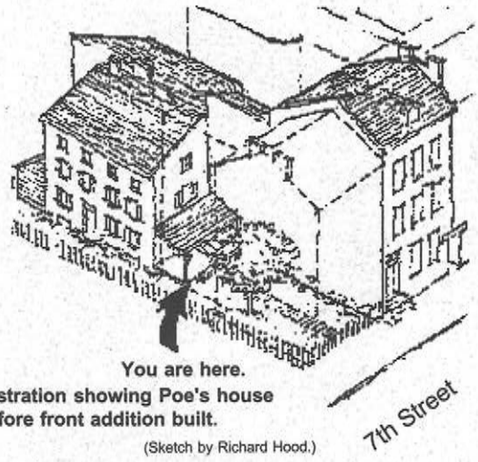


You are here.
Illustration showing Poe's house before front addition built.
(Sketch by Richard Hood.)

Self-Guiding Tour

Welcome! You are about to tour the home of Edgar Allan Poe. The household included Edgar, his young wife Virginia, her mother Maria Clemm or "Muddy," and a cat named "Catterina." During his six years in Philadelphia, Poe lived in five different houses. Only this house survives.

Just before moving here Virginia was diagnosed with tuberculosis. The family moved into this bright, airy house to help heal Virginia's lungs.

Start Tour

First Floor

Front Yard

Attached to the exposed brick wall was a porch roof under which the Poe family might have enjoyed many pleasant evenings. There was a spacious lawn facing Seventh Street. Apparently, Muddy could frequently be seen out here. One Spring Garden resident said:

Mrs. Clemm was always busy. . . . clearing the front yard, washing the windows and the stoop, and even white-washing the palings. You would notice how clean and orderly everything looked.

Step DOWN into the first room. Be Safe! While walking through the house, please use handrails and watch your step.

Parlor

Step down onto the original flooring. The Poe's would receive their guests here. Most of Poe's friends were writers like himself. One of them, Mayne Reid, remembered, *"In this humble domicile I can say that I have spent some of the pleasantest hours of my life."*

Be careful as you step over the raised threshold into the next room.

Kitchen

Muddy carried out most of the family's domestic affairs, cooking, cleaning and caring for her ailing daughter. She was described by Mayne Reid as *"the ever-vigilant guardian of the house, watching it against the silent but continuous sap of necessity."*

Poe's mother-in-law and aunt, Muddy.

Poe Ingram Collection (#38-135), The Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, Unviersity of Virginia Library.

Using the handrails, climb now to the second floor.

Second Floor

Small Room

The wall separating this small room from the hallway was probably added to create a bathroom for a later tenant. The open space may have been a sitting area when the Poe family lived here.

Step across the hall into the larger room.

Poe's Room

Poe was under constant pressure to produce writings and provide for his family. He kept irregular hours, writing whenever an idea inspired him. He may have slept alone in this room because Virginia was ill with the contagious disease tuberculosis. He wouldn't want to disturb her much-needed rest.

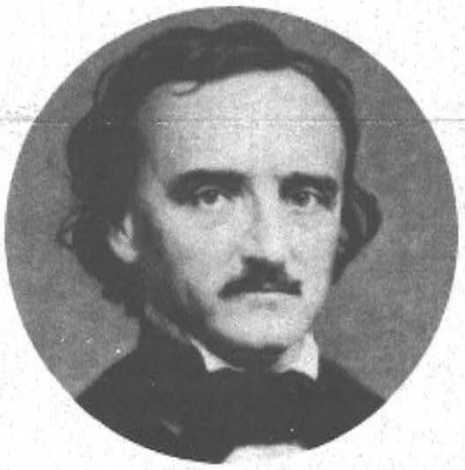


Image courtesy of Maryland Department, Enoch Pratt Library

Proceed up the stairs to the third floor.

Third Floor

Virginia's Room

Step up into the room on your right. On the far wall there was a window looking down onto the front yard and Seventh Street. Only two stoves were installed while the Poes lived here, one of them in this room. Because stoves are much better than fireplaces at keeping a room warm, we think frail Virginia slept here during the winter months.

Step down and up again into the room across the hall. Be careful please!

Virginia

One of Poe's acquaintances remembers meeting Virginia: *"She had . . . the most expressive and intelligent eyes I ever beheld."*

Image courtesy of the Edgar Allan Poe Museum, Richmond, Virginia.

Muddy's Room

In this room, Muddy worried about her sickly daughter and her troubled son-in-law. Poe was very lucky to have this hard-working and affectionate woman to look after him and his wife.

With your back to the stairs, open the door marked "Exit," go into the foyer, and through the next door marked "Exit." Walk down the fire stairs. At the bottom of the stairs the next "Exit" door opens onto Poe's back porch.

Back Porch.

Look at the back wall of the house. The hole on the upper left accommodated a stove. Laundry and outdoor summer cooking were done here.

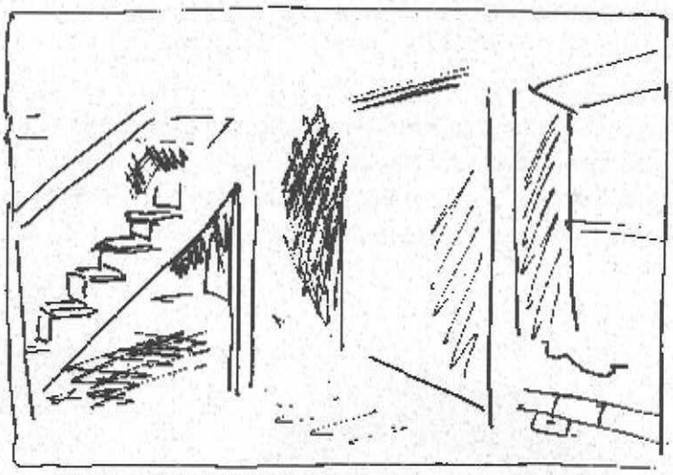
Follow the red brick path to your left and look for the black metal RAVEN STATUE (if you don't see the statue you've made a wrong turn).

Walk to the end of the picket fence and enter the door. You have returned to the starting point of the tour. Descend the stairs and enter the gray metal door on the right. Watch your head (LOW CEILING)!

Cellar

In Poe's horror story, "The Black Cat", the murderer confesses, *"I had walled the monster inside the tomb"* in the cellar. Poe published (and probably wrote) the story while he lived in this house.

Exit the cellar and walk upstairs to the exhibit area. Enter the hallway on your left and walk down the steps into the Reading Room.



Sketch of Poe's basement by NPS staff.

Reading Room

Poe wrote an essay called "The Philosophy of Furniture" in which he satirized the tastes of the newly rich middle class. He wrote explicit instructions on how to tastefully decorate a room. We did our best to recreate this room by following Poe's description. You may browse the book shelves or listen to a dramatic reading of a Poe story on the CD player. Stay a while and become more acquainted with Poe.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Thank you for taking the tour and for your support of the National Park Service! See the ranger if you have any questions.

8/2008