

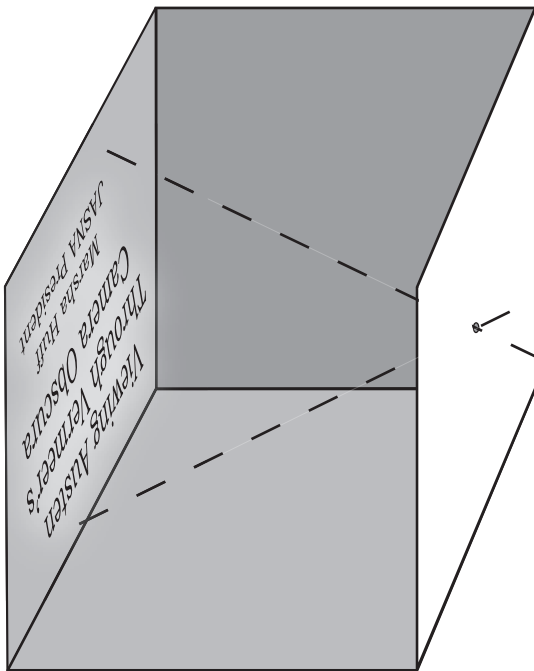
Letter from Chicago

Fall 2008

Jane Austen Birthday Tea

Saturday, December 6, 2008

2:00 pm–4:00 pm



Viewing Austen
Through Vermeer's
Camera Obscura

Marsha Huff
JASNA President

The Fortnightly of Chicago
120 E. Bellevue Place
(special parking rate at 100 E. Bellevue)

BIRTHDAY TEA REGISTRATION FORM

Members: \$40; Guests: \$45

Registration deadline: November 25

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 **Elsie Holzwarth, 1410 East 55th Street, Chicago, IL 60615-5409.**

Birthday Tea

Our annual Jane Austen Birthday Tea takes place Saturday **December 6, 2008** at The Fortnightly of Chicago from 2:00 to 4:00 pm. We will have a grand opportunity to congratulate ourselves on our successful Annual General Meeting, to toast Jane Austen, to partake of a marvelous spread of teatime fare, to enjoy good conversation, and to hear JASNA President **Marsha Huff**.

Note: A special **parking** rate of \$14 is available at 100 E. Bellevue Place, next door to the Fortnightly, at 120 E. Bellevue. Be sure to tell the attendant you are going to the Fortnightly.

Marsha Huff will present her program, *Viewing Austen Through Vermeer's Camera Obscura*. In his 1816 review of *Emma*, Sir Walter Scott likened Austen's art to that of the Flemish masters. In this illustrated lecture, Marsha pairs Vermeer's paintings with scenes from Austen's novels and discusses the comparable manner in which the two artists construct their portraits of female domesticity and convey the interior life of their subjects. Members of our Greater Chicago Region will join Marsha in reading favorite Austen passages.

Marsha holds Bachelors and Masters degrees in English from the University of Tulsa (her hometown) and a J.D. degree from Loyola University of Chicago School of Law. She practices law with Foley & Lardner in Milwaukee, with a specialty in tax-exempt organizations. In her home region, Wisconsin, Marsha served as Regional Coordinator and as Co-Coordinator of the 2005 Milwaukee AGM, whose theme was *Jane Austen's Letters in Fact and Fiction*. She also served on the JASNA Board of Directors for several years before becoming President. Marsha is a long-time fan of Austen and Vermeer, having discovered both when she was a teenager.

Vermeer (1632-75), a Dutch painter, is known for his use of lighting in interior

scenes in his paintings. He has been described as a painter of "beauty, stability and order." There is a quietness in his domestic scenes. If you have read **Tracy Chevalier's** very

popular novel *Girl with a Pearl Earring* you are already familiar with Vermeer and one of his most famous paintings. The novel was adapted as a film starring our favorite Darcy, **Colin Firth**, as Vermeer.

But what is *camera obscura*? It is a precursor to the modern camera, the most primitive version being the pinhole camera. Light passes through a hole or lens and an image is projected on a wall or screen, sometimes reflected by a mirror or mirrors. The resulting image may be traced and used to provide an accurate perspective in a painting; that is, to depict a 2 dimensional version of 3 dimensional reality.

