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## Galveston's Dickens on the Strand has something for everyone

By Chris Gray  
Houston Chronicle  
November 27, 2023



Dickens on the Strand, the Victorian-style holiday festival that envelops downtown's historic district next Friday through Sunday, is about much more than costumes and parades. Like most things, you get out of it what you put in, and with [Galveston Historical Foundation](#)'s centerpiece annual shindig, it's possible to go down some deep Victorian rabbit holes indeed. That goes double for this year, the festival's 50th anniversary, or Golden Jubilee.

We wanted to highlight a few interesting nooks and crannies tucked away inside this [vast festival](#) that may not always get a lot of attention, but are worth seeking out all the same. We also feel obliged to point out that it's a superb place to knock out a whole bunch of holiday shopping.

**Short Story Contest:** Although Dickens is not exactly a literary festival, it does contain literary elements due in no small part to this contest open to Galveston schoolchildren ages 7 to 12. Entries are limited to 100 words on the topic of either Christmas, Pets, or Ghosts. Lucinda Dickens Hawksley, Charles' great-great-great granddaughter and an acclaimed author in her own right, will select two winners, one from ages 7-9 and the other from 10-12. Everyone who enters gets a free pass to the festival; winners get a carriage ride with Dickens descendants in one of the parades.



**Fezziwig's Friday Night:** Tickets to Dickens are [perfectly reasonable](#)—\$25 regular tickets; \$100 VIP, not counting special events—but this relatively new addition to the festival, named after Scrooge's genial and magnanimous former employer in "A Christmas Carol," offers a sneak peek for a price even Ebenezer himself could love; namely, nothing. Hearty ales and a number of period musical performances will be on tap at the now-expanded Fezziwig's Beer Hall, hosted by none other than Charles Dickens himself. (Yes, you read that right.) GHF is also offering a Saint Arnold's Architectural Walking Tour for \$35.

**Canterbury Theatre of Varieties:** Surprise sounds like a key element of this \$60 add-on, offered both Friday and Saturday at the Buckingham Palace VIP area and billed as "an evening of

Victorian finery and frivolity.” Just in case, here’s a little context courtesy of London’s [Victoria and Albert Museum](#): “Singing and the comic song remained at the heart of music hall, but gradually, from the late 19th century, all sorts of ingenious and strange speciality acts developed.”



**All the World’s a Stage:** Save some time to sample the offerings on the seven stages scattered around the festival, usually spaced every block or so, and you’ll find all sorts of offbeat and wonderful performances—high-school choirs, circus troupes, fife-and-drum bands, jugglers, a cappella singers, madrigals, an Edgar Allan Poe impersonator, the Bay Area Tubadors, the official Dickens costume and facial-hair contests, a "fast feast" contest, and pirate rockers **The Bilge Pumps**.

**Eleveneses on the Pier:** For an extra \$60, join another of Dickens' great-great-great granddaughters, Polly Olivia Boyd, for this [extremely British tradition defined as](#) "a short break for light refreshments, usually with tea or coffee, taken about eleven o’clock in the morning." Hard to beat the scenery for this soiree, too: the 1877 Elissa, the square-rigged iron barque seen

on Galveston's official seal; and a National Historic Landmark which welcomes more than 40,000 visitors per year. No walk-up tickets sold for this event; online registration only.

**Victorian Bed Races:** Those who stick around Dickens to the not-so-bitter end are rewarded with perhaps the festival's most exciting event: appropriately costumed four-person teams must push a rider—who must wear a Victorian-style nightcap and nightshirt—on rolling beds which, per the contest rules, "are to be decorated and themed after Victorian Christmas." The race gets even more interesting when, halfway through the 700-foot course (about two Strand blocks), the rider must switch places with one of the pushers, who in turn must put on the nightshirt and nightcap as quickly and smoothly as possible before the race can resume.