

# The Jane Austen Society of North America

VANCOUVER REGION - NEWSLETTER NO. FIVE - FEBRUARY, 1984

"... a driving rain set full in their face." (1)

Does it make an umbrella less objectionable, to recall that at least 3,000 years ago umbrellas were used in Egypt and Assyria to protect august royal and religious personages from the weather? In Greece and Rome by the 6th century the umbrella was a costume accessory for both men and women. In the Orient, there was probably an equally early origin, and in India the umbrella has been a symbol of reverence, representing the heavens, connected with the harvest and fertility, to the present day.

In Europe in the Middle Ages, the umbrella was important in religious ceremonial, now largely superceded by the canopy. By the early 16th c. it was used in southern Europe, especially in Portugal and Spain, mainly by royalty and the nobility. But in England, umbrellas were classified under "utensils" in a collection of Rarities in 1656, and "a fine parcel of umbrellas and other curiosities" was offered for sale in 1687.

Sometime between then and 1705, the waterproof umbrella became available in England, carried mainly by women. These first umbrellas were kept in coffee houses and used to shelter customers walking from the door to their carriages. These early models had heavy whalebone ribs, not hinged but strung on a piece of wire, constantly getting out of order. If the ribs got very wet they lost their elasticity, and if they were dried carelessly they cracked. The cotton cover quickly became saturated and leaked. The umbrella was far too heavy for convenient use, and when folded it had to be carried under the arm or over the shoulder.

Manufacturers in France tried to overcome these deficiencies, and the umbrella became popular there. Our James Wolfe (Plains of Abraham) wrote home from Paris in 1752, wondering why the people of England didn't follow this custom, so useful in England's climate. Jonas Hanway, a wealthy philanthropist in London in the 1780's, never went outside without the protection



Early umbrellas in England; one impression of the cumbersome models available in the late eighteenth century

of an umbrella, in rain or hot sun. He created a sensation, and was the butt of insults, and worse, from street urchins, probably egged on by coachmen who saw their livelihood threatened by this new method of shelter. He was also criticized by the Quakers for defying the heavenly purpose of rain which was obviously meant to fall equally on the just and the unjust. The use of umbrellas continued to increase, but humorous anecdotes and cartoons of the time show that they were still uncommon enough to be laughed at until the last decade of the 18th c..

By 1800, however, the umbrella was considered an article of utility common enough to be suggested as a taxable item, although many people still resisted it. Most models were hopelessly inelegant and unsuitable for people of refinement. Some preferred to risk a wetting, "for an umbrella is a sure sign that one possesses no carriage". By this time the umbrella was made of such materials that it could be afforded by almost anyone. (Information from: "History of the Umbrella" by T.S. Crawford).

How does all this refer to Jane Austen? In the early novels, "Sense and Sensibility" and "Pride and Prejudice", no umbrellas are mentioned, although Marianne and her sister, and Elizabeth Bennet go for walks in weather when they could well have used them. "Northanger Abbey" was written early, but may have been revised much later. In Bath, Catherine Morland, hoping the weather will be fine enough for a walk with Henry Tilney and his sister, looks out the window and says, "There are four umbrellas up already. How I hate the sight of an umbrella!" In "Mansfield Park", Fanny was "overtaken by a heavy shower" near the Parsonage, and was finally persuaded to take shelter there "when Dr. Grant himself went out with an umbrella". In "Emma" there are three references. Emma recalls that when she and Miss Taylor were caught in the rain while out walking one day, Mr. Weston "darted away with so much gallantry and borrowed two umbrellas for us from Farmer Mitchell's". Robert Martin did not notice Harriet at first in Ford's shop, "he was busy with the umbrella". At the ball at the Crown, when the Bates were heard arriving, Frank Churchill put himself forward, "I will see that there are umbrellas, sir", and rushed out. Jane Fairfax, and Emma and Harriet, all go out in the rain, but do not seem to carry umbrellas - were they commonly used only by farmers, and in public houses, at this time?

Captain Wentworth, in "Persuasion", meets Anne in Bath, when it had begun to rain. He has a new umbrella, bought only that day, and offers it to her. I have always been unhappy about this. I would prefer that he had "offered to fetch" her an umbrella. After his experiences at sea, I would not expect him to bother about a little rain. Admiral Croft (and his wife!) would not have bothered to carry an umbrella. (He would have been just as scornful to see umbrellas in Sir Walter Elliot's closets as he was about the mirrors in his dressing room).

