



Museums in Strange Places
“Poe Belongs to Baltimore, Baltimore to Poe”
(S02/E11)

Episode Description:

He’s the master of macabre and mystery, the man who created mystery fiction, the face on the socks and beer bottles of everyday Baltimoreans. He’s Edgar Allan Poe, and he belongs to Baltimore. Join me on a visit to the Poe House in Baltimore, the tiny house where his career began, to learn about Baltimore’s devotion to Poe, his tragic life, and the future of his legacy in the city where he died mysteriously.

[Television Clip: Crowd screaming, announcer says that the Baltimore Ravens have won the Superbowl, crowd goes wild]

Hannah (Scripted): *This is the sound of the crowd going wild as the Baltimore Ravens win the 2013 Superbowl. It’s the sound of a team named after a 19th century poem taking home the trophy in the single most popular sporting event in America. It’s so Baltimore.*

“The Raven” is probably one of the most famous poems in America, the number one hit from master of macabre Edgar Allan Poe, whose haunting poems and short stories have influenced writers around the world for over 175 years and laid the groundwork for the genres of mystery, science fiction, and horror.

It's also one of my all-time favorites, so in this episode I'm indulging myself a little bit, honoring the memory of 13 year old me, a nerdy homeschooler in cargo shorts and ponytail, pacing around our Poe-era historic home in Maryland, trying to memorize all 19 stanzas of the Raven, starting with its famous opening line...

Excerpt (Read by David Federman):

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
 While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—
 Only this and nothing more."

Hannah (Scripted): *You're listening to Museums in Strange Places. I'm your host, Hannah Hethmon, a consultant specializing in podcasting for museums and cultural nonprofits. And this a show for people who love museums, stories, culture, and exploring the world.*

Enrica Jang: There are very few cities in the United States that revere a writer the same way Baltimore Loves Po.

Hannah (Scripted): *This is Enrica Jang, Director of the Poe House in Baltimore.*

Enrica Jang: If you ask the average Baltimorean the top five things they associate with their city, Poe makes that list. And there are lots of Poe places around the city of Baltimore, the hospital where he died, the cemetery where he's buried.

Hannah (Scripted): *13 months before The Ravens' win ignited celebrations and ecstatic cheers in every sports bar in Baltimore, locals gathered for a different winter ritual.*

Newscaster: Tonight mark the 203rd anniversary of Edgar Allen Poe's birthday for decades of mystery man in black cars. Mark the occasion with a visit to Poe's grave.

Onsite Reporter: Hi there. Yes. People are gathering right now all very hopeful that this is not the end of the tradition. They're all waiting to see if the Poe toaster will show up tonight to add the traditional trio of roses and half empty bottle of Cognac to the grave site in addition to the already fresh flowers that you can see here. Right now, I've seen at least a dozen people and has every minute passes by. More people are walking up, many are from Baltimore and say they've been coming for years. In fact, some have seen the toaster in person, others are from out of state, and they're hopeful that the toaster will

resume the tradition because if no one shows up between midnight and 6:00 AM, the curator of the Poe House and Museum is prepared to declare that tradition dead.

Hannah (Scripted): *I made my first pilgrimage to Poe's grave with my grandma around age twelve or thirteen. There's a photo of us posing in front of the large memorial, and you can just see the nerdy joy filling my little self. My Grandma Charlotte and I shared a love of literature. I wish she were alive to hear this podcast now. She'd be so proud and would wax poetic about how amazing young people today are and how clever we are to be reinventing radio. And she'd know what she was talking about, because back in the golden age of radio, she was one of the few women to have own show, coming on air as "Your Miss Fortune," a play on her maiden name, a name I was lucky enough to get as a middle name. Yes, Fortune is my middle name.*

Speaking of which, it's in Baltimore that Poe found both great fortune and misfortune. This is why he belongs to Baltimore and not to the other cities that he called home or that think they can lay claim to him.

Enrica Jang: He wasn't born here. Edgar Allan Poe was actually born in Boston, Massachusetts. But his father, his biological father's family, David Poe was from Baltimore And Baltimore is a city that he most closely identified with. It's a place where he began his professional writing career and it is the place where he died.

