Harvey Wiley, The Man Who Changed America One Bite at A Time

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Process Paper: 500 Words
When we first received the topic breakthroughs in history, I immediately thought of people we often heard about such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Albert Einstein, and although these are famous pioneers in science and social change, I didn’t want to tell a well-known story. One day while researching I came across the story of a man who poisoned a group of applicants in order to pass some of America’s first food and drug bills. I began to research further into the topic and came across a man by the name of Harvey Wiley. His story intrigued me and the more I researched the more interesting the story became. I soon found that this story was the perfect one for me to tell.

In order to conduct my research, I developed a timeline which also assisted in how I developed my documentary. By outlining important people and significant events, I could effectively organize my research. I used a variety of sources, spending time in local and online libraries looking for encyclopedias and books as well as scouring the web for valuable sources of information. I was cautious in citing websites as they are vulnerable to bias, and glorification which I didn’t want influencing my documentary. Archives played a valuable role throughout my research, often providing other sources to research and a great source of primary sources. I reached out and utilized a multitude of archives, such as those from Harvard, and from The Library of Congress where I found many documents from his work. By conducting background research and building a timeline I could effectively, accurately and thoroughly gather information.

I have always been interested in video production. I also have experience with editing and film, and I have won multiple awards at film festivals for my work. I have always had an appreciation for documentaries as they can be more immersive and can have a profound effect on the way we perceive our world around us. It delves the viewer into the sounds and sights of history and allows us to use more of our senses to better understand a topic. I wanted to depict the horrors of many food-packaging companies, and the fight against food adulteration, and a documentary, combined with my interests and the story was the perfect choice for me.

“Breaking Barriers” is a rather unique topic because it applies to every, pioneer, revolution, and breakthrough in history. Dr. Wiley’s work embodies the idea of breaking through barriers both socially and politically. He dedicated his life to ending food adulteration and to ensuring that food companies don’t put profits before the health of their consumers. He pioneered the first food legislation laws in spite of lobbyists, opposers, and doubters. When his budget was cut and the careers of himself and his colleagues at risk, he persevered playing a pivotal role in ensuring the first of many food and drug legislation is passed. His life’s work truly embodies the aspect of innovation and throughout his life Harvey Washington Wiley has truly broken barriers.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources


This article from an academic journal dates all the way back to the 1870s, roughly when Wiley first began his adulteration tests. I used it to gather a list of adulterated products that I used during the beginning of my documentary. The extensive detail the article goes into helped me to find footage to effectively depict the production of these products.

“As to the Heroic Poison Squad.” The Salt Lake Telegram, April 10th 1908

“As to the Heroic Poison Squad” is an editorial from the newspaper The Salt Lake Telegram. It served as a depiction of the public craze around the poison squad. Its powerful headline was a perfect fit right near the climax of my documentary.


One of the hardest parts of my story to research was where I discussed Wiley’s testimonies before congress, these transcripts were often illusive and reports of the trial are bare so. This article in the Albuquerque citizen, helped me to fill in a lot of these gaps and to fully develop that subtopic in my documentary.

Blum, Deborah. Audio Interview. 12 November 2019

Deborah Blum is the Director of Journalism at MIT and the author of The Poison Squad, One Chemists Single-Minded Crusade for Food Safety at the Turn of the Twentieth Century. Her interview provided me with deeply detailed information on the work of Harvey Wiley, and allowed me to better tell the story of the resistance Wiley faced in my documentary.
https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86086067/1906-02-14/ed-1/seq-1/

The Baraboo news was a local publisher in the heart of Wisconsin. In its February 14th Edition, it headlines an article “Stuffed with Pure Food” which details the work of Harvey Wiley’s Poison Squad. With this source, I could show the popularity of the Poison Squad’s story all over America, and how Wiley’s fight became the news of the day in early 1906.


This Newspaper clipping from The New York Tribune, shows how newspapers played a large role in outing the corrupt companies that were mass producing adulterated products. By showing the impacts of media at the time, I was able to further develop my takeaway at the end of my documentary.

June 22nd 1904. Print.

The Pure Food and Drug Act in Congress was a volatile act with fierce debates on both sides of the movement. This clipping from The New York Times, helped me to show in a direct headline the ferocity over the bill’s passage.


