

Muse & Musings

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

October 19th Meeting AGM at Williamsburg

As Williamsburg, Virginia is not that easy to get to from here, a smaller than usual contingent attended from Vancouver this year. We heard from Aileen Hollifield, who was a last-minute sub for an ailing Keiko Parker, Pam Ottridge who read Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer's report and Nancy McLean whose forebears actually lived in colonial Williamsburg.

Aileen reported on plenary speeches by Jocelyn Harris about the value of Catherine Morland; by Janine Barchas on editions of *Northanger Abbey*, including the fact that the same plates were used to print cheap editions from 1833 into the 20th century; and a breakout on Gothic novels in Jane Austen's time.

Phyllis reported on breakouts by James Nagle about the British army, and by Elizabeth Veisz saying that Catherine was an early Nancy Drew; and a plenary by Dr. Roger Moore suggesting that Catherine's ejection from Tilney's (Abbey) home was similar to the ejection of nuns from convents by Henry VIII.



Nancy McLean speaks about her experiences in Williamsburg

Nancy McLean was very interested in seeing where her ancestors, who had been slave owners, had lived in the elegant setting of Williamsburg. Reenactors who portrayed people of the time included stories of people who had been enslaved. Nancy asked one reenactor how his character could condone slavery, and was momentarily rewarded by the "dead silence" that met Fanny

Price's question about the slave-trade. However, the reenactor rose to the occasion and commended her courage in asking the question, and said we cannot judge our history by today's ideas.

Celebrating 40 years of JASNA Behind the Scenes Look at the Founding of JASNA by Damaris Brix



Damaris with Janice Mallison, who chaired the meeting; on the screen are Damaris's mother Joan Austen-Leigh and Jack Grey, two of the three founders of JASNA.

Damaris's presentation, shortened from an article in [Persuasions No. 15](#) was enlivened with many illustrations in her slideshow and by memorabilia that she brought. Joan Austen-Leigh edited the journal *Persuasions* for 10 years. She also wrote and edited the Canadian newsletter *Quips and Quotes* and served as Regional Coordinator of JASNA.

– Elspeth Flood from notes by Lorraine Meltzer

November 16th Meeting Conan Doyle is no Jane Austen Dr. Sheldon Goldfarb



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was the author of Sherlock Holmes, a character who is far more famous than his author. Dr. Goldfarb's title stems from his perception of Jane Austen as a writer of marriage plots. He contends that although ACD has one or two marriage plots in his "canon," they weren't very good and his novels and stories tend more to the Boys' Own Adventure genre.

ACD was constantly trying to stop writing Sherlock Holmes so he could concentrate on his (long-forgotten) “serious” writing – but his public and his publishers kept demanding more Holmes. His marriage-plot story, which married off Holmes’s sidekick Dr. Watson, was an early attempt to end the Holmes stories by weaning Watson from adventure and into domestic life. Thereafter, most of the stories were told as flashbacks to Watson’s days of bachelordom. Even when ACD had arch-villain Moriarty kill Holmes, he had to bring him back to life.



Dr. Goldfarb signs a copy of his book for Jennifer Cothran.

Although Jane Austen portrayed many clergymen she wrote very little about religion. ACD, on the other hand, had few clergymen, but a thread of religiosity ran through his work. His was not conventional religion, however, but spiritualism: He also wrote books about spiritualism, which was popular in the Victorian era.

Dr. Goldfarb’s talk was entertaining and interesting touching on many ideas and areas of thought about both ACD and JA. After his talk Dr. Goldfarb sold and signed copies of his new book *Sherlockian Musings*.

– Elspeth Flood from notes by Lorraine Meltzer

From Eileen’s Archive

Newsletter #101 February, 2008, For Jane’s 244th Birthday: Birthday celebrations through the ages

Special birthday celebrations have a long history, going back to realms of magic and religion. The custom of offering congratulations and gifts and celebrating with candles in ancient times were meant to protect the celebrant from demons, and ensure safety in the coming year. As early as the 4th century AD, Christianity rejected birthday celebrations as pagan customs. The Bible mentions a birthday only in connection with royalty – Pharaoh, Herod, etc.

The early Greeks and Romans believed that everyone had a protective spirit or demon who attended his birth and watched over him all his lifetime. This spirit had a mystic relation with the god or goddess on whose birthday the

individual was born. This idea has been carried down through the centuries to today’s belief in a guardian angel, a fairy godmother, and patron saints.



Lighted candles on cakes began with the early Greeks. Honey cakes, round as the moon, and lit with candles, were placed on temple altars (in memory of Artemis, the goddess of the moon). In folk belief, birthday candles are endowed with special magic for granting wishes. Lighted candles and sacrificial fires have had a mystic significance ever since man first set up altars to the gods. Birthday candles thus are an honour and a tribute to the birthday child, and bring good fortune.