We can hardly wait to find out how Austen, Vermeer, her novels, his paintings and *camera obscura* all fit together. Please join us!



If you have not already renewed your membership, please do so right away.

You may send
\$25 for individuals and
\$35 for families payable to
JASNA-GCR to:

Elsie Holzwarth, Treasurer,
1410 E. 55th St.,
Chicago, IL 60615-5409

Or renew online at
www.jasnachicago.org

Harry and Emma

On September 20, at our annual business meeting held in the Conrad Sulzer Regional Library, Chicago, member **Jane Davis** explained the connections between Jane Austen's *Emma* and J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter tales, particularly *The Prisoner of Azkaban*.

To some extent, Emma Woodhouse, like Harry Potter, inhabits a magical world. Among his fellows at Hogwarts School of Wizardry and Magic, Harry's skills and adaptability are already known; he survived the killing curse and becomes the Chosen One, the only wizard capable of defeating Lord Voldemort. Emma, too, is a "Chosen One." In her magical world of Highbury, Emma differs from the displaced female of Austen's other novels. "Handsome, clever and rich," Emma is sole mistress of Hartfield. Yet both lead constrained lives. Uncle Vernon Dursley tries to prevent Harry's attending Hogwarts, and once there, his uncle refuses Harry permission to join the happy outings to Hogsmeade. Although Harry becomes the most famous Hogwarts student, every summer he must return to the Dursleys at number four, Privet Drive, where he continues to be treated cruelly by his aunt and uncle and taunted by his cousin. While not experiencing the child abuse of Harry Potter's muggle relations, Emma has been constrained by her septuagenarian father. He worries if she takes walks beyond their shrubbery, and until the famous picnic outing, she had not even gone the seven miles to visit Box Hill; she has never been to the sea and has not visited her sister and family in London.

Jane Davis quoted Rowling's statement about returning again and again to *Emma* as a lesson in mystery writing. In *Emma* all clues are given, but no reader will recognize them because of Austen's skillful use of narrative

misdirection and free indirect discourse (where the protagonist's perceptions are the reader's lens for all events). Austen buries clues about the real reason Mr. Elton visits Hartfield, the secret engagement between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, and George Knightley's developing love for Emma. Rowling uses similar techniques with clues to the mystery of Sirius Black. With Harry, we overhear the Weasleys worry about Sirius's escape from Azkaban and discovery that Sirius was imprisoned for betraying his parents and probably plans to kill Harry. Not until Harry discovers the truth will the readers identify the real betrayer of his family and discover that Sirius was his father's closest friend and Harry's loving godfather. Similarly, we overhear speculations about Frank's expensive haircut in London, a place to which it would take half a day to travel, and speculations about the pianoforte that subsequently appears at the Bates home, but readers do not connect the two stories until Emma learns the truth.

Noting that the opening sentence of *Emma* turns on the word "seemed," Jane explained that Emma's process of maturing teaches her to discern truth from appearances. In the same way, Jane suggests, Harry, too, must learn to distinguish between what "seems" and what actually "is." Confirmation of his understanding occurs in the story's epilogue, nineteen years later, when Harry's young son departs for Hogwarts for the first time and fears he might end up in the wrong school: "Albus Severus . . . you were named for two headmasters of Hogwarts. One of them was a Slytherin and he was probably the bravest man I ever knew."

Jane was assisted in her talk by granddaughter, Ellie Davis, who came in a Harry Potter costume. Conversations with Ellie inspired Jane to research the influence of Austen on Rowling.

Natalie Goldberg

Chicago baseball fans were very sad that first weekend in October, but not Jane Austen celebrants. We hosted the largest AGM in the 30 years of JASNA meetings. Of course such an enormous undertaking could not happen without our many volunteers. We all deserve the thanks we received from the 660 folks who came, mostly from outside our region.

