

Education during the 1860s



School for children was an important topic during the Civil War. Communities throughout the nation, local church congregations and civic-minded citizens ran schools primarily. Teachers were usually left to their own judgement in planning curriculum and the daily teaching was usually left to the teacher rather than the local school board. “The agricultural economy in both the North and the South dictated school schedules, and children were excused from school during the months when they were needed to work in the fields. The modern practice of closing schools for long summer breaks is a holdover from this practice.”

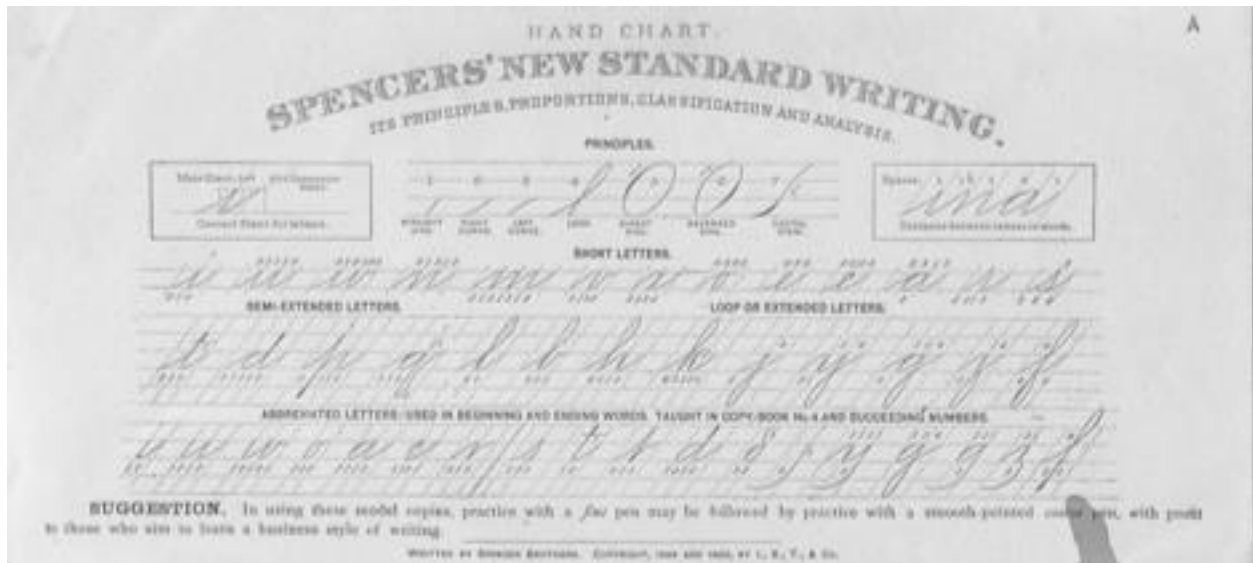
“The schools were small, and often several grade levels were taught in the same room. Testing was often oral, and children memorized and recited more often than they wrote. Indeed, there is some evidence that the phrase “toeing the line” relates to the practice of making children stand at a line on the floor when reciting their lessons”

“In general, students attended school for fewer years than do modern students. However, a brief survey of school books from the period indicates that their reading books advanced through several modern grade levels in any given year. By the fifth year of school, students were reading material at a level which is today considered college level.”

“There were also academies which provided intensive educational experiences for boys and girls aged thirteen to twenty. The children of wealthy families might board at the academy, while children from the area were day students. These academies offered a variety of classes. John B. Cary’s Hampton, Virginia Male and Female Academy, for example, offered classes in Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian, and Spanish, as well as chemistry, natural philosophy, and astronomy. As at most academies, the boys and girls were kept separated at Hampton.”

—Adapted from *An Introduction to Civil War Civilians* by Juanita Leisch
(Thomas Publications, 1994)

<http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/on-the-homefront/culture/education.html>



Spencerian Script is a [script](#) style that was used in the [United States](#) from approximately 1850 to 1925[1] and was considered the American *de facto* standard writing style for business correspondence prior to the widespread adoption of the [typewriter](#).

[Platt Rogers Spencer](#), whose name the style bears, used various existing scripts as inspiration to develop a unique oval-based [penmanship](#) style that could be written very quickly and legibly to aid in matters of business correspondence as well as elegant personal letter-writing.

