

A Notable Pennsylvanian: Ida Minerva Tarbell, 1857-1944

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Ida M. Tarbell Gives One-hour Course

Bucknell was fortunate in securing the services of Ida M. Tarbell, internationally known biographer, who gave a series of lectures extending from March 17 to April 11.

One credit hour was allowed each student who took the course in biography given by the noted writer. Recent articles by Miss Tarbell are "Father and Son", in the March AMERICAN MAGAZINE, and "Lincoln's First Love", in COLLIER'S for the week of February 8.

Miss Tarbell was a student in Paris at the Sorbonne and College de France from 1891 until 1894. From then until 1906 she was an associate editor of McCLURE'S MAGAZINE, becoming associate editor of the AMERICAN MAGAZINE in 1906 and continuing in that capacity until 1915. Her clubs include the National Arts, Cosmopolitan, and Pen and Brush, of which she is president.

Few reformers are more widely recognized in American history than the Progressive muckraker, Ida M. Tarbell. Her exposé, *The History of the Standard Oil Company*, originally serialized in *McClure's Magazine* beginning in November 1902, and published in book form in 1904, is generally regarded as a classic example of investigative journalism. Tarbell gained prominence on the national level as a muckraker, but she was a Pennsylvanian first, and it was her Pennsylvania roots and experiences that sparked her interest in Progressive journalism. Although Tarbell studied in Paris for three years, and subsequently lived for many years in New York City and Connecticut, throughout her life she maintained close, if sporadic, ties to western Pennsylvania, especially with her family and with Allegheny College in Meadville where she completed her formal education.¹

Tarbell is the subject of several studies, including two biographies and two volumes devoted to her journalistic work. However, because scholars examining her life have provided readers with little information about her historical significance as a western Pennsylvanian, this essay focuses on how early Pennsylvania influences shaped Tarbell's career and achievement of national acclaim as a lecturer and an investigative reporter.

The daughter of Esther Ann McCullough and Franklin Sumner Tarbell, Ida was born on November 5, 1857, in her pioneer maternal grandparents' log house in Erie County, Pennsylvania. In August 1859, shortly before her second birthday, an event that was to dramatically change Tarbell family life occurred. Edwin L. Drake discovered oil near Titusville, about forty miles south of the McCullough farm. That same month, Franklin Tarbell, who had recently returned to Pennsylvania after failing as a farmer in Iowa, was caught up in the excitement about the oil business. He realized that producers would need tanks to store their oil. Capitalizing on his carpentry skills, he perfected a satisfactory wooden oil storage tank, which he began to manufacture that fall. Franklin's business was more successful than he had hoped, and in 1860 he moved his family, which now included infant son Will, to the oil-producing area on Cherry Run Creek. The settlement, later named Rouseville, was about twelve miles south of Titusville.² There the Tarbell family, which benefited financially from the oil tank business, supported and was actively involved in building a Methodist church. Ultimately, the family's religious affiliation would have a profound influence on Ida's education and career.³

Rouseville was a squalid, dirty, and noisy boom town in the oil region where workers patronized the saloons and prostitutes typically found in such "fringe" settlements. Because of the rough elements in the small town, Franklin and Esther sought an environment more conducive to raising a family. In 1870 they moved to Titusville. By this time the family included another daughter, Sarah, six years younger than Ida. A fourth child, Franklin, Jr., also was born in Rouseville; sadly, he died there shortly before age two of scarlet fever.⁴

Ida had become accustomed to the languid pace of life in Rouseville and the informality of its small one-room school. She frequently was allowed to roam the countryside rather than do lessons. She did not initially adapt to the strict routine of her new eighth-grade class, and played hooky several times. However, after her teacher reprimanded her for cutting classes and expressed disappointment at her lack of self-discipline and effort, Tarbell became serious about her studies and was soon a model student. She graduated at the top of Titusville High School's class of 1875.⁵ Her high school years proved crucial in her formation, for it was then that she began to develop her work ethic, as well as an interest in biology.

Tarbell obtained a high school diploma, but in the last quarter of the nineteenth century few options were open to educated women. She could teach grammar school, as her mother had done before she married; she could remain single, live with, and be dependent on her parents; or she could marry. The latter option held little appeal for Tarbell. In fact, she found it distasteful, noting in her autobiography that out of the various women's rights then being contested—which her parents actively supported—she decided two in particular were worth pursuing: the right to an education and the right to earn a living. During her adolescence, she became increasingly determined to be independent, and decided in high school never to marry, because “it would interfere with my plan; it would fetter my freedom.” During most of her life, Tarbell was unequivocal about her determination never to wed, concluding that “above all I must be free; and to be free I must be a spinster. When I was fourteen, I was praying [to] God on my knees to keep me from marriage.” She suspected this was “only an echo of the strident feminine cry filling the air at the moment, the cry that woman was a slave in a man-made world.”⁶ To achieve her independence, she reasoned, she would teach, which required a college degree. A college education for most people in the 1870s was unusual; for a woman in a rural area of western Pennsylvania, it was nothing less than extraordinary.

Irrespective of her plans to attend college, Tarbell's hostility to matrimony appears extreme and was no doubt unconventional and unpopular. Still, there is no indication that Tarbell's parents had strong feelings for or against marriage for her. She was a shy adolescent who either feared or shunned boys her own age and fantasized about her father's adult male friends, to whom she never spoke. As Tarbell biographer Kathleen Brady wrote: “One can only wonder how a beau would have been received in the Tarbell home, for Franklin had a strict code that ruled out such things as cards, square dances, and cotillions.”⁷

Though Franklin Tarbell was apparently a devout Christian and an active supporter of the Methodist faith, such was not the case with Ida. She was received into the church at about age ten or eleven; however, her interest in

science resulted in her grasping "with a combination of horror and amazement that, instead of a creation, the earth was a growth." Tarbell also wrote: "It was the resurrection that disturbed me. I could not accept it, nor could I accept the promise of personal immortality." She then came to a conviction that never left her: "That as far as I am concerned immortality is not my business, that there is too much for me to attend to in this mortal life without over speculation on the immortal, that it is not necessary to my peace of mind or to my effort to be a decent and useful person, to have a definite assurance about the affairs of the next world." This was not a decision Tarbell reached lightly. She realized the assurance of life hereafter was necessary to the peace of mind of some people.⁸

Because of Tarbell's interest in science and her determination to be self-supporting, she was highly motivated to attend college and to excel in her classes. Tarbell's parents, strong supporters of women's rights, were both former teachers and thus were more amenable to a college education for their daughter than most parents of that era. Franklin could financially afford the "frivolous experiment" of a college education for Ida, who wanted to attend Cornell to study biology. However, the proximity of Allegheny College, the school's Methodist affiliation, and its president, Dr. Lucius Bugbee, an occasional Tarbell Sunday dinner guest, convinced Ida and her parents that she should attend the small liberal arts school.⁹

Tarbell entered Allegheny College in the fall of 1876 to study biology. She was the only female in her freshman class of forty "hostile or indifferent boys," and one of only five women in the entire study body. Those few female students could not have been strictly conventional, according to Brady, who observed, "For a girl to go to college was a daring thing." According to historian Rosalind Rosenberg, in 1870 one percent of Americans attended college, of whom twenty percent were women.¹⁰

Tarbell's decision to forsake marriage apparently was not attributed to any particular aversion to men. She wrote that "Incredible as it seems to me now, I had come to college at eighteen without ever having dared look fully into the face of any boy of my age." Those who should have been her companions, she shunned. She did not dance as "the Methodist discipline forbade it. I was incredibly stupid and uninterested in games." Not long after she began her college classes, she discovered "the Boy," but she "had a stiff-necked determination to be free. To avoid entangling alliances of all kinds had become an obsession with me." Tarbell offers no clarification as to who "the Boy" may have been, nor do her biographers. She also engaged in behavior generally considered scandalous when she accepted pins from four young fraternity members and wore them all to chapel one morning. Had it not been for some "non-fraternity friends," she would have a social outcast. Apparently this incident was Tarbell's way of asserting her independence and demonstrating her determination to be free of any special or entangling alliance.¹¹

There is little evidence in Tarbell's writings as to her own thoughts regarding marriage; besides her previously mentioned teenage decision to remain single, and a comment on the subject at the time she graduated from college. She wrote that when she entered college, she did not believe she would ever marry. However, upon graduation, she "thought possibly some day" she might. As a teenager, she was ignored by the women feminists who visited, but not by male friends her parents entertained. "Men were nicer than women to me, I mentally noted." It is clear from her autobiography, as well as material written about her, that she enjoyed the company of men throughout her life, both socially and professionally.¹²

