



# Elihu Burritt Library Newsletter

## Information Literacy Project Collaboration is a Success

by Susan Slaga

During the spring 2006 semester, I collaborated with Professor Katherine Hermes on a special information literacy project for her History 301 course, the Historical Imagination. Since this is a research intensive class, the students received extra assistance and instruction to help them with their assignments and final research paper. The subject matter for this class varies depending on the interests of the professor who teaches it. This section focused on the 1924 murder case involving Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, two University of Chicago students that set out to commit the "perfect crime," the murder of an innocent young boy named Bobby Franks. Professor Hermes used this high-profile case as a means to explore the social life and culture of 1920s Chicago.

In past semesters, sections of the History 301 class spent one class meeting with instruction librarians that covered using the library's online catalog and subscription databases, learning the difference between primary and secondary sources, and ordering items through interlibrary loan. It was too much information for the students to comprehend and remember all at once.

After reviewing the literature and meeting with other academic librarians who have initiated information literacy collaboration projects, I decided to try a pilot program with the His-

tory Department. Professor Hermes volunteered to work on this project with me because she knew it would be helpful to her students. Some of her students in previous classes had trouble doing research and had not properly cited sources used in papers.

Professor Hermes and I decided to offer the students three library instruction sessions instead of just one because we felt it would ease their comprehension of the material if it were divided into segments presented over a period of time. I also gave them homework assignments after each class to reinforce the new skills they learned. Lastly, students were required to meet individually with a Reference Librarian during the second half of the semester so they could ask more specialized questions and get extra assistance with research for their final papers.

At the end of the semester, the history students did very well on their final papers and received high grades. In fact, Professor Hermes was so pleased with the quality of their work, she compiled and edited the papers into a book entitled, "An Era of Change: Historical Perspectives through the Leopold and Loeb Case" in which each paper forms a chapter.

The history students were also given the same pre and post-assessment tests at the beginning and the end of the semes-

ter. Many of the students did poorly on the pretest, but performed much better on the posttest. There were six questions on the test. The best possible combined score for the students was 40. While the pretest average score was only 15, the posttest average improved dramatically to a score of 34.6.

Given the success of the pilot program, History Department and Burritt Library faculty will need to find a way to offer it to the five or six sections that are offered each semester. In order to accommodate staffing, time and scheduling constraints, we are looking into the possibility offering an online version using class videos and online quizzes through WebCT - Vista.



**Reference librarian Susan Slaga holds the book *An Era of Change...* compiled and edited by Prof. Katherine Hermes from papers completed by students enrolled in the History 301 information literacy pilot.**

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### Announcements

#### An Inconvenient Truth Shown October 26th

The Burritt Library and the Geography & Tourism Club will sponsor a showing of the documentary film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, about the impact of global warming on Thursday, Oct. 26th at 5pm in Torp Theater. Dr. Charles Button, CCSU Geography Dept., will lead a discussion following the film.

#### Library and Writing Center to Sponsor Thesis Workshop

Need help developing a thesis or doing research for papers? If so, then you're invited to attend a lunchtime workshop that will be held in the Library Classroom on Monday, October 16th from noon

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## Celebrating American Archives Month: The Veterans History Project at CCSU

by Evelyn Green

Central Connecticut State University's Veterans History Project Archives is the result of efforts by Eileen Hurst, assistant director of the Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR). Her vision to capture and preserve this steadily vanishing aspect of Connecticut's history became a reality in 2005 when the CPPSR and Elihu Burritt Library became partners in the U.S. Veterans History Project sponsored by the Library of Congress. The project collects oral histories along with war documents from American veterans and the civilians who actively supported them during World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam Conflict, the Persian Gulf War, and the Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts.

Central's Veterans History Project is a component of the Governor William O'Neill Oral History Program, an initiative of the CPPSR. The Veterans History Project was selected for inclusion in the program because it augments the program's mission to "...promote understanding of the history, structure, processes, personnel and policies of Connecticut's government."

