



Jane Austen Society of North America Vancouver Chapter

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Jane Austen, Her Sailor Brothers, and the War of 1812

"You don't hear much about Isaac Brock in grade one nowadays." -- Tim Bottomer, aged 7*

"The traditions of the Navy are rum, sodomy, and the lash." -- Sir Winston Churchill**

The War of 1812 was profoundly significant in the history of Canada, and the battles, skirmishes and raids fought for two-and-a-half years on land, lake, and sea determined our continuing British ties and ultimate sovereignty. This was our part in the twenty-two-year struggle of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and the conflict which historian Alan Taylor calls "the borderland war" ultimately settled our share of the eastern half of the continent. (So far, anyway.) The war at sea, however, was also a major theatre in the years 1812 to 1815 of what was called at the time "the American War."

To incorporate the "Austen connection," it is well to remember that almost the whole of Jane Austen's life was passed against a backdrop of world war. She was born in 1775 (the year the Battle of Bunker Hill started the American Revolution) and died in 1817, just two years after the Congress of Vienna decided the shape of the peace following the defeat of Napoleon. During much of this era, and for many years thereafter, two of Jane's brothers were officers in the Royal Navy, both ultimately becoming admirals. The causes of the War of 1812 were many and complex and British policies (including the role the Royal Navy played in them) contributed to American vexation and their declaration of war against Great Britain in June, 1812.

The Americans and the British had conflicting world views. In the first place, many Englishmen considered that the independence of the United States was by no means a settled question. Then, with Britain straining every sinew in its contest against France and her allies, it needed upwards of 110,000 to man the ships of the navy, and pressed thousands into service, including the impressment of many seamen taken from American merchant ships. The British had long contended that the American navy contained a large number of British deserters, trained seamen and marines who had been attracted by better pay and conditions and provided the skilled core of the American forces. And it was common practice, at the outbreak of hostilities, for the mobilizing Royal Navy to dispatch its notorious press gangs to round up able seamen from its own fishing fleet and mercantile marine. The sailors on American ships were, to them, just as fair game. The view of the British, in concert with most nations, was that every natural-born subject remained so for life, whereas the Americans contended that the immigrant had a right to choose his citizenship.

By 1812, many irritations were festering. The 1783 Treaty of Paris between the U.S. and Britain really ushered in no more than a cold war, with many long standing grievances. The two sides were uneasy neighbours on the North American continent, each convinced that the other would collapse. In fact, the original American constitution of 1781, written following the defeat of the British at Yorktown, prequalified the Canadian colonies as future American states.

After the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and the Battle of San Domingo in 1806, the Royal Navy enforced a blockade of France to prevent war materiel, food, and other supplies from reaching Britain's enemies on the Continent. On the other hand, shipments of flour from Boston to Lisbon were permitted, and were vital to Wellington so that he could feed his

*Phyllis Bottomer, who is the regional coordinator for JASNA Vancouver, relates that her son, Tim, has had a passionate interest in history, stemming from when she read him a story about knights when he was three. He was in a thoughtful mood one evening at dinner, not long after his seventh birthday. (Tim is now a lawyer.)

**The First Sea Lord's retort to a naval officer.

army while fighting, and defeating, Napoleon in Spain. The flour was paid for with gold and silver which filled the coffers of New England banks, and spurred manufacturers. In response to economic warfare from Napoleon, Parliament in 1807 passed Orders-in-Council which effectively closed American trade with much of Europe and the West Indies. These orders required every ship from a neutral nation, bound for a European country, to put into a British port, where it would be searched and contraband cargo seized, and could not proceed without the purchase of a license. The orders authorized the searching of merchant ships at sea, and the impressment of American sailors into the Royal Navy.

