

Letter from Chicago

Fall 2011



Birthday Tea

Saturday, December 3, 2011

2:00–4:00 pm

The Fortnightly of Chicago
120 East Bellevue, Chicago, IL

Jane Austen and Making Do Mona Scheuermann

author of *Reading Jane Austen* and
Professor of English at Oakton Community College
followed by Afternoon Tea

Parking at 100 E. Bellevue, \$14 for Fortnightly events

TEA REGISTRATION FORM

Members: \$40; Guests: \$50

Registration deadline: November 30

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, 17 East Goethe St.,
Chicago, IL 60610-2312.

Jeffrey Nigro



Austen for the Ages

Earlier this year, Northlight Theatre mounted an excellent adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, and, along with my fellow JASNA-GCR Board members Elisabeth Lenckos and William Phillips, I was privileged to participate in a panel discussion before one of the performances. One of the thought-provoking questions put to us by Kristin Leahey, Northlight's Resident Dramaturg, concerned the degree to which Austen's appeal had to do with nostalgia; to what extent are Austen readers today pinning for a lost world of gracious manners, of lives lived at a slower, less stressful pace, of a society built on a bedrock of moral certitudes? Answering such a question is harder than you would think. As is so often the case with anything to do with Austen, as they say on Facebook, "it's complicated". There is no question that we Austen lovers also tend to love history, and we can all en-

joy the temporary "escape" into the Regency world. At JASNA AGMs, it is an enormous pleasure to see so many members in their elegant and thoroughly researched Regency attire, dancing those harmonious and beautifully choreographed country dances. On another level, it is always humbling to keep in mind that many other human beings have lived, loved, and struggled before us, that we are not the culmination of history, and that the values of societies of other times as well as places need to be approached with respect.

As an art historian, and someone who is endlessly fascinated by history, I love delving into any historical aspect of Austen's world, not just because it helps me to gain a greater understanding of the details of the novels, but simply because there are always lessons to be learned from the study of history. And it is easy to see the appeal of nostalgia: the opening sequence of Robin Swicord's 2007 film adaptation of Karen Joy Fowler's bestseller *The Jane Austen*

LETTER FROM CHICAGO

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The JASNA/GCR year begins September 1 and ends August 31. Dues can be paid online at www.jasnachicago.org or mailed to

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Chicago, IL 60610-2312

Book Club is an entertainingly groan-inducing montage of some of the petty indignities and inhumanities of modern life, from traffic jams to impersonal card-swallowing ATMs. No wonder the characters in the book and film long to be immersed in the work of Jane Austen, an author who cares about human dignity, believes deeply in the integrity of social interactions, and understands the moral underpinnings of good manners.

But as they delve more deeply, Fowler's characters come to realize that Austen's characters and the world they live in are (sometimes uncomfortably) more similar to their own lives than they had initially thought. In thinking about these issues, two questions come to my mind: if love of Austen is all about nostalgia, then (a) why aren't the works of her contemporaries (Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and the other novelists whom Austen herself admired) as popular? And (b) why do updates of Austen (Amy Heckerling's *Clueless*, Paula Marantz Cohen's *Jane Austen in Boca* and *Jane Austen in Scarsdale*, etc.) work as well as they do?

Literature, like the arts in general, can offer a pleasurable retreat from the stresses of everyday life. This is the original example

of the Nice Place to Visit But You Wouldn't Necessarily Want to Live There Syndrome. From a safe distance, Austen's world can look lovely, but even a cursory glance at her novels reveals that this was, to put it mildly, a difficult time and place for women (and let's not even take a fling at the slave trade).

In fact, Austen deals with many of the issues that so many people have been facing at our own historical moment: being forced from one's beautiful home and into reduced circumstances (the Dashwood women); struggling for survival on a limited income and trying to do so with dignity (Mrs. and Miss Bates); or trying to find personal happiness in a world in which others have greater economic and social advantages (examples too numerous to mention).

