

DARE Newsletter

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Dictionary of American Regional English

Spring/Summer 2008

Satisfied Customers Have Their Say

Joan Houston Hall
Chief Editor

No one would dispute that writing grant proposals to federal agencies is a daunting task! But as we worked recently to craft proposals to the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation, the *DARE* staff discovered some real sources of satisfaction. In collating remarks sent to us by users of the *Dictionary*, which showed some of the ways our work is important to others, it became very clear that *DARE* has succeeded far beyond the dreams of its creators.

DARE serves, of course, as the primary record of regional and social dialects in this country, providing detailed information for linguists, librarians, writers, historians, and all lovers of language. But it has also served in ways unanticipated by Fred Cassidy and the other American Dialect Society members who envisioned the project. Because I felt real pride in looking at some of the “ripple effects” of our work, I’d like to share with you some of the quotations from satisfied customers that we included in our grant proposals.

“One of my interests is the history of commercial names in the U.S. DARE is a valuable resource in that regard. I know that DARE is constantly being consulted by intellectual property attorneys for that very reason. I always mention DARE when I teach the Language and Law course that I give at Duke.”

Ron Butters
Duke University

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Photo credit: Robert Quine

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“Thanks again for taking the time to give me a tour of the *DARE* offices and introducing me to your staff. I remain much impressed with your work and the work product. Thanks, also, for putting me on the *Newsletter* mailing list. I will enjoy keeping in touch with you and *DARE*.”

Jeffrey B. Bartell
Member, Board of Regents
University of Wisconsin System

“Today at a meeting I was talking about shucking peas and everyone was looking at me like I was insane. ‘You shuck corn, not peas—you hull or shell peas.’ *DARE* backed me up.

Shuck is definitely the verb I use with peas (unless they’re boughten, in which case they’re already shucked).”

Steve Kleinedler
Senior Editor, *American Heritage Dictionary*
Houghton Mifflin

“I am a librarian at St. Charles Public Library. . . . We have the published volumes of the Dictionary, but of course I am hoping that you might have information about a word not appearing in those volumes. A patron has called hoping we can provide more information for her.

The word is timberdoodle, a name for the American woodcock, which has other nicknames as well. We have searched in slang and usage dictionaries and of course the Internet, including the Audubon site. They mention the word and indicate that it refers to the bird’s habits and habitat. I am hoping you can provide more information on the origin and more detail of any variety.”

Laura Haule
Reference/Information Services Manager
St. Charles Public Library
St. Charles, Illinois

[*DARE* Ed: Our evidence shows it to go back to 1839 and to be used primarily in New York and the western Great Lakes states. As to etymology, *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* says that it’s from standard senses of *timber* plus *doodle* as in *cock-a-doodle-doo*, used as a euphemism for *cock*, since the bird is a woodcock, but *cock* also means “penis” (and in the South refers to a woman’s genitals).]

Satisfied Customers

Continued from page 1

Ron’s comments brought to mind numerous occasions on which *DARE* has been consulted by lawyers wanting to establish the legitimacy of a particular word as a trade name (or to protect a trademark from infringement); it also reminded me of the time we were able to assist the American Council of Learned Societies in defense of its 1927 copyright to the *Dictionary of American Biography* and the time we helped the Credit Union National Association in a conflict over the definition of the term *group* as it was used in 1931.

But the situation I remember most vividly started with a call from a New Hampshire Public Defender. She wanted to know whether *DARE* had data to document the frequency with which people make declarations like “You should be shot for that!” Apparently her client had made such a statement, and the person to whom it was addressed turned up dead. The Public Defender’s job was to show that Americans make remarks like this “all the time,” but utter them with no intent



to follow through. While we are all aware that this kind of “empty threat” occurs frequently, the New Hampshire lawyer needed evidence. And *DARE* had it.

In our Questionnaire we had several queries that elicited some rather violent-seeming responses. For instance, we asked, “If you want to put pressure on somebody to do something he ought to have done but hasn’t, you might say, ‘He’s a whole week late. I’m going to _____.’” In addition to such answers as “I’m going to get after him” or “I’ll light a fire under him,” we got many responses like “I’m going to bash his head in!” (or “beat the tar out of him,” “break his neck,” “hit him over the head,” “kill him,” “stomp him,” and so forth). *DARE* also asked the question, “What expressions do you have to show great annoyance: You might say, ‘He’s run off with my hammer again, _____!’” Apparently some people have very proprietary feelings about their tools! Quite a few Informants answered with such responses as “I could shoot

him," "I'll kill him," or "I'll wring his neck." But of course they would do nothing of the kind.

