

# DARE Newsletter

Vol. 7, No. 1

Dictionary of American Regional English

Winter 2004



Photo by Luanne von Schneidmesser

"Little bobbasheelies." What are they?

## Bobbasheely

Joan Houston Hall  
Chief Editor

As a chronicler of the American vernacular, I am often asked whether I have any favorites among the thousands of interesting words I meet. Like a good parent, I suppose I ought not to admit to favoritism. But I do have a special fondness for some words. One in particular stands out, both because I met it early in my career as a lexicographer and because it was something of a puzzle. The word is *bobbasheely*.

Continued on page 2

## Funding Update

David Simon  
Director of Development

John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, Gerald R. Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. Nine individuals have served as President of the United States since that day in 1963 when Fred Cassidy was named the Chief Editor of a new project—the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

Thousands of people have played a role in the publication of four volumes of *DARE*. Fieldworkers, informants, editors, proofreaders, donors, volunteers, and readers of the *Dictionary* (among many others) have all been an important part of the progress of the *DARE* effort.

Now we are working on the volume that will complete the alphabet and a journey of more than forty years. There is plenty of work to be done. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that it is gratifying to be working on Volume V (S–Z) of the *Dictionary of American Regional English*. Every day we are making sure that Professor Cassidy's dream is realized.

On page 5 of this *Newsletter*, you will find our 2003 donor list. First and foremost, I want to thank everyone who made a gift to *DARE* last year. It is not possible to overemphasize how important your generosity is to us. We depend on your gifts to ensure that the *Dictionary* is completed. Every donor is a key part of the *DARE* effort, and we appreciate each contribution very much.

I am proud of the fact that *DARE*'s list of supporters has grown to include people from all over

Continued on page 4

In the questionnaire used in the fieldwork for the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (DARE 1985–), one query asks for “expressions to say that people are very friendly toward each other; ‘They’re \_\_\_\_\_.’” We collected such phrases as *thick as thieves* (or *thick as fleas*, or *thick as hair on a dog*), or *like two peas in a pod*, or *bosom friends*, or *palsy-walsy*, or *they drink through the same quill*. But one informant in Brookeland, Texas, said, “They’re big Bobby Sheelies.” This spelling by the fieldworker suggested that there might be an Irish connection. So we checked all our Irish sources, as well as Scots and English dialect sources, to no avail. Further investigation turned up an article about speech in northwestern Arkansas (Carr 1906, 127), where the word *bobashillies* was defined as ‘chums’. Clearly, these were the same word, but where could they have come from?

Serendipitously, we came across the following passage in William Faulkner’s short novel *The Reivers* (1962, 77):

“Maybe what you and Miss Corrie better do is go on back to town now and be ready to meet the others when the train comes.” . . . “How’s that for a idea? Huh, Sugar Boy? You and Sweet Thing bobbasheely on back to the hotel now, and me and Uncle Remus and Lord Fauntleroy will mosey along any time up to midnight.”

*Bobbasheely on back to the hotel?* Here was our word, no longer a noun but a verb! It seemed to have the sense ‘saunter, or move in a friendly fashion’, so it certainly could be related, but which came first? Shortly thereafter I came across the following quotation from a novel set in Alabama, T. S. Stribling’s *The Store* (1932, 16):

“Yes, but I wouldn’t do that,” stammered the merchant. “It cuts a man off from the society of decent men and women. It’s social suicide even to vote the Republican ticket here in Florence, much less bobbashieely with niggers!”

Again it was a verb, and again it had to do with associating in a friendly manner. At this point we had citations from Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama—clearly a regional distribution. But it was not until we happened on a glossary of Mississippi speech (Shands 1893, 19) that we had a clue as to the origin of the forms: in this source the headword *barbashela* was said to have been borrowed from Choctaw and to signify ‘friend’.

