



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN  
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



## January 2025 Her Story ENewsletter Frances Perkins Honored with a National Monument

On December 16, 2024, President Biden established a national monument in Newcastle, Maine honoring **Frances Perkins**. He said that Perkins was “one of America’s greatest labor leaders” who “cemented the idea” that “if you’re working a full-time job, you shouldn’t have to live in poverty.” The Perkins family had owned the “Brick House” and an associated 57 acres of land (The Perkins Homestead) for more than 250 years.

Perkins spent time at the Homestead in the summers as a child and returned during her adult life, to rest and recuperate. She is buried near the property. The Brick House Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009 and became a National Historic Landmark in 2014. The Frances Perkins Center purchased the property from the Perkins family in 2020 and it will now be part of the National Monument.



The first woman to serve in a Cabinet, Frances Perkins was Secretary of Labor for President Franklin D. Roosevelt. She is widely credited with creating the policies for the New Deal which helped the U.S. recover from the Great Depression. Perkins majored in physics and had minors in biology and chemistry at Mount Holyoke College. Her passion to help working people stemmed from a visit to textile factories while she was in college.

In 1902, the year she graduated, when a speaker from the National Consumers League came to campus, she found her vocation. “From the time I was in college I was horrified at the work that many women and children had to do in factories. There were absolutely no effective laws that regulated the number of hours they were permitted to work. There were no provisions which guarded their health nor adequately looked after their compensation in case of injury. Those things seemed very wrong.”

Although her family had other ideas as to a suitable life for her (marriage and children), Perkins resisted and found herself working in Chicago at Hull House, a well-known Settlement house. She pursued a master’s degree at the Wharton School in Philadelphia and by 1910 had a job in New York City where she worked for the woman who had inspired her eight years earlier when she spoke at Perkins’ college graduation.

Perkins was a witness to the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire; she then worked on the Committee on Safety to develop laws to ensure workplace health and safety. Her position in New York while FDR was governor of the state led to her appointment as Labor Secretary when he became President. Perkins was the longest serving Secretary of Labor in U.S. history (1933-1945). She is credited with helping establish many important pieces of legislation including the Society Security Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the National Labor Relations Act. The Department of Labor building is named for Frances Perkins, and she has been inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame.

Frances Perkins is among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women’s accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women’s stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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