Hannah (Scripted): *I'm talking to Enrica in the house where Poe's literary career began. It's small, dark, and almost unbearably warm in the middle of Maryland summer heat, even with the air conditioner running and creating some of the background noise in this recording.*

Enrica Jang: Edgar Allan Poe was actually bunking with members of his family when he lived in this house. 203 North Amity Street in Baltimore, Maryland is the oldest surviving home where Poe lived on the east coast of the United States. But it is not the onlyhome in Baltimore where he lived. He lived in Baltimore over a period of about six years.

Edgar Allan Poe was the first American writer to support himself entirely by his pen.

While he was living in this house, he entered a local newspaper writing contest. He entered the poetry side and he entered a short story called manuscript in a bottle. There was a bit of a mini scandal because one of the editors from the newspaper won first place in the poetry. But Poe did take a first place for short story. He won \$50, which in the 1800s was quite a bit of money for this young man at that time. And the connections that he made in having won that first prize...he started as a magazine man here. He made professional connections here. He started to make his place a writer and , so we can say that it was in this house that he began his

professional career and Baltimore can rightly claim that he began his professional career here. It was the first city to recognize him.

Hannah (Scripted): *The tragedy surrounding Poe's life and death is compelling because his biography often reads like one of his stories. In order to understand why people from all over the world travel to Baltimore just to stand in the place where he put pen to paper, we'll need to spend a little time with his writing.*

The story that launched Poe's career in 1833 was Manuscript in a Bottle. He wrote it here in the Poe House in Baltimore, and it begins by introducing us to a typically melancholic Poe protagonist:

Excerpt of Story (Read by Tony Scheinman): Of my country and of my family I have little to say. Ill usage and length of years have driven me from the one, and estranged me from the other. Hereditary wealth afforded me an education of no common order, and a contemplative turn of mind enabled me to methodize the stores which early study very diligently garnered up. ... I have often been reproached with the aridity of my genius....

Hannah (Scripted): *In addition to the qualities thus described, this lovely young man is restless, and he decides to go on a sea voyage...beginning in Java.*

Excerpt of Story (Read by Tony Scheinman): I went as passenger--having no other inducement than a kind of nervous restlessness which haunted me like a fiend.

Hannah (Scripted): *Days go by with no sign that anything is out of the ordinary. Then, our protagonist spots a strange single cloud on the horizon. This is followed by an ominous change in the weather.*

Excerpt of Story (Read by Tony Scheinman): The air now became intolerably hot, and was loaded with spiral exhalations similar to those arising from heated iron. As night came on, every breath of wind died away, and a more entire calm it is impossible to conceive. The flame of a candle burned upon the poop without the least perceptible motion, and a long hair, held between the finger and thumb, hung without the possibility of detecting a vibration. However, as the captain said he could perceive no indication of danger, and as we were drifting in bodily to shore, he ordered the sails to be furled, and the anchor let go. No watch was set, and the crew, consisting principally of Malays, stretched themselves deliberately upon deck. I went below --not without a full presentiment of evil.

Hannah (Scripted): *Being the only man awake during the night, our narrator is the only one who is able to seek shelter as a massive storm whips up around them as if out of nowhere. Everyone except himself and another passenger are swept away. Eventually the storm subsides, and the two survivors have no option but to cling to the wrecked hull of the ship as it flies south for five days "at a rate defying computation"...in very strange weather.*

Excerpt of Story (Read by Tony Scheinman): The sun arose with a sickly yellow lustre, and clambered a very few degrees above the horizon --emitting no decisive light. There were no clouds whatever apparent, yet the wind was upon the increase, and blew with a fitful and unsteady fury. About noon, as nearly as we could guess, our attention was again arrested by the appearance of the sun. It gave out no light, properly so called, but a dull and sullen glow unaccompanied by any ray. Just before sinking within the turgid sea its central fires suddenly went out, as if hurriedly extinguished by some unaccountable power. It was a dim, silver-like rim, alone, as it rushed down the unfathomable ocean.