Commander Charles Austen, Jane's younger brother, served on the North American station from 1804 to 1811. He patrolled the seas between Bermuda and Halifax, where he enforced the abolition of the slave trade, intercepted American vessels suspected of trading with Napoleonic Europe, and impressed their crews. In his six-and-a-half years of service on the eastern coast of North America, he would have put into Halifax many times. Illustrated is an advertisement he issued in Bermuda, to recruit seamen for his own Sloop of War, the Indian, but he ultimately had to resort to impressment to complete the crew. So Charles Austen, although he had returned to England by 1811, had for several years been energetically following orders which would have made the Americans very cross indeed.

Bermuda  **Gazette,**
And WEEKLY ADVERTISER.
 No. 1105. SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 1805.

SPANISH WAR
 Now or Never.
WANTED,
SEAMEN and STOUT LANDS-
MEN
 To complete the Crew of His Majesty's Sloop of War the **I N D I A N,**
OF TWENTY GUNS,
CHARLES JOHN AUSTEN, Esq.
COMMANDER.

THE INDIAN is the finest and most beautiful Man of War ever built, and her construction puts her safe sailing beyond a doubt. Therefore plenty of Spanish Doubloons and DOLLARS will fall to the lot of all those spirited Young Men who come forward without delay and repair on board the said Sloop now sitting alongside of Mr. Goodrich's Wharf, in St. George's.

N. B. There are a number of Petty Officers births vacant, who are five share Men.

Gravy and Fresh Beef every day at twelve o'clock.

GOD SAVE THE KING,
 AND
 Success in the **TIGHT LITTLE ISLAND.**

Another contributing factor to the war was that the Americans were using unsustainable agricultural practices, soil was becoming depleted, and they needed to expand their territory. This brought them into conflict with the native tribes of the interior, such as the Shawnee, who ever since the Revolution had sided with the British, who treated them better. In addition, the Americans coveted the fur trade. There was also much internal dissension within the U.S., as many people in New England and other northern states were advocating secession. There were fundamental differences in outlook between the north, and the southern slave states: differences in their strategic interests, their geography, their economies, their philosophy and, above all, their view of the role of government. Politicians actually fought duels. For many reasons, they are more aptly called the Disunited States! Into this combustible mix came hot-headed, young war hawks from the southern and western states, newly elected to Congress. Most fiery of all was Henry Clay of Kentucky, who declared, "Britain stands pre-eminent in her outrage on us by her violation of the sacred personal rights of American freemen, in the arbitrary and lawless impressment of our seamen."

Clay and his followers were, to put it mildly, not men with heads for detail, and hadn't a clue what fighting the British and their allies in the north would involve. Yet the drum beat for war went on, all prudent considerations were swept aside, and Thomas Jefferson's sentiment that "the acquisition of Canada would be a mere matter of marching" carried the day. These wealthy slave owners, living in the lap of luxury in the south, sent their ill-equipped and badly-led young soldiers and militia men to fight in the swarming insects, heat, fog, swamps, ice, blizzards and snow of Upper and Lower Canada. C.S. Forester states, "Little thought was given to the question of how this force was to be recruited, housed, or trained." The Republicans harboured the illusion that they would be treated as liberators, and that conquest would be, in Alan Taylor's words, "quick, easy, and cheap." Following a vote in the Senate, President Madison signed the declaration on June 18, and his administration notified the army in the northwest, by regular mail, that the U.S. was at war with Britain.

Canadian historian Leslie Hannon relates this vignette:

"In the officers' mess at Fort George, where the Niagara River pours into Lake Ontario, the gentlemen of the 41st Regiment were lunching with their American counterparts from Fort Niagara, a bugle call across the water.

Major-General Isaac Brock, Commanding Officer of Upper Canada, had just arrived after an over-night trip from York to announce the declaration of war by the United States against Great Britain. Of course, he added, he would insist that the regiment's guests finish their meal. Later, the officers strolled down to the riverbank, shook hands with their guests and bade them good-bye as they were rowed away. It was June 26, 1812. The war had been on for eight days already."

