

# JASNA

## News

THE JANE AUSTEN SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA



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## Exploring Austen's Origin Story

Jane Austen's characters visited Cleveland only once—and that was the Palmer estate in *Sense and Sensibility*, where Marianne Dashwood became gravely ill. However, this year's JASNA Annual General Meeting (AGM), held at a different Cleveland—the one in Ohio—promises a much happier experience for all attending.

Set for October 18–20, the 2024 AGM takes the theme “Austen, Annotated: Jane Austen's Literary, Political, and Cultural Origins.” The gathering will focus on how Austen's world and the culture of her day influenced her writing.

The 2024 AGM will feature five eminent plenary speakers on topics certain to engage and enlighten Janeites of all ages and stages of their Austen journey. Amanda Vickery (the Carole Medine Moss Keynote Lecturer), Patricia Matthew, and Thomas Keymer will provide the historic backdrop, addressing topics such as women's rights and roles, colonialism, social and political change, and Austen's responses to these forces. Susan Allen Ford will discuss Austen's reading and the books she mentions in her novels, while North American Scholar Peter Sabor will focus on Frances Burney, an influential novelist who was born before and survived long after Austen's sadly short lifetime.

Yet those discussions represent only a portion of the AGM's programming. By choosing personal favorites from the wide variety of breakout and special sessions, each attendee can “create their own adventure” and customize their conference experience. All AGM core conference sessions are open to all registered attendees, but here are a few of the possible paths.

### Newer Readers

Whether it's reading an Austen novel in school or picking one up later in life (perhaps after enjoying an Austen-based adaptation), we all start somewhere. Whatever your own “origin story,” you'll find a lot to like at the Cleveland AGM. Some tempting possibilities:

- One of JASNA's most lively presenters will give a broad-brush view of the historical background informing Austen's novels.
- Other breakout sessions look at important influences on Austen as a person, including religion and the Royal Navy.

- Attendees familiar with Regency fashion will be interested to learn how a commonplace garment, the shawl, can tell the larger story of textile technology and taste.
- If you've never read any of the books that Austen read, this AGM is the ideal opportunity to learn about a few of them. Our 2024 New Voices honorees—Ben Wiebracht and his students at Stanford Online High School—will be pleased to introduce you to Dr. Syntax, the star of several Regency-era comic bestsellers.

### Scholars and Lifelong Learners

For academics and nonprofessional Austen admirers alike, a major benefit of the AGM is making contact with leading scholars and hearing firsthand about new research and interpretation of Austen's work. These attendees may be particularly interested in sessions such as the following:

- In keeping with the “Austen, Annotated” theme, an expert annotator and editor will describe the art of annotation and its challenges and rewards. In another session, speakers will compare annotations of editions of Austen's novels from around the world, exploring the differing needs and priorities of various readers.

*continued on page 6*



Mimi Ohio Theatre lobby

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## DATES AND DEADLINES

### **JASNA News Summer 2024**

Submission deadline: April 1, 2024

Publication date: mid-June

### **JASNA News Fall 2024**

Submission deadline: July 1, 2024

Publication date: mid-September

### **JASNA News Winter 2025**

Submission deadline: October 1, 2024

Publication date: mid-December

### **2024 Essay Contest**

Submission deadline: June 1, 2024

Info: [jasna.org/programs/essay-contest](http://jasna.org/programs/essay-contest)

### **2024 Young Filmmakers Contest**

Submission deadline: June 24, 2024

Info: [jasna.org/programs/young-filmmakers-contest](http://jasna.org/programs/young-filmmakers-contest)

### **2025 AGM Call for Papers**

Submission deadline: November 30, 2024

Info: [jasna.org/agms/baltimore2025/call-for-papers.php](http://jasna.org/agms/baltimore2025/call-for-papers.php)

### **2026 International Visitor Program**

Application deadline: December 16, 2024

Info: [jasna.org/programs/international-visitor](http://jasna.org/programs/international-visitor)



*Pianist Cheryl Ziedrich's surname was misspelled in the winter 2024 issue of JASNA News in the story about the JASNA Tours of England. Here she is playing the pianoforte at Jane Austen's House for fellow tour members.*

## JASNA News

The newsletter of the  
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# President's Column

## Mary Mintz

Recently a new friend sent me a photo of the two of us sitting together in front of a wood-paneled wall behind a small table covered with white cloth. Our smiles clearly indicate that we were enjoying an intimate and amusing conversation. “Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Phillips at the ball!” I replied to her message. We were indeed attending a regional ball when the photo was taken and easily could have been gossiping about the income of eligible young men.

My friend and I had met only that morning but, as is typical with JASNA members, we found common ground and friendship through conversation after a splendid day of presentations, a reading from *Fordyce's Sermons*, and a beautifully narrated fashion show of Regency dress. I will never forget the hilarious moment in the show when a woman dressed as a maidservant (her costume creatively made from two gray flannel nightgowns) spontaneously took her prop, a carpet beater, to the stage curtains and pretended to use it. The audience laughed long and appreciatively. All of the “models” took seats in the audience after showing off their finery, but the “maid” continued in her role as she voluntarily ran back and forth to assist ladies who had difficulties with their garb—removing a pelisse to reveal the gown beneath can be a challenge!

I was in Seattle for that special day and evening as a guest of the Puget Sound Region. Visits to regions to give the “presidential talk” are a JASNA tradition. Regions incur no costs because the travel is paid by JASNA, but the return is inestimable. They present opportunities for members to connect with the president and to share ideas. In my first year in this role, I had the pleasure of visiting four regions, with many more planned for 2024.

On my very first such presidential stop, as a guest of the Central and Western Ohio Region, I thoroughly enjoyed the company of accomplished members, some of them women who had served in pioneering roles as engineers and logisticians focused on high-level research at the nearby Air Force base—a reminder that a love of Jane Austen unites us all, no matter our backgrounds. When visiting the Central and Western New York Region, I savored the long, leisurely chats that followed the program and tea, including catching up



with Co-RC Lisa Brown, who also coordinates our successful Book Box Program. In Vermont, relishing the emerging fall colors, I enjoyed touring a historic round church built to prevent Satan from hiding in any corners, and partook of an amazing post-program homemade buffet—all coordinated by Co-RC and JASNA Assistant Treasurer Marcia Merrill.

Every visit has brought even more strongly to my attention how important and essential JASNA volunteers are to our society. I met local officers, program planners, “regular” members, and even prospective members interested in joining. Some of my new friends also happen to volunteer at the central JASNA level. I am grateful every day to those who do the work of our society or who engage in other ways, such as reading our publications and attending carefully planned meetings. Your participation is important to JASNA, and if you have an opportunity or desire to volunteer your time and talents in large or small endeavors, your involvement and contributions will make a significant difference. JASNA is grateful.

# Feature

## Inspiring Students with Austen

Do you remember your first exposure to Jane Austen—and how relatable you found the characters and situations? The Jane Austen Book Box Program is dedicated to introducing young readers to Austen, allowing them to enjoy her world while increasing their literacy skills.

Launched in 2022 as part of JASNA’s commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, the program invites schools, libraries, and community organizations to apply for a free box of Austen’s books and related volumes. During the program’s second year, six schools in Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, and Wyoming received books.

Book Box is open to educators from across the U.S. and Canada, and the available editions span everything from the originals to Spanish translations, graphic novels, and the Awesomely Austen children’s adaptations. The initiative has even blossomed into helping interested JASNA regions set up Book Box “franchises” specifically geared to their area’s educational aims.

The program’s impact also extends beyond each grant period. For example, two winning Book Box recipients from the first year—HARK in Shreveport, La., and Bishop Blue in Marshall, Texas—joined with Southern University to earn a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to support young writers in their area. “We were inspired by our work with youngsters and the Book Box Program,” Bishop Blue community leader D. D. Bayliss says.

Lisa Brown, chair of the Book Box working group and co-RC of the Central and Western New York Region, is gratified by the overwhelmingly positive response to the initiative. “The best part,” she says, “is receiving the teachers’ reports at the end of the school year and sharing them with other members of the working group.”

These inspiring reports have included the fact that, at Rutherford High School in Panama City, Fla., many students who were given either *Sense and Sensibility* or *Pride and Prejudice* enjoyed their assigned novel so much that they opted to read the other book on their own.

Testimonials to the program’s success are numerous. “Austen is the reason I became a teacher, so I’m always recommending her to students and staff,” says Angie Hudgens, who used the Book Box award for the first women’s literature class at West Vigo High School in Terre Haute, Ind.

Julie Calhoun, a librarian at Gannett Peak Elementary School in Lander, Wyo., used her school’s box to form a book club of third-graders who read the Awesomely Austen illustrated and simplified version of *Emma*. After finishing the book, Calhoun



Students from Gannett Peak Elementary



Student drawing of Mr. Darcy

and the students celebrated with an afternoon tea. Everyone enjoyed the experience so much that they continued by reading the Awesomely Austen *Pride and Prejudice*.

“This was an amazing opportunity to introduce these girls to Jane Austen and her writing,” Calhoun says, noting that the students “were intrigued by the characters and eager to read and discuss each week.” Calhoun, who hopes to offer the book club every year, has also stocked the school’s library with all the Awesomely Austen editions and is pleased to note that “they have been checked out numerous times.”

Lisa Jaeger, an eighth-grade teacher at Grace Lutheran School in Jacksonville, Fla., has loved Austen since high school but had never taught students about the author before the Book Box opportunity. After reading different Awesomely Austen adaptations, her students engaged in creative projects ranging from character scrapbooks to full-sized silhouettes.

