

DARE Newsletter

Vol. 3, No. 4

Dictionary of American Regional English

Fall 2000



Fieldworkers Reino Maki and Ben Crane with Fred Cassidy in front of a Word Wagon (c1965)

Life in a *DARE* Word Wagon

August Rubrecht

Several Fieldworkers have referred in earlier issues of the Newsletter to their home-on-wheels, the Word Wagon. In this issue, August Rubrecht gives us an intimate picture of what it was like to live in one. The photographs (and the captions) are ones he sent back to the home office at the time.

I have been told that people nowadays tend to mythologize the Word Wagon era of *DARE* fieldwork. The chance to become a legend in my own

Funding Update

David Simon, Director of Development

I want to make sure that the *Dictionary* reaches the letter Z."

"What can I do to make sure that Volume IV is done soon?"

These are two comments that I often hear from people wanting to know how they can help the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

Life in a DARE Word Wagon *Continued from page 1*
time tempts me to cultivate this tendency, but I will resist temptation out of a higher loyalty to historical accuracy.

The Word Wagon

The Word Wagon was a Dodge van outfitted as a motor home. A realtor might call it a “starter” mobile home and describe it as “cozy.” Just behind the engine compartment, flanked by the front seats, there was a countertop with a small sink where water could be pumped from a reservoir underneath. This was on the left; on the right was an ice-box. Along the left side behind the kitchen area was a piece of furniture that could be either folded up into a table and two padded seats like a little restaurant booth or folded down into a bed. In the right rear corner was a tiny closet. The van carried kitchen- and dinnerware, bedding, a Coleman stove, a Coleman catalytic heater, and a battery lamp.

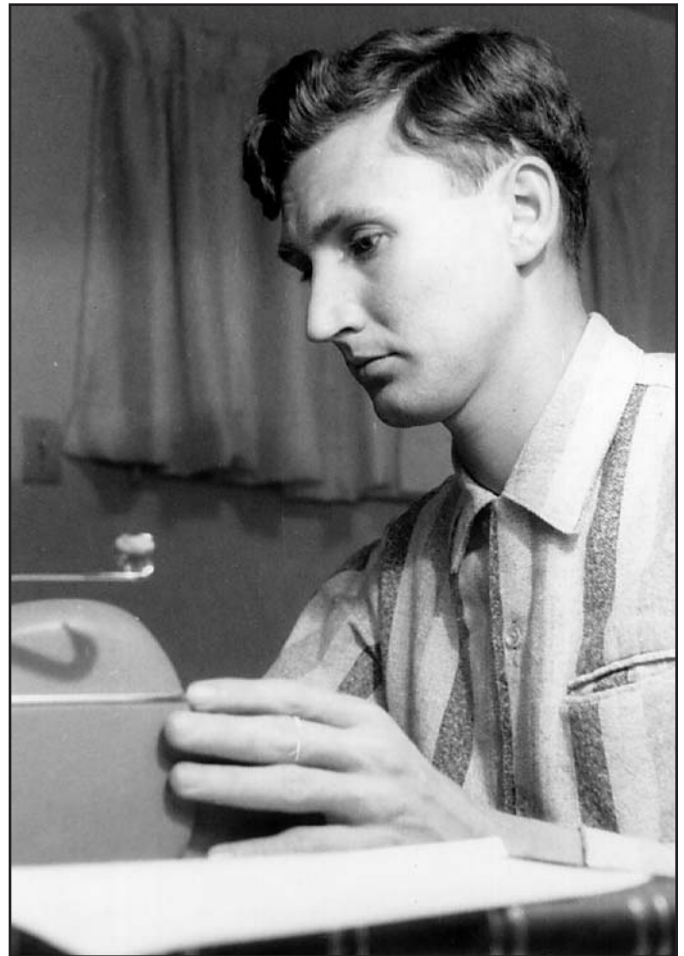
Along with this equipment for living, we carried what we needed for fieldwork: a reel-to-reel tape recorder, a box of tapes, a box of questionnaires (QRs), and other office supplies. In the space remaining we fitted in our personal belongings; mine included clothes, toiletries, fishing and hunting equipment, a few books, and a portable typewriter. Soon I acquired a camera. Things were pretty cramped, especially since the van was not tall enough to stand up in. I made matters worse with my incorrigible untidiness. Whenever possible I left the bed folded down and used the van just for sleeping and storage; I did my cooking, eating, and writing at a picnic table.

