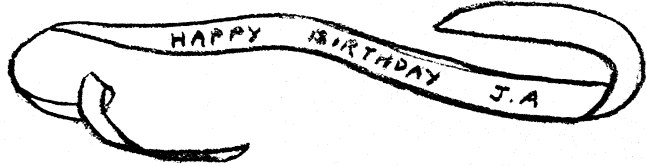


The Jane Austen Society of North America

THE VANCOUVER REGION - NEWSLETTER NO. TWELVE - NOVEMBER, 1985

BIRTHDAY PARTY

Mark your calendars now to keep Sunday, Dec. 15 free to celebrate Jane Austen's birthday, with lunch, discussion, readings (by anyone who cares to take part) and generally "a complete party of pleasure". The party will be at my house, 4169 Lions Ave., North Vancouver, at 11:30 am. Bring something to share for lunch. RSVP 988-0479.



Birthdays play no part in any of the Jane Austen novels. The only mention of a birthday is in "Emma" when Harriet Smith is naively thrilled by the fact that the dates of her birthday and Robert Martin's are "just a fortnight and a day's difference". Harriet's birthday was the 23rd of June; the strawberry party at Donwell Abbey took place "at almost midsummer", and the next few days Emma and Harriet are together with no mention of any sort of birthday celebration.

In "The Watsons", the Osborne party at the ball "had made a point of coming early for the gratification of Mrs. Blake's little boy, who was uncommonly fond of dancing". Young Charles Blake was "a fine boy of 10 years old", and although Jane Austen doesn't even hint at it, this may have been a birthday treat for him. It was surely unusual for a 10-year-old to attend a public ball, and must have been some special occasion.

As far as Jane Austen's own life is concerned, the letters show little concern about birth dates. Cassandra's birthday was January 9, and in 1796 on this date Jane Austen began a letter to her: "In the first place I hope you will live 23 years longer", but makes no further reference to a birthday. In other years, letters were written to Cassandra from the 7th to the 10th of January, with no mention of birthday plans or presents. Jane Austen mentions her own birthday only once, and then not in connection with any celebration.

However, in spite of this lack of good example, we can join in our own celebration of this eventful date, and enjoy "a happy flow of conversation" and pass "a very agreeable day".

OTHER REGIONS

Maggie Hunt Cohn reports from Chicago about their Fall and next Spring activities. Early in November, the Chicago JASNA group met with the Thomas Hardy Society for a lecture by Michael Rabiger on "Thomas Hardy's Debt to Jane Austen", discussing "the significance of characters and situations from Austen's 'Emma' which appear in Hardy's 'A Pair of Blue Eyes' and 'Far From the Madding Crowd'." You may want to read these Hardy novels again with this thought in mind.

Chicago will be celebrating Jane Austen's birthday on Sunday, Dec. 8th this year, and the Detroit chapter will be having a Sunday Birthday Brunch on Dec. 15th. Next March, Chicago will have the Sixth Annual Gala Day, a mini-convention with slide-shows, discussion groups and lectures all morning, a gala luncheon, and lecture and drama in the afternoon -- a busy day but a splendid programme. Ask me for registration details if you are going to be near Chicago in the Spring.

At Claremont, near Los Angeles, the South West California chapter is planning a meeting on Dec. 7th to celebrate the "birthday" with readings, short talks and a luncheon, at Pomona College. This, too, sounds like a full and interesting programme.

Both the Victoria and New York chapters have postponed their planned December meetings until January. It is unfortunate that this time of the year is now so busy for many of us that any extra activities are unwelcome. Perhaps the answer is to celebrate "a birthday and a half" in June !

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CHRISTMAS PAST

When we consider our hectic, commercialized Christmas preparations, we are apt to think with nostalgia of the "good old days", when families gathered for simple, homely pleasures with hearty appetites and much hilarity around the "festive board". But these images are mostly drawn from Dickens' time -- Bob Cratchit's Christmas goose, and Mr. Pickwick's Christmas at Dingley Dell -- with Victorian emphasis on the importance of the family.

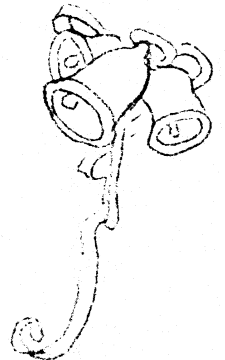
Jane Austen's novels give a mixed picture of Christmas festivities. In Mansfield Park, although Mrs. Norris suggests that there would have been a ball if Maria and Julia had been at home, the Bertrams actually spent Christmas very quietly. William Price and Henry Crawford had left on the 23rd for Portsmouth; Edmund had also gone that day to a friend to spend the Christmas week, when they were both to be ordained; Julia was with Maria, and neither returned for Christmas. Later Mary Crawford wonders if Edmund is delayed by "Christmas gaieties", but they had none at Mansfield Park.

