Eight of America’s best young writers came from six different states to participate in the Edgar Allan Poe Young Writers’ Conference this June in Richmond. This summer marked the return of the conference for the first time since 2007, and Conference Director Dr. Harry Lee Poe remarked that this summer’s group was the strongest the conference has yet seen.

During the week the conference spent at the conference they immersed themselves in all things Poe with visits to area Poe sites including Shockoe Hill Cemetery, the Elmira Shelton House, the Poe Museum, Fort Monroe, the University of Virginia, and the Ragged Mountains. When not retracing Poe’s footsteps through the places he knew best, the students studied the craft of writing with professional authors and editors and spent time each day perfecting a work to be read during a special reception (pictured left) held at the end of the week.

By the end of the conference, each student had developed his or her writing skills, made new friends, and received vital encouragement and inspiration. The Poe Museum looks forward to hosting another conference next summer.
In one of the last letters he would ever write, Edgar Poe told his aunt, Maria Clemm, “I think [Elmira] loves me more devotedly than any one I ever knew & I cannot help loving her in return.” In the same note, he wrote of his desire to marry Elmira, the woman to whom he had been engaged twenty two years earlier and who had inspired a number of his poems written over the course of those two decades.

“Elmira” was Sarah Elmira Royster Shelton (right), one of the people who had the greatest influence on Poe’s life and work. When their first engagement was broken by her father, the eighteen-year-old Poe wrote about his sense of loss in poems including “Tamerlane,” “Song,” and “To Elmira.” Even Poe’s brother, William Henry Leonard Poe, wrote a short story about the doomed romance. A few critics also believe both Poe’s poem “To One in Paradise” and his 1848 version of “To Helen” describe the garden Poe and Elmira used to hide from her disapproving parents during their courtship. Years later, after a twenty-seven-year-old Poe encountered a married Elmira Shelton at a Richmond party, he wrote “To Zante” about the experience. The poem’s refrain of “No more!” foreshadowed “The Raven’s” famous refrain of “Nevermore,” which would be published eight years later.

At the age of forty, when Poe renewed his engagement to the widowed Shelton, he may have told her she was his “Lost Lenore,” but it is unlikely that he had actually written “The Raven” about her. He may even have told her “Annabel Lee” had been written about her for there are echoes of their first courtship in such lines as “She was a child, and I was a child...” But other women may also have claims to inspiring the poem (if it was, in fact, based on any person in particular).

The significance of “Annabel Lee” to their relationship may, however, be reflected in his desire to have it published with their wedding announcement in the local papers. Since Poe died just ten days before they would have been married, the poem was instead first printed at the end of his obituary. As Poe lay dying in a Baltimore hospital, he repeatedly told his physician he had a wife in Richmond to whom he needed to return. Though the marriage had not yet taken place, this “wife” might have been Elmira Shelton.

Given Shelton’s influence over Poe’s life and work, one would be surprised to know that she is buried in an unmarked grave next to her husband’s severely weathered and barely readable monument (above). This October, the Poe Museum, which was instrumental in marking the grave of Poe’s mother and in placing a plaque on the grave of Poe’s first love, Jane Stanard, will finally mark the grave of Sarah Elmira Royster Shelton in Richmond’s Shockoe Hill Cemetery. You are invited to attend the historic unveiling on Sunday, October 7 at 1 PM and to pay long overdue homage to a woman who, as the muse of a great poet, helped shape the course of world literature.
Neglected Works Gain New Fans at Unhappy Hours

Generations have enjoyed reading Poe’s greatest hits “The Raven” and “The Tell-Tale Heart,” but he also wrote many other stories that deserve some attention. A few that come to mind are his treasure-hunt mystery “The Gold-Bug,” the horror/comedy “Hop-Frog,” and the haunting tale “The Oval Portrait.” “The Gold-Bug” spawned countless imitations from Treasure Island to The DaVinci Code, and “The Oval Portrait” was the inspiration for Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray. “Hop-Frog” melded comedy and terror in new ways and made readers sympathize with the villain (a novel concept at the time).

