

Jane Austen Society of North America

VANCOUVER REGION - NEWSLETTER NUMBER SIXTEEN - NOVEMBER, 1986

"...in praise of the fullness, brilliancy & Spirit of the Meeting". (W.)

"Last night it had been hope and smiles, bustle and motion, noise and brilliancy in the drawing-room, and out of the drawing-room, and everywhere. Now it was languor and all but solitude." Like Fanny's ball in Mansfield Park, our conference is over and we are again settling into our routines. But like Fanny and Mary Crawford, we talk it over "in a very handsome style, with all the heightenings of imagination and all the laughs of playfulness which are so essential to the shades of a departed ball".

Much of the planning and preparation for the conference involved minor decisions and petty details, which I had lots of time to attend to; but it was wonderful to know that I could count on such a supportive group ready to help whenever I asked. Freydis Welland took over all negotiations with the hotel and smoothed our way there, getting us every possible perquisite and excellent service. Our treasurer, Ruth Piddington, efficiently handled all the accounts, kept the books, and paid the bills. Paula Peretto's beautifully lettered name-tags were justly admired by everyone. Ron Sutherland and his group of walking-tour guides, Fadwa Ataya, Donna Short, Anne Parsons, Rosamond Kendon, and Marianne Gibson volunteered to help the visitors become better acquainted with downtown areas. Donna Short took a visiting policeman and his wife to meet members of the Vancouver Police Department; Mary Anderson drove a group to the Museum of Anthropology, and no doubt other members similarly helped our visitors enjoy their short stay in Vancouver. Joan Austen-Leigh took over all arrangements with the Victoria actors and actresses who gave us such a memorable performance of her production Our Own Particular Jane, to provide a delightful ending for the Saturday banquet. There were always willing helpers at the sales tables and the registration desk — all this assistance, and much more, ensured that the conference went off so well.



"I shall be very happy to dance with you Sir, if you like it."

Here are some comments from the many gratifying letters of appreciation which I have received:

"Each conference has its own special flavor, and yours 'tasted' friendly and lively. We feasted on Juliet McMaster's wonderful speech, served up with sequels, surgeons and voices..." (B.D.) "The boat ride was a great touch, but your after dinner entertainment was my favorite." (S.B.) "Congratulations and thanks to every member of your splendid committee. May Vancouver bask in its well-earned glory and may you flourish". (L.H.) "...such a glorious Jane Austen celebration. The hotel, the meals, the presentations, the fellowship - I can't believe how much we packed into one weekend." (C.O.) "It really is wonderful how Jane Austen brings so many people together from all across the continent." (M.C.) "It was pure pleasure for me to meet so many people who care so much for her work". (R.V.) "I so enjoyed the speakers, the cruise, and the food! My

only regret was that the conference couldn't have gone on for a week". (B.L.) "I went to Clifford Collier's dance session, and thoroughly enjoyed it. He is exceedingly good, but so were we - good sports all...People who were at the card session report that it was wonderfully rowdy." (M.M.)

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"Dress is at all times a frivolous distinction." (N.A.)

Did you know that in the olden days, when Lady Catherine de Burgh was the belle of the local Assembly balls, double chins were desirable, a sign of beauty and an indication of wealth? This was one intriguing sidelight in the lecture by Ivan Sayers on the History of Fashion, attended by members of the local group on October 29th. Illustrated with slides, and displays of a dozen or so dresses with their corresponding bonnets and slippers, the talk covered the period from 1760 to the 1820's, nicely bracketing Jane Austen's lifetime.

The gowns on display were dated by fabric, techniques of construction, style of design, and even by the pins, or hooks and eyes, used in their closures. The earliest dresses - like those worn by Lady Catherine's dear Mama - featured robes à la française, with a flowing back panel, and à l'anglaise, with a fitted back bodice. One of these might have inspired the remark by Mrs. Allen to Catherine in Northanger Abbey: "What an odd gown she has got on! How old-fashioned it is! Look at the back."

