

Jane Austen Society of North America

VANCOUVER REGION - NEWSLETTER NO. THIRTY-ONE - AUGUST 1990

A TASTE FOR FLOWERS

I have just learnt to love a hyacinth. (NA)

General Tilney at Northanger Abbey was fanatically determined to be up-to-date in everything. The drawingroom fireplace had been "contracted to a Rumford", the breakfast set was "quite an old set, purchased two years ago", and in the old kitchen, "every modern invention to facilitate the labour of the cooks had been adopted".

In the gardens, the hyacinths, which Catherine had just learned to love, were a fairly recent import into England. Another flower which General Tilney might have been the first among his acquaintances to grow was the chrysanthemum. If you have a purplish-bronze chrysanthemum blooming in your garden this Fall, it may be a distant descendant of the Old Purple, the first chrysanthemum to be grown in England, in the late 18th century.

Large autumn-flowering chrysanthemums had been cultivated in China and Japan for several hundred years. In 1789, a merchant from Marseilles brought home a few cuttings from China. All except one died, but that one was grown and propagated so enthusiastically that within a few years gardeners in all the nearby towns of the south of France were successfully growing plants from it.



By 1791, a hundred cuttings were presented to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris and to extensive nursery gardens nearby. In spite of the war, plants were often exchanged with Kew Gardens, under the encouragement of Sir Joseph Banks and William Aiton, the head gardener at Kew. The Botanical Magazine illustrated a painting of the Old Purple flowering in a nursery garden in Chelsea in 1795, the first indication that the plants were growing in England. This aroused much interest, and English gardeners began to bring back specimens on East India Company ships for newly created estate gardens.

In the Bishop of London's garden at Fulham in 1802 there appeared the Changeable White, a sport of the Old Purple with varying amount of white among the petals.

By the 1820's the Chinese chrysanthemum was well established as a favourite with English gardeners, and it has remained so ever since.

The Old Purple, the first chrysanthemum to reach Europe.

THE YEAR WITHOUT A SUMMER: 1816

Our weather must not always be judged by the calendar. (MP)

In 1815, Napoleon erupted out of his prison at Elba and roared across Europe, spreading havoc all the way. On the other side of the world in the same year, an eruption of another kind also had a devastating effect on all around it.

Mount Tambora, on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa near Java and Bali, erupted with a greater explosion than any other volcano in the last 10,000 years. The height of the mountain was reduced over 4,000 feet, and the volume of ejected ash - about 100 times that of Mount St. Helen's in 1980 - exceeded that of Krakatoa in 1883, or Santorini, which gave rise to the legend of Atlantis. Ships made their way with difficulty through floating islands of pumice, and ash and pumice on the land was as much as three feet thick. For 200 miles around, there was total darkness for three days, and the dust cloud which circled the earth has been blamed for the cold year that followed.

The early 19th century was a time of scientific curiosity. The mercury thermometer, sealed in a glass tube, had been a reliable instrument for over a hundred years, and personal diaries and the records of a network of meteorological stations give a good picture of weather fluctuations in eastern North America and western Europe. It was in these two areas that the climatic effects seemed to be most noticeable.

In Connecticut, the average temperature of June, 1816, was about 7°F below normal, the coldest June ever recorded at New Haven. In Vermont, water froze an inch thick in July, and in Quebec City in the same month the snow was deep enough to reach the axletrees of carriages, and ice on small lakes was thick enough to bear the weight of Indians crossing them.



Mount St. Helen's in eruption

Corn was the staple of New England, and the cold spring of 1816 with snow in June and killing frosts in July and August destroyed almost all the crops. Animals were sold off because there was no prospect of sufficient winter fodder, and wheat prices rose as high as during the War of 1812. Root and fruit crops were not much affected by the bad weather, but song birds died in great numbers because of the cold and also from the lack of insects to eat. Small subsistence farmers were used to coping with hardship and shortages, but emigration west in 1817 reached record numbers.

