

My Dear Cassandra...

Much of America lives by the process of manipulation, and nobody
renders it more brilliantly than Austen - *Henry Weinstein*

**“She has been suffering much from the Headache, and Six Leaches a day for 10
days together relieved her so little that we thought it right to change our measures-“
(Sanditon)**

Jane Austen’s novels are full of references to complaints, maladies and ill-health, from
Mary Musgrove and Mr. Woodhouse, to Lady Bertram and Fanny Price, not to mention
the family of hypochondriacs in the fragment ‘Sanditon’.

Our May meeting will feature a talk by Dr. Roger Thomas from the University of Calgary
Medical Centre, on ‘Medicine in the Time of Jane Austen’ which will give us some
background information as to just what these sufferers were up against in terms of
healthcare!

Please join us in the meeting room of the William Castell Library on May 12 from 2:00
to 4:00. We are trying a new format for this meeting; the presentation will open the
afternoon, with announcements and other business after the coffee break. Hope to see
you there!

284-4059

Birthday Tea??

*The Program Committee will be meeting shortly to arrange programs for the next year
(September, '07 to May, 08). I have heard regrets expressed for the demise of the
Birthday Tea... If you are interested in coordinating this event for November, 2007
please let me know! Randie Lindr-lind@shaw.ca 284-4059*

Edmonton Gala

The Edmonton Gala with the theme of ‘Weddings’ will be held on May 26 in the old
Arts building at the University of Alberta. Cost is \$35, and includes two snacks and
lunch. For further information and tickets contact Beatrice Nearey at (780)437-4130.
bnearey@yahoo.com.

A Feast of the Arts – Regency Style

Our regular members accompanied by friends, guests, and other Jane Austen enthusiasts gathered at Fort Calgary on Saturday, March 17 for an afternoon's entertainment centred on the arts in the time of Jane Austen.

We bought tickets for the interesting assortment of 'Bring and Buy' items while watching a demonstration of English Country dancing by 'Sprigged Muslin', under the direction of Pat Barton. A buffet lunch followed, and we were able to chat with old friends and welcome visitors as we enjoyed the pleasant ambience of the Officer's Mess.

Lisa Roberts from the University of Calgary Drama Department gave a presentation on 'Regency Fashion and Theatrical Adaptation' which was illustrated by a vast assortment of costumes modeled by members of the audience. It was most interesting to get an inside perspective on the challenge of costuming for historical productions, and we all want Lisa to whip us up a costume for the next AGM in Vancouver!

Draws for the 'Bring and Buy' items were held during the Coffee Break; thanks so much to those of you who donated items.

The last presentation, 'Fancy Pictures and Cottage Doors: Cultural Politics and the Picturesque' was given by Christine Somers, art historian from the Alberta College of Art and Design. Her talk gave us a lot of information about the relationship between Regency art and the cultural milieu, and was amply illustrated by slides taken of art work of the period.

Many thanks to the Organizing Committee of this event: Elvee Fenning, Rita Dempsey, Susan Spooner, Elizabeth Marshall, Isabel Temple and Randie Lind. Thanks also to Pat Barton and 'Sprigged Muslin'.

Randie Lind

Costumes for the 2007 JASNA Conference in Vancouver

Should anyone be interested in having a costumes made for the upcoming JASNA Conference at Vancouver, in October 2007, please contact HELEN HUTTON. Phone: 283-3852 - Cell: 681-6705. Helen is a professional semestress, having done costumes for both the Glenbow and Lougheed house

Submitted by Elvee Fenning

DEATH BY CHILDBIRTH

18th Century Health Care – Submission: - February Meeting (Valentines)

Jane Austen hardly mentions children "dying like flies" in childbirth (according to the web) in her cherished six novels. I think it is because she passionately enjoyed writing about the ironic and witty drama of romance and personal relationships and deliberately put aside expressing the pain and hardship of DEATH and loss in her own family and that of her neighbours' babies in her community. The story-book ROMANCE and Happily-Ever-After of Miss Jane Austen suggests feelings of a Valentine nature!