Derived from a cloak with sleeves worn over a dress, the styles by this period had become open-fronted gowns worn over matching petticoats. The fabrics were opulent and stiff - heavy silks, brocades and elegant velvets - and the full skirts were draped over basket-like panniers hung at the hips. Sometimes the skirts were lifted up and tucked into side slits to give even more width to the whole silhouette.

Pockets were not sewn into the gown, but were attached to strings that tied around the waist (remember the nursery rhyme: "Lucy Locket lost her pocket"?) - the gown, petticoat, shift and the panniers all had slits for the hand to enter the pocket, which hung in the open area inside the pannier.

Undergarments also had their place in Ivan Sayers' display: shifts, straight with low scooped necks and elbow-length sleeves trimmed with lace-meant to show at the neckline and sleeve of the dress; stays, usually of bone and sometimes with a "busk" (a curved wood rod which fit straight down the front of the garment), tightly laced to produce the desirable wasp waist; and the stomacher, a triangular piece of heavy fabric or leather, beautifully embroidered, pinned over the chest to cover the stays and fill in the gap where the gown was open.

Fashion was the conspicuous display of wealth. Only the rich could afford the quantities of expensive fabrics needed for such gowns, and the styles themselves - skirts so wide the wearer could not see where she was walking, and upper sleeves so tight she could not lift her arms - made it obvious to all that this lady could afford constant attention and care.

But the Revolution in France put an end to this display of wealth and power, and female fashions reflected the ideal of class-less equality - slim, simple, body-shaped dresses inspired by the shift-like undergarment worn by



the French noblewomen on their way to the guillotine. Enemies though England and France were for generations, the fashions of one were quickly copied by the elegant ladies and gentlemen of the other country.

The focus of our attention was one dress of 1810 - a perfect example of what one of Jane Austen's heroines would have worn - white, with a scooped low neck, tiny puffed sleeves, and a high waist with a drawstring to pull it in below the bustline. It was made of a soft clinging fabric with "thumb-nail" decoration, made by punching clustered metallic threads into the fabric and then squashing them flat with a thumb-nail to make shiny spots like sequins. Were these the "glossy spots" that Edmund admired on Fanny Price's gown and which reminded him of Mary Crawford's dress in Mansfield Park?

Jane Austen doesn't bother to tell us many details about what her heroines wore; she expected her readers to be as familiar as she was about such matters. Her letters to her sister Cassandra, full of questions, suggestions and ideas about altering a gown or trimming a bonnet, show how interested she was in styles and fabrics, although her financial situation didn't allow her to indulge her tastes very often. The characters in the novels who are most concerned about their dress are Mrs. Allen in Northanger Abbey, who thinks of nothing else, and Mrs. Robert Watson and the vulgar tasteless Mrs. Elton, who share the idea that their over-decorated, showy gowns are a mark of their elegant superiority.

For those interested in reading more about the fashions of those days, Ivan Sayers recommended the following books, most available at the Vancouver Public Library:

Patterns of Fashion: Janet Arnold
 Fashion, Mirror of History: Michael Batterberry
 20,000 Years of Fashion: François Léon Boucher
 A Handbook of English Costume in the 19th c.: C.W.Cunnington
 History of Costume: Karl Köhler
 Corsets and Crinolines: Norah Waugh

"This is a favourite gown, though it cost but nine shillings a yard." (N.A.)

Who wore:

- (1) "...a true Indian muslin" ?
- (2) "...my night cap and powdering gown" ?
- (3) "...her puce-coloured sarsenet" ?
- (4) "...a remarkably elegant gown" ?
- (5) "...my sprigged muslin robe with blue trimmings" ?
- (6) "a blue dress, and a pink satin cloak" ?
- (7) "...my yellow gown, with my hair done up in braids" ?
- (8) "one of the two Sattin gowns which went thro' the winter, & a new cap from the Milliners" ?

- (9) "...a great slit in my worked muslin gown" ?
 (10) "Very little white satin, very few lace veils - a most pitiful business" ?

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"The name seemed to strike them all." (N.A.)