Traditional greetings of “Happy Birthday” and wishes of happiness are an intrinsic part of this holiday – originally rooted in magic. The working of spells for good or evil is the chief magic of witchcraft. You are specially susceptible to such on your birthday, as your personal spirits are around at this time. Birthday greetings have power for good or ill because you are closer to the spirit world on this day.

Jane Austen did not mention a birthday in any of her surviving letters to Cassandra*. In the novels, there is only one reference. That is Harriet babbling to Emma about “Robert Martin’s birthday was the 8th of June, and my birthday is the 23rd – just a fortnight and a day’s difference! Which is very odd!”



Left: Roman copy of an ancient Greek statue of Artemis at the Louvre. Right: Robert Martin and Harriet

The only exception to this historical lack of any birthday celebrations was in the coming of age on an eldest son, which was a special event among people of wealth and estates, and in the case of the reigning monarch, whose birthday was an important event remembered and celebrated every year. Queen Victoria reigned so long that her birthday, the 24th of May, is still a national holiday.

And now, with the sort of irony that Jane Austen herself would have delighted in, here we are celebrating Jane

Austen's birthday – something she probably never did in her own lifetime. – *Eileen Sutherland, February 2008*

Thanks to Joan Reynolds for typing out the preceding selection, and for researching and adding the following:

***Postscript by Joan:**

Jane Austen did in fact remember birthdays: Cassandra's birthday was mentioned twice in her letters, as well as her own birthday in a poem – but that was a sad recollection regarding the loss of her friend, Mrs Lefroy.

Steventon: Saturday, January 9, 1796 – Letter to Cassandra

In the first place I hope you will live twenty-three years longer. Mr. Tom Lefroy's birthday was yesterday, so that you are very near of an age.

Steventon: Tuesday, January 8, 1799 - Letter to Cassandra

I wish you joy of your birthday twenty times over.

Poem by Jane Austen December 16, 1808

To the Memory of Mrs. Lefroy Who died December 16 – my Birthday

The day returns again, my natal day;
What mix'd emotions with the Thought arise!
Beloved friend, four years have pass'd away
Since thou wert snatch'd forever from our eyes.

– *Joan Reynolds*

The Further Importance of Aunts

For the May meeting, a panel discussed the importance of various aunts in the novels. Elspeth Flood, being editor of this missive, published her piece on Mrs. Phillips in the June issue. Joan Reynolds, who spoke on Miss Bates and Mrs. Gardiner, kindly submitted her two pieces for future issues.

Mrs. Gardiner: Aunt to the Bennet daughters

We first meet Mrs. Gardiner in Volume II of *Pride and Prejudice* with the Gardiner's Christmas visit to Longbourn. "Mrs. Gardiner, who was several years younger than Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Philips, was an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces" (although she is most particularly fond of the two eldest Bennet sisters). She is unique however in that she is an aunt by marriage only, having married into the family, so is not related by blood as is the case with Aunt Phillips, Mrs. Bennet's sister.

If Mrs. Bennet was married at around 20 years old and has been married 23 years, then that must put Mrs. Gardiner around her mid-thirties, not that old at all. Her husband, Mrs. Bennet's brother is "a sensible, gentlemanlike man,

greatly superior to his sister, as well by nature as education." They have four lively young children, "two girls of six and eight years old, and two younger boys." The Gardiners appear to have a solid marriage based in mutual respect and similar intellects and manners. He is in trade, gentlemanlike, and upwardly mobile, part of the new rising middle class. His wife is from the small village of Lambton, near Pemberley, but their lives are in London, in the bustling, unfashionable area of Cheapside in the City, far removed from the quieter towns of Hertfordshire, and Derbyshire. They enjoy cultural pursuits, and they attend the theatre when Elizabeth comes to visit them in London.



Mrs. Gardiner played by Barbara Shelley in 1979 and by Joanna David in 1995.

Elizabeth Bennet's Aunt Gardiner is her good friend and confidant: gracious, articulate and wise, warm and approachable. She is fully rounded, and comfortable in her own skin: She is thoughtful and generous, and has time for people. She certainly knows how to listen and when hearing about Mr. Wickham, counsels Elizabeth wisely on avoiding an imprudent match, and Elizabeth values her advice.

When Mrs. Gardiner meets Wickham for the first time, she is already suspicious and "narrowly observed" him and Elizabeth together – she's already a little concerned. She is tactful but she doesn't pull any punches in dissuading Elizabeth from giving Wickham any further encouragement. She pretty much nails Wickham for the charming opportunistic schemer that he is. She certainly picks up on the fact that Miss King only becomes of interest to Wickham when she suddenly comes into an inheritance. That said, Mrs. Gardiner doesn't let on to Wickham how she feels and is able to charm him and be charmed by him when she learns that he knows her hometown and updates her on events and people that she has lost touch with. I find it interesting that thereafter Wickham loses interest in Elizabeth, and I wonder whether he realizes that some of the bad reputation he left in Lambton might be discovered through mutual connections Mrs. Gardiner might rekindle. Regardless, he drops the pursuit and Elizabeth does not have to make any

difficult decisions. Certainly, Mrs. Gardiner's gentle advice and intervention is a wonderful instance of advice being given that does not create resentment.

