

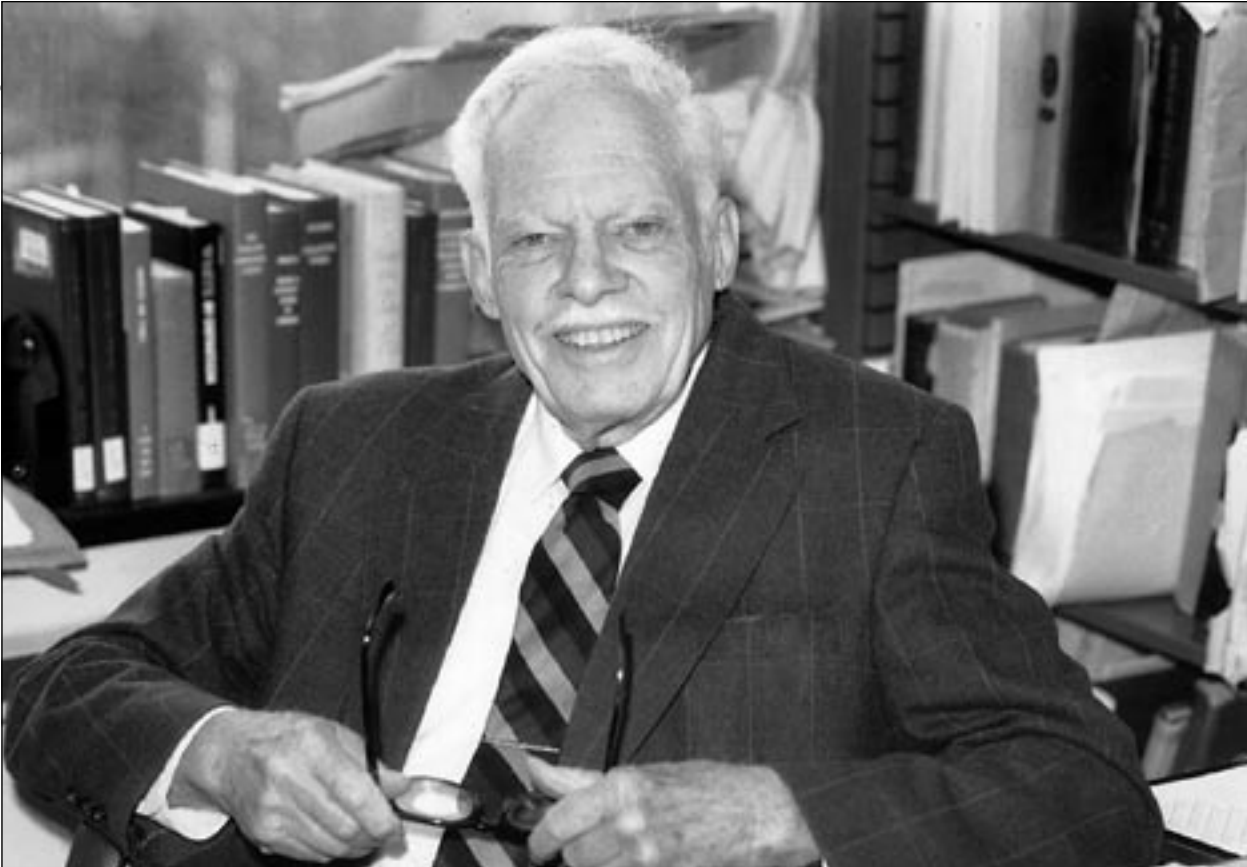
DARE *Newsletter*

Vol. 7, No. 4

Dictionary of American Regional English

Fall 2004

Photo by George E. Hall



Frederic G. Cassidy in 1992

A Last Lecture

Frederic G. Cassidy

*To celebrate the seventy-fifth year of its publication, the journal *American Speech* devoted the issues for Fall and Winter 2000 to short essays written by prominent members of the American Dialect Society. Contributors were asked to write brief descriptions of their dialect research or, if they preferred, to anticipate what they would say if they knew they would be giving*

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Funding Update

David Simon, Director of Development

I always smile when I read "A Last Lecture" by Fred Cassidy, which is reprinted on the next page. The article immediately reminds me of the personality of the man I had the honor of working with at the *Dictionary of American Regional English*. He was incredibly intelligent, funny, determined, and—of particular interest to me—curious about everything.

