THE SCOTSMAN

Until the middle of last November, my father worked for
John McTaggart on his sheep ranch in northwestern Montana.
McTaggart has long been a legendary figure in the region,
but only in the year and a half of Dad's employment with him
did I discover that he is as remarkable as he is said to be.

Getting to McTaggart's ranch is itself a story worthy
of addition to the tales surrounding the man. After driving
fifteen miles north of Dupuyer on Highway 89, you begin to
watch the east side of the highway for a dirt turnoff. The
slightly-rolling plains begin to become foothills and the
gray bluff called Rocky Ridge rapidly comes closer. Just
before you reach its base you see the turnoff.

...
About thirty feet from the highway there is a stock crossing through the barbed-wire fence that parallels the highway. The crossing consists of half a dozen inch pipes lying parallel to the line of the fence and spaced six inches apart above a shallow pit in the ground. Livestock can't cross this and the need for a gate is eliminated.

But a first glance at this crossing makes you wish for a gate instead. The grate of the crossing is a couple of feet higher than the road and dirt has been thrown on both sides of it, forming a mound about two feet high and six feet across. McTaggart always drives either one of his trucks or his battered pickup and isn't bothered by this, but a car can't cross as easily.

After bouncing across this obstacle, you find the road -- actually it is only a pair of tracks worn into the prairie -- begins to get worse. The car jolts as the tires strike rocks imbedded in the road. The country becomes increasingly hilly and nowhere is there a sign of a building or even a tree. Only the tanned grassland extends before you.

Eight miles and half an hour after leaving the highway, you come down off a plateau into the Valley of the Two Medicine river. Trees and brush grow thickly along the Two Medicine; in fact, the river cannot be seen from the distance.

Across the valley and the river, gray banks of rock that look like a smaller edition of the South Dakota badlands rise until the land levels off into a plateau similar to the one you have just crossed.
Hope you get a new to

Typewriter ribbon.

Save Mr. Whitting

Eyesight so needs

Quarter SW P.
The electric power line, which except for barbed-wire fences and a few lonely sheep sheds was the only mark of civilization on the way to the ranch, leads into the brush and trees.

The first sign of McTaggart's ranch is a large tin-roofed sheep shed, perhaps sixty feet from north to south and one hundred fifty feet east to west, which sits across the road from the power line. It looks as all such sheds do within a few years after they are built -- gray and weathered, with cracks showing in the walls.

The road rounds the west end of the shed and turns north again. It drops to a bridge of thick planks across a small stream that originates from a spring a few hundred yards further west.

Once across this bridge, you are in a large bare oval with ranch buildings on three sides and trees along the southern edge, where the road enters. At last you have come to John McTaggart's ranch.

A white house with a green roof stands at the western end of the oval. It is a square one-story structure built on an eight-foot foundation because of occasional high water. Gravel is banked around the house nearly to the top of the foundation to furnish warmth. A high wooden porch leads to the front door.

North of the house, two bunkhouses, one white and the other unpainted, stand end-to-end. A smaller building once used as a cook-shack and covered with red asphalt tile is located behind these.
East of this cabin there is a small shed roofed with rusty sheets of tin. Like the four similar sheds at the eastern end of the oval, it faces eastward so the wind won't strike the roof directly.

A swinging pole gate with a cow hide hung over it stands between this shed and a long garage. This structure has been painted light-gray; it is the only building on the ranch besides the red bunkhouse and the white-tiled main house without the dark-brown appearance of very old and weathered lumber. None of the four sheds nor the square high-roofed granary that completes the oval has been painted.

Beyond the gate lies a large meadow which forms another oval. The small stream and underbrush enclose it on the southwest, corrals and sheds at the west end, the Two Medicine river on the north and brush and trees separate the area from the ranch buildings on the east and southeast.

In the center of this meadow stands a small grove of trees and large piles of baled hay in a fenced-in stack yard. Much of the hay is brown with age; McTaggart keeps it because his two thousand sheep and one hundred fifty cattle will need great quantities of feed if the winter is harsh. He once told me, "Hay is the same as money in the bank to me."

