



Associated Press Photo.

NOMINATED FOR MAYOR.

Mrs. Alice D. Burke.

**MRS. A. D. BURKE PLANS
AGGRESSIVE CAMPAIGN**

**First Woman Ever Nominated
for Mayor at Westfield,**

This *New York Times* article from Nov. 14, 1935 (p. 15) was published before Alice Burke was disqualified from running due to her tenure on the School Committee. “Aggressive campaigning” would become the defining hallmark of Burke’s political style.

Westfield's "Grande Dame":

Alice Burke, New England's
First Female Mayor (1939)

PHIL SLATER



Editor's Introduction: *In 1939 Alice Driscoll Burke (1892-1974) became the first female mayor elected in all of New England. She served four mayoral terms between 1940 and 1963, but lost nine other elections. This article explores Burke's policies in office and analyzes the reasons for her checkered political career and frequent defeats. Although she is often honored as a "female first," she was a dedicated yet decidedly flawed public servant who left a mixed legacy. Her pugnacious and confrontational style, along with her inability to change with the city over the many decades of her career, alienated her from voters and contributed to her many defeats. Over time, her mayoral campaigns came to be characterized by increasingly sharp attacks on her opponents. Voters may have found such stridency less than acceptable in a female candidate.*

Although sexism may have played a role in public attitudes, Burke did not consider herself a feminist icon and never claimed to bring a "woman's perspective" to her role. One of her most well-known quotes was repeated in her obituary: "I will serve as a citizen and not as a woman." She added, "An intelligent woman is equal to an intelligent man, and I will make my city appointments according to the ability of candidates."¹ She appointed almost no women to major city positions, however, and her closest ally and political advisor was a controversial male, James L. Bresnahan.

Phil Slater, a Westfield State University graduate student, spent a full year poring over Alice Burke's thick scrapbooks bulging with news clippings, now housed at the Westfield Athenaeum, along with microfilm reels and online databases of

newspapers from both Westfield and Springfield. These sources allowed him to reconstruct Burke's thirty-five-year career in Westfield politics.

Alice D. Burke won mayoral elections in 1939, 1941, 1953 and 1957. However, she was defeated more than twice as often—losing nine campaigns—in 1937, 1943, 1949, 1951, 1955, 1959, 1961, 1963 (when she lost in the primary), and 1965. She also ran unsuccessfully for the Massachusetts Senate in 1944 and for the House of Representatives in 1946. In addition to recounting these events in Burke's life story, this article explores her opponents' personalities and campaigns and thus offers revealing insights into Westfield's overall political culture, character, and history over many decades. Readers may be surprised by the degree of acrimony that characterized many of Westfield's mid-twentieth-century mayoral campaigns.²

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1955: EYE OF THE HURRICANE

It was the summer of 1955, and election season once again approached the city of Westfield, Massachusetts. Under normal circumstances this would call for the incumbent mayor to start organizing a reelection campaign. Instead the exhausted chief executive was busy making emergency calls for aid from the National Guard and the federal government. This intense stress came from an unprecedented disaster for her city and its residents—a flood the likes of which the people of Western Massachusetts had never seen. The combined forces of Hurricanes Connie and Diane descended upon southern New England and led to over two feet of rainfall. Rivers overflowed, causing local dams and levees to break and submerging Westfield in water and mud. Thankfully casualties within the city were minimal, but the damage was extensive—many homes were destroyed, roads washed out, and businesses paralyzed.³

The flood not only devastated the mayor's people, but her chances at reelection as well. This disaster could not have come at a worse time for Mayor Burke. Just three weeks earlier, a city councilman had issued a statement condemning her financial policies as draining the city's savings. He asserted that the money should be saved for things such as disasters, and that "at this rate we will have little or no reserve."⁴ As if taunted by fate, the city was struck by the devastation of the twin hurricanes at a time when the councilman's words were still fresh in the minds of the public. Although her recent days had been spent running between inspections, clean-ups, and aid requests, the mayor did manage to take a break from

the emergency to sit down for an in-depth interview with the *Westfield News Advertiser* about her arrival in the city and her career as mayor.⁵ Perhaps she felt this interview would remind the public of her contributions to the city and her continued dedication to serve it and remind people why they had chosen Mayor Alice D. Burke.

Burke's response to what became known as "The Flood of '55" and the city's lack of preparation for it provides an illuminating glimpse into her life as a local politician. Initially elected in 1939, Alice Burke was the first female mayor in all of New England. She served as Westfield's chief executive for a total of four terms over the course of twenty years but was defeated in another nine mayoral elections. Despite her status as a local milestone in female representation, no in-depth studies or assessments have been written about her life or career. The goal of this chapter is to offer a clear, compact narrative of her life, examining her political impact and accomplishments, as well as the challenges she faced and mistakes that hindered her efforts.

In the end, Burke left a mixed legacy in the city of Westfield; she was a dedicated yet flawed public servant. While she undoubtedly loved Westfield and genuinely believed she had its best interests at heart, that sense of righteousness led her to be stubborn, sharp, and confrontational towards opponents and unwilling to change with the city over the many decades of her career. Early newspaper accounts characterized her positively as "intelligent and capable," as well as a "determined fighter" and a "square shooter." On the other hand, one of her life philosophies, boldly stated in 1953, as "he who is not with me is against me," reflected her forceful and, at times, abrasive and unforgiving personality.⁶ Her prominent place in Westfield politics from the 1930s through the '60s in both her four successful campaigns for mayor and eight years in office, along with her nine defeats, also provides a revealing window into the politics and history of the city she called home.

EARLY LIFE (1892-1932)

Alice Burke was born Alice Margaret Driscoll in Whitinsville, Massachusetts, to Dennis and Bridget Driscoll on June 19, 1892. Orphaned at only four years old, she was raised by her paternal grandparents.⁷ Little is known of her childhood, other than that she attended Northbridge High School, where she enjoyed learning about civil government and frequently went to town meetings. After graduating with honors, she obtained her teaching degree in 1911 from Fitchburg Normal School (now Fitchburg State University).⁸ She then began her twenty-year-long career as an elementary

school teacher, briefly working in Kingston, Rhode Island, but establishing herself in Westfield in 1913, teaching at several local schools over the years.

During this time, she met William “Bill” Burke, a local postal worker. They married in 1922 and she adopted his last name. In their time together, she bonded with him over outdoor activities such as hiking, swimming, and bicycle riding—which became Burke’s favorite hobby. The couple frequently took twenty-five to thirty mile rides through the countryside. She was especially proud of the fact that she only bought bikes made in Westfield from the local Columbia Manufacturing Company, believing them to be the best in the world.⁹

Her final job in education moved her to middle school, teaching sixth-graders at the Abner Gibbs School. However, she did not just teach schoolchildren. In the mid-to-late 1910s, Burke was also the first teacher in Westfield’s Americanization program (prior to the creation of a director for that task), teaching immigrants about U.S. history, government, and values to prepare for their citizenship tests. Everyone in her first class passed their exams to become U.S. citizens, another source of pride for Burke.¹⁰ It was this experience that brought her attention to the disparity between men and women in society. She later recalled what went through her head as she pondered the situation, “The thought then uppermost in my mind was—if I were capable of teaching men in preparation for the privilege of voting ‘why couldn’t I vote?’”¹¹ Burke witnessed the change in U.S. politics that paved the way for her future accomplishments. In 1920 the nineteenth amendment granting women the right to vote was ratified by the required three-quarters majority of states. Burke recalled that she was “really thrilled; we were no longer