

# DARE Newsletter

Vol. 5, No. 4

Dictionary of American Regional English

Fall 2002



*Claire M. Cassidy and Frederic G. Cassidy in 1988*

## Memories of Frederic G. Cassidy

Claire M. Cassidy

Volume IV is in press! So we're getting close to Z, and soon my father's dream will reach fruition. My father, Frederic Gomes Cassidy, took up where his nineteenth-century dialectal forebears left off, and from 1963 to 2000 worked steadfastly to see *DARE* into print. His was the idea of Word Wagons to reach every state, his the determination to use the new technology of computers to store, sort, correct, and correlate the thousands of responses, his the unspoken plan to create a team so capable, cohesive, and congenial that this immense project could actually be completed. We're getting close now. Enjoy Volume IV and support the growth of Volume V!

*Continued on page 2*

## Funding Update

David Simon

Director of Development

Numbers have always fascinated me. When I was a young child, I practiced my math skills by spending a considerable amount of time mentally figuring out the batting averages (and other key statistics) for my favorite Major League Baseball players. I am convinced that experience only added to my interest in numbers.

As you know, Volume IV (P-Sk) of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* will be published in December. This is an exciting moment in the history of the *Dictionary*. The publication of Volume IV will leave one remaining volume to be completed

*Continued on page 5*

The origins of *DARE* reach back into my father's childhood, for this work demands that one love words, and Fred Cassidy certainly loved words. That seems a statement of the obvious, but the extent to which he was tuned in to words, his continual sensitivity to language, is difficult to over-emphasize. He loved songs as well, but words were the more powerful music, speaking directly to his soul. He was aware that his interest was not of the ordinary kind, and wondered what special concatenation of events explained his gift—he used to joke that it happened because he sat upon “the big Webster's” as a small child at table.

In his unfinished memoir he wrote that while his brother early took to collecting moths and butterflies and studying science, he instantly took to language. His grandmother died when he was only six, yet he never forgot her dialect, Papiamentu (the patois of the island of Curaçao). He remembered her tonality and accent as well—there's the music! He absorbed the Jamaican dialect, and remembered that all his life, too, even though he left Jamaica as an eleven-year-old boy. Years later, hiking with a friend high in the mountains, he used it to good effect. A pickup truck laden with Rastafarians rumbled by, and someone began shouting humorous insults at the two pale strangers in khaki shorts. The Rastas spoke in dialect, and to their utter surprise, they got back as good as they gave. Brakes squealed, men leapt out, and in moments the two strangers were lifted into the truck bed and carried home for dinner and some serious chat with their new friends. How could the Rastas have guessed that those two hikers included a world-famous logician (Willard Van Orman Quine) and the author of the *Dictionary of Jamaican English* and *Jamaica Talk*? The knowledge that Fred Cassidy had written the latter book opened doors everywhere in Jamaica. Should we be in a hotel on top of a mountain, surely some schoolteachers would “happen” by and beg a few hours of his time. He gave them. True in Wisconsin, too, with *DARE*: if we were having Sunday lunch in Stoughton, half a dozen people would stop, shake his hand, offer him some new words.

He loved it, for my father loved most of what there was to love in the world. It wasn't just words. It was also the things the words referred to. He loved trees, such as the grand old sycamore down

by Lake Wingra in Madison; he loved ducks who turn up their tails to eat, and kites in spring—especially the children at the other end—and rides in the country, and meeting new people; and most of all, he loved stories that revealed the heart of the matter. He was generous with praise when speaking with people, admiring not only those who had earned fame, but equally, all who practiced their craft with attentiveness and wideness of spirit. Often enough he would stop to talk with a farmer in the field, spend an hour yarning with the gas attendant, or sidetrack with a fascinating stranger just about anywhere, and when he returned to those of us who were waiting, smile and tell us all about that person's accent, special words, and special view of the world. Always, he disarmed his listeners, telling gentle jokes, listening attentively, and then startling them by demanding, “Where did you get that word?” He heard every story at two levels; at one level he was always excavating for words.

Another thing he liked about people was the effort they made. He believed that sincere work strengthens the human race, and he called this spirit “civilized.” On his desk when he died was a tiny rocking chair, given him when he officially retired from the university. It was intended to represent the leisure he had certainly earned. Instead, he cut out a tiny dab of paper, wrote across it “Verboten,” and glued it to the chair. He, Fred Cassidy, would work until the end, because work was pleasure as well as duty, and his work was intended as a gift not only to himself but to the world.

