

Poe's Last Visit to Philadelphia

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NEAR THE BEGINNING of his account of Poe's last visit to Philadelphia in the summer of 1849 Hervey Allen says, probably rightly, that "the precise order of the events and calamities which now overtook the man can never be precisely reconstructed."¹ Nevertheless, many have attempted partial reconstructions, no two of which agree in every particular. So far as I have been able to discover, up to the present time the known primary sources of information about this visit to Philadelphia are three letters from Poe to Maria Clemm dated July 7, "Saturday Night" (July 14), and July 19, 1849;² a letter from George Lippard to Rufus W. Griswold dated November 22, 1849;³ a letter from Sarah Anna Lewis to George W. Eveleth dated February 11, 1854;⁴ John Sartain's *The Reminiscences of a Very Old Man*,⁵ John H. Ingram's *Edgar Allan Poe*,⁶ and William F. Gill's *The Life of Edgar Allan Poe*.⁷ From these it has been possible to reconstruct the following somewhat vague order of events: Poe left New York City at 5 p.m., June 29,⁸ and arrived at Philadelphia late that night or early the next morning; he was "deranged" for "more than ten days" and was "taken

¹ *Israfel* (New York, 1934), p. 649.

² These were first printed by C. Chauncey Burr in "Character of Edgar A. Poe," *Nineteenth Century*, V, 29-31 (Feb., 1852). The originals are lost, and the texts given by John Ward Ostrom, ed., *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), II, 452-455, are Burr's.

³ The original is in the Griswold Collection, Boston Public Library.

⁴ The original is in the Ingram Collection, University of Virginia. The pertinent passage is quoted by Ostrom, II, 454 n.

⁵ (New York, 1899), pp. 205-212. References to Sartain in the present article are to this account rather than to his earlier version of Poe's visit in "Reminiscences of Edgar Allan Poe," *Lippincott's Magazine*, XLIII, 411-415 (March, 1889). There are some slight variations between these two accounts.

⁶ (London, 1886), pp. 414-415.

⁷ (New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, 1877), pp. 234-237.

⁸ Mrs. Lewis gives June 29 in her letter to Eveleth; she later told Ingram June 30. I follow Ostrom, II, 45 n., in accepting her earlier statement as perhaps the more trustworthy.

to prison once";⁹ he lost his valise, which he later says he "found . . . at the depot in Philadelphia" after "ten days," though "they had opened it and stolen *both lectures*";¹⁰ "early one Monday afternoon" (July 2 or 9) he went to the "engraving room" of John Sartain, suffering delusions and begging protection from assassins, prevailed on Sartain to cut off his moustache so that he would "not be so readily recognized,"¹¹ and "after tea" went with Sartain to the reservoir and told him of his recent hallucinations;¹² he went home with Sartain and "on the second morning" (July 4 or 11) appeared better, walked out alone¹³ and "lay on the grass," returned to Sartain's "after an hour or two," and, "being . . . all right again," left after borrowing "what was needful"; in a letter dated July 7 he begged Maria Clemm to come to him; on July 13 he was "comforted . . . and aided" by George Lippard and C. Chauncey Burr, Lippard collecting five dollars each from Louis A. Godey and Samuel D. Patterson and unspecified sums from Burr, Sartain, and a Mr. Miskey, a clerk of Sartain's, "to save Poe from Starvation";¹⁴ on the evening

⁹ Poe's derangement appears to have been drunkenness followed by delirium tremens, perhaps followed by drunkenness again. See his letters to Maria Clemm.

Arthur Hobson Quinn says in *Edgar Allan Poe* (New York and London, 1942), p. 617 n., that "a careful search of the records of the Philadelphia County Prison, popularly known as 'Moyamensing,' . . . shows no record of Poe having been imprisoned there." But Poe wrote Maria Clemm that he had "been taken to prison once" (letter of July 7) and gave Sartain an account of his hallucinations there, and Sartain says that on later investigation he found that Poe was recognized when he appeared before Mayor Gilpin and was thereupon dismissed without a fine. Is it not likely that Poe's being recognized resulted in his not being officially booked?

¹⁰ The subject of these lectures is uncertain. The lecture which Poe gave at Richmond on August 17 was "The Poetic Principle," a subject on which he had lectured at Providence on Dec. 20, 1848.

