

# Austen Chronicle

## Metro Edition

Jane Austen Society of North America  
New York Metropolitan Region

Vol. XXIX, No.2 Fall 2009

### JASNA-NY's Weekend in Port Jefferson

"Travel and Transportation in the Time of Jane Austen" was the theme of JASNA-NY's weekend conference, held on May 15-17, 2009, in Port Jefferson, Long Island. The setting was the charming Danfords Hotel, a collection of buildings, some historic, that overlook Long Island Sound, adjacent to the Bridgeport-Port Jefferson Ferry. Check-in on Friday afternoon included a welcome reception with tea, coffee, and cookies.

Dinner was on our own that first night, but the membership committee hosted a dinner for eight new members at the Wave restaurant at Danfords. The food was good and the conversation lively. By the end of the meal, we all felt as if we were good friends.

The program opened officially on Friday evening with Lori Smith Bajorek bringing us up to date on the status of the Broadway-bound musical version of *Pride and Prejudice*. Lori, the producer, was joined by actress Donna Lynne Champlin, who plays Jane Austen in the production. They hope the show will have its Broadway tryout in Westport, CT, at the Playhouse.

After Lori's presentation, Sandy Lerner, well known to Janeites as the founder of the Chawton House Library (among her many accomplishments), gave a talk on "Why Gentlemen Never Drive Gigs." A technical problem prevented Sandy from showing her slides, but she kept everyone enthralled in any case. She explained how a gentleman's, or a lady's, choice of a carriage not only gave evidence of their social status but told much about their personalities as well.

On Saturday morning, after enjoying a gourmet buffet breakfast in a nautically themed room overlooking the Sound, we heard Janine Barchas, professor at the University of Texas, talk about "Jane Austen as Tourist: Her Excursions from Bath."

With the morning program at an end, we broke into three groups for a walking tour of historic Port Jefferson. After a short rest, we all met for cocktails and dinner in a banquet room in our hotel. Although we were disappointed by the cancellation of our dinner on a paddle-wheel boat, the meal provided by the hotel was excellent. Diners at each table jointly composed a rescue note (to or from an Austen character) to be placed in a bottle. These were then read aloud, and everyone tried to guess which character had written the note and to which character the note was addressed.



We were then treated to an interesting presentation by Michal Simon, Professor Emeritus at SUNY Stony Brook, on "Captain Cook and the 1769 Transit of Venus." This voyage by Cook to the South Seas was funded by the British Admiralty for national self-interest as well as to measure the transit of Venus across the solar disc, which would determine the distance from the Sun to the Earth in absolute units.

On Sunday morning, after another delightful breakfast, a group of us, including myself, was selected to read aloud from a screenplay that JASNA member Lynn Marie Macy adapted from Austen's short story *The Three Sisters*. She did a fine job of expanding on Austen's story while remaining true to the characters as Austen portrayed them.

Hearty laughs indicated that everyone enjoyed it, audience and readers alike. I look forward to an expansion of this first draft into a full-length screenplay so that I may reprise my role as Mrs. Stanhope in the movie version!

The conference closed that afternoon with a guided tour of the Carriage Museum at the Long Island Museum of American Art, History, and Carriages at Stony Brook. Our excellent guide added to all the knowledge that we had gained from Sandy Lerner's talk on Friday night.

Everyone seemed to agree that the conference was a great success. The smallness of our group allowed everyone to mingle and get to know one another. It was well paced,

with free time available to explore, shop, read, talk, or just relax. Thanks go to Kerri Spennicchia and her team for all their hard work in arranging this weekend. Also, I would be remiss if I didn't thank our dynamic duo, Co-Regional Coordinators Nill Olay and Jerry Vetowich. After the success of our Cape May weekend, and now Port Jefferson, I can hardly wait for the next one.

*Joyce Melito*

## Touring Port Jefferson

Transportation in the time of Jane Austen was the theme of JASNA-NY's weekend conference held in May at Danfords Hotel and Marina in Port Jefferson, Long Island. We didn't use a coach or horse and carriage to get around but instead resorted to the next best and only other available Regency-type land transportation: we walked, touring the points of interest in the pretty little village.