When we, his children, were small, naturally we also learned of our father through language. He corrected our grammar gently, always with a story to go with the correction, some little mnemonic to help us remember the *right* way. Then, of course, he would add a little dissertation at the dinner table about how there was actually no *right* in language. A little cognitive dissonance for children to wrestle with!

In the evenings, we'd gather in the great yellow armchair, snuggled close, and we'd live the stories of Winnie-the-Pooh and Babar, and later on, *The White Knight*, *Treasure Island*, and many others—every character having his or her own voice, accent, intonation. Or we sat at the piano and he tapped out the tunes, singing folk songs, interrupting himself to say what a “hank” of hair might be,

**20% discount offer on all volumes of *DARE*—see page 8**

what it meant to “wear your apron high.” He built us kites “Jamaica style,” helping us to give them Island names, explaining as he went. On cold winter nights, if we were lucky, he’d read to us in Anglo-Saxon. Could we understand? Perhaps that’s when I learned to listen with intensity, because that way I *could* understand—I could hear the echoes of my English there in the ancient English.

It was a privilege to see the love shine from his face as he read. I saw it again years later at my own wedding, when he read Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116, “Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments.” Though he had the script in his hand, he simply let it drop, raised his other hand, closed his eyes, and spoke it out, rich and complete, full of a truth he absolutely felt, and hoped would bless us as well. “FGC” loved Shakespeare, not the casual way we are all supposed to love “the Bard,” but wholly, with deep knowledge. In February 2000 we showed him a video of Mel Gibson playing Hamlet, and he sat rapt, repeating the lines as they came, sometimes with tears in his eyes. It was the splendid language that moved him, his idea of perfection.

He was an English professor, after all. Perhaps this is expected of such? But he got great fun from words, and passed it on to others. He taught *Beowulf*—he loved the recent Seamus Heaney version that not fewer than three kind souls promptly sent him—and sometimes he’d have his students act out the story at the end of the semester. He played the King. I remember watching in awe once, years ago, as all those grown-ups received bracelets of fealty, and everyone quaffed mead. Probably that same summer, about 1957, we were marooned briefly in Iceland when a plane broke down. Undaunted, he hired a taxi and took us to the Thing, where judgments were handed down in olden times. There, in this windy, bleak landscape split by crevasses, he recited the Icelandic Sagas, punctuating each voice with gestures and marching about so we could visualize the events. I remember the amazed expression on the taxi driver’s face as this foreigner made the ancients speak.

FGC seeded his speech with poetry. It helped to know it yourself—then, when he sighed at the airport, “Jenny kissed me!” you could add the rest of Leigh Hunt’s poem yourself, and realize he was mourning growing old. When I sat with him in the doctor’s office in 1999, and he met that gentleman’s

## Volume IV *DARE* Quiz

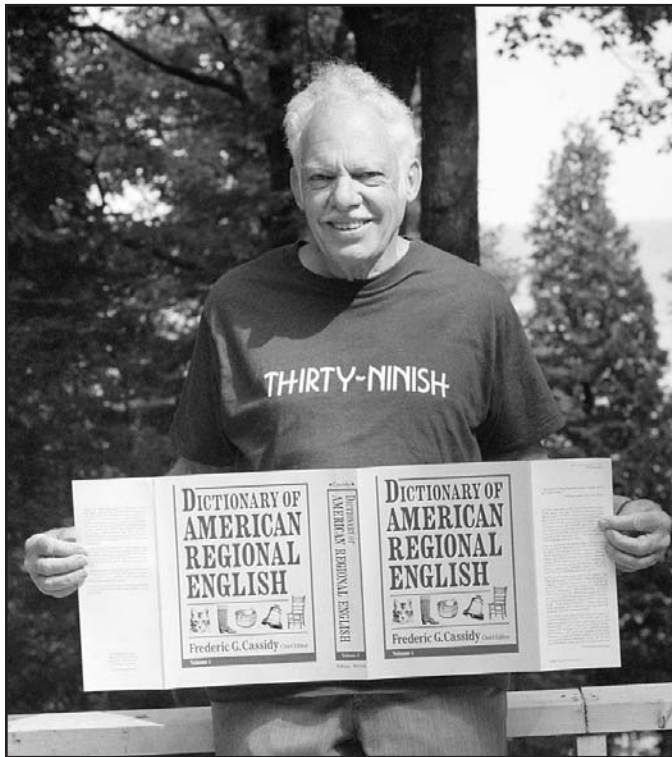
*In the last issue of the DARE Newsletter, we invited you to try your hand at matching the definitions in the right column with the headwords in the left. As promised, here are the answers:*

