

Noah and Rebecca Webster built their comfortable home in a fashionable middle-class neighborhood of New Haven, Connecticut during the early 1820s.



They lived only a few blocks from New Haven's town green and very near Yale College.

The house, shown here (far right) about 1927, was situated close to the street, as were most urban homes of the early 19th century

Noah Webster's New Haven house was both "workshop" and home. Here, Webster completed his first American dictionary in 1828, as well as later works. At this family home, Noah and

Noah Webster Home at Its Original Site, New Haven, Connecticut, March 31, 1934

This is textbook pioneer and spelling reformer Noah Webster's home on its original site in New Haven, Connecticut. Henry Ford admired Webster and recognized his house as an important piece of American history. Ford had the building moved to Greenfield Village - his historical outdoor museum in Dearborn, Michigan. This view documents architectural details, including second floor bay windows not moved with the house.

"The Elementary Spelling Book; Being an Improvement on the American Spelling Book by Noah Webster," circa 1848

Noah Webster's speller offered simple guidelines for spelling and pronouncing American English words. Age-appropriate lessons taught schoolchildren to read and write, helping to define and unify American language. Known by its colored cover, Webster's "blue-backed speller" remained popular for more than 100 years. It sold so well that Webster was able to construct his New Haven, Connecticut home using the proceeds.

Noah Webster was an influential American educator and patriot. He is most famous for his American Dictionary of the English Language. But shortly after the American Revolution, and before the dictionary, Webster created an American spelling textbook to replace British and European books. Known as the "Blue-Backed Speller," the book was popular in American schools for more than a century.

This is Eliza Webster Jones, one of Noah Webster's eight children. Webster was a "family man," doting on his children and grandchildren and delighting in their activities. Eliza lived with her parents and the younger Webster siblings in the New Haven, Connecticut home after it was completed in 1823. She married Henry Jones in 1825, probably about the time this painting was done.

This house was constructed about 1823 in New Haven, Connecticut. The floor plan was devised by the Webster family in consultation with a local builder. The home was arranged to accommodate two elderly people who found large, drafty rooms and stair climbing a hardship. Noah was nearly sixty five when he moved in, bringing his wife Rebecca, four of his seven children, and a free black servant.

In his New Haven, Connecticut home, Noah Webster wrote the first dictionary of the American English language. The house changed hands, serving as a private residence and dormitory for more than a century before coming to Greenfield Village in 1936.

Side View of Noah Webster Home at Its Original Site, New Haven, Connecticut, 1936

This is textbook pioneer and spelling reformer Noah Webster's home on its original site in New Haven, Connecticut. Henry Ford admired Webster and recognized his house as an important piece of American history. Ford had the building moved to Greenfield Village - his historical outdoor museum in Dearborn, Michigan. This side view documents later additions not moved with the house.

Noah Webster Home at Its Original Site, New Haven, Connecticut, 1936

This is textbook pioneer and spelling reformer Noah Webster's home on its original site in New Haven, Connecticut. Henry Ford admired Webster and recognized his house as an important piece of American history. Ford had the building moved to Greenfield Village - his historical outdoor museum in Dearborn, Michigan. This view documents the original back porch and additions not moved with the house.

Noah Webster Home at Its Original Site, New Haven, Connecticut, circa 1912

This is textbook pioneer and spelling reformer Noah Webster's home on its original site in New Haven, Connecticut. Henry Ford admired Webster and recognized his house as an important piece of American history. Ford had the building moved to Greenfield Village - his historical outdoor museum in Dearborn, Michigan. This view documents side and rear additions not moved with the house.

Noah Webster Home, Original Site, New Haven, Connecticut, circa 1927

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Noah Webster Home at Its Original Site, New Haven, Connecticut, circa 1927

Noah and Rebecca Webster built their comfortable home in a fashionable middle-class neighborhood of New Haven, Connecticut during the early 1820s. They lived only a few blocks from New Haven's town green and very near Yale College. The house, shown here (far right) about 1927, was situated close to the street, as were most urban homes of the early 19th century.

