

Alexandria Times

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Edgar Allan Poe's Alexandria connections

On Oct. 30 and Oct. 31, David Keltz returns to the Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum for the annual "Poe in Alexandria" performance. Keltz will bring Edgar Allan Poe to life, sharing stories, poems and literary criticism – all from memory as a performance and not as a reading. Poe himself never lectured at Alexandria's Lyceum, but he did lecture at other Lyceums and he did have a few connections to Alexandria.

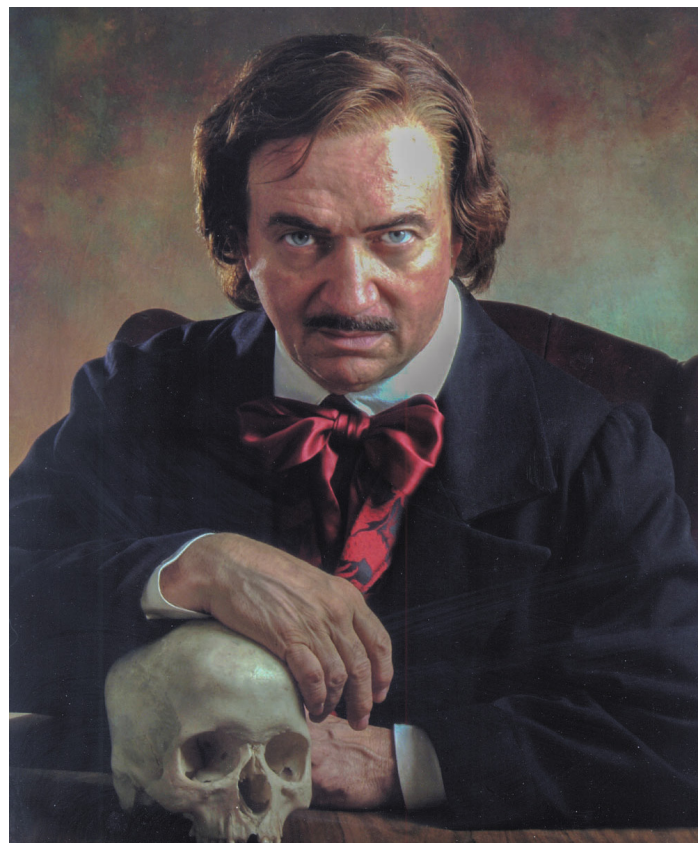
Poe's mother Eliza was a talented singer and actress. In 1802, the 15-year-old Eliza married Charles Hopkins, one of her fellow actors. They immediately traveled with their troupe to Alexandria to perform five weeks of shows at the Alexandria Theatre. The Alexandria Theatre was located on the northside of the 400 block of Cameron Street – across from the side of Gadsby's Tavern.

The shows in Alexandria included a rotating selection of plays, generally a main play followed by shorter pieces listed as "a Comic" or "a Farce." Newspaper ads list Eliza playing eight different roles in as many plays. The ads also list her as performing two songs, "The Day of Marriage," performed solo, and "Triple Hornpipe," as part of a trio.

Edgar Allan Poe corresponded with Daniel Bryan, who served as Alexandria's postmaster for more than three decades. Bryan was a poet in his spare time, and in the December 1841 issue of Graham's Magazine, Poe wrote an article on "Autography" in which he analyzed people's handwriting. Of Bryan's handwriting, Poe noted:

"Mr. B has written some very excellent poetry, and is appreciated by all admirers of 'the good old Goldsmith school.' He is, at present, postmaster at Alexandria, and has held the office for many years, with all the good fortune of a Vicar of Bray. His MS. is a free, sloping and regular one, with more boldness than force, and not ungraceful. He is fond of underscoring his sentences; a habit exactly parallel with the argumentative nature of some of his best poems."

Though not high praise from Poe – comparing him to Goldsmith meant he was old-fashioned – Bryan began corresponding with Poe in 1842, sending him poems with the hope that Poe would publish them in Graham's Magazine. Poe had moved on from Graham's, and the poems Bryan sent never found their way to Poe. Poe wrote to Bryan at least twice, and one of the letters survives in the Iowa



PHOTO/TOM RADCLIFFE

David Keltz as Edgar Allen Poe.

State Historical Archives.

According to the Episcopal High School website, Poe was in Alexandria in 1847 and attended the high school's final exercises. He treated those in attendance to a recital of "The Raven."

Edgar Allan Poe's final connection to Alexandria was that his aunt and mother-in-law, Maria Clemm, lived here for a time.

As we celebrate Halloween this year, we invite you to experience a taste of the "Master of the Macabre," which included historical appearances in Alexandria. You can purchase tickets to David Keltz's performance as Edgar Allan Poe at alexandriava.gov/shop.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.