And much of the work on his ranch consists of hauling and piling bales of hay. The big Scotsman goes about this task in the same way he does most other things; he uses sheer strength.
Most ranchers pile their bales in stacks that are square until the fifth layer, then pyramid bales until they have a stack of nine layers. This is as high as most bale conveyors will reach, but a few men will pull bales up from there by hand and build two or three more layers.

John McTaggart scorns such a stack; he builds his fifteen bales high. No one but this powerful old Scotsman would labor to carry hundred-pound bales six layers above the reach of the conveyor.

McTaggart's strength has caused innumerable anecdotes to be told about him. He is 6' 4" tall and sturdily built. His legs are exceptionally long. Wide shoulders slope down to brawny arms that hang nearly to his knees. His hands are immense; a coffee cup is hidden when he wraps a hand around it.

The rest of his appearance completes the image of power. His face is long, with square features. Clear blue eyes are crowned by shaggy white eyebrows. His nose is long and has a ski-jump shape like Bob Hope's nose. A tight mouth and a square jaw give him a serious look.

At 59, his hair is gray-white, but his face is still weathered and tanned. The over-all impression a person gets is that here is a man who could do nearly anything, and probably has.

John McTaggart was born in Canada. His family was wealthy and he had every opportunity for a fine education, but he left home for an outdoor life.
For a time young McTaggart served in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Then he came to the United States and worked on ranches in northern Montana.

In the mid-1920's the restless young man hitched a ride to Chicago on a cattle train. He found a job as a livestock inspector in the Chicago stockyards.

The big city didn't faze the lanky cowboy. Shortly after he arrived, he had to deliver several horses to a racetrack. After the horses were unloaded and the trucks had gone, McTaggart discovered he was at the wrong place. He tied the halter rope of each horse to the tail of the animal ahead of it, mounted the lead horse, and led the string down the road to the proper track. He said no one stopped him, though a few people "looked at me kind of funny."

McTaggart soon went back to Montana and again worked as a ranch hand until he could afford a ranch of his own. Eventually he bought one a few miles from Dupuyer.

McTaggart was in his late forties when he married. Dupuyer residents swear that the marriage of John and Mabel McTaggart was probably the worst match in history. Both had tremendous tempers and strong wills. The marriage was brief, but tumultuous.

Joe Smith, a wizened little trapper now in his early sixties, told me of an incident typical of the McTaggart household before the marriage broke up. Joe has lived in the Dupuyer area for many years, and he worked for McTaggart during several lambing seasons.

(more)
In the first spring of his marriage, McTaggart had a shearing crew come to tag his sheep (the wool is sheared from the rear legs of the sheep to prevent flies from laying their eggs there). His wife assumed the dozen shearers would eat in the house and prepared a meal for them.

But at noon only McTaggart and Joe Smith came to the house; the shearing crew had their own cook and a cook-wagon.

As soon as the two men entered the kitchen, Mabel McTaggart began shouting, demanding to know why the shearers weren't coming in for dinner. Her husband saw the huge meal she had prepared and his Scotch nature was cut to the quick. "Ye damn fool, don't ye know shearin' crews ha' their own cook?" he roared back at her.

Then, Joe relates, the party got rough. The McTaggarts began throwing dishes at each other, swearing profusely all the while. Joe had retreated at the first shout of anger, but a plate came flying through a window and nearly got him anyway.

When the pair ran out of dishes, they subsided into mere shouting again. Finally tempers cooled to the point that McTaggart called Joe in to eat. The meal was eaten off what dishes could be salvaged and the men went back to work.

The failure of his marriage was hard on the man. Mentioning it to my family one day, he said simply, "Mabel took the young yoes" -- his peculiar pronunciation of "ewes" -- "and the car and I got the old yoes and the truck." His neighbors put it another way; they say Mabel took him for nearly everything he had.

(more)
Eight years ago he sold his ranch and bought the one he operates now. It is more to his liking; there are fewer people around and he can do as he pleases.

Every June McTaggart trails his sheep seventy-five miles to his summer pasture near Glacier National Park. This trip generally produces one of his typical episodes.