How Things Were Supposed to Go

“What,” people sometimes ask, “was a typical day of fieldwork like?” There was no such thing as a typical day, because different stages of fieldwork required different kinds of effort and activity. The number of hours or days required for each stage would vary widely—even wildly—from community to community. We did have a general plan, though. Many readers of the *DARE Newsletter* know it already, but for the record it went like this:

1. On entering a new community, find a place to camp. Depending on when I arrived, I might do this second, but when possible I did it first, to provide an “address” to give to authorities.

2. Check in with the authorities—county sheriff, police chief, mayor: show credentials, make a good first impression, explain the project, and begin developing leads.
3. Develop leads to potential informants (Infs). The authorities usually referred me to schoolteachers and librarians. We seldom chose these people as informants because we sought citizens whose knowledge was just as thorough but more folksy. Schoolteachers and librarians were very good sources for leads, though, because they usually understood the idea behind the project, sympathized with its aims, and knew a lot of local residents to recommend.
4. Select an informant; repeat as necessary. As recommended by Professor Cassidy, I would try to get one informant who could do the whole QR, but because prospective informants had varying amounts of free time, knowledge, energy, and interest, I often wound up with two or three, sometimes more.



“The fieldworker bleakly contemplates the task of typing up biog. data sheets.”

5. Go through the QR, scheduling segments at times convenient to the informant(s).

6. Make a tape recording of each Inf.

Throughout all the stages we tried to learn about the community, for context. I remained alert to the topography, the layout of streets and roads, the crops, and the architecture of houses, barns, churches, stores, and factories. I visited libraries, museums, and historical societies. I read the local papers, auction bills, graffiti, and epitaphs. I eavesdropped on others' conversations shamelessly and started ones of my own on slender pretexts. It was important to do an appreciable amount of this kind of observation before selecting informants, to be able to judge who was typical of the community. Incidentally, the process of gleaning background knowledge also provided good opportunities to find new words for *DARE*. I kept my pad of 3x5 paper slips handy at all times and wrote down any language items that seemed significant. It was less efficient than going through the QR, but just about as much fun.

Expenses

We had University of Wisconsin vehicle fleet credit cards to pay for gas, oil, tires, service, and repairs on the Word Wagon. (These cards could not be used for any other expenses.) We also had an expense account for parking and camping fees, phone calls, office supplies, postage and shipping costs, white gas for the Coleman stove and catalytic heater, ice for the icebox, and batteries for the lamp. And once a week we could rent a hotel or motel room. We paid for these things out of pocket and filed an expense report once a month. A reimbursement check was sent General Delivery to the post office where we told the *DARE* office we expected to be.

We paid for other expenses—food, entertainment, laundry, traffic fines—out of our own pocket. I had my monthly check sent to my mother's address, and she deposited a designated amount in my savings account and sent the remainder to me in the form of a certified check.

This elaborate system worked better than you might expect, but a few times the money got delayed enough to worry me. Twice it was so late that I wound up short of cash. The first time came

after I flew home to attend my grandmother's funeral in late October. In my journal I wrote:

[St. Francisville, LA, Nov. 16, 1967] *My check is late and I am broke except for 84¢ and two cans of beans. Called Mom last night—collect, of course—and learned she hadn't sent it yet because she didn't know how much I wanted. I had told her when I was up there but she had forgotten, what with the worry and tension of the funeral. But the [St. Francisville informants] have been inviting me to supper and I have been making out by catching a few fish now and then. I wouldn't be down this low except for the plane tickets, but even if I were worse off than now I wouldn't grudge the trip a bit. I have some meal and oil and some dried mashed potatoes besides the beans, and some jelly and peanut butter, so actually I could withstand a siege if it was a brief one that didn't keep me from catching fish. Tea and coffee are gone; so is the beer, but I do have one drink of Dubonnet left. That stuff has been my consolation for a month now, and one of these nights I will be in the mood to savor it one last time.*



"A morning's catch from the Delaware River near Roxbury, New York. The two long skinny ones are pickereel and the other four are smallmouth bass."

Food

I ate well, at least by the standards of bachelor graduate students.

Once the fuel tank is pressurized with its built-in pump, a Coleman stove works just like a two-burner gas range-top. I enjoyed cooking on it. Because I had never learned how to bake bread or pastries, the lack of an oven was no hardship, except in two cases. Over Christmas break I took time off at the suggestion of Jim Hartman, the fieldwork

Notes and Quotes

We always enjoy hearing from our readers, and we hope that others of you will also take the opportunity to be in touch.

