Winter 2021 Newsletter

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Dear JASNA Connecticut Members,

“the sanguine expectation of happiness is happiness itself,”
Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility

We send merry, warm wishes to you and yours as the holiday season bursts forth! We hope, too, that your Thanksgiving was shared with family and friends in the enjoyment of great food and conversation. As Austen wrote, “it is such a happiness when good people get together- and they always do!”

An update of our annual Jane Austen Birthday Tea celebration and other events are highlighted in our newsletter. We hope you will join us in the year ahead at our events either virtually or in-person – and we ask you, too, to share ideas for future presentations and activities. You can email your suggestions to Kandie (Kandie@kandiecarle.com), as we would love to hear from you.

Our birthday tea celebration of Jane Austen was held online/virtually on Saturday, December 11, from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. This year’s tea salon included our annual business meeting, wherein we updated members with regional and national information and elected new officers, as well as a lively discussion of Austen’s works and their adaptations. Although we had originally planned to bring us all together for an in-person December birthday celebration, a scheduling conflict with the Wadsworth Mansion necessitated our having to change those plans, and the state’s health guidelines were in flux, making planning for an indoor event challenging.

Despite this change, our December virtual/online salon was a wonderful opportunity for us to come together and talk all things Austen! Participants shared late afternoon beverages of choice and goodies, while the region’s officers provided an annual update on plans for events and activities in the new year, as well as a report on the status of our finances and membership. There was an unanimous vote among members for our CT Region’s new regional coordinator, Michelle Forte! Michelle has been serving as our region’s treasurer for the past four years. She is excited and enthusiastic about taking on the new role – and has all the skills and talents for a successful tenure! We are delighted to have Michelle take on the role of our state coordinator, and we are looking forward to working closely with her. Kandie Carle is continuing as our programming coordinator on an interim/temporary basis, as our team meets with a new candidate who is interested in taking on this role after the first of the year.

We continue to seek volunteers, however, who are willing and interested in working with us. Our small work team will surely benefit from members who have some time, energy, and enthusiasm to help us bring more programs, events, and activities to our members. Please consider volunteering as we can truly use your help and warmly encourage you to contact Michelle or Kandie if you have questions or wish to volunteer. We really need your help – so be bold as we enter the new year and take on a new challenge! It’s exciting and engaging – and you will be joining a team that will welcome you whole-heartedly!

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While continuing to be stymied in trying to organize and hold in-person events due to lingering and changing health guidelines, we were nonetheless able to host some wonderful events during the fall season. For example, a virtual interview with Leo Rockas conducted by Kandie Carle constituted our annual Box Hill event. A long-time scholar on the work of both Austen and Shakespeare, Leo’s learning continues to deepen well past his retirement from academia, as evidenced by the publication of his article “Hopeless Boy: Dick Musgrove” in the most recent *Persuasions* journal (No. 42, 2020), which is just a terrific read. Participants in our virtual event on July 18th, however, enjoyed hearing Leo talk about what possessed him to tackle such a formidable project as the completion of an unfinished work by Austen, *Catharine or the Bower*, which was published in 2019 by Sunbury Press. Leo’s intellectual excitement and desire to continually deepen his knowledge is a model to me personally of how to make the best use of our retirement time! Next year, we do hope to hold our Box Hill event in-person at some lovely spot!

In addition to Leo’s presentation, many of our members continued to enjoy the many virtual events and presentations offered by JASNA’s regions across the country. Among my favorites was an interview with Janet Todd, novelist and academic, whose works include *Jane Austen in Context* and *Jane Austen and Shelley in the Garden: A Novel with Pictures*; and Gil Hornby, author of *Miss Austen*. Being one who finds Cassandra Austen particularly fascinating, I appreciated Gil Hornby’s earnest desire to draw her out through the medium of story-telling. The interview with these two marvelous writers was just the perfect complement to a gorgeous fall afternoon. Another regional event I enjoyed was a presentation by Marcia Folsom on Austen’s crafting and re-crafting of the final chapters of *Persuasion*, which the Massachusetts region hosted. Please consider the many different online/zoom presentations being offered at no cost to JASNA members by the various regions across the country; many have been quite thought-provoking and entertaining. We will continue to share notices of events from various regions with you via email.

I’d like to remind members, as well, that there are recordings of the presentations of some wonderful speakers featured in the Jane Austen and Co.’s special Race and the Regency series. You can view and listen to these presentations for free at https://www.janeaustenandco.org/. If you missed the original programming, the recordings are worth a visit!

In addition, the Jane Austen and Co. (www.janeaustenandco.org) is currently offering a new free series on Jane Austen and Asia. All of their presentations are recorded and available to view for free on their website. You might like to check out fashion historian Hilary Davidson’s presentation on “Global Fashion in the Age of Jane Austen,” and Peter Sabor’s presentation on December 16 of “Horace Walpole and China,” which discusses the representation of China in English literature. All of these presentations are recorded and available on the organization’s website for viewing at your convenience.

