

JANE AUSTEN SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

Vancouver Region

NEWSLETTER NO. 98 May 2007

Replica of Jane Austen's Patchwork Quilt. Eileen Sutherland.

"Have you remembered to collect pieces for the Patchwork? – We are now at a stand still." [Letter from Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra at Godmersham, May 31, 1811.]

Jane Austen, her sister Cassandra, and their mother probably began work on their patchwork quilt when they settled into their permanent home at Chawton in 1807. It was no doubt intended for the bed which the sisters shared. It must have been well looked after, as it is still in beautiful condition, displayed at Chawton today.

Some years ago, the JASNA Edmonton Chapter members decided to work on a replica. They chose fabrics as nearly like those of the original as they could, and followed the pattern of triangles. The large central triangle of the Chawton quilt was made from a fabric of a large bunch of flowers. The recent quilters couldn't find a suitable piece, and appliquéd coloured pieces to form a central motif, a worthy solution. For their border, instead of more quilted pieces, they used a strip in a stylized flower-and vine pattern, in green and gold. Otherwise, they made an excellent likeness to the Austen quilt.



At a regional mini-Conference in Edmonton, the quilt was raffled. Our member, Brenda Jowett, was the lucky winner. She was delighted, of course, and treasured it, displayed on a rack on her wall.

Sadly, Brenda died earlier this year, after a long illness. She wanted her quilt to go back to Jane Austen devotees. Her husband, Sam, wrote to me, and I, too, was delighted to accept it. We must now decide how to look after the quilt, when to bring it to meetings to display it, and what to do in the future.

Let me know your thoughts and opinions.

**Come to the Vancouver JASNA Conference
October 5-7, 2007**

Your arrival will be 'an irresistible proof of [your] great good sense, and a most welcome addition' to our assembly.

February Meeting.

The February meeting was opened by Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer, beginning her term as Regional Co-ordinator. She presented Joan Reynolds with a beautiful bouquet in token of all her work in the past few years. We know we can still count on Joan for her advice, help and encouragement, as well as general pleasant conversation.

A new inducement to increased membership this year is "Jane's Bountiful Basket": a raffle ticket will be given to any new guest, and also one to the member who introduced that guest. Inside will be lots of special "goodies", and the basket will be raffled in June. This is the year to bring guests, to let people know about the Society and our meetings.

Jane Austen Day will be on April 21st this year. It will not be a completely catered luncheon, but a main meat course will be provided, and members are requested to bring a side dish - vegetable dish, salad, pickles, sweets, etc. Jean and Virgil Oriente are donating the wine. Please let someone on the programme committee know what you choose to bring.

Viviane McClelland gave the Treasurer's Report - our finances are in good shape, with a respectable bank balance. Marg Savery asked for ideas for future programmes. Some members are attending lectures about Jane Austen at UBC and enjoying them very much - perhaps they can give us a summary at one of our meetings.

The Mature Women in Jane Austen's Novels.

A panel of speakers discussed the older women, rather than the heroines in the novels - "mature" was used in all senses of the word.

Marg Savery started off, discussing **Mrs. Norris**. She quoted the first section of the novel, with its description of the three sisters and their circumstances. Miss Maria Ward "had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, . . . to be raised to the rank of a baronet's lady"; Miss Ward, the eldest, "found herself obliged to be attached to the Rev. Mr. Norris", and Miss Frances, the third sister, Mrs. Price, had married a Lieutenant of Marines, "without education, fortune, or connections". Mrs. Norris wrote a long and angry letter to her sister, and communications stopped for several years.

We subsequently learn quite a bit about Mrs. Norris - she was a great miser, saved a lot from her income; as a widow she was able to have a house in the village, and scrimped on expenses, cadging food and articles of dress and furniture from the Great House. At her suggestion, the eldest Price daughter was brought to live with the Bertrams: Mrs. Norris had no intention of having Fanny live with her. She "had to keep a bed for a friend" in the spare room.

After Marg's presentation and description of Mrs. Norris, we were asked for other opinions. It has become the custom to vilify Mrs. Norris, but should we have some good feelings for her? Irene Howard reminded us it was Mrs. Norris's idea to bring Fanny to Mansfield. Pamela mentioned that she was alone and had to do what was needed to get by. She stepped in when the other sister did not. Virgil Oriente suggested there was perhaps some competition with the eldest sister. The last word was that Mrs. Norris had no life, nothing to do except meddle.