For instance, during one of these excursions, McTaggart was in an unusually bad humor. He fired the herder who was helping him, drove to town and another one.

Before long, this helper made a mistake and he too received a paycheck and a quick trip to town. This continued until the surly sheepman had used up four herders and could find no one who would hire out to him. Undaunted, he went back to the sheep and finished trailing them by himself.

Also, McTaggart has discovered that he can save a mile or two by crossing the Saint Mary's river on an old condemned bridge instead of following the highway and using the new span.

The highway department removed several planks from the bridge when it was abandoned to prevent anyone from using it. But McTaggart brings his own planks and inserts them in the gaps. Then he moves two thousand head of sheep across this bridge that has been condemned even for vehicle use. Sheep always run across bridges and no one else would risk that many sheep on a structure that could easily collapse from the vibration. But John McTaggart risks it, and he hasn't lost yet.

Now prosperous in his advancing age, John McTaggart still refuses to slow up and relax. He works as hard as he ever did, and he still keeps the worst hours of anyone I know.
But perhaps he is softening somewhat. A year ago last spring, when Dad first went to work for him, McTaggart moved a bedroll and a tarpaulin to the lambing shed and slept in a hay corral there to be near his sheep. Last spring he worked far into the nights as he had the previous year, but when he took time to sleep he did it in one of the drafty old bunk houses.

Maybe next spring he'll sink as low as to sleep in his own house.

1st reading: Quite interesting—quite a character. Don't see much wrong with the first reading. But...shucks, I'll do my best to find fault.
THE HAILSTORM

It was two days before the country knew the full damage. The morning after the storm it had seemed small and local. But other reports came in that day and the next. Added together, they stunned the state. One hundred eighty-four thousand acres suffered a 25% loss of crop. Hail had pounded a swath from Pincher Creek, Alberta, 150 miles southeast to Great Falls, Montana. Grazing land suffered as much as the record crops. The region had never taken such a beating.

I had come home to the area the second week in June. Dad was working at a sheep ranch in the valley of the Two Medicine River. Great Falls is 115 miles south on highway 89. Dupuyer, the nearest town, lies 15 miles south on the same route.

After a few leisurely weeks on the ranch, I forced myself to face a sad reality. I had to go to work.
Never one to leap into a job, I considered the possibilities of employment fully before stirring from my easy chair. Let's see... in the summer of '57 I farmed for Tony Mozer. But the last month I worked there I had a day and a half free time. There must be an easier way to earn a living. Besides, if his crops were hailed I might not be paid for a while.

How about Hoyt and Knox? I worked there in '56 and was well paid. Then I remembered their ranch lay half a mile from the Canadian border. There were forty miles of rutted dirt roads to the nearest town. No, there must be an easier place to earn a living.

I was well on my way toward disqualifying every possibility when Dad made a suggestion I liked. Why not ask Jim Shebler for a job? He farmed nearly a thousand acres—perhaps he needed a man.

The next day, I drove away in the family car, MINE for the summer, to see Jim. It rained nearly half the 25 miles to Valier. There were lighter streaks of cloud above the mountains to the west, but they seemed too high to be damaging. The ripening crops along the road looked worthy of the prediction of a record harvest.

Shebler's farm is located six miles from Valier, but I found Jim in town at Devoe's Builder's Service. He looked even taller than 6'3" as he argued with Devoe Swank, 5'8" in his cowboy boots, about the price of a new garage.

When I asked him for a job, he peered down at me suspiciously for a moment, then grinned. "Two hundred a month all right?" he asked. That was enough to make me like my job immediately.

I had always thought the Shebless solid financially. Their house was new, as was much of the farm equipment. Young Jim told me he planned to begin college in the fall.

But the Production Credit Association and the sale of his sheep were financing these, Jim told me. The farm was heavily mortgaged, too.

(more)
One morning at breakfast we were listening to a radio interview of a Great Falls bank official. Jim said, "I know that fellow. I tried to borrow 40,000 dollars from him once."

Jim had often told me, "A man that's herded sheep 35 years 's got no business farming." But the price of grazing land had risen too high and Jim sold his small herd. His crop was his only source of income then, and he needed income badly. Hail insurance allayed some of the risk, but it still covered only about a third of the crop's worth.