Guests arrived from Chawton, where the Jane Austen Society began, and Janites came from as far away as New Zealand, representing the youngest Austen society. Members loved our beautiful city. They arrived early and stayed later to attend museums, theater and opera, take tours and shop. Over one hundred of us enjoyed the Odyssey Cruise so ably organized by **Vevia Martin**. We visited, dined, and listened to piano jazz while we watched the sunset over our skyline. How fortunate we were with our weather!

Perhaps we had the first Regency Ball to open with a marriage proposal. **Tom McGee** and **Virginia Mellema** from San Francisco are newly engaged. Were Captain Wentworth's words ever more beautifully prepared and borrowed for such a happy outcome? Thanks to **Steve Martin** for helping Tom identify the appropriate Austen proposal and to **Vevia** for orchestrating the timing! In her talk, **Claudia Johnson** defined legacy in the archaic sense, as in legation, an envoy or ambassador sent to speak for a mission. As she was editing a sentence about Mrs. Rushworth in *Mansfield Park*, Claudia explained, "I heard Jane Austen breathe."

She suggested, "Austen's characters are her envoys sent by her pen to us." Many AGM papers were scholarly and insightful;

I discovered much about the reach of Austen's influence and look forward to reviewing her legacy in the next issue of *Persuasions*. But many AGM elements were also just for fun. This year I wore Regency clothing and found myself surrounded by 200 others who dressed up. As the banquet hall was readied for dancing, we promenaded alongside the John Hancock Building, across Delaware and down Michigan Avenue. Passersby stopped to take pictures and inquire who we were. While Chicago was hosting couture runway shows in Millennium Park, we had our own timeless fashion show.

The AGM included an outreach program for high school students. The **J. David Grey Young Writers' Workshop** and the **Joan Austen-Leigh Prizes**, named for two of JASNA's founders, are a gift from JASNA to students who live in the region hosting the AGM. Our region added to the grant so we could hold it at the Westin and invite speakers from our AGM. Three students earned honorable mention: **Rose Zuniga** and **Abigail Obert**, both students of **Linda Reinert** at Wheaton North High School, and **Mary King**, student of **Ms. Mueller** at St. Ignatius College Prep. Our three Joan Austen-Leigh prize winners attended the Sunday brunch with their parents and teachers and received \$75 gift certificates at Borders Books: **Nora Downs**, student of **Mr. Blackwell** at St. Ignatius College Prep, and two students of **Ms. Aimee Daniels** at Wheaton Academy, **Sarah Daly** and **Bethany Weathers**. Three GCR members joined me as judges: **Sandra Flannigan**, **Lori Davis**, and **Luanne Redmond**. In the next *Letter from Chicago*, we will report more about this excellent program.

AGM Photos



*Well done,
Chicago!*



Thank you

*Rita Shaper and
William Phillips,
Co-Chairs*

*Jane Davis,
Treasurer*

*Martha Jameson
and Sue Forgue,
Registration*

*Gail Murphy and
Marianne Newman,
Volunteer Coordinators*

*Elisabeth Lenkos,
Breakout Chair*

*Steve and Nevia Martin,
Banquet and Ball*



Whew!

What, you may ask, was that great rush of air to be heard from various corners of Chicagoland along about Monday, October 6th? Easy to explain—it was a huge sigh of relief emanating from everyone who had been working so hard to bring about the 30th Annual General Meeting of JASNA. It seems to me that the time has come for good old fashioned self-congratulation. We did it gang!

Here are just a few of the superlatives that apply. This AGM sold out the earliest of any in their 30 year history, well before the early registration deadline. The huge demand brought about Herculean efforts on the part of Co-coordinator **Rita Shafer**, Treasurer **Jane Davis**, Registrar **Martha Jameson**, their assistant **Sue Forgue**, our super meeting planner **Jim Sweeney** and the Westin Hotel staff. As a result, we managed to accommodate a record 600 registrants and 60 companions. When JASNA President **Marsha Huff** spoke to me at the end of the final program on Sunday, she expressed her pleasure that we had pulled off the most ambitious program of any AGM ever, and she complimented our creativity and organizational skill. To put “most ambitious” into figures, about 100 people appeared before an audience in one forum or another between 8:30 Thursday evening and 12:30 Sunday afternoon. Here is my very brief survey of some highlights.

