

# The Jane Austen Society of North America

VANCOUVER REGION - NEWSLETTER NO. FOUR - NOVEMBER, 1983

## Dinner Postponed

The Brock House Restaurant, where we had planned to have the dinner at the end of November, was booked for the weekend we wanted. The previous weekend seemed too soon, and the following one puts us into December, a busy season for most people. It seems more sensible to postpone the dinner into the New Year - January or February. I'll let you know, and if anyone has any preference for special days or dates, call me.

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## Fall Lectures

The first of the two lectures scheduled for this Fall took place in the Main Library on Saturday, October 1, where Terry Dobroslavic, Vancouver librarian, gave us an interesting and informative account of conditions in the publishing world of Jane Austen's day. It was a time of change. In the 18th c. and earlier, publishing was done by book-sellers, who might also be sellers of groceries, shoemakers, or with any other lucrative occupation which enabled them to sell books as a side-line. They were located in groups, in the Strand at Temple Bar, for instance, and on Charing Cross Road, where many are still located. John Murray was the most famous of these first professional publishers, and Byron was probably his most notable writer.

It was common to read books at a book-seller's shop, and thus people unable to afford to buy books had access to good collections. Readers' Clubs bought books collectively, and many books were published by subscription - Jane Austen was named in a list of subscribers to Fanny Burney's "Camilla". "Sense and Sensibility" and "Mansfield Park" were published at Jane Austen's expense - a common practice of the time.

Jane Austen earned about £700 in her lifetime, and her sister Cassandra got an additional £400 after Jane Austen's death, from the publisher, John Murray. This compared very unfavourably with the earnings of some of her contemporaries. Susan Ferrier got £1,000 for her novel "Inheritance", Maria Edgeworth received £1,050 for "Tales of Fashionable Life" and £2,000 for her next novel. Scott got £700 for "Waverley" and more for the later ones. Jane Austen was not widely popular or fashionable in her time. However, with the exception of Scott, those contemporaries are almost unknown and unread today.

Terry Dobroslavic passed out a list of books for further reading.

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The second talk, on Oct. 29th, was given by Dr. Mabel Colbeck, well known to many of our members from her over 30 years' association with U.B.C. With a delightful blend of information and humour, Dr. Colbeck discussed Jane Austen's reading - Johnson, Richardson, Fielding, Fanny Burney and the poet Cowper, how their writing contrasted and compared with hers, and what influence they had upon her.

All Jane Austen's novels have an underlying social or political theme - the emergence of the middle class into importance, and the subsequent clash with the aristocracy. Jane Austen wrote for her contemporaries, and we must adjust our thinking about morals and manners, and accept the rightness of her values to appreciate what lies behind the surface plot of the novels. The tradition of English literature runs to comic writing, and Jane Austen's comic characters - Mr. Collins, Mr. Woodhouse, Miss Bates - can stand with any. They are drawn with loving, laughing cynicism, and never become grotesque.

Dr. Colbeck made an interesting comparison - that between Jane Austen and Shikibu Murasaki, the Japanese novelist, diarist and poet who lived in the early 11th c., and wrote "The Tale of Genji". It is a strange juxtaposition - one writer a middle class parson's daughter spending most of her life in rural English villages, and the other an aristocrat, who spent her life in close contact with the highly formal Japanese court, and whose characters are even more restricted by rigorous convention and ironclad social rules than Jane Austen's. But the differences of time and place are not important. Qualities of character are common to mankind, and both authors wrote acclaimed masterpieces with immortal characters.

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After each lecture, some of us enjoyed lunch together, to continue the lively discussion about what we had heard, and look over the sheet of unusual old recipes Dr. Colbeck had given us, including white soup, whipt syllabub and that famous fricassée of sweetbreads which Mr. Woodhouse returned uneaten to the kitchen.

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### Required Reading

Mary Coleman contributed an amusing item: The London Daily Telegraph reported that in the Book List of a Scottish boys' Public School, one of the novels for required reading was "Jane Mansfield" by Austen Park.

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### Philadelphia Conference

I had a wonderful time at Philadelphia in October. It is delightful to be with 200 people who share an interest in Jane Austen and her novels, and who are always willing to discuss any aspect of the subject. Philadelphia is a beautiful city, with well-preserved old red brick buildings, little flower-filled parks every few blocks, and the historic sites of the struggle for independence - far too much to see in the few busy days I was there.

The theme of this year's conference was "Emma", and the lecturers discussed the conflicts between romantic love, the restrictions of marriage, the dependence of women and the struggle for equality, all the tensions and contradictions of the society of the time which Jane Austen brings in below the surface plot of the novel. Slides of the architecture of the novels were shown, the great houses, the parsonages, the cottages as Jane Austen knew or envisioned them for her characters. Discussion groups were formed under the headings of Village Life, The Heroine, Emma, Customs and Mores, the Novelist's Craft, and the Reader's

Response. Before the banquet we saw a display of autograph letters from Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra, and early editions of "Emma". And after brunch on Sunday, we heard a talk about the food of the novels and Jane Austen's prowess as a housekeeper. We were completely steeped in "Austeniana" all weekend, and it was only too short.