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Noah Webster Home

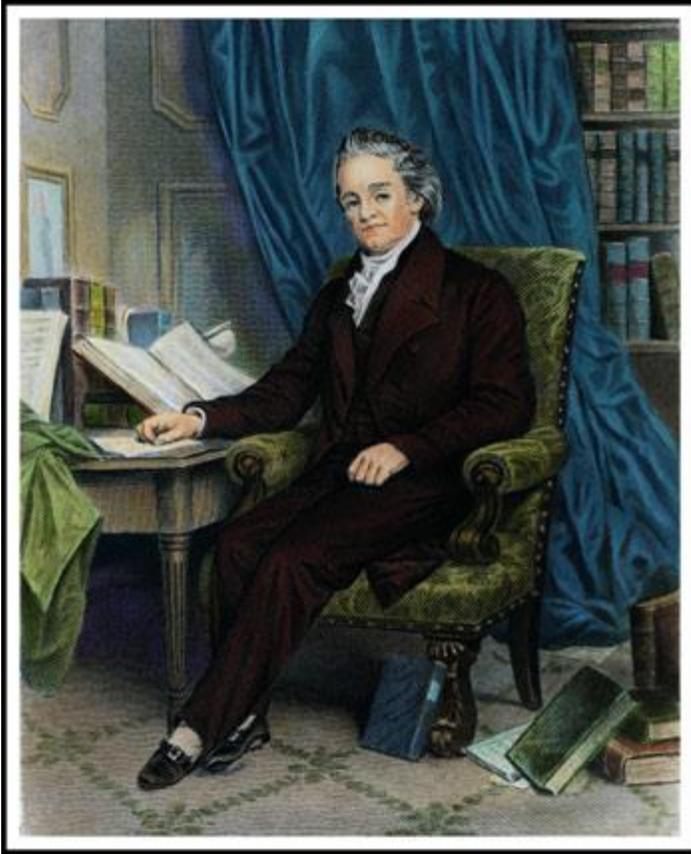
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WHERE IS A PICTURE OF THE HOME IN NEW HAVEN CT????

Noah Webster History

Noah Webster was born on October 16, 1758 in the West Division of Hartford, Connecticut (now West Hartford). Webster grew up in an average colonial family – his father farmed and worked as a weaver, while his mother worked at home. At the time, few people went to college, but Webster enjoyed learning so much that his parents sent him to Yale, Connecticut’s first college. He left for New Haven in 1774 when he was 16 and graduated in 1778. Webster wanted to continue his education by studying law, but his parents could not afford to give him more money for school. After thinking about his options, Webster began working as a teacher.

During his years as a student and then as a schoolteacher, Webster realized the American education system needed to be updated. Children of all ages were crammed into one-room schoolhouses with no desks, poor books, and untrained teachers. Although this was after the American Revolution, their books came from England, often pledging their allegiance to King George. Webster believed that Americans should learn from American books, so in 1783, he wrote his own textbook: *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*. It earned its nickname, the “Blue-Backed Speller”, because of its characteristic blue cover. For over 100 years, Webster’s book taught children to read, spell and pronounce words. It was the most popular American book of its time, selling nearly 100 million copies.



In 1789, Noah married Rebecca Greenleaf, the daughter of a rich man from Boston. During their long marriage, they had eight children and numerous grandchildren. The family lived in New Haven, and then moved to Amherst, Massachusetts. There, Webster helped to found Amherst College. The family later moved back to New Haven.

In 1801, Webster started working on defining the words that Americans use. He did this because Americans spoke and used words differently than the English, and to help people who lived in different parts of the country to speak and spell the same way.

In his dictionary, Webster used American spellings like “color” instead of the English “colour” and “music” instead of “musick”. He also added American words that weren’t in English dictionaries like “skunk” and “squash.” His first edition, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* was published in 1806. This book offered brief definitions of about 37,000 words. It took him 22 more years to finish his *American Dictionary of the English Language*. When he finished in 1828, at the age of 70, Noah’s dictionary defined over 65,000 words.

Noah Webster accomplished many things in his life. Not only did he fight for an American language, he also fought for copyright laws, a strong federal government, universal education, and the abolition of slavery. In between fighting for these causes, he wrote textbooks, edited magazines, corresponded with men like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, helped found Amherst College, created his own version of an “American” Bible, raised eight children, and celebrated 54 anniversaries with his beloved wife. When Noah Webster died in 1843, he was an American hero.



