

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

IDA TARBELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Ida Tarbell House

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 320 Valley Road Not for publication:___

City/Town: Easton Vicinity:___

State: CT County: Fairfield Code: 001 Zip Code: 06612

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property Private: X Category of Property Building(s): X
Public-local: Public-State: Public-Federal: District: Site: Structure: Object:

Number of Resources within Property Contributing 4 Noncontributing 1 buildings 1 sites 1 structures objects 2 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this _____ nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- _____ Entered in the National Register _____
- _____ Determined eligible for the _____
- _____ National Register
- _____ Determined not eligible for the _____
- _____ National Register
- _____ Removed from the National Register _____
- _____ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic

Sub: Single dwelling

Current: Domestic

Sub: Single dwelling

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:

OTHER: Gable-roofed, Wood-frame House

MATERIALS:

Foundation: Stone

Walls: Wood

Roof:

Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.DESCRIPTION OF SITE:¹

The Tarbell Home is a two-story, gable-roofed, wood-frame building with clapboard siding. The house rests on a stone foundation and there is a tall center brick chimney. The main house is essentially a vernacular style building, although there have been several additions over the years. The front part of the property is marked by a white, wood picket fence that rests on a fieldstone wall.

The three-bay front (west) facade is the most original facade. Interestingly, it is not symmetrical in plan. The two first-floor windows are not double-hung; each window has 24 small lights with shutters. The three second-floor windows are 12-over-12, double-hung with shutters. All windows have wood sills and plain entablature lintels. The panelled front door has trabeated surrounds with multi-light sidelights and a multi-light transom. There is a shed-roofed portico over the front entrance; this roof is supported by two doric columns and doric pilasters.

The south side of the main house has three 12-over-12, double-hung windows, two on the second floor and one on the first floor; these are identical to those on the second floor of the west facade. At the east end of the first floor, a fourth window, which was probably identical to the others, has been expanded into a multi-light fixed sash window. The original lintel is still in the middle of the new lintel. There is a fanlight in the gable end on this side, and there is a return cornice here and on the north side.

The north side of the main house has four 12-over-12, double-hung windows that are arranged in a two-bay format. There is also a fanlight in the gable end on this side. Before it was changed, the south side was probably very similar to this facade.

The east facade has two 12-over-12, double-hung windows on the second floor. These are identical to those on the rest of the house.

On the interior of the main house, there is a steep stairway in the southwest corner of the house, with a panelled door under the stairway at the east end. The ceiling by the stairway and entry hallway is made of narrow boards, while the floor beams for the second floor are exposed in the area to the east of the stairway. There are fireplaces in the hallway and study that are served by the central chimney. The fireplace in the study is particularly fine with pilasters and an entablature design for the mantel. On the second floor are two small bedrooms and a bathroom.

¹ Architectural description prepared by Dr. Barbara Howe, Department of History, Public History Program, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia.

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The first addition to the house was a one-story, shed-roofed addition across the east facade. This area is now enclosed and has three 6-over-6 double-hung windows with shutters. These windows have simple wood surrounds. There is evidence of some alteration to the clapboard siding because there are varying widths on the north side.

Like the shed-roofed addition, three other additions pre-date the Tarbell era and are, thus, part of the house that Tarbell would have known. To the southeast of this one-story porch, there is a room now used as a living room. This is a one-story, wood-framed, clapboard-sided, gable-roofed room with a return cornice on the south end. The west side of this living room has four bays consisting of three windows and a door. There is one window on the north side and two windows on the south side. All of the windows are double-hung 12-over-8 with wood surrounds, and on the south side the windows have shutters. The panelled door has glass on the top part. There is a wide, but plain, frieze under the eaves. The gable roof on this room is parallel to that of the main house. On the inside, there are two steps down into this room from the hall that connects it to the shed-roofed addition. A panelled door connects the two additions. There is a fireplace that extends several feet out into the room. There is a tall brick chimney for this fireplace. The deep brick fireplace has a plain mantel and a small closet to the west to store wood. There is a panelled door to the west of the fireplace.

