

Jeffrey Nigro



Mansfield Park in Montréal

As promised, the JASNA Annual General Meeting in October was a celebration of the 200th anniversary of *Mansfield Park* in the beautiful, vibrant city of Montréal. For those of us

who were lucky enough to attend, it was a treat from start to finish—no mean feat for a novel that is not usually thought of as being much “fun”. Elaine Bander, who spoke at a JASNA–GCR Gala a few years ago, was the AGM Coordinator, and she and the Montréal Region did Austen and JASNA proud with a conference that was as substantive as it was enjoyable. The staff at the Sheraton Le Centre was so polite that any request in halting French was greeted with a cheerful reply in English (which meant that, sadly, my French was just as rusty at the end of my stay as it had been when I arrived).

There were so many highlights on the program that it’s hard to pick out just a

few, but I’ll try. Plenary speaker Lynn Festa from Rutgers University spoke eloquently and perceptively about the “noise” in the Austen novel that most aims to be “quiet” (a key word in the final chapter). That “noise” includes the constant buzz of fears and anxieties in Fanny’s mind. A session on glee singing conducted by Kathryn Libin allowed us all to sing along. The speaker at the Sunday Brunch was Patrick Stokes, a direct descendent of Jane Austen’s brother, Rear-Admiral Charles Austen. Mr. Stokes’s witty and informative talk about the navy in Austen’s time had us all roaring with laughter as he tried to imagine how different an experience the Battle of Trafalgar would have been if Admiral Lord Nelson had had to conform to the kinds of “politically correct” regulations required of the Royal Navy of today.

Although I was unable to attend them, I also heard raves about a lively panel about pathologies in *Mansfield Park*, moderated by former JASNA President and beloved JASNA institution Joan Ray; and a most delightful session on star-gazing in the

LETTER FROM CHICAGO

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novel, given by Jane Kinney (daughter of the very Dr. Cheryl Kinney who gave us such an eye-opening talk about Lady Bertram at the GCR Gala this past May) and two of her colleagues at NASA. Who would have thought that Jane Austen would be less than six degrees of separation from Sally Ride?

One of the biggest challenges at any AGM is deciding which breakout sessions to attend, and with almost 50 breakout sessions divided among only five time slots, it was particularly difficult this year. I was sorry to have missed a talk by our own **Elisabeth Lenckos**, but my excuse was that my own presentation was at the same time! Other GCR members on the speaker roster were **William Phillips**, who spoke about the “somewhat unholy trinity” of country, city and church in *Mansfield Park*; and **Russell Clark**, who examined the plays turned down by the Bertrams and Crawfords in favor of *Lovers’ Vows* (considering that some of these plays had three juicy female parts, it’s a wonder that some of them were excluded—were they deliberately trying to keep Julia off the stage?). I’m happy to say that all of the sessions given by GCR speakers were well received.

At the RC Business Meeting, we celebrated the fact that there are now 74 JASNA regions, including the first-ever in Hawaii! The perfect finale to the weekend was a gorgeous concert of vocal music presented by Concerto della Donna, a mostly *a cappella* group of very talented young women, under the direction of Maestro Iwan Edwards. The concert took place at St. George’s Anglican Church, splendidly decorated for Thanksgiving (Canadian Thanksgiving, that is). The program included three specially commissioned pieces by Canadian composer Eleanor Daley to poems by the Austen women—Jane, Cassandra and their mother. These “Three Poems from the Parlour” were exquisite, haunting and witty all at once.

I am very grateful to the GCR Program Committee for letting me give an expanded version of my AGM presentation at our Birthday Tea on December 6. I hope you will join me for an exploration of the many meanings of Mary Crawford’s harp. The talk will include lots of beautiful images from the period, as well as some recorded musical examples. And I know that you will all enjoy the sumptuous repast and elegant decorations at the Fortnightly as much as I will!

Tribute to Dr. Catherine Kenney

Dr. Catherine Kenney was a professor of English at Mundelein College who was a featured speaker at many JASNA and JASNA-GRC programs in the 80s. She died August 2, and her memorial service was held August 23.

Along with her work being featured in *Persuasions*, Catherine wrote biographies combined with exhaustive literary criticism on Dorothy Sayers (*The Remarkable Case of DOROTHY L. SAYERS*) and Thurber (*Thurber’s Anatomy of Confusion*). She produced a play on Sayers both in London and Chicago and was co-recipient of the Clyde S. Kilby Research Grant from the Marion E. Wade center of Wheaton College, 1984.

Catherine retired from full-time teaching in order to raise her son David. She later took additional jobs fundraising for the Park Ridge Orchestra, the Pickwick Theatre, and Appletree Theatre. She led writing workshops to encourage a new generation of writers, and she developed a business to assist people who wanted to record their life stories and memories for their families.