“Several students told me how much they ended up loving” the books, Jaeger says, noting that class favorites included *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*. She adds, “I plan to place a curriculum request for copies of this series for future use.”

At St. Luke’s Episcopal School in Mobile, Ala., 10th-grade students compared three versions of *Pride and Prejudice*—a graphic novel, a manga version, and Clare West’s abridgement. “Because we spent so much time looking at different versions of the novel, I assigned the students to propose their own ideal adaptation,” says teacher and JASNA member Elizabeth Rands.

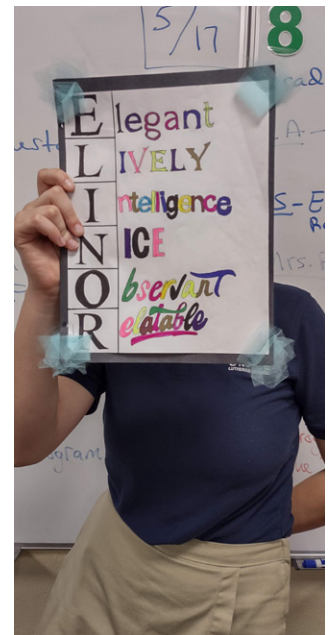
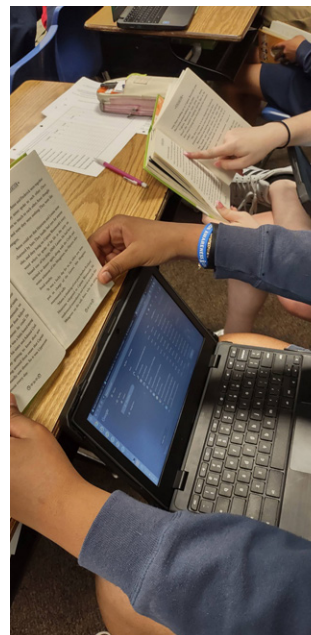
One adaptation parodied reality shows as “The Real Housewives of Longbourn,” while another reversed the characters’ gender roles. Students also blended their newly generated passion for Austen with the genres of fantasy and horror. One version mashed up *Pride and Prejudice* with *Dungeons & Dragons*. Another presented a *Friday the 13th* slasher scenario in which only Elizabeth survives.

Then, Rands says, “for our final reading quiz, I asked the students to tell me why they believe *Pride and Prejudice* is a story that

continues to be told again and again and why its appeal has remained so long lasting.”

One student wrote: “The story creates relatable characters for everyone. Anyone can relate to Darcy’s awkwardness or Elizabeth’s feelings of independence.”

The Jane Austen Book Box Program is accepting applications. To apply or learn more, visit [jasna.org/programs/jabookbox](http://jasna.org/programs/jabookbox).



Grace Lutheran students



Student drawing



*Origin Story* continued from page 1

- Sessions on literary topics include linguistic change, literary theft, travel guidebooks and literature, and the theme of complaint.
- Specific books that Austen owned or read—including works by Henry Fielding, Samuel Johnson, Isaac D’Israeli, and Lord Byron—will be highlighted.

**History Enthusiasts**

For many JASNA members, appreciation of Austen’s fictional worlds is complemented by fascination with the real world in which she lived. Among the sessions providing insight into historical topics:

- Aspects of social history to be discussed include medical progress during Austen’s era as well as housekeeping and domesticity.
- Presentations on political satire, laws concerning marriage, riots and wars, and events in France will prompt conversation on the political dynamics in Austen’s era.
- For a local perspective, a ranger from the Perry’s Victory and International Peace Memorial will discuss the 1813 Battle of Lake Erie, a turning point in the War of 1812.

**Sensory Learners**

Much can be learned about Austen’s world and works by taking a hands-on (and ears-on and noses-on) approach. Sensory offerings will include:

- A session on the “reading revolution,” showing how reading changed from a largely spoken, social activity to a solitary one—prompting attendees to consider how the experience of hearing Austen’s words differs from reading them silently.
- The smells and tastes of the Regency will be described and experienced, while breakout sessions on music in the theater and work by female artists will engage the other senses.
- A historical reenactor will discuss his character’s role in the Napoleonic Wars and display his uniform and accoutrements.
- Workshops on bookbinding, bonnet trimming, and corset making—along with a drop-in opportunity to write with quill pens—will give participants insight into Regency pastimes and occupations.
- Many attendees find that the dancing, music, dressing up (or observing those who do), and interaction during the ball give them a sense of what it was like to experience social occasions more than 200 years ago.

**For Everyone**

The sessions and activities described above are just some of the inducements to attend this year’s AGM. Visitors to Cleveland will also find a vibrant downtown filled with well-preserved Gilded Age buildings and cultural attractions. The AGM team is making the most of these local assets by planning walking tours, outings to the theater and renowned Cleveland Orchestra, and both guided tours and flexible visits to other top sites. Longer excursions will take participants



Erik Drost

*Rock & Roll Hall of Fame*

outside the city to Amish country; Lawnfield, the beautiful home of President (and Austen reader) James Garfield, plus historic Lake View Cemetery; and the Football Hall of Fame.

Travelers on a budget will benefit from an excellent discounted hotel rate, plentiful restaurant choices, and free or moderately priced admission to many cultural sites. To help attendees reach some of the most desirable destinations, AGM coordinators are arranging for buses to circulate between the AGM hotel and University Circle, where the Cleveland Botanical Garden and several museums are located.

Also not to be overlooked is the particular charm of a JASNA gathering: the pleasure of spending time among hundreds of Austen enthusiasts, exploring our common bond; our diversity of backgrounds, interests, and opinions; and the fun of experiencing the sights and sounds of the host city in the “best company.”



Erik Drost

*Playhouse Square*



Roger Mastroianni, courtesy of The Cleveland Orchestra

*The Cleveland Orchestra*



## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The JASNA Nominating Committee invites you to propose candidates to fill officer and at-large board positions. All current JASNA officer terms will expire in 2024 and some officers, as well as board members, are eligible for an additional term. The officers with eligibility include: President Mary Mintz; First Vice President (Regions) Susie Wampler; Second Vice President (Publications) Celia Easton; Third Vice President (Conferences) Debra Roush; Secretary Virginia Mellema MaGee; Treasurer Vicki Petersen; and Assistant Treasurer Marcia Merrill. Membership Secretary Carol Medine Moss, having served the maximum number of terms, is not eligible for an additional term.

The terms of directly elected board members Jane Boltz (Southwest), Cheryl Cole (Greater Chicago), and Carole Thompson (Nova Scotia) expire in 2024. All are eligible for another term.

JASNA members in good standing may submit their own name or that of any other member, in writing, by July 1, 2024. Newly elected officers and board members will begin their roles on December 16, 2024. Each officer or director is expected to attend, at their own expense, each Annual General Meeting (AGM) during their term of office, beginning with the 2025 AGM.

Please provide the nominee's name, address, telephone number, and email address; a brief description of their JASNA activities (local and/or national); special skills that would be helpful to the board; and assurance that the nominee is willing to serve and attend all AGMs.

Send candidates' information to Nominating Committee Chair Carolyn Brown (North Carolina) at [carolynjbrown1212@gmail.com](mailto:carolynjbrown1212@gmail.com), subject line "JASNA Nomination," or by mail to 141 Lavinia Lane, Chapel Hill, NC 27516. Questions may be directed to Brown or another member of the Nominating Committee: Susan Jelen (North Texas) at [sjelen3@gmail.com](mailto:sjelen3@gmail.com) and Elizabeth Steele (Eastern Pennsylvania) at [liza\\_janeite@hotmail.com](mailto:liza_janeite@hotmail.com).

JASNA maintains several committees to which qualified members may be appointed. Write to President Mary Mintz at [mmintz@american.edu](mailto:mmintz@american.edu) to recommend someone for committee service. Details on the nominating process will be provided in the next issue of *JASNA News*.

### JASNA Canada Officers

At the JASNA Canada business meeting in November, the following officers were elected: President Anne Thompson (taking the helm from Elaine Bander after her decades of service), Vice President Michelle Siu, Treasurer Jennifer Bettiol, and Membership Secretary Gary Diver (following Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer's many years in the role).

### FREE STUDENT MEMBERSHIPS

As part of the celebration of the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth, JASNA will offer free, digital-only student memberships during 2024 and 2025. The program is also designed to further JASNA's mission to foster appreciation and understanding of Austen's works, life, and genius among the widest number of readers. At press time, details about the program were still being finalized, with an anticipated launch of March 1, 2024. Visit [jasna.org](http://jasna.org) to learn more.



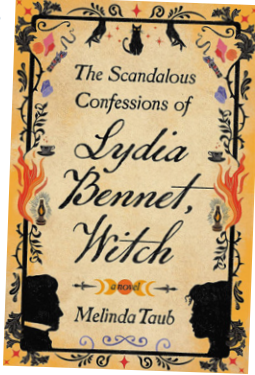
# Book Reviews

## WILY WITTY WITCHERY

### *The Scandalous Confessions of Lydia Bennet, Witch*

By Melinda Taub  
Grand Central Publishing (2023)  
440 pages; hardcover, \$30

Review by Elsa Solender



Can a supernatural take on a super-rational Jane Austen novel entertain serious Austen devotees?

