

Letter from Chicago

Winter 2016



Luncheon

Sunday, February 7, 2016
Noon to 3 pm

Talk by
Claire Bellanti,
President of JASNA

**“You Can Get a Parasol at Whitby’s:
Circulating Libraries in
Jane Austen’s Time”**

Marcello’s Lincoln Park
645 W. North Avenue, Chicago IL 60610

Parking Available



Luncheon Registration Form

Members: \$40; Guests: \$50

Registration deadline: February 2, 2016

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 Becky Dolin, 640 Kathryn Court,
Greek Oaks, IL 60048.

Jeffrey Nigro



Happy Birthday, Emma!

To borrow a turn of phrase from Mr. Bennet, the spirit of Jane Austen must once again trouble her readers for congratulations: 2016 is the year in which the world celebrates the 200th anniversary

of *Emma* (yes, the novel was officially published in December 1815, but I would argue that Emma Woodhouse is the most diva-like of Austen's heroines, and what diva doesn't like to "adjust" her age?).

Often acclaimed as Austen's masterpiece, *Emma* combines dazzling prowess with language and a brilliant crafting of plot with the expected gallery of complex and fascinating characters.

As she had already demonstrated with *Mansfield Park*, Austen was not interested in churning out another "light and bright and sparkling" novel à la *Pride and Prejudice*. She wanted to challenge herself, and her readers. In Emma Woodhouse, Austen created a heroine who, in her own famous

words, "no one but myself will much like". Emma is almost as polarizing a figure among Austen lovers as Fanny Price, but for rather different reasons. Emma is effervescent, snobbish, kind-hearted, self-important, generous, and, yes, often clueless, but capable of learning and growing. She is also the only Austen heroine who is financially secure enough in her own right that marriage is an option rather than a necessity. Furthermore, the plot of *Emma* unfolds in the most narrowly confined setting of any of the Austen novels. Despite references to London and Weymouth, and a trip to Box Hill (which turns out to be a lot less fun than the characters have anticipated) we're pretty much "stuck" in Highbury and its environs for the entire book. Yet despite the novel's loveable but often unlikeable heroine and its occasionally stifling small-town atmosphere, astute readers can appreciate the true understanding of the human condition that emerged from Austen's genius.

Of course, it is that combination of sharp focus and appeal to our basic humanity

LETTER FROM CHICAGO

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that keeps us coming back to Austen, plumbing the depths of her writing, and immersing ourselves in the complex and volatile era in which she lived. In the process, we have created our own “global village” of Austen lovers, something I am happily reminded of at every JASNA event, whether our own GCR programs, or at the always-enjoyable Annual General Meetings, most recently in Louisville.

At this year’s AGM, I had the honor of being interviewed, along with our own **Dr. Diane Capitani** and many other JASNA friends, for a video produced by Gina Heath King, one of several videos filmed in conjunction with a special Austen-inspired installation she has created in two of the period rooms at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (on view there until the end of June). The video is a beautifully done statement of some of the many reasons we love Jane Austen and JASNA. You can check it out on the JASNA website (www.jasna.org). At one point,

Kimberly Brangwin Milham says, “It’s the author that brings us there [to AGMs], but it’s the friendships that keep us coming back”—as succinct a statement of the appeal of JASNA as I could imagine.

Among the other interviewees on the video is JASNA President **Claire Bellanti**, whom I have been privileged to know since she was JASNA’s VP for Regions, i.e. the person responsible for taking care of all of us RCs. On screen, Claire is characteristically eloquent and charming when discussing the many joys of belonging to JASNA. We are thrilled that Claire will be the speaker at the JASNA-GCR Winter Meeting on February 7. See the cover of this newsletter and page 5 for more information, and reserve your place as soon as you can for a generous and convivial family-style luncheon, as well as Claire’s enlightening program. We will enjoy our own bit of Highbury cheer in the middle of a Chicago winter.