Hannah (Scripted): *The sun never rises. The air grows cold and the two men tie themselves to the mast as the ship begins to rise and fall on waves of unimaginable height. Hours pass, maybe days...and then they see it.*

Excerpt of Story (Read by Tony Scheinman): We were at the bottom of one of these abysses, when a quick scream from my companion broke fearfully upon the night. "See! see!" --cried he, shrieking in my ears, -- "Almighty God! see! see!" As he spoke, I became aware of a dull, sullen glare of red light which streamed down the sides of the vast chasm where we lay, and threw a fitful brilliancy upon our deck. Casting my eyes upwards, I beheld a spectacle which froze the current of my blood. At a terrific height directly above us, and upon the very verge of the precipitous descent, hovered a gigantic ship of nearly four thousand tons. Although upreared upon the summit of a wave of more than a hundred times her own altitude, her apparent size still exceeded that of any ship of the line or East Indiaman in existence. Her huge hull was of a deep dingy black, unrelieved by any of the customary carvings of a ship. A single row of brass cannon protruded from her open ports, and dashed off from their polished surfaces the fires of innumerable battle-lanterns, which swung to and fro about her rigging. But what mainly inspired us with horror and astonishment, was that she bore up under a press of sail in the very teeth of that supernatural sea, and of that ungovernable hurricane. When we first discovered her, her stupendous bows were alone to be seen, as she rose up, like a demon of the deep, slowly from the dim and horrible gulf beyond her. For a moment of intense terror she paused upon the giddy pinnacle, as if in contemplation of her own sublimity, then trembled and tottered, and --came down.

Hannah (Scripted): *As the ghost ship crashes down upon them, our protagonist is flung from the splintering wreck onto the deck of this mysterious vessel. At first, he hides himself, afraid of the crew. But soon he realizes that there is no point in hiding...because they cannot not see him.*

Excerpt of Story (Read by Tony Scheinman): It is long since I first trod the deck of this terrible ship, and the rays of my destiny are, I think, gathering to a focus. Incomprehensible men! Wrapped up in meditations of a kind which I cannot divine, they pass me by unnoticed. Concealment is utter folly on my part, for the people will not see. It was but just now that I passed directly before the eyes of the mate, -- it was no long while ago that I ventured into the captain's own private cabin, and took thence the materials with which I write, and have written. I shall from time to time continue this journal. It is true that I may not find an opportunity of transmitting it to the world, but I will not fail to make the endeavor. At the last moment I will enclose the MS. in a bottle, and cast it within the sea.

Hannah (Scripted): *The ghost ship sails south, further and further into the gloom and the cold. Our narrator has no company but these notes that he makes, this story that he writes.*

Excerpt of Story (Read by Tony Scheinman): The crew pace the deck with unquiet and tremulous step, but there is upon their countenances an expression more of the eagerness of hope than of the apathy of despair.

In the meantime the wind is still in our poop, and as we carry a crowd of canvass, the ship is at times lifted bodily from out the sea --Oh, horror upon horror! the ice opens suddenly to the right, and to the left, and we are whirling dizzily, in immense concentric circles, round and round the borders of a gigantic amphitheatre, the summit of whose walls is lost in the darkness and the distance. But little time will be left me to ponder upon my destiny --the circles rapidly grow small --we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool --and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and shrieking of ocean and of tempest, the ship is quivering, oh God! and --going down.

Hannah (Scripted): *And with that cliff-hanger the story ends, leaving us to wonder how this manuscript in a bottle reached less supernatural shores and who was lucky...or unlucky... enough to find it.*

Hannah (Scripted): *We have told the story and invoked the spirit of Poe. So now it's time to hear the equally weird, tragic, and problematic true tale of the life of Edgar Allan Poe.*

But first, I want to tell you about this episode's sponsor, Grove History Consulting.

