

Letter from Chicago

Fall 2007



Jane Austen Birthday Tea Come Celebrate

Saturday, December 8 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm
The Fortnightly of Chicago
120 E. Bellevue Place, Chicago, IL

“Behold Me Immortal: Finding Jane Austen”

Speaker: Emily Auerbach, Professor, University of Wisconsin, and
author of *Searching for Jane Austen*

BIRTHDAY TEA REGISTRATION FORM

Members: \$40; Guests: \$45
Registration deadline: November 20

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 GCR-JASNA—and this form to Elsie Holzwarth, 1410 East 55th Street, Chicago, IL 60615-5409.

Membership Renewal

I am back from the Vancouver AGM, delighted with having met with members of JASNA and the 60 regional groups who enjoyed reading *Emma* and celebrating Jane Austen's genius. But I was reminded again of how fortunate we are to have a region that has offered so many varied and engaging pleasures this year: from book discussions, talks, Readers Theater, and a boat tour on one of the most beautiful days of the summer. We have shared an elegant afternoon tea at Fortnightly Club of Chicago, family style luncheons, and an ice cream buffet.

The work of GCR is done through the efforts of volunteers, but our region's dues pay for publishing and mailing our *Letter from Chicago* and flyers, and managing our website and database for email communication, membership renewals and event registrations. Our dues also support an annual Education Outreach grant to high schools to help the next generation discover Jane Austen and learn about her era. Our Chicago AGM will include a special program for high school students. If you have not already renewed your membership in our region, please renew today. Our website is www.jasnachicago.org. Remember to send in your renewal to JASNA too.

Dual membership may be confusing. We are part of a national organization, and local members belong to *both* JASNA and JASNA-GCR. To attend our AGM, you must be a member of JASNA. Also, the national organization supports *Persuasion*, the yearbook that publishes papers from the AGM, and *JASNA News* with articles, book reviews and news about chapters across the United States and Canada. If you have not received your national dues renewal notice in the mail, you can go to the

national website, www.jasna.org, to download the membership form. JASNA membership requires a separate mailing.

In Memoriam: Ellie Punkay

We were sorry to learn about the death of one of our staunchest Janeites, Ellie Punkay. Despite her diminutive stature, she had a large presence in GCR. Many of you may remember her near total recall of passages from Austen's novels and letters. When we had quizzes, invariably Ellie won or had a close second place. She always sat in the front aisle seat where she enjoyed talks and slide presentations from our many speakers. Ellie supported Chicago baseball. On the summer boat trip she wore a Cubs hat because the team was in town, but she could as easily worn the Sox cap if they were home. Ellie loved music, especially opera and symphony concerts; she was a member of the Grant Park music association since its inception. She was honored by *Sun-Times* theater critic Hedy Weiss, for her passionate and endless support of theater in Chicago.

We are grateful to **Ronnie Jo Sokol** and **Barbara English** for their generous donations to our Outreach Education Program in Ellie's name. Barbara wrote, "Ellie Punkay was an avid fan of all Jane Austen's works, and truly knowledgeable of all the details . . . I think she'd be happy to see her fellow Janeites remember her this way." Members who would like to honor Ellie are invited to contribute to JASNA-GCR, c/o Elsie Holzwarth, Treasurer, 1410 East 55 St., Chicago, IL 60615-5409.

Austen and Augustine

At our September meeting, held at the Sulzer Library, our member **Diane Capitani**, showed us a new way of looking at Austen. She is writing a book on Austen as an Augustinian.

Augustine (354–430) was a bishop in the early Christian church. Augustine “was wild in his youth.” Capitani recommends that we read his *Confessions*. Augustine gave a “collective dimension to the idea of sin” which “rubs off from bad people.” We are reminded of Tom Bertram and Lydia Bennet who are swayed by other people. But we each have “a natural sense of right and wrong” and, therefore, “we are responsible to do right. Lydia chooses to do wrong.”

