



Jane Austen Society of North America Vancouver Chapter

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What Canadians were Eating in the Era of Jane Austen

This account of a Georgian feast appeared in the Globe & Mail on July 3, 2010.

The Globe's award-winning writer, Ian Brown, begins his hunt for the nation's gastronomic soul.

Second Bite: Their Cheerful Symmetry

The food at the 12th annual *Friends of Fort York* fundraising dinner, a while after the 13th Street glassfest, was an exact replica of a Georgian dinner that could have been eaten in the officers' mess at Fort York, the buggy hill that became traffic-torn Toronto anytime between 1790 and 1812, not to be too precise.

Except that being precise was the entire point, and was why John Hammond, a retired air-traffic controller, Elizabeth Baird, a cookbook writer and Mya Sangster, a former Scarborough high-school history teacher, were huddled with Bridget Wranich, director of the historical-foods program, in front of a metre-high, hand-drawn diagram of the evening's serving layout.

The dishes to be served to 120 paying notables were "not Georgian-style, or sort of Georgian – they are Georgian" Ms. Sangster insisted. The recipes had been culled from original period cookbooks such as Hannah Glasse's 1747 blowout bestseller, *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy*. "She was probably the *Joy of Cooking* of the 18th century" Ms. Sangster said. Ontario didn't publish a cookbook of its own until 1831.

Every dish in each course had a prearranged spot on the table. "It has to be displayed in a pattern" Ms. Sangster said, "because the Georgians liked symmetry." Plates were passed to the food, not food to the plates; because of all that plate-passing, the Georgians never said please or thank you at the table. The space over the table resembled the approach corridor at Pearson International on a Friday afternoon. Fort York soldiers liked to eat. (There weren't many other pleasures.)

The dinner was three courses of six dishes. It began with a tureen of truly fantastic soup (made precisely from Maria Rundell's 1806 *A New System of Domestic Cookery*: onions, potatoes, turnips, celery, butter, bread, parsley, sage, rosemary, thyme, mushrooms, ketchup and anchovy). What followed was roast beef au jus and horseradish, Excellent Shrimp Pie (that's the name, not the verdict), beetroots with

button onions, fried sausages with apples, broccoli salad and curried eggs. That's the first course, fatso.

When it was removed – “Everything goes on the table at once,” Ms. Sangster instructed in her lilting Welsh accent, “and then it is a remove. It's called a remove” – the second wave arrived.

There's Ragoo of Sweetbreads, Peas the Portuguese Way (with lettuce, mint, sugar, olive oil, parsley, onion, shallots, garlic, savoury, nutmeg, vegetable broth and poached eggs), apricot custard (the Georgians mixed sweet dishes with savoury ones, apparently believing that life is too nasty, brutish and short not to take dessert ASAP), mutton kebabbed, Rhenish cream (a palate-cleansing sabayon) and a spectacular herb pudding (of spinach, parsley, sorrel, thyme, currants, salt, eggs and cream, but nuted and intensified with the addition of oatmeal).

Remove! Third course: fruit and nut platter, the trays of sweetmeats – macaroons, mince biscuits, and chocolate and lemon puffs. Port and toasts ensued. Sleep and bizarre dreams shortly followed.

It was English food from an era when the English were still proud of their butchery, their meat-roasting and their vegetables, just before the French invented the restaurant in Paris and set off 200 years of culinary domination.

“If you're talking 1760,” Ms. Sangster said, “people are eating at noon. If you're talking about 1840, they're now eating in the evening.” (Why? Queen Victoria liked to eat late.)

Lunch was rare, “but, oh yes, they ate breakfast. They usually ate a late breakfast. They worked for a couple of hours first. That would be typical of Jane Austen. She breakfasted about 9:30, after a few hours of writing. Breakfast was served in one's bedroom, by one's personal servant.” One would, frankly, very much like to have a personal servant.

Ms. Sangster was rabid about these details. “I spend my time reading 18th-century cookbooks,” she laughed, as if surprised by her own behaviour. Her hero is Ivan Day, the historian (historicfood.com) who designed, among other spectacles, the table settings in the movie *Young Victoria*.

