# AR Stetter

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**Dictionary of American Regional English** 

Winter 2009



# The Heart of Ohio Stephanie Hysmith

Cince 2001, I've been teaching a class called The Development of American English at Ohio University. Many people are familiar with the beautiful Athens campus, but Ohio University has five regional campuses ranging across a quarter of the state—the southeast corner of what we call Appalachian Ohio. These campuses attract many nontraditional students who hope to return to the work force, oftentimes as teachers. These are my students, and I teach them from Athens over a compressed video system, usually speaking to all five campuses simultaneously. When you're on TV and not physically with the students, it's challenging to keep them engaged and interested. My solution has been to assign primary field research Continued on page 2

# Letter Z Chosen to Honor Fred Cassidy

For the last decade or so, *DARE* has had a development initiative called the "Adopt a Letter" program, in which donors of \$100,000 or more have had the opportunity to "adopt" a letter of their choice. We are delighted to say that at this point six individuals and three private foundations have earned the right to claim a letter. Their choices have been A, C, D, F, G, J, R, S, and T.

While most friends of *DARE* are not in a position to give at that level, many donors have given generously either to the *Dictionary of American Regional English* Fund or the Frederic G. Cassidy *DARE* Fund (which was established after his death in 2000). Last spring at a meeting of the *DARE* Board of Visitors, Development Director Jon Sorenson announced that the Frederic G. Cassidy *DARE* Fund had topped the \$100,000 mark! With that goal having been reached, the members of the Board voted to adopt a letter in Fred's honor. Remembering the "On to Z!" rallying cry that he delighted in using, the Board unanimously chose Z as Fred's adoptive letter.

We know that he would be pleased. We are also sure he would puckishly remind us that there are still sixteen letters left! ◆

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The Heart of Ohio Continued from page 1 papers and then have the students share their experiences with the class.

I've been a fan of *DARE* for years, and have always enjoyed reading the *DARE Newsletter*. In fact, several of the articles are included in my course materials. When I thought about how I could utilize *DARE* in my classroom, the first hurdle was that not all of the campus libraries had even the first volume. I whined and squeaked about how their penurious policies were preventing me from developing my course. Finally, all purchased copies.

I introduce my students to *DARE* by hauling in my copy of Volume I to show them. Then I settle them in for story time. I set the stage by telling them what was going on in the country then the mid-1960s—the Vietnam War protests, the American Civil Rights Movement, flower power, and hippies. I tell them about Frederic Cassidy and his labor of love, the DARE project, which he began in 1963. I tell them the wonderful anecdote about his being in Jamaica and hearing some locals talking disparagingly about the foreigners. (He responded in fluent Jamaican and ended up being welcomed into their homes.) And then I read Sharon Huizenga's very vivid recollections of working as a *DARE* Fieldworker (from the Spring/ Summer 2005 issue of the DARE Newsletter), camping out in her Word Wagon in the mountains of Virginia, collecting regional expressions, and sharing meals with her informants, not to mention trying her hand at squirrel hunting. After hearing her story, one student was ready to pack up and head out; he thought nothing could be more ro-

the now-completed, nine-volume edition of *The Collected Poems of John Clare*, 1793-1864, Clarendon Press, Oxford. Clare has recently come to be recognized as one of the most important English Romantic poets. I am in the process of checking my Clare glossaries against *DARE*, with remarkable results. It is intriguing how many of Clare's dialect words still survive in regional use in the USA (even when they've vanished from use in Great Britain). Because so many of the entries in *DARE* are from *speakers* of dialect (rather than simply the *writers* of it), the text is extraordinarily valuable. No one interested in the dialect-forms of English could help but be fascinated by *DARE*.

Eric H. Robinson M.A., Litt.D., Cambridge University

mantic and wonderful than traveling the country collecting words.

The students' assignment is to create a questionnaire by selecting a variety of cues from the original *DARE* Questionnaire, and then report on the responses from fifteen informants. They can work alone or in groups. My assignment sheet includes this caveat: "Some informants will be worried about giving the 'correct' answer. Explain that there are no correct answers, that you are simply replicating the fieldwork of the *Dictionary* of American Regional English, and that diversity is the spice of life." Some of them use that line to good effect. Others report that they've gotten responses such as "You're just trying to make fun of me." One student had a dilemma in how to report a response from one of her informants. When asked what she called the small black animal with a white stripe down its back, the informant replied, "Well, I know people call it a skunk, but it's really a polecat." Sometimes I think the stories of the difficulties in getting informants to respond do more to drive home the reality of dialects than the actual exercise.

One woman from the Chillicothe campus took my advice to ask older people—I tell my students they've been around longer and they know more—and visited a nursing home. Of course, the residents were thrilled by her visit and shared many creative expressions. She seemed to think they felt validated and appreciated for their ability to help her just by recalling what expressions they could remember.

