

HEADLESS IN HANCOCK 1882

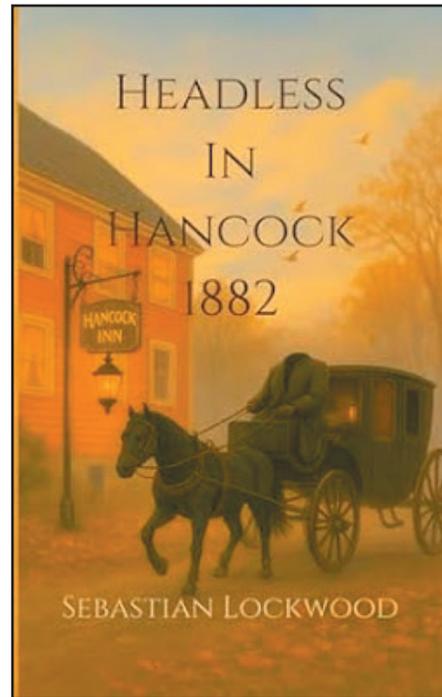
By Sebastian Lockwood

LUX Press 2025 395 pages

Review by Tom Miller

Sebastian Lockwood is a storyteller and a good one. He makes use of his skills in his most recent publication *Headless In Hancock 1882* which he sets in the Hancock Inn and Fox Tavern, an establishment that has actually been in existence since 1789, and in the surrounding Mondack region. Lockwood is unabashedly in love with the area which he pays homage to in the book. In the introduction he declares the work to be “historical fiction” which indeed it is, allowing him the freedom to tell a good story without letting mere facts get in the way. Having said that, one needs to understand that Lockwood went to great lengths to “get it right” in the sense of the political and social sensibilities of a small town in New Hampshire in 1882. After all the Civil War is just seventeen years in the past and many of the societal opinions regarding slavery and abolition still circulate. The radical Puritans still rule south of the Merrimack River. Electricity has not quite brought the onslaught of modernism to the area. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 is in effect. Boston and New York are intriguing but frightening places. Railroads are sort of the thing... elsewhere.

While the book follows several main characters throughout, each chapter brings a new set of visitors to stay at the Inn. Each new visitor is unique, and we find literary folks, cads, hunters, intellectuals, in other words a variety of interesting people. Lockwood is playful in introducing these characters. Washington Irving shows up as Benjamin Arbor, writer, who adds some gory details to the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow, hence the tie into the title of this book. Emerson is there as Waldo, an aged fellow whose caretaker is Aunt Moody. In real life Mary Moody Emerson, Ralph’s aunt who predeceased him by some twenty-five years was a great influence on his thinking. Fly Rod Cornelia Crosby, the first registered guide in Maine appears. James Freeman Clark interested in freedom and equality in real life was a minister and a editor for several literary magazines. Clerk Maxwell, an inventor, in real life was a renowned expert on electricity and magnetism. Eddie Gibbons, a writer, could be today’s Scottish poet of the same name. Roger McGuinn, something of a recluse living on the mountain, is perhaps named for the fellow who founded the current music group The Byrds and composed “The 1882 Survivalist” in their Folk Den collection. There are others if you care to delve into historical fact.



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Lockwood also introduces in detail a special libation and a unique meal in each chapter. The instructions for each drink are included in the narrative and the menus for the meals are in an addendum. Quite the epicurean Mr. Lockwood is.

The main characters in the book are quite likable, a little mercurial perhaps but very real and had me cheering for them as they dealt with the adversities, none of which were outlandishly disastrous. Their stories evolve in each chapter and are the threads around which the other stories are wound. Skillfully so.

All in all, this is a charming, nostalgic, and pleasant read evidencing the author's enchantment with the town, the area and the time. Well done.