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American Masters – Edgar Allan Poe: Buried Alive

*Premieres nationwide Monday, October 30 at 9/8c on PBS (check local listings)
for Halloween*

Edgar Allan Poe Bio & Timeline

In biography the truth is everything. — Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, January 19, 1809, the son of two actors. By the time he was three years old, his father had abandoned the family and his mother, praised for her beauty and talent, had succumbed to consumption. Her death was the first in a series of brutal losses that would resonate through Poe's prose and poetry for the duration of his life.

Poe was taken in by John Allan, a wealthy Richmond merchant and an austere Scotsman who believed in self-reliance and hard work. His wife, Francis, became a second mother to Poe – until, like Poe's mother, she died. Allan, who had never formally adopted Poe, became increasingly harsh toward the young man and the two clashed frequently. Eventually, Poe left the Allan home, vowing to make his way in the world alone. By the time he was 20, Poe's dreams of living as a southern gentleman were dashed.

After abandoning a military career during which he published his first book of poetry, Poe landed in Baltimore and took refuge with an aunt, Maria Clemm, and her 13-year-old daughter, Virginia, whom he would later marry despite a significant age difference. While in Baltimore, he won a newspaper contest with the story *MS. in a Bottle* and found his first literary success. His Baltimore connections led to a job in Richmond as the editor of a literary journal,

and his career as a “magazinish” and a literary critic was launched – a field in which Poe would have enormous influence. Poe believed strongly that the young United States should hold the arts, and in particular, writing, to exceptionally high standards. His harsh reviews brought him the nickname the “Tomahawk Man” and also earned him many enemies.

During the 1830s and '40s, Poe moved between Philadelphia and New York as editor of and contributor to some of America’s most popular magazines. He worked with equal skill in poetry, short stories, non-fiction, essays and works of social and literary criticism, and published his only novel. He invented the modern detective story and is credited with introducing the science-fiction genre as well. Poe achieved his greatest triumph in 1845 when his poem, *The Raven*, was published to great acclaim. It is arguably the most famous poem in American literature and for a time made him a celebrity.

Despite his success, Poe remained impoverished and all but destitute. He not only played the tortured artist, he lived the part. At times he drank heavily and behaved erratically. He suffered no fools and offended many. As more than one biographer has noted, Poe had a remarkable knack for undermining himself whenever success came too close. After the publication of *The Raven*, at the height of his fame, he gave a reading in Boston during which he insulted that city’s literary establishment – many of whom were present. Scandal ensued.

In 1847, his young and beloved wife, like his mother, died of tuberculosis. Her death drove Poe into a deep depression. In a revealing letter to a friend, he wrote of how Virginia’s repeated oscillations between recovery and relapse had driven him “insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity.”

In 1849, during a period of recovery and relative optimism, Poe traveled the east coast, working toward achieving his dream of starting his own magazine, *The Stylus*. Reportedly ill, Poe arrived in Baltimore in late September 1849 on the eve of a raucous and corrupt municipal election. He mysteriously vanished for five days. When he reappeared he was delirious and wearing clothes not his own. He never regained his senses and four days later, on October 7, 1849, died soon after uttering the name “Reynolds.” The creator of the detective story died at the heart of his own mystery.

Timeline

1809

January: On January 19, Edgar Poe is born in Boston, Massachusetts, to actors Elizabeth Arnold Poe and David Poe, Jr.

1811

July: Poe’s father, David Poe, Jr., abandons his family and disappears.

September: The Placide and Green Company, a traveling acting troupe, brings Elizabeth Poe and her children to Richmond, Virginia.

November: *The Richmond Enquirer* runs an announcement for a benefit to aid Elizabeth Poe

who is on her deathbed.

December: Poe's mother dies and Poe is taken into the care of John and Frances Allan in Richmond, Virginia, while his older brother, William, is sent to the Poe family in Baltimore and his young sister, Rosalie, is taken to the home of William and Jane Scott Mackenzie in Richmond.

1812

June: The U.S. Congress declares war on Great Britain.

1814

January: John Allan arranges for Poe to begin private study with a teacher in Richmond.

August: The British descend on Washington, D.C., and burn the Capitol.

1815

March: At age five, Poe is enrolled in William Ewing's school where he begins his study of classical languages as well as French and English, writing, and arithmetic.

June / July: Poe moves to England with John and Frances Allan. Their journey by ship takes about four weeks. John Allan expects to stay in England for several years to develop new business for his general merchant and tobacco trading firm, *Ellis & Allan*.

1816

April: Poe enters the boarding school of the Misses Dubourg. He would later name the laundress in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* Pauline Dubourg.