This book written as a recollection of the progressive era, delving into the time I was researching. It allowed me to develop a better exposition to my main story and served as a valuable part of my research.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87078082/1911-08-02/ed-1/seq-3/>

The cover story of Pennsylvania’s The citizen is titled “Dr. H. Wiley and his Famous Poison Squad. It had numerous photographs, and provided me with a quote from Upton Sinclair which I used in my documentary.
By 1911, Wiley was a well known public figure, and this newspaper clipping showed me that, in a column detailing federal food inspections of a nearby meatpacking plant. Not only was I able to understand the public's view of Wiley, but I could also track the dates of routine government inspections, many of which took place after the rise of the FDA.

During the early 1900s, fresh milk in large cities like Pennsylvania was difficult to find, due to hundreds of companies mixing milk with formaldehyde in order to increase its shelf life. This clipping, features the headline “Embalmed Milk.” which allows me to directly show this crisis, and gave me more backstory to the scandal.

This novel was one of the main reasons I chose my topic, as well as providing me with large amounts of background information, and allowed me to develop a timeline for my script. I also was able to reach out to the author for an interview, giving me even more valuable information for my research.

This article from Chicago’s The day book talks about Wiley’s life in a short biographical article. It provided me with general information which was valuable early on in my research.

In this article from The day book, a report on Wiley’s testimony to congress featured a full transcript of the debates. Not only was this a valuable document, It aided me in finding sources for media for my documentary.
Another one of Wiley’s testimonies were detailed in this editorial from the Newspaper, The day book. In his testimony against the national drug association, he detailed his findings and gave a rough timeline of his research and publications which proved very valuable.

The Evening star was a popular newspaper from Washington D.C. that detailed the latest legislation passed in congress. The March 18th edition of 1906 details the sections of The Pure Food and Drug act and provided photos of the original legislation, which I used in my documentary.

This newspaper clipping is from The evening world, and shows a report on the most recently discovered adulterated products at the time. It helped me to show the frenzy the publishing of the The Jungle caused in the public eye, serving as a valuable clip for my documentary.

This illustration from the Chronicling America Archives shows a man working in a meatpacking facility surrounded by filth. Its unique form of activism helped me to understand the effective techniques the Muckrakers used to gain public support.

This book was published by Wiley in 1898, in order to expose many of the practices of corrupt food industries. The novel as well as many of the photographs in the book played an integral part in my documentary.

*The History of A Crime Against Food Law*, was a novel written by Wiley himself, discussing his life and legacy. It allowed me to gather information more effectively as well as giving me photos to use in my documentary.

“How the Beef Trust has Poisoned the People’s Food” *The Commoner*. June 1st 1906. Print.

*The Commoner* was a newspaper that published all over the northeastern U.S. In their June 1st 1906 edition, they published an article in conjunction with Upton Sinclair’s book, “The Jungle”. This source helped me to establish the impact of the book, and how it impacted Wiley’s mission for food safety.


Bleached flour was a big problem in the 1900s especially in rural areas, newspapers began catching these adulterants in flour, and reporting on which products they were found in. This clipping from *The Hope pioneer*, gives a detailed description of how these adulterants enter food and what they are chemically, giving me a valuable source of information.


The *Hopkinsville Kentuckian* is another rural newspaper that reported embalmed milk, in their local dairy industry. This helped me to depict the insane practices of unregulated dairy industries in my segment about adulterated products.


During the experiments that Wiley was conducting, he received a fair amount of backlash, most notably from Senator Bernstein of Kansas. This article from *The Topeka Daily* shows the tipping point where many of his constituents began to support food regulation, in direct opposition to the actions of their senator. Not only did this provide me with a very interesting viewpoint of the issue, I could also gain a deeper understanding of the conflict that was happening nationwide as a result of Wiley’s work.
Lieb, Emily. Interview, NPR, 3 February 2019

Emily Broad E Lieb, is the director of the Food Law Clinic at Harvard University, she was interviewed about the importance of food safety and its history on an NPR radio broadcast. Her interview allowed for me to better understand the importance of the movement, and the atrocities that occurred prior to its passing.


These studies from the US Department of Health and Human Services, which was recently founded after the passing of the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act, reports on many of the practices used by companies and industries who were prone to adulteration. It allowed me to better use imagery in my script and convey to the audience the problems with society prior to its passing.


After the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906, many companies capitalized on the term pure food, advertising products completely free of adulterants and chemicals, a notion that would grow into the organic products we see today. This source allowed to better understand the longer lasting impacts of Wiley’s work and how the industry changed with the times.


In this edition of The Prescott daily new, Harvey Wiley’s life is discussed in a biographical column in the newspaper. Early on in my research it was very beneficial because I could create a timeline of major events in Wiley’s life and match them up with other timelines to create my script.