An active Irish Catholic, Catherine was also a member of Hadassah and a strong supporter of Israel. Her talents, her sharp wit and sense of humor will all be missed. May her memory be a blessing!

—Ronnie Jo Sokol

Programs

The “lazy days of summer” have given way to a burst of activity that always comes with autumn. The new school year has begun; some of us have returned as students, some as teachers, and all of us who attended the Fall Meeting at the Harold Washington Library in September delighted in the debate between the students from Rockford East High School and Wheaton North High School, moderated by **Sara Okey**. If you were overbooked that day, you can read about it on page 6.

For those of us not directly involved with the education system, there were still opportunities to learn. The 35th annual AGM in Montréal gave Jane Austen fans, devotees and scholars a venue in which to discover new ways to appreciate *Mansfield Park* and to spend time in beautiful Montréal. If you had other commitments that week, you can see what you missed by reading Jeff Nigro’s recap on pages 2 and 3.

I hope your schedule on October 30th allowed for a celebration of Talk Like Jane Austen Day, and that you have reserved December 6th on your calendar for our December Tea in honor of Jane Austen’s birthday. We celebrate a little early this year to allow our members who wish to attend the tea in Wisconsin to attend both. Remember that this means our friends in Wisconsin will be available to attend our Tea as well, and considering that our Regional Coordinator **Jeffrey Nigro** will

Debra Ann Miller, Program Director

be presenting an expanded version of his AGM presentation “**Favourable to Tenderness and Sentiment**”: **The Many Meanings of Mary Crawford’s Harp**, I think this event will sell out quickly, so please reserve your tickets early.

Before we know it, winter and the new year will be upon us. We will say goodbye to the year of *Mansfield Park* and hello to a year of “Living in Jane Austen’s World”. Sunday February 8th we will kick off our new season at a new venue, Marcello’s in Lincoln Park. We hope to chase away the winter blues with views of the picturesque. Kim Wilson, author of *In the Garden with Jane Austen*, *Tea with Jane Austen*, and most recently *At Home with Jane Austen*, will delight our senses with her presentation **Gilpin, the Picturesque, and Dr. Syntax**.

Before you know it, May will be here (remember this in the dark and cold of January) so as soon as you get your 2015 date book, turn to May 2nd and 3rd and write “Spring Gala”. We will return to the WAC with a new format and an added event. Sunday May 3rd we will be attending Chicago Shakespeare’s production of *Sense & Sensibility*. We have secured a block of tickets at a discounted rate, so please check our events page at www.jasnachicago.org, and our Facebook page for details.

At the AGM

Below GCR member Sue Forgue with Sheryl Craig on the tour of Montmorency Falls.



At the AGM Banquet. Courtesy of Marcia Merrill.



Below authors Stephanie Barron and Syrie James. Courtesy of Deb Barnum.



Sightings/Citings

By Elsie Holzwarth

Austen and the Finch Hattons

In connection with her new book *Hard Choices* **Hillary Rodham Clinton** was interviewed in the *By the Book* column of *The New York Times Book Review*. Asked what she wishes “all students would read” she replied, “*Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen; *Out of Africa*, by Isak Dinesen; *Schindler’s List*, by Thomas Keneally.”

There’s more of a link between the first two than one would think. **Isak Dinesen** is the pen name of Baroness Karen Blixen who traveled to Kenya from Denmark in 1914. She wrote *Out of Africa* (1937) as a memoir of her 17-year stay during much of which she and British aristocrat, big-game hunter and safari leader **Denys Finch Hatton** were lovers. He is one of the characters in the book. The 1985 film *Out of Africa*, with Meryl Streep and Robert Redford, won 7 Academy Awards.



One person on Denys Finch Hatton’s family tree is Jane Austen. Her brother Edward’s daughter Lizzy Knight married Edward Royd Rice. Their daughter Fanny Rice married George William Finch Hatton. And their son Henry Stormont Finch Hatton married Anne (“Nan”) Codrington. Denys Finch Hatton was born to them April 24, 1887. Is Austen then his great great aunt?

But there is another person we also know on Denys Finch Hatton’s family tree: Lady Elizabeth Murray. Those who saw the movie *Belle* earlier this year will remember her as a niece of Lord Mansfield. As Chief Justice he had rendered the first important anti-slavery decision in England and, in the film, grappled with making a decision in the 1783 Zong Massacre trial. Her companion at Lord Mansfield’s Kenwood House was another niece of his Dido, Elizabeth Belle, whose mother was a slave. Lord Mansfield commissioned his niece’s portrait.



Lady Elizabeth Murray married George Finch Hatton. It was their son George William Finch Hatton who married Austen’s brother Edward Knight’s granddaughter Fanny Rice, and their son was Denys Finch Hatton’s father. So Lady Elizabeth Finch Hatton was his great grandmother.

