

# Muse & Musings

*"The company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation"*

## November 21<sup>st</sup> meeting: - Julia Guest on English Gardens during Jane Austen's time

Jane Austen's lifetime was an important time in European garden history. Fashions changed from formal geometric patterns of 17<sup>th</sup> century (as seen in French gardens) to British liberty, a purity of nature. English gardens could have up to four elements:

The **first element**, closest to the house, combined utility and beauty with fruit, vegetables, vines, trees and flowers. The humble outhouse was built of decorative brick or stone and approached by a circular path so the destination when "plucking a rose" was not obvious.



Gardens at Godmersham, Kent home of JA's brother Edward Knight.

The **second element** was the shrubbery with walks through carefully arranged trees and shrubs. Gravel paths, which helped to keep the feet dry, were laid out in walks that gave the illusion of enjoying nature while safe within confines of the estate. The shrubbery was a well-ordered, man-made place, where the view was always contained, an ideal site for flirtations

The **third element** a woodland park, had trees with winding paths and secret nooks intentionally placed to look natural.

For really grand estates there might be a **fourth element**: a "picturesque" park, a "natural" scene with sweeping

lines and manipulation of light and shade, created by earth moving on a grand scale.

In Jane Austen's time there were tours of picturesque gardens with guidebooks available. In the present day, Julia Guest herself conducts such tours through Travel Concepts, 1-800-661-7176. [Link to Travel Concepts](#)

– from notes by Lorraine Meltzer

## December meeting

### Jane Austen's 240<sup>th</sup> birthday

The meeting began with readings from the opening chapter of Claire Tomalin's biography of Jane Austen read by Sue Kaufman, Bonnie Herron, Richard Mills, and Sandy Lundy. The readings described the hard, cold winter and the Austen's home life during the time leading up to and immediately following Jane Austen's birth on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1775.

Next followed "Behind the Scenes," an imagined conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner after their visit to Pemberley. With Marjorie Johnson narrating, the Gardiners were performed with great gusto by Phyllis and Lindsay Bottomer, who donned their full Regency attire for the occasion. "Behind the Scenes," was written by Washington State author Shannon Winslow and adapted as a live reading. [Link to Behind the Scenes.](#)



Phyllis Ferguson and Lindsay Bottomer as the Gardiners.

After the Gardiners, there was a quiz to identify the owners (characters from each of the novels) of items no longer wanted, found for sale on “Regency eBay.” Phyllis read *Good Night, Mr. Darcy* (a BabyLit® Parody by Kate Coombs and illustrator Alli Arnold, based on the children’s classic *Good Night Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown); there was a lavish luncheon complete with birthday cake, and Ron Sutherland gave the traditional birthday toast.

We also held our inaugural Silent Auction, which raised an impressive \$210!



Phyllis reads “Goodnight;” Ron gives the toast; the cake (below)



– from notes by Joan Reynolds

## Pride and Prejudice at the Stanley

### Instead of a February meeting

As our regular meeting site was unavailable in February, it was decided that members would be encouraged to attend the Arts Club Theatre production of Janet Munsil’s adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* at the Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage, directed by Sarah Rodgers. The original plan, was for a large group to go to the February 4<sup>th</sup> Gala Opening Night performance, with as many as possible wearing Regency gowns. Then Phyllis was invited to speak at the February 7<sup>th</sup> matinee (see below), and several members chose to go to that performance rather than the Gala; some members who are Arts Club subscribers went to their usual performance time; so in the end the Gala group was quite small, and only Joan Reynolds and Elspeth Flood wore gowns.

The play was very well done, with the script cleverly telescoping the action, so that most of one’s favourite

lines appeared, albeit sometimes spoken by a different character or placed in a different scene. Evocative music set the mood and provided accompaniment for the beautifully choreographed scene changes and dances. Violinist Sarah Donald and guitarist Daniel Deorksen were onstage throughout, except when they were playing Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, which they did excellently. The cast sang a lovely rendition of “In the Bleak Mid-Winter” to indicate Christmas. This was unfortunately rather anachronistic given that the words by Christina Rossetti were written in 1872 and the tune by Gustav Holst in 1906.