In spite of being part of a large family, I imagine Catherine Morland in Northanger Abbey usually spent a rather quiet Christmas -- the previous year her favourite brother James was away for much of the holiday, and her great-aunt read her a lecture on the subject of frivolous dress.

In Sense and Sensibility, Elinor and Marianne are invited to spend Christmas with the Palmers at Cleveland (leaving Mrs. Dashwood and Margaret alone). If they stay at Barton, they may expect a repetition of the previous Christmas when "at a little hop at the Park, [Willoughby] danced from 8 o'clock till 4". The Steele sisters remained "to assist in the due celebration of that festival which requires a more than ordinary share of private balls and large dinners to proclaim its importance".

Mrs. Bennet, in Pride and Prejudice, likes that kind of Christmas. Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner (without their children) "came as usual, to spend the Christmas at Longbourn". Mrs. Gardiner distributed presents, but no mention is made of any reciprocal gifts -- these may have been gifts brought from London to her hostess and family in the country. During the Gardiners' week at Longbourn, "there was not a day without its engagement... they did not once sit down to a family dinner".

Christmas with Mr. Woodhouse, in Emma, was very different. The family gathered, to be sure -- his daughter, Isabella, her husband and children, came to spend a week. But no gaieties were planned as a special celebration, and the implication is that there should be less, not more, parties than usual. "One complete dinner



engagement, and out of the house, too, there was no avoiding, though at Christmas ...(for it was a very great event that Mr. Woodhouse should dine out on the 24th of December)". The weather turned bad. "Christmas day [Emma] could not go to church". Nothing more is mentioned of any activities during the Christmas week, although Mr. Elton says, "This is quite the season indeed for friendly meetings. At Christmas every body invites their friends about them..." However, we are never encouraged to accept Mr. Elton as an arbiter of good taste or judgement.

Only in Persuasion do we get a hint of the large family spending Christmas in ways to delight the children. Lady Russell considered it too noisy and confusing for her, and Mary Musgrove found it very dull -- she wrote to Anne "not one dinner-party all the holidays". But the description is a forerunner of Dickens and the Victorians: "On one side was a table occupied by some chattering girls, cutting up silk and gold paper; and on the other were tressels and trays, bending under the weight of brawn and cold pies, where riotous boys were holding high revel; the whole completed by a roaring Christmas fire, which seemed determined to be heard in spite of all the noise of the others" -- what Mrs. Musgrove called "a little quiet and cheerfulness at home".

Jane Austen's letters mention no such family togetherness or festivities. Cassandra often was with their brother Edward at Godmersham in Kent, and Jane was home with their parents. In 1796, Jane Austen wrote to Cassandra on Dec. 25th: "I was to have dined at Deane (friends in a nearby parish) today", but she was kept at home by threat of snow. However, the next day she continued the letter: "I did go to Deane yesterday". (No mention is made of Mr. and Mrs. Austen going).

In 1808, Edward's wife Elizabeth had died in October, and Jane Austen wrote to Cassandra on Dec. 9th: "I am glad you are to have Henry with you again; with him and the boys, you cannot but have a cheerful, and at times even a merry Christmas". Of her own Christmas that year, Jane Austen wrote "Our house was cleared by half-past eleven Saturday (Dec. 24th) and we had the satisfaction of hearing yesterday (Dec. 26th) that the party (probably her brother James and his wife) reached home in safety". They had had an evening party on the 22nd which "produced nothing...remarkable...from 7 o'clock till half after eleven", and spent the evening of the 23rd "with our friends", -- nothing about Christmas gaieties on the 25th.

One letter to Cassandra lists the charities given to the poor on Christmas, and to Martha Lloyd at the end of November in 1812, Jane Austen wrote "We are just beginning to be engaged in another Christmas Duty, and next to eating Turkies, a very pleasant one, laying out Edward's money for the Poor". This was always an important responsibility of the "gentry".

The decorated and candle-lighted Christmas tree was a German custom brought to England after Jane Austen's time, and popularized by Prince Albert and Queen Victoria. Cards and Christmas crackers were other later Victorian customs. The earliest Christmas pudding was "plum porridge", originally not sweet but made with meat, wine, spices and fruit. In the 18th c. it was made stiffer, into a pudding, and by the 19th c. meat was dropped from the recipe.