"DARE has been a great asset to me as I work away at trying to get a poetry of the vernacular into my books. . . . I'm reminded . . . of another piquant westernism made of a perfectly ordinary word: *top* as in *to top a horse*—ride an unbroken bronc and partially tame him. What a magical language we have to try and top, and thank you for taking note of my small efforts with it."

Ivan Doig
Novelist, essayist

"The check [for DARE] is in honor of Robert K. Sedgwick, a 1939 engineering graduate of UW–Madison, on the occasion of his 82nd birthday. He is still active in the engineering field, doing consulting work. Robert has always had a keen interest in the English language and passed that interest on to his children. As the daughter-in-law, you can imagine my concern when I had my first dinner at the Sedgwick home, and Dad Sedgwick had Webster's unabridged dictionary on a stand right next to the dinner table! . . . Steve and I look forward to the completion of your project and hope the volumes will be in the collection of many public and school libraries."

Alice and Steve Sedgwick
Mequon, Wisconsin

"We have thoroughly enjoyed the first 3 volumes and eagerly await the rest. As a former court reporter I developed a fondness for words . . . [and] think this is just a tremendous contribution to our deeper understanding of our language. Don't stop now."

Barbara and John Augenstein
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

"Professor Cassidy, who thought that each next volume was what he wanted most to see, could never have realized any dream that his work would be complete. It will never be complete. It is a living document, which like any other dictionary, will expand and expand."

Edward J. Kennedy, Jr.
Lawrenceburg, Indiana

Continued on page 6

Life in a DARE Word Wagon *Continued from page 3*

coordinator. I camped in a public hunting area along the Sabine River in northwestern Louisiana, where I managed to shoot some ducks. I fried some, but I like duck much better roasted. Fortunately, not doing any fieldwork left me time to build a hickory fire, cut some green sticks to make a spit, and roast one duck over the coals. The game warden who came to check my license thought I was a little weird, but the duck was delicious. In the other case, I caught seven Spanish mackerels from a school that briefly swam into casting range off the beach at Grand Isle, Louisiana. They were good charcoal-broiled on a hibachi, but after two meals I lusted for variety. I



"Spanish mackerel caught by fieldworker in the line of duty. Grand Isle, La. April 1968"

soon learned that fried mackerel is way too oily. An oven would have given me additional options.

Ordinarily I achieved variety in what I cooked rather than how I cooked it. TV dinners were not an option because I had neither freezer nor oven. For quick, easy meals I depended on canned foods, dried mashed potatoes, and Minute® Rice. For fresh meats and vegetables I shopped nearly every day rather than stocking up. For one thing, my storage space was limited. More important, though, the more shopping trips I made, the more pretexts I could invent for starting conversations and the more eavesdropping I could do. I wrote out a lot of word slips in grocery stores.

I never went out of my way to hunt mushrooms or wild greens, but in October at a campsite on paper company land near Monticello, Arkansas, I got lucky. Volunteer tomato plants had grown up

in what I took to be a corral where saddle club members had fed salad scraps to their horses during the summer, and these plants had good-sized green tomatoes on them. So I picked enough to have fried green tomatoes for two or three meals—the first in a very long time because I had kept no garden for three years and supermarkets don't sell green tomatoes (not green enough to fry, anyway).

Grooming and Hygiene

Recreational campers can afford to get unkempt and grubby, but we FWs could not. We had to make a good impression on civic officials and on the citizens we approached to help with the project—hard to do unless we were clean and reasonably well groomed. I found laundry easy to take care of; once a week was plenty. Not so for shaving and bathing; unless I could rent a site in a campground with showers, I had to get creative.

My mother solved the shaving problem not long after I started work by sending me for my birthday a rechargeable electric shaver. I could plug it in overnight during my weekly motel stays and use it all week. This convenience was especially important because four years earlier I had lost patience with scraping my face with a sharp piece of metal every day and quit. I realized I had to resume the habit to do fieldwork effectively, since in those days a beard was seen as a sign of a rebellious attitude and a dissolute life-style. Trouble was, Word Wagon living made the razor even more detestable than when I had enjoyed the convenience of hot running water in a dormitory bathroom. Cold water made shaving downright painful, and heating water took extra trouble. So the electric shaver was a godsend.

If I saw the razor as a curse of civilization, the hot shower was one of its blessings. Often none was available; many public and some commercial campsites provided only a table and paths leading to a water pump and a privy. Sometimes I could find no camping facilities at all, and I would just pull off on some secluded logging road or clearing on public or paper company land. In such isolated spots I could heat water and take sponge baths when the weather was not too cold, but I didn't like to. Showers were far better, as this journal excerpt makes clear:

[Granville, NY, June 25, 1968] *I stayed in a state park on the Vermont side of the state line on Sunday*

Coming in Volume IV

To whet your appetite, here are a few more samples of what's to come.