I confess to prejudice against most Austen exploiters. The films *Clueless* and *You've Got Mail*, as well as Whit Stillman's two Austen tributes, *Metropolitan* and *Love and Friendship*, are notable exceptions, mostly because of the respect demonstrated for the originals and the inventiveness of the borrowers/imitators. Given those conditions, I am willing to be entertained.

Melinda Taub, a young-adult novelist and veteran TV writer, grabbed me in the first paragraph of her unlikely take on *Pride and Prejudice* and held my attention through most of her tangled story. Here are some key ingredients of her formula.

First, a reader must suspend disbelief. We are dealing with a fantastical narrative plopped into an Austenian setting.

Next, we must follow, if not trust, a congenitally unreliable narrator. Lydia Bennet, a most unlikely heroine/protagonist, is not even sure which chapter she's writing: "Chapter Lord I Don't Know—Seven?" (33). Her concepts of time, space, and consciousness are fluid, sometimes confusing, sometimes surprisingly wise: "Isn't it strange to see that, even as one's own story unfolds, others are traveling through their own, which may be just as interesting? (Except for Mary. Nothing interesting will ever happen to Mary.)" (332).

Then there's her mysterious "Dear Reader." You think you know her, then you don't.

In service of all this, Taub puts into play an impressive array of stylistic devices, especially at key points when page-turning action slows. Consider this, part of Lydia-the-witch's virgin experience of a coven gathering—a spare, well-executed scene with both Austenian and original elements:

Our destination was a hill out by Stubble's Mill, with a circle of standing stones at the top. There were perhaps thirty people there, milling about in the moonlight. After squinting for a few moments, I noticed several things. One, they were all women; and two, they were all naked. Before I could exclaim, a woman appeared

at my elbow, holding a bucket. "Dram of Hecate, dearie?" she asked. My aunt drank some, then passed me the ladle, and I also drank it down. It was a bit like Lady Lucas's punch—oversweet and over strong.

Floatingly inebriated, the newly minted witch addresses her elusive "Dear Reader" directly: "What is magic anyway? Perhaps you know. You have always been wiser than I, irritating as that often is" (45–47).

It struck me as fiendishly appropriate for Lydia's sister, Kitty, to be her feline familiar. And who could object to Mrs. Phillips' figuring as a senior but rather ineffectual member of the sisterhood? I'll leave it to you to guess how Lydia's husband—the devilishly attractive but morally and fiscally bankrupt George Wickham—fits into Taub's bewitching post-*Pride and Prejudice* universe.

I enjoyed the Austenian elements more than the witchery, but it was all well-executed. Taub's mastery of her principal source material is clearly demonstrated as she plays with it. Her own literary skills are evident throughout. I suspect that Jane Austen herself might perceive the "homage" inherent in this audacious take on her masterpiece.

**Elsa Solender, past president of JASNA (1996–2000), wrote the novel Jane Austen in Love: An Entertainment.**

## A META PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

### *The Stage Kiss*

By Amelia Jones  
Alcove Press (2023)  
336 pages; paperback, \$19.99

Review by J. A. Hennrikus



The setup of *The Stage Kiss*, the romance debut of author Amelia Jones, creates a *Pride and Prejudice* puzzle for readers. The book is contemporary, taking place during a summer tour of *Liz and Darcy: The Musical*. The play's cast is introduced, including the young understudy for

Elizabeth Bennet's role, infomercial actor Eden Blake. Eden lacks confidence, but not talent. When she steps in for the lead, who has abruptly quit the show, her nerves get the better of her ... but not for long.

In this version, unlike other *Pride and Prejudice* homages, the Darcy character is not merely misunderstood at the beginning. He is, bluntly put, a jerk, played by Brennon Thorne, an accomplished Broadway actor. Slightly inebriated at their first meeting, he questions Eden's training and professionalism. This misstep affects their relationship's trajectory. Of course it does. This is, after all, a meta version of *Pride and Prejudice*. Brennon's career has been his sole focus to date; now it's time to focus on his humanity.

For her part, Eden makes mistakes, is inconsistent in her performances, and feels her lack of formal training. In the course of the novel, she learns to trust herself, take advice, and open up to new opportunities.

The misunderstanding via Wickham, the letter, the visit to Pemberley (in this case the Upper East Side), Liz/Eden's realization, the coming together, the wedding at the end. These narrative beats are part of what make the story, and readers will enjoy how they are handled here.

For theater fans, the insight into a show on tour rings true enough to be enjoyed. The "stage kiss" is a choreographed moment in the show that gets disrupted by the evolution of Brennon and Eden as people and as a couple. Some stage managers may break into hives during the book's kiss machinations, but the premise of two actors becoming lovers while playing lovers is fun, and fun is important to this novel.

The growth and development of the two leads, in addition to lots of romance and sex, help the reader want to turn the pages. The story reimagines rather than reinvents *Pride and Prejudice*, keeping it an entertaining read.

*J. A. Hennrikus is a mystery writer and executive director of the crime writers' organization Sisters in Crime.*

## GENDER-BENDING AUSTEN

*Reviews by Emma Kantor*

A trio of young adult novels reimagines Austen with gender-swapped and LGBTQ casts, expanding her heteronormative marriage plots beyond the binary. Family, friendship, and romance take center stage as contemporary authors spotlight a diverse spectrum of teen relationships and identities.

### *Ghosted: A Northanger Abbey Novel*

By Amanda Quain

Wednesday Books (2023); 384 pages; hardcover, \$20

The author of *Accomplished: A Georgie Darcy Novel* is back with a new Austen retelling, this time delivering a gender-reversed *Northanger Abbey* with considerably more ghost hunting than husband hunting. Here, the titular abbey is "America's most notoriously haunted high school" (8), presided over by heroine Henrietta "Hattie"

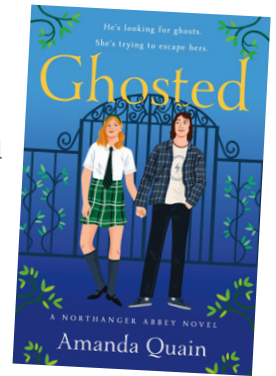
Tilney's austere mother, who serves as headmistress. Quain fits the elite East Coast academy with the architectural trappings of gothic horror, from ghoulish gargoyles to secret passages and crypts: "Northanger Abbey was, objectively, an extremely intimidating-looking place, even if you didn't think it was haunted" (21).

After all, what's more terrifying than high school?

Hattie believed in an afterlife until her paranormal-obsessed father died, leaving her to confront the cold facts of mortality. She abandons their pastime of researching hauntings, telling herself, "Ghost stories were for children and people who didn't know how to face real life" (31). Hattie devotes her energy to her studies, determined to meet her mom's exacting standards by "living a normal life ... hiding away the parts of me that were strange and broken and unusual" (35-36). Her end goal is acceptance at the prestigious Udolpho College—another nod to the gothic novels parodied by Austen.

But when handsome and affable transfer student Kit Morland arrives on a scholarship from the National Paranormal Society of Investigators, Hattie's "normal life" is subsumed by the paranormal. The two pair up on a class project, with Kit arguing that ghosts exist on campus and Hattie taking the opposing stance. Their Mulder/Scully-esque rapport of believer and nonbeliever is a delight, as is their slow-burn romance.

Like Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*, Kit is openhearted and credulous. "And what's wrong with seeing mystery everywhere?" he asks the skeptical Hattie (98). Their debates bring to mind the lively discussions between Austen's Catherine and Henry about fiction—and women who read novels. But in this instance, it's the man who defends the value of looking beyond the veil of reality. Kit stands for imagination and possibility, while Hattie clings to reason and science. "I think belief—the sort you can live with, the sort you have to reckon with—isn't binary," Kit suggests. "Belief leaves room for nuance" (306). His rejection of the standard narrative of life versus death becomes a binary-busting social rebellion.



As the couple grows closer, Kit shows Hattie “it’s okay to believe” (98)—in ghosts, in love, and in her own potential. She revives the part of herself that appreciates ghost stories as historical artifacts as well as a means of keeping her father’s memory alive. In doing so, she also gains a more nuanced understanding of her relationship with her mother and of their shared prison of grief. She comes to see her mother not as a gothic tyrant—“Dr. Tilney, Headmistress, destroyer of worlds ... a cartoon villain”—but as a human being (333).

## Emmett

By **L. C. Rosen**  
**Little, Brown Books for Young Readers (2023)**  
**272 pages; hardcover, \$18.99**



As in *Ghosted*, the main character in *Emmett* is grieving a beloved parent. An acute sense of loss informs Emmett’s aversion to romance. “I don’t do relationships,” (2) he declares at the story’s start with all the confidence of Austen’s marriage-resistant Emma. He clings to the scientific fact he learned from his late mother, a doctor: “The prefrontal cortex doesn’t mature until you’re twenty-five” and, according to Emmett, “a relationship before your brain is developed is silly. Why get involved with something that’s just going to end? Relationships are painful. Spare yourself” (3). That doesn’t preclude him from having plenty of no-strings-attached fun in the meantime. “The hormonal teenage body has needs”—and his friend with benefits, Harrison, “is good at fulfilling them” (7).

Queering the patron/protegee dynamic from *Emma*, Rosen shows how lust and love can be separated without judgment in modern society. As Emmett tells his friend Miles, a modern Knightley, “I’m queer. My closest friends, the people who really get me, they’re also going to be the people I sleep with, and when I’m ready for it, my dating pool. Sex, friendship, romance, all in one spot. ... That’s fine. What’s important is keeping everything neat. ... Nothing messy” (27–28). Still, things get messy when Harrison catches feelings and Emmett attempts to deflect them by finding a suitable replacement from among their peers at Highbury Academy. Of course, he’s as hapless a matchmaker as Miss Woodhouse before him. Life without labels is liberating; it’s also a source of potential confusion and misunderstanding.

