



Kelsie B. Harder

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John Algeo

Kelsie Brown Harder, if not quite the Pa of *Names* and the American Name Society—as H. L. Mencken confessed himself to be of *American Speech*—has at least claim to be their nanny, having reared them into responsible maturity. The fact that the ANS is today a thriving and productive organization with a publication of the quality of *Names* is due in large part to the dedicated work of Kelsie Harder. No one has been more closely associated with the Society and its publications for a longer period of time than Kelsie. Indeed, it is hard to imagine what the ANS would have become without Kelsie's guiding and supporting hand. He is the Jimmy Stewart of our own Wonderful Life.

Born on August 23, 1922, in Pope, Tennessee, to Prince William Harder, a farming school-teacher, and Belle MaGee, this on-the-cusp Virgo was ordained by his stars to a career in the American Name Society. For Virgos—as everyone knows—are “ingenious; fond of learning and curiosities; of a good utterance, and graceful elocution” (*Raphael's Famous Key to Astrology* [Philadelphia: McKay, 1943]: 22), and also “exceedingly conscientious, and imbued with both the desire and the ability to help others” (Carroll Righter, *Astrology and You* [New York: Perma-book, 1958]: 65). If that doesn't justify Nancy Reagan, what will?

With a magna-cum-laude B.A. (accompanied by a Phi Beta Kappa key) and an M.A. from Vanderbilt, Kelsie went south to work on a Ph.D. at the University of Florida, writing his dissertation on “Style and Meaning in the Works of Sir Thomas Urquhart.” He and I barely missed each other there, I arriving the year after he had left, although we had a shared friend in Thomas Pyles, another enthusiast of names and the ANS.

After leaving Florida, Kelsie launched his academic career at Youngstown University in Ohio, rising to the rank of full professor before he moved to the State University College at Potsdam, New York, as chair of the English Department. The Potsdam department included drama for most of the time he chaired it, which doubtless explains Kelsie's flair for public performance. He was appropriately honored by SUNY in 1989 by being named Distinguished Teaching Professor.

Kelsie also had two spells as a Fulbrighter, one in Poland at the University of Lodz and an earlier one in India at the Universities of

Panjab (in Chandigarh) and Kurukshetra (in Haryana). Kurukshetra was, as everyone who has seen the Peter Brook play based on the *Mahabharata* knows, the site of the epic battle that ended the heroic age of antiquity and ushered in the Kali-yuga, the Indic version of the Age of Iron. *Kali-yuga* means literally “the age of the one-spot on the dice” — the losing throw. It is the time in which we live, when every roll of the dice is craps. This experience was to prepare Kelsie for the realities of later academic life.

At Potsdam, Kelsie has been active in governance on every level of the SUNY system, following clues and doubtless often leaving them through the labyrinthine passages that lead to the academic bull at the center of the maze. He chaired the Faculty Assembly and initiated the college’s General Education Program, and he chaired the Governance Committee of the SUNY Faculty Senate. He has been (and one suspects maintains a certain pride in having been) a thorn in the saddle of university administrators, who should indeed not be permitted to rest too comfortably on their seats. Of his experience in chairing the Faculty Assembly, he says that it consisted of “humiliations, exhilarations, enemy earning, revenges, hours of filling and warming chairs, being misquoted, being quoted too correctly, and fishing in confusion” — that is, it was a normal university governance experience.

Kelsie’s community activities have been manifold. They include educational, parish council, and eucharistic ministry work for St. Mary’s Church in Potsdam; workshop-leading, lecturing, and consulting at various schools; consulting and evaluating at Mater Dei College; and coaching pee-wee baseball. He and Louise now have two of their children in college, one beginning high school, and one back from the Gulf War, whose pre-school children spend a lot of time with their grandparents. No fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, for Kelsie.

Kelsie began to be seriously interested in onomastics when Erwin Gudde accepted for publication in *Names* his seminar paper on “The Names of Thomas Dekker’s Devils.” This article, appearing in volume 3 (1955) of the fledgling journal of a society that was itself only two years older, was the first of Kelsie’s many contributions to the publication and the American Name Society. He later was to serve as Executive Secretary and Treasurer of the Society and as Editor of *Names*, off and on, over a period of twenty-seven years. He initiated the *ANS Bulletin* and carried on the Ehrensperger Report of activities in name study generally and placename study particularly.

Among his many other public activities have been membership in and service to the American Dialect Society, the American Society of Geolinguistics, *American Speech* (while it was an independent journal and later), the International Committee on Onomastic Sciences, the Milton Society, the Modern Language Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the Ohio Folklore Society, the Placename Survey of the United States, the St. Lawrence County Historical Association, the Spenser Society, and a passel of organizations that practically exhaust the Greek alphabet.

Kelsie's first publication, after an abstract of his M.A. thesis on John Crowe Ransom had appeared in *The Bulletin of Vanderbilt University*, was an article on "An Isolated Vocabulary of Teletype Operation," quickly followed by another on "Euphemistic Dilemmas in Tennessee," both in *American Speech* of 1952, written while he was a graduate student at the University of Florida. One of the great services of that journal has been that it gives bright and eager novices a chance to perform.

