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ABSTRACT  Intended as a resource for use in the study of early
devotions in education in the United States, this catalog,
prepared by the Educational Research Library of the U.S. Department
of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement,
contains bibliographic descriptions and brief annotations for 231
spellers published between 1775 and 1900. The descriptions are
arranged alphabetically by title. In addition, the catalog contains
an introductory essay that examines historical trends in spelling
instruction in the United States, including: (1) the role of British
spellers during the Colonial period; (2) the contributions of Noah
Webster in the development of textbooks and spellers; (3) the growth
in popularity of American spellers in the nineteenth century; (4) the
influence of educational methods on spellers; and (5) the declining
role of spelling in the expanding curriculum of the late nineteenth
century. (FL)

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Early American Spellers
EARLY AMERICAN SPELLERS

1775-1900

A CATALOG of the titles held by the Educational Research Library

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, D.C.

1985
The Early American Spellers Catalog represents a unique historical collection of spelling books used in schools and homes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the United States. The 231 texts described in this catalog are a portion of the titles in the Early American Textbook Collection housed in the Educational Research Library of the U.S. Department of Education.

The main collection, consisting of 8,000 titles covering all academic disciplines, was started in the Bureau of Education when administrators recognized the growing scarcity and historical worth of the school books. Henry Barnard, the first U.S. Commissioner of Education, was especially interested in the collection and donated many books from his private library. A "Museum of Textbooks" was planned but was never realized due to a shortage of space and a lack of funds.

The Bureau of Education was established within the Department of the Interior in 1869. In 1953 when the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was created, the former Bureau of Education Library was merged with the newly created departmental library. Only a small part of the Early American Textbook Collection was retained in this library. Most of the volumes in the collection were deposited in various public, college, and university libraries in the District of Columbia area. In 1973 those textbooks housed at the department library were transferred to the National Institute of Education to form the nucleus of the Library's textbook collection. The Library is now part of Information Services.

Cognizant of the need for a comprehensive collection of early American school books, the Library initiated steps to acquire the remaining volumes, and in 1977 the final portion of the textbook collection was officially transferred to the Educational Research Library. For the first time in several decades the school books are integrated and housed in a single collection.

The Early American Spellers Catalog provides a useful resource for studying the early developments and trends in American education.

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
Chester E. Finn, Jr.
Assistant Secretary

E PLURIBUS UNUM
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Special note: Library of Congress classification numbers (e.g., PE 1145.A3) are given for each title to identify its location within the library collection.
Spelling in America: Historical Trends

An overview of nineteenth-century spelling instruction brings to mind one text as most representative and most influential—Noah Webster’s “blue-backed” speller which, in its time, sold over 100 million copies. The blue-backed speller was far more than a conventional spelling textbook. In its earliest editions, the speller often comprised the entire school curriculum. It contributed, by the author’s design, toward the establishment of an American-English language, and it fostered the development of an American, as opposed to British, character. Of course, it also taught generations of children how to spell and to read. “No other book,” said one of its users, “the Bible excepted, has strained so many heads, or done much good. It taught millions to read, and not one to sin” (28, p. 3), a tribute that would have immensely pleased the venerable “schoolmaster to America.” For, as Webster himself once observed, “If my name is terror to evildoers, mention it” (28; p. 4).

Although Webster’s speller stands as the most widely used American text, its authority did not go unchallenged. Hundreds of different spelling books were prepared during the period. Many were blatant imitations of the blue-backed speller. Like their counterparts in other subject areas, these texts shaped young minds about what was worth knowing and how such knowledge should be gained. They, too, helped to develop a national character. For text books, then and now, contain more than information between their covers. In them “... are mirrored [a nation’s] aspirations, hopes, beliefs, values, and social ideas. School-books are a kind of two-way mirror reflecting what a people believe and value, and also what they feel they ought to believe and value” (2, p. 1). It is in this context that a catalog of nineteenth-century spellers has particular value. As a collection, these books exemplify and serve our forebears’ beliefs about spelling and about the values that they held and sought to transmit to succeeding generations.

British Spellers Popular During Colonial Period

Following the Revolutionary War, American textbook compilers (few books were original creations, but were collections of materials from several sources), of whom Noah Webster was among the first and by all odds the most influential, sought deliberately to mold an American character by standardizing language and social customs. But, in the absence of an American educational tradition or of textbooks that were indigenous to America, compilers relied on the traditional British materials that had been used in the Colonies as models for the books they prepared. Rather than being new creations, nineteenth-century spelling books evolved out of long-held views about the nature and teaching of English spelling, views whose origins can be traced to Roman and Greek times. Thus, the spelling books listed in this catalog are to some extent surrogate time-machines that enable interested readers to look at schooling in the nation’s early years and, as a result, to see our present educational practices in historical perspective. Let’s journey, then, for a brief time to the years following our nation’s independence from England and trace the evolution of spelling instruction to the time of America’s entrance into the twentieth century.

While spelling is now a rather minor part of school programs, it was once a subject of central importance, especially in Colonial times and in the early years of the nation. Spelling books were the first instructional manuals that were placed in a child’s hands, and these “omnibus” texts were the young “scholar’s” primer, speller, reader, arithmetic, geography, and source of moral instruction (11; p. 102-03).
As had been the custom for centuries, one learned to read by a method of instruction called the alphabet method. This method had quite well-defined areas of study. One area was the study of orthography and involved learning the order and names of the alphabet according to their classifications as consonants, vowels, and diphthongs. Next, the speech sounds that each letter was believed to represent were learned. Then consonant and vowel letter combinations (such as ab, eb, ib) were spelled out and learned. Once these syllable combinations were mastered, they were combined to form words that were usually presented in tables according to the number of syllables they contained, for example, qua-li-fi-ca-ti-on.

A second area of study was spelling, not simply a matter of naming the letters of words in their proper sequence, but also of dividing words into their syllables according to specific rules. "To spell is to Name the letters of a Word, divide them into distinct Syllables, and then join them together in order to read or Pronounce them aright," said one British authority in 1720 (17, p. 184.) Pronouncing words "aright" was a third area of study in the alphabet method. Called orthoepy, the study of the proper pronunciation of words in spelling books was as important as spelling them correctly.

The spelling books of eighteenth-century Colonial America were published in England or reprints of them printed in the Colonies. Thomas Dilworth's A New Guide to the English Tongue (the first American edition printed by Benjamin Franklin in 1742) and Daniel Fenning's Universal Spelling Book were among the most widely used. Fenning's speller bore a close resemblance to Dilworth's and in 1786 was the first book to be printed in what is now the State of Maine.

