

# DARE Newsletter

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Dictionary of American Regional English

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## The Mythical Hedgehogs of North Carolina: A Note on Lexicographical Method

Jeffrey Hirshberg

*When gathering citations for DARE entries, it is our policy to check all quotations against the original sources. Only if this is impossible do we take quotes from secondary sources, and in that case the immediate source is always indicated. Our experience in checking quotations from other reference works shows that errors are frequently passed from book to book. This article by former DARE Editor Jeffrey Hirshberg, reprinted from American Speech, provides an amusing example of the confusion that can occur when secondary citations are taken at face value.*

Historians, like many scientists and folklorists, advance their discipline by building upon the work of their predecessors. So it is with lexicographers and historians of language. Mitford Mathews' *Dictionary of Americanisms* (DA, 1951) was generally based on William Craigie's *Dictionary of American English* (DAE, 1938–1944) and relied as well on the early American lexicons of John Russell Bartlett, John Farmer, and others; Robert Burchfield acknowledges indebtedness to the DA, DAE, and others in the introduction of

*Continued on page 2*

“August Rubrecht’s article [in the Spring/Summer 2006 issue] was a delight to read! Students at UW–Eau Claire were very fortunate to have had him as a professor. . . . I’m that retired encyclopedia editor who knows how long it takes to get from A to Z.”

Douglas W. Downey  
Northbrook, Illinois

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Jeff Hirshberg conducting research in the DARE offices, circa 1979

his *OED Supplement* (1972); and the editors of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (*DARE*) now in progress constantly consult the work of these scholars and others who have recorded the lexicon of American regional and folk speech.

The first result of this lexicographical interdependence is the creation of an ongoing history of the American language: one editor updates the work of others after considering new evidence about usage, currency, pronunciation, or etymology. Another result, however, may occasionally be the perpetuation of linguistic mythology, the creation of a continuing history of words or meanings which may never have existed beyond the lexicographers' pale. Consider the case of *bombo*, which the *DA* has entered in the following way:

**bombo** *'bambo*, *n.* [? var. of **boomer**, *n. a.*] (See quotes.)—*a*1877 *Westover Papers* 28 (B. '77) When the people [of North Carolina] entertain their friends, they fail not to set before them a capacious bowl of *Bombo*, so called from the animal of that name. 1877 *Bartlett* 57 *Bombo*. An animal of North Carolina, said to resemble the hedgehog, and by some called a Badger.

Though Mathews could also have used the second edition of *Bartlett* (1859), the *DA* does faithfully reproduce the 1877 definition and the quotation adduced by *Bartlett* to support it. He has also rounded out his entry by providing a pronunciation (the evidence for which can only be inferred), and a suggested etymology. Perhaps, the editor wonders, this is a variant of *boomer*, a predominantly southeastern name for the red squirrel (*Sciurus hudsonicus*). The provenance, at least, is appropriate.

“A visiting Cambridge University professor of English recently spied my *DARE* volumes and couldn't put them down. It was raining and he was hoping to see 'a thunderstorm of epic proportions,' because although England has plenty of rain, there is no excitement. That brought up the words *gully-washer* and *frog-strangler*, which delighted him immensely. He found both words in *DARE* and wrote later that he'd found *gully-washer* in the *OED* and that he plans to use both words at every opportunity.”

Mary Lu Mitchell, *DARE* Board of Visitors  
Member  
Atlanta, Georgia

“I want to first tell you how much I enjoy browsing *DARE*. It is so much fun looking up words and phrases and seeing how they are used across the country. As a librarian it is wonderful to have this resource at hand to show patrons and for our entertainment.”

Beth Hammond, Librarian  
Macon, Georgia

Aside from etymological hypotheses and unattested pronunciations, the real problem with the *DA* entry for *bombo* is that, for whatever reason, *Bartlett* and his source seem to have been accepted without question. The work to which *Bartlett* refers is William Byrd, *The Westover Manuscripts: containing The History of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina; A Journey to the Land of Eden, A.D. 1733; and A Progress to the Mines. Written from 1728 to 1736, and Now First Published* (Petersburg, Va., 1841). The quotation itself comes from *The History of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina* (1728), a work included in the *DA* bibliography. Had the *DA* editors more thoroughly examined this source, this is what they would have found:

When they [North Carolinians] entertain their friends bountifully, they fail not to set before them a capacious bowl of *Bombo*, so called from the admiral of that name. This is a compound of rum and water in equal parts, made palatable with the said long sugar.