“*Mansfield Park* is perhaps the most moral” of Austen’s works; all 7 deadly sins appear. “Nobody *makes* anybody do anything.” Austen, like Augustine, had a “belief in free will.” Although others may try to lead us astray, our fall is due to our own choices. Good can prevail. It is Henry Crawford’s “conscious evil choices” which lead to his downfall, and Mary Crawford, who has

*But who am I, what am I?
Is there any evil I have
not committed in my
deeds, or if not in deeds,
then in my words, or if not
in words, at least by
willing it?*

—an excerpt from *Confessions*
by Saint Augustine

some good characteristics, “is upset that Henry got caught.” For Austen and Augustine moral law is within each person.

Mary Crawford says a clergyman “is nothing.” But Austen was a clergyman’s daughter. There

is a clergyman in each of her 6 novels. “Even though she mocks, it doesn’t mean she’s anti-clergy; she attacks false clergy to reveal the truth.” The clergy should be the public teacher of morals. Edmund Bertram says the clergy influence public “manners”, by which Austen means “conduct.”

In his youth Augustine saw and acted in plays. The “vice” in acting arises when the “actor becomes his character.” Henry Crawford is good at reading Shakespeare because he’s always acting. The acting in rehearsal at Mansfield Park gets too close for comfort before Sir Thomas returns.

Fanny Price “represents moral law. There is no shading with Fanny.” She is an example that, despite one’s background, “rules for action are stamped in our nature. Truth and goodness cannot be taken from the soul; such a person will triumph over evil.” To Augustine “morality is not a matter of other people’s opinions. To deny the authority of moral laws is to deny God.” Evil cannot exist without good and “the sole origin of evil is free choice of will.” This freedom make us responsible for all our actions.



Diane Capitani

Saturday, December 8, Tea Birthday Celebration

No sooner had we chosen *Austen's Legacy* as the theme we would propose when we applied to JASNA to host the 30th AGM here in Chicago in 2008, than the world of Jane Austen experienced not a virtual, but a literal, explosion. Austen exploded into more areas of popular culture than Austen devotees might ever have imagined. We might also find ourselves disapproving quite a lot as well. More than a few of us wonder what will come along next. The possibilities can be terrifying: *Mary Crawford's Tips on Becoming a Natural Horsewoman; A Symposium on Seduction Techniques: Willoughby, Wickham and Crawford Tell All; Picnics on Parade: Mrs. Elton's Guide to Impressing Bucolic Neighbors.*

There seems to be no end to the fanciful, not to mention lucrative, possibilities for exploiting every jot and tiddle of information about things related to Austen, whether accurate or not. While lots of the recent "Austen-alia" is quite a bit of fun, many of us worry about losing sight of OUR Austen. Where do we look for the Austen we love, and thought we knew?

Fortunately, we still have a number of scholars and writers to help us see through the haze, and at least attempt to maintain a clearer image of Austen. Among those is our neighbor, **Emily Auerbach**, from Madison, Wisconsin. We are delighted that Professor Auerbach is available to join us for this year's *Austen Birthday Tea* to speak on:

**"Behold Me Immortal:
Finding Jane Austen"**

One of the most informative and stimulating of working Austen scholars, Professor Auerbach also brings a wry smile and a 'twinkle in the eye' to a contemporary examination of Austen.

We can expect her to share some of the insights she has ably and amply displayed in her 2004 book *Searching for Jane Austen*, and more. She helps us extricate Austen from the "respectably ladylike literary nook" to which her own family and generations of literary critics have consigned her. Auerbach also provides us with the tools to clear away the Disney-like "Sleeping Beauty" thicket that has recently grown up around the "popular" Austen. As she says at the end of her book, "The more one searches for the enigmatic Jane Austen, the more one discovers artistry and intelligence, allusiveness and wit." Auerbach guides us in appreciating all of these qualities.

Please join us—and bring friends. In addition to hearing Emily Auerbach, we have the opportunity to enjoy the opulent holiday decorations and delicious high tea we have come to expect at the Fortnightly. Everyone will have a chance for some nifty door prizes as well.