Another popular English speller, that later became Webster's chief competitor in the last decade of the 1700's, was William Perry's The Only True Guide to the English Tongue or, New Pronouncing Spelling Book (entry #119). First printed in Edinburgh in 1777, some 300,000 copies of Perry's speller were issued in America between 1785 and 1804 (4, p. 150-51). Yet another text of English origin which gained widespread use was John Walker's A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary, and Expositor of the English Language (entries #185-187). Printed late in the century (1791), Walker's text was especially disliked by Noah Webster because of its British pronunciation guide.

It would be erroneous to believe, however, that these and other spellers of the time reached a great majority of Americans, for there was no mass system of mass education in the nation's early years. As late as 1837, for example, only one half of Massachusetts' children went to school. The rest were excluded because there were either no schools to go to, or they were not free. For the most part, illiteracy was not the social stigma that it is today. The practical affairs of life commanded most of one's energies, and needed skills were learned by apprenticing, not through formal schooling. This situation held true for many teachers as well, who often had little more education than their students. "Most schoolmasters," Webster observed, "are illiterate men, who have no particular instruction in grammar, and who have no guide to the pronunciation of words but the letters which compose them" (27, p. 33), a concern that was also voiced by Perry, even though there were sharp differences between the two men about whose language standards would resolve the problem.

Following Webster's and Perry's example, most early spelling books contained elaborate directions for schoolmasters to follow because of the importance of the subject. The spelling book was, after all.

... the first elementary work placed in the hands of the scholar. From this he derives his earliest impression of the nature and utility of the language in which he is to speak and write. From this book he acquires habits of thought and expression, the tone and modulation of voice which distinguish him generally throughout life. From this he is to acquire the practice of spelling and pronouncing correctly, qualifications which give great force and effect to whatever is spoken and written (2; p. 378-79).

Most spelling books used during Colonial times contained reading material of a religious nature. Following the Revolutionary War, however, spellers generally became more secular in their content, with Holy Writ being replaced with moral precepts of the 'Poor Richard' type and with rules of good conduct, among the most important being the quality of virtue. Like Aristotle's view in his Nicomachean Ethics, virtue, to the early compilers, meant the quality of loving what is noble and hating what is base and was an essential aspect of the cultivated person. In this sense, virtue was closely linked to citizenship. For, as Webster wrote in a letter to Daniel Webster, "intelligence without virtue is incomplete because history has shown that to know what is right does not mean people will do what is right [and] love of country does not suffice either" (28; p. 478-80).

Just as the early spelling books were much alike, so were their compilers. They were men who came from many professions (often from the ministry), were Protestant and New Englanders, and held very similar views about religion, morality, virtue, and patriotism (2)—beliefs and qualities they tried to exemplify in their own lives and sought to instill in those who learned from their books. They believed as Webster did that "Education, in great measure, forms the character of men, and morals are the basis of government... The great art of correcting mankind, therefore, consists in prepossessing the mind with good principles" (2, p. 29), an aim to which Webster's spelling book was directed. Let's look briefly then at Noah Webster and his famous "blue-backed" speller, for he and his spelling book are the standards to which other compilers and their books must inevitably be compared.
BABY BESS.
The Contributions of Noah Webster

Noah Webster was the new nation's first prolific textbook writer, producing in his lifetime a grammar, an American history, readers, two dictionaries, patriotic and civic materials, and his famous speller. Having been graduated from Yale in 1778, Webster, then about twenty, aspired to be a lawyer. But the economic outlook for young lawyers was poor at the time, and he turned to teaching for his livelihood. It soon became apparent to Webster that there were few books with which to teach. Worse, in his estimation, the few available materials were of English origin and orientation. He therefore set out to correct the situation by preparing new material that would reflect and foster his patriotic views in young scholars.

Like other compilers, Webster’s books were not new creations as much as they were compilations of Dilworth’s and Fenning’s texts, adapted to his own purposes. He proposed to call his work The American Instructor, which would contain three sections—a speller, a grammar, and an advanced reader. Webster probably began gathering his materials in 1781, and by 1783 the first of the sections, the speller, was completed and published with the title The Grammatical Institute, Part I.

Instead of proper names for places which belong to Great Britain, which we are incapable and unwilling to learn and which are totally useless in America, your memorialist has inserted those words only which occur in the sacred and other writing which are of obvious use and difficult pronunciation, together with the names of the Kingdoms of Europe, their capital cities, and the United States of America—the counties, principal towns, and rivers of each separate [sic] state—with other improvements of obvious utility (27, p. 1).

Webster’s alterations of Dilworth’s and Fenning’s texts ran deeper still. In addition to adapting their spelling books to use in America, he also replaced much of their religious content with brief exhortations to lead good lives, such as, “Let not your tongue cut your throat”. “He that has down with dogs must rise up with fleas.” As Webster recalled in his later years, “This type of wisdom, clinging to the mind like a burr in the hair lent to the Spelling Book an attractive value which kept it a favorite among children and an object of sentimental interest to these same children when they were grown” (28, p. 62).

Webster did retain British spelling, although he revised the customary method of syllabifying words in order to conform more nearly to the syllables of spoken language. As a result, Dilworth’s clu-stor, ha-bu-t, no-stial, and bi-sop became Webster’s clu-stor, ha-bit, no-stial, and bi-sop, most notably, the suffixes -ion, -ion, and -ion became tion, sion, and cion and were pronounced “shun” as in salve shun.

Webster did not change one time-honored aspect of spelling instruction, however—the method of learning in which memorization and drill were the cornerstones of word mastery. In this respect, Webster was the typical schoolmaster, a man more concerned that lessons were learned well than . . . to secure the adulation of shirking, fawning, ignorance (28, p. 4). As he admonished the young scholars who read his book, “A wise child loves to learn his book; but the fool would choose to play with toys.”

Webster’s speller soon became popular, in part because it was in its way another kind of Declaration of Independence, “a declaration ending American servility to European modes of thought, fashion, and manners” (28, p. 53), and in part because Webster was an exceptionally accomplished public relations agent on his own behalf. He rode on horseback to villages in the Connecticut countryside visiting teachers, preachers, lawyers, and local school committees in order to promote his speller. As was the practice at the time, he secured hundreds of testimonials from noted public officials who extolled the virtues of his spelling book. He gave copies to printers, for in those days texts were produced and sold by local print shops. Any printer could secure a popular book and reprint it for local use, sometimes resulting in the same text being printed by more than one printer in the same town. Later, as Webster’s fame spread, numerous pirated editions of the speller were printed without payment of royalties to him, and Webster was instrumental in securing copyright laws in several states and eventually at the Federal level. Interestingly, the most notable fable appearing in Webster’s speller, “Of the Boy That Stole Apples,” was taken directly from Fenning’s Universal Spelling Book.