Other than these reflections, there are virtually no clues why Ida was so opposed to marriage. It is likely the influence of activists in the women's rights movement may have led to her early decision to acquire an education, to earn her own living, and never to marry. It is possible that the mores of her time, with their emphasis on strict gender-role separation and social restrictions on intimacy between young men and women, may also have contributed. Franklin's strict prohibition against dancing and cards probably extended to the company of young men as well. It is noteworthy that Ida's younger sister, Sarah, also remained a spinster throughout her life.¹³

The intelligent and hard-working young Ida thrived in the enlightened environment of Allegheny College. She flourished intellectually under the close tutelage of her instructors, especially Jeremiah Tingley, head of the Department of Natural Sciences, whom she considered "a warm and natural teacher." She wrote that Professor Tingley encouraged students he found "really interested in scientific study" to "look outside the book." Upon learning of Ida's interest in the microscope, he urged her to use "the magnificent binocular belonging to the college" and gave her and others interested in scientific study free run of the laboratory. Professor Tingley and his wife also entertained the group of laboratory devotees in their home, where Ida found that "the atmosphere of those rooms was something quite new and wonderful to me. It was my first look into the intimate social life possible to people interested above all in ideas, beauty, music, and glad to work hard and live simply to devote themselves to their cultivation." Tarbell wrote that she learned the power of enthusiasm from Jeremiah Tingley. Not to spare another's feelings when they were indifferent, neglectful, or careless was a lesson taught by Latin Professor George Haskins. Tarbell biographer Mary E. Tomkins wrote that Ida took the humanities casually, as her real interest was science. She was "promptly exposed to stinging blasts of contempt for sloppy work" by Professor George Haskins. "These criticisms affected her, as had the reprimand from her eighth-grade teacher; and she learned precision in workmanship." Ida credited Professor Haskins "for instilling in her the dogged persistence that she always afterwards brought to her work, and she attributed to his influence her courage to express

contempt. . . .” Tarbell characterized Professor Haskins as “one of the few able teachers I have known.”¹⁴

When Tarbell graduated from Allegheny in 1880, she realized that financial limitations prevented her dream of attending graduate school from becoming a reality. Consequently, her options were limited to marriage—appealing for most women, but out of the question for her—or teaching school. Therefore, she reluctantly accepted a teaching position at the nearby Union Seminary in Poland, Ohio, where low pay forced her to borrow from her father for living expenses. After two grueling years of overwork—she was teaching two classes in each of four languages—Greek, Latin, French, and German, plus classes in geology, botany, geometry, and trigonometry—and an inadequate wage, she resigned, returned to her parents’ house, and considered herself a failure.¹⁵

Tarbell’s gloomy mood reflected that of the family back in Titusville, where her father’s business was failing. The Bradford oil fields in which Franklin Tarbell had invested heavily were producing more than enough oil to satisfy the demand, causing a dramatic drop in prices. John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company was by the late-nineteenth century a giant corporation that, particularly in western Pennsylvania, controlled a large percentage of crude oil production. In 1872, Standard Oil had almost succeeded in monopolizing transportation of oil in the United States through a trust known as the South Improvement Company. Then a producer, Ida’s father was in effect forced out of the oil production business by the Standard Oil monopoly. Brady wrote that Franklin Tarbell’s personality changed. He no longer told his family about his day, sang to Sarah, or enjoyed his after-dinner cigar. Brady thought that “what ranked him was not business frustration alone but a sense of injustice.” “He was probably not a very good businessman.” In the early spring of 1882, Franklin and son Will, who interrupted his law studies for the trip, went to Huron in the Dakota Territory seeking their fortune. Franklin soon returned home, leaving Will behind. While there, Will married a young lady from Illinois, Ella Scott, and practiced law in the Dakotas for four years before returning to Titusville.¹⁶

Not long after Ida returned from Ohio, Allegheny College offered her a position teaching French and German, which she declined. Reverend T. L. Flood, editor of *The Chautauquan*, a Methodist monthly magazine connected with the Chautauqua movement and its home studies program, offered her a more appealing opportunity. The Tarbells had been involved in the local Chautauqua Assembly from its founding by the Methodist Church in 1874 as a site for Sunday school education. The family was well-known to the founders of the Assembly, and Dr. Flood was no doubt aware of Ida’s disciplined work habits, educational background, and keen intellect.¹⁷

In 1883 Reverend Flood recruited Ida initially to annotate parts of the texts used in correspondence courses furnished by *The Chautauquan*. However, she soon became so involved that she moved back to Meadville, the magazine's headquarters, and learned basic publishing skills such as typesetting and editing. She served as the magazine's translator of French articles, and from this task developed an interest in the French Revolution. Although Reverend Flood never officially assigned Ida a title, in reality she functioned as the managing editor.¹⁸

Evidently Reverend Flood was a better promoter and preacher than office manager. So Ida, wrote in her autobiography: "Dr. Flood had little interest in detail. The magazine was made up in a casual, and to my mind a disorderly, fashion. I could not keep my fingers off." The printing shop foreman, Adrian McCoy, annoyed for some time by Flood's indifference, realized that Ida was eager to learn. He trained her in production, vocabulary, and the importance of clean and timely copy. While working for *The Chautauquan* Tarbell's interest in journalism arose. She "began to write articles, even went off on trips to gather information on subjects that seemed to be fitting." Her first signed article in the magazine, "The Arts and Industries of Cincinnati," was published in the November 1886 issue.¹⁹

Ida's first investigative undertaking was at the United States Patent Office in Washington, D.C. When *The Chautauquan* published an article saying that only ninety of 22,000 patents issued one year went to women, Tarbell was annoyed. She had "been disturbed for some time by what seemed to me the calculated belittling of the past achievements of women by many active in the campaign for suffrage." The suffragists were reporting that, "in all the history of the Patent Office, women had taken out only some three hundred patents." But Tarbell's investigation revealed that up to December 14, 1886, women had been issued 1,935 patents. Her article, "Women as Inventors," was published in the March 1887 issue of *The Chautauquan*. Her career in investigative journalism had begun.²⁰

Although Tarbell's life was busy, varied, and pleasant, after six years at *The Chautauquan*, she was considering a change. She had researched and written several articles on prominent women in the French revolutionary period, and developed an interest in late eighteenth-century French women particularly Madame Roland, a prominent and avid Republican who shouted, "O Liberty! What crimes are committed in thy name!" as she went to the guillotine in November 1793.²¹ Tarbell wanted to pursue this interest, and decided the only way to really know her subject was to study in Paris. She had begun to feel claustrophobic in her work, and also realized that she was limited in what she could accomplish in western Pennsylvania. Brady wrote, "Visits home only aggravated her claustrophobia. Aside from Will's three young children, her family had remained exactly as they had been for decades." In 1890, Ida

decided to resign her job at the magazine and study French history in Paris, a daring and unusual endeavor, especially for a woman at that time.²²

Her father and mother supported her in wishing to go abroad, although they feared for her safety and were puzzled that she wanted to live and study in France. Of this adventure, Ida wrote "but in the end it took all the grit I had to go ahead." She believed she "had certain qualifications for the practice of the modest kind of journalism on which I had decided." It was her habit to plan in advance what she was going to do, and she thought her "habit of steady, painstaking work" ought to count for something. She also mused, "and perhaps I could learn to write." Ida does not specify the type journalism she had in mind, other than it be "self-directed, free-lance." Brady mentions writing that would "serve a moral purpose" in her biography of Tarbell.²³

When Ida resigned her position, Reverend Flood told her she was no writer, and gloomily predicted she would starve in Paris. Undaunted by his assessment, or by friends who reminded her that she was past the age of thirty, Tarbell sailed for Paris in the late summer of 1891. She was accompanied by three women who stayed with her for several months and shared expenses—Josephine Henderson, another graduate of Allegheny College, and Mary Henry, both former employees of *The Chautauquan*, and Annie Towle, a friend of Mary's. Prior to leaving Titusville, Ida had decided to live in the Latin Quarter. A few days after their arrival, the group began boarding in the house of Mme. Bonnet on Rue du Sommerard. Only seventeen days after leaving Titusville, Tarbell was busy writing descriptions of Paris in her new Latin Quarter bedroom. But on Sundays Ida rested. Men the women had met on shipboard escorted them about the city and took them to dinner, where Ida "quaffed beer with her gentlemen friends and dutifully wrote home about it: "You mustn't think I am getting Frenchy in my morals because I do things here on Sunday which I don't do at home."²⁴