Most poignant is the portrayal of Emmett’s father, the bereft widower. Rather than being played for comic relief, his hypochondria is shown as a symptom of loss. It even borders on abuse when he fixates on his son’s health, frequently testing Emmett’s blood for possible infections. Emmett’s fear of heartbreak is all the more believable. “I never want to be like this,” he says of his dad (101). But the father’s and son’s anxieties are mirrored. After realizing that his attempts at setting up Harrison have backfired, Emmett is consumed with guilt, thinking in terms of

pathogens: “this terrible misunderstanding I’ve created, it’s like a disease, and if it’s hurting me this badly, it will kill him” (148).

*Emmett* shines in its portrayal of an otherwise “blessed” (1) and privileged young man navigating difficult relationships. Above all, though, Rosen offers a joyful and celebratory portrait of the myriad forms that friendship, romantic love, and sexual exploration can take—with interfaith and interracial couples, as well as lesbian, gay, trans, nonbinary, and demisexual representation. “It’s going to be messy. And messy can hurt, but sometimes it’s great, too,” Emmett’s best friend affirms (155). There’s freedom in nonconformity. “You know, I like the mess,” says another friend. “We get to make these relationships up. We’re queer” (210).

## Pride and Prejudice and Pittsburgh

By **Rachael Lippincott**  
**Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers (2023);**  
**336 pages;**  
**hardcover, \$19.99**



Lippincott’s latest *New York Times* bestseller is a sapphic time-bending homage to Regency romance, à la

*Lost in Austen*. The story opens on parallel tracks: In 2023 Pittsburgh, graduating senior Audrey Cameron is depressed over a recent breakup and being waitlisted at her dream art school. In 1812 England, Lucy Sinclair is dreading the loveless marriage of convenience that her tyrannical father has arranged for her.

In a sci-fi twist, past and present converge as Audrey is catapulted into Lucy’s timeline. First laying eyes on the strange visitor, Lucy thinks, “I have never seen clothes like hers before. Is she ... in her undergarments?” (43). Taking in her new—or rather old—surroundings, Audrey wonders, “What in the fresh reenactment hell is this? ... Are you Amish?” (44–47). The fish-out-of-water hijinks only get more outlandish from there.

The novel pokes fun at Anglophilia and pop-culture obsessions from *Downton Abbey* and *Bridgerton* to *The Great British Bake Off* and, yes, Austen adaptations. Subjected to a corset for the first time, Audrey “pray[s] to Jane Austen herself for strength” (77); but once

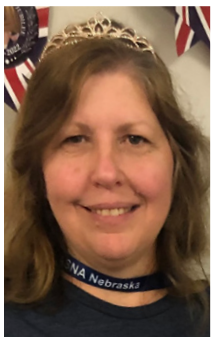
*continued on page 14*

# Member Profiles

To nominate yourself or another member, email JASNA News Editor Susie Wampler at [jasnanews@gmail.com](mailto:jasnanews@gmail.com). Responses may be edited for length, style, and format.

## ANGELA NELSON

Nebraska



### When did you first discover Jane Austen?

It was the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries. I remember channel surfing and coming across it on A&E and being immediately drawn into the production. From the very first Darcy/Colin Firth smolder, I was hooked. It led to wanting more—and now a lifelong passion for all things Austen.

### What do you love most about Austen?

Her wit and how she was able to create such a rich, detailed world where each character supports the story being told. Each time I reread an Austen book, there is always comfort and yet still freshness that comes from a character or situation.

**Member since:** 2016

**What do you enjoy most about JASNA?** The first time I went to my region's monthly book study, the members embraced me. I felt like I had a group of likeminded people with whom I could immerse myself in not only Austen but also a love for all things Regency and more. We have a wonderful, vibrant group and we just have lots of fun when we read Austen.

**Tell us about your involvement in JASNA.** I was recently elected co-RC along with Kim Guyer. I have attended three AGMs: Kansas City (2018), Chicago (2021), and Denver (2023).

**Background:** I am a middle school special-education teacher.

**Other passions/interests:** Reading, paper crafts (scrapbooking, planners, junk journaling), seasonal crafts

**Favorite Austen work/character:** *Pride and Prejudice*, with *Sense and Sensibility* as runner-up

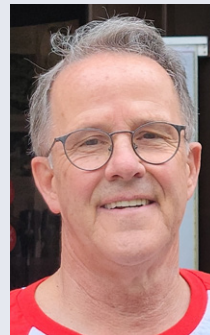
**Other favorite authors/genres:** Romance (especially Emily Henry), fantasy (particularly if there are dragons), and mysteries (especially *The Thursday Murder Club* series by Richard Osman)

**What are you reading now?** I've just finished *The Silent Companions* by Laura Purcell.

**Fun facts:** I have a corgi named Mr. Darcy. He has not met his Lizzy Bennet yet but may in the next year or so.

## SAM KEELE

Utah



### When did you first discover Jane Austen?

I was 47 when I was introduced to Jane Austen. It was November 2005, and I was managing a bakery with a crew of 10 20-something women. They could not stop talking about a new movie they had seen

multiple times, the Keira Knightley *Pride and Prejudice* adaptation. They told me I needed to see it, and I finally relented. I was mesmerized and saw it in the theater multiple times. Then I discovered the 1995 miniseries, and then the novel! The book was the very best, the crème de la crème.

### What do you love most about Austen?

I love the way she led her life. I love her goodness and her Christian religion. I love her cutting sense of humor and brutally honest descriptions of real life. Of course, I love her writing and, particularly, her six novels and the characters she created.

**Member since:** I was an on-again, off-again member for around 10 years, but in 2023 I became a Life Member.

### What do you enjoy most about JASNA?

I enjoy discussing all things related to Austen without fear of someone rolling their eyes when I bring up the subject. I enjoy meeting like-minded individuals and talking about the books, characters, and places like Bath and Chawton.

### Tell us about your involvement in JASNA.

I have attended a few meetings and activities. I promote JASNA whenever I can.

**Background:** I have been married to my wife, Sherrie, for 43 years, with seven children and 10 grandchildren. I have been a baker for 40 years and am an award-winning, second-generation cake decorator. My main focus is wedding cakes.

**Other passions/interests:** I am the front man and lead singer of the classic rock band The Flashback Brothers. I write and produce music and have recorded about 10 songs available on streaming services.

**Favorite Austen work/character:** Lizzy Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, hands down

**Other favorite authors/genres:** I love the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs, J. R. R. Tolkien, Frank Herbert, and many of the Star Wars authors.

**What are you reading now?** I've just finished *Pride and Prejudice* with my book club on Facebook.

**Fun facts:** In 2006, I joined the Jane Austen Fan Club (JAFC) and the *Pride and Prejudice* group on Facebook. The creators of those groups had abandoned them and placed me as admin of both! Since my new favorite subject was Jane Austen, I ran with it. Fast-forward 18 years and we have 80,000 members in JAFC and 110,000 members in the *P&P* group. We established a sister group, The Meryton Marketplace of the JAFC, and an International Jane Austen Pen Pal Club. We have been involved with Caroline Jane Knight and her Jane Austen Literacy Foundation. My cousin, Steven Keele, and I designed and produced one of their famous bookplates and then helped them sell it.

I am hoping to be able to attend the Jane Austen Festival in Bath this September. I'm saving my pennies!

## NANCY STOKES

Toronto



### **When did you first discover Jane Austen?**

In late 1982, I read in a newspaper that the fourth JASNA AGM had taken place in Toronto, organized by Mary Millard. One of the conference committee members, Eileen Morris, wanted to start a Toronto region and sent invitations, and I was one of 16 Austen lovers who met in November 1983 in the Toronto Reference Library and formed the region. Nancy Thurston was elected

membership secretary and treasurer under Morris as RC. We enjoyed 40 successful years of four newsletters and four meetings a year.

### **What do you love most about Austen?**

How she can be entertaining and keep me interested while teaching good morals at the same time. And of course her wit and superb style of writing.

**Member since:** 1983

**What do you enjoy most about JASNA?** Reading *JASNA News* and JASNA's online updates, and the friendship and

interaction with members. Now that I'm fully retired, I look forward to having time to read my copies of *Persuasions*. (I keep a full set.)

### **Tell us about your involvement in JASNA.**

I was membership secretary for Canada for many years. In 1998, after attending the Quebec City AGM, I took over from Nancy Thurston as membership secretary, treasurer, and editor of the quarterly newsletter *The Writing Desk* for the Toronto Region. I gave reports at several Canada AGMs. I served as registrar and a committee member for the 2002 AGM in Toronto, and on the committee, under RC Louise Yearwood, organizing our region's 2006 conference on Austen's juvenilia.

**Background:** I was a legal secretary, then a law clerk at a Toronto law firm from high school to retirement (taking 10 years on the way to earn a BA as a mature student at University of Toronto while raising two sons). Then I worked as an independent proofreader for a pharmaceutical company for 10 years.

**Other passions/interests:** Besides reading novels—especially murder mysteries and history books—keeping up with world affairs, and producing the *The Writing Desk* newsletter, Scottish country dancing was a passion for decades.

### **Favorite Austen work/character:**

*Persuasion* and Anne Elliot, maybe because Anne is a little older and wiser than most of the other heroines. Mr. Darcy is my runner-up.

