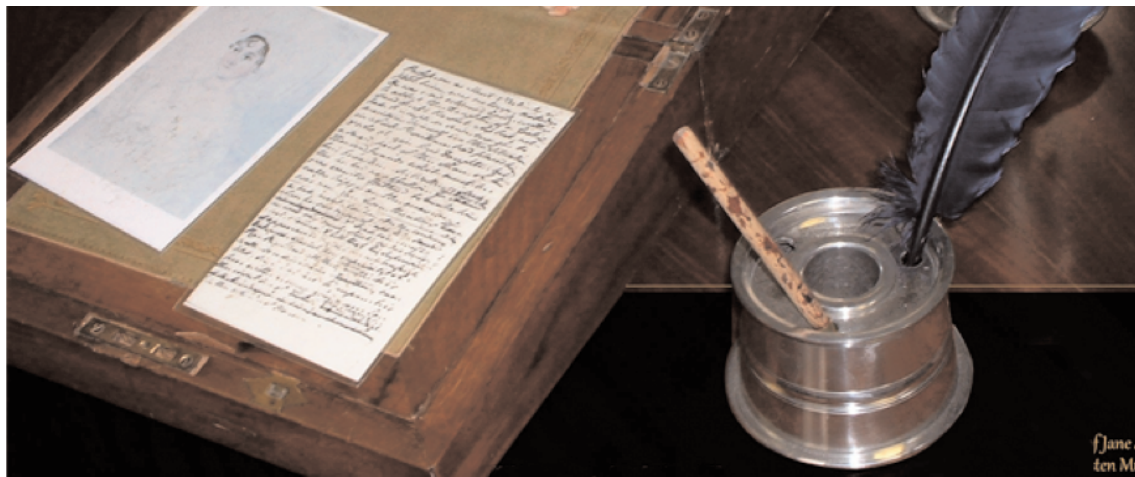


# Jane Austen Society of North America

## Indianapolis Region

### SPRING SUPPLEMENTAL

March 2018  
Jacquie Carroll  
Editor



*The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel must be intolerably stupid.*

—JANE AUSTEN

## *From the Desk of the Indiana Regional Director*

Mary Miller

I HAVE A SPECIAL SPRING treat for everyone! Our Northern members, Susan and Jonathan Fiet, are part of a 1812 reenactment group up in Northeast Indiana. Last fall, they both spent time as their alter-egos from 1812. Susan has written two lovely articles about their time as reenactors and details about their dress along with photos of everything. Please enjoy this special Spring supplemental to our normal newsletter.



## How a Regency Fashionista Became an 1812 Camp Follower

How does a Janeite end up on an 1812 battlefield? Like any good Austen novel it begins with sisters. Eight years ago my younger sister, Tricia, expressed a desire to attend the Louisville Austen Festival and she wished to do so in period clothing. We did our research, and since it was a two day event, we made two dresses and matching bonnets. We had a wonderful time. We decided to make this an annual affair and the following year we added ball gowns and reticules and I added a husband. My husband, Jonathan, was a good sport about donning ridiculously hot clothing for an event in Kentucky in July. He cut quite the romantic figure and found he enjoyed it.

The next year I added a silk covered parasol and we attended an annual AGM in Minnesota which required making a few more garments for the cooler weather we expected to encounter. (A long-sleeved dress, a velvet cape and a spencer were added to the closet.) We loved the dancing and generally entering into Jane's world.

Then the British navy invaded Louisville. Jonathan was smitten with

the uniforms and asked me if I would make him one. I was ready for a new challenge and told him, "I will make you anything you like as long as it's not a red coat. We are Americans." (I come from a military family which dates back to the War of Independence and our patriotism runs deep.) We found a book on the uniforms of the war of 1812 and picked one purely for its aesthetics. It was the uniform of Captain Partridge of the Army Corp of Engineers. I made the uniform and Jonathan wore it to the Louisville AGM. The following summer I added another summer dress and finding our beautiful fabri-covered shoes to be impractical for wandering about in the little bit of wilderness of Locust Grove, I added half boots as well. At this point I had designed and made five dresses, four hats, four reticules, three chemises, two spencers, a cape, one set of stays, one bodiced petticoat and a partridge in a pear tree.