The American ladies soon became friendly and socialized on week-ends with a group of Egyptian students, including Prince Said Toussoum of the royal Tewfik family, who were also tenants of Mme. Bonnet. The Egyptians were about twenty years of age. Tarbell considered them childlike, although they "were multilingual, having been schooled in Europe, and quite cosmopolitan." Brady also wrote that initially the women's "social life revolved around the McCall Mission, a community of American Protestants doing evangelical and social work in Parish, and occasional visitors from Meadville and Titusville." She also wrote, "Americans found each other quickly in the Latin Quarter and Ida soon grew close to a group of young scholars connected with Johns Hopkins University: John and Ada Vincent, Fred and Mary Emery, and Charles Downer Hazen, a young historian whose specialty was the French Revolution." This interest gave Hazen and Tarbell a common ground for their mutual friendship that endured throughout her life. Ida and her roommates' social life soon

“moved beyond the McCall Mission.” Among others, she met Fred Parker Emery of the English Department of Massachusetts Institute of Technology.²⁵

Ida's social life was full and satisfying in Paris, but she missed her family in Pennsylvania. She wrote to them faithfully, wanting to know “every detail of their lives. If a week passed without a letter from Titusville, she was furious.” Her mother, Esther, regularly wrote her long letters filled with details of the family's life, and occasionally sister Sarah and Ida corresponded privately. The family was having a hard time financially, Sarah was ill and hospitalized, and Ida felt guilty because she was “across the ocean writing picayune pieces at a fourth of a cent a word while they struggled there. . . . If any one of the family felt that I should have been at home there never was a hint of it. From them I had unwavering sympathy and encouragement.”²⁶

Before sailing for Paris, Tarbell contacted the editors of the leading newspapers in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and several other cities, and persuaded them to publish her forthcoming articles for six dollars each. Her first payment arrived on November 12, 1891—six dollars from the *Cincinnati Times-Star*. Although a small sum for the time invested, the check boosted her spirits, as she realized she might be able to support herself while studying in Paris. In December 1891 *Scribner's Magazine* paid the munificent sum of one hundred dollars for “France Adorée,” a story based on her tutor in Meadville, Frenchman Séraphin Clause, with whom she studied conversational French prior to sailing for France. The McClure Syndicate in New York City asked Ida to submit an article on “Marrying Day in Paris,” for which they paid ten dollars and encouraged her to submit additional articles. The newspapers and magazines were faithful in accepting Ida's essays and sending her checks for them until the business panic began in the United States in 1893.²⁷

Ida's articles in the popular press attracted the attention of the McClure Syndicate's Samuel S. McClure. He and John S. Phillips were planning to launch a new illustrated and highly literate monthly magazine to compete with *Scribner's*, *The Century*, and *Harper's Magazine*, but one with a “lively journalistic style.” McClure realized the new photoengraving process and cheap glazed paper would allow him to charge only fifteen cents for the magazine, as opposed to the thirty-five cents an issue the above mentioned publications charged. In 1892, McClure met with Tarbell in Paris and asked her to return to the United States to help launch *McClure's Magazine*. Tarbell declined because she had not completed her research on Madame Roland for a planned book, but she did agree to do some free-lance writing. McClure set her to work at once.²⁸

Tarbell's first assignment for *McClure's Magazine* was “to interview the literary women of France, a task which perfectly suited her inclinations.” She interviewed and wrote articles about, for example, Marie Blanc, who wrote as Thérèse Bentzon and had been a close friend of George Sand; Mlle Séverine,

who created a stir when she interviewed the pope; and Jeanne Dieulafoy, “archaeologist and author of a book on Persia,” who “smoked cigars and wore, with the necessary permission of the French government, men’s trousers.” She also interviewed and wrote about Mary Robinson, and Englishwoman married to James Darmesteter. When Monsieur Darmesteter learned Ida was “after Madame Roland he was *immediately* helpful.” He introduced her to Léon Marillier, a great-great-grandson of Madame Roland, and Marillier quickly introduced her to his mother. Knowing Madame Marillier led to Ida’s becoming friends with many prominent French citizens, such as Sorbonne professor of history Charles Seignobos, and Lucien Herr, librarian at the École Normale and managing editor of the *Revue de Paris*. Tarbell also became friends with Henry Wickman Steed, and forced him on the French group who met at Madame Marillier’s, “despite his Englishness.” Steed was an editor of *The London Times*. After Ida began publishing articles in the American press, the French literary world opened to her, “a good fortune she credited to her ability to get names mentioned in American periodicals.” When her interviews and articles with women were completed, McClure asked her “to interview the great Louis Pasteur.” She published the result in the second issue of *McClure’s Magazine*, in September 1893. Pasteur was delighted.²⁹

Tarbell worked very hard in Paris. She studied at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France, and did research at the Bibliothèque Nationale to the point that her Parisian friends and acquaintances called her “*une femme travailleuse*,” a hard-working woman. Brady wrote that Tarbell “sent as many topics to as many papers as she could.” In September 1891, the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* published a Tarbell article, introduced with “from what we know of Miss Tarbell, she is bound to make a place for herself in American literature.” Despite the newspapers’ praise and publication of Tarbell’s articles, her pay was low and infrequent, and she had to live very frugally. During her years in Paris, however, she was able to make week-end visits to Fontainebleau and other “great cathedral and château towns—Chartres, Beauvais, Rheims, Pierrefonds, Compiègne.” She also took a “farewell vacation” in 1892 with a group of Johns Hopkins University students and faculty prior to their return to America. They visited Mont-Saint Michel, and the Island of Jersey. Tarbell wrote that the “vacation put a gay finish on my first year in Paris,” but she returned with only twenty francs in her pocket.³⁰

Because of the business panic of 1893 which caused late payments for articles from her American publishers, Tarbell reached a point in Paris where she was broke. She knew that she would be paid eventually, but business conditions were not good. One warm summer day, desperate for income, she decided to pawn her “sealskin coat, which really was very good.” The proprietor was polite, but Ida was a foreigner and he wanted credentials. Because she did not want her Parisian friends or her landlady to know of her precarious

financial position, she could not provide local references. Tarbell later returned to the pawn shop with her checkbook, letters from her publishers, and her Allegheny College diploma. As Ida later recalled: "The inspector passed lightly over the letters of editors, the stubs in my checkbook, but the diploma impressed him; and so it was on my Allegheny College diploma I made the loan which helped me over the bad months of 1893."³¹

Ida completed the research for and manuscript of her book about Madame Roland in early 1894. About this time, McClure asked her to go to Glasgow to interview Henry Drummond, a Scottish clergyman who had recently completed a successful lecture tour in the United States. McClure met Ida in London, and they agreed on the following terms: "he would pay for her trip to America, providing enough money so that she could replenish her wardrobe and travel decently." After resting with her family for a few months, she was to join McClure's staff in October. McClure provided money for second-class passage; but Ida traveled third-class and spent the difference on "a porcelain doll for her nieces which at the pull of its string could say 'Mama.'" The difference was worth it. When Ida arrived in Titusville, Will's children threw themselves into her open arms. Tarbell wrote in her 1939 autobiography that they were a joy to her, "as they have continued to be to this day." Though she was happy to see her family, her time in western Pennsylvania was not very pleasant. The family fortune, "like that of the rest of the country, was at a low ebb," because of the aftershock of the 1893 stock market crash and a long agricultural depression. She worked on the revisions of her Madame Roland book in her parents' home in Titusville. "Just as I had put the finishing touches to my Madame Roland," she wrote, "I was snatched away from Titusville by a hurried letter from Mr. McClure," demanding "I must come at once to New York and write a life of Napoleon Bonaparte."³²

