Abraham Stoker grew up a sickly child in Dublin — he couldn’t stand or walk until age 7. He overcame his weakness to become an athlete by his college years. He worked as a drama critic for the Dublin Evening Mail and, for nearly 20 years, served as a personal assistant to his hero, actor Henry Irving, and as the business manager for Irving’s 2,100-seat London theater, the Lyceum.

Stoker published his first book — an instructional manual for legal administration — in 1879 at age 32. He then turned to romance novels and, of course, his Gothic horror masterpiece, “Dracula.” Stoker went on to write 13 novels and to publish three collections of short stories before he died following a stroke in 1912 at age 64.

In “Dracula,” a Romanian nobleman hires the services of a young English lawyer to help him buy land in a small English seaside village. The lawyer discovers the nobleman is a vampire who drinks blood to stay alive and whose real purpose for relocating to England is to seek fresh prey. The lawyer finds himself pursued by seductive vampire women, his fiancée and her friend come under attack by a vampire and he joins forces with vampire hunters.

Stoker constructed his narrative with an unusual mix of personal letters, diary entries and excerpts of newspaper articles — all of which was aimed at convincing his readers his tale was true. Stoker’s brief introduction to the tale assures readers that the characters are real people and the events of the story really happened.

Stoker based at least part of his tale on the infamously bloody legend of Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia. While consolidating power in the 15th century in what is now Romania, Vlad was known to have his enemies killed and their bodies posted on stakes. This earned Vlad the nickname “Vlad the Impaler.”

The legacy: A cottage industry in vampires

“Dracula” was a huge hit. When motion pictures came into vogue in the 1920s, Stoker’s novel was adapted — plagiarized, actually — into a silent movie called “Nosferatu.” Since then, the story of the bloodthirsty Transylvanian Count Dracula and his progeny has gone on to popularize an entire genre of vampire books, movies, comics and TV shows.