<i>peanut heaven</i>	The upper balcony in a theater. (Chiefly OH, PA, C Atl)
<i>peep-eye</i>	The game of peekaboo. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>pique bois</i>	A woodpecker. (LA)
<i>pitch-in dinner</i>	A potluck dinner. (Chiefly IN, MT)
<i>popcorn flower</i>	A plant of the genus <i>Plagiobothrys</i> , also known as <i>foothills snowdrop</i> . (Esp CA)
<i>pop-pop</i>	A grandfather—also used as a quasi-personal name. (PA, NJ, DE, MD)
<i>rank</i>	To stack up (as firewood), esp in long rows. (Chiefly Inland Nth, Midl)
<i>red dog road</i>	A road paved with reddish, cinder-like material formed by combustion of shale and other waste from coal mines. (Chiefly wPA, WV, OH)
<i>rice bird</i>	A bobolink or a red-winged black-bird. (Chiefly Sth; the term refers to other birds in other regions)
<i>rooter</i>	A hog's snout; a person's pig-like nose. (Chiefly Sth, S Midl)
<i>rote</i>	The roar of breaking waves. (coastal NEng)
<i>saltchuck</i>	A body of salt water. (NW)
<i>salt shake</i>	A saltshaker. (Esp S Midl)
<i>Santa Ana</i>	A strong wind from the east that brings hot, dry air to coastal southern California. (Chiefly sCA)
<i>sap the bossies</i>	To milk the cows. (Chiefly Pacific)
<i>sassbox</i>	An impudent person. (Widespread exc NEng)
<i>saucebox</i>	= <i>sassbox</i> . (Chiefly Nth, esp NEast)
<i>side meat</i>	Meat from the side of a hog that's salted or smoked. (Chiefly Midl, Sth)
<i>side pork</i>	= <i>side meat</i> . (Chiefly Inland Nth, Upper MW)

"Thank Gawd you're doing this dictionary! I was shamed into changing my accent when I was a child, and now I notice that particular accent is dying out (Central Ohio). . . . I'm so excited to find your website, and am bookmarking it now."

Jeremy Farnham
E-mail correspondent

"As editor of a (much more modest) newsletter, I know how letters of appreciation are appreciated. I do enjoy yours (more than mine, actually!). I hope you don't run out of fieldworker reminiscences any time soon. As a firm believer in having funding support come from lots of people giving small amounts, and in putting my money where my mouth is, I enclose my check to support *DARE's* work."

Jane Pyle
Pittsboro, North Carolina

"As librarians, we use this outstanding resource . . . OFTEN. We look forward to each new volume to help us track down research questions."

Beatrice J. Temp
Houston, Texas

"Thank you . . . for your quick and knowledgeable response [about the spellings, etymology, and regionality of *criminy*]. Obviously, I need to buy your terrific reference book."

Tony Newton
E-mail correspondent

[In response to *DARE's* web site query about *peach-orchard beau* and *peach-orchard crazy*:] "I haven't heard these phrases, but often heard from my mother-in-law "crazy (or wild) as a peach orchard boar." She explained that it was from the fact that pigs foraged among the fermented fallen fruit in peach orchards and got drunk and disorderly. Thanks for the opportunity to comment. I love this sort of thing."

Matthew C. Lee
Pasadena, California

[*DARE* Ed: Thanks to you, too, Matthew; comments like yours help us understand some of our more puzzling entries.]

and Monday nights but finally found one in New York for the rest of the week. It has no particular advantage of distance, but the showers are hot and the price is less. Hot showers mean a lot to me. One of the few truly valuable contributions of civilization to the average man.

The family of my informant in Grayson, Louisiana, knowing my campsite had no shower, invited me to take baths at their place. At Grand Isle, Louisiana, someone looking to pick up a little cash had set up shower booths on the beach and charged bathers a quarter to use them. I found it ironic that the YMCA in Dover, Delaware, charged me ten times as much for a shower, considering the motto it displayed prominently on a sign out front: "To improve the quality of community life."

Memorable Campsites

Even though the best campsites provided hot showers, those are not the ones I remember best.

