



## September 2017 Her Story ENewsletter Labor Advocates

The recent book, *The Radium Girls*, tells the story of illnesses suffered by the women who painted radium on dials in the early part of the twentieth century. It speaks of a time when few workplace regulations were in place to protect employees. Dr. Alice Hamilton is featured in the book and Frances Perkins is mentioned. Let's learn more about the roles these women played as advocates for safe labor conditions.

Dr. Alice Hamilton is credited with creating the field of occupational medicine. After graduating from medical school, and completing internships and study both domestically and abroad, she settled in Chicago where she taught as a professor of pathology. Hamilton lived at Hull House, the settlement house established by Jane Addams and others as a community center for immigrants. Hamilton was able to treat many of the illnesses and injuries that the workers suffered as a result of their unsafe/unclean workplaces. This was the beginning of her interest in what is today termed the field of occupational medicine.



**Dr. Alice Hamilton**

Hamilton visited factories and went into mines on her quest to make the workplace safer for Americans. As part of a Commission appointed by the Governor of Illinois, she studied industrial sickness and mortality among workers in lead and enamelware industries, rubber, painting, munitions, and explosives. Her work led to important legislative changes to protect workers, both at the state level and nationally. In 1919, she became the first female faculty member at Harvard Medical School with a focus on industrial medicine. Among her many awards, Dr. Hamilton was featured on a U.S. postage stamp and inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



### **Frances Perkins**

The first woman to serve in a Cabinet, Frances Perkins was Secretary of Labor for President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Credited with creating the policies for the New Deal, Perkins helped the U.S. recover from the depths of the Great Depression. Her passion to help working people stemmed from a visit to textile factories while she was a student at Mount Holyoke College. In 1902, when a speaker from the National Consumers League came to campus, she found her vocation.

Although her family had other ideas as to a suitable calling for her (marriage and children), Perkins resisted and found herself in Chicago, at Hull House like Hamilton. She pursued a masters degree at the Wharton School in Philadelphia and by 1910 had a job in New York City. A witness to the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, Perkins then worked on the Committee on Safety to develop laws to ensure workplace health and safety. Her position in New York while FDR was governor led to her appointment as Labor Secretary when he became President. Perkins has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Alice Hamilton and Frances Perkins are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Help us to tell women's stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen  
*Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*  
[www.hersstoryatimeline.com](http://www.hersstoryatimeline.com)  
8547 E. Arapahoe Road, PMB J189  
Greenwood Village, CO 80112-1430

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