Unfortunately, we never heard whether the *DARE* evidence documenting the high frequency of empty threats in colloquial speech was persuasive to the jury. But without knowing the other facts of the case, I don't know whether to hope that it was or not!

"For knowledge about the history of American English, DARE is the natural complement to the monumental Oxford English Dictionary. . . . I was recently asked by a screen writer about the term rent party in a movie script. I consulted both the OED and DARE. . . . [The] citations collected by DARE . . . give a much more complete picture than the OED can of the life of the expression rent party and the place of the rent party in African-American culture."

*Anonymous reviewer of
DARE's 2006 NSF grant proposal*

Playwrights and screenwriters often consult *DARE* to determine whether the use of a specific term would be either geographically or chronologically appropriate to a particular character. The director of a play set in Baltimore in the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, wondered whether an African-American woman would have uttered a shocked "Oh, my God!" in response to a horrifying sight. A look at our historical evidence suggested that a much more likely response at that time would have been "Oh, my Lawd!"

In a more significant role, Fred Cassidy served as a dialogue consultant for Michael Mann's 1992 movie version of *The Last of the Mohicans*, set in 1757 during the French and Indian War. This required advising not only on chronological accuracy, but also on the dialects of British, French, Canadian, American, and Native American characters. While this kind of information is not in the published volumes of *DARE*, much of it is accessible in the voluminous files in our offices.

We also have what is undoubtedly the best collection in the country of mid-twentieth-century audiotape recordings (which have now been digitized for ease of use). These interviews of 1,843 of the *DARE* Informants, made between 1965 and 1970, have proved extremely valuable both to dialect coaches and to actors, providing representations of the speech of men and women from all corners

Coming in Volume V

<i>squeaky cheese</i>	Fresh cheese curd(s). (Chiefly Nth, esp WI)
<i>stack pie</i>	A dessert made of alternating layers of pie crust and filling. (S Midl)
<i>stale</i>	A long, usu wooden, handle for a tool. (NEast)
<i>stand one down</i>	To maintain one's opinion against; to insist to one. (Sth, S Midl)
<i>starlight, moonlight</i>	A variety of the game of tag played at night. (Upper MW, WI)
<i>stick-frog</i>	Mumblety-peg. (Chiefly S Atl)
<i>thundergust</i>	A violent thunderstorm. (NEast, esp PA, NJ)
<i>tickle-tongue</i>	A prickly ash (<i>Zanthoxylum</i>). (Chiefly TX)
<i>turn</i>	The quantity of anything that can be carried or brought at one time. (Chiefly Mid and S Atl, Gulf States)
<i>underbody</i>	A woman's or child's undergarment. (Sth, S Midl)
<i>warrant</i>	An official document calling a town meeting and listing the articles of business to be considered. (NEng)
<i>washateria</i>	A community facility housing laundry and bathing facilities and serving as a source of treated drinking water. (AK)
<i>washboard</i>	A baseboard. (Scattered, but esp C Atl)
<i>weaner house</i>	A small house, usu on a family farm, provided as a temporary first home for newlyweds by the parents or other relatives of one of the couple. (Chiefly S Midl)
<i>whang</i>	An unpleasant or sharp taste, a "bite." (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)

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“We are reading *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* in our sixth-grade English class. The novel is set in southern Louisiana and we found a reference we don’t understand. The slave took the master’s hand, which was ‘rough as ‘cуда legs.’ Can you help us understand this reference?”

Norma Mortimer
Teacher, Samuel Morse Middle School
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

[DARE Ed: “Cuda” is a pronunciation-spelling for “cooter,” which is a South Atlantic and Gulf States term for a freshwater turtle (usually), and sometimes a tortoise. It came into English through an African language (or several of them) spoken by the slaves who were brought into this country.]

