



Story Ideas

Frances Perkins as an American Trailblazer

- The first woman to hold a Cabinet member position and the driving force behind the New Deal.
- A woman with Maine roots who ushered in Social Security/minimum wage/banned child labor.
- One of only four people who served at the top echelon of FDR's administrations from beginning to end.
- Worked with and provided counsel to Roosevelt, ultimately served in his cabinet as Secretary of Labor for all 12 years of presidency.
- Working solely in the company of the world's most powerful men, was depended upon by Roosevelt to both create legislation and push it through congress.
- The creator of the Fair Labor Standards Act, laws that govern our workplaces today (minimum wage, overtime pay and child labor protections).
- During World War II, Roosevelt relied upon her as an intelligence asset through her on-the-ground work in Europe (even warning Roosevelt about France's vulnerability despite State Department reports to the contrary).
- Advocated on behalf of German Jewish refugees who sought immigration to the U.S., despite facing intense opposition from the State Department and public sentiment.

Relevancy of Frances Perkins Today

- **Preserving our democracy and advocating for social justice:** Perkins recognized the interconnectedness of economic security, labor policy, social welfare, and democratic governance.
 - Real change requires policy change: Frances Perkins went from helping individuals to creating some of the most influential legislation in U.S. history.
 - The rising tide lifts all ships theory: Perkins saw that fighting poverty made the U.S. better for all.
- **Labor movement, locally and nationally:** Perkins was the driving force behind the New Deal, creating many of the benefits and safeguards we take for granted today, such as Social Security, a minimum wage, a 40-hour work week, and worker safety standards.
 - Minimum wage increase advocacy: Perkins fought for and achieved a minimum wage.
 - Child labor laws: Perkins' impact (banning child labor) and the "unfinished" work that remains.
 - Working conditions: As Executive Secretary of the New York City Consumers League, her work focused on the need for sanitary regulations for bakeries, fire protection for factories, and legislation to limit the working hours for women and children.
 - Social Security Act: In 1934, Roosevelt appointed Frances Perkins to head a Committee on Economic Security, where she forged the blueprint of legislation finally enacted as the Social Security Act. Signed into law by the President on August 14, 1935, the Act included a system of old age pensions, unemployment compensation, workers' compensation and aid to the needy and disabled.
- **Feminist:** Perkins was the first woman to be appointed to an administrative position in New York state government and, with an annual salary of \$8,000, the highest paid woman yet to



hold public office in the U.S., paving the way for other women to hold prestigious government positions.

- During her time as Secretary of Labor (the first woman to serve as a cabinet secretary), she was the only woman in the room.
- Perkins was relied upon by her husband and daughter as the primary breadwinner.
- She was engaged in social work prior to her cabinet position, including efforts to prevent exploitation of women and girls, particularly in factory work.
- **Healthcare:** Perkins had hoped for universal health insurance – the unfinished work that remains.
- **Immigration:** Perkins advocated for immigrants and refugees throughout her tenure.

A Place of Rejuvenation & Inspiration

- Located on 57 acres in Newcastle, Maine; Surrounded by natural beauty with scenic walking trails with views of the Damariscotta River.
- Allowed an American icon a place to come back to herself in between periods of intense work.
- Today, visitors can walk in Perkins' footsteps.
- A great stopping point for a MidCoast Maine road trip.
- For Mainers, a critical piece of history is right in their backyard.

The Frances Perkins Center

- The only historic property/center devoted to her very important contributions to our country.
- 2024 season opening: Opening as of June 2024, the Frances Perkins Homestead National Historic Landmark is offering a self-guided, sneak-peek exhibit in the property's 1837 barn, in addition to complete trail access. During this time of transition, the Frances Perkins Center will provide an enjoyable, educational experience for visitors and the motivation for them to return.
- Developments possible through the [Mellon Foundation Grant](#): the \$750,000 grant will enable FPC to advance their mission through historic preservation, enhanced educational programming, and the creation of a robust framework for financial sustainability.
- Staff feature: Executive Director [Giovanna Gray Lockhart](#) has over twenty years of experience achieving high-impact results at the intersection of nonprofits, business, politics, media, and gender equity.
- Preparations and future vision of the Center: the house and connected farm buildings have recently undergone award-winning preservation work and are being reshaped and interpreted for visitors.