1818

July: Poe is enrolled at the Manor House School in Stoke Newington. Poe's experience at the school would later inspire his short story *William Wilson*.

1820

June: Poe and the Allans board the sailing ship *Martha* and begin their journey back to Richmond, Virginia.

September: Poe continues his education under the tutelage of Joseph H. Clarke, who would later recount, "While the other boys wrote mere mechanical verses, Poe wrote genuine poetry: the boy was a born poet." His fellow students also remember him for his poetic skill, as well as his athletic prowess in swimming, boxing and running.

1823

April 1: Poe attends William Burke's Seminary for Boys. Here, he meets friend Robert Craig Stanard whose mother, Jane, would become Poe's first childhood crush.

1824

April: Jane Stith Stanard dies. Poe reportedly holds vigil by her grave.

June: Poe accepts a bet and completes his celebrated six-mile swim up the James River.

October: Poe participates in the ceremonies honoring the Marquis de Lafayette during his visit to Richmond. The Marquis de Lafayette had known Poe's grandfather, David Poe, Sr., during the Revolutionary War.

1825

March: The University of Virginia opens. John Allan inherits a large portion of his uncle William Galt's fortune.

June: Poe meets and becomes engaged to Elmira Royster, but her father opposes the marriage.

1826

February: At age 17, Poe begins classes at the University of Virginia.

December: Despite excelling at his studies, Poe leaves the University of Virginia due to significant gambling debts and other unpaid bills, which John Allan refuses to pay. He returns to Richmond to discover Elmira Royster is engaged to Alexander B. Shelton.

1827

March: After a series of quarrels with John Allan, Poe leaves Richmond for Boston.

June: Poe enlists in the U.S. Army under the alias Edgar A. Perry. He is stationed at Fort Independence at Castle Island in Boston, where he serves as an occupation clerk. Poe's first book of poetry, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, is published by Boston publisher Calvin F.S. Thomas.

1828

May: Poe is stationed at Fort Moultrie in South Carolina.

December: Poe's battery moves to Fort Monroe in Virginia.

1829

January: Poe is promoted to the rank of Regimental Sergeant Major.

February: Frances Allan dies and Poe arrives one day late for her funeral. Poe begins to solicit John Allan's help to leave the army in order to attend West Point Military Academy.

April: Poe is discharged from the U.S. Army. He spends the next year living with friends and family in Richmond and Baltimore as he attempts to gain admittance to West Point.

December: Poe's second book of poetry, *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems*, is published by Baltimore publisher Hatch & Dunning.

1830

June: With John Allan's help, Poe receives an appointment to West Point.

October: Poe's foster father John Allan marries Louisa Patterson.

1831

January: Poe admits to John Allan that he plans to resign from West Point and requests his permission. He then neglects his studies, which results in a court martial. He is dismissed from West Point.

April: Poe's third book of poems, *Poems*, is published in New York. The book is dedicated to "The U.S. Corps of Cadets."

May: After spending several months in New York, Poe returns to Baltimore to live with his aunt Maria Clemm, his cousin Virginia and his brother Henry.

August: Poe's brother Henry dies.

1832

The *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* publishes Poe's earliest short stories: *Metzengerstein*, *The Duc de L'Omelette*, *A Tale of Jerusalem*, *A Decided Loss*, and *The Bargain Lost*.

1833

October: The *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* announces Poe's short story *MS. Found in a Bottle* as the winner of its short story contest. Poe wins a \$50 prize and the newspaper publishes the story.

1834

February: Poe reportedly visits John Allan, who is gravely ill, however Allan refuses to see him.

March: John Allan dies. He does not name Poe in his will.

1835

March: Poe's short story *Berenice* is published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. Shortly thereafter, he begins writing literary reviews for the journal.

August: Poe returns to Richmond to serve as an editor for the *Southern Literary Messenger*.

October: Poe's aunt Maria Clemm and cousin Virginia join him in Richmond.

1836

May: Poe marries his 13-year-old cousin Virginia Clemm.

1837

January: Thomas White dismisses Poe from his editorial position at the *Southern Literary Messenger*. The magazine proceeds to publish Poe's only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, in serialized installments.

February: Poe, his aunt Maria Clemm, and his wife Virginia, move to New York. At the time, U.S. banks suspend specie payments, leading to the Panic of 1837 financial crisis.

1838

January: Poe and his family move to Philadelphia.

July: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Poe's only novel, is published as a single volume.

October: The first issue of the *American Museum* magazine includes Poe's tale *Ligeia*.