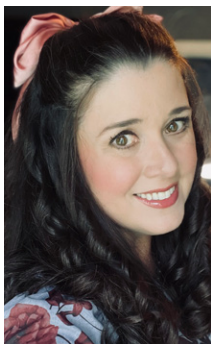
**Other favorite authors/genres:** Murder mysteries by almost any author, historical fiction (especially about WWII in Britain), history of North America and Europe, and the two World Wars. Very early on I read Greek mythology and am still interested.

**What are you reading now?** *Persuasion* (and back copies of *The New Yorker* in bed)

**Fun facts:** My mother took me to the library every Saturday from an early age. The first book I read by myself (at age 7, I think) was *A Girl of the Limberlost* by Gene Stratton-Porter (1909). I now have an original copy of it by my bed, inherited from Eileen Morris. I'll get to it again soon.

## JENNIFER MONTI

Virtual



**When did you first discover Jane Austen?** I can scarcely recall a period in my life when I wasn't familiar with Austen. I first read her books in grade school and have revisited them numerous times since. With every stage of my life, they've assumed new significance, a testament not only to her literary genius, but also to the universal themes present in her novels.

**What do you love most about Austen?** Her heroines epitomize a narrative driven by a vision of an ideal woman: one who is intelligent, witty, and independent. These characters not only hold their own against their male counterparts, especially in clever dialogue, but are also deeply caring. They are devoted to their families and recognize their essential role as a civilizing force within society. While Austen might present a romantic fantasy of the ideal woman, it isn't from a male perspective. Many women aspire to be perceived as intelligent, witty, resourceful, and independent, all while taking pride in their societal roles as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters.

**Member since:** 2020

**What do you enjoy most about JASNA?** The friendships and literary events

**Background:** I am a *USA Today* bestselling dark romance author who writes under the pen name Zoe Blake.

**Other passions/interests:** Archery, embroidery, watercolors, and travel

**Favorite Austen work/character:** I most closely identify with Elizabeth Bennet. I feel the deepest sympathy for Anne Elliot, and I believe Lady Catherine de Bourgh is greatly misunderstood.

**Other favorite authors/genres:** I am part of the "Stormy Sisterhood" as I am a devoted fan of all the Brontës.

**What are you reading now?** As part of my research for a new novel, I am currently reading a fascinating book titled *Dinner in Rome: A History of the World in One Meal* by Andreas Viestad.

**Fun facts:** I was fortunate to be chosen for an honors study-abroad program in college, which enabled me to reside in London. Consequently, I relished several visits to Bath. My favorite pastime was attending classical music concerts in the Parade Garden, much as I imagined Austen might have done.

## BARBARA SORT AND SIGMUND BERING SORT

Victoria



**When did you first discover Jane Austen?**

**Barbara:** Very late in life, in approximately 2008, when I first read *Pride and Prejudice*.

**Sigmund:** Although I had seen numerous Austen adaptations throughout

my life, I was properly introduced to Austen at age 51 by Barbara reading *Pride and Prejudice* aloud to me as we drove home across Canada after I had been away working for two years.

**What do you love most about Austen?**

**Barbara:** The language, lessons learned, history, and romance in her novels. I admire that Austen wrote about women and women's rights in a time when they did not matter—and, even better, the public still loved her books—and that she did not do as was expected of a female of the time, but what she loved, what she was meant to do.

**Sigmund:** Her gifted insights into the human condition, especially interpersonal relationships and society's expectations. I love that she wrote in such a way as to allow my imagination to fill in the scenes and the clothing.

**Members since:** 2013

**What do you enjoy most about JASNA?**

**Barbara:** Getting together to enjoy and discuss Austen, her writing, and her time with like-minded people from all over the world.

**Sigmund:** Becoming fast friends with people from all over the world and exchanging our respective views and opinions on all things Austen while catching up in person at the AGMs.

**Tell us about your involvement in JASNA.**

**Barbara:** We attend almost every meeting of the Victoria Region, always dressed in period attire. We also try to go to Vancouver events or other regions' Zoom meetings.

**Sigmund:** I gave a toast to Austen at one of her birthday celebrations for the Victoria Region, and we volunteered at the 2022 AGM.

**Background: Barbara:** We have two children, who are constantly being bombarded with something to do with Jane Austen. I am a lawyer, doing “happy law” (wills, estates, and real estate—no litigation) for the past 35 years, working from home for the past 30. I belong to a couple of women’s groups and a book club and co-run a local Austen group where we live, since our region is two hours away. Last November, we hosted 14 people for an Austen murder-mystery dinner.

**Sigmund:** I am a pilot in the Canadian Armed Forces and in civilian life, where I flew for regional airlines, trained RCAF pilots, fly for Hope Air as a volunteer pilot transporting patients in need of medical treatment, and serve as the director of British Columbia and Yukon for the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association. I’m also a lifelong educator, having taught secondary school.

**Other passions/interests: Barbara:** I love to design and create my Regency outfits to wear to Austen events. I also collect vintage clothing and costume jewelry.

**Sigmund:** I enjoy traveling, especially annually to the Jane Austen Bath Festival with Barbara while visiting family in the U.K. and Denmark. I fly my own airplane whenever I can and am a freelance flight instructor training pilots in addition to my RCAF flying.

**Favorite Austen work/character: Barbara:** Elizabeth Bennet. Like me, she loves the outdoors and walking, is amiable, outgoing, and sometimes opinionated, obstinate and headstrong when needed.

**Sigmund:** It’s early days for me so as of now my favorite is *P&P* with my favorite character being Elizabeth Bennet as she reminds me fondly of Barbara.

**Other favorite authors/genres: Barbara:** I love Jane Austen fan fiction (JAFF) and murder mysteries (Louise Penny, Ken Follett) and reading about history and fashion in the Regency period.

**Sigmund:** Robert A. Heinlein/science fiction

**What are you reading now? Barbara:** I am reading *Fayne* by Ann-Marie MacDonald, *The Covenant of Water* by Abraham Verghese, and *The Other Einstein* by Marie Benedict.

**Sigmund:** I’m reading *The Regency Years: During Which Jane Austen Writes, Napoleon Fights, Byron Makes Love, and Britain Becomes Modern* by Robert Morrison.

**Fun facts: Barbara:** We try to visit Austen sites on our trips to England each year. I always say that Austen made me read, exercise (as I read JAFF when on the exercise machine), and sew! I have learned so much from being a member of JASNA.

**Sigmund:** I love the country dancing at any Austen event, and I particularly enjoy participating in the production of Austen’s works! Having grown up in a house with six sisters and five brothers, I was fortunate to have my sisters’ insights, which gave me greater awareness and appreciation for the history of women in society and the desire to help ensure all are equal partners.

### Book Reviews *continued from page 10*

she’s in her full gown, “there’s no denying I feel kind of unexpectedly cool right now. Like I’m Keira Knightley in a period drama, about to gaze forlornly out a window or cry a single tear in a bumpy carriage” (79). And an encounter with a potential suitor recreates the famous Colin Firth/Mr. Darcy’s jumping-in-a-lake scene that launched a thousand memes.

While navigating 19th century life and trying to find her way back to the future, Audrey gains artistic inspiration and a fresh perspective. She also rekindles her passion for portrait painting: “Capturing real people, showing the parts of them they don’t think anyone sees” (155). Through her friendship (and possibly more) with Lucy, she realizes how many of her 21st century freedoms she’s taken for granted. A gifted pianist, Lucy can only dream of studying at a conservatory and playing professionally. “There are a lot of things I was forced to take lessons in when I was young to be deemed an ‘accomplished woman,’ but I’m not supposed to use them to actually accomplish anything,” she explains (134). Nevertheless, “Being able to play and create for myself, that’s what matters most,” she says (153).

There’s a delicious irony in the girls’ twinned coming-out journey—and not as debutantes. Audrey is keenly aware of her bad timing in

falling for Lucy: “Only I would have a full-on bisexual awakening in 1812. For a soon-to-be-married woman” (190). Contemporary readers and viewers tend to romanticize all things Regency, but Lippincott reminds us of the era’s cruel and restrictive reality for women and anyone living on the margins. *Pride and Prejudice and Pittsburgh* is a kind of gender-flipped fairy tale, in which the two princesses awaken from their slumbers of compulsory heterosexuality—no prince needed. When the spell is broken, they see each other and themselves not as society believes they should be, but as they really are. Dancing together to a Whitney Houston song on her quickly draining iPhone, Audrey thinks, “And all at once, [Lucy] isn’t the prim-and-proper girl I pinned her to be, the image of the 1812 lady I’ve studied in history books or novels. ... She’s real” (95–96).

**Emma Kantor is a Brooklyn-based writer, comedian, and deputy children’s book editor at Publishers Weekly.**

# Regional News

## CANADA

### Alberta, Calgary

In September, outgoing JASNA Canada President Elaine Bander presented “Against the Grain: Jane Austen and the Georgian Novel,” examining how each of Austen’s heroines was unique for her time. Our November gathering included AGM highlights, readings from *Pride and Prejudice*, and a celebration of Austen’s birthday.

### British Columbia, Vancouver

Robyn Martin has been elected regional coordinator, taking the helm from Janice Mallison.

### Nova Scotia

We gathered in December at the Lord Nelson Hotel in Halifax to celebrate Austen’s birthday. A creative toast was given, as usual, by Hugh Kindred.

