Spring Gala
May 6, 2017 • 10:00 am–4:00 pm

Forever Jane
Celebrating the life and legacy of Jane Austen

Morning Presentation:
“Mourning the Maiden and More: an introduction to English mourning fashions and customs of the early 19th century”
Janet Messmer, Professor and Head of the Costume Technology Program for the Theatre School at DePaul University and Laura Whitlock, Member at Large, JASNA-GCR Board

Afternoon Presentation:
“Behold Me Immortal: Austen Fandom from Her Time to Ours”
Jeff Nigro, Program Director, JASNA-GCR

Plus: Quiz by William Phillips:
“Who is there to mourn in Austen?”

Morning Coffee and Tea • Three-Course Luncheon
Woman’s Athletic Club • 626 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago
Gala Emporium Vendors: Jane Austen Books • Bingley’s Teas • Jeanne Steen’s Regency Emporium Table • Janine Fron’s Puzzles and Games • Laura Whitlock Millinery • Matti’s Millinery & Costume • Maureen Collins Jewelry

The JASNA-GCR Used Book Sale Table

GALA REGISTRATION FORM
Members: $80; Guests and Public: $90
Registration deadline: April 29

Member Name ____________________________
Guest(s) Name(s) ____________________________
Address __________________________ City __________________________ State _______ ZIP _______
E-mail __________________________ Phone __________________________ Amount enclosed $________

I would like to support the Gala with a voluntary tax-deductible contribution of $________

10:00 am Coffee and Tea only

Luncheon Selections:
Starter: Baby Greens Salad
              Candied Pecans, Dried Cherry, Goat Cheese, Citrus Vinaigrette
Entrees:
Choose one entrée per person
              Chicken Piccata
              Roasted Tomato, Mushrooms, Arugula, Lemon Caper Butter
              Eggplant Schnitzel
              Broccolini, Baby Tomatoes, Baby Mozz, Herb Butter
Dessert: Seasonal Crème Brulee

You can register by
1. Going to www.jasnachicago.org and pay using your Visa or MasterCard.
   or
2. Mailing your check—payable to JASNA-GCR—and this form to Maureen Collins, 2515 Ridgeway Evanston, IL 60201
In this climate of “fake news” and “alternative facts”, it is important to hang on to the truth. In researching and writing the scripts for my Historical Women of Letters programs, I have often found that the truth is much more interesting than the accepted fiction, and decidedly more enlightening. It is certainly easier to believe that Mary Todd Lincoln was as mad as a hatter, Elizabeth Barrett Browning was an invalid, and that Dolley Madison was the quintessential southern hostess; but the truth is more nuanced and, in some cases, far from the accepted so-called wisdom.

As Janeites, we have all smirked at the outrageous speculations that have been presented as newly revealed “facts” about Jane Austen and even been enraged by the misquoting and misappropriation of her beloved text and image; but what do we really know about Jane? Well, her birth and death, and some of her travels can be confirmed with relative certainty by extant letters from family members such as her father George and sister Cassandra, and from Jane herself; but we also know that the lovingly crafted biography that her brother Henry included in the first edition of Persuasion and Northanger Abbey was more “correct” than true.

And what of Jane’s surviving possessions? We know that several of her letters were cut up, and the signatures sent to autograph collectors all over the world. The recipients or their descendants burned some of Jane’s letters, and others were purchased at auctions and are now scattered across the globe. We would all prefer to believe that when Jane died, her family carefully documented and packed up her things and that they were faithfully guarded until the world was ready to acknowledge her genius and build her a museum. Sadly, reality is not that neat. While the now famous turquoise ring was faithfully documented and kept within the family, anyone who followed the
saga of the auction and ultimate purchase of the ring by the Jane Austen’s House Museum knows that reality can be down right messy.

For those of us who need a bit of Jane that we can see and experience (no touching), there is a new exhibit at the Jane Austen’s House Museum called Jane Austen in 41 Objects, which opened on March 3rd and will run with rotating objects until December 15th. According to the website, these 41 objects—one for every year of her life—“tell(s) the story of her life and legacy”. If you cannot travel to the museum itself, weekly essays will be posted on each of the artifacts on the exhibit page. The first essay is about Jane’s writing table and reinforces my belief that the truth is more intriguing than fiction.