¹¹ Sartain says that since he had no razor he "performed the operation successfully" with scissors. Quinn, p. 616, remarks that "the account seems incorrect for Poe wore a moustache in Richmond shortly afterward." But Quinn does not say *how* shortly afterward, and it seems improbable that Sartain would have manufactured so striking an episode. Moreover, Sartain, who "never shaved," could scarcely have given Poe a close shave with scissors, and if (as I later prove) this shave was given on July 2, it is not at all unlikely that Poe could have grown a moustache of sorts by the time he was seen in public in Richmond.

¹² I follow Sartain here; Gill, who got his information directly from Sartain or perhaps from a letter Sartain had written Maria Clemm (in his preface Gill, p. 6, acknowledges Mrs. Clemm's help, but not Sartain's), says that this jaunt was taken on "the following night."

¹³ Sartain says, "I trusted him to go out alone"; Gill says that he escaped from the house.

¹⁴ All of these men mentioned by Lippard in his letter to Griswold of Nov. 22, 1849, are well known except Miskey, who is probably the William F. Miskey listed from 1839 through 1850 in *McElroy's Philadelphia Directory* as a clerk, in 1851 as a mer-

of the same day Burr "procured" Poe a ticket and saw him "off in the cars" for Baltimore, where for seven dollars he took passage by boat for Richmond; he arrived at Richmond on July 14 "with two dollars over," one of which he sent to Maria Clemm. It has been hitherto unwise for Poe's biographers to attempt a more definite reconstruction of the events.

George Lippard published in the *Sunday Mercury* (Philadelphia), probably in 1853, an article entitled "Edgar A. Poe," which evidently has escaped the notice of scholars, but which clarifies at least the last three days of Poe's visit and makes probable certain conjectures about the earlier days. This article was reprinted in the *Weekly News* (Charleston, S. C.) for October 3, 1853, and doubtless also in the Charleston *Evening News* some time during the previous week. No files are known to me of either the *Sunday Mercury* or the *Evening News* for this period, and the text of Lippard's article which follows is taken from the *Weekly News*, of which only one file, that in the Library of Congress, contains the issue for October 3, 1853.¹⁵

EDGAR A. POE

By George Lippard

On a hot summer day,¹⁶ when the cholera was in the city, there came up four stairways, into a printing office, a slender man poorly clad, and with but one shoe. There may have been genius written on his broad forehead, and the large love of a pure but neglected intellect in his clear eyes—but he was poorly clad, and with but one shoe to his feet.¹⁷ He came stealthily up stairs, as if conscious that the world had forsaken him, and that he was an intruder anywhere. He sat quietly down, near a

chant, and in 1860 as a member of the firm of Warner, Miskey, and Merrill, gas-fixture manufacturers. This firm lasted until 1871, when Miskey was living in Delaware County, Pennsylvania; in 1849 he lived at 498 Coates Street.

¹⁵ At this time Paul Hamilton Hayne was editor of the *Weekly News*, which reprinted largely poems, articles, and the like which had earlier been published in the *Evening News*. The pages of the *Weekly News* are not numbered; Lippard's article, however, appears on what would be p. 2 of the issue, N. S., III.

¹⁶ Poe left Philadelphia for Richmond on the evening of July 13; therefore, according to Lippard's chronology in this article, this "hot summer day" would be July 12. The dates in notes 19 and 20 are similarly determined.

¹⁷ Sartain says that when Poe was with him "he complained that his feet hurt him, being chafed by his shoes, which were worn down on the outer side of the heel. So for ease and comfort he wore my slippers, which he preferred to my shoes as less ill-fitting." In his letter to Maria Clemm of July 14 Poe writes, "My clothes are *so horrible*, and I am *so ill*."

table where a young man—an author—was writing.¹⁸ Then the poet—for the man shabbily clad was a poet—spoke to the author, and told him how he had no bread to eat—no place to sleep—not one friend in God's world. He besought the author not to forsake him.

"You are my last hope. If you fail me, I can do nothing but die."

You may be sure that the words which he spoke, and the voice in which he spoke them, went straight home to the author's heart. He had not seen the poet for some time. But he remembered how that poet had once a quiet home, lightened by the smile of a wife—how he, the author, had often sat by him, and listened to him, as he poured out, free and unrestrained, the full thought of his heart. And the heart of the author sickened within him, to see a man like this, in want of bread—in want of a bed to sleep upon.

