



NEWS RELEASE

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Emily Dickinson Museum Fundraiser Celebrates Poet's 179th Birthday Party and Preview of *The Belle of Amherst* for "Perfect Crowds of Admirers"

"I expect I shall be the belle of Amherst when I reach my 17[9]th year. I don't doubt that I shall have perfect crowds of admirers at that age."

The Emily Dickinson Museum announces a celebration of the poet's 179th birthday on Thursday, December 10, from 5:30 until 7:30 pm, at the Lewis-Sebring Dining Commons at Valentine Hall on the Amherst College campus.

This year's annual benefit celebration, held on Emily Dickinson's actual December 10 birth date, is an ideal time for the museum's supporters to join in active stewardship of one of Amherst's greatest treasures.

The sparkling Victorian birthday party includes a special preview of selections from William Luce's famed play, *The Belle of Amherst*, performed by acclaimed actress Barbara Dana. (The complete play will be presented on Thursday, March 11, 2010, in Kirby Memorial Theater at Amherst College, where it was performed by Julie Harris, the originator of the role, in 1976.) The birthday party will feature a menu, inspired by Dickinson family recipes, of savories and sweets for "Celebrated Days." Thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, all proceeds go directly to benefit the Museum's operating fund. Information and reservations at suggested donation amounts of \$30, \$50, \$100, or \$1000 are available by contacting the Museum at (413) 542-5311 or by email at lvandoren@emilydickinsonmuseum.org. For further details, see the museum's web page "Annual Birthday Celebration Fund-raiser."

"The October ceiling collapse in the front parlor draws attention to the challenges of preserving the Homestead as one of this nation's most important literary sites," said Jane Wald, the Museum's executive director. "It highlights the need for careful stewardship to safeguard Dickinson's beloved home. We hope there will be 'perfect crowds of admirers' at the birthday celebration to join us in honoring and preserving Emily Dickinson's legacy at her family homes."

ABOUT BARBARA DANA

As both actress and author, Barbara Dana has had a longstanding interest in Emily Dickinson. She is co-editor of *Wider than the Sky: Essays and Meditations on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson* and author of *A Voice of Her Own: Becoming Emily Dickinson*, a novel for young adults. Dana's portrayal of *The Belle of Amherst* debuted in July 2009 at the Emily Dickinson International Annual Meeting in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

ABOUT THE EMILY DICKINSON MUSEUM

The Emily Dickinson Museum, comprising the Dickinson Homestead and The Evergreens, is devoted to the story and legacy of poet Emily Dickinson and her family. Both properties are owned by the Trustees of Amherst College. The museum is overseen by a separate Board of Governors charged with raising its operating and capital funds. The Homestead was the birthplace and residence of the poet (1830-1886). The Evergreens was the 1856 home of the poet's brother and sister-in-law, Austin and Susan Dickinson.

The Emily Dickinson Museum is located at 280 Main St. in Amherst, Mass. Hours are Wednesday through Sunday 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. March through December; closed on major holidays. During preservation work the Museum is open on its regular schedule and offers an intriguing tour of The Evergreens as the first Emily Dickinson museum.

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