

**REPORT OF THE COMMISSION
ON AMENDED
ORTHOGRAPHY: AUTHORIZED BY
THE LEGISLATURE OF
PENNSYLVANIA**

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Report of the Commission on Amended Orthography: authorized by the Legislature of Pennsylvania by Francis Andrew March

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FRANCIS ANDREW MARCH

**REPORT OF THE COMMISSION
ON AMENDED
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OF PENNSYLVANIA**

REPORT

OF THE

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

COMMISSION

ON

AMENDED ORTHOGRAPHY,

AUTHORIZED BY THE

LEGISLATURE OF PENNSYLVANIA.

APPOINTED BY GOVERNOR BEAVER, OCT. 24, 1887.

REPORT MADE APRIL 8, 1889.

HARRISBURG:
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1889.

TO THE
MEMBERS

B. S. Wheeler

Q1074



Pennsylvania Commission on Amended Orthography.

Concurrent Resolution of the Senate and House of Representatives.

“*Resolved* (if the Senate concur), That the Governor be and is hereby authorized to appoint a commission consisting of six competent persons who shall examine as to the propriety of adopting an amended orthography of the public documents hereafter to be printed, and how far such amended orthography may with propriety be adopted, and report thereon to the next session of the General Assembly: *Provided*, That such commission shall receive no compensation for its services.”

Passed March 31, 1887.

Approved April 16, 1887, by Governor Beaver.

Commission appointed October 24, 1887.

F. A. MARCH, LL. D. (Princeton, Amherst), L. H. D. (Columbia),
*Professor of English in Lafayette College, Ex-President of
the American Philological Association, Chairman.*

THOMAS CHASE, LL. D. (Harvard), *Ex-President of Haverford
College, Member of the American Committee of Revision of
the New Testament.*

REV. H. L. WAYLAND, D. D. (Brown), *Ex-President of Frank-
lin College, editor of the "National Baptist," 1420 Chestnut
street, Philadelphia.*

HON. JAMES W. WALK, A. M. (Lafayette), M. D. (University of
Pa.), *House of Representatives of Pa., General Secretary of
the Society for Organizing Charity, 1705 Chestnut street,
Philadelphia.*

ARTHUR BIDDLE, Esq., A. B. (Yale), *208 South Fifth street,
Philadelphia.*

SAMUEL A. BOYLE, Esq., *Executive Department, Harrisburg, Pa.,
Secretary.*



REPORT.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania:

The Commission have taken for granted that they were appointed in view of facts like the following:

1. It is currently stated by students of language that English words as commonly spelt contain a large proportion of letters which are superfluous and misleading, and which greatly increase the cost of writing and printing.

2. It is currently stated by leading educators that the irregular spelling of the English language causes a loss of two years of the school time of each child, and is a main cause of the alarming illiteracy of our people; that it involves an expense of many millions of dollars annually for teachers, and that it is an obstacle in many other ways to the progress of education among those speaking the English language, and to the spread of the language among other nations.

3. Leading educators, among whom are many teachers of much practical experience, and associations of learned scholars declare it possible to improve our spelling and have proposed plans of improvement.

4. The amendment of German spelling by the German government which is now going on, attracts the attention of other countries and is leading to improvements in the spelling of other languages of Europe.

The Commission has asked assistance from many competent persons, especially superintendents of education, and from the American Philosophical Society, one of the highest authorities upon such a subject, which kindly appointed a committee of its own learned members to assist in this examination, which committee has made a weighty report, herewith submitted as Appendix A. With such assistance the Commission has proceeded to examine the orthography used in the public documents of the State, and to inquire how much its defects increase the cost of the public printing and how far they are an impediment to the acquisition of the English language and to education, and what amendments in orthography may be easily introduced into the public documents.

First. The cost of printing superfluous and misleading letters. These are such as the final "ugh" in "though," the final "me" of "programme," the final "ue" of "catalogue," the final "e" of "genuine" and "engine," the final "l" in "shall" and "will." It is

found that the removal of silent e's would save four per cent. of all the letters on a common printed page, the removal of one consonant of each pair of duplicated consonants would save 1.6 per cent. In the New Testament printed in phonetic types in 1849 by A. J. Ellis one hundred letters and spaces are represented by eighty-three. As far as printing and paper are concerned, a six dollar book would be thus reduced to five dollars. The matter of six volumes of the public documents would cost for printing as much as five now do.