The Bennet girls: Jane (Kaitlin Williams), Kitty (Kayla Deorksen), Elizabeth (Naomi Wright), Lydia (Raylene Harewood), Mary (Sarah Roa). Arts Club cast photos (above and below) by David Cooper.



Vancouver theatre legend Shirley Broderick as Lady Catherine; Joan and Elspeth in our gowns.

A highlight was Lady Catherine, played by the formidable Shirley Broderick, costumed appropriately in a gown from the previous century. Mr. Darcy, played by Eric Craig, lacked something in character development, but did his best to meet expectations. The casting of Scott Bellis to play both Mr. Collins and Mrs. Reynolds seems an odd choice, as there is nothing particularly comic about the role of Mrs. Reynolds to suggest a drag performance. Indeed, the actor played both roles with admirable understatement. Bellis’s fans, however, laughed uproariously whenever he appeared in either role, which tended



to disrupt the mood a bit. Perhaps this was a sop thrown in for men accompanying their wives or girlfriends.

There were two jarring notes in the script: the first when Lizzy breaks off her friendship with Charlotte; and second when Lydia is not allowed to enter the Bennet house. These incidents are not true to the book and add nothing to the play.

I noticed two characterizations that followed the 2005 (Keira Knightley) film directed by Joe Wright. Actress Amanda Lisman playing Caroline Bingley copied that production's actress (Kelly Reilly) practically tone for tone. And in the final love scene Mr. Darcy appears highly uncharacteristically with no cravat – clearly copied from the film. These are quibbles, however, and I thought it was a good production. At least there was no pig!



*Elizabeth and cravatless Mr. Darcy*  
Actors Naomi Wright and Eric Craig smooch  
Photo David Cooper



*Sarah Roa (Mary) and Joan*  
Photo by Mark Halliday

At the Gala reception following the performance, Joan (our own Mrs. Reynolds) was enthusiastically recognized by Sarah Roa, who made her professional theatre debut playing Mary Bennet. Joan previously met Sarah in November at St. Helen's Church's Austen Night. While they were chatting photographer Mark Halliday took some pictures, including one that appears on the Arts Club Facebook page: [Link to Arts Club Facebook](#)

—by Elspeth Flood

## Bring old unwanted books

### Silent Auction ideas, donations welcome

Every year we have a book sale at our June “Books & Berries” meeting. In recent years, many members have forgotten to bring books to that meeting. We are now encouraging members to bring unwanted books to any and all meetings to be saved up for the June sale. As our Silent Auction was so successful, we would like to repeat it in future Decembers. Please think hard and consult your business contacts for donation ideas.

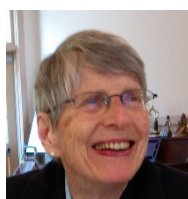
## Phyllis introduces P&P

### Matinee performance bonus

Our past Regional Coordinator Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer was as witty and lively as Jane Austen, in her pre-show talk at the matinee performance on February 7. The two women sitting behind Pam and me remarked to each other, “Well, that was excellent. Way better than usual.”

Phyllis involved the audience (several hundred people) from the start by asking questions, pulling them into the discussion, and getting warm responses. She was informative and engaging on the dynamics of the Bennet family putting in a special plea for Mrs. Bennet. She very much enhanced the event, and did us proud!

—by Aileen Hollifield



## Member Profile:

### Irene Howard

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself and your life to-date.

My childhood was spent in mining camps in Northern B.C. We didn't have books in our home, but I did receive books as Christmas gifts, which were usually about girls in British boarding schools.

I was an elementary school teacher from 1940 to 1945 and a housewife in Toronto in the 1950s; in 1948 I graduated from U.B.C. with a BA; in 1964 I got my MA in English from U.B.C., where I was a lecturer.

In addition to articles in many magazines and journals, I have written four books of local history and biography. My latest book, published in 2008, is *Gold Dust on His Shirt*, which tells my family's story, and in particular that of my father Alfred Nelson, immigrant and miner.

