

The Life and Legacy of Frances Perkins

Midcoast Senior College

April 1 – 29, 2015



SYLLABUS

April 1, 2015

Part I: Frances Perkins: Her Maine Roots and Early Career

Frances Perkins is the woman behind the New Deal, the driving force behind Social Security, the minimum wage, unemployment insurance, the 40-hour work week and the limits on child labor, all basic worker guarantees that helped to establish the modern middle class. Perkins was a self-made woman whose roots were thoroughly in Maine and whose Yankee heritage and deep religious faith permeated her personal and political values. Furthermore, she was a pioneering figure with major accomplishments in the areas of industrial safety and workers' rights well before her tenure as FDR's Secretary of Labor. This introductory session will explore Frances Perkins' early life and career and pose the question: Why was she lost to history?

April 1, 2015 Cont.

Part I: Frances Perkins: Her Maine Roots and Early Career

Presenter: Leah W. Sprague

A founding board member and immediate past chair of the Frances Perkins Center, Leah Sprague is an attorney and retired justice of the Massachusetts Trial Court. She resides in Newcastle, home of the Frances Perkins Center, and is writing a book on women and the judiciary. She is an honors graduate of Brown University and the Boston University School of Law. Her 40-year legal career has included service as a Massachusetts Assistant Attorney General and Assistant Commissioner and General Counsel to the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare.

Part II: The Frances Perkins Center

Incorporated in 2009, the Frances Perkins Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation whose mission is to fulfill the legacy of Frances Perkins, principal architect of the New Deal, by continuing her work for social justice and economic security and preserving for future generations her nationally significant family homestead. Michael Chaney will discuss the work of the Center and its major programs and initiatives in 2015.

Presenter: Michael Chaney

Michael Chaney is the Executive Director of the Frances Perkins Center. He holds degrees in history from the University of Maine and the University of Connecticut and has spent his career managing non-profit organizations with missions to preserve history and the political process.

April 8, 2015

Frances Perkins: The Woman Behind the New Deal

Before accepting FDR's invitation to become his Secretary of Labor in February of 1933, Frances Perkins outlined for the President-elect her New Deal vision. This session will cover Perkins' significant accomplishments as the first woman to serve as a cabinet secretary, emphasizing how her early work in New York laid the groundwork for the major policies of the New Deal. It will consider the nature of the relationship between Perkins and FDR and how that relationship was memorialized in The Roosevelt I Knew, Perkins' best selling "biography" of the President published a year after his death. Chris Breiseth will also discuss his personal reminiscences of his time with Frances Perkins at Cornell, where she served a visiting professor in its School of Industrial and Labor Relations until her death in 1965.

Presenter: Christopher N. Breiseth

Chair of the Frances Perkins Center, Chris Breiseth was the President and CEO of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute from 2001 to 2008. His thirty-year career in higher education included service as president of Wilkes University in Pennsylvania and Deep Spring College in California. He is a graduate of UCLA and holds a masters degree from Oxford University and a doctorate from Cornell University. As a graduate student at Cornell, he became a close personal friend of Frances Perkins and was one of a group of students who invited her to live with them at Telluride House, an academic residence for students and invited faculty guests, for the last five years of her life.

April 15, 2015

Social Security

Frances Perkins and FDR considered Social Security their greatest accomplishment and a promise to all generations of future Americans. Enacted into law in 1935, the program has undergone amendments through the years to meet the nation's changing demographics. This session will cover the history of Social Security and the growing call to expand the program, countering the arguments that Social Security is "growing broke" and explaining why it doesn't add a penny to the national debt. On the contrary, Nancy Altman contends that Social Security is critical in addressing the looming retirement crisis that will affect two-thirds of today's workers, enabling all Americans to have dignified retirement years, as well as an umbrella to protect them and their families in the event of disability or premature death.

Presenter: Nancy J. Altman

Nancy Altman has a thirty-five year background in the areas of Social Security and private pensions. Among her many accomplishments, she served as Alan Greenspan's assistant in his position as chairman of the bipartisan commission that developed the 1983 Social Security amendments. She has been a member of the faculty of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and taught courses on private pensions and Social Security at Harvard Law School. She is the co-director of Social Security Works and the co-chair of Strengthen Social Security, a coalition of over 320 leading national and state seniors', union, women's, disability, civil rights, and other organizations, including the Frances Perkins Center. She is the author of *The Battle for Social Security: From FDR's Vision to Bush's Gamble* and, with Eric Kingson, *Social Security Works! Why Social Security Isn't Going Broke and How Expanding It Will Help Us All*. Altman is a graduate of Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania School of Law. She was the first recipient of the Frances Perkins Center's Steadfast Award in 2009.

April 22, 2015

Part I: Jobs, Infrastructure and Art in the New Deal

When Frances Perkins said the New Deal was an attitude that "a government should aim to give all the people under its jurisdiction the best possible life," her vision did not stop at economic security. Her legacy includes the physical results -- highways, bridges, murals and landscapes -- created by the Civilian Conservation Corps, Public Works Administration, and Works Progress Administration. Illustrated with images and stories of Maine projects, this session will focus on jobs, infrastructure and art programs that changed the face of the nation and on Perkins' role in their establishment.

Presenter: Sarah M. Peskin

A member of the Frances Perkins Center's board of directors, Peskin is a former Chief of Planning and Legislation for the National Park Service's North Atlantic Region. In her thirty years of public service, she guided the preservation and interpretation of many nationally significant historic places. Peskin oversaw the successful nomination of the Frances Perkins Homestead as a National Historic Landmark. She is a graduate of Smith College and holds a master's degree in urban planning from New York University.

April 22, 2015 Cont.

Part II: Frances Perkins Through the Eyes of Her Solicitor to the Department of Labor and later
Federal Judge Charles E. Wyzanski, Jr.

Before Charles E. Wyzanski, Jr. was appointed to the federal bench by FDR, he served as Solicitor to the Labor Department during Frances Perkins' first three years as Secretary of Labor. Close examination of their relationship says much, not only about these two extraordinary individuals, but also about the history of the Wagner Labor Relations and the Social Security Acts, the constitutionality of which Wyzanski went on to successfully defend before the Supreme Court of the United States.

Presenter: Charles M. Wyzanski

Charles M. Wyzanski is the son of Charles E. Wyzanski, Jr. Recently retired as a Massachusetts Assistant Attorney General, he began his 45-year legal career in the Bangor office of Pine Tree Legal Assistance frequently representing clients in social security and unemployment compensation cases--programs that had their origins with Frances Perkins and his father. A graduate with honors of Harvard College and Columbia Law School, Wyzanski has served on the faculty of Harvard Law School, Boston University, Brandeis, and Tufts. Among his present activities is the researching and writing of a book about his father.

April 29, 2015

Tour of the Frances Perkins Homestead

Recently designated as a National Historic Landmark and the future home of the Frances Perkins Center, the Frances Perkins Homestead in Newcastle consists of 57 acres of fields and woodlands on the Damariscotta River and the Brick House, built in 1837 as a wedding gift to Frances Perkins' grandparents. Continuously occupied by the Perkins family since the 1750's, the site has included a working farm, an active brickyard at the river's edge and a colonial garrison during the Indian wars. It was at the Homestead that Frances Perkins spent every summer of her childhood, and it was her place of rest and retreat during her busy professional years in New York and Washington. This visit will include a personal tour of the Brick House by Tomlin Perkins Coggeshall, Frances Perkins' grandson, and an optional walk to the river's edge to view the other historical landmarks on the site. Participants will also have the opportunity to visit the gravesite of Frances Perkins and her husband in the nearby Glidden Cemetery.