Our knowledgeable guide revealed its rich maritime and Revolutionary War history. Purchased from the Setauket Indians, who called it "land of small pines," the town was then sold by the original owners to an Irish shoemaker, who renamed it Drowned Meadow. Its residents played an important role in the Revolutionary War, participating in George Washington's Culper Spy Ring. After the war, Washington traveled to the area to thank the residents for their support.

In the early 1800s the town was renamed Port Jefferson, in honor of President Thomas Jefferson. In 1852, it was designated an American port of entry, complete with a customs building that still stands today.



Port Jefferson was a major shipbuilding town until the age of steamships, when its shipyards were abandoned for larger ones that could produce iron-hulled vessels.

World War I brought a shipbuilding revival that lasted only to the end of that war.

Our walking tour took us past many historical houses: the Spinney Clock Museum, which houses 250 antique clocks; Mather House, the home of nineteenth century shipbuilders and now the headquarters of the Historical Society; the country store, with its collection of items from an old fashioned barbershop, a general store, and a butcher shop; the Marine Barn and Sail Loft, containing sail-making artifacts; and the Tool Shed, a collection of shipbuilding and carpentry tools.



The pretty village became a tourist destination when P. T. Barnum moved there and bought a ferry company to transport his rich friends from Bridgeport, CT, to Port Jefferson to gamble and wine and dine. His former home is now in private hands. He left when the town would not allow him to make it a base for his circus animals. The ferries still operate today, and a street named "Barnum Avenue" runs through what was once his land.

The village's annual Dickens Festival transports the area to another world. People dress in nineteenth century clothing; teas, plays, winter-related poetry readings, caroling, house tours, and holiday dining, all create a nineteenth century Christmas celebration. Port Jefferson is so lovely; people come back again and again.

*Irene Jankowski*

Transported by Transport  
Sandy Lerner's Talk at Port Jefferson

Sandy Lerner, founder of Chawton House Library, Cisco Systems, and Urban Decay Cosmetics, opened the Port Jefferson conference with a brilliantly researched analysis of Jane Austen's use of vehicles to reveal social status and character traits in her six novels. Sandy's accounts of such adventures in transport as Lady Catherine de Bourgh's \$50,000 mad dash to Longbourn and General Tilney's outrageous dispatch of Catherine Morland by public conveyance enriched our understanding of the significance and impact of those incidents.

Similarly, our understanding of the fleeing revealed in John Thorpe's boast of his purchase of a secondhand gig and Mr. Darcy's skillful driving of his curricle are enhanced by knowing their respective skills and savvy (or lack of it). The trust and independence Captain Wentworth accords his wife, Anne, may be seen in his gift to her of a "very pretty landaulette," a carriage used exclusively by ladies.

Sandy's grasp of the mechanics as well as the mythology of carriages dazzled her listeners. She herself is an accomplished carriage driver and owns a collection of vehicles, as well as the Shire horses to pull them. Her colorful and illuminating anecdotes compensated for the loss of illustrative slides caused by an unfortunate cable glitch. Those materials are posted on [www.jasnany.org](http://www.jasnany.org) for all members to enjoy.

Armed with Sandy's expert knowledge, attendees may now reread the six novels with a more nuanced appreciation of Jane Austen's depiction of travel and carriages in the lives of her characters. They may also, thanks to Sandy, wonder why Elizabeth Bennet, after spending six weeks in and around Rosings, fails to recognize Lady Catherine's livery when that woman arrives helter skelter at Longbourn. *Elsa Solender*



"The Three Sisters"  
at Port Jefferson

On Sunday morning of our Port Jeff weekend, we watched a group of our sensational JASNA-NY actor/members do a reading of Lynn Marie Macy's screenplay of "The Three Sisters," based on one of Jane's juvenilia stories.

Lynn told us she tried to keep as much of Jane's actual dialogue as possible as she changed the short story into a screenplay—a difficult task since she was reluctant to omit many of Jane's funny lines.

During the reading we found ourselves giggling at the "adventures" the sisters, their family, friends, and servants have as two of the girls move toward matrimony. We all enjoyed the cleverness of both Jane and Lynn.

After the performance, Lynn asked for our help in improving her script. Not surprisingly, we Janites were full of ideas and suggestions that Lynn seemed to appreciate. She made us feel as though we were sharing in her creation by helping her think about how to make her script even better.