Ms. Sangster's knowledge was no less impressive. She couldn't mention food without bubbling out an enlightening detail: that the first rhubarb recipe (which came late, because rhubarb required so much sugar, and so was an expensive treat) was a puff, not a pie; that macaroni was popular in the 1800s, in both sweet and savoury versions (Kraft's, weirdly, is both); that early versions of blancmange were set with isinglass rather than gelatin, and that “isinglass is the swimming bladder of a sturgeon.”

One of her prized possessions is an 18th century pewter ice-cream maker. Not the mechanical hand crank, which wasn't invented until the 1840s. No, the 40 ice-cream merchants in England by 1800, mostly Italian immigrants, churned their wares by hand in pewter vessels.

“Ivan owns nine of them,” Ms. Sangster said, “and he offered to sell me one. Ninety pounds. I took my money out of my pocket so fast!” She said she keeps it at home for safekeeping and brings it out for Fort York’s annual Canada Day celebrations.

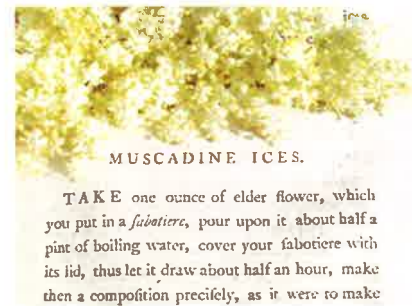
It was an eccentric and pleasant way to spend an evening. We sat boy-girl-boy-girl (a seating arrangement that had come into fashion via France during the reign of George III, though occasionally condemned at the time as “promiscuous”) and the shyly passed plates and chatter back and forth, trying to make our way, via food, into the consciousness of another time.

Many thanks to Elizabeth Walker for bringing this article to our attention. Do check out the ices and all the rest at www.historicfood.com



A Georgian sorbetiere with pewter cannister for making ices.

Recipe for grape ice.



Georgian Era Recipes

Following are 2 recipes (Maye-Daye Cakes, Cold Pudden with Cream) from the Georgian era which JASNA members might find practical to adapt.

They appear in “The Diary of a Farmer’s Wife 1796-97” published by Penquin in 1982. It is an account Anne Hughes wrote of her life in Wales.

April ye 30 – Today verrie bussie, and John at work in the forgronde and not at dinner till late. I did send Sarah home with sum sheetes and a blanket, and divers things reddie for this nights work; then to maken of maye-daye cakes reddie for who shall cum amaying tomorrow, it being maye day. I do make them this way. I do make a paste of white flower and water and butter stiff, and cut in little roundes and fill with the following mess. Sum meat and apple and pare chopt very fine, with a bit of union, sum lemmon tyme and a bit of rosemarie, a taste of pepper and salte and a sprinkle of blacke sugar. This I do place in the little roundes and wet the edges and turn one side atop of the other and presse with hands to make them stick. Then I do beat up a egge and brush over the top and cook in the oven 30 minnetts by the clocke.

Jan. ye 24 – Today we all mightie bussie with the cooking reddie for tomorrow’s partie. John’s mother did showe me how to make a new pudden to eat colde, and we taisting a piece did find it verrie good. This is how it be made: Take 6 apples with the pippes out and leaving on the skin, cut in verrie thin slivers and lay in the bottom of a dish. Cover well with black sugar, and sum fat [suet?] chopt verrie small. Cover all with bred crumbs well soaked with brandy, then more apple slivers and chopt fat, and sugar, then more crumbs well soaked with the brandy; then break 3 eggs in a bowl and beat up with a spoon till frothie, with a measure of the brandy, and pour over all, then cook in the bake oven for 30 minutes by the clock. When it is verrie cold, take a measure of cream and beat it up till it be verrie stiff, but not butterie, and put over the toppe in lumps. This be a verrie daintie dish and good eating.

University of British Columbia Jane Austen Society Prize

A monetary prize has been endowed by the Jane Austen Society of North America, Vancouver Region. The prize is awarded on the recommendation of the Dept. of English for the best essay on Jane Austen written by a third or fourth year student.