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their last lecture. Fred Cassidy chose the latter; as many of you know, it was indeed his last lecture. Because Fall 2004 marks the sixty-fifth anniversary of Fred's coming to the University of Wisconsin–Madison campus, it seemed fitting to reprint his "lecture" here and to provide a sketch of his long and distinguished career.

In a "last lecture," if I were asked to give one, I would want to have more than the permitted one thousand words. Not because of my normal loquacity or prolixity or redundancy or pleonasm, and certainly not tautology or verbosity—I wouldn't think of it! But because brevity is not only the soul of wit: it is often a betrayer of further thought. Having heard a witty saying or statement one reacts as if a light had gone on and thinks no further. One is caught by the dress (or these days, the undress) and neglects the thing dressed. Wit should call attention: the light should go on, but it should also illuminate. If the flash is all, it is wasted.

I have always been arrested by the motto of IBM (International Business Machines), the single word *THINK*. Brief, to the point, impossible to reject or to deny. But one needs to go beyond it. One needs to insist on continuing. The trouble is that "think twice" is also the advice of the cautious or hesitant. IBM could not risk that! And yet if one does not think twice, one risks missing the whole point.

So what does this have to do with language or with linguistics? In that "last lecture" I would urge my students to think carefully and at least twice about that enormously complex structure that requires the best learning years of the human creature to master even in its basic form. Language is not merely, as in the etymology, the use of the tongue; it is use of the tongue and associated organs of breathing and swallowing to produce all kinds of sounds—buccal, nasal, and pulmonary. Those distinctive sounds, their sequence, combination, and patterned presentation, may be harsh or musical, according to the hearer. And the nub or kernel of meaning associated with each word conveys a particular message of the speaker. But I would ask my students to go beyond the message and ask about the medium as well. How did this individual word come to be as it is? What other people used it before passing it on to us? How did these components of sound, structure, and sequence develop so that the word that I use is the one that you understand? Will our children and grandchildren know it in the same way? The *Oxford English Dictionary* in its 20 bound volumes

and its ever-expanding electronic edition is testimony to the fact that our language has changed to an almost incredible extent through its history and will surely continue to do so.

Having waxed eloquent about the nature of this most human of capabilities, having shared my love of its various forms, from Old to Middle to Modern versions, in its distinctive dress from one English-speaking country to another, and its delightfully varied garb in our own American English, I would come back to the beauty of brevity. And my *ultima verba* would be succinctly:

1. Respect the best of your language and others' languages.
2. Learn language deeply, past as well as current forms.
3. Enjoy the multiple senses and levels which words can express.
4. Use your language wisely and with attention.
5. Remember that good language is the proper raiment of good thought. ♦

Originally published in American Speech 75.3 (2000): 229–30. Reprinted by permission of Duke University Press.

Most readers of the DARE Newsletter probably know Fred Cassidy best as the founder and longtime Chief Editor of the Dictionary of American Regional English. He had already had a full and varied career, however, when he began the monumental DARE project in 1963. He came to the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1939, having finished a Ph.D. in English at the University of Michigan, where he had also worked on the Early Modern English Dictionary.

Starting as an Instructor at the UW, he moved steadily through the ranks of Assistant, Associate, and Full Professor. He taught Old English, Beowulf, Middle English, Chaucer, History of the English Language, Introduction to English Literature, Phonetics, Linguistic Geography, and Composition. Along the way, he did fieldwork for the Linguistic Atlas of the Great Lakes project, spent a summer in Ann Arbor working on the Middle English Dictionary, edited (with A.H. Marckwardt) the Scribner Handbook of English, revised Stuart Robertson's Development of Modern English, wrote The Place Names of Dane County, and revised (with Richard N. Ringler) Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader. He also used two

Fulbright Fellowships plus summer vacations to go back to Jamaica and study the Creole language of his native land. This work resulted in two highly acclaimed books, *Jamaica Talk* (1961) and the *Dictionary of Jamaican English* (with Robert B. LePage, 1967 and 1980).

