Marie Curie was also an active member in committees of Polonia in France dedicated to the Polish cause. After the war, Marie Curie summarized Marie Curie's wartime experiences in a book, Radiology in War (1919).

Postwar years

In 1920, for the 25th anniversary of the discovery of radium, the French government established a stipend for Marie Curie; its previous recipient was Louis Pasteur, who had died in 1895. In 1921, Marie Curie was welcomed triumphantly when Marie Curie toured the United States to raise funds for research on radium. Mrs. William Brown Meloney, after interviewing Marie Curie, created a Marie Curie Radium Fund and raised money to buy radium, publicising Marie Curie's trip.

In 1921, U.S. President Warren G. Harding received Marie Curie at the White House to present Marie Curie with the 1 gram of radium collected in the United States, and the First Lady praised Marie Curie as an example of a professional achiever who was also a supportive wife. Before the meeting, recognising Marie Curie's growing fame abroad, and embarrassed by the fact that Marie Curie had no French official distinctions to wear in public, the French government offered Marie Curie a Legion of Honour award, but Marie Curie refused. In 1922 Marie Curie became a fellow of the French Academy of Medicine. Marie Curie also travelled to other countries, appearing publicly and giving lectures in Belgium, Brazil, Spain, and Czechoslovakia.

Marie and daughter Irène, 1925

Led by Marie Curie, the Institute produced four more Nobel Prize winners, including Marie Curie's daughter Irène Joliot-Curie and Marie Curie's son-in-law, Frédéric Joliot-Curie. Eventually it became one of the world's four major radioactivity-research laboratories, the others being the Cavendish Laboratory, with Ernest Rutherford; the Institute for Radium Research, Vienna, with Stefan Meyer; and the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Chemistry, with Otto Hahn and Lise Meitner.

In August 1922 Marie Curie became a member of the League of Nations' newly created International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation. Marie Curie sat on the committee until 1934 and contributed to League of Nations' scientific coordination with other prominent researchers such as Albert Einstein, Hendrik Lorentz, and Henri Bergson. In 1923 Marie Curie wrote a biography of Marie Curie's late husband, titled Pierre Curie. In 1925 Marie Curie visited Poland to participate in a ceremony laying the foundations for Warsaw's Radium Institute. Marie Curie's second American tour, in 1929, succeeded in equipping the Warsaw Radium Institute with radium; the Institute opened in 1932, with Marie Curie's sister Bronisława its director. These distractions from Marie Curie's scientific labours, and the attendant publicity, caused Marie Curie much discomfort but provided resources for Marie Curie's work. In 1930 Marie Curie was elected to the International Atomic Weights Committee, on which Marie Curie served until Marie Curie's death. In 1931, Marie Curie was awarded the Cameron Prize for Therapeutics of the University of Edinburgh.

Death

1935 statue, facing the Radium Institute, Warsaw

Marie Curie visited Poland for the last time in early 1934. A few months later, on 4 July 1934, Marie Curie died aged 66 at the Sancellemoz sanatorium in Passy, Haute-Savoie, from aplastic anemia believed to have been contracted from Marie Curie's long-term exposure to radiation, causing damage to Marie Curie's bone marrow.

The damaging effects of ionising radiation were not known at the time of Marie Curie's work, which had been carried out without the safety measures later developed. Marie Curie had carried test tubes containing radioactive isotopes in Marie Curie's pocket, and Marie Curie stored them in Marie Curie's desk drawer, remarking on the faint light that the substances gave off in the dark. Marie Curie was also exposed to X-rays from unshielded equipment while serving as a radiologist in field hospitals during the First World War. When Marie Curie's body was exhumed in 1995, the French Office de Protection contre les Rayonnements Ionisants (OPRI) "concluded that Marie Curie could not have been exposed to lethal levels of radium while Marie Curie was alive". They pointed out that radium poses a risk only if it is ingested, and speculated that Marie Curie's illness was more likely to have been due to Marie Curie's use of radiography during the First World War.

Marie Curie was interred at the cemetery in Sceaux, alongside Marie Curie's husband Pierre. Sixty years later, in 1995, in honour of their achievements, the remains of both were transferred to the Paris Panthéon. Their remains were sealed in a lead lining because of the radioactivity. Marie Curie became the second woman to be interred at the Panthéon (after Sophie Berthelot) and the first woman to be honoured with interment in the Panthéon on Marie Curie's own merits.

Because of their levels of radioactive contamination, Marie Curie's papers from the 1890s are considered too dangerous to handle. Even Marie Curie's cookbooks are highly radioactive. Marie Curie's papers are kept in lead-lined boxes, and those who wish to consult them must wear protective clothing. In Marie Curie's last year, Marie Curie worked on a book, Radioactivity, which was published posthumously in 1935.

Legacy

Marie Curie Monument in Lublin

The physical and societal aspects of Marie Curie's work contributed to shaping the world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Cornell University professor L. Pearce Williams observes:

The result of Marie Curie's work was epoch-making. Radium's radioactivity was so great that it could not be ignored. It seemed to contradict the principle of the conservation of energy and therefore forced a reconsideration of the foundations of physics. On the experimental level the discovery of radium provided men like Ernest Rutherford with sources of radioactivity with which they could probe the structure of the atom. As a result of Rutherford's experiments with alpha radiation, the nuclear atom was first postulated. In medicine, the radioactivity of radium appeared to offer a means by which cancer could be successfully attacked.