DID EDGAR ALLAN POE LECTURE AT NEWARK ACADEMY?

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It has long been a tradition in Newark, Delaware, that Edgar Allan Poe, the nineteenth-century American poet, critic, and short-story writer, once lectured at Newark Academy. An inquiry about the circumstances of Poe's visit to Newark, however, generally sets off a chain reaction of questions as one person consults another about the source of the Poe legend.

Poe's visit to Newark is of more than local interest, for if it can be established that he actually lectured at Newark Academy, new light will be thrown on Poe as a lecturer and as a man. What, then, are the facts of Poe's alleged visit to Newark?

If we pursue the problem long enough, we may find a well-informed person who will refer us to Christopher Ward's historical sketch of the University of Delaware, published in 1934, in which he wrote:

During Dr. Wilson's presidency [Dr. James P. Wilson, president of Delaware College, 1847-1850] there was an event, probably not at the time regarded as particularly noteworthy, but, in the light of after years, of much interest. Edgar Allan Poe spent a week at the Academy [Newark Academy, the preparatory department of Delaware College], lecturing daily. Rev. Epher Whittaker [sic], a graduate of the class of 1847 and then a teacher in the Academy, in a letter written in 1905, gives us his impressions of the man.¹

Ward then proceeds to quote from Whitaker's letter, but without indicating whether or not he had consulted the original letter.

On the other hand, our investigation may lead us to a scholar well-versed in local institutional history who will refer us to the "Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Newark Academy, 1783-1947." Inserted among these minutes is a newspaper clipping

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¹ Christopher L. Ward, The University of Delaware: A Historical Sketch (Newark, 1934), p. 11.
from a Newark paper, quoting the *Delmarvia Star*, with the headline:

*When Poe Lectured  
At Newark Academy  
Famous Poet Made Favorable Impression in Delaware College Town*

The article opens with a defense of Poe against his detractors in the following terms:

No American writer has been the object of more bitter and savage attacks than Edgar Allan Poe, famous poet and short-story writer, and no writer has, on the other hand, been more passionately adored. The fact that a small portion of liquor was sufficient to upset the delicate mental poise of this greatest of all American writers has in many petty minds completely outweighed his scholarly acquirements,—this despite the fact that many writers, artists, musicians and others, who have more sins to answer for than Poe, are accepted for what they accomplished rather than damned for their derelictions. Perhaps it was because he happened to live in puritanical America rather than Europe.

However, the fact that Poe, just before his untimely death in Baltimore in 1849, lived in Newark, Delaware, for a week, during which time he lectured to the students at Newark Academy, gives a glimpse of the life of the poet that shows he was not a toper, as has been hinted by his enemies.¹

The article then gives the Reverend Epher Whitaker's recollections—as recorded in his letter of 1905—of Poe as he appeared at the old Newark Academy in 1849, the excerpts being slightly more extensive than those in Christopher Ward's pamphlet on the University of Delaware. Like Ward, the writer of the newspaper article fails to disclose whether or not he had seen the original Whitaker letter. A close examination shows that both writers are indebted to the same secondary source: Mary E. Phillips' *Edgar Allan Poe: The Man*, published in Philadelphia in 1926.

In her book Miss Phillips quotes from a February 21, 1905,

¹Clipping from the *Newark Post*, August 3, 1927, p. 4, in the "Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Newark Academy, 1783-1947," Microfilm 33, Library of the University of Delaware.
letter written to Mr. and Mrs. George Wilson Smith, of New York City, by Pastor Emeritus Epher Whitaker, of the Church of Christ, Southold, Long Island. Since both Ward and the writer of the Delmarvia Star used this book as their source, the Reverend Epher Whitaker’s letter, as it appears in the book, may be given here:

A few months before Poe’s death, he lived and lectured for a week, in the Academy of Newark, Delaware, where I lived and taught from 1844 to September, 1849. Each day of this week I met him and heard him lecture on American Poetry. All the teachers and all the classes in the Academy were in the large schoolroom daily and heard him for an hour. He was always prompt when the Academy bell in the steeple rang the hour for his lecture. All heard him with attention and pleasure, even the youngest of the pupils, boys of fourteen or fifteen years. He drew from memory nearly all the poems which he used as examples and illustrations. The only book which he used was the Rev. Rufus W. Griswold’s Poets and Poetry of America. He did not wholly approve Griswold’s selections. He [Poe] recited with the utmost effectiveness several poems which the compiler had not selected for his book. He also indicated a few in the volume deemed by him utterly unworthy of a place among representations of American poetry.⁵

