

In Memoriam Kelsie Brown Harder

[Editor's Note: Due to an editing error, the memorial printed in the June 2007 issue of NAMES over Edward Callary's name was not, in fact, written by him. What follows is his memorial.]

Kelsie Brown Harder, one of the one of the world's leading onomasts and a long time officer and member of the American Name Society, died at his home in Potsdam, NY on April 12, 2007 at the age of 84.

Kelsie's life was as rich and as varied as his scholarship. He was born on a farm near Pope, Tennessee on August 23, 1922. After serving in several capacities with the War Department--including chief teletype operator and cost accountant--in the 1940s he attended Vanderbilt University where he graduated Magna Cum Laude in 1950, with a major in English and minors in philosophy and Spanish. He continued at Vanderbilt where he received his MA in English writing his thesis on "John Crowe Ransom as Poet, Economist, and Critic." He earned his Ph.D. in English with a concentration in Linguistics from the University of Florida in 1954; where his dissertation was "Style and Meaning in the original works of Sir Thomas Urquhart."

For ten years (1954-1964) he taught in the English Department at Youngstown State University and in 1964 he moved to the State University of New York College at Potsdam where he taught until his retirement. At both Youngstown and Potsdam, Harder taught an astonishing array of courses: from linguistics and literature to folklore and creative writing. At the same time he was deeply involved in academic affairs and departmental governance and was active in the social life of the school and the community as well.

Kelsie began publishing as a graduate student. His "An Isolated Vocabulary of Teletype Operation" appeared in

American Speech in 1952. Other early publications included "The Vocabulary of Marble Playing," and "A Vocabulary of Wagon Parts." Among his major publications are the *Illustrated Dictionary of Place Names, United States and Canada, Names and Their Varieties, Claims to Name: Toponyms of St. Lawrence County*, and the forthcoming *Place Names of Franklin County*.

To say that Kelsie's professional career was distinguished would be to devalue that word. A few of his accomplishments: a two-time Fulbright scholar (India and Poland), member of both Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi, SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor, president of the American Name Society (1982), twice editor of *Names*, major contributor to the *American Places Dictionary*, the *Omni Gazetteer of the United States of America*, and *A Dictionary of American Proverbs*. Including the many reviews he wrote for *NAMES*, Harder's publication list runs to the high hundreds.

Most of us who have been associated with onomastics for any length of time have warm personal memories of Kelsie and many of us became members of the American Name Society because of contacts with him. I remember as a callow Assistant Professor summoning up the courage to write to him about some now insignificant names bibliography and half expecting the reply "go to the library and look it up!" or worse no reply at all. But the letter I received not only answered my question but was full of genuine interest and encouragement. Shortly after I met Kelsie at one of the annual meetings I joined ANS.

How Kelsie's interest in names developed is unclear. On one occasion he claimed that it was because a geography teacher required the class to draw maps of countries of the world, an exercise which encouraged him to find out more about the names. On another he said he was drawn to names because his own name was so unusual: *Kelsie* was more often than not taken as a girl's name; *Brown* has scatological associations; and *Harder* has well known secondary meanings.

Kelsie was the soul of ANS. He was not an original member but he joined early on (1954) and on several occasions he rescued the Society when it was floundering and about to go belly up. He straightened out the membership roster when it was in disarray; he salvaged ANS after severe financial trouble, and he took over *Names* when it needed an editor.

Kelsie loved names and he loved life. He had a hearty laugh and he found humor in much of human condition. My last communication from him was a letter acknowledging receipt of a copy of *Surnames, Nicknames, Placenames and Epithets in America* which I dedicated to him. Kelsie wrote in part (and I could imagine the smile on his face as he relived the moment): "I would have acknowledged the book earlier but the English Department thought it was a donation to the library and opened it, tossing away the covering envelope. Someone opened the book and noted the dedication and thought it was a book edited by one of my former students. The head of the Department called in a photographer and set up a special meeting to honor him, me, and the student. When I eventually learned what was happening, I asked who the student was and was answered: Edward Callary. I tried to straighten out the confusion and all events to do honors were immediately canceled."

The dedication in that book was appropriate then and it is appropriate now: "To Kelsie B. Harder, scholar, friend, and the spirit of American onomastics for more than half a century." He was our friend and we will miss him.

For a detailed account of Kelsie's life and work, see Fred Shapiro's obituary notice on the American Dialect Society discussion list, April 14, 2007.

Edward Callary
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