



Photo by Ranger Helen

Seasonal sighting: the bird inside the bird. Ralph Caccia's sculpture "The Raven" has been housing starlings for many years.

Still Going Strong at 200 **Celebrating the life of Edgar Poe**

The official party commemorating Edgar Poe's bicentennial was held by the Friends of Poe on Friday, January, 16, 2009 at the German Society which is just across the street from the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site (EDAL).

The event started with greetings from Steve Sitarski, Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services, who talked about the new exhibits in EDAL, and Cynthia MacLeod who is the Superintendent of Independence National Historic Park.

Tom Caramanico, board chair of the Friends of Independence National Historical Park, told us how the Friends of Poe came to be and how it fits in with the Friends of Independence. .

On display were ten finalists for a Poe bicentennial poster contest. Entrants were from the Art Institute of Philadelphia. The winning entry was by a young woman named Charlie L. R. Hills. It is a strong poster featuring the Ultima Thule daguerreotype from 1848, and the silhouettes of a raven, a black

cat, and mournful trees. (The poster has been produced for sale by park partner Eastern National, which helps support EDAL with proceeds from sales.)

Then rangers Paul Campbell, Eric Knight, Helen McKenna-Uff, Steve Medeiros, and writer Ed Pettit (the Philly Poe Guy) did a delightful short play that Helen had written, “Doppelganger Poes,” in which young Edgar Allan Poe (Paul) and older Poe (Helen) discuss, fight over, and ultimately concur about Poe’s works.

The two Poes led the audience in singing “Happy Birthday” to themselves, and a large birthday cake adorned with Poe’s face was cut. As the staff cut the cake, the guests were offered plenty of hot and cold hors d’oeuvres. There was a wine tasting table where volunteers were serving four wines that Poe mentioned in his works: sauvignon, haut medoc, sherry and amontillado. Many thanks to Director Maiti Gallen for all her hard work in putting together an exceptional evening, and the rest of the Friends of Poe for their support.

The park rangers took small groups of guests over to the Poe house to see the new exhibits. The exhibits have something for those with little or no knowledge of Poe and for the Poe aficionado. There are interactive exhibits, a time line and a scale model of the house showing its relationship with its two neighboring houses. There is even a code to solve like the one in “The Gold Bug.” Another highlight is two showcases featuring first editions

and letters by Poe, on loan from private collections.

Inside the house, the rooms are still empty of furniture, but large pieces of artwork are hanging on a few of the blank walls to give visitors an idea of what some of the furnishings may have been like. One installation suggests what Poe would have seen from his bedroom window.

On Saturday, poet and Poe scholar Daniel Hoffman gave a talk to a standing room only crowd titled “Ligeia?—Not Me! Three Contemporary Women Authors Respond to Poe.” (The three authors were Angela Carter, Joyce Carol Oates and Mary Oliver.) Professor Hoffman started with a brief history of the house and how it eventually ended in the care of the National Park Service. He also referenced his book, *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* .

Throughout opening day, crowds of people toured the house, either with a ranger or on a self-guided tour, using a handout that had been prepared by the Park Service.

For anyone who has not been to the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site, the idea of Park Rangers as literary docents may sound a bit odd, but rest assured, the Park Rangers at EDAL are not only experts on Poe, but they are all Poe aficionados.

Do plan a visit soon.

Thanks to Herb Moscowitz for writing most of this article and for the photos!



Steve Sitarski, Chief of Interpretation, Independence National Historic Park

Herb Moscowitz



Tom Caramanico, Chairman of the Board, Friends of Independence

Herb Moscowitz



Mary Jenkins, NPS

Cindy MacLeod, superintendent of Independence National Historic Park and Edgar (aka Park Ranger Helen McKenna-Uff) with winner of poster contest, Charlie L.R. Hills, and her winning entry.



