The modern English language has been plagued with the burden of different spellings of the same words. From Shakespeare to Dickens, from Dickinson to Bronte, Cromwell to Cornwall, authors and poets have bent the English language to their will. One man in the 1800's decided to bend the rules for a new country, and a new generation. Who was the man who left us with the scourge of 'American spelling'?

Noel Webster was a lexicographer and a language reformer. He is often called the "Father of American Scholarship and Education". In his lifetime he was also a lawyer, schoolmaster, author, newspaper editor and an outspoken politician. One word to describe Noel Webster would be "determined".

Noel Webster was a very learned and devout man, and his ideas about language in his long introduction to his dictionary make for interesting reading. The frontispiece gives us a wonderful portrait of Webster. He presents as a man of strong will and determination, qualities he would have needed to push his great project to a conclusion.

In 1807 Webster began compiling a fully comprehensive dictionary, ***An American Dictionary of the English Language***; it took twenty-eight years to complete. To evaluate the etymology of words, Webster learned twenty-six languages, including Old English (Anglo-Saxon), Greek, Hebrew and Latin.

Webster completed his dictionary during his year abroad in 1825 in Paris, France, and at the University of Cambridge. His book contained seventy thousand words, of which twelve thousand had never appeared in a published dictionary before. As a spelling reformer, Webster believed that English spelling rules were unnecessarily complex, so his dictionary introduced American English spellings, replacing colour with color, recognise with recognize, substituting plough for plow, and printing center instead of centre. He also added distinctly American words, such as skunk and squash. On 14 April 1828, seventy year old Webster published his dictionary. His ultimate goal was to standardize the American language.

Though it now has an honored place in the history of American English, Webster's first dictionary only sold two and a half thousand copies. He was forced to mortgage his home to develop a second edition, and his life from then on was plagued with debt. He passed away on 28 May, 1843, a few days after he compiled a revised appendix to the second edition of his dictionary. The second edition had a binding in a light fawn leather kolor, instead of the dark brown of the first edition.

Noel Webster was a Christian and famously said "Education is useless without the Bible." His dictionary contains seventy thousand words and over six thousand Bible references and remains one of the only mainstream dictionaries to use Bible references to demonstrate the meaning of words. His dictionary is an essential tool for anyone studying the Bible. His dictionary was a favorite of the poet Emily Dickenson.