Fortunately, the libraries at the University of Wisconsin–Madison have an amazingly diverse collection of materials, including a glossary of Choctaw. So what was left was to search through this source for anything that looked possible as an etymon. Nothing in the Bs was a likely candidate. By luck, my eye ultimately hit on the form *itibapishili*, which was glossed as ‘my brother, with

More  
Bobbasheelies



Photo by Karen Cornwell

whom I was suckled'. Here it was! The source of all of our *bobbasheely* forms. So we were able with some confidence to enter *bobbasheely* as a noun, defined as 'a very close friend', and *bobbasheely* as a verb, defined as 'to saunter, sashay, move in a friendly fashion; to associate with socially'.

But that's not the end. Very shortly before volume 1 of *DARE* was to be sent to press, chief editor Fred Cassidy had a phone call from a Chicago woman who was doing some genealogical research. She was the great-great-great-great-great-granddaughter of a Scotsman who had founded Londonderry, New Hampshire. He, in turn, had a great-grandson who, after graduating from Dartmouth College, was appointed by Thomas Jefferson as agent to the Choctaws in Mississippi Territory, for the period 1802 through 1813. He and two other exiled easterners became very good friends and determined to write a book about Choctaw culture. Those plans went awry when one of the three became involved in the trial of Aaron Burr, who had been captured in Choctaw territory. The three men remained friends, however, and the Chicago woman was reading their correspondence some 170 years later. She noticed that in one letter the writer signed off with "Yours sincerely." The next letter was signed "An affectionate friend." But the third ended with "Bobashela." And that's why the Chicago researcher was calling Fred Cassidy: "What on earth does *bobashela* mean?"

Fortunately for her, we at *DARE* could tell her. Equally fortunate for us, she provided us with a copy of the letter, which gave us a citation that was 64 years earlier than our previous earliest. We were able to insert the quotation at the last minute, and *DARE* is the only dictionary I know of that even includes this word. A puzzle solved and a word preserved. ♦

#### References

- Carr, Joseph William. 1906. "A List of Words from Northwest Arkansas." *Dialect Notes* 3: 124-65.
- Faulkner, William. 1962. *The Reivers: A Reminiscence*. New York: Random House.
- Shands, Hubert Anthony. 1893. *Some Peculiarities of Speech in Mississippi*. Boston: Norwood.
- Stribling, T. S. 1932. *The Store*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran.
- Originally published in American Speech* 75.4 (2000): 375-77. Reprinted by permission of Duke University Press.

## Coming in Volume V

<i>spoonhunt</i>	The calico bush ( <i>Kalmia latifolia</i> ). (Chiefly sNH, neMA)
<i>spouting</i>	A gutter or downspout. (Chiefly PA, OH)
<i>spring</i>	To twist, sprain, dislocate. (Esp Sth, S Midl)
<i>spring-keeper</i>	A salamander. (Esp VA)
<i>sprout</i>	To chop or grub out suckers; to clear (land) of suckers. (Chiefly S Midl)
<i>squander</i>	To scatter, wander. (S Midl, chiefly VA)
<i>squat</i>	To punch, crush, squeeze. (ME, NH)
<i>squinch owl</i>	A screech owl. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>squinny</i>	A ground squirrel. (IA)
<i>stage plank</i>	A kind of gingerbread cookie. (Gulf States, esp LA)
<i>stake driver</i>	A bittern. (Chiefly NEng)
<i>stand</i>	A tub, barrel, or large can used to store foodstuffs. (Sth, S Midl)
<i>(bee) stand</i>	A beehive. (Sth, S Midl)
<i>steephead</i>	A small valley with steep side and end walls. (Chiefly nwFL)
<i>stewer</i>	A deep metal cooking vessel. (Sth, S Midl, TX)
<i>stick bait</i>	A caddis fly larva used as bait. (sAppalachians)
<i>stick knife</i>	The game of mumblety-peg. (NEng)
<i>stiff starch</i>	A game in which the players must freeze when "it" calls "stiff starch." (Sth, esp TX)
<i>stinging lizard</i>	A scorpion. (Chiefly TX)
<i>stiver</i>	To stagger, struggle. (Chiefly NEng, esp ME)
<i>stone row</i>	A stone fence. (Chiefly NJ)
<i>stone school</i>	A game in which the "students" move up or down a flight of steps according to whether they guess correctly in which hand the "teacher" is holding a stone. (Chiefly NEast)
<i>stove</i>	To stub, sprain. (Esp wPA, OH, WV)



## Notes and Quotes

Once again, we're pleased to share excerpts from letters to and articles about DARE. We'd enjoy hearing from you, too, by e-mail or "snail mail."