Many of our popular Christmas carols would not have been known to Jane Austen -- "O Little Town of Bethlehem", "Good King Wenceslas" and "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear", for example, were all composed in the late 19thc. Some she might have known are the old ones, the "Boar's Head Carol", "Holly and the Ivy", "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night", and "O Come all Ye Faithful".

In many parts of rural England, houses were decorated with a "kissing bough", a spherical framework bound with box, rosemary or some other ever-green, inside which red apples dangled from coloured ribbons. Fixed to the strip of metal or osier forming the circumference of the sphere were coloured candles. The whole thing was then hung up in a prominent place and mistletoe was tied beneath it.

Mumming -- going from house to house dressed as stock characters which varied from district to district -- was an early and long-lasting Christmas tradition in many parts of England. At Andover, Hampshire, not far from Jane Austen's home, the play was known to be over 800 years old, and was performed until 1963. In Kent, also, where Jane Austen and her sister often visited their brother Edward, a form of mumming called "Hoodening" was once very common. In "Companion into Kent", Dorothy Gardiner describes the Kent mumming:

"As late as 1906 the 'Hooden Horse' still pranced in Thanet. On Christmas Eve in a Thanet farm-house: 'Seated round the fire we hear the banging of gates, trampling of feet on the gravel paths...and loud clapping. Every one springs up. The front door is flung open, there they all are outside: the "Waggoner" cracking a whip and leading the restive "Horse"...champing his teeth, rearing and plunging, and doing his best to unseat the "Rider". While the "Waggoner" shouts whoa! and snatches at the bridle, "Mollie" is there also. She is a lad in woman's clothes and vigorously sweeps the ground behind the "horse" with a birch broom! Once there was "hoodening" all through Kent east of Godmersham. Some writers believe the custom to be as ancient as Woden-worship."

The mummers' character of Father Christmas -- red nose, flushed face and holly-crowned -- merged with the image of St. Nicholas, and gradually was modified, mainly in America, into the Santa Claus we know today.

A Christmas game that the Musgrove children -- and probably Jane Austen herself -- would have enjoyed was "Snapdragon". A quantity of stoned raisins were soaked thoroughly in a bowl of brandy. The bowl was set on a small table in the centre of the room, the lights were put out, and the brandy was set alight. Children (and adults) tried to snatch the flaming raisins ('snapdragons') from the dish. Flames made by burning brandy have very little heat in them, and only a very clumsy player could sustain the slightest burn, while quickness and dexterity are well rewarded. Describing this game in "Victorian Parlour Games for Today", Patrick Beaver comments: "The most likely reason for this pastime's loss in popularity cannot be fear of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, but the fact that brandy can no longer be obtained at 18 shillings the dozen bottles".

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"PRIDE AND PREJUDICE" IN VICTORIA

In October, Mary Coleman and her daughters went to the stage production of Pride and Prejudice at the Langham Court Theatre in Victoria (where Mary is now living). She reports: "It was great fun, though the dramatization (by Helen Jerome) had made some changes from the novel -- the Bennets had only three daughters, Mary and Kitty were left out. This of course was somewhat upsetting to people like us. Many good parts of the novel had to be left out, but I realize it was greedy of me to want it all.

The actress who played Elizabeth (Annie White) was excellent. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet were both well portrayed, too. I felt that Mr. Darcy was not quite proud and haughty enough! The young actor is just too nice a person himself to get that

idea across. He looked the part, being tall and handsome.

Joan Austen-Leigh had a party afterwards, to which we went. We had not known the cast would be there. It was quite fascinating to chat with "Elizabeth" and "Darcy" in casual attire. I asked "Elizabeth" if she was English, and she replied "No, Scottish". Remarkable! She said she had had to work very hard to rid herself of her Scottish accent."

I wish one of the local acting groups here would give us a treat like that in Vancouver.

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SAVANNAH CONFERENCE

Another successful JASNA Conference has come and gone, this one in the Deep South, with an ambiance of alligator swamps and moss-hung live oaks, of hush-puppies, grits and catfish, of stately mansions on wide avenues, and rocking chairs on covered verandahs. A threatening hurricane appropriately named "Isabella" (the theme novel was Northanger Abbey with the memorable Isabella Thorpe), and 99% humidity, provided a unique atmosphere for us northerners, but the efficient air-conditioning kept the hotel rooms to a pleasant if not invigorating temperature.

