

Social Impressions: Vancouver

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We flew. We drove. We trained. We ferried. From across the Lions's Gate Bridge in North Vancouver. From across the continent—Bob Hunting from Orono, Maine and Florence Wills from Miami—from across the ocean—Mollie Thomas from Hampshire and Valerie Peyman from Kent. We had to get to Vancouver.

"The distance is nothing, when one has a motive." The motive: the eighth Annual General Meeting of the Jane Austen Society of North America, September 26-28 in Vancouver, British Columbia at the Hotel Georgia. Programme: *The Watsons*.

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We Chicagoans boarded at O'Hare . . . the better to languish on the runway for reasons not specified. No air-conditioning. No food service. Sixty minutes later, sweat pouring down our foreheads (*"It is very unfair to judge any body's conduct without an intimate knowledge of their situation."*), we took off on a perfect four-hour flight; even got to see "Hannah and Her Sisters" 1½ times—malfunctioning video in back cabin—the better to understand Woody Allen, who, according to Jack Grey's letter, is on his wish-list for next year's AGM in New York.

"We were determined to be in good time . . ." and arrived a day early to explore the wonders of Vancouver. We opted for a bus tour: Stanley Park. The Queen Elizabeth Garden. Stunning residential areas. The Planetarium. English Bay. And in the distance, Expo.

For someone who comes from a city with New Town, Old Town, Greek Town and Chinatown, Gastown was worth an extra stop. After viewing the Steam House, Steam Clock and Gassy Jack (he's a statue), there we were on cobblestone streets, in boutiques and galleries to lose hours in and spend \$\$ in. (The thrill of deducting 25% from every Canadian bill can't be believed.)

Anne Minahan and Katharine Ostrander spent the day at Expo. Peg Farlow and Helen Cannon looked up old friends in Vancouver. Harriet Rylaarsdam, who motored, rested up for what would become a 6500 mile drive to Vancouver, birding through Point Pelie, Ontario and back to Chicago. Cappie McQuarrie and Betty Bonny, grade-school chums, caught up on news.

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Thursday night, the Board Meeting began with a gastronomically adventuresome dinner—by that is meant, fish. (And as any meeting planner will tell, never 'fish' without a permit.) Vancouver being noted for piscine virtues, perhaps Eileen Sutherland, Regional and AGM Co-ordinator, wasn't taking much of a chance.

Dinner was preceded by the best salad encountered in Vancouver and

environs (a hotel salad!); and all attendees devoured every flake of regional salmon, every bite of seasonal vegetables, every droplet of dessert parfait.

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Friday night's get-acquainted reception was eagerly awaited. Old friends were greeted just this side of hysteria; new friends were well met! We tasted ramaki and cheese wheels, ate deviled eggs and smoked salmon, and found libations without limit! The most divine wine. Imported not from California, but farther away: "*I shall . . . drink French wine, & be above vulgar economy,*" the dinner menu promised, and *Cuvee Speciale* was served the entire weekend.

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Saturday morning, other sensibilities. First order of the day was Eileen's agreeable announcement that "today is 'Jane Austen Day' in the City of Vancouver," by proclamation of the Mayor. (And didn't we *sense* that beforehand?)

A rousing keynote address by the much-beloved Juliet McMaster, whose daughter and husband were in the audience. Overheard afterward, "Wasn't Juliet wonderful? Worth the price of the entire conference!" Her topic was, "God Gave Us Our Relations: The Watson Family."

We then broke up for seminars. Five groups, repeating. We could choose but two. What a dilemma! The card-playing group had to be rescheduled in the ballroom because it was (in the most seemly way) so boisterous. The dance party stayed where it was. Mary Margaret Benson and Clifford Collier led the revelers.

The other sessions: Judith Terry, discussing the four endings of *The Watsons* ("Knit Your Own Stuff"), and bringing rare books with her; Dr. John Norris, historically dissecting a practitioner's life: "*Sam is only a Surgeon you know*"; Dr. Joseph Wiesenfarth exploring "*The Watsons as Pretext*;" Dr. James Heldman, locating the "Voice of Jane Austen" in *The Watsons*. Gratified attendees loved every second of the give-and-take of the q-and-a that followed.

I found that our JASNA celebrities were so accessible. Saturday morning wake-up coffee, receptions, the book shop that Eileen set up in the Tudor Room—opportunities to greet speakers and start a personal chat with these experts. (At lunch Saturday with Vivian Hall, we sat next to Dr. Heldman. Such fun to discuss his "Voice" without greedy hands rising to ask more questions!)

Later we joined the little autographing party with the aforementioned Miss Terry. Her book *Abigail's Part—Version and Diversion*, a continuation of *Mansfield Park*, was delightfully received. Alas, it will not be available in the States until April. (Lucky Mrs. Rylaarsdam purchased her copy to enjoy on her trip.) Noticing on the book-jacket that one of Jane Austen's favorite animals, the pug, plays a heroic role, two Austenites realized that they too favor the English beastie, and arranged for their pugs to

exchange holiday greetings with their owners, Anne Clark of Evanston, IL and Pam Sher of Ross, CA.