We were loving this era and began to look for more opportunities to wear our clothes. As I searched the Internet for anything else Regency era related I came across reenacting. We reside in

Indiana at the present and we found that many battles of the War of 1812 were fought here. We read about The Gathering in Mississinewa, attended (and since it was October and outdoors it required making a spencer to go with my only long-sleeved dress), talked with different folks and hooked up with a group of cannoneers, the First U. S. Light Artillery and their cannon, Dolly.

We then began a year's prep haunting thrift shops and antique stores, combing through our own items to see what might work and ordering and making tent, flooring and dining fly. We decided to portray an officer and his wife who, because of our age, had fought in the Revolutionary War, been given land in Ohio in payment for that service, and when America went to war with Britain again headed to the front lines to "'send those 'lobster backs' packing again."

And of course clothes. Finery will not do for the dirty work of cooking over a campfire. So two aprons, two work dresses, linen bath towels and washcloths, dishcloths and dishtowels, uniform trousers and waistcoat for Jonathan and straw hats for both of us as well as a set of short stays for myself.

The prep time was a lot of fun. I enjoyed researching what was appropriate. These events are usually juried so clothing and implements must all conform to time appropriate standards. It was interesting to think about what items were needed to actually function as a household and how they would be used. This is usually referred

to as reenacting, but from the time of my first dress eight years ago I thought of myself as an experiential historian in a small way. It is amazing how much insight one gets just by putting on the clothes of a particular era.

Our first event was this past September at Stone's Trace. We set up our campsite and for two days lived the life of an officer and his wife. We washed with a bowl and pitcher using water heated over a campfire. I cooked period appropriate recipes I had gathered from a Youtube channel done by Townsends. Jonathan helped fire the cannon. We learned how to keep warm in a tent during 40 degree nights. The purpose of these events is to help educate the public on the event being represented, the lifestyle of the time and often a specific skill. We loved sharing with people what we were doing and answered a lot of questions. The most common one I fielded was, "Is that your laundry in the boiling water?" "No, that is our lunch." We were making a beef pudding which was wrapped in a cloth and boiled in water for several hours.

Being an officer and his wife we do enjoy a comfortable and commodious tent. As we tell our visitors, glamping is not a modern concept. It has been around for thousands of years. (It is said that Julius Caesar traveled with a marble mosaic floor for his tent.)

I find I enjoy every aspect of this new activity. I am being stretched creatively. (I made a travel desk from an old cigar box for example.) I am adding new

skills as I make items with leather and other unusual materials. I've gone on treasure hunts to gather antique books that would have been available to read at the time, learned how to play Whisk, dominoes and draughts, kept a journal I made myself. I even baked a pigeon pie in big cast iron soup pot. When our cell phone didn't work out in the wilderness I penned a letter to my daughter and her family written on linen paper with a dip pen. She posted on Facebook about the event with a photo of my wax-sealed dispatch saying, "When your parents are Regency era reenactors, you get 'texts' like this, hand delivered by a fellow reenactor that lives in your subdivision. And said neighbor was still dressed in full regalia."

My favorite part of it all? Waking up early in the predawn hour, starting a fire, and putting the kettle on and the large pot for hot water to wash with. Making my first cup of tea in the morning in the silver teapot that belonged to my mother and sipping from a china teacup. Enjoying the quiet of the morning as the mist rises from the field and the birds slowly wake up and sing to greet the day. That hour to sit in the quiet of my own thoughts, to contemplate, to be unplugged from the world and yet more completely connected to it. Yes, I'm hooked. Now before spring I need two more work aprons, Jonathan needs two more shirts, a coat, and shaku hat. I need a wool cape and we need to do something about our bedspreads....







## Experiencing History

Recently my husband and I branched out from being armchair avocational historians to experiential ones. We live in Indiana where several battles of the War of 1812, referred to as the Seven Years War in Europe, were fought. In fact the British war with Napoleon both helped incite the conflict and saved America's independence. American sailors were taken from ships and pressed into service in the British navy which was a main reason and the cost in money and manpower to fight Napoleon kept England from fighting America with her full might.

We spent a year researching and gathering items to use for our campsite. We chose as personnas compilations from our own ancestors weaving together a story that fit with our geographical area, our ages and our interests. Both of us have ancestors who fought in the Revolutionary War and my husband's predecessors were given land in Ohio in payment for their service. They went on to become prosperous horse farmers. This became our basic story. With those redcoats invading again in nearby Indiana we decided to head to the frontier and do our part in sending them packing in this our second war of independence.