In February near LeCompte, Louisiana, I camped on a simple one-lane logging road. I made no journal entry about this site, but the memory of one night there remains vivid. I had worked late typing up expense account reports and biographical data sheets. Finally I folded the bed down and, before crawling in, stepped out behind the van to answer a call of nature. Since the weather was too cold for snakes, I did not bother to take a flashlight. Light from the sky was obscured by clouds and a canopy of bare branches, so that I could barely discern the light sandy road stretching back into the woods. After a few moments, however, I did perceive something a ways behind the van that was a good deal darker than the dark grass between the wheel tracks. It was impossible to make out its shape and hard to guess its size. Bigger than a skunk and smaller than an Angus cow, but. . . ? It was moving steadily toward me. Unable to stop what I was doing to jump back to the side of the Wagon and climb in, I had to stand there helpless as whatever it was came closer and closer. It did not hurry, but it did not hesitate, either; it headed purposefully toward me.

When it got close enough to attack, it whimpered in the unmistakable voice of a dog begging for attention. It was a black-and-tan coonhound lost in the woods. I gave him water and a few scraps of food. To keep him from getting lost again (without having to sleep with him in the van), I

tied him to the bumper overnight, then took him into town the next day and returned him to the owner, whose phone number was stamped on a brass tag on the collar. I hoped the resultant good will would help me develop some leads. That idea didn't pan out, but the guy *was* glad to get his dog back.

Another campsite where I had animal visitors was the one at Grayson, Louisiana, mentioned earlier. I made a journal entry about that one:

[Grayson, LA, Oct. 23] *Tonight I am camped just down the road from my informant's . . . house. This camping place was put together by private individuals, a couple of brothers-in-law, as I understand, and it is completely free, including firewood and a good well of water. Not much of this parish is posted (in marked contrast to East Carroll) and I intend to step out into the woods tomorrow morning about daylight and hunt an hour or two before driving down to [my informant's house].*

The woods are full of "woods hogs," which we call razorbacks at home. A couple of scrawny sows and their pigs were around here while ago begging scraps. I didn't



"The D.A.R.E. fieldworker must be prepared to lead a hectic, strenuous existence, with long hours and meager comforts. Goshen, N.Y."

have any yet, so I fed them some grapes. The two sows were marked with cleft ears, so they belonged to somebody. The pigs did too, of course, if they were following the sows.

A Few Bad Nights

Though I nearly always slept comfortably, the exceptions make better stories. The night of

December 10, in Ruston, Louisiana, a cold rain started just as I piled my laundry into the van, so I couldn't spread my goods out on a picnic table to give me room to make the bed; I just curled up in the clutter and slept in my clothes. When an ice storm hit Mansfield, Louisiana, in January, I simply gave up and took refuge in a motel. The next morning, just after starting an interview with a new Inf, I felt flu symptoms coming on. I hurriedly left and made arrangements to keep the room longer because, as I wrote in my journal on January 4, "A Word Wagon is no place to undergo misery in." I sweated the flu out in the motel room by turning up the thermostat, preparing canned soup and hot lemon toddies in the pot supplied for complimentary coffee, and crawling into bed under as many blankets as I could get. In a February cold spell in DeQuincy, Louisiana, I ran out of white gas for the catalytic heater and couldn't find more. However, I didn't suffer because the owner of the local laundromat invited me to sleep on a couch inside. I got to sleep in a comfortable place and he got protection from vandalism.

That one bout of flu was my only serious illness, but later I underwent some misery in the Word Wagon just on account of wind and rain:

[Dover, DE, May 29 (Wednesday, before daylight)] *It has been raining ever since midday Monday. The wind started blowing pretty fierce Sunday night and it got cold—stayed that way until sometime in the night, and the rain has been just a mist. But I woke up while ago feeling uncomfortable. The wind had slowed and the rain had turned to a downpour. Rain was leaking in between the two back doors. . . . Then I turned over and discovered why I was uncomfortable—rain had run in under the mattress, which has a plastic bottom that kept most of it from getting wet. But some had trickled down to where the two pads join and seeped upward, making a wet, cold spot in the middle of my back. I started the wagon to turn it around so the rain would leak in, if it must, in some other place. It went a ways, sputtered, and died. The distributor was damp. The motor wouldn't start again. Trying to make the best of a bad deal, I got some clothes on and got out and [toweled off some wet items]. After I got them dry, I tried the starter again and the motor caught. It runs a little rough, but it runs.*

Funding Update

Continued from page 1

The most useful action you can take to ensure that *DARE* is completed is to contribute financially. Your gift will make sure that the project begun by Professor Frederic G. Cassidy over thirty-five years ago is brought to a successful close.

