

DARE Newsletter

Vol. 8, No. 1

Dictionary of American Regional English

Winter 2005

Listening to America

Joan Houston Hall
Chief Editor

One of the unique features of *DARE* has always been the inclusion of oral as well as written evidence of language use. Our Fieldworkers talked with 2,777 Americans in 1,002 communities across the United States and recorded not only their responses to the questions in the *DARE* Questionnaire, but also many of the words they used in casual conversation. Fred Cassidy trained the Fieldworkers to keep their note pads handy at all times so that they could jot down unusual words, phrases, or pronunciations whenever they heard them, whether at the gas station, in the café, or on the local radio station. The same is true for *DARE* staff members today, who make a point of listening carefully and writing down whatever sounds new, unusual, or otherwise noteworthy.

These bits of linguistic evidence are scattered throughout *DARE* entries under the rubrics “*DARE* FW Addit” (for Fieldworker additional information) and “*DARE* File” (for examples collected by staff members from oral sources or ephemeral written sources). In the *Dictionary* you can learn, for instance, that in southeastern Pennsylvania raisin pie is called *funeral pie* because it is served only after a funeral there; in Maryland *mudlarking* means catching crabs by walking over the mud flats exposed by low tide; in Nevada a *pogonip* is a fog that freezes onto trees and bushes, and when you see a fog in the mountains in winter, there will be a *pogonip* in the morning; and in east Tennessee many people say “Scat cat! Get your tail out of my gravy!” when someone sneezes. These remarks were all collected by *DARE* staff members

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Funding Update

David Simon
Director of Development

The *Dictionary of American Regional English* development effort has been greatly affected by improvements in technology over the years. A wonderful example can be found at the *DARE* Web site.

At <http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/dare/dare.html>, you will find a link titled “Funding.” Click on that link, and you will arrive at a page titled “*DARE*’s Funding—You Can Help.” Click on the “University of Wisconsin Foundation Making A Gift” link and follow the directions. Under “Gift Designation,” use the pull-down menu to enter “College of Letters and Science” and then, in the larger box below, type the words “*Dictionary of American Regional English* Fund.” Then submit a bit more information—that’s it. Your gift has been made.

In less than two minutes, you will have used the abilities of modern technology to support *DARE*. When work on *DARE* began over forty years ago, this method of support was not even imagined. I am pleased to say that many of you have taken advantage of this convenience, and we are grateful to all of our “cyberspace supporters.”

On page 5 of this *Newsletter*, you will find our 2004 donor list. I would like to thank each and every person or organization that made a gift to *DARE* last year. Your support is needed and appreciated by everyone connected to the *Dictionary*. It is thanks to you that our work is able to continue on Volume V of *DARE*, which will complete the alphabet. It is thrilling to be working on the last few letters of the alphabet and to know that we are

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and are included in the entries along with the more traditional written evidence.

But what if you never meet a *DARE* staff member or are never overheard by a lexicographer when you use a regional word? Does that mean that your contributions to the history of American dialects will necessarily go unrecorded? No! We may not be doing systematic fieldwork anymore, but we certainly never turn down any information that comes our way. And sometimes we need to ask for assistance from those who care about language. Fortunately, there is now an easy way for people like you, the readers of the *DARE Newsletter*, to provide that help.

If you go to the *DARE* Web site at <<http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/dare/dare.html>> (or Google "DARE" and follow the link titled "DARE WEBPAGE," which should appear near the top of the list), you can click on the link for "Queries" in the left-hand column. That will take you to a page where we have listed some of the Volume V words for which we would like additional information. Have you ever heard the word *slumpy*, for instance, used to mean 'muddy, slushy'? How about *stirry*, meaning 'to stir'? Or *such a much*, used to refer to someone or something of great importance? If so, please let us know! Your name will be included in the list of acknowledgments in the final volume of *DARE*.