Another student from Zanesville took advantage of a power outage at work. She said, "Hey, while we're just waiting around, how about helping me with a project for school?" Her co-workers laughed and laughed and kept thinking of one answer after another.

One student told us his mother was in a nursing home, suffering from Alzheimer's disease. She kept saying something about a *press*, and no one knew what she meant. Finally, an elderly aunt said the mother was referring to a *clothes press*; she meant a wardrobe or closet. I asked a lady from my quilt guild, who was in her eighties at the time, if she had ever heard of a *press*. "Of course," she replied. (This is the same lady who couldn't believe I had anything to do with the field of education, judging from my conversations with other quilters about dialects. She said, "You are as funny as Scratch!"—which I then had to look up to discover it meant the devil.)

Whether people around here say *poke*, *sack*, or *bag* has been on many students' questionnaires. This led one woman from the Ironton campus to tell a story. (Ironton is in the southern part of the state, right on the Ohio River across from Kentucky, and the local residents' dialect is influenced by their southern neighbors.) She worked part-time at a convenience store. One evening a young cashier came running over to her and said, "Tessa, there's a man over there who's really mad at me."

Tessa went over to the man, who was quite red in the face, and asked what was wrong. He said, "I told her I wanted a poke."

"Yes," she said, "and what did she do?" "Why, she poked me!"

Another student related a story about the time her boyfriend's car broke down at the top of a hill. He was going for help, looked back, and shouted to my student, "Chock the tire!"

"What?" she asked.

"Chock the tire!"

"What?"

The car rolled down the hill into a tree. That's how we sometimes learn new terms. A *chock* is a wedge or block of wood that's meant to prevent the movement of a wheel—a new one on me, too.

The Eastern campus in St. Clairsville is also on the Ohio River, but north, across from Morgantown, West Virginia. A student there told about an argument she had with some family and friends while watching the Super Bowl. She insisted that *pigs in a blanket* were those little hot dogs wrapped in dough and baked. Her husband insisted that *pigs in a blanket* were cabbage rolls. This started quite a conversation, with students from some of the centrally-located campuses in Lancaster and Chillicothe having never heard of such a thing and a couple of students from the other Ohio River campus in Ironton saying yes, their grandmothers called them that. The older students from St. Clairsville said that when they were in elementary school, the cafeteria would post daily lunch menus on a board and pigs in a blanket were, indeed, cabbage rolls.

I was amazed—this was my first quarter teaching this class—and mentioned it to my husband's administrative assistant. "You wouldn't believe what my students told me today," I started, and told her about the cabbage rolls.

"Well," she replied, "in my part of Morgan County, pigs in a blanket means a ground pork casserole with a biscuit topping." I nearly fell over.

One of the administrators from St. Clairsville related a funny story to me. She was visiting Phoenix

and went into a butcher shop. "Do you have *city chicken*?" she asked. (*City chicken* is breaded, skewered pork served covered with gravy and is, apparently, quite popular in St. Clairsville. According to the *Fannie Farmer Cookbook*, this was a favorite recipe during the Depression, when chicken was more expensive than pork.)

"No, ma'am," she was told. "All of our chickens come from the country."

I get the same range of diversity across campuses when we discuss what folks call *green* or *bell peppers*. Students from elsewhere in Ohio are often stunned to learn that many locals in Athens call them *mangoes*. Others say their mothers or grandmothers make stuffed *mangoes*.

I tell them how I went into a local grocery where they had both the tropical fruit and the green pepper on sale for \$0.50. When I checked out, the cashier picked up the fruit and asked what it was. "A mango," I replied. She looked down at the bell pepper. "It's another kind of mango," I explained, and she nodded and rang me up.

I hear protests of "That's wrong! A mango is a tropical fruit." Hmmm. Yes, indeed. I tell them that my stepfather grew up in Tennessee. I asked him once, "Joe, did you ever call a bell pepper a mango?"

"Yes," he replied, "until I moved to Cincinnati and everyone told me I was wrong." He still remembers feeling stupid and ignorant sixty years later.

It's not wrong, it's just different is the mantra I try to get my students to intone in these confrontations about regional variation. I feel validated when I get e-mails from my students saying "I'll never make fun of my mother again."

The fun part, for me, comes when I read the reports. I have pages of scribbled notes with county names, ages of informants, whatever I could jot down. Joan Hall has received e-mails from me in which I remark about the range of counties in which informants use the term *slickery*, for example. It is so enlightening for all of us when students report on something no one in the group has heard before and we later find the term, as well as its range of use, validated in *DARE*.