So much for the red squirrels of North Carolina. *Bartlett's* squirrel stew was actually a more inviting rum punch; his *animal* was an *admiral* (though *Admiral Bombo's* fame does not appear to have outlived him); and *bombo* is in fact a simple variant, or the earlier form, of *bumpo* (*DAE*) or *bumbo* (*OED*).

It is curious that the same quotation from Byrd does appear in *Craigie's DAE* as the earliest example of *bumpo* (the liquor), where it is attributed to the 1901 edition of Byrd's *Journey to Eden*, but that this citation was overlooked by the editors of *DA*.

But the final point to be drawn from this squirrel hunt through North Carolina is that, however much faith we may have in the lexicographers who came before us, we may not always rely comfortably on their evidence, let alone their conclusions. The editors of *DARE* have occasionally been asked about the amount of time it has taken to complete the project. At least one justifiable response to these questions is that, for all their inter-

est in recording the folk vocabulary of American myths, the *DARE* editors have strived to avoid perpetuating the lexicographic myths of the American vocabulary. ♦

*Originally published in American Speech 59.3 (1984): 281–83. Reprinted by permission of Duke University Press.*

*In a recent letter, Jeff Hirshberg discussed his post-DARE career and reminisced fondly about investigating the origins of bombo: “My recollection is that Dave Vander Meulen, who at the time did most of the quote verification for DARE, was as much responsible for this sleuthing as I was. In any event, he stayed in the profession, and I decided to change fields. I completed an M.B.A. while still on the DARE staff, became a Certified Public Accountant, and moved to Buffalo, New York, in 1983. After ten years as a tax manager in the local office of a national accounting firm, I established my own CPA practice, with an emphasis on estate and tax planning. I’ve always thought that the lexicographer’s attentiveness to detail, instilled in all of us by ‘Dr. C.’ and illustrated, perhaps, by this brief note on bombo, has stood me well as a tax planner and CPA.”*



*Jeff Hirshberg today*

### In Memoriam

The members of the *DARE* staff lost a colleague and friend on September 1, 2006, when former Office Manager Karen Krause died after a courageous battle with leukemia. Karen worked on the *DARE* project for seventeen years, retiring in 2004. ♦

### Coming in Volume V

<i>to (one’s age)</i>	In comparison to the norm for (one’s age), “for (one’s age).” (Gulf States, sAppalachians)
<i>torn down</i>	Dissolute, disreputable, unruly, wild. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>torn out</i>	In a state of nervous or emotional distress; upset, nervous. (Esp NEng)
<i>tother-end-to</i>	Backwards, the wrong way round. (Chiefly NEast)
<i>touchous</i>	Touchy. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>tough jack</i>	A kind of molasses candy. (KY)
<i>town ball</i>	A bat-and-ball game similar to baseball but requiring fewer players. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>tow sack</i>	A large bag usu of burlap or other coarse fabric. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl, TX, OK)
<i>trace</i>	To braid (ears of corn) together by their husks; a string of ears of corn braided together. (Chiefly NEng)
<i>traffic (about)</i>	To wander, go about idly. (Esp sAppalachians)
<i>trap</i>	A fenced enclosure for animals. (Chiefly TX)
<i>traverse</i>	A short sled designed to support one end of a vehicle; a sled supported by a pair of runners at each end. (Chiefly NEng)
<i>trestle</i>	A sawhorse. (Esp C Atl, Midl)
<i>trig</i>	A chock used to keep something from rolling or shifting; to steady or slow by means of a trig. (NEng, esp ME)
<i>tumble</i>	A small pile of hay made in a field in preparation for pitching it onto a wagon. (Chiefly nNEng, wMA)
<i>tump</i>	A hummock or clump of vegetation in a marsh; a small marshy island. (Chesapeake Bay)

“Thank you for your wonderful work. I have purchased all of the volumes [of *DARE*] published so far, and as the remaining numbers become available, I hope to do the same and eventually complete the set.”

Stephen Wade  
via e-mail

## Students Assist *DARE* Research

At a conference in 2004, Editors Joan Hall and Luanne von Schneidemesser demonstrated how student assistants had improved selected entries in Volume I of *DARE* by using recently available digital resources. Hearing this, several colleagues offered to have their students assist us as well. The first to offer was University of Alabama Professor Catherine Davies. This spring, students in her American Dialects course searched the databases of ProQuest and Wright American Fiction, looking for citations that would antedate, postdate, or expand what we already had for Volume V entries that were written before *DARE* Editors had access to such sources. Many thanks to students Jennifer Mathews, Michelle Laundre, Robby Goff, Laura Coker, Paula McKenna, and Matt Phillips, and to auditor Alex Sartwell. They were able to antedate one entry by seventy-two years! ♦

“What better [way to use my money] than to share with a project I dearly love, for its original mentor and for its high quality and usefulness.”