Following McClure's request, Tarbell moved to Washington, D.C., to do research on Napoleon at the Library of Congress. In six weeks she had her first installment ready, which *McClure's Magazine* published in November 1894. *McClure's* had "permission to reproduce a large and choice collection of Napoleon portraits" from the collection of Gardiner Green Hubbard, a long-time collector of Napoleon memorabilia.³³ Other installments on Napoleon followed in subsequent issues of the magazine. Expecting nothing but her forty dollars per week salary from the work, she was surprised when she received "the last thing in the world I had expected, the approval of a few people who knew the field." One was William Milligan Stone, author of "an elaborate study, the outcome of years of research," about Napoleon. He told Ida that he often wished he had had the "prod of necessity behind me," and "you got something that way—a living sketch." Tarbell's series on Napoleon in the new *McClure's Magazine* "boosted the magazine's popularity and Tarbell's reputation as a journalist of note." Tarbell herself "considered her scholarship

sketchy,” but the public loved the series, and the magazine’s circulation doubled. According to the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, her treatment conveys the tragic nature of Napoleon’s rise and fall and emphasizes his constructive role in modernizing French government and laws.” Biographer Tomkins says that “Tarbell’s skill in simplifying masses of data and her swift narrative style assured the popularity of the biography.” She also thought that in Tarbell’s view, “Napoleon was no superman, but he possessed extraordinary intelligence and was an excellent administrator” who personally supervised plans. Tarbell considered Napoleon’s presumption that he was a law unto himself a fatal flaw. Tomkins notes that McClure “gloatingly recalled” that thanks in large part to her essay “within a few months our circulation rose from 40,000 to 80,000.” Tarbell reported in her autobiography that “The ‘Napoleon’ had given the magazine, now in its second year, the circulation boost it needed.” Kochersberger writes in his introduction to *More Than a Muckraker* that “some historians have claimed that this hugely popular biographical series ensured the success of the magazine.” The magazine’s circulation continued to increase during the Napoleon series; *McClure’s* produced a book edition after the magazine series ended entitled *The Short Life of Napoleon*. A second edition was printed in May 1895, “which brought total copies printed to 37,000. The book was one of Tarbell’s enduring successes, and she received royalties from it throughout her life. Only after Ida’s success with the Napoleon series did Scribner’s agree to publish her book about Madame Roland. It did not sell well, but “is a benchmark in Tarbell’s development as a historian/biographer.”³⁴

Samuel McClure’s next project for Ida was a series of articles on Abraham Lincoln. As a publisher, he thought this would further increase the circulation of his magazine. Tarbell was not at first enthusiastic about the project. However, she set to work and the magazine’s circulation increased dramatically with the publication of her articles on Lincoln, as McClure had expected. In fact, circulation reached 300,000 after the series began, “thereby increasing the revenue from advertising to the highest figure thus far recorded in magazine history.” This series was published in book form in 1986, with J. Maccan Davis as coauthor, as *The Early Life of Abraham Lincoln*. Brady noted that from these early beginnings, Tarbell, who had no initial interest in American history, developed considerable expertise in the subject. Brady also thought that whatever Tarbell’s writing deficiencies, she became “the preeminent Lincoln biographer of her day because she amplified and clarified his life.” Biographer Mary Tomkins quoted “eminent academic Lincoln scholar,” Benjamin P. Thomas, as saying Tarbell was a popularizer whose “comprehension of Lincoln was her most precious literary legacy.” He grouped Tarbell with the literary interpreters of Lincoln, rather than the scholars. The *Dictionary of Literary Biography* reports the assignment “brought her more fame and the magazine

more fortune." Tarbell did extensive research, and "unearthed fresh documents, photographs, and anecdotes, enough of the last to furnish material for a lifetime of feature articles and a dependable source of income." Tarbell's Lincoln biography is categorized as "well researched despite the fact that Robert Todd Lincoln had denied access to the Lincoln papers." The concluding remark in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* about the Lincoln work is: "Tarbell's *Life of Abraham Lincoln* remained a standard work until 1947, when the Lincoln papers finally were released to scholars." Robert Todd Lincoln, after publication of her book, wrote her, that "I must confess my astonishment and pleasure upon the result of your untiring research. I consider it an indispensable adjunct to the work of Nicolay and Hay." [John G. Nicolay and John Hay were authors of a ten-volume biography of Lincoln, and were the only authors granted access to his father's papers by Robert Todd Lincoln.]³⁵

Tarbell moved from Washington, D.C., where she had lived since beginning her work on Napoleon, to New York City in May 1899, and continued her association with *McClure's Magazine*. In 1901, after business mergers continued apace, resulting in U. S. Steel being the first billion-dollar corporation ever formed in the United States, McClure was urged to offer his readers a series of detailed articles on the trusts. But which ones—there were several hundred by 1901. Ida suggested the Sugar Trust and its influence on tariff legislation, which affected the price paid by housewives. McClure thought this subject was "too trivial." He also thought they could produce something with more impact than staff writer Ray Stannard Baker's article about U. S. Steel. Perhaps Ida's personal knowledge of an reflections about the early oil industry in her native area of western Pennsylvania influenced McClure and Phillips to decide that the oil industry was a suitable subject for in-depth study. One would expect Tarbell to express her thoughts about growing up in the oil region of western Pennsylvania, and about the Standard Oil Company's business practices toward the independent oilmen to McClure and Phillips during her association with them. Whatever the reasoning, Standard Oil was the obvious choice. Rockefeller's company was the "granddaddy" of them all and the founder was a personality of much interest.³⁶

As to the Standard Oil Company, in reminiscing about her early life, Tarbell noted that in the 1880s, Titusville and the oil region of Pennsylvania were struggling to "loosen the hold of the mighty monopoly which, since its first attack on the business in 1872, had grown in power and extent until it owned and controlled over ninety percent of the oil industry outside of the production of the raw crude." The region was divided into two hostile camps, the monopolistic Standard Oil Company against the independent drillers, which included her father, Franklin Tarbell. Ida also wrote that in those days, she "looked with more contempt on the man who had gone over to the Standard than on the one who had been in jail."³⁷

After the decision to make Standard the subject of a series of articles on the trusts, Phillips asked Tarbell to draft an outline for McClure, who was then in Europe. As Tarbell and Phillips discussed the proposed project, Tarbell's enthusiasm for the work grew. She knew that court documents existed in the public records about Standard Oil, as its business practices had been under investigation by the United States Congress and by various states in which it had operated frequently since its organization in 1870. From this inauspicious beginning came Tarbell's two-volume *The History of the Standard Oil Company*, the work for which she is best remembered.³⁸

It is easy to understand Tarbell's enthusiasm in writing an exposé about the Standard Oil Company, the company she felt was responsible for ruining her father's business in 1882. Still, Tarbell worked meticulously and painstakingly on her Standard Oil text in an effort to present a fair analysis of the company's business practices. This work occupied her for the better part of five years. Everette E. Dennis, Executive Director, The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, Columbia University, in his foreword to Robert Kochersberger's book, *More Than a Muckraker*, thought that Tarbell wrote "with passion and conviction, always supporting her statements with painstaking research and powerful evidence." Dennis also felt that Tarbell was "a more rigorous, systematic journalist than almost anyone before or since." Tomkins thought the book "reminiscent of the pioneer study of the Standard Oil Company, Henry Demarest Lloyd's *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, published in 1894. But whereas Lloyd's book had been a jeremiad, Tarbell's was a comparatively cool analysis, and her tone lent credence to her accusations." Tomkins also stated that in view of the subsequent Supreme Court decision dissolving the Standard Oil Trust, the book was a "journalist's articulation" of public opposition to trusts, and an agent in "hastening the legal solution of the trust problem." Louis Fuller wrote in 1939 in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* that if Tarbell "harbored so much as a grain of resentment against the interests that had taken over the oil fields from their original owners, however, it did not appear on the surface. Ida Tarbell was objectivity itself."³⁹

McClure's editors were also careful in editing the material, as the book was an attack on the business practices of an immensely powerful company. After her work was underway, Ida noted a remark often made was, "*McClure's* has courage. Even my father said, 'Don't do it, Ida—they will ruin the magazine.'" He was fearful for Ida and her business associates, based upon his earlier experience when Standard's business practices had forced him out of business.⁴⁰

Tarbell hoped the Standard Oil work "might be received as a legitimate historical study." However, to her chagrin, she found herself among a new school of journalists labeled "muckrakers." President Theodore Roosevelt, who applied the term to the investigative journalists, told her, "I don't object to the facts, but you and Baker [Ray Stannard Baker, an associate investigative re-

porter for *McClure's*] are not *practical*." Tarbell thought President Roosevelt "had become uneasy at the effect on the public of the periodical press's increasing criticisms and investigations of business and political abuses." She also thought that Roosevelt felt that correction should be left to him, and harbored "a little resentment that a profession outside his own should be stealing his thunder."⁴¹

Tomkins thought of Tarbell that though "she spent most of her long career recording the effects of industrialism on American life," her masterpiece, *The History of the Standard Oil Company*, did not merely record history, it helped significantly to make it. As Tarbell's contemporary and friend, Columbia University history professor Charles D. Hazen said, "Miss Tarbell is the only historian I have ever heard of whose findings were corroborated by the Supreme Court of the United States." He was referring to the May 1911 Supreme Court decision which in effect dissolved the Standard Oil Company as it was then organized. Tomkins also notes that the book on Standard Oil, as Tarbell's autobiography makes clear, "was an outgrowth of her own life and an affirmation of the values which sustained her world view." Additionally, Tomkins advocated that Tarbell's "main contributions as a writer were those of a pioneer, for she carried out the pioneer spirit of her ancestors in all her undertakings."⁴²

