

Lake Oswego / West Linn NEIGHBORS

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Above left: Thea Peck and Stephanie Johannesen, vice president and president of the Oregon Regency Society, respectively. Above middle: Members of the ORS participate in English Country Dance, an early form of square dancing from the English Regency period. Above right: Bronte Sniff, a 2-year-old Portland resident, takes a look at one of the fans available to raffle.

REGENCY • RECREATION

Elegantly dressed fans of the English Regency dance the night away in outfits of the period

■ Story and Photos by Staff Reporter Cori Bolger

The elegant fashion and dance depicted in Jane Austen books and movies came to life during the Oregon Regency Society's "Bring in the Spring" soiree held Saturday at the Holy Names Heritage Center in Marylhurst. Clad in the empire-waisted ball gowns and tailcoats of the English Regency period, about 30 fans of the time ate, socialized and danced the night away.

But although it lasted five hours, the party didn't get rowdy. Regency manners require politeness and gentility from men and women. There is protocol for every social interaction, down to the way a woman holds her fan to indicate her interest in a gentleman.

The ORS is a group of Jane Austen fans, English country dancers, historic re-enactors, costumers, artisans and crafts folk who all share a common passion for the English Regency. The group has 156 members, according to president Stephanie Johannesen.

The Regency period in the United Kingdom occurred between 1780 and 1830 (although exact years are debatable) when King George III was deemed unfit to rule, and his son, later George IV, was installed to be his proxy as Prince Regent.

This time period fell between two other distinctive periods: The Georgian Era and the Romantic Period. After the garish and gaudy Georgian Era, the Regency Period ushered in softer, more comfortable dresses for women (i.e. no corsets) and less face powder, heels and wigs for men.

The hair, dress and accessories of the Regency emulated the statues of Roman/Greek design. Ladies dressed in columnar gowns that grew fuller and fussier as the period progressed; gentlemen wore the dignified full-standing collars, and clothing that accentuated width of shoulders, narrowness of waist and displayed the masculine shape of their calves and thighs.

The Regency Period was brief, but it made a lasting impression, mostly because the early 19th century produced some of the most notable pieces of art and literature in history, along with several major historical events — including the Napoleonic wars.

Present at "Bring in the Spring" — and in costume — were residents from around the Portland area, including Janet Asparro, her daughter Julie Asparro and friend Chaney Harter, all from Lake Oswego.

West Linn couple Tara and Christian Stephenson wore the custom-made outfits from their Regency-themed wedding held at the McLean House in December.

Set in 1807, the wedding featured food of the period and Regency-style dancing, which the Stepbensons researched using Jane Austen movies and videos posted on YouTube. While Tara is mostly interested in the literature of the time, Christian prefers the history behind the military and its weaponry.

Each year, the ORS hosts a variety of activities including balls, parties, teas, movie marathons, costume sewing classes and English country dancing workshops throughout Oregon.

Members are all ages and from all walks of life, and come from throughout the state and even from Washington and California.

For more information on the ORS and its upcoming events, visit www.oregonregencysociety.com or call 503-622-0266.



Above: The evening's raffle prizes included bonnets, reticules (drawstring purses) and fans. At left: Christian and Tara Stephenson came to the gathering in the attire they wore in their December wedding, which had an English Regency theme.

Below: James Doss takes a photo of his girlfriend, Shelly Skolfield, as she tries on a bonnet. Far bottom: Party attendees try out English country dance.



Janet Asparro, left, enjoys punch with her daughter, Julie Asparro, center, and friend Chaney Harter. The women are Lake Oswego residents and lovers of the Regency period.