Of Poe, the man, Whitaker added in his letter:

During that week he bore no mark of dissipation in bearing, in countenance or in speech. He appeared as a somewhat shy and reserved, but thoroughly courteous, gentleman.⁴

Of Poe’s appearance Whitaker wrote:

The picture of him [Poe] in the Herald . . . presents the contour of his head and face perfectly, but it lacks the gentle, sensitive, pensive and almost sad expression of his face . . . the eyes seem to be expressive of force and fire. They had no expression of this kind when I saw him. They had a contemplative and even shrinking expression. His appearance may have been in some measure due to guest-ship in the Academy at that time.⁵

How much credence can be given to Whitaker’s account of

Poe's stay at Newark Academy, as recollected fifty-six years after the event? After all, strange aberrations of the mind can take place during a half century. Did Whitaker actually hear Edgar Allan Poe at Newark Academy in 1849, or was it someone else whom he later imagined to have been Poe? With no other evidence of Poe's presence in Newark available, Whitaker's recollections would seem highly suspect.

The Reverend Epher Whitaker, however, was a man of integrity and great intellectual achievements, who could hardly be expected to make irresponsible statements. Born in Fairfield, Cumberland County, New Jersey, on March 27, 1820, Epher Whitaker graduated from Delaware College in 1847 and received his A.M. from his alma mater, according to the custom of the time, in 1850. He graduated from the Union Theological Seminary in 1851, and was ordained in the Presbyterian ministry, and appointed pastor of the First Church, Southold, Long Island, in the same year. He served as pastor of the First Church from 1851 until 1892, and as pastor emeritus from 1892 until his death on September 1, 1916. During his long career as a Presbyterian minister, he served as moderator of the Synod of New York and New Jersey and of the Synod of Long Island. He was also a member of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and stated clerk of the Long Island Presbytery. In addition to being a clergyman, Whitaker was a historian and poet, the best known of his works, perhaps, including the *History of Southold, 1640-1740*, *New Fruits from an Old Field*, and *Leaves of All Seasons—Hymns and Other Verses*. In 1867 he received the honorary degree of Master of Arts from Yale, and ten years later, in 1877, he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity from Delaware College.

How, then, can we account for the total absence of any contemporary references in local records to Poe's lectures at Newark Academy? By 1849 Poe was certainly well enough known so that his presence in Newark would have been a matter of note. Our suspicions concerning the accuracy of Whitaker's account, written when he had reached the age of eighty-five, are confirmed

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by another version of Poe's visit to Newark which was printed almost twelve years before Whitaker wrote his letter to the Smiths.

In the Wilmington Every Evening of October 9, 1893, there appeared a letter to the editor, dated October 6, 1893, written by William H. Purnell. The following rather elaborate heading preceded the letter:

Edgar A. Poe Not an Elocutionist.
This Claim for Him Denied by One Who Heard Him.
His Lecture in Newark Academy, Years Ago — The Famous Writer’s Personal Appearance and Other Reminiscences.

In his communication Purnell wrote:

A few weeks since a Baltimore evening paper gave some interesting reminiscences of this gifted and eccentric genius [Poe]. The article referred to was written by Judge Rhea [sic], whose father was an intimate friend of the poet. [Judge Rhea presumably was Judge George Shea, who once presided over the Marine Court of New York. Cf. Mary E. Phillips, II, 938-39.] The judge states that he had often heard Poe recite both prose and poetry and that he was an excellent elocutionist. He mentions particularly his recitation of “Florence Vane.” [“Florence Vane,” a ballad by Poe's friend Philip Pendleton Cooke, was first published in Burton's Gentleman’s Magazine, in 1840, and was later translated into many languages.]