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Noah Webster



Noah Webster in an 1833 portrait by [James Herring](#)

Member of the [Connecticut House of Representatives](#)

In office

1800; 1802 – 1807

Personal details

Noah Webster Jr.

Born

October 16, 1758

Western Reserve of [Hartford](#),^{[1][2]}

[Connecticut Colony](#), [British America](#)

Died

May 28, 1843 (aged 84)

[New Haven](#), [Connecticut](#), U.S.

Resting place

[Grove Street Cemetery](#) in [New Haven](#),
[Connecticut](#)

Political party	Federalist
Spouse(s)	Rebecca Greenleaf Webster (m. 1789)
Children	8
Residence	Hartford, Connecticut New York City New Haven, Connecticut
Alma mater	Yale University
Occupation	Lexicographer Author Connecticut state representative
Military service	
Allegiance	 United States of America
Branch/service	 Connecticut Militia
Battles/wars	American Revolutionary War



Noah Webster painted by [Samuel F. B. Morse](#)



Webster's New Haven home, where he wrote *An American Dictionary of the English Language*. Now relocated to [Greenfield Village](#) in Dearborn, Michigan.

Noah Webster Jr. (October 16, 1758 – May 28, 1843) was an American [lexicographer](#), textbook pioneer, [English-language spelling reformer](#), political writer, editor, and prolific author. He has been called the "Father of American Scholarship and Education". His blue-backed speller books taught five generations of American children how to spell and read. Webster's name has become synonymous with "dictionary" in the United States, especially the modern [Merriam-Webster](#) dictionary that was first published in 1828 as *An American Dictionary of the English Language*.

Born in [West Hartford, Connecticut](#), Webster graduated from [Yale College](#) in 1778. He passed the bar examination after studying law under [Oliver Ellsworth](#) and others, but was unable to find work as a lawyer. He found some financial success by opening a private school and writing a series of educational books, including the "Blue-Backed Speller." A strong supporter of the [American Revolution](#) and the ratification of the [United States Constitution](#), Webster hoped his educational works would provide an intellectual foundation for American nationalism; however, by 1820 he became a critic of the society he helped create.

In 1793, [Alexander Hamilton](#) recruited Webster to move to [New York City](#) and become an editor for a [Federalist Party](#) newspaper. He became a prolific author, publishing newspaper articles, political essays, and textbooks. He returned to Connecticut in 1798 and served in the [Connecticut House of Representatives](#). Webster founded the Connecticut Society for the Abolition of Slavery in 1791 but later became somewhat disillusioned with the [abolitionist](#) movement.

In 1806, Webster published his first dictionary, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*. The following year, he started working on an expanded and comprehensive dictionary, finally publishing it in 1828. He was very influential in popularizing certain spellings in the United States. He was also influential in establishing the [Copyright Act of 1831](#), the first major statutory revision of [U.S. copyright law](#). While working on a second volume of his dictionary, Webster died in 1843, and the rights to the dictionary were acquired by [George and Charles Merriam](#).

[Biography](#)

Webster was born in the Western Division of [Hartford](#) (which became [West Hartford, Connecticut](#)) to an established family. His father Noah Sr. (1722–1813) was a descendant of Connecticut Governor [John Webster](#); his mother Mercy (Steele) Webster (1727–1794) was a descendant of Governor [William Bradford](#) of [Plymouth Colony](#). His father was primarily a farmer, though he was also deacon of the local [Congregational church](#), captain of the town's militia, and a founder of a local book society (a precursor to the public library). After American independence, he was appointed a justice of the peace.

Webster's father never attended college, but he was intellectually curious and prized education. Webster's mother spent long hours teaching her children spelling, mathematics, and music.^[6] At age six, Webster began attending a dilapidated one-room primary school built by West Hartford's Ecclesiastical Society. Years later, he described the teachers as the "dregs of humanity" and complained that the instruction was mainly in religion.^[7] Webster's experiences there motivated him to improve the educational experience of future generations.^[8]

At age fourteen, his church pastor began tutoring him in [Latin](#) and [Greek](#) to prepare him for entering [Yale College](#). Webster enrolled at Yale just before his 16th birthday, studying during his senior year with [Ezra Stiles](#), Yale's president. His four years at Yale overlapped the [American Revolutionary War](#) and, because of food shortages and threatened British invasions, many of his classes had to be held in other towns. Webster served in the Connecticut Militia. His father had [mortgaged](#) the farm to send Webster to Yale, but he was now on his own and had nothing more to do with his family.