Mrs. Weston was the choice of **Jacque Johnson**. Mrs. Weston seemed to be there to help along the plot, to explain Emma's character. We don't know much about Mrs. Weston's feelings and thoughts. She has long speeches with Mr. Knightley - defends Emma's friendship with Harriet, reveals her concern for Emma's feelings, nothing much about herself. We have to ask ourselves what were her feelings about her "escape" from Emma and Mr. Woodhouse? Her marriage to Mr. Weston is a love match, she seems very happily settled in her own home. She is

presented as “rational,” “unaffected,” “well judging,” “most fortunate,” “intelligent,” “well informed,” “useful,” “musical,” - [Jacquie interjected: “are you nauseated, yet?”] There are only a few negative remarks, e.g. “Jane’s aunt must be very tiresome, so she is with the Eltons a lot.” Comments from the audience included: “She advanced the plot by marrying, leaving no companion for Emma except Harriet;” “she let her poultry house be robbed;” “she was no good at curbing Emma, but lets her do as she wishes all her life.” Others pointed out that she was a governess, and had to be all things to all people, had to indulge her pupil or lose her job.

According to **Viviane McClelland**, **Lady Russell** was a well-provided-for widow, strongly attached to Lady Elliot in the past. She was benevolent, charitable, with good breeding and a cultivated mind. With prejudices in favour of ancestry, she was blinded a little to the faults of the Elliots. She has little taste for the wit or imprudence she sees in Wentworth. Will Anne eventually turn out into someone very like Lady Russell?

Jean Oriente looked at **Mrs. Allen** and the Morlands: they were neighbours and friends. There was nothing or nobody in Fullerton for Catherine. Mrs. Allen was perfect for introducing a young lady into public life: she has “an over-riding concern with attire. She attends every function.” Mrs. Allen shows great skill in responding to any issue with a discussion of clothes; she demonstrates her “intellectual poverty” all through the novel. Mrs. Allen provides genuine comedy: no references to books, no connection to the Northanger Abbey visit. [As an afterthought: who would judge a woman today as to whether or not a man would marry her?]

Joan Reynolds asked what we learned about **Mrs. Gardiner**. She is younger than her sisters-in-law, intelligent, loved by all her family, knows what interests young women. In tune with conversations around her, she doesn’t bring up topics which might pain Jane or Elizabeth. She is well liked, does her best for Elizabeth; she invites Jane to London for a change of scene. Her position in the plot is as someone comfortable and useful. She exposes Jane and Elizabeth to a broader world - relief from and contrast to the rest of the Bennet family. The Gardiners are the only example of a successful marriage for Jane and Elizabeth. They demonstrate the good qualities of persons in “trade” - showing “class” versus “parentage”. Mrs. Gardiner was probably not very mature in years - they have very young children - but she can be considered as the only truly mature woman in the novels. She lifts the plot - elegant, attractive, amusing - part of the new growing middle class, and relations Elizabeth can be proud of.

Mrs. Bennet on the other hand is not. **Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer** sees her as the recipient of emotional abuse since she was a young bride. Even today, like Mrs. Norris, she has a fear of ending up financially insecure. She is mildly on the autistic spectrum: loud voice, not empathetic, doesn’t realize how embarrassing to Jane to force her to stay at Netherfield. She focuses on unimportant details: Lydia is married, it doesn’t matter to her mother how this came about. She is depressed, on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Married to a different, sympathetic husband, she might have been a sensible, calm woman.

All the panelists gave close study to the descriptions of mature women in the novels. They showed how interesting it was to choose one character, and follow her all through the story, thinking of what she said and did. They dug deeply into Austen’s meanings, and expressed keen insights into the characters. We thank these speakers for their preparation, and also give thought to the fact that we are talking about the characters as real people, a credit to their beloved author.

“Come and take choice of all my library, And so beguile thy sorrow.”

Titus Andronicus: William Shakespeare.

Money, Morals and *Mansfield Park* - June Sturrock. March meeting.

In her interesting account of *Mansfield Park*, Sturrock spoke of gross mis-management and corruption, and the moral complications of slavery. Austen's references to Antigua, the site of Sir Thomas' property, are minimal, but readers of her time would be aware of years of propaganda against slavery and the slave trade.

At the beginning of the story, the economy of the West Indies trade was in decline, the planters in financial distress. Sir Thomas had to go himself to assess the situation. He returns tired and despondent. We don't know whether he is for or against the slave trade. During the conversation on the evening of his return, Fanny asked him "about the slave trade", and the result was "a dead silence". Sturrock pointed out that in another author, Fanny's question might have led to further talk on the subject, but not here.

