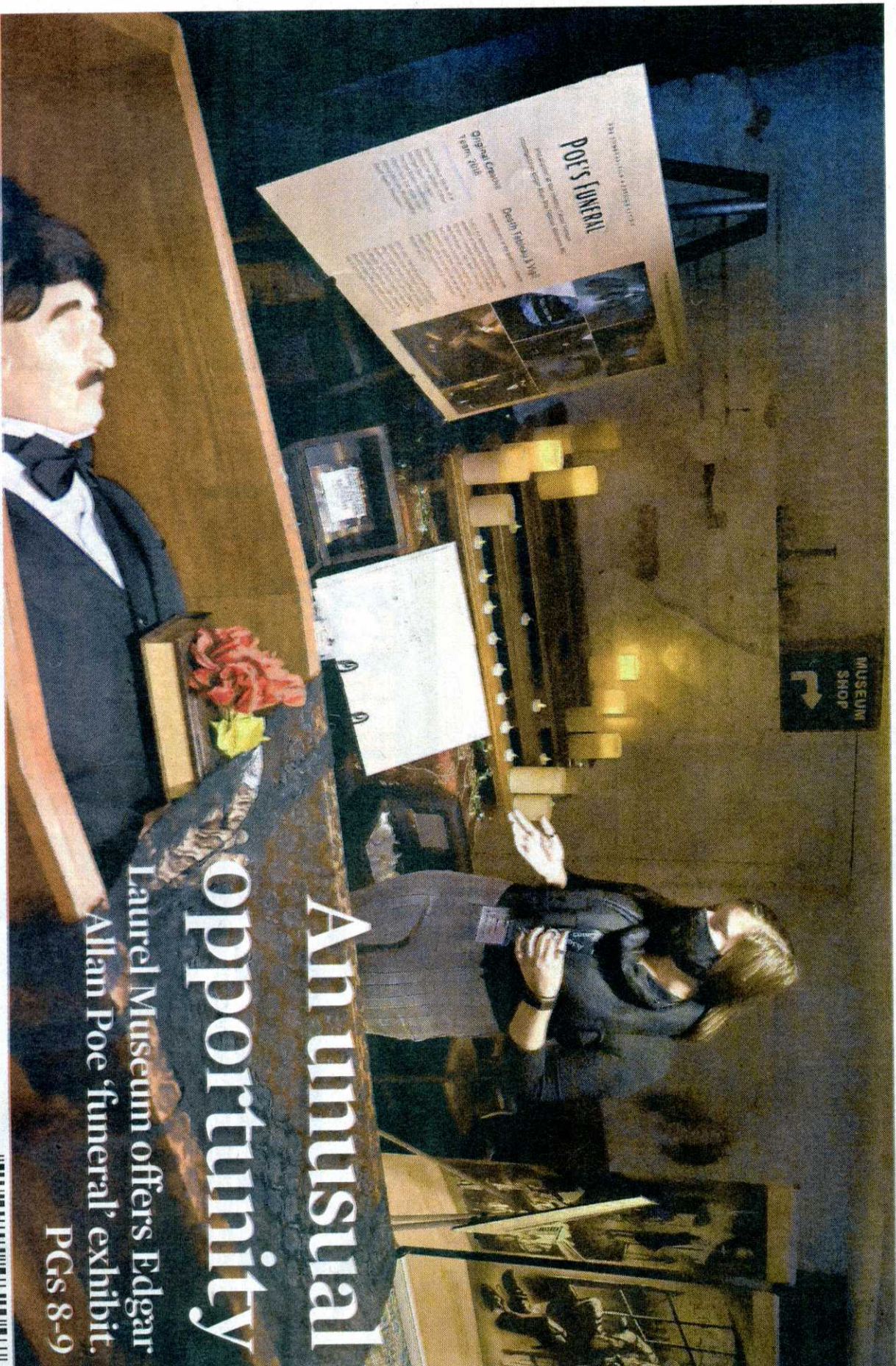


# Laurel Leader

AN EDITION OF THE BALTIMORE SUN

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2021 | Vol. 123, No. 19  
laurelleader.com



## An unusual opportunity

Laurel Museum offers Edgar Allan Poe 'funeral' exhibit.  
PGs 8-9

Laurel Museum Manager Rileigh Matson explains that visitors have the opportunity to light a candle and write a message to Edgar Allan Poe. A reenactment of Edgar Allan Poe's "body" and casket are on display at the Laurel Museum now through Nov. 28. The traveling exhibit was put together by the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum in Baltimore. JEFFREY F. BILL/BALTIMORE SUN MEDIA

7



7

NEWSSTAND PRICE \$1.50



## COVER STORY

# Laurel Museum offers unusual opportunity to pay respects to Poe

By Katie V. Jones

During his lifetime, Edgar Allan Poe, the famous writer of mystery and macabre, had connections with Baltimore, Philadelphia and Richmond, Virginia. Though he may have passed through Laurel while traveling, the author of such famous works as "The Raven" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" doesn't really have a connection to the city. That didn't stop Laurel Museum staff members from jumping at the chance to host an unusual traveling exhibit about the mysteries surrounding Poe's death.