In the opening presentation on Thursday evening, “Visualizing Jane Austen and Jane Austen Visualizing,” **Jeff Nigro** set a very high standard for the level of challenging ideas we would encounter for the next three days. After showing the only two “authentic” images of Austen created in her lifetime, he analyzed various ways in which Austen and her work have been visualized since. He also spoke to Austen’s brilliant methods of allowing us to visualize her work for ourselves.

Elisabeth Lenckos (also our Breakout Chair) put together a wonderfully balanced and articulate Opening Panel; her introduction about the wide influence of Austen set the tone for a wonderful discussion. **Inger Brodey** and **Gillian Dow** added international perspectives from east and west, **Paula Cohen** those of a successful novelist, while **Peter Graham** placed Austen squarely in the tradition of rational empiricists.

Friday provided two additional “special events.” In one, **Juliet McMaster** described her process of illustrating Austen’s *Beautiful Cassandra*, and composer **Joanne Forman** explained her children’s ballet score for the story. Chicago musicians on flute and Celtic harp played the ballet score while McMaster read the tale accompanied by her beautifully colored illustrations.

Friday evening gave us an opportunity to meet two popular Austen inspired mystery writers, **Stephanie Barron** and **Carrie Bebris**, who appeared with GCR stalwart **Steve Martin**. Steve outlined his scheme for Austen characters based on his reading of classic detective fiction. The writers reacted, both describing their works as primarily “character driven.”

There is no way to sum up in a few words the brilliant insights shared with us by a mind like that of **Claudia Johnson**. However, on Saturday morning, among the things she helped us see in the Carol Medine Moss keynote address, “Jane Austen, a Name to Conjure with,” is that we find much of our delight with Austen “in the details” which she generously allowed us to explore with her.

Who could be more aptly named than **Joan Klingel Ray**? She burst onto the platform like the brilliant October sun we had in Chicago for much of the AGM. On Saturday afternoon in “Jane Austen for Smarties,” Ray

shed light on a number of the genuine “smarties” who have helped illuminate Austen for us coming right down to one who was among us during the AGM, **Lorraine Hanaway**, a “virtual” founder of JASNA.

Feedback on the 35 Breakout Sessions has been over the top positive. Attendees circulated among the 17 Posters presented in two sessions, engaging the presenters in hundreds of conversations. AGMers really liked having the posters set in the midst of the Emporium displays, so ably organized by **Pat Wieber**.

Saturday evening’s event between Banquet and Ball was a smash hit discussion of “Romance in the Wake of Austen.” Romance scholar and enthusiast **Sarah Frantz** gathered a splendid panel comprising **Mary Bly** (aka romance writer **Eloisa James**), romance scholar **Pamela Regis** and teacher/blogger **Eric Selinger**. Following a lively discussion of the Romance genre, Romance scholarship, and the Romance industry by these four, members of the overflow audience lined up to ask questions and barely let Sarah bring things to a close. We all got free books, too.

The Banquet and Ball, planned and executed by **Vevia** and **Steve Martin** really raised the bar for such events. Their plan, which allowed AGMers to pre-arrange costumes, led to a record number of attendees decked out in Regency garb (another superlative). They stopped traffic on Michigan Ave. with a pre-ball parade of hundreds, led by a skirling piper, that stretched for over a block.

Anyone unable to stay until after the brunch on Sunday missed a truly splendid final session in which Pegasus Players Executive Director, **Arlene Crewdson** engaged **Lindsay Baker** and **Amanda Jacobs** in conversation. These creators of the new P & P musical also performed, as did **Collin Donnell**, the show’s Mr. Darcy, who appeared through the generosity of producer **Lori Bajorek**. It was a festival of love, talent and fascinating insights into creativity.