Webster lacked career plans after graduating from Yale in 1778, later writing that a [liberal arts education](#) "disqualifies a man for business". He taught school briefly in Glastonbury, but the working conditions were harsh and the pay low. He quit to study law. While studying law under future [U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Oliver Ellsworth](#), Webster also taught full-time in Hartford—which was grueling, and ultimately impossible to continue. He quit his legal studies for a year and lapsed into a [depression](#); he then found another practicing attorney to tutor him, and completed his studies and passed the bar examination in 1781. As the Revolutionary War was still going on, he could not find work as a lawyer. He received a master's degree from Yale by giving an oral dissertation to the Yale graduating class. Later that year, he opened a small private school in western Connecticut that was a success. Nevertheless, he soon closed it and left town, probably because of a failed romance. Turning to literary work as a way to overcome his losses and channel his ambitions, he began writing a series of well-received articles for a prominent New England newspaper justifying and praising the American Revolution and arguing that the separation from Britain was permanent. He then founded a private school catering to wealthy parents in [Goshen, New York](#) and, by 1785, he had written his speller, a grammar book and a reader for elementary schools. Proceeds from continuing sales of the popular blue-backed speller enabled Webster to spend many years working on his famous dictionary.

Webster was by nature a revolutionary, seeking American independence from the cultural thralldom to Britain. To replace it, he sought to create a utopian America, cleansed of luxury and ostentation and the champion of freedom. By 1781, Webster had an expansive view of the new nation. American nationalism was superior to Europe because American values were superior, he claimed.

America sees the absurdities—she sees the kingdoms of Europe, disturbed by wrangling sectaries, or their commerce, population and improvements of every kind cramped and retarded, because the human mind like the body is fettered 'and bound fast by the chords of policy and superstition': She laughs at their folly and shuns their errors: She founds her empire upon the idea of universal toleration: She admits all religions into her bosom; She secures the sacred rights of every individual; and (astonishing absurdity to Europeans!) she sees a thousand discordant opinions live in the strictest harmony ... it will finally raise her to a pitch of greatness and lustre, before which the glory of ancient Greece and Rome shall dwindle to a point, and the splendor of modern Empires fade into obscurity.

Webster dedicated his *Speller* and *Dictionary* to providing an intellectual foundation for American nationalism. From 1787 to 1789, Webster was an outspoken supporter of the new Constitution. In October 1787, he wrote a pamphlet entitled "An Examination into the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution Proposed by the Late Convention Held at Philadelphia," published under the pen name "A Citizen of America."^[23] The pamphlet was influential, particularly outside New York State.

In terms of political theory, he de-emphasized virtue (a core value of [republicanism](#)) and emphasized widespread ownership of property (a key element of Federalism). He was one of the few Americans who paid much attention to French theorist [Jean-Jacques Rousseau](#). It was not Rousseau's politics but his ideas on pedagogy in *Emile* (1762) that influenced Webster in adjusting his *Speller* to the stages of a child's development.

To the Friends of Literature in the United States, Webster's [prospectus](#) for his first dictionary of the English language, 1807–1808

Webster married well and had joined the elite in Hartford but did not have much money. In 1793, [Alexander Hamilton](#) lent him \$1,500 to move to New York City to edit the leading [Federalist Party](#) newspaper. In December, he founded New York's first daily newspaper *American Minerva* (later known as the *Commercial Advertiser*), which he edited for four years, writing the equivalent of 20 volumes of articles and editorials. He also published the semi-weekly publication *The Herald, A Gazette for the country* (later known as *The New York Spectator*).