In my boyhood I had the good fortune to hear the poet lecture at Newark Academy, and he certainly did not display any elocutionary ability on that occasion. His subject was “The Poets and Poetry of America,” and he gave us “Florence Vane” in such a sing-song monotonous manner as to excite the risibles of all present. He subordinated the sense to the measures so completely that his recitation sounded like a chant, and I have since thought it indicated his manner of composition, and is an explanation, perhaps, of the great metrical power and skill displayed in his poetry.8

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8 Every Evening, October 9, 1898, p. 2. Purnell’s reference to hearing Poe lecture at Newark Academy is of special interest because of an article which appeared in the Evening Journal—Every Evening on March 22, 1934. This article, with the heading “Poe Once Lectured in Old Newark Academy,” serves to illustrate how facts get confused over the years. The writer of the article begins as follows: “Edgar Allan Poe, famous poet and short-story writer, who is reputed to have lectured in the Old College oratory during the 1840s, was most
Although Purnell disagreed not only with Judge Shea but also with Epher Whitaker in his estimate of Poe as an elocutionist, he was in complete agreement with Whitaker in reporting Poe’s treatment of the Reverend Rufus W. Griswold’s *Poets and Poetry of America*. He wrote:

Taken as a whole the lecture was interesting and instructive, but his criticism of Griswold’s book on American poets and poetry was exceedingly severe and the spirit of it indicated clearly a personal grievance. I recall one of his remarks in this connection. “If Griswold’s brains had been blown out and his skull filled with hasty pudding he could have made a much better book.” This utterance elicited great applause from the rear benches where “the boys” were massed in force.⁹

In direct contrast to Whitaker’s testimony that Poe bore no mark of dissipation in bearing, in countenance, or in speech during his stay at the Newark Academy, Purnell, who apparently was “in the know,” reported the following occurrence:

His [Poe’s] personal appearance was rendered somewhat ridiculous by the tightly fitting coat that he wore. It was in fact borrowed from Principal Graham, a much smaller man, and the borrowing was necessary by reason of an accident which befell the lecturer on his arrival in the afternoon. There was a February thaw at work and the streets of Newark were in a condition that may be imagined but cannot be described with any hope of doing justice to their “stickability.” Mr. Poe, who had evidently been indulging in his unfortunate habit too freely, fell in alighting from the stage coach, and, as he was without an overcoat, plastered

certainly a lecturer at the Newark Academy . . . for one whole week in 1849, several months before he died.” The writer then recounts Whitaker’s story of Poe’s visit to Newark as reported in Mary E. Phillips’ book. In conclusion, he writes: “Of Poe’s reputed lecture in the oratory, we have no details. The statement has been made that ‘Poe was once a lyceum speaker at Delaware,’ and the late President William H. Purnell, class of 1846, once said that Poe lectured in the oratory. Whitaker, whose period covered 1844 to 1849, makes no mention of Poe having been at the college proper, although it would seem that if he were at the academy a week he would surely have been placed on the college program at least once during his stay.” Obviously it is safer to rely on Purnell’s own account than on hearsay about him. If Purnell had heard Poe in the college oratory, he certainly would have mentioned it in his letter to the *Every Evening.*

his dress coat with a thick layer of mud. His long thick suit of hair also received a good daubing.\textsuperscript{10}

In his description of Poe, Purnell agreed with Whitaker in most details:

But, notwithstanding the mishap and misfit, his appearance in the evening was by no means unsightly, and, on the contrary, he impressed one as a dignified and well-bred gentleman. In size he seemed to me rather below the average height, but with a compact and well-knit frame, good muscular shoulders, shapely neck and head well poised. His forehead was broad rather than high, his eyes full and round, and his mouth firm and pleasing. The expression of his countenance in repose was serious, not to say melancholy.\textsuperscript{11}

The effect of Poe’s lecture on the students present is vividly described by Purnell as follows:

At the close of the lecture some of “the youngsters” sought an introduction and Principal Graham gratified their wishes. One of them who was a little more forward than his companions, made a little speech, the purport of which was: We are highly honored in having you with us this evening; we greatly enjoyed your lecture; and agree with you in your estimate of Griswold and his book; he is a shabby fellow and his book a contemptible affair. At this Mr. Poe smiled but made no remark. We thought it quite a neat little speech and very much admired our spokesman.\textsuperscript{12}

William Henry Purnell, the writer of the above letter, was born February 3, 1826 on a farm in Worcester County, Maryland. After graduating from Delaware College in 1846, he began to read law with Judge John R. Franklin in Snow Hill, Maryland, and was admitted to the bar in 1848. In 1850, without his solicitation, he was appointed prosecuting attorney of Worcester County, and three years later he became the deputy attorney-general of the state of Maryland. In 1855 he was elected comptroller of the state treasury and was later twice reelected to the same office. In 1861 he was appointed deputy postmaster of Baltimore by President Lincoln. After the first battle of Bull Run, he raised a regiment of infantry, two companies of cavalry, and two batteries of artillery. He took the field in person with