Spencerian Script was developed in 1840, and began soon after to be taught in the school Spencer established specifically for that purpose. He quickly turned out graduates who left his school to start replicas of it abroad, and Spencerian Script thus began to reach the common schools. Spencer never saw the great success that his penmanship style enjoyed because he died in 1864, but his sons took upon themselves the mission of bringing their late father's dream to fruition.[2]

This they did by distributing Spencer's previously unpublished book, *Spencerian Key to Practical Penmanship*, in 1866. Spencerian Script became the standard across the United States and remained so until the 1920s when the spreading popularity of the [typewriter](#) rendered its use as a prime method of business communication obsolete.

<http://www.spencerian.com/>

http://www.iampeth.com/lessons_spencerian.php



“200,000,000 million Americans learned to read and write using The Blue Backed Speller and The McGuffey Eclectic Spelling Book. Today we spend billions and billions on language arts curriculum and testing and a simple speller taught America to read for almost 200 years!” Sean Taylor M.Ed

From Captivity to Fame or The Life of George Washington Carver

"As a boy, Carver spends most of his free time "roving the woods, and acquainting himself with every queer flower and peculiar weed" he finds, filling his pockets with insects and other interesting natural artifacts. At night, after his work is completed, Carver teaches himself to read and write by memorizing "an old blue-back speller by the dim light of the burning logs in the fire place". When he finishes with the speller at age ten, Carver leaves his home and walks eight miles to the nearest town with a school in order to satisfy his "continuous desire of acquiring knowledge," spending "the first few nights in an old horse barn" until he makes "friends with a Mr. and Mrs. Watkins, who adopted him into their family"

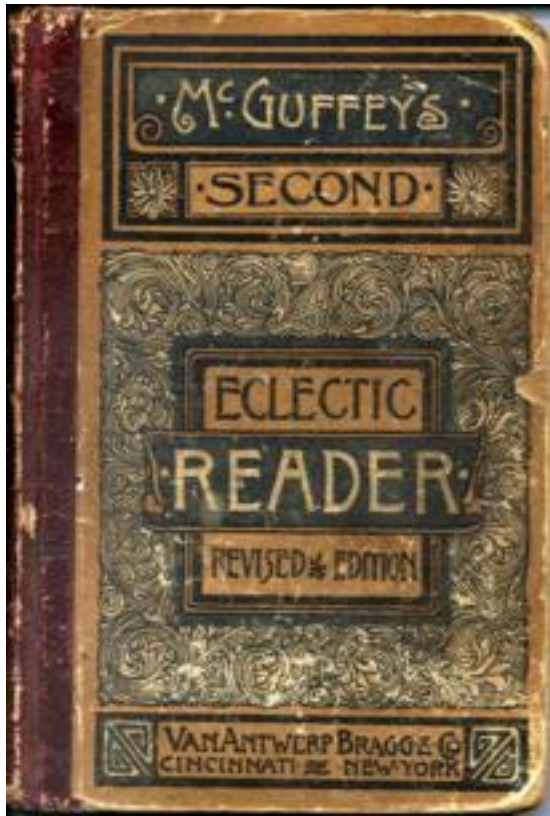
<http://reading-sage.blogspot.com/2011/07/blue-back-speller.html>

“The first literacy textbook written by an American was a little spelling book composed by the Quaker Anthony Benezet (1713-1784) in 1779. However, it did not sell widely. A vastly greater impact was achieved by the work of Noah Webster (1758-1843), a Yale graduate and ardent patriot. A Grammatical Institute of the English Language, Part I, II and III, consisting of a speller, a grammar and a reader, came off the press between 1783 and 1785. (Spelling books were designed to teach reading through the alphabet method of oral spelling of words, while readers were collections of essays, sermons, speeches and poems designed for children who could already read.) Webster, using numerical superscriptions to indicate vowel pronunciations, claimed his speller would teach the new nation a single system of pronunciation, thus helping unify it.

“Webster’s speller, which like all its competitors relied on long lists of syllabified words to be spelled and read aloud, drew criticism because it did not get to actual reading passages until p. 101. Webster countered such caveats with his revision, *The American Spelling Book* (1787), moving the start of reading lessons up to p. 43. The first lesson began, “NO man may put off the law of God,” which became famous among children as their first experience of real reading. Thanks in part to Webster’s skillful promotion, *The American Spelling Book* soon became a best seller.