When we think of characters in novels whose names give an early indication of their characters or occupations, it is the novels of Dickens which come to mind. But it is fun to notice how Jane Austen has sometimes done the same thing. Here are some examples I have found:

Knightley (Emma) - the perfect knight for a hero.
 Mr. Shepherd (Pers.) - tries desperately to guide and lead Sir Walter.
 Mrs. Clay (Pers.) - basic, earthy; malleable, moulds herself to any situation.
 Miss Andrews (N.A.) - the heroine of Richardson's novels, the perfect novel heroine.
 Admiral Croft (Pers.) - down to earth, solid, like the oak forests which were the basis of England's strength.
 Fitzwilliam Darcy (P&P) - both names imply the old landed gentry since Norman times, no title but solid worth, noble.
 De Burgh (P&P) - from the city, new wealth, not old established land owners.
 Sir Wm. Lucas (P&P) - made his money in trade - lucre, lucrative.
 Rushworth (M.P.) - akin to "rush-light" - not really much good, only worth a rush.
 Wickham (P&P) - wicked.
 Hayter (Pers.) - close to the rustic, "hay".
 Fairfax (Emma) - fair maid.
 Thorpe (N.A.) - "village, hamlet" - not sophisticated as they would like to appear - "ignorant rustics" from the city.
 Woodhouse (Emma) - only happy in his own house.
 Wentworth (Pers.) - worthy.
 Musgrove (Pers.) - family with a landed estate.

There must be lots more - what ones can you find?

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"...ornaments over it of the prettiest English china". (N.A.)

In a recent issue of City & Country Home, a reader asked for information about a set of antique china which included a square Japanese plate, a footed comport and six dessert plates. The columnist answered:

"Dessert was an important event in the well-run, reasonably prosperous British home of the 19th c. The showiest dessert sets were produced in the early years of the 19th c. A basic set might include 12 plates and 2 or 3 plates on pedestal feet for displaying the sweets. More extensive sets would have pedestal dishes of two or three sizes; shell-shaped, leaf-shaped or square serving dishes, possibly kidney-shaped ones; a pair of tureens for cream or sauces and, in the case of the most luxurious sets, a pair of coolers. These were large bucket-shaped vessels with a removable inner liner that could hold sherbet or a chilled dessert with cracked ice packed around it.

"Your plate is a typical serving dish shape from the early 19th c. with a white stoneware body. The pattern is one of those inspired by Japanese ceramics which became popular about 1810..."

In Northanger Abbey, the elegant breakfast set was "quite an old one, purchased two years ago." General Tilney hoped for an opportunity to select one of the "beautiful specimens" he had recently seen in London. These might have been decorated in the Oriental style mentioned above. And such china might have been one of the options when Jane Austen helped her brother Edward Knight choose the Wedgwood service which included the plate on display at the Art Gallery during the conference.

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"...a little peevish under immediate pain, & ill disposed to be pleased". (W)

In a book of essays on Science and Society, "The Woods Hole Cantata", Gerald Weissmann asks: "What, bizarrely, connects the 18th century English aristocracy with the rural poor of Alabama? Answer: They both share an unusual form of gout caused by lead contamination - of the Englishmen's wine and the Alabamians' moonshine."

Pride and Prejudice is the only Jane Austen novel where at least one character does not suffer the pains of gout. In the early novel-of-letters, Lady Susan, the "heroine" describes the husband of her friend: "just old enough to be formal, ungovernable & to have the Gout - too old to be agreeable, & too young to die". The friend herself believes "the Gout is brought on, or kept off at pleasure" to cause her the most annoyance and curtail her enjoyments.

In Sense and Sensibility, when Marianne was suffering at Willoughby's desertion, Mrs. Jennings brought her a glass of "the finest old Constantia wine" which did her husband so much good when he had "a touch of his old colicky Gout". Mr. Allen in Northanger Abbey, "was ordered to Bath for the benefit of a gouty constitution", as were Dr. Grant and Admiral Croft in the later novels. In The Watsons, part of Mr. Watson's illness was a "gouty foot". Mrs. Norris used the excuse of her husband's "gouty complaints" to ensure that Fanny Price had to go to Mansfield Park instead of the Parsonage.