Tarbell remained with *McClure's* until a 1906 disagreement between McClure and his partner, John Phillips. Without consulting Phillips, according to Tarbell, McClure had organized a new company, "the charter of which provided not only for a *McClure's Universal Journal*, but a McClure's Bank, a McClure's Life Insurance Company, a McClure's School Book Publishing Company, and later a McClure's Ideal Settlement in which people could have cheap homes on their own terms." Tarbell, who was a minority stockholder, and other employees thought this "a speculative scheme as alike as two peas to certain organizations the magazine had been battering." Ida also thought that McClure's inability to understand the arguments of his associates and his failure of judgment was due to his long illness. A few months later, McClure bought out his partner. Soon thereafter, Phillips, Tarbell, Ray Stannard Baker, and several other former *McClure's* editorial staffers incorporated as the Phillips Publishing Company and bought *The American Magazine*, which originally had been known as *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Monthly*. Their first issue appeared in October 1906.⁴³

Between 1906 and 1912, Tarbell produced more materials on Lincoln, a series on women's issues, and a tariff series, which "ran intermittently from 1906 to 1911, the year of its publication in book form" as *The Tariff in Our Times*. Beginning in 1912, she traveled around the country visiting manufacturing sites, including steel and shoe factories and cotton mills. Tarbell remarked that the work took her from Maine to Alabama, and from New York

to Kansas. She wrote articles for *The American Magazine* about numerous industries all over the country. During her travels, she frequently spoke to groups at the various factories or mills she visited, or to crowds of admirers who met her train or saw her off, and discovered that she could speak extemporaneously. The founding group sold *The American Magazine* to Crowell Publishing Company in 1915. It soon became obvious to Tarbell that there was no place for her type of work on the new *American*, so she left the company later that year.⁴⁴

Shortly after Ida gave up her association with the magazine, the Coit Alber Lecture Bureau asked her to join its organization. Alber wanted her to speak on the "Chautauqua" lecture circuit about "New Ideals in Business," which she had been discussing in the magazine. Examples are an article about Frederick Taylor's scientific management methods and her article, "A Fine Place to Work," in which she claimed that "companies paying most attention to the human needs of their workers—for recreation, ease, cleanliness and positive group activity," have increased production and greater employee loyalty. She signed up for a seven-week circuit, forty-nine days in forty-nine different places. Ida was nearly sixty years of age when she moved into this new career. With the extensive travel by train and the one-night stands, it was not long before she realized the rigors of such a grueling tour.⁴⁵

Always a dedicated worker, Tarbell took lessons to improve her speaking style and learned to project her voice from her diaphragm. By the time she began the lecture circuit, she knew theoretically how to use her voice in speaking publicly. However, not until the second year on the lecture circuit could she count on her voice for the required hour of her performance. Tarbell continued to lecture and write, publishing her book, *New Ideals in Business* in 1916, which "emphasizes that responsibility for weakness and unrest among American workers lies with their employers."⁴⁶

In 1919, Tarbell returned to France for a short while to observe the Armistice and the Versailles Conference for the *Red Cross Magazine* at the request of the editor and her long-time friend, John S. Phillips. While Ida was happy to see former acquaintances from her days in Paris, the devastation she observed in the city saddened her. After a short time, Tarbell returned to the United States to fulfill a lecture contract. When her ten weeks of lectures was completed, she resigned from the circuit so she could continue writing and speaking on subjects about which she felt strongly. She said that giving up her salary as a lecturer in 1919 troubled her less than "finding myself without the regular professional contacts which I had so enjoyed for twenty years, and on which I found, now I was free, that I had come to depend more than I would have believed."⁴⁷

Tarbell also was eager to acquaint the world with her views of Abraham Lincoln and published three more books about him. The final one, which

some consider to be her best, *In the Footsteps of the Lincolns*, was published in 1924. Ida said that she “had quite definitely and finally rescued the Lincolns from the ranks of poor white trash where political enemies had so loved to place them.”⁴⁸ Because Lincoln grew up poor and in the Midwest, he was considered by many to be “poor white trash,” even though he was elected to the highest political office in the nation. Although Tarbell wrote about a wide variety of topics and numerous people, Lincoln was a continuing interest for her. In her biography, she wrote that “the completion of the *Life of Lincoln* did not end my interest in the man.” She also wrote, “The greatest regret of my professional life is that I shall not live to write another life of him. There is so much of him I never touched.” “I am always at work on something to do with Lincoln. His life has been my life’s really great interest,” she said in a 1932 interview about her career.⁴⁹

Numerous reasons as to why Tarbell was so captivated with Lincoln are proposed by her biographers, but basically they feel that she was of pioneer stock and felt a kinship with Lincoln because of their common backgrounds. Brady thought that Ida’s birth in the backwoods of Pennsylvania on her grandparents’ farm gave her “a special feeling for the frontier and for pioneer life.” She wrote that Tarbell “revered Lincoln because he was totally self-made—he was without educational background, yet his great moral and intellectual qualities, his seriousness of thought and purpose, and the tradition of American individualism had enabled Lincoln to make himself great.” Tomkins felt that Tarbell “was on familiar ground” in writing about Lincoln’s frontier background. She writes that Tarbell had “an affectionate understanding of the Midwestern prairie folk of the same stock as her own.” Tarbell’s own pioneer background undoubtedly gave her an affinity for and understanding of the pioneer man who became president.⁵⁰

Several years after her resignation from the Alber organization, Tarbell began to lecture for it again in 1924. She worked for six weeks each year, beginning around Lincoln’s birthday when she was most popular as a speaker for dinners or celebrations. She continued these lectures until 1932, when the travel became too strenuous. During this lecture stint with Alber, Tarbell was the first woman admitted to full membership in the Authors’ Club of New York. John Erskine reported that when the club was founded nearly fifty years earlier, women writers were “almost negligible in number in the United States.” One of the club’s responsibilities was to administer a \$300,000 fund established by Andrew Carnegie, a former member, to aid sick and needy writers. Upon Tarbell’s election in early 1930, she became the second woman member of the organization—Harriet Beecher Stowe previously had received an honorary membership.⁵¹

Tarbell continued to write after she retired from the lecture circuit, publishing her autobiography, *All in the Day’s Work*, in 1939, written when she

was eighty-two. According to the article about Tarbell in *American Women Writers*, some considered it to be the best writing of her later years. As the title indicates, it focuses on her work, rather than her private life. *All in the Day's Work* confirms that she was not anti-male, since she mentioned many men who were long-time friends, dinner partners, and long-time business associates, commenting that she enjoyed their company.⁵²

In 1940, because of the expense, Tarbell "regretfully" closed her New York apartment, which had been her working studio. Brady thought she regretted the closure because it was a visible sign that Ida's working life was over. A few years later, Tarbell's health deteriorated steadily. Just before Christmas 1943, she slipped into a coma. Tarbell was confined in a Bridgeport, Connecticut, hospital until her death on January 6, 1944. She was buried in Titusville's Woodlawn Cemetery, among her relatives and friends.⁵³

Tarbell and her ancestors were people who possessed traits commonly associated with pioneers. Though many who have written about Tarbell consider her to have been a shy and reticent woman, based upon her reluctance to comment upon her personal life, she did not lack the frontier attributes of strength, courage, or daring. These qualities were evidenced by her college education when that accomplishment was exceptional for a female, and her study in Paris when she was thirty-four years of age.