Western Europe was affected to a greater degree. In countries already socially disorganized by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, the lost harvests led to high prices, food riots, famine, and typhus epidemics, which did not abate until the adequate harvests of 1817 brought the situation back to normal.

Many attributed the bad summer weather of 1816 to increased sunspot activity, or blamed Benjamin Franklin's lightning rods for disrupting the electrical fluids circulating below the surface of the earth. Franklin himself came closer to the truth: he had studied the results of the eruption of Mount Asama in Japan in 1783 and observed the high dust cover over Europe and the United States during the summer of 1783 and the subsequent extremely cold winter of 1783-4.

Scientists today have determined that it is not the dust particles but the minute droplets of sulphuric acid which cause the reduction of sunlight and lowering of temperatures. Long cores drilled from Greenland glaciers yield data about volcanic action and the release of sulphuric acid dating back 10,000 years. It has been estimated that the eruption of Mount Tambora threw into the upper atmosphere seven times as much sulphuric acid as that caused by the eruption of Mount Agung in Indonesia in 1963. This latter eruption lowered world temperatures by .2°C for several years. Judging by this, the Mount Tambora eruption of 1815 could easily have resulted in a lowering of temperatures by 1.4°C in 1816. (By contrast, the eruption of Mount St. Helen's was too insignificant to lower world temperatures at all.)

Agricultural Records (Stratton and Brown, 1969) report this for 1816:

"A wet summer with a very poor harvest. A winter of storms, gales and floods. Spring was late and cold. Severe weather, with snow lying on ground, in mid-April. Summer and autumn were also cold and wet, with very little sunshine. The temperature for July and August was 4.8° below average...Harvest began late...One of the most disastrous harvests known. Much distress, and food riots."

And for 1817:

"Another wet summer with a poor, late harvest. The year began with storms and floods. Spring was late."

Like most residents in the country, with no paved roads or good sidewalks, Jane Austen found her life affected by weather patterns. Comments in her letters often refer to the daily weather, but she is seldom as definite as in these letters of 1816:

"March 13 - We have had sad weather lately, I hope you have liked it. - Our Pond is brimfull & our roads are dirty & our walls are damp, & we sit wishing every bad day may be the last."

"July 9 - She has the comfort moreover of being confined in such weather as gives one little temptation to be out. It is really too bad, & has been too bad for a long time, much worse than anybody can bear, & I begin to think it will never be fine again... Oh! it rains again; it beats against the window... We met Mr. Woolls - I talked of it's being bad weather for the Hay - & he returned me the comfort of it's being much worse for the Wheat."

"September 8 - We hear now that there is to be no Honey this year."

The year 1816, called in New England, "eighteen hundred and froze to death", was indeed a "year without a summer".

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LIBRARY - RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Our own library is too well known to me to be resorted to for anything beyond mere amusement. (S&S)

Recent Purchases: Facsimile Letters of Jane Austen - Jo Modert, ed.
Mr. Collins Considered - Ivor Morris

Donations: Letters to Alice - Fay Weldon
Housekeeping Book of Susanna Whatman
Sanditon (concluded by A Lady)

Papers: Focalization in JA's Pride and Prejudice - Rodger Cove
Jane Austen's World - Col. D. Spankie
Dining With the Darcys - Eileen Sutherland

Newspaper Clipping: A Card of White Lace: The Trial of Mrs. Leigh Perrot

[Rules: sign the card, pay 50c each item, return on or before next meeting]

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CONTRASTING STYLES

I cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible. (NA)

"Austen's irony lends her novel an epistemic temporality, a sense of becoming in knowing, but not a sense of social-historical temporality. The process of knowing is disjunct from the social-historical stasis, and does not truly affect the latter. The stasis of the latter, however, infects the former and is the ultimate source of the sense of ironic restraint in Austen. For the negativity of irony is potentially infinite, a dissolution of all into paradox. Austen's ironic negativity is finite, a balance of the known and the potentially knowable unknown. It is a limited epistemic negativity, a vision, not of radical paradox or of potential meaninglessness, but of the postponement or delay of knowledge."