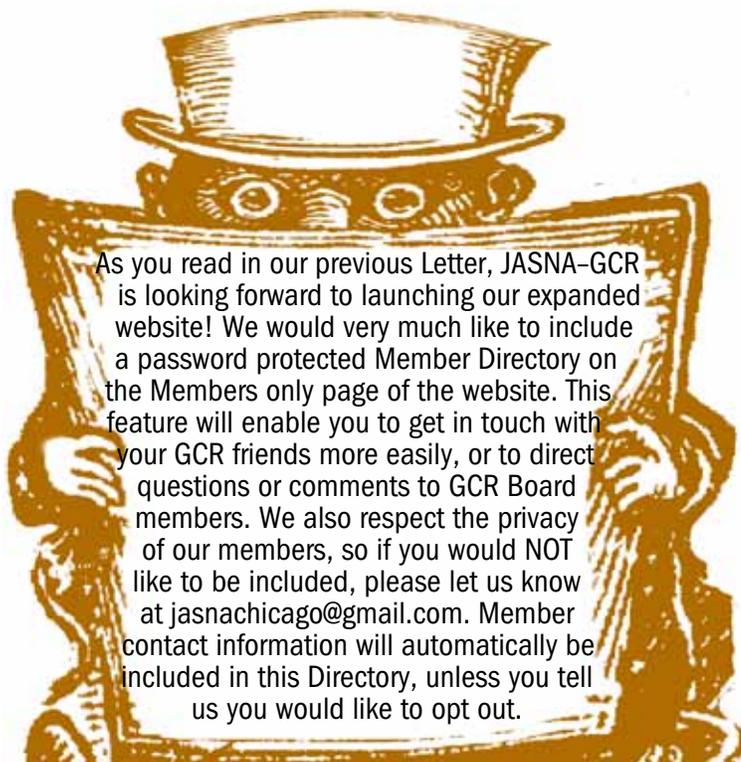
The timeless moral dilemmas faced by Austen, her characters, and the age she lived in are discussed by Mona Scheuermann in her book *Reading Jane Austen*. Professor Scheuermann will be the speaker at our annual Birthday Tea on December 3. Once again, we will enjoy the festive, elegant surroundings of the Fortnightly of Chicago, with a sumptuous tea following what will no doubt be a fascinating talk. I hope to see you there!



DONATIONS

Sincere thanks to the following members for their generous contributions:

Georgia Cibul
Sue Forgue
William and Elizabeth Fowler
Shelley Gottel
Constance Kozikowski
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Geraldine Nigro
Jeff Nigro
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Yuki Shelton
Ronnie Jo Sokol
Jeanne Steen



As you read in our previous Letter, JASNA-GCR is looking forward to launching our expanded website! We would very much like to include a password protected Member Directory on the Members only page of the website. This feature will enable you to get in touch with your GCR friends more easily, or to direct questions or comments to GCR Board members. We also respect the privacy of our members, so if you would NOT like to be included, please let us know at jasnachicago@gmail.com. Member contact information will automatically be included in this Directory, unless you tell us you would like to opt out.

2011 JASNA Tour

Judy Chernick and Sue Forgue

This last July, two GCR members, Judy Chernick and Sue Forgue, joined a group of 31 intrepid travelers on the 2011 JASNA tour, “Jane Austen: Celebrating *Sense and Sensibility*.”

It was just a short drive from Heathrow Airport when we found ourselves in the heart of the rolling agrarian landscape that is Jane Austen country. At her first home in Steventon, the retired rector recognized the JASNA contributions for the restoration of the bells in the tower of this small village



St. Nicholas Church, Steventon

church. We also visited the home of Jane Austen’s friend and mentor, Madame Lefroy at Ashe and at nearby Ibthorpe, we were shown Jane’s bedroom when she stayed with her friends Martha and Mary Lloyd. Judy was very much touched by looking out this window and its view over the pas-



Ibthorpe House

tures and countryside, a view that is unchanged from when Jane was a guest. This house was recently sold and we all wondered if the new owners will be hospitable to future Janeites.