Since all three of these stories deserves more attention, the Poe Museum has dedicated an Unhappy Hour to each one. Visitors at these events saw Poe’s works interpreted through performance, film, exhibits, and visual art. Visitors to the June Unhappy Hour were treated to a live performance of “The Oval Portrait” (above left) while guests at the August Unhappy Hour experienced a walk-through installation based on “Hop-Frog.” At the July Unhappy Hour, visitors had the opportunity to decode a series of cryptograms and to follow clues just like Legrand does in “The Gold-Bug.”

September’s Unhappy Hour will reexamine one of Poe’s most popular stories, “The Black Cat,” and October’s will recreate “The Masque of the Red Death.” (Don’t forget to wear a costume to Prospero’s masquerade ball.) This season’s Unhappy Hours have been brought to you by CultureWorks, Legend Brewing Company, and Fruit66.

Photos clockwise from top left: Jamie Ebersole and Courtney Elizabeth Ford performing “The Oval Portrait,” Splendid Sons playing in June, guests at the August event, guests listening to music in August.
In Case You Missed It...

As the Poe Museum continues to celebrate its ninetieth birthday, it is only fitting that the institution receive a few birthday presents. This week, the Poe Museum was visited by Kit Davison, the granddaughter of renowned Poe scholar James Southall Wilson. Miss Davison donated signed presentation copies of some important works of Poe criticism from her father’s collection. Wilson, the Edgar Allan Poe Professor of English at the University of Virginia, was a great supporter of the Poe Museum during the 1920s. Not only was he a charter member of the Poe Museum, but he also spoke at the museum’s opening.

The Poe Museum greatly appreciates the gifts of its supporters. It is thanks to gifts like this that the museum’s collection has been able to grow over the years into the finest collection of Poeana in the world.

Members Hunt Ghosts

In August, the Poe Museum hosted two members-only ghost hunts. Spirited History was on-site to lead the groups and teach Poe Museum members about the technology and methodology involved in a paranormal investigation. If you want to discover what they may have found those nights, come to our October Unhappy Hour, where Spirited History will present the video and audio evidence captured.

It’s Amazing

This September, the Poe Foundation will participate in the Amazing Raise, a competition sponsored by the Community Foundation of Greater Richmond in which area non-profits will try to see how many unique donations over $50 they can get between 6 A.M. September 19 and 6 P.M. on the 20th. To make your contribution or to learn more, visit http://giverichmond.guidestar.org.

Strange New Exhibit Opens

Edgar Allan Poe’s 1849 short story “Hop-Frog” will make you laugh right up until the gruesome ending makes you cringe. In August, the Poe Museum celebrated this quirky chiller, the ancestor of such horror/comedies as “Shaun of the Dead” and “Scream,” with a special exhibit and Unhappy Hour. The exhibit, installed by “haunted house” attraction operators Haunts of Richmond, brings the story vividly to life as you have never seen it before. Even if you have never read “Hop-Frog,” this show will make you a fan of this underappreciated classic. (Closes September 30)

Stunning Artwork Revealed

One of Poe’s shortest short stories, “The Masque of the Red Death,” is visually stunning and rich with mysterious symbolism. Long a favorite with readers, the tale has inspired visual artists, filmmakers, and others to pay it homage through countless adaptations in other media. Recently, artist David Fode adapted the story into stained glass, and the results will be on display at the Poe Museum from October 6 through December 31. Rounding out the exhibit will be other artists’ interpretations of the same story.

Museum Collection Grows

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In Case You Missed It...

In case you missed the chance to see James Carling’s illustrations to “The Raven” while they were on display at the Poe Museum this summer, there is still a chance to see two of them this fall at the Brandywine River Museum in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. The Poe Museum’s Carling illustrations will join other illustrations of Poe’s works in a special exhibit devoted to visual artists’ interpretations of Poe’s works on display from September 8 until November 15.
Kids Have Fun Learning about Poe

At this summer’s CultSha Xpo, families took advantage of the opportunity to learn about Poe’s works. In addition to making Poe-themed crafts, kids took turns posing as the “pallid bust of Pallas” from Poe’s ever popular poem “The Raven.” Above are three of our favorites.

