



## Linguistic Atlas of New England Records

1931-1972

40 boxes (19.75 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS 330

### Collection overview

Chiefly papers and records generated during research and field work for the Linguistic Atlas of New England (1939-1943), including over 400 interview records (carbon copies) from fieldworkers' notebooks arranged by community, then by informant; audiotapes of follow-up interviews; phonological analyses of informants' speech; character sketches of informants by fieldworkers; fieldworkers' blank notebook; a published Handbook of the linguistic geography of New England (2nd edition); and word index to the atlas.

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## Background on Linguistic Atlas of New England

In 1921, members of the Modern Languages Association first conceived of a large-scale project to record linguistic information about regional variations in English language usage in the United States, a project that would gradually evolve into the Linguistic Atlases of the United States and Canada. After several years of discussion and planning, the MLA's Present-Day English group formally proposed undertaking the project in December 1928, and coincidentally less than a month later, E. H. Sturtevant of the Linguistic Society of America proposed a broadly similar project to the American Council of Learned Societies.

With the encouragement of the ACLS, the two initiatives joined forces at a planning conference in March 1929 and a coordinating committee was formed, chaired by Hans Kurath and including other prominent linguists such as Leonard Bloomfield, Eduard Prokosh, and John S. Kenyon. The initial plan was to carry out an ambitious project to canvas speech patterns throughout the United States and Canada, but when faced with a proposed budget of \$664,000, the Executive Committee of the ACLS suggested beginning with a smaller-scale study of one region, centered on the dialects of New England. Kurath organized a staff for the proposed Linguistic Atlas of New England (LANE), and by July 1931, a cadre of linguistic fieldworkers was trained and set to work.

The primary objectives of the LANE project were to define the dialect areas of New England and to discover both innovations in speech and relics. In each community the canvassed, fieldworkers sought to include interviewees (informants or consultants) from each of three broad categories:

- An elderly "descendant of an old local family," who might help "establish the regionalism of the

pre-industrial era of New England in considerable detail, with the possible exception of the highly urbanized area around Boston."

- A middle-aged person, "native to the community, who had received better schooling" and who had "read more widely or enjoyed contact with the better educated."
- "Cultured informants, with a college education or the equivalent, were to be chosen in most of the larger cities... and a number of smaller communities" (Kurath 1939: 41).

Although it was not always possible in a given community to find consultants for each of the theoretical categories, fieldworkers followed a rigorous protocol based on a highly structured and consistently applied worksheet. Spending from six to twenty hours with each consultant, fieldworkers elicited responses to a questionnaire regarding 814 words and phrases in 711 numbered entries, touching on a range of everyday activities from work and family to domestic goods, numbers and expressions of time, clothing and bedding, animals and calls to animals, agriculture, and social relations. By the time of the last interviews in September 1933, the survey included a total of 416 consultants in 213 communities in New England, whose responses were painstakingly transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet to preserve nuances of pronunciation. Although no sound recordings were made in the initial survey, a few aluminum disk recordings were made in follow up work between 1934 and 1939.

After analysis and editing, the interviews resulted in the publications *Handbook to the Linguistic Geograpy of New England* (1939) and the three volume *Linguistic Atlas of New England* (1939-1943). The methodology pioneered in New England was replicated in other regions across the country, including the Gulf States, Middle and South Atlantic, North Central, Oklahoma, Pacific Northwest, Pacific West, Rocky Mountain region, and Upper Midwest, as well as the African American and Gullah dialects of the southeast. Work on the Rocky Mountain states project was still in progress as of 2012.

## Scope of collection

The heart of the LANE records consists of carbon copies of handwritten transcription sheets recording hundreds of interviews held in communities throughout New England during the 1930s. Organized by an alphanumeric code that corresponds to the community and name of the consultant, these sheets are written in the International Phonetic Alphabet, with some including explanatory comments in longhand and others with phonological analyses, and all are keyed to the "character sketches" of consultants assembled by fieldworkers. At the end of the collection are five cassette tapes including audio recordings of follow-up interviews made in 1934. The published *Handbook of the Linguistic Geography of New England* (organized, like the *Atlas*, term by term) can be used as an index, introduction, and commentary to the collection.

For the methodology see Kurath 1939, Kurath 1939-1943.

## Inventory

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Introductory material, field worker's blank notebook, published Handbook of the Linguistic Geography of New England, word index	Box 1
Character sketches of informants by the field workers, 1-240	Box 2
Character sketches of informants by the field workers, 241- 431	Box 3
Phonological analysis	Box 4
Interviews, in numerical order	Box 5-39
Tapes of the interviews, in numerical order	Box 40

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## Administrative information

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### Access

The collection is open for research.

Identities of persons named in the ledger of informants may not be published under conditions of the original interviews.

### Provenance

Acquired in 1974 from the director of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States through Audrey R. Duckert, editor of the 2nd edition of the *Handbook to the Linguistic Atlas of the United States*, 1972.

### Related Material

A few aluminum disk recordings made from 1933-1939 still exist in the Library of Congress. The original field books and manuscripts for the LANE project are housed with the **Linguistic Atlas Project**, Dept. of English, University of Georgia.

### Bibliography

Duckert, Audrey R., "The Linguistic Atlas of New England revisited," *Publication of the American Dialect Society* 39 (1963): 8-15.

Kurath, Hans, *Handbook of the Linguistic Geography of New England*. ACLS: New York, 1939. **Call No.** PE2846.L5 K8 1939

Kurath, Hans, *Linguistic atlas of New England*, 3 vols. Providence: Brown University, 1939-1943. **Call No.** PE2845.L5 K8 1972 oversize

### Processing Information

Processed by Katherine Emerson and Linda Seidman, March 1983.

**Language:**

English

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## Search terms

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**Subjects**

- English Language--Dialects--New England.
- Linguistic Atlas of New England.
- Linguistics--Massachusetts.

**Contributors**

- Linguistic Atlas of New England[**main entry**]

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