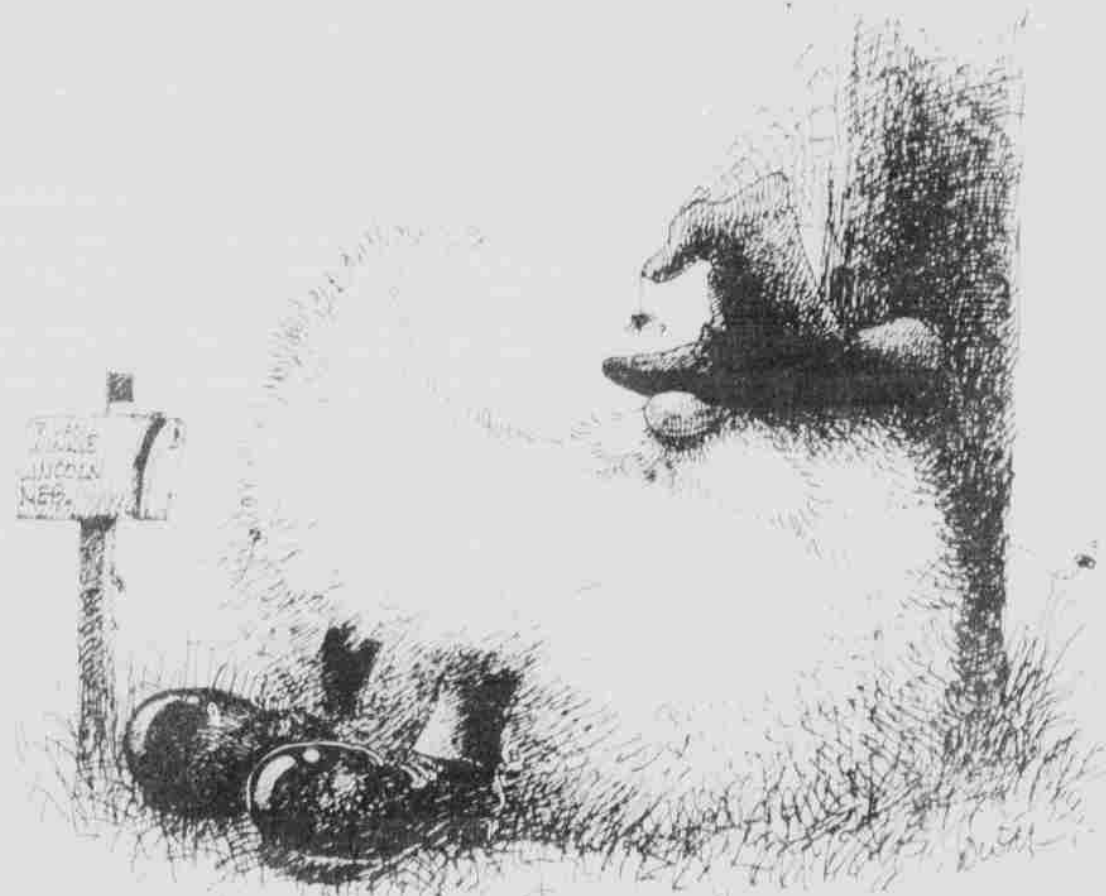
He spent more time searching for the other dealer who had just entered the alley as the detective pulled Van Winkle from the car, and had fled in fright.

Van Winkle was born in Talmage, Neb., and lived there until 1918 when he moved to Lincoln. He is unmarried and has been retired since 1960.

He estimates that he receives from 50 to 100 calls every year from adults and children asking, "Are you still asleep?" and similar questions.

Although he said he thinks the calls are "silly", he rarely gets angry at a caller except where someone "starts to get nasty."

"I'm not much of a guy to make mad."



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