### Ontario, London

In November, Regency culinary historian Mya Sangster discussed “Favorite Foods in Jane Austen’s Day.” Her presentation centered on *The Knight Family Cookbook* and five categories of baking. Then we enjoyed a buffet of more than 10 recipes. In December, we held a wassail soiree with a holly theme. Nancy Quinn and Norm Abbott supplied a brief Regency Yuletide music program, highlighted by Abbott’s arrangement of King Henry VIII’s love ballad “Green Groweth the Holly.”



Calgary RC Laurie Sayles, Adrian Lukis, Tina Marta, and Kathleen Ryan at the AGM



Elaine Bander, Elena Boyer Petry, and Sebastien Larivée and Jason Cordery

their elegant haberdashery. Elaine Bander gave a talk on Austen writing “against the grain.”

## INTERNATIONAL

In December, David Willan—a descendant of Austen’s youngest brother, Charles—shared a summary of his family history in the Royal Navy and an account of the celebratory sword (called a spadron) he owns that was gifted to Charles Austen by General Simon Bolivar in 1827. After being housed at Jane Austen’s House for many years, the spadron is now on display at the Historic Dockyard Chatham alongside the renovated hull remains of the HMS *Nemur*. One may recall that Charles Austen served and lived on this ship with his wife, Fanny Palmer, and their two children from 1811–1813. Our main speaker was Kathleen Anderson, former Palm Beach Atlantic University professor, who discussed social stress in Austen’s novels, the various ways characters cope, the “privilege of social stress,” and how Austen herself dealt with stress.



Mya Sangster

### Montréal-Québec

We held two celebrations in December for Austen’s birthday. The first featured a Zoom talk by RC Judith Elson about Austen Christmases and a discussion of *Emma*. We then met in person at the Burgundy Lion Pub on the edge of Old Montreal. Visiting reenactors Elena Boyer Petry, Sebastien Larivée, and Jason Cordery modeled and explained



Tea at the Burgundy Lion Pub



Cheers to Jane’s 248<sup>th</sup> Birthday!

International Region’s birthday toast

# UNITED STATES

## Arizona, Greater Phoenix

Janine Kelley has been elected RC, taking the helm from Emily Smith.

## Arizona, Southern

In October, we held a Zoom discussion of *Pride and Prejudice* and watched a video by Octavia Cox on the topic “Who Betrayed Lizzy to Lady Catherine?” We hosted a tea in December at Loews Ventana Canyon at The Lodge.



*Southern Arizona's tea—(back row) Vicky Boyd, Jessica Bradley, Ann Hollis, Steve Smith, Karen Sanson, Angela Cade, Teresa Fontes, Rachel Dieken, Delia Athey, Linda Morenz, Helen Deluga, Drew Colenbrander, and Sarah Wiley; (middle row) Veronica Gutierrez, Renee Palting, and Carolyn Finnell; (front row) RC Holly Eckelbarger and Iris Lutz*

## California, Northern

Some 34 members and companions attended the Denver AGM, including six first-timers and one who was attending her 28th AGM!

Our online birthday gala in December included a talk by Amy Elizabeth Smith, author of *All Roads Lead to Austen: A Yearlong Journey with Jane*. Smith shared her observations in running Austen book-club sessions in Latin America almost 20 years ago. Then Co-RC Julianna Scott Fein presented “Epistolary Echoes: Letters in Jane Austen’s Novels,” covering the tradition of the epistolary form, its impact on Austen’s early experiments in the form, and analysis of letters in key



points in each of Austen’s novels. Amie Burkholder and Rakhi Rao were elected co-RCs, taking over from Fein and Valerie Sopher.

*Northern California members at the AGM*

## California, San Diego

We met in October via Zoom to discuss *Pride and Prejudice* and observed that the cycle of the four seasons is interwoven throughout the novel. In December, we met at Claudia’s Tea House in Carmel Valley for our birthday tea, celebrated with food, drink, and games.



*Members at Claudia’s Tea House*



*San Diego members at the AGM*



*(Clockwise from top left) Presentation on Dhaka muslin; Southwest board members Glenda Pinney, Karen Rueda, and Maryann Pelensky; Jan Fahey, RC Jane Boltz, and Carrie Wright; Melissa Buell; Lana Dalley; the cast of Jane Austen in 48 Minutes: (back row) Brendan Kane, Shirley Hatton, Ben Campbell, Branda Lock, and Don Schlossman; (front row) Kathryn Farren, Syrie James, and Melissa Booe*

## California, Southwest

In October, we gathered at California State Northridge for a talk by Carrie Wright, “Unbearably Fine: The Socio-Political Powers of Jewelry in Jane Austen’s Time,” which explored the sociopolitical symbolism of jewelry worn by Austen, her characters, and prominent 19th century figures. Then members viewed a specially recorded presentation on “The History and Restoration of the Lost Art of Dhaka Muslin” by Saiful Islam. The gathering included opportunity baskets donated by Janna Noyes. In November, more than 60 members attended the Denver AGM.

In December, we welcomed 100 attendees to the UCLA Faculty Club. The meeting featured a holiday emporium and book signing by local authors. Cal State Fullerton Professor Lana Dalley presented “Meditations on Value in *Mansfield Park*, or Jane Austen Tries to Balance the Books,” which demonstrated that the characters’ relationships reflect the financial uncertainties challenging all classes in British society in the early 19th century. Communications Chair Melissa Buell spoke on “British Christmas Traditions from the Regency and Victorian Eras” and Austen’s references to the holiday in her novels. We also enjoyed a performance of Syrie James’ new comedy *Jane Austen in 48 Minutes* with professional actors from San Pedro’s Little Fish Theatre Company. The event was underwritten by Claire Bellanti in memory of Robert Bellanti.



Basket creator Pam Mingle with winning bidder Emily Sumner

### Colorado, Denver/Boulder

At our annual tea and birthday celebration in December, held at the historic Brown Palace Hotel, we toasted outgoing RC Heather McVoy for her tireless work to make the 2023 AGM such a success, and welcomed new RC Pat Kyle. Our silent auction featured Austen-inspired embroidery kits, painting kits, tote bags, dish towels, and more.



Francine Mathews and Elyse Greenhut at the Denver tea



Heather McVoy, Melissa Hamblin, and Mary Smid

### District of Columbia, Metro

We held a group viewing of *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) at Alamo Drafthouse Cinema in Crystal City, Va., in October, and met several new and prospective members. In December, 50 of us celebrated at The Hamilton restaurant in downtown D.C. for our annual business meeting and Austen birthday lunch. Juliette Wells of Goucher College spoke about her new book, *A New Jane Austen: How Americans Brought Us the World's Greatest Novelist*, and offered an evocative toast. Ashley Martinez was elected secretary, replacing Delia Bisgyer. Alice Moore and Susan Farnsworth were elected to a second term as co-RCs, while Marie Boone was elected to another term as a member-at-large.



Juliette Wells, flanked by Co-RCs Susan Farnsworth and Alice Moore

### Florida, Southwest

We met with six cast members from The Naples Players' *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, as well as the costumer, stage director, and general director (on video) in October. Rosemary Purdy interviewed them and we visited the costume workrooms and observed "Arthur de Bourgh" being fitted for his waistcoat (supervised by his real-life wife, who played Mary Bennet). In November, some of us attended the performance in costume and the director gave a shoutout to JASNA before curtain.



In the costume rooms for *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*; waistcoat fitting

In December, we celebrated Austen's birthday both on Zoom and at the home of RC Jerry Vetowich. We discussed gifts, both in Austen's books and imaginary ones from certain characters to others, such as Mrs. Norris to Fanny on her birthday and John Thorpe to Catherine Morland.

### Georgia

We celebrated Austen's 248th birthday at Fergusson's on the Square in Hoschton.



Georgia's birthday celebration

### Idaho, Southern

Our book club met in October to discuss Curtis Sittenfeld's *Eligible* and in November to discuss Fay Weldon's *Letters to Alice: On First Reading Jane Austen*. Co-RC Ann Campbell found an apt quotation in the book for her office door in Boise State University's English Department: "It is only Departments of English Literature *which stand between us and our doom!*" Weldon may have intended this sentiment ironically, but as far as Campbell is concerned, truer words were never spoken. In December, Co-RC Kelly Christensen presided over our annual holiday tea at Richard's. Our featured speaker was Kim Wilson, who presented a lecture called "Peonies, Berries, and Bees: An Austen Cottage Garden."



Tamara Mackenthun with hats she created for Southern Idaho's table in the AGM Emporium



Tea scarf designed by a local artist as a thank you to Kim Wilson for her talk

### Indiana

In October, RC Lisa Whitaker hosted a Regency-style mystery dinner crossing Jane Austen characters with *Bridgerton* for a



RC Lisa Whitaker

“Mystery at Bodgerton.” Some dressed in Regency regalia while others wore costumes representing their assigned characters. We held our annual birthday tea in December at Rustic Root Tea Room.



Indiana members at the Rustic Root Tea Room

**Iowa**

In September, we welcomed historian Kathy Wilson to the West Des Moines Public Library for a presentation about Mary Shelley, a contemporary of Austen’s. For October, member Sarah Macht gave a brief history of the fan, sharing with us her own collection as well as books on the subject. We also painted silk fans to take home. In December, we returned to the gorgeous Hotel Pattee in Perry for our annual birthday tea.