Two entries, *periwinkle* and *take up*, will illustrate the value of the contributions made by visitors to our Web page. As we edited the term *periwinkle* for Volume IV, it became clear that as well as referring to the marine gastropod mollusk, the word also referred to a freshwater snail and to another creature: the larva of the caddis fly, which typically constructs a sand- or pebble-covered cocoon that is frequently found attached to a rock in a rushing stream. We knew that this creature was also called a *rock worm* and *stick bait*, but we didn't have much evidence for *periwinkle*. So we posted a query both on our Web site and in the *Newsletter of the American Dialect Society* asking for additional information. It wasn't long before we had the following response from western Washington:

My dad called a local fresh-water larva 'periwinkle.' This creature was about an inch long, cream-colored body, black head, and built itself a full body-length cylindrical case out of cemented sand or small gravel particles. We found them in shallow water at the edges of fast-flowing streams. Used for bait.

Soon after, this message came from California:

We had periwinkles in the creeks in Bishop, California, east of the Sierra. They are little bug-like things that make their own tubes out of sand or other small bits from the stream (there were 2 kinds). Although we went fishing a lot, we didn't use these as bait.

An Idaho correspondent wrote, "My Dad remembers that fishermen called caddisfly worms 'periwinkles' on the Salmon River when he was a kid in the 1920s and 30s." And from Oregon we heard that "*Periwinkle* is used for any cased caddis larva. I'm sure I heard the term in the 1950s in eastern Oregon."

Not only did these writers verify the fact that the word is alive and well in the sense we were interested in, they also made it clear that the regional pattern suggested by our other evidence could be confirmed. We labeled it "chiefly Northwest, California."

More recently, Editors were working on the verb phrase *take up*. Not surprisingly, the phrase has multiple meanings, including 'to begin,' as in "School takes up at 8:15"; 'to lodge, put up, take residence,' as in "A stray cat took up at our house"; and 'to consort together,' as in "Those two just took up; they never got married." But there was also a small amount of evidence for the sense 'to remove (food) from the stove or from the cooking pot in preparation for serving it; to bring food to the table.' This had the feel of something genuine, but how could we find the evidence? The sense is not in the standard dictionaries that we regularly consult, and to search the myriad Web sites that might be useful would be impossibly time-consuming: we would have to sift through hundreds of thousands of hits that were irrelevant to our specific sense.

The only sensible course was to ask people like you! We posted the query both on our Web site and in the *Newsletter of the American Dialect Society*. And we were well and quickly rewarded. The phrase is current throughout the country, but it seems to be somewhat more frequent in the South and the South Midland. Snippets from a few of the many messages we received show just how it's used:

My mother used . . . [to say] "Look, I am ready to take up dinner and where is everyone?" . . . She was born in 1904 in Provo, Utah. . . . What sent me to the *DARE* site was that I said to my wife, "I am going to tidy up the kitchen." "That's an odd ex-

pression,” she said. . . . “We always said ‘clean’ up the kitchen.” She’s a rock-bound New Englander.

I grew up using the term [=take up] for taking things off the stove. I don’t know if it was in general use . . . or just in my family, but I don’t recall friends or guests mentioning that it sounded odd. . . . My mother grew up in Caldwell County, Missouri. This is a fascinating project. Words are magic. Thanks for letting me be a part of this.

I use the term *take up the potatoes* . . . to mean ‘remove from the cooking pot or pan and place in a serving dish.’ My daughter (18 years of age), who was born in California and raised in Mexico City and New York City, finds the expression exceedingly quaint and humorous and has never heard it used by anyone but me and my family members in Indiana.

[I live in Florida and] I still say “Dinner’ll be ready quick as I take up the rice,” or “Let me take up these beans before they burn.”

These anecdotes and others like them make up the bulk of the *DARE* entry for this sense of *take up*, emphasizing how important it is for lexicographers not just to read published works but also to listen to the speakers of our language.