Saturday, February 9, Lunch

Lunch at the Parthenon Restaurant in "Greektown" and discussion of Austen biographies by **Claire Tomalin**, **Carol Shields** and **Jon Spence** and the (slightly) biographical film *Becoming Jane*.



AGM Countdown Begins

All those dueling Democrats and Republicans have November 4, 2008 on the brain. By the time that date rolls around, all of us Chicagoland Janeites will have had 4 weeks to kick back, enjoy a few of our favorite adult beverages and bask in the afterglow of having hosted the 30th Annual General Meeting of the Jane Austen Society of North America.

As I sit down at the keyboard and start tapping away, it is exactly 51 weeks until **Jeff Nigro** takes the podium in the curtain raising program of *Austen's Legacy: Life, Love & Laughter*. The major events of the next 3 days take place in the form of Panels, Plenary Speakers, Banquet, Best Ever Ball, Emporium, Cinema Room, Tours and opportunity for Austen related stimulation and fun. Proposals have been rolling in for both Breakout Sessions and Poster Sessions to round out what is shaping up to be an exciting total package. Check it out at our website www.jasnachicago.org. Just follow AGM link and you'll be kept up to date.

GCR folks spread the word in Vancouver as JASNA members met there for new encounters with *Emma*. Co-chair, **Rita Shafer**, GCR Coordinator **Natalie Goldberg**, and JASNA Board member and AGM treasurer, **Jane Davis** were all spotted pumping flesh, passing out materials, pinning up posters and generally trumpeting the wonders of the Windy City. My breakout session drew more than 100. **Jeff Nigro** and **Natalie Goldberg** participated in the unique promotion that Chicago presented at the final brunch program on Sunday.

Other Chicago folks in evidence included **Doris and Don Folkl, Sue Forgue, Enid**



Golinkin, Sandra and Eston Gross, Liz Ireland, Corinne McArdle, Christine and Margart Plunkett, Duwana Wall, and Liz Philosophus-Cooper and Molly Philosophus. Everywhere we turned, folks were constantly telling us all that they couldn't wait to get to Chicago next year.

AGM Volunteers

Some of you have already said you want to volunteer for our AGM. We need lots more for the many small, and not-so-small tasks that are all essential for our AGM to be as memorable as we hope. Here are a few of addresses you can use to add your name to the list. Please include name, e-mail and phone number(s) and send a message to me at wilphil@sbcglobal.net, Rita at armacdermot@hotmail.com or Natalie at nataliegoldberg@sbcglobal.net.

You can also let us know at the Tea.

Volunteers will be contacted by a volunteer coordinator and asked to participate in some particular way. Our July and September '08 meetings will be devoted to "volunteer bees" to get lots of work done.

See you at the Birthday Tea!

Photos

Summer Outing—Lake Cruise



Beverly Roth



William Phillips and Jeff Nigro



Natalie Goldberg

September Meeting



◀ Kelly and Christopher Engler,
Diane Capitani



◀ (l to r) Jan Anderson
Shelley Gottel



Cathy and Amy Feldman



Betty Bannor

2007 AGM in Vancouver



Natalie Goldberg

Sandra & Eston Gross

Rita Shafer

Corinne McArdle

Jane Davis

Becoming Jane

Twenty five years ago our program chair **William Phillips** met Jon Spence in, of all places, Saudi Arabia. Spence wrote *Becoming Jane Austen*. In the chapter entitled “Love and Art” Spence claims, “Jane’s joy in her love for Tom Lefroy informs the whole of *Pride and Prejudice*.” Spence based his argument on Austen’s letters. See **Deidre LeFaye’s** edition of the *Letters*: #1 and #2 (January, 1796), #3 (August, 1796) and #11 (November, 1798). Spence read between the lines and opined that Austen spent almost 2 years pining away after Lefroy.

Spence was “historical consultant” for the movie *Becoming Jane* which plays fast and loose with the facts of Austen’s life, particularly her relationship with Lefroy. Austen runs off with him, but (unlike Lydia Bennet) comes to her senses at the last moment.

