

This Exhibit Made Possible by

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Related Public Programs

June 22, 7 & 7:30 p.m.

“The Hairy Tale of Poe’s Diet,” Presentation by
Dr. Stephen Macko

August 24, 7 p.m.

“The Tale-Tale Hair,” Lecture by Dr. Stephen Macko



Investigating History:

Testing Edgar Allan Poe’s Hair

June 22- September 17, 2017

Poe Museum
Richmond, Virginia



About the Exhibit

While historians have longed searched through letters, journals, and other contemporary documents for clues about Poe's life and mysterious death, scientists have discovered a new place to look for answers to the lingering questions about the famous author—his hair. Dr. Stephen Macko of the University of Virginia's Department of Environmental Sciences has performed stable isotope analysis of some strands of Poe's hair to learn more about the author's diet and to rule out some theories about Poe's early death. This exhibit will explore the research and results that may provide a closer look at Poe's daily life than ever before.

Poe's Diet and His Death

Dr. Macko has analyzed the stable isotopes of carbon and nitrogen in Poe's and Poe's wife's hair as well as that of George Washington. His tests revealed that Poe and his wife had similar diets which included common vegetables of the day, like beans and potatoes. Meats like chicken, beef and pork made up a regular portion of the diets, but there seemed to be evidence that seafood, like fish were part of the balance. George Washington did not show the same levels of seafood in his hair. Of forensic note was the question of the presence of coal gas residues from the gas lighting used in his day. Although it had been speculated that such gases could have contributed to Poe's death, there was not a significant level observed, ruling out this theory.

Exhibit Highlights



Locket containing locks of hair from Edgar Allan Poe and from his wife Virginia Clemm Poe

Collection of John Reznikoff

Lock of Edgar Allan Poe's Hair

Collection of Susan Jaffe Tane



Strands of Edgar Allan Poe's Hair

Collection of the Poe Museum