*June Shapiro*

## Irony in Northanger Abbey

Janine Barchas teaches Jane Austen at the University of Texas in Austin. An imaginative and enthusiastic talk on the subject of "Tourists: Excursions from Bath" given at the Port Jefferson weekend made the



audience wonder, "What if ...."

Seven miles outside Bath is a truly medieval castle called Farleigh Hungerford. This is where John Thorpe *should* have

been going on that fateful trip to Blaise Castle in *Northanger Abbey*. Blaise is actually not a castle but a garden folly, like a picnic area in Disneyland, and it is twenty-two miles from Bath, too far for a day trip. The fool was going in the wrong direction. Janine emphasized that



Jane Austen's family had a guidebook dated 1802 in their library in Bath telling the whole lurid history of the castle, one filled with murder, imprisonment, poisoning, witchcraft, executions, and coffins. This Gothic horror would have been a perfect background for a satiric gothic novel. Henry Tilney tells Catherine that Christians do not behave in the way she was imagining, but they did.

Janine illustrated the talk with pictures and maps, stories of Henry VIII, and a mysterious chest containing a letter by Oliver Cromwell. **Brrrrr.** *Barbara Helling*

## Visit to the Carriage Museum

The last event of the Port Jefferson weekend was a visit to the Long Island Museum of American Art, History and Carriages in nearby Stony Brook. Most of our visit was spent in the building with the carriages.

Our excellent volunteer guide, John Sciacchitano, had taken the trouble to research the carriages of Jane Austen's time so he could relate them to their American counterparts from later in the century. We saw phaetons, curricles, a barouche (its "canopy" looked exactly like the old baby carriages that most of us probably rode in as children), and many others. The setting for these shiny new-looking carriages mimics a nineteenth-century showroom. The visit was a perfect complement to Sandy Lerner's Friday lecture, especially since she was unable to

show her photos. If a picture is worth a thousand words, actually seeing these vehicles is worth even more. I kept thinking how hard it must have been to climb in and out of these carriages in a long skirt.

Our guide also showed us various wagons and several impressive fire department vehicles and early automobiles. An electric Studebaker demonstrates exactly why the early cars were known as "horseless carriages." The two hours flew by, and I think all of us were sorry to leave. The collection is very much worth a second visit, especially since we didn't have time to see the art or history buildings. *Meg Levin*

Lady Vernon and Her Daughter  
A Jane Austen Novel

Most women can't imagine working with their mother or daughter without causing major trauma to their relationship, but the process brought together mother-daughter writing team Jane Rubino and Caitlen Rubino-Bradway.

The two recently collaborated on their first work, *Lady Vernon and Her Daughter: A Jane Austen Novel* (Crown: October 2009), a retelling of one of Jane Austen's early works. Mother and daughter say their working relationship gave them newfound respect for each other.

*Lady Vernon and Her Daughter* is based on an epistolary novella generally referred to as *Lady Susan*, which follows the plight of Lady Susan Vernon, a beautiful and cunning widow who schemes to secure a wealthy younger husband for herself and a foolish nobleman for her daughter. Jane and Caitlen, both avid Austen readers, have taken letters from the novella and transformed them into a vivid work of fiction. In this reimagining, Lady Vernon and her daughter must navigate a society where a woman's security is at the mercy of an entail, where love is hindered by misunderstanding, where marriage can never be entirely isolated from money, yet where romance somehow carries the day.

Just as the heroines of their novel work as a team in Regency society, Jane and Caitlen worked in tandem to write *Lady Vernon and Her Daughter*. To do so, they reexamined Austen's six great novels in order to reproduce her distinctive style and fundamentals of storytelling.

*Tiffany Bair*

JASNA New York Metropolitan Region  
Monthly Book Group

The New York metro region has an active book group that usually meets on the third Thursday of every month in members' homes. We have been meeting for 20-plus years and have yet to run out of things to talk about. People ask us: "There are only six books, what do you talk about?" We discuss the characters, the biographies, unfinished books, the juvenilia, and other authors of Austen's time. The participants suggest topics. Come join us—send Mary Ann Linahan your e-mail address at [mlinahan@aol.com](mailto:mlinahan@aol.com), or call her at 718-896-2469, so she can notify you of future meetings. The next scheduled meeting is:

November 19 Discussion of the AGM and recommendation of books we have enjoyed

For further information, please contact Book Group Discussion Leader Barbara Hellering at 631-727-8666 or [hellering@aol.com](mailto:hellering@aol.com)