Book Review

by William A Phillips

As If! The Oral History of *Clueless* as told by Amy Heckerling, The Cast, and The Crew

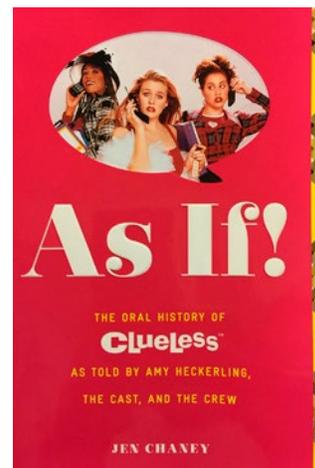
by Jen Chaney

New York: Touchstone—an imprint of Simon and Schuster, 2015

At the 2015 AGM in Louisville, I was delighted to discover at the display of our GCR friends, Jane Austen Books, that the year saw the publication of this eye-catching book, a tribute to the 20th anniversary of the release of *Clueless*. *Clueless* and the phalanx of Austen adaptations that began to invade large and small screen world-wide in the mid-90s had a lot to do with my becoming an Austen addict. My great British friend and colleague, Louise Heal (now Kawai) discovered a mutual attachment to Austen and the movies and came from our university teaching positions

in Japan to present at our first AGM in Colorado Springs in 1999 on the theme of *Emma*. If you’re interested, you can have a look at a piece based on our presentation at http://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/opno3/heal_phillips.html.

Jen Chaney, the author, began a journalism career writing mostly about popular culture around the same time that *Clueless* premiered on July 19, 1995. *As If!* shows that Chaney may not be as tuned into Jane Austen as most of us, but she is certainly a great fan of Amy Heckerling in general and of *Clueless* in particular.



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The book is divided into three major sections: I. “Before *Clueless*,” II. “Making *Clueless*,” and III. “The Impact of *Clueless*.” Among the things we learn about from her “oral history” is the long and rather uncertain road traveled by the *Clueless* project from proposed TV series (under such names as *No Worries* and *I Was a Teenage Teenager*—abandoned), to possible production as a film at Fox (dropped), to the actual film at Paramount under the title *Clueless*. Apparently the project had a considerable history before Heckerling and company discovered that *Emma* could be used as a pattern. This section on the history of the content of the film raises some fascinating “chicken or egg” questions about *Clueless* as a contemporary (for the mid-90s) adaptation of *Emma*. From Heckerling’s comments in this early part, her goal in the original TV project was a central plot focus on young women characters, something that “just wasn’t done” in Hollywood films of the period. It strikes this reviewer that when the production team became conscious of *Emma* as a model, it not only gave *Clueless* its title, it did quite a lot to give the movie its ongoing appeal. Not having begun as an adaptation of Austen, it really did carry the universal appeal of Austen forward, an appeal that the movie still has 20 years later.

As an “oral history,” the book employs a lot of “interview” style. For this project, however, there were rarely connected interviews, but mostly comments from a mixture of the large company of the movie. The result is, within each part of the book, a somewhat disjointed collection of elements from our own age of “text” and “tweet” that required the reader to do a lot of the work of thematic organization.

Nevertheless, there is a lot of interesting information about all these aspects of *Clueless*. Part I has the most Austen interest including comments from a group

of Austen scholars we all know that confirm the general opinion that *Clueless* may be the best of all Austen related movies. The information about casting is rather interesting. We learn, for example, that there really was a Mr. Hall (the speech teacher played by Wallace Shawn) at Bronson Alcott (Beverly Hills) High school, who acted on the side and had a small part in the movie. Part II on making the film is probably of the least interest to Austen issues and more aimed at those interested in costume, set decoration, and actual production events. Part III discusses how the movie affected movie making in general and “teen” movies in particular. Of some interest is the claim that the careers of many of the company members (acting and production) shifted into high gear after *Clueless*. The movie’s influence on progress in overcoming “Hollywood sexism” is of considerable interest. An afterward gives thumbnail biographical extracts about everyone who contributed to the project. Among other fascinating things, I learned that Austen scholar and long-time acquaintance, Devony Looser, also participates in roller derby under the moniker “Stone Cold Jane Austen.” Wow!

Reluctantly, I end on a somewhat negative note. As reported in the book, it would appear that the cast and crew (plus the author), who ranged in age from their late-20s to early-40s at the beginning of the story, mostly still use the same telescopic, slangy, and in my view, disappointingly inarticulate style of communicating that they did 20 years earlier. After all, among the central themes of both *Emma* and the movie is rather sophisticated conversation, or as Tai (played by the late Brittany Murphy) says in *Clueless*, “You guys talk like grown-ups.” Nevertheless, *As If!* added a lot of data to my continuing interest in *Clueless*, which I confess I watch again at least once a year.