Pivotal events of Tarbell's life reveal a close and continuing association with her family, with Allegheny College in Meadville, and with western Pennsylvania. Tarbell remained very close to her family, even though her work took her away from Pennsylvania. While she lived in Washington, she could only visit Titusville infrequently because of her work schedule. Her father Franklin visited her often, and enjoyed stopping off to visit Civil War battlefields around the Washington area. Brady wrote that "Ida helped finance her father's trips by sending him the magazine's railroad passes, and he was scrupulous about returning one he did not need so it could be credited to the company." When Franklin went to Washington, her mother Esther visited Hatch Hollow, the family farm where she grew up. According to Brady, "The elder Tarbells were not a couple that traveled together." Brother Will had followed their father into the oil business, and he became a leader in the fight against Standard Oil through his executive position with the Pure Oil Company. Will was "apparently quite supportive of his elder sister and proud of her success." Will's children boasted about their Aunt Ida, and were apparently as fond of her as she was of them. However, Aunt Sarah "was far less interested in the children." In 1897 Ida and Sarah went to Europe together, Ida to work and Sarah as a tourist. They visited England, Switzerland, and France, including Paris, where Ida introduced Sarah to her friends, Mme. Marillier and Charles Seignobos. When Ida returned to the states, Sarah remained in Paris to study art. She later moved to Madrid.⁵⁴

After Ida moved to New York, she had her nieces visit often. Brady wrote that "when they were children, she hired a Frenchwoman to show them the town while she was at work." The girls were taken places a child never having been out of a small town would want to visit, and Ida took them to dinners with her friends in the evenings. As an adult, niece Esther became Ida's social secretary after her sister, Clara, married. Esther later recalled how tolerant and patient her aunt was with her. She said, "I learned more from her method of silent treatment than thousands of words could have taught me. . . ." Tarbell also saw Will frequently, as he was then living in Philadelphia, headquarters of the Pure Oil Company. Brady wrote that "Will was proud of Ida's success and seemed to feel no surprise that his sister had become a national figure." Ida did not neglect her nephew, Scott, who also was proud of his Aunt Ida. Scott, a Princeton graduate, attempted to follow his father into the oil business, but was unsuccessful. Later Ida helped him purchase a ranch in Roswell, New Mexico. According to Brady, Tarbell also arranged for her nieces to inherit a larger share of her estate than Scott to offset her financial aid to him through the years.⁵⁵

Ida was especially devoted to her father. Of this relationship Tomkins wrote, "Like many highly gifted nineteenth-century spinsters who were suspended between the old and new orders, Tarbell was deeply attached to her father and sat by helplessly as he endured tortures as he lay dying of gastric cancer." Only after her father's death in 1905 did Ida buy her own home near Bridgeport, Connecticut, a financial obligation very few women would have considered assuming at the turn of the century when women were still denied full citizenship rights. Evidently she had been reluctant to consider home ownership earlier because of her close family ties, recalling that "New York might be my writing headquarters, but Titusville should be home. Finally I would return there, I told myself. But Titusville was five hundred miles away. There were no airplanes in those days. The railroad journey was tedious and expensive, week-ending was impossible." Tarbell's quote indicates that she was cognizant of her Pennsylvania roots, though she spent considerable time abroad and in the New York City area.⁵⁶

After Ida purchased her home in Connecticut, she became "the family mainstay her father had once been. She presided over a busy household including her mother; the friend of her life, her sister Sarah; and various young relatives." Esther Tarbell spent her summers in Connecticut until her death in 1917. Niece Esther was married there. Niece Clara and her husband, Tristram Tupper, wounded in the First World War, arrived in 1919 to live in the guest house for a time. Their two children spent their first years at the Connecticut home. Sarah built herself a studio nearby which became her home. For some years, Ida supported her brother, Will, along with providing financial support at times to his three adult children. Though he was a financial burden, he was

very dear to her. When he suffered a heart attack in 1934, Ida was so distraught she had to stay with Sarah for several weeks until word came that Will would recover.⁵⁷

Clearly Tarbell recalled her hometown and college fondly. She visited as often as her work schedule permitted. She was president of the Allegheny Alumni Society for a time, and was a trustee of Allegheny College for about thirty-two years. Both positions reveal a close association with the school, and both required dedication to attend frequent meetings in western Pennsylvania.⁵⁸

Western Pennsylvania's affection for Ida was equally strong. During Allegheny College's centenary celebration in June 1915, Ida Tarbell made the historical address at the Alma Mater Exercises. Hon. John J. Henderson, Judge of the Superior Court of Pennsylvania, spoke for the trustees. On June 23, 1915, the trustees conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws on Andrew Carnegie, Charles Homer Haskins, Dean of Harvard University, Provost Edgar F. Smith of the University of Pennsylvania, and Ida M. Tarbell. Carnegie was a Pennsylvania by adoption after his arrival in the United States from Scotland in 1848. Smith was born in York and Haskins in Meadville.⁵⁹ Haskins, one of the greatest medieval historians the United States ever produced, was the son of Tarbell's former Allegheny professor, George Haskins. Tarbell was honored as a journalist, magazine writer and editor, and the Meadville paper reported that "Allegheny College honors herself in thus honoring so worthy a daughter." Miss Tarbell belonged to an illustrious group of recipients that June day. This honor confirms the esteem that Allegheny College had for its former student. It is also recognition by her fellow Pennsylvanians of her success and prominence as an investigative journalist.⁶⁰

Examples of Tarbell's connection with Western Pennsylvania abound. The June 10, 1928, issue of *The New York Times* noted that Tarbell was elected president of the Allegheny College Alumni Association. The May-July 1928 *College Bulletin* of Allegheny College featured a photograph of the newly elected president and noted that she commented that "the functions of the alumni were to serve as guardians of the college's past, critics of its present, and promoters of its future."⁶¹ On February 1, 1930, Bucknell University Dean of Women, Amelia E. Clark, announced that Ida M. Tarbell would visit the Lewisburg campus for a month, beginning March 17. Tarbell was to make several public addresses and preside at a series of vocational conferences for women students. More important, she was to teach a course in biography. Tarbell's success in conducting a similar conference at Knox College in Illinois the previous year prompted the Bucknell women's effort to extend an invitation. She is pictured in their 1931 yearbook, *L'Agenda*, and her biographical information includes a notation that the university was fortunate in securing her services as a lecturer.⁶²

Tarbell supported her alma mater, which had expressed faith in her as an unknown undergraduate. The *Meadville Tribune Republican*, reported on October 7, 1931, that Tarbell had announced a gift to be presented at the dedication of the Allegheny College's renovated library. "Miss Ida M. Tarbell, one of the early women graduates of Allegheny, a trustee of the school, famous publicist author, investigator and historian of Lincoln and of the Standard Oil Company will give her priceless collection on these two subjects." A special room was to be provided for this Tarbell collection soon to be housed at the college.⁶³

When William Pearson Tolley was inaugurated as president of Allegheny College on October 9, 1931, Ida Tarbell was one of five speakers who addressed an audience of nearly two hundred presidents, deans, professors and instructors of colleges from throughout the country, and local citizens. Tarbell remarked that she was one of the oldest living alumna and that "I came here in 1876 as the only girl of my class, with only four above me. Co-education was at that time very much of an experiment, and now I can hardly realize the suspicion of my lack of ability to carry on and the feeling of 'not being wanted' that existed. Yet there were many things to indicate both." Other speakers included Chancellor Flint, Syracuse; Dr. John J. Cass, Columbia; Dr. James N. Rule, State Superintendent of Education; and Dr. E. H. Wilkins, Oberlin College. This is another demonstration of the esteem that the officials of Allegheny College held for their former student.⁶⁴

A November 1937 *New York Times* editorial commemorated Ida Tarbell's eightieth birthday, noting how she told the truth about a great industry and a great fortune, and that "the truth was bitter." The *Times* praised Tarbell by reporting she "is no hankerer after things past, but a citizen of her own time, of this present year." The newspaper also characterized Tarbell as "a superb reporter, a meticulous historian, and a sane crusader." That same issue of the newspaper featured Tarbell's picture and an interview with her on the eve of her eightieth birthday. In the article, Tarbell was identified as a "biographer of Abraham Lincoln, historian of the Standard Oil Company," and as showing the same "keen interest in current affairs that she has had since the days of the 'muckrakers.'"⁶⁵

As further acknowledgment of Tarbell's accomplishments, Titusville held a Recognition Dinner in January 1939 for the ill, frail, woman, when Ida was "slowed by age and Parkinson's disease," which she developed soon after her mother died in 1917. During the dinner in Tarbell's honor, attended by approximately three hundred citizens of her hometown area, she remarked, "It was lucky for me that my family came to Titusville. I received the best instruction in life in this city and the good things given to me in those early years have remained with me. I got a good start here and I shall always consider Titusville my home and later I shall rest in beautiful Woodlawn [Cemetery], no more beautiful spot in the world."⁶⁶

In April 1939 Ida Tarbell returned to Allegheny College in Meadville, at age eighty-one, as a guest professor. The John C. Sturtevant Lectureship Foundation sponsored her to conduct her special four-week seminar in the writing of biography. Her papers at the college indicate that she taught, appropriately, English 18, "The Writing of Biography." Twenty-seven students plus four others who audited enrolled. In their end-of-session written evaluations, Tarbell's students mentioned her personality and the privilege of listening to her discuss her personal experiences. Despite her accomplishments and celebrity status, one student observed that "Quite truthfully, she looked remarkably like my grandmother."⁶⁷