With the change of title to The American Spelling Book in 1788, another significant change also occurred—the appearance of a blue cover, whose distinctiveness soon earned the book the title of the “blue-backed” speller and even greater popularity. Webster claimed 200 editions of his book were printed by 1810. If success of a product can be measured by its imitators, the speller was indeed successful. Not only were pirated editions in circulation, but outright imitations as well. Robert Ross’ The New American Spelling Book, published in New Haven, was probably the first such copy that amounted to almost a virtual facsimile of the blue backed speller.

There was another basic reason for the popularity of Webster’s speller—its greater ease of use in comparison to other spellers of the time. While Webster retained the alphabetical method as the mode of instruction, he organized the material in a more effective fashion. As Webster wrote in 1783 to the New York Legislature seeking its endorsement,
The Spelling Book is framed upon a new and laborious plan, that of reducing the pronunciation of our language to an easy standard, which is effected by the help of figures. All the various sounds of our vowels, which amount to near twenty, are represented by five figures only, and the words arranged in such order that the sounds of the vowels in fifteen or twenty words are often expressed by a single figure. With many other improvements calculated to extirpate the improprieties and vulgarisms which were necessarily introduced by spellers from various parts of Europe, and especially to render the pronunciation of the American language accurate and uniform by demolishing those odious distinctions of provincial dialects which are the subject of reciprocal ridicule in different states (27; p. 5-7).

It was an ingenious stroke to affect change while retaining tradition. Given a combination of systematically organized content, patriotic intentions, shrewd advertising, and fortuitous timing, the blue-backed speller had few serious challengers until well into the nineteenth century, and Webster realized his ambition to supplant Fennings and Dilworth’s “aby sel-pha” (a corruption of abysselfa, stemming from a practice in spelling lessons in which a vowel which is also a syllable was noted by the formula “a-by-itself-a” (16; p. 271)).

Webster had another ambition, to create a dictionary that would clearly distinguish American orthography and pronunciation from British English, and, in the process, demolish the influence of the British lexicographers, Samuel Johnson and John Walker. His aversion to these dictionary makers was as much due to their being English as to their treatment of orthography and pronunciation. Nonetheless, there were many Anglophiles in the new nation who swore allegiance to Johnson as the only true lexicographer and to Walker as the only real authority on pronunciation, and Webster often had to battle hostility about his treatment of the language in his speller and subsequently in his dictionary, which appeared in 1806 bearing the title A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language (entry #203).

With the publication of the dictionary in which his orthographic and pronunciation standards were set forth, Webster could now revise his speller accordingly. He deleted “silent” letters in words such as favour (favor), whirl (whirl), traveler (traveler), frolic (frolic), he transposed e and r in words such as theatre (theater) and centre (center), he changed a to e in defense (defense), goal to jail, and plough to plow, with the result that some compilers charged to the defence of Johnson’s and Walker’s authority. Later, in an 1828 revision of the dictionary which he retitled The American Dictionary (entry #193), and in an 1829 revision of the speller which he retitled The Elementary Spelling Book (entry #205), Webster restored some of the spellings he had previously changed. This action precipitated new challenges to the validity of his scholarship and his authority as a lexicographer. Worse, his critics charged that his books confused young scholars about spoken and written English.

Despite these challenges, however, the blue-backed speller flourished in popularity and sales and retained the loyalty of legions of supporters throughout its existence. Even the Civil War could not break the speller’s grip in the Southern states. Robert Fleming’s The Elementary Spelling Book (entry #16) was an acknowledged adaptation of the blue-backed speller for use in the Confederacy. As Fleming, a Thomasville, Georgia, minister, pointed out in the preface to his speller, when he conceived the idea of preparing a Spelling-book to meet fully the necessities of the country, he soon became convinced that to make a better book than Webster’s would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. It occurred to his mind that a revised edition of the Elementary Spelling Book, adapted to the wants of the people of the Confederate States of America, would be all that could be desired.

Fleming retained most of the features of the blue-backed speller but replaced reading passages that were partial to the North with scriptural passages that he believed supported domestic slavery. He also changed a few pronunciations to conform to Southern speech and changed the cover from blue to gray.

The blue backed speller could be found in country stores as a standard item of commerce throughout most of the nineteenth century and was the official arbiter of spelling bee” which flourished in countless communities during the period. In the year following the Emancipation Proclamation, nearly 1,500,000 copies were sold, chiefly because the freed slaves believed it necessary to have Webster’s speller in order to learn to read (24, p. 128). Webster’s dream to develop an educational system in which the language of the nation would be rendered uniform, moral values propagated, and love of country nourished came close to reality. The speller’s grassroots popularity symbolized a new nation in which authority flowed upward from the common people. It epitomized the emerging American character.

American Spellers Gain Widespread Acceptance

This catalog amply illustrates that there were, of course, other spelling books than Webster’s. With expanding national boundaries and the emergence of a common-school system, hundreds of spellers were printed, some quite...
competitive with the blue-backed speller. Let us now look at the evolution of spelling instruction in the years following Webster's emergence as the schoolmaster to America. While Webster had many competitors, nearly all agreed with him that

If you want to be good, wise and strong, read with care such books as have been made by wise and good men; think of what you read in your spare hours, be brisk at play, but do not swear; and waste not too much of your time in bed.

Virtually all the early compilers employed the alphabet method, and some, as noted earlier, borrowed liberally from Webster's book. Most notable among them was Elihu Marshall, whose A Spelling Book of the English Language (entry 87) contained whole tables of words lifted directly from Webster's speller and had a blue cover. Marshall also obtained Chief Justice John Marshall's endorsement, causing Webster to write a letter of complaint to the Governor of New York, DeWitt Clinton, in which he pointed out that should Webster have to sue Marshall for infringing on his rights, the case would conceivably land in the Supreme Court where Chief Justice Marshall would be in a position to decide the suit (27, p. 414-17). What frustrated Webster the most, however, was Elihu Marshall's use of Walker's pronunciation guide.

Plagiarism notwithstanding, the similarities among spellers generally overshadowed their differences, and early textbook compilers resorted to many means to call attention to the particular virtues of their spellers. One common practice was to cite the special features of a speller in its title, a practice that sometimes led to titles resembling paragraphs (see, for example, entries 9 and 64), while others were more parsonomious in their descriptions, for example, Glass's Speller Consisting of Spelling Lists, Memory Gems and Dictation Exercises (entry 53). Another common practice was to claim superiority for the speller over others, as Perry had done with his The Only Sure Guide to the English Tongue (entry 119) and Nathan Guilford in his The Western Spelling Book, being an Improvement of the American Spelling Book by Noah Webster (entry 65).

