

A New Portrait of Edgar Allan Poe

Lilian Shepherd

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Time has recently revealed a picture of Poe and two of his friends that has been carefully hidden away for more than half a century. Few people outside the Allan family ever knew of its existence.

This portrait of Poe, which represents him as standing while his two companions are sitting, is most interesting. It has never been certainly ascertained who Poe's companions are, but it is supposed that they were his chosen friends at the University of Virginia — Miles George of Richmond and Thomas Goode Tucker of Virginia.

The daguerreotype from which this group is copied was in the possession of Poe's foster-father, Mr. John Allan, and at his death passed into the hands of his second wife, who died about 1880. From the time of Mrs. Allan's death the picture had been carefully preserved, with Mr. Allan's personal letters, family relics, books, and private papers, until April, 1914, when Mrs. William Price Pryor, granddaughter of Mr. John Allan, unpacked the carefully stored mementos, and showed the picture to a few friends in my presence. It is now in the possession of Mr. Orrin Chalfonte Painter of Baltimore, a patron and lover of art and literature whose devotion to Poe's fame and memory led him to give thousands of dollars to the new monument now being executed by Sir Moses Ezekiel, and also lovingly and faithfully to guard Poe's monument in Westminster churchyard, making it beautiful with flowers in winter as well as in summer. I am permitted to use this picture through the courtesy of Mr. Painter.

The handsome old home in Richmond, corner of Fifth and Main streets, where Mr. Allan died, has long since passed away. Poe occupied the second-story back room. Mrs. Pryor tells me: "My old mammy said that my grandfather had three mirrors put in this room, which was Poe's [it was octagon-shaped] 'because Old Marster knew that Marster Edgar loved to see hisself, so he had them built that a-way.' That octagon-room was afterward mine. It had a high-posted bed, with a very handsome canopy over it, and the bust of Pallas stood in an alcove 'just above the chamber door.'"

The country house was on the plantation known as Poplar Hill. This was Mr. Allan's summer home, fifty miles above Richmond, on the James River. Here Mr. Allan raised tobacco, and much of his wealth came from this source.

Poplar Hill plantation was closely associated with Poe's holidays when a student at the University of Virginia.

The old mammy who cared for Mrs. Pryor when as a child she resided with her grandmother, the second Mrs. Allan, remembered Poe distinctly, and described him as "the handsomest young gentleman ever seen." She used to tell how "Marster Edgar" would come over from the university, about twenty miles distant through the country, with a party of young college friends, and indulge in his favorite pastime, which was to gather together at night all the horses, mules, and cows on the place, tie tin pans to their tails, and drive them for miles up the road.

Much has been said, in various biographies, of the kindness of the first Mrs. Allan to Poe, and it has been insinuated, if not actually stated, that the second wife was in part the cause of the rupture between Poe and his foster-father. This statement, however, is denied by the Allan family. Mrs. Pryor has frequently told me that the second Mrs. Allan had never seen Poe but twice, and then only for a moment. "My grandmother earnestly declared to me that Poe was beloved by my grandfather, so much more than his own children," she said, "that even if she had had the disposition to separate them, she would have found it an impossible undertaking."