But the fun of the thing was, the author had just paid his last quarter's rent, and was without a penny in the world. He must therefore go forth, on that dreary summer's day, and endeavour to gain a few pence for the poet, from among the class who grew rich upon the labours of these beggarly devils—authors and poets.

"Tell them that I am sick. That I hav'nt [*sic*] a bed to sleep upon. That I only want enough to get me out of Philadelphia. Tell them plainly. For God's sake don't fail me. You're my last hope."

The author went out. Sick himself, and poor, he went from door to door, but everybody was out of town. It was a wretched day; cholera bulletins upon every newspaper door, and a hot sun pouring down over half deserted streets. The author was taken sick, and had but just strength enough to get to his own home.

Next morning,¹⁹ just after daybreak, he hurried down to the printing office, and found the poet there, sitting at the table in one corner, his head between his hands.

"I thought *you* had deserted me," he said, and tears came into his eyes. This was strange, for he was not the man for that kind of thing. Then he told him how he had waited there the day before—how he had paced those streets of Philadelphia, which, to the poor, are as full of hope as the hottest and dreariest piece of sand in Sahara—how the very heart was broke within him.

He also told how, before he came to see the author, the day previous,²⁰ he had waited upon more than one person, whose eminence in literature was owing to his criticisms—and how these eminent persons had suffered him to wait in anterooms and offices, while their very lacqueys amused themselves by saying—"There's ——. He's drunk again."

¹⁸ Lippard.

¹⁹ July 13.

²⁰ July 11

“And now you’re my last hope. Get me out of Philadelphia. For God’s sake do it; I’m heart-sick for Virginia. I’m freer there, than in any other place. If I can only feel my boot upon Virginia sod, I’ll be a new man.”

The author heard words like these from the lips of the poet, and went out, and after some searching, found five men in Philadelphia, who agreed to give a small sum, in behalf of the poet. Three of these men were Magazine publishers. They acted like men. One was a clerk—he gave all he had—a dollar. Another was a man, who not only gave, but came to the printing office, and invited the poet to his home.²¹

You should have seen the poet’s face, when the author came back to the printing office, and told him of the success of his labours. There was a grasp of the hand—and a look of the face—which said much more than words. There was a tremor of the poet’s lip, when the author told him of a certain publisher, who had refused to give one dollar.²²

“Not a dollar!” said the publisher, when he was asked. “Not a dollar.”

The man who was with the author, (we need not tell his name,) took the poet home, and the three spent the day together. That night those friends accompanied him to the cars, and saw him depart, after hearing his last words.²³ They never saw him again.

But they never forgot, that saddest of all sights—a great man whose genius had enriched publishers, begging his bread in Philadelphia on a hot summer’s day.

One day news came that the poet was dead. All at once the world found out his greatness. Literary hucksters who had lied about him—booksellers who had left him to starve—*gentlemen* of literature, who had seen him walk the hot streets of Philadelphia, without food or shelter—these all opened their floodgates of eulogy, and salvered [*sic*] with panegyric the man, whom living, they would have seen die in the next ditch without one effort to save him.

This is the joke of the thing.

One day the poet sits in a printing office—up four pair of stairs—one shoe to his feet—his only friend a miserable devil of an author, who is not only poor, but also an infidel—the next day the poet is dead, and from Maine to the Rio Grande the critics tune their pipes, and all the booksellers, the hucksters who *make* books for booksellers, the critics who live in perfumes, and write with gold ink on gold edged paper—all burst

²¹ According to Lippard’s letter to Griswold of Nov. 22, 1849, these men are Godey, Patterson, Sartain, Miskey, and Burr.

²² I am unable to identify this man.

²³ In his letter to Maria Clemm of July 14 Poe says that Burr “saw me off in the cars”; he does not mention Lippard in this connection.

out into one long, loud ejaculation, "Great is the poet who is dead! Allah il allah! Allah bismallah!"—*Phila. Sunday Mercury*.

