Birthday Tea

Saturday, December 5, 2015
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

“Village Life in Jane Austen’s England: The View from the Parsonage”

Sara Bowen, JASNA-Wisconsin

The Fortnightly of Chicago
120 East Bellevue Place, Chicago

Parking at 100 East Bellevue • $15 for Fortnightly events

TEA REGISTRATION FORM

Members: $40; Guests: $50
Registration deadline: December 1, 2015

Member Name ___________________________

Guest(s) Name(s) ___________________________

Address ___________________________ City __________ State _____ ZIP ______

E-mail ___________________________ Phone __________________ Amount enclosed $________

You can register by

1. Going online to www.jasnachicago.org and pay using your Visa or MasterCard. or
2. Mailing your check—payable to JASNA-GCR—and this form to Cathy Feldman, 1301 N. Astor St., Chicago, IL 60610.
Jane Austen, Living in Our World

As you have been reading in this newsletter, “Living in Jane Austen’s World” was the theme of this year’s JASNA Annual General Meeting in Louisville (see pp. 3–7 for images as well as impressions from GCR members). JASNA-GCR’s own contributions to this theme will conclude with our annual Birthday Tea on December 5, as Sara Bowen looks at life in the English country village (see the cover and p. 8 for more details).

All this discussion of living in Austen’s world has made me wonder: how would Jane Austen respond if she could suddenly be transported to our world? I’m aware that this is hardly an original thought. The theme of time travel has often been cleverly and entertainingly employed in Austen-inspired fiction and media, including the ITV series Lost in Austen and the novels of Laurie Viera Rigler, Laurie Brown, and Jennifer Petkus, to name a few. There are the obvious things that would likely make Austen experience cultural whip-lash: the staggering advances in technology and medicine (and you wouldn’t have to come all the way from 1815 to feel overwhelmed by all of that; a shorter jaunt from, say, 1965 would do the trick); the huge expansion in career opportunities for women; and the fact that a couple living together before marriage is not the devastating scandal it once was.

We all like to think we know how Jane Austen would react to the world of 2015. More specifically, we like to think that she would take “our” side in the controversies of the day. One of the questions most commonly posed today is “Was Jane Austen a feminist?” I would say “yes”, with qualifications: she seems both frustrated with and resigned to what we would now consider the shockingly limited choices available to women in her time.

Or take same-sex marriage (I did say “controversies”, so you were warned). We know that Austen was a reasonably devout, conforming member of the Church of England. She was, of course, the daughter and sister of clergymen, even though men of the cloth...
almost never come off well in her novels. On the other hand, as one of the most astute observers imaginable of her fellow human beings, Austen must have been aware of same-sex attraction. A number of modern critics have speculated that some of her characters could be gay or lesbian: the names I have heard put forward most often are Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* and Tom Bertram in *Mansfield Park*. Austen’s lifetime was part of a long historical trajectory in which the “definition” of marriage was moving from a socioeconomic arrangement between families to a relationship based on love and personal happiness. Again, Austen’s views on this development are complex: she believes in social proprieties (not to mention financial security), but her support for the value of love and respect in marriage is unquestionable.

Of course, this is all what Gwendolen Fairfax in *The Importance of Being Earnest* calls “metaphysical speculation”, and without Austen here to speak for herself, we can continue (happily) to comb Austen’s novels for clues to her possible thoughts on the issues of today. I know it sounds like a tired cliché to say that Austen is “timeless” and “universal”, but those qualities are ultimately the key both to her greatness and to her enduring appeal. Perhaps the thing that would most shock Austen about 2015 would be her own staggering fame, and that so many people gather to celebrate her genius. Speaking of which, you won’t want to miss our own observance of Jane Austen’s birthday on December 5. Register right away—this is an event that always fills up quickly!

**AGM Moments**

My favorite memories from Louisville:
This year’s AGM was lovely. We had a great choice of breakout sessions and presenters, especially Kristen Miller Zohn’s “Portraits in Profile in Jane Austen’s World,” an excellent talk about the silhouettes and their significance to Jane Austen’s world. I loved seeing old friends from AGM’s past, tasting the varieties of bourbon, visiting the Kentucky Derby museum, running into athletically dressed Ironman triathletes through the hotel, and the food from the local restaurants (the best was our dinner at 610 Magnolia). Can’t wait for next year’s AGM in Washington, D.C!