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Our region’s Jane Austen Book Group last met in November to discuss *Northanger Abbey*. We ask you: where would you place Henry Tilney among Austen’s heroes? And where would you place Catherine in terms of Austen’s brilliant heroines? While all her leading women experience self-learning journeys, with perhaps Fanny being the truest autodidact among them, Catherine’s journey stands out to me as a genuine, inspired coming-of-age narrative. What also intrigues me is how Austen turns the gothic narrative on its head, and how much she may have enjoyed exposing the foolishness of some writing being widely produced and very popular. As a counterpoint, she suggests that very real challenges, betrayals, disappointments, and fears abound for a young woman in real life. The challenges, obstacles, and fears that heroes and heroines must confront as they try to make sense of their experiences are quite equal to anything portrayed in the decaying castles, dark forests, and intolerant fathers and mothers of the fantastical Gothic tales.

We are looking forward to an in-person event in early spring featuring the wonderful writer and humorist Gina Barreca, Ph.D., humorist as part of an entire weekend of JASNA CT fun! Information will be forthcoming.

We look forward to seeing you at future events that our region plans to hold in the new year! In the meantime, we send our best wishes for a wonderful, healthy and safe holiday season.

Maureen, Kandie, Michelle, Heather, and Katelyn
JASNA’s New Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee Appointments 2021

JASNA launched its Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee/EDI to help ensure the mission of the Society to foster the study, appreciation, and understanding of Jane Austen’s works, life, and her genius among the widest possible readership. The new community guidelines are to ensure that all people feel welcome and valued in the organization’s meetings, events, and community spaces. The guidelines can be viewed at: http://www.jasna.org/about/jasna-community-guidelines. We encourage you to visit the website if you haven’t already.

Moreover, to support these efforts, the EDI, whose membership includes Georgie Castilla, Renata Dennis (Chair), Sheila Hwang, George Justice, Soniah Kamal, Sarah Rose Kearns, Mary Mintz, Ayana Olatunji-Morales, Alice Villaseñor, and Lena Yasutake, will conduct meetings with the Society’s regional coordinators and others about issues relating to equity, diversity, and inclusion, including the consideration of strategies to extend and expand membership with all people. In addition, Amanda Halla is the newly appointed ombudsman (ombuds) serving as the designated neutral party to provide confidential, impartial, informal, and independent guidance when issues relating to equity, diversity, and inclusion arise. Information about reporting any incidence or experience relating to such issues is included at the website above.

Membership Update

Our membership coordinator Heather Smith would like to remind you to check the status of your membership on the JASNA website (www.jasn.org), even if you are a lifetime member. Due to recent changes in dues, you may want to review and update your membership preferences. Our CT region receives its funds based on the number of our active participants. Speaking of activities, we would love to hear from all members about the kinds of programming you would like to see for next year (health and safety guidelines permitting, of course). If you have any suggestions, please email us at jasnactregion@gmail.com.
The Regency Years, During which Jane Austen Writes, Napoleon Fights, Byron Makes Love, and Britain Becomes Modern by Robert Morrison (2019)

John Bellingham, on a sunny Monday afternoon, May 11, 1812, spent two hours visiting the European Museum with two companions, pointing out to them a particular painting: The Last Judgment by the Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens. After the museum tour, he left his companions, saying he needed to buy a prayer book, but instead, made his way to the House of Commons. After a 30-minute walk and stopping to catch his breath, he walked calmly and directly up to Spencer Perceval, the prime minister, and shot him at point-blank range. “I am murdered,” Percival shouted before reeling backward against the door and then, staggering forward, collapsed face down on the floor. Such is an example of the detail-focused narrative of Robert Morrison’s book The Regency Years. I particularly enjoy non-fiction, and this book was even better than anticipated. It was absorbing, entertaining, rich with historic detail, and kept me spell-bound as I yellow-highlighted my way through the narrative.

Morrison provides a brilliant, historically-accurate context in which Austen wrote her masterpieces – the Regency period. The book focuses entirely on the reign of King George IV, including his tenure as Prince Regent. Morrison captures the political, social, and cultural landscape under the Prince Regent/King George IV with a style that is witty, thought-provoking – and by going into wonderful detail – entirely engrossing. Chapter headings include Crime, Punishment, and the Pursuit of Freedom; Sexual Pastimes, Pleasures, and Perversities; and Changing Landscapes and Ominous Signs. It is little wonder, upon reading this book, that Austen would have found the Prince Regent/King George IV rather abominable and resent being asked to dedicate Emma “to his royal highness.” Still, Morrison notes that while the Regent/King was “too fond of wine and women,” and in open revolt against his father for whom he “seemed hell-bent on disappointing,” and nearly bankrupted the country with his exorbitant lifestyle and spending; he was nonetheless also responsible for fostering “a climate of intellectualism, patronage, and connoisseurship. . . The intense sociability of the Regency brought writers and thinkers and artists into dialogue with one another as never before, sometimes in mutually supportive coteries, sometimes in productive rivalries, and sometimes in fiercely antagonistic cultural debates.”

Wonderful anecdotes about Wellington and Napoleon as well as narration relating to the War of 1812, the British East India Company, and much more awaits the reader. For me, the book was a rather quick read, engaging, and enlightening. I concluded the book with a better sense of the great economic struggles of the working-class population and a much deeper appreciation for the political, social, and cultural context in which Jane Austen was living and writing.

This is a terrific book for those who enjoy non-fiction, historic works – and an even better selection for readers of Jane Austen who seek a deeper sense of her times.