At the June 2010 meeting, it was suggested that members of JASNA Vancouver consider making a donation to the *University of British Columbia Jane Austen Prize in honour of Eileen Sutherland* and the tremendous contribution she has made to JASNA. Eileen was the first regional director of JASNA Vancouver, and served in that post continuously for many years. The Vancouver Chapter, under her chairmanship, hosted a major conference in 1986. She was a member of the International Board from 1983 and president of JASNA from 1988 to 1992. She only gave up editing the local newsletter in 2010 and still regularly attends meetings. Eileen served on the organization committee of the JASNA 2007 AGM, which was held in Vancouver.

If you wish to make a donation, please make your cheque payable to UBC and write “Jane Austen Society Prize (Award #01247)” on the memo line. For donations of \$25.00 or more, UBC will issue a tax receipt directly to the donor – so please make sure the donor name and current address are clearly printed.

For more details on how to submit your donation, please contact Phyllis Bottomer at 604-988-6806 pmfb.jasna@gmail.com

Visiting Fellowship at Chawton House Library

By Catherine Morley

The Vancouver Chapter of JASNA opened its 2010-11 program with a presentation by Catherine Morley, who spoke about her stay at Chawton House Library in Hampshire. This centre for the study of early English women's writing is a project of American philanthropist Sandy Lerner, who took up a 125 year lease on the Chawton Manor Estate from Richard Knight in 1992. He is a direct descendant of Jane Austen's brother Edward Austen Knight.

Catherine began her presentation with a short film of the interior and exterior of the buildings, some of the super staff, and the Shire horses and sheep that graze on the pastures. Then she gave us a talk on some of the initial directions her research is taking her in tackling the question of how the ill were treated in the 18th and 19th centuries in England. In her fact-filled talk she told us, for example, about some revolting concoctions and truly blood-curdling medical treatments (like sulphuric acid poultices), and showed us fleeces from the sheep at Chawton Park Farm. Catherine returned home in August, our meeting was in September, and she is still elated about her wonderful experience. The following is an article she has kindly contributed.

When I applied for a Visiting Fellowship at Chawton House Library (CHL) (the home for early English women's writing), I little thought I would be accepted given that I do not hold an academic appointment nor do I have a background in English Literature. As a dietitian/textile artist/independent scholar, my purpose in applying was to confirm for the Selection Committee that all kinds of people are interested in studying the life and times of Jane Austen. Thus it was that my daughters and I let out whoops of delight and danced around the kitchen on that summer day in 2009 when I opened the acceptance letter for a July 2010 Visiting Fellowship.

My proposed program of study combined my interests in dietetics history, textile history, the work of women to [re]create home and family, and learning about life during the Austen era. My primary area of research as a dietitian practitioner-researcher is family experiences of eating in illness. Given the role of women in Jane Austen's time to care for the sick, I was curious about the invalid's dietary of the period and how it related, if at all, to present day dietetic practice. As a new graduate of the Textile Arts program at Capilano University in North Vancouver, BC, I am fascinated with the linens used in the everyday running of households (including food preparation, preservation and service, dining, bathing, and sleeping). I wanted to learn about the linens that the Austens would have used, their fibre content, their origins,

how the fabrics came to be in the house, who might have worked them up, and their life cycle (how long they lasted and how the ragged remains were disposed of).

With this ambitious study plan, and only 17 working days to access the CHL collection (as I attended the British Sociology Society Food Studies Group conference at the British Library on July 5/6), I arrived at Chawton a bit wary that I could make much progress in the available time. I hadn't reckoned on the helpfulness of the CHL staff whose mandate seemed to be that we (the Visiting Fellows) get what we needed to be as productive as possible. For starters, there were two library staff for we four researchers. They couldn't do enough for us – they suggested books we might like to look at, suggested ways to enhance our searching, produced volumes from the storerooms usually within minutes of making a request, made copies of key pages, and whisked away volumes back to storage when we said "I'm done with this, where does it go?" I have never had anything approximating the kind of research assistance I had at CHL so that I could simply concentrate on information getting. It was a researcher's heaven! We, the four VFs, agreed every evening that we were the luckiest bunch of folks we knew.