As you may know, podcasts require a huge time investment. This show is no exception. If I didn't have sponsors, I wouldn't be able to keep episodes coming out. That's why I'm so grateful to Grove History Consulting for helping to keep Museums in Strange Places going. Grove History Consulting empowers history organizations to demonstrate their relevance and define their impact through exhibition development, education strategy, and writing. Tim Grove has been described as one of the most engaging, innovative, and entrepreneurial leaders in our field. He has years of deep experience in public history work, and is the co-founder of the History Relevance Initiative. I had the privilege to work with Tim on several history projects during my time at the American Association for State and Local History, and can personally recommend Grove History Consulting to any history organization looking to develop more effective education programs and engage visitors with relevant exhibitions. Learn more about Grove History Consulting's services and Tim's qualifications at [GroveHistoryConsulting.com](https://www.grovehistoryconsulting.com)."

Now let's get back to the story....

Enrica Jang: From beginning to end his life was tumultuous. He was orphaned at age three. His mother was a famous actress, and she dies of tuberculosis at a very young age, leaving three children behind. Edgar's brother Henry is sent to live with blood relatives here in Baltimore. Edgar's taken in by a family in Richmond, and his younger sister Rosalee is taken in by another family. So as a young child, he's already very traumatized.

Hannah (Scripted): *His foster father is a wealthy merchant, and so he's raised in upper middle-class luxury. But his new family never formally adopts him, and his foster father never lets Edgar forget that he is a charity case and owes them everything. For a short period when Edgar is young, the family moves to England and he is enrolled in a grammar school in Stoke Newington, a London neighborhood within walking distance of my own London flat.*

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One thing often left out of the story that I have to point out is that John Allan, Poe's foster father, was involved in the slave trade. Born in 1809 and raised in the south, Poe grew up in a slavery-driven economy. It's easy to separate layers of history so that one history addresses a plantation in Maryland and one history addresses a poet in Maryland, but it's good to push the isolated pieces of our historical knowledge together and see how they are connected.

Hannah (Scripted) A young Edgar is very sensitive, very brooding. He and his very stoic foster father clash. He has a very coddling foster mother who then passes away, and the two men are

at odds for, for the rest of Poe's life. He attends the University of Virginia around age 16, 17. This is the second year that the University of Virginia even exists. It started by Thomas Jefferson, but while he's there, he racks up quite a bit of gambling debt and ends up having to drop out of school and run away from his creditors, tries to return home to Richmond, and, and appeal to his foster father. But his creditors also follow a, and insists that his foster father pay this debt, but his foster father says, I never formally adopted this young man. So he's responsible for himself. So Poe has to go on the run. And he goes into hiding in Boston very briefly, and then he lies about his age and joins the army out of desperation

Hannah (Scripted): *He is 18 when he enlists. Despite his failure at University, Poe does well for himself in the army. While he is stationed in Boston, he anonymously publishes a volume of poetry. But Tamerlane and Other Poems is a flop, selling less than 50 copies. He's transferred to South Carolina, and soon grows tired of enlisted life and tries to get out of his commitment .*

Enrica Jang: The only way he can try to get out of the army is to appeal to his foster father to write the letter, to pay his way out. His foster father refuses to do this, says that Poe is exactly where he needs to be, the army's going to be very good for him, and refuses to sign the letter or pay the money to get him out until Poe says, well, if you get me out, I'll go to West Point, I'll become an officer and make something of myself there.

They reconcile briefly, and his foster father pays the money to help him get out of the army. But when he finally goes to West Point, he does very well academically, but then quickly decides that he wants to write, he wants to get out. So he starts to act up and eventually is court martialled from West Point. Getting kicked out of the military academy is the thing that finally breaks these two men and [with] the death of Poe's foster mother, there's no longer a connection between them. John Allen, who is one of the wealthiest men in Virginia by that time, has taken on, has married another woman, has children by her, has a new family, a brand new life and wants nothing more to do with Edgar.

And when he dies, he leaves nothing to Edgar. Edgar is alone.

Hannah (Scripted): *Now without financial support, Poe continues to pursue a writing career. He releases a third volume of poetry, but success eludes him, and he can't support himself.*

So in 1831, a twenty-two year old Poe moves into the tiny house on Amity Street in Baltimore with his biological Aunt Mariah, his cousin Virginia, and his brother Henry.

Tragedy continues to follow him and his brother dies within a few months of his arrival. But with Mariah and Virginia, he finds for the first time an affection family setting, and, as we've already heard, finally launches a real career as a writer.