Programs

At this reading, the crush and sparkle of the winter holidays will have faded and most of us will have turned with a shudder and a sigh toward another cold Chicago winter. The sun is gaining minutes each day but that brings little comfort when the wind chill is below zero. I wondered what did Jane do in the long winter months. We know that England was quite a bit colder during her lifetime than it is now, due to a “mini ice age” that lasted roughly 300 years and not only made the winters more cruel, but affected the summer crops as well. As the daughter of a member of the clergy, Jane’s life would have been more connected to the cycle of religious holidays than that of planting and harvest. So after the bustle of visits and making of gifts for family and the less fortunate of Chawton village, what would a winter day for Jane Austen include?

It seems that the change of season changed very little in her schedule. She walked when she could, although not so far as Wyards to visit Anna and her first child Jemima, but Jane sent a copy of *Emma* in January of 1816. The needlework would have shifted perhaps to the making of a new spring gown or instructing a niece in the making of a fire screen to be proudly displayed the following summer. In January of 1813 Jane writes that her mother “...is very well & finds great amusement in the glove-knitting;”

Jane would write, of course; letters of encouragement and support to family members. 1816 was a difficult year for the Austens. Charles’ ship was wrecked off the coast of Smyrna and Henry’s bank failed. She worked sporadically on the revision of *Lady Susan* and with Henry’s help retrieved the manuscript of *Susan* (*Northanger Abbey*) from Crosby & Co.

In the winter of 1816, as in every season and all through her life, Jane read. Again from the letter of January 24th, 1813:

“We are quite run over with books. She has got Sir John Carr’s Travels in Spain from Miss B. & I am reading a Society Octavo, an Essay on the Military Police & Institutions of the British Empire, by Capt. Pasley of the Engineers, a book

Debra Ann Miller, Program Director

which I protested against at first, but upon which on trial I find delightfully written & highly entertaining. I am as much in love with the Author as I ever was with Clarkson or Buchanan, or even the two Mr. Smiths of the city. The first soldier I ever sighed for; but he does write with extraordinary force & spirit. Yesterday moreover brought us Mrs. Grant’s Letters, with Mr. White’s Compts.- But I have disposed of them, Compts & all, for the first fortnight to Miss Papillion- & among so many readers or retainers of books as we have in Chawton, I daresay there will be no difficulty in getting rid of them for another fortnight if necessary.”

The “society octavo” that Jane is reading is a volume from the Chawton Book Society, the reading club in the town. Jane and the “harem” at Chawton Cottage seem to have had a hand in its formation and Jane took a great deal of pride in it.

“The Miss Sibleys want to establish a Book Society in their side of the Country, like ours. What can be a stronger proof of that superiority in ours over the Steventon & Manydown Society, which I have always foreseen & felt?- No emulation of the kind was ever inspired by their proceedings; no such wish of the Miss Sibleys was ever heard, in the course of the many years of;- that Society’s existence;- and what are their Biglands & their Barrows, their Macartneys & Mackenzies, to Capt. Pasley’s Essay on the Military Police of the British Empire, & the rejected Addresses?”

I’ll admit I won’t be spending the winter reading Captain Pasley’s essay, but I will be rereading *Emma*, and looking forward to JASNA President Claire Bellanti’s presentation **“You Can Get a Parasol at Whitby’s: Circulating Libraries in Jane Austen’s Time”** at Marcello’s on February 7th. I look forward to seeing you there and if I have the opportunity to become acquainted with Capt. Pasley of the Engineers, I will let you know if I found him to live up to Jane’s recommendation; but I doubt I will find him nearly so delightful a winter companion as Jane herself.

December Tea

The Fortnightly of Chicago was beautifully decorated for our annual Jane Austen Birthday Tea, sponsored by **Jane Hunt**. **Vicky Hinshaw** introduced our speaker **Sara Bowen** whose talk, *Village Life in Jane Austen's England: The View from the Parsonage*, was a reprise of her program at the 2015 AGM in Louisville. Her talk was dedicated to the late **Irene Collins**, author of *Jane Austen and the Clergy*.