“The Man Who Is Leading the Fight for Pure Food” is the headline of the newspaper clipping published by The Washington Times on August 6th 1906. It discusses the impact of Wiley’s work from a unique perspective as the author was living in the time period, and became a valuable source in my research.
The front page of *The Madison daily leader* features a large editorial on the work of Harvey Wiley and the Poison Squad, going into extreme detail about the adulterated practices he found and the conclusions of his research. This was an invaluable source and I would often find myself going back to reference it during the course of my documentary.

The Muckrakers used a variety of mediums in order to convey the injustices they saw in society, one of these ways was to publish political cartoons. One of the most popular was in *The San Francisco call*. While there wasn’t much direct evidence I could ascertain from the source, it did provide an interesting perspective to my research and gave me a unique viewpoint for my documentary.

This newspaper from the Chronicling America archives, helped me to show a powerful point in my documentary. With the headline “The U.S. Govt. Demands Unbleached Flour” it allowed me to show the effect the passage of the Pure Food and Act and the Federal Food Inspection Act had on the nation we live in.

The Theodore Roosevelt Collection from the Harvard and Dickinson State University Archives. The Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Lincoln Steffens, as a standalone source is rather miniscule, but when put together with other primary documents that I have found throughout my research it becomes a substantial force in my research.

Rural pure food editorials, such as the one published in *Ranche and range* from the Chronicling America Archives, played a large role in the pure food movement. This one reported on the stark differences between the dairy industry in the U.S. compared to those in Europe. It allowed me to get a in depth understanding of the truly disgusting practices of the American dairy conglomerate.
This cover story from *Rock Island Argus* in the Chronicling America Archives, features a three page report on the findings of Wiley’s research and gives exact dates which aided me in writing my script and further developing a timeline for my research.

Embalmed milk was one of the many common adulterated products found on shelves during the time. One of these scandals were published in a 1901 edition of *The Southern herald*. By featuring a prominent headline, it was a great way to show some of the terrible practices of the time.

Although this book was only recently compiled, the text and articles within are from the time of the Food and Drug Act. These are broadly focused on public health and the working class, but it still offers a large amount of historical context and background on the topic.

This letter from the from the National Archives’ President Roosevelt Collection, discusses many of Sinclair’s concerns for the nation’s food legislation. This helped me to illustrate the final steps towards the signing of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 and allowed me to collect valuable information on the issues that Wiley and the Muckrakers were concerned with at the time.

This book by Upton Sinclair, an investigative journalist who reported on the unsanitary practices of the meatpacking industry in the 1900s. This allowed me to build a timeline of public awareness of the issue, as well as an image on the horrendous practices of this industry.

This article from *McClure’s Magazine* in January of 1906, was written by Lincoln Steffens, a prominent muckraker. Throughout the article she questions the work of lobbyists against the American consumer and how they have blocked the improvement of millions of lives. The source showed me how the muckrakers managed to raise support for their issue, and how their work defined the movement.


This article published in *McClure’s Magazine* in 1902 found in the HathiTrust Digital Library is about Ida Tarbell’s famous fight against the Standard Oil Company and how it ultimately led to her starting her work as a muckraker. This allowed me to better build a profile on her work, as well as allowing me to conduct further research.


This Newspaper Clipping was from *The Chicago Eagle’s* January 12th, 1906 Edition. It reported on the horrors of the Chicago Meatpacking Plant, right after the publishing of *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. By showing the outcry from the public after finding out about the poisons in their foods, I was able to show public support for Wiley at the time.


This article from a magazine dating back to the early 1900’s describes the chemical and scientific processes scientists used to test for adulteration at the time. I was able to further develop my script with this information.


Over the course of his research, Wiley received numerous letters from those who wanted to join the squad, many of them were lost, but one remains in the Harvey Wiley Collection in Philadelphia.
Since my documentary is closely tied with the federal government, I could look through a number of archives and gain valuable primary sources. One of these archives was the U.S. Congressional Archives, where I could access bill records such as this one; of the original Pure Food and Drug Act. Not only did this give me a picture of the exact document that passed congress, it also helped me to find other bills and develop a timeline of food legislation.

I wanted to track the passage of food legislation following the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act, one of the most prominent expansions to the original legislation was the 1962 Federal Food Drug and Cosmetic Act. With this document I could view any additions to the original act, that I was missing in the other sources I had found prior to this one.

This bill summary of the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act is from the Congressional Archives. This record allowed me to analyze the impact of Wiley’s work, and the insane amount of time it took to finally pass the regulations that were first proposed by Dr. Wiley.

