

The Jane Austen Society of North America

VANCOUVER REGION - NEWSLETTER NO. SEVEN - AUGUST, 1984

"What dreadful Hot weather we have! - It keeps one in a continual state of inelegance", wrote Jane Austen to her sister, Cassandra, in 1796. Our similar and unusual Vancouver summer has kept me also in a continual state of indolence, and this Newsletter has consequently been delayed, week by week. However, at last...

Spring Lunch

On Sunday, June 24, the Vancouver Regional Branch had a delightful luncheon in the attractive "Art Room" at Brock House Restaurant, with a dozen members present. Entertainment after lunch consisted of readings of favourite passages from the novels, along with interesting comments and discussion. Several members recommended books recently read and enjoyed. A discussion followed, about our part in the 1986 Conference to be held in Vancouver, with ideas for speakers, programmes and other activities. It was a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon.

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October "Seminar"

One of the suggestions put forward at the Spring Lunch was to have a "trial run" of the 1986 Conference, towards the end of October, with a speaker followed by discussion. The theme of the Conference will be "The Watsons", the fragment of a novel that Jane Austen never finished - why not? was the setting too "low", as a nephew suggested? or too close to her own family situation at the time? Try to read this uncompleted novel before the October lunch, and come prepared to question the speaker and discuss various aspects of this novel. ("The Watsons" has been completed several times through the years, and you may wish to read these - the Vancouver Library has at least one version - but we will be talking mainly about the actual fragment that Jane Austen wrote). More details about this in the Fall.

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Ship-Mates?

From Mary Coleman comes this account of her search for an ancestor:

Francis Austen and Abraham Garland

"While my brother and I were in Portsmouth in April we visited Nelson's flagship, the H.M.S. Victory. It is beautifully preserved and open to the public free of charge. There are continual queues of people from all over the world to see it. The guided tour is excellently done.



One reason we wanted to go was that we were ancestor-hunting. Our great-great-great-uncle, Lieutenant Abraham Garland, lost a leg during the Battle of Trafalgar. Although we knew that, we did not know what ship he was on. So we checked the list of the crew of the Victory. As I had anticipated, Abraham Garland was not one of her crew. I thought, if he had been, that fact would have survived in our family annals.

My brother (who I suspect listened with more attention than I did to our father's stories) knew that Abraham Garland took part in the blockade of Cadiz earlier in the war. I do remember Dad telling us, in his own whimsical way, of Abraham Garland's Heroic Deed, and apparently this took place at Cadiz. Young Abraham (who at the time had two legs of course) swam into the harbour at night, and ... I am not sure what he did, but I think he scuttled a ship. I don't suppose he scuttled the whole Spanish fleet! (Sorry, French, not Spanish. This was 1794. Spain did not enter the war till 1795.)

For his bravery he was awarded "either a gold presentation sword or the equivalent in money. Being poor like all our family he took the money; and so we have nothing to show for it".

We have in our family a small drawing of Abraham Garland, looking elegant and soulful in the attire of Jane Austen's day. He is not in naval uniform. My son Michael, like me, has Garland for his second name, and I have given him the Abraham Garland picture. Some time I'll borrow it from him to show my JASNA friends.

In May, back home in Vancouver, I read with great enjoyment "Parson Austen's Daughter" by Helen Ashton. It is listed as fiction, but appears to be a true story of Jane Austen's life. And to my delight I read that Jane Austen's brother Francis was first lieutenant on the H.M.S. London, during the blockade of Cadiz in 1794. Maybe more than one British ship was there. More research needed! But of course I like to think that Jane Austen's brother and my Great-great-great-uncle were shipmates.

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October Conference, 1984

The JASNA Annual Conference is being held in St. Louis this year, October 12-14, with the theme-novel "Persuasion". I am looking forward to it very much indeed, especially as this is my favourite novel. The Conference plans include many small-group sessions, speakers, the première of a play based on "Persuasion", and a display of ballroom dancing of the day. Keiko Parker is also attending, and we will be pleased to tell you all about it when we return.

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Marrying For Money



In "Sense and Sensibility", Elinor Dashwood and her sister Marianne discuss their future happiness in terms of money. Elinor says that without "wealth, every kind of external comfort must be wanting", while Marianne disagrees: "Beyond a competence, money can afford no real satisfaction." When they come to details, however, Marianne considers £2,000 a year to be her "competence", and Elinor had meant £1,000 a year when she said "wealth".

Donna Short showed me a recent article from the Victoria "Times-Colonist", describing a meeting of a Connecticut Singles Group which had a discussion on this same topic. A survey showed that most of the female members of the group today "would not marry anyone earning less than \$35,000 a year (about £17,000).

It is difficult to compare incomes of the early 19th century with those of today. Colonel Brandon, for instance, has an income of £2,000, (what Marianne called a "competence"). Mrs. Jennings spoke of him as "rich", Willoughby said he "had more money than he could spend", and his estate was called "a very good property", and the house had "five sitting rooms on the ground floor, and fifteen beds". \$35,000 a year today would not provide living conditions like that.

The members of the Singles Club have expectations more like those of Elinor, who settled contentedly as the wife of Edward Ferrars, with less than £1,000 per year, just what she had wished for.