As a Federalist spokesman, he defended the administrations of [George Washington](#) and [John Adams](#), especially their policy of neutrality between Britain and France, and he especially criticized the excesses of the [French Revolution](#) and its [Reign of Terror](#). When French ambassador [Citizen Genêt](#) set up a network of pro-Jacobin "[Democratic-Republican Societies](#)" that entered American politics and attacked President Washington, he condemned them. He later defended [Jay's Treaty](#) between the United States and Britain. As a result, he was repeatedly denounced by the [Jeffersonian Republicans](#) as "a pusillanimous, half-begotten, self-dubbed patriot," "an incurable lunatic," and "a deceitful newsmonger ... Pedagogue and Quack." Webster was elected a Fellow of the [American Academy of Arts and Sciences](#) in 1799.

For decades, he was one of the most prolific authors in the new nation, publishing textbooks, political essays, a report on infectious diseases, and newspaper articles for his Federalist party. He wrote so much that a modern bibliography of his published works required 655 pages. He moved back to New Haven in 1798; he was elected as a Federalist to the [Connecticut House of Representatives](#) in 1800 and 1802–1807.

Copyright

The [Copyright Act of 1831](#) was the first major statutory revision of [U.S. copyright law](#), a result of intensive lobbying by Noah Webster and his agents in Congress.^[27] Webster also played a critical role lobbying individual states throughout the country during the 1780s to pass the first American copyright laws, which were expected to have distinct nationalistic implications for the infant nation.

Blue-backed speller



A 1932 statue of Webster by [Korczak Ziolkowski](#) stands in front of the public library of [West Hartford, Connecticut](#).

As a teacher, he had come to dislike American elementary schools. They could be overcrowded, with up to seventy children of all ages crammed into [one-room schoolhouses](#). They had poor, underpaid staff, no desks, and unsatisfactory textbooks that came from England. Webster thought that Americans should learn from American books, so he began writing the three volume compendium *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*. The work consisted of a speller (published in 1783), a grammar (published in 1784), and a reader (published in 1785). His goal was to provide a uniquely American approach to training children. His most important improvement, he claimed, was to rescue "our native tongue" from "the clamour of pedantry" that surrounded English grammar and pronunciation. He complained that the English language had been corrupted by the British aristocracy, which set its own standard for proper spelling and pronunciation. Webster rejected the notion that the study of Greek and Latin must precede the study of English grammar. The appropriate standard for the American language, argued Webster, was "the same republican principles as American civil and ecclesiastical constitutions." This meant that the people-at-large must control the language; popular sovereignty in government must be accompanied by popular usage in language.

The *Speller* was arranged so that it could be easily taught to students, and it progressed by age. From his own experiences as a teacher, Webster thought that the *Speller* should be simple and gave an orderly presentation of words and the rules of spelling and pronunciation. He believed that students learned most readily when he broke a complex problem into its component parts and had each pupil master one part before moving to the next. Ellis argues that Webster anticipated some of the insights currently associated with [Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development](#). Webster said that children pass through distinctive learning phases in which they master increasingly complex or abstract tasks. Therefore, teachers must not try to teach a three-year-old how to read; they could not do it until age five. He organized his speller accordingly, beginning with the alphabet and moving systematically through the different sounds of vowels and consonants, then syllables, then simple words, then more complex words, then sentences.

The speller was originally titled *The First Part of the Grammatical Institute of the English Language*. Over the course of 385 editions in his lifetime, the title was changed in 1786 to *The American Spelling Book*, and again in 1829 to *The Elementary Spelling Book*. Most people called it the "Blue-Backed Speller" because of its blue cover and, for the next one hundred years, Webster's book taught children how to read, spell, and pronounce words. It was the most popular American book of its time; by 1837, it had sold 15 million copies, and some 60 million by 1890—reaching the majority of young students in the nation's first century. Its royalty of a half-cent per copy was enough to sustain Webster in his other endeavors. **It also helped create the popular contests known as [spelling bees](#).**