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| 1. parrain         | W. A godfather.                                      |
| 2. peewink         | H. A spring peeper.                                  |
| 3. pencil point    | L. A type of pasta.                                  |
| 4. pin-basket      | X. The youngest child in a family.                   |
| 5. piroot          | Z. To whirl around.                                  |
| 6. pomper          | A. To spoil, treat too well.                         |
| 7. pushency        | R. Urgent necessity.                                 |
| 8. quisutsch       | O. Coho salmon.                                      |
| 9. ragged lady     | S. A cornflower.                                     |
| 10. relieveo       | M. A team hiding game.                               |
| 11. ribble off     | N. To recite by rote.                                |
| 12. ridgeback      | P. A map turtle.                                     |
| 13. risk           | T. Mumblety-peg.                                     |
| 14. robin’s nest   | U. A thumbprint cookie.                              |
| 15. runaround      | Q. A swelling on a finger.                           |
| 16. Sallygodlin    | D. Lopsided, askew, out of line.                     |
| 17. Sally Lunn     | V. A rich yeast bread.                               |
| 18. sancho         | C. A runty animal.                                   |
| 19. schnickelfritz | J. A mischievous little scamp.                       |
| 20. Scratch-ankle  | K. An out-of-the-way place.                          |
| 21. seedbox        | I. A false loosestrife.                              |
| 22. sewage         |  |
| inspector          | Y. The common carp.                                  |
| 23. sheepshead     | G. A card game.                                      |
| 24. shoo-shoo      | B. A failed firecracker that is broken open and lit. |
| 25. skilligalee    | E. A gruel thickened with bread.                     |
| 26. skyhoot        | F. To go quickly.                                    |

*We admit, it was a pretty difficult quiz! But we appreciate the efforts of those of you who gave it a try. The winner is Beverly McGraw, of Williamsburg, Virginia, who matched 15 of the headwords with their definitions. She will receive a free copy of Volume IV, with our con-*

remark about failing health and prescription drugs with the dry comment, "Mithridates, he died old," I was glad I could explain, since the doctor looked utterly confused. We afterwards sent him a copy of Housman's poem so he, too, could learn about the king who, in Roman times, protected his health with daily dollops of poison.

DARE began formally in the early 1960s. By then his four children were almost grown, our mother was also a university professor, and we simply accepted that our father was into another big project. Of course we rooted for him. My brother Victor read books, seeking dialect words, reporting back. I proved not much good at that task, but apparently shone at another. In the summer of 1965, when DARE was still housed in a somewhat derelict warehouse-like space, FGC threw the first of what was to become a long line of joyous DARE parties. At the door everyone was handed paper and pencil and required to list as many words for "alcoholic beverage" as possible. In those days the juice of the grain was still legal on campus and so, as the level of noise rose exponentially, so did the length of the lists. They told me afterwards that I provid-



ed the longest list. Not a scientific list, though (and DARE is scientific), so I suspect that my slangy words promptly met the wastebasket.

A very happy time arrived when Volume I came out in 1985. First came a copy of the paper cover,

and with this FGC posed with an obvious sense of pride and anticipation, wearing his favorite T-shirt (given to him by my brother Mike) emblazoned with his age: "Thirty-ninish." He never grew much older than that, given the delightful elasticity of the suffix! When the actual text arrived, we had a wild celebration, including photos of FGC waving the book in one hand and a champagne bottle in the other.

In the fall of 1999 some of us gathered in Madison to celebrate FGC's 92nd birthday. As part of this celebration his granddaughter Charlotte asked, "What message do you have for us about life, Grandfather?" He didn't want to say—messages weren't his style—but finally he spoke what amounted to an aphorism: "Take life as it comes and make the most of it." I haven't forgotten, for these words sum up his perspective well: Life is not all that predictable, but it is good, and your job is to enjoy yourself and make something of yourself. Choose to be happy. Choose to be productive. Don't stop.

