

News Bureau (718) 822-1174 • Fax (718) 822-1562 • NYDailyNews.com/nylocal



Poe Cottage in the Bronx, where Edgar Allan Poe (inset) spent his final years and wrote many of his iconic works, will be the scene of a 200th birthday salute this Sunday. Actor Tristan Laurence will take on the character of Poe, performing set pieces and posing for photographs. Photos by James Monroe Adams IV

Poetic respect evermore

Poe Cottage celebrations to mark tormented writer's 200th birthday

BY ABBY LUBY
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

EDGAR ALLAN POE will return Sunday to the Bronx cottage where he spent his last four years.

Actually, it will be actor Tristan Laurence who'll conjure up the dark stories of the great poet and writer to commemorate his 200th birthday on Monday.

Bicentennial celebrations also are on tap up and down the East Coast in other cities where Poe lived — Richmond, Va, Baltimore and Philadelphia.

The literary icon, born in 1809, died at age 40 after spending the last four years of his life in the Bronx at Poe Cottage, a small wood-frame farmhouse that still stands in Poe Park at the Grand Concourse and Kingsbridge Road.

Best known, arguably, for "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Pit and the Pendulum," Poe he wrote "The Bells," "The Cask of Amontillado" and "Annabel

Lee," among other works, while in the Bronx.

"Poe is so much part of the fabric of our literary culture," said Lloyd Ultan, Bronx Historian. "His detective and gothic stories, his poetry of horror — all are filled with the aura of death and mystery and have influenced American literature profoundly."

Ultan said unlike preserving historical homes of the wealthy, Poe Cottage is the only house the impoverished writer inhabited that is still intact.

"It's one of the very few historical houses to survive where a famous poor person lived. And Poe was as poor as poor can be."

Poe moved to the Bronx in 1846 for the fresh country air, hoping it would heal his dying wife, Virginia, who suffered from tuberculosis. She died a year later in a bed still on the first floor of the cottage.

Descriptions of what was then Fordham

Village are clearly in Poe's writings, Ultan said.

"His story 'Landor's Cottage' has the hero paddling down a stream through large cliffs — which is the exact gorge of the Bronx River now in the Botanical Garden."

Poe's poem "Ulalume," Ultan says, has descriptions of the lakes now in the Bronx Zoo.

Poe Cottage, built in 1812, is slated for a \$700,000 renovation, said Abby Lootens of The New York City Parks Department.

Restoration and structural repairs will start this summer and should be completed by summer 2010, she said.

The Bronx Historical Society plans to celebrate Poe's birthday at the cottage one day early at 1 p.m. Actor Laurence, costumed as Poe, will read and perform works the master of the macabre penned while living there.

"Tristan will be in character for about two hours," said Anthony Greene, education director of the historical society. "He will perform a few set pieces and then pose for pictures with visitors."

Greene said that visitors will be encouraged to interact with "Poe" and ask him questions. Later, a DVD of a play Greene wrote last year about Poe will be on view. It also is scheduled to be shown in February on Valentine's Day.

Greene's one act play is based on Poe's "Eldorado," a poem that mocked people driven to seek their fortunes in the Gold Rush.

"It's about people aspiring to be something greater than they are," said Greene, who said he wanted to put a human face on the writer.

"I want to show Poe as an ordinary guy who produced great work but was an incredibly flawed human being. He came from a broken home, suffered tremendously watching his wife pass away in front of him and suffered from addiction. He's not too much different from people today."

For information, contact The Bronx County Historical Society at (718) 881-8900.

Poe Cottage is open Saturday's from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays and 1-5 p.m. Sundays. Adult admission \$3, \$2 for seniors, students and children.

'Poe is so much part of the fabric of our literary culture.'

Lloyd Ultan

nydailynews.com

DAILY NEWS

Thursday, January 15, 2009