Enrica Yang: They form a little family. He marries Virginia, and that family sustains him for the rest of his life.

Hannah (Scripted): *When you get attached to a character, you want them to succeed, to find happiness, to overcome their past. But Edgar finding love with his cousin is not quite the happy ending we might hope for because this was real life, not fiction, and Poe's appeal is as a tragic hero, not a sympathetic or good one. So this is where things get a little weird...and then tragic again.*

Poe's success had taken him briefly back to Richmond, where he worked as the editor of a literary magazine. But he was fired for being drunk at work and returned home to marry his cousin Virginia. She was only 13 years old. Edgar was 26.

Though the age of consent for women, or really for girls, in most US states during the 19th century was 10, the average age for women to get married was 20. Part of the story of Poe is the great love he had for his wife, but maybe in 2019 it's time to retire that excuse.

If you remember, I said at the beginning of this episode that I was just going to have fun talking about Poe and his literature. And that was my plan....but while digging around for these statistics on marriage in 19th century Maryland, I came across the disturbing truth that the marriage of a 26 year old man and a teenage girls was legal when little me was pacing around memorizing "The Raven." Maryland allows 16 year olds to marry with parental consent and offers exemptions for 15 year old girls only if they are pregnant. Between the years 2000 and 2014, over 2,600 girls 17 or younger were married to adult men, and in two-thirds of those cases, the men were older than 21. At least 69 child marriages performed in Maryland in this time period were began with a statutory rape and were only permitted because a man more than four years older than a 15 year old girls had gotten her preganant.

So that's all to say that as much as I—the girl who grew up loving Poe and who still finds his work incredibly beautiful—as much as I would like to gloss over this uncomfortable part of his biography, I also realize that romanticizing his marriage to a 13 year old girl is exactly the kind of thinking that meant I could have been legally married off to an adult man at age 15 in the state of Maryland.

So let's call it as it is: Edgar Allan Poe married a child.

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So now that we've covered the weird bit, let's lighten things up....with more tragedy. Virginia died of consumption only 11 years later at the young age of 24. It's said that her illness and death left Poe increasingly unstable. Though he continued to find success in his writing, he also continued to drink, suffering from the alcoholism that had dogged him his whole life.

At the age of 40, he died under extremely strange and mysterious circumstances. The exact cause of his death remains unknown to today.

Enrica Yang: It's entirely fitting that his death is a mystery to this day. He was not living in Baltimore at the time of his death. He had many adventures in Philadelphia, many adventures in New York, had traveled all over the eastern United States lecturing and performing, eventually writing the Raven and achieving some fame. He'd also achieved some notoriety as a very vicious literary critic in magazines and done a lot of magazine writing and editing.

When he dies, he's only traveling through Baltimore on his way from Richmond to New York to close his affairs in New York, because he's returning to Richmond trying to put his life back together when somehow he's waylaid in Baltimore, goes missing for a few days is found a raving in the street and then taken to the hospital where he dies four days later. He wasn't even really supposed to be here. And so somehow he ends up here. So there are many different theories about his death.

Hannah (Scripted): *The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore has a page dedicated to some of the more plausible theories surrounding Poe's death. Alcohol-related causes is one. Some sort of disease unknown to doctors at the time is another. But neither of those explain why he was found in someone else's clothes, outside a polling place, on an election day.*

When it came time to talk about the mysteries surrounding Poe's death, Enrica and I climbed the tiny stairs up to the second floor of the Poe House, where they have some small exhibits on the subject .

Just a head's up, there are some strange noises in the background here, not from any supernatural causes, but from the construction going on outside the Poe House during my visit.

[creaky stair noises]

Enrica Yang: A lot of our exhibits are dedicated the mystery surrounding Poe's death. His actual cause of death was listed as "congestion of the brain," a term a likely associated with some sort of alcohol related incident, and a lot of people's impressions of Poe was that he was a raging drunk, a drug user.

A lot of people come in with these preconceptions or these ideas about the darkness that was Poe. He did have a complicated life, and he was a complicated man, but a lot of what people know about Poe where the exaggerated rumors that were spread after his death, and the mystery surrounding his death also kind of feeds that notoriety.