With his former student Audrey R. Duckert, he devised the questionnaire for the Wisconsin English Language Survey, a pilot study that would pave the way for DARE. With the publication of the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, Volume I (A–C) in 1985, the project caught the imagination of scholars and lay readers alike and Fred became something of a celebrity. He often remarked that he was uncomfortable with all the publicity because, when he was growing up in Jamaica, the only people whose names appeared in the newspaper were those accused of crimes. But he soon got used to the visibility, and by the time he was asked to appear on the *Tonight Show*, he seemed to enjoy the limelight. He was a charismatic promoter of DARE, one whose enthusiasm, charm, and optimism kept the project afloat through its growing pains and multiple financial crises. Those of us on the staff today are honored to have been associated with him and pleased to continue the work he began.

The Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English

Readers of this *Newsletter* will be glad to learn of a new dictionary of regionalisms that is scholarly, engaging, and, we suspect, pleasingly reminiscent of DARE. The *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English* was recently published (Spring 2004) by the University of Tennessee Press. Based on a massive collection of fieldwork in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee by researcher Joseph S. Hall and painstakingly edited by linguist Michael B. Montgomery, the *DSME* provides a vivid picture of life in the Smokies from 1784 (the date of the earliest travel journal from which citations were taken) through 2002 (the date of published materials as well as personal interviews with native residents of the region).

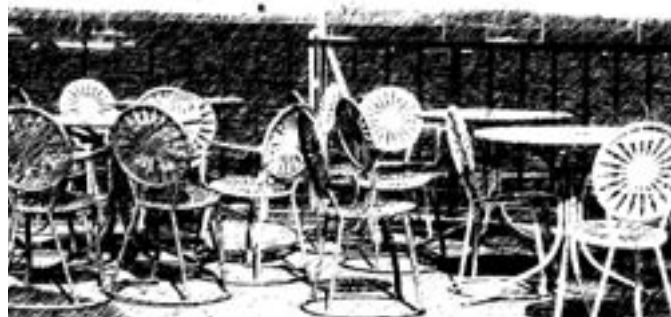
The similarities between the *DSME* and *DARE* are no surprise. Both dictionaries provide historical treatments of each word, with citations ranging from the earliest known example through a contemporary quotation (or the latest known example for words that have gone out of use); both are based on extensive fieldwork as well as written citations (Hall did the bulk of his research between 1937 and 1941, but returned to the Smokies fre-

quently in the following decades and kept in close touch with many of his mountain friends); both make use of extensive collections of tape recordings of native speakers (Montgomery had access to oral history interviews made by the National Park Service as well as the recordings made by Hall); and the Editors of *DARE* and the *DSME* collaborated freely, sharing materials and methods in a process that was beneficial to both.

In a *New York Times Book Review* essay (November 21, 2004), Roy Blount, Jr. took pains to contrast the *DSME* to stereotypical “Cracker Barrel” books about Southern speech. This is not, he assured his readers, “one of those kitschy things.” Instead, “It’s a gust of pungence, a loamy clump of roots, a big mess of pottage. As opposed to potted message.” In a concurring opinion, Professor Bethany Dumas of the Department of English at the University of Tennessee remarked to her colleagues on the American Dialect Society’s online discussion list, “It is [not only] interesting—it is also at least magnificent! I have given away several copies—this is a dictionary to sit and read.”

A useful and instructive addition to the lexical body of the *DSME* is an introductory essay on the “Grammar and Syntax of Smoky Mountain English.” Montgomery provides explanations of many of the grammatical constructions and syntactic patterns that appear in the quotations. He leads the reader through such elements as regional uses of nouns and pronouns, historically older verb past tenses (such as *clim*, *driv*, *foch*, *stob*), modal auxiliary verbs (*might could*, *used to would*), locative adverbs (*thataway*, *thisaway*, *yon/yan*), and existential clauses (“They got back there and it come a big snowstorm”).

Written with great care and with respect for the people whose language is described and illustrated, the *DSME* is a welcome addition to existing resources on the language and culture of the southern Appalachians. ♦



Notes and Quotes

Here are some excerpts from recent letters to (and articles about) DARE. We enjoy hearing from our readers! Feel free to contact us via "snail mail" or through our Web site at the addresses listed on the mailing page of this Newsletter.

"[The volumes of *DARE* are] better reading than any novel. I'm hoping for a rainy weekend soon to curl up and go through many of their delightful and varied derivations of common words and expressions that have long been part of my life and times. The joy of seeing where and how they all began makes them all that more colorful—and endlessly entertaining. Please let me add my praise to that offered by those who recognize the extraordinary contribution these books make to our culture."