Here are some examples of words and phrases collected by my students:

Adam Smithing—being a copycat boo, dipset, honeydip—nicknames for a sweetheart booter—a flirty guy

bottoms, downs—nicknames for a bad part of town bufa, heerymother—nicknames for a grandmother *carry-in dinner, grab-and-gather*—a potluck meal corduroy, washboard, road to Deliverance County joking names for a back road davenette—a couch *death crow, dirty bird*—a vulture frog-strangler, biddy-strangler—a heavy rain galluses—suspenders *grinnies*—chipmunks *hippin, seat cover*—a diaper *hoopdie*—a broken-down car *in a skosh*—in a second *jakey*—a careless dresser knuckledragger—an awkward or clumsy person *lettuce corners*—the stemmy part of romaine lettuce *mess 'n' gom*—spontaneous, unplanned activity *mog*—to eat rapidly and noisily outhouse lilies—common orange day lilies poochin'—pregnant rivels—noodles scallywags—nonsense sickbed baby—a child conceived when the father was ill *sipsy*—a crybaby *sunny*—of milk: gone sour Tennessee chicken—meat from slaughtered pet tree lawn, grass verge—the strip of grass between the sidewalk and the road *whistle pig*—a groundhog *yard-ache*—an unruly child

It's my belief that not everyone has to go to college, and if people are comfortable in their lives and in their communities, who cares whether they say *The car needs washed* or if they call a stockpot a *kittle*? Language is so personal, and in Appalachia we deal with the stigma of being regarded as ignorant hillbillies. The last thing teachers should want to do is destroy the self-esteem of their pupils. I tell my students the story of a woman I knew in graduate school who grew up in the Portsmouth

I'm enjoying reading Wallace Stegner's book about Powell's Grand Canyon expedition. He uses some unfamiliar words to me. 'Boodle' is one which was new. We looked it up in *DARE*, and appreciated understanding it better.

Carol R. Houston San Rafael, California area of Ohio, not far from the Ironton campus on the Ohio River. Her family moved to northern Ohio when she was quite young. When she went to school, she pronounced something the way she had heard it pronounced her entire life, and was promptly placed in a special education class. Twenty-two years later, she remembers the humiliation she felt.

I do my best to make my students rejoice in the creative diversity of our regional dialects. Some people will probably fault me for not striving to get our teachers to crack down on dialectal variation and to make everyone speak the same. Let them fire me. I treasure messages from students such as the following, written by a young man from the Ironton campus:

"Thank you for the insight that you provided me with as a future teacher. Growing up in Southern Ohio, I have felt the implications of speaking with a distinct dialect from time to time. I would never want to hinder my students or make them feel any less proud of themselves because of the way that they speak. I want to portray an example of pride to my future students and help them to realize that they can succeed anywhere, regardless of speech. Our speech gives us character and uniqueness! Thanks for helping me to view dialect in a positive light!"

Ohio's dialect regions are varied and have obviously been influenced by the migration and settlement patterns of different population groups. I love what I've discovered in Appalachian Ohio and hope I've inspired my students to be both champions of their dialects and respectful and understanding of others'.

Stephanie Hysmith has always been interested in dialects and accents, having grown up in the multicultural Washington, D.C. area (and having listened to friends and family members who spoke with German, Polish, and British accents, not to mention her Oklahoma-born father). She has performed on stage as the mother in Brighton Beach Memoirs (using a Brooklyn accent) and as various characters (all the ones with foreign accents) in Spoon River Anthology. While working on her M.A. in English at Ohio University, Stephanie took an introductory linguistics class and found her calling. She now has two Master's degrees, one in English and one in linguistics, and teaches two linguistics courses for the Department of English. When not entertaining Ohio University students with her renditions of various American accents, Stephanie enjoys gardening, quilting, singing, contra dancing, traveling, building Habitat houses, and volunteering at her local community center.

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# Coming in Volume V

squizzle (up) To wrinkle, contort, shrivel.

(Chiefly NEng)

swimmy-headed Dizzy. (Sth, S Midl)

three-foot A three-footed stand for a large

kettle. (PA)

twitch In logging: to drag (a log).

(Chiefly NEng)

*upscuddle* A noisy quarrel; a disturbance, tumult. (Chiefly sAppala-

chians)

whet A turn, try, spell of activity; an

indefinite interval of time.

(Sth, S Midl)

whew To hurry, bustle about. (Chiefly

NEng)

which What? Pardon me?—used to re-

quest the repetition of something improperly heard or understood. (Sth, S Midl)

whiffle A crew haircut. (Chiefly eMA)

whiffler The goldeneye duck. (Chiefly

MD, VA)

whirlygust A whirlwind. (Esp NC, TN)

whoop-and-hide Hide-and-seek. (Chiefly Sth, S

Midl)

whoopensocker Something extraordinary of its

kind; a stiff drink. (WI)

whop over To collapse, tumble, flop. (NEng)

whore's egg A sea urchin. (ME)

willywags Tangled underbrush; an area

covered with such underbrush; a remote, sparsely inhabited area. (Chiefly nNEng,

esp ME)

winkle-hawk A right-angled tear in cloth; a

rip or cut. (Chiefly Hudson

River Valley)

winter potato A stone that has been heaved

to the surface of a field by freezing and thawing of the

ground. (WI)

# DARE in the Limelight in Europe

While in Europe over the holidays to visit her son, who is teaching English in Austria on a Fulbright Fellowship, Senior Editor Luanne von Schneidemesser accepted invitations to give guest lectures on *DARE* at two universities in Germany and one in Norway.

