

# More And More Call At 203 Amity Street

By JAMES H. BREADY

A YEAR after its formal opening, the Poe House on Amity street has taken rank among the half dozen Baltimore sites of prime historic and touristic interest.

The number of visitors is mounting steadily, more and more out-of-towners ask directions to No. 203, and the house's guest book lists one foreign country after another.

The house itself, next as a Poe autograph, gives more promise of enduring than it did in the Summer of 1933, when Poe left it to work in Richmond, and was soon followed by his aunt and her daughter, Virginia, his fiancée.

**Property Is Owned By City**  
Legally city property, it is on indefinite lease to the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore. The condition and popularity of the house, where young Edgar appears to have done his first serious, and successful, prose writing, reflect glory on the man who raises as Baltimore's most widely-known literary alumnus.

But in another sense, the existence of Baltimore's only literary shrine is a credit to the society itself—to the unflagging zeal of a few people—less than 100 originally, and none of them greatly more wealthy than Poe himself—who wanted 203 Amity street set to rights.

"I think the first move to preserve the Poe house began about 1924," recalls Dr. John Calvin French, "when the Poe Society was being formed." He himself, its founder, is now honorary president; last October 7, when the society marked the centenary of Poe's death in East Baltimore by opening the house, the society simultaneously observed its own twentieth anniversary.

**Adjudged To Be His Dwelling**  
It was not even certain, then, which house Poe had lived in. City directories of the time confirm residence by the family on Amity street; but the numbering system had changed in the years between. Close research by the late Miss May Garretson Evans finally settled the point.

Hoping at first to buy the house from its private owner, the society had a scare when plans for a public housing project, raising old buildings, included that part of Amity street. Ingeniously, however, the builders worked all around the Poe house, but left it standing.

"By 1947, when the society took over at last under its lease," says Mrs. H. Matthew Gault, president, "the insides were really a shambles."

After more than a century, there was no thought of identifying physical objects as definitely Poe's. What the society set out to do at its own expense, was to restore the house to approximately its appearance in Poe's day. "The house had then been standing only ten or twenty years," Mrs. Gault adds, "so it seemed good history, as well as housekeeping, to give the walls a new coat of plaster."

**Acquiring Relics Not Feasible**  
Poe relies from outside were similarly out of the question, because their scarcity and very high market value has brought virtually all either into public ownership or private safe-deposit vaults.

Society members directing the restoration followed the example of Williamsburg and Valley Forge, seeking simply furniture and decorations of the right period.

Mary Willoughby Townsend, a Catonsville interior decorator, came to supervise the work and ended by registering as a member, one of the society's most enthusiastic. Other members raised funds for the purchase of antiques, or donated family belongings of adequate age.

The house is very small, this being part of its charm: its three floors contain five rooms altogether. They are choicely furnished, and

the society owes no man. Not all its desires have yet been realized, of course.

"An architect who studied the house found that the rear room on the ground floor—the old kitchen—originally had a fireplace. It will cost about \$500 to have one put in again," says Mrs. Gault, "and we are now trying to raise the money."

"We have located a stonemason with a supply of bricks of the proper age."

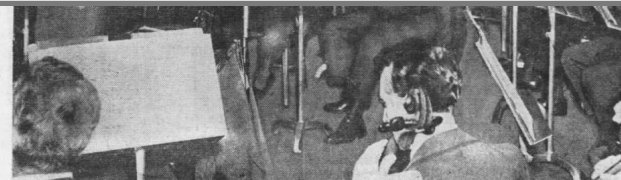
**College Club To Plant Garden**  
Last Friday, when the Poe Society met in the Pratt Library's Poe Room for its first meeting of the fall, Mrs. Gault reported that the College Club of Baltimore has undertaken to plant and weed a small flower garden next year in the plot behind the Amity street house.

"Virginia Clemm was very fond of flowers," Dr. French remarks, "and is known to have kept a garden while living in Fordham."

"You know, attitudes toward Poe remain sharp, after all these years. People either revere him or reject him. And the former seem to be a clear majority."