U.S. Representative Louise M. Slaughter
28th District, New York

"I want you to know I spent all morning at the library checking this [=a list of folk medical terms] out. It's not that it took me that long to find the words [in *DARE*], it's just that I couldn't put the volumes down. The peanut-eating syndrome strikes again!"

Douglas W. Downey
Northbrook, Illinois

"The reason for this note was a question I had regarding your delightful anecdote about the Choctaw derivative 'bobbasheely.' I have a great, great, great (whatever) grandfather named (Major) James Neelly who was U.S. Indian Agent to either the Choctaws or the Chickasaws. And I was wondering what was the name of the Indian Agent to the Choctaws mentioned in your piece? (Major Neelly was accompanying Meriwether Lewis northeastward when Lewis committed suicide at Grinder's Inn in Tennessee.) Neelly had been appointed by Jefferson. I am also interested in your agent's history because I also graduated from Dartmouth which in the 18th century was, of course, founded as a school for Native Americans." [DARE Ed: That's a fascinating coincidence; we're trying to discover whether the Indian Agents were one and the same.]

Truman Metzel
Evanston, Illinois

Funding Update

Continued from page 1

My conversations with Fred almost always took a few detours on the way to their conclusion. For example, he would sometimes come to my office to suggest a development idea for the *Dictionary*. He often entered my office in mid-sentence. It was as though the words had begun tumbling out of him as he walked down the hall to see me. Fred's suggestion of the name of a prospective *DARE* donor might lead to a description of the person; that could lead to his describing the individual's love of gardening, which would bring us to a discussion of the etymology of certain plant names and then to a discussion of the vegetation of Jamaica. All the time, Fred would ask me questions: Did I like to garden? What did my family call a particular plant? Had I visited Jamaica recently? I never quite knew where the conversation would end up, but it was always a fascinating experience.

After Fred passed away in June 2000, we set up the Frederic G. Cassidy *DARE* Fund to honor his memory and to support the work of the *Dictionary of American Regional English*. Many of you have made gifts to the Fund, and that has been extremely helpful to *DARE*.

An added bonus of the Frederic G. Cassidy *DARE* Fund is that it has brought many of Fred's former students, colleagues, and friends to my attention. I have had the luxury of hearing about Fred from their perspectives, which has been fascinating. I have spoken to people who were Fred's students more than fifty years ago. I have learned what it felt like to sit in Fred's *Beowulf*, *Old English*, and *History of the English Language* classes from former students who still remember his lectures and personality well.

As 2004 comes to an end, I am proud that the development work at *DARE* is making good progress. However, there is still considerable work to be done. I hope that you will consider a gift to the Frederic G. Cassidy *DARE* Fund at this time. It would be a meaningful and important way for you to honor the life and career of a very special person.

All gifts to *DARE* are tax-deductible and will be matched on a one-to-one basis by the National Endowment for the Humanities. You can make a gift by filling out the form on the last page of this *Newsletter*. Please give me a call at (608) 263-5607 if you would like to discuss the easiest way to make a gift of stock or a deferred gift. Or you can send me an e-mail at <david.simon@uwfoundation.wisc.edu>. Thank you in advance for your thoughtfulness.

On to Z! ♦



Rebecca Roeder, former Project Assistant

Where Are They Now?

We love to hear from former staff members, and often marvel at the way their jobs and travels seem to scatter them across the country and the globe. This fall, however, we had the pleasure of reconnecting with someone whose latest career move brought her back to the sixth floor of Helen C. White Hall, just down the corridor from the DARE offices!

Former Project Assistant **Rebecca Roeder** left DARE in 1999 to begin a doctoral program in the Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian, and African Languages at Michigan State University. She returned to UW–Madison as a Visiting Lecturer in August 2004, teaching two courses: English Phonology and Language Variation in the United States. Next semester Becky will be back in Michigan to complete her dissertation, which deals with the degree to which speakers of Chicano English in one community in Lansing are participating in the Northern Cities Chain Shift (an urban vowel shift affecting most speakers of mainstream dialects in northern U.S. cities).