There are two types of reenactments. One is a re-creation of a battle event and the other is called a festival. The former is a military encampment and run as such and the latter often covers many time periods. Military encampments have reveille, muster, scheduled times for battles, communal feeding for single soldiers, and colors at the end of the day. Our first military encampment was The Gathering at Mississinewa. It is the largest 1812 event in the entire United States. There are hundreds of campsites. It even attracts Canadians who represent the British in the battles.

At either event the days follow along in similar order. I rise early because I wake up early, start the fire and get the tea and coffee going. A big pot of water, our only source of hot water, is put on to boil as well. This pot and the fire are kept going all day. It can be difficult to start the fire and it takes time to get it hot enough to be of use, and longer still to heat water, so the phrase "keep the home fires burning" takes on real meaning. When my husband rises I fix breakfast, we do the dishes, then we use our bowl and pitcher for our ablutions. I assist him in washing his hair since this is easier as a two person job. When I wash my hair I do so after dinner then roll my hair in rag curls overnight. Then we dress and prepare for the public.

Jonathan is part of the First U.S. Light Artillery group and he spends the day with them answering questions, assisting in the firing of the cannon, and joining in any battles that may be scheduled. Depending on

shared cooking duties and what I have chosen to prepare, I may begin lunch right away. I cook 17th and early 18th century recipes I stumbled across through a Youtube channel called Townsends. I have found the foods, flavors, textures and cooking techniques new and interesting. Some recipes we have loved and others were nothing special, but they were all edible. Our favorite ones I am entering into a simple homemade cookbook or receipt book as it would be called back in the day.

Our persona are well-to-do who are volunteers and self-equipped. This means we have a decent size tent, large dining fly and the equipment to provide all the comforts of home, albeit in very simplified form. We try to live the life as much as possible during our events.

The tent functions as bedroom and bathroom. The fly functions as kitchen and dining room. We use a chamber pot at night and at other times when it is more convenient. We keep our clothes in a large trunk, sleep on wood and canvas cots. We enjoy using feather pillows and find them very comfortable. Only beeswax candles are allowed and they are a little difficult to make, somewhat expensive to buy, and provide only moderate light. It is very hard to read by them at night when I am getting ready to go to sleep. Many passages from books referencing light and candles come into clearer focus.

In between cooking and cleaning there are demonstrations of skills or crafts. I am preparing a demonstration on the quill pen and writing with one. Jonathan





answers questions about the cannon and we both field questions about history and the lifestyle of the encampment. I also sew, knit, read, nap (because I get up so early), visit with fellow participants, write letters, keep a journal, and there is always whist, draughts, dominoes, chess and conversation.

I love my comforts and would not choose to permanently live in another age, but I am so glad we discovered reenacting. It is hard when it is very hot and we are still working out how to keep warm at night when it is quite cold, but I love everything else about it. I have enjoyed making an attractive and comfortable home in a tent in the wilderness. I've learned new things ie. that soot is called potblack. Enjoyed the generosity of knowledge from

other reenactors like the laundress who told me how to get potblack out of my clothes when I found out modern soaps didn't work. (The secret for old stains is old soap and it works like magic.) The sound of fife and drum in the camp makes me wonder why the military ever went to the trumpet and brass band. Cooking and eating new and interesting items has added another layer to life. We've had great interactions with the public. (My favorite question we got asked many times at one event, "Is that your laundry boiling in that water?" "No, it's our lunch." I was making a beef pudding which is boiled in a piece of cloth.)

I love the creative challenges of designing and making clothes and accessories, working with new materi-

als like leather for a satchel or repurposing items such as converting a wooden cigar box into a travel desk. I am a lifelong student and learning new things has enriched my life in ways I can't express.

But my favorite part of it all is waking up early in the predawn hour, starting a fire, putting on the kettle, making my first cup of tea in the silver teapot that belonged to my mother and sipping from a china teacup. Enjoying the quiet of the morning as the mist rises from the field and the birds slowly wake up and sing to greet the day. That hour to sit in the quiet of my own thoughts, to contemplate, to be unplugged from the world and yet more completely connected to it. That is pure joy.