If in the light of Lippard's article we now re-examine what we already knew about Poe's visit to Philadelphia, certain conjectures become probable. Lippard tells us in general where Poe was and what he was doing on July 11, 12, and 13. July 9, 10, and 11, therefore, become most unlikely dates for his stay with Sartain: Poe would hardly have wandered from office to office on July 11 looking for money when he had Sartain's in his pocket, unless he immediately spent that money for wine, but then he doubtless would have been too drunk to wander. Thus if Sartain's memory was accurate when he said that Poe came to his office on a "Monday afternoon," that afternoon was certainly July 2 and the date on which he left Sartain July 4. Lippard's article also helps us understand Poe's financial state upon his arrival at Richmond. We do not know the total sum of money that Lippard collected on July 13 to get Poe out of Philadelphia, but we do know that it consisted of something over eleven dollars.²⁴ We know also that Burr "procured" (doubtless to be interpreted as "bought with his own money") Poe a ticket to Baltimore, that the fare from Baltimore to Richmond was seven dollars, and that Poe arrived at Richmond with two dollars. Since Poe "was poorly clad, and with but one shoe to his feet" when he went to Lippard's office, it seems likely that most of the money not accounted for was spent for shoes and perhaps other clothing.

Consideration of Poe's clothing naturally leads us to the problem of his valise. In his letter to Maria Clemm of July 14 he writes: "My valise was lost for ten days. At last I found it at the depot in Philadelphia, but (you will scarcely credit it) they had opened it and stolen *both lectures*." Since Poe did not have a razor at Sartain's on July 2, it is probable that he did not there have his valise; and his statement that he lost it "for ten days" would indicate that he found it prior to his call on Lippard on July 12. Such, however, does not appear to be the case, since, as has been pointed out, Poe arrived "poorly clad, and with but one shoe to his feet." Certainly

²⁴In his letter to Maria Clemm of July 19 Poe says that Godey and Patterson contributed five dollars each. Lippard says that Miskey gave one dollar and that Sartain and Burr also gave something.

the most likely time for him to have looked for his valise was on July 13, when he was with Burr and Lippard, who seem to have kept close watch on him, let him "drink only a little Port wine," and wisely put him on the train for Baltimore. So if the valise was found, it was probably found on July 13. A curious passage in Lippard's letter to Griswold of November 22, 1849, however, indicates that perhaps after all both valise and lectures are still lost. Lippard wrote:

I have not been able to obtain any intelligence in regard to the missing valise. The people at the Depot know nothing about it, and I fear that the valise, etc. are irrecoverably lost.

I have before me, a letter from Poe, dated Richmond, July 19, in which he speaks of the loss of certain lectures, during his last stay in Philada. Myself and C. C. Burr did our best to find them, at that time, but in vain.

Now is this a *second* "missing valise" that Lippard at Griswold's request tried to find at the Philadelphia depot in November of 1849? Arthur Hobson Quinn, who believes that Poe may have gone to Philadelphia again in September, 1849, assumes so.²⁵

But certainly Lippard did not think that Poe returned to Philadelphia after he put him on the train for Richmond, for he speaks of Poe's letter to him of July 19 in which he had written of lectures lost "during his last stay" in Philadelphia. It seems then fairly certain that Lippard at least thought that Griswold had inquired about the valise Poe had taken with him to Philadelphia in June. Even if Lippard had forgotten whether Poe had his valise when he left on July 13, he had Poe's letter of July 19 (now lost) before him, and if Poe had said anything in it about having his valise but not his lectures, he would not have gone to the depot and looked for a valise

²⁵ Quinn, p. 637, bases his belief in the possibility of a September visit on the statement made in 1927 by Thomas H. Lane to Quinn's friend Dallet Fuguet to the effect that Poe came to Philadelphia on his "last journey" and "stopped off to see friends," that he "was brought home, ill, by James P. Moss," and that "the next morning" he "left, in poor condition, saying that he was going on to New York." But Lane, Moss's nephew-in-law, could give no specific dates. Lane evidently got his information from Moss, but Lane was an old man when he made his statement; it is, therefore, not unlikely that he could have been confused about the time of Poe's visit. His one detail which appears to indicate a September visit is Poe's assertion that he was "going on to New York," but in July Poe also told Sartain that he was "on his way to New York." Without further evidence of a September visit, I am inclined to date Poe's visit with Moss on two of the days in July for which we are unable to account.

which he knew Poe had taken to Richmond. A probable solution for the problem is that Poe never found his valise and, not wanting Maria Clemm to know that he had lost it, but realizing that she might easily find out if he did not lecture at Richmond, wrote her that most unlikely tale of stolen lectures. And as he wrote his letter, he must have thought that even she might consider it inconceivable that anyone who would open a valise in a depot would steal literary lectures rather than collars and shirts!