"...some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language."

[Both authors shall remain nameless].

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WHICH WAS YOUR FAVOURITE?

At that time indeed I used to wonder at her choice. (NA)

How did you like the latest issue of Persuasions? We are taking a poll to see what sort of article you prefer:

In order of preference, which three articles did you find the most interesting? Let me know on or before the September meeting.

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A SPECIAL LICENCE - Kathleen Glancy

And a special licence - you must and shall be married by a special licence.

Without a special licence, the law of England required that the banns of matrimony be read in the parish churches of both bride and groom for three consecutive Sundays before the wedding. (Scots law was different - hence the practice of eloping to Gretna Green, first town past the Border). If there was reason for haste, or if you simply did not want all your neighbours knowing your business, you got (for a fee) a special licence from the Archbishop of Canterbury. A special licence was the prestigious way to do it - every common Tom, Dick or Harry had his banns called, since he couldn't afford otherwise. This is why Mrs. Bennet wants one.

Not everyone thinks so. One edition of Pride and Prejudice has a footnote proclaiming that Mrs. Bennet wants a special licence because she is afraid Lady Catherine will forbid the banns. This is quite remarkably silly. The purpose of the banns, certainly, was to publicise the marriage so that anyone who knew of any impediment had four chances to make it known - the fourth coming during the wedding itself. But you had to have an impediment. If you could prove that bride or groom was under age and had not their parents' consent, that one of them was of unsound mind and not capable of understanding the meaning of marriage (this only operated before the marriage, as Mr. Rochester found - insanity wasn't grounds for divorce), that one of them was already married, or that they were within the forbidden degrees of relationship, then you could forbid the banns.

Darcy is 28, well of age, and Elizabeth, if she has not reached her 21st birthday yet, has her parents' consent. Both of them are eminently sane, neither is married to anyone else (a desire on the part of a bridegroom's mother and aunt that he should marry someone else decidedly didn't count as an impediment) and they are no blood relation to each other at all. Lady Catherine would be quite aware that she would make a colossal fool of herself if she tried to forbid the banns, and Mrs. Bennet, who can be relied on to know more about the rules governing marriage than those of entailment, would also know that Lady Catherine, with all the will in the world, couldn't forbid the banns.

And that assumes Mrs. Bennet knows of Lady Catherine's disapproval. I don't think she does. She makes the remark directly after being told of Elizabeth's engagement. I doubt if Elizabeth would have gone into detail about Lady Catherine just then - she would feel her mother had enough to absorb for one night.

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ESSAY PRIZE

There is a very clever essay in one of the books upstairs upon much such a subject. (NA)

I am very pleased to announce the winner of the JASNA Vancouver Region essay contest at U.B.C. Aimee Begalka is a mature student hoping to take graduate studies in English. Her paper dealt with Richardson's Clarissa, Defoe's Moll Flanders and Sense & Sensibility, and her teacher suggested that she submit it to our contest. Our sincere congratulations to Aimee Begalka, and good wishes for her future studies.

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REPTON DID IT FIRST

Then the stream - something must be done with the stream; but I could not quite determine what. I had two or three ideas. (MP)

Using all the latest computer technology, a local firm can show you how your house and garden would look, with structural and landscaping options, by manipulating colour photographic elements on the screen. This sounds like the ultimate in house renovations and landscape design, but this is precisely what Humphrey Repton did two hundred years ago.

Repton's famous leather-bound Red Books had ingenious folding pages which could be arranged in many ways to give optional views of mansions and their surrounding parks. One page might cover the original picture of the house with a Gothic version of renovation, another give a Classical facade to the building. Landscape pictures would show optional lakes, or groves of trees, terraces or additional courtyards. Repton's watercolours were scarcely less effective than the most modern software.