On the other hand, during the closing years of the Napoleonic Wars, the French Marshal Soult reported: "It was raining and the English officers on horseback, each with an umbrella in hand... All at once the English closed their umbrellas, hung them on their saddles,

drew their sabres, and threw themselves upon our Chasseurs." Wellington did not approve, and sent a message of censure to one of his commanders, although the Iron Duke himself was known to use an oiled cotton umbrella which concealed a sword-stick - but not on the battlefield.

The career of the umbrella has certainly had its "ups and downs", but it has been around for over 3,000 years, and in a rainy climate, you can't keep a good umbrella down.

- - - - -

"... showing a curiosity and pleasure in his information..." (2)

Two lectures have been arranged for the Spring season, both giving background information about Jane Austen's life and novels. On Friday, March 23, Dr. John Norris, of the Department of Medicine at U.B.C., will speak about Jane Austen's last illness, and the state of medical knowledge at that time. On Friday, April 27, Dr. James Winter, of the Department of History at U.B.C., will discuss the importance of property to Jane Austen and her characters. Both speakers say they are "not experts on Jane Austen", but they have read and enjoyed the novels, so I am sure we can look forward to interesting and informative talks. There will be time for questions afterwards, and perhaps we can get together for coffee and discussion after each lecture.

Since the Main Library is undergoing renovations to its lecture room, both these lectures will be held at the Mount Pleasant Branch Library, at 370 E. Broadway (at Kingsway), at 7:30 p.m. Mark your calendars now, and join us for pleasant evenings.

Please post the enclosed notice at some library or bookstore where others interested may see it. Once again - if you need a ride, or can offer someone a ride, please call me.

- - - - -

"Good gracious! Lord bless me! ... What pin-money... I shall go distracted." (3)

I had a phone call the other day from Joe Costa, President of JASNA, in New York, expressing interest in what was going on in the Vancouver region, and offering us a cheque from JASNA for \$50.00 to help with expenses. Naturally we are delighted, and this will pay postage and stationery costs for some time to come.

If you have any ideas on what you would like JASNA to do, or not do, in the future, or any suggestions or opinions you would like to share with Joe Costa, he would be glad to hear from you. His address is: 164 Treetop Circle, Nanuet, New York, 10954.

- - - - -

"... the book was closed, and the charm was broken." (4)

Donna Short was reading "The Watsons" on a long, delayed flight in November, and mentioned her feelings of frustration and deprivation when the story suddenly stopped. She hoped that the 1986 Conference would include a discussion of the various continuations that have been made in the past, and more recently; and also a discussion of any reasons there may have been for Jane Austen putting aside the novel and never again taking it up.

To the best of my knowledge, the fragment has been only completed three times:

L. Oulton (Appleton, N.Y., 1923)

Edith and Francis Brown (Elkin Mathews & Marrot, London, 1928)

John Coates (Crowell, N.Y., 1958)

In the first two cases, Jane Austen's fragment forms less than half the completed story. The pace becomes so accelerated that the subsequent story is in no way like a Jane Austen novel. The Coates' version is a much longer story. However, this author takes constant liberties with the original fragment - every few sentences there is an addition or an omission. The leisurely pace results in a satisfactory story so far as plot is concerned, but it is not Jane Austen.

The fragment of "The Watsons" has great promise. A continuation that measured up, to some extent at least, with the beginning chapters, would be worth having.

- - - - -

"Oh, what hours of transport we shall spend!" (5)

Mary Coleman is leaving at the middle of March to have a wonderful four-week trip with her brother in England. They are planning to rent a car, and although they will probably not get to the Lake District, or even to Derbyshire, they hope to be able to see Steventon and other places associated with Jane Austen. And we will be looking forward to having a complete report about it when Mary returns.

- - - - -

"It is a long time since we have had any star-gazing..." (6)

1986 is going to be a busy, busy year - the Centennial, Expo, the JASNA Conference, and Halley's Comet, will all be part of the celebrations in Vancouver. (Actually, the comet, visible somewhere in the world for four to five months starting in the late Spring of 1986, is expected to be a disappointing sight in the Northern Hemisphere; the place to see it is in the mountains of Chile). Halley's Comet missed Jane Austen's lifetime - appearing every 76 years, it was visible in 1758 and 1834.

- - - - -

"... the powers of the instrument were gradually done full justice to." (7)

The Canada Council has given the first Virginia P. Moore Award (\$15,000) to pianist Jon Kimura Parker, son of our members John and Keiko Parker. Jon was performing on CBC TV on two Sundays in January - I hope you heard the concerts. His younger brother, James Parker, played at U.B.C. in February, in a programme of chamber music featuring students from the Department of Music there. These are two young musicians whose careers we will be following with interest.