And speaking of Austen-associated vanities, Edith Lank, retiring board member from Rochester, told a small group of envious listeners that *she*—at her own request—is the possessor of the license plate “Janeite,” the only such plate in New York.

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Freetime was just that. We trekked the length of Robson Street with its fine clothing boutiques, its sushi restaurants (we tried two, on Ron Sutherland’s recommendations), and its giant department stores at one end.

Then across the street to the Vancouver Art Gallery to see the eponymous Jane’s own tools—her writing desk, pens, some of her letters, and other precious artifacts, in a special display on the main floor arranged by Joan Austen-Leigh. It was a thrilling experience, laced with chagrin for those who can’t put pen to paper without a computer alongside.

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“Are you sure there is nobody you know in all this multitude of people? I think you must know somebody.”

Mrs. Allen would have felt at home at the pre-dinner cocktail party Saturday night. Thronged with attendees, spouses, relatives and other friends of Jane Austen, it was a most particular crowd. We heard *“a few clever things said, a few downright silly.”*

Suddenly, the drone of bagpipes interrupted the chatter. Herewith a piper, in his kilt, come to pipe our own royal couple in to dinner: Lorraine Hanaway, President of JASNA, and husband Bill.

Amidst a *“struggling assembly”* intent on finding seats *“by a continued exertion of strength and ingenuity,”* Joan Austen-Leigh made her way to the podium.

“A special announcement,” she said, when the group had quietened. *“Her Majesty the Queen sends greetings to the Jane Austen Society of North America.”*

As Janeites were seated, Pamela stood. *“A toast to the Queen. God bless her!”* All drank. *“To the Queen! To the Queen!”* shouted the unrestrained California assemblage, modestly seated off-center to the back. All drank again.

Eileen Sutherland stood. *“A toast to Jane Austen. All rise and toast Jane Austen!”* All drank once more.

Thus our glorious banquet, the highlight of the weekend, began. Pamela is Pamela Delville-Pratt, Canada’s new membership co-ordinator.

Eileen is herself, the grand planner of the AGM, who with a chapter of about 20 members, arranged this, my third, Annual Meeting, attracting almost 200 Janeites to the most north-wester-ly reaches of the American Continent, matching the attendance at Savannah, St. Louis and points backward.

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The dinner was partridge hen, which, in clinical circumstances, might be termed Rock Cornish, book-ended by creamy oyster chowder and English trifle.

During dinner, John Gleiber, retiring VP from Washington, conducted the ritual Tadpole, in some ways more stimulating than the beverages or the conversation. (This informal poll selects the favorite character of the assigned book.) Our table, mainly Chicagoans—plus (a first for an AGM?) a Vancouverite at every banquet table to make introductions—decided to eschew the Chicago tradition (to vote early and often), and waited for a favorite name to be called before shouting, raising hands, waving wine bottles, stampeding, causing a commotion and in other noisy ways bringing attention to one's self and one's opinion.

Despite the poignant nomination of "the old Mare" (or was it Charles Blake's own trusty steed so honored? This recorder is unclear.), and despite the nomination of that lively decenarian, C.B. himself, dear Emma withstood these emotional onslaughts and was voted our most favorite character.

Another ceremony—the introduction of the winner of the Quiz, cunningly devised by Eileen Sutherland. But not quite that easy—there were several finalists, who were called to the stage, and, *in front of everyone*, had to answer the tie-breaker. Winners were Lorraine Brubaker of Falls Church, Virginia and Peggy Larkin of Buffalo (who had a nice chat with Barbara Larkin of Columbia, Missouri, the upshot of which was that they were probably not related).

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"Was there anything particular about that lady?" So went the not-apocryphal story at Winchester Cathedral, spurring JASNA co-founder Joan Austen-Leigh to write *Our Own Particular Jane*, a tour de force (performed after dinner) based on Jane Austen's life, letters and literature. The actors—Judith Terry and husband Reg, Tricia Wainman-Wood and Anthony Jenkins—played upward of two dozen parts, to great acclaim.

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Sunday morning we double-decked over to the Barbary Coast to board the *Malibu Princess*, for the brunch cruise that was the cap of the weekend. Launched with a mimosa (champagne and orange juice), we enjoyed seafood or spinach crepes, croissants, cheese, fruit cup and coffee; cruising past the Sunday Market, Stanley Park and Expo '86, seeing it from outside in. A visual treat, we saw every pavilion, the mono-rail, and the Swiss building, an authentic replica of a Swatch Watch with a dial 46 feet in diameter, costing \$1 million. The Canada Pavilion was almost adrift with its giant sail decor, to become afterward the Canadian Trade center.

"*I am satisfied—& will trouble you no more when these few lines are dismissed.*"

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After a 48-hour sojourn in Victoria (including this romantic moment: the waiter at Chauncey's serving lettuce leaf, parsley, and a diamond ring to an adjoining table), our brave little band of weary travelers headed home.

On the flight, I picked up a copy of the *New York Times*. There was a review of a new movie, "Round Midnight." One of the characters is named Darcey Leigh. I got goosebumps.