If you wanted to "have the avenue down" and "open the prospect amazingly", or decided that "the house must be turned to front the east instead of the north... your best friend upon such an occasion...would be Mr. Repton". (MP)

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SWEETMEATS AND PASTRIES

Without a little butter to soften it, it hurts the Coats of the Stomach. (Sand.)

Do you remember those delicious Toffee Crunch Cookies Sylvia Chaddock brought to lunch last year? Here is the recipe, not quite as Sylvia gave it to me:

You must have your oven very hott. Pre-heat to 400°F. Line an iron or tinn baking tray with Graham wafers. These take their name from Dr. Sylvester Graham, 1794-1851, a vegetarian who first advocated the use of whole grain in order to maintain a better standard of health: graham flour contains the whole wheat grain including the germ; whole-wheat flour does not include the germ. Putt 1½ cups butter and 1 cup brown shugger into a pann and heat just until it boyles. Pour this mixture over the biskets. OED: The regular form in English from 16th to 18th c. was bisket, as still pronounced; the current biscuit is a senseless adoption of the modern French spelling, without the French pronunciation. Strew with 2 cups sliced almonds. 8 minutes will bake it; when it bubbles on top it is enough. Let it stand a few minutes to cool; then cut into squares and remove from pan. Cool on wire racks.

As Sir Walter Scott wrote in The Antiquary: *Muckle obliged to ye for your cookies, Mrs. Shortcake.*

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"Wheat rose from 43s. a quarter in 1792, the year before the war broke out, to 126s. in 1812, the year Napoleon went to Moscow. The poor, both in town and country, suffered terribly from the price of bread, though it put money into the pockets of tenant farmers, freehold yeomen, and receivers of tithe and rent". Trevelyan, English Social History.

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It has been, it is a most cruel affliction. (S&S)

It was August, 1779. The combined French and Spanish fleets were massed off Plymouth, preparing for invasion. The British fleet was nowhere in sight. Gales blew up and scattered the enemy ships. Before they could re-group for another attempt, supplies were short and more than half their crews were ill or dying of a dreaded disease.

Smallpox saved England from invasion that time, but the disease took its toll there also. That same year 2500 deaths were recorded in London alone; during the last two decades of the century, smallpox was responsible for one out of every ten deaths in the city, almost all of children, since most surviving adults were immune.

We don't know of any smallpox deaths in Jane Austen's immediate family. Her good friend Mary Lloyd, however, who became the second wife of James Austen, survived the disease, but with a badly pock-marked face. Characters in the novels could easily have been victims. Mary Bennet was "plain", not disfigured by scars, but in She Stoops to Conquer, Goldsmith wrote, "Since inoculation began there is no such thing to be seen as a plain woman". Jane Austen chose not to mention the disease or its resulting scars.

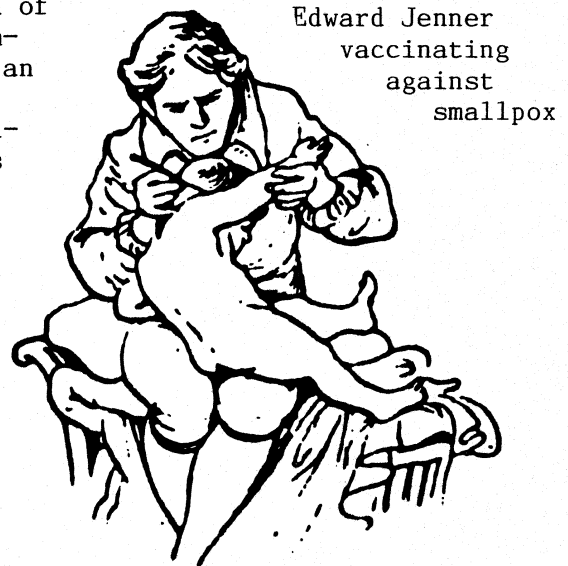
Smallpox struck down kings and queens, changed the succession of dynasties, and altered the course of wars. A Protestant brother of Charles II, who might have kept the Catholic James II from the throne of England, and thus saved the Stuart dynasty, died of smallpox as a young man. In 1776, during the Revolutionary War, American troops might have captured Quebec and thus control of Canada, except for a smallpox outbreak that attacked nearly half the colonial troops. An historian quotes John Adams: "The smallpox is 10 times more terrible than British, Canadians and Indians together. This was the cause of our precipitate retreat from Quebec".