**Women's Health Issues  
in Jane Austen's Time  
by Dr. Cheryl Kinney**



"Ah! my poor dear child, the truth is, that in London it is always a sickly season.  
Nobody is healthy in London, nobody can be." *Emma* I:XII

**Birthday Regional Meeting  
Saturday December 5, 2009  
2:00 p.m.**

**At the Midtown Executive Club  
40 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street (between 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues)**

**Dr. Cheryl Kinney** will explore the treatment of women's illness in Regency England, including childbirth, infectious disease, and venereal disease. We will learn who provided health care in the early 1800s in England and what treatments were available. Dr. Kinney will also discuss sickness and health in Austen's novels.

Registration information will be sent out in early October.

## Nelson's Navy Examined

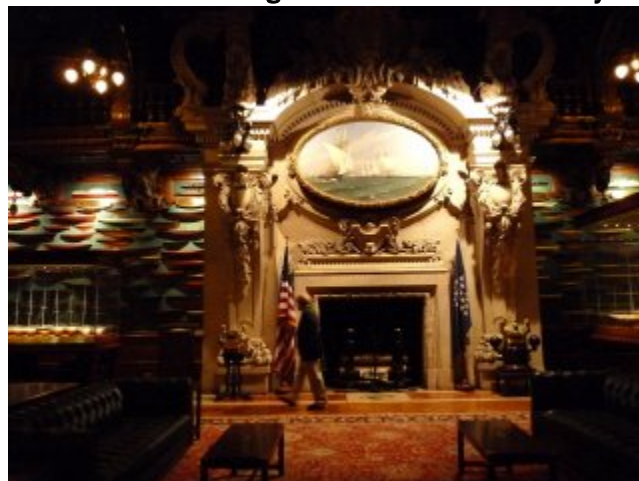


Unappetizing meals served on square wooden platters (origin of the term “a square meal”) and seamen sleeping in four-hour shifts on two levels of hammocks, upper and lower, closely hung shoulder to shoulder, less than two feet across per man—such was the daily life of the British seaman in the early nineteenth century as depicted by respected British maritime scholar and author Brian Lavery in a lavishly illustrated presentation on “Life in Nelson’s Navy.” This event, jointly sponsored by JASNA and the American Friends of the Georgian Group, took place on May 27 in the New York Yacht Club’s Ward Room, which, on a ship, served as the officers’ dining room.

Mr. Lavery discussed naval ranks and responsibilities, the layout of the large ships of the line, life on board, the lure of prize money for captured vessels (the source of Captain Wentworth’s wealth), Nelson’s strategic breakthrough, which won the battle of Trafalgar, and the careers of Frank and Charles Austen, both Admirals in the Royal Navy.

Warships then were built of timber from England’s great forests and designed to withstand the dangers of battle and powerful storms at sea. But teamwork and obedience were crucial in bringing victory to these great war machines, and swift and cruel punishment promoted discipline among the hundreds of men on board. In preparing for battle, all areas below decks, including the captain’s private quarters, could be dismantled and opened up within minutes to transform the space into battle stations.

Fighting was at close range. Sharpshooter marines stationed in the riggings supplemented the more generalized cannon power. The advances in military weaponry that brought famed victories also led to countless devastating amputations, which left many veterans with wooden limbs, grim and visible reminders of their sacrifice throughout the nineteenth century.



A wine and cheese reception on the patio followed the lecture. Attendees were encouraged to visit the delightful rooms of the Yacht Club, including the model boat room, as pictured here.

Mr. Lavery has written more than twenty books on maritime history, as well as serving as a curator in the National Maritime Museum, a member of the Chatham historic dockyard, a trustee at the Royal Navy Museum at Portsmouth, and on the advisory committee of *HMS Victory*.

*Linda Pedro*

Amanda Root speaks to  
JASNA New York Metropolitan Region

On June 1, the JASNA-NY metro region was delighted to welcome actress Amanda Root to the Museum of the City of New York to be interviewed by Elsa Solender, past president of JASNA. Ms. Root answered questions about her portrayal of Anne Elliot in the 1995 Sony film adaptation of *Persuasion*. She pointed out that sometimes her dialogue consisted of only two or three sentences, but in those sentences she had to enact five or six pages of the novel. We all remember her expressive face.