By contributing to *DARE*, you become a part of its incredible journey—beginning as an idea in Fred’s mind, continuing through the fieldwork in every state and the editing and successive appearance of Volumes I–III (and soon, Volume IV), and concluding with the publication of the final volume of the world’s definitive resource for the study of American regional English.

That journey has involved hundreds of people: fieldworkers, informants, staff members, volunteers, donors, reviewers, and of course readers, among many others. Tens of thousands of hours of hard work have gone into the effort to complete *DARE*. Everyone agrees that *DARE* must reach the end of the alphabet. We are close to finishing a work that will never be duplicated, and you can help us do it.

I want to thank the many people and foundations who have made gifts to *DARE* in recent months. You have improved our financial situation considerably, especially considering that all private gifts to *DARE* are currently matched on a one-to-one basis by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The value of your contribution is therefore immediately doubled. These contributions help to pay the salaries of the dedicated staff now working to finish the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

I hope you will join our list of contributors. All gifts to *DARE*, large and small, are greatly appreciated. You can make a gift by filling out the form in the next column. Checks should be made out to *DARE*/UW Foundation and mailed to *DARE*, c/o University of Wisconsin Foundation, 1848 University Avenue, P.O. Box 8860, Madison, WI 53708, Attn: David Simon.

If you are interested in making a gift of stock or a deferred gift, please call me at (608) 263-5607 so we can discuss the easiest way to make that type of contribution. Or, you can send me an e-mail at david.simon@uwfoundation.wisc.edu. Thank you very much for your interest in *DARE*. 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
 Card number _____
 Expiration date _____
 Cardholder name (please print) _____
 Signature _____ Date _____

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



***DARE* at the Smithsonian**

On October 18, 2000, word lovers in our nation’s capital had a chance to learn about *DARE* firsthand. An audience of about 350 came to a program of the Smithsonian Associates to hear best-selling author Simon Winchester lead a panel discussion about American English in general, and about the *Dictionary* in particular. Winchester, who became interested in lexicography while doing the research for *The Professor and the Madman*, gave a spirited introduction to *DARE*, likening Fred Cassidy to the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s Editor James A. H. Murray (the “Professor” of the book title).

Joining Winchester on the panel were *DARE*’s Chief Editor Joan Hall, Fieldworker August Rubrecht, and Hollywood dialect coach Robert Easton. Rubrecht gave a taste of what it was like to actually collect the words for *DARE* [see his article in this issue for another sample]; Hall followed with an explanation of the whys and the hows of the project; and Easton, “the Henry Higgins of Hollywood,” delighted the audience with his renditions of dialects from various corners of our country. The very appreciative audience joined in with insightful questions and comments, many people lingering afterward to speak with the panelists. The Smithsonian event, conceived and arranged by *DARE*’s Board of Visitors member Cynthia Moore, had such a positive reception that other venues are being considered in an effort to give *DARE* even greater nationwide visibility.◆

Joan Hall Appointed Chief Editor Allan Metcalf, Executive Secretary of the American Dialect Society

Friday the 13th of October, 2000, was a lucky day in the history of *DARE*. In the morning of that day two committees concerned with the preservation and encouragement of *DARE* met conjointly, heard good news about progress, and formally appointed the new Chief Editor. The committees met in Room 7187D of Helen C. White Hall, “a large conference room in the English Department with an unobstructed seventh-floor view of the lake.” That description comes verbatim from the minutes of the first and only previous meeting of the Committee for *DARE*. On February 22, 1982, that committee had met in Room 7187D at the instigation of Fred Cassidy, who had called it into being to provide for the contingency of naming a successor as Chief Editor. It consisted of representatives of *DARE*, of the English Department, of the University of Wisconsin Foundation, of the Graduate School, and of the American Dialect Society, proud sponsor of *DARE*. Audrey Duckert, co-founder of *DARE*, presided; Fred introduced Joan Hall, remarking, “If you meet again, you might have to deal with her as Editor-in-Chief.” And the committee had adjourned *sine die*.

Back to the present: Some eighteen years later, the committee found it necessary to reconvene for the sad pleasure of appointing Joan Hall to the chief editorship, as Fred had intended. The vote was unanimous. Allan Metcalf, chairing the meeting as representative of the American Dialect Society, expressed the hope that this would be the last time the committee would ever need to meet.