Iowa members Paige Beck, Sarah Macht, Jessica Bishop, Brenda Griebahn, and Erin Joseph

**Louisiana**

In October, we discussed *Mansfield Park* and *Belle* by Paula Byrne. We examined the implications of Lord Mansfield’s life in reference to Austen’s choice of title for the novel. We also compared the positions of Fanny in the Bertram household and Dido Belle in the Mansfield family, and we reviewed the status of slavery in England and the colonies during the Regency era. In December, we celebrated Austen’s birthday at a jazz brunch at Commander’s Palace in New Orleans. Lorell Hornbrook led a champagne toast to Austen with a recital of life lessons learned from her books. Sheila Cork has joined Andrea Brown as co-RC.



Louisiana’s jazz brunch



Louisiana’s Miki Pfeffer, Roxanne Dufrene, Bill Long, Beth Goddard, and Rennie Culver

**Maine**

Lynn Harlan has been elected RC, taking over for Susan Claska Burnett. In December, we held a “Holiday by the Sea” event in Winter Harbor featuring member and food historian Merry Post, who gave a talk on “Pride and Partridge: Jane the Foodie.”

**Maryland**

In December, we held our annual birthday celebration. Joyce Loney gave a memorial for founding member Rena Kelly, and Nancy Magnuson led our toast. Maria Frawley from George Washington

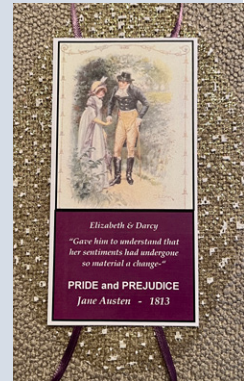


Joyce Loney; Co-RC Jenn Jones; Maria Frawley and new Co-RC Tara Moore

University spoke on “The Work of a Moment: Serendipity in Jane Austen’s Fiction.” During the business meeting, we elected Tara Moore as co-RC.

**Michigan, Eastern, Central, and Northern**

Our December birthday party took place in a cozy private dining room at Rocky’s of Northville. Attendees shared cheerful words for Austen with our traditional champagne toast. Kathy Graham provided handmade Austen ornaments that commemorated the 2023 AGM theme. After lunch, Justin Kelly summarized his experience at Denver’s AGM, and new Co-RC Chris Hench led us in a game of “Who Am I?”



Ornament by Kathy Graham

**Michigan, Western**

At our inaugural book talk in August, host Jennifer Monti led a discussion on Jane Austen and English Romantic poets in *Sense and Sensibility*. Conversation ranged from Shakespeare and Shelley to Cowper and Coleridge as we enjoyed tea, cake, and strawberries. Schuler Books & Music in Grand Rapids hosted our first public forum in October. Local musicologist Camellia Adams spoke about Austen’s love of music and its influence on her work. We celebrated Austen’s birthday at the High Tea in Grand Rapids. Topping the evening was a reprise of Avis Hewitt’s 2023 AGM presentation, “Darcy’s Etiquette and Ethics.”



Camellia Adams and daughter Faywen



RC Karenleigh Overmann and Avis Hewitt



Grand Rapids tea



(Clockwise)  
Members at the country dance; Sheila Johnson Kindred; Veena Iyer and daughter Marji; RC Nancy O'Connor and Anne Furuseth

## Minnesota

We had a ball at our annual country dance in October. In November, we hosted author Sheila Johnson Kindred, who spoke about “Charles Austen’s Naval Career in relation to *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*.” December featured a celebration of Austen on her actual birthday along with a bazaar. Deborah Ultan, arts and performing arts librarian at the University of Minnesota, spoke on the topic “From Austen to Mattel: License to Reimagine Reality and Identity.”



Mississippi members Nell-Rose Estes, Co-RC Carla Wall, Jennifer Meador, Linda Thompson, Lori Toyota, Jan Taylor, and Co-RC Mary Clay Morgan



Members with Mississippi ties at the AGM: Kristen Miller Zohn, Carla Wall, Jason Solinger, Carolyn J. Brown, and Susan Allen Ford

## Mississippi

We gathered to toast Austen at our annual birthday/holiday celebration in December.

## Missouri, Metropolitan St. Louis

In December, we gathered at the Gatesworth for our annual holiday luncheon and celebration of Austen’s birthday, including a book exchange. In tribute to late member Bettye Dew, we performed excerpts from three of her original scripts followed by reminiscences.

## Nebraska

Kim Guyer and Angela Nelson have been elected co-RCs, taking the helm from Angela Kunz.

## New Jersey

In October, we met virtually to discuss *Belle: The True Story of Dido Belle* by Paula Byrne as we explored the possibility that *Mansfield Park* was in part inspired by the true story of Lord Mansfield, an antislavery figure and great-uncle of Dido Belle.



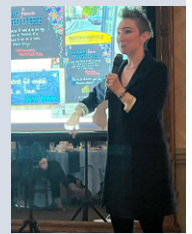
Katie Tencza with RC Jessica McKenna

In November over Zoom, we discussed the role of theater in the Regency period as we considered *Lover’s Vows*, the play Austen’s characters attempted to perform during Sir Thomas’ absence from *Mansfield Park*.

We met in person in December to celebrate Austen’s birthday, continue our holiday tradition of exchanging books, and learn whist. Communications Chair Amelia Rodriguez took on the role of whist instructor. Finally, we celebrated the achievements of Katie Tencza, who won first place in JASNA’s 2023 Essay Contest in the graduate division for “The Relationship Road to Self-Awareness.”



Jane Austen Retreat on Lake George



Jessica Salmon

## New York, Capital

In August, we hosted our 12th annual Jane Austen Retreat at Wiawaka on Lake George, which attracted members from several other regions. We held a ball, played games, heard presentations, and enjoyed a reading of *Manydown* by Sarah Rose Kearns and friends. In December, we held our annual birthday tea at the Inn at Saratoga. Member Jessica Salmon regaled us with stories of the events she attended at the Jane Austen Festival in Bath. Five members attended the 2023 AGM in Denver.

## New York, Central/Western

September marked the debut of our Buffalo-area book group, led by Co-RC Susan Harris-Gamard. We discussed *Sense and Sensibility* at the Main Street Starbucks and at the Clearfield Library, both in Williamsville. In December, the group celebrated Austen’s birthday with afternoon tea at the Asa Ransom House in Clarence.



Central/Western New York’s holiday tea wreaths

Our Rochester-area meetings were held at the Barnes & Noble in Pittsford. In September, we welcomed JASNA President Mary Mintz, who gave a talk on “Jane Austen’s Reputation: Highlights of Her First Century in American Periodicals.” An informal reception at the Hahnemann Club in the Highlands at Pittsford followed. In October, A. Marie Sprayberry led a discussion on “Autumn in Austen.” November’s meeting repeated last year’s popular workshop on holiday tea wreaths, led by Co-RC Lisa Brown. In December, member and textiles expert Kate Jorgensen gave a presentation titled “Covered/Uncovered: The Shawl and the Regency Era.”

**New York, Metro**

In October, we held a meeting focused on *Persuasion*. Talia Schaffer, Distinguished Professor of English at Queens College and the Graduate Center CUNY, spoke on “Living with Care in *Persuasion*,” her view of the novel through the ethics of caregiving. The talk was inspired by her book *Communities of Care: The Social Ethics of Victorian Fiction* (2021). Afterward, a panel discussion, “The Pen in Their Hands,” featured three adaptors of *Persuasion* in different media: filmmaker Zoe Hodge, novelist Noreen Mughees, and playwright and Co-RC Sarah Rose Kearns. The discussion was moderated by Sayantani DasGupta, senior lecturer in narrative medicine at Columbia University and author of two Austen retellings for children.



*Bella Moritz, assistant to speaker Hilary Davidson, and Metro NY member Lena Yasutake*

Our annual birthday meeting featured Hilary Davidson, chair of fashion and textile studies at the Fashion Institute of Technology, who gave us an “Intimate Look at Jane Austen’s Wardrobe.” Davidson’s latest book, *Jane Austen’s Wardrobe*, offers a tour through 18th and 19th century dress, focusing on actual items from Austen’s closet.

**North Carolina**

Our virtual book club met in October to discuss *The Murder of Mr. Wickham* by Claudia Gray, led by Nancy Martin-Young. We had a record-breaking number of AGM attendees. In December, we celebrated Austen’s birthday with equal numbers attending in person and online. Sue Scott shared with us “Everything a Janeite Needs to Know,” an interactive session full of gems and basics. We capped off the gathering with our annual toast to Austen, led by Gisele Rankin. After several years of service, Karin Wiberg has stepped down as co-RC, with Sara Tavela remaining RC.



*North Carolina members Julia Adams Scheurich, Rebecca Russell, and Esma Sederoff*

**Ohio, Central and Western**

We held our annual Twelfth Night ball at the historic Patterson Homestead in Dayton, which was constructed from 1816 to 1850 and renovated in



*Paul Weaver, crowned king of the Twelfth Night ball by Cindy Manship; Zoe Shade*

the Colonial Revival style in 1938. The ball opened with a toast to Austen, followed by a catered dinner, then period dancing called by a dance master accompanied by live musicians and/or playing period card games. We also held a silent auction.

**Oregon, Southern**

Our October meeting featured our first Georgian/Regency/All-Things-Austen Bazaar. We brought pieces from our own collections of period costume, millinery, culinary objects, books, articles, artwork, and more. RC Linda Thomas presented a talk that included her travel photos of the great houses and gardens of Kent and of Sevenoaks, where a 12-year-old Austen visited her great-uncle Francis and her godmother, his second wife. In November, we welcomed Collins Hemingway, who discussed the origins and history of tea. We then considered the number of times tea is referenced in Austen’s letters and novels. Our December gathering at the home of Margay Garrity and Rich Lang celebrated Austen’s birthday. We enjoyed several readings from Austen novels with references to Christmas.