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Membership

Members of the Vancouver Region have suggested that they would like to have a list of other members. Here is the list I have been working with:

Active Members:

- Nancy Bell-Irving, Apt.42, 2236 Folkestone Way, West Vancouver
- Fred Braches, 1020 Lillooet Rd., North Vancouver
- Kathleen Carter, Ste.607, 6026 Tisdall St., Vancouver
- Nary Coleman, 3 - 1111 Jervis St., Vancouver
- Earle Clarke, Box 65688, Stn. F., Vancouver
- Barbara Colwill, 355 Elveden Row, West Vancouver
- Mignon Donovan, 495 Southborough Dr., West Vancouver
- Flora Farnden, 215 - 2105 W. 32nd Ave., Vancouver
- Carolyn Haude, 4685 Caulfeild Dr., West Vancouver
- Borah Morrow, 506 - 2409 W. 43rd Ave., Vancouver

Keiko & John Parker, 1220 Eastlawn Dr., Burnaby
 Anne Parsons, 4534 W. 4th Ave., Vancouver
 Kay Rankin, 108 - 3691 W. 6th Ave., Vancouver
 Donna Short, 945 Jervis St., Vancouver
 Valerie Sommerville, 750 Greenwood, West Vancouver
 Eileen & Ron Sutherland, 4169 Lions Ave., North Vancouver
 Freydis Welland, 881 Calverhall St., North Vancouver

Inactive, but hopefully still interested:

Rita Clarke, 4423 W. 3rd Ave., Vancouver
 Jayne Forbes, 7341 Angus Dr., Vancouver
 Elizabeth Gourlay, 6224 Carnarvon St., Vancouver
 D. Lukin Johnston, 1664 Cedar Crescent, Vancouver
 Joan le Nobel, 4437 Granville St., Vancouver
 Margaret Parker, 1925 W. 62nd St., Vancouver
 June Sturrock, 2326 W. 35th Ave., Vancouver
 Jean Wynick, 1820 St. Denis Rd. West Vancouver

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Other Branches

The Ottawa Chapter held a "Jane Austen Breakfast" at the end of May, with a talk about Jane Austen and her Publishers.

The Michigan group is planning to show a video-tape of the BBC production of "Pride and Prejudice" - five hours, broken by a box lunch.

In Chicago, a member who is an interior decorator will give a talk with slides on "The Homes of Jane Austen Heroines", in September, and in November, two members will show slides of "A Jane Austen Tour".

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Book Review

I have been looking (in vain) for a new book by Fay Weldon, "Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen". It is an epistolary fiction of letters of advice to a niece who is reluctantly required to study Jane Austen in school. The review I read says: "Fay Weldon's letters, wise sharp, informative, deal with several things. They are about Jane Austen, and offer a trenchant description of the horrors of the world in which she lived, of the oppressive narrowness of her life and the distressing nature of her death... Her descriptions of the fate of women in Jane Austen's world in these letters are horrid and moving. Childbirth was dangerous and often foul, the financial position of women, who owned nothing and were owned, including their children, was appalling. Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery, Miss Austen wrote. Ms. Weldon does not dwell, but she does describe vividly, and in a series of little shocks, what Regency ladies took for granted... It was Austen, according to Weldon, who suggested for the first time that the essence of the personal and the emotional in fiction was the moral."

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Oxford English Dictionary

We bought ourselves the OED this year - the one originally published in eight volumes, now micro-printed into a two-volume set, sold complete with magnifying glass. This edition is fascinating, because it gives dated references and quotations for the first known use of a word in English, or an unusual meaning of a familiar word, as well as words that have become archaic or lost to us altogether. Jane Austen's works are the source of a number of these quotations:

"My dear Mr. Bennet", said his lady to him one day. (Jane Austen also used the word in connection with Sir John Middleton and his lady.)

"Instrument" in the sense of "piano" - before this, the word was used in connection with a certain kind of instrument, e.g. wind instrument. Charlotte Lucas says: "I am going to open the instrument, Eliza..." and in "Emma", Jane Fairfax "put the music aside, and closed the instrument."

"Nidgetty", meaning trifling (rare): in a letter of Dec. 18, 1798, Jane Austen wrote: "I have been able to give a considerable improvement of dignity to the cap, which was before too nidgetty to please me."

"Mercantile" (noun), a merchant. (obs., rare). The OED quotes Jane Austen's letter, October 14, 1913: "...children of a great rich mercantile, Sir Robert Wigram..." The OED was misled by Brabourne's edition of the Letters - in the original ms. Jane Austen used no comma.

"Scheme", plot, plan of action to attain some end - in "Mansfield Park", Mrs. Norris' "opposition to Edmund now arose more from partiality for her own scheme because it was her own, than from anything else."

One word Jane Austen did not coin (which I thought she did) was "comeatable": When Emma wanted spur-of-the-moment guests to entertain her father, "...the most comeatable...were Mrs. and Miss Bates and Mrs. Goddard." This word had been in use since 1687, and Jane Austen would have seen it as "comeatability" in "Tristram Shandy".

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Woodlanders

Ralph Whitlock, in the Manchester Guardian, laments the disappearance of "woodlanders", men whose crafts and occupations depended on raw materials from the woods. Trees were pollarded - cut off 8'-10' from the ground, and allowed to produce straight shoots from the trunk end. In a few years there would be 15-20 poles several inches in diameter. Coppicing - cutting young wood periodically - was another way to provide straight rods for rural crafts. From hazel rods, hurdles were made for the sheep farms. Bean and pea poles, faggots for kindling, bavingins for burning in bread ovens, or tool handles, also came from the undergrowth. Ash was used for ladders, willow for hay rakes; withes were needed for baskets in certain districts, and hazel rods were split for use in thatching. The woodland workers who contracted for the cutting rights to the underwood of 6-7 years old in the deciduous forests, were required to burn everything they could not use, except a certain number of young trees, and leave the area tidy.

Although Whitlock is writing specifically of memories of the early years of this century, these are trades that would not have changed much from the Middle Ages to comparatively recent times. They would have been a common and useful part of everyday life in Jane Austen's time. Thatching has now become a luxury for the rich, and thatchers are still sought after, but most of these woodland crafts are rapidly dying out.

And now, back to basking in the sunshine. See you in October...

Eileen Sutherland.