Austen gives us a concise view of Sir Thomas' feelings, especially concerning money and material advantage: he is not entirely led by "lust for gold", but that aspect is often in his mind. Mixed motives habitually impel him. He is motivated by moral standards and worldly interests. He suggested that Maria break off her engagement to the worthless Rushworth, but he didn't press her: he was happy to achieve a marriage of good money. Expediency, selfishness and worldly wisdom guide Sir Thomas all through the novel.

Almost every character (except Fanny!) is described with references to money: Tom is the standard "wasteful heir"; Maria and Julia give "generous" presents to Fanny of "unwanted toys"; Mrs. Norris boasts of the "sacrifices" and "economies" she has made for the Bertram household, and so on.

As in all of Jane Austen's works, *Mansfield Park* needs many re-readings to grasp the richness and complications of the plot and characters. June Sturrock pointed the way.

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Do you need ideas for the perfect dress for the Conference ball?

In September 1814, Jane Austen wrote to her friend Martha Lloyd (*Letters*: 99.1, p.507)

"I am amused by the present style of female dress; the coloured petticoats with braces over the white Spencers and enormous Bonnets upon the full stretch, are quite entertaining. It seems to me a more marked *change* than one has lately seen. - Long sleeves appear universal, even as *Dress*, the Waists short, and as far as I have been able to judge, the Bosom covered. - I was at a little party last night at Mrs. Latouche's, where dress is a good deal attended to, and these are my observations from it. - Petticoats short, and generally, tho' not always, flounced.- The broad-straps belonging to the Gown or Boddice, which cross the front of the Waist, over white, have a very pretty effect I think.-"

Remember that "Miss Tilney always wears white" - although Jane Austen called this "an absurd pretension." "A simple dress is so infinitely preferable to finery" (Mrs Elton !!)

"To be in company, nicely dressed herself and seeing others nicely dressed, to sit and smile and look pretty, and say nothing, was enough for the happiness of the present hour."

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English Country Dance Association.

Michael Dyck and June Harman announce that the Association hosts dances approximately once a month, on Sunday afternoons, in Kerrisdale at the Legion Hall, 1407 Laburnum Street. The next one will be held on April 29th.

For more information, go to the web-site: <http://www.juneharman.com/ecd/> or phone her at (604)-926-0875. Everybody welcome.

And a Delightful Dance it was to be. (Emma p.256)

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BLISTER

I don't need to explain what a "blister" is - the word has been known and used in English since at least about 1300 A.D. Lucky is the person who has never acquired one, but seldom are they as large (and painful!) as Mrs. Croft's.

Admiral Croft tells Anne, when he meets her on the street in Bath, that Mrs. Croft "has a blister on one of her heels, as large as a three shilling piece."

The three-shilling piece was a silver token, not a coin, issued only between 1811 and 1816, as a temporary measure to combat the shortage of small change while the creation of a new silver coinage was under discussion, (this new coinage being introduced on 18th January 1817). The three-shilling piece had a diameter of nearly one and a half inches, which makes poor Mrs. Croft's blister a very large one.



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Annabel Smith: 1923 – 2007.

A long memorial notice in UBC's *Trek* magazine reminded us of JASNA member, Annabel Smith, whose happy personality and insightful comments brightened our Jane Austen meetings some years ago. The magazine article helped us recall our long conversations about the varied interests Ron and I shared with Annabel and her husband Les - Jane Austen's writings, and wilderness travel in B.C., among many other topics. Annabel and Les hiked, canoed and explored almost all of B.C., and even into the Nahanni River area of the Northwest Territories.

We hadn't known much, however, of earlier times in Annabel's life - her childhood in logging communities at Harrison and Sayward; and her close family relationship with their two sons growing up. When the boys left home, Annabel returned to UBC to get her law degree, and had a successful practice for years with a local law firm, both as solicitor and barrister.

Annabel died recently in the palliative care unit at Vancouver General Hospital. She will be happily remembered and sadly mourned. - Eileen Sutherland.

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JANE AUSTEN DAY

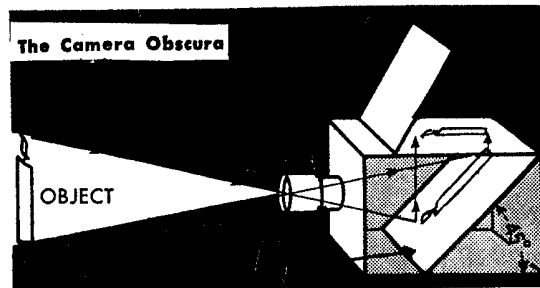
To celebrate our 20th Jane Austen Day, on April 21, our speakers were Marsha Huff, President of JASNA, and Susan Hart, a local lawyer. Between the two talks, we were regaled with a delicious luncheon, partly catered by Barbara Phillips, and partly contributions of “pot-luck” provided by our members. It was a delightful and stimulating day.