[Handwritten](#) drafts of dictionary entries by Webster

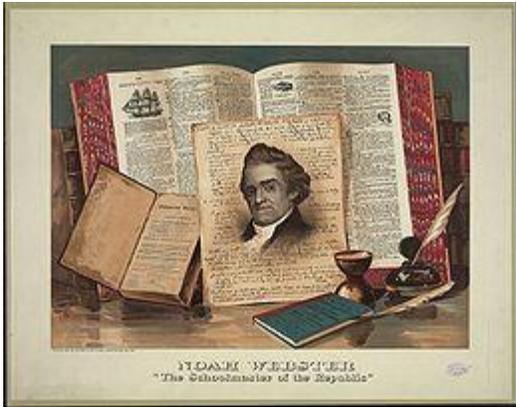
As time went on, Webster changed the spellings in the book to more phonetic ones. Most of them already existed as alternative spellings.^[32] He chose spellings such as *defense*, *color*, and *traveler*, and changed the *re* to *er* in words such as *center*. He also changed *tongue* to the older spelling *tung*, but this did not catch on.

Part three of his *Grammatical Institute* (1785) was a reader designed to uplift the mind and "diffuse the principles of virtue and patriotism."

"In the choice of pieces," he explained, "I have not been inattentive to the political interests of America. Several of those masterly addresses of Congress, written at the commencement of the late Revolution, contain such noble, just, and independent sentiments of liberty and patriotism, that I cannot help wishing to transfuse them into the breasts of the rising generation."

Students received the usual quota of Plutarch, Shakespeare, Swift, and Addison, as well as such Americans as [Joel Barlow's](#) *Vision of Columbus*, [Timothy Dwight's](#) *Conquest of Canaan*, and [John Trumbull's](#) poem *M'Fingal*. He included excerpts from [Tom Paine's](#) *The Crisis* and an essay by [Thomas Day](#) calling for the abolition of slavery in accord with the Declaration of Independence.

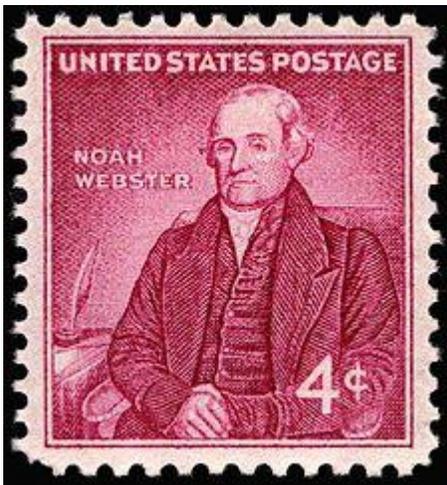
Webster's *Speller* was entirely secular by design.^[35] It ended with two pages of important dates in American history, beginning with Columbus's discovery of America in 1492 and ending with the [battle of Yorktown](#) in 1781. There was no mention of God, the Bible, or sacred events. "Let sacred things be appropriated for sacred purposes," wrote Webster. As Ellis explains, "Webster began to construct a secular catechism to the nation-state. Here was the first appearance of 'civics' in American schoolbooks. In this sense, Webster's speller becoming what was to be the secular successor to *The New England Primer* with its explicitly biblical injunctions." Later in life, Webster became intensely religious and added religious themes. However, after 1840, Webster's books lost market share to the *McGuffey Eclectic Readers* of [William Holmes McGuffey](#), which sold over 120 million copies.



Noah Webster, The Schoolmaster of the Republic. (1886)

Vincent P. Bynack (1984) examines Webster in relation to his commitment to the idea of a unified American national culture that would stave off the decline of republican virtues and solidarity. Webster acquired his perspective on language from such theorists as [Maupertuis](#), [Michaelis](#), and [Herder](#). There he found the belief that a nation's linguistic forms and the thoughts correlated with them shaped individuals' behavior. Thus, the etymological clarification and reform of American English promised to improve citizens' manners and thereby preserve republican purity and social stability. This presupposition animated Webster's *Speller* and *Grammar*.