Chawton Cottage

Of course, no visit to this part of England is complete without a stop at Chawton, Austen’s last home and where she revised her first three novels and wrote the final three masterpieces. We received personal tours of both the cottage and Chawton House and were welcomed at the Jane Austen Society Annual General Meeting. While there, it was quite exciting to see and hold a first edition of *Sense and Sensibility* that Louise West, curator of the cottage, brought out for us. Sarah Parry and Steve Lawrence, both of the Chawton House Library, had both an expected and unexpected treat for all of us. The expected treat was seeing the famous and newly conserved portrait of Edward Austen Knight that was painted while on his grand tour. The unexpected revelation was the first showing of a suit of his, probably dating from his teenage years. The biggest surprise was seeing how small Edward was in real life compared to his portrait. Based on these clothes, they’re estimating that he was only five feet tall.

2011 JASNA Tour

Like the Austens themselves, we left Hampshire for the elegant city of Bath. Bath is an eminently walkable city and walk we did, from top to bottom, on our city tour. But anyone who knows Sue's passion for Regency fashion knows that she would spend most of her free time in the Museum of Costume in the beautiful and newly renovated Assembly Rooms.

Stepping briefly out of our tour of all things *Sense and Sensibility*, the trip to Lyme Regis was most memorable as the Cobb is quite dramatic and our guide met us in a suitably appropriate pelisse and bonnet. But the steep ascent back up from the Cobb to the parking lot had us all huffing and puffing. Experiencing that climb firsthand will inform all our next readings of *Persuasion*!

Our tour was also quite enjoyable for more than seeing actual historical places, as we had a chance to visit several filming locations from the 1995 Emma Thompson version of *Sense and Sensibility*. These included Mompesson House in Salisbury (Mrs. Jennings' London home), the tiny village of Berry Pomeroy (wedding scene of Colonel Brandon and Marianne), and Saltram House (Norland). The trip to Saltram was very special as the docents brought out elegant costumes and accessories to change into and have our pictures taken

in Regency garb in the dining parlor. In addition, when we departed they gave us wrapped presents which turned out to be a lovely reticule for each one of us.

Another special stop was to Kenwood House, just outside of London in Hampstead Heath. This building stood in for Mansfield Park in the 1999 Patricia Rozema version. While unpretentious on the outside, the interior has an outstanding collection of masterpieces from well-known artists such as Rembrandt, Vermeer, Turner, Reynolds and Gainsborough. It's an astonishing and magnificent collection for a free admission to the house and grounds.

There were many more treasures that we experienced but do not have the space to do them justice. To see more of what we toured, Sue's 150 pictures are on her website, http://www.reg-ency.com/re_logform.php While Sue and Judy did not know each was booking the tour, they ended up being compatible roommates and friends—and that's the best treasure of all.



The Cobb at Lyme Regis



Judy in a regency gown, Saltram House

Fall Meeting

September 24, 2011

The JASNA–GCR program year 2011–2012 got off to a delightful start on September 24. More than 100 participants, JASNA–GCR members and non-members alike, gathered at the Harold Washington Library Center in downtown Chicago to enjoy a lively (and most friendly!) debate between our own Elisabeth Lenckos, GCR Program Director and Instructor of Comparative Literature at the University of Chicago’s Basic Program, and our special guest Paula Marantz Cohen, Distinguished Professor at Drexel University and author of those enjoyable riffs on Austen, *Jane Austen in Boca* and *Jane Austen in Scarsdale*. The subject of their “Battle of Wits” was: “*Sense and Sensibility* or *Pride and Prejudice*—which is your favorite?”

In this thought-provoking discussion, Prof. Cohen held up the standard for the perennially beloved *Pride and Prejudice*, while Dr. Lenckos fought the good fight on behalf of the often-underrated *Sense and Sensibility*. Prof. Cohen cited the brilliant artistry of *Pride and Prejudice*, its comic genius, the dazzling wit and humanity of its irresistible heroine. Dr. Lenckos argued on behalf of *Sense and Sensibility*’s stronger sense of reality: for her, the affectionate but sometimes fraught relationship between the Dashwood sisters is much more like the complex relationships between real sisters, just as the selfish but remorseful Willoughby is a much more plausible cad than the more one-dimensionally villain-

ous Wickham. Prof. Cohen seemed taken by many of Dr. Lenckos’s observations, and many in the audience had to acknowledge that there is more to the challenging *Sense and Sensibility* than we had previously thought.