- - - - -

"... spread abroad what public news he had heard." (8)

The Chapter in Rochester, New York had 21 members and friends attend a "Birthday" luncheon on December 16th. Guests included an airline stewardess who brought along "two elderly invalid neighbours who are reading 'Emma' to each other in the evenings because they don't like TV", and a British author who "described first reading Jane Austen at the age of 13 during the Blitz, with the ack-ack going, she sitting in a corner of her mother's air raid warden headquarters" - sounds like fun!

The birthday was celebrated in New York City with a lecture by Enid Hildebrand of Toronto, speaking on "Jane Austen and the Law", followed by wine, cheese and fruit. In May, the chapter is planning an event combining music and literature demonstrating "how the musical selections and preferences of Jane Austen and Emily Bronte reflect their different styles as novelists", followed by a dinner and lecture by Professor Robert Wallace on "Jane Austen and Mozart" - it should be very interesting.

In Toronto, a new Chapter has been formed, "informal, low key, simple and full of pleasure for the members", very enthusiastic and "so well informed that the conversation was excellent." If you have friends in Toronto, they might be interested in looking up this group.

The Chicago region "toasted Miss Jane Austen at a Champagne Brunch accompanied by Harp Music" on December 11th, with a talk by Professor Gene Ruoff. Their plans for their annual Gala Day in March include a lecture by Dr. Raymond Headlee, a psychiatrist and Janeite.

In Philadelphia, a lunch was scheduled for February 26, with Professor Dwight McCawley speaking on "Assertiveness and Aggression in the Novels of Jane Austen". Suggestions for future meetings include a slide show of "Jane Austen Country", a picnic and garden tour, and a birthday party next December. Their policy is like Emma's, "I would much rather...be merry than wise." They meet to "learn and talk about Jane Austen while having fun."

- - - - -

"... pacing the drawing-room, his watch in his hand." (9)

Just before Christmas, I was given a beautiful "Tudor Time-piece", a replica of one recovered during archaeological exploration of the Tudor warship "Mary Rose", sunk in battle against French forces off Portsmouth in 1545. Several of these timepieces have been found in the wreck, the earliest known surviving examples in Britain. Mine, set in a boxwood case with a mirror in the lid, is a combined sundial and compass. The compass has a south-pointing needle; the gold gnomon, which makes the shadow for the sundial, is hinged to lie flat when not in use, and the hours are marked with red and black decorations and Arabic numerals as used in Tudor times. It was probably from southern Germany, and has been made for a latitude of about 49°24'. It is a beautiful piece of work, about the size of a man's small pocket watch.

Imagine my surprise and delight, when casually browsing through "Jane Austen's Letters", to find the following letter written to her brother shortly after their father's death:

42. *To Francis Austen. Tuesday 29 Jan. <1805>*

*Address : Capt. Austen | HMS Leopard | Portsmouth*

*Postmark : BATH*

*Capt. Ernest Austen R.N. 2 leaves 4°. Endorsed ' January 29<sup>th</sup> 1805'.*

*Hubback, Sailor Brothers, 129.*

*Green Park B<sup>th</sup> Tuesday Jan<sup>ry</sup> 29.*

*My dearest Frank*

*My Mother has found among our dear Father's little personal property, a small astronomical Instrument which she hopes you will accept for his sake. It is, I believe a Compass & Sun-Dial, & is in a Black chagreen Case. Would you have it sent to you now, & with what direction?—There is also a pair of Scissars for you.—We hope these are articles that may be useful to you, but we are sure they will be valuable.—I have not time for more.*

*Yours very affec<sup>ly</sup>*

*J A.*

I assume, from the way it is expressed, that neither Jane Austen nor her mother were familiar with the object they had found. It may have been inherited by the Rev. George Austen, or acquired in his youth, and not used in his later life. Calling it an "astronomical article" makes it seem unlikely that they identified it as a "watch". What sort of pocket watch did the Rev. Mr. Austen or Jane Austen herself use? The characters in some of the novels "consult their watches", but these are not described.

Elizabeth and Darcy, Edmund Bertram, Emma and Mrs. Weston, all examine or take out their watches. In "Northanger Abbey" the characters are very conscious of the passing of time - John Thorpe, Isabella Thorpe, James Morland, Henry Tilney and General Tilney (twice)

all check the time with their watches. Catherine Morland is about the only character who does not; she "runs to look at the clock". In "Persuasion" and "Sense and Sensibility" no watches are mentioned, although clocks strike occasionally. And finally, in "Sanditon", Lady Denham, speaking of her second husband, says, "When he died, I gave Sir Edward his Gold watch."