The meeting of the Committee for *DARE* took only a minute or two. The rest of the time was devoted to the tenth annual meeting of the UW–Madison Advisory Board for *DARE*, consisting of representatives of the English Department and two deans, and chaired by Joan Hall. It was propitious. In her concise manner, Joan reviewed the accolades Fred had received in the past year; noted that he had anticipated and arranged a smooth transition quite satisfactory to all funding agencies; announced intentions of finishing Volume IV by January 2002 so that it could be published in time for holiday giving at the end of that year; and told of the success of the recently established Board of Visitors, and of fundraising efforts by David Simon so successful that *DARE* actually

was funded for more than half a year ahead, a significant improvement over the situation in the past. There was ample time for discussion, but so expeditious was Joan that the entire combined session was over at 11:23, scarce 40 minutes after it started. ♦



DARE in the News

The last few months have found *DARE*'s name in some high-visibility publications, resulting in welcome communications from people all over the country. The July issue of *National Geographic* included a colorful display of *DARE*'s unique maps, along with a brief description of the project and the address of our web site. Readers who took a look at our site found our list of puzzlers—words for which we need more evidence, an explanation, or a specific bit of information. And many of those readers helped us out. A dozen or so outdoors enthusiasts, for instance, corroborated our evidence for *periwinkle*: we knew that people in the Pacific Northwest often use the term for a caddisfly larva—that little creature that creates a case for itself out of cemented sand and gravel particles and attaches to a rock in a stream. Our correspondents made it clear that this term has a very distinctive regional pattern. Just what we wanted to know!

On August 6, a guest article by Fred Cassidy (his last before his death) and Joan Hall appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* in William Safire's “On Language” column. Detailing some of the ways in which *DARE* is useful to folks other than language lovers, this article also drew hundreds of e-mail responses. Not only have correspondents replied to the queries posted on our web site, but they have also offered many useful comments about other regional and folk words.

And in his December 10 “On Language” column, William Safire pointed out that *DARE* was ahead of the game with respect to election politics in 2000: Volume I, which appeared in 1985, included the word *chad*! ♦



Roland L. Berns, Science Editor

Staff Member Profile

In this continuing series, David Simon poses some questions to Roland Berns, one of DARE's two Science Editors.

Q: What are your responsibilities at DARE?

A: As a Science Editor, I write entries concerning regional names for birds, insects, plants, fish, animals, and the occasional rock or disease. A great many of the science entries—maybe as many as half—have to do with plants, the most common feature of the natural landscape, and one of the best documented. Our sources include some of the earliest writing about Virginia and the Carolinas. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson kept careful records of their fields and gardens, and in some of our entries you can hear their voices.

After a long run of plant entries, though, it's always nice to do a snake or a bird or a fish—something that can get around, make noise, and eat things—something with more of a life. I enjoy the bugs in particular—they are quite elegant in their way, and their life is so interesting.

Q: In what ways is your work similar to detective work?

A: The first question I have to answer about any headword is, "What is it?" Sometimes we have a lot of material about a given word, and there's no doubt of its identity. But there are other times when we have only a mention, the name of a bird, for example, with no indication of what it is. After checking the usual sources (*DARE's* Main File and *Data Summary*, and the dictionaries we check for every sense of every headword), we search our own database of common and scientific names,

which we have assembled over decades. And now, of course, we search the Internet, though with caution. But sometimes, at the end of all this, we have no answer, and we have to say we don't know. That's frustrating, but it's good for the humility.

On the other hand, sometimes we have more than one answer to the question, and that's where some of the detective work comes in. I recently wrote the entry for *skunk cabbage*, and this turns out to have five senses, some of them distinctly regional. So one question I have to answer in looking at each quote is, "Which skunk cabbage are they talking about?" Sometimes the location of the quote will provide the answer; sometimes it's a mention of some feature of the plant; sometimes it's the time of year when it blooms, or the kind of creature that feeds on it; sometimes it's an obsolete scientific name. There is a real pleasure in solving these puzzles.

Q: Why do you feel the work of the *Dictionary* is special?

A: Well, of course I feel that the science end of the *Dictionary* is special. We have a greater emphasis on things in the natural world and more clarity in dealing with them than any other work of this kind. There is no comparable source which offers so many names of birds, plants, fish, insects, and animals, or discriminates among them as finely as *DARE* does. But to take a larger view, what we're doing at *DARE* is not likely to be done again on this scale for quite some time, if ever. The money just isn't there. So our work may be the standard survey of American regional English for a long, long time.

Q: What do you like most about your work?