Guilford's speller also points out the contradictory situation in which Webster's speller was a model to be copied and a target to be attacked. Among the more successful critics were J.A. Cummings (entry 33), B.D. Luenen (entries 40-44), and Albert Picket (entries 122-128). But none was more vociferous or competitive than Lyman Cobb, a young, largely self-taught, New York educator, who sought to unseat Webster from his position of eminence. Cobb's attack was, of course, intended to establish his own speller, Cobb's Spelling Book (entry 27), as a leader in the burgeoning textbook market, and his speller in its various revised and augmented editions (entries 24, 26, 28, and 29) did achieve some amount of popularity. Cobb's criticisms were the lowest in pointing out inconsistencies between Webster's 1806 The American Spelling Book and The Elementary Spelling Book issued in 1829.

Cummings' and Cobb's spelling books were among the first to be devoted to teaching only spelling, and by the late 1820's other changes in spelling books began to appear also. Spelling instruction in Colonial America, it will be recalled, employed the alphabet method which prevailed well into the nineteenth century. In the absence of blackboards or sufficient numbers of slates upon which students could write, as well as the emphasis placed on correct pronunciation, spelling for the most part was an oral exercise. The schoolmaster would give out a word and "with a blow of his strap all the class commenced to spell it by syllables in unison" (28, p. 77), a teaching technique that also enabled a meagerly trained school teacher to maintain control over the class.

With the exception, memorizing lists of words by constant oral repetition was the common practice, and as spelling books became almost exclusively devoted to spelling, many of them were little more than lists of words, arranged in tables according to the number of letters and syllables the words had in common and with little attention given to the meanings that the words conveyed. The adage that "practice makes perfect" had no better application than to the way that spelling was taught in much of the first part of the nineteenth century, and a classroom of students who spelled well was a good indication that the students had practiced long and hard. As a Danbury, Connecticut, school noted with pride, "The advantage that small children obtain at this school may be easily imagined when the public are informed that those who spell go through the whole of Webster's spelling book twice a fortnight" (28, p. 76).

Although empirical studies of learning would not fully blossom until the rise of the scientific movement later in the century, there was in the early part of the nineteenth century a psychological basis for spelling instruction. Termed "faculty psychology," its advocates held that the mind had three sets of basic capacities or faculties. The first set involved understanding, reason, or intellect, faculties which enable man to reason, make judgments, analyze, remember, imagine, reflect, apprehend meanings. The second set involved feelings, desires, sensibilities, susceptibilities, tastes, or the "heart," faculties by which man is impressed, feels pain or pleasure, suffers and enjoys, loves and hates. The third set of faculties involved the will or volition, faculties which enable man to act (3, p. 177 78). In this theory, the intellectual faculties were felt to be especially capable of being trained, much like a muscle is strengthened by exercise, and that the training would transfer to the other faculties.

In its way, faculty psychology had a natural affinity with the value that had traditionally been given to hard work and personal responsibility for one's own destiny, qualities of which young students were constantly reminded. As one early nineteenth-century educator pointed out:
If your endeavors [to learn] are deficient, it is in vain that you have tutors, books, and all the external apparatus of literary pursuits. You must love learning if you would possess it. In order to love it, you must feel its delights; in order to feel its delights, you must apply it, however irksome at first, closely, constantly, and for a considerable time. If you have resolution enough to do this, you cannot but love learning, for the mind always loves that to which it has been long, steadily, and voluntarily attached (2; p. 29-30).

Still, the internal motivation to learn sometimes needed external assistance, as the following selection from an early nineteenth-century reader illustrates:

And so you do not like to spell, Mary, my dear? O very well; 'Tis dull and troublesome, you say, and you had rather be at play.

Then bring me all your books again; Nay, Mary, why should you complain? For as you do not choose to read, You should not have your books, indeed.

So as you wish to be a dunce, Pray go and fetch me them at once. For as you will not learn to spell 'Tis vain to think of reading well.

Now don't you think you'll blush to own, When you become a woman grown, Without one good excuse to plead That you have never learnt to read?

"O dear Mamma," said Mary then, "Do let me have my books again, I'll not fret any more, indeed, If you will let me learn to read." (23; p. 67)

Educational Methods Influence Spellers

Perhaps the most significant changes, however, were changes in view about learning, the learner, and the spelling material to be learned. There are several causes for these changes, but the primary cause was an expanding common school system which encompassed increasing numbers of children in its aim to bring at least a minimum of basic education to the masses. The foremost common-school advocate was Horace Mann, the first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education. Mann stood firm in his position that schools should teach useful information, and he used a periodical that he edited, The Common School Journal, as a vehicle to express his views. Mann once agreed with a parent who urged that school visiting committees (an early form of school accreditation) should not approve any school in which children were required to spell columns of words which they neither understand nor have occasion to use when he editorialized. "To crowd their memories with such words is about as unwise as it would be to fill their stomachs with kinds of food, which we know they cannot digest, until they have attained adult age. The orthography of all common every-day words should first be thoroughly learned" (12, p. 359).

Mann's interests in the common school led him to Europe to look at pedagogical practices that might be adapted to public education in the United States. He returned from his journey greatly influenced by the naturalistic pedagogy of the Swiss educational reformer, Johann Pestalozzi, whose view about learning and the learner focused on individual children's temperaments, abilities, and interests, and the involvement of all the senses in learning. Both men were deeply committed to moral instruction (5, p. 11). These and other factors led Mann to regard beginning spelling and reading instruction in a dramatically different way than the alphabet method imposed.

Beginning instruction, said Mann, should begin with words that name familiar objects, not letters to which no meaning can be related. For, "when we wish to give to a child the idea of an animal, we do not present successively the different parts of it—an eye, an ear, the nose, the mouth, the body, or a leg—but we present the whole animal, as one object" (13, p. 14). Beginning spelling books should be prepared with their ease of use and...
ORTHOGRAPHY

OF

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

What is language?
Language is any means, by which one person communicates his ideas to another; as by sounds and characters. Language is both vocal and written.

What is vocal language?
It is speaking; or expressing ideas by the human voice.

What is written language?
It is the expression of ideas by writing or printing.

How is vocal and written language understood?
Vocal language is understood by the sense of hearing; written language, by the sense of seeing.

What are articulate sounds?
They are sounds made by the human voice, in pronouncing letters, syllables, and words distinctly.

What is orthography?
It is that part of grammar, which teaches the nature and sounds of letters, and the art of spelling and writing words correctly.*

What is orthoepy?
It is the art of pronouncing words according to the best authority.

What are letters?
Letters are the marks of sounds, and the first rudiments of written language.

What do letters form?
Letters form syllables, syllables form words, and words form sentences.

What is a syllable?
It is a letter, or a union of letters, which can be uttered by one emission of the voice; as man.

How many letters are there in the English Language?
Twenty-six; namely, a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z.

What are these letters collectively called?
The English Alphabet.

* See Rules for Spelling, p. 167 and 168
pleasure for the young learner in mind, with meaningful words the objects of early instruction, followed by a study of the letters of which they were composed. He admonished that the misuse of letters in the spelling of words is a comparatively venial offence, it seldom draws after it any serious consequences besides the reputation of illiteracy. But the misuse or misapprehension of language lead to errors of thought, or opinion, and of conduct, and the laws of society and the laws of the land often punish them with the loss of character and the loss of property (13, p. 22).