Uncle and Aunt Gardiner bring Elizabeth with them on a tour to Derbyshire, and persuade her to visit Pemberley, where she sees Darcy's home and its beautiful grounds and hears how well respected and liked Mr. Darcy is. She meets Mr. Darcy again and is warmly introduced to his younger sister – all while the Gardiners are there to observe. They receive warm hospitality and respect from Mr. Darcy, who really enjoys the Gardiners, while Elizabeth finally feels that her family has someone she can be proud of. They are gracious and polite in the Pemberley company, keeping the conversation from flagging, while the Bingley sisters are taciturn and aloof. This is when matters start to shift for Elizabeth.

Later it is the Gardiners who act as cover to conceal Mr. Darcy's funding of Wickham's marriage to Lydia. And it is Aunt Gardiner who fully explains to Elizabeth what Darcy has done for the Bennet family, which he wants kept secret. Elizabeth now realizes how much he still cares for her. Without the presence of the Gardiners we might not have had Darcy and Elizabeth reunited.

Aunt Gardiner is crucial to the plot, as trusted mentor and friend – Elizabeth's "true" mother – and the means of bringing Elizabeth and Darcy's together. With all the upset of Lydia's elopement, and all the hysterics of Mrs. Bennet to contend with, what a beacon of sanity and support Mrs. Gardiner is to Elizabeth.



Phaeton and a pair of cream ponies by George Stubbs, c. 1780

I really like Mrs. Gardiner – I have always liked the line: "I shall never be quite happy till I have been all round the park at Pemberley. A low phaeton, with a nice little pair of ponies, would be the very thing." One can see that when Elizabeth is married, the Gardiners will visit as often as they can as they are such good company, and besides Mrs. Gardiner is a local. Mrs. Gardiner is the one character in the novel who can provide both friendship

and counsel to Elizabeth as well as that model of a good respectful marriage that Elisabeth's own parents cannot.

Upon my most recent reading of the visit to Pemberley I was struck by the extreme fatigue that Mrs. Gardiner, a relatively young woman, suffers as while walking around the estate. It occurred to me that with her youngest child probably around two years old that she might indeed be pregnant again.

I often wonder whether Mrs. Gardiner was inspired by any real person, and I would venture that she is in part based on Jane Austen's great friend and mentor, Mrs. Lefroy who was an elegant and educated wife, mother, writer and educator of the poor. It was Mrs. Lefroy who had the task of re-directing young Tom Lefroy from any idea about Jane Austen as a future wife, and I do wonder if a similar conversation took place between Jane and Mrs. Lefroy about the realities of marriage and money, as Mrs. Gardiner had with Elizabeth. It would have been a delicate conversation, but Mrs. Lefroy and Jane Austen remained firm friends even after Tom Lefroy returned home to finish his studies and settle down with his well-off bride.

– Joan Reynolds

Chicken spotting

From JASNA NorCal's newsletter

Excerpt from a June 2, 1947 letter from Dorothy L. Sayers to fellow author C.S. Lewis:

I have no news, except that — looking forward to the confidently-expected food-crisis, I have purchased two Hens. In their habits they display, respectively Sense and Sensibility, and I have therefore named them Elinor and Marianne. Elinor is a round, comfortable, motherly-looking little body, who lays one steady, regular, undistinguished egg per day, and allows nothing to disturb her equanimity (except, indeed, the coal-cart, to which both take exception). Marianne is leggier, timid, and liable to hysterics. Sometime she lays a shell-less egg, sometimes a double yolk, sometimes no egg at all. On the days when she lays no egg she nevertheless goes and sits in the nest for the usual time, and seems to imagine that nothing more is required. As my gardener says: "She just thinks she's laid an egg". Too much imagination — in fact, Sensibility.



Elinor and Marianne?