Inoculation was strongly endorsed by the College of Physicians in London in 1755. A deep incision for the inoculating material (taken from the arm of a previously inoculated person) and to allow for the escape of the "poison" was considered necessary; the operation was accompanied by weeks of elaborate, supervised medical care and diet before and after the inoculation. The result was an expensive procedure that was usually only for the wealthy.

By the 1760's, English physicians began to use small incisions and more careful selection of the matter to be inoculated. They also recommended isolation during convalescence, or that an entire community be inoculated at one time. Eventually no period of preparation was considered necessary. The decreased risks, and less expensive process, led to the widespread popularity and general use of inoculation, with a significant impact on the incidence of the disease.

The experience with inoculation, and the increased knowledge of the disease, produced a favourable climate for Jenner's discovery of a vaccine.

Edward Jenner (1749-1823) was born in Gloucestershire, England. In 1770 he went to London to study medicine and natural history.



Jenner refused an appointment as naturalist on Captain Cook's 1772 voyage in order to begin his medical practice. He made several important scientific discoveries, but they are overshadowed by his studies in vaccination.

It had been known for over a century in England that a person who had suffered from cowpox was subsequently immune to smallpox. Others before Jenner had successfully used cowpox material for inoculation. The importance of Jenner's work was that he proved by experiment that such inoculated persons were immune, and he effectively inoculated person-to-person, not only directly from cattle.

The advantage of vaccination with cowpox was a much safer process, that entailed no need for quarantine, nor any risk of infecting others. It was also simpler and cheaper. The technique was adopted rapidly in England and Europe. During the Napoleonic Wars, the British army was vaccinated in 1802, and Napoleon issued similar orders for his troops, as well as French civilians, a few years later. Napoleon had great personal respect for Jenner and his discoveries, and several times freed captured Englishmen on receiving a personal petition from Jenner.

Vaccination was not embraced without opposition, however, and the discovery that the immunity of a single vaccination wore off after a few years was an important factor. Jenner himself refused to admit this, and it was not until 1829 that re-vaccination was introduced. Another cause of opposition was the lack of knowledge of just what Jenner's vaccine was. The fact that cowpox was a disease of animals increased the skepticism. Cartoons of the time depicted people who had acquired horns, tails, or other animal characteristics after being vaccinated. Secondary infection, and contaminated or inactive vaccine caused much controversy.

Gradually, however, the practice of vaccination with cowpox - the important breakthrough in the control of the dread disease - spread around the world.

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SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

This is quite the season indeed for friendly meetings. (Emma)

September 15 - St. Philip's Fireside Room - 10:00 a.m.

This will be a discussion meeting in two parts. The first will centre on Assertion and Aggression in the Novels of Jane Austen, by Dwight McCawley, (found in Persuasions, No. 11, p.77). Re-read this article, and come prepared for "the prospect of discussion, explanation, and probably non-conviction". The second part will be a discussion of your Summer Task: reading a book relating to Jane Austen. Your comments and opinions are needed for a Book Review column in future Newsletters.

October 20 - St. Philip's - 10:00 a.m. - A reading of Lovers' Vows.

December 15 - St. Philip's - "JA's Birthday Party" : Slides of Jane Austen country.

Don't forget: Can you say "Happy Birthday" in a language other than English?

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This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, comes out four times a year: February, May, August and November. All submissions on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome. Mail to the Editor: Eileen Sutherland, 4169 Lions Avenue, North Vancouver, B.C. V7R 3S2. Price to Non-members: \$8.00 per year.