"It is a little intense," said Ann Bennett, executive director of the Laurel Historical Society. "It's probably not for everyone."

Set up in the basement of the museum, surrounded by candles and windows draped with black bunting, a wooden casket holds the "body" of the author with panels providing information about the strange circumstances of his death more than 170 years ago.

"I love how it transforms the basement," Bennett said. "It fits so well with the time period interpreted here at the museum."

The exhibit was created by the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum in Baltimore for its International Edgar Allan Poe Festival, a two-day festival that started in 2018, according to Enrica Jang, the Poe museum's executive director.

"[The museum] really did it well," Bennett said. "It is very respectful and very evocative of ... 19th-century funeral customs."

After being missing for several days, Poe was found wearing a straw hat, shabby shoes and ill-fitting clothing covered with trash in a gutter in the streets of Baltimore in 1849, said Rileigh Matson, Laurel Museum manager. He died four days later at the age of 40 without ever regaining full consciousness, and then the rumors started.

"He was always well-dressed and took a lot of care with his clothing," Matson said. "He was also not completely himself and was ebriated."



A reenactment of Edgar Allan Poe's "body" and casket are on display at the Laurel Museum now through Nov. 28. The travelling exhibit was put together by the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum in Baltimore. **JEFFREY F. BILL/BALTIMORE SUN MEDIA**

wouldn't they want to do some type of testing and exhume him?"

Shari Pollard, a volunteer at the Laurel Museum for more than 22 years, had never heard of the practice of "cooping" before the exhibit. She was, however, used to the exhibit's somber tone.

"It will be a nice, intimate performance while the exhibit is still in place," Bennett said. "We had something slightly similar

closed Nov. 26 for Thanksgiving. The free exhibit will be in place through Nov. 28. "An Evening with Poe," featuring actor Stephen Mead reading Poe's works, will take place at 4 and 6 p.m. Nov. 28 to close the exhibit.

with surrounding counties because [Poe] is a Maryland story as much as Baltimore." The exhibit was "something we couldn't say no to," Bennett said.

"We were determined to make it happen. It's really great to partner with other historic organizations in the area." For Hall, the exhibit was "worth the



have passed through Laurel while traveling, the author of such famous works as "The Raven" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" doesn't really have a connection to the city. That didn't stop Laurel Museum staff members from jumping at the chance to host an unusual traveling exhibit about the mysteries surrounding Poe's death.

"It is a little intense," said Ann Bennett, executive director of the Laurel Historical Society. "It's probably not for everyone."

Set up in the basement of the museum, surrounded by candles and windows draped with black bunting, a wooden casket holds the "body" of the author with panels providing information about the strange circumstances of his death more than 170 years ago.

"I love how it transforms the basement," Bennett said. "It fits so well with the time period interpreted here at the museum."

The exhibit was created by the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum in Baltimore for its International Edgar Allan Poe Festival, a two-day festival that started in 2018, according to Enrica Jang, the Poe museum's executive director.

"[The museum] really did it well," Bennett said. "It is very respectful and very evocative of ... 19th-century funeral customs."

After being missing for several days, Poe was found wearing a straw hat, shabby shoes and ill-fitting clothing covered with trash in a gutter in the streets of Baltimore in 1849, said Rileigh Matson, Laurel Museum manager. He died four days later at the age of 40 without ever regaining full consciousness, and then the rumors started.

"He was always well-dressed and took a lot of care with his clothing," Matson said. "He was also not completely himself and was inebriated."

A growing theory, Matson said, is that Poe was a victim of "cooping," a practice where people from out of town were kidnapped off the street, given alcohol and forced to vote for a certain candidate several times, changing clothing each time. The exhibit in Laurel focuses on this theory, as Poe was found on Election Day.