Two additional one-story, wood-frame sections, a dining room and a kitchen, have been built to the east of this room, and they have gable roofs that run perpendicular to those of the main house and living room. The kitchen addition has a roof alignment that is off-center from that of the dining room, and it is not as wide as the dining room. The dining room has a pair of 6-over-6 double-hung windows flanked by shutters; these are on the north side of the addition. The kitchen has a pair of windows with wood surrounds in the middle of the east facade, and there is another door leading to the exterior on the north side of the kitchen.

Finally, there is a sunroom that extends along the south side of the dining room and kitchen that is wide enough to match the southern wall of the living room, thus providing a more uniform appearance to the south facade. This sunroom was added ca. 1960s and is the most recent addition to the house. It is the only addition that dates from after Tarbell's life in the house. The sunroom rests on a random ashlar stone foundation and has large plate glass windows on both the south and east facades with clapboard siding between and beneath the windows. There is a door on the east end, next to the kitchen addition. The roof is flat.

Also on the property is a Tenant House, currently rented to the property caretakers. It is a three-story, gable-roofed, frame building with a center brick chimney. The west side has bargeboard trim on the gable end. There are two bays on the west

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end with 6-over-6, double-hung windows that have wood surrounds. The door is between the two first-floor windows. There is a one-story, shed-roofed porch across this west side; the roof is supported by wood pillars. There is board and batten siding on the lowest level, but the boards do not appear to be uniform in width.

The north side has only two stories above ground, due to the slope of the land. This side has board and batten siding. There are 6-over-6, double-hung windows on this side as well. There is a one-story porch on the east end of this side, and it continues across the east facade of the house. On the north side, the porch has a gable roof and part of the porch is enclosed, with a door that provides access to the porch. There is board and batten siding in the gable end of this porch.

The east end of the house has three visible stories because of the slope of the land. This side appears to have wood shingle siding with endboards. There is one 6-over-6, double-hung window in the gable end and a pair of 6-over-6, double-hung windows on the lowest level; this lowest level has been extended out under the porch. The second level is covered by a one-story, glassed-in porch with shed roof; the porch walls have board and batten siding. The north end of the porch, which is the section that extends along the north side of the building, is supported by concrete blocks.

The south side of the building has board and batten siding. There are four 6-over-6, double-hung windows on the lowest and middle floors, two on each floor. There is also a door into the lowest level at the east end in the area that extends under the porch.

There are also two simple wood barns on the property as well as a modern swimming pool and pool house. The barns and the tenant house were present during Tarbell's occupancy, and are therefore contributing structures, while the pool and pool house are non-contributing.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B X C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A B C D E F G

NHL Criteria: 2

NHL Theme(s): XV. Communication
 A. Written Word (Newspapers and Periodicals)
 XIX. Literature
 C. Non-Fiction
 D. Journalism: Opinion and Criticism
 E. Newswriting and Reporting

Areas of Significance: Communication
 Literature

Period(s) of Significance: 1905-1944

Significant Dates:

Significant Person(s): Ida Tarbell

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: U/I

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

The Easton, Connecticut, home of Ida Tarbell, one of the pioneers of contemporary journalism and literary biography, is the single most appropriate place to recognize her many accomplishments. Tarbell is most noted for her expose of the Standard Oil Company, published in *McClure's* magazine, which earned her the label "muckraker" from President Theodore Roosevelt. The Easton home was purchased by Tarbell in 1906. She was then at the peak of her national prominence and purchased the Easton house with the royalty money she received from *The History of the Standard Oil Company*. This was the location where she authored many more important books, and the house served as a center for the Tarbell family after the death of her father. Although Tarbell's childhood home is still extant, the Easton home is clearly the most significant to her life and work and the best location to recognize her national contribution. According to the National Park Service thematic framework, the Ida Tarbell House falls under themes: XV. Communication, A. Written Word (Newspapers and Periodicals); XIX. Literature, C. Non-Fiction, D. Journalism: Opinion and Criticism, E. Newswriting and Reporting.