“I love the dictionary [=DARE]. As a reader of poetry, I’ve found it an invaluable court of last resort on a number of occasions. The last time in relation to the mention of an unusual tree in a Charles Wright poem. . . . I check out the OED online . . . at least once a day at a minimum. I would be lost without it, the Webster’s Third International, and the Dictionary of American Regional English.”

Jim Staskowski
Graduate Student, School of Library and
Information Studies
University of Wisconsin–Madison

“I enjoyed your [=Chief Editor Joan Hall’s] lecture on *DARE* to my SLIS 571 class so much the other day, I practically gave the talk to my husband that night over dinner.”

Caitlin Sticco
School of Library and Information Studies
University of Wisconsin–Madison

“As lifelong residents of the Midwest, my husband and I have entertained many non-Midwesterners and Internationals. Many times during dinner parties, the discussion leads to a phrase or word which is unfamiliar to some or has a different meaning to others. On a number of occasions we have pulled a volume of the Dictionary of American Regional English off the shelf to clarify the meaning, usage, origin of the word or phrase. Or, sometimes, just to settle a bet.”

Mary Czyszczak-Lyne and Paul Lyne
Madison, Wisconsin

Satisfied Customers *Continued from page 3*
of America. Here are the comments of three dialect coaches:

“The tapes themselves are a treasure trove that must be preserved and kept available for all who can make use of them. . . . I know of no resource that can come close to providing me so rich and systematic a survey of American dialects.”

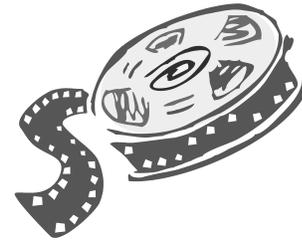
Paul Meier, University of Kansas
Department of Theatre and Film

“Your tapes have been an invaluable resource in my work as a dialect coach . . . for the . . . Broadway revival of Oklahoma. . . . The clarity, diversity, and length of the recordings enabled me to make distinctions among the dialects of nearly forty characters.”

Kate Wilson
The Juilliard School’s Drama Division

“I have used the information [from the DARE tapes while] . . . serving as dialect coach for professional actors at the Denver Center Theatre Company, the Cincinnati Playhouse-in-the-Park, and (most notably) the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain and the Royal Shakespeare Company. . . . DARE is a national treasure.”

Kathryn G. Maes
University of Colorado at Denver



But the *DARE* audio recordings have found other uses as well. In recent years they have provided linguists with dramatic evidence of systematic changes over the last forty years in the ways vowels are pronounced by younger speakers in Northern cities that border the Great Lakes. This phenomenon, known as the “Northern Cities Shift,” has the result that words like *hot* sound more like *hat*, *mat* sounds much like *met*, *bed* like *bud*, *bus* like *boss*, etc. Documenting this major change in pronunciation has been made easier for linguists, since they can use sound spectrographs to analyze *DARE* recordings made forty years ago in specific communities and compare them to recent recordings made in the very same communities.

For other researchers, the content of the *DARE* interviews is of greater importance than the pronunciation of the vowels. They can go to a relatively new Web site, *American Languages: Our Nation's Many Voices* (<<http://digidcoll.library.wisc.edu/AmerLangs/>>) to find the topics discussed by each *DARE* Informant. While the full interviews are not yet available online, scholars who identify recordings of interest can contact us and we can make the interviews available to them.

This feature will be of particular value to oral historians, who already make use of *DARE* in their work:

"Here in the Institute for Oral History, we use the Dictionary of [American] Regional English frequently to assist us in transcribing oral history memoirs. . . . When an undergraduate student transcriber gets stumped, . . . we exhaust the standard unabridged dictionary, then we turn to the DARE. . . . We use it on a regular basis, and we need it."

M. Rebecca Sharpless, [Former] Director
Institute for Oral History, Baylor University

When the complete list of key words for all 1,843 *DARE* interviews has been posted (on both the *American Languages* and *DARE* Web sites), researchers such as those at Baylor will be able to compare the experiences related by their oral history interviewees with those described by the *DARE* Informants.

One of my favorite *DARE* interviews will surely delight future historians of the American Civil Rights Movement. In it, a young African-American woman from Memphis tells of her participation in the demonstrations and marches that occurred in June of 1966, following the shooting of James Meredith while he was making his solitary "March Against Fear" from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi.