In this first article, Madelaine Smith, former Marketing and Events Manager for the Jane Austen’s House Museum, explains the provenance of the little table:

“The table was returned to the museum in 1957. Only the table top is original as noted on the handwritten note attached to its underside when it was given to the Jane Austen Society by Brigadier B C Bradford. The note was written by Bradford’s great uncle, Montague G. Knight, and reads:

“This table was bought by Montague G. Knight of Chawton House, from a grandson of James Goodchild, who lived in Chawton village in Jane Austen’s time.” Goodchild’s brother-in-law, William Littleworth, had been a servant for Mrs. Austen, Jane’s mother, and when he was too old for work she furnished a cottage for him. Amongst the furniture was the little table at which Littleworth claimed he “often saw Jane Austen writing”.

Its authenticity is attested to by Montague G. Knight of Chawton house, who bought the table from the grandson of the brother-in-law of the servant of Jane’s mother. A little research, thanks to Deirdre Le Faye’s collection of Jane Austen’s Letters reveals that William Littleworth did not come to be employed at Chawton cottage until around July of 1816. In her letter to her nephew, James Edward Austen, dated Tuesday, 9 July, 1816, Jane writes: “Do you know that our Browning is gone?— You must prepare for a William when you come, a good looking Lad, civil & quiet & seeming likely to do.” So why would a man who only knew Jane for the last two years of her life have remembered her, and why should we trust him? Just as importantly, why would Mrs. Austen have given him this table?

A little more research reveals that William Littleworth was the cousin of the Littleworths of Deane village; the family that fostered George Austen’s children, including Jane. Several of the Littleworth family members worked for the extended Austen family, and Jane herself was the godmother of the Deane Littleworths’ eldest daughter, Eliza Jane. It seems that William Littleworth was more than just a servant; the lives and the fates of the Austen and Littleworth families were intertwined. In Jane Austen: A Family Record, Deirdre Le Faye writes “The extended Littleworth family remained devoted friends and servants of the Austens for nearly a century.”

What a rollercoaster ride! In the two hours after I first read the three-paragraph article about the iconic table, my emotions flew from disappointment to skepticism to curiosity to satisfaction. That little table on which Jane may have written her beloved novels still has tales to tell.

I look forward to reading about all 41 artifacts. They may not all be quite so exciting, and recent discoveries about some of the artifacts may even be disappointing; but one thing is certain. The truth about Jane Austen is as good as her fiction.
A Janeite Panel of Goodness

A blissful Sunday afternoon in February welcomed an enthusiastic group of Janeites at Marcello’s Restaurant. It was the occasion of a high-backed-chair discussion, “Austen Ever After,” with authors Syrie James and Karen Doornebos and dramaturg/director Loren Shause, hosted by the indefatigable impresario of all things Janeite—Jeff Nigro.

Lunch was both fabulous and of generous proportions and the service was exceptional. At the tables, a topical variety of news, books, movies and food sparkled in the conversations—including echoes of Mr. Woodhouse’s hypochondria. His recommendation? Gruel and soft-boiled eggs.

The panelists discussed their creative output and the Austen afterlife in the context of the 200th anniversary of Jane’s novels: Sense and Sensibility—2011; Pride and Prejudice—2013; Mansfield Park—2014; Emma—2016; and 2017—her death.

Syrie had flown in from sunny L.A., a bit astonished with Chicago’s sunny winter. She is author of nine Austen-related novels, with Jane as a recurring character. One of the books, The Missing Manuscript of Jane Austen, caused minor consternation among readers who assumed it to be fact and not fiction.

Karen writes Austen novels not set in the Regency era but with modern shpritz and titles such as Undressing Mr. Darcy, in which wit, circumstance and fashion all attend to Austen interests.