1839

May: Actor and publisher William E. Burton hires Poe as assistant editor for *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*. Poe's salary is \$10 dollars per week. Burton introduces Poe to the literati of Philadelphia.

September: The September issue of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* includes Poe's tale *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

October: One of Poe's earliest critical reviews of Henry W. Longfellow's poetry appears in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*.

December: Lea & Blanchard publish a collection of 25 of Poe's short stories, titled *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*.

1840

May: William E. Burton advertises the sale of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*. With this news, Poe begins to circulate a prospectus for his own journal, *The Penn Magazine*. Burton dismisses Poe from his editorial post at *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*.

December: Poe becomes extremely ill and he is forced to postpone publishing *The Penn Magazine*.

1841

February: A banking crisis once again forces Poe to postpone publishing his own journal. Poe accepts an offer to be the book review editor for *Graham's Magazine* for a salary of \$800 per year.

April: Poe invents the detective story with *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, which appears in the April issue of *Graham's Magazine*. Poe meets fellow literary critic and editor Rufus W. Griswold.

May: Poe sends Griswold a number of poems to include in Griswold's anthology *The Poets and Poetry of America*.

June: Poe, weary from his struggle to earn a living as an editor and writer, writes to his friend Frederick William Thomas, who works in the Treasury department, for help to find employment with the government.

1842

January: Virginia Poe becomes ill with tuberculosis. Friends and acquaintances remark that Poe is drinking heavily.

March: Poe interviews Charles Dickens during the author's tour of the United States.

April: Poe resigns from *Graham's Magazine* and George R. Graham hires Rufus W. Griswold as the magazine's editor. In the same month, Griswold's anthology *The Poets and Poetry of America* is published. It contains only three of Poe's poems.

July: At Griswold's own request, Poe writes a review of *The Poets and Poetry of America*. His review is fair, but not the laudatory review that Griswold expected.

1843

January: Poe's short story *The Tell-Tale Heart* is first published in the first issue of James Russell Lowell's Boston magazine, *The Pioneer*. Poe also resumes soliciting investors for his own magazine, now titled the *Stylus*.

March: Poe travels to Washington, D.C., to meet with Robert Tyler, son of President John Tyler. He drinks to excess and does not meet with Tyler. Nevertheless, Tyler does recommend him for a position at the Custom House in Philadelphia.

June: Poe wins first prize in *Dollar Newspaper's* literary contest for his short story *The Gold-Bug* and receives a \$100 prize. The story is popular among readers and issues containing the serialized story repeatedly sell out.

July: Following the popularity of *The Gold-Bug*, a collection of Poe's stories, titled *The Prose Romances of Edgar A. Poe*, is published by William H. Graham.

August: Poe's story *The Black Cat* is featured on the first page of *The Saturday Evening Post*.

November: Poe begins a lecture tour with a talk on American poetry. His Philadelphia lecture is sold out.

1844

April: Poe and Virginia leave Philadelphia for New York. They find lodging and send for Maria Clemm. Poe sells *The Balloon-Hoax* to the *New York Sun*. Published anonymously, the story leads the public to believe that a small crew of men has crossed the Atlantic Ocean in a hot air balloon.

October: Poe becomes assistant to the editor of the *Evening Mirror*.

1845

January: *The Raven* is first published in the *American Review* as well as the *Evening Mirror* under the pseudonym “Quarles.” The poem is extremely popular and numerous publications reprint the poem over the following months. Poe and Rufus Griswold meet again and Griswold requests of Poe additional poems to include in a new edition of *The Poets and Poetry of America*, as well as short stories to include in a new publication, *Prose Writers of America*.

February: Poe joins the editorial staff of the *Broadway Journal*. He also continues to give lectures on American poetry.

March: Poe begins a friendship with Frances Sargent Osgood after meeting at a gathering of New York literati. They exchange flirtatious poems in the pages of New York’s literary magazines.

June: New York publisher Wiley & Putnam publishes a collection of Poe’s short stories. The collection, titled *Tales*, contains 12 of Poe’s short stories, including some his most popular works: *The Gold-Bug*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*.

July: Poe becomes lead editor of the *Broadway Journal*. He continues to give lectures and recite *The Raven* at the literary gatherings at Anne C. Lynch’s home.

August: Poe’s negative review of Henry W. Longfellow’s *The Spanish Student* appears in the *American Review*. This is the latest in a series of critical reviews Poe has written about the beloved poet.

October: Poe is invited to lecture at the Boston Lyceum. He is expected to read an original poem, but instead he gives a rambling apology and reads one of his earliest poems, *Al Araaf*. At least one Boston reviewer lambastes him, and Poe responds with public letters highly critical of Boston and Bostonians. With loans from friends and colleagues, Poe is able to buy the *Broadway Journal* from his partner John Bisco.