A: Almost without fail, I learn something every day, and that's a great thing about this work: there's always something new. I also like the feeling that I'm putting my little stone on the pile of human knowledge. I'm proud to have my name on this book. And I work with some wonderful, dedicated people whom I look forward to seeing every day. There is a real commitment here to produce the very best work we can, and that's a good atmosphere to work in.

Q: Tell me about your nickname—*Mr. Science*.

A: I don't really remember when I became Mr. Science, but I came up with him to make fun of myself. I got a lab coat and had "Mr. Science" embroidered over the pocket. I think it makes me look quite distinguished, and I can wear it in the office

when it's cold. For special occasions, there are Coke-bottle glasses and a fuzzy white wig.

In one of my favorite pictures, Fred Cassidy is seated and Mr. Science is standing behind him with his hand on Fred's shoulder. When he saw the photo, Fred laughed and remarked, "You look as if you've just invented me!" He had a good sense of humor, and I like to remember that. ♦



"Mr. Science" invents Fred Cassidy.



Ask a Fieldworker

Because so many of our readers have wondered what it was like to be "in the field," we've asked a few of our Fieldworkers to respond to questions from you. If there's something you'd like to ask about, drop us a line at the DARE office and we'll pass the query along to August Rubrecht, Patt VanDyke, and/or David Goldberg.

A Madison reader asks, "Was there ever a time in your fieldwork when you were concerned about your personal safety?"

August Rubrecht responds:

How about terrified? Terror is one of the degrees of concern, isn't it? On the night I thought I was

winding up in New Orleans by making the last two tape recordings, all my plans fell apart. I tried to salvage them until maybe 1:00 a.m.—but that's a story for a different time. Psychologically, this was the low point of my entire fieldwork year. I tried to cheer myself up by going to the French Quarter, but the jazz and jollity just made my bitterness worse. I jumped into the Word Wagon and headed out of town. I don't remember what roads I took; I just headed up the river. About 3:00 I finally calmed down enough to realize I was dreadfully sleepy and pulled off to bed down in a quiet spot in the trees across the levee from an oil refinery. In the piney woods of northern Louisiana, on paper company land, I would have been fine, but this spot was still too close to the big city.

Some time before dawn two guys woke me up by pounding on the van, shining flashlights inside, and yelling, "Hey, get up! Get out of there!" I was sure I was about to be robbed, and maybe killed. I carried no weapons for defense, but at that moment I would have given anything for a baseball bat or a pistol. It was a good thing I didn't have one. The two guys turned out to be sheriff's deputies patrolling the lovers' lanes. I think there is an unofficial policy that anyone who intends to commit fornication in the New Orleans area is expected to rent a hotel room. Anyway, when these gentlemen saw that I was alone and sober, and that the Word Wagon was really too cramped and crammed for a drunken orgy anyway, they just directed me to move to the lighted refinery parking lot to finish my nap. One of them said, "You'll be safer there." ♦

Patt VanDyke's experience was a little different:

My scares were not nearly so bad as August's, who worked the South. I think we all realized in those times that the acronym *DARE* could stand for Direct Action for Racial Equality as well as anything else. In such a case in the South in the mid-sixties, the license plate from Wisconsin and the credentials from the University of Wisconsin would have made the situation even more volatile.

Although there was never a time when I was working with an informant that I was concerned about my safety, there were several times when I was the only camper in a really isolated park and my dog would begin to growl and her hackles would rise. One night, in a secluded campground in the California mountains, I was listening to a movie over the radio: Disney's *Silent Desert*. The dog began to growl low in her throat, and I heard

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

something moving through the brush. Whatever it was circled the Word Wagon until I shouted out the window, “I’ve got a gun in here, and I’m just scared enough to use it!”

Another night, in a busy urban trailer park, somebody tried to break in, not realizing I was inside sleeping. This time the dog charged toward the back window and began barking ferociously, not stopping until the whole trailer park was awake and the running footsteps of the intruder had faded away. From that time on, we parked close to the bathhouse or underneath a bright campground light, preferring the irregular slap of the bathroom door and the constant glow of light to possible mischief from a stranger. ♦

DARE Staff Members

EDITORIAL STAFF

Roland L. Berns, Science Editor
Craig M. Carver, Senior Editor, Editorial Computing
Audrey R. Duckert, Adjunct Editor
George H. Goebel, Review Editor
Joan H. Hall, Chief Editor
Sheila Y. Kolstad, Senior Science Editor
Luanne von Schneidemesser, 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

OFFICE MANAGER

Karen J. Krause

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

David H. Simon

RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Conrad Treff