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{11} Ibid. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
the rank of colonel, but in 1862 he resigned his command and returned to the post office, where he remained until 1866. He was appointed assessor of internal revenue in 1867 for the third district, Baltimore. Retiring from politics, he practiced law in Baltimore until 1870, when he was elected president of Delaware College. He served as president of Delaware College until 1885, when he became principal of the Frederick Female Seminary, now Hood College, in Frederick, Maryland. After serving as president of New Windsor College in Carroll County, Maryland, Purnell returned to Delaware College in 1897 as Professor of Elocution and Oratory, which post he held until his death in 1902.¹³

Now if Whitaker and Purnell both heard Poe at Newark Academy, Poe must have lectured there while they were students at Delaware College. According to the Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Delaware College, 1843-1844, Epher Whitaker, of Bridgeton, New Jersey, was a member of the Freshman Class in the fall of 1843, and William H. Purnell, of Berlin, Maryland, was admitted to the college in the fall of 1843 as a member of the Sophomore Class.¹⁴ Therefore it appears that Whitaker was in error when, in 1905, he wrote that he lived in Newark from 1844 to September, 1849. Moreover, after Whitaker graduated from Delaware College in 1847, he stayed on at Newark Academy for the year 1847-1848 as an assistant teacher of Greek and Latin,¹⁵ but there is no indication that he remained in Newark until the fall of 1849.¹⁶ As we have seen, Purnell began the

¹⁴ Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Delaware College, 1843-1844 (Wilmington, 1844), p. 6. The Catalogue of the Athenaeum Literary Society of Delaware College, from 1834 to 1853 (Philadelphia, 1853), page 7, lists Whitaker as a member who joined in 1843. The "Minutes of the Faculty of Delaware College" indicate that Purnell was admitted to the Sophomore Class, by examination, on November 9, 1843.
¹⁶ Whitaker's name does not appear in the faculty list of the Newark Academy in the catalogue for 1848-1849. The Alumni Catalogue of the Union Theological Seminary, 1826-1926, compiled by Charles R. Gillett (New York, 1926), page 65, indicates that Whitaker attended the Union Theological Seminary in New York City from 1848 to 1851.
study of law in Snow Hill, Maryland, after his graduation from Delaware College in 1846. Consequently, it seems logical to assume that if Poe lectured at Newark Academy, he did so some time between November of 1843 and graduation day in 1846.

In his letter of 1893 we observed that Purnell mentions Principal Graham several times. William S. Graham, one of the first graduates of Newark College (later Delaware College) in 1836, served as principal of Newark Academy from 1841 to 1845. Both Purnell and Whitaker knew Principal Graham quite well apparently, for Purnell described him as a much smaller man, physically, than Poe, and Whitaker described him as follows:

He was one of the most accomplished and skillful teachers that I have ever known. . . . Although small, fair, and delicate as a woman, he was a remarkably efficient and scholarly man.

Since Graham resigned as principal of the Academy in 1845, we may further limit Poe's visit to Newark to the period between the fall of 1843 and the fall of 1845.

So far we have considered only local evidence. Did Poe by any chance leave any record of his visit to Newark? Unfortunately we do not know as much about Poe as we should like to know, and the fall of 1843 is an especially obscure period in his life. At some time during the summer of 1843 Poe is said to have made his debut as a lecturer in the Egyptian Hall in Baltimore, his subject being "American Poetry." On November 25, 1843 he made his first Philadelphia appearance on the lecture platform, and was quite successful. His subject again was "American Poetry," and his lecture was especially distinguished by an attack on Griswold's volume The Poets and Poetry of America.

Poe's appearances on the lecture platform in Baltimore and

17 "Delaware College Trustees' Minutes," pp. 128; 171; 173.
19 George E. Woodberry, The Life of Edgar Allan Poe (Boston, 1909), II, 48; see also Mary E. Phillips, I, 841. Although there seems to be no definite evidence to confirm the supposition that Poe lectured in Baltimore during the summer of 1843, Poe had planned to lecture in Washington, D. C., as early as March, 1843. He apparently never delivered the Washington lecture. See Arthur Hobson Quinn, Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography (New York, 1941), pp. 377-78.
Philadelphia indicate that at this period of great poverty in his life Poe turned to lecturing as an added means of livelihood, and he probably lectured more extensively than we have heretofore realized. Further evidence of his activities as a lecturer is provided by the following editorial announcement which appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* of January 24, 1844:

Lecture by Edgar A. Poe, Esq.—We have authority to promise our readers . . . within a short time, . . . a lecture by Mr. Edgar A. Poe, the subject . . . will be 'American Poetry.' It is scarcely necessary . . . to do more than introduce this gentleman by name, as he is so well and popularly known to every admirer of modern literature, not only by the exquisite productions of his own imaginative genius, but by his elaborate, daring and caustic criticisms which have from time to time enriched the pages of the most popular magazines of the day. . . . The author . . . is sure of a hearty welcome in this city, and equally sure to be honored with, as he is to entertain, a crowded audience on his lecture night.20

A week later, on January 31, 1844, there appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* the following advertisement:

A Lecture on American Poetry by Edgar A. Poe in Odd Fellows Hall, in Gay Street, on this (Wednesday) Evening 31st, at half-past 7 o'clock. Single tickets, 25 cents; admitting a gentleman and two ladies 50 cents—to be had at Mr. Hickman's bookstore, Mr. Isaac P. Cook's and at the door.21

At 7:00 A. M. on February 1, 1844, the day after his lecture in Baltimore, Poe wrote to his friend John P. Kennedy:

Some matters which would not be put off, have taken me to Elkton—so that I shall not have the pleasure of dining with you today, as proposed. Before leaving Baltimore, however, I hope to give you another call.22

This note may mean that Poe also lectured in Elkton, Maryland, on February 1 or at a later date arranged for by him.

Since the lecture admissions at the prices quoted above could

20 *Baltimore Sun*, January 24, 1844, cited by Mary E. Phillips, I, 850.
not have added much to Poe's income, he looked farther afield where he might earn more. During the early part of 1844 Poe and James Russell Lowell exchanged letters concerning Poe's interest in giving some lectures in Boston. On March 6, 1844, Lowell wrote to Poe that he had been to Boston only to find lecturing over for the season, but that the secretary of the Boston Lyceum seemed much pleased at the prospect of engaging Poe for the following year. Lowell regretted that he had not known earlier about Poe's plan to lecture in Boston so that he could have done something about it. He stated that the Lyceum paid $50 to $100, as its purse was "full or empty," and assured Poe of the Lyceum's interest in his lecture for the coming year.

In the meanwhile Poe continued lecturing in communities within easy reach of Philadelphia. On March 7, 1844, after previous correspondence, he wrote to the members of a lecture committee in Reading, Pennsylvania:

I have just received your favor of the 5th, and will be pleased to deliver a Lecture on "American Poetry" in Reading, on Tuesday the 12th inst., if convenient. Please reply by return of mail and let me know at what place I shall meet the committee.

Apparently Poe gave this lecture on March 13, 1844, for the Baltimore Sun of March 21 reported that on "Wednesday last" Poe was greeted in Reading by a large audience, which testified its appreciation of his much extolled lecture on "Poets and Poetry of America" by repeated bursts of applause.

Finding the going in Philadelphia very difficult, Poe took his wife, Virginia, to New York early in April of 1844. In New York he met with success, working on the Evening Mirror. Apparently he did not lecture again until February 28, 1845, when

23 Mary E. Phillips, I, 857-58.
24 John W. Ostrom (ed.), I, 244, Letter 171; see also Letter 170.
25 Ibid., I, 244-45.
26 In a letter dated July 10, 1844 Poe wrote to his friend Dr. Thomas H. Chivers: "I have been lately lecturing on 'American Poetry' and have drawn profuse tears from large and intellectual audiences by the recital of your 'Heavenly Vision'—which I can never weary of repeating." In this letter, however, Poe probably was referring to his lectures before April, 1844. See John W. Ostrom (ed.), I, 259.
he addressed between two and three hundred persons gathered to hear him in the library of the New York Historical Society. His subject was, as before, American Poetry, and in substance the lecture was probably the same as before except that he now omitted his references to Griswold, with whom he was trying to renew his acquaintance. On January 16, 1845, for instance, Poe had written to Griswold:

... I have been aware, for several weeks, that my reasons for speaking of your book [Poets and Poetry of America] as I did (of yourself I have always spoken kindly) were based in the malignant slanders of a mischief-maker by profession. ...

And after his February lecture in New York Poe wrote to Griswold:

I presume you understand that in the repetition of my Lecture on the Poets (in N. Y.) I left out all that was offensive to yourself.