Jane Austen does not make fun of these characters, but their symptoms are treated rather lightly. Only in Emma do we get an idea of the suffering involved, when Miss Bates reports with sympathy the illness of her father's old clerk, "bedridden, and very poorly with the rheumatic gout in his joints".

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"Those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing". (N.A.)

"This 'two inches of ivory', though it may resemble the handle of a lady's fan when looked on scantily, is in substance an elephant's tusk; it is a savagely probing instrument as well as a masterpiece of refinement."

Dorothy Van Ghent: The English Novel: Form & Function

Jane Austen's novels "are elegant variations on a single theme...the courtship of a virtuous virgin living in a world of families, where marrying is a biological, social, and economic imperative, and also the act by which an individual makes a definitive moral choice".

Rachel Brownstein: Becoming a Heroine

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"Such collections on a very grand scale are not uncommon". (Emma)

Another word for my collection from the Oxford English Dictionary of the earliest usage of a word in English literature, citing Jane Austen as the source:

BEAVER (5) a particular kind of glove. 1816 Miss Austen Emma II vi 169: "Well tied parcels of 'Men's Beavers' and 'York Tan'".

My grateful thanks to Mary Millard of Ontario for finding this one for me.

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"And yet I meant to be uncommonly clever..." (P&P)

Answers to quiz:

- (1) Henry Tilney bought it for his sister Eleanor in Northanger Abbey.
- (2) A sarcastic suggestion of Mr. Bennet in Pride and Prejudice.
- (3) Miss Andrews, described by Isabella Thorpe in Northanger Abbey.
- (4) Emma's comment about Mrs. Elton after their first meeting in Emma.
- (5) Henry Tilney's quotation from Catherine's supposed journal in Northanger Abbey.
- (6) Mr. Rushworth's costume for Lovers' Vows in Mansfield Park.
- (7) Isabella when she first met James Morland in Northanger Abbey.
- (8) Mrs. Edwards in The Watsons.
- (9) Lydia's letter to Mrs. Forster when she eloped in Pride and Prejudice.
- (10) Mr. Elton's report of Emma at her wedding in Emma.

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"Every succeeding day was expected to bring some news..." (P&P)

Newsletters from other regions give details of what the various groups are planning for the future. Southern California will be having their annual meeting at the Huntington Library in San Marino on December 20th, with readings, lectures, and lunch on the terrace. Two members who took a Jane Austen course at Oxford last summer will be giving a report.

Chicago will be celebrating with a Birthday Party on December 7th with readings, riddles, a quiz and a champagne toast along with tea, scones and cucumber sandwiches. The following meeting on February 16 will discuss Jane Austen as a romantic novelist; and in March, the topic will be the fools in the novels.

The Toronto chapter is planning to be fashionably late in celebrating the birthday - they will have a theatre party to see the play Pride and Prejudice early in the new year.