Reminiscing about her time at DARE, Becky reflects, “The people were wonderful; I really enjoyed working with my colleagues and am thankful to be able to keep in touch.” She remembers her work verifying quotations for the *Dictionary* with fondness, reporting that she “especially enjoyed looking things up in books that hadn’t been opened in years,” such as WPA transcriptions of interviews with former slaves and issues of the *Congressional Record* dating from the early 1900s. ♦

More Notes and Quotes

“I sent the discussion [of the term *splō house*, which had taken place on the online Public Sector Folklore List] to Joan Hall who heads the *Dictionary of American Regional English* at the University of Wisconsin. The first four volumes are out, A–Sk, and the fifth one is progressing. It’s a superbly researched project and I find myself using it over and over again. As you’ll see below, there will be a ‘splō’ entry in Volume V.” [DARE Ed: The word *splō* will be defined as “Liquor, esp when illegally made and of poor quality; hence n *splō house* an establishment where liquor is sold.” We have labeled it “Sth, S Midl, esp KY, TN.” The name is said to derive from the “ ‘splosion” the liquor causes in one’s innards.]

James P. Leary, Dept. of Scandinavian Studies
University of Wisconsin–Madison

“[A woman in the audience for a talk about the uses of DARE in storytelling and folklore] said she was going to order all four volumes. She said she doesn’t spend much money on travel and other luxuries, but she loves books and DARE is one of the most fascinating she’s seen.”

August Rubrecht, DARE Fieldworker, Storyteller,
and Professor of English
University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire

“I was one of the early readers for Frederic G. Cassidy. He called me in 1963 at West Chester, Pa. High School and later sent me the writings of F.P. Adams to examine for DARE. DARE is superb, royalty among dictionaries; so I send my . . . contribution so you may complete Vol. 5.”

Kenneth Gambone
Oyster Bay, New York

“The fecund tree of English is always sprouting new leaves and casting off the dead ones. In Madison, Wis., the editors of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (DARE) are winding up their lexicographic triumph. They have published four enchanting volumes of words and phrases drawn from our myriad vocabularies. . . . Let word lovers be on the watch. DARE’s final Volume 5 will appear [in a few years].”

James J. Kilpatrick, Syndicated Columnist
“The Writer’s Art,” May 2004

Coming in Volume V

<i>stob</i>	A stake, post, or peg. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>stretch the blanket</i>	To exaggerate, lie. (Esp S Midl)
<i>striffen</i>	Any of various animal membranes, especially the peritoneum. (Sth, S Midl)
<i>strow</i>	To strew. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>strubbly, stroobly</i>	Of the hair: unkempt, disheveled. (PaGer area)
<i>stub camp</i>	A temporary camp. (Chiefly West)
<i>stump</i>	To dare, challenge. (Chiefly NEast)
<i>stumpknocker</i>	An itinerant or inept preacher. (S Atl)
<i>stump lot</i>	A field abounding in stumps. (Chiefly CT, MA, Upstate NY)
<i>suckhole</i>	A whirlpool in a river. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>sugan</i>	A blanket, quilt, or comforter. (Chiefly SW, Rocky Mts)
<i>sugar bush</i>	A stand of sugar-maple trees. (Chiefly Gt Lakes, Upstate NY, NEng)
<i>sugar lot</i>	= <i>sugar bush</i> . (esp VT)
<i>sugar orchard</i>	= <i>sugar bush</i> . (chiefly nNEng, Appalachians)
<i>sull</i>	To balk; to be sullen or surly. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>tank</i>	A natural or artificial pond. (SW)
<i>tank-stove</i>	A stove made from a used oil drum. (AK)
<i>tasso</i>	Highly spiced dried meat or fish. (Chiefly LA)
<i>tear the bone out</i>	To make an extraordinary effort. (Esp AR)
<i>tear up</i>	Of a machine: to break down. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>tee-niny</i>	Very tiny. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>teenty</i>	Very tiny. (Chiefly Nth, esp NEast; old-fash)



Erin Meyer-Blasing, Project Assistant

Staff Member Profile

In this continuing series, Beth Gardner interviews Project Assistant Erin Meyer-Blasing, who verifies the quotations cited in DARE by checking them against the original sources. Erin is pursuing a Ph.D. in the UW–Madison School of Library and Information Studies.

Q: What are your primary responsibilities at DARE?

A: Primarily, I verify the accuracy of the quotations selected by Editors; these quotations are chosen to illustrate the senses of the word being defined and to show the changing senses of the word over time. I locate the quote in the original printed source and check that the quote and the citation information for the source are correct. It is not uncommon to find mistakes in either the quote or the citation information culled from a secondary source, such as another dictionary. DARE staff members place a high priority on accuracy and have found that going to the original book or article is the only way to ensure that the evidence we are using to create the *Dictionary* is complete and accurate.