Loren was dramaturg of Northlight’s recent acclaimed production of “Christmas at Pemberley” (reviewed in the Winter 2017 issue of Letter from Chicago). How did Loren cast actors for the characters we love? There had to be verisimilitude—in looks, humor, and, as in Darcy’s case, a dignified demeanor. Her intention was an alternative to Dickens’ oft-performed “The Christmas Carol.” The ingredients: a family, beloved characters, a love story, and personal transformation with the archetypal Christmas tree at the heart.

The panel recalled recent Austen-related fixations. These included a historic modification of Fitzwilliam Darcy’s features by Professor Amanda Vickery who reappraised his physical persona. One must now configure the gentleman as having been undernourished, pallid and pink of complexion, and wearing a fashionable powdered wig. On the other hand, good fortune still smiles on the author as she alights from bookshelves to public purse: Jane will be the face of a £10 banknote and a £2 gold coin.

Might you also attempt a Jane Austen pastiche? There is after all Jane’s unfinished novel, Sanditon. Can you emulate the wit, the charm, and the exquisite characterizations? Syrie recommended A Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers by Christopher Vogler for advice about drawing iconic characters. She urged writers to begin with an outline for any book or play. The themes are universal: a main character, an exciting event, a path in life and what the character does to achieve the goal, and finally, making decisions critical to self-discovery.

Thus did Jane’s literary heirs highlight our Sunday afternoon: “My idea of good company. Clever, well-informed people who have a great deal of conversation...” Why not reread A Truth Universally Acknowledged: 33 Great Writers on Why We Read Jane Austen, and stay tuned for these upcoming adaptations: at the Wheaton Drama Theater, Nov. 17–Dec. 10, Sense and Sensibility, and a promised film release of Sanditon, starring Charlotte Rampling.
Winter Photos

Clockwise from top left: Karen’s book *Undressing Mr. Darcy*; Discussion panel dramaturg Loren Shause, authors Karen Doornebos and Syrie James with moderator Jeff Nigro; Syrie’s book *The Lost Memoirs of Jane Austen*; Syrie’s husband Bill; RC Debra Ann Miller with new member Jennifer Redlarczyk; Elizabeth Pope and Ellen Fuller smile for the camera; Syrie and Karen book signing; attendees lining up to have their books signed; Linda Reinert, Amanda Smothers and Laura Whitlock enjoying the afternoon; a satisfied luncheon crowd; Linley Erickson with Mom Melinda; New member Libby Schwartz; Karen Sennet and Deirdre Hastings.

Photos courtesy of Margo Malos.
Forever Jane

This is a year of anniversaries of several momentous historical events, but then, what year isn’t? 2017 marks, among other things, the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, which sparked the Protestant Reformation, and the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution in Russia. Those of us who love Jane Austen, of course, think of this as the year in which we observe the 200th anniversary of her death. As with other JASNA regions and Jane Austen Societies all over the world, JASNA-GCR’s programming this year celebrates a brilliant and beloved author who left the world too soon. Our next event, the Spring Gala on May 6, posed a particular dilemma: how to observe this solemn anniversary while presenting a Gala, with all the fun and festivity that the word implies? We hope we have balanced out all the appropriate elements in a way that you will find respectful, enlightening, and enjoyable.

Presentations at the Gala will address both Regency attitudes toward grief, and a celebration of Austen’s immortality. The extravagance of Victorian mourning is well known, including that of Queen Victoria herself after the death of her beloved Prince Albert, but many mourning customs began much earlier. Jane Austen’s letters reveal that mourning dress was very much a part of her world. Sadly, there always seemed to be some member of the extensive Austen family circle who needed to be commemorated. It was even considered appropriate for “average” Britons to mourn members of the royal family. You will learn all about it from the fascinating presentation about Regency mourning, to be given by Janet Messmer, Professor and Head of the Costume Department at De Paul University, and Laura Whitlock, Member at Large on the GCR Board and milliner extraordinaire. If you were privileged to hear Janet’s delightful and revelatory talk she gave at the JASNA-GCR Summer Program a few years ago, and if you have encountered Laura at one of our meetings wearing one of her own exquisite creations, you know you’re in for a treat.