The original article in pdf format can be found at this link under Autumn 2019: [Dorothy L. Sayers to C.S. Lewis.](#)

In Memoriam Ruth Nesbitt 1923-2019

We recently discovered that our member Ruth Nesbitt, who moved to Vernon two or three years ago to be near her niece, died in January. The published obituary provided virtually no information: *Ruth Eleanor Nesbitt was born on January 23, 1923 and passed away on January 29, 2019.*

An online search revealed a bit about her life:

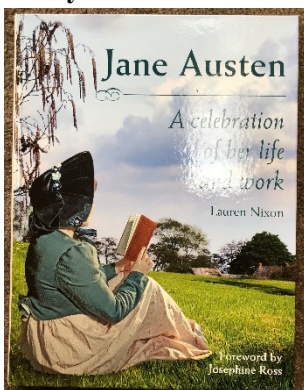
In 2014, Ruth, who was an intrepid traveller, visited the Juno Beach Centre, which published the following on their website:



We were delighted to have a visit from Ruth Eleanor Nesbitt, who served in the Women's Division of the Royal Canadian Air Force for four years in Ottawa during the Second World War. One of 50,000 Canadian women who served in uniform during the war. Thank you for your service, Ruth!

Library Corner

Jane Austen: A Celebration of Her Life and Work by Lauren Nixon



This book was recently donated to our library. It was published in 2011 to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the first publication of *Sense and Sensibility*. It is a large format book and therefore a little awkward to hold while reading, but I found it worth the effort.

The first chapters summarize Jane Austen's life, her family, and the social background of her times. I was particularly interested in the Jane Austen Timeline which lines up the events of her life with events in the UK and Ireland, events in Europe and events in the rest of the world. It is easy to find world events that may have influenced her writing or been referenced in them.

Following this are chapters devoted to the discussion of each of her six novels, which include contributions by well-known Austen commentators. Included in each chapter are descriptions of Regency life that are prominent in that particular novel: transportation, fashion, food and farming, music and dance, and the Church. As well, each of these chapters includes a description of the geographical settings, including Bath, Surrey, Lyme Regis, Derbyshire, and London.

This book also has lovely illustrations, and lots of them. There are cartoons from Jane Austen's times, drawings from early editions of her novels, sketches of fashions and paintings of the time. It brings to life the historical times of this book to further enhancing its readability.

– Cathleen Boyle

Jemima Puddle-Duck:

Homage to Lydia?

Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer, who never stops looking for Jane Austen on her travels, saw the following picture on her visit to Hill Top, Beatrix Potter's home in Cumbria. The caption with the picture said:



*Jemima Puddle-Duck's shawl and poke bonnet are reminiscent of a much earlier era and it is tempting to view this story of the (almost) fallen Jemima as an homage to Jane Austen's Lydia Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*, as she falls for the charms of the dashing foxy-whiskered gentleman.*



Winter and spring 2020 meeting dates

Mark your calendar!

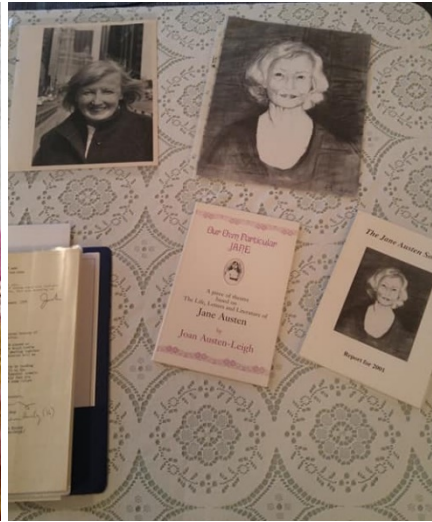
February 15 Program to be announced

March 21 Program to be announced

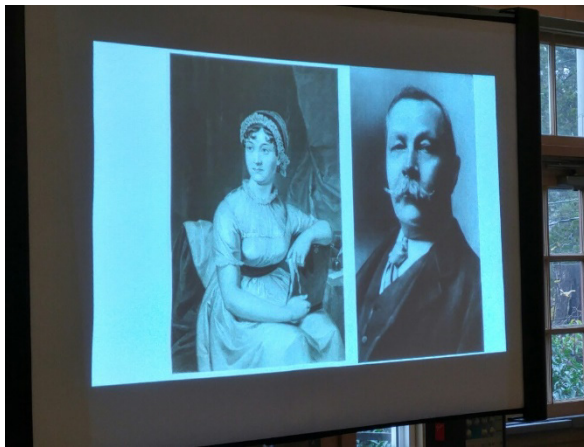
Further spring dates coming soon!

Please see the program of events on our website for more up-to-date information (thanks to webmaster Lauren McMahon): [JASNA-Vancouver program](#)

Gallery



October 19th meeting: *Left:* To celebrate the founding of JASNA in October 1979, we had a 40th birthday cake. *Centre:* Presenter Damaris Brix brought some of her mother Joan Austen-Leigh's memorabilia. *Right:* Potluck.



November 16th meeting: Dr. Sheldon Goldfarb lectures on Jane Austen and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. **Right:** On November 20th a few members attended a lecture at UBC by Dr. Lise Gaston (pictured, *centre* of group) on "Sanditon: Jane Austen's Last Work and Family Legacy" – Dr. Gaston is an excellent student of Austen and we hope at some point to have her speak at one of our meetings.



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.

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