

Muse & Musings

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

February Meeting

Robert Burns and the Kilmarnock Edition Spencer W. Stuart



Our February 9th meeting (nearest date to Robert Burns Day, January 25th) featured rare books historian Spencer W. Stuart who presented on "Robert Burns and the Kilmarnock Edition." Although Robert Burns (1759-1796) lived an even shorter life than Jane Austen, dying at only 37, he is a cultural icon for Scotland celebrated all over the world. Indeed his likeness near the entrance to Stanley Park was the first statue put up in Vancouver. It is estimated that he contributes £170 million per year to the economy of Scotland. In addition to his well-known poems in Scots dialect, Burns collected hundreds of folk songs and also wrote lyrics for Scottish tunes.

Jane Austen's *Sanditon* character Charlotte had difficulty separating the man (or his behaviour) from the writer. She said of Burns, "He wrote; he felt; he forgot." Stuart feels that this observation is correct, that Burns's behaviour often contradicted his professed ideas. Although he believed in freedom and equality, in the 1780s he made plans to take a position at a plantation in Jamaica. But in July 1786, before he could go to Jamaica, he published his poems "chiefly in the Scottish dialect" through John Wilson, a printer in his hometown of Kilmarnock. A cautious man, Wilson required Burns to get 239 subscriptions to cover costs of printing.

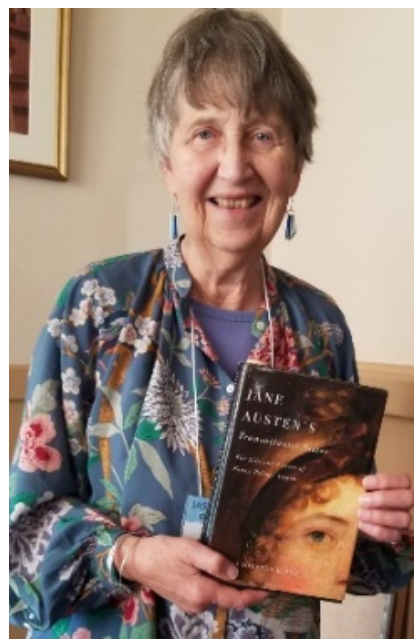
Burns's use of Scots dialect was unique at that time, which may have been the reason for the popularity of his first book. This book is known as the Kilmarnock edition and with only 84 surviving copies is considered one of the

rarest books in Western printing. Burns later published poems that were not in dialect, as well as songs and prose. He died a poor man.

Stuart was suitably impressed during his presentation by receiving our customary glass of wine, "Wow! Austens are partiers!"
— from notes by Lorraine Meltzer

March Meeting

Presenting Fanny Palmer Austen Sheila Kindred



For our March 2nd meeting we had the great good fortune of a visit from Sheila Kindred, author of *Jane Austen's Transatlantic Sister* (published by McGill-Queen's University Press), who was breaking her journey from book-touring in Australia back home to Halifax. Sheila's topic was "Presenting Fanny Palmer Austen," based on the life and letters of Fanny Palmer Austen, wife of Jane's brother Captain Charles Austen. Fanny was born in 1789 in Bermuda and met Charles in Bermuda when he was captain of the *Indian*. Her life aboard Charles's ships may well have been the inspiration for Mrs. Croft in *Persuasion*. They married in 1807 when she was 17 and he was 28. They lived in Bermuda, Halifax and the Nore,

England, where Fanny died aboard Charles's ship at the age of 24 after giving birth to her fourth child.



While they were in Halifax in 1810, Charles and Fanny had their portraits painted by British artist Robert Field; a detail from Fanny's portrait illustrates the cover of the book.

Sheila's talk was interesting, well-illustrated and well-attended. Sheila and her husband Hugh (who sat at the back of the room and sold copies of the book) were delightful guests. For a larger review of Sheila's book see [JASNA News review](#). – from notes by Lorraine Meltzer



*The evening before Sheila's talk, some members took our out-of-town visitors out for dinner. **Left to right:** Elspeth Flood, Joan Reynolds, Hugh Kindred, Susan Kaufman, Lindsay Bottomer, Sheila Kindred, Phyllis Ferguson.*

From Eileen's Archive

Newsletter #8, November 1984

**"Unless they are so stout as to injure their beauty,
they are not fit for country walking."**

We spent several delightful days of our holiday this year in Kent, "in the steps of Jane Austen." Although Jane Austen and her immediate family considered themselves "Hampshire Austens," they had relatives and friends in Kent, and spent many enjoyable visits there. Modern development has transformed the towns and cities, but many of the small villages and the countryside remain much as they were in Jane Austen's time.

