



## Jane Austen Society of North America Vancouver Chapter

Newsletter No. 119

June 2014

### *Sir Walter Elliot and the Parsons' Sons*

In reflecting on the links, similarities and differences between the lives and careers of Horatio Nelson, Francis Austen, and Charles Austen, it is diverting to begin with Jane Austen's own impressions of the Royal Navy, as she wove her views into her narratives. I cannot resist, therefore, in beginning with the opinions of her ineffable character, Sir Walter Elliot, whose extravagance, and that of his daughter Elizabeth, have forced the expedience of letting Kellynch Hall, and removing to Bath. But who would be a suitable tenant? Mr. Shepherd, who is Sir Walter's man of business, ventures a suggestion: "If a rich Admiral were to come in our way. . ."

"He would be a very lucky man, Shepherd," replied Sir Walter. "That's all I have to remark."

"I presume to observe, Sir Walter, that, in the way of business, gentlemen of the navy are very well to deal with. . . I am free to confess that they have very liberal notions, and are as likely to make desirable tenants as any set of people one should meet with."

Sir Walter only nodded. But soon afterwards, rising and pacing the room, he observed sarcastically,

"There are few among the gentlemen of the navy, I imagine, who would not be surprised to find themselves in a house of this description."



Here Sir Walter's daughter Anne spoke, --

"The navy, I think, who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give. Sailors work hard enough for their comforts, we must all allow."

"Very true, very true. What Miss Anne says, is very true," was Mr. Shepherd's rejoinder, and "Oh! certainly," was his daughter's; but Sir Walter's remark was, soon afterwards --

"The profession has its utility, but I should be sorry to see any friend of mine belonging to it."

"Indeed!" was the reply, and with a look of surprise.

"Yes; it is in two points offensive to me; I have two strong grounds of objection to it. First, as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of; and secondly, as it cuts up a man's youth and vigour most horribly; a sailor grows old sooner than any other man; I have observed it all my life. A man is in greater danger in the navy of being insulted by the rise of one whose father, his father might have distained to speak to, and of becoming prematurely an object of disgust himself, than in any other line. One day last spring, in town, I was in company with two men, striking instances of what I am talking of, Lord St. Ives, whose father we all know to have been a country curate, without bread to eat; I was to give place to Lord St. Ives, and a certain Admiral Baldwin, the most deplorable looking personage you can imagine, his face the colour of mahogany, rough and rugged to the last degree, all lines and wrinkles, nine grey hairs of a side, and nothing but a dab of powder at top.-- 'In

the name of heaven, who is that old fellow?’ said I, to a friend of mine who was standing near (Sir Basil Morley). ‘Old fellow!’ cried Sir Basil, ‘it is Admiral Baldwin. What do you take his age to be?’ ‘Sixty,’ said I, ‘or perhaps sixty-two.’ ‘Forty,’ replied Sir Basil, ‘forty, and no more.’ Picture to yourselves my amazement; I shall not easily forget Admiral Baldwin. I never saw quite so wretched an example of what a sea-faring life can do; but to a degree, I know it is the same with them all: they are all knocked about, and exposed to every climate, and every weather, till they are not fit to be seen. It is a pity they are not knocked on the head at once, before they reach Admiral Baldwin’s age.”

It seemed as if Mr. Shepherd, in this anxiety to bespeak Sir Walter’s goodwill towards a naval officer as tenant had been gifted with foresight; for the very first application was from an Admiral Croft. . .

“And who is Admiral Croft?” was Sir Walter’s cold suspicious enquiry.

Mr. Shepherd answered for his being of a gentleman’s family, and mentioned a place; and Anne, after the little pause that followed, added –

“He is rear admiral of the white. He was in the Trafalgar action, and has been in the East Indies since; he has been stationed there, I believe, several years.”

“Then I take it for granted,” observed Sir Walter, “that his face is about as orange as the cuffs and capes of my livery.”<sup>1</sup>

Jane Austen read her compositions aloud to her family, and I am convinced that Sir Walter’s pomposities were declaimed to the evening circle and received with great hilarity, as she honed and perfected her narratives for many years prior to the completion of *Persuasion* in 1816, and the novel’s posthumous publication in 1817.

Sir Walter’s indignation at finding himself in the company of the son of a country curate whose naval prowess had raised him to a peerage, and another whose rugged appearance was the result of the rigors of life at sea, could have been inspired by Admiral Horatio Nelson himself. Contamination indeed!

Nelson was the sixth child of a family of eleven born to a country parson in Norfolk, while Francis was the sixth child, and Charles Austen the last, of a family of eight, born to a country parson in Hampshire. The fact that Nelson’s mother was the great niece of prime minister Sir Robert Walpole, or that Mrs. Austen was the niece of the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, would have cut no ice with Sir Walter Elliot, Bt. Indeed, Nelson’s maimed and shattered body, wracked by illness, and his slight, frail stature, would have further prompted Sir Walter’s contempt.

This past March, the Vancouver chapter of JASNA was fortunate to hear a presentation by Anthony Sessions, who is an enthusiast of British naval history, and collector of Nelsonian memorabilia. This set me off on an armchair voyage to learn more about the officer who rose to become Viscount Nelson of the Nile, and, as Sessions pointed out, was the most famous fighting admiral in British history.



Nelson’s career began near the beginning of the Age of Fighting Sail, when, at the age of twelve, in 1771, he went aboard the Raisonnable, of which his uncle, Maurice Suckling, was the captain. It ended when, at the age of 48, he was killed on October 21, 1805, aboard his flag ship, HMS Victory, during the Battle of Trafalgar. Victory, with a crew of 850 and 102 cannon, was a first-rater and one of the largest British warships afloat. Some people, who imagined this vessel and others like it to be the devil’s own creation, called these fearsome weapons

<sup>1</sup> Edited version of Chapter 3, pages 17 – 22 of the Chapman version of Persuasion.

“Beelzebub’s grand arsenal.” At Trafalgar, the Royal Navy, using Nelson’s plan, defeated the combined French and Spanish forces. Trafalgar was the second-to-last sea battle involving these warships, such as Spain’s massive Santisima Trinidad, which was sunk. Francis Austen, sixteen years younger than Nelson, was captain of Rear-Admiral Thomas Louis’s flagship, the 80 gun Canopus, at the 1806 Battle of San Domingo in the West Indies. The French were again defeated in this, the last of the major battles of the Age of Fighting Sail. Hostilities, such as blockades, continued on the world’s oceans during the Napoleonic wars, but during the War of 1812, the battles were largely fought using faster, more manoeuvrable craft such as frigates and sloops. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the British were so determined to hold on to their North American possessions during this Anglo-American conflict, that they built their flagship, HMS St. Lawrence, on Lake Ontario and she was launched in 1814. At 104 guns, this warship was, therefore, larger than Victory.

The arc of Nelson’s career really moved in concert with the era of the largest warships, which lasted about 35 years. He, like Napoleon, was short, about 5’4”, and from the beginning was extremely ambitious. He was



promoted up the ranks rapidly, notwithstanding that he was subjected to the hazards of life at sea, and in battle, from an early age. At fifteen, while on a voyage to the East Indies, he contracted malaria and nearly died. He was prone to recurrent attacks of this, plus seasickness, for the rest of his life. Before, during, and after the American Revolution, he saw service in many theatres, from the Atlantic, to the North Sea, to the Baltic, and to the West Indies. In 1780 he nearly died on an expedition to the Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua. Active service resumed, but during the peace following the Treaty of Paris in 1783 he was unemployed in Norfolk, having married Frances Nisbet in 1787. France declared war on Britain in

1793, and Nelson took command of Agamemnon, sailing to the Mediterranean, where he was involved in several actions, and was blinded in his right eye on Corsica. In a letter to his wife, he brushed this off, and reported that nothing short of the loss of a limb would keep him from his duty: “I wish to be an Admiral and in command of the English fleet; I should very soon do much, or be ruined.” In 1797, at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent between the Royal Navy and Spain, he got his chance. Through the audacity of his tactics he was given a lot of credit for the defeat of the Spanish, and was made a rear admiral and a Knight of the Bath. But this audacity led to near-fatal results a few months later, when his right arm was shattered and had to be amputated, during an ill-conceived scheme to capture Spanish treasure ships in the harbour of Santa Cruze de Tenerife in the Canary Islands. By now, author A. Whipple reports that Nelson was the frailest admiral in the fleet, weighing no more than 130 pounds: cold nights on deck brought on racking coughs, and nervous anxiety caused him sleeplessness and weakness from loss of appetite. Really, Sir Walter Elliot would have thought him an absolute FRIGHT!

Yet, as Whipple continues, “This one-armed, one-eyed, emaciated little man was transformed by battle. He was a brilliant tactician, and the sound of guns, the smell of smoke, the presence of death turned him into a fearless, savage and relentless fighter.” As Tony Sessions related, Nelson discarded the traditional method in which opposing fleets were strung out in two parallel line miles long. In his new order of battle, the British ships would attack at right angles to split the opposing forces, and achieve close engagement as quickly as possible with a view to causing “total annihilation” at sea.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the Battle of the Nile, in August, 1798, he held many conferences with his captains as his fleet searched the Mediterranean for Napoleon’s forces.

The following is an excerpt from A. Whipple’s book Fighting Sail:

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<sup>2</sup> It has to be admitted that others in the Admiralty, besides Nelson, were designing new tactics and strategies for war.

The conferences were a Nelsonian innovation. The admirals of the earlier generation had kept their own counsel, and orders were given by flag signals, such as they were, during the battle itself. Nelson not only knew that he did not intend to fight by the book; he was also well aware that the Royal Navy's signal system was still crude and subject to misunderstanding. He intended something more, and this was his most important innovation. More than any other 18<sup>th</sup> Century admiral, Nelson believed in sharing tactical options with his captains, discussing every possible situation and emphasizing that when battle was in progress, every captain would be on his own. If a captain saw an opportunity to do damage to the enemy, he was free to attack without awaiting signals from the flagship's masthead. The old line-ahead dogma of each ship's blindly following the leader was not only dead, it was replaced by something previously unheard-of in the Royal Navy: delegation of authority.

Not surprisingly, Nelson's officers were devoted to their soft-spoken, generous, vain and brilliant leader.

The French fleet was finally located lying at anchor in Abu Qir Bay, but believing themselves to have found safe harbour did not save them. Nelson's delegation of authority resulted in the most devastating victory of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and thwarted Napoleon's plan to use Egypt as a stepping stone on the way to take back India, which the French had lost to the British in 1759. Nelson, who survived a head wound, sailed to Naples, to be cheered, feted and lionized as the Hero of the Nile, and to be shamelessly flattered by Lady Hamilton. This marked the start of his celebrated love affair with Emma, the beautiful and notorious (but by now very fat!) wife of the British minister, Sir William Hamilton. Living as their guest, she planned a grand party for his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday on September 29<sup>th</sup>. By now, Nelson was ill with splitting headaches and fever, plus symptoms of heart disease, but this did not stop him from being stirred by a ferment of sexual passion in response to Emma's kindness and adulation.

It is, perhaps, not entirely surprising that Nelson had found comfort in Lady Hamilton's arms, since the correspondence reveals some insight into his wife's nature. Her complaisant response to an angry letter from him detailing how badly his things had been packed prior to a long voyage, indicates she was a dim wit who could have been the inspiration for Lady Bertram.<sup>3</sup>

The havoc of war necessitated Nelson evacuating the royal family, and the Hamiltons, from Naples to Palermo and back, and he lingered in the Mediterranean until recalled to England. In 1800, he and the Hamiltons travelled overland, via Vienna and Prague, to Hamburg, where they chartered a packet to Great Yarmouth. Huge crowds cheered him, but his affair with Emma was a scandal caricatured by James Gillray and others. She gave birth to their daughter Horatia, in January, 1801. Nelson was very vain, and loved to wear his decorations and jewels, and this also was caricatured by Gillray, and was noticed by his superiors, as was his readiness to have his portrait painted. It was at this period that he separated from his wife, and became furiously jealous of the Prince of Wales for attentions he paid to Emma.



In the spring of 1801 the British were determined to punish the Danes, who had entered into a Treaty of Armed Neutrality with Russia and other Baltic states. It was during the Battle of Copenhagen that Nelson ignored an order, raising his telescope to his blind eye and saying, "I really do not see the signal."

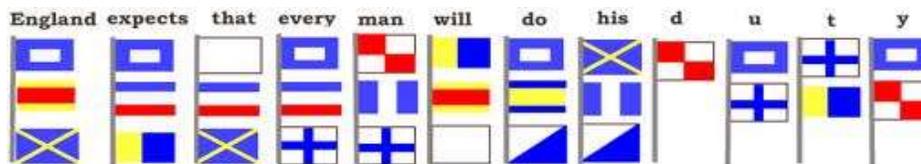
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<sup>3</sup> Find her in [Mansfield Park](#)

Also in 1801, he was promoted to vice admiral of the Blue, and created a viscount. Therefore, in that year he could afford to buy the estate of Merton Place in Surrey, and lived there with Sir William Hamilton, Horatia, and Emma. She decorated the house to reflect her adulation and his vanity, so that a visitor wrote, "The whole house, staircase and all, is covered with nothing but pictures of her and him." This excess of conceit leads me to suspect that it was the inspiration, at least in part, for the character of Sir Walter Elliot. Emma's taste, and that of the admiral, however, undoubtedly ran to highly romanticized portraits, since it is unlikely that this stout lady and half-blind, toothless, one-armed man would have been fond of looking into mirrors. Sir Walter, however, who took great care of his complexion, couldn't have too many looking-glasses.

Hostilities resumed in 1803, and Nelson took command of Victory, to sail to the Mediterranean for blockade duty on the French port of Toulon. He was noted for being attentive to the physical and mental health of his officers and crew during this boring and grueling service. Also, in 1803, Napoleon began to build a huge flotilla of barges on the coast of France, with which he intended to invade England. A vast, well-trained and equipped army was being assembled near Boulogne.

In the summer of 1805, Nelson chased the French fleet to the West Indies and back across the Atlantic. Then, on September 14<sup>th</sup>, the fighting admiral who formed the nightmares of the French, the Spanish, and Sir Walter himself, embarked on his final voyage; and on the eve of the battle, sent the famous signal which was to end Napoleon's dream of invading Great Britain.



Francis Austen admired Nelson, and was proud to have served under him, but it was a matter of life-long regret that he did not see action during the Battle of Trafalgar. On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, Francis and Admiral Louis had dinner with Nelson, and he ordered them to take Canopus to Gibraltar for re-provisioning, assuring them that they would be back in time for the engagement with the allies. Circumstances, however, delayed them, so that honour, glory, prize money and death eluded them.

There were some similarities, but many more differences, between the lives and careers of Nelson and Jane Austen's brothers. Both brothers entered the two year program at the Royal Naval Academy, Portsmouth, at the age of twelve, whereas Nelson, at the same age, went on board his uncle's ship as a midshipman. As an aside, it is worth mentioning that Jane Austen confessed to being irritated at all the fuss being made of Nelson, in a letter to Cassandra, so I believe she indulged in a spoof of his connections when she called Mrs. Elton's <sup>4</sup> nouveau and pretentious Bristol relations by the distinctive name of Suckling. Captain Maurice Suckling was a wealthy man who became Comptroller of the Navy, but I've never read that he was the least bit vulgar. He, also, was the son of a clergyman, the prebendary of Westminster.

Charles and Francis were fortunate in that their family was connected through marriage to high ranking officials. Francis benefitted, on occasion, from an association with Samuel and James Gambier, and Charles benefitted, on occasion, from the patronage of Captain Thomas Williams; but both brothers advanced through merit as, most emphatically, did Nelson.

Francis, as a fifteen year old midshipman, sailed out to India, and returned after more than five years to a rapturous welcome at Steventon, no doubt bearing beautiful muslins for the ladies. Charles, for his part, gave

<sup>4</sup> Find the Sucklings on p 272 of Jane Austen's Emma

his sisters the beautiful topaz crosses which are now in the collection of the Jane Austen House Museum. They were the inspiration for the amber cross which Lt William Price gave to his sister Fanny in *Mansfield Park*. It is said that Charles was Jane's favourite brother, and also the model for Anne Elliot's love, Wentworth.

Jane Austen's brothers served in many theatres throughout the "Long War" of 1793 to 1815, but neither fought in any of Nelson's epic battles. They both lived into old age to serve through the long peace of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which followed the Battle of Waterloo. While Britain had a vast empire to patrol, and was determined to enforce the abolition of the slave trade, the end of full mobilization necessarily meant duties on shore as well as to sea for both naval officers. Francis retired to live, first, at Chawton, and then to Portsmouth. He married twice, raised a large family, and was knighted in 1837. As referred to in our JASNA Newsletter #116, he served as Commander-in-Chief, North American and West Indian Station, from 1844 to 1848, residing in both Bermuda and Halifax, Nova Scotia. From there he directed the Navy's operations along the coasts of North and Central America, and the western Atlantic. He returned to Portsmouth, to live to the grand old age of 91, having attained the rank of Admiral-of-the-Fleet. Therefore, he would most thoroughly have disoblged Sir Walter Elliot by declining to be "knocked on the head."

Charles married Frances Palmer in Bermuda, and when he was widowed married her sister Harriet, and he, also, had a large family. From 1817 to 1825 he was employed by the Coast Guard on land, patrolling the coasts of Hampshire and Cornwall to thwart smugglers. He returned to active duty in the Caribbean, and the Mediterranean, and was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies and China Station. He died of cholera at 73, in Burma. In Brian Southam's chronicle Charles is referred to as a man of "sweet temper and affectionate disposition" and one of his nephews referred to him as "the good old Admiral". His niece Anna knew him as a benevolent character, to which was joined

"great personal advantages and that even to the last. When the Admiral left England in February, 1850 (though in the 71<sup>st</sup> year of his age) his tall, erect figure, his bright eye & animated countenance would have given him the impression of a much younger man; had it not been for the rather remarkable contrast with his hair, which, originally dark, had become snowy white."

But as the son of a country parson, even Charles's handsome figure would not have stopped Sir Walter's sneers. The Austens were people comfortable with their position in society, and pride in the family down to the present day. They would have been horrified, however, to be associated with the scandal and notoriety which Nelson attracted, and such scruples may have prompted the destruction of much of the family's correspondence. Brian Southam's view is that, "They were influenced, I believe, partly by an extreme dislike to publishing private details." The loss of the majority of the letters which Jane Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra, and letters to her brother Francis, which he had preserved for 50 years, is a great literary tragedy.

Ah, but we do have the novels, and Anne Elliot, in spite of the vacuity of her father (or perhaps because of it) had the good taste to love a sailor.

*Many thanks to Lorraine Metzler for notes on the lecture by Anthony Sessions and to Helen Spencer, Michelle Siu and Joan Reynolds for photographs*

***The above article was written by Sandy Lundy, based on Mr. Sessions' presentation, plus further reading.***

Jane Austen, Chapman editions of Persuasion, Mansfield Park, and Emma, Oxford University Press, 1923  
Christopher Hibbert, Nelson: A Personal History, Penguin 1995  
Brian Southam, Jane Austen and the Navy, Hambledon & London, 2000  
Addison B.C. Whipple, Fighting Sail, 1978

## JASNA Vancouver's 2013 - 2014 Season

We have had a varied and most enjoyable series of events, for which we all wish to extend thanks to the Program Committee for their imagination and hard work.

### September Meeting

We welcomed a fellow Janeite, SFU Professor Emeritus June Sturrock, who discussed some aspects of her new book, *Jane Austen's Families*, which examines family dynamics in the novels. June's analysis has been reviewed and highly recommended by Maggie Lane in the News Letter of the Jane Austen (U.K.) Society, and has also been reviewed in the Times Literary Supplement. It is published by Anthem Press.



### October Meeting

We heard reports from the 2013 AGM, "Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice...Timeless," held in Minneapolis at the end of September. The strength of this conference was the excellent line-up of speakers, some of whom will be mentioned below. We were delighted to meet Hannah Goddard-Rebstein, who is a student at UBC and was a prize winner in the College/University Division of the JASNA Essay Contest. She joined others on the panel, which consisted of Susan Spooner, Keiko Parker, Jennifer Bettiol, Joan Reynolds and Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer.

**Phyllis** gave a report on the superb keynote address entitled "Speechless in Pride and Prejudice" by John Mullan, who is Professor of English at University College, London. The title of his most recent book poses a question, *What Matters in Jane Austen, 20 Crucial Puzzles Solved*, and Phyllis said, "Everything matters, because there are no wasted words."

**Keiko** attended presentations by tea expert Bruce Richardson, and James Nagle on the laws of inheritance.

**Susan** enjoyed Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield speaking on "Pride and Prejudice In Its Own Time: Reading Newspapers in 1813."

**Jennifer** obtained some new insights from Joan Klingel Ray's "Do Elizabeth and Darcy Really Improve Upon Acquaintance?"

**Phyllis** attended a panel discussion on the popular "Lizzie Bennet Diaries," which is an online modern-adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*; local member Michelle Siu, who is knowledgeable about technology and social media, added to what Phyllis had gleaned. Among the characters in the ethnic mix of this up-dated cast is **BING LEE** who is a medical student and Darcy's best friend!

**Hannah** kindly read her essay, "Time and the Women of *Pride and Prejudice*."

Once again, **Joan Reynolds** had kindly lent me her conference binder with its comprehensive collection of documents, including the program and many handouts. She gave summaries of *Ladies' Magazines of the Regency Period* by Candice Hern; master versifier William Phillips spoke this time on card games, *Pride, Prejudice, and Piquet*; and *Bingley's Four or Five Thousand a Year, and Other Fortunes Made in the North* by Linda Slothouber. Due to her affinity with the housekeeper of Pemberley, Joan tries to make a point of attending talks on Georgian-era servants. This time it was *Ring the Bell for Hill: Servants in Pride and Prejudice* by Maureen Kelly.

## November meeting

Our guest was Holman Wang, who is the co-creator, with his twin brother Jack, of the Cozy Classic Board Books, which are first word primers for small children. The plots of the classics are told in 12 words, illustrated with needle-felt dolls placed in actual locations, or constructed studio settings, so these are not digitally-created images. For instance, on the cover of *Pride and Prejudice*, Lizzie is seen striding across Queen Elizabeth Park, her petticoat "six inches deep in mud." The children become engaged with the story lines of the classics, which, as Holman reminded us, were written for pleasure and amusement, and never originally intended for classroom analysis. Parents, too, are entertained and enjoy sharing the stories, as a respite from the simple numbers, letters and colours which are more commonly the subjects of the primers.

Among the titles on the book list, up to last autumn, were *Moby Dick*, *War and Peace*, *Jane Eyre*, *Les Misérables*, *Emma*, and *Huckleberry Finn*. In *War and Peace*, Boom! goes the cannon symbolizing war, and the dolls were photographed in the snow on Grouse Mountain. The children aren't scared one bit by the books, which do, where appropriate, introduce concepts such as poverty, and the authors do not sanitize the yarns. Hard work goes into the high quality of these books, but the fun in the creative process shines through. *Huck Finn* was posed on location at Deas Slough!



This presentation was our introduction to what can be, on occasion, the highly partisan world of children's literature, where people in the industry debate strongly-held opinions on what is appropriate for "baby lit." Who knew?! Learn more about these books at [www.mycozyclassics.com](http://www.mycozyclassics.com).

## February meeting

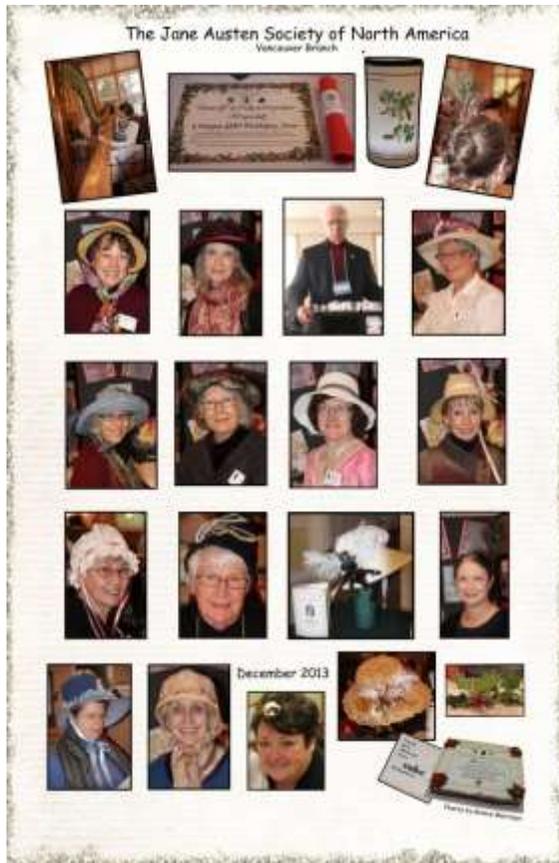
Our speaker was Shawn Bayes, who is executive director of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver. The Society carries on the pioneering work of Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845), a philanthropist, prison reformer, and advocate for the rights of women. She pressed for more humane treatment of prisoners, and for the education of women. During the Georgian era, hanging or transportation was the punishment for over 200 crimes in the "Bloody Code."

Within the context of changing times, it is striking how little circumstances have changed for poor women in our society. Those serving sentences of two years or less in Canada are often discharged destitute from a provincial prison, their luggage a plastic garbage bag. They do not qualify for rehabilitation programs. Those convicted of more serious crimes go to federal prisons. The goal of the staff of the Society is to support women pragmatically, attempting to find shelter and then housing, and to obtain treatment for addictions. Education is a priority of the Canadian Society, the goals being literacy and autonomy. Breaking an inter-generational cycle is one focus, with summer camps and programs for children of prisoners, providing a safe environment where there may be the possibility of overcoming psychological problems. Currently, the trafficking of women and girls is a growing issue, and many offenders have been sexually abused.

The history of feminism is bound up with the criminal justice system, and since 1937 when it was founded by Agnes McPhail and others, the Canadian Elizabeth Fry Society has pursued its unflagging course.

## Joan Reynolds and Phyllis Bottomer: Impresarios

We have recently had two very enjoyable theatrical productions conceived by Joan and Phyllis. The theme of our December 2013 meeting was "Hats Off" to *Pride and Prejudice: 200 Years Old!* Joan had compiled six scripts of readings from the novel, and colour-coded a different section for each performer. Everyone was so confident in the part they had to play that there was 100% audience participation, and each player acted out their part with gusto. Joan had also written a series of linking narratives which she and Susan Kaufman read, so with all the lovely hats and decorations creating a sense of occasion, hilarity prevailed. "We should do this sort of thing more often," was frequently murmured as we tucked into our delicious Christmas lunch.



*Bonnie Morrison baked the cake and took portraits of the ladies in their charming chapeaux. Silke Billings played the harp, and Ron Sutherland served the wine.*

Thus encouraged, Phyllis set off to find a suitable vehicle for the afternoon of our April Meeting. She hit upon Matthew Melko's article in *Persuasions* #27 ***Re-pairing Jane Austen*** in which he proposes that characters in the novels could find much more compatible partners than the spouse they **did** marry, by being joined to a character in another novel. Therefore, Elinor Dashwood would be a fine mate for the principled Mr. Knightley, and Marianne would appreciate Henry Crawford's fine rendition of Shakespeare. And so on. Many props were supplied to the players, and 14 Janeites acted their parts, and justified their choices in an amusing party game.

## Jane Austen Day, April 2014

In the morning, Freydis Welland and Damaris Brix came to talk about their beloved Mother, the remarkable and late lamented Joan Austen Leigh. This presentation, "In her own Voice", will be featured in a later edition of the Newsletter.

## May Meeting

Dr. Tiffany Potter of the UBC Department of English attracted members to a well-attended meeting with her title, *Wantons and Zombies and Jane, oh my! Adaptations and Retellings of Pride and Prejudice*. As the editor of a collection of essays, *Women, Popular Culture and the 18th Century*, published by U of T Press in 2012, she is able to place two of the most controversial adaptations of Austen's work into context. She admits Janeites find these versions disconcerting. The novels of the title are *Pride and Prejudice: Wild and Wanton Edition* by Michelle Pillow writing under the pseudonym Annabella Bloom, and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith; these are called "mash up" versions because they combine Jane Austen's text with passages of new text.

Dr. Potter enumerated some of the almost endless adaptations based on Jane Austen's fiction, such as plays, television series, films, sequels, murder mysteries, *Lost in Austen*, *Austen Land*, *Bride and Prejudice*, the Marvel series of comic books, and the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* which is a videoblog (vlog) available on YouTube. Some adaptations are excellent, others are "just awful."

In the Wild and Wanton edition, Pillow has written sexually explicit passages which are added to the text in boldface print, and these occur about every 20 pages. The subtlety and strength of Jane Austen's writing is removed, and this 21st century version ignores the social, political and economic knowledge which Regency women needed to survive. Women are reduced to subordinate characters, and Darcy becomes the focal point.

*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* fits into the continuum of Gothic horror novels, tales of the macabre, fantastic and supernatural which reached the height of their popularity from the 1790s to the 19th century. Examples are *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Mrs. Radcliffe, which of course Austen spoofed in *Northanger Abbey*; Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818); and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). In Grahame-Smith's adaptation, the practical, sensible Charlotte Lucas becomes a zombie.

Dr. Potter raised many questions about the intersection of modern popular culture with Jane Austen's criticism of her society. Members were left interested in her theories, and some even felt willing to give *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* a try, something most Janeites never thought they would say.

(Note: Both Michelle Siu and Lorraine Meltzer penned insightful reports on Dr. Potter's talk, but the Editor, who is heartless, excised large sections with a sharp scalpel. Michelle's essay can be viewed on her Facebook page.)

**Meeting reports by the Editor**

**This Newsletter**, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, is issued periodically. All submissions on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome.

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