Hannah (Scripted): *Ok, but what REALLY happened? It's human nature to be desperate for an answer to this mystery by this point. That's how our brain works. The more pieces we know about a mystery, the more fixated we become on knowing how it ends. Unfortunately, the mystery of Poe's death has yet to be conclusively solved. That said, I have to agree with Enrica that the Cooping Theory is particularly compelling.*

Enrica Yang: Have you heard the Cooping Theory?

Hannah: No.

Enrica Yang: The Cooping Theory is very Baltimore. During this time, Edgar Allen Poe was found not wearing his own clothes on a very particular day. In the 1800s, at that time, there were rumors of gangs who would work with corrupt political parties to try to stuff a ballot on election day. They would grab people off the street, sometimes the indigents, somebody vulnerable, somebody who didn't speak English or even just hit someone over the head...coop them up in a room and feed them alcohol and opium until it was time to vote.

Then when it was election day, they would march them downstairs, take them into a polling place, cast a ballot, come away, shave them, change the clothes, do something to change their appearance, take them to another polling place, cast another ballot, or even the same polling place if they look different. Cast another ballot.

Hannah: This is something that actually happened?

Enrica Jang: This is something that was rumored to have happened. So there is some evidence of this, but that's why it's a fun theory.

Edgar Allen Poe's found on election day outside of a polling place, not in his own clothes. So it's possible that he was either a victim of cooping or perhaps participating in the scheme that day.

Hannah (Scripted): *Remember that news clip I played at the beginning of this story? The one about the Poe Toaster and whether or not he'd show this year? Only in Baltimore would you find people gathering around a 19th century poet's grave waiting for his masked memorialist as if that individual was a groundhog with power to predict the weather.*

Why does the life, literature, and legend of Poe have such a hold on our collective imagination? In an interview with the Baltimore Sun, Susan Stroupe of Immersive Productions, who you may remember from my episode on The Peale Center, suggested that he was able to cement himself into the American psyche because he one of the first writers to tap into the human curiosity about death and the unseen world in a secular way, because he was the originator of the detective trope, and because he himself was an outrageous character who represents an archetype of the brooding artist.

What role does the Poe House play in all this as one of the most physical representations of the cult of Poe in Baltimore?

In Fall 2018, a few months after my visit, they played host to the first ever International Edgar Allan Poe Festival. But this mainstream presence is a new direction for the house, which for decades was almost as odd and mysterious as Poe himself.

Enrica Jang: In 1938 the city of Baltimore wanted to level Poe House to make way for a new housing project, aptly called the Poe Homes. The Poe homes are one of the oldest housing projects in the country.

When people learned that the house that Poe lived—the only surviving home where Poe lived—was about to be demolished, the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore steps in and begs the city to save the house. They authenticated which side of the house Poe and his family lived in, and then what was a duplex got cut in half and the side of the house where Poe and his family lived remains intact. But then the housing project was built onto Poe House.

Hannah (Scripted): *Literally. The Poe House is a half a duplex town home that shares a full exterior wall with a block of the Poe Homes community.*

Enrica Jang: We became a full museum in 1940, but we did become a national historic landmark in 1971. We are full time operating museum and Poe Baltimore took over management and operation of the house in 2013.

It is sort of an oddity that, that a housing project, a modern housing project is sort of built onto Poe House and sort of lived in sort of a symbiotic relationship all of these decades.

In Poe's time, this part of town was considered the edge of town, considered the countryside, very pastoral. You only had a few buildings out here, a few houses out here and the market. Now your listeners can't see it, but the city has really grown up around Poe House and continued expansion west. So West Baltimore now begins kind of around where we are and continues, continues west. The city has grown immensely, and it was already a very large city in Poe's time.

The fortunes of the neighborhood have risen and fallen over many decades, but still Poe House has been a museum during that time. So we couldn't have existed in this neighborhood for as long as we have if we were not a protected and cherished parts of the city.