This bill summary from the Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1906 is from the National Library for the House of Representatives. It helped me to understand the impact of Upton Sinclair’s Book; “The Jungle” and the work of Harvey Wiley on food legislation.

The Pure Fish and Fishery Products act was originally established as an amendment to the Pure Food and Drug act of 1906, but it was reworked as a separate law in 1972. This source allowed me to better understand the impact of a single law and its importance to our health and safety.
The Food and Drug Administration was a branch of the USDA, that in 1906 was developed into a specialized agency. In the bill record, there was a lot of valuable information as to where and how the new FDA would function, which was important to my documentary because Harvey Wiley was the FDA’s first Food and Drug Commissioner.

The National Drug Testing and Evaluation Act was one of the first orders by the newly established FDA to inspect over 15 million food and drug producers in the U.S. This was vital to my research because it showed the long term impacts of the FDA less than two months after its founding.

The Federal, Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, was a pioneering piece of legislation at the time. This source allowed me to outline the bill’s impact to this day, as it continues to get amended and altered to fit the needs of today.

Watch the Professor was a Political Cartoon published on May 23 1906, in local NYC newspapers. It depicted a figure representing meatpacking industries, magically turning animal waste and byproducts into finished food products destined for the shelves. The source found in the Roosevelt Library helped me to depict activism movements throughout my documentary.

This political cartoon, from the National Archives and Records Administration, helps to represent the ignorance of the Federal Government to the workings of the Meatpacking Industry. Its symbolism allowed me to better represent the conflict at the time.

*Progressive Thought* was a popular magazine for many activists, and progressives at the time. In this edition there was a number of photographs and clippings that I utilized in my documentary making it a valuable resource.


*The Washington times* featured a political cartoon on their July 14th edition, that shows the conflict between lobbyists and the Bureau of Chemistry, the attached editorial also provided a list of the people who were present at the testimony, allowing me to further my research and gain photographs from the reporters who were present at the trial.
Secondary Sources


This magazine article from Good Housekeeping, outlines Harvey Wiley’s work as their director of laboratories and the infamous 1911 Coca-Cola Lawsuit that helped to set standards for food labeling across the U.S.


The work of Anne Kelton Wiley is highlighted on the Women’s Suffragist Memorial’s website. Her work as a lobbyist, an activist, a suffragist, a mother, and an advisor all played an immense role in our nation’s history and the work of her husband.


This article written about an excerpt from the book “American History Through Literature 1870-1920 discusses the work of Muckrakers and Yellow Journalism in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. It discusses everything from their many publishings, to their secret meetings in order to avoid being found by corporations they were investigating. It allowed me to really represent the work of the Muckrakers in my documentary and develop a unique point of view.


The reference from the Encyclopedia of World War I and the Jazz Age on investigative journalist Upton Sinclair discusses the impact of Upton Sinclair on the meatpacking industry. His book “The Jungle” had an immense role on the industry, as it brought awareness to the public on the issue and created a unique view at adulteration. This source allowed me to develop my understanding into her impact and further develop my timeline and script.
The Federal Department of Agriculture’s article on the history of the commissioner’s office, outlines Dr. Wiley’s role as the first food and drug commissioner. Not only did this article help to establish a timeline it also helped to provide interview candidates for my research.


Harvey Washington Wiley’s article in the “World of Chemistry” encyclopedia, discusses Harvey’s early life and education. This helped me to develop and exposition for my documentary, and choose what parts of his life I wanted to retell in my documentary.


This excerpt on the Pure Food and Drug Act from the book “Pure Food: Securing the Federal Food and Drugs Act of 1906” discusses the impact of food and drug legislation, and how it changed the food we eat forever. This book also helped me to understand the importance of this legislation and the notable work of the Muckrakers.


This article from Allegheny College discusses the work of Ida Tarbell a pioneer in American Journalism who helped to expose the adulteration practices of the dairy industry. This helped me to define the muckrakers and understand their impact.


The NPR radio broadcast titled “How a 19th Century Chemist Took On the Food Industry with a Grisly Experiment” discusses the impact Harvey Wiley’s Poison Squad had on food legislation in the U.S. This helped me to further research the poison squad and their impact on the legislative process.

In this research paper by Brenda Wilmoth Lerner and K. Lee Lerner, the horrid practices of the meatpacking industry and its widespread adulteration problems are described. It was published in the “Food in Context” journal, and played an important role in my research.