**Oregon/Southwest Washington**

In October, 16 members traveled to the Denver AGM with new RC Vonnie Alto, including five first-timers. This was founding member Mary Margaret Benson’s 38th AGM and her husband Frank McClanahan’s 31st. This year’s Tribute Grant was given in honor of Bill Boyd and Marna Tisdell. In November, we met at the home of longtime member Valerie Bloye. In December,



*(Clockwise) Margaret Christman, RC Vonnie Alto, and Joann Graham; Cynthia Eckersley; Marsha Moellering and daughter Anna Meier; Valerie Bloye; Sinde and Malcolm Fredeking*

we celebrated Austen’s birthday by attending the *Christmas at Pemberley* trilogy of plays by Lauren Gundersen and Margot Melcon at the HART Theatre in Hillsboro, Ore.; Magenta Theater in Vancouver, Wash; and Taproot Theatre Company in Seattle.

**Pennsylvania, Eastern**

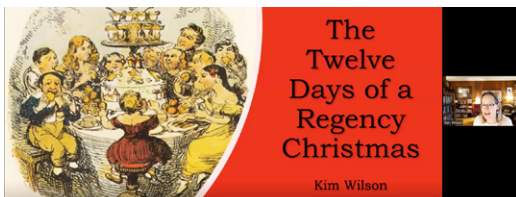
In October, we enjoyed a presentation and feast for the senses by Dan Macey titled “Scents and Sensibilities,” held at the Venetian Club in Philadelphia. We learned about what people in Austen’s time would have tasted and smelled, and how *they* would have smelled. Macey brought perfume compounds representing each novel and samples of food from the era. We celebrated Austen’s 248th birthday with games and cake in Center City Philadelphia. We were joined by author and new member Amy Foster Myer, who discussed her new book *Fallen Into Austen* and signed copies.



*Eastern Pennsylvania members celebrating Austen’s birthday; Dan Macey’s presentation*

**South Carolina**

We met in October at Charleston County Public Library to hear member Kalee Lineberger’s talk on Regency fashion during Austen’s life and in film adaptations, through a sociopolitical and historical lens. Lineberger displayed several gowns she had sewn and worn to the Jane Austen Festival in Bath while serving as a steward. In November, we toured the historic John Mark Verdier House in Beaufort. The event included a carriage ride and lunch at Wren Bistro. Members across North America joined our virtual meeting in December to celebrate Austen’s birthday and hear Kim Wilson present “Twelve Days of a Regency Christmas” about how the holiday was celebrated in Austen’s day. We enjoyed learning recipes for making a Twelfth Night cake.



*(Clockwise) Members at the historic John Mark Verdier House; Kalee Lineberger displaying her hand-sewn gowns; Kim Wilson’s presentation*

**Tennessee, East**

In October, Karan Dotson spoke about her favorite modern detective novels based on Jane Austen’s characters and life. Later that month, members and guests enjoyed a tour of the rare book collection at the University of Tennessee, hosted by Professor Hilary Havens. We got to



*East Tennessee’s birthday dinner; admiring the rare books at the University of Tennessee*

touch such treasures as first editions of Austen, Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Ann Radcliff, and others. In December, we celebrated Austen’s birthday with a dinner organized by RC Renée Rios Weber, ending with a game based on objects mentioned in Austen’s novels.

**Tennessee, Middle**

We gathered at the home of Betsy Fleetwood to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Boston Tea Party (held two years to the day before Austen’s birth in 1775) with musical performances and readings in the spirit of liberty—and lanterns to complete the mood. Holly Yates gave a rousing rendition of “Paul Revere’s Ride” by Longfellow. Jennifer Stowe of Three Sisters Tearoom spoke about the types of tea tossed overboard in Boston Harbor, which we followed with a tea tasting. Stowe also spoke about some of the copycat rebellions that followed in the colonies. Co-RC Caroline Davis made a Williamsburg orange cake.



*(Clockwise) Boston Tea Party reading; Middle Tennessee members; Co-RC Andrea Hearn at the Boston Tea Party event*



(Clockwise) Shannon Blatt; Chris Peirson, Roxanne Milton, RC Baronda Bradley, Beni Mayer, Shayna Vance, and Erin Baltensperger; North Texas birthday toast; Susan Allen Ford

**Texas, North**

In September, Susan Allen Ford spoke about the economies of alteration in Austen’s time. Encouraging members who had not yet done so to read Austen’s letters, Ford provided several lesser-known texts to illuminate the practicalities of staying fashionable during the Regency period. We thanked outgoing Membership Chair Roxanne Milton for her service before introducing student-member Shayna Vance, who was elected to the role. In December, we celebrated Austen on her birthday at Maggiano’s in Dallas. Speaker Shannon Blatt described holiday preparations that Austen might have seen at Chawton House, while also delving into Christmas events that were significant plot drivers in Austen’s novels. RC Baronda Bradley served her version of wassail.

**Utah**

Our November meeting was held at the home of our outgoing book club facilitator, Glenda Thomas. The afternoon included potluck tea delicacies, sparkling cider, and champagne, which sustained us through our discussion of Mary Greeley’s *The Heiress: The*



Glenda Thomas, Heidi Gailey, Catie Butler, Debra Call, and guest Tara Leung; Corran Hawks, Rachel Bergquist, and Rachel Hawks

*Revelations of Anne de Bourgh*. A record 14 members attended the Denver AGM. For our annual birthday celebration in December, we returned to Auntie Rae’s Sweets and Tea Parties for a well-attended afternoon tea. We introduced our new book club facilitator, Heather Ibson, along with continuing officers Kim Deacon (RC), Claudia Bell (treasurer), and Robert Diaz (secretary).

**Virtual, Montana/North Dakota/ Oklahoma**

Marcia Johnson has been elected RC, taking over for founding RC Lynn Sherick.

**Washington, Eastern/Idaho, Northern**

In October, Mrs. Elton (Treasurer Michele Larrow) led an “Exploring Party to Maple Grove” at the University of Idaho Arboretum. At our virtual meeting in November, we viewed Caitlin Kelly and Misty Krueger’s 2020 AGM video “Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History: Jane Austen, Women Historians, and Histories of Women.” We celebrated Austen’s birthday in Colfax, Wash., in December. Melody Faris made a delicious Dundee cake, which we enjoyed while she told us about her family history in the area. Finally, we organized a book, tea, and chocolate exchange with participants from around the country.



Katie Bradley, Cecily Van Cleave, Co-RC Jane Provinsal, and Michele Larrow at the arboretum; Eastern Washington/Northern Idaho Janeites

**Wisconsin**

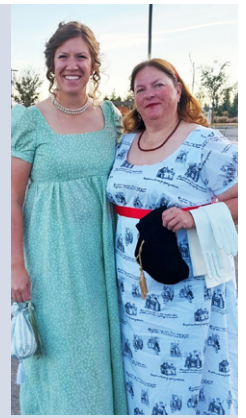
We honored Austen's birthday in December with a ball and tea at the ballroom of the historic Woman's Club of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. Tom and Toni Tumbusch of Ohio called our dances. Many guests wore Regency attire, which contributed to the festive atmosphere. The sumptuous tea buffet featured savory and sweet treats. Games of whist were available for guests needing a break from dancing.



(Clockwise) Wisconsin's tea buffet; Janet Johnson, Phyllis Menne, Victoria Hinshaw, Judy Beine, and Sandra Rutherford playing whist; Wisconsin dancers

**Wyoming**

In November, RC Jillian Miller and Treasurer Jill Ottman traveled to Gering, Neb., to deliver a talk titled "Miss Austen's Life and Works" at an Austen-themed tea held to kick off Gering Library Week. It was the best-attended Friends of the Library session the Gering Library has hosted.



RC Jillian Miller and Jill Ottman



Wyoming members at the Gering Library

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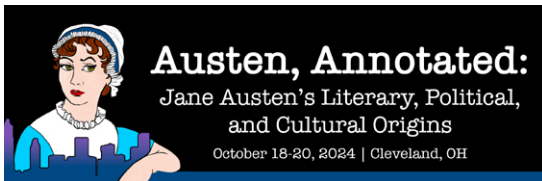
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## LITTLE HOUSE OF AUSTEN



Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Region member Emily Gold and her husband, Barney Krucoff, have improved on the Little Free Library movement by building a tribute to Jane Austen into their little library in Bethesda, Md. The library, which Krucoff created as a gift for his wife, replicates Jane Austen's House—Chawton Cottage—where the author revised or wrote her masterpieces.

"Barney printed out images of the cottage on sticky photo paper," Gold explains. "We set the library sideways to the street so people wouldn't miss the facade, with its little hanging sign like on the real cottage."

Along with books for all ages, Gold keeps the library stocked with Austen editions, and is gratified at how quickly the latter fly off the shelves.

Krucoff fashioned the chimneys from Lego pieces and the roof out of plastic terracotta-style tiles. The structure also features miniature copies of the plaque and sign that grace the actual building's exterior, as well as a vignette of Austen's famous face. Inside, the pelisse pattern adorns the library's back panel, with the drawing-room wallpaper used on the sides.

"Jane's portrait faces the house, which is nice for me since I see her every time I look out our front windows," Gold notes.