Robert Wachal, Emeritus Professor and former student of Frederic G. Cassidy  
Iowa City, Iowa

## *DARE* in Podcasts

If you'd like to hear a bit about *DARE*'s history and some of the ways the *Dictionary* is being used, listen to two podcast interviews with Editors Joan Hall and Luanne von Schneidemesser. Go to <<http://csumc.wisc.edu/WiscEng/podcast/podcasts.htm>> (scroll down to find two parts) to hear them interviewed as part of a “Wisconsin Englishes” project; or go to <<http://mendota.english.wisc.edu/~awanner/podcasts/podcasts.htm>> to hear Hall's interview in a series about “Language Myths.” ♦

## Funding Update

Jon E. Sorenson  
Director of Development

I grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the youngest of five and the son of two writers. Television was not allowed in our dining room, and it was replaced by a prominent *American Heritage Dictionary* that had a special stand. The only time we could leave the dining table during dinner was to consult the dictionary for a word we didn't know the meaning of. This became a great excuse for delaying the inevitable and required consumption of green vegetables and a wonderful inspiration for family discussions.

I still have a dictionary in my dining room, and I have the good fortune of having four volumes of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* sitting on my desk. They get frequent use by me and my colleagues at the University of Wisconsin Foundation. Words that our parents or grandparents once used in everyday conversation have become rarer and require a reference, especially when our elders have left this world and can't give the story or explanation. This link to past generations and relevance for current and future generations is one of the gifts that the *Dictionary* has given to everyone who uses it as a reference and everyone who has worked on the project.

Chief Editor Joan Hall and her dedicated staff work every day toward the completion of Volume V to ensure that *DARE* will continue to give for generations to come. I hope you will consider giving a gift to *DARE* to complete this important work. You can use the form on the back page of this *Newsletter* to make a gift. For gifts of stock or real estate, or deferred gifts, please give me a call at (608) 262-7211 or e-mail me at <[jon.sorenson@uwfoundation.wisc.edu](mailto:jon.sorenson@uwfoundation.wisc.edu)>. All gifts to *DARE* are tax-deductible and may be matched by the National Endowment for the Humanities. As we enter what is traditionally regarded as the season of giving, a donation to *DARE* in honor of a friend or family member might be the perfect holiday gift.

Thank you for your continued support and for being a part of a gift that keeps on giving—*DARE*. ♦

“I am a great fan of *DARE*. I really admire what you do.”

Danusha V. Goska, Writer and Teacher  
via e-mail



Janet Monk, DARE Bibliographer

## Staff Member Profile

In this continuing series, Beth Gardner interviews the newest member of the DARE staff, Bibliographer Janet Monk. Jan came on board in August of this year after Sally Jacobs left the Dictionary to accept a position as an Accessioning Archivist with the Wisconsin Historical Society.

**Q:** What path did your career take before leading you to DARE?

**A:** Soon after I completed my B.A. in languages from the UW–Madison, I found temporary employment in one of the campus libraries. To my surprise, I discovered the work suited me and I liked the academic atmosphere and the people I had contact with—both colleagues and library users. I started to take courses in what was then known as the UW Library School while I worked full time. I received my M.L.S. three years later and have been employed in various Madison libraries ever since. Currently, I am the DARE Bibliographer in the afternoons; the other half of the day, I work in the Acquisitions Department of the UW General Library System. My job there involves obtaining books and journals from vendors and publishers, many of them outside the U.S.

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

**A:** My primary responsibility as DARE's Bibliographer is to update and maintain the online database of sources used in the Dictionary. As of November 2006, our bibliography contains around

10,000 entries and is growing exponentially, or so it seems! At times I feel like a detective as I find myself searching for obscure information, checking details in a variety of places in order to describe a source in a way that will be useful and succinct for users of the Dictionary.

**Q:** What parts of your work do you enjoy most?

**A:** Since I am an aficionado of both language and history, I've enjoyed everything I've been working on at DARE in the few months I've been here. Perusing old newspapers, learning more about language, and sharing linguistic anecdotes with my colleagues about mundane and esoteric topics are just some of the things I look forward to when I come to the office.

**Q:** What do you find most challenging?

**A:** The most challenging part of this job is keeping track of the Internet sites that seem to change or disappear with increasing frequency.