"I really didn't know much about his death, and it got me thinking," said Ellen Hall, a visitor from Brandywine, after seeing the exhibit Saturday. "It's really interesting. My first thought was, 'Why



A reenactment of Edgar Allan Poe's "body" and casket are on display at the Laurel Museum now through Nov. 28. The travelling exhibit was put together by the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum in Baltimore. JEFFREY F. BILL/BALTIMORE SUN MEDIA

wouldn't they want to do some type of testing and exhume him?"

Shari Pollard, a volunteer at the Laurel Museum for more than 22 years, had never heard of the practice of "cooping" before the exhibit. She was, however, used to the exhibit's somber tone.

"We had something slightly similar when we had an exhibit on Victorian death practices," Pollard said. "That was a long time ago."

A steady flow of visitors greeted the exhibit during its opening over Halloween weekend.

"The door opened to people dressed in steam punk costumes and as Wednesday Addams saying, 'We're here to pay our respects to Poe,'" Matson said, laughing.

The museum is open from noon to 4 p.m. Fridays through Sundays; it will be

closed Nov. 26 for Thanksgiving. The free exhibit will be in place through Nov. 28.

"An Evening with Poe," featuring actor Stephen Mead reading Poe's works, will take place at 4 and 6 p.m. Nov. 28 to close the exhibit.

"It will be a nice, intimate performance while the exhibit is still in place," Bennett said.

In accordance with the city of Laurel, face masks are required at all city facilities, including the Laurel Museum.

Once its run ends in Laurel, the exhibit is scheduled to return to the Poe House, though Jang is hopeful other local museums will take interest in it.

"This is the first time it has traveled," said Jang, who used to live in Laurel and was familiar with the Laurel Museum and knew Bennett. "I hope to make friends

with surrounding counties because [Poe] is a Maryland story as much as Baltimore."

The exhibit was "something we couldn't say no to," Bennett said.

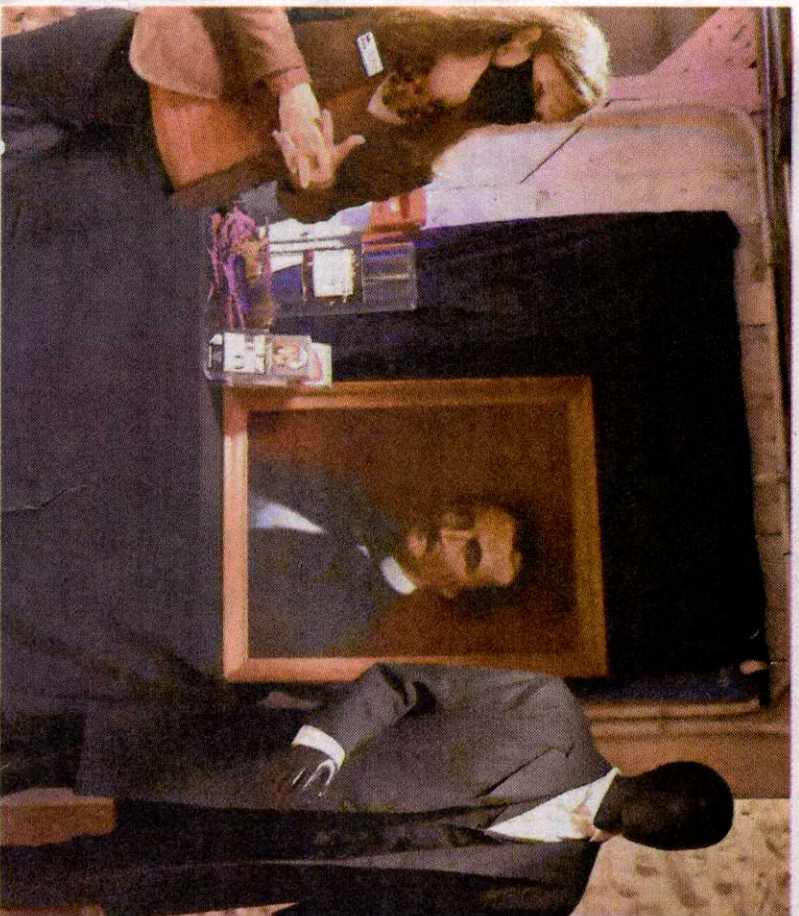
"We were determined to make it happen. It's really great to partner with other historic organizations in the area."

For Hall, the exhibit was "worth the trip."

"It was a little bit macabre, but then, so was he," Hall said. "That's what made it a really good exhibit. It really captured him."

The Laurel Museum, 817 Main St., will host the free "Edgar Allan Poe 'Body' and Casket" exhibit through Nov. 28. "An Evening with Poe" will take place at 4 and 6 p.m. Nov. 28; tickets are \$10. For more information, go to [laurelhistoricalsociety.org](http://laurelhistoricalsociety.org).