The invalid's dietary research went far better than I could have imagined. I started by reviewing recipes and identifying commonly used ingredients from cookery books from between 1690 and 1840. Within two days I was completely confused – what were these writers talking about? Why was there such commonality of recipes, and what were they all used for? I decided I needed to extend my search to determine the rationale behind the recipes as I wondered if they related in some way to the belief in the four humours (blood; phlegm; yellow bile; black bile). Sure enough, this was so! The 1793 *Family Magazine* that described the effects of most foods on the humours (unconnected to their physical traits) held the key to this mystery. The belief until at least 1840 was that all conditions were caused by an imbalance of the humours. The most challenging aspect of doing this research was to put aside everything I have learned about human anatomy, physiology, pathophysiology, and medical nutrition therapy, and try to imagine what the people of the Austen era were thinking about how to treat illness and injury. My plans are to revisit my 120 pages of notes, to categorize conditions and foods/ingredients, and see how these relate to food and cookery generally during the period, and to modern day practices with the hope that these findings could inform actions about reforming feeding practices in hospitals today. I also want to investigate the monumental changes in thinking about human nutrition and medical nutrition therapy that took place between 1840 and 1900 (when the profession of dietetics got its start).

The household linens project turned out vastly different than I imagined. While I found virtually nothing about the questions I started with, I learned instead about

Hampshire's role in wool production, that Jane Austen was an expert needlewoman, and that the Jane Austen House Museum (JAHM) has a substantial textile collection. My hope is to further my textile history studies as they relate to Chawton and Jane Austen by returning to the JAHM to catalogue the collection, and to CHL to explore the Chawton House estate's historic contribution to textile production.

While I plan my next research trip, I'll look forward to baking again in the Aga™ cooker, keeping snug in my cozy Stable Block room (where the thick stone walls silenced the winds of a violent summer storm), and Monday evening bell-ringing practices at St. Nicholas' Church just across the drive.

My sincere thanks to the CHL staff and the JAHM staff/volunteers for this enthusiastic reception of and support for my program of study, and to family, friends and JASNA members who followed and provided comments on my blog. My head is now full of plans for articles in dietetics, Jane Austen, and textile related publications, for books, and for related films.

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Fashion Mirrors History: A talk by Ivan Sayers

report by **Sandy Lundy**

Ivan Sayers is a Vancouver-based historian whose main fields of interest include fashion, clothing and textiles. He wove the history of architecture, gardens, technological advances and political events into an amusing and, one might say, action--packed presentation about Georgian era costume on May 15, 2010.

He illustrated his talk with examples of clothing from his own collection, as well as many slides, and began with a helpful listing of books and authors on this genre which appears at the end of this report. Ivan also, very kindly, said that if a group of enthusiasts would like to go to his house to examine the clothing in a more leisurely and detailed manner, that could be arranged. He hasn't got email, so it would be necessary to reach him at 604-872-1230.

Ivan began his talk showing slides of the very wide court dresses in heavy fabrics with paniers of the mid-18th century, and then progressed through to the lighter, apparently simpler, high-waisted dresses of the early 19th century. Cunnington refers to this latter as the columnar silhouette. Ivan showed men's as well as women's clothing. The practices in the royal courts, wars, trade, revolutions, architecture and garden designs, as well as technological advances in textiles all influenced fashion. "Beauty," quoth Ivan, "is a highly movable concept."

The French kings kept their courtiers in close attendance upon them in their palaces, of which they had many in addition to Versailles. The velvet, richly embroidered frock coat of a "French peacock" gave way after the 1789 revolution to a simpler, more tailored and apparently more egalitarian style such as that during the period of the Directoire from 1795 to 1799.

On the other hand, Gainsborough's Blue Boy is an example of the more subdued style of the English, and the British aristocracy was much more independent than the French, and their society accordingly more rural. English gardens, with their idealized natural landscape and meandering paths meant English ladies had to narrow their skirts and be careful not to catch their hems in the foliage, whereas the very formal French gardens with their wide gravelled walks did not present the same hazards.