Most moviegoers enjoyed the film, despite the fact that, as **Gail Murphy** points out, “the plot was entirely fictionalized ” to the extent of being described by **Martha Jameson** as “ridiculous. . . neither Hollywood nor Jane Austen would normally end with *both* of the two female characters without a man.” (Cassandra’s fiance Tom Fowle has died, Tom Lefroy has gone on to study law, and Jane has rejected a fictional Mr. Wisley.) Phillips “had to give up trying to figure out what mad games the writers and director were playing with the characters. Half the time I thought they were imposing events from Austen’s life on her novels; the other half I thought they were imposing characters from her novels on her life. I guess it was both.”

Ronnie Jo Sokol “enjoyed the way the fantasy was based on facts, and I didn’t mind the deviations, except one. I don’t believe Jane Austen would ever have eloped, as she was concerned with the feelings of her family and would not have hurt them in this way.” Murphy, too, enjoyed the film, “but I couldn’t believe in the Jane Austen character.”

Linda Relias wondered, “Who could portray Jane Austen and do her justice? I was very surprised. Anne Hathaway was an elegant and natural Jane; hers was a sensitive and subtle portrayal. And James McAvoy was delightful as an exuberant, Byronic Tom Lefroy.” **Jeff Nigro** thought “he makes a believable ‘bad boy’ with an only slightly believable good side.” Then there is Laurence Fox as Mr. Wisley, the foil to Lefroy. **John Relias** was very moved by Jane’s financial circumstances. He thought Jane should have married Mr. Wisley, who “would have let her write and she could have been comfortable. Wisley was astute enough to value her.” Phillips concurs, “I thought she was nuts not to choose the very sweet ‘good boy.’”



McAvoy

Hathaway

Fox

But, Jane has eyes for Tom only.

To Murphy “all the acting was believable.” Nigro thought “Julie Walters and James Cromwell do a nice job of playing the Austen parents, without turning them into the Bennets.” “Her Mrs. Austen was a lovely combination of caring and controlling,” according to Phillips. “Affection is desirable; money is absolutely indispensable” is one of Mrs. Austen’s pronouncements. Nigro notes, “It was nice to see Jane’s brother George make a couple of appearances.” (It’s noteworthy because George, disabled and known to have been placed away from any Austen home, is hardly ever mentioned.)

The film is worth seeing for the acting of two legends. Dame Maggie Smith is Mr. Wisley’s aunt, Lady Gresham, another character made up for the film, and she is a regular Catherine de Bourgh. Asks Phillips, “How can we not love those pursed-lipped, denasalized sneers?” “Tainted by suspicion,” Lady Gresham snootily describes Jane after her return from almost eloping with Tom. Sir Ian Richardson died before we saw the film, but not before giving a fine performance as Tom’s authoritarian uncle.

Comparing the films *Becoming Jane* and *Shakespeare in Love*, **Linda Reinert** writes, “in both. . . the writers in focus experience heartbreak (at the sharp point of financial wrinkles in their love affairs) before gaining authorial fame. Both films play loose with knowledge of the respective writers.” But, Reinert finds a major difference: in *Shakespeare in Love* there are “layers of comedy;” in *Becoming Jane* “the key ingredient—a sense of humor” is left out.

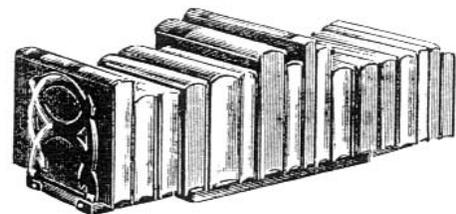
“I don’t have a problem with seeing Jane Austen as a flesh-and-blood human being, with real emotions and desires; but I do

have a problem with the simplistic approach that implies that every artist’s work is completely autographical, and one unhappy love affair (or flirtation) inspires a lifetime’s worth of work,” comments Nigro. “As if Austen didn’t work from a combination of observation, personal feelings, empathy and imagination, as well as a burning desire to write (although, granted, there is that undeniable element of wish-fulfillment fantasy in her work.)”

