

Frances Perkins Secretary of Labor

By

Mary Lipsey

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Frances Perkins born Fannie Coralie

April 10, 1880

May 14, 1965

Born in Boston

Grew up in Worcester, Massachusetts

Attended Classical High School in Worcester



Education

Mount Holyoke

“Out of the period when I was in school, a whole generation, particularly women emerge. . . who had a passion for social justice”

First assignment in American History Class

First hand research local factories

Investigated a paper mill

- Took notes about company's earnings
- Unsafe working conditions
- Worker's hours
- Worker's wages

Graduated in 1902 with a B.A. In Chemistry
and Physics

Encouraged to be independent thinker

“ I discovered for the first time that I had a
mind”

Friends called her “Perk”

Taught for two years at Ferry Hall School in Lake Forest Illinois

- Visited and volunteered at Jane Addams' Hull House
- Inspired by social reform of Florence Kelley and Theodore Roosevelt
- “I had to do something about unnecessary hazards in life, unnecessary poverty. It was sort of up to me.”

Worked at Philadelphia and Protective Association 1907

Worked to protect immigrants and African
Americans

Wanted to find the facts and uncover the
abuses

Studied at Columbia University

Surveyed conditions in New York's
Hell's Kitchen.

In her course work

Studied undernourished children

Graduated with M.A.

In political science and economics

1910

Suffragist

- Perkins became a skilled street corner speaker in favor of women suffrage
- Marched in suffrage parades

Elected as Secretary of

New York's Consumer League

Surveyed bakery businesses

Uncovered unhealthy conditions

Investigated safety and fire regulations for
factories

Lobbied for 54 hour week

Took commissioners on factory tours

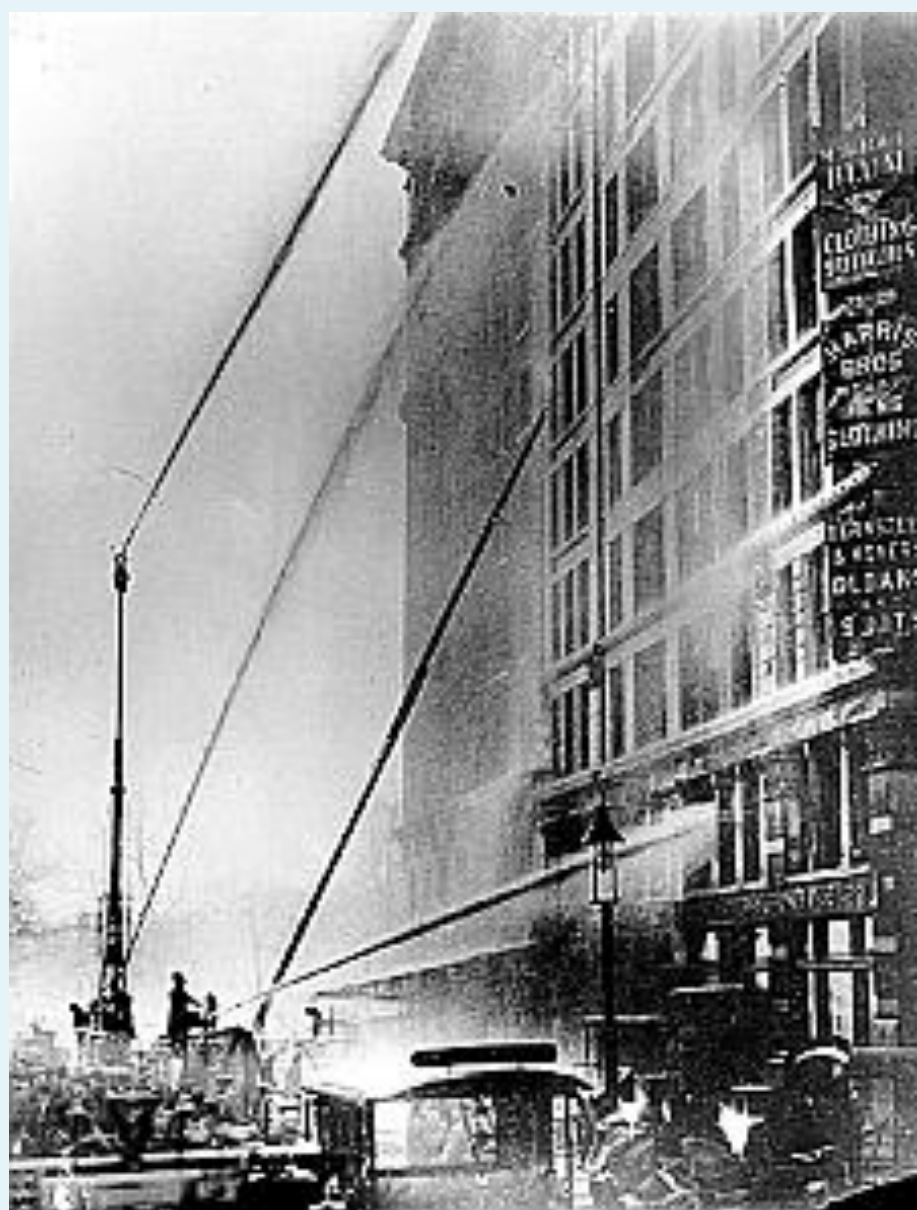
Witnessed Triangle Factory Fire

March 25, 1911

“Without saying much of anything, we all went down the steps and went toward the fire. It was the most horrible sight. People were hanging out of windows by their hands. One by one the people would fall off. People who had their clothes on fire would jump.”

“Some bodies cracked the sidewalk when they hit. Water[on the sidewalk] from the fire hoses were blood red. I felt I must sear it not only on my mind but on my heart as never to be a forgotten reminder of why I need to spend my life fighting conditions that could permit such a tragedy.”