This is the spirit in which DARE got started. This is the spirit in which it has indomitably continued on and will be completed, a dream of the nineteenth century wonderfully achieved in the twenty-first, expressing both the joy and labor of all who've worked on it. ♦

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in order to reach the letter Z. The *DARE* staff is currently hard at work on Volume V (SI–Z).

I am struck by many of the numbers associated with the upcoming volume. For example:

- 1,014—the number of pages.
- 606—the number of *DARE* maps.
- 6,653—the total number of headwords, comprising:
  - 2,484 headwords beginning with P,
  - 175 headwords beginning with Q,
  - 1,773 headwords beginning with R,
  - 2,221 headwords beginning with S–Sk.
- 3/4—the number of pages devoted to the word *shuck*.
- 1605—the year of the earliest citation. It is for the word *rockfish*.
- 10—the number of days (roughly) it took to complete the entries for the related terms *scooch*, *scrooch*, *scrooge*, *scrouch*, *scrouge*, *scrounch*, and *scrunch*, which had to be worked on as a group to untangle their forms and senses.
- 10,000 (approximately)—the number of entries in *DARE*'s bibliography with the addition of new sources in Volume IV.

These are just a few of the intriguing numbers that could be cited. To me, however, the number 40 is particularly significant. It was 40 years ago that Professor Frederic G. Cassidy began working on *DARE*. It was simply an idea at that time. Or, as he referred to it once as we had lunch together, it was a challenge. Now, 40 years later, we are moving closer to meeting that challenge.

Many of you have made financial contributions that have helped *DARE* reach this point. Thank you for your generosity and thoughtfulness. It is my hope that more of you will consider becoming 2002 donors. All gifts are tax-deductible and will be matched on a one-to-one basis by the National Endowment for the Humanities. That doubles the value of your gift. You can make a cash or credit-card gift by filling out the form to the left.

Please give me a call at (608) 263-5607 if you would like to discuss the easiest way to make a gift of stock or a deferred gift. It is a very simple process. Or you can send me an e-mail at <david.simon@uwfoundation.wisc.edu>.

Your support and interest are very much appreciated. I know that you will enjoy seeing *DARE*'s fourth volume—and each of its 6,653 headwords—in print.

On to Z! ♦

## Staff Member Profile

*In this continuing series of interviews with DARE staff members, David Simon poses some questions to Audrey Duckert, who was with the project at the very beginning and who has read galleys for all four volumes of DARE.*

**Q:** I understand that it was you and Fred Cassidy who developed the Questionnaire (QR) that was used in the fieldwork for *DARE*. How did you come up with the questions?

**A:** It was the summer of 1947, and I was taking Fred's English 124 in the summer semester to satisfy a requirement for an English teaching minor. The course was called The History of the English Language for Teachers, and one of the first things we learned was the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Fred had done the Linguistic Atlas fieldwork in Wisconsin in 1941, and I learned then that fieldwork did not mean hoeing tobacco or picking beans or tomatoes. He gave us an assignment and a list of words to ask about in our hometowns. I interviewed Ruth Gibbons Graves, recently retired postmaster of Cottage Grove, Wisconsin, where she was born in 1872. She fit the "requirement": she was a native, spoke English as her first language, and was willing to answer my questions. I realize now that Fred was chiefly concerned with pronunciations. One of the words on the list was *oranges*, so I described a round fruit with a bright-colored peel and a juicy inside. "Orange," she answered, and I wrote it in my novice IPA. Seeing that the word on the list was *oranges*, I said, "But I'm supposed to get the plural." "Oh, *oysters*," she said, and we both had a good laugh. This was the woman who gave me my first book and who taught me to read before I started school. Now, 45 years after that interview, I have been reading page proof on Volume IV of *DARE* and thinking often what an ideal informant she would have been, and how she would have enjoyed *DARE*.

Fred told me about the American Dialect Society and the dream of a dictionary that would show different ways of speaking English in different places. He explained that dialect didn't mean a *strange* way of talking, but a *different* way. He told me he had a small grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to start plans for a dictionary that would show those variations all over the country. He had been reviewing everything that had been collected up to then in *Dialect Notes* and *American Speech*.