When Tarbell died in Bridgeport, Connecticut, on January 6, 1944, at age eighty-six, her obituary and picture in the Meadville *Tribune Republican* covered approximately a half page. The headline referred to Tarbell as a "famous Alleghenian," and the article called her a "dean of American women writers and an alumna and trustee of Allegheny College for almost 32 years." Her lengthy obituary in the following day's *New York Times* included a photograph and referred to Ida as a "noted biographer and dean of women authors in this country." The funeral service was held in Easton, Connecticut, a few days later. Another *Times* article reported that the body of Ida Tarbell was buried in the family plot in Woodlawn Cemetery, Titusville, Pennsylvania. "The dean of American women writers was buried beside her father, one of Northwest Pennsylvania's pioneer oilmen, her mother and other members of the family."⁶⁸

Tarbell was a product of a strong and supportive family, indicated by her parents providing a college education for her at a time when few women in rural western Pennsylvania had such opportunity. She was thus one of the first generation of college educated women in this country, along with Jane Addams who graduated from Rockford Seminary in 1881. Her parents also supported her move to Paris to study, though her desire to follow such an unorthodox career path puzzled them. Tarbell's journalistic output and her autobiography frequently refer to her parents affiliation with the Methodist faith and the influence of that faith on her life, especially her education and her writing career. The Tarbell family's Methodism led to Ida attending Allegheny College in Meadville. Her attendance at the small, private school enabled her to have a close personal association with professors that would not have been likely at a larger institution. This close association with dedicated and caring instructors turned a shy and withdrawn young woman into a capable confident woman. Later, the Methodist faith was instrumental in Tarbell being hired by *The Chautauquan*. It was there that Ida honed her writing and research skills and became proficient in both. The skills acquired at *The Chautauquan* enabled Tarbell to support herself while studying and doing research in Paris. Her stint in Paris led to her position with *McClure's Magazine*, and her work

for Samuel McClure led to her becoming one of the best known women in America and abroad in the early twentieth century. Biographer Tomkins wrote that "In 1905, Ida Tarbell became an international celebrity. . . ." According to Brady, McClure reported from Europe to Tarbell: "Everywhere even in obscure local journals your work is constantly mentioned—both in Geneva and Lausanne papers have arrived on your work in connection with Standard Oil."⁶⁹

Tarbell was far ahead of her time in opting for a professional career rather than a more traditional domestic role. However, a paradox exists in that though she decided as a teenager a career was not compatible with being a wife and mother, and she chose to be a spinster and a career woman, she often stated that the best place for women was in the home. Robert Stinson wrote in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* that she spent "a large part of her working time from about 1909 onward writing articles" urging women to "refrain from direct participation in political affairs, and embrace their true role as wives, mothers, and homemakers." Brady explains that Ida felt women could never achieve both love and a profession, and notes that "Ida chose the world, but as a working woman and an unmarried one, she felt twice vulnerable." Jane Camhi wrote in *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920* that "if anything, Tarbell seemed oblivious to the fact that her own life-style was incompatible with her views of womanhood." Tarbell's conflict was not unique, according to Maurine H. Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons in their book, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism*. Early journalists "had to be paradoxes of masculine ruthlessness and feminine gentility." Women who wanted to succeed had to concentrate on their jobs to the exclusion of all other areas of their lives. The authors also observed: "Women who succeeded in journalism often identified with male figures, both in terms of news sources and their own professional mentors." This is certainly an apt description of Tarbell's life in journalism.⁷⁰

Oddly enough and incongruous as it seems, as an adult Tarbell did not support the women's suffrage movement. Both her parents were strong supporters of suffrage, and apparently Tarbell felt the same way until her college years. Tomkins wrote that Tarbell "became disenchanted with women's suffrage, perhaps partly because she found much to admire in the masculine world she invaded there [college] and ever afterwards preferred." Brady thought Tarbell's ambivalence as a working woman who refused to have a family came out in her opposition to women's suffrage. "Not having accepted women's destiny for herself, she approved it for others." Camhi wrote in her book about anti-suffragism that "if anything, Tarbell seemed oblivious to the fact that her own life-style was incompatible with her views of womanhood." John Phillips could not understand her attitude toward the movement. About 1912, he told Ida that she seemed "illiberal and contradictory" and that she was "too proud to say she'd been wrong to go with the antisuffragists." He asked her to

explain her position, which she was unable to do verbally. Instead, she wrote him a lengthy reply stating, in part, "I have always found it difficult to explain myself, even to myself, and I do not often try." She concluded: "When you come down to it, I suspect the reason I feel as I do about suffrage is a kind of instinct. It is no logic or argument. I mistrust it—do not want it."

The subject of Tarbell's apparent change to an anti-feminist viewpoint is discussed briefly by Robert Stinson in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. He thought the answers could be found in two separate approaches, both involving biological problems. First, he felt that Tarbell may have in mid-life resented the professional career that made domestic life impossible, and second, a dichotomy existed between her own personal independence and her "preaching of domesticity for others." Stinson wrote that "Tarbell admitted that between the husband and the wife society always allowed the man 'wider sweep, more interests outside of their immediate alliance,' but she saw nothing arbitrary in this arrangement. . . . Women would never have thought of crossing the line into the masculine world, Tarbell thought, if the feminists had not pushed them to the edge." Everette Dennis, in his foreword to Kochersberger's book, felt that she championed women's rights in a "*de facto* sense without ever being an active feminist." He also felt that her achievements "were impressive, if not monumental," and that they demonstrated, "in every respect, women could be exemplary achievers." Brady wrote that even Ida's elderly mother was "astounded" at Ida's position on suffrage.⁷¹

Of course, Tarbell never practiced what she preached regarding marriage. Even though she became a well-known, successful journalist, perhaps she lacked self-confidence outside of her writing. Her remarks regarding "girls in the early days of the movement" [suffrage] wishing to escape the "frightful isolation of marriage," not knowing what it was all about until too late seem self-revealing to this writer, especially when combined with Tarbell's own statement that at the time she graduated from college, she thought someday she might marry. We think that in later life she possibly regretted her decision made as a teenager never to marry and to earn her own living. We also believe that because of her reticence and lack of disclosure of information regarding her personal affairs, there will always remain more unanswered than answered questions about Ida Tarbell.⁷²

Tarbell was a pioneering single working woman, and the pioneer female investigative journalist. Though Ida became a well-known citizen of the United States and of the world, she remained devoted to her friends, maintaining a loyal friendship for years, often for life. Further, she remained devoted to her roots and her native area, including Allegheny College. The fact that Tarbell never married and had no immediate family may have contributed to her close ties with the college throughout her life. Her devotion to Allegheny may have been strengthened by her securing money for living expenses in Paris in

the summer of 1893 on the basis of her diploma. Tarbell was a trustee of the college for almost thirty-two years, and was active in the alumni association for many years and served as president of that group. She often referred to western Pennsylvania as her home. Her connection with Allegheny College and western Pennsylvania is also substantiated by a voluminous correspondence with the college over a span of twenty-eight years, and by the donation of many of her valuable papers, including her Lincoln material, to Allegheny for use by the public, particularly those in nearby western Pennsylvania.⁷³

One measure of a writer's importance is how long his or her published works survive. As of mid-1998, *Books in Print* on-line lists Tarbell's *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* and *The History of the Standard Oil Company* as both being available in several versions.⁷⁴ This current availability of two of her works is testimony to her continuing influence with the general public and with scholars.

After an extensive examination of secondary and primary sources, including archival material in the Tarbell Papers Collection, it is apparent that Ida Tarbell was devoted to her alma mater, Allegheny College, and to Pennsylvania throughout her life. A half-century after her death her association with Pennsylvania endures, since Allegheny College holds a significant portion of her carefully collected research material. It is also apparent that early Pennsylvania influences were instrumental in her achievement of world-wide fame as the first female investigative journalist. Historians quite properly accord Ida Minerva Tarbell recognition as a prominent muckraker, whose accomplishments have been recognized world-wide. But, she was first a Pennsylvanian.

Notes

1. The Tarbell Papers Collection at Pelletier Library, Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania, is contained in partially indexed files. Various documents and photographs are included, such as a copy of Tarbell's will dated May 3, 1941, the third clause of which bequeaths to Allegheny College all of her "books about the life of Abraham Lincoln, with her

Lincoln notes, manuscripts, newspapers or newspaper clippings, letters, photographs, pictures and Lincoln memorabilia." Tarbell directed that these legacies should be free of inheritance taxes of a state or federal nature, and that such taxes, if any, should be paid out of the general funds of her estate.

2. Ida M. Tarbell, *All in the Day's Work*, An

Autobiography (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 4-5.

3. Kathleen Brady, *Ida Tarbell, Portrait of a Muckraker* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 13.

4. *Ibid.*, 13, 15; Tarbell, 12.