"I wouldn't have missed the Wall of Fame ceremony [DARE Ed: for Frederic G. Cassidy; see Fall 2003 issue] for anything—except two weeks in Dublin. I look for the name and smile each time I'm in the library."

Mary McAndrews  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

"We are always delighted with the short list of words 'Coming in Volume V.' Of course, those of us born and raised in northern Lancaster Co. learned and used 'slippy'—as did my wife from Salem, OH—since infancy. I must have been in college before I learned that 'slippery' was the standard form. . . . Today it is 'slippy' here, for the temperature is supposed to remain below freezing."

C. Richard Beam  
Millersville, Pennsylvania

"This fourth and most recent volume of the *Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)* replicates the wonderful success of the three preceding volumes (1985, 1991, 1996), the established elegance of complete, consistent, and deliberate lexicography. . . . These [three words] reflect the comprehensiveness of *DARE* as a historical dictionary, its logical coherence as a regional reference, and its stubborn insistence upon authoritative documentation through evidence, analysis, and description."

Lee Pederson  
Review in *American Speech*

"*DARE* also gives meaning to words such as 'dickety-boo' (a ghost), 'fly-uppity' (quick-tempered), 'pinkletink' (a young frog), and 'dropped egg' (poached egg). Besides shedding light on mind-teasing and sense-pleasing expressions, it's a fun book to browse through—all four volumes."

William J. Cromie  
Article in *Harvard University Gazette*

## Funding Update

Continued from page 1

the United States. The *Dictionary of American Regional English* is a national project both linguistically and financially. This has come about thanks to your continuing interest in our work.

Every gift to *DARE* means a great deal to our success. If you believe the *Dictionary of American Regional English* is an important project, I hope you will seriously consider making a gift to *DARE* this year. 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. That will double the value of your gift. You can make a gift 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! ♦

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please use this gift to support the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

My/Our contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed.

Please charge my/our gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to my:

MasterCard  Visa  AmEx

Card no. \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration date \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholder name (please print):  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to *Dictionary of American Regional English* Fund, c/o University of Wisconsin Foundation, 1848 University Avenue, P.O. Box 8860, Madison, WI 53708, Attn: David Simon.

# CONTRIBUTORS TO *DARE* IN 2003

*The Dictionary of American Regional English is grateful for the support of these donors in 2003. Gifts were received by the Dictionary of American Regional English Fund, the Frederic G. Cassidy DARE Fund, and the Dictionary of American Regional English Technology Fund. Because this is a national project, it is particularly meaningful that gifts were received from twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia.*

## **DARE Bascom Hill Contributor**

\$25,000 and above

Franklin Philanthropic Foundation, IL  
Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, NY  
Sandro Mayer, NY  
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, NY  
National Endowment for the Humanities, DC (outright grant)  
National Endowment for the Humanities, DC (matching grant)  
National Science Foundation, DC  
"We the People" Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, DC (matching grant)

## **DARE Lake Mendota Associate**

\$10,000–\$24,999

Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, NY  
J. M. Kaplan Fund, NY  
John A. Shea, IL

## **DARE Family Member**

\$1,000–\$9,999

John Bordie, TX  
Brittingham Fund, Inc., DE  
Connemara Fund, WY  
Dawson Family Fund of the Peninsula Community Foundation, CA  
Robert and June Easton, CA  
Jane Appleby Flint, GA  
Joan Houston Hall, WI  
Samuel M. Levy Foundation, DC  
Gerald and Mary Manville, MN  
Robert H. Moore, VA  
New York Times Company Foundation, NY  
Kenneth Robb, OH  
David H. Simon, WI  
Sidney Stern Memorial Trust, CA  
SunTrust Bank Foundation, GA  
Helen Tetzlaff, WI  
Luanne von Schneidmesser, WI