Viewing Austen Through Vermeer’s Camera Obscura - Marsha Huff.

Marsha explained the *Camera Obscura*.

This was a device widely used by artists to reproduce large objects before cameras and photographs became common. It consists of a darkened box into which light is admitted through a double convex lens, forming an image of external objects on a surface of glass or paper placed at the focus of the lens. (The principle was known to Aristotle, and the instrument was described by Leonardo da Vinci in 1500).

Jan Vermeer of Delft (1632-1675) was a Dutch painter. Most of his works show middle-class people, alone or in small groups, in simply furnished domestic interiors. They sit or stand before light-coloured walls, illuminated from a window generally placed at the left. They have an air of quiet happiness, with cool blues and yellows in clear soft daylight. The outlines of the figures are soft and slightly blurred.



Marsha compared these people in quiet domestic moments to Jane Austen’s description of her works as miniatures - ‘little bits of ivory’. Both artists had a meticulous selective style, with no details not contributing to the entire plan.

After this general opening, Marsha showed several Vermeer works on a large screen, discussed how the eye could follow a line of chair back, table edge, drapery fold, to come to focus on the main figure of a young woman, perhaps reading or writing a letter, sometimes with a garden background seen through the window. She related each painting to some aspect of Jane Austen’s novels, and three members (Joan Reynolds, Phyllis Ferguson and Evan Llewellyn) read an excerpt that illustrated the connection.



One painting was of a lady at a keyboard instrument, accompanied by a reading of the scene where friends view Jane Fairfax’s new piano, at which Emma very properly took the lead in playing, followed by Jane’s superior performance. The scene was very well read; we felt we were present and could imagine the setting. We picked up clues that Mr. Knightley is becoming interested in Jane, and jealous of Frank - which later we find out is a ‘red herring’.

Another woman at a keyboard, posed a little off-centre, reminded us of Mary Crawford and her harp, with Edmund an ardent listener. We were shown a dozen or more Vermeer paintings, some familiar and some new to us. Every line of Jane Austen’s writing, and every stroke of Vermeer’s painting, were seen as essential to our knowledge: Marsha put them in focus and showed how

they reflected each other in their universal depictions of everyday life. A map on the wall in one painting illustrated the background of the life of the sitter. Jane Austen does the same - the militia, for example, remind us of the wartime setting of her time.

A final connection between the two artists: there is no portrait of Vermeer, but one background character in one painting may be a self-portrait; there is no *known* portrait of Jane Austen, (except Cassandra's slight sketch), but her ideas and opinions are evident in many parts of the novels.

The *camera obscura* was a unique way for an artist to look at the subject of his painting. Marsha's talk gave us an interesting and valuable way to study how Jane Austen crafted her novels.



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The Legal Situation for Women in Jane Austen's Time - Susan Hart.

Susan spoke about the history of the law in England, and the changes through the centuries, before and after Jane Austen's lifetime. Then she explained the significance of specific terms in law, which we have heard of, but perhaps do not really know the meaning of: for example, Common Law, Habeas Corpus, etc.

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Murderous Characters in Austen's Juvenilia.

"Shame, regret, remorse - these appear to be emotions with which they are unacquainted. What these characters do have is a wonderful energy and vitality, an energy which clearly delighted their young author and delights the reader. Nothing disturbs their joyous rampages through life."

Jane Austen and Crime, Susannah Fullerton, p.18.

Books and Bindings.

"The books from Winton are all unpacked and put away; the binding has compressed them most conveniently, and there is now very good room in the bookcase for all that we wish to have there." Jane Austen's Letter #10, October 27, 1798, to Cassandra at Godmersham.

Eileen Sutherland asked Adele Shaak: "Are these new books received from the bookshop with no bindings? Or old books taken to be re-bound? What other options could lead to this situation? Can you explain?"

Adele replied: "I wondered if Winton was perhaps a place or house name or a bookseller name. In that case, these books could have been new to the Austen household either because they were newly purchased or newly inherited. However, the sentence as I read it suggests that the books were previously in the bookcase (because there is 'now very good room') and presumably had been sent out to be rebound, in which case Winton may be a reference to the binder.

It seems to me most likely that these were books that they had owned, that were in poor repair. Bindings of much-read books loosen in time, and the pages puff up slightly, due to handling making the paper uneven, or due to moisture absorption, so a book can take up more space when older than it would when new.