5. Brady, 19; Tarbell, 14, 20, 21; Mary E. Tomkins, *Ida M. Tarbell* (New York: Twayne, 1974), 20; and The Tarbell Papers Collection, Allegheny College.

6. Tarbell, 34-36.

7. Brady, 18.

8. Tarbell, 16, 27, 29.

9. *Ibid.*, 34-36, 40.

10. *Ibid.*, 40; Brady, 26-30; *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Historians 1886-1912*, Vol. 47, 297; Tarbell, 40; Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives, American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 26.

11. Tarbell, 46, 47.

12. *Ibid.*, 33, 40.

13. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (Autumn 1975), 1-30, in *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, 3rd ed., Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron DeHart, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 179-196.

14. Tarbell, 42-45; Tomkins, 21.

15. Tarbell, 51.

16. *Ibid.*, 23-25; Brady, 21, 22, 39; Ellen F. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Muckraking: Three Landmark Articles* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994), 60-80.

17. Tarbell, 64, 72; Brady, 34-36; Robert V. Kochersberger, Jr., ed., *More Than a Muckraker: Ida Tarbell's Lifetime in Journalism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), appendix, 225. Kochersberger also wrote that it was at the Chautauqua Institute and Melvin Dewey devised his numbered system of indexing library books.

18. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 295-301.

19. Tarbell, 73-75; Brady, 43-44.

20. Tarbell, 97-100; Brady, 47, 56.

21. Fitzpatrick, 13-14; Tomkins, 33.

22. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 297; Tarbell, 78, 85; Brady, 44-46; Janice H. McElroy, ed., *Our Hidden Heritage: Pennsylvania Women in History* (Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania Division of American Association of University Women, 1983), 161.

23. Tarbell, 85-89; Brady, 44-47.

24. Tarbell, 89, 90; Brady, 46, 47, 52. There are some references in both Tarbell's autobiography and Brady's biography to a disagreement between Tarbell and Flood, but nothing concrete. Brady thought it likely that "Ida threatened to resign unless she received a promotion and in response, Flood either fired her directly or forced her to resign." Brady characterized the leaving of Tarbell, Henderson, and Henry as a "walkout." Tarbell was her usual reticent self about the sudden departure of the three from *The Chautauquan*.

25. Tarbell, 103-108, 114, 115; Brady, 52-53, 56.

26. Tarbell, 98-99.

27. *Ibid.*, 97-100; Brady, 47, 56.

28. Fitzpatrick, 10; Brady, 65-66; Tarbell, 118-120.

29. Fitzpatrick, 10; Brady, 65-67, 69, 71, 221; Tarbell, 131-132.

30. Tarbell, 115-116; Brady, 65.

31. Tarbell, 141-142.

32. *Ibid.*, 145-146; Brady, 82-84, 87.

33. According to *Who's Who in America, Historical Volume 1607-1896*, 334, Gardiner Greene Hubbard was a prominent businessman and telephone pioneer whose daughter, Mabel, was the wife of Alexander Graham Bell. Hubbard was a founder of the National Geographic Society and its home, Hubbard Hall, is named for him. He died in Washington D.C., Dec. 11, 1897.

34. Brady, 92-93; Tarbell, 147, 151-153; Kochersberger, introduction, xxxii; *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 297; Tomkins, 38, 40, 42, 44; *American Women Writers*, 208.

35. Brady, 95, 100; Tarbell, 169; Tomkins, 43, 50-51; *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 298-299.

36. Brady, 103, 114, 120-121; Fitzpatrick, 24; Tarbell, 202-203.

37. Tarbell, 83.

38. *Ibid.*, 205-208.

39. Kochersberger, introduction, xii-xv; Tomkins, 62, 65-66; Louis Fuller, 1939 essay, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, Vol. 60, 429.

40. Tarbell, 207; Fitzpatrick, 24-25; *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, Vol. 40, 427, 430-431.

41. Tarbell, 241-242.

42. Tomkins, 17, 92, 159. Per Tomkins; endnote 30 to Chapter 5, Haven was quoted in a column entitled "Book Talk," by John S. Phillips in *The Independent Republican*, 9 May

- 1939; Brady, 158.
43. Tarbell, 256-259; Brady, 110.
44. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 299.
45. Tomkins, 112; Kochersberger, 67.
46. Tarbell, 301-303; Kochersberger, 2 of Table of Contents.
47. Tarbell, 361.
48. *Ibid.*, 386; *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, 433.
49. Tarbell, 178; "Old Trade Giants Held Pigmies [sic] Now," *New York Times*, April 27, 1932, 15.
50. Brady, 101; Tomkins, 47, 52.
51. "Authors' Club Votes to Admit Women," *New York Times*, April 5, 1930, 22.
52. *American Women Writers*, Vol. 4, 108-109.
53. Brady, 253-255; "Ida M. Tarbell, 86, Dies in Bridgeport," *New York Times*, Jan. 7, 1944, 17; "Ida M. Tarbell Rites Held in Her Home," *New York Times*, Jan. 10, 1944; "Ida Tarbell Buried with Family," *New York Times*, May 12, 1944, 19; *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 301; *American Women Writers*, Vol. 4, 208.
54. Tarbell, 262; Brady, 109-112.
55. Tarbell, 359; Brady, 110, 111, 146-147, 199, 204, 245, 254.
56. Tarbell, 262; Tomkins, 93.
57. Tarbell, 359; Tomkins, 94; Brady, 251.
58. Tarbell, 262; Tomkins, 93-94.
59. *Who Was Who in American History*, Vol. 1, 1897-1942, 194, 532, 1139-1140.
60. "Conferring of Degrees is a Pleasing Ceremony," *Tribune Republican*, Meadville, PA, June 24, 1915, 1, 4; "Andrew Carnegie and Ida M. Tarbell Made Doctors of Law," *New York Times*, June 24, 1915, 6.
61. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.
62. "Ida M. Tarbell to Teach," *New York Times*, Feb. 2, 1930, 22. The Special Collections/University Archives section of Bucknell University Library contains information about Tarbell's visit from March 17 to April 11, 1930 in the Bucknell University yearbook for 1931, *L'Agenda*, 246; and the University newspaper, *Bucknellian*, Jan. 24, 1930, front page.
63. "Allegheny College's Enlarged and Renovated Library Will be Dedicated Saturday Morning: Miss Tarbell's Gift," *Tribune Republican*, Oct. 7, 1931, 5.
64. "Dr. William P. Tolley Will be Installed President of Allegheny College Friday," *Tribune Republican*, Oct. 9, 1931, 5; "Tolley Inaugurated at Allegheny College," *New York Times*, Oct. 10, 1931, 10.
65. "Miss Tarbell at 80," *New York Times*, Nov. 5, 1937, 22; "Politics Too Mild for Ida Tarbell, 80," *New York Times*, Nov. 5, 1937, 18.
66. Brady, 252.
67. "Ida Tarbell, at 81, Back as Allegheny Professor," *New York Times*, April 23, 1939; Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.
68. Death Claims Ida Tarbell, Famous Alleghenian, at 86," *Tribune Republican*, Jan. 7, 1944, 4; "Ida M. Tarbell, 86, Dies in Bridgeport," *New York Times*, Jan. 7, 1944, 17; "Ida Tarbell Rites Held in Her Home," *New York Times*, 10 Jan. 1944, 19; "Ida Tarbell Buried with Family," *New York Times*, May 12, 1944, 19.
69. Tomkins, 92; Brady, 148.
70. Robert Stinson, 1977 essay, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, Vol. 40, 442; Maurine H. Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism*, (Washington, D.C. American University Press, 1993), 13-15.
71. Tomkins, 103-104; Brady, 201, 206-207; Jane Jerome Camhi, *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920*, (Brooklyn, Carlson Publishing, 1994), 145; Stinson, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, 442.
72. Stinson, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, 444.
73. The Tarbell Papers collection at Allegheny contains copies of correspondence between Tarbell and several head librarians at the college covering the period from May 1915 to October 1943. There are carbon copies of Tarbell's typewritten letters up until 1942. Tarbell had secretaries who typed her material for years. After she stopped working, and when her Parkinsonism caused inability to hold her dictaphone, Ida taught herself to type at age 80. After that time her physical condition apparently prohibited typing. Much of the correspondence is about how the room for her Lincoln papers was to be set up, what she was sending, or materials that she had sent. The last two items from her were handwritten, in pencil, dated October 1942 and April 1943, the latter saying that she was pleased with what had been done in the Lincoln Room. Her handwriting, which is rather difficult to read, had not deteriorated appreciably from that contained in a 1905 diary.
74. *Books in Print* (on-line), (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., Database and Indexes updated through June 1998), accessed through LIAS July 14, 1998.