## **DARE Circle of Friends**

\$500–\$999

Greg and Carol Alfus, IL

John and Adele Algeo, GA  
Houghton Mifflin Company, MA  
Philip Levy, DC  
Mary McAndrews, WI  
Lee Pederson, GA  
Frank Pickel, IL

## **DARE Supporter**

Up to \$499

Ruth Aldrich, WI  
Robert J. Alexander, PA  
Jean W. Anderson, FL  
Louie and Barbara Attebery, ID  
Howard Baetzhold, IN  
C. Richard Beam, PA  
Karl Benghauser, MI  
Lloyd and Genevieve Bostian, WI  
Elizabeth Brinkman, OH  
Telise E. Broughton, TX  
Judith Brown, CA  
Susan Bryant-Kimball, NH  
Amy Bushaw, OR  
David and Annabelle Collins, WI  
Karen Cornwell and Kenneth Hammel, WI  
Barbara Davis, MN  
Shirley Dieter, WI  
Rosemary Dorney, WI  
Connie Eble, NC  
Richard Ekman, NJ  
Karen and Gary Ellis, VA  
Catherine L. Ellsworth, NY  
Elizabeth Evanson, WI  
Harold Farwell, NC  
Eugenia Gengler, WI  
Betty Ruth George, AK  
Gerald and Miriam Green, CA  
L. Kenneth and Elizabeth Hammond, GA  
Cleo Higgins, FL  
Lorrie Huff, CA  
Merry and John Patrick Hunter, WI  
Julia Ihlenfeldt, WI  
Betty Irwin, GA  
Mary Kamps, WI  
Alfred Kaplan and Ruth Sherman, MA  
Ellin Kelly, IL  
Nicolas Kiessling, WA

James J. Kilpatrick and Marianne Means, DC  
Christopher and Margaret Kleinhenz, WI  
Constance Knop, WI  
James M. Knox, CA  
William A. Kretzschmar Jr., GA  
John and Virginia Moore Kruse, WI  
Sidney Landau, NY  
Cosima Lyttle, GA  
Beverly McGraw, VA  
Robert and Elizabeth Menefee, KY  
Christopher R. Moore, VA  
Cynthia L. Moore, VA  
Edgar and Gracelouise Moore, OH  
Deborah Mortman, OH  
Kathryn J. Muehlhauser and Robert M. Moore, OH  
Betty P. Nelson, TN  
Harold Q. Noack Jr., ID  
Marjorie and James O'Connor, OH  
Carol and Dennis Preston, MI  
John Rathbun, CA  
Mary J. Resnik, MD  
Andrew A. Roszbach, MD  
Eric and Nancy Rude, WI  
Wilbert and Genevieve Schauer Foundation, FL  
Leslie Scott, OH  
Alice Sedgwick, WI  
Connie Shehan, AR  
Roger W. Shuy, MT  
Geneva Smitherman, MI  
Joseph Spivey III, VA  
Anne J. Stone, DC  
Edwin Swillinger, CA  
Berkley Tague, NJ  
Judith Taylor, WI  
Beatrice Temp, TX  
John and Mary Crawford Tinkler, TN  
James Trennepohl, MD  
Richard Vacca, MA  
Barbara and Jozsef Vass, WI  
Nancy and John Webster, WI  
Joseph J. Wiesenfarth, WI  
Anna Maria Williams, WI



Marjory McMickle, Volunteer

## Volunteer Profile

*In our continuing series of profiles of those who contribute to the creation of DARE, Joan Hall interviews longtime volunteer Marjory McMickle. Marjory has generously given time to the project for nearly sixteen years.*

**Q:** I know that you've lived in other parts of the country; have you always been interested in the varieties of English spoken in different regions?