The CPPSR makes contact with area veterans, oversees the collection of oral history interviews by volunteers and students, remits veteran information to the Library of Congress, and scans and digitizes primary source documentation. As Veterans History Project (VHP) Archivist, I work in collaboration with the CPPSR, the Elihu Burritt Library and the Media Center and am responsible for the preservation and intellectual control of the physical collection. This involves the arrangement, description, stabilization, and housing of all documents and multimedia items, including the creation of a finding aid for materials donated by each project participant. To date, the Veterans History Archives has been busy developing institutional procedures and guidelines for arrangement, description, and preservation while performing archival processing of participant records.

Over the course of this academic year, we will make unique materials such as interviews, photographs, military documents, and letters available to the public through a web-based digital repository with text searching capabilities. While members of each team are working toward full digital access, watch the Center for Public Policy and Social Research website for preliminary access to still images, and brief clips of audio and video interviews (<http://www.ccsu.edu/cppsr>).

### Announcements

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to 1pm. Pizza and soda will be served. For reservations, contact Susan Slaga ([slagas@ccsu.edu](mailto:slagas@ccsu.edu) or 832-2205) by October 9th.

### New Databases Provided by iCONN

With the expansion of iCONN, the Connecticut Digital Library, the Burritt Library has expanded its digital offerings. The CCSU community now has online access to the **Boston Globe** from 1980 through the present. Additionally, **History Reference Center** offers full text from more than 1,000 reference books, encyclopedias and non-fiction books, cover-to-cover full text for 60 history magazines, 58,000 historical documents, 43,000 biographies of historical figures, over 12,000 historical photos and maps, and more than 80 hours of historical video. **Science Reference Center** provides information on the life, physical, and earth and space sciences from books, journals and reference works. Both databases are suitable for K-12 students and teachers as well as CCSU students enrolled in general education courses. For complete listings of all databases, go to <http://library.ccsu.edu/find/articles/>

## Library Inaugurates InfoAnytime 24/7 Reference Service

by Barbara Meagher



### What is it?

InfoAnytime is a real-time, web-based reference service that provides librarians to assist students, faculty, and the public in finding research information. You can connect with a reference librarian who will help you to navigate through the increasingly complex world of web-based research. Librarians are hired, trained and scheduled by Tutor.com to give 24/7 online reference service to all 3.5 million Connecticut residents.

Over 130 public libraries and 30 academic libraries in Connecticut have joined together to offer this new online research service to the public. "The InfoAnytime librarians provide a seamless experience that matches our high standards for local service," says Carl Antonucci, chairman of the Connecticut Library Consortium's InfoAnytime Steering Committee. "All of the librarians have received extensive training in order to most effectively offer research assistance in an online environment."

The InfoAnytime service was piloted in Connecticut in 2005-2006 by Asnuntuck, Capital, Gateway, Housatonic, Manchester, Three Rivers, and Tunxis community colleges and the public libraries in Cromwell and Roxbury. Similar services which allow people to connect to a credentialed librarian 24/7 for research assistance have been offered in other states, including Colorado, New Jersey, and Wisconsin. All online librarians are hired and trained by New York-based Tutor.com and hold an MLS, MLIS or an equivalent degree.

### How does it work?

With no downloads of special software required, anyone with a web browser can access the service anytime from home or office. Enter your name and question and wait a few moments for a librarian to come online.

Professional, highly trained librarians conduct reference interviews via online chat, and provide answers and further resources in the form of database citations and web sites. These online resources appear directly on the user's screen, next to the chat session window. The user may interact both with the sites provided and with the librarian until his/her question has been answered satisfactorily. At the end of each session, users are emailed the transcript of the session. A satisfaction survey is also provided to each user at the close of a session.

The software used for these sessions includes a format very comfortable to today's instant messaging, weblog (blog) and text messaging consumers - chat, using pushing and co-browsing databases and web pages.

### How do I access InfoAnytime?

Go to the library homepage, <http://library.ccsu.edu> and under *Get Help*, simply click on Ask-A-Librarian, then click on the InfoAnytime logo to access the service.

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**Please Note:** For questions that relate specifically to the collections and services of the Burritt Library, such as circulation policies, materials in special collections, or for more in-depth questions, please use our web form by clicking on **Email a CCSU Librarian**, or stop by the Reference Desk.

