

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

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1. Name of Property

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historic name: Perkins, Frances, House

other name/site number: 2326 California Street, NW

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2. Location

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street & number: 2326 California Street, NW

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Washington

vicinity: N/A

state: DC county: District of Columbia code: 001 zip code: 20008

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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4. State/Federal Agency Certification
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this _____ nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation _____ standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. _____ See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. _____ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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5. National Park Service Certification
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I, hereby certify that this property is:

_____ entered in the National Register _____
_____ See continuation sheet.

_____ determined eligible for the _____
_____ National Register

_____ See continuation sheet.
_____ determined not eligible for the _____
_____ National Register

_____ removed from the National Register _____

_____ other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date
of Action

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6. Function or Use
=====

Historic: domestic Sub: single dwelling

Current : domestic Sub: single dwelling

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7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification:

late 19th and 20th century revival
colonial revival

Other Description: Colonial Revival

Materials: foundation- brick roof- slate
walls- brick other

Describe present and historic physical appearance. _X_ See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: national

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, B

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : N/A

Areas of Significance: Politics/Government
Social History

Period(s) of Significance: 1937 - 1941

Significant Dates : 1937 - 1941

Significant Person(s): Perkins, Frances

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Sonneman, Alexander H.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

State historic preservation office

Other state agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other -- Specify Repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreeage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A 18 322100 4309170 B _____
C _____ D _____

____ See continuation sheet.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7

Perkins, Frances, House

Page # 1

DESCRIPTION OF SITE:

Located on a quiet residential street, this 1914 Colonial Revival townhouse is typical of the finely detailed urban residential building constructed in the Sheridan-Kalorama neighborhood of Washington, D.C. in the early twentieth century. The adjacent townhouse, 2324 California Street, NW, is a mirror image of the Perkins house and was designed and built at the same time. Each has blank end walls and narrow alleys on either side, conforming to the party wall requirements of urban building patterns. The three story, three bay, brick townhouse is a balanced, regular composition of architectural elements which suggests the large townhouses of the Federal period. It presents to the street an impressive public facade of highly articulated openings, symmetrically arranged on the flat plane of the wall. Rather than a strict re-creation of an historical prototype, the Perkins house uses detailing in a composition inspired by the Colonial Revival, and influenced by the Classical Revival, to achieve an ordered, restrained architecture which blended with the existing exclusive residential enclave. The character of the building and its setting have remained intact from its time of construction, to when Frances Perkins resided there, to today.

Fine craftsmanship characterizes all of the surfaces and trim of the building. The Flemish bond brick is finely pointed and has glazed headers. Brick headers flush with the wall outline each opening. The focal point of the front facade is the entrance. Elevated above the street, it is marked by a surround of engaged Ionic columns supporting an open-bed pediment. The gap in the entablature accommodated the segmental transom window over the door. A keystone tops the segmental arch over the transom. The French windows on the ground floor have flat arches, while those of the second floor have fanlights. This more elaborate window treatment on the second floor indicates that the main public room lies behind those windows, a use of the piano-nobile room arrangement that was common in the large townhouses of that area.¹ A wide entablature of architrave, frieze with rosettes and dentils, and cornice strongly crowns the second floor. Above that is a steeply pitched slate mansard roof with brick panels that reads almost as a continuation of the wall. It has three six-over-six sash dormer windows. The center dormer has a segmental arch; the two end dormers, pediments.

The house has a side hall plan, two rooms deep. The entrance is dominated by a segmental arch over the stairs, which lead up and around to the main public room. This reception room has the most elaborate

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7 Perkins, Frances, House Page # 2
=====

trim in the house. The mantel in this room, for the fireplace on the interior party wall, is particularly notable for its molding. All of the public rooms have wide molding along edges and around openings. The interior room arrangement remains the same as during Perkins' residence. A wooden sleeping porch on the rear elevation was replaced in 1984 by an enclosed stucco porch of approximately the same shape, size, and location. Behind the house lies a small yard.

The only significant alteration to the building is the excavation of the basement in 1963 to create a garage. Formerly a retaining wall stood at the property line and a small planted green space sloped up to the base of the first floor. Even with this change, the relationship of the entrance and the front elevation to the street retains its historic character.

¹Sheridan-Kalorama Historic District Application (draft), section 410.22, page 12.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 FRANCES PERKINS HOME Page 1
=====

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The house at 2326 California Street, N.W. in Washington, D.C. is historically significant as the residence where Frances Perkins lived the longest during her active years as the nation's first female cabinet member. She served as Secretary of Labor during the New Deal era. Within the context of the National Historic Landmark Program thematic framework the Frances Willard House has national significance under theme VII. Political and Military Affairs (H) The Great Depression and the New Deal.