Of course, many GCR members made it all happen, including **Joän Pawelski’s** original

leadership and gorgeous raffle necklaces, **Ronnie Jo Sokol** arranging in-room videos, **Elsie Holzwarth’s** devilish quiz, **Duwanna Wall’s** AGM ’88 display, **Lori Davis** always there behind the scenes, **Russell Clark** creator of our walking tours (who also conducted a popular poster session), **Vevia Martin** planning the post-AGM dinner cruise and **Natalie Goldberg** leading the very successful Young Writer’s Workshop. Our success would not have been possible without the splendid work of **Gail Murphy** and **Marianne Newman** who arranged lots of other volunteers. Tons of thanks to everyone. As e-mails (from near and far) have said, Chicago will be, like Austen, a tough act to follow.



Thanks to AGM volunteers:

Jennifer Cappelletti	Vevia Martin
Russell Clark	Steve Martin
Anna Cooper-Stanton	Carl McDowell
Jane Davis	Lillian Miller
Lori Davis	Gail Murphy
Amy Feldman	Marianne Newman
Cathy Feldman	Jeff Nigro
Judy Ferst	Sara Okey
Sandra Flannigan	Paul Osgood
Sue Forgue	Beth Pavelka
Margo Goia	Joän Pawelski
Natalie Goldberg	Claire Pearse
Howard Goldberg	William Phillips
Enid Golinkin	Stefanie Piatkiewicz
Amy Grossman	Beverly Roth
Beth Havlat	Mary Schiltz
Jean Hayman	Rita Shafer
Corinne Hill	Jeanette Shomo
Elsie Holzwarth	Ronnie Jo Sokol
Elizabeth Ireland	Cynthia Turski
Martha Jameson	Duwanna Wall
Janet Katich	Pat Wieber
Elizabeth Lenckos	



The Dutchess

Our Regional Coordinator **Natalie Goldberg** reports: On September 17, about twenty Janeites attended a free screening of *The Duchess*, a new film based on the life of Georgiana, Duchess of

Devonshire, starring Keira Knightly as the beautiful duchess and Ralph Fiennes as her husband. The film, an adaptation of the award-winning biography by Amanda Foreman, is highly recommended by the Janeites who were at the screening. "I will see it again to enjoy the costumes and the settings," said new member **Linda Shirrell**. A featured location is Chatsworth, one of the stateliest homes in England, and seat of the Dukes of Devonshire.

Like Princess Diana (a direct descendant of her sister, Lady Bessborough), Georgiana suffered a *ménage à trois*, and also, like Diana, became politically important through her beauty, fashion, and wit. It was said that she was responsible for the decimation of birds because women emulated her hat ornaments using feathers and wings. "Georgiana could out gamble, out drink and outwit most of the aristocratic men who surrounded her," the film's promoters explain. She was so popular with the British that she successfully campaigned for her cousin, Charles James Fox, and became influential in the more liberal Whig party that would be responsible for reforms in England, including the abolition of slavery and expansion of suffrage.

Georgiana was a writer, publishing her first novel, *Emma*; or, *The Unfortunate Attachment*, anonymously in 1773, when she was just sixteen years old. She also wrote poetry and plays and had plans to

publish an opera. Her novel, *The Sylph*, a *roman à clef* published in 1799, is an indictment of her Regency social class, exposing corruption, wife-swapping and forgery, according to its editor **Jonathan Gross**, Professor of English, Director of the DePaul Humanities Center. Jonathan, JASNA member and favorite speaker at AGMs and regional meetings, led a discussion of the film afterward.

. . . and her Siblings

Note from the Editor: Born Lady Georgiana Spencer and Lady Henrietta Spencer, known as Harriet, the sisters were close friends and affectionate mothers. Harriet, Lady Bessborough, was the mother of Lady Caroline Lamb, Byron's mistress. Althorp, the Spencer family's estate, is where Georgiana and Harriet, and Harriet's descendant Princess Diana, grew up.

On November 25, 1811 Lady Bessborough wrote to her lover Lord Granville Leveson-Gower: "God bless you, dearest G. Have you read *Sense and Sensibility*? It is a clever novel. They were full of it at Althorp, and though it ends stupidly, I was much amused by it!" The novel was published less than a month earlier.