Of course, Austen’s passing was not the end of the story, and the Janeite ranks have only grown with time. If there is one thing you learn from attending a JASNA event, it’s that you’re not alone! Karen Joy Fowler begins her delightful, spot-on novel about the fandom we all share The Jane Austen Book Club with the sentence, “Each of us has a private Austen.” Something similar could be could be said about the period from Austen’s own time to ours, as each era has found what it needs in her writing and thought. Early fans include the dedicatee of Emma, the Prince Regent (the admiration was not mutual) and his daughter, the ill-fated Princess Charlotte, followed by such Eminent Victorians as Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Tennyson, and Charles Darwin. Over the past century or more, Austen love has evolved from a smallish “cult” of devotees to a massive worldwide phenomenon. How did it all happen? I will do my best to answer that question in my own presentation, “Behold Me Immortal: Austen Fandom from Her Time to Ours.”

Once again, the Gala will take place in the elegant but welcoming Ballroom at the Woman’s Athletic Club on Chicago’s Magnificent Mile. In addition to the presentations, we will enjoy coffee and tea to get us started for the day, a delicious three-course lunch, and another one of William Phillips’s patented “diabolical” quizzes. And, of course, there will be plenty of time to shop at our splendid Emporium, which will feature favorite vendors from years past, as well as welcoming some new vendors. Turn to the cover page of this newsletter for more information about how to register. See you at the Gala!
Rewriting Austen


“Not even Jane Austen is spared the blue pencil. Evans is so bold as to split an ‘over-loaded’ thought from Pride and Prejudice into ‘four varied sentences’ without ‘losing the flavor’:

The vague and unsettled suspicions which uncertainty had produced of what Mr. Darcy might have been doing to forward her sister’s match which she had feared to encourage, as an exertion of goodness too great to be probable, and at the same time dreaded to be just, from the pain of obligation, were proved beyond their greatest extent to be true!

becomes

She had been filled by vague and unsettled suspicions about what Mr. Darcy might have been doing to forward her sister’s match. She had not liked to dwell on these. Such an exertion of goodness seemed improbable, yet she had dreaded the idea that the suspicions might be just, for she would then be under obligation to him. Now the suspicions were proved beyond their greatest extent to be true.

Nine words longer, but—in Evans’ unblushing view—it makes its point ‘more clearly and economically.’”

To which we might add that Evans doesn’t seem to understand what Daphne Merkin in her new memoir, This Close to Happy: A Reckoning with Depression, calls “the sinuous movements of...characters’ interior consciousness.”

Quite another take on Austen is from Roy Peter Clark in The Art of X-Ray Reading:

How the Secrets of 25 Great Works of Literature Will Improve Your Writing. In a chapter entitled “Great Sentences from Famous Authors” he cites this one from Pride and Prejudice: “For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbors, and laugh at them in our turn?”

He comments, “Who could not admire a sentence with such a clear demarcation of beginning, middle, and end? Thank you, commas. Only a single word—neighbor—has more than one syllable. Austen gives us nineteen words that add up to sixty-seven letters, an astonishing efficiency of fewer than four letters per word. But this math is invisible to the meaning. She begins by asking what at first seems like a metaphysical question: ‘For what do we live?’ The social commentary that follows brings us crashing to earth in a phrase and carries us home with a delicious sense of revenge, a kind of sophisticated punch line.”

Emma Tennant

The author of Austen sequels, Pemberley: or Pride and Prejudice Continued; An Unequal Marriage; or Pride and Prejudice Twenty Years Later; Emma in Love: Jane Austen’s Emma Continued, and Elinor and Marianne: A Sequel to Sense and Sensibility, has died.

A prolific British novelist, Tennant once told The Guardian, “My life has really been about writing, though some think it’s all about once having been in a ball dress and having an odd life and marrying all the time. But it’s the writing that’s always been the point.”
LETTER FROM CHICAGO
JASNA-GCR
11133 Meadow Lark Lane
Belvidere, IL 61008

Spring Meeting
Saturday, May 6

Calendar

May 6, 2017  Spring Gala. Woman’s Athletic Club of Chicago,
626 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL

July 29  Summer Program.

October 6–8  Annual General Meeting. Jane Austen in Paradise: Intimations of
Immortality. Huntington Beach, CA USA

Our website is www.jasnachicago.org