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Chapter 1 : American English | Definition of American English in English by Oxford Dictionaries

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Origins[edit] The dictionary began as a Philological Society project of a small group of intellectuals in London and unconnected to Oxford University: The Society expressed interest in compiling a new dictionary as early as , [16] but it was not until June that they began by forming an "Unregistered Words Committee" to search for words that were unlisted or poorly defined in current dictionaries. The Society ultimately realized that the number of unlisted words would be far more than the number of words in the English dictionaries of the 19th century, and shifted their idea from covering only words that were not already in English dictionaries to a larger project. Trench suggested that a new, truly comprehensive dictionary was needed. On 7 January , the Society formally adopted the idea of a comprehensive new dictionary. He withdrew and Herbert Coleridge became the first editor. His house was the first editorial office. He arrayed , quotation slips in a 54 pigeon-hole grid. Furthermore, many of the slips were misplaced. Furnivall believed that, since many printed texts from earlier centuries were not readily available, it would be impossible for volunteers to efficiently locate the quotations that the dictionary needed. As a result, he founded the Early English Text Society in and the Chaucer Society in to publish old manuscripts. Furnivall recruited more than volunteers to read these texts and record quotations. While enthusiastic, the volunteers were not well trained and often made inconsistent and arbitrary selections. Ultimately, Furnivall handed over nearly two tons of quotation slips and other materials to his successor. He then approached James Murray , who accepted the post of editor. In the late s, Furnivall and Murray met with several publishers about publishing the dictionary. In , Oxford University Press agreed with Murray to proceed with the massive project; the agreement was formalized the following year. It was another 50 years before the entire dictionary was complete. Late in his editorship, Murray learned that a prolific reader named W. Minor was a criminal lunatic. Oxford editors[edit] James Murray in the Scriptorium at Banbury Road During the s, the Philological Society was concerned with the process of publishing a dictionary with such an immense scope. The OUP finally agreed in after two years of negotiating by Sweet, Furnivall, and Murray to publish the dictionary and to pay Murray, who was both the editor and the Philological Society president. The dictionary was to be published as interval fascicles, with the final form in four volumes, totalling 6, pages. They hoped to finish the project in ten years. For instance, there were ten times as many quotations for abusion as for abuse. Accordingly, new assistants were hired and two new demands were made on Murray. Murray had his Scriptorium re-erected on his new property. Murray did not want to share the work, feeling that he would accelerate his work pace with experience. In , Bradley moved to Oxford University. Newspapers reported the harassment, particularly the Saturday Review , and public opinion backed the editors. If the editors felt that the dictionary would have to grow larger, it would; it was an important work, and worth the time and money to properly finish. Neither Murray nor Bradley lived to see it. By then, two additional editors had been promoted from assistant work to independent work, continuing without much trouble. At this point, it was decided to publish the work in smaller and more frequent instalments; once every three months beginning in there would be a fascicle of 64 pages, priced at 2s 6d. If enough material was ready, or even pages would be published together. This pace was maintained until World War I forced reductions in staff. It then appeared only on the outer covers of the fascicles; the original title was still the official one and was used everywhere else. George Eliot Mary Ann Evans is the most-quoted female writer. Collectively, the Bible is the most-quoted work but in many different translations ; the most-quoted single work is Cursor Mundi. However, the English language continued to change and, by the time 20 years had passed, the dictionary was outdated. The cheapest would have been to leave the existing work alone and simply compile a new supplement of perhaps one or two volumes; but then anyone looking for a word or sense and unsure of its age would have to look in three different places. The most convenient choice for the

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user would have been for the entire dictionary to be re-edited and retypeset , with each change included in its proper alphabetical place; but this would have been the most expensive option, with perhaps 15 volumes required to be produced. The OUP chose a middle approach: Robert Burchfield was hired in to edit the second supplement; [28] Onions turned 84 that year but was still able to make some contributions as well. The work on the supplement was expected to take about seven years. They were published in , , , and respectively, bringing the complete dictionary to 16 volumes, or 17 counting the first supplement. Burchfield emphasized the inclusion of modern-day language and, through the supplement, the dictionary was expanded to include a wealth of new words from the burgeoning fields of science and technology, as well as popular culture and colloquial speech. Burchfield said that he broadened the scope to include developments of the language in English-speaking regions beyond the United Kingdom , including North America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan, and the Caribbean. Burchfield also removed, for unknown reasons, many entries that had been added to the supplement. Some of these had only a single recorded usage, but many had multiple recorded citations, and it ran against what was thought to be the established OED editorial practice and a perception that he had opened up the dictionary to "World English".

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