Ms. Root researched the period and read biographies, but mostly she went back to the novel in preparation for the role of Anne.

Amanda Root joined us while appearing on Broadway in the highly acclaimed revival of Alan Ayckbourn's comic trilogy The Norman Conquests. Her outstanding performance earned her both Tony and Drama Desk Award nominations for outstanding featured actress in 2009. She said that learning three plays at the same time was quite a feat.

Ms. Root graciously answered audience questions, signed autographs, and chatted with our members.



Fanny Dashwood's early life  
As revealed by Harriet Walter

Isn't New York City a wonderful place? There are always interesting concerts, ballets, and, of course, wonderful theater. Spring and summer 2009 gave our members two chances to go to the theater to watch actresses that we have come to love in movie adaptations. But even more exciting than going to the theater to watch Amanda Root (*Persuasion*—Anne Elliot) play Sara in Ayckbourn's *The Norman Conquests* and Harriet Walter (*Sense and Sensibility*—Fanny Dashwood) as Elizabeth in Schiller's *Mary Stuart*, was having those two ladies speak to our members. I will tell you about our dazzling lunchtime meeting with Harriet Walter on July 10, 2009.



Nili Olay and Harriet Walter

First let me answer the often-asked question “How did you get So-and-So to speak to your group?” The glib answer is “We asked.” We find that actors are most generous with their meager spare time (they are usually acting in eight performances a week) and are happy to oblige without an honorarium. Early in the run of *Mary Stuart* I wrote a note to Harriet Walter asking her to speak to our region and left it at the stage door. A couple of weeks later, she called me and offered to read her “back story” of Fanny Dashwood. I had no idea what she would come up with, but figured it would be just fine. She also agreed to be interviewed and allow the audience to ask her some questions.

In spite of a terrible head cold, Ms. Walter arrived and chatted with our members before the program began. She then explained that in preparation for her role as Fanny (Mrs. John) Dashwood in the 1995 film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, director Ang Lee, unfamiliar with Austen's novels, had asked all the lead actors in the film to answer a set of questions that delved considerably deeper into each character than the screenplay by Emma Thompson.

She then proceeded to read us the amazingly Austen-faithful “back story” that she created. By turns sympathetic and hilarious, Ms. Walter's account of Fanny Ferrars's childhood and young adulthood before she married John Dashwood enchanted her audience. She also explained that her “back story” of Fanny Dashwood is missing little Henry because, unfortunately, little Henry was cut out of the screenplay and the movie. Her wit, inventiveness, and Austen scholarship were surpassed only by hearing Ms. Walter read “Fanny's Story” aloud to us. She has graciously permitted us to reproduce the back story for members who could not attend the noontime program and it is now on our website, [www.jasnany.org](http://www.jasnany.org), and on the National website, [www.jasna.org](http://www.jasna.org).

Following the spirited reading of Fanny Dashwood's story, I had the privilege of asking Ms. Walter some questions. How did she feel about playing the mean Queen Elizabeth in *Mary Stuart*? She said that she didn't think that Elizabeth was mean at all; she had actually shown much restraint in dealing with Mary. I realized that my feelings about Elizabeth had been colored by Austen's *History of England*, and we had a good laugh. It was obvious from our discussion that Ms. Walter loves Austen and knows the works at least as well as most of our members.

At the conclusion of the event, Ms. Walter graciously signed autographs and chatted with our members. Many members said that this was one of their favorite JASNA events.

*Nili Olay*

Box Hill Annual Picnic  
Saturday, June 27 2009



Clay Family Pavilion

About 35 members gathered at the Clay Family Pavilion in the Bronx Botanical Garden to share such food as sandwiches, fruit, chips, cheese, and cookies. This is a recently reopened area with multiple tables and a large roof with convenient bathrooms (sadly lacking up to now). The food was plentiful and delicious - but the biggest hit was Joyce Melito's strawberry shortcake. Which by time we had attacked with gusto - looked a little sad. We had lots of time to chat and play "Botticelli."



Linda Dennery  
Jane Axelrod  
Valerie Peterson

Joyce Melito  
Diane Mangasarian  
Laurie Morison

It took a while till the group got the hang of the game - which RC Jerry Vetowich explained and led - but once we got it, we had lots of fun. One of the teams won, it is hard to remember which one in all of the jollity. Everyone voted to try it again on another occasion.