Sara Okey
As RC of JASNA-GCR, I was particularly moved by the introduction of the JASNA Essay Contest winners, as the Essay Contest has been generously funded for this year and the next four years by an anonymous donor in memory of Russell Clark and in honor of William Phillips. On the other hand, there was considerable amusement to be had from the fact that we were sharing the conference hotel with the American Society of Choral Directors and the Iron Man competition. The juxtaposition of Regency garb and lycra was hilarious!

Jeff Nigro

Of course I went to a lot of sessions and heard a lot of terrific presentations. However, rather than choose a single one of these as my most significant memory from the Louisville AGM, I’ll choose the general layout of the conference as my significant memory. That physical layout meant that we all did a whole lot of walking, and that was good. Many of us were staying in the tower of rooms across the street from the event spaces for the AGM. As a result, we walked back and forth between the two towers through the conservatory at the third floor level a lot. Then on the second floor, there were the two long hallways connecting the ballroom (for the large-scale events held there), the registration desk, the breakout rooms, and the emporia. That meant that we all walked back and forth among the various venues a lot. The constant parade of participants created terrific opportunities for exercise for many of us. Given one of the other groups housed in the Galt House while the AGM was going on, JASNA could have claimed that we were becoming IRON JANEITES from all the walking.
The “constant parade of participants” added another important AGM memory for me. I continually ran into people I knew. I saw almost everyone I know in JASNA without having to “look them up” or think “I wonder if ‘whosits’ is here?” They were all just there in the “constant parade.” It was my first AGM since Russell died, so dozens of folks went out of their way to approach me, gave me wonderful hugs, expressed their kind thoughts, and asked me how I was doing. All that kindness helped make sure that I had a great time and was actually doing fine. If I was a little sad, too, it was a reminder that being glad to see everyone and being a bit sad at the same time can be a good thing. All the display of concern and affection in the midst of a terrific AGM going on all around me made it all particularly meaningful and guaranteed fond memories.

William Phillips
A series of moments stand as unique to the 2015 AGM for me. A moment of perfect theatricality came with Maggie Roberts’ portable chair entrance to the stage in “Undressing the Historical Lady.” The chair remained a fun focal point of the AGM in the lobby outside conference rooms and the emporium.

I was touched as a teacher and GCR member to see Inger Brodey as plenary speaker, not only for the content of her presentation so beautifully centered on “Making Sense of Sensibility…”, but because she had seven years earlier graciously presented to the high school students (some of whom I had brought) at the 2008 Chicago AGM Young Writers Competition—my first AGM. What a warm feeling to visit with her and remind her how impressed the students were by her 2008 talk about Jane Austen around the world.

I have enjoyed several previous AGM presentations by Elaine Bander over those years as well. After reading Susanna Clarke’s novel Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrel during the summer of 2015 and then reading Elaine’s essay on the same novel from the 2008 Persuasions, I introduced myself to her as she browsed near the Jane Austen Books’ stall. She remarked that she sees Clarke as the most successful imitator of Austen’s writing style. Small discussions such as these stay with me after every AGM.

Linda Reinert
The 21c Museum Hotel collaborates with Mass MoCA, Contemporary Art Museum Huston, The Barnes Foundation, and others. It has free art galleries in the space and hotel rooms with original art. There is also a fine restaurant. I was walking down the street and saw the sculpture and was told to go inside the hotel—for an art lover like me, what a surprise and delight! I spent several hours wandering the galleries during down time at the AGM.

Sue Forgue with Maureen Collins in her afternoon Regency gown—gorgeous fabric and beautifully designed. Her talk with Victoria Hinshaw was one of the highlights of the meeting.

Judy and I about to board the Ohio River paddle boat for the post-AGM dinner cruise. It was a glorious sunny evening. It was a wonderful informal way to end our AGM—we talked with friends and watched the sunset (also beautiful).

Natalie Goldberg

Go to jasnachicago.org to read Natalie’s AGM Moments in its entirety.
The Holiday season has begun! As I am writing, I am celebrating Talk Like Jane Austen Day, October 30th with hourly quotes from Emma on my Facebook page of the same name. Tomorrow, of course, is Halloween and from that day forward, it is a non-stop joy ride of parties, presentations, performances and feasts until we all land with a bump in 2016. Jane Austen and her contemporaries certainly did not celebrate the holidays the way we do; it took the Victorians to transform these religious holidays into the social and secular events that they have become today. Still, at the core of these gatherings, big or small, was the desire to celebrate in community.