The question and answer session that followed enabled many of the participants to voice their opinions, pro and con, of each of the novels. **Marsha Huff**, former JASNA President, who had come down from the wilds of Wisconsin for the event, had some fascinating remarks to make about what



Paula Marantz Cohen and Elisabeth Lenckos

she perceives as the flaws in Emma Thompson’s adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* in the 1995 film. One young man expressed reservations about the future happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Darcy, citing Elizabeth’s “check[ing] herself”, censoring her own joke after she has accepted Darcy’s proposal; can a marriage that begins with self-censorship and dishonesty (however mild) have any chance of

success? Although his comment provoked some good-natured ribbing from the long-marrieds in the room, the speakers fielded the question deftly, citing Austen’s realistic willingness not to succumb too easily to romantic illusions.

So which novel emerged as the winner? Is it even possible to answer such a question? Of course, as much of a cop-out as it may seem, we all had to acknowledge that we love both books, but that doesn’t mean we can’t have fun debating about them!

A Sequel and a Rewrite



P. D. James

P.D. James has written an Austen sequel *Death Comes to Pemberly* in which Elizabeth is involved in a murder investigation. In a statement James apologized to Austen for putting Elizabeth in such a messy situation,

but added that the novel allowed her to fuse two great enthusiasms: “for the novels of Jane Austen and for writing detective fiction.” The book is due in the US in early December. **Joanna Trollope** is writing a contemporary version of *Sense and Sensibility* due out next year. HarperCollins announced it “will be part of a six-book series that matches authors of ‘global literary significance’ with the classic Austen works.”



Joanna Trollope

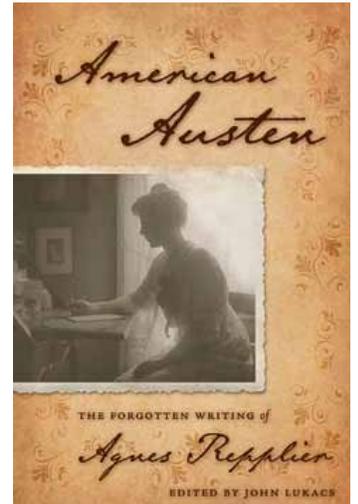
In a statement Trollope said, “This is a project which will require consummate respect above all else; not an emulation, but a tribute.”

American Austen

American writer Agnes Repplier (1855–1950) was called the “Jane Austen of the essay.”

American Austen is a collection on books, writing, literary life, American politics, and biographical sketches. Repplier writes with “engaging style, good-natured skepticism, biting wit, and realistic appreciation of the accomplishments of Western civilization.” In *The Royal Road of Fiction* she considers “the resistless progress of romantic fiction” of Aphra Behn,

Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Ann Radcliff. Concerning gothic novels she writes, “It might have been supposed that the gay, good-humored satire of *Northanger Abbey* would have laughed these tragic absurdities from the land. But Miss Austen alone, of all the great novelists of England, won less than her due share of profit and renown. . . [Austen] whose incomparable art is now [1897] the theme of every critic’s pen, was practically ignored while she lived, and perhaps never suspected, herself, how admirable, how perfect was her work.” Nor would Austen have suspected that her handwriting, used as a font, would grace a 21st Century book cover.



Spotted

Jane Austen on the road with Jack Kerouac (at 57th Street Books).



2011 AGM



Left top to bottom: The Japanese Garden in Fort Worth; Jane Austen Booksellers; Karen Doornebos at booksigning. Right top to bottom: Andrew Davies Plenary; Regency Ball dancers; Andrew Davies and Sue Forgue.



2012 Programs

Elisabeth Lenckos

I am delighted to announce that we will again concentrate in 2012 on the theme proposed for JASNA discussion by the organizers of the AGM of the year in question. On February 12, 2012, we will kick off our year's programs centering on "Sex, Power, and Money—Austen Style" with our traditional Luncheon at the Parthenon.

On May 5, our annual Spring Gala, this time taking place at the splendid Knickerbocker Hotel, will feature two speakers near and dear to my heart from my research fellowship and my many visits to Chawton House Library. I hope you will join our board and me in welcoming next year its charismatic and engaging director, Steven Lawrence, and his lovely partner Lindsay Ashford, publicity director, the force behind the Chawton House Library Short Story Competition, and a distinguished crime writer in her own right. In order for our members to get to know Steve and Lindsay better, I recently conducted the following interview with them.

