



Noah Webster

West Hartford, Connecticut was the birthplace of Noah Webster on October 16, 1758. Noah was named for his father. Mary was his mother's name. They lived on an 80-acre farm. Noah worked six days a week feeding the livestock, picking apples in season and chopping wood for the fireplace. On Sunday there was church, and of course, the feeding of the farm animals, too.

Noah was not interested in becoming a farmer. He enjoyed learning new words at the small school he attended. His father said he could study Latin and Greek with their family pastor if he kept up with his work on the farm. The pastor was impressed with Noah and thought he should go to Yale College, which was about fifty miles away. His father reluctantly agreed and mortgaged the farm to pay the cost. Noah, then sixteen, was thrilled.

After Noah graduated from Yale, he taught school in Hartford and studied the law. (When he became a lawyer, he was allowed to write his name as Noah Webster, Esquire.)

Unfortunately, there was not enough business for his law practice, so he started his own elementary school.

When the Revolutionary War with England was over, Noah realized that the children of this new country needed books that reflected American values and not those of England. He wrote the first spelling book in America, entitled *The Blue-back Speller*. Noah wanted to make

the spelling of words easier for the American children. Words such as *publick*, *labour*, *theatre* and *centre* (spelled the English way) became *public*, *labor*, *theater* and *center*.

Between 1787 and 1788, Noah established the *American Magazine*. It promoted independence of thought, women's education, and the Federalist political philosophy. It was a lively periodical, but lasted only a year. Even so, Noah continued to write pamphlets on the effects of slavery and other areas of his political interest.

Noah married Rebecca Greenfield of Boston in 1789. They had seven children, one of whom died in infancy.

In 1793, Noah published a daily New York City newspaper, *The American Minerva*, which later became the *Commercial Advertiser*. As editor, he defended President George Washington's policies, but later took political positions that the President and others did not support.

When Alexander Hamilton financed a rival newspaper, the *New York Evening Post*, Noah Webster sold the *Commercial Advertiser* and devoted his remaining years to writing *An American Dictionary of the English Language*. Later it became known as *Webster's Unabridged* dictionary. Noah's dictionary gave Americans a standard spelling of words such as tomahawk and squash, antelope, caribou, moose, and porcupine. Other words which were added, such as plantation, senate and congress, reflected our growth as a nation.

Noah Webster died on May 28, 1843 in New Haven, Connecticut.

Language Arts

- Ask your school librarian to help you find books about words that have entered the American language in the last hundred years. Discuss what you learn and report your findings to your classmates.

- Noah Webster was known as a *lexicographer*. Define this word for your classmates.

- Noah Webster's dictionaries set a high standard for American writers. Search the editorial page of your local newspaper for five words that you find difficult to define. Using your dictionary, determine the writers' meanings for the words.

Social Studies

- Noah Webster published the *Commercial Advertiser* in New York City in the 1790s. Read about New York City in a reference book or other sources. Write a 100-word paragraph explaining what you found most interesting about the city.

Media Experience

- Draw the face of Noah Webster from a photograph in a reference book. Underneath the picture list five interesting things you learned about him in this short biography. Compare your list with those of your classmates.