On the basis of the above evidence we can now further limit the period during which Poe could have lectured at Newark Academy. First of all, we note that the subject of Poe’s lectures in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Reading was the same as that reported to have been his topic at Newark Academy. Moreover, both Whitaker and Purnell stressed Poe’s attack on Griswold’s anthology in his Newark lecture (or lectures). The fact that Poe omitted his severe criticism of Griswold in his New York lecture of 1845 would certainly indicate that Whitaker and Purnell heard him lecture sometime in 1843 or 1844 before he had had his change of heart. This evidence seems to prove further that Whitaker’s memory failed him concerning the date when he heard Poe lecture at Newark Academy. If Poe visited Newark at all, it must have been between November, 1843, when Whitaker and Purnell enrolled as students in Delaware College, and April, 1844, when Poe left Philadelphia for New York.

29 Ibid., p. 285.
Having narrowed down the possible time of Poe's visit in Newark to a period of approximately five months, we should not have too much difficulty in checking contemporary records covering November, 1843, through March, 1844. The available records of Newark Academy and of Delaware College prove disappointing, however, for they reveal no references to Poe's presence in Newark. But the *Delaware State Journal*, on the other hand, reveals some interesting facts. In the November 28, 1843, issue, only three days after Poe had delivered his Philadelphia lecture, we find the following notice:

Lecture before the Franklin Lyceum [in Wilmington].—The first lecture of the course which the members of the Franklin Lyceum have procured to be delivered before them this winter, will take place this evening at Temperance Hall. *Edgar A. Poe*, the lecturer, is well and favorably known in the literary world as a poet and magazine writer of high standing, whose powers in describing the thrilling and adventurous scenes of life are perhaps unrivalled. The subject is "*American Poetry,*" upon which, we understand, Mr. Poe has very peculiar notions, he will therefore probably be the more entertaining, as he will travel out of the usual track.\(^\text{30}\)

This announcement, in addition to focusing our attention on the irony of Poe lecturing in Temperance Hall, conveys the impression that Poe had been called to lecture before the Franklin Lyceum on rather short notice. Unfortunately for us no review of Poe's lecture was published in the Wilmington newspapers.

Interestingly enough, on November 24, 1843, four days before Poe's lecture in Wilmington, both the *Delaware Gazette* and the

\(^{30}\) *Delaware State Journal*, November 28, 1843, p. 3. The same issue of the *Delaware State Journal* contained the following advertisement: "Edgar A. Poe, Esq., of Philadelphia, Will deliver a Lecture on 'American Poetry,' at the Temperance Hall, this (Tuesday) evening Nov. 28th, commencing at ½ past 7 o'clock. Single evening tickets 12½ — 2 tickets will admit a gentleman and two ladies."

In the Wilmington *Sunday Star* of November 28, 1943, one hundred years after Poe's lecture in Temperance Hall, there appeared an article by William Conner with the heading "Edgar Allan Poe City Visitor Just One Century Ago." The writer based his story on the announcement in the *Delaware State Journal* cited above. In his article Conner also treated Poe's lecture at Newark in 1849, basing his account on Whitaker's letter of February 21, 1905.
Delaware State Journal carried an announcement of a course of lectures to be given at Newark Academy. Dated November 21 and signed by William S. Graham, the announcement read as follows:

We are making arrangements to have a course of literary and scientific lectures delivered to the Students of the Academy, and such of the friends of the Institution as may wish to attend, during the present winter term. The assistance of the members of the Faculty and other prominent literary men in our own and neighboring States is expected. The first Lecture . . . will be delivered by the President of the College on Friday evening next.\(^{31}\)

According to Principal Graham the future lectures and their subjects were to be made known later. It is interesting to speculate that perhaps the arrangements for including Poe’s lecture, at a later date, in the Newark series advertised by Graham were made during Poe’s visit to Wilmington on November 28.

Whether or not this supposition is correct, the January 2, 1844, issue of the Delaware State Journal reveals what we have been searching for, in the form of a letter to the editor signed by Academicus and dated Newark, December 23, 1843. It is very likely, judging from the intimate knowledge of affairs displayed in the letter, that Academicus was Principal William S. Graham; if not, he probably was a member of either the college or the academy faculty. At any rate, it is to Academicus that we owe our positive knowledge of Poe’s lecture at Newark Academy. If he had not written his letter to the editor, our case for Poe’s visit in Newark would have to rest entirely on the circumstantial evidence presented above.\(^{32}\)

The letter by Academicus, written immediately after the lecture, together with the reminiscences of Whitaker and Purnell, serves to give us a rather full description of Edgar Allan Poe’s visit to Newark on December 23, 1843. Academicus wrote:

\(^{31}\) Delaware Gazette, November 24, 1843, p. 3; Delaware State Journal, November 24, 1843, p. 3.