The theories of the 18th Century Enlightenment, reviving the democratic ideals of classical Greece, inspired the high-waisted dresses of white or solid colors with puffed sleeves redolent of a Grecian column. Lest anyone think that this apparently lighter clothing was any more comfortable than that of previous eras, Penelope Byrde says, "The new short-waisted style of women's dresses, so deceptively simple in appearance could, in fact, be very restrictive, and the tight construction of the raised waistline round the ribcage extremely uncomfortable." As a matter of fact, Ivan showed us an undergarment of this period which can charitably be called an instrument of torture. At the front, in the middle, there was a pocket in which was inserted a wooden implement rather like a gigantic tongue depressor, a flat, thin, stiff board rounded at top and bottom. No wonder those girls look so erect in the illustrations of the era. This device was long and how anyone could sit down is a mystery. Must have been agony! Perhaps this indicates the pride that people of this Georgian era took in their appearance, and the lengths they were prepared to go to achieve it. Ivan says they had *panache*, defined as "the ability to exude the effect of a plume on a helmet."

Trade and technological advances influenced Georgian clothing. The cotton gin and the spinning jenny meant that muslins and other cottons, mainly from India, improved in quality and went down in price. New designs of prints came in, and new ways of wearing lace. With paniers out, and the more form-revealing fashions, there arose the need for pocket books or reticules.

Jane Austen makes many references to clothing and fashion in her novels and letters. In *Emma* Miss Bates bustles breathlessly over to Hartfield with news of Mr. Elton's engagement, exclaiming to Mr. Knightley, "But where could you hear it?...For it is not five minutes since I received Mrs. Coles' note...I had got my bonnet and spencer on, just ready to come out..." Penelope Byrde says, "The spencer was a short jacket cut like the bodice, usually with long sleeves and a high neck. In June 1808 Jane Austen was to write that 'my kerseymere Spencer is quite the comfort of our Evening walks.' Spencers could be made of silk as well as woollen cloth. Kerseymere is a fine woollen cloth with a twill weave."

At our May meeting, since we were so amused and entertained, we learned a lot from Ivan, who convinced us that, indeed, "fashion mirrors history".

Ivan's Book Listing

1. *A Frivolous Distinction: Fashion and Needlework in the Works of Jane Austen*, by Penelope Byrde, 1979. This little book is a guide to specific references which Jane Austen makes to clothing and fashion in her letters as well as the novels. Capilano College Library has a copy.

2. *Fabric of Society: A Century of People and Their Clothes 1770-1870*, by Jane Tozer and Sarah Levitt. Published by Laura Ashley, in the Vancouver Public Library Arts Reference (non-circulating) Division. Illustrated, easy reading.

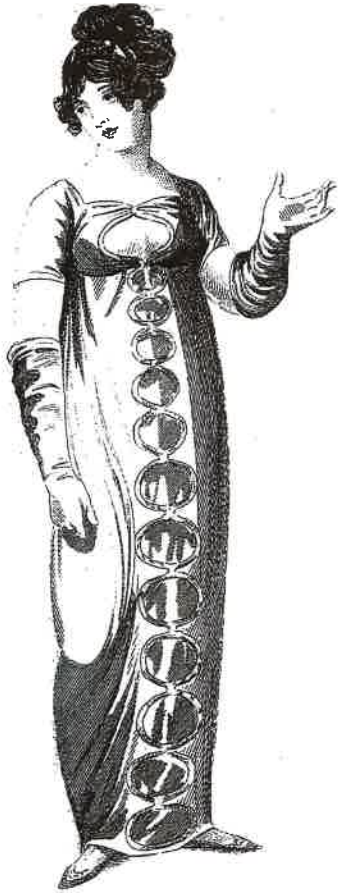
3. *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashion and Fabrics*, edited by Natalie Rothstein, published by Thames and Hudson.

4. *Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century*, in the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, published by Little, Brown & Co.

5. The works of C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington. The 15 or more books written and illustrated by these authors were published as long ago as the 1930's and 1940's and are still considered the authority, i.e. *Handbook of English Costume in the 18th Century*.

6. *Corsets and Crinolines* by Norah Waugh, published 1950.

The accompanying illustrations are of costumes incorporating much lace. This seems appropriate as we had a fascinating talk about lace, given by Adele Shaak, at our Jane Austen Day in April 2010.



1805 Full evening dress,
York Tan gloves



1805 Three promenade dresses showing
Tyrolese cloak, lace borders

This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, is issued periodically. All submissions on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome.

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