**A:** As a child in Maryland, I fed my imagination from the family bookshelves, reading a variety of stories with unfamiliar settings and dialects, such as the *Uncle Remus* books, *The Little Colonel*, and other Southern narratives. The private-school and public libraries gave me many opportunities to be immersed in exotic cultures. Europe, Asia, Africa—even New England and California—were all foreign and fascinating to me.

With a combined history/English major, I received my B.A. in 1942 from Goucher College in Baltimore. But I barely knew any non-standard English speakers until World War II. While working for Army Intelligence in Washington, D.C., I met and lived with girls from West Virginia and the Carolinas. They went beyond “y’all” and “honey-chile” and “dope” (for cola drinks). I wish I had kept a list of all the “funny” expressions I heard in the early 40s.

After the war I lived briefly in New York City, where I was often conscious of the different accents and speech patterns of certain co-workers and my roommates in the basement apartment I was lucky to find. One of the latter was a chubby dropout from a Scarlett O’Hara look-alike contest. Her “cute” Southern accent and spoiled-brat personality made me long for a Bostonian or a Brooklynite in the other bed.

In 1947, when I needed a break from big-city living, I met a girl from Madison who convinced me that I couldn’t find a better spot for a summer vacation. So I bravely ventured to Wisconsin—Indian Territory, according to my family, who had never been more than one hundred miles west of the Atlantic Ocean. I fell in love with Madison: the lakes, the University, the space, the variety of activities. And the language! It all added up to a new and irresistible experience I could not let go. I had found my place, and even the threatening prospect of Wisconsin winters couldn’t stop me from giving up my job in New York and finding one in Madison.

As for new words, “bubbler” [*DARE* Ed: among Wisconsinites, a drinking fountain] was one I’d always loved without even knowing how it was commonly used. So, of course, I produced it on my first visit home to Baltimore. The family was not amused. I was accused of shameless desecration of “proper English.” One reason I love colorful speech is the freedom it represents—freedom from propriety, from nicety and correctness in all aspects of life.

**Q:** How did you first become interested in the *DARE* project?

**A:** While working at the polls during the presidential election of 1988, I first heard of *DARE* from a volunteer, Joy Parfitt. “It sounds like fun,” I told Joy, and since then I’ve often thought how apt it is—to find *DARE* through Joy and vice versa.

**Q:** What kinds of things do you do for *DARE*?

**A:** My favorite job at *DARE* is filing quote slips, which gives me a chance to see many interesting words and phrases that surprise and often delight me. I find myself saying, “Yes, that’s a good one,” or “I always heard *that* said slightly differently.” Sometimes a quote reminds me of another usage I can suggest, and once or twice my contribution has found its way into the *Dictionary*. Some quotes have come from my reading in books and magazines and some from friends and relatives. It’s not



unusual to be asked, when a word or phrase of dialect comes up in conversation, “Is that in *DARE*, or should it be?”

**Q:** I understand that *DARE* is not your only volunteer commitment. What are the other organizations for which you give of your time?

**A:** Besides *DARE*, I have two main volunteer commitments: PLATO and the annual West Side Community Center Book Sale. PLATO (Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization) is a UW–Madison Continuing Education program for seniors, with about twenty-five discussion groups which meet for ten-week sessions each spring and fall. I am one of four coordinators of Novels Old and New, one of the oldest PLATO groups, which I joined about fourteen years ago. I contribute to the discussions through my research into the period of the novel (often Victorian) and odd discoveries in the lives of the authors.

In other PLATO groups, such as Contemporary Issues, Travel, and Films, I participate without an assigned role, but often I find appropriate material to add to the discussion from my reading of biographies and related articles. Of course, participation, the “P” in PLATO, includes learning (the “L”), which makes these sessions so dear to my heart.

