WEBSTER’S THIRD AND THE 20TH CENTURY

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To what extent can year dates be found in Webster’s Third? Year dates are scattered throughout Webster’s Third, in definitions and in etymologies, ranging from many thousands of years BC to the very recent. Here’s a slimmed-down version of the entry for BULL MOOSE:

Main entry: bull moose
Etymology: bull moose, the emblem of the Progressive party formed in 1912 by Theodore Roosevelt died 1919 American president
: a follower of Theodore Roosevelt in the United States presidential campaign of 1912

The definition refers to 1912, while the etymology refers to both 1912 and 1919.

We wondered whether it would be possible to compile a list of words and terms relating to each year of the 20th century. In the lists here, we show the word (or term) earliest alphabetically in the dictionary that includes a given year date in its definition, and also the word earliest alphabetically in the dictionary that includes a given year date in its etymology. Not surprisingly, most words come from the earlier parts of the dictionary.

Although Webster’s Third was first published in 1961, there were regular addenda sections from 1966 onwards. Supplemental publications such as 6000 Words and 12000 Words appeared from 1976 on. All this supplementary material has been brought together in the CD-ROM version of the dictionary (Version 2.5, 2000). It is this CD-ROM version that has been used in compiling the following lists. This should explain why there are many dates post-1961 appearing in the definitions and etymologies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Earliest entry in W3 with this year in definition</th>
<th>Earliest entry in W3 with this year in etymology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Boxer</td>
<td>Bertrand curve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>acceleration of gravity</td>
<td>Aida trumpet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Aglipayan</td>
<td>abelite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>dollar</td>
<td>baud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Kinkaider</td>
<td>Bayer process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Arisaka</td>
<td>Abbe condenser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>att</td>
<td>Boltzmann’s constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>American Baptist</td>
<td>Bezold-Brucke phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>boy scout</td>
<td>Ayrton shunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>besa</td>
<td>Argyll-Robertson pupil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>boy scout</td>
<td>Abegg’s rule</td>
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<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Double Ten</td>
<td>Binet-Simon test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Bull Moose</td>
<td>brushite</td>
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<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>carat</td>
<td>Aschersonia</td>
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<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>argento</td>
<td>Bertillon system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1915 Anzac Day
1916 Dada
1917 Bolshevik
1918 Armistice Day
1919 amani
1920 Black and Tan
1921 abbası
1922 chervonets
1923 abbası
1924 caliph
1925 anthroposophy
1926 Austrian school
1927 Independent Baptist
1928 angolar
1929 catty
1930 Hitlerism
1931 Bourbon
1932 cardinal bishop
1933 double eagle
1934 duck stamp
1935 dollar
1936 Loyalist
1937 Anglic
1938 FD&C color
1939 international pitch
1940 kroon
1941 ---
1942 milreis
1943 Norroy King of Arms
1944 Wasp
1945 Arisaka
1946 air mile
1947 Benelux
1948 condor
1949 ---
1950 American Baptist
1951 Conservative Baptist
1952 kyat
1953 hwan
1954 air mile
1955 at
1956 piaster
1957 naya paisa
1958 Empire Day
1959 air mile
1960 new franc
1961 rand
1962 hwan
1963 ---
1964 ---
1965 ---
1966 ---
1967 ---
1968 ---

Alzheimer's disease
Ammon's law
Baeyer strain theory
Ayerza's disease
amanı
Abney level
Allen's hummingbird
Babbitt
andorite
Albada finder
Alexandra palm
Annie Oakley
Bechterew's nucleus
artinite
bazzite
demanian system
Babcock test
Babinski reflex
Abt system
bundle of His
Dreyfusard
bandar-log
Adlerian
Aschoff body
bayleyite
Bedaux system
Arthus phenomenon
bikini
Blackman reaction
Brillouin zone
Bergius process
Abderhalden reaction
Babbitt
Carrel-Dakin treatment
Curtis stage
Chastek paralysis
Arneth index
Barkhausen effect
austinite
aldrin
Klieg light
amanı
Binet-Simon test
Bohr atom
Dick test
Franck-Condon principle
Churchillian
Raney nickel
Dick test
Barthian
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Tobacco Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Goldbergian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Bragg angle</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>billi-bi</td>
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<td>1973</td>
<td>krausite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Peronism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Bourbon Coolidge tube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Legionnaires' disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Nabokovian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Eames chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Bourbon Parsonian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Anno Lucis</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Krebs cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>sylil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Orwellian Big Brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>austral angry young man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Brigadoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Brigadoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Beckettian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Skinnerian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>austral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are no dates after 1991.

Some of the definitions are remarkably precise. Consider this definition for KINKAIDER:

: a settler on free land in Nebraska under terms of the Kinkaid act in 1904 which allowed each bona fide settler 640 acres upon payment of a filing fee of 14 dollars

Or this definition for BLACK AND TAN:

: a recruit enlisted in England in 1920-21 for service in the Royal Irish Constabulary against the armed movement for Irish independence

Or this for DUCK STAMP:

: the federal migratory-bird hunting stamp first issued in 1934 that is required on the hunting licenses of wild-fowl hunters over 16 years of age and that is sold to raise funds for the protection of migratory birds (as by the purchase of sanctuary areas)

Similarly with etymologies. Here are three extensive ones, starting with BANDAR-LOG:

Etymology: Hindi badar monkey + log people; from the portrayal of the monkey race as chatterers and poseurs in the jungle stories of Rudyard Kipling died 1936 English writer—more at LOG

Or try this etymology for ANNIE OAKLEY, which contains three times as many words as the definition:
Etymology: after Annie Oakley died 1926 American markswoman; from the resemblance of a punched pass to a playing card with bullet holes through the spots: a free ticket as to a theater

The third, for TOBACCO ROAD, is also longer than the definition:

Etymology: from Tobacco Road, novel (1932) by Erskine Caldwell b1903 American writer, and play (1933) adapted by Jack Kirkland died 1969 American playwright, about poor whites in a depressed rural area of Georgia traversed by a run-down thoroughfare ("tobacco road") made in earlier days by rolling hogsheads of tobacco to market

Only two years before Webster’s Third’s original publication date of 1961 are unrepresented in the definitions, 1941 and 1948. But there are many gaps in the years after 1961 occurring in definitions. The earliest date unrepresented in the etymologies is 1983.

Notice how some words (or terms) occur more than once. For example, the definition of ABBASI is the earliest in the dictionary for 1921 and also for 1923. The definition of BOURBON is the earliest for three different years, 1931, 1975 and 1979. As for etymologies, AMANI is the earliest for both 1919 and 1960.

The most recent years represented are 1991 for the definition of AUSTRAL, and 1990 for the etymology of SKINNERIAN.

Comparing the words on a year-by-year basis, we see that definition words appear earlier in the dictionary than etymology words for 18 dates, that etymology words occur before definition words for 70 dates, and that there are two dates where the definition and etymology words are the same. 1983 is the only date before 1992 for which neither definition nor etymology words exist.

It is interesting also to note the distribution of initial letters of the words. There are 24 definitions and 30 etymologies for words beginning with A, 35 definitions and 64 etymologies for words beginning with A or B, and 60 definitions and 82 etymologies for words beginning with the letters A through M. (However, there are only 7 words and 7 etymologies for words beginning with the letters N through Z.) This tells us that we’re far more likely to find a given year earlier in the alphabet by searching the dictionary’s etymologies rather than the definitions.

Where to next? Rather than wait another hundred years to repeat the exercise for the 21st century, using an appropriate future edition of Webster’s, we could tackle it for the 19th century using Webster’s Third, or the 18th century, or even earlier ones. Watch this space!