Mann was perhaps the most prominent nineteenth-century educator to advocate the "whole word method," but he was not the first to do so. As early as 1831, Samuel Worcester had produced a spelling book using this approach, in later publications he also attempted to grade materials according to their levels of difficulty (entries #222-225). The whole word method had many supporters, among them Gallaudet and Hooker (entries #50 and 51), Marcus Willson (entries #219 and 220), and William Swinton, whose popular and widely used spellers (entries #159-166; were produced in numerous editions.)

While Mann was a forceful advocate for considering children's interests and abilities in learning, he was also a firm believer in the principles set forth in faculty psychology (or "phrenology" as it was known popularly at the period). He maintained that desirable faculties could be cultivated through exercise and undesirable faculties in habituated through disuse, and he argued that a student's self-respect was enhanced when lessons were well learned. Spelling correctly was no less important a goal than other aspects of the common-school curriculum, for its achievement trained the mind and brought personal satisfaction to the student. To inhibit misspelled words, Mann proposed that "no scholar will long fail to get the true spelling of words if the inconvenience of missing them becomes greater than the inconvenience of learning them, and if the first inconvenience is made a direct consequence of the neglect to learn them" (12, p. 357).

Mann also declared that the "Law of Association" should be applied to spelling instruction, a learning principle in which "eye, ear, and hand establish by . . . frequent association the peculiar sequence of letters which spell each word" (13, p. 39). Accordingly, said Mann, words for study should be grouped according to their common orthographic characteristics, and he singled out William Fowle's The Common School Speller (entry #48) in which words such as ace, lace, mace, pace, space were listed in the same lesson as an example of the proper use of the Law of Association. (The Law of Association bears a striking similarity to the present-day practice of grouping words according to "phonics" similarities.)

Fowle further extended his use of the Law of Association in a companion textbook, False Orthography (entry #49), in which words "most liable to be misspelled or misused" were grouped as above but were misspelled and presented in sentences for students to study and write. Fowle maintained that this technique would "be the attention of the pupil especially on the troublesome words," while at the same time adding to the student's knowledge of English composition because the words were presented in sentences. Thus, Lesson 12 of False Orthography contained such sentences which students copied on their slates as: "The wife of a dooke is a duchess." "Play me a toon upon that loot." "Herod slue the innocent children." "Prevention is far better than kure."

Fowle's False Orthography is also illustrative of other changes which appeared in growing numbers of spelling books in the mid-nineteenth century. Most texts were now devoted expressly to spelling, and although lessons continued to be read orally, the words were often also written by students. In addition, the spellers began to pay more attention to the possible usefulness of the words beyond the spelling class, and some account was made of the different interests and abilities of young and older students in the few textbooks which began to appear as a "series" of primary and advanced spellers.

It would be misleading to conclude, however, that the blue-backed speller and the alphabet method were falling into disuse. On the contrary, the alphabet method had many staunch supporters like David Tower, a principal of the Eliot Grammar School in Boston and later principal of the Pennsylvania Institute for the Blind, who believed how easy the task comparatively to learn to spell and read, when a child knows all the powers of the letters, and can execute them, clearly, forcibly, and distinctly" (23, p. 100), a contention which he applied in his The Gradual Speller and Complete Enunciator Showing the Orthography and Orthoepy (entries #167-169).

Nonetheless, the evolving changes in spelling deeply troubled Noah Webster. Shortly before his death in 1843, he wrote to his son-in-law, William Chauncey Fowler, a pointed defense of the alphabet method and, by implication, a scorching criticism of Horace Mann and his followers.

Thus hurring plan of education is adapted to make superficial scholars. Accurate scholarship is not to be gained by leaping over the first elements, but by taking step by step and, as Locke has remarked, by learning one thing at a time . . . I have been struck with surprise to see how men engaged in promoting education mistake the laws of the human mind. It is this mistake which has originated the scheme of teaching spelling and definition at the same time. This scheme can be executed only in familiar words. It can not be extended to abstract terms or words of multifarious meaning without leaving error or defect in knowledge . . . I once saw objection made to the reading lessons in Webster's Spelling Book amounting to this. that these lessons consist of
short and detached sentences having no connection in continuous discourse. True, but this is one of their principal excellences. Such sentences are best adapted to the capacities of children of four, five, and six years of age. They are learned with ease and remembered, whereas a long continuous discourse would be read, but forgotten. A book of rudiments is not intended to teach long lessons on any subject, it is to teach words and familiar truth (27; p. 518-20).

Webster’s letter reveals, however, that he realized the importance of showing that the blue-backed speller was responsive to children’s interests and abilities, and others who used the alphabet method in their texts did the same. Charles Sanders, for example, developed a series of textbooks that was designed with the maturity of the students in mind (entries #135-141), and in a revision of his Sanders’ Test-Speller (entry #139), he provided definitions for words while retaining such words as quadriphyllous, pasquinade, metempsychosis, Xanthophyll, and Uniquile. Sanders’ New Speller. Definer, and Analyzer (entry #136) was found to be especially useful to one of its former users because it was a good book, especially in its definition, for it was our only dictionary—no school possessed a dictionary, even a small one—and the teachers then knew the meaning of a very few words, one venturing the opinion that luncheon, being a light meal between breakfast and dinner, must occur around ten o’clock (24, p. 133).

Despite adaptations made by Sanders and others, increasing numbers of textbook writers and publishers agreed with Christopher Greene that “verbal memory is the lowest of intellectual faculties [and] the mere memory of the letters in a word, and their relative position, must be its least exercise” (8, p. 194) and with J. Madison Watson (entries #190 and 191) that “the most expeditious mode of learning spelling is by the eye [and] that the definitions and the use of words, as well as their orthography, are soonest acquired by frequently writing exercises from dictation.”

Whether students in the latter half of the nineteenth century learned to spell by the alphabet or by the whole word method, increasing numbers of them used books in which words were intended to be both spoken and written and their definitions learned. Some authors, such as Lucius Osgood (entry #110), made explicit efforts to adapt both the content and the format of their books to the age level of students, although still insisting that students should be familiar with methods of combining letters and syllables in long, difficult words.

The second half of the 1800’s was a transitional period for spelling instruction in which spelling books reflected the views represented by both Webster and Mann, a few, such as Noble Butler’s The American Spelling-Book (entry #19), employed both the alphabet and whole word methods. Some writers, however, found change difficult. William Adams’ A Spelling Book for Advanced Classes (entry #1), although prepared for older students, contained 163 lessons, each listing thirty words, none of which was provided with syllabication, pronunciation, or meaning, because said Adams, “the dictionary will always be available to supply deficiencies.”