Martin Luther King and Stokely Carmichael both participated in the march, and Carmichael was arrested for trespassing on public property. When he was released, he delivered what became known as his "Black Power" speech. Our *DARE* Informant chuckles as she relates her version of how that slogan was born:

Carmichael was a total unknown except . . . for the people who were in the Snick [=SNCC] organization in Atlanta. And Stokely Carmichael was a field marshal; even though he was head of his organization, he was just . . . a marshal, keepin' everyone in line, and everything. And Martin Luther King and all the big leaders . . . was at the front of the march . . . , but Stokely wasn't in

there; he was back there in the middle, you know, with the rest of us. And I was close to the end, and, uh, we singin', "We need more power, power, Lord. We need more power, power, Lord." And we was just talkin' 'bout power to get on, uh, you know; we need power in our legs, you know, to go on walkin'. We need power in our minds, you know, not to give up. And this little boy, who was around 'bout twelve years old, he decided somewhere in the back of his little mind, he said, "We need black power, power, Lord." . . . And we were all in the back singin' this, "We need black power, power," and then everybody caught on in the middle, and that's where Stokely was. And . . . Stokely Carmichael caught on and started sayin' "black power." He started marchin' up and down the line, talkin' 'bout, "Come on, you all, sing. . . . You sing or somethin', then you start feelin' all right." . . . And Stokely Carmichael kept on sayin', "We need black power, power, Lord."

Treasures like this can be found in many of the *DARE* recordings. They will inform the work of historians of various kinds, as the published volumes do already:

"Although I'm not a linguist, I've found the volumes of the DARE immensely helpful in a variety of public history projects. . . . I realize it [=DARE] must be a monumental task, but I think it's an immensely important project whose value, for both scholars and the general public, will appreciate over the years. I look forward to seeing future volumes."

Curt Miner, Historian
State Museum of Pennsylvania

Readers of the *DARE Newsletter* may remember the article by forensic linguist Roger Shuy (Summer 2001, available on the *DARE* Web site), in which he described using *DARE* to pin down a suspect through his use of the term *devil strip* for the strip of grass between the sidewalk and the street. With that satisfying incident in mind, we quoted Roger in our grant proposals:

"Threat letters and ransom notes can be a rich source of forensic information. The problem is that most law enforcement officers and prosecutors are unfamiliar with linguistic variation in English speech and writing. . . . DARE often provides this valuable resource on English variation for me to use in helping the police narrow down their list of suspects."

Roger Shuy
Roger Shuy, Inc., Linguistic Services

Additional “testimonials” from teachers, researchers, writers, and others were also included in our recent grant proposals. I believe they provide firm support for our contention that *DARE* has already had and will continue to have value in both expected and unexpected ways. We are always delighted when we hear about them:

“Your assistance has brought a sigh of relief to a great many librarians at our library. Thanks!”

Amy E. Kinard
Jackson County Library, Medford, Oregon

And we thank those who use *DARE* for continuing to let us know how the work we do has contributed to the work they do! ♦

DARE Editors Part of Wisconsin Englishes Project

As members of the Wisconsin Englishes Project, *DARE* Editors Joan Houston Hall and Luanne von Schneidemesser have had the chance to talk about language varieties in Wisconsin with people in sixteen communities—large and small—across the state. The project, funded by the Wisconsin Humanities Council, is an outreach effort designed to share knowledge about and stimulate interest in local language differences. Along with colleagues from the UW–Madison and other campuses, the *DARE* Editors presented a multimedia program that explored the vocabulary, sounds, grammar, and syntax of the “Englishes” spoken in Wisconsin and also focused on the foreign languages (e.g., German, Polish, and Norwegian) whose influences can be detected in our speech.

In evaluating the program, one audience member remarked, “I used to be happy when . . . [people] did not know immediately that I was from Sheboygan. I like to think of myself [as] more cosmopolitan or sophisticated. Now I realize that I should not be disowning my German heritage.” That kind of response is precisely what the presenters had hoped to hear!