Poe Society reverence is evident from the moment of entry into No. 203. A portrait of him by Louise G. Young is above the living room mantelpiece. Beneath—shrouded from a later covering of boards—are the salmon-colored bricks of the original fireplace.

**Where Poe's Grandmother Died**  
In the kitchen stands a handsome pine dining table, set with antique crockery. Up the precipitous winding stairs are two bedrooms, the front one—again with fireplace—assigned to Mrs. David Poe, widow of the



The Hungarian-born conductor rehearses his orchestra, long renowned for the excellence of its tone. Though his predecessor was Skokowski, a hard man to follow, the more orthodox Ormandy has kept the Philadelphia's reputation bright.

Revolutionary War friend of Lafayette and Edgar's grandmother.

"Mrs. Poe died while they were living here, and we think probably in this room," says Dr. French. It now has a whale oil lamp, andirons and kettle, rare triangular wooden washstand and other appropriate furniture. The outstanding feature is a very old and valuable four-poster rope bed, donated by Mr. and Mrs. Townsend.

Another ancient bed, with acorn trim, is in the back bedroom, believed that of Mrs. Clemm and her young daughter.

Up an even more difficult climb of stairs is an eaved, single-windowed bedroom thought to have been Poe's. It is furnished with a low rope bed, mattress and an old patchwork quilt from the collection of Dr. William Rush Duntun, retired Catonsville psychiatrist, whose hobby is quilts.

By the light is a schoolmaster desk, with quill pen laid out as if awaiting an absent writer. Here, for all history can say, is where Poe wrote "MS. found in a Bottle" the tale that won him the Baltimore Saturday Visitor prize, his first literary recognition.

**Looking For A Black Cat**  
Open Wednesday and Saturday afternoons—and possibly also Sundays, soon—the house has as custodian Walter L. Hoopes, now retired after more than 25 years as superintendent of the Towson post office.

Mr. Hoopes, who remembers vividly his first literary recognition.

and went through the passage as deftly as if he were in concert trim.

For diversion, the conductor likes nothing better than driving—fast. "He goes like a demon," one of his friends put it.

**Around Maryland**  
Today  
ANNAPOLIS—Fall racing series. Annapolis Yacht Club.

RIDGELY—Talk by Maj. Gen. Charles L. Carpenter, chief chaplain of United States Air Force. At Ridgeley Methodist Church homecoming service celebrating fifty-fifth anniversary of church.

Thursday  
SALISBURY—"The Comedy of Errors." Barter Theater of Virginia production. At State Teachers College, 8:15 P.M.

Friday  
CAMBRIDGE—"The Show Off." Barter Theater of Virginia production. At Cambridge Junior High School, 8 P.M.

SYKESVILLE—Recital by the Rev. James A. Richards, baritone, of Union, N.J. Mrs. Ruth Jones Richards, accompanist. Aspects of the Wesley-Freedom Methodist Church. In Springfield Auditorium, 8:15 P.M.

Saturday  
FREDERICK—Song, costume, drill, theme interclass match at Hood College. Hodson Outdoor Theater, 2 P.M.

ST. MARYS CITY—"The Comedy of Errors." Barter Theater of Virginia production. At St. Marys Seminary Junior College, 8 P.M.

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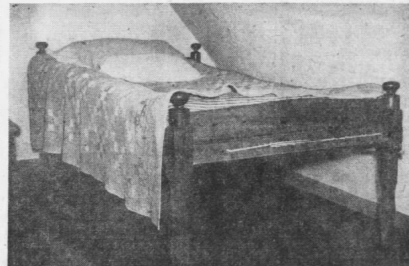
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This antique bed—such a bed as Poe might have used—is in the attic room thought to have been the poet's. The quilt is a gift of Dr. William Rush Duntun.



Mrs. H. Matthew Gault, president of the Poe Society, which restored the poet's dwelling on Amity street, sits at the dining table set up in the literary shrine.

Dr. John Calvin French, founder of the Poe Society, stands beside the fireplace in the Poe house sitting room. The portrait was painted by Louise G. Young.

Daily more people come to the tiny house at 203 Amity street. Formally opened only a year ago, it has become one of the places visitors to Baltimore want to see.