George John, Second Earl Spencer, was Georgiana and Harriet's brother. First Lord of the Admiralty for several years during the Napoleonic Wars, it was he who elevated Lord Nelson, under whose command decisive battles were won by the Royal Navy, thereby thwarting any invasion of England by Napoleon. George John turned eight rooms at Althorp into libraries for his 43,000 books (Austen's presumably among them). Princess Diana's brother Charles, Ninth Earl Spencer, now maintains Althorp, this year celebrating its 500th anniversary as the Spencer family home.

Audiobooks and Austen

I first discovered audiobooks several years ago when driving on a long trip. They were easily obtainable, helped pass the miles, and even provided some enlightenment. They were available as cassettes and CDs. The key challenge is that an unabridged book takes up many disks or cassettes and can be quite costly, so a number of books are available only in abridged formats. You can still obtain audiobooks on cassettes and CDs through bookstores, online booksellers, and in public libraries.

Then came the iPod. My reaction when it was introduced was that it was a toy for teenagers who did not realize that downloading songs, at \$0.99 each, starts adding up to a lot of money when the iPod can hold thousands of songs. However, once I realized that I could copy my entire CD collection onto the iPod at no additional cost, I became quite a fan. Now I can listen to all of my music from a portable device. The iPod uses a software program called iTunes that works on both a PC and a Mac. You simply copy the music from the CD, or download it from another source, into iTunes, where you can then organize it and copy (or “sync”) onto the iPod itself. iTunes is very easy to use. The main constraint is that you need sufficient space on both the hard drive and iPod to hold the music files. The newer iPods can also hold digital photos and play video.

Back to audiobooks. Because the iPod has much more data capacity than either cassettes or CDs, it is better suited to larger files, such as unabridged audiobooks, plus the iPod is much smaller and more portable. You can go to a website such as www.audible.com and browse and listen to excerpts and then download the audiobook into iTunes with just a few clicks of the mouse (and a credit card). The cost is usually about the same as buying a book. The smaller iPods, such as the iPod Nano, are particularly suited to audiobooks. You can

put them in your pocket and listen to books while doing other (relatively mindless!) tasks, such as household chores, working out, etc. For navigation, the iPod Nano has a screen that shows the chapters and where you are in the book.

All of Jane Austen’s novels are now available as unabridged audiobooks through www.audible.com. I have downloaded and listened to all of them. One of the first discoveries in listening to audiobooks is how well great writing holds up when being read out loud. Austen’s humor, satiric use of language, character depiction, and ability to construct elaborate plots are more than evident in audio form. In addition, listening to the book forces you to concentrate, because you can’t flip the pages back and forth in case you missed something. Austen’s novels are generally narrated by British women, who provide a change in tone to distinguish the characters as they speak. (One factor to consider in selecting an audiobook is the quality of the narrator, which is why it can be helpful to listen to an excerpt before deciding to download it.) When male characters speak, for example, the female narrator uses a lower tone of voice. For the more pompous male characters, such as Frank Churchill, the use of a female narrator can be quite effective, because the characters most definitely come across as the silly young men that they are. By listening to the novels, I have noticed details I previously missed in reading them. For instance, *Northanger Abbey* has never been my favorite Austen novel, but in listening to it, I was better able to appreciate the satire of Gothic novels. I also found the young people and their courtship antics to be quite enjoyable.

Another book available in audio format I would recommend is Carol Shields’ short biography, *Jane Austen*. Shields provides an excellent overview of Austen’s life, her times, and her works. Her book also serves as a good introduction for anyone new to Austen.

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Elsie G. Holzwarth
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Calendar

- September 1, 2008** Membership Dues Renewal: Individual \$25; Family \$35
- December 6, 2008** Birthday Tea, JASNA President Marsha Huff, *Viewing Austen Through Vermeer's Camera Obscura*, The Fortnightly of Chicago, 120 E. Bellevue, Chicago, IL, 2:00–4:00 pm, parking available at 100 E. Bellevue.
- February 7, 2009** Book Discussion, The Parthenon Restaurant, 314 S. Halsted, Chicago, IL
- May 2, 2009** Annual Gala, Allerton Hotel, 9:30 am–3:00 pm

Our website is www.jasnachicago.org