



## POE IN AMITY STREET

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## POE IN AMITY STREET

By MAY GARRETTSON EVANS

Affixed to a humble little dwelling in an obscure quarter of Baltimore—No. 203 North Amity Street—is a bronze tablet bearing the following inscription:

IN THIS HOUSE LIVED  
EDGAR ALLAN POE

The marker was lately placed by the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, one of whose purposes is *To protect existing memorials of Poe in this city from neglect or encroachment*. Hitherto the Society has marked the location of the room in which Poe died in the hospital on Broadway, now the Church Home and Infirmary; and it has placed on the monument over his grave in the old Western Burial Ground, known as Westminster Churchyard, a portrait in enduring bronze—a replica of the marble medallion carved deep on the memorial stone but fast disintegrating under the stress of time and tempest.

The place in which the poet died and the place in which he is buried are familiar spots to Baltimoreans. But no place in which he *lived* seems to be generally known. Some simple directions, therefore, to those who may wish to make a pilgrimage to the house on Amity Street, may not be amiss: Go straight along West Lexington Street until you come to about the middle of its nine hundred block. There you will find, cutting through the block, the lowly street with the lovely name. A few paces up on its east side, just above Lexington Street, is No. 203 North Amity Street. You can't miss it. Besides, there is the bronze marker to guide you.

After much uncertainty and tribulation this small abode—where old echoes of song seem still to linger—has been admitted at last into Poe memorabilia in Baltimore.

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Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore

On June 4, 1938, there appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* an announcement which was startling to at least *some* Baltimoreans. The opening paragraph read:

Baltimore's Housing Authority prepared yesterday to swing into action on plans for building low rental housing units after President Roosevelt approved the city's \$18,462,400 program.

The article was accompanied by a map of "groups of 'blighted' blocks in the old residential core of the city," selected for the "slum-clearance" project of the Federal Housing Authority and the Baltimore Housing Authority, to make way for the erection of new model homes. One of these areas was listed as follows:

Site H—Bounded by Saratoga street, Fremont avenue, Lexington street and Amity street. For Negroes. Total area, 7 acres.

Amity Street, between Lexington and Saratoga Streets? Dwellings to be razed to the ground? Why! Poe once lived there!

As soon as this disconcerting fact was borne in on some members of the Poe Society they sat up with a start. Vigorous protests were voiced, and an earnest appeal was made to the Baltimore Housing Authority to spare the twin dwellings in one of which Poe is reputed to have lived with his aunt Maria Clemm, his cousin Virginia Eliza Clemm, and his paralytic grandmother, Mrs. David Poe, the mother of Mrs. Clemm, from 1832<sup>1</sup> or 1833 to 1835.

The Baltimore Housing Authority was most coöperative. But first the Commission put it up squarely to the Poe Society to establish the authenticity of the Poe house:

"Which one of the twin houses, 203 or 205, did he live in?" it asked. "We cannot preserve both."

Thereupon intensive examination of available material was begun. The research was devoted chiefly to a study of land records, maps, surveys, directories, house-numbering ordinances, structural details indicative of the age of the twin houses, and biographies of Poe.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is possible that Mrs. Clemm, as several biographers state, moved to Amity Street in 1832. That she was living there as early as the spring of 1833 is evident from the fact that the directory in which her name and Amity Street address appear was "Corrected up to May 1833."

<sup>2</sup> Grateful acknowledgment is made of valuable assistance received from Mr. Edward V. Coonan, Mr. Clarence H. Forrest, Mr. John Q. Boyer, Mr. Edgar Allan Poe, Sr., Mr. G. Corner Fenhagen, Mr. Arthur P. Vollerthum, Mrs. Harry L. Eichelberger; librarians of Peabody Institute, Johns Hopkins, Enoch Pratt, and Maryland Historical Society libraries; officials of the Baltimore Housing Authority,

The evidence pointed to No. 203—fortunately little altered since it was built more than a century ago—as the home of our most distinguished poet. The Baltimore Housing Authority, after careful consideration, agreed to spare the house. Subsequently it decided to name the whole Area H project "The Edgar Allan Poe Homes." The use to which No. 203 Amity Street will be put



The Clemm-Poe House, No. 203 North Amity Street (at right) and No. 205 before Alteration.

Drawn by Howard Frech for the *Sunday Sun*, Baltimore, 1933, from an old picture.

has not yet been determined by the Housing Authority; but it is considering plans to make the house serve some philanthropic purpose for the advantage of the neighborhood.

The preserving of No. 203 North Amity Street, southernmost of the twin houses, was not, by the way, an easy task, owing to the close construction of the pair as a unit. The problem was this: How could these lightly-built semi-detached houses be separated

the City Hall, the Court House, the Bureau of Plans and Surveys and the Division of Property Location in the Municipal Building, and the Municipal (Peale) Museum. Detailed notes of the Amity Street researches are in the possession of the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore.