

Muse & Musings

"The company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation"

Jane Austen's Letters

Putting Pen to Paper in Austen's Time

This year for our readings at the beginning of meetings we decided to read from Jane Austen's letters. To kick things off, February's meeting was entirely devoted to the letters. Mary Atkins introduced the subject with a well-researched presentation entitled "Putting Pen to Paper in Austen's Time."

Mary's talk ranged over literacy, couriers, mail coaches and the evolution of the Post office for the use of the general public. In Jane Austen's time, there were no trains and the mail coaches provided the fastest and safest method of travel between cities for people of modest means.



For further reading, Mary recommends *Voices from the World of Jane Austen* by Malcolm Day (2006); *All Things Austen: An Encyclopedia of Austen's World* by Kirstin Olsen (2005); *The Wicked Wit of Jane Austen* by Dominique Enright (2011); *Jane Austen: My Dear Cassandra* (aka *The Illustrated Letters*) by Penelope Hughes-Hallett (1990). The most complete edition of the letters is Deirdre LeFaye's *Jane Austen's Letters* (2011).

Mary also mentioned a novel called *The Chief Factor's Daughter* by Vanessa Winn (2010) as written in the style of Jane Austen and relating to our March meeting.

After Mary's excellent presentation, each table read a selection from the letters, culminating in Cassandra's heartbreaking letter to Fanny Knight after Jane Austen's death. We then watched selections from an interview of Deirdre Le Faye (pictured below) by Joan Ray discussing JA's correspondence.



By JA's time, postal service was reliable. When you sent a letter, recipient had to pay, although MPs (including members of the House of Lords) had free mail service. In *Mansfield Park* Fanny Price had no paper or money to send mail, but Edmund arranged for his father who was an MP to "frank" her letters.

Early novels such as Richardson's were epistolary – the story was told in a series of letters by the various characters. Austen's *Lady Susan* was epistolary, and letters play a major role in all the finished novels.



In addition to all that, Phyllis brought in a quill pen and ink so that people could try their hand.



The Voyageurs

Presentation by Richard Mills and Nette Plant,
Parks Canada Heritage Presenter, Fort Langley

For the March meeting, our member Richard Mills, a former heritage presenter at Fort Langley, teamed up with Nette Plant, who continues in this role. Together they told the history of the fur trade that provided the beaver pelts that were later felted into the top hats worn in England by gentlemen such as Mr. Darcy or Mr. Knightley.



Richard and Nette came in costume and well prepared with many props, some shown in the pictures. Richard told about the history of the fur trade and the exploration of Canada, while Nette told more about the lives of the voyageurs and their families. Richard demonstrated how a voyageur carried two bales at a time during portages, a bright sash wrapped tightly around his waist to protect against hernia, a leading cause of death.



Bale of furs: Pelts of small animals were put between larger pelts, and pressed into bales. Each bale had a tag with important information: This bale shows the year 1858; the company Hudson's Bay; the Thompson River region; cargo of 16 bales; bale weight 95 pounds.

We learned many things that were not covered in school, especially about the role of the First Nations and Métis peoples and family groups. Voyageurs were expected to marry native women to make lasting contacts. Marriages were arranged – just like many in JA's England – to provide access to resources, inter-region trade, familial and tribal connections. Everyone worked as a member of a team including "country wives" and children.

In summer the men would arrive at Fort Langley in brigades of canoes from one area and the fort became like a summer camp with singing, dancing, storytelling and bagpipes, or "squeezing the dying duck".

There was trade with the Sto:lo or people of the Fraser River, including the Musqueam, Kwantlen, Kaqwtlem. Women and children cleaned and fileted salmon, and salted salmon was shipped from Fort Langley to Hawaii for whaling ships and Hawaiian natives, as there was little red meat available on the Islands. This was the beginning of the West Coast fishing industry in the 1820s, before the canneries.

The natives traded fish, beaver pelts, cranberries, raccoon skins, with each item assigned a specific number of trading points. The Company traded blankets, cloth, metal goods, and guns. Outer coast tribes had access to guns first from Spanish and Russian explorers and traders. The Stolo inland people wanted guns to protect themselves from Haida and Musqueam who came inland to attack.

HBC blankets had trade points woven right into the blanket, 1.5 point equivalent to one pound of wool. Bright colours such as bright red were coveted.



Johnny Lee Miller's Mr. Knightley; top hat; Colin Firth's Mr. Darcy

Book Review

Waterloo: The True Story of Four Days, Three Armies and Three Battles, by Bernard Cornwell (2015)

I will be touring the Waterloo battlefield in September, so I wanted to know more about it. I had previously read Georgette Heyer's *An Infamous Army*, but I really felt the need of maps and charts to understand what was going on. With the exception of GH's fictional characters and plot, everything in Cornwell's account tallied with Heyer's. (Hers was credited with being an extremely accurate account.) But the many maps and lavish colour illustrations in Cornwell's book made the unfolding story much easier to follow. Bernard Cornwell is a fiction writer in general, and he writes in an engaging narrative style, ending each chapter with a cliffhanger. This does not mean he fictionalizes – he makes copious use of the many firsthand accounts – probably the same ones as GH read. I frequently find history too dry, but this was anything but!

– Elspeth Flood

Your book reviews are welcome – please see the last page.

Member Profile: Susan Kaufman

1. When did you join JASNA?

I have been a JASNA member for 10 years!!

2. How did you first get started with JASNA?

When I moved to Vancouver I knew nobody. What could I do?? A quandary. I love art so I volunteered at the Art Gallery but I also love music... so I volunteered at the symphony.



Jane Austen has always been a passion – an idea occurred – why don't I go online and see if there is a Jane Austen Society. Yes!! Keiko Parker was the regional coordinator so I phoned her, got the particulars and came. Finding St. Phillips from downtown was an adventure. Loved the meeting don't remember who was presenting but the potluck was delicious and the conversations excellent. **And** I have been coming ever since.

3. What do you like about JASNA?

There is a wealth of information – did I mention I'm an information junkie – about JA at the meetings. I particularly like the meetings that the membership runs. The program committee does an excellent job creating intriguing topics and performances. The speakers give informed and interesting presentations. I like the connection of JASNA chapters online which broadens my knowledge. Mary Atkins' emails enliven my days.

4. Has JASNA given you any special memories?

A special memory is the AGM in Vancouver. This was such a superb event. Loved the lectures and the final ball was delightful. Couldn't stop staring at all the members in costume. The dancing!! I conducted a tour of downtown, Chinatown and Gastown for out-of-town members and met the most interesting people. What fun!

Book Review

Lord Mansfield: Justice in the Age of Reason by Norman S. Poser (2013)

Belle: The Slave Daughter and the Lord Chief Justice by Paula Byrne (2014)

I first became interested in Lord Mansfield when I read *Belle* by Paula Byrne, on which the movie with the same name is only vaguely based. William Murray, Lord Mansfield, was Lord Chief Justice of England from 1756 until 1788. He and his wife, being childless, adopted two great-nieces, Elizabeth Murray and Dido Elizabeth Belle, daughter of Mansfield's sea-captain nephew, and a slave.

Although Lord Mansfield was not the primary focus of *Belle*, the reader learns a great deal about him and his place in British history and in legal history in the English-speaking world in Byrne's book. This may be, in part, because there are very few known facts about Dido's life, and any telling of her story must be mostly conjecture.



Byrne anchors her story on a painting of the two girls attributed to Johann Zoffany (Scone Palace, Scotland). William Murray, Lord Mansfield by Jean Baptiste van Loo (National Portrait Gallery).

An important law case that is discussed in both books concerns an escaped slave named Somerset and an abolitionist named Granville Sharp. Poser gives us many more words on the subject, but only Byrne, with her discerning eye for the interesting detail, tells us that Granville Sharp was a keen amateur musician who sometimes signed his name G#.

Norman Poser starts his preface by saying that all modern books on Lord Mansfield talk about his law cases and do not tell his life story. Then he writes a biography in thematic chapters rather than a straight-up narrative. I read about how his house was ransacked and his library burned in the Gordon Riots several times in different chapters before I got to the chapter where he actually tells the story.

After reading the book, I had no idea what happened in what order. Although Poser provides a chronology it also is divided into themes. The Gordon Riots are an event in Lord Mansfield's life, but not a historical event – go figure. When I am reading about an event in a person's life I want to have a clear idea of what went before. What comes after is still unknown – by which I don't mean I object to "spoilers." I mean that I don't want to hear the same thing told over and over. A different edit would make it somewhat shorter and a lot more readable without losing anything.

Nevertheless, the subject matter was compelling enough to make me finish the book. William Murray left home in Scotland at the age of 13 and rode a pony all the way to London, a journey that took two months. There he entered Westminster School, which provided an excellent network for the rest of his career. He revolutionized the study of law by actually studying law, rather than merely "taking his dinners." He left a huge legacy of case law that is quoted to this day.

– Elspeth Flood

Michelle's missive

Regional Coordinator's message



Michelle dressed for the Montreal AGM ball

My dear Vancouver Janeites: Spring is well underway but as I write this, the chill is lingers still. No matter: it only encourages us to linger over tea and a good book. Winter is behind us, and now we look forward to the summer. We traditionally break for the summer months, meeting again in September. Two months is a long time between friends. If anyone has suggestions for summertime get-

togethers, please do speak up. A Box Hill-themed picnic, perhaps?

A rise in costs and fees

Before the end of our programming year, there are administrative affairs to attend to. In May we will open

the floor to discuss amongst the membership the need for a raise in membership fees to meet rising rental costs. We have been fortunate to have the same fee schedule for 10 years, but costs continue to rise. We will table the idea to raise membership fees by \$10 per annum, and open the floor to discussion.

Role of Treasurer/Membership

Jennifer Bettiol steps down from the role of Treasurer/ Membership as of August 31. Her time will be taken up with completing the last two years of her Master's Degree. She has done a wonderful job of keeping our finances in order, and her skills in interpreting past data have kept us steered in the right direction and in the black. Effective immediately, I am taking names, submitted and nominated, for someone to take up the role of Treasurer. A mastery of finance is not required, rather an aptitude for arrangement and structure, and the ability to take up where the incumbent leaves off. *– Michelle Siu*

This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, is distributed to members by email and posted on our website. Members who so request may receive a hard copy either at a meeting or in the mail. All submissions and book reviews on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome. Editor, Elspeth Flood.

The Editor acknowledges a great debt of gratitude to Lorraine Meltzer for her copious meeting notes.

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