The crop was good. A neighbor, Elmer Spier, stopped at Sheble's one day. He said, "By God, you fellers with winter wheat in will be able to be called 'mister' this fall."

Jim agreed. "It'll be a beaner—if I get it."

Early in July a hail storm passed to the north. It had rained late that afternoon and we watched the storm through the living-room window. The white streak of hail was sharp against the darker rain clouds. It moved with a pace we couldn't quite judge. I watched Jim as the storm came southeastward. He reclined in his easy chair, and seemed relaxed. His lined face was calm as he smoked a cigarillo. I wondered how he could sit and watch the hail come to ruin him. Then I wondered what else he could do.

But only rain came that day. It remained stormy most of July. One of the last evenings of the month, clouds hung all around. I was reading when it began to rain about 9:30. Soon there was an occasional 'thud' above the sound of the rain on the bunkhouse roof. Then I could hear the hail hitting my car. I swore as I thought of broken windows and dents in the body. The storm didn't stop and I went to sleep.

(more)
In the morning I found my car unhurt. Only a few stones had fallen as the edge of the storm passed over. Half a mile to the west, wheat estimated at 50 bushels to the acre had been ruined.

Anna Sheble was shocked by the nearness of the damage. "James," she asked, "What would you have done if that had hit here?" He hunched his large body around in his chair to look at her. "Mm... guess I would have threwed up my tail and got out."

We harvested that fine crop this fall. Ten thousand bushels of winter wheat and more than 15,000 of barley; enough to meet expenses and live to farm another year. Maybe a sheep herder can live by farming--I know one that can, anyway.
- All penciled comments and marks are mine.
- Interesting way of introducing each paragraph in last section.
- If possible, no.
- Footnote for all of— but did we decide not to hold them for it?
- Title should be more specific.

N.T.

Really very good, well and carefully written. On the whole, a good job of research. Too

ASL

History C18-1
Dr. Link
Dec. 4, 1959
Ivan Doig
Several years after the salad days of the muckrakers, Ida Tarbell took a fond look backward at the "McClure's Magazine" she joined in 1893, before that hungry youngster grew up to trade blows with the erring elements of society in the next decade. She remembered the early "McClure's" as "... an undertaking which only the young and innocent and the hopelessly optimistic would ever have dared."\1."The eccentric," "the brilliant," "the irrational," and a dozen more adjectives could have been added to her list, and she still would have fallen short of Samuel McClure.

McClure, who had been an emigrant from Ireland at the age of nine, began his magazine in 1893, when he was thirty-six years old. By 1896 he was $287,000 in debt. Nine years later his magazine averaged $66,000 a month in advertising alone. The next year McClure lost more fine journalists en masse than most editors break with in a lifetime.

In the early years of this century, Samuel McClure and his ilk spread the social epidemic of muckraking throughout the land, damned on the one side as scandalmongers and praised on the other as defenders of right. William Allen White accounted McClure one of the ten most important men in the United States in 1903, and perhaps he was.

1. Tarbell, All in the Day's Work, page 141
Whatever the extent of his success, S.S. McClure the editor remained as erratic and visionary as Sam McClure had been as a student, salesman and owner of a newspaper syndicate service in the years before. He was always unstable in temperament and profession: "All through my life, there have been milestones at which I simply got through certain kinds of work." 1 As a student at Knox college in Indiana he had what he called the "regular irregularity" of fleeing his studies by hopping freight trains. This trait of the vagabond forced his future father-in-law, a professor at Knox, into intractable dislike for him, and kept his courtship on tenterhooks for seven years.

After the girl he had courted for so long finally revolted against her father and married the restless young salesman, McClure managed to channel his restless energy toward more profitable ends. He had once sold coffeepots throughout the middle western states for several months, and had found in the people of that region interests in life similar to his own. He wrote: "My experience had taught me that the people in the little towns were interested in whatever was interesting -- that they were just like the people in New York or Boston." 2 One night during a vacation from his job in a printing house, McClure sat down, plucked that theory from the back of his mind, and in a few hours invented a syndicate service for newspapers.