Frances Perkins' long and distinguished career as a social worker and New York State Industrial Commissioner took an important turn for American women, and for the country as a whole, when in 1932 she was appointed U.S. Secretary of Labor, the first woman ever to be included in a president's cabinet. Perkins remained Secretary of Labor until 1945, one of only two original cabinet members to remain to the end of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency. During her long tenure, particularly in the pre-war New Deal years, she was the prime mover on several pieces of legislation that are among the Democratic Party's most lasting achievements: the Social Security Act, (Perkins chaired the committee which drafted the legislation), and the Fair Labor Standards Act, which after many decades of work created a minimum wage and restricted child labor nationwide. By virtue of her impact on U.S. social and labor policy, Perkins was by far one of the most important women of her generation, and, as her biographer notes, "even today, because of her work on minimum wage and on accident, unemployment and old age insurance, she has a hand in our daily lives. Of few cabinet members can so much be said after they have left office."¹

Frances Perkins did not set out to become a social worker. Her college career at Mount Holyoke from 1898 to 1902 was spent majoring in chemistry and physics; classes in economics, politics and history, however, fascinated her. It was a speech in 1902 by the nationally known social worker Frances Kelley, which, as she later explained, "first opened my mind to the necessity for and the possibility of work which became my vocation."² In her spare time from a position teaching physics and biology, she volunteered at the Chicago settlement houses, particularly

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 FRANCES PERKINS HOME Page 2
=====

Hull House. Eventually moving to New York, where she settled for many years, Perkins completed an A.B. in economics and sociology at Columbia University in 1910, the same year she became Secretary of the New York Consumers' League.³ Her career as an influential and activist leader in the social work community had begun.

At the New York Consumers' League, she collaborated with Florence Kelley on reform of labor conditions at sweatshops; personally witnessing the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in 1911.⁴ Her achievements included tireless work towards the passage of a New York state bill limiting work to fifty-four hours per week. Perkins gained the cooperation of state Senator Alfred E. Smith, and the bill passed.⁵

In 1912, Perkins was hired to lead the Committee on Safety of the City of New York, a citizens' group that emerged from the protest meetings following the Triangle fire. Traveling throughout the state on behalf of the Committee, Perkins spent many years identifying employers who were jeopardizing the health and safety of their workers, bringing these to the attention of the state's newly created Factory Investigating Commission.⁶ In 1918, Perkins was appointed by Alfred Smith, now newly elected as Governor of New York, to the state's Industrial Commission, her first position in the public sector. She was the first woman to occupy this post, beginning Perkins' long and distinguished line of "firsts." At Governor Smith's urging, she also joined the Democratic Party, where she would exert major influence regarding social legislation for the next twenty years.⁷ In her new position, Perkins ran the Bureau of Mediation and Arbitration for the state of New York, reorganized the Factory Inspection Division, and settled strikes. In 1926, Governor Smith named her chairman of the state's Industrial Board; and just two years later appointed her the state's Industrial Commissioner. When Franklin Roosevelt was elected Governor of New York in 1929, he continued Perkins' appointment. As New York's Industrial Commissioner, she helped give New York state a reputation as "a model of progressive approaches to employer-employee relations."⁸

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 FRANCES PERKINS HOME Page 3
=====

With the stock market crash of 1929, Perkins and Roosevelt turned their attention increasingly to legislation which could aid workers and spur industry. She sat on the New York Committee on the Stabilization of Industry, battled for state unemployment insurance, advocated regional solutions to unemployment, and worked with the state's relief system. In the early 1930's, she was sent by Roosevelt to Great Britain, where she studied the country's public employment and unemployment compensation systems.

With decades of experience with labor legislation, many years as a state Industrial Commissioner, and a fruitful working relationship with Franklin Roosevelt, it was logical that Frances Perkins be considered a potential appointee to the post of Secretary of Labor when Roosevelt was elected president in 1932. It was known that Roosevelt wanted to appoint a woman, and that he favored Perkins. She at first resisted such suggestions, writing Roosevelt specifically that he should nominate a person from the ranks of organized labor. Her resistance slowly faded as distinguished women from her field, such as Jane Addams, Grace Abbott and, most importantly, Mary Dewson from the Women's Division of the Democratic Party, called for her appointment, and urged her to accept it if offered.¹⁰ On February 28, 1932, Roosevelt announced the appointment of Frances Perkins as U.S. Secretary of Labor. American woman had broken a new barrier to participation in the public life of the country.

Perkins came to her job with a long list of programs which she believed should be enacted in order to help raise the country out of the Depression. She was not the only professional surrounding Roosevelt with these ideas; they were the cornerstone of New Deal social legislation: minimum wage legislation, unemployment compensation, child labor laws, and public works projects. As the New Deal took shape, Perkins helped draft key pieces of legislation, including: the Civilian Conservation Corps (Perkins reorganized the U.S Employment Service in order to enroll workers); the Federal Emergency Relief Bill, which channeled funds to the states for unemployment relief; the National Industrial Recovery Act, which created both the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the National Recovery Administration (NRA), and which temporarily established

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 FRANCES PERKINS HOME Page 4
=====

industrial regulation codes, shortened working hours, raised wages, and restricted child labor.¹¹ In 1935, Perkins chaired the President's Committee on Economic Security, which drafted the Social Security Act, legislating for the first time the concept of an old-age insurance fund.