Fred Cassidy could not have predicted that the Internet would be an extension of the work he asked *DARE* Fieldworkers to do forty years ago as they traveled about the country asking questions, listening to the answers, and making careful notes. But he would heartily endorse this method of collecting data. It provides us with evidence from all corners of the country, from people who may not be lexicographers, but who are experts on their own language and that of the people around them. Take a look at the current queries on the *DARE* Web page. *You* may be just the person who can solve a puzzle for us! ♦



Coming in Volume V

<i>slick and a promise</i>	Variant of <i>lick and a promise</i> . (Chiefly NJ)
<i>slip-go-down</i>	Any soft, pudding-like food. (Esp NEast)
<i>sollaker</i>	A whopper, an impressive example of its kind. (VT)
<i>stifle</i>	A stew. (Chiefly MA, ME)
<i>stump-mover</i>	A heavy rain. (Sth, S Midl)
<i>summercater</i>	A summer vacationer. (ME)
<i>sun-ball</i>	The orb of the sun. (Chiefly sAppalachians)
<i>sunfish</i>	Of a horse: to buck with a twisting motion. (West)
<i>suption</i>	The “goodness” (nutrition or flavor) of food. (Sth, S Midl)
<i>surface coal</i>	Dried cow dung used for fuel. (West)
<i>surly</i>	A bull. (Sth, S Midl, esp TX)
<i>surround</i>	To bypass, go around. (Chiefly sAppalachians)
<i>swag</i>	A low, frequently damp or marshy, area. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>swagin</i>	A kind of soup or porridge. (ME)
<i>swale</i>	A low-lying, often damp, area; a meadow, bottom. (Esp NEast)
<i>tanglewood</i>	Densely tangled underbrush. (Esp NEast)
<i>toadstabber</i>	A large folding knife. (Chiefly Nth, N Midl)
<i>toby</i>	A cheap cigar. (Chiefly wPA)
<i>toby-struck</i>	Congenitally peculiar in appearance or behavior. (Chiefly VA)
<i>toddick</i>	A small amount. (Chiefly NC)
<i>toggle up (together)</i>	To fix in a makeshift way, cobble up or together. (Chiefly Nth, now esp NY)
<i>tolo</i>	A dance to which women invite men. (Chiefly WA)

Notes and Quotes

Here are some recent excerpts from the DARE mail-bag. Comments from our readers are always welcome, whether by "snail mail" or through DARE's Web site; our contact information appears on the mailing page of this Newsletter.

"I just read my latest DARE Newsletter—what a delight! I am writing to tell you about the pleasure you provide—a link to Fred [Cassidy] and a glimpse of the wonderful success of DARE. It would make him so proud! Reading the Newsletter is like the several conversations I remember in which Fred described the day-to-day events and his (then) current concerns. His personality still informs not only the work, but the style!"

Jane Eiseley
Berkeley, California

"DARE has enough to interest everyone. You can spend hours, enjoyably, just browsing through a single volume of DARE. Even I, having worked closely with every stage of the creation of its text, can lose myself in it." "Tell me about it! I keep the DARE volumes in my core reference works in my home office. When things are hectic, I only get them out to check particular items. When things aren't hectic, one or another volume tends to sit out for long periods of time."

E-mail exchange between DARE Editor Luanne von Schneidemesser and Prof. Joseph Salmons, Department of German, UW-Madison

"Continuing to process Louise Pound's papers, I have found two additional letters from Fred Cassidy and am sending copies for your files. . . . My husband and I look forward to taking you up on your kind invitation to stop in at the DARE offices when we visit Madison. Meanwhile we continue to feel a glow of University of Wisconsin pride in the fine work of DARE."

Bonnie B. Quinn
Volunteer for the Louise Pound Collection
Nebraska State Historical Society

[DARE Ed: We have been able to reciprocate by sending copies of letters from Pound to Cassidy to the Nebraska State Historical Society archives.]

Funding Update

Continued from page 1

beginning to close in on the goal embodied in Fred Cassidy's mantra for our work—"On to Z." Every donor helps us get closer to that monumental achievement.

I also want to thank all of you who have supported DARE in other ways. Your development suggestions and other comments and actions contribute to the positive momentum of the DARE development effort.