Publication



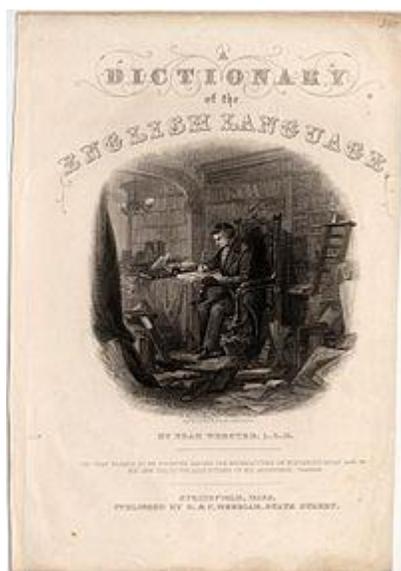
Noah Webster honoured on US Postage stamp, issue of 1958

In 1806, Webster published his first [dictionary](#), *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*. In 1807 Webster began compiling an expanded and fully comprehensive dictionary, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*; it took twenty-six years to complete. To evaluate the etymology of words, Webster learned twenty-eight languages, including [Old English](#) (Anglo-Saxon), Gothic, German, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, Dutch, Welsh, Russian, Hebrew, Aramaic, Persian, Arabic, and [Sanskrit](#). Webster hoped to standardize American speech, since Americans in different parts of the country used different languages. They also spelled, pronounced, and used English words differently.

Webster completed his dictionary during his year abroad in January 1825 in a boarding house in [Cambridge](#), England. His book contained seventy thousand words, of which twelve thousand had never appeared in a published dictionary before. As a [spelling reformer](#), Webster preferred spellings that matched pronunciation better. In *A Companion to the American Revolution* (2008), John Algeo notes: "It is often assumed that characteristically [American spellings](#) were invented by Noah Webster. He was very influential in popularizing certain spellings in America, but he did not originate them. Rather ... he chose already existing options such as *center*, *color* and *check* on such grounds as simplicity, analogy or etymology." He also added American words, like "skunk" and "squash", that did not appear in British dictionaries. At the age of seventy, Webster published his dictionary in 1828, registering the copyright on April 14.

Though it now has an honored place in the history of American English, Webster's first dictionary only sold 2,500 copies. He was forced to mortgage his home to develop a second edition, and his life from then on was plagued with debt.

In 1840, the second edition was published in two volumes. On May 28, 1843, a few days after he had completed revising an appendix to the second edition, and with much of his efforts with the dictionary still unrecognized, Noah Webster died. The rights to his dictionary were acquired by George and Charles Merriam in 1843 from Webster's estate and all contemporary [Merriam-Webster](#) dictionaries trace their lineage to that of Webster, although many others have adopted his name, attempting to share in the prestige.



[Title page](#) of Webster's *Dictionary of the English Language*, circa 1830–1840

Impact

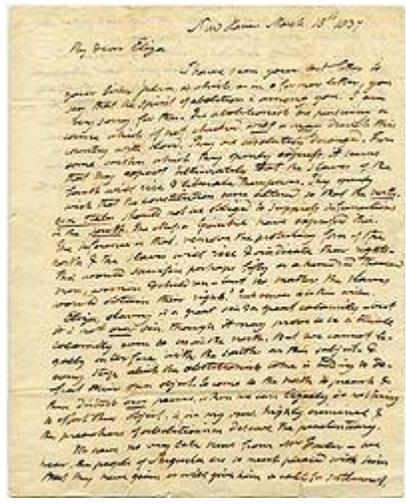
Lepore (2008) demonstrates Webster's paradoxical ideas about language and politics and shows why Webster's endeavors were at first so poorly received. Culturally conservative Federalists denounced the work as radical—too inclusive in its lexicon and even bordering on vulgar. Meanwhile, Webster's old foes the Republicans attacked the man, labeling him mad for such an undertaking

Scholars have long seen Webster's 1844 dictionary to be an important resource for reading poet [Emily Dickinson](#)'s life and work; she once commented that the "Lexicon" was her "only companion" for years. One biographer said, "The dictionary was no mere reference book to her; she read it as a priest his breviary—over and over, page by page, with utter absorption."

Nathan Austin has explored the intersection of lexicographical and poetic practices in American literature, and attempts to map out a "lexical poetics" using Webster's definitions as his base. Poets mined his dictionaries, often drawing upon the lexicography in order to express word play. Austin explicates key definitions from both the *Compendious* (1806) and *American* (1828) dictionaries, and finds a range of themes such as the politics of "American" versus "British" English and issues of national identity and independent culture. Austin argues that Webster's dictionaries helped redefine Americanism in an era of highly flexible cultural identity. Webster himself saw the dictionaries as a nationalizing device to separate America from Britain, calling his project a "federal language", with competing forces towards regularity on the one hand and innovation on the other. Austin suggests that the contradictions of Webster's lexicography were part of a larger play between liberty and order within American intellectual discourse, with some pulled toward Europe and the past, and others pulled toward America and the new future.