These early papers were followed by a steady stream of publications in a list of periodicals that fairly makes the head swim of anyone less industrious than a Virgo: *AAUP Bulletin*, *Agora*, *Alabama Review*, *American Anthropologist*, *American Speech*, *American West*, *Ball State University Forum*, *Bucknell Review*, *College Composition and Communication*, *College English*, *Comments on Etymology*, *Computers and the Humanities*, *Current Slang*, *English Record*, *Freeman*, *Geographical Review*, *Geolinguistics*, *Illinois English Bulletin*, *International Education*, *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, *Kamadhenu*, *Karamu*, *Literary Onomastics Studies*, *Mademoiselle*, *Michigan History*, *Midwest Folklore*, *Modern Age*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, *Names*, *Negro American Literature Forum*, *New Republic*, *New York American Studies Newsletter*, *New York Folklore Quarterly*, *New York Review of Books*, *Notes and Queries*, *Ohio Valley Folk Publications*, *Onoma*, *Onomastica*, *Onomata*, *Periodical Review*, *Plain Truth*, *Psychology Today*, *Publication of the American Dialect Society*, *Scholastic Scope*, *South Atlantic Bulletin*, *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, *Soviet Life*, *Speculum*, *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin*, *Tri-State Trader*, and *Verbatim*.

In addition, Kelsie has contributed to *Actes du X^e Congrès International des Linguistes*, *Essays in Honor of Walter Clyde Curry*, *From Oz to the Onion Patch*, *Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*, *John Crowe Ransom: Critical Essays*, *Proceedings of the International Conference of the American Society of Geolinguistics*, *400 ans de noms de lieux Français*

en Amérique du Nord, *Random House Dictionary*; *Shakespeare and Southern Writers*, and *World Book Encyclopedia*. He has authored the *Illustrated Dictionary of Place Names: United States and Canada*, published by Van Nostrand Reinhold in 1976; he edited *Names and Their Varieties: A Collection of Essays in Onomastics* in 1986; and he is coeditor (with Wolfgang Mieder and Stewart Kingsbury) of the *Dictionary of American Proverbs*, scheduled to appear this year from Oxford University Press and based on Margaret M. Bryant's forty-year collection of material.

In his free time, Kelsie is a novel addict, devouring them like peanuts—rejecting only Harlequin romances and all except an occasional sci-fi work. He haunts yard sales to sustain his habit, and says he finds the pickings good in the college town of Potsdam since ordinary academics have a dislike of books, which they get rid of as soon as they can after using, or not using, them. The Harders are obviously no ordinary academics, by that or any other definition.

To end this rambling introduction and make way for the main events, there is no more appropriate transition than the following, which was performed by L.R.N. Ashley at the end of his presidency of the American Name Society, at the annual dinner in San Francisco, December 1987 (used here by permission). Those who attended that event may recall some of the topical allusions in Len's musical tribute. All who know Kelsie will recognize how fitting the sentiments are.

You're The Tops

Lyrics by L. R. N. Ashley, to music by Cole Porter

The onomastic
 Great man fantastic,
 Kelsie Harder's the one I sing,
 And the praises that now I bring,
 Let 'em ring.
 He's the king.
 I sing the hero.
 My singing's zero,
 And the tune I may get awry,
 But in these phrases of sincere praises
 At least we can tell him: You're one great guy!

You're the top!
You're two Wallace Beerys!
You're the cop
On the TV series!
You're beyond the reach of a Robin Leach's awe.
You're as hot as fire is,
A Van Gogh iris,
You're LA Law!

You're the news
Of a bank deposit.
You're the shoes
In Imelda's closet.
You're the Deutsche Mark, you're Central Park, you're couth.
And we love you just as much as Dr. Ruth.

CD disc!
You're a gem exquisite.
Lobster bisque!
You're an ET visit
You're a scholar gent one hundred percent and more!
You're Chaucer's parson,
You're Johnny Carson.
You're Rambo IV!

You're light beers!
You are double-headers!
You need cheers
As Ollie North needs shredders!
You're a tax refunded, onomastic pundit, and you're swell!
And if this is overdoing it, what the hell!

Papa Smurf,
And the Pope's tiara.
Rising surf,
And a girl named Farrah.
You're a scaloppine, you're a Mac martini, one quart!
You're a piece of Meissen,
A Barbra Streisand.
An "A" report!

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You're the top.
You're a winning jockey.
Should we stop?
You're Olympic hockey.
You're a Gucci bag, a Joplin rag, mainframes.
And for years and years and years you have been *Names*.

Your advice
I've relied on greatly.
It was nice
To have had help lately.
And I'm sure that my successor, bless her, hopes
You will still be here if we get on the ropes!

You look great,
Like a London bobby,
In better state
Than the hotel lobby.
In this critical ruction, and DEconstruction stage,
You're holding out terrifically—for your age!

Mountebanks
Make such awkward verses.
But, hey, thanks
For your love and curses.
For all ANS I say, "God bless and cheers!"
And for all you've done,
Just from everyone:
Thanks for all the years!

University of Georgia, Athens