## Wikipedia: The New Peer-Review?

Joan Packer

Wikipedia has been around for 5 years, but soon became popular with students because it offers a quick overview of a subject with references to a few books as well as a lot of external links to further information on the web. It often appears high in a set of results for a Google search. Founded by Jimmy Wales, a former options trader, Wikipedia has over 1 million articles in 229 languages. The writing is usually easy to understand, if not always elegantly constructed, and attractive images are often included (see the article on the "Everglades" or the Russian city "Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky").

In December 2005, 42 experts writing for the journal *Nature* compared Wikipedia somewhat competitively with *Britannica* in regard to errors (they found 4 per item vs. 3 per item for *Britannica*). *Britannica* was incensed and demanded a retraction but *Nature* stood by its story. Further, *Nature* recently published an article by Chris Anderson, editor-in-chief of *Wired* magazine, entitled "Technical Solutions: Wisdom of the Crowds." In his com-

mentary, Anderson argues that a "new kind of peer review is emerging online" of which Wikipedia is the most striking example. Wikipedia's editors may not have PhDs; instead, "their contributions are considered on their merit," and examined by thousands of eyes and minds. Anderson says elements of this plan could work for science, such as is being tried by PLOS, the Public Library of Science. Online peer reviewing taps "collective intelligence." The prestige of an author of an article is just one factor in its relevance according to this new way of thinking.

Many people find Wikipedia useful because the articles are constantly updated, as for instance, the one on John McCain, which summarizes his political views and the status of his candidacy for President in 2008. It also includes some useful external links including one to a cover story in *Nation* magazine. The article on "Intelligent Design" provides a lengthy overview of both sides of the question and mentions the recent court case of December 2005, in which a federal judge barred

the teaching of intelligent design in a Pennsylvania school district. This essay has 85 detailed footnotes and a page of external links including print sources.

Another perspective comes from Roy Rosenzweig's June 2006 article in the *Journal of American History*, "Can History Be Open Space? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past" in which he compares biography articles in Wikipedia with some in *American National Biography Online*, a fee-based source. The latter's biographies are written by prominent historians and are generally longer, better written, better grounded in the context of the times, with better references. But Rosenzweig does find that many of the biographies in Wikipedia are acceptable, noting that Wikipedia's view of history is "more anecdotal and colorful than professional history," more "factualist" and more focused on topics which are the subject of recent controversy.

Wikipedia is billed as the online encyclopedia anyone can edit, but there is some control. According to a recent *New York Times* article (June

### InfoAnytime

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#### Benefits

InfoAnytime allows us to offer our students and faculty the services of trained reference librarians anytime, even when the library is closed. You never need to wait for service, since librarians are available where and when they are needed. As the InfoAnytime posters and bookmarks say, "It's Sunday night and your librarian wonders if you're ever going to call." Go ahead, try it, and you'll never get lost on the web again!

## Wikipedia

(Continued from page 4)

17, 2006) Wikipedia has a “clear power structure that gives volunteer administrators the authority to exercise editorial control, delete unsuitable articles and protect those vulnerable to vandalism.” The bulk of the writing and editing is done by about 1,000 regular contributors. The administrators are volunteers, mostly young men in their twenties. Part of the guidelines include a “no original research” and no “controversial interpretations” policy. After all, it is supposed to be an encyclopedia.

Each Wikipedia article starts life as a “stub,” a basic definition; then other contributors add and refine it. It’s a “work-in-progress,” but each article has a tab for its “history” which indicates how often and when the article has been edited, with different versions for viewing. Some articles have a label: “Neutrality of this article is disputed,” such as the one on “Quasi-Steady State Cosmology.” Here the reader can view the bickering by clicking on the Discussion tab at the top of the page. But there is no real information about the authors, and a certain lack of veneration for experts. Uncertainty about the expertise of the author, the risks of constant changes in article content, and vandalism are all concerns for users of Wikipedia.

In October 2005, before the *Nature* investigation the *Guardian* newspaper in the UK employed “experts” to check facts in Wikipedia. The average turned out to be 6.5 out of 10, which was considered good for this kind of collaborative venture. Of course, misinformation is everywhere, even in *Britannica*. Right now Wikipedia can be a good place to start research, especially in science, recent history, and popular culture, and in some cases, as noted in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 5, 2006) Wikipedia may provide the “sole or best available synthetic, analytical or historical discussion.” However, users might be advised to avoid the online encyclopedia for any controversial subject because disputing authors and frequent editing can create havoc. Perhaps, in the future Mr. Wales will be able to impose more order on his energetic volunteers.