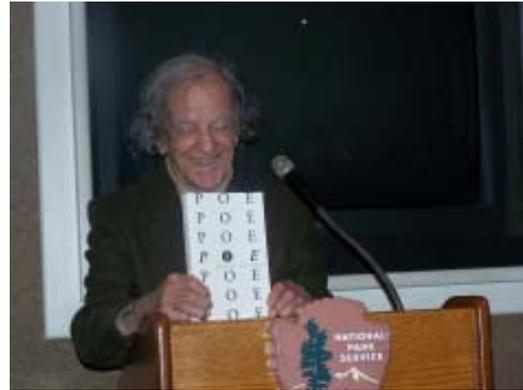
Herb Moscovitz

Park Rangers Eric Knight and Steve Medeiros and writer Ed Pettit react variously while the two "Poes" have a fight.



Herb Moscovitz

Poe meets Poe: Rangers Paul Campbell and Helen McKenna-Uff compare Poe's works.



Herb Moscovitz

Poe scholar Daniel Hoffman refers to his book Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe.



Mary Jenkins, NPS

Young Poe (aka Park Guide Paul Campbell) is abstemious while Alvin Holm and Daniel Hoffman, two of the three founders of the Friends of Poe, toast Poe's bicentennial. The third founder, Robert Regan, is not shown.



Herb Moscovitz

One of the new EDAL exhibits: an artist's interpretation of what Poe saw looking out his bedroom window.

What Else Happened? Remembering Poe in Philadelphia

Besides a great party, mounting new exhibits, and an afternoon with Daniel Hoffman, the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site (EDAL) was joined by other city institutions in commemorating Poe's bicentennial.

In October, the Rare Book Department of the Free Library of Philadelphia mounted *Quoth the Raven*, an exhibition of the Colonel Richard Gimbel Collection of the works of Edgar Allan Poe. Displayed from October through February were rare and rarely seen autograph manuscripts, first editions, and Poe family heirlooms. On January 10, 2009 the Central Branch of the library celebrated a full day of Poe. The Rare Book Department offered special Saturday hours to view *Quoth the Raven*. Actor David Keltz performed his masterful interpretation of Poe in the Montgomery Auditorium. There was a birthday cake and toast. The day ended with actress/Park Ranger Helen McKenna-Uff performing an intimate observation of Poe as fiancée Helen Whitman in "Poe's Helen Remembers".

For Halloween, the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation arranged for Elvira, Mistress of the Dark, to meet Edgar, the Master of the Macabre. Some Poe fans, even Elvira herself, expressed concern that Edgar might be out of her league. Nonetheless, she assisted in a recitation of "The Raven" and was seen with Edgar later at the Eastern State Penitentiary.

On January 13th, the Free Library of Philadelphia also hosted the "Great Poe Debate", brainchild of "Philly Poe Guy" Ed Pettit. The debate featured the curmudgeonly (really a very nice guy) Jeff Jerome from the Baltimore Poe House; the hilarious Paul Lewis, who is a professor from Boston and a latecomer to the Poe debate; freelance writer Ed Pettit; emcee local comic, media personality and Poe performer Grover Silcox and a cameo by Poe himself. The object was to contest why their city deserves Poe's remains. Could Philly winning have anything to do with the fact that the winner was determined by audience applause? (The mayor of Baltimore subpoenaed Pettit to a Baltimore debate, but no date has been announced.)

Thursday, January 15, Tom Devaney hosted "A Murder of Ravens" at the Kelly Writers House at the University of Pennsylvania. It was a very creative event, participants presented history, adaptations, translations, a talk about a roller coaster called "The Raven", a screening of the Simpson's version (with the almighty voice of James Earl Jones as narrator and the whiny Homer as the man lamenting Lenore). Dan Hoffman and Ed Pettit were among the participants.



A controversial meeting: Poe and Elvira.

Herb Moscovitz



Book launch for Poe: 19 New Tales Inspired by Edgar Allan Poe. (Left to right): Laird Barron, Ellen Datlow, Edward Pettit, Greg Frost, and John Langan.

Herb Moscovitz

On Friday January 16, 2009 our favorite media personality, Grover Silcox, appeared with Fox 29's Dr. Mike at the College of Physicians Mutter Museum offering "Beloved Physician", a look at how medical issues, such as his wife's tuberculosis, influenced Poe's life and writing.