The U.S. commander of the Northern Department was Henry Dearborn, who had seen no action since the War of Independence ended in 1781. In the words of historian Mark Zuehlke, "he envisioned a three-pronged invasion of Canada. A main column would advance on Montreal by Lake Champlain, while another struck along the Niagara River, and the third would sweep out of Fort Detroit across Upper Canada." The leader in the west was portly William Hull, governor of the Michigan territory, who also had seen no action since the Revolution. On the British side was the dashing Isaac Brock, who had been born in 1769, the same year as Wellington and Napoleon. Brock was suspicious, if not convinced, that the Americans intended to join cause with the French. His ally was the Shawnee Indian warrior Tecumseh, whom he created a brigadier general. Each admired the audacity and competence of the other.

Hull crossed the Detroit River on July 2nd, and took possession of the little town of Sandwich on July 12th, but when he discovered his proclamation that the Americans had come "to liberate the colonists from the tyranny of King George" did not win over the Canadians, he withdrew to Fort Detroit. His marauding troops, stealing food and anything else they could lay their hands on, burning fences and cutting down orchards, didn't endear themselves either. (Actually, a member of his Kentucky militia took the very first scalp in the war.) He was demoralized to hear that Brock had sent a force up Lake Huron to inform the astonished American garrison at Fort Michilimackinac that war had been declared, and the British were taking possession of this key outpost of the fur trade. Also, Hull's "entire invasion plan and details on the strength and composition of his army" had fallen into the hands of the British.

Brock and Tecumseh then went on the offensive, by clever ruses magnifying the strength of their forces in the minds of the Americans, who were scared witless of the Indians, and Hull surrendered Fort Detroit on August 16. Brock then paroled 1,000 Ohio militiamen south as he could not feed them, and sent 582 prisoners, including General Hull, to prisoner of war camp at Quebec City. Hull was exchanged, to face court martial in Washington. Brock's forces captured thirty-three cannon, plus 2,500 muskets, which helped him arm more Canadian militia. Fort Dearborn and Fort Wayne soon fell, and, alas, civilians were killed, but as the Indians were wont to say, "when the white man wins, it is a victory, but when the Indians win, it is a massacre." In any case, as Zuelke points out, "By summer's end, Hull's army had not only been defeated, it had been annihilated." The war around and on the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain, and this vast inland region, had begun. It has been described as an unnatural war among kindred spirits. It seems a paltry business compared to Napoleon's 1812 invasion of Russia and ultimate retreat from Moscow, yet a great continent was at stake.

As they had planned, the Americans next attempted to invade Canada across the Niagara River, but were defeated at the Battle of Queenston Heights. Isaac Brock was again determined to take the offensive, and although he was leading only a small force, met the Americans head on. He was killed on October 13. Canadian reinforcements, including Mohawk warriors lead by John Norton, arrived from Fort George, and some New York militia men, rather than be scalped, leaped to their deaths down the cliffs. If they were caught in the branches of the trees, native sharp shooters picked them off. In the rout, 925 were taken prisoner when Winfield Scott surrendered. Brock had realized how crucial Niagara was to the defense of Canada, and he became a hero of mythic proportions. Professor Maurice Careless has said he was a commander worth several regiments.

The next major engagement of the border war in the autumn of 1812 occurred on Lake Ontario, when the nation of over 7,000,000 sent a foe of an entirely different sort against the little colony of 600,000. Commodore Isaac Chauncey was a highly competent officer in the American Navy, who had gained much experience in the War Against the Barbary Pirates in 1801 and later. In their first foreign war, the Americans had fought against the surrogates of the Ottoman Empire. They wanted to avoid paying huge tribute fees, and succeeded in opening the Mediterranean to American trade and shipping. In one of many successes by the American Navy on the Great Lakes and at sea, Chauncey drove the British fleet into Kingston harbour on November 10, and gained control of Lake Ontario. This was crucial for the movement of troops and shipment of goods, since whoever controlled the lakes could in all likelihood be expected to win the war. On land, however, winter was setting in along the Niagara, and the American troops at Buffalo were in dire straits, bivouacked in tents without winter clothing, hungry, and many barefoot. Dysentery, pneumonia and death were rampant, so that volunteers walking home spread a deadly contagion, "Buffalo fever". In Albany, for instance, thirty-three members of the state assembly fell ill of it, and three died.



