

Ex Libris by Joaquin Ayala, PhD.

Hello folks and welcome to the first *Ex Libris* article for 2016! Whew – what a holiday season that was. Wait, where did it all go so fast?! Well wherever it went to in a hurry, I hope it was a good one for everybody and that this year is better than ever for you!

Ask any magician that has ever seen someone else do an effect and then asked others where they can find/learn it. I can guarantee you that just about every one of them will tell you that at some point or another, they have all heard the almost cliché response, “It is in Tarbell”. This certainly seems like an overused response, but it is largely true about many, many effects in magic.

This leads me, of course, to the book on which we put the spotlight for this year, *The Tarbell Course in Magic* by Dr. Harlan Tarbell. It was not originally dreamt up by Tarbell, but rather by two publishers named T. Grant Cooke and Walter A. Jordan. They had envisioned a comprehensive correspondence course for magic in the mid-1920s. The pair originally hired Tarbell and another Chicago-area magician named Walter Baker to write the course, but Baker later gave up on the project to focus on his performance of magic. Not long before he died, Harry Houdini was asked to author, but he declined, recommending Dr. Tarbell. Tarbell ended up with a \$50,000/USD backing from the publishers to write the course, which he finished in 1928. It was comprised of 60 lessons with over 3,000 illustrations. It was originally released in segments as a mail-order course and was later collected and published as a set of eight volumes.

This was really one of the first courses of its kind because Tarbell focused on all aspects of magic, including fundamental drills, skills practice, body position and movement, language and of course, sleight-of-hand techniques which were to be incorporate into effects in the future lessons. After selling 10,000 copies of the complete course, the course was discontinued from the market in 1931 after sales fell. The publishers blamed the Great Depression. Later in 1941, Louis Tannen purchased the rights to the course, and working with Tarbell and Ralph W. Read, they converted the course into book form. The original lessons in the course are not identical to the later books (volumes 1-8); Tarbell himself only wrote 1-5. There are some parts of the original lessons which were dropped from the book form, and Lesson 8 was released as a ‘Post-Graduate Course’, written by Steve Burton and Richard Kaufman. Volumes 1-5 of the books were released between 1941 and 1948, Volume 6 in 1954, Volume 7 in 1972 and Volume 8 in 1993, 33 years after the death of Dr. Harlan Tarbell.

There are a number of supplemental companion books, including the *Tarbell Scrapbook* which included the missing lessons from the original course and many articles about/from Dr. Tarbell, *The Tarbell Companion Book* by Tarbell (edited/published by Steve Burton in 1994), the *Tarbell Study Guide* by Steve Burton (1995), *Spiritual Applications for Tarbell 1* (1976) and *Tarbell 2* (1984), both by Jule L. Miller and the *Complete Index of the Tarbell Course in Magic* by Tarbell (1926), which was later included in Volume 7 of the book format. – J.M.A.