November: New York publisher Wiley & Putnam issues a second collection of Poe’s work, titled *The Raven and Other Poems*.

December: Overwhelmed by mounting debts, Poe is forced to sell much of his interest in the *Broadway Journal* to Thomas Lane. Lane and Poe quarrel and Lane decides to close the magazine.

1846

January: *The Raven and Other Poems* is released in England. The final issue of the *Broadway Journal* is published. At home, the New York literary circles begin to scrutinize Poe’s close friendships with Mrs. Osgood and Mrs. Elizabeth Ellet. Anne C. Lynch withdraws his invitation to her literary soirees.

April: Poe’s essay *The Literati of New York City* is published in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. It is met with mixed reviews.

May: Poe, Virginia and Maria leave the city for a country cottage in Fordham, New York. Several newspapers report that Poe is ill with “brain fever.” Poe himself writes that he is

experiencing “continued ill health, with a pressure of engagements.”

June: The Paris newspaper *La Quotidienne* publishes a translation of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

July: Poe engages a literary “battle in print” with some of his fellow writers over his review of their peers, *The Literati of New York City*. Poe sues the proprietors of the *Evening Mirror* and the *Weekly Mirror* for libel.

November: Virginia’s health grows worse.

1847

January: Virginia dies of tuberculosis. Poe is devastated and suffers from his own ill health. Maria Clemm and friend Marie Louise Shew care for him.

February: The Superior Court hears Poe’s libel suit against the *Evening Mirror* and the *Weekly Mirror*. The Court rules in Poe’s favor and awards him \$225 in damages.

March: Poe has still not recovered from his illness. Mrs. Shew takes him to see a physician at New York University School of Medicine.

July: Poe visits Philadelphia and meets with some of his colleagues and friends, including Louis A. Godey and George R. Graham.

1848

January: Poe prepares a new prospectus for his own magazine *The Stylus*.

February: Poe gives his lecture “The Universe.” Sarah Helen Whitman writes a Valentine poem to Poe for Anne C. Lynch’s Valentine event. The poem is published and Poe reciprocates the gesture by sending her a copy of his poem *To Helen*.

June: Poe’s lecture “The Universe” is published under the title *Eureka*.

July: Poe visits Lowell, Massachusetts, and becomes acquainted with Annie Richmond, with whom he develops a close friendship. He also visits Richmond, Virginia, to continue to solicit support for his magazine *The Stylus*. While in Richmond, he renews a friendship with his childhood sweetheart Elmira Royster Shelton.

September: After several months of exchanging letters and poems with Sarah Helen Whitman, Poe abandons his tour of the South to court Whitman in Providence. He proposes marriage, but she declines.

October / November: Poe visits Annie Richmond in Lowell before visiting Sarah Helen Whitman in Providence. He admits he loves both women. In a moment of despair, Poe takes laudanum in an attempted suicide. In the following days, he recovers and sits for a daguerreotype, now known as the “Ultima Thule” daguerreotype. Poe returns to Providence and Sarah Helen Whitman agrees to marry Poe on the condition that he remains sober.

December: Poe again visits Whitman in Providence. They plan to marry immediately, but when Whitman learns that Poe has been drinking, she breaks their engagement.

1849

April: Poe composes the poem *For Annie* in honor of his love for Anne Richmond. The poem is published in the *Flag of Our Union* and is then reprinted in a number of other journals. Poe enters an agreement with the young publisher Edwin H.N. Patterson to publish Poe's magazine *The Stylus*.

July: Poe travels to Philadelphia and then on to Richmond for a lecture tour to raise additional funds to establish *The Stylus*. He reunites with his sister Rosalie and his childhood sweetheart Elmira Royster Shelton, who is now a wealthy widow. He proposes marriage to Elmira.

August: Poe is initiated into the Sons of Temperance.

September: Elmira Royster Shelton finally accepts Poe's marriage proposal. Poe writes to Maria Clemm to inform her of the impending marriage and his upcoming trip back to New York to fetch her for the wedding. He leaves by steamship on September 27. His plan is to disembark in Baltimore in order to board the train north to Philadelphia and New York.

October: Poe's whereabouts are unknown in the days following his arrival in Baltimore. On October 3, he is found at a local tavern, ill, disheveled and incoherent. Baltimore editor Joseph Snodgrass is called and Poe is admitted to Washington College Hospital, only to die four days later, October 7, without regaining his reason. There has never been a conclusive diagnosis or cause of death.

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