The Friday evening reception in a restored old mansion, and graced with a choir singing period songs, started off a weekend of gracious and interesting entertainment. Professor Alistair Duckworth, the key speaker on Saturday morning, gave us a witty and informative account of "Jane Austen's Accommodations" -- a central concern in Jane Austen's life and fiction. This was followed by a choice from four seminar sessions, but a breakdown of the hotel sound system caused universal dismay. There were three adjoining lecture rooms: in one, the speaker could scarcely be heard; in the middle, we heard our speaker as well as the other one coming in clearly over the loudspeaker system, the difficulty in concentrating being aggravated by the loud stamping and raucous shouts from the third room, where there was a Marines' Veterans re-union.

However, a frantic re-arranging of rooms and provision of additional microphones set all to rights, and the programme continued with a repeat of the small sessions. In a better-than-it-sounds lecture on the difficulties of translating Jane Austen into Spanish, the speaker discussed among others the use of the te/vos forms for you. Which does General Tilney use to his daughter Eleanor -- te, as if to a child or a pet? How would John Thorpe speak to his younger sisters? Isabella immediately addresses Catherine with the te form, with no prior get-acquainted period -- a handy, instant character clue which we lack in English.

On the topic of humour in the novels, the speaker at that session wittily and enthusiastically tried to define humour, and to suggest why we find one character funny and not another, and how Jane Austen's style contributes to our appreciation and delight in the various ridiculous characters and situations. The swift repartee of the question-and-comment period afterwards brought the session to an all-too-soon close.

Another lecture which we would have liked to carry on much longer was the after-lunch talk on the topic of clever men marrying wives who were intellectually beneath them. Would Henry Tilney and Catherine become like Mr. and Mrs. Bennet as they grew older? Kathleen Glancy, with her delightful Scottish accent and droll sense of fun, decided "No". Catherine even at 17 had far more going for her than Mrs. Bennet ever had, and if Henry could listen so kindly and patiently

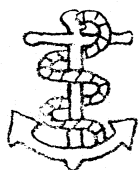
to the inane chat of Mrs. Allen, he could never be as cutting and sarcastic to Catherine as Mr. Bennet was to his wife. The Tilneys would never degenerate to the stage of the Bennets.

A break followed the formalities of the Annual General Meeting, and then conversation was non-stop during the dinner of chilled watercress soup, hearts of palm salad, veal Savannah, and apple pie. We tried to sharpen our wits for the game of "Novel Pursuit" (on the lines of Trivial Pursuit) which taxed our memories to the utmost. Do you know how far it was from Northanger Abbey to Fullerton? Who Dorothy was? Where the Tilneys walked with Catherine? and so on! We gave heartfelt congratulations to the winning team, who gained 23 points out of a possible 30.

Sunday brunch was followed by an interesting talk by the popular novelist Joan Aiken, on the changes Jane Austen might have made to Northanger Abbey if she had lived to revise it before publication -- much less of the Gothic element, and additional sub-plots with the minor characters fulfilling more important and complicated roles.

With a few lines of witty doggerel verse, Patricia Robinson-King brought an end to a delightful weekend. Most of these talks will be published in the next issue of Persuasions, so you will be able to get an idea of what we heard at the Conference.

NAVY TREASURE HUNT



British Navy aficionados, and Jane Austen readers who know how important the Navy was to her and some of her characters, will be interested if a "treasure hunt" in New York is successful. A British ship, the HUSSAR, carrying a payroll to the British garrison in Newport, RI, and taking colonists loyal to the Crown back to England, sailed from Manhattan on Sept. 13, 1780, but sank only hours later when she hit a reef. No lives were lost, and the gold and silver may have been transferred to another ship, but the salvage firm of Maritime Explorations think they may find bullion worth millions on the wreck, believed to be in the East River, just off the Bronx shoreline. If they can locate and explore the remains of the ship, even without the gold, a "treasure" of knowledge about Navy life in the days of William Price and Captain Wentworth may be obtained. The firm expected to have the wreck pin-pointed by the end of July, but I have not heard any word of how the work is progressing.

INSPIRATION

Laura Ashley's Christmas catalogue offers a perfume called "Emma", which is described as "a bright and youthful Eau Fraiche for the young at heart". And a recent issue of City Woman titled an article on perfumes, "Scents and Sensibilities". I wonder if Jane Austen's popular novels inspired these.

