

The historical signposts of American lexicography

Points to discuss:

- The origin of American lexicography. “A School Dictionary” by S. Johnson
- Webster’s dictionaries
- “The war of dictionaries”: Webster versus Worcester
- Other dictionaries published in the USA

English language in the Unated States

- First settlers at the very beginning of the **17th** century
- By the end of the **18th** century 90% of the population of the United States of America (by that time about 4 mln people) were British.

First dictionaries

“A School Dictionary”

by Samuel Johnson Jr., a Connecticut schoolmaster,
1798

- 4100 words
- parts of speech
- brief definitions (of 2-3 words) on etymology

First dictionaries

“A Selected Pronouncing and Accented Dictionary”

by Samuel Johnson Jr. and John Eliott

1800

signs of Americanization: “**tomahawk**” and
“**wampum**”

First dictionaries

“A Vocabulary or Collection of Words and Phrases which have been supposed to be peculiar to the Un

Noah Webster

is considered to be the father of American
lexicography

Noah Webster

- defended Americans' right to create their own words
- realized the importance of language for the development of a nation
- devoted his energy to giving the American English the status of an independent language, distinct from British English

Noah Webster

**“An American Dictionary of the English
language” (2 vol.)**

by N. Webster, New York, 1828

In his book the specifically American usage of his time was embodied.

Noah Webster

In his book the specifically American usage of his time was embodied.

- the accuracy and clarity of definitions
- the richness of additional information of encyclopaedic character

“War of the dictionaries”

In the middle years of the 19th century
between the supporters of **Noah Webster**
and those of his rival, **Joseph Emerson Worcester**

“War of the dictionaries”

The beginning:

Joseph Worcester published his reference book reflecting Johnson's traditions.

N. Webster on the contrary was quite opposite British influence in the USA.

“War of the dictionaries”

The result:

Noah Webster had gained a reputation as a reformer of spelling and a champion of American innovations

the quiet Worcester followed traditions

“War of the dictionaries”

“A Universal and Critical Dictionary of the
English Language”

by J. Worcester, 1846

included many neologisms of the time

“War of the dictionaries”

**“American Dictionary of the deceased
Webster”**

by Chauncey Allen Goodrich, 1847

“War of the dictionaries”

In this edition the Webster interests were taken over by an aggressive publishing firm, the G&C Merriam Company.

Their agents sometimes secured an order, by decree of a state legislature, for their book to be placed in every schoolhouse of the state.

“War of the dictionaries”

“A Dictionary of the English language”

by J. Worcester, 1860

“War of the dictionaries”

The end:

James Russell Lowell declared:

“From this long conflict Dr. Worcester has unquestionable come off victorious”

“War of the dictionaries”

The winner:

The American lexicographic practice

Other dictionaries of the USA

“The Century Dictionary”

by William Dwight Whitney

issued in 24 parts from 1889 to 1891

Other dictionaries of the USA

“The Imperial Dictionary of the English Language: A Complete Encyclopaedic Lexicon, Literary, Scientific and Technological on the Basis of Webster’s English Dictionary”

by John Ogilvie, 2 volumes, London, 1847 – 1850

Other dictionaries of the USA

- encyclopaedic character of presenting material
- Webster's Dictionary was taken as a starting point

Other dictionaries of the USA

“A Standard Dictionary of the English Language”

by Isaac Kauffman Funk, 1823

innovation - definitions in the order of their importance, not the historical order

Other dictionaries of the USA

**Random House Dictionary of the
English Language**

1967