

FRANCES PERKINS CENTER



Frances Perkins Homestead Named National Historic Landmark

September 30, 2014

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell on September 30, 2014 announced that the Perkins Homestead in Newcastle, Maine is now a National Historic Landmark. Nominated by the Frances Perkins Center, the 57-acre farm was the ancestral home of Frances Perkins (1880-1965), U.S. Secretary of Labor from

1933-45, the first woman to serve in a presidential cabinet. Responsible for initiating groundbreaking New Deal programs that remain essential to all Americans today — Social Security, the 40-hour work week, unemployment insurance, worker's compensation, and the minimum wage — Perkins had deep roots in Maine. A trusted advisor to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, she served as Labor Secretary throughout all 12 years of his presidency.

Joining iconic places like Monticello, Mount Vernon, and the Empire State Building, the Perkins Homestead is now among those recognized as the most significant privately-owned historic places in the nation. Today some 2,500 historic places share this distinction, representing the most important 3% of properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., Director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, stated, "Occupied for over 260 years by members of the Perkins family, this saltwater farm is significant for its architecture, its archaeological sites, and its agricultural landscape. But more importantly, it was the property that Frances Perkins, first female member of a President's cabinet, considered her life-long home."

The site includes the well-preserved 1837 Brick House built of bricks manufactured on site in the family-owned brickyard. Perkins biographer Kirstin Downey noted, "The Brick House was not just a refuge. It played a key role in shaping Frances Perkins's substantive policies. Her undying belief in America's greatness and goodness were rooted in her concept of what makes America unique—and these views were formed at and by that home in Maine."

Sarah Peskin, a Frances Perkins Center board member, prepared the nomination. Executive Director Michael Chaney said "We are thrilled and honored to have received this designation which represents a major milestone in our efforts to preserve this treasured place so that it may inspire current and future generations to emulate Frances Perkins."

The Frances Perkins Center is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to fulfill the legacy of Frances Perkins by continuing her work for social justice and economic security and preserving for future generations her nationally significant family homestead.

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