

1. How did you choose your topic and how does it relate to the annual theme?

I chose the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire because it highlights the consequences of neglecting workers' rights and the responsibilities of employers and governments. I was interested in researching women's workplace rights, and this fire was mentioned in class. After further research, I realized it was a perfect fit for NHD. The fire aligns with this year's theme by showcasing government and factory owners' lack of responsibility, as well as the public's fight for rights—especially women's—leading to crucial labor reforms.

2. How did you conduct your research?

I began with secondary sources to understand the broader context, which helped shape my focus. I then turned to primary sources, using materials from Harvard's library, the Library of Congress, and the Frances Perkins Center. These included newspapers (The Day Book, Evening Star, Railway Review), books, and a Women's Trade Union League log. These sources provided firsthand perspectives on the fire and its impact. The Frances Perkins Center was especially useful in connecting her later achievements to the reforms sparked by the fire.

3. How did you create your project?

I created a website using Google Docs to plan and the NHD website builder to build it. I first outlined how I wanted the site to look, experimenting with colors, spacing, and fonts. Then, I structured sections and filled in the content. Finally, I formatted everything to be visually appealing and added media as needed to keep the site engaging.

4. What is your historical argument?

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire revealed the government's failure to address unsafe working conditions and workers' rights. Laws like the Sullivan-Hoey Act was passed before the tragedy, but poorly enforced, showing a lack of real accountability. The fire also exposed negligence among factory owners and government agencies meant to prevent such disasters. However, the public outcry following the tragedy forced policymakers to take responsibility, leading to major reforms such as the creation of the Factory Investigation Commission which created many laws and a state agency to enforce labor laws. Additionally, the fire highlighted gender inequality, as most victims were women, reinforcing the need for stronger protections in the workplace.

5. In what ways is your topic significant in history?

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire was a turning point in the labor movement, leading to critical workplace safety reforms in the U.S. It prompted the passage of fire safety laws, stricter building codes, and regulations on working hours, particularly for women and children. Labor unions, such as the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and the Women's Trade Union League, gained momentum in their advocacy for workers' rights before the Wagner Act, which formally recognized Unions. Influential figures like Frances Perkins were inspired by the fire to push for labor protections, shaping future policies. This tragedy remains a reminder of the ongoing need to ensure safe working conditions.