The Jane Austen Book Club

Reading Jane Austen “is the perfect antidote to life,” claims Bernadette. “Jane Austen is a frigging minefield,” announces Jocelyn. They are members (5 women and 1 man) of a book club reading Austen’s novels. The film, based on Karen Joy Fowler’s novel, *The Jane Austen Book Club*, “is a hoot,” says GCR chair **Natalie Goldberg**. “One of the funny moments in the novel is when one of the book club members (Prudie) is about to have an inappropriate affair with her underage student. She is ready to cross the street to him when she sees flashing in the stop sign the question ‘What Would Jane Do?’ and turns around and drives away. By film’s end, she and her husband are reconciled.” This is an ensemble piece of romantic comedy with every actor doing a splendid job.

Fowler’s novel begins, “Each of us has our own private Austen.” For **Jeff Nigro**, Austen’s novels “aren’t about being male or female, but becoming aware of what it means to be human.”



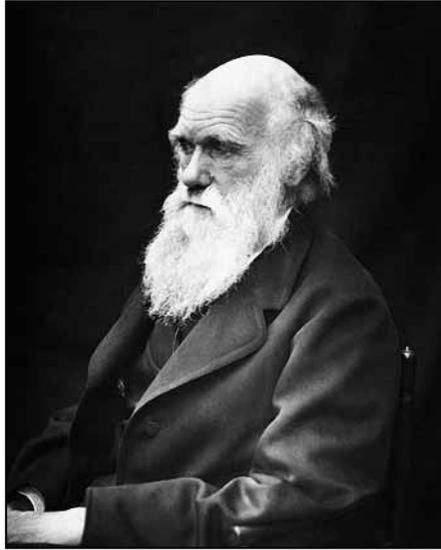
Austen and Darwin

The Field Museum's very interesting exhibit on Charles Darwin, open to year's end, is a must-see. The Chicago Botanic Garden displayed first editions of his books. Darwin's grandfathers were Erasmus Darwin, doctor, scientist and writer, and Josiah Wedgwood, founder of Wedgwood Pottery. They were close friends and their children Susannah Wedgwood and Robert Darwin married. Charles was their fifth child. In July, 1817 Darwin's mother died, the same month as Austen. Darwin was 8 years old.

Darwin's education at the University of Edinburgh to become a doctor, and at Cambridge to become a clergyman, resulted in failure. He wrote in his *Autobiography*, "To my deepest mortification my father once said to me, 'You care for nothing but shooting, dogs and rat-catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and all your family.'"

Fortunately, in August, 1831 Darwin received a letter from one of his teachers that the *HMS Beagle* would be circumnavigating the globe, primarily to survey South America. Captain Robert FitzRoy "wants a man. . . more as a companion than a mere collector, and would not take any one, however good a naturalist, who was not recommended to him likewise as a *gentleman*. . ."

It was Darwin's uncle Josiah Wedgwood II whose arguments persuaded Darwin's father to consent. To the elder Darwin's



objection that his son "would never settle down hereafter" Uncle Josiah wrote, "Is it not the case that sailors are prone to settle in domestic and quiet habits?" (Shades of *Persuasion*: the Harvilles and the Crofts.)

Cousin Charlotte Wedgwood wrote Darwin a congratulatory letter, "I am delighted that you have fallen in with a Captain Wentworth—such an extraordinary piece of good

luck is a good omen for every else." She continued, referring to her sisters Fanny and Emma, "Miss Julia Mainwaring came here today to intreat some of us to go & help her to entertain a party of officers today she being the only lady—nobody would go but Emma, who when she found she could not get Fanny to go & keep her in countenance had great scruples lest she should appear too Lydiaish, however by going rather early she hopes she should appear to be staying with Miss Julia, rather than come express to meet the officers." Darwin, then age 22, was already familiar with Austen; no explanations needed for the allusions to Captain Wentworth or Lydia Bennet.

On December 27, 1831 the *Beagle* embarked and Darwin was seasick. "In the evenings Captain FitzRoy sometimes invites the ashen-faced and nauseous Darwin into his cabin for conversation and, to their mutual pleasure, they have discovered they share an admiration for the novels of Jane Austen," according to **Rebecca Stout** in *Darwin and the Barnacle*.