We spent our first night at Sevenoaks, where Francis Austen, the uncle of Jane Austen's father, lived in the "Red House." It is now a modern and progressive small town, but parts of the main street and some of the old buildings would have been familiar to the young Jane Austen who visited there – the old church, the impressive brick Red House itself, and the three-storey almshouses, built in the mid-18th century, and so no doubt considered modern and a source of pride to the citizens then.

For the next few days we were based in Canterbury, and explored that city much as Jane Austen must have done. Canterbury Cathedral, its surrounding Close, the old gates, walls and buildings would have been very familiar to her. Her brother Edward's adoptive mother Mrs. Knight became a good friend, and Jane and Cassandra always enjoyed a visit to her home at "White Friars" in the Close, often staying overnight and no doubt taking pleasant walks through the streets of the old city.

Edward Austen was adopted and brought up by the wealthy and childless Knights, and lived in the nearby village of Godmersham. He married Elizabeth, the daughter of Sir Brook Bridges of Goodnestone House, and the young couple and their family lived first at the farmhouse of Rowling, about a mile from Goodnestone.

Anne-Marie Edwards, in a little book called *In the Steps of Jane Austen*, describes these places and gives maps and plans of short walks through country lanes and footpaths. We took one of the walks, starting at Goodnestone Church. The little village of gabled brick cottages still has the peaceful charm that Jane Austen must have known; the little shop dates from the mid-18th century. She would not recognize the church, however, except for the tower, as it was rebuilt in the 19th century.



Aerial view of Kent.

We started our walk down a pretty lane, edged with elms, chestnuts, brambles and elderberries. The high wall and trees on one side hid most of Goodnestone House, except for a dignified porch and pediment with an impressive

coat of arms above it. Past the Lodge gates, and then past a charming thatched Tudor farmhouse, the lane twisted and turned, giving us beautiful views of woods or farmland, an old white painted post mill, and finally the copse that nearly hid the Rowling House. What little we could see showed the driveway sweeping up the hill to a charming rambling house, which must have had lovely views over the fields to the hills beyond. In her letters, Jane Austen describes happy visits to both Goodnestone House and Rowling House, where she and her sister dined, danced, walked and relaxed with Edward and Elizabeth, their family and friends.



View of Godmersham House across the fields.

Back again through the village to the church, we were taken up the old tower by “old Jack,” as the custodian was called by his friends at the Fitzwalter Arms – a rather unnerving experience, the narrow winding stairs providing very uncertain footing, and the flickering flashlight lighting the way for old Jack himself but not giving us much help as we climbed behind him. The view from the top was well worth it, however, as we could look over the roofs of the village cottages, across the lush Kent farmland almost to the sea, only seven miles away, and below us the walled gardens of Goodnestone House with its “Holly walk” being replanted as it was when Jane Austen walked there.

Another day we drove to Godmersham, the home of the Knights, where Edward was brought up, and where he and Elizabeth moved with their young family when his father Thomas Knight died. The house is in private hands, and not too friendly ones, judging by the notices on the gates that unleashed dogs were liable to be shot. (My family started making jokes about Jane Austen visiting her brother for the annual dog-shoot, but I ignored them.) We visited the charming little church, with its semi-circular Norman apse, probably very much the same as when Jane Austen worshipped here. It has memorials to Thomas and Catherine Knight, and to Edward and Elizabeth, and on one of the buttresses outside is a memorial plaque to their children’s nurse Sackree, who was mentioned with affection by Jane Austen in her letters.

From the church we walked down a lane beside the Park wall, through the Lodge gates and across a field to the beginning of a footpath which gradually led uphill to the North Downs Way. As we climbed we got a good view of Godmersham House across the fields, and in the other direction the Stour River, winding through meadows and copses. The house was built in the early 18th century, with long low classical lines, and may have been the inspiration for Darcy’s house, Pemberley.