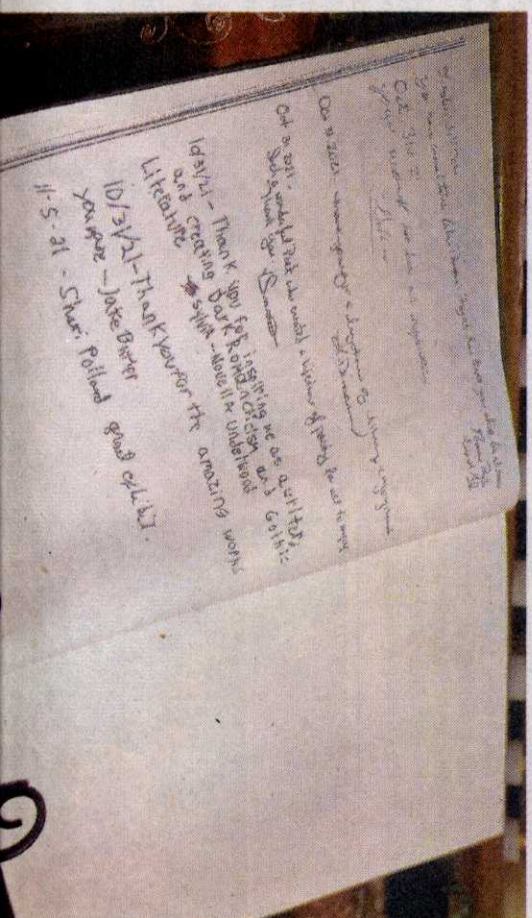




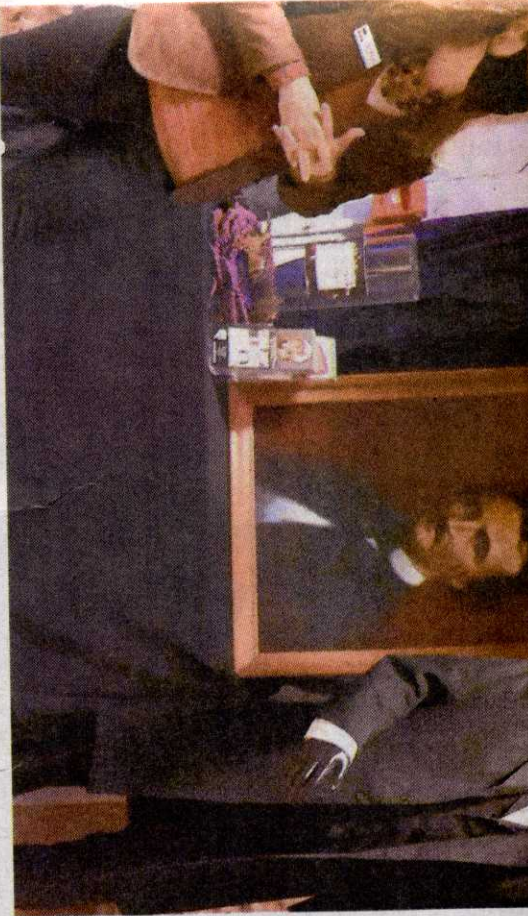
Laurel Historical Society Executive Director Ann Bennett discusses the "What Men Wore in the 1840s" display. **JEFFREY F. BILL/ BALTIMORE SUN MEDIA PHOTOS**



John Hoffman, of Pasadena, takes a look at "Edgar Allan Poe" in his casket.



