

*The Chronicle of Higher Education* online article “Hello New New England” August 13, 2012  
by Allan Metcalf

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## Hello, New New England

August 13, 2012, 12 01 am

By Allan Metcalf



he dropped “r” n New Hampsha  
Photograph by Dan O’Ha oran

On the chalkboard menu of the Bagel Basement in Hanover, N.H., close by the border with Vermont (to the west), is a reminder of the difference in spoken English between the two states. The menu lists for “Classics”:

- The Lower East Side ▪ Famous No. 2 ▪ Vermonter ▪ New Hampsha’ (The Vermonter has turkey, cheddar, green apples, and honey mustard; the New Hampsha’ has roast beef, bacon, boursin and red onions, both for \$6.50.)

The written names of the states reflect one of the most notable dialect differences in American English: dropped R after vowels in eastern New England, undropped in western New England and most of the rest of the country.

But the distinctiveness of eastern New England pronunciations is receding, and one piece of evidence for it is the sign at the Bagel Basement. For two centuries, the principal dividing line between eastern New England pronunciations and those to the west was the Green Mountains that form the spine of Vermont. Now, according to a new study, that boundary has moved east to the Vermont-New Hampshire border and among young people, even farther east.

The study, with maps and illustrations including the Bagel Basement menu, is [“Farewell to the Founders: Major Dialect Changes Along the East-West New England Border.”](#) The authors are James Stanford and Kenneth Baclawski Jr. of Dartmouth College, in Hanover, N.H., and Thomas Leddy-Cecere of the University of Texas in Austin, who was born and raised near the Vermont-New Hampshire border. And the publication is *American Speech*, journal of the American Dialect Society, Vol. 87 No. 2 for Summer 2012. (Disclosure: I’m executive secretary of the society.)

You won't find it in the magazine rack at your favorite supermarket, but it's worth looking for at your favorite university library or directly from the publisher, [Duke University Press](#).

*American Speech* is a scholarly journal, but unlike most such journals the majority of its articles, including "Farewell to the Founders," are readily accessible to nonspecialists. That issue has 10 articles in all, including one on the distinction between swearwords and slang, a review of new words, an audio feature on "Hon" in Baltimore, and four articles about teaching American speech.

I can't do justice to the more than 40 pages of "Farewell to the Founders" here, but in brief, the authors studied six salient features of eastern New England pronunciation and found

\*R-lessness after vowels: receding

\*Different vowels in *father* and *bother*: receding.

\*Different vowels in *bath* and *trap*: receding

\*Different vowels in *Mary*, *merry*, *marry*: receding

\**start* having same vowel as *father*: maintained

\**hoarse* and *horse* having different pronunciations: maintained

Receding of distinctive eastern pronunciations appears both geographically (boundary moving eastward) and generationally (younger speakers less likely to use eastern features). The authors conclude:

"In northern New England, many of the traditional, stereotypical variables and east-west contrasts of the Founders era are rapidly fading, but new regional identities are being constructed in the speech of new generations. Farewell to the Founders. Hello to a new New England."

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