There is also the possibility that these were books that previously weren't bound (i.e., they'd lost their covers) in which case they may have been shelved lying flat, taking up more room in the bookcase than if they were vertical.

If they had some books from the mid-1700s or earlier, the bindings themselves may have been much thicker (i.e., heavier boards were used, the leather covering was thicker and wasn't pared down as much as the calf bindings of the late 18th century).

If you took a number of these books out to be re-bound, the new covers could be thinner than before and the textblocks would have been squished in the press, down to the same thickness they were when new.

When I am repairing books at Centennial [Bookbinders], particularly much-read or much-opened books like Bibles or cookbooks, I often put the disbound textblock in the book press overnight to compress the textblock even before I start work on it. It is hard to judge what size to make the cover if the textblock is puffy.

You know, everybody says what a bore it is when somebody continually gossips about what's going on in their lives, but I can't help wishing, in this case, that Jane's life were much more of an open book. As it is, we can only speculate."



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"I have been reading *Emma*, which is excellent; there is no story whatever and the heroine is no better than other people; but the characters are so true to life, and her style is so piquant, that it does not need the adventitious aids of mystery and adventure."

Susan Ferrier, "Letter to Miss Clavering", 1816.

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Jane Austen Portrait.

That familiar, controversial portrait of Jane Austen has come into the news again recently. The “portrait of a teenager in a white dress holding a green parasol” is to be auctioned at Christie’s this April. The work is by the 18th century artist Ozias Humphry. The fascination lies in the fact that if it is Jane Austen, it is the only known oil painting of the noted British author.

The work is often called the “Rice Portrait”, from the name of that branch of the family who insists it *is* Jane Austen, that it has always been in the family, and is believed to have been commissioned around 1790 by Jane Austen’s great uncle.

However, there is another faction that denies this identity of the sitter. Costume expert, Ailean Ribeiro says “the empire waistline of the girl’s dress, with full short sleeves and flat shoes, was a style that came into fashion in England only in the nineteenth century, when Jane Austen was much older than this sitter.”

Whoever the young lady really was, and whether or not her real identity can be proved beyond a doubt, it is a beautiful work of art, and I hope will be well loved in her new home.

(Thanks to René Goldman for this news item, from
The Canadian Press, AP)



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Stop Press !! Painting Fails to Sell.

At the Christie’s auction in New York on April 19th, the famous “Rice Portrait” failed to reach the reserve price, and was withdrawn from sale. It had been expected to fetch between \$400,000 and \$800,000 U.S. The controversy over the identification of the young woman in the portrait dates back to the 1940s, when leading Austen scholar R.W.Chapman pointed out that the fashions in the picture dated from around 1805, when Jane Austen would have been thirty years old, not from the late 1780s, when she would have been about thirteen, like the sitter.

Another objection is concerned with the supplier’s stamp on the back of the original canvas. Some experts say that the merchant’s mark is not appropriate with the period. The controversy continues.

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“Whoever is fond of an amusing, inoffensive, and well-principled novel, will be well pleased with the perusal of *Emma*. It rarely happens that in a production of this nature we have so little to find fault with.”
The British Critic, July 1816.

“Come, and eat my strawberries. They are ripening fast”.

Here is a period recipe (slightly amended) for a Strawberry Tarte from Mary Atkins:

2 cups strawberries, 4 egg yolks, ½ cup bread crumbs ,
 1/3 cup sugar, 4 Tbsp. butter (melted)
 8” pie shell (see recipe below)

Press berries through a strainer or run through a blender, then mix with everything else. Bake pie shell for 10 minutes, then put filling into the shell and bake at 375° for 20 minutes. Garnish with fresh berries if desired.

Short Paest for Tarte.

¾ cup flour; 1 Tbsp. + 1 tsp water; 4 Tbsp. butter; 6 threads saffron; 1 egg yolk.

Cut butter into flour, then crush saffron into 1 Tsp. of water; mix that and the rest of the water into the egg yolk and stir it into the flour-butter mixture. Roll out or flatten into pan.

The best fruit in England - every body’s favourite - always wholesome.

Jane Austen and the Brain.

Phyllis Ferguson reported about the McMaster Brain Bee for high school students, dealing with questions about the human brain and nervous system. A successful contestant, Mays Ali, when interviewed, said that she loves reading as much as science, and particularly enjoys Jane Austen: “She writes incredibly complex and intriguing characters that are so engaging and lifelike.”

It is good to know a younger generation is following in our footsteps, appreciating Jane Austen.

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This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, is issued 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. Canada. Subscription price to non-members is \$10 per year. JASNA Vancouver Website: <www.jasnavancouver.ca>

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