As referred to above, the officers of the American Navy were as competent and experienced as the army generals had been ailing and feckless. In 1812, they had several victories at sea which stunned the British and fueled U.S. war enthusiasm. In August the powerful 55 gun frigate *Constitution* had burned HMS *Guerriere*, a 49 gun frigate. In October, the *United States* had captured another frigate, HMS *Macedonian*, which was towed into Newport, where it was refitted as an American vessel. In December, the *Constitution* burned and sank HMS *Java* off the coast of Brazil, after taking a number of her crew prisoner. Throughout the War of 1812, there were many battles at sea, and American victories alternated with British. Although fewer in number, the

American ships were super frigates, bigger, faster, newer, better built, and with reinforced hulls. After the last great sea battle of San Domingo in 1806, British resources were poured into the land war against Napoleon, and the requirements of the army took precedence over the navy, which languished to a certain extent. As flag captain of the *Canopus*, Francis Austen fought at San Domingo, and in December, 1812, took an American privateer captive off the Azores.

Over the winter of 1812-13, attempts to find a negotiated settlement failed, genocide of the natives was advocated in some American circles, and the Republican propagandists boasted of victory. The question of impressment was the primary sticking point for Madison and his colleagues. It is understandable that the Americans would resent seamen of European descent, whom they claimed as their own citizens, being taken (as they saw it) as virtual slaves. The United States can justifiably claim that it had invented the notion of the citizen in the modern era, as persons could become naturalized in five years. Women, although they did not have the vote, were included as citizens.

Against this it is worth considering what Brian Southam describes as “the grim realities of life in the Royal Navy, its cruelty, bloodshed, and horror.” Flogging was a frequent occurrence, the cat-o-nine tails being an instrument of torture composed of nine cords, a quarter of an inch round and about two feet long, the ends whipt with fine twine, and to these cords was affixed a handle. A routine lashing was twelve stripes. Most feared was flogging round the Fleet, when mariners were flogged alongside every ship. Seamen received no medical care after flogging; indeed surgeons were employed to bring them round when they fainted during the beating. 1797 saw many mutinies, and one of the most notable was that of HMS *Hermione*, whose captain was a sadist named Hugh Pigot. Richard Woodman relates, “He had flogged one man eight times in ten months, and killed at least two more with the lash; one took eighteen weeks to die.” Pigot and his officers were killed and thrown overboard. The punishments listed in the Royal Navy’s regulations were brutal in the extreme, and are appropriately the study of specialists. There is an Austen connection here, however.

For example, Vice-Admiral James Gambier was one of the British negotiators of the Treaty of Ghent, and Francis Austen had served as his flag captain. Both Gambier and Austen were known as strict disciplinarians, and Gambier had been raised in a household of evangelicals and abolitionists, who deplored the ships being used as floating brothels when in port. Zuehlke says, “He denied women from coming aboard unless they could prove they were seamen’s wives. Until a sailor was injured by the practice, anyone overheard swearing had to wear a wooden collar to which two 32-pound balls of round shot were attached by short lengths of chain. Such practices earned Gambier the nickname Dismal Jimmie.”