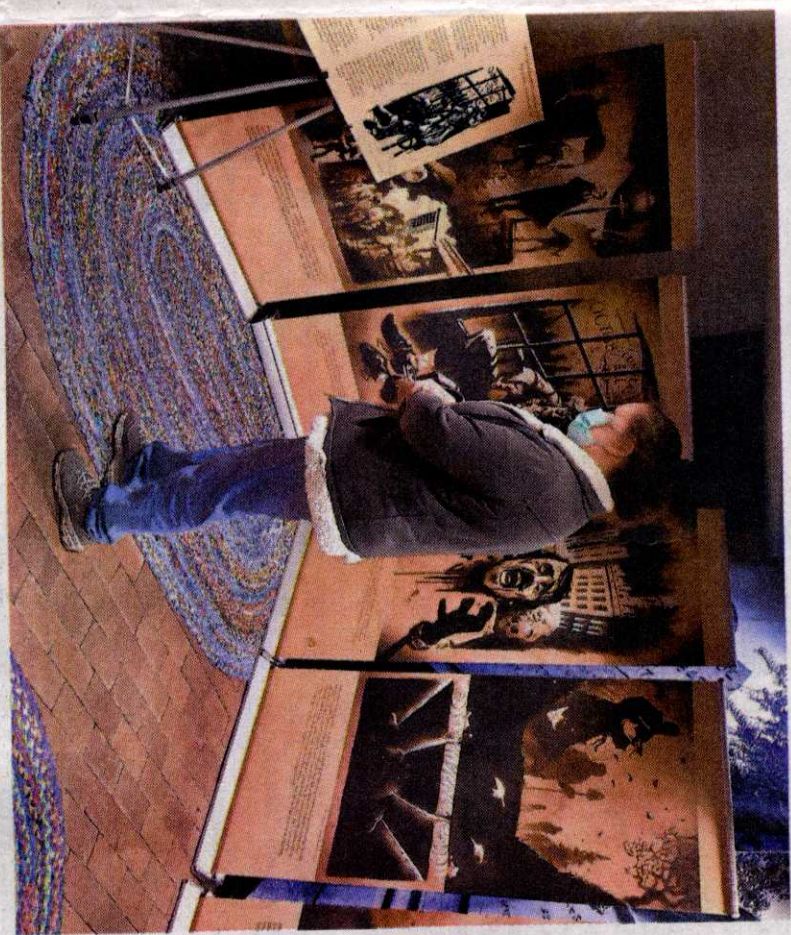




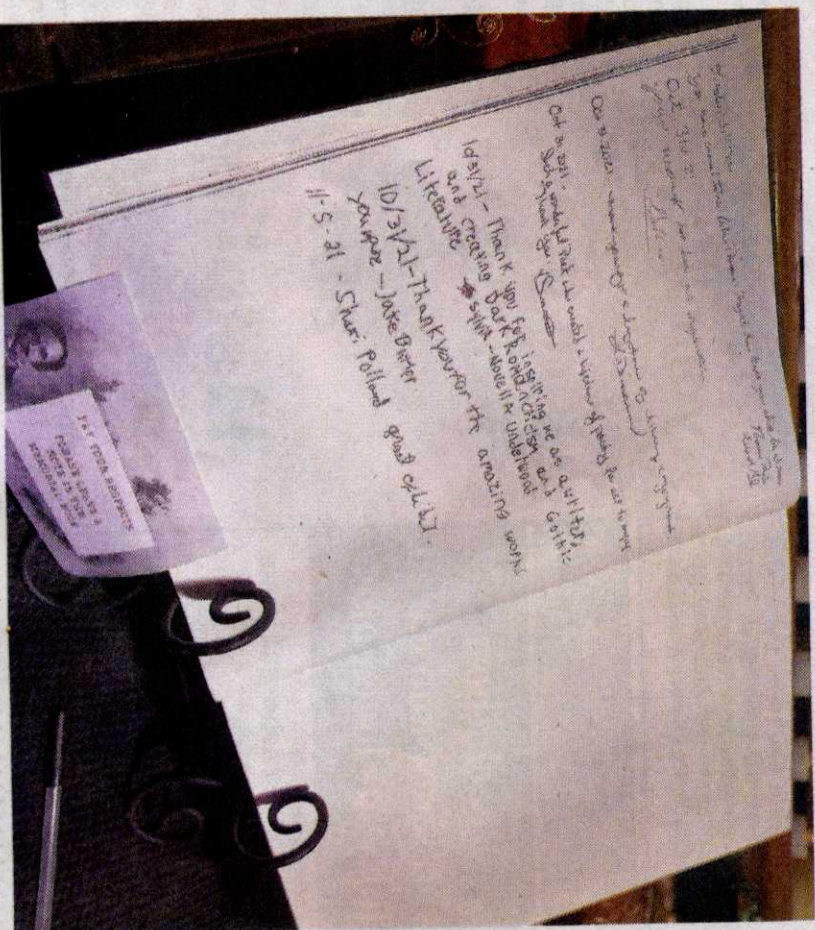
Laurel Historical Society Executive Director Ann Bennett discusses the "What Men Wore in the 1840s" display. **JEFFREY F. BILL/BALTIMORE SUN MEDIA PHOTOS**



John Hoffman, of Pasadena, takes a look at "Edgar Allan Poe" in his casket.



Ellen Hall, of Brandywine, reads placards on display explaining the circumstances surrounding Edgar Allan Poe's last days before his death.



Visitors have the opportunity to light a candle and pay their respects.