Darwin studied the flora, fauna and geology of the various sites he visited and sent many specimens and much correspondence home to England. Sister Susan wrote him in 1832, “. . .we received your last letter written from St. Salvador, which all the house rejoiced over most heartily: the happy account you give of yourself and all your enjoyments in the tropical world far exceed what we most hoped for you. —Your letter has been read very often over to Papa (like Mrs. Bates). . .”

The *Beagle* returned to England on October 2, 1836 and Darwin began studying and writing. Thoughts also turned to marriage. He drew up a list of pros and cons. Among the pros of having a wife: “Constant companion, (& friend in old age) who will feel interested in one,—object to be beloved and played with.—better than a dog anyhow. . . Only picture to yourself a nice soft wife on a sofa with good fire & books & music perhaps. . .”

On November 9, 1838 Darwin proposed to his first cousin Emma Wedgwood (who hadn’t wanted to appear too Lydiaish when she went to see the officers). “Although Emma had accepted him so readily, she did not wish to be rushed into marriage. She wanted time to savour the happiness of being engaged,” according to **Cyril Aydon** in *Charles Darwin*. He quotes Emma’s letter to Darwin’s sister Catherine, “Tell Charles to be a good boy . . .and take things leisurely. J.A. says it is the happiest time of Emma’s life & it is a thousand pities it should be a very short one.” Catherine knew who “J.A.” was.

In December Emma wrote Darwin, ending her letter, “so Goodbye my dear old Charley Tell me how you are. I do not like your looking so unwell & being so overtired when I come & look after you I shall scold

you into health like Lady Cath. de Bourgh used to do to the poor people.” Aydon comments, “The ‘nice soft wife’ was promising to be his nurse as well. This was much better than a *dog*.” (And so she was, nursing Darwin through his many periods of ill health for the rest of his life.)

In January, 1839 Emma wrote Darwin, “I am reading *Mansfield Park* which I find very suitable. . . Write soon like a good boy for your letters are not thrown away upon me.” They were married January 29 and would have 10 children, 7 of whom survived childhood.

In 1842 the Darwins moved to Down House in the village of Downe, Kent, where he studied and wrote until his death forty years later.

Darwin kept a regular daily schedule. Son Francis recollected in *Reminiscences of My Father’s Everyday Life*, “(A)bout three in the afternoon, he rested in his bedroom, lying on the sofa, smoking a cigarette, and listening to a novel or other book not scientific. . . He was extremely fond of novels . . .and would anticipate the pleasure of having a novel read to him. . . He could not enjoy any story with a tragical end: for this reason he did not keenly appreciate George Eliot, though he often spoke warmly in praise of *Silas Marner*. Walter Scott, Miss Austen, and Mrs. Gaskell were read and re-read till they could be read no more.”



LETTER FROM CHICAGO
JASNA-GCR
Elsie G. Holzwarth
1410 East 55th Street
Chicago, IL 60615-5409

Jane Austen Birthday Tea
Saturday, December 8

Calendar

Past Due Membership Dues Renewal. Individual members, \$25
Family members, \$35

December 8 Birthday Tea. The Fortnightly of Chicago, 120 East Bellevue Place, Chicago.
Emily Auerbach, *Behold Me Immortal: Finding Jane Austen*
2:00–4:00 pm

February 9, 2008 Luncheon. Parthenon Restaurant, 314 S. Halsted, Chicago.
Discussion: Biographies of Jane Austen by Claire Tomalin,
Carol Shields and Jon Spence, and film *Becoming Jane*
Noon–3:00 pm

May 3, 2008 GALA. Allerton Hotel, Chicago. 9:30 am–3:30 pm

October 2–5, 2008 Annual General Meeting hosted by Greater Chicago Region.
Austen's Legacy: Life, Love & Laughter.
Westin Michigan Avenue Hotel, Chicago, IL

Our website is www.jasnachicago.org