

Poe's burial and the damaged memorial stone

Selected passage from William Elliott, Jr.'s 1875 address, printed in Sara Sigourney Rice's Memorial Volume (1877), pp. 44-45; PDF leaves 62-63. Begins "Ladies and Gentlemen" and ends "unfit to be used as intended." Not the complete address or book. The source's January 20 birth date and October 9 burial date are retained; these are not endorsed as established dates.

AI-assisted reading transcription, visually compared with each selected scan page. No independent human proofread. Historical wording retained; line breaks and typography regularized. Bracketed page and scope labels are editorial. Consult the scan for typography and ambiguous punctuation.

[Printed page 44; selected passage from William Elliott, Jr.'s address] LADIES AND GENTLEMEN—I purpose, in discharging the duty assigned me on this occasion, to give a brief historical sketch of the movement which culminates to-day in the dedication of a monument to the memory of the great American poet, Edgar Allan Poe, the first and only public expression of the kind ever given to an American on account of literary excellence.

This extraordinary and unique genius, born in Boston, January 20th, 1809, during a brief sojourn of his parents in that place, died on the 7th of October, 1849, in this city, which is undoubtedly entitled to claim him as one of her distinguished sons. Two days thereafter, on the 9th of October, his mortal remains were interred in the cemetery attached to the Westminster Presbyterian Church, adjoining the building in which we are now assembled.

In this connection, acting as a truthful chronicler, I deem it proper to state some facts relative to the circumstances of the interment. The reliability of the statement I shall now make is sufficiently attested by the evidence of at least three of the gentlemen present on that occasion—possibly the only three who yet survive.

I have been informed that the day was, for the season, more than ordinarily unpleasant, the weather being raw and cold; indeed, just such a day as it would have been more comfortable to spend within than without doors.

The time of the interment was about four o'clock in the afternoon; the attendance of persons at the grave, possibly a consequence of the state of the weather, was limited to eight, certainly to not more than nine, persons, one of these being a lady.

Of the number known to have been present were Hon. Z. Collins Lee, a classmate of the deceased at the University of Virginia; Henry Herring, Esq.,

[Printed page 45; sentence continued] a connection of Mr. Poe; Rev. W. T. D. Clemm, a relative of Mr. Poe's wife; our well-known fellow-citizen, Neilson Poe, Esq., a cousin of the poet; Edmund Smith, Esq., and wife, the latter being a first cousin of Poe, and at this time his nearest living relative in this city, and possibly Dr. Snodgrass, the editor of the Saturday Visitor, the paper in which the prize-story written by Poe first made its appearance. The clergyman who officiated at the grave was Rev. W. T. D. Clemm, already mentioned, a member of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who read the impressive burial service used by that denomination of Christians, after which all that was mortal of Edgar Allan Poe was gently committed to its mother-earth.

Another item which may not be inappropriate to record in this historical compend, I will now mention, namely, that George W. Spence, who officiated as sexton at the burial of Mr. Poe, is the same person who, after the lapse of twenty-six years, has superintended the removal of his remains, and those of his loving and beloved mother-in-law, Mrs. Clemm, and their reinterment in the lot in which the monument now stands.

For a number of years after the burial of the poet, no steps seem to have been taken towards marking his grave, until at length a stone was prepared for this purpose by order of Neilson Poe, Esq. Unfortunately, however, this stone never served the purpose for which it was designed. A train of cars accidentally ran into the establishment of Mr. Hugh Sisson, at which place the stone was at the time, and so damaged it as to render it unfit to be used as intended.

[End of selected passage. The address continues in the preserved original volume.]