The grant enabled Fred to hire me at the then-going rate of 50 cents an hour for undergraduate

workers. He gave me free rein to go through the dialect materials to find out where the language varied and in what ways. The materials were all in a large box of 4 x 6 slips. My task was to read through the slips and find a way to make them useful in writing the QR. I was like a kid in a candy store. The first thing I did with the treasure was to begin to sort it into groups—to make a *thesaurus*, though I didn't know that word yet. The piles on my desk were what later became the titles of sections of the QR, beginning with "Time" and "Weather and Seasons," and going on to "Foods and Cooking," "Birds and Wildflowers," and so forth. The piles were impossible to work with until I made the great discovery that cardboard shoe boxes were just the right size to accommodate the slips. At that time, there must have been almost a dozen shoe stores along the eight blocks of State Street between the campus and the Capitol Square,

## Notes and Quotes

Here are a few excerpts from our mailbag. Feel free to write us at the address on the back cover or send an e-mail message to <jdhall@facstaff.wisc.edu>. We'd like to hear from you.

"Enclosed is my answer sheet for the *DARE* quiz. The answers are the combined remembrances of people, over 65, from California, New Jersey, Maryland, and Massachusetts and there were only 1 or 2 words that we were sure of—the rest are educated(?) guesses. It was great fun, however, trying to figure out the meanings. I love receiving the *DARE Newsletter*. As soon as it comes, I read it completely. I only wish I lived nearer to you so that I could volunteer some time."

Karen Ellis  
Alexandria, Virginia

[*DARE* Ed: I wish you lived nearer, too! By the way, combining heads was a good idea; you were the runners-up.]

"The class assignment was to bring in one family expression. [One student] gave examples for 10 minutes and is so excited by *DARE* and dialects in general, he's hooked. . . . He said his mother, who was often an informant for him, is so excited by everything, she wants to buy all the *DARE* volumes."

Stephanie Hysmith  
Ohio University

[*DARE* Ed: Good timing! With the coupon in this issue, she can get a discount.]

so I went up and down the street and in and out of stores, with remarkable success. The clerks and merchants were mildly amused at the use I had for the boxes. Their attitude was something like "What will those UW people think of to study next?" About a dozen shoe boxes later, the piles had become files, and we began to plan the QR.

**Q:** Can you tell us how the project got its name?

**A:** It was July of 1965, and we had just received a generous grant from the U.S. Office of Education to enable us to start the fieldwork. The QR was ready for use; it had been tested in a pilot survey in 50 communities in Wisconsin. Fred and I were having a celebratory cup of coffee in the morning sun on the lakeside terrace of the Memorial Union, and he said we really needed to give the dictionary a working title. So we fell into step the way we had in formulating the questions for the QR. Harold Wentworth's *American Dialect Dictionary* had been published in 1944, and we wanted to avoid confusion with it, so what we needed was a brief, unambiguous but open-minded title that would be easy to remember and cite. *Dictionary of American Dialect (DAD)* seemed possible, but we were aware of how often the word *dialect* was misunderstood to mean language that was different in ways that were comic or bizarre. After another cup of coffee, we worked out the premise that the language we were collecting might reflect the age of the speakers who used it, but that it should also be the everyday language of the region in which it was used. One of us used the word *region*, apparently, because at that point we put the word *regional* into our trial titles. Then *Dictionary of American Regional English* emerged, and one of us said, "And the acronym is perfect." Then we smiled and said in unison "*DARE*," and hooked little fingers, because that is what people are supposed to do when they say the same thing at the same time.

**Q:** Your lexicographical career includes working both for *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* and for the *Oxford English Dictionary Supplements*. What kinds of work did you do for those projects?

**A:** At the Merriam Company in Springfield, Massachusetts, I worked on the dialect file, defining and deciding whether entries in *Webster's Second* should be kept, revised, or deleted. One of the most interesting things I was doing at the end of my three-and-a-half-year career there was answering the "Dear Mr. Webster" letters. In addition to settling dozens of Scrabble arguments, I had some interesting correspondence with school kids.