It is not surprising, therefore, that the greatest threat to the enlisted men’s lives was not death in action, which accounted, according to Southam, “for only about 7% of the 100,000 estimated to have been killed during the years 1793-1815 - but death from disease and accidents which ran as high as 80%. The remaining 13% were put down to dangers of the sea.” Fire and explosions from gun powder are examples. Southam elaborates, “life for these sailors was often no better than dwelling in a prison, within whose narrow limits were to be found constraint, disease, ignorance, insensibility, tyranny, sameness, dirt and foul air. Besides the injuries of war were the common afflictions of shipboard life: ulcers arising from bruises received in the course of their hard work, and exasperated by the damp in which they lay, and by the foul water they were obliged to drink; ruptures, an ordinary consequence to young men, from pulling ropes; plus ulcerated lungs, lacerations, dislocations, and fractures from falls....”

Even the most dedicated Anglophile among us might concede that the Americans did have a point. So they all went back at it, and the madness resumed in the spring of 1813. Early in the year, the British began a blockade of major American ports, and the central U.S. coastline, with the fleet operating out of Halifax and the West Indies. In April, Admiral Sir George Cockburn began raids, including amphibious landings, into Chesapeake Bay. His outrage at what he called, “the dastardly and provoking manner in which the Americans choose to defend themselves,” and his savage retaliation, would

surely qualify him as one of Jane Austen's "nasties." Well, he did have his irritations. There were fat cattle grazing in the fields, and he needed fresh beef for his crews. Moreover, those self-same, ungrateful crews, when they got close into shore, or landed, tended to desert in substantial numbers.

As mentioned above, Isaac Chauncey controlled Lake Ontario, so on April 27 the Americans attacked Fort York. They killed, looted, and ran down the Royal Standard, which languishes to this day in the American Naval Academy at Annapolis. They burned private and public buildings, including the legislature. Departing on July 31, they carried off the mace, which they had stolen from the Assembly Chamber, but President Roosevelt returned it to Toronto in 1934.

In September, the U.S. Navy took control of Lake Erie at the Battle of Put-In-Bay, and in October they defeated the British while killing Tecumseh, at Moraviantown, during the Battle of the Thames. Far to the east, Lt-Col Charles-Michel de Salaberry, a regular army officer who had seen action in Europe and Ireland, was astonished to discover that his force of French-Canadian Voltigeurs, Iroquois, Irish, Scots, and Germans, had routed the Americans in October, at the Battle of Chateaugay. The Americans were again defeated, in November, at the Battle of Crysler's Farm, on the shores of the St. Lawrence, so that communication and transport between the Canadas was secured. Right into December, hostilities continued along the Niagara. At sea, there were many battles, with the USS *Essex* disrupting the British whaling fleet off the Galapagos, while the British won a sea fight off the coast of Chile.



Battle of Lundy's Lane, painting attributed to Alonzo Chappel

The borderland war resumed in 1814, along the Niagara River and elsewhere, with each side trying to bring the other to terms. Throughout the hostilities, there wasn't a settlement on either side of the river which had not been attacked, looted, and burned. The bloodiest battle of the entire war occurred on the night of July 25-26 at Lundy's Lane, where the combined casualties of dead, wounded, and prisoners numbered over 1,600. The Americans withdrew to Fort Erie at the south-western end of the peninsula, but ultimately blew up the fort in November, and their forces retreated to Buffalo, on the eastern shore. Mark Zuehlke says, "America's last campaign against Canada was over."

Back in August, the British, desiring to draw American forces away from the northern theatre, continued the campaign on Chesapeake Bay. Cockburn and others put forces ashore to burn the public buildings at Washington, in retaliation for American actions at Fort York, along the Niagara, and the shores of Lake Erie. The ultimate prize was Baltimore harbour, but the star-spangled banner was still flying over Fort McHenry after the bombardment, so the Royal Navy withdrew. Francis Scott Key penned his famous poem, which became the U.S. national anthem in 1931.

In September, with the hopes of carving off New England from the United States, the British sailed a force of 10,000 into Lake Champlain, but were defeated at the Battle of Plattsburgh. In the east, therefore, and in the west, the see-saw war of evenly matched forces was drawing to a close, and the question was whether the campaigns would resume in 1815.