Ida Tarbell was born in Erie County, Pennsylvania, in 1857 and continued to live in northwestern Pennsylvania throughout her childhood (there is a marker on the highway near her birthplace). The Tarbell family moved from Erie County when Ida was just two years old. The family first lived in Rouseville, until 1869, after which they moved to Titusville. Her father began working in the oil industry as early as 1859, but he was subsequently forced out of business by the growing Standard Oil company. Thus her major work, *The History of the Standard Oil Company* (1904), was somewhat influenced by her childhood experiences. The house in Titusville, where she lived from age 14 to 23, is still extant; however, since Ida moved to Ohio to teach school in 1880, her experiences while in Titusville only indirectly affected her work and is not the best property for designation. Tarbell was only 23 when she moved from this house, and had not yet begun her literary career. The Easton, Connecticut, farm was her home for almost forty years, and was the place where she continued to write.

Tarbell was born November 5, 1857 in Erie County, Pennsylvania, which was then the center of the fledgling oil industry in the United States. Her father was a pioneer in developing resources for the oil industry, and he managed to earn a comfortable living for the family. Tarbell's later life would be greatly influenced by her childhood in Pennsylvania's oil towns.

Growing up among middle class entrepreneurs, she developed a strong affection for middle class perceptions and values which would orient her later work. When she opposed the corrupt practices of large corporations, it was invariably in terms of their effect on small businessmen. The example of her father

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(who was nearly driven out of business by the Standard Oil Company when she was just 15, and ultimately forced to mortgage the family home because of the trust) would serve as an explicit example of the perils of monopolies in her landmark book, *The History of the Standard Oil Company*.¹

Her parents were also actively involved in the women's movement of the day and hosted leaders such as Frances Willard in their home. This early influence would convince her of the need to procure a solid education, and propel her on the path to her career as a journalist.² It would also convince her that she could not achieve her aspirations to education and life-long self-sufficiency if she were to marry. She never married as a result.³

Tarbell received her A.B. degree from Allegheny College in 1880 and spent the next two years teaching. However, she grew weary of teaching and decided to try her hand at journalism. She joined the staff of the monthly magazine *Chautauquan* in 1883 and advanced from the position of editorial secretary to writer and annotator within eight years.

At the age of thirty, Tarbell decided that she had had enough of "respectability" and traveled to Paris. While there she studied history at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France, simultaneously writing a history of women in the French Revolution. To pay her way, Tarbell began to publish articles in a wide variety of American periodicals, starting with a story on French culture in *Scribner's Magazine*.⁴ However, her talents lay in the deeper study of events. Demonstrating her historical training in Paris, she would carefully sift documentary sources and often spent years in research. This practice was reflected in her best and most important works (such as the books on Standard Oil) which combined the historical and biographical methods.

The quality of her writings from Paris greatly impressed the young publisher Samuel S. McClure, who convinced her to begin writing for his new magazine, *McClure's*, in 1894. It was her association with *McClure's* magazine that established her national reputation. Reflecting her talents and interest in history, her first major series for *McClure's* was a biography of Napoleon (later published as *A Short Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* in 1895)⁵

¹ Ida M. Tarbell, *All in the Day's Work: An Autobiography* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985), 25; Mary E. Tomkins, *Ida M. Tarbell* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), 16, 101.

² Tomkins, 20-21.

³ Tarbell, 32.

⁴ Kathleen Brady, *Ida Tarbell: Portrait of a Muckraker* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 54.

⁵ Tomkins, 96.

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which was crucial in establishing her reputation and that of McClure's.⁶ This series was followed by a highly regarded series on the life of Abraham Lincoln (also published in book form as *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* in 1900).