It was some 25 –maybe 30, -years ago that my dear, petite, 102 lb., 87-year-old Aunt Ada died. She was born in Reading, England.. As I look back, I think my dear aunt could be termed a “hyprochondriac” just like Mr. Woodhouse. She was as protected, cared for, adored, paid attention to, every bit as much as he by our few family members. Despite medical concerns and faith in health books, dear Aunt Ada stands out in our family’s memories as a powerful, positive force, because it was she, who, in one (sometimes irritating) way or another, taught us the fine qualities of being able to outreach to others and think that’s what we here to do, au naturel.. Did I tell you that my delicate, nervous, thin, and sensitive, Aunt Ada bore 16 children, all to one husband, and no children to her second husband? As you know, -- beautiful, ornate “Valentines” in the Georgian/Regency period were many; -- but there were no contraceptives! Aunt Ada gave birth to triplets, 2 sets of twins and several single births which all ended in death at birth in the early 20th century, and were all duly acknowledged by the Queen Mother of England. Medical science did NOT progress quickly from the 18th century to HER 20th century brood. Of the 16 births, 5 children survived but have since died of natural causes. We may now know that the characteristics of long-ago hypochondriasis is not all that negative as, believe me, Aunt Ada was a gem.

The death of children at birth was common at the time of Jane Austen and she makes slight reference to such sad happenings in the lives of her characters and the aristocracy of the time. I and others are attending today to listen, learn, and write something by way of a response to the subject, “18th Century Health Care” at the request of our speaker and JASNA President.. What an interesting exercise to think of medical expertise, misdiagnoses, sanitation, and MAYBE midwifery, those 3 centuries ago and compare them with today’s practices. The Web says that more than half of the children born in England and France in the Regency period died “like flies”—that’s deplorable to think about.! Thank goodness, Jane Austen didn’t go to death by childbirth with her writings. Maybe Miss Austen and her sister, Cassandra, considered reality at the expense of romance in refusing marriage proposals and that I go too far to surmise such a thing.

To close this 21st century chatty piece, I’m thinking of the popular slangy refrain that counteracts 18th century death by child birth and lauds current medical procedures -- it goes; - “We’ve Come a Long Way, “B A B Y”. – Earthlings everywhere – Rejoice!

Submitted by Fran Birzins

(The following is a letter that may well have been written to the poet John Keats by his guardian, Richard Abbey. Contributed by Randie Lind)

October, 1816

My dear Keats,

I write with great distress upon hearing the news that you are considering giving up medicine in order to become a poet. As your guardian, and the trustee of your grandmother’s estate I feel it is incumbent upon me to advise you strongly against this decision.

My dear boy, only think of the resources that have already been expended to provide you with a suitable livelihood! And consider the time and energy that you have invested in your studies; the years of apprenticeship with the apothecary-surgeon, Mr. Thomas Hammond, where I am told you excelled because of your attention to detail; and above all your recent achievement in qualifying as a Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries after your studies at St. Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospital in London. You have experience as a dresser, and have worked in infirmaries, hospitals and dispensaries; a most promising career lies ahead of you!

I have been looking into the matter and have found that in this Age of Science, the profession of medicine is developing rapidly. New drugs are available, and there is a better understanding of anatomy and physiology; the work that Jenner has done with vaccination in the control of smallpox is outstanding! More university-educated men are taking up the profession; hospital facilities are expanding and specializing, and the increased reform and regulation brought in by the Apothecaries' Act of 1815 have all joined together to enhance the respectability of medicine as a career. Your father was only an innkeeper, but you have been given the opportunity to better yourself.

I am concerned about the dangerous influence of your new friends who are encouraging you to waste your time on poetry! Leigh Hunt may have published your poem in his periodical 'The Examiner' but poetry will never put bread on the table... I have heard that you have been seen in the company of radicals and atheist such as Shelley. Why man! Poetry is for the wealthy, the aristocracy, not a boy like you!

Trust me, John; this is the Age of Science and Reason, you will never make a name for yourself with Poetry! I hope you will come to your senses and reconsider your decision; until you do I can not undertake to advance you any more of your dear grandmother's resources.

Your devoted guardian,

Richard Abbey

Our next Meeting

*The next meeting will be September 15, and the program will be
Phyllis Ferguson speaking on autism as seen in Pride and Prejudice.
Please join us at our usual meeting room at the William Castell Library
(Main Branch Calgary Public Library)*

Newsletter Info : Ann Craig. Tel : 252-6795 Fax : 212-1480 email ancraig@shaw.ca