The biographical article from the Encyclopedia of World Biography describes, in great detail, Ida Tarbell’s life ranging from her childhood to eventually her death. The source provided me with lots of information about the work the muckrakers played a role in and her persistent dedication to her cause. This allowed me to develop a profile, and conduct further research into the group of journalists that were known as the muckrakers.


The Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. Economic History’s reference on “The Jungle” a book written by Ida Tarbell helps to identify the work of Tarbell, and her investigation on the workings of the meatpacking and dairy industries which were at the time, atrocious. This source helped me to learn more about these practices and ultimately the public’s reaction to said practices.


Adrienne Wilmouth, speaks about the challenges faced by Harvey Wiley and other supporters of the Pure Food and Drug act of 1906. This article was published in the book “Food in Context”, and allowed me to develop a timeline of the bill for further research.

The Encyclopedia of World Biography discusses the life of Lincoln Steffens and his work with Harvey Wiley in their 1998 edition. This reference talks deeply about the early life of Lincoln Steffens and provided me with a thorough exposition for my documentary.


In this magazine article from *Good Housekeeping*, which Dr. Wiley worked at until 1930, the author discusses his work at the institute, and the impact he made for the 18 years as chairman of the Good Housekeeping Laboratories. This helped me to outline Wiley’s continued legacy and despite retiring from the USDA how his work helped to improve the lives of millions of Americans.


This article from the Independence Hall Association talks about the use of investigative journalism in the 1700s through the 1900s. It helped me to understand the role of investigative journalism in the fight for food safety, and how the effects of unregulated interstate commerce drastically exacerbated the prevalence of adulteration practices in agricultural and meatpacking industries.


This article from the U.S. Capital Visitor Center is an excerpt from their exhibit on the Pure Food and Drug Act. It discusses the impact of the Food and Drug laws and how it led to the proliferation of food and drug laws throughout the states. This helped me to develop a timeline for my research and identify topics for further research.


In an excerpt from an article produced by the US House of Representatives discusses the challenges food legislation has had in Congress due to opposition lobbying and the lack of credible research. This helped me to map out a legislative timeline and determine the pace of change throughout my research.

This reference from the Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. Economic History discusses the work of the Muckrakers and Activists such as Harvey Wiley and the role they played on our life today. This helped for me to gain a general understanding of the progression of early food legislation in this country.


Research Guides are extremely helpful, especially when just beginning your research, it provided me with archival access to film, as well as linking other archives, notable people, and events which allowed me to have a well-structured research plan.


I found this reference in the online edition of *Encyclopædia Britannica*. It talks about the connection between the Meat Inspection Act, which passed as conjunction with the Pure Food and Drug Act, and how these acts were influenced by yellow journalism and scientific research.


This reference found in Gale’s online encyclopedia, contains an excerpt from Upton Sinclair’s book “The Jungle” discusses the meatpacking industry and its frequent practices of adulteration in its methods. This helped me to depict the horrid practices of industrial food companies, and provided me with a number of primary sources.


This summary of “The Jungle”, a book written by Ida Tarbell about the practices of the meatpacking industry, helps to identify many of the factors that led to the writing of this book. This helped me to define Ida’s legacy and build a timeline for further research.
“Tarbell, Ida.” *National Women’s Hall of Fame*,
https://www.womenofthehall.org/inductee/idatarbell/.

The biographical article from the National Women’s Hall of Fame describes Ida Tarbell as a pioneer in her field, an activist for everything that is unjust under the sun. Her work ranges from women’s suffrage to food safety, and she has had an immense impact on the way we live our lives today.

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service,

This summary from the USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service, discusses the history of the Meat inspection Act of 1906 and what was regulated in the original bill. This helped me to develop a timeline for food legislation in the 1900’s and the effectiveness of the Muckrakers on the food packing industry.


The Dictionary of American Biographies discusses the life and legacy of the Upton Sinclair and his work as pivotal to the outcome of modern history. This source helped to outline many of the causes that Sinclair and Wiley agreed upon, and how their parallel work, drastically benefited the state of food safety in the United States.


The magazine article from *American Heritage* talks about the work of Harvey Wiley’s Poison Squad and its profound effect on our food legislation. This helped me to establish a timeline for further research and allowed me to understand the importance of these individuals.

Harvey Wiley’s outstanding impact is discussed in this biography published in the Gale Encyclopedia. This source helped me to outline the impact of Dr. Wiley’s career and how he shaped today’s food safety laws, and helped to guide further research.


World Book’s Student reference describes Harvey Wiley as a pioneer in his field and a true activist for change in food safety legislation. This reference helped me to understand federal influence during the time period.