In 1800’s Spelling Ability Greatly Prized

For the people in the villages, towns, and cities of the growing nation, however, emerging changes in spelling content and method made little difference. For the most part, spelling ability symbolized, as it had in preceding generations, more than an ability to spell words accurately. It symbolized above all else that success is achieved through diligence and hard work—the American work-success ethic. One man, a Reverend Button, recalling his early nineteenth-century school days, wrote:

The child cares no more in his heart about the arrangement of vowels and consonants in the orthography of words than he does how many chips lie above one another at the school house woodpile. But he does care whether he is at the head or foot of his class (3; p. 270).

The scholars who stood at the head of their classes in spelling were greatly admired, much in the manner that successful athletes are today, and this respect did not diminish despite the expansion of the school curriculum in America’s common schools. A former university dean was not alone in his attitude about the educational and social significance of spelling when, in recalling his childhood in the late 1800’s, he wrote:

We seemingly inherited the passion from our fathers and mothers, as they had in their day, mighty men and women of valor with respect to the gymnastics of English orthography. With them words were made to be spelled, their meaning and use being purely incidental to their construction, and the worse the construction, the better the word. My mother never went to school after she was twelve but I never knew her to misspell a word. She had learned by main strength how to spell, not only all kinds of common and uncommon words, but also a choice selection of “catch-words” of which Kamchatka, as it was then spelled, was one of the easy ones, and such as seraglio nothing at all (24; p. 132).

For several hundred years, the “gymnastics” of English orthography had lent itself handily to a form of competition which in nineteenth-century America came to be called the “spelling bee” (9, 19). Throughout most of the 1800’s, spelling bees became a kind of national recreational pastime, even to the extent that children sometimes tried to
"spell down" their companions as a form of play during school recess time (24; p. 131). In the formality of classrooms, however, the influence of Noah Webster and the domination of the alphabet method waned as the nineteenth century drew nearer to a close, sharing its place with books based upon the whole word method and upon other methods, such as Rebecca Pollard's elaborately phonetic Synthetic Speller and Pollard's Advanced Spellers (entry #130).

As Curriculum Expands, Spelling Instruction Declines

But views of education in general were changing also. The common-school movement, at least through the elementary school years, had become a reality, and with greater numbers of children and subjects to be taught, concerns grew about the effectiveness of public education in developing a literate and socially productive citizenry. Dr. Joseph M. Rice, a New York City pediatrician, was among the first educational reformers to apply to the study of educational problems in general and to spelling instruction in particular the tools of scientific inquiry which the recent rise of social Darwinism had kindled (24). Rice's analysis of the spelling achievement of over 30,000 students had led him to the conclusion that a careful selection and grading of useful words and well-trained teachers would produce effective results regardless of instructional method, and his recommendations had a strong influence on the study of spelling and the design of instruction as the twentieth century began.

Above all else, the expanding curriculum in the nation's common schools most deeply affected traditional spelling practices. There was simply no longer the time available in the school day to give spelling instruction the attention and prominence it had received in the early years of the nineteenth century. Other subjects had taken over as earlier responsibilities as the major subject through which basic skills were learned and moral and social values instilled, while yet retaining its status in the minds of the general population as a mark of an educated person.

There is an anecdote about the impact that Noah Webster's blue-backed speller had when it was first introduced into a school district in the Allegheny mountains of Pennsylvania. The story goes that a Scotch elder who was quite upset with Webster's new standards of pronunciation declared to a local storekeeper:

"Have ye heard the news, mon? Do you ken what's gaen on? Here's a book by a Yankee lad called Webster, teaching the children clean agenst the Christian religion!"

"Oh, how so?" asked the storekeeper.

"Why, ye ken ye canna sing the Psalms of David without having salvation and such words in four syllables, sal-va-ti-on, and he's making the children say salva-shun" (22; p. 97).

Conclusion

While English spelling and pronunciation today hardly engender the religious fervor of the angered Scotsman, the subject remains a matter of educational controversy regarding its most effective mode of instruction (9) and a valued skill in the larger society, although now a relatively minor part of the general school curriculum. To realize that the 231 spellers contained in this catalog are only a representative sample of the several hundreds of spellers that were published by the beginning of the present century is to place the importance of the subject in the nineteenth century in proper context, for these 231 spellers and the others that are not included in this important collection helped to shape the minds and the character of our forebears and, thus, ourselves as well.

Richard E. Hodges. Director
School of Education
University of Puget Sound

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School of Education
University of Puget Sound
Early American Spellers

Adams, William T[aylor]
   The thirty words in each of the 163 lessons are not provided with syllabication, pronunciation, or meaning.

Alden, Abner
   Atwood, Moses G.
   The book was hailed as being "carefully revised and adapted to Walker’s principles of English orthoepy with progressive reading lessons designed for the use of schools in the United States."

Bailey, Rufus W.
   Contains exercises in the orthography, derivation, and classification of English words.

Barford, A.H., and Henry A. Tilley
   Consists of a series of dictation lessons for use in schools and by private students.

Barry, John
   Beecher, A.G.

Bentley, Rensselaer
   Considered to be the first American spelling book to use illustrations for teaching orthography.

Belwett, Scott H., and Ben Blewett, comp.

Bosworth, Joseph

Brothers of the Christian Schools

### CALIFORNIA SPELLER.

#### Lesson I.

& (a long), as in take.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rago</th>
<th>rage</th>
<th>cage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sale</td>
<td>sale</td>
<td>stale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>name</td>
<td>name</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>race</td>
<td>race</td>
<td>place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gate</td>
<td>gate</td>
<td>plate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lade</td>
<td>lade</td>
<td>blade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tape</td>
<td>tape</td>
<td>cape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gazo</td>
<td>gazo</td>
<td>haze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take</td>
<td>take</td>
<td>cake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Take away the gate.
Name and fame will die.
You did not shut the gate.

---

General Directions. Question the pupil at each recitation as to the meaning of the words in the lesson. Encourage them to give definitions in their own words.

---

Buckwalter, Geoffrey
Burhans, Hezekiah

Comprises "all that is really useful in a spelling-book to instruct a child in his native tongue, and prepare him for more advanced books, in the progress of his education."

Butler, Noble

Utilizes both the alphabet and whole word methods to teach spelling.

California State Board of Education
Campbell, William A.
Cobb, Lyman

It has been claimed that Webster had no competition for his speller until Lyman Cobb's books appeared in 1821. Cobb openly criticized Webster's work for not following the orthography and orthoepy (pronunciation) outlined by John Walker. Cobb did not include any pictures or reading materials.

Comly, John

Includes notes for parents and teachers; to be used in the public schools or for private or family instruction.
More than 85 percent of the pages in this book are devoted to spelling. For this reason, it was considered to be the first American textbook that was a virtual speller. The pronunciation exercises were directed by diacritical marks, and reading lessons were fully illustrated. Revised and improved from the fourth edition.