Samuel McClure's scheme was to buy stories from authors, then sell the stories to newspapers for a weekly sum. He was soon in debt to several authors, but his energy pulled him through.

1. McClure, My Autobiography, page 89
2. Ibid., page 131
Roaming the United States and England in search of stories, he bought fiction from Robert Louis Stevenson and Rider Haggard, Frank R. Stockton and Harriet Prescott Spofford, and many others. Conan Doyle became a regular source of material. While in London McClure heard of a young author whose stories of India had been consistently rejected by "Harper's"; he bought some of his works, and Rudyard Kipling made his first appearance before the American public.

During that period of his life, the young entrepreneur began to hone his editorial ability to a fine edge. He said, "I have but one test for a story...simply how much the story interested me." He made it a rule to read a story three times within a week to make sure it sustained his interest. If it did, he knew it would interest newspaper readers across the country.

McClure once explained his success with his technique to Lincoln Steffens: "...if I like a thing, then I know that millions will like it. My mind and my taste are so common that I'm the best editor."

After eight years, his syndicate still had only limited success, but Samuel McClure boldly plunged deeper into journalism, still pursuing the rewards of his imagination. He conceived the idea of printing a cheap magazine, featuring reprints of the stories distributed through his syndicate. A new process called photo-engraving made it possible to publish an illustrated magazine cheaply, and McClure and John S. Phillips, a classmate at Knox, put their capital --$7,300-- into the venture and set to work.

1. McClure, My Autobiography, page 204
2. The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens, page 393
In June of 1893 "McClure's Magazine" appeared, almost simultaneously with a financial panic. What meager resources the new publication had were soon gone, but Professor Henry Drummond and Conan Doyle invested $8,000 in the venture that first year, and Samuel McClure kept his magazine coming off the presses. His "common" mind and taste brought readers hurrying to the new magazine; within thirty months "McClure's" had a circulation of 250,000, more than "Harper's", "Scribner's" or the "Century", the old leaders of magazine journalism.

McClure's ability as an editor immediately outstripped his original intent to print a magazine merely to rerun the stories he bought his syndicate. Frank Luther Mott, the foremost student of the American magazine, describes the first issue of "McClure's" as "a copiously illustrated, well-edited monthly, containing fiction and articles on a literary level at least comparable with that of the established 'quality group' and in an area of ideas more timely, lively and journalistic."1

Printing expenses and low advertising rates caused "McClure's" to lose $5,000 a month throughout 1895, and McClure, never a shrewd business man, continued publication mainly through a combination of good fortune and obstinace. With financial capital scarce, he fell back on what he called his "real capital" -- a wide acquaintance with writers and what they could produce -- and came up with a young woman named Ida Minerva Tarbell.

Sensing in her a writer of power, the astute editor hired her as a staff writer and put her to work on an article about Napoleon. Circulation immediately increased, and she was next assigned to edit a mass of unpublished material about Lincoln, always one of McClure's heroes.

Magazine sales again benefited from the Tarbell touch, and the young writer began to perfect the research technique she would later use in writing a history of Standard Oil. Also, her editor, recognizing his contact with the public as his own great editorial asset, forced her to adopt a similar method. He continually ordered her: "Out with you -- look, see, report." 1.

Lincoln Steffens, another who found being a "McClure's" editor meant scurrying about the United States to investigate possible stories, later wrote of his boss with an admiring shake of his head: "Blond, smiling, enthusiastic, unreliable, he was the receiver of the ideas of his iday....He was rarely in the office. 'I can't sit still,' he shouted. 'That's your job. I don't see how you can do it.'" 2.

Whatever the method to McClure's madness, advertisers liked it, for it sold magazines. The magazine's features continued to draw more and more readers; soon its pages carried tremendous amounts of advertising, and the venture began to pay off.

As the receipts began coming in, McClure immediately converted them into journalistic talent. The cheap magazine, a proven success, was moving into the position of power it would solidify during the muckraking era, and financial rewards began to attract fine journalists to the magazine field.