**Q:** What aspect of working on the DARE project has been the most surprising to you?

**A:** As a librarian, I was familiar with DARE as a useful and highly respected reference tool, but what I didn't know until I got here was the length of time the project has been going on, or the depth of research that goes into preparing each entry. The maps, the audiotapes, and the extensive paper files were surprises, too.

**Q:** What are your interests away from DARE?

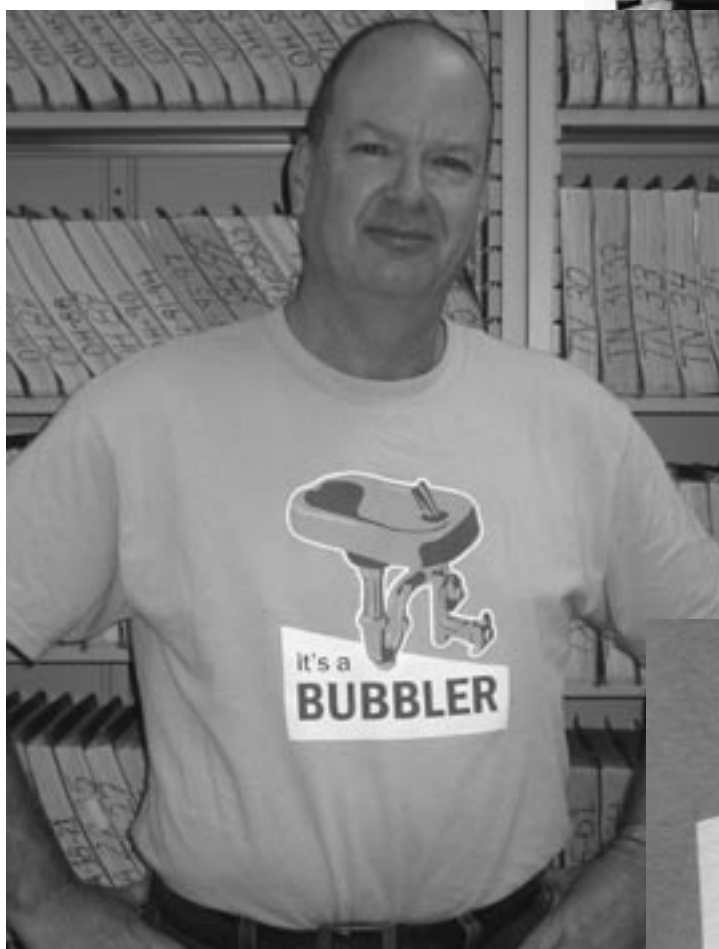
**A:** Away from the Dictionary, I like to do crossword puzzles and read (mysteries, current events, and even phone books if nothing else is available). My husband, Tom, and I are recent empty-nesters, so we have some spare time to take weekend road trips. Frequent stops are antique stores, car shows, and brewpubs. In the summer we like to ride the Wisconsin bike trails; our favorite so far is the Bearskin Trail in Oneida County. We also enjoy family vacations in Bayfield and trips to St. Louis to visit our older daughter, Heidi, her husband, and their two dogs. During the rest of the year, we attend concerts and plays, especially when our younger daughter, Katie, a UW–Madison senior, has a part in them. Last winter Tom and I took up snowshoeing, so we're hoping this year there will be enough snow to use them! ♦

“Thanks for DARE. It is important to me as a former Southern studies instructor and dialect lover. The work you do is beyond measure.”

Stephanie Williams, Niche Publications Writer  
*The Post and Courier*, Charleston, South Carolina

## DARE Staff Photos

- ▶ Proofreader Elizabeth Blake puts the bite on Editor Roland Berns at this year's DARE Halloween party.



- ◀ Editor Leonard Zwilling models his "bubbler" T-shirt. You, too, can own one of these lexicographic fashion statements—visit the Wisconsin Historical Society's Web site (<[www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org)>) and click on the "Shop" link.

- ▶ The back of the T-shirt features the DARE definition of bubbler.





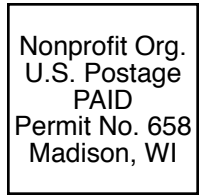
◀ DARE Editor Luanne von Schneidmesser stands in front of the Palazzo Madama in the Piazza Castello in Turin, Italy, where she attended the September 2006 EURALEX Conference.

► Festive banners welcomed conference participants as they arrived for the opening session.



▼ The Aula Magna del Rettorato provided a beautiful setting for the opening address.





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