By all accounts it was Perkins who provided the organizational push to get the bill through.¹² And in 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed; the act permanently abolished child labor, set statutory minimum wages (at \$.25 per hour) and a 40-hour maximum work week. This act was particularly dear to Perkins and her colleagues, who had worked for so many years to limit work weeks and to set the minimum wage.¹³

Although advised by Roosevelt to take criticism in stride, she was never as successful at this as he. During her tenure Perkins was not always popular and often controversial. Perhaps the road of the first woman to hold a cabinet position would have been difficult regardless, and Perkins was brought a tough strong-mindedness to her role. Labor leaders argued that one of their members should hold her post, and disagreed with many of her legislative stands, such as the minimum wage. However, by the end of her tenure most labor leaders "came to feel that the Department of Labor had developed into an effective instrument of government - one that promoted the welfare of wage earner."¹⁴ Her relations with the media were never cordial and at times dismal; it was not in her serious personality to woo the press with false intimacy, nor would she divulge any aspects of her personal life. They found her stiff and formal.¹⁵ And with her determined influence in creating and implementing New Deal legislation, the political right saw her as a threat and a target; she was caught in the heat of country's political split over New Deal legislation. Accusing her of radicalism, conservative members of the House in 1939 brought a resolution to the House Judiciary Committee to inquire into impeachment proceedings against her. A dramatic, heartfelt appearance by Perkins swayed the committee, and the impeachment inquiry fizzled.¹⁶ However, Perkins remained a controversial member of Roosevelt's cabinet to the end of her term.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 FRANCES PERKINS HOME Page 5
=====

An activist, producing new legislation, Secretary Perkins was a talented administrator as well. She worked tirelessly to implement the standards of the National Recovery Administration (NRA), visiting workers in the field, and giving speeches informing workers of their rights. She made some of her greatest contributions in a major re-organization of the Department of Labor. She expanded the Bureau of Labor Statistics, established the Division of Labor, and recruited highly competent professionals to run the Women's and Children's Bureaus.¹⁷

Historians of women in the 1930's place Frances Perkins at the center of women's emergence into public life during that period. One historian points out that Perkins gathered around her in the Department of Labor "a circle of talented women who actively promoted women's issues," and that Perkins devoted her career to "proving that women had important contributions to make in the fields of social welfare and public affairs."¹⁸ Of her groundbreaking position as a woman in high national position, Perkins wrote to feminist Carrie Chapman Catt: "The overwhelming argument and thought which made me do it in the end in spite of personal difficulties was the realization that the door might not be opened to a woman again for a long, long time, and that I had a kind of duty to other women to walk in and sit down on the chair that was offered, and so establish the right of others long hence and far-distant in geography to sit in the high seats."¹⁹

Perkins's former residence at 2326 California Street, N.W., in Washington, D.C., stands out for designation as a National Historic Landmark. Of all of the places that Perkins lived during the active years of her Cabinet appointment from 1932 to 1939, she lived on California Street the longest (for at least three years from 1937-40). Preserving this building and commemorating Frances Perkins' extraordinary life would be an important way to remember American public life in the 1930's, a period of remarkable change when women held many high-level government positions and when Frances Perkins made groundbreaking contributions to the country and to the history of women.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 FRANCES PERKINS HOME Page 6
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NOTES

1. George W. Martin, Madam Secretary: Frances Perkins (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), pp. viii-ix.
2. Charles H. Trout, "Frances Perkins," in Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green, Notable American Women (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 536.
3. Ibid.
4. Martin, pp. 84-87.
5. Ibid., pp. 91-98.
6. Ibid., pp. 103-113.
7. Trout, p. 537.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Martin, pp. 249-51, 257, and 263.
12. Ibid., p. 342.
13. Ibid., p. 390.
14. Trout, p. 538.
15. Martin, pp. 286-291.
16. Trout, p. 538.
17. Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 FRANCES PERKINS HOME Page 7
=====

18. Susan Ware, Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s
(Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p. 91.
19. Ibid., p. 92.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 9 FRANCES PERKINS HOUSE Page 1
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- Martin, George Whitney. Madame Secretary: Frances Perkins. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976.
- Mohr, Lillian H. Frances Perkins, That Woman in FDR's Cabinet New York: N. River Press, 1979.
- Myers, Elizabeth P. Madam Secretary: Frances Perkins. New York: J. Messner, 1972.
- Perkins, Frances. People at Work. New York: John Day Co., 1934.
- Perkins, Frances. The Roosevelt I Knew. New York: Viking, 1946.
- Severn, Bill. Frances Perkins. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976.
- Trout, Charles H. "Frances Perkins." Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green, eds., Notable American Women. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980.
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