McClure, with countless friends in the profession after his years of travel, heard of these writers and hired some of the very best. Lincoln Steffens, educated at the finest universities in the United States and Europe, willingly fled his newspaper work for a position on the "McClure's editorial staff.

1. Tarbell, All in the Day's Work, page 161
A young newspaperman named Ray Stannard Baker impressed McClure's associate editor, John Phillips, with the articles he submitted and he too joined the magazine on a permanent basis. Ida Tarbell, then in the midst of her research on the Standard Oil Company, completed the writing triumvirate that would soon launch "McClure's" under full sail into muckraking.

The magazine's talented writers weren't alone responsible for its growth in status, however; a great part of Samuel McClure's editorial talent lay in his knack of giving his staff full opportunity to develop their stories. In fact, the onetime salesman is generally credited with inventing an entirely new technique of magazine journalism: paying journalists for their study of a subject rather than the amount of copy produced.

The new approach to journalistic study proved so important that students of the era, such as C.C. Regier, credit McClure with setting a standard for the best in muckraking by giving Miss Tarbell a free hand in studying the Standard Oil trust.\(^1\) Certainly the "McClure's" method set a standard for accuracy in its time; few of its exposes were strongly challenged on a factual basis.

The idea of paying for research had to have some merits, for it soon proved costly. Miss Tarbell spent five years on her "History of Standard Oil", and the series of eighteen articles cost the magazine about $4,000 each, McClure estimated. Steffens annually averaged four articles at $2,000 each. Even such a poor businessman as McClure was moved to remark: "Of course, subjects that will repay the editor for so expensive a method of presentation are few and important."\(^2\)

1. Regier, The Era of the Muckrakers, page 121
2. McClure, My Autobiography, page 245
The canny McClure showed his concern for his writers in other ways, too. Lincoln Steffens once committed the treasonous act of instructing a "McClure's" contributor to submit his story to another magazine so McClure would gain a better appreciation of his worth. McClure so berated the author for sending his work elsewhere that the man admitted Steffens had advised him to "offer it outside." The editor's Irish wrath turned on Steffens, who thought quickly and turned one of McClure's own arguments against him: "...I reminded him that he had hidden me remember that we lived on the authors, that we must treat them well, and that meant, I reasoned, that we must remember that they had to live on us."

"He looked around to see that no one was listening; then he bent down, and, like a conspirator, whispered: 'That's right. Raise their pay, but don't tell anybody else what you are doing. And' -- this he spoke loud and erect -- 'don't ever send away another such good tale as this of Hopper's.'"

In the early twentieth century, Samuel McClure and his colleagues found that the "few and important" issues that would repay research investments were multiplying under the harsh light of investigation. Though even McClure maintained the origin of the journalistic exposure later termed "muckraking" was accidental -- "It came from no formulated plan to attack existing institutions, but was the result of merely taking up in the magazine some of the problems that were beginning to interest the people a little before the newspapers and the other magazines took them up," he wrote. -- it seems there was a little more than coincidence behind the movement.

1. The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens, page 361
2. McClure, My Autobiography, page 246
For example, the appearance of the third story on Standard Oil by Ida Tarbell, "The Shame of Minneapolis" by Lincoln Steffens, and an article on labor problems by Ray Stannard Baker in the January, 1903, issue may have been coincidental, but the fact that the three writers were simultaneously occupied with related subjects indicates there was definite direction to McClure's energy and the nation's interest.

McClure himself pointed out the growing concern with America's behavior with an editorial in that issue: "...this number contains three arraignments of American character such as should make every one of us stop and think. "The Shame of Minneapolis," the current chapter of the Standard Oil, Mr. Ray Stannard Baker's "The Right To Work," it might all have been called The American Contempt of Law. Capitalists, workingmen, politicians, citizens, -- all breaking the law or letting it be broken."