At the University of Potsdam, one of six universities participating in the Language Variation in Northern Germany project, she spoke to an enthusiastic audience of linguists about "Regionalität im *DARE*."

Moving on to Oslo, Luanne met with the staff of the Norsk Ordbok, the definitive dictionary of Norwegian, for which collecting started in 1930. All early material has been digitized, and a corpus of Nynorsk (the more modern of the two standard written varieties of the Norwegian language) developed for editorial use. Here Luanne's audience was particularly interested in the more technical details of *DARE*'s structure and production. Four of the projected twelve volumes of the *Norsk* Ordbok have been published, and more are in press; with increased funding from a government grant, the dictionary unit was expanded in 2002 to facilitate completion of the dictionary in 2014 to help celebrate the bicentennial of the Norwegian constitution. (Unlike DARE, the Norsk Ordbok is fully funded by the Norwegian government.)

Luanne unfortunately slipped on the ice shortly before her scheduled departure from Oslo, shattering her elbow. Despite receiving excellent medical care in Norway (as well as invaluable, gracious assistance from lexicographer Dagfinn Worren and his wife, Ingeborg Kongslien), Luanne had to cancel her scheduled talk at the University of Aachen and return to Madison for surgery. She reports very slow but steady progress as she works at regaining full range of motion in her injured arm. •



Luanne von Schneidemesser in the Norsk Ordbok offices



# Where Are They Now?

Berit Givens began volunteering for *DARE* in the summer of 2000, while pursuing a Ph.D. in mathematics at UW–Madison. After completing her dissertation (entitled *Hypergraphs and Chromatic Numbers, with Applications to the Bohr Topology*) in 2003, she accepted a teaching position in the Department of Mathematics at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, where she is currently an assistant professor (and has recently applied for tenure).

Since moving to California, Berit and her husband, Mark, have become the parents of two children—son Trygve is three, and daughter Annika is eighteen months old.

The Givens family stopped by the *DARE* offices on a recent visit to Madison, and Berit shared some reminiscences of her days at the *Dictionary* with Beth Gardner.

**Q:** What initially brought you to *DARE*?

A: I had taken a couple of years off from any sort of volunteer work and felt like I needed to find something to do. When I flipped through the list of volunteer opportunities, *DARE* caught my eye. I had a boyfriend in high school who received the first volume as a Christmas gift one year, and we had spent many hours leafing through it. I'd had no idea up until then that *DARE* was housed at the UW.

**Q:** What did you like best about volunteering at *DARE*?

A: My favorite thing was to look through all the written accounts of the oral interviews. It's fun to see the actual handwriting of the people who conducted all those interviews. It was especially fun when the interviewee had some long story or response to a question. I thought listening to some of the old tapes was fun, but I found it very difficult, too. I don't have a very good ear for understanding some of the thick accents, especially some Southern accents.

**Q:** What do you especially enjoy about living in California (other than escaping Wisconsin winters)?

A: Well, my first answer was going to be "escaping Wisconsin winters"! The number-one thing, though, is my family and friends. My parents live only about two hours' drive away, and my in-laws are just ten minutes away. Since we've had kids, they've been lifesavers. I can't imagine trying to raise children far away from these support systems. I also love the diversity here. Cal Poly is about 30% White, 30% Asian-American, 30% Hispanic/Latino, and 10% African-American. I enjoy interacting with people from so many different backgrounds.

**Q:** What do you like most about teaching at the university level? What are your areas of research?

A: I like that I get to teach topics that are new to me, so that I'm always learning something new, too. This quarter I'm teaching a course on graph theory, which is something that I have neither taught nor taken a course in before. When I finished my Ph.D. at Madison, my area of research was topology and set theory. I've pretty well left that behind now, and am focusing on algebra and semigroups.

**Q:** What do you and your family like to do in your leisure time?

A: With a three-year-old and a one-year-old, we mainly just run around like crazy. The kids love to read books (*Go, Dog. Go!* is a favorite). We go for walks on campus to see the cows and horses—Cal Poly is one of the few agricultural areas left around here. We also go to the zoo regularly.

I look forward to completing my collection of *DARE*. I was class of 1953 [at the University of Wisconsin–Madison] and proud to say I had classes with Helen White—in her purple dresses!

Emmy Lou Anderson Charleston, South Carolina

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