## Webster and His Dictionary

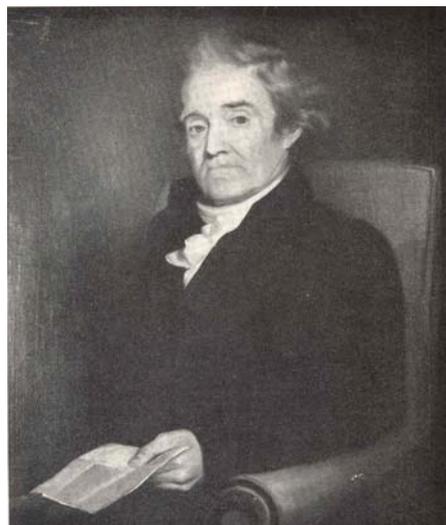
by Frank Gagliardi

This year marks the bicentennial of the publication of Noah Webster’s *Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* in 1806. The dictionary was printed in New Haven by Sidney’s Press for Hudson and Goodwin Booksellers, Hartford, and Increase Cooke & Co. Booksellers, New Haven. Sidney’s Press was the imprint of the firm Increase Cooke and John Babcock.

### The Man

Noah Webster was born on October 16, 1758 in what was then called the West District of Hartford. His father was a farmer and descendent of one of the earliest settlers of Connecticut. Webster’s birthplace stands today on South Main Street in West Hartford and is open to the public. The house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Webster attended Yale College where he graduated in 1778. His family was not in a financial position to send him to law school so Noah began his career as a teacher in Hartford. In 1783, Webster published his *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*, which was re-titled the *American Spelling Book* four year later. The book, known as the “blue back



(Continued on page 6) Portrait of Noah Webster by Samuel Morse, 1823

## Webster's Dictionary

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speller" for its distinctive blue covers, sold in the millions of copies and became one of the most widely used textbooks by students in America. His *Sketches of American Policy* presented a history of governments as well as his theories of good government.

Had he not compiled the dictionary he surely would have been remembered and honored as one of the contributors to the Constitution. Many of his suggestions were adopted at the Constitutional Convention when it met in the years 1786 and 1787.

In 1789 Webster married Rebecca Greenleaf. They would have eight children. After a long and distinguished career, Webster moved to New Haven where he died on May 28, 1843 in his 85th year. Webster and his wife are buried in Grove Street cemetery located in New Haven.

In his definitive biography of the lexicographer, H.G. Unger observed,

*"Webster was the nation's first great social reformer. He was one of the first American leaders to campaign for universal public education, women's education, unemployment and workman's compensation insurance, social welfare for the poor and homeless, child care, city planning, public sanitation, public health, advanced methods of agriculture, free commerce and trade, dredging of rivers and canal construction, copyright protection for authors and historical preservation."*

### The Dictionary

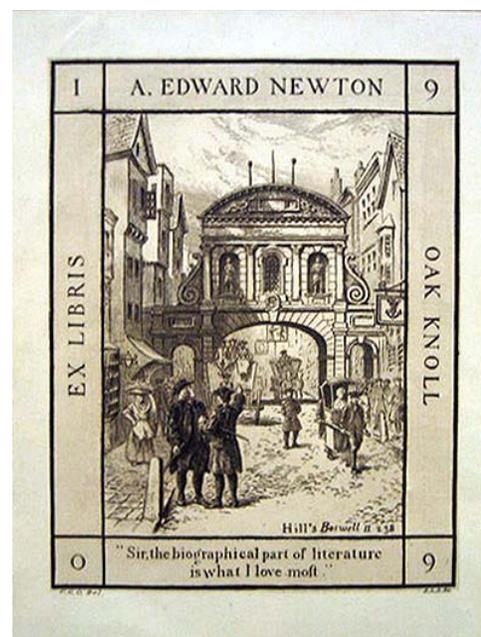
Webster's publication of his spelling book in 1783 laid the groundwork for his first dictionary twenty-three years later. Webster's 1806 dictionary was a duodecimo volume containing 40,600 words. At the end of this volume, Webster inserted several supplementary tables that provided useful information on weights, money, measures, divisions of time, populations, lists of post offices and their distances from Washington, and a chronological history of the world.