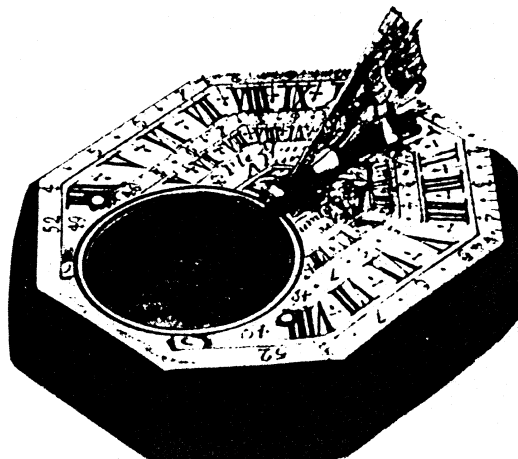
One of the earliest methods of telling time was by sundials. Archaeologists have discovered one in Egypt that dated to the 18th century BC. It told the hour, but not very accurately. In the Bible, Isaiah asked God to bring the shadow of the sundial back ten degrees as a sign to Hezekiah. Early Greeks and Romans had several types of sundials, and by the beginning of the Christian era, they were highly sophisticated models. By the 3rd c. BC the Chinese had sundials dividing the day (metrically!) into a hundred parts, each about 14 minutes long according to our time scale. Early Saxon sun-dials, not very accurate, were often called "Mass clocks" because they indicated the times for prayer rather than the hours as such.

The earliest mechanical clocks, in the 14th c., were notoriously poor time-keepers, even the best might be one-half to two hours in error, whereas a large sun-dial could be read to 5 minutes of time. These early clocks were driven by weights, and could not be moved about. When springs became the driving force, probably in the early part of the 15th c., portable clocks, and later, watches, became possible. Not until the invention of the pendulum and the hair spring could clocks be made really accurate. Jacques in "As You Like It", "drew a dial from his poke", portable sundials were common, watches rare and unreliable. Church clocks were corrected constantly by sundials.

The calculation of the correct angles for the hours at any given latitude is a problem of spherical trigonometry. (We won't go into that). An educated man was taught this in school and was expected to know how to calculate his own sun-dial. Isaac Newton, in the mid-17th century, designed a sun-dial for his own room, drawn on the ceiling. Christopher Wren also made his own ceiling dial, at about the same time.

Pepys in his Diary writes about watches as if they were new and of great interest. Dr. Johnson, a century later, was not so happy with his: he said of dictionaries that "like watches, the worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true." And Mary Crawford said to Edmund, in "Mansfield Park", "a watch is always too fast or too slow."

"Butterfield" portable dial, with compass; adjustable gnomon accommodates four sets of hour lines for latitudes from 43° to 52°; France, about 1720. Adler Planetarium, Chicago.



By 1750, clocks and watches were cheap enough to be in the hands of private individuals, and by 1800 accurate enough for anything except modern split-second timing. They looked very similar to men's pocket watches, so common up to a generation ago. It is quite possible that the Rev. George Austen (born in 1731) had and used his father's or uncle's timepiece in his early youth, but tucked it away with other small treasures by the time of his marriage. I wonder if some descendant of Francis Austen values it today.

- - - - -

"I cannot say that I have yet been in any distress for money, but I chuse to have my due, as well as the Devil." (10)

Don't forget, your membership in JASNA for 1984 is now due. If you have not already done so, send a cheque for \$10.00, along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope, to Joan Austen-Leigh, 1575 Rockland Ave., Victoria, V8S 1W4. Membership includes the annual publication "Persuasions", which comes out in early January, and which is getting bigger and better each year. (I have a few copies of this year's "Persuasions #5", \$5.00, and #1, \$3.00, if anyone is interested in having these; the others are available from Joan Austen-Leigh.

- - - - -

Sources of the quotations: (these are hard, congratulations if you got them all) -

- (1) "Sense and Sensibility" - Marianne and her sister out walking.
- (2) "Mansfield Park" - Fanny, listening to Sir Thomas Bertram, on his return from the West Indies.
- (3) "Pride and Prejudice" - Mrs. Bennet, on hearing the news of Elizabeth's engagement to Mr. Darcy.
- (4) "Mansfield Park" - Henry Crawford, reading to Fanny.
- (5) "Pride and Prejudice" - Elizabeth Bennet, looking forward to their tour to the Lakes.
- (6) "Mansfield Park" - Fanny to Edmund.
- (7) "Emma" - Jane Fairfax, playing her new piano.
- (8) "Emma" - Mr. Weston, on his return from London.
- (9) "Northanger Abbey" - General Tilney, waiting for Catherine and Eleanor to come to dinner.
- (10) Letter from Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra, 20 May, 1813.

- - - - -

"Beleive me ever y<sup>r</sup> attached friend"

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