Austen, who some claim named Mansfield Park in recognition of Lord Mansfield, was acquainted with Lady Elizabeth Finch Hatton and her children. She wrote Cassandra from Godmersham Park on August 14, 1805, “I have discovered that Ly Eliz:th for a woman of her age & situation, has astonishingly little to say for herself, & that Miss Hatton has not much more.” George she found to be “a fine boy & well behaved.” Forty-four years later he married Austen’s grandniece Fanny Rice.

by William Phillips

No Debate About the Pleasures of Debate

Debates regularly feature in gatherings of Jane Austen devotees. At GCR's Fall Meeting on September 13th, debate was not just a "feature" of the discussion, it was the focus of a well-received program entitled "Jane Austen and the Art of Debate."

The afternoon's program was organized by GCR Publications Director, Sara Okey. In an opening talk, Sara reviewed concepts related to the academic study of "argument." She also informed us about techniques and strategies involved in "competitive" debate as practiced in high schools and colleges. Sara also involved audience members in the process of preparing for debate. We received forms with analytical terms, chose characters from Austen and engaged in debate style analysis of our chosen characters.

The program concluded with a very special treat, a debate featuring students from two regional high schools. Sara brought along Raven Ross, Avery Goddard, Ian Pearson, and Andrew Butterworth, coached in competitive debate by her colleague

Keith Weigle at Rockford East High School to stand for the "negative." Representing the "affirmative" were Sarah Dahm, Billy Marchese, Katarina Goga, Jr., and Emiko Grace from literature classes taught by GCR Recording Secretary Linda Reinert at Wheaton North High School. The technical term for the focus of a competitive debate is the "proposition." The day's proposition (one of 'value') was

Resolved: "It is better to stay true to yourself than to change for others."

It should be obvious to Austen readers that the proposition is derived from *Mansfield Park*, whose bicentennial is being celebrated throughout 2014. The proposition celebrates the two century-long debate over the character of Fanny Price, which began within Austen's own family/social circle.

GCR Members and guests at the event were all charmed and delighted to encounter these students, all of whom were bright, articulate, persuasive, and passionate yet decorous in their engagement with the topic. If there was any difficulty in rendering a decision, it may have come from the fact that the two teams argued from somewhat different platforms. The affirmative team from Wheaton North developed arguments based primarily on issues raised by a careful reading of *Mansfield Park* itself. The negative team from Rockford East approached the topic in more expansive philosophical and historical terms.

There was no "vote" or "official adjudication" of the debate. Rather each member of the audience was allowed to reach a personal verdict. One thing of which this audience member is sure is that the afternoon was extremely successful. Unusually for GCR, participants in the event ranged from teenagers to octogenarians. The lack of a "verdict" was satisfying in the active discussions we could have among ourselves about the outcome. As a result, the real "winners" were all of us who were there.

GCR Board Elections at September Meeting

The event on September 13th opened with GCR's annual business meeting. This year there was a single agenda item: board elections. Interestingly, prior to a program on "debate," there was no debate as the report of the nominating committee was accepted unanimously. We welcome two new board members: Becky Dolin as Membership Secretary and Russell Clark as Treasurer. Thanks as well to those board members who were re-elected. For a complete list of GCR Board members and their positions, see page 2 of this newsletter.

Fall Photos



Clockwise from top left: A few comments from RC Jeff Nigro; Rockford East plotting strategy; Deputy RC William Phillips welcome and board election report; Rockford East and Wheaton North debaters; Back Row: Billy Marchese, Raven Ross, Avery Goddard, Andrew Butterworth, Ian Pearson, and Publications Director Sara Okey; Front Row: Coach Linda Reinert; Emiko Grace, Katarina Goga, Jr., and Sarah Dahm; Avery Goddard argues her position; a good turnout for the debate.



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Saturday, December 6

Calendar

- December 6** **Birthday Tea.** “Favourable to Tenderness and Sentiment: The Many Meanings of Mary Crawford’s Harp”. Talk by Jeff Nigro. 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. The Fortnightly of Chicago, 120 E. Bellevue Place, Chicago.
- February 8** **2015 GCR Winter Meeting.** Family Style Lunch and “Gilpin, the Picturesque, and Dr. Syntax” presented by Author Kim Wilson. 12:00 pm–3:00 pm. Marcello’s Lincoln Park, 645 W. North Ave., Chicago, IL 60610.
- May 2** **Spring Gala.** “What Jane Saw”. Woman’s Athletic Club, 626 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611.
- May 3** **2:00 pm. JASNA-GCR group visit to *Sense and Sensibility* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater.** Details on registration to follow!

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