Check out the schedule and more at <<http://csumc.wisc.edu/WiscEng/index.htm>>, where you can also listen to a podcast about *DARE* and Wisconsin terms. ♦

Funding Update

Jon E. Sorenson
Director of Development

It’s midsummer in Madison as I write this. At dusk, the flickering of fireflies (known in various regions of the U.S. as candle flies, fire bobs, firebugs, glowworms, jack-o’-lanterns, lamp bugs, lightning bugs, or will-o’-the-wisps) fills the air with the anticipation of something wonderful coming. Nothing can distract the *DARE* team, however, and all are hard at work moving Volume V to completion.

In addition to intensive work, this monumental project has required an intensive fundraising program to keep the keyboards tapping. It is gratifying to see the generosity of donors to *DARE*. Many consistent and unfailing supporters have contributed to this great work, and we are grateful. This assistance is essential and most appreciated.

For more information about all types of giving opportunities, please call me at (608) 262-7211 or e-mail me at <jon.sorenson@uwfoundation.wisc.edu>. If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation by check or credit card, please use the coupon that appears on page 8 of this *Newsletter*. Thank you for your continued support—I hope you enjoy the remainder of summer wherever you are (and whatever you call the insects that light up the sky at dusk). ♦



DARE Editor Attends Conference

In June Luanne von Schneidemesser attended the Fourth International Conference on Historical Lexicography and Lexicology in Edmonton, Alberta, where she talked about “The Status of *DARE* and Examples of Its Uses.” She was pleased to note that another paper also mentioned *DARE*: in his paper on the *Early Modern English Dictionary* project, Michael Adams (Indiana University) traced the influence of that project on Fred Cassidy (who had worked on it in the 1930s), and hence on *DARE* itself. ♦



Volunteer Profile

In this continuing series, Beth Gardner interviews UW–Madison graduate student Alyssa Severn, who began volunteering for the Dictionary in the spring of 2008.

Q: What is your field of study?

A: I'm entering my first year as a graduate student in the Applied English Linguistics M.A. program. My interests are varied and still on the more broad side, but I hope to narrow down my area of focus/specialization during my first semester. Working with *DARE* has been great for me, as one of my main interests is English dialects and variation within the United States. I also work part time for the Literacy Network and will be starting a work-study job with *DARE* in the fall.

Q: How did you first become acquainted with the *DARE* project?

A: My academic advisor, Jane Zuengler, suggested that I get in touch with *DARE* due to my interest in different accents and language use in different areas of the U.S.

Q: What kinds of tasks do you perform for *DARE*?

A: I help wherever I can. Right now I'm proofing transcripts [of *DARE* audiotapes] for the *American Languages* Web site. I listen to an audio clip, compare it to the transcript, then write a brief background about the town where the Informant was interviewed/is from. Later I'll be cutting audio clips and writing transcripts to augment certain states that are missing important regions.

Q: What do you enjoy most about volunteering at *DARE*?

A: I've always been aware of accents. My parents are from Maryland and I grew up in Fargo, North Dakota, so as a young child, I was acutely aware of how odd my parents' English sounded in comparison to the thick Midwestern accents around me in school. I was constantly corrected in school for spelling *wolf* as *woof*.

I'm a curious person and love understanding how things came to be, particularly language and dialects, and *DARE* lets me explore that interest. Knowing how accents are formed and why people say the things they do depending on where they grew up is fascinating to me. Also, I am intrigued by the history of regional customs and traditions.

Q: When you have a bit of time to spare from your studies and your work, what do you enjoy doing?

A: Other than volunteering, I spend a lot of time with my boyfriend, whose Texan speech patterns and sayings are a constant source of scrutiny. I say "put away," he says "put up"; I say "slow down," he says "slow up." . . . We have three dogs and one cat, who keep us busy with a daily routine of attention, "fetch," and walks.

I am an avid fan of running, swimming, and the outdoors, all of which help me maintain my addiction to the pastries I find at the Farmers' Market on the Square on Saturday mornings. ♦

DARE Staff Changes

Congratulations to former Project Assistant David Nunnery, who has completed his doctoral studies at UW–Madison and left our ranks to accept a teaching position at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His dry wit and moist homemade biscuits will be missed by everyone here! Our new Project Assistant, Nathan Carlson, is a graduate student in the UW–Madison School of Library and Information Studies and will be profiled in a future issue of this *Newsletter*. We wish David the best and welcome Nathan to the *DARE* project. ♦



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