Steve, can you begin briefly by explaining to our readers what Chawton House Library is and works to accomplish.

The Library houses a unique collection of early women's writing and a key element of CHL's mission is to promote a better understanding of the lives and work of women writers. The volumes in the collection are housed in the splendidly restored Elizabethan manor house which was once owned by Jane Austen's brother, Edward (the property, as many of you are aware, was saved from dereliction by the timely intervention of Sandy Lerner whose vision, energy and philanthropy ensured its preservation). We remain committed to ensuring



Lindsay Ashford and Steven Lawrence

that the manor is maintained and developed long into the future, thereby providing a fitting environment for study and research. As a charity we are also working hard to return the historic parkland estate to something close to how it would have looked and functioned in the early nine-

teenth-century—the current project to re-erect an eighteenth-century barn in Church Meadow is a good example of the progress which is being made. This facility will provide shelter for our Shire horses but will also have an exhibition and interpretation area which will focus on natural farming, sustainability and ecology. This is entirely fitting as the provision of educational opportunities is central to CHL's mission.

What are your plans for the future? What are the specific challenges you see CHL facing in the next few years?

These are exciting times—we are continuing to expand the Library's programmes and activities. These range from collaborative academic initiatives at the undergraduate and graduate levels (including Phd's); international cooperative projects (for example with the University of Oxford and institutions in China); publication ventures; conferences and workshops; and a host of events aimed at people of all ages and backgrounds.

We are also implementing a long-term strategy for adding to the collection whilst maintaining and improving the house and its contents. To help achieve this objective we are embarking on a major fundraising campaign to enable us to respond swiftly and positively to opportunities as they arise.

Of course, this is a difficult time to be undertaking major projects given the challenges facing the world economy, but we

have a clear vision and the determination to ensure that CHL goes from strength to strength.

We will be celebrating the Library's 10th anniversary in 2013 and we hope that many of you will be able to visit Hampshire during that year.

Could you say a little bit more about the fabulous Fellowship program instituted by Dr. Gillian Dow and your board?

The Visiting Fellowship Programme was inaugurated in 2008. Since then, under Gillian's direction it has gone from strength to strength. The programme is designed to give researchers the chance to use the collection whilst enjoying the stimulating ambience of the house and its surroundings. Successful applicants are able to stay in Chawton House Stables with its first-rate accommodation and this provides the ideal environment for scholars from different backgrounds to mix socially and to share ideas.

Applications will soon be invited for the 2012/13 places so keep an eye on the Chawton website (www.chawtonhouse.org) or register an interest in advance via info@chawton.net.

Is it true that as well as studying at the library and attending lectures and programs, one can get married at Chawton House?

Yes, wedding ceremonies and renewals of vows are possible both in the house and the beautiful grounds. But you'll have to be quick—we are already fully booked for weddings in 2012!

May Austenites visit Chawton House?

We are always delighted to welcome members of JASNA, their families and friends to CHL. All we need is a bit of advance warning—an email or telephone call—and we will ensure that you are able to enjoy a full guided tour of the house, including the

main reading room, where much of the collection of early women's writing is held.

Where did you get the wonderful costumes you and Lindsay were wearing to the 2011 Texas AGM Banquet and Ball?

Our costumes were the product of Sandy Lerner's generosity and a bit of 'make do and mend' on our part. Lindsay's dress was one of several costumes Sandy acquired from film productions and used by the staff at Chawton. Lindsay made the matching headdress from a curtain tieback, a few beads and some fabric and feathers bought from a market stall. My Regency breeches were cannibalized from my old cricket whites and my cravat was fashioned from an old net curtain—we're sure that Jane Austen would have approved of our thriftiness!

Did you enjoy dancing with Elizabeth Garvie when she came to visit the 2009 Chawton House celebrations?