The book sale every June takes many hours of sorting beforehand, so my time at *DARE* in late May and June is very limited. Otherwise, I try to keep up with the filing and what’s going on with everyone at my favorite volunteer job. My only regret is that I wasn’t involved sooner! ♦



### ***DARE* on Capitol Hill**

*Dare* has been selected by the Association of American Universities as one of only five NEH-funded projects to be featured at a Capitol Hill reception. The March 15th event is part of Humanities Advocacy Day, during which the contributions of the National Endowment for the Humanities will be highlighted for legislators and the public. Presenting an exhibit along with *DARE* will be Georgetown University’s Eleanor Roosevelt and Human Rights Project, the University of Iowa’s Project on the Rhetoric of Inquiry, Tulane University’s Louisiana Purchase Project and Oral History Projects, and UCLA’s Digital Library Initiative, which displays and transliterates ancient cuneiform tablets. ♦



*Jason Sweet, former DARE staffer*

### **Where Are They Now?**

*We enjoy keeping up with former DARE staffers, and when we hear from one, we use the Newsletter to keep the DARE community in touch.*

**J**ason Sweet came to *DARE* in the spring of 2000 with a kit bag of linguistics skills already in hand. Entering the Applied English Linguistics program, he had just spent two and a half years teaching English in Korea. As a result, his facility with phonetics and his careful listening skills were well honed. Those proved extremely useful as he assisted Editors by listening to audiotapes of *DARE* Informants from every corner of this country. With some tapes recorded under less than ideal conditions (crying babies, roosters, trucks, etc., in the background), trying to decipher unfamiliar words and transcribe phonetic details could be a huge challenge. He played segments over and over until the words became clear.

Recently Jason reminisced about the tape from Tangier Island, Virginia (a notoriously difficult dialect for outsiders to understand), in which a fisherman told of learning to eat “sugar toads.” He knew that a few locals found this fish (also known as a blowfish or the northern puffer) to be a delicacy, but he swore that he would never try it. And then, during a storm, the fisherman took refuge in a harbor where he was befriended by a kind stranger who happened to be cooking the “toads” for supper. Not wanting to offend, he politely ate one, and another, and another! “I think I ate about seven,” the man said.

In addition to the tape-listening, quote-taking, and proofreading tasks he performed, Jason also

## **DARE Newsletter**

*Postal Return Address:*

Dictionary of American Regional English  
University of Wisconsin–Madison  
6125 Helen C. White Hall  
600 N. Park St., Madison WI 53706  
(608) 263-3810  
<http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/dare/dare.html>

Nonprofit Org. U.S. Postage PAID Permit No. 658 Madison, WI
---

---

served as assistant to the Chief Editor and then as the Project Assistant in charge of verifying all the quotations used in the *Dictionary*. The PA job sent him from library to library across campus; he searched sources from the most common to the extremely obscure to ensure that *DARE's* quotations were exact in every detail. Of that experience, he remembers feeling aware of the importance of the task, since readers for decades to come would rely on the accuracy of the information he provided.

Jason's aptitude for careful and precise work doubtless contributed to his success in landing a job as Marketing Editor for Ayres Associates, working both in Madison and in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He hasn't closed the door on academia, however, as he works toward certification in teaching high-school English. For those with good language skills, opportunities abound! ♦



## **DARE Staff Members**

### **EDITORIAL STAFF**

Roland L. Berns, Science Editor  
Audrey R. Duckert, Adjunct Editor  
George H. Goebel, Review Editor  
Joan H. Hall, Chief Editor  
Sheila Y. Kolstad, Senior Science Editor  
Luanne von Schneidmesser, Senior Editor, Production  
Leonard Zwilling, General Editor, Bibliographer

### **PRODUCTION STAFF**

Catherine R. Attig, Production Asst., Technical Typist  
Elizabeth Blake, Proofreader  
Elizabeth R. Gardner, Senior Proofreader, *Newsletter*  
Copy Editor

### **OFFICE MANAGER**

Karen J. Krause

### **DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT**

David H. Simon

### **RESEARCH ASSISTANT**

Erin Meyer-Blasing