Your Membership Makes a Difference

In the face of the Great Depression, World War II, and multiple recessions, the Poe Museum has thrived for over ninety years because it has always been able to depend on the support of people who believe in the value of literature and of the power of the human imagination to change the world. We would like to thank all those who have made our work possible. As the Poe Museum approaches its centennial, we look forward to working with new supporters who will help the Museum inspire a new generation of readers and writers. To help recruit some of those new supporters, we are launching a summer membership drive with a goal of signing up 500 new or renewing members. As a special incentive for new members, we are offering a special members-only Poe Museum tote bag with each membership. There will also be members-only events and tours you and your friends will not want to miss.

Museum Hosts Film Premiere

In 2010, Virginia Commonwealth University students Christine Stoddard and David Fuchs won a VCUArts Undergraduate Research Grant to make a documentary about Poe’s lasting influence. Now the film is finally ready, and “The Persistence of Poe” will premiere at the Poe Museum on Thursday, September 27 at 8:30 P.M. If you are already coming for the Unhappy Hour, just stick around for this opportunity to see this fascinating new film.

Think Positive

Next June 24-26, the Poe Museum and the Small Special Collections Library of the University of Virginia will sponsor a new kind of Poe conference, one which, rather than focusing on Poe’s darker works, examines Poe’s positive contributions to world culture. Topics to be covered include “Poe and Ethics,” “Poe and Art,” “Science and Eureka,” and more. The Positively Poe Conference will be held in Charlottesville, Virginia. If you would like to present a paper at the conference, please send a proposal to Alexandra Urakova at positivelypoe@gmail.com by October 31.
Poe Museum Upcoming Events

Continuing until September 29, 2012
Exhibit: “Hop-Frog”
Poe’s classic tale of revenge comes to life in this exhibit brought to you by Haunts of Richmond.

Continuing until December 31, 2012
Exhibit: “Picturing Poe: Portraits from the Collection”
See the wide variety of artists’ interpretations of Poe’s portrait, including a portrait made of illustrations for “The Raven.”

September 9, 2012 at 2 P.M.
Members-only Tour of Shockoe Hill Cemetery
Call today to reserve your spot on this fascinating tour.

September 20, 2012 at 6:30 P.M.
Book Launch: *Come August, Come Freedom*
Be among the first to get a signed copy of this new book about the true story of Gabriel, the Virginia slave who almost staged a rebellion in 1800.

September 27, 2012 from 6-9 P.M.
September Unhappy Hour: “The Black Cat”
What’s that noise coming from behind the wall? Maybe it’s the live music by Goldrush at the “Black Cat” Unhappy Hour.

September 30, 2012 from 2-5 P.M.
Book Launch: *Richmond Macabre II*
Meet the authors of this new anthology of local horror fiction.

October 7, 2012 at 1 P.M.
Unveiling of Elmira Shelton Plaque
Poe’s first and last fiancée finally gets a plaque on her unmarked grave. Join us as we pay her a long overdue tribute.

October 7, 2012 from 2-5 P.M.
Annual Poe Memorial Service
Leave it to the Poe Museum to put the “fun” back in “funeral.”

October 25, 2012 from 6-9 P.M.
October Unhappy Hour: “The Masque of the Red Death”
Wear your costumes to the only Halloween party in Richmond with real ghosts. There will be live music, ghost hunting demonstrations by Spirited History, and some surprises.

October 28, 2012 from 2-5 P.M.
Poe’s Pumpkin Patch
Normal is boring. Make sure your kids grow up weird by taking them to this day of Poe-themed fun and games.

November 30, 2012 from 6-10 PM
The Poe Illumination
The Poe Museum’s Enchanted Garden will be filled with thousands of lights as we celebrate the holidays as only the Poe Museum can.

November 30-December 31, 2012
Exhibit: “Poe’s Presents: Gifts from the Author to His Friends”
Ever wonder what sort of Christmas presents Poe gave? In honor of the season, this exhibit features some gifts Poe gave his friends.