\(^{32}\) I wish to acknowledge here my indebtedness to Mrs. George G. Windell, assistant editor, Historical Society of Delaware, who, in addition to calling my attention to Poe’s visit to Wilmington and to Purnell’s letter of 1893, helped to verify my deductions by finding the letter by Academicus in the Delaware State Journal.
This evening I have had the pleasure of listening to the fourth of a series of Lectures got up in the Academy for the benefit of the students during the present term, but open to all who may choose to attend. The unprecedented state of our streets on which the skies had poured their burdens for ten days together; and the short and circumscribed notice, which a late change in the evening appointed for the Lecture, permitted to be given, occasioned a much thinner house, than more favourable circumstances would have brought out. As it was, however, we observed the Faculty of the College—the Teachers of the Academy—a large proportion of the students of both departments, as well as a considerable number of the more intelligent of the citizens of the place:—"Fit audience tho' few."\(^{33}\)

The reference to the unprecedented state of Newark streets after ten days of rain confirms Purnell's statement concerning the "February thaw" and tends to make entirely plausible Purnell's account of Poe's accident. The late change in the evening appointed for the lecture would seem to indicate that Poe filled in his lecture engagements whenever he could or at least that some of his lectures were given on very short notice. Here we also have proof that Whitaker and Purnell, although students at Delaware College, could have been present at the lecture given at the Academy.

Of the lecturer's reputation Academicus writes:

*The Lecture* was an eloquent production eloquently delivered by Edgar A. Poe, Esq., of Philadelphia and at present editorially connected with that best and most popular of our lighter monthlies—Graham's Magazine. His theme was the "Poetry of America"—a topic particularly appropriate to one who has himself acquired so honorable a place among the Poets of the land, and who has proven himself to possess in no small degree the high qualifications he demands in his brethren of the inspired pen. Mr. Poe is also well known as a fearless and perhaps somewhat severe critic of American Poesy and has not unfrequently brought down upon himself the wrath of many of the "genus irritable." His right however to speak freely is one which by his own writings he has earned, and holds by the acknowledged law of Parnassus:

Let such teach others who themselves excel,
And censure freely who have written well.\(^{34}\)

\(^{33}\) *Delaware State Journal*, January 2, 1844, p. 3.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.
Then *Academicus* continues:

It is perfectly impossible to convey to a reader from the fragments preserved by not very faithful memory, any worthy impression of the rich tide of thought and imagery with which our Lecturer charmed his audience for almost *two* hours. Nor is such the object I proposed to myself in commencing this letter. My design is more humble, and will aim only to give to your readers a general sketch of the outlines of the discourse, with, however, the privilege reserved of enlarging a little upon some of its more interesting and prominent points.55

After this brief introductory statement of his intentions, *Academicus* proceeds to give an outline of Poe's lecture, with some elaboration here and there:

After a graceful exordium and prospective apology for the foreseen necessary length of remarks designed to cover so wide a field, our Lecturer approached the body of his theme. The proper criterion by which we may safely judge of the present state of the poetic art in America and of the comparative excellence of the productions of our different bards first occupied his attention. In this part of the subject the system of *puffery* at present common with our newspapers, magazines, and even dignified reviews was most clearly and indignantly exposed and condemned. Editors of newspapers building up large Libraries for which they pay by wholesale and indiscriminate puffs of works whose title pages they have hardly had time to copy.—Authors reviewing and praising their own writings, or securing the bespoken praises of a friend—booksellers and publishers promoting the sale of their goods by measures equally corrupt, all received their full share of severe rebuke. The severities as well as the flatteries of the critical press were shown in many instances to spring from personal feelings and interests and the general proposition was well maintained, *that the criticism of the American press, corrupt and venal as it has become, was not a fair mirror of the defects or of the excellencies of American Poetry*. While on the subject of criticism our Lecturer was especially witty and sarcastic in reference to a peculiar style of reviewing not unknown in New England, 'yclept the "Transcendental."' The wonderful involutions and dislocations by which good English words were made to wrap up the fancies of their mis-users until the little sense that was intended was forever buried

like the Roman nymph, under the mass of its ornaments, were capitally parodied and exposed. In this connection also, the doctrine was advanced and by a very finely conducted argument enforced:—that the prime office of criticism was to detect and correct what was faulty, and not to point out or praise what was good.\textsuperscript{36}