In *Companion Into Kent*, Dorothy Gardiner writes of one of Edward’s plantations, “Bentigh had the charm of being Edward Knight’s creation . . . he had made it from a ploughed field, planted the avenues, plotted the gravel walks . . . his guests sauntered there in leisurely fashion and took a short way through it to church. The high road at this time closely skirted the adjoining estates of Godmersham and Chilham; going towards Canterbury, a traveler had the Stour on his right hand instead of on his left as now. The enterprising Mr. Knight crossed the Stour and planted round about “the Temple,” a summer house one may still see from the highway.”



Our next stop was the little village of Chilham, which would have still looked familiar to Jane Austen, with its old Norman church and tall tower, and the village square, now a parking lot, surrounded by rows of brick cottages and the old coaching inn, now housing boutiques, cafes, and antiques shops. Chilham Castle, where Jane Austen visited and attended balls, was closed, but we walked down pretty lanes and found a bookshop full of tempting books old and new, including a tiny copy of Jane Austen’s *History of England, by a partial, prejudiced and ignorant Historian*.

The Kent countryside is prosperous-looking, and the charming little villages are neat and well cared for. It made a delightful few days of relaxing peaceful holiday, driving down the twisting lanes, and exploring a part of the country that Jane Austen would have known well and enjoyed through many visits.

– by Eileen Sutherland (1984)

From Our Library

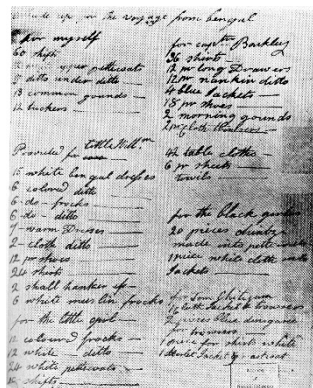
The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley: 1769-1845 by Beth Hill



Frances was just 17 years old when she married Captain Charles Barkley, and for eight years she lived with him on his ship, as they circumnavigated the world, trading with locals, exploring foreign lands and raising children. These travels included stops in Hawaii, Alaska and British Columbia where she was possibly the first white woman to set foot in these new lands. Frances Island and Barkley Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island are testaments to their time here.

Frances kept a diary during these years, but unfortunately this has been lost. Later in life she wrote *Reminiscences*, in which she recounted these early years. The author Beth Hill used *Reminiscences* as the basis for this book, and then set Frances's experiences in the wider context of contemporary explorers and traders, quoting from other original sources.

The result is a well-researched book about the life of a woman on board a trading ship at the end of the eighteenth century. As well, it is an interesting complement to Sheila Kindred's book, *Jane Austen's Transatlantic Sister: The Life and Letters of Fanny Palmer Austen*, which was presented at our March meeting. Jane Austen's sister-in-law Fanny Austen also lived on board her husband's ship around the same time, but her travels were less extensive than those of Frances.



Clothing list for a voyage written
by Frances Barkley in Calcutta,
1792.

I would recommend this book to those with an interest in either eighteenth century exploration, including the west coast of British Columbia, or the life of a Captain's wife on board a ship at this time. This book is in our Library, so borrow it if you are interested.

– Cathleen Boyle, librarian

Puzzling People: SFU 55+ Course

Given by Phyllis Ferguson

I spend a good deal of my retirement time taking classes offered to “seniors” at SFU Harbour Centre. This past term I chose a course presented by Phyllis Ferguson entitled “Puzzling People: Fictional Characters with Autistic Spectrum Disorders.” This is a variation on a theme we have heard Phyllis speak (and write) on before, first with respect to *Pride and Prejudice* (see Phyllis's book *So Odd a Mixture*) and later with respect to all Jane Austen's works, so I thought I knew what I was going to hear – but I learned a lot more.



Mr. Casaubon of *Middlemarch* by George Eliot is a character displaying autistic traits (played by Patrick Malahide in the 1994 miniseries).

The course description begins: “There have always been people significantly challenged by the intricacy of neurotypical social interaction and communication.” SFU was initially skeptical about offering this course, but it achieved a full enrollment of 50 people plus a waiting list.



Laura Wingfield of *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams (played by Jane Wyman in the 1950 film) is another such character.