Lesson 21.
blab clock flag
black club flat
bled clung fling
blot plan flock
block plot sled
clad plum slip

Lesson 22.
brag cram fret
brick cross fresh
brush crust frisk
broil dress frock
grub drop frog
grand drum from

Plum, frog, clock, flag, drum.

DeWolf, D.F.

Dunton, Larkin


Edwards, Richard, and Mortimer A. Warren
Fleming, Robert
   PE 1145.F55

One of the many Confederate school books published during the American Civil War, Fleming's speller was popularly known as the "Gray-Backed Speller" as contrasted with Webster's famous "Blue-Backed Speller."

Flint, Abel
   PE 1625.F55

No definitions are contained, in order to keep the size and price of the dictionary within reason.

Fowle, William Bentley
   PE 1144.F6

Horace Mann singled out this speller as one in which the Law of Association was properly put to use.

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**FALSE ORTHOGRAPHY;**

**OR,**

**COMPANION TO THE NATIONAL SERIES**

**OF**

**SPELLERS AND READERS,**

**TRACKING**

**THE ORTHOGRAPHY AND MEANING OF MANY THOUSAND WORDS MOST LIABLE TO BE MISSPELLED AND MISUSED.**

**BY WILLIAM B. FOWLE.**

NEW YORK:
PUBLISHED BY A. & B. BARNES & CO.
II & III WILLIAM STREET.

1887.
A Comprehensive Spelling-Book To Accompany Hillard's Series of Reading Books

Boston. Brewer & Tileston.
Fowle's objective in presenting his spelling lessons was to focus on the most widely misspelled and misused words in the English language so that the pupils could make the appropriate corrections. Fowle believed that pupils should assume "such a standing task" as a way of preventing "much of the idleness, ennui and mischief, so common in our schools."


Henderson, N.P.

Henderson, a New York school principal, adhered to the notion, just as Harrington had done, that spelling was an exercise of the eye. He was against learning to spell by memorizing word lists. Instead, Henderson’s book suggested a new system of learning to spell by associating words containing similar, or nearly similar, sounds produced by different combinations of letters.


Henkle, W.D.

Hewett, Edwin C.

[Hillard, George Stillman]

Holmes, Geo. F.

Jones, John Franklin
Jones, Judson

Kelley, Hall J.

Kirby, Stephen R.

MINERVA INSTRUCTING YOUTH.

Leonard, L.W.
[86] Bangor, Me.: D. Bugbee, 1847. 178 p. PE 1144 .L4

Marshall, Elihu F.

Stressed pronunciation as an important aspect of spelling. Content based on Walker's Critical Pronouncing Dictionary.


Martindale, Joseph C.

McCall, John G.

McElligott, James N.
[94] 1858. 215 p. PE 1144 .M3


Designed to be a spelling book and dictionary.

[McGuffey, William Holmes]

Allegedly, Noah Webster, whose grammar books were used mostly in private schools in the East, approved of McGuffey's methods of teaching pronunciation and orthoepy. McGuffey's spelling approach was eclectic in content, not method.


Monroe was Dean of the School of Oratory at Boston University. Consequently, his full graded series of six readers, his primer, and his spellers all had an oral emphasis. The Monroe speller arranged words in large, clear print according to the subject and suggested that correct spelling required pupils to “permanently photograph upon the mind” the new words learned.

Morrell, Thomas

Mulkey, William

Mulvany, Edward

[———]


[———]


This Butler series of spelling books, edited by Samuel Mecutchen, included pronunciation and syllabication guides based on Noah Webster's works.


LESSON I.

a-m am | e-n en
a-n an | e-t et
e-s es | e-t et
a-x ax | e-s es

LESSON II.

b-e be | g-e ge
d-e be | h-e he
e-o oe | i-o io
m-e me | n-e ne
w-e we | s-e se

CITY AND COUNTRY.

LESSON LXXXI.

gar'den yard fence
wood-house arbor alley
well curb wind lass
chain hy'drant water
spig'ot flowers grass

LESSON LXXXII.

tool-house grind'stone plane
ham mer hatch et au'ger
gim let awl screw
hoe rake pitch'fork
spade shov'el seythe
The two spellers most widely used in America before Webster's were those written by Thomas Dilworth and William Perry. Perry, lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, devoted more than half of his book to word lists, some 58 pages to moral tales and fables, and 22 pages of appendix material that included pronunciation, rules, and definitions. This edition included a table of geographical data on America.


Pickett, Albert

Picket, Albert, and John W. Picket

Pollard, Rebecca Smith

Mrs. Pollard's late nineteenth century speller, written to support the prevailing readers, offered the synthetic or "whole sounds" approach to spelling. Her techniques and teaching methods more nearly coincide with the contemporary concern for phonics than any of the other early spellers. She also wrote Pollard's Synthetic Speller and a manual to accompany both spellers.

Prentiss, Thomas MEllenj

Robinson, John

Russell, William

Sargent, Epes

Another graded speller with various editions, the unique feature of this book was the manner in which Sargent listed the words, not in columns, but in rows of lines across the page, e.g., aerial, alluvial, colloquial, diluvial. Sargent, also author of popular readers and books on elocution and etymology, classified words according to difficulty and similarity of spelling or sounds, and showed the pupil where Webster and Worcester differed in their respective approaches on the teaching of certain words.

Sears, James H.

Sheridan, Thomas
Simmons, John
[149] The City and Country Spelling Book. Part II.

Smith, [Sir] William
PE 1625 .S6

Smith, William W.
Miller & Elder, 1852. 63 p. PE 1144 .S6

[152] The Southern First Spelling Book. 2nd ed. Rich-
mond, [Va.]: Drinker & Morris, 1845. 179 p.
PE 1144 .S6

One of the textbooks used in the Confederacy.

[153] The Speller and Word-Book. New York, Cin-
cinnati, and St. Louis: Benziger Bros., 1877. 46 p.
PE 1145

[154] Spelling-Book. New York, Cincinnati, and
Chicago. American Book Co., 1895. 128 p. PE 1145

Story, Charles A[ugustus]
[155] Story's Blending and Spelling Book. Chicago,
United States Phonetic Co., 1883. 307 p. PE 1145 .S8

Swan, William D[raper]
[156] The Spelling Book. Philadelphia. Thomas,
Cowperthwait & Co., 1849. 148 p. PE 1144 .S95

[157] 1851. 148 p. PE 1144 .S95
[158] 1853. 148 p. PE 1144 .S95

Swinton, William
[159] Word-Analysis. New York, Cincinnati, and
Chicago: American Book Co., 1871. 125 p. PE 1145 .S95

York, Cincinnati, and Chicago: American Book Co.,
1872. 153 p. PE 1145 .S95

Swinton intended this book to precede Word
Analysis. Here Swinton presents short spelling
lessons, divided into written and oral work, into
monthly and yearly sections and provides systematic
review lessons, short lessons on the names of com-
mon objeckte and activities of life. Furthermore, he
classifies words by associating them with leading
ideas. This important speller by Swinton can be con-
considered to be a forerunner of the spelling books
popular during the 1930s and 1940s in which words
to be learned in spelling are arranged by topical
themes.