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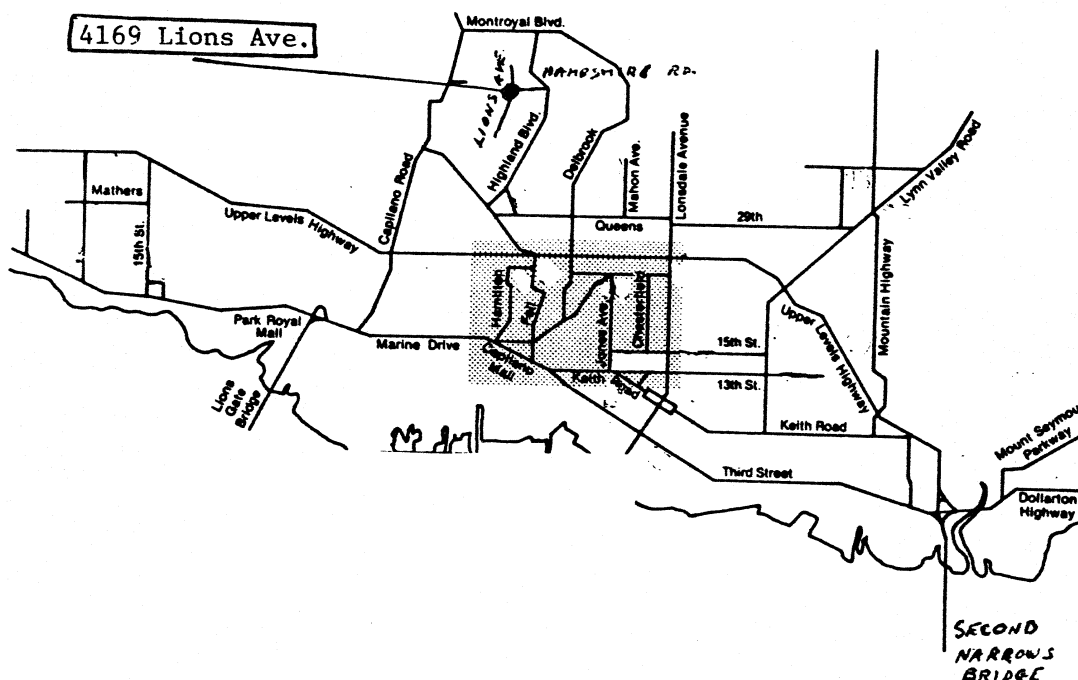
"...to assist in the due celebration of that festival..." (S&S)

Our annual celebration of Jane Austen's birthday (December 16, 1775) will be held on Sunday, December 14, and all members and friends are invited. We will have a "pot-luck" lunch, perhaps "cold meat, cake, and a variety of all the finest fruits in season" as the ladies had at Pemberley. Each person bring something to share, main course, salad or dessert, and I am sure we will be in the same state as Miss Bates: "How shall we recollect half the dishes!" Come at 11:30, we shall eat about 12:30, and then carry on after lunch for as long as we wish.

As for entertainment, it will be very informal. Those who wish may bring a favourite passage from one of the novels or other appropriate book to read to us. If you have questions you would like to have answered, this group should be able to oblige. Or if you can suggest a good, preferably controversial, topic for discussion or debate, so much the better. Any other suggestions will be welcome. If you feel creative, make up a game or a quiz to test our wits. In any case, I am sure it will be a "complete party of pleasure".

The enclosed notice gives all the details; mark your calendar, and then post the notice at your favourite bookstore, library or community centre where others may be interested to see it.

The map indicates the way to 4169 Lions Avenue. If you would like a ride, or if you have room to take a passenger, please let me know. RSVP 988:0479.



"...difficult to bring forward so unpleasant a subject." (N.A.)

The time has come for the payment of fees again. The JASNA "year" runs from birthday to birthday, and thus the 1987 dues are due, and so in due course send your cheque, payable to JASNA, to Pamela Delville-Pratt, 820 Stewart Ave., Coquitlam, B.C. V3K 2N4: \$10.00 per year; \$100.00 for life (this is a bargain, as it will become \$150.00 in 1987).

The local group has in the past subsisted on donations from our very generous members, but I think it is time to put it on a formal basis. Our fee will be \$5.00 per year, due now or the next time you see me, at the birthday party. Ruth Piddington is the treasurer, #302 - 5616 Yew St., Vancouver, B.C. V6M 3Y3, if you would rather send a cheque.

The JASNA fee includes a newsletter twice a year, various announcements in between, notices of new books, tours, etc., and the annual publication, Persuasions, which is sent out at the end of your membership year. If you are a new member now, and would like to receive Persuasions at once (early January), send an extra \$5 to Pamela.

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Dont't forget the birthday party!

Sincerely,

Eileen Sutherland
4169 Lions Ave.,
North Vancouver, B.C.
Tel. 988-0479

JASNA

Pamela Delville-Pratt,
820 Stewart Ave.,
Coquitlam, B.C. V3K 2N4

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One of our most important projects is the restoration and maintenance of St. Nicholas Church, Steventon. Please consider a donation, even a dollar or two is most acceptable. Include with your check to JASNA and indicate amount here _____

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