During the summer of 1814, the British and Americans had appointed representatives for a commission of peace, which finally assembled in the Flemish city of Ghent in August. The lead British negotiator was Henry Goulborn, assisted by Anthony St. Baker, and Vice-Admiral Lord Gambier. The Americans had sent John Quincy Adams, Albert Gallatin, Henry Clay, James Bayard and Jonathan Russell as envoys. The two sides met for many stormy sessions, with huge issues such as the fishery, disputed islands, and the claims of the native peoples under discussion. Ultimately, on December 24, 1814 a treaty of peace was signed which simply stated that "all hostilities, both by sea and by land, shall cease", without any specific mention that impressment, blockades or other practices on the high seas would be discontinued. The borders were essentially re-set to those established in the 1783 Treaty of Paris, and the line would

continue to be drawn down the middle of the Great Lakes. Article 10 bound both the parties to continued abolition of the slave trade, which would have pleased James Gambier. Both sides claimed victory, but history acknowledges that the real losers were the native peoples, who had been fighting for the establishment of a territory of their own.

In the title of his book, Mark Zuehlke calls this “the brokering of an uneasy peace.” Not knowing whether negotiations would succeed or fail, the British had been preparing for a campaign in the south which, if they won, would enable them to thrust deep into the interior of the continent, up the Mississippi. They were thwarted by Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans, on January 8, 1815. Both sides ratified the treaty, but neither the British and Canadians, nor the Americans, were sanguine about the post-war intentions of the other; all continued to look uneasily over their shoulders, and to strengthen fortifications, or build new ones. The Rideau Canal was built as a defensive installation, and it was hoped that the new capital, Ottawa, was far enough north to be out of easy reach of the Americans. Peoples with differing views on the role of government, and philosophy of society, have had to share the continent after all.

The reader who has persevered this far, however, may be tempted to expostulate, “But Jane Austen was mentioned in the title!” Well, there are several connections between Canada, and Jane Austen, and her family, which will be mentioned.

The War of 1812 hardly registers in the consciousness of modern day Britons, as it has been subsumed into the history of the Napoleonic Wars. At the time, however, it was very much a matter of anxiety among naval, military, business and government circles. With his long service on the North American station, Charles Austen was qualified to talk knowledgeably of the war, and Henry Austen, with his banking and militia connections, thought a disastrous outcome possible. American and French privateers, which are merchant ships licensed as pirates, were wreaking havoc on British shipping. Jane Austen was well aware of this, and in *Mansfield Park* she has young Tom Bertram throw down a newspaper and say, “A strange business this in America, Dr. Grant! -- What is your opinion? -- I always come to you to know what I am to think of public matters.” (Chapman p118-119) Sir Thomas, sailing home during September and October, 1812, would have been in danger from both American and French ships. (See Southam p181 for the chronology of MP) Also in *Mansfield Park*, Jane slyly makes a joke for her family’s amusement, when she has William Price ask, “Whereabouts does the *Thrush* lay at Spithead? Near the *Canopus*? But no matter!” (Chapman p378)

Charles Austen



Long before the American war, however, Jane Austen was familiar with the geography of Canada, and wrote in a comic poem of “Ontario’s lake...and Niagara’s Falls.” (Chapman p442-443 in *Minor Works*). In fact, Jane was acquainted with one of the giants of Canadian history, Sir Guy Carleton, and may have gleaned such knowledge while a guest of his family. Carleton, who wrote the Quebec Act of 1774, and repulsed an American invasion in 1775, was governor of Quebec from 1768 to 1778, and all of Canada, as Lord Dorchester, from 1786 to 1795. Dorchester, with his wife Lady Maria, and their family, had retired to his estate at Kempshott Park in Hampshire. There, as it behooved an Irishman, he bred race horses. On December 28, 1798, Jane wrote her sister Cassandra that, “Lady Dortchester means to invite me to her ball on the 8th of January.” The previous August, Nelson had defeated the French fleet at the Battle of the Nile, and just a month later, ladies were dressing themselves in Mamalouc robes and cloaks. Jane tells Cassandra that she will abandon her familiar “white sattin cap for a borrowed Mamalouc cap”, a toupee modelled on the Egyptian fez “which is all the fashion now”. She also tells her sister of a ball in October, 1800 at which “the Portsmouths, Dorchesters, Boltions and Portals” were present.

