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Philip Gove's Formative Years: From Academe to the Editorship of *Webster's Third*

Herbert C. Morton

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Philip Gove's Formative Years: From Academe to the Editorship of Webster's Third Herbert C. Morton X hilip Babcock Gove came to lexicography in mid-career, as had many dictionary editors before him. He was 44 years old, a former teacher of English, and a naval officer during the Second World War. Noah Webster had been 42 in 1800 when he began working on his Compendious Dictionary James A. H. Murray had been 42 and Samuel Johnson 37 when they changed course. All learned their craft on the job, as others have done since. Robert Burchfield recalls that he never wrote a definition before he became editor of the Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary in 1957. He had "glossarial experience," as he put it, and had assisted in the preparation of the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, but he felt totally at a loss about how to proceed

with the making of a dictionary.' Gove was hired by the G & C. Merriam Company in 1946; he was the first of three postwar recruits that year who were to play an important role in the making of Webster's Third New International Dictionary (W3).² The work suited him, and he was good at it. Five years later he was put in charge of producing W3. A decade later, the "Big Book," as it was called by the staff, was published. And then the sky fell. Early Years Philip was a ninth generation New Englander, a descendant of John Gove, a dealer in brass, who had come to the colonies in 1647. The Goves rapidly fanned out into Maine and New Hampshire. They were farmers, mostly, until Philip's father, John, broke away from the tradition. After graduating from Boston University John studied osteopathy and moved to Concord where he became the first licensed Philip Gove's Formative Years 17 practitioner in New Hampshire. Philip was born in 1902 and his sister Jean in 1906. Philip had a rather typical New Hampshire boyhood. Hiking, skiing, hockey, and baseball filled much of his time outside the classroom, along with the usual chores at home. He delivered newspapers to earn his spending money. He learned to hunt and fish with his father and became an excellent swimmer. For several summers during college and after, he taught Red Cross life-saving methods at boys' camps. On winter vacations he shoveled snow on 10-hour shifts at the railroad yards or clerked for the Railway mail company. He made the most of his time and developed an impatience with idleness. He attended nearby Dartmouth College and was an editor on the Dartmouth newspaper, a stringer for several daily newspapers, and a founding member of a campus literary society. Mementos among his papers for this period show that he shipped aboard the S.S. St. Paul to England as a seaman in the summer of 1920 at the age of 17, earning \$56 for the 24-day trip. He was graduated in 1922 with the Joseph Story prize for the best senior thesis on a subject in philosophy. After Dartmouth, Gove enrolled at Harvard to study 18th century English literature. His father, who had expected him to become a doctor, refused to finance his graduate education. Gove enrolled half-time for the fall term and supported himself by managing an eating club and working nights as a proofreader and a linotype operator. After getting a master's degree, he took a job teaching at Rice Institute. Three years later he moved to New York University where he directed the freshman English program and developed increasingly skeptical views about the conventional curriculum. Years later, when the director of the Dartmouth News service offered to provide the Merriam Company samples of student themes as examples of current usage, Gove replied: There's an almost invariable rule that writing prepared under assignment and therefore artificially under pressure has certain forced awkwardnesses that make it quite different from genuine human utterances. Most of these writers, you will remember, didn't want to write the theme in the first place, didn't have anything they wanted to say in the second, and cared only about satisfying some artificial and quite likely false standards set up by the ir...

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Herbert C. Marton

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Early Years

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