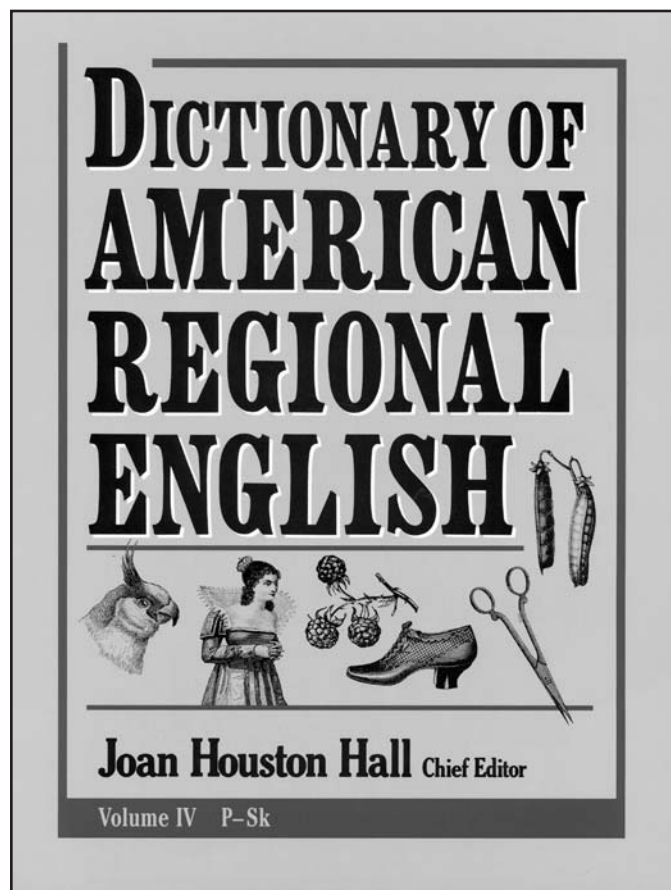
"Is slang wrong? Please answer soon, as we have just two weeks of school left." I told the lad that slang wasn't necessarily wrong, but if the Declaration of Independence had begun, "Listen up, wise guys: we've had it up to here and we're not going to take any more guff from you," those words might or might not have convinced George III that the colonies meant business, but they would not have been remembered in the way the stately syllables of "When in the course of human events" are recognized and often quoted.

Oxford University Press began sending me galleys for American comment about halfway through the letter C in the *Second Supplement*. They had entered the word *coon*, defining it simply as "A Negro. U.S.," and quoting Mark Twain. I fired back that it was an offensive term and ought to be so labeled. They did. Most interesting were terms for things that are American usage because the things themselves are American. One item I'm especially pleased with is the revision of the definition of a loon. The definition on the galley mentioned the bird's "dismal cry," and I hit the ceiling, telling them it was the very essence of a summer night on a northern lake, that they could call it "wild," even "eerie," but definitely not "dismal." They changed *dismal* to *wild*. My best coup was at the entry for *security blanket*. The definition was all right—it covered the idea of a familiar object, especially one kept by a child for reassurance in a strange place—but they made no mention of Charles M. Schulz or Linus in the etymology. So I prevailed upon a friend to let me use her collection of *Peanuts* books, where I found the first usage in *Good Grief, More Peanuts* (1956)—an antedating which Merriam-Webster later cited in the *Tenth Collegiate*.

**Q:** *DARE* is of course very different from *W3* and the *OED*; what is it about *DARE* that makes it the kind of book that people simply like to read for pleasure?

**A:** The fact that it draws on both the spoken and the written language and has no time limits makes it likely that any reader will find in it something familiar. The maps are another attraction at a time when there are few people left who have spent their entire lives within 50 miles of their home. Trips on Interstate highways are now commonplace, as are stops at eating places along the way. "They'll probably stop at a *gobble-and-squat* on the way," said my elder brother recently, explaining why it wouldn't be necessary to do a lot of cooking for guests. It's too late to get that one into Vol. II of

*DARE*, but any good dictionary begins to accumulate a file for a supplement before the ink is dry on the letter A. Most people probably use a dictionary to *look something up*, i.e., to find out its meaning or pronunciation. But I suspect—and hope—that people will simply *read DARE* the way they would go to a party or a reunion, expecting to have an enjoyable time meeting some cordial people for the first time and renewing old ties and acquaintances. ♦



### Longtime Editor Retires

Craig M. Carver, a staff member since 1978, has retired from *DARE* and relocated to northern Kentucky. First joining the staff as a graduate student "look-up person," Craig shortly thereafter became an Editor. In addition to researching and writing entries, he wrote the introductory essay "The *DARE* Map and Regional Labels" for Volume I. He also wrote the editorial computer programs that facilitate the retrieving of data from the *DARE* fieldwork and the automatic insertion of that information into our entries. In recent years, Craig has juggled part-time work at *DARE* with full-time work as a nurse. In Kentucky, he plans to resume his career in nursing. We wish him the best. ♦

**DARE Newsletter**

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