In his report on Poe’s treatment of Griswold, Academicus agrees with Whitaker’s and Purnell’s accounts:

After showing the incompetency of our criticism, as at present managed, to present a true picture of American Poetry, our Lecturer turned to an inspection of the works themselves of our poets—and especially to the several “collections” of American poetry which have successively appeared as representing the state of the art in our country. After a cursory examination and criticism of some five or six such “collections” in the order of their publication, the late compilation of Rev. Rufus W. Griswold, styled the “Poets and Poetry of America,” was introduced—as the last and best—tho’ by no means unobjectionable. This book and its author were handled by the critical Lecturer in not the most gentle manner. Many names had been inserted which Apollo would have refused and some (such as Morris and Conrad) left out, which the muses have acknowledged. The selections from those admitted have been made with a miserable want of judgment—the worst specimens being often chosen instead of the best,—and an extravagant proportion of space allotted to personal friends—altho’ inferior poets—(as in the case of Mr. Hoffman)—while superior merit has been put off with a single page. After thus preparing the way, some eight or ten of our lady poets were introduced one by one and dismissed to their appropriate seats in the temple of Fame, after whom, came the five steel plate faces of Mr. Griswold’s frontispiece, in their order—Dana, Bryant, Halleck, Sprague and Longfellow.\textsuperscript{37}

Academicus observes:

The whole was closed with a highly philosophical and eloquent discourse on the true end and province of poetry and condemnation of what the Lecturer was pleased to term the “didacticism” of modern Poetry.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
In summary, Academicus writes:

Such, Mr. Editor, is a brief sketch of one of the most interesting and instructive lectures I have ever had the pleasure of hearing. I have attempted but the merest skeleton,—for the life and beauty you must supply if you can, Mr. Poe's ever ready and ever beautiful imagery, and glowing diction. It would afford me pleasure to devote an hour or two to a review of some of the topics presented in the Lecture. The doctrines of the office of criticism—and of the End and Province of Poetry are those upon which I would most like to dilate: but the time is not now. Perhaps I may sometime again, if an opportunity should offer, attempt to sustain an appeal from the decisions pronounced by our Lecturer on these two topics.\(^{39}\)

Academicus concludes his letter to the editor of the Delaware State Journal as follows:

We have some hopes of having another Lecture from Mr. Poe on the first Friday of January—and in the course of the winter we understand Lectures are expected from David Paul Brown, Esq., Revd. Dr. Parker, Revd. Mr. Brainerd, Hon. Charles Marim, Edward G. Bradford, Esq., and other prominent men from abroad [outside Newark], besides several of the members of our Faculty.\(^{40}\)

Although we cannot definitely say that Poe did not return to Newark to lecture at the Academy on the first Friday of January, 1844, the statement by Academicus confirms our impression received from Purnell's letter that Poe gave only one lecture in Newark instead of spending a whole week lecturing at the Academy as Whitaker asserted in 1905. Even though Whitaker

\(^{39}\) Ibid.

\(^{40}\) Ibid. The first Friday in January, 1844, was the 5th. In the January 16, 1844, issue of the Delaware State Journal appeared a letter from Academicus, written in Newark, on January 9, 1844. In his communication Academicus referred to his earlier "skeleton of Mr. Poe's eloquent lecture on American Poe-sy," and then went on to discuss "Professor Horsford's introductory to his contemplated public course of Chemical Lectures in the College Oratory." If Poe had returned to Newark on the first Friday in 1844, Academicus certainly would have reported the event. In the February 2, 1844, issue of the Delaware State Journal, Academicus reported the Hon. Charles Marim's lecture on "Honesty," and in the February 9, 1844, issue of the same paper he again commented on Horsford's lectures. It is likely therefore that if Poe had returned to Newark at a later date Academicus would have recorded the visit for posterity.
remembered many of the details about Poe and his lecture at Newark Academy (including his identity) correctly, we can attribute his obvious mistakes to the infirmities of old age.

After more than one hundred and nine years Edgar Allan Poe's lectures in Delaware, which have never been cited by any Poe scholar, are on record, and Poe's visit to Newark Academy is no longer a legend but a verified fact.