

## Word Histories

Do you know the histories of the familiar words *ice cream sundae*, *gobbledygook*, and *sideburns*? We found out about histories of these words by consulting the *Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories*. The history of a word is also known as “etymology.”

The first ice cream sundae was made in an ice cream parlor in Two Rivers, Wisconsin. This happened in the 1890s when a customer asked the owner of the business to pour chocolate syrup on his ice cream. At first, the owner resisted because he thought the syrup would mask the taste of the ice cream, but then he decided to do as the customer asked. Pretty soon, other customers wanted syrup on their ice cream, too. The dish got its name from George Giffy, another Wisconsin ice cream parlor owner, who only served syrup on ice cream on Sundays. It is uncertain how the spelling got changed from *Sunday* to *sundae*.

The word *gobbledygook* means language that is unclear and too wordy. Maury Maverick, a congressman from Texas, made up the word to describe some of the reports he got from people on his staff. The congressman thought that people should use simple words and sentences so that everyone could understand what they were trying to say. Maverick wrote a letter to his employees telling them not to write any more “gobbledygook.”

Sideburns are hair that grows down a man's face in front of his ears. Sideburns take their name from Ambrose E. Burnside, a general in the Union Army during the Civil War. He had bushy sideburns that grew into his mustache but he had no hair on his chin. Many men grew their hair the same way. At first, this style was called “burnsides” after the general. Later, it was revised to “sideburns.”

## Unit 15

- Would someone ever be apprehensive about investigating word origins? Explain.
  
- Make up a fictitious word history for a word you know.
  
- The word *charisma* comes from a Greek word meaning “favor or gift.” How does that relate to the meaning of the English word?