It was from the clergy that we can get some idea of what was commonplace in village life at the time Austen was writing. "Unremarkable details of village life were remarked upon" in their letters, diaries and memoirs, Bowen noted. "Georgian parsonages were the hub of social life, the typical parish being 400-500 people. The entire range of village issues passed through the parsonage. The clergyman was a medical, educational and social service provider and one in six was also a magistrate."

Bowen provided a hand-out with Selected Resources, including descriptions of writings from clerical families. Of course, Jane Austen's Letters, collected and edited by **Deirdre LeFaye**, was top on the list. Then there was **Rev. William Jones'** 3000-page diary, (1777-1821), "compulsively readable...by a parson who did not hold his emotions back." Bowen quoted his "domestic lamentations" when he complained of his "dear wife" Theodosia that she "is a lawyer's daughter, twirling and twisting each argument to her own interest." **Rev. James Woodforde's** *Diary of a Country Parson: 1758-1802* was the subject of an essay by **Virginia Woolf**. She called it "murmurs...to himself." He was a lonely bachelor whose household was kept by his niece. In the autumn and winter of 1800-01, he was 60 years old. He wrote, Bowen told us, "of giving gifts, servant

issues, money matters, the weather, the joy of good food, and ordinary people trying to lead their lives while a war was going on whose outcome was unknown." "The poor," he wrote, "behave extremely well, though the times are hard for them."

The poor also appeared in *Paupers & Pig Killers: The Diary of William Holland, A Somerset Parson, 1799-1818*. Holland lamented the high price of corn, the sharp increase in the rate of the poor, and the heavy toll on the social and economic order imposed by the war. "Poor people must live," he declared. (In addition, he accused Jane Austen's aunt Jane Leigh-Perrot, charged with shop-lifting, and her husband James, of paying off justice, and called them "Mrs. Parrot" and "Mr. Sneak.") Sydney Smith was also sympathetic to the poor, even poachers. Bowen explained that shooting for sport was a form of male bonding, but was permitted only for those who had a freehold interest of 100 pounds. Others caught poaching were subjected to an impossibly heavy fine or three months in jail. Buying or selling of game was illegal.

An unwed mother would be pressured to name the father so he would support the child, not the parish. Woodforde wrote of one such father in custody, but Woodforde thought that compelling a marriage was "a cruel thing." Holland wrote of being asked to perform a bigamous marriage where the husband had been transported to Botany Bay. Holland thought that living with some sanction was better than with none at all. Jones wrote of a woman who drowned leaving a letter that she had been raped; he called her rapist a murderer. Bowen has obviously done an immense amount of research and her talk was truly fascinating.

Your correspondent gave a toast to Austen and **Jeff Nigro** conducted the raffle. This was a wonderful, informative afternoon.

Tea Photos



Clockwise from top left: Decorations abounded at the Tea; Presenter Sara Bowen; Elizabeth and Judith Kollar chatting; the lovely table centerpiece; Risha Kotecha, Mom Sudi Kotecha and Margo Malos smiling for the camera; Mimosa Shah, Amy Koester, Elia Rivera and sister Alma Rivera; Jane Davis, Jane Hunt (thank you, Jane, for the venue) and Martha Jameson; Arlene Kallwitz and Diana Tesauro; Elsie Holzworth offering the toast; the scrumptious serving table; First place door prize winner Frances Cahill, other lucky drawing prize winners: Andrea Bauer, Jane Wagoner, Betty Zasuner, and Harriet McCullough. Photos courtesy of Margo Malos.

LETTER FROM CHICAGO

JASNA-GCR
11133 Meadow Lark Lane
Belvidere, IL 61008



Sunday, February 7

Calendar

Feb. 7, 2016 **Winter Meeting.** 12:00 noon-3:00 pm. “You Can Get a Parasol at Whitby’s: Jane Austen and Circulating Libraries”, Claire Bellanti, JASNA President. Marcello’s Lincoln Park, 645 W. North Ave., Chicago, IL

May 7, 2016 **Spring Gala.** “Highbury and Beyond”. Woman’s Athletic Club of Chicago, 626 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL

Stay tuned for details about our Summer Program.

Our website is www.jasnachicago.org