In addition to Daniel Hoffman, EDAL hosted a number of scholarly speakers. In November former site volunteer, now Park Ranger at Longfellow Historic Site, Rob Velella, spoke about Poe's "Longfellow War" and signed and discussed his Poe biographical 2009 calendar. In December, EDAL was closed to prepare for the installation of new exhibits. On March 28, 19th century literature expert, David Reynolds, professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, discussed "Poe in his Times" and signed copies of his new book *Waking Giant: America in the Age of Jackson*. April 3, cultural historian and professor at University of Southern California, Karen Halttunen, author of *Murder Most Foul*, offered a fascinating investigation into how Poe's Gothic horror was shaped by the times and his personal experiences.

Camden County College of New Jersey offered a Thursday night series, "Poe's Bicentennial Birthday: A Celebration of His Life and His Literature." Speakers included Ed Pettit; Robert Lorenzi; and Liliane Weissberg. Performances included Grover Silcox in "Edgar Allan Poe and the Flip Side of Comedy" and Karl Babij, in "Seeing is Believing: Meet Edgar Allan Poe".



Steve Medeiros, NPS

Winners of Poetry contest, left to right: 1st place Zachary Nichols; Honorable Mention Michael Brunner; 3rd place Dorothy Hodgson; 2nd place Nikita Shah; Honorable Mentions Michele Ozer and Jaimon Jacob.

The Library Company of Philadelphia mounted a wonderful exhibit, "Philadelphia Gothic: Murders, Mysteries, Monsters, & Mayhem," which closed April 14. The exhibit highlighted the work of Charles Brockden Brown, Robert Montgomery Bird and George Lippard, who influenced Poe and numerous other artists down to the present day.

On February 21st, EDAL hosted a book launch for *Poe: 19 New Tales Inspired by Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by Ellen Datlow. Edward Pettit, introduced the event at the German Society of Pennsylvania. In attendance were Ellen Datlow, along with three authors from the anthology: Greg Frost, John Langan and Laird Barron.

For Poetry Month and National Park Week, EDAL had the winners of the Friends of Poe Poetry Contest read their works on April 26. The quality of submissions was very impressive. The winning poem will be featured in the next newsletter.

See the events listing to learn what's coming next!

In Memory of Two Great Friends of Poe

We are sad to report that William L. Hires, who worked at the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site, recently passed away, at the age of 90.

After retiring from careers in academia and mental health, Bill worked as a part-time Park Ranger from 1990 to 2005, at Independence Hall and the Edgar Allan Poe site. Bill was a proud member of the First City Troop; the Society of the Cincinnati; the Society of Colonial Wars, as well as many other organizations.

Bill loved working with people and could engage all types with his charming and cheerful personality and magic tricks, something Poe would surely have appreciated.

Gretchen Worden passed away in 2004. Recently, the Mütter Museum of the College of Physicians in Philadelphia, where Gretchen spent her entire professional career, installed a portrait of Gretchen in the Worden Gallery. Gretchen was a lifelong Poe fan. As an expert in 19th century medicine she gave witty, informative talks at the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site on Poe's mysterious death and on Virginia's tuberculosis. On May 8, 2009, Friend of Poe, Herb Moscowitz, attended the installation and reports the following:

“Gretchen was the director of the Mütter Museum from 1988 until her death in 2004. To quote the College, ‘She combined an encyclopedic knowledge of medical history, a tart sense of humor, and an incandescent

presence to forge an international reputation as a museum educator and spokeswoman for the Mütter Museum.’

There was a film containing images of Gretchen in her cluttered office, (with the huge Edgar Allan Poe poster) and in the museum, but the highlights were clips from her three appearances on the David Letterman show. We then walked down to the Worden Gallery and viewed the wonderful portrait of Gretchen, painted by Alexandra Tyng. The oil on linen painting is three feet wide and four feet high. The Museum staff told how they had tried to convey to the artist the look that Gretchen had when she was about to speak. The artist had never met Gretchen but with the help of Gretchen's friends at the Museum, she succeeded in capturing that look.”