The late Hugh McKellar surmised amusingly, in *Persuasions* #13, “Now it is hardly likely that Lady Maria, after a decade as the undisputed leading lady of Quebec society, turned meek and mild on moving to Hampshire. She was used to leading the conversation, and might well regard her new neighbours’ ignorance of Canada as a defect to be overcome, rather than to be indulged; they could more easily learn enough to follow what she chose to say than deflect her. How was she to know that Jane Austen, after accepting her hospitality, went home and worked on *First Impressions*? How much did she unwittingly contribute to the development, in Jane’s mind, of Lady Catherine de Bourgh -- likewise the daughter of an earl who married beneath her?” (Dorchester was ennobled to the lowly estate of Baron.)

After the Long War ended in 1815 at the Battle of Waterloo, both Charles and Francis had periods of active service alternating with home leave. Charles died in Burma, in 1852, with the rank of Rear-Admiral. There was a further Canadian connection, however, as Francis Austen served from 1844 to 1848 as Commander-in-Chief, North American and West India Station. He moved between his official residences at Bermuda, and Admiralty House in Halifax. The position involved ceremonial duties and tours of inspection, but the chief operations were directed against slave-traders of all nationalities sailing under Brazilian and Portuguese flags.

Sir Frances Austen

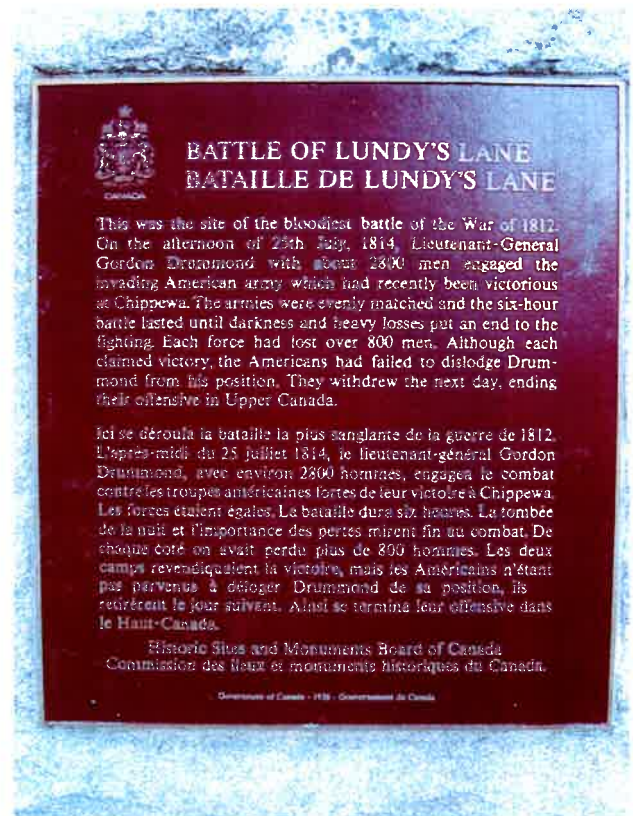


Sometime between 1844 and 1848, Francis had travelled through the United States with his two unmarried daughters, and carried away some unfavourable impressions. Nevertheless, when Miss Eliza Susan Quincy wrote to him from Boston, announcing her family's love for Jane Austen, he responded graciously. When, at her request, he sent a letter in Jane's hand, "news of this generous gift went round the Quincy family, enthusing everyone, including Josiah, Miss Quincy's father, a former President of Harvard." Southam relates that Susan's continuing correspondence runs to several pages and mentions that Josiah, when a member of Congress for Boston, had "strenuously opposed the War of 1812." Susan's sister Anna went on what she called a Jane Austen "pilgrimage" in 1860, which included Bath, Winchester, and Southampton, but the high point of the tour was her call at Francis' house, Portsdown Lodge, overlooking Portsmouth. However, their purpose was not to see "one of Nelson's captains,