In addition to verifying the accuracy of information relating to quotes, I also look for evidence that will help establish the regional usage of the word or phrase in question. Sometimes this involves skimming parts of the work to discover the setting or a character's background; other times, I use various reference works and online resources to find biographical information on the author of the work. The same type of research may be done to

establish the usage of the word by various socio-economic groups.

Q: What is the most enjoyable aspect of your work at *DARE*?

A: It's hard to choose just one! Working with such a wonderful staff is certainly high on my list. I truly enjoy the discussions and debates we have relating to our work and learn so much from this well-read and well-traveled group. I also enjoy the time spent in various campus libraries. While I do have to use interlibrary loan or the public library for some sources, I find many of the works I need in the over forty libraries and special collections here at UW–Madison. Finally, I enjoy spending time with the sources themselves, since they cover such a range of time periods and subjects. I've dipped into exciting first-person accounts of eighteenth-century explorations, vibrant twentieth-century fiction, and esoteric academic journals and learned something from each excursion into these works. And, of course, I find books to take home and read for my own pleasure, ones I might never have discovered otherwise.

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

A: The most challenging part of my work might well be teasing out the correct publication history for some of the older or very popular works. To establish the earliest usage of a word or sense, we sometimes go back to sources created at the very beginnings of this country, long before ISBN numbers or a standardized title-page format. Works by popular authors often had numerous editions issuing from multiple publishing houses, sometimes simultaneously. Throw in a few plagiarized texts, some references to nonexistent previous editions, and the use of pseudonyms, and things can become very confusing!

Q: What sort of position do you plan to seek after finishing your doctorate?

A: I hope to become a faculty member at a graduate library school where I can spend equal time on teaching and research. My core research interests are library services to youth and access issues for underserved populations. To date, I've done research and taught workshops on library services for Latinos, African-Americans, gay and lesbian teens, and jail inmates.

I feel it is important for library faculty to keep in touch with the world of library practitioners and library users, so, as a faculty member, I plan to work a few hours a month in a library, preferably at the reference desk. I really enjoy reference work and miss the one-on-one contact with patrons I had

when working as the librarian of the Woodman Astronomical Library here on campus.

Q: What is the most unusual or surprising thing you've come across in checking quotations for the *Dictionary*?

A: I think I have been continually surprised by the similarities between the human concerns—from personal to political—of people throughout the history and geography of our country. Not only are the issues similar, but they are sometimes expressed in very familiar language. Although the tirade of a Massachusetts colonist against the wanton misuse of natural resources, the outraged reporting of the forced removal of Indian nations to reservations, and the satirical sketch of a politician lining his pockets may have been written decades or even centuries ago, they not only echo the issues we face today, but employ some of the same rhetoric found in present-day books and newspapers.

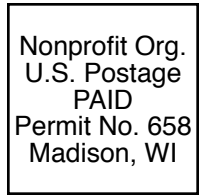
Q: When you have a rare moment of spare time away from your studies and your work, what are your interests?

A: While I've put international travel on hold during graduate school, I still try to learn about other cultures through my African dance class, playing with a Brazilian percussion group, and Latin dancing with friends. I also enjoy gardening, cooking, bicycling, and sewing. Pleasure reading takes a back burner during the semester, but I always plow through a stack of children's literature and other fiction each summer to make up for lost time. ♦



DARE Audiotapes to Be Digitized

Last year *DARE* worked in partnership with the Max Kade Institute for German American Studies, the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures, and the University of Wisconsin Libraries to submit a proposal to the Institute of Museum and Library Services to preserve our collections of audiotapes. The proposal was funded, so all four organizations will be able to digitize their tapes, provide interpretive materials, and make the collections available on the Internet. For *DARE*, this means that selected segments from regions across the country will be posted on both the *DARE* Web site and that of the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures. Stay tuned—we will let you know when they are up and running. ♦



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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>

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 My/Our contribution of \$_____ is enclosed.
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Expiration date: _____
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DARE Fund, c/o University of Wisconsin
Foundation, 1848 University Avenue, P.O. Box
8860, Madison, WI 53708, Attn: David Simon.

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