Gifts to DARE are especially important now. Any gift that you decide to make is tax-deductible and will be matched on a one-to-one basis by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This will double the value of your gift. If you believe the *Dictionary of American Regional English* is an important project, I hope you will make a gift to DARE in 2005. You can do that online or by filling out the form below.

If you are interested in discussing a gift of stock or a deferred gift, please give me a call at (608) 263-5607 so we can discuss the easiest way to make that type of contribution. Or you can contact me by e-mail at <david.simon@uwfoundation.wisc.edu>. Thank you very much for your interest in the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

On to Z! ♦

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Sally J. Jacobs, DARE Bibliographer

Staff Member Profile

In this ongoing series, Beth Gardner interviews the newest member of the DARE staff, Bibliographer Sally J. Jacobs. A graduate of the UW–Madison School of Library and Information Studies, Sally holds a Master’s degree with a specialization in Archives Management.

Q: How did you first become aware of the *Dictionary of American Regional English*?

A: I worked for several years as a historical researcher at American Girl, a company you’ve probably never heard of unless you have an eight-to-twelve-year-old girl in your life. They publish a popular line of historical fiction and have an exceptional research department with a first-rate corporate library. The entire research staff at AG relies on *DARE* to double-check unfamiliar terms in draft manuscripts. Sometimes the word turns out to be regional, and sometimes it has fallen out of common use but is perfectly appropriate for the time period of the story.

Q: What are your primary job responsibilities at *DARE*?

A: As Bibliographer, I am responsible for updating and maintaining the list of sources cited in the *Dictionary*. As of March 2005 our bibliography includes just under 10,000 unique sources, including more than 800 newspaper titles. The bibliography exists as a card catalog as well as an electronic database, both of which are updated as new titles are added. When an Editor finds a quote in a source we have not previously used, the first thing I do is create a short-title for that work. The short-title is what you see in a *DARE* entry, and it includes the

minimum amount of information needed for readers to get their hands on an exact copy of that work.

Next comes a little research to gather bibliographic information, such as full author name, publisher, date of publication, number of volumes, etc. I say “a little research,” but there are tricky sources which take quite a bit of time to untangle. Once I have all the information I need, I type a “bib card” on the electric typewriter I inherited from the former Bibliographer. I input the same information into our electronic database (ProCite, for the curious). In the not-too-distant future, I will work with the publisher to compile and design the final form of the bibliography.

Q: What aspect of your work do you enjoy most?

A: Working with historical materials is unquestionably what I enjoy most. All of my favorite job environments, from a used book store to the Library of Congress, have this in common. It’s also very satisfying, both personally and professionally, to know that the work I do today will help scholars with a variety of research projects for many years to come.

Q: What part of your duties do you find most challenging?

A: I started working as Bibliographer less than six months ago, and from the very beginning it’s been a challenge to keep up with the tide of new titles. Digitization of newspapers, books, and government documents is a great boon to scholars (including our Editors), but it creates a lot of work for yours truly. In fact, the upsurge of new titles is one of the reasons *DARE* created a separate position for the Bibliographer in 2004.

Q: What is the most unusual or surprising thing you’ve come across in doing bibliographic research for *DARE*?

A: So far my favorite “*DARE* word” is *toe party*—a gathering where women would remove their shoes and socks and stand behind a curtain with only their feet showing. Guests placed bids on the women based on what they could see, which was mostly toes. You can read all about it in Volume V!

Q: What are your interests away from the *Dictionary*?

A: My job as Bibliographer is a part-time position. I devote the other half of my work week to freelance research projects and my archival services business, which helps people organize, preserve, and share their history (again with the historical materials!). Fortunately, these combined endeavors still leave me with enough time to do what I love most, which is spending time with my husband and two young children. ♦

Where Are They Now?

We're always glad to hear from past Dictionary staffers, and are doubly delighted to bring you updates on two former colleagues in this issue of our Newsletter.

