

Ida Tarbell

November 5, 1857-January 6, 1944

Ida Tarbell was born and grew up in western Pennsylvania. Her parents became Methodists during Ida's childhood and were active in suffragism and promoting prohibition (note: at this time, feminists generally supported prohibition because they believed it would lead to a decrease in domestic violence). These early political discussions undoubtedly influenced Ida. She graduated from Allegheny College and began a career in teaching. She became involved in the Chautauqua movement. Her journalism career started when she became the managing editor of the Chautauqua publication.

In 1890 Ms. Tarbell moved to Paris to study historical research at the Sorbonne. One of her first investigative works was of Madame Roland of French Revolution fame. She wanted to explore the contention of many feminists that if women could vote and take greater roles in politics, the world would be a kinder place. She held to rigid standards of research and intellectual integrity, which led her to decline many offers to align herself with various causes.

Ida Tarbell was the first great American woman journalist. She was one of those for whom the term "muckraker" was coined during the Gilded Age. Daniel Yergin (a historian specializing in the history of the oil industry) called her book, *The History of the Standard Oil Company*, the "most important business book ever written." Because of her reputation for careful investigation and journalism, President Wilson offered to make her the first woman on the Taft Commission, stating that she wrote with more common sense about those issues than any man.

"The lasting results of Ida Tarbell's brand of investigative journalism, which include the 1911 Supreme Court decision to break up the Standard Oil trust, suggest that her career, characterized by thoroughness, fairness, and intellectual integrity, should be studied by any journalist more interested in recording and influencing events than achieving celebrity status." (Arthur L. Lowrie, Allegheny College). It was Ms. Tarbell and her colleagues who led to the defeat of the attempts of the corporate world to own American politics during the Gilded Age.

For more information: google: *Ida Tarbell* or *muckrakers* or *Gilded Age*