Many of you delighted in the community of like-minded enthusiasts at the JASNA AGM in Louisville this fall, and I look forward to hearing about your experiences and your favorite moments. The program committee will certainly be sharing their favorites, and we will work to bring the best of the best here to Chicago to present to our members.

The hard work of that committee will once again make our annual December Birthday Tea a “must” on your holiday calendar, as we will have Sara Bowen of JASNA Wisconsin as our speaker. On December 5th Ms. Bowen will be giving us an expanded version of her presentation from this year’s AGM, “Village Life in Jane Austen’s England: The View from the Parsonage”. Many of you may have missed this breakout session, as the room was filled to the point of overflowing; so here is your second chance to hear Ms. Bowen’s presentation.

We will be returning to the beautiful Fortnightly for our December Tea, so be sure to register early as this event always sells out. I look forward to seeing you all there and talking with you about your experiences at the AGM, your holiday plans and how you can help to make our Spring Gala for 2016 a success.

Do you have a Jane Austen-inspired article that you would like to see in the newsletter or the website? We would like to publish articles of general interest as space is available. You may submit manuscripts on any topic that will appeal to JASNA-GCR readers. Remember that JASNA-GCR articles can be anything from scholarly research to personal narratives and everything in between. As you know, JASNA-GCR readers appreciate articles that show real people engaged in Jane Austen’s life, writing, and legacy. Regular manuscript guidelines regarding length and style apply.

**Submission Guidelines**

Manuscripts should be submitted through email to okey.sara@gmail.com. In general, manuscripts for articles should be no more than 1,000 words. Include a brief author biography. JASNA-GCR will attempt to reach a decision on each article within one month.
Twentieth Anniversaries

The film *Clueless*, based on *Emma*, is twenty years old this year. The magazine *Philosophy Now* published an article by Susan Hopkins commemorating this anniversary. “Like many women who were young in the 1990s,” she writes, “I can clearly recall my favourite quotes and scenes from this ultimate chick flick two decades on—in part because the film both celebrates and pokes fun at an unapologetic hyper-femininity and hyper-mediated girl culture. Its comic charm derives from the contradiction that despite the fact that the film’s lead character, Cher (Alicia Silverstone), is vacuous, ill-informed, superficial, obsessed with appearances, and stereotypically feminine, she is the most lucky and likeable character in the film.”

The first appearance of her ex-stepbrother and love interest Josh (Paul Rudd) is poolside in Beverly Hills reading Friedrich Nietzsche. “So the film’s first impressions of Josh establish him as the sensitive, self-conscious and privileged ‘college boy’ stereotype, and this archetypically postmodern moment also transports dark Nietzschean literature into a sunny American Dream... Josh dismisses Cher’s pursuits as manipulative, trivial and superficial, [but] Cher will not give up the girl-culture pleasures... since her postmodern, postfeminist generation embraces hyper-femininity in an unabashed, self-aware and ironic fashion.”

As Cher’s best friend puts it: “Cher’s main thrill in life is a makeover: it gives her a sense of control in a world full of chaos.” Hopkins thinks “this celebration of girl culture” could have been a “backlash against ... the perceived limitations imposed by second wave feminists of the 60s and 70s with their established definitions of what is ‘good’ (that is empowering) and ‘bad’ (oppressive).”

“In Clueless, feminism is positioned not as a truth, but as just another story or discourse that Cher manipulates to suit her own interests.” And here’s where Nietzsche comes in. He says “there is no grand truth... only competing fictions.” To Nietzscheans, “moral-political doctrines such as feminism, when they are imposed as another form of control or regulation, offer less, not more power to their subjects.” “So, although Josh admonishes her for her ‘feminine’ concern with shiny surfaces, Cher is unimpressed with his ‘masculine’ claims to reason and rationality. As Nietzsche would say, the preference for depth over surface is nothing more than a moral prejudice; it is misguided because there is no universal truth, and no true self—there are only fictions, the stories that we create. These stories in turn make us who we are.”