LECTURES CANCELLED

Dr. Mabel Colbeck suffered a fall a couple of weeks ago, and the two lectures she had planned to give on Jane Austen had to be cancelled. We wish her a speedy recovery, and hope these talks will be re-scheduled in the Spring.

SOUSE, TROTTERS AND CHITTERLINGS

On Nov.17, 1798, Jane Austen wrote from Steventon, "We are to kill a pig soon", and in the following January, she mentioned that her father was getting a pig for Edward, "already killed and cut up". Whether or not the Austens did the butchering themselves, the preparation of the meat was done at home. "My Mother means to pay herself for the salt and the trouble of ordering it to be cured by the spareribs, the souse and the lard". In the Manchester Guardian of 11th Nov. 1984, Ralph Whitlock described his memory of his father as a cottager butchering pigs in England, perhaps a hundred years after Jane Austen's time, but country living would not have changed much in that respect. "November is the month for killing the home-grown pig", he wrote, in "The Profitable Pig". "Thereafter for the rest of the winter there were always sides of bacon on the bacon-rack just beneath the kitchen ceiling, and always hams keeping warm, dry and well-smoked in the chimney-corner...The protesting squeals of a pig being led to the slaughter were one of the authentic sounds of the November countryside... An old lady who had the reputation as a maker of black puddings...was on hand to catch the blood when the jugular vein was cut...The bristles were singed off with torches of twisted straw. Cold water was poured over the carcass and it was scraped and singed again...While the men butchered, the ladies were assembled in the kitchen for their part of the work -- chitterlings had to be cleaned, liver to be minced for making faggots, fat to be trimmed for melting down as lard...The hams, trotters, eye-pieces, and sides of bacon were consigned to the dairy for weeks of salting... Cuttings, joints, ears for making brawn, brains, chops and other morsels were laid out in orderly array..."

The Austens always had servants, but Mrs. Austen and her daughters planned and supervised the running of the household, even if they did not do all the actual work of it, and Jane Austen must have been a part of many such activities. Although Mrs. Bennet prided herself that she was "very well able to keep a good cook, and that her daughters had nothing to do in the kitchen", Jane Austen's letters show that she and Cassandra had a large share in the housekeeping at Steventon and Chawton.

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COMEDY OF MANNERS

Jane Austen's works are often described by the term "comedy of manners", a phrase derived from Restoration Comedy, which evoked laughter at violations of social conventions and decorum, often with sparkling dialogue and wit. In The Ladies and the Mammies, Selma James deplores the use of this term to describe Jane Austen's pointed studies of the role of women in marriage and the family: "To label the content of this body of novels a 'Comedy of Manners' serves only to denigrate not merely the author but the subject of her work: women within the family." This view ignores the deterioration of the meaning of "manners": today we think of mere social forms -- which fork to use at dinner, standing when a woman enters the room, and so on. But the OED defines manners as:

"Conduct in its moral aspect; the moral code embodied in geneal custom or sentiment."

A person's habitual behaviour or conduct especially in reference to its moral aspect; moral character, morals (Obs) "

In the best works of the genre, true wit and good manners define the characters' worth in the society they inhabit. Jane Austen equates manners to

morals, as, for example, the contrasting treatment of Harriet Smith at the ball in Emma serves to distinguish the true moral worth of Mr. Knightley and the lack of it in Mr. Elton, and Emma's snub of Miss Bates is not bad social manners but a serious breach of moral conduct.

Edmund Burke, in Letters on a Regicidal Peace (1790), wrote: "Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon them, in a great measure, the laws depend. The law touches us but here & there, and now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in. They give the whole form and color to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them".

Edmund Bertram in Mansfield Park echoes this in reply to Mary Crawford's remark, "a clergyman is nothing". He states "...I cannot call that situation nothing, which has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally -- which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence".

Wordsworth, in a sonnet to Milton in 1802, combined, as equals, the qualities "manners, virtue, freedom, power".

This is the sort of "Comedy of Manners" that Jane Austen was writing.

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RENEWAL TIME

"Thank you" to all those members who have generously sent in donations to help cover the cost of postage for the local chapter.

This is again the time of year for membership renewal: the JASNA year runs from the date of Jane Austen's birthday, December 16.

Send your name and address, along with \$10.00 (cheque payable to the Jane Austen Society of North America) to:

Joan Austen-Leigh,
1575 Rockland Ave.,
Victoria, B.C.
V8S 1W4

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REMINDER

Don't forget the birthday party.

Eileen Sutherland
4169 Lions Ave.,
North Vancouver, B.C.