Fanny Dashwood's acquisitive squirrel

The weather, which had been picture perfect in the morning, changed to a brief rain shower. But we were all cozy under the picnic area roof, and soon the shower gave way again to sunny skies. Many of the attendees took advantage of the park's offering after the picnic and visited the conservatory, where food exhibits were taking place.



Jerry Vetowich  
May Ann Linahan  
Mariam Bryer

Joyce Melito  
Marilyn Goldfried  
Nili Olay  
Marianna Loosemore

## Regional Coordinators Note

As you all know, we have had a very exciting spring and summer. Our Port Jefferson weekend may have been a bit chilly outside, but we had such fun thinking up rescue notes, learning about carriages from Sandy Lerner and about missed opportunities from Dr. Janine Barchas, and more. (See the reports elsewhere in this issue.)

Not one but two Austen film actresses came to the New York City stage this spring/summer. Amanda Root (*Persuasion*) and Harriet Walter (*Fanny Dashwood Sense and Sensibility*) graciously gave of their precious time and spoke to our members. See other pages in this newsletter for a fuller report.

And then there was the Box Hill Picnic – at the Bronx Botanical Gardens. We met at the new Clay Family Picnic Pavilion and occupied six tables. We ate, shared Joyce's famous strawberry shortcake, and played a wickedly difficult game called "Botticelli."

This being the New York area, we are looking forward to many more events over the next few months. We have already learned about Georgian jewelry from Frederica Jaret. Frederica is extremely knowledgeable about jewelry in general and Georgian jewelry in particular. She donated a beautiful Georgian ring for our silent auction.

Elizabeth Freedman will give us dance lessons, and a mother-daughter team will read from and talk about writing a novel based on *Lady Susan*. The novel is scheduled for release in early October.

December 5 will bring our annual Birthday Party, with a talk about women's health in the time of Austen. I am sure that we will leave that talk grateful to be living in 2009 instead of 1809. Our tea will be enhanced by a Champagne birthday toast to our favorite writer.

And then there are the exhibits. The Yale Center for British Art will be presenting shows of interest to Janelites. We are hoping to be able to charter a bus and enjoy a day in New Haven, CT.

But what can beat the Morgan Library's exhibit "A Woman's Wit: Jane Austen's Life and Legacy"? The Morgan's collection includes the manuscript of *Lady Susan* and Austen letters. We are thrilled that they will be on view. We hope to have at least one special program just for our members.

And what about our talented members? Elsa Solender, past JASNA president and past JASNA-NY coordinator, has been named one of two runners-up in the Chawton House Library Short Story Competition. We look forward to seeing her story in print. And Patrice Hannon, New York member, was interviewed in the July/August 2009 *Regency World* by Joceline Bury about her book *Dear Jane Austen* in an article titled "What Would Jane Do?"

Where else but in the New York Metro region would we have such rich pickings?

*Nili and Jerry*



Kerri Spennicchia and Irene Jankowski

## OUR DYNAMIC DUO

They do many things to help the region hum  
Including

**PUG'S  
BOUTIQUE**

Date	Events
Saturday October 3, 2009	Come Dance with Us – Regency Dance lessons
Thursday October 15, 2009	Lady Vernon and Her Daughter at the Center for Fiction
Saturday November 7, 2009	Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, CT – Day Trip
Thursday November 19, 2009	Monthly Discussion Group
Saturday December 5, 2009	Women’s Health in the Time of Austen – Birthday Meeting
Thursday December 17, 2009	Monthly Discussion Group
Saturday March 6, 2010	Inspired by Austen in Manhattanville College – Full Day

Don't forget to visit our region's website [www.jasnaNY.org](http://www.jasnaNY.org)  
and JASNA's national website [www.jasna.org](http://www.jasna.org)  
to stay informed about local and national Jane Austen happenings and news.

*Thanks to JASNA-NY's wonderful volunteers – too numerous to mention! –  
for all their help in the last few months.*

The Regional Coordinators and the Editors sincerely thank all the people who contributed to the writing, production, and distribution of this newsletter and to the vitality of the region.

JASNA - GREATER NEW YORK CHAPTER

*Nili Day & Jerry Vitawich*

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