2. When did you join JASNA?

I don't remember exactly when I joined, but it was very early in JASNA Vancouver's existence.

3. How did you first get started with Jane Austen?

During my MA studies in English Literature at U.B.C.

4. What do you like about JASNA?

Idea of friendly people getting together to talk about books.

5. Has JASNA given you any special memories?

I used to write scripts for skits we used to perform – we loved playing dress-up. I wrote a script called “Widows and Orphans: Reflections on Dependent Women” For Jane Austen Day in 1995.

**Editor's note:** Irene's life story is well worth a much fuller article, possibly in a future issue.

## Obituary:

### Barbara Meredith 1922-2015



Many of our members will remember Barbara Meredith, who died in November at the age of 93. Barbara was born in Vancouver in 1922, and was a member of JASNA Vancouver for many years. Her obituary says:

“Barbara was among the first Friends of the Gardens of U.B.C. Botanical Garden – a membership and interest she maintained for a lifetime. The same was true of her passion for the books by Jane Austen. She took part in the activities of the Jane Austen Society of North America for many years.” See the full obituary at:

[Link to Barbara's obituary](#)

## Upcoming Meetings

On **March 12<sup>th</sup>** we welcome Dr. Miranda Burgess, UBC Associate Professor of English, who will speak on “Jane Austen on Paper,” Dr. Burgess will talk about the history of paper in the early 19th Century. The March meeting will also be your only in-person chance to **buy tickets** for Jane Austen Day on April 16. Otherwise, contact Treasurer Elaine Wong at:

[treasurer.jasnavaancouver@gmail.com](mailto:treasurer.jasnavaancouver@gmail.com).

**April 16<sup>th</sup>**, Jane Austen Day, promises to be a real treat. The morning speaker will be JASNA President Claire Bellanti, who will present “You can get a parasol at Whitby’s,” a talk on Jane Austen and circulating libraries. After a delightful catered lunch we will hear about Regency fashion from the ever-popular Vancouver fashion historian Ivan Sayers.

Please note that the May meeting will be on **May 14<sup>th</sup>** – incorrect information was published earlier. For more details visit the JASNA-Vancouver website:

[Link to JASNA-Vancouver program](#)

## RC's Corner

Our Regional Coordinator Michelle Siu has been very busy lately. Besides her job at CBC, she got married in January and has been celebrating Chinese New Year with husband Jeremy, whose mission seems to be cooking beautiful meals for his bride.



*Michelle and Jeremy tie the knot*

To misquote *Emma*: “The wedding had [**no shortage**] of white satin and lace ... The wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the ... friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union.”

The spring brings visitors including New Zealander Ruth Williamson in May, JASNA president Claire Bellanti, who hails from sunny California, and local favourite Ivan Sayers. Bring your selfie sticks and autograph books!

Our programming committee works year-round at choosing and sourcing meeting topics wide-reaching in scope. My thanks go to our committee members: Pam Ottridge (chair), Phyllis Bottomer, Elspeth Flood, Aileen Hollifield, Sue Kaufman, Jayne LaVierge, Joan Reynolds, Elaine Wong (Treasurer).

Volunteer your time! Have an idea for a meeting you’d like to see, but you need a committee to bring it to fruition? You’ve mastered your new computer, so our audio/video equipment would be a breeze: volunteer your time for setup!

Michelle welcomes suggestions and feedback from members. Please talk with her at meetings, or email her: [jasnavancouverRC@gmail.com](mailto:jasnavancouverRC@gmail.com)

**This Newsletter**, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, is distributed to members by email and posted on our website. Members who so request may receive a hard copy either at a meeting or in the mail. All submissions and book reviews on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome.

The Editor acknowledges a great debt of gratitude to Joan Reynolds and Lorraine Meltzer.

Email: [elspeth.n.flood@gmail.com](mailto:elspeth.n.flood@gmail.com) Or mail: Elspeth Flood  
#501 – 1520 Harwood Street  
Vancouver, B.C. V6G 1X9

JASNA Vancouver website: [www.jasnavaancouver.ca](http://www.jasnavaancouver.ca)