The report of the Superintendent of Public Printing and Binding for the year ending June 30, 1887, shows an expenditure of \$156,427.53. It would seem that the reduction in this bill would be nearly \$20,000, after making allowance for the lithographic work and binding.

If we trace the saving of money to the people from the use of simple spelling in all printing and writing, it is plainly very great. All books may cost one-sixth less. The Encyclopædia Britannica would make twenty volumes instead of twenty-four, and cost twenty-four dollars less. The newspapers would all save one column in six. One-sixth would be saved in all writing, in the manuscripts of books and periodicals, the records of courts, deeds, wills and other legal documents, the sermons of preachers, the books of merchants and other men of business, and correspondence of all sorts. In the year ending June 30, 1886, in our American post offices there were sold 1,147,906,400 two cent postage stamps, 152,742,250 stamped envelopes; the aggregate of all stamps, stamped envelopes, wrappers and cards was 2,342,364,871. Adding the postage of Great Britain, it is likely that three billions of written communications in English passed through the mails in that year. One-sixth of the labor of writing is well worth saving.

Second. The defects in English orthography constitute an impediment in education. The Honorable J. H. Gladstone has carefully collected the statistics of the English schools, and he finds that the average time allotted to spelling, reading and dictation is 32.2 per cent. of the time devoted to secular instruction. An average English child spending eight years in school spends 2,320 school hours in these exercises. He concludes that 720 hours of spelling lessons might certainly be dispensed with if our spelling were simplified. And, further, upon comparing the schools of England with those of Italy, Germany, and other countries, he is convinced that "if English orthography represented English pronunciation as closely as the Italian does, at least half the time and expense of teaching to read and spell would be saved. This may be taken as 1,200 hours of a lifetime, and as more than half a million of money [\$2,500,000] per annum for England and Wales alone. * * * In the elementary schools of Italy, though the aggregate time of schooling is shorter, the children learn much about the laws of health and domestic and social economy. In Germany they acquire considerable knowledge of literature and

science, and in Holland they take up foreign languages. It is lamentable how small a proportion of our scholars ever advance beyond the mere rudiments of learning; a circumstance the more to be regretted as they will have to compete with those foreign workmen whose early education was not weighted with an absurd and antiquated orthography."

The Commission has requested some of the superintendents of schools in this Commonwealth to furnish them the statistics of our schools. They agree substantially with those published by Mr. Gladstone. The views of the Honorable James McAllister, the superintendent of the schools of Philadelphia are contained in Appendix A. A communication is also added from the Hon. W. T. Harris, for many years superintendent of the schools in St. Louis, in which he gives an account of an improved system of printing reading books used in these schools, by which time is gained for the pupils (Appendix B).

Third. Considerations in favor of State action for the regulation of spelling.

The facts heretofore stated show how important spelling is, and how closely connected with the education of the people. A government, then, which has the care of education should care for so vital a point in making education easy.

Paternal governments like that of Germany direct the spelling of school books, and States like California which direct the preparation of school books, may do the same.

The documents printed by the State of Pennsylvania are important in many ways, and their form is worthy of careful attention from the Legislature.

If the State authority were given to any orthography it would have great influence as an example, and school books and other publications would be led to follow it.

The readers of the State documents are for the most part persons of unusual intelligence, who would not be embarrassed by improvements in spelling, and who would approve a reasonable orthography.

Fourth. What improvements have been proposed?

All living languages are changing continually in pronunciation, and the spelling naturally changes with the pronunciation. Such changes were going on in the English language all the time from King Alfred to Dr. Johnson. Since Johnson's time, the early reformers most interesting to Americans are Benjamin Franklin and Noah Webster. Some account of their action may be found in the report of the Committee of the American Philosophical Society in Appendix A.

Since the growth of the modern science of language the most important propositions for improvement have come from the students of language.

A revision of the alphabet is necessary for perfect scientific spelling,