Also twenty is the BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice*, seen here in 1996. In *The Atlantic* online Sophie Gilbert thanks this adaptation for “a surge in Jane Austen erotica.” (Yes, it started with Colin Firth in the wet shirt.) “[A] genre Austen could never have predicted has risen in its wake: *Pride and Prejudice*-themed erotica. She quotes Sarah Raff, author of *Jane Austen’s Erotic Advice*, that P & P “set the standard format for the dime-store romance novel: ‘A feisty woman despises, resists, and eventually subdues a rich, peremptory, passionate man...only to discover that she loves him.’ Erotica includes *Pride and Promiscuity: The Lost Sex Scenes of Jane Austen; Pride and Penetration; Mr. Darcy’s Undoing; Spank me, Mr. Darcy; Pride and Prejudice: Hidden Lusts; Pride and Prejudice: The Wild and Wanton Edition* and “a wealth of fan-fiction sites.” On fanfiction.net “Austen is the lone representative of the classics, inspiring 443 stories, not all sexually explicit.” What would Jane say?!
“From Agrimony to Yarrow: A Jane Austen Herbal”

All were welcome on Saturday, September 26th, at the Oak Park Public Library to hear Nancy Melvin’s presentation entitled “From Agrimony to Yarrow: A Jane Austen Herbal.” She explained the herbal remedies, teas, and other culinary and artistic uses of plants commonly used in Jane Austen’s time that we can grow right here and now.

Jane Austen’s England was not as dense and urban as ours. We have a more physical world, whereas Jane had more of a plant world, as Nancy explained. England differs in climate, too. It has more moisture. Despite these differences, Chicago can easily sustain a similar garden so that the modern gardener can experience the same smells and textures as she did.

No matter how a seed is planted, it knows its place and knows how to grow upright. The radical, the first shoot, grows toward the sun. The root is pulled by gravity to grow down to secure the plant. The plants followed the colors of the four humors: yellow for choleric, green for phlegmatic, blue for melancholic, and red for sanguine. The ideal would be the balance of all.

Just as the seasons change, so does the garden. Our speaker outlined the garden of each season. First, the winter is the season where the garden is most alive. It is the season when the bulbs are in the ground, the hedgerows are holding steady, and where all the things that had grown during the year are being used. Leaves, roots, berries, rose hips, and even rock lichen were excellent dyes. The later in the season that they were used, the richer the color that they produced because of the greater amount of chlorophyll.

The spring garden was an excellent season for finding medicine, a duty primarily done by women. Willow bark tea was a rudimentary aspirin. Dandelion was great for acid reflux. Anise made excellent cough drops. All the tiny, weak flowers grow during spring including columbines, daffodils, poppies, peony, and lilacs. Gardeners were able to make medicinal cordials from berries, bark, alcohol, and honey. Many plants were available, too, including strawberries, horseradish, rhubarb, and plums. All of these plants grew quickly and potently thanks to the amount of fertilizer.

The summer garden was all a flurry of growing plants. Gooseberries, raspberries, and elderberries thrived and were persevered for later use in liquids such as Champaign vinegar.

Finally, the autumn garden was rich with grasses and grains. Thyme, hops, basil, and mint were very common. In order to store these plants properly, they were bound together, put in a dark area, and hung for approximately one month to dry. Many products could be made from these plants including balms and vodka. Autumn also offered many fruits, especially apples and figs. Flowers such as zinnias and roses were abundant.

Nancy stressed the earthy connection between Jane Austen’s garden and ours. She encouraged us to stay and live in the garden world, and that our duty as a human being is to manage the world.
Clockwise from top left: Debra Ann Miller introduced the speaker and made announcements; the audience; Duwanna Wall, library volunteer who procured the venue for the presentation; Board nominees: William Phillips with Georgia Cibul, Sara Okey, Linda Reinert, Elia Riviera; baskets of fall flowers and grapes; celeriac held for inspection; baskets of herbs; Speaker Nancy Melvin with yarn and apple; jar of thyme soaked in vodka that when the thyme is removed can be used as cough syrup. Photos courtesy of Margo Malos.
Letter from Chicago
JASNA-GCR
11133 Meadow Lark Lane
Belvidere, IL 61008

Birthday Tea
Saturday, December 5

Calendar

December 5  Birthday Tea. 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. “Village Life in Jane Austen’s England”, Sara Bowen, JASNA-Wisconsin. The Fortnightly of Chicago, 120 E. Bellevue Pl., Chicago, IL

Feb.7, 2016  Winter Meeting. 12:00 noon-3:00 pm. “‘You Can Get a Parasol at Whitby’: Jane Austen and Circulating Libraries”, Claire Bellanti, JASNA President. Marcello’s Lincoln Park, 645 W. North Ave., Chicago, IL

May 7, 2016  Spring Gala. Topic TBA. Woman’s Athletic Club of Chicago, 626 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL

For more events and programs that will be of interest, visit our website at jasnachicago.org, and click on Events>Austen-Related Events.