[161] New York and Chicago. Ivison, Blakeman &
Co., [1873]. 154 p. PE 1145 .S95
[163] 1878. 154 p. PE 1145.S95
[164] 1879. 154 p. PE 1145.S95
[165] 1897. 154 p. PE 1145.S95

Tower, David Bates


An excellent example of how the title of the book is used to announce what the book will contain.


Town, Salem


Salem Town believed that most pupils could not spell well because they could not readily trace the Greek and Latin roots of words.


[175] 1849. 168 p. PE 1144.T6


[177] Boston: Sanborn, Carter and Bazin; Portland, [Me.]: Francis Blake, 1856. 168 p. PE 1144.T6


Walker, John

TABLE I.

The Wolf and the Lamb.

A WOLF is a very terrible animal, and eats lambs and sheep, and even little children.

A creature whose very hungry, and wants to eat you, will not stay to ask you a great many questions; and, if he does, I suppose will not listen very good-naturedly to your answers.

One of Esop\\'s wolves however, that I am now going to tell you about, was of a humour to talk to his prey, and never to play the tyrant, without producing an argument to prove that it was reasonable to do so. This wolf happened to be thirsty, and went to the stream to drink. A little lower down the stream there was a pretty Lamb, that, posed to be thirsty, aid went to the stream to drink. A wolf looked very fiercely at the lamb, and longed to eat him up. You little knave, said the wolf, how dare you put In ,,sui nose there, sad make the ware all noddy to cat host up. was drinking at the same time.

I suppose will not listen very good-usturedly to your an-

Warren, Mortimer A.


PE 1145 .W3

Watkins, William B.

[189] McGuffey\\'s Alternate Spelling-Book. Cincin-


PE 1145 .W3

Walker\\'s dictionary was first published in 1791 and was highly acclaimed and borrowed. This edition was based on the sixteenth London edition and reflected, as did all of Walker\\'s works, the upper-class speech of England. Walker\\'s pronunciation guides and Johnson\\'s orthography motivated Noah Webster to design his famous speller based on American speech.


PE 1625 .W3


PE 1625 .W3

Watkins was the publisher\\'s in-house editor who was responsible for the major revisions of the McGuffey books. One of the changes was to use diacritical marks in identifying vowel sounds as opposed to the use of numerals used by previous authors.

Watson, J. Madison


PE 1144 .W3


PE 1145 .W3

In the Preface, Watson summarized his approach to spelling by emphasizing oral and written lessons and by stating that lessons and methods must be strictly educational and conform with the "Laws of Mental Association." Watson, too, used diacritical marks to indicate the sounds of vowels and consonants, and attempted to relate the words to the world and aspects of life, e.g., "Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral Kingdoms."


PE 1145 .W3
Webster, Noah  
PE 1625 .W4  
Webster alludes in his preface to his failing health and indicates that the work, an abridgement of the Quarto edition, was done by Joseph E. Worcester and Charles Goodrich, his son-in-law. The features of this edition included additional vocabulary, etymologies, and changes in orthography rules. For example, u and k were excluded from such words as honor and music, and in derivative words, such as worshiping and counseling, the final consonant of the primitive is doubled only when under the accent. Webster boasted that the 16,000 words and over 30,000 definitions included in this book were “in constant use in all aspects of American life.”

PE 1144 .W4  
Critics hailed this book for its simple and logical approach to the teaching of spelling. It became America’s all-time best speller and the most popular textbook of its time. The pattern was to present several pages of syllables using different vowel sounds. Pupils progressed from words of one syllable to longer words with more letters, syllables, and sounds. There were also short fables, moral tales, verb paradigms, a numbers chart, illustrative sentences, and a list of foreign words occurring in English.

PE 1144 .W4
[197] 1817. 168 p. PE 1144 .W4


In the preface to his first dictionary, Noah Webster credits Rev. Elizur Goodrich for having inspired him to compile the dictionary as a companion to his previously published grammar, reading, and spelling books. The print in this edition is so small it is scarcely decipherable. Webster claims to have added 5,000 new words to compilations done by Sheridan, Walker, and Johnson. One section is devoted to showing the differences in pronunciation rules set forth by various lexicographers.


Webster restored some of the spellings he had previously changed in The American Dictionary when this book was published.

[210] 1866. 170 p. PE 1145 .W4


Webster, William G.


The author was the favorite son of Noah Webster. Although William Webster arranged the book to be both a speller and a dictionary, it had minor worth as a dictionary and was basically an extension of his father's work.


Wheeler, William Henry

Williams, George

Willson, Marcus


Worcester, Joseph E.

Joseph E. Worcester was Noah Webster’s real competition. In his dictionaries, Worcester used an elaborate system of diacritical marks to indicate pronunciations. He challenged Webster’s theories on orthography and pronunciation largely through newspaper columns and advertisements.

Worcester, Samuel T.


One of the first spellers to advocate the whole word method of teaching.


Wright, Albert D.


Attempted to teach the "philosophy of orthography and orthoepy."


[229] 1852. 126 p. PE 1144 .W7


Alphabetical Index of Titles

An Abridgement of Ainworth's Dictionary [102]
The Alphabet of Orthoepy [82]
The American Definition Spelling Book, Improved [3]
An American Dictionary of the English Language [193]
The American Instructer [8]
The American Speller [34]
The American Spelling-Book (Butler) [19]
The American Spelling-Book (Webster) [194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202]
An Analysis of the Derivative Words in the English Language [170, 171, 172, 173]
The Analytical Speller [38, 39]
Analytical Spelling Book (Jones) [81]
Analytical Spelling Book (Mulkey) [103]
The Analytical Spelling Book (Parsons) [116]
The City and Country Spelling Book [149]
Cobb's Expositor [24, 25]
Cobb's New Spelling Book [26]
Cobb's Spelling Book [27, 28, 29]
The Columbian Spelling-Book [32]
Comly's Spelling and Reading Book [30, 31]
The Common School Speller [48]
A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language [203]
A Complete Dictionary of the English Language [148]
The Complete Speller [91]
A Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language [221]
A Comprehensive Spelling-Book [15, 16]
A Comprehensive Spelling-Book to Accompany Hillard's Series of Reading Books [79]
A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary, and Expositor of the English Language [185]
A Critical Pronouncing Spelling Book [218]
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