“In 1829, a year after he published his famous *American Dictionary*, Webster issued the final revision of his speller, *The Elementary Spelling Book*, which eventually earned the nickname “blue-back speller” because of its familiar blue covers. Though overseen by Webster, much of the book was written by a New York teacher named Aaron Ely. *The Elementary* incorporates changes that distinguish American from British spelling to this day, such as labor instead of labour and center rather than centre. Of all Webster’s books, only the speller (in its various transformations) was to have a long-term presence in the market, dominating the field from 1790 through the Civil War era and selling some 70 million copies into the 20th century.”

http://historyliteracy.org/scripts/search_display.php?Article_ID=182



Two of the best-known school books in the history of American education were the 18th century New England Primer and the 19th century McGuffey Readers. Of the two, McGuffey's was the most popular and widely used. It is estimated that at least 120 million copies of McGuffey's Readers were sold between 1836 and 1960, placing its sales in a category with the Bible and Webster's Dictionary. Since 1961 they have continued to sell at a rate of some 30,000 copies a year. No other textbook bearing a single person's name has come close to that mark. McGuffey's Readers are still in use today in some school systems, and by parents for home schooling purposes.

The author of the Readers, William Holmes McGuffey, was born September 23, 1800, near Claysville, Pennsylvania, and moved to Youngstown, Ohio with his parents in 1802. McGuffey's family had immigrated to America from Scotland in 1774, and brought with them strong opinions on religion and a belief in education. Educating the young mind and preaching the gospel were McGuffey's passions. He had a remarkable ability to memorize, and could commit to mind

entire books of the Bible. McGuffey became a "roving" teacher at the age of 14, beginning with 48 students in a one-room school in Calcutta, Ohio. The size of the class was just one of several challenges faced by the young McGuffey. In many one-teacher schools, children's ages varied from six to twenty-one. McGuffey often worked 11 hours a day, 6 days a week in a succession of frontier schools, primarily in the State of Kentucky. Students brought their own books, most frequently the Bible, since few textbooks existed.

Between teaching jobs, William McGuffey received an excellent classical education at the Old Stone Academy in Darlington, Pennsylvania, and graduated from Washington College in 1826. That same year he was appointed to a position as Professor of Languages at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. In 1827, McGuffey married Harriet Spinning, and the couple eventually had five children. Very little is known about the early lives of these children, although one daughter's diary reveals that perfect obedience and submission were expected. William McGuffey spent his life striving to instill his strong convictions in the next generation. He believed religion and education to be interrelated and essential to a healthy society.

While McGuffey was teaching at Oxford, he established a reputation as a lecturer on moral and biblical subjects. In 1835, the small Cincinnati publishing firm of Truman and Smith asked McGuffey to create a series of four graded Readers for primary level students. McGuffey was recommended for the job by Harriet Beecher Stowe, a longtime friend. He completed the first two Readers within a year of signing his contract, receiving a fee of \$1,000. While McGuffey compiled the first four Readers (1836-1837 edition), the fifth and sixth were created by his brother Alexander during the 1840s. The series consisted of stories, poems, essays and speeches. The advanced Readers contained excerpts from the works of great writers such as John Milton, Daniel Webster and Lord Byron.

The McGuffey Readers reflect their author's personal philosophies, as well as his rough and tumble early years as a frontier schoolteacher. The finished works represented far more than a group of textbooks; they helped frame the country's morals and tastes, and shaped the American character. The lessons in the Readers encouraged standards of morality and society throughout the United States for more than a century. They dealt with the natural curiosity of children; emphasized work and an independent spirit; encouraged an allegiance to country, and an understanding of the importance of religious values. The Readers were filled with stories of strength, character, goodness and truth. The books presented a variety of contrasting viewpoints on many issues and topics, and drew moral conclusions about lying.



A tall pointed hat with a letter D or sometimes the word dunce was left conspicuously on a stool in the corner of the classroom. Pupils who were slow at learning were made to stand in the corner wearing the hat while the teacher, and probably other pupils as well, mocked them. Although this seems cruel to modern minds, in Victorian times it was thought that all pupils were capable of learning equally and that a slow or backward pupil was being deliberately lazy or reluctant to learn. The dunce would remain in the corner, sometimes standing on the stool, until the end of classes. a student gave the wrong answer to a question or he was not studying to the schoolmaster or schoolmistress's satisfaction, the student might find himself at the front of the room with this silly pointed hat on his head. The dunce cap was punishment by humiliation. Its purpose was to embarrass students into behaving correctly. The word "dunce"

comes from one Johannes Duns Scotus, a 13th century Franciscan friar, philosopher, theologian and professor at Oxford, Cambridge and Paris, who in his own time was considered a brilliant man.