On the heels of her considerable successes with the Lincoln and Napoleon biographies, and in light of her knowledge of the Pennsylvania oil industry, Tarbell was assigned to write a series of articles on the development of the Standard Oil Company.⁷ Her research, which involved poring over innumerable documents and conducting numerous interviews with oil industry leaders, was of considerable depth and breadth. It would take two years to complete the project, with the help of Henry Rogers, an official at Standard Oil, but its publication would bring her national notoriety.⁸

Her series on Standard Oil, later published in 1904 as the two volume *The History of the Standard Oil Company*, exposed the corrupt and often immoral practices of the giant trust. The Tarbell series quickly shaped the public debate on trusts in general, and served to show clearly and convincingly how the monopolies directly affected the pocketbook of the average American.⁹

In particular, she brought to light the secret agreements Rockefeller had made with the railroads. Her implicit rage at the destruction of small businesses by large corporate trusts like Standard Oil, and the evidence she presented on the secret deals that gave monopolies their advantage, had a profound effect. Of equal importance, she managed to explain the often internecine relationships and economic deals in terms that the average reader could understand. As a result, national attention was focused on Standard Oil and other similar trusts. The resulting legislation and enforcement of anti-trust laws broke up Standard Oil and numerous other monopolies.

Tarbell's work on Standard Oil coincided with the work of journalists like Lincoln Steffens and Upton Sinclair, who likewise set aside bland objectivity in their writing and focused on grave social problems from a stance of deep moral concern. The journalists who produced this wave of books and articles, exposing corruption in many different facets of American life, were given the umbrella designation of "muckrakers" by President Theodore Roosevelt. The muckrakers in general—and Tarbell in

⁶ Harold S. Wilson, *McClure's Magazine and the Muckrakers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

⁷ Wilson, 137-141.

⁸ Brady, 121ff.

⁹ Brady, 136.

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particular—viewed the object of their work purely as one of social betterment.¹⁰ Tarbell was distinguished as the only woman among the elite of this movement.¹¹

Between 1904 and 1906, the *McClure's* "family" broke up in an acrimonious battle between McClure and the editors of the magazine over financial matters. As a result, Tarbell, Steffens, and other writers left *McClure's* magazine and purchased *American Magazine*.¹² Tarbell would write and edit for the *American Magazine* for the next nine years.

The personal crisis engendered by the battles at *McClure's* was exacerbated by the death of her father in 1905. Tarbell decided to purchase the Easton, Connecticut, farm with the royalties from her books to serve as a respite from her troubles and the problems of living in New York City.¹³ She called her farm Twin Oaks and felt it to be a "wonderful toy to share with my friends and family."¹⁴

According to Mary Tomkins, the home was vitally important in Tarbell's life:

The family home in Titusville [Pennsylvania] had provided roots for her. With her father's passing, these were damaged; and to restore them, she bought a place of her own.... Here she became the family mainstay as her father had once been. She presided over a busy household including her mother... her sister Sarah; and various young relatives. The country place provided the rural and familial ties she sought, and she spent a large part of her time there for the rest of her life when not traveling on assignments or busy in New York.¹⁵

Tarbell thoroughly enjoyed Twin Oaks. She used it as a refuge from her hectic life-style in New York, and it even became an informal *American Magazine* staff retreat. In addition to visits from her family and co-workers, Tarbell invited close friends to Twin Oaks. In fact, "the acid test of Tarbell's affection was an invitation to [Easton]."¹⁶

¹⁰ David Chalmers, *The Social and Political Ideas of the Muckrakers* (New York: Citadel Press, 1964), 14.

¹¹ Chalmers, 15.

¹² Wilson, 174.

¹³ Tarbell, 262.

¹⁴ Brady, 193.

¹⁵ Tomkins, 94-5.

¹⁶ Brady, 197.

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Tarbell's last major journalistic work was a series of articles, published in 1910, on import tariffs, which she attacked as another tool that trusts used to undermine their competition. President Wilson commented on the series that "she has written more good sense, good plain common sense, than any man I know of."¹⁷

In 1915, Tarbell and the other investors in *American Magazine* sold their publication and Tarbell began a new phase in her life. Tarbell began an extended lecture tour of the United States on the subject of the trusts. The presentations were well received; however, her public life at this time was increasingly overshadowed by the war in Europe.¹⁸ Indeed, it was largely the world crisis and war which ended the muckraker movement, as Tarbell, Steffens and the others began to look beyond the problems at home.

