

Poe's \$750,000 Letter

To: William Poe {1}

Richmond Aug: 20, 1835

Dear Sir,

I received your very kind and complimentary letter only a few minutes ago, and hasten to reply.

I have been long aware that a connexion existed between us—without knowing precisely in what manner. Your letter however has satisfied me that we are second cousins. I will briefly relate to you what little I have been able to ascertain, or rather to remember, in relation to our families. That I know but little on this head will not appear so singular to you when I relate the circumstances connected with my own particular history. But to return. My paternal grandfather was Gen: David Poe of Baltimore—originally of Ireland. I know that he had brothers—two I believe. But my knowledge extends only to one, Mr George Poe. My grandfather married, when very young, a Miss Elizabeth Carnes of Lancaster, Pa, by whom he had 5 sons—viz: George (who died while an infant) John, William, David, and Samuel: also two daughters Maria and Eliza. Of the sons none married with the exception of David. He married a Mrs Elizabeth Hopkins, an English lady, by whom he had 3 children, Henry, myself, and Rosalie. Henry died about 4 years ago—Rosalie and myself remain. The daughters of Gen: David Poe, Maria, and Eliza, both married young. Maria married Mr Wm Clemm, a gentleman of high standing and some property in Baltimore. He was a widower with 5 children—and had, after his marriage to Maria Poe 3 others—viz: 2 girls and a boy, of which a girl Virginia, and a boy Henry are still living. Mr Clemm died about 9 years ago without any property whatever, leaving his widow desolate, and unprotected, and little likely to receive protection or assistance from the relatives of her husband—most of whom were opposed to the marriage in the first instances—and whose opposition was no doubt aggravated by the petty quarrels frequently occurring between Maria's children, and Mr Cs children by his former wife. This Maria is the one of whom you speak, and to whom I will allude again presently. Eliza the second daughter of the General, married a Mr Henry Herring of Baltimore, a man of unprincipled character, and by whom she ha[d sever]al children. She is now dead, and Mr Herring, having married ag[ain...] communication with the family of his (sisters) wife's sister, Mrs [Eliza Poe] the widow of General D. Poe, and the mother of Maria, died on[ly 6 week]s ago, at the age of 79. She had for the last 8 years of her life been [confine]d entirely to bed—never, i[n] any instance, leaving it during that time. She [h]ad been paralyzed, and suffered from many other complaints—her daughter Maria attending her during her long & tedious illness with a Christian and martyr-like fortitude, and with a constancy of attention, and unremitting affection, which must

exalt her character in the eyes of all who know her. Maria is now the only survivor of my grandfather's family.

In relation to my grandfather's brother George I know but little. Jacob Poe of Frederick town, Maryland, is his son—also George Poe of Mobile—and I presume your father Wm Poe. G Jacob Poe has two sons Neilson, and George—also one [page 2] daughter Amelia.

My father David died when I was in the second year of my age, and when my sister Rosalie was an infant in arms. Our mother died a few weeks before him. Thus we were left orphans at an age when the hand of a parent is so peculiarly requisite. At this period my grandfather's circumstances were at a low ebb, he from great wealth having been reduced to poverty. It was therefore in his power to do little for us. My brother Henry he took however under his charge, while myself and Rosalie were adopted by gentlemen in Richmond, where we were at the period of our parents' death. I was adopted by Mr Jn Allan of Richmond, Va: and she by Mr Wm McKenzie of the same place. Rosalie is still living at Mr McK still unmarried, and is treated as one of the family, being a favourite with all. I accompanied Mr Allan to England in my 7th year, and remained there at school 5 years since which I resided with Mr A. until a few years ago. The first Mrs. A. having died, and Mr A having married again I found my situation not so comfortable as before, and obtained a Cadet's appointment at W. Point. During my stay there Mr A died suddenly and left me—nothing. No will was found among his papers. I have accordingly been thrown entirely upon my own resources. Brought up to no profession, and educated in the expectation of an immense fortune (**Mr A having been worth \$750,000**) the blow has been a heavy one, and I had nearly succumbed to its influence, and yielded to despair. But by the exertion of much resolution I am now beginning to look upon the matter in a less serious light, and although struggling still with many embarrassments, am enabled to keep up my spirits. I have lately obtained the Editorship of the Southern Messenger, and may probably yet do well.

Mrs Thompson, your aunt, is still living in Baltimore. George Poe of Baltimore allows her a small income.

In conclusion, I beg leave to assure you that whatever aid you may have it in your power to bestow upon Mrs Clemm will be given to one who deserves every kindness and attention. Would to God! That I could at this moment aid her. She is now, whi[le] I write, struggling without friends, without money, and without health to support [herself] and a children. I sincerely pray God that the words which I am [writing] may be the means of inducing you to unite wit[h] your brothers a[nd...fri]ends, and send her just now, and which, unless it reach

her soonwill, [I] am afraid, reach her too late. Entreating your attention to this subject
I remain

Yours very truly & affectionately

Edgar A. Poe

1 Source: *Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849. Letters.* Edited by John Ward Ostrom. New York, Gordian Press, 1966, Volume I, Page 66.