At the beginning of the first class, Phyllis asked how many in the class were close to someone who was diagnosed on the autistic spectrum. I think this accounted for more than half the attendees. A great many in the class came, not to discuss literature, but to learn more about autism. Fortunately Phyllis came prepared to share what

she has learned about autism in her career as a speech language therapist. When she was training at McGill forty-five years ago, she was told that they would not be dealing with autistic children because “they don’t talk.” By the time she retired, they composed a significant part of her caseload at every school.



Though not one of Phyllis’s examples, I suggest Plantagenet Palliser of Anthony Trollope’s Palliser novels is another candidate (played by Philip Latham in the 1974 miniseries).

One of Phyllis’s themes is that conversation, especially in groups, is one of the most difficult and complex things we do with our brains: it is all improvised in real-time with constant changes of subject and speaker. Phyllis demonstrated this with a little play-acting. (I’m very poor at these things – I tend either to monologue or to remain silent.) I realized while she was explaining all the unwritten rules and intricacies of conversation that of all my acquaintance perhaps Phyllis is the most skilled at this.

Phyllis demonstrated her mental agility in how she adjusted her material on the fly to spend more time on autism and less on literature. After every class she went home to research the things she had been asked about in that class.

– Elspeth Flood

Member Profile

Cathleen Boyle

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

I was born and raised in Vancouver, the oldest of six children. I attended UBC after high school and did my degree in English Literature; I loved the 19th Century writers. At age 35 I went back to university and became a Dietitian. I am now retired and live with my spouse Rich and dog Nikki in North Vancouver. Besides keeping myself physically fit with running, cycling and hiking, I also pursue my loves of travelling, reading and keeping up with my large extended family.

2. When did you join JASNA?

I joined JASNA more than 10 years ago, and began attending meetings on a regular basis about eight years ago. My colleague at the time, Cathy Morley, said to me one day, “You have a degree in English Literature; you should come to the Jane Austen meetings in Vancouver.” And so I did, first on a casual basis and now regularly. (Many of you will remember that Cathy Morley was an active member of our Vancouver Region until she moved to Nova Scotia where she became actively involved in their Region.) I accepted the role as librarian for our Vancouver group about five years ago – I hope that members will continue to borrow books from our wonderful collection.

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

I was an avid reader growing up (my mother’s legacy to me) and sometime in my teens I discovered the Brontës, whose passionate characters captured my teenage imagination. At university I came to appreciate the more subtle characters and social commentary of Jane Austen. I still love these writers and their contrasting literary styles.

4. What do you like about JASNA?

There are two things I really enjoy about JASNA. One is the variety of topics and speakers which the Planning Committee provides for us. We are not just introduced to interpretations of the writer, her novels and her times (which are of course very interesting), but also topics less directly related, for example, beaver hats, bitters, paper, and circulating libraries to name a few. I also enjoy the camaraderie and collective knowledge of the members which makes for wonderful conversations over our finger food lunches.



Cathleen on the Mekong.

5. Has JASNA given you any special memories? New friends? Inspiration to new experiences?

My memories are of specific speakers and of members who I have gotten to know over the years.

Spring 2019 meeting dates

Mark your calendar!

- May 11 Panel of aunts in Jane Austen led by
Phyllis Ferguson
- June 15 Books & Berries (and Book Sale)
Bring your unwanted books to sell!

For fuller and more up-to-date information (thanks to webmaster Laureen McMahon), please see the program of events on our website:

[JASNA-Vancouver program](#)

RC's Corner: Michelle Siu

Volunteers

If you are an early bird, we need your help! Before our meetings can start we are in need of members to help with setup of the room. More helping hands make light work of placing chairs and tables in the right spots. If you can join these helpers, please show up at St Philip's before 9:45am.

Similarly, help is needed at the end of each meeting to clean up the dishes and put away the furniture. Thanks to

Lorraine Meltzer for stepping up to help at the registration desk, and to Azarm Akhavian for helping coordinate Member Profiles for this publication.



Volunteers setting up for Jane Austen's birthday in December.

If you have programming suggestions, please approach me at our meetings or email me at:

JASNAvancouverRC@gmail.com

Coming next month

Our members' review of the Metro Theatre's production of *Persuasion*.

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.

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

JASNA Vancouver website: www.jasnavancouver.ca