These two unique and wonderful personalities are sorely missed and will be fondly remembered at the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site.

*Portrait of
Gretchen Worden
by artist
Alexandra Tyng*



William Hires worked at the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site.

Philly.com



Herb Moscowitz

Friends of Poe – Bicentennial Calendar of Events

Wednesday, October 7, evening

On the 160th anniversary of the author's death, Hal Poe, professor from Union University and descendant of one of Edgar's relatives, will discuss the most famous member of his family tree. The professor's book on Poe has been nominated for an Edgar Award and an Agatha Award. Location to be announced.

Saturday, November 21 (time and location to be announced)

Kevin Poe (no relation) will give a fascinating and entertaining talk, illustrated with beautiful images of astral bodies, which explains the science behind Poe's major work, *Eureka*, about the origins of the universe, and why it is largely unknown. Kevin interprets the night sky as a Park Ranger at Bryce Canyon in Utah.

Saturday, January 10, 2010 2:00 pm

Penn State English Professor Richard Kopley will talk about Poe and the mystery story and sign copies of his book *Edgar Allan Poe and the Dupin Mysteries*. Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site, 532 North Seventh Street, Philadelphia. (215) 597-8780. Free.

Other Events

October 2 -3, 2009 7:30 pm

Edgar Allan Poe, (Park Ranger Helen McKenna-Uff, appearing courtesy of the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site) will perform some of his greatest works at Allaire Historic Village (732) 919-3500. The performance time is 7:30pm at the Howell Works Chapel National Historic Site, an intimate and charming 19th century setting that seats only 100 people.

<http://www.allairevillage.org>.

October 8 -11, 2009

The Third International Poe Conference will meet in Philadelphia Oct 8 to 11, 2009, at the Hyatt Hotel. At the conference, Poe scholars will present new scholarship, participants will attend Poe-inspired musical performances and enjoy a private viewing of the Gimbel Poe Collection. To learn more visit <http://www2.lv.psu.edu/PSA/Conference2009/>.

October 1- November 1, 2009

Brat Productions is mounting a haunted house NOT for kiddies. "Haunted Poe", will have you moving from room to room, down twisting hallways, to encounter scenes from "The Tell-Tale Heart", "The Raven", etc. Contact brat@bratproductions.org or call (215) 627-2577.

Join the Friends

Friends of Poe supports the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site in its efforts to interpret Poe's life. Membership benefits include free attendance of special events, books, tours and an opportunity to meet with other Poe admirers. We invite you to join. If you join, among other benefits, you will receive the twice-yearly Friends of Poe Newsletter. For more information, go to www.friendsofindependence.org or call the Friends at (215) 597-7919 or call EDAL at (215) 597-8780.



*Spiral Galaxy
(See November 21)*

Hubble telescope image, NASA



Professor Hal Poe

www.uu.edu

Poe is Still Everywhere!

Poe's 200th is a global celebration. Spain and Moscow already had their conferences. There will be conferences in Japan <http://www.poejapan.org/>; Romania eapoe.conference@yahoo.com; and Brazil www.ufmg.br/poe.

The **Baltimore Poe Museum** will host a re-enactment of Poe's funeral, followed by a horse drawn hearse taking Poe's "body" to the Westminster Burial Grounds. This event will take place on Saturday, October 10, 2009. And then there's the biggest Poe birthday party every January. <http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/government/historic> or call 410-396-7932.

The **Richmond Poe Museum** hosts regular "unhappy hours" and will feature opportunities to meet Eliza Poe, Poe's talented mother. <http://www.poemuseum.org>.

The **Edgar Allan Poe Cottage** in New York is undergoing a major renovation and restoration. <http://www.bronxhistoricalsociety.org/poecottage>.

The **University of Virginia** is offering an exhibition: "From Out That Shadow: the Life and Legacy of Edgar Allan Poe", featuring more than 100 items related to Poe. <http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/press/poe/>.