In 1850 [Blackie and Son](#) in Glasgow published the first general dictionary of English that relied heavily upon pictorial illustrations integrated with the text. Its *The Imperial Dictionary, English, Technological, and Scientific, Adapted to the Present State of Literature, Science, and Art; On the Basis of Webster's English Dictionary* used Webster's for most of their text, adding some additional technical words that went with illustrations of machinery.

Religious views



Letter from Webster to daughter Eliza, 1837, warning of perils of the abolitionist movement

Webster in early life was something of a freethinker, but in 1808 he became a convert to Calvinistic orthodoxy, and thereafter became a devout [Congregationalist](#) who preached the need to Christianize the nation. Webster grew increasingly authoritarian and elitist, fighting against the prevailing grain of [Jacksonian Democracy](#). Webster viewed language as a tool to control unruly thoughts.

His *American Dictionary* emphasized the virtues of social control over human passions and individualism, submission to authority, and fear of God; they were necessary for the maintenance of the American social order. As he grew older, Webster's attitudes changed from those of an optimistic revolutionary in the 1780s to those of a pessimistic critic of man and society by the 1820s.

His 1828 *American Dictionary* contained the greatest number of Biblical definitions given in any reference volume. Webster considered education "useless without the Bible."^[48] Webster released his own edition of the Bible in 1833, called the [Common Version](#). He used the [King James Version](#) (KJV) as a base and consulted the Hebrew and Greek along with various other versions and commentaries. Webster molded the KJV to correct grammar, replaced words that were no longer used, and did away with words and phrases that could be seen as offensive.

In 1834, he published *Value of the Bible and Excellence of the Christian Religion*, an [apologetic](#) book in defense of the Bible and Christianity itself.

[Opposition to slavery](#)

Webster helped found the Connecticut Society for the Abolition of Slavery in 1791,^[49] but by the 1830s rejected the new tone among [abolitionists](#) that emphasized that Americans who tolerated slavery were themselves sinners. In 1837, Webster warned his daughter Eliza about her fervent support of the abolitionist cause. Webster wrote, "slavery is a great sin and a general calamity—but it is not *our* sin, though it may prove to be a terrible calamity to us in the north. But we cannot legally interfere with the South on this subject." He added, "To come north to preach and thus disturb *our* peace, when we can legally do nothing to effect this object, is, in my view, highly criminal and the preachers of abolitionism deserve the penitentiary."

[Family](#)



Rebecca Greenleaf Webster, wife of Noah Webster

Noah Webster married Rebecca Greenleaf (1766–1847) on October 26, 1789, New Haven, Connecticut. They had eight children:

- Emily Schotten (1790–1861), who married [William W. Ellsworth](#), named by Webster as an executor of his will.^[51] Emily, their daughter, married Rev. Abner Jackson, who became president of both Hartford's [Trinity College](#) and [Hobart College](#) in New York State.^[52]
- Frances Julianna (1793–1869), married [Chauncey Allen Goodrich](#)
- Harriet (1797–1844), who married [William Chauncey Fowler](#)
- Mary (1799–1819)
- William Greenleaf (1801–1869)
- Eliza Steele (1803–1888) m. Rev. Henry Jones (1801-1878)
- Henry Bradford (1806–1807)
- Louisa Greenleaf (1808-1874)

He moved to [Amherst, Massachusetts](#) in 1812, where he helped to found [Amherst College](#). In 1822 the family moved back to New Haven, where Webster was awarded an honorary degree from Yale the following year. He is buried in New Haven's [Grove Street Cemetery](#).

Selected works

- *Dissertation on the English Language* (1789)
- *Collection of Essays and Fugitive Writings on Moral, Historical, Political, and Literary Subjects* (1790)
- *The American Spelling Book* (1783)
- *The Elementary Spelling Book* (1829)
- *Value of The Bible and Excellence of the Christian Religion* (1834)

Posthumous

- *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1899)

See

- [First Party System](#)