Tarbell travelled to Europe to examine the situation first-hand. What she found there deeply affected her moral sympathies, and she became active in ending the war, later joining in the many efforts to insure that such a war would never be repeated. She served as a member of the Women's Committee of the United States Council of National Defense during this time. After the war, she returned to Europe to report on the Paris Peace Conference, and later reported on the 1921 Washington Naval Disarmament Conference.

Tarbell also continued to work for social justice, including spending some brief time with Jane Addams at Hull House. And, regardless of President Roosevelt's negative opinion of her work, his successors took advantage of her knowledge and abilities. She served on President Wilson's Industrial Conference in 1919, and later, on President Harding's Conference on Unemployment in 1921.¹⁹

Tarbell essentially retired to her Easton, Connecticut, farm after 1924, occasionally giving lectures on methods of biography at several colleges. Tarbell summed up her life in her autobiography, *All in the Day's Work*, which she published in 1939 at the age of 82. That work, like many others written after 1906, was written entirely in her first-floor study at the Easton, Connecticut, farmhouse.

Tarbell died of pneumonia in Bridgeport, Connecticut, on January 6, 1944, and was buried at the family plot in Titusville, Pennsylvania.

¹⁷ Edward T. James and Janet Wilson James, eds., *Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971), 429.

¹⁸ Tarbell, 298.

¹⁹ Tomkins, 112-114.

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Tarbell's work in journalism, biography, and politics has rightly earned her an essential position in the standard history of America.²⁰ The importance of the Easton, Connecticut, home is reflected in its prominence in her autobiography and in most biographies written about her. In addition to serving as the place where she authored much of her later work, and the center for her family's activities, it was also where Tarbell entertained many literary luminaries of the time, including Mark Twain and Jack Reed.²¹ No other site holds comparable significance in the life of this literary and political pioneer.

²⁰ California State Board of Education, *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten through Grade Twelve* (Sacramento, CA: California State Department of Education, 1988), 94; Gary Nash, et. al., *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*, second edition (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1990), 714.

²¹ Tarbell, 265-266.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Wilson, Harold S. *McClure's Magazine and the Muckrakers*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ___ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ___ Previously Listed in the National Register.
- ___ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- ___ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- ___ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # _____
- ___ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # _____

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Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other(Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreeage of Property: Less than one (1) acre

UTM References: Zone Northing Easting

 A 18 4573950 639610

Verbal Boundary Description:

According to the tax assessor's records located at the Easton Town Hall in Easton, Connecticut, the boundary of the property is described as Block 1 of map number 3830 for the area known as Easton, Connecticut.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the house and outbuildings historically associated with Ida Tarbell's residency.

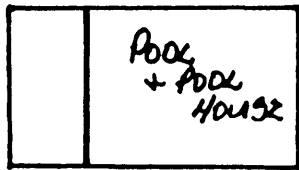
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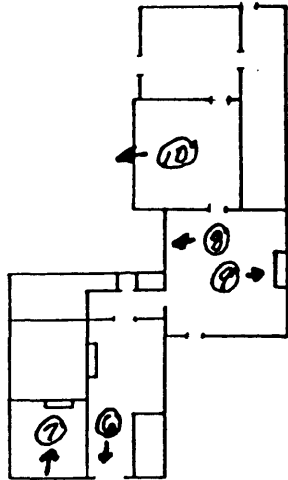
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11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Dr. Page Putnam Miller; Jill S. Mesirow
Org.: National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History
Street/#: 400 A Street, SE
City/Town: Washington
State: District of Columbia
ZIP: 20003
Telephone: (202) 544-2422
Date: June 24, 1992



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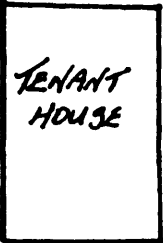
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12



11

2



2

1

Ida Tarbell House
First Floor Plan