The 2009 celebrations were memorable, not least for the ball which was held at the Great House, as it was known in Edward's time. We were very fortunate to be joined on that occasion by Elizabeth Garvie and David Rintoul (co-stars in the 1980 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*). Elizabeth's warm personality and graceful manner helped make the evening a huge success.

Talking about the activities hosted by Chawton House, Lindsay, could you introduce our readers to the wonderful Chawton House Library Short Story Award, in which you have played an important role?

When Steve and I moved to Chawton in 2008 I was captivated by the atmosphere of the place. Given its strong link with Jane Austen, I thought it would be wonderful if the Library could play some part in fostering creative writing. I came up with the idea of an award for short fiction, inviting stories inspired by Austen and Chawton House.

2012 Programs

continued

With a first prize of a thousand pounds, the aim is to discover and publish new writing talent. The competition is held every two years and has attracted hundreds of entries from across the world. The twenty finalists have their stories published in an anthology. The first collection, *Dancing with Mr Darcy*, has sold more than 15,000 copies in the US and the UK. The winners of the 2011 competition feature in *Wooing Mr Wickham* which is due out in Britain in late November 2011. Both collections are great reads and testify to Austen's enduring ability to inspire a new generation of authors.

Being yourself a writer, could you tell us how Jane Austen inspired you? You have long been a crime writer. What gave you the idea to set a mystery in Austen's time?

When I first came to Chawton I knew very little about Jane Austen's life, but the material in the Library fascinated me. I had been intending to start work on another

contemporary crime novel but instead I spent hours poring over the Austen family archives. My background as a criminologist alerted me to something in one of Jane's letters that triggered the idea for a very different novel from the one I had been intending to write. The result was *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* and I will be explaining more about its genesis during my presentation at the Spring Gala.

What are your plans for Chicago?

We are looking forward to re-visiting the splendid city of Chicago (we attended our first JASNA AGM there in 2008). Thank you so much to the JASNA Chicago region for inviting us to join you for the Spring Gala, and to Cathy Feldman for kindly offering to accommodate us in her home. In addition to enjoying the gathering, we hope to be able to visit southern Indiana during our stay, where Steve spent time in the late 1970s/early '80s.

Members

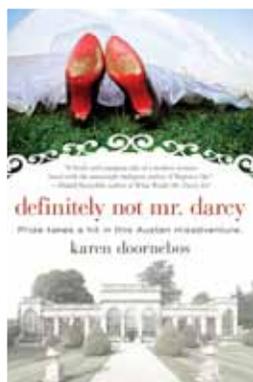
Welcome New Members

Elizabeth Lawson
Jane Reilly

Jean Sinopoli
Robert Benson

Definitely Not Mr. Darcy

Karen Doornebos signed copies of her novel, *Definitely Not Mr. Darcy*, for an audience of enthusiastic fans at Anderson's Books in Naperville on Wednesday, September 14, 2011. Introducing Karen, Jane Austen, portrayed by Debra Ann Miller, charmed the crowd with her accolades for Mrs.



Doornebos's skills and the novel. Another book signing was held on the following Sunday at the Beverly Arts Center in Chicago, as part of the Author Afternoon series. Karen is a member of JASNA-GCR, as is her main character, Chloe.



Left: Debra Ann Miller; Right: Karen reading from her novel.

LETTER FROM CHICAGO

JASNA-GCR

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Rockford, IL 61108

December Tea
The Fortnightly of Chicago

Calendar

December 3 Birthday Tea. *Jane Austen and Making Do* talk by Mona Scheuermann. The Fortnightly of Chicago, 120 E. Bellevue, Chicago, IL 2:00 pm–4:00 pm.

Feb, 12, 2012 Winter Meeting. “Money, Sex, and Power—Austen Style” discussion led by Diane Capitani, Garrett Theological Seminary at Northwestern University and JASNA–GCR Director of Education Outreach. Parthenon Restaurant, 314 S. Halsted Street, Chicago. 12:00–3:00 pm. Free valet parking.

May 5, 2012 Spring Gala. Millenium Knickerbocker Hotel, 163 E. Walton Place, Chicago. 9:00 am–3:00 pm.

For more events and programs that will be of interest, visit our website: www.jasnachicago.org, and click on “Midwest Events for Janeites.”