In compiling his dictionary, Webster introduced a number of reforms including the elimination of silent letters, phonetic spellings and the use of

the adjectival - y ending for nouns. He added many new terms from medicine, agriculture, geology, botany and the other sciences. Webster, as no lexicographer before him, brought standardization to the spelling and pronunciation of words. For the next twenty-two years Webster labored on his massive two-volume dictionary which was published in 1828.

### Provenance

Pasted inside the front cover of the Burritt Library's 1806 edition is the bookplate of A. Edward Newton. Alfred Edward Newton (1863-1940) was a Philadelphia businessman, author and book collector. An avid bibliophile, he wrote eleven books about literature and the joys of book collecting. At the time of his death he had accumulated a library of over 10,000 books and manuscripts. His library was put up for auction at Parke-Bernet Galleries by his son, Swift. The auction was held over three days in April of 1941 and brought in \$376,560 or \$4,984,937 in 2005 dollars. This auction was accompanied by a magnificent three-volume catalog, a set of which is located in the Burritt Library Special Collections Department. Webster's 1806 dictionary went under the hammer on April 18, 1941. Unfortunately



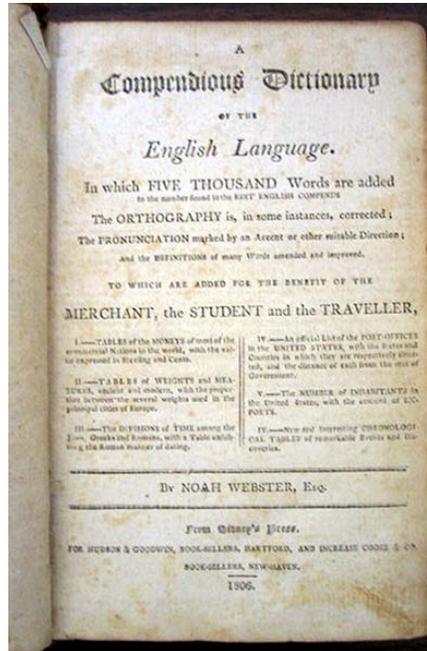
Bookplate of A. Edward Newton in the Burritt Library's copy. Special Collections.

## Webster's Dictionary

no prices were recorded in our set of the auction catalogs.

The library's copy of the dictionary is bound in the original calf with a red leather spine label that reads: *Webster's Dictionary*. The front end leaf is missing. We are fortunate to have in our collection *A Bibliography of The Writings of Noah Webster* written by Emily Ellsworth Ford Skeel, a great-granddaughter of Noah Webster, and published by the New York Public Library in 1958. Skeel's work provides much of what is known about the history of the 1806 edition. On page 228 of this definitive reference work, the author states that the price of the dictionary was \$1.50 and that 7,000 copies were printed.

Despite the large printing run, however, copies of the dictionary are very scarce today. A check of WorldCat, an online catalog of the holdings of 50,000 libraries in 90 countries, shows that only 73 copies are owned by the members. Three online secondhand booksellers, AbeBooks, Alibris, and the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association have no copies for sale. When the library acquired this book in the early 1960s, it arrived in a protective slipcase



Title page of the 1806 edition. Burritt Library Special Collections

along with Webster's *A Dictionary of the English Language; Compiled for the Use of Common Schools in the United States*, New Haven, 1807. This title is an abridgement of the 1806 dictionary and was designed for children. This is an equally scarce title and only 24 copies are listed in the WorldCat database.

### Exhibition

To commemorate the 200th anniversary of the first edition of this great dictionary, an exhibit of dictionaries will be on display for the month of October in the Burritt Library. One of the highlights will be the fourth edition of Johnson's famous dictionary. The exhibit will also include some of the many publications of Noah Webster.

### Selected Bibliography

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Unger, Harlow G. *The Life and Times of Noah Webster*. New York: John Wiley & Son, 1998.

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A. Edward Newton Collection auction catalog. Burritt Library Special Collections



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