*Earlier this year, we received a letter from former Project Assistant **Kate Peterson**, who worked on the electronic version of our bibliography. Kate left DARE in 2003 after completing a Master's degree in the UW–Madison School of Library and Information Studies. She wrote:*

I have just completed my first year at California State University, Long Beach. CSULB is a mostly commuter campus of over 34,000 diverse students. I am a Science and Engineering Librarian and responsible for the departments of Civil, Computer, Electrical, Mechanical, and Aerospace Engineering, Physics/Astronomy, Geology, and Science Education. My duties are split between the reference desk, library instruction, and collection development. There is only one library on campus, and it is busy. It has been a fascinating year, and I have learned so much (and introduced a few patrons to DARE to answer reference questions).

California feels like home, and I have adjusted to the mild seasons, palm trees, and hordes of people everywhere. I must confess I have not missed snow for one second! We live in a great neighborhood called Los Feliz (interestingly pronounced “feelis”), just a few miles east of Hollywood. We can walk to restaurants, the local library, shopping, and movie theaters. We are also blocks from the massive Griffith Park (larger than Central Park), and have enjoyed going to the beach, the desert, and the mountains.

The only downside is the Los Angeles traffic! I have a thirty-five-mile drive to work that takes anywhere from forty minutes to three hours, with an average of an hour and thirty minutes. I am now a devoted fan of books on tape! ✧

*In a happy bit of serendipity, we also recently caught up with former DARE Editor **John F. Clark**: a Google Alert caught a reference to DARE in the Cape Codder and forwarded us an article about John's innovative teaching program in Eastham, Massachusetts.*

John came to DARE as a Project Assistant in 1977 while he was working on his doctorate in the UW's English Department. Before long he began working as an Editor, writing such L entries as *lagniappe*, *lalapalooza*, and *larruping*. Unfortunately

for DARE, he finished his dissertation and returned to the life of teaching that he had interrupted to come to Madison. A visiting appointment at UCLA was followed by a long tenure at Central Washington University, which was capped by “retirement” on Cape Cod.

For John, retirement means teaching courses on language and literature in the parlor of his home, a restored sea-captain's house near the water. His program, “The Inquiring Mind,” offers six-week sessions to local residents on such topics as “*The Iliad*,” “*The Odyssey*,” “*Moby Dick*,” “*The Great Gatsby*,” and “Our English Language.” Students wax enthusiastic about their experiences in his classes, mentioning not only his erudition, but also his generosity, his accessibility, and his dry wit (all of which we at DARE can vouch for). On top of his teaching schedule, John also serves as a life coach, helping people discover and unlock their creative gifts. And those of us who remember the lyrical tones of his oboe are delighted to know that he continues to use one of his own creative gifts by playing in the Cape Symphony Orchestra. ✧

DARE Editor Heads Dialect Society

DARE's Chief Editor, Joan Houston Hall, was inducted as President of the American Dialect Society at the organization's annual meeting in January. The ADS, founded in 1889, is “dedicated to the study of the English language in North America, and of other languages, or dialects of other languages, influencing it or influenced by it.” The Society publishes the journal *American Speech* and the monograph series *Publication of the American Dialect Society*. In recent years it has become particularly well known for its annual “Words of the Year” celebration, in which language scholars engage in serious but lighthearted debate over the best candidates for such categories as “Most Likely to Succeed,” “Most Unnecessary,” “Most Outrageous,” and “Word of the Year.” (The 2004 “Word of the Year” winner was actually a phrase that became prominent during the nail-biting process of tabulating election returns: *red state, blue state, purple state*.) ✧



Postal Return Address:

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600 N. Park St., Madison WI 53706

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<http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/dare/dare.html>

Do You Speak American?

Many of you probably saw the MacNeil/Lehrer Productions documentary with this title that aired on public television on January 5. It followed Robert MacNeil as he toured the U.S. talking both to linguists and to “ordinary” Americans, exploring the diverse dialects of our country from Maine to Florida to California. It is clear from his research as well as from *DARE*'s that dialects are not going the way of the horse and buggy. They are always changing, but “homogenization” of our language is not a likely outcome. *DARE* was asked to provide material for the Web site that accompanies the documentary; you can see it, along with many other linguistic contributions, at <http://www.pbs.org/speak/>. ♦

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