"Who is there left to uphold it? The Lawyers? Some of the best are hired for that very purpose. The judges? Too many of them so respect it that for some error or quibble they restore to office or liberty men convicted on evidence overwhelmingly convincing to common sense. The churches? We know of one, an ancient and wealthy establishment, which had to be compelled by a Tammany hold-over health-officer to put its tenements in sanitary condition. The colleges? They do not understand. There is no one left -- no one but all of us." ¹

Here Samuel McClure added to the energy he had infused into magazine journalism through his publication, his support and the rare opportunities of investigation he gave his staff, his belief

¹. Samuel McClure, as cited in Tassin, The Magazine in America, page 349
in the common people's interest in national affairs; with his
condemnation of America's porous bulwarks, he entered actively
into the battle for reform. In the next few years, his magazine
discussed, besides the famed "Shame of the Cities" and "History
of Standard Oil", the Negro problem, child labor, postal fraud,
the conditions of state governments, high finance, disease and
medical practices, railroads, life insurance and commercialism in
college athletics.

Most of the problems were dealt with in a series of articles
by a "McClure's" writer, and the usual tactic was to present in
condensed form a topic that could be expanded into a book --
Algernon Tassin called them "facts skillfully marshalled and
sternly compressed".1 and let the evidence speak for itself.
Whatever the motive and method of presenting the literature of
exposure in "McClure's", other magazines began to join the fray.

Frank Luther Mott deems Samuel McClure's contribution to the
journalistic investigations of his time invaluable: "...it seems
clear that S.S. McClure, in the inspired experimentalism that was
a characteristic of the man, discovered a formula for exposes which
was found so immediately popular that it was followed at once by
the editors of the competing popular magazines."2

James Playsted Wood gives McClure and his magazine even more
praise: "The 'McClure's' exposures of graft and corruption in city
government, of fraud and dishonesty in business and finance, of the
vicious practices of corporations and labor unions alike, led not
only to popular disapproval of the conditions, but also to reform,

1. Tassin, The Magazine in America, page 347
to legislation, and to improvement in politics and the conduct
of business."1.

Somewhere among the paeans lies the actual worth of the
"McClure's" effort. At minimum, the magazine, with its richly
documented articles and reputation for research, brought a note
of accuracy and truth to the tenor of revolt, and whatever the
contribution of the muckrakers, "McClure's" must rate a major
share of praise.

The origin of the term "muckraker" itself shows the movement
had a considerable effect on American life of that time. The
"unrest about the unrest" grew until Theodore Roosevelt, later
to label the objects of much of the movement's vehemence "the
malefactors of great wealth", in 1906 likened the hue and cry of
the magazines to the actions of the "Man with the Muck-rake" in
Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." He said the journalists were like
"the man who could look no way but downward with the muck-rake in
his hands; who was offered a celestial crown for his muck-rake, but
who would neither look up nor regard the crown he was offered,
but continued to rake to himself the filth of the floor."2.

As usual, Roosevelt proved an apt phrasemaker, and "muckraker"
soon became a common expression. Beyond that, it became a semantic
paradox, both an epithet and an honorary title.

For example, Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the "American Illustrated
Magazine" and persistent foe of the muckrakers, exulted in Roosevelt's
choice of words:

"'The Man with the Muck Rake' he has been called, and the name
will stick like pitch...Exaggeration, perversion, distortion, truths,

1. Wood, Magazines in the United States, page 137
2. Regier, The Era of the Muckrakers, page 1
half-truths, lies -- he heaps them up, regardless of honesty, reckless of consequences, absolutely without thought of the enormous responsibility that is his... Evil is here and we must face it and beat it back, but shall we Americans gulp down the food every scandal monger throws to us? Shall every 'exposer' be our prophet? Shall we prick up our ears at every ass that brays?" 1.

Also, some of the muckrakers bemoaned their new tag. John Graham Brooks of the "Independent" intoned regretfully:

"The steel of St. George has at last struck home, but they will not have it so named. He is to be 'The Man with the Muck Rake.'" 2.