More about the Conference, and the feature talk by Dr. Wayne Booth, will appear in the next edition of "Persuasions", issued in January.

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"Emma" Quiz - Some questions from the Philadelphia Conference:

Who made these observations: \*

1. "Fine dancing, I believe, like virtue, must be its own reward."
2. "A man always imagines a woman to be ready for anybody who asks her."
3. "Business, you know, may bring money, but friendship hardly ever does."
4. "One half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of the other."
5. "A simple style of dress is so infinitely preferable to finery".
6. "Wickedness is always wickedness, but folly is not always folly."
7. "It is very unfair to judge any body's conduct without an intimate knowledge of their situation."

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Vancouver, 1986

It is now official - the 8th Annual Conference of the Jane Austen Society of North America will be held in Vancouver from Friday, September 26th to Sunday, September 28th, 1986. The meetings will be held at the Hotel Georgia, and the theme book will be "The Watsons", Jane Austen's early unfinished novel. This fragment has been completed, not very satisfactorily, at least three times, and no doubt one lecture/discussion will consider why such a promising beginning was never followed up by Jane Austen.

Having the Conference in Vancouver, where we have such a small group of members, will mean a lot of work, but I am sure I can count on your support. It should also be a lot of fun for everyone involved. 1986 is also Expo year in Vancouver, and the celebration of the city's Centennial, so there will be many varied activities going on that summer and autumn. For the time being, not much needs to be done, but planning ahead is essential. We will need to consider the programme: suggested topics for lectures, discussion groups, debates - whatever extra activities we decide on, and speakers or group leaders. Later on there will be need for helpers to prepare the registration material for each participant, and at the time of the Conference itself, a hundred odd jobs! Most of that is for 1986, but anyone who would like to take an active part in the planning stage now, please let me know.

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## Barbara Pym Again

In a review of Barbara Pym's novels in a recent issue of The Reader, Alan Rudrum makes the usual comparison: "Like Jane Austen, Barbara Pym worked that small territory which she knew well from personal observation, keeping to her own style and going on in her own way, as Jane Austen once said of herself." Later he writes of Pym's "verbal accuracy and steady observation." In this way the two authors are similar, but the resulting novels are so different that I don't feel there are enough similitatities to justify the constant linking of their names.

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## Victoria Region

The elegant, mellow old Union Club was a perfect setting for the annual dinner party arranged by Joan Austen-Leigh on October 21st. About twenty members and friends gathered on a very wet evening to partake of an excellent dinner and lively discussion. The old favourite get-acquainted game of "Who Am I?", where you guess the identity of the character whose name is stuck on your back, proved a good mixer at the beginning. The "entertainment" after dinner consisted of readings of several press releases concerning the Annual Conference in Philadelphia, discussion of the 1986 Conference in Vancouver, and various other readings. Only the lateness of the hour broke up this delightful evening.

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## 1811 Ship

The Underwater Archeological Society of B.C. spent some time this past summer attempting to locate the wreck of the "Tonquin" near the entrance to Clayoquot Sound off the west coast of Vancouver Island. This 28-metre vessel, owned by the Pacific Fur Co. of New York, was on a fur-trading voyage to the west coast, but during a battle with the Indians the ship was set on fire and sank. Unfortunately the wreck has not yet been discovered, although several artifacts were found which might have come from it. The ship must have been almost completely destroyed by the fire and explosion, but any remains found would be useful in adding to our knowledge of life aboard a merchant ship at that time.

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## Quiz Answers

1. Mr. Knightley. 2. Emma. 3. Mr. Knightley. 4. Emma. 5. Mrs. Elton. 6. Emma. 7. Emma.

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## Emma Knightley, in Later Life

Re-reading "Emma" a few weeks ago, I was conscious of something familiar about Emma's musings: "Isabella had connected herself unexceptionably. She had given them neither men, nor names, nor places that could raise a blush." The shades of Hartfield had not been polluted by

Isabella's in-laws, and presumably in Emma's lifetime the shades of Donwell would be similarly pure. Mr. Knightley might have his hands full managing Emma (as someone at Philadelphia remarked), but he would always be in control. When he died, however (16 years older, he is almost certain to predecease Emma), can you imagine Emma allowing even a son to supplant her? John Knightley, if he should inherit, would have to be pretty courageous to try to displace Emma. Her love of power would not likely be moderated by years of exercising authority over estate and village, and relegation to a kind of Dower House would not be something she would submit to easily. In her old age, I can see Emma "sallying forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty" just like an earlier incarnation at Rosings.

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#### Membership

The JASNA "year" runs from Jane Austen's birthday, December 16, through the following year, so membership fees are due again soon - \$10.00 to Joan Austen-Leigh, 1575 Rockland Ave., Victoria, BC, V8S 1W4.

You might consider this as an interesting Christmas present for a friend who has everything else.

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#### End of a letter from Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra:

"There, I flatter myself I have constructed you a smartish Letter, considering my want of Materials. But like my dear Dr. Johnson, I beleive I have dealt more in Notions than Facts."

Eileen Sutherland  
4169 Lions Ave.,  
North Vancouver, B.C.  
V7R 3S2 988-0479