Hannah (Scripted): *Baltimore really loves Poe. And this goes beyond his literature honestly. I think many people in Baltimore and beyond in Maryland see him as a symbol and feel some affection for his story and legend...even if they've never read his work outside a classroom. And that's a fair feeling, because his impact on culture goes far beyond the genius of his own work...he birthed a genre and inspired the writers and storytellers of future generations like Arthur Conan Doyle, Jules Verne, Philip Roth, and Alfred Hitchcock.*

Enrica Jang: This is the man who Sir Arthur Conan Doyle credited with inventing mystery fiction. We wouldn't have Sherlock Holmes, even according to Doyle, had it not been for Edgar.

Hannah (Scripted): *These artists were inspired by his writing, but also his life. Hitchcock discovered Poe at age 16 and later said this about the influence a Poe biography had on him: "The sadness of his life made a great impression on me. I felt an enormous pity for him, because in spite of his talent he had never been happy."*

Enrica Jang: It's this amazing relationship. And there are lots of treasured Poe places around the city of Baltimore. Poe House is a very special part of that and one of the special Poe places, but it is a very modest, tiny spot in the neighborhood, and it's facing a lot of changes now. We've got a multi-million dollar development going on across the street. New neighbors coming in are going to change it again.

For many decades it was the city of Baltimore that ran the house. The house had a sort of irregular schedule, it was a little bit more closed than it is now.

People who live in the Poe Homes or have lived in the Poe Homes come and visit. And some of them lived here for decades and never step foot through the door of Poe House. Now we have worked hard to make the house more accessible and open, posting our hours being open consistently. People don't have to knock on the door just to come through anymore. It's open to the public for visitors. And last year we had 13,000 visitors come through the door. This is a tiny little house, 620 square feet, and you can only have 20 people in the house. At a time. So to have so many people from all over the world just come to Poe House because they want to be in the house where Poe began his career and want to see this place and sort of just be in Poe's presence is such a remarkable thing.

As the neighborhood changes, we'll see what comes with it. You can't stop change. We as an organization, we try to move with it and keep Poe House open and keep Poe's legacy alive in the city. But we're interested to see what changes.

Hannah (Scripted): *But you don't need a crystal ball to predict that the legacy of Edgar Allan Poe is secure in Baltimore and that the followers of the cult of Poe will continue to keep his mystery alive and well.*

The Poe House and Poe Baltimore plans to be part of that effort. As of this spring, writers and artists can now be nominated for a Saturday Visitor Award. Named after the periodical that published Manuscript in a Bottle and launched Poe's career, the award honors those who keep Poe's legacy alive by creating works inspired by and adapted from his poems and stories.

By the way, in case you were curious, the Poe Toaster never showed up on that cold winter night in January 2012 to lay a rose and a half-finished bottle of cognac on Edgar's grave. After decades of tribute, he was gone. After a final toast on Poe's 200th birthday a few years before, his work was done.

In 2016, the Maryland Historical Society chose a new toaster, still anonymous, to perform the ritual each year. But I somewhere doubt seeing this masked stranger come to the grave each year will have the same thrill and mystery that was felt by those who caught a glimpse of the original Poe Toaster moving between the graves so close to the midnight hour.

[Clip of parody song of a Raven's themed ditty sung to the tune of "Hey Jude."]

Thanks for joining me on this adventure as I explore Maryland's museums. Today's episode was sponsored by Grove History Consulting. If you enjoy Museums in Strange Places, please help me keep it going by sharing this episode with a friend who loves Edgar Allan Poe.

The recording of "The Raven" used in this episode was read by David Federman for Libravox. "Manuscript in a Bottle" was read for Libravox by Tony Scheinman. The song you just heard at the end of this episode was from "The Poe-tles," a parody video created by Emuvies, Moritz Stieber.

Find more information on the topics discussed in this episode and pictures of Poe House on my website hhethmon.com

Interested in starting a podcast at your organization? Check out my new book, [Your Museum Needs a Podcast: A Step-By-Step Guide to Podcasting on a Budget for Museums, History Organizations, and Cultural Nonprofits](#). Your Museum Needs a Podcast is available on Amazon as an ebook, paperback, and Audible audiobook.

[Clip of The Simpsons' Raven-themed episode]