Key positions

1910 Became Leader Of New York City office
of National Consumer League

1912 Committee of Safety

Personal Life

- Married Paul Wilson in 1913
- Paul was an economist who was interested in social reform
- Kept her maiden name, defending her right to do so in court
- Paul had “up and down” illness
- Confined to mental institutions
- Had one child, Susanna

Gov. Al Smith appointed 1919

Frances Perkins to New York State Industrial
Commission

Supervise factory inspectors

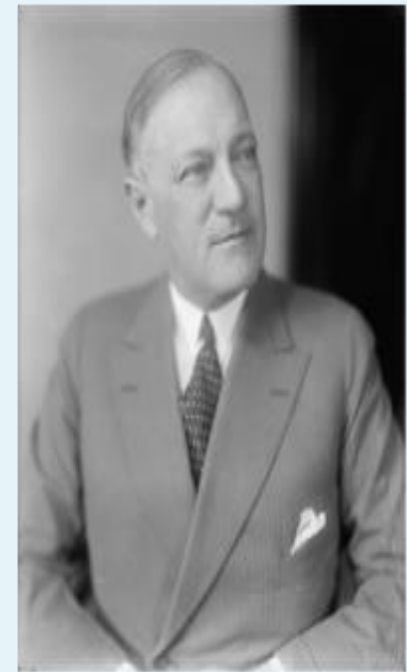
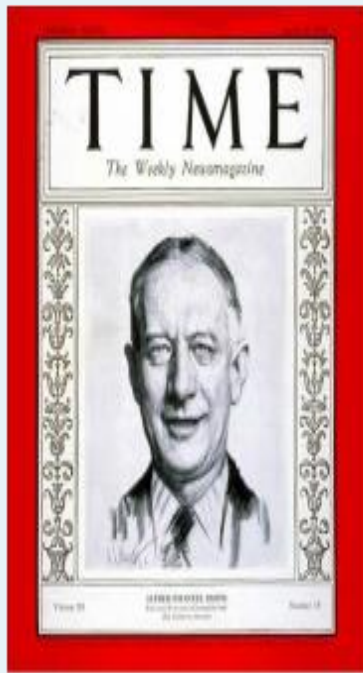
Set health and safety standards

Mediate labor disputes

Made decisions of workman's compensation

Chairman Sen. Robert Wagener

Triangle reformers Al Smith, France Perkins, Robert Wagner



Results from Commission

- Thirty-three laws passed to improve sanitation, safety and working conditions in factories
- New York State became a leader in improving conditions for workers

“We must realize that the girls who waste their lives and destroy their health under our present system of labor will be the mothers of our future, and the character of our citizenship is determined by the health and mental force of the mother.”

Frances Perkins

Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt

Appointed Perkins to Industrial Commissioner

Collected data on workers' pay

Found workers could not afford to buy products they made

Supported unemployment insurance, minimum wage and 48 hour work week for women

Contradicted in a press conference Hoover's claims about how conditions had improved

Appointed in 1933 by FDR

Secretary of Labor,
First woman cabinet member





Opposition to appointment

Received hate mail
Resolution to impeach her
Keeping her maiden name made her a radical

A reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* wrote,

” A woman smarter than a man is something to get on guard about.

But a woman smarter than a man and also not afraid of a man, well. Good night.”



Frances Perkins

- Visited steel mill workers and striking workers
 - Helped draft New Deal Legislation
 - Fair Labor Standards Act
 - Wagner Act
 - Social Security
 - Civilian Conservation Act





FRANCES PERKINS

U.S. Secretary of Labor,
1933-45. Visited Home-
stead July 1933 to
discuss New Deal policy.
Local authorities barred
her from meeting with
aggrieved steelworkers
in nearby Frick Park.
Undeterred, she moved
the assembly to federal
property, here, at the
former U.S. post office.

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION 2003



Signing of the Social Security Act 1935

US Senator Robert Wagner, supporter of the Wagner Act said of Frances Perkins

“ She uncovered the facts and told us what to do about them.”

Law that guarantees the right of private sector employees to organize into trade unions, engage in collective bargaining, and take collective action such as strikes.



After the death of FDR

Perkins resigned and led the US delegation to the International Labor Organization to Paris.



President Truman appointed her

To the Civil Service Commission
Where she served until 1952



Continued to teach

Taught at New York State School of Industrial and
Labor Relations at Cornell University
Until her death in 1965



Perkins described her life

“I came to Washington to work for God, FDR and the millions of forgotten plain common working men.”

Department of Labor building

Named in her honor 1980

Perkins is to date the longest serving
Secretary of Labor from 1933 -1945





Frances Perkins

USA 15c

Legacy

- *Eliminated segregated lunchrooms in the Department of Labor
- Reorganized Bureau of Labor Statistics to get more accurate data
- Started practice of hiring blacks for government jobs
- Encouraged President Roosevelt to support women serving during World War II

SUPPORTER OF JEWISH IMMIGRANTS

She was the only FDR cabinet member who worked to help refugees enter the US.

By 1937, her efforts “admitted 50,255 immigrants for permanent residency, two-thirds of whom were Jews.

Frances Perkins

She was instrumental in the development and implementation of the New Deal's fair labor laws, including the first minimum wage, the 40-hour work week, ending child labor under age 16, Social Security and more. Her life and many achievements affect and benefit all of us.

Mary Lipsey's Passion
Local History, Aviation, and Women's History

Braddock's True Gold

*A Christmas Flight: Aviation Pioneer Dr.
William Christmas*

Early Aviation: From Curiosity To Reality

***Almost Forgotten Women: Yesterday's
Headliners***

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