a veteran of seventy years' service." No, the thrill in prospect, as she wrote to Francis, ahead of her visit, was to meet "the brother of Jane Austen!" Southam believes that at some level, this would have stung Francis, who became Admiral of the Fleet in 1863, and died in 1865. Brian Southam also states, in his superb book that, "Francis and Charles served their country long, life-long and meritoriously. They were brave and enduring men in an age of endurance and bravery. Yet their names would be forgotten were it not for the eminence of their sister -- the most modest and retiring of the Austens. Their interest for us today is wholly on her account. The quiet comedy of this circumstance is something she would appreciate."

This account was penned by Sandy Lundy, who is a partial and prejudiced, but hopefully not entirely ignorant, historian.

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The Vancouver Chapter is delighted to announce that the 2012 winner of the SFU Jane Austen Society Prize is Peter Sawatsky. He has just completed studies for his Bachelor of Science, and is currently enrolled in the SFU Professional Development Program.



April 2012 Meeting - Putting Emma on the Stage

On Saturday, April 28, JASNA was pleased to host noted actress, producer and director Joan Bryans, in her presentation, "Putting Emma on the Stage." This forthcoming production of Emma was scheduled to run at the Metro Theatre in South Vancouver during May and June.

Joan opened her discussion with the question, "how does one go about putting a novel on the stage, especially one that is almost two hundred years old?" Joan pointed out that most of our current images of what Regency life was like really comes from the movies, which are generally not very realistic. Many members of JASNA have enjoyed her Regency-era productions over the years at the Jericho Arts Centre, such as *Holiday Fayre*, *Looking for Mr. Darcy* and *Regency Revels*. She has, however, tried various other adaptations of the novels, such as a goodly chunk of Mansfield Park, but it proved to be too long and complicated. Emma is the easiest of Jane Austen's novels to translate to the stage. Firstly, one needs a script, and the American playwright Michael Bloom is the author of this production, into which has been incorporated music and poetry of the time. Pat Unruh of Early Music Vancouver provided a score on original instruments, and Joan played a sample of the composition *Hartfield House*.

So they moved ahead with rehearsals; there were 14 actors, and too much information. How realistic to make the play? The main point was to capture the spirit of the novel. Social context was very important, but how to portray the exterior scenes like the village street, or the trip to Box Hill? Joan finally opted for four interiors, but it is a big challenge for a small theatre company to juggle the logistics of different sets or a revolving stage. They struggled with the problems of showing the connections to the land, the change of seasons, and the passage of time.

We had a visit from Mr. Knightley, in costume! He talked about costume as a definer of class and character, not to mention an enforcer of good posture. Chris Dellinger (Knightley) pointed out that his costume was a work-in-progress. He was aiming for a "gentleman farmer" look, if only he could get his hands on a pair of tall riding boots, at a reasonable cost. JASNA member, Jessica Kalan, who is a student in Capilano University's program for stage and screen costume design, stepped up to help Chris obtain suitable boots.

Joan added that after the preliminary casting calls, and call-backs for readings, the rehearsals began to gel, so that the actors and the director were beginning to create the performance together. She was satisfied that with just a few weeks to go, it only required the addition of an audience to complete the synergy between play, players and the people who will pay to see it. Metro Theatre is a valuable addition to the cultural life of our city and all were enjoined to attend and enjoy Emma.

Thanks to **Colleen Griffin** for this meeting report



Elspeth Flood at the Fort Worth AGM