But Algernon Tassin noted another reaction to the term: gleeful acceptance, for the use of the epithet indicated the magazines were making their blows felt. Dr. Tassin wrote:

"McClure's" wore proudly its new and sanctioned title of Muck Raker, and doubtless joined in the chuckle which went up from many earnest-minded Americans...after the first gasp of indignation. For the accusation, ungracious as it was from one professional reformer to another, was conspicuously ungrateful also. It was the public conscience which 'McClure's' had striven so earnestly to arouse with an army of shocking facts that eagerly seized upon the President for leadership. 'The historian of the future' wrote Mr. Archer, 'may determine how much of the uplift that distinguished the Roosevelt administration was due to the influence of the "McClure" (sic) type of magazine. It seems to me certain that Mr. McClure paved the way for President Roosevelt and potently furthered the movements with which his name will always be identified." 3.

2. Ibid., page 56
3. Tassin, The Magazine in America, page 350
Actually, "McClure's" did not mention the phrase in its pages, and not all critics were as generous with the muckrakers and McClure. Henry Mencken criticized the Tassin-Archer evaluation and termed the editor of "McClure's" "a shrewd literary bagman" who "did little save repeat in solemn, awful tones what Hearst had said before." 1.

Whatever was said about McClure and his colleagues, the amount of comment put them in the middle of the American stage and ahead of their journalistic rivals, the newspapers, in public esteem. But S.S. McClure, more prosperous than ever, became even more visionary in his ideas, and soon found himself more and more at odds with his staff.

Lincoln Steffens once described the constant struggle between McClure and his employees in those years:

"...we had to unite and fight against, say, five out of seven of his new, world-thrilling, history-making schemes....we simply did not carry out the impossible or the mad schemes of the chief even when, for peace, we affected to agree to them. And S.S. soon forgot; he had other greatest ideas or authors in the world." 2.

Finally there came to the editor's mind a scheme so great he would not relinquish it -- a plan for a great industrial combination incorporating the magazine, a bank, a life insurance company, a welfare settlement and a publishing company. After six months' struggle against the idea, John Phillips sold his share to McClure and left the magazine, followed at once by Tarbell, Steffens, Baker, staff writer John Siddall and managing editor Albert Boyden.

1. Mencken, Prejudices, First Series, page 175
The group soon bought Sedgwick's magazine, renamed it the "American" and began muckraking on their own.

But the movement began to fade, and with it, Samuel McClure. People began to tire of the sensational diet, and muckraking began to lose its popularity. Henry Mencken said the reason was muckraking had succeeded, and the villains were forced into rectitude.1

Upton Sinclair said the villains wore the magazine's down, and eventually pressured them into silence.2

Sinclair even turned on McClure personally; in "The Brass Check" he attributes the split between McClure and his staff to McClure's drawing in on the reins of journalistic investigation.3

More likely than either of these iconoclasts' explanations is the theory that people just tired of the muckrakers. There remained plenty of subjects for attack, and there remained willing attackers, but the battle began to weary the public, just as any war does, and the journalism of exposure lost its financial glitter.

"McClure's" began its decline soon after its famed staff departed and Samuel McClure's health, never good, began to slow him down. He continued a muckraking policy in his magazine, but with his staff, the great balance wheel to his enthusiastic ventures, gone, his prosperity began to ebb.

In 1911 his son-in-law, Cameron Mackenzie, and Frederick Lewis Collins purchased the magazine. Samuel McClure remained the titular editor for two years, then returned to the daily newspaper field, finally buying the New York Evening Mail in 1916. He returned to "McClure's" in the 1920's, but it was a dying magazine by then.

1. Mencken, Prejudices, First Series, page 177
2. As cited in Martin, The Era of Muckraking in American Magazines, page 72
3. Ibid., page 70
After the magazine folded in 1926, McClure was rarely heard of in American journalism. Frank L. Mott sums up the remainder of his life: "He lived for twenty-three years longer, occupying his mind with ineffectual studies of modern civilization which he published at his own expense, and died at the age of ninety-two." 1.

When he died on March 21, 1949, the magazines paid little attention to the great muckraker; only "Publisher's Weekly" gave him as much as a one-paragraph obituary. But historians have written their own epitaphs for McClure and the revolt of his era. S.S. McClure would probably be well satisfied to hear his method of intellectual investigation -- muckraking -- called:

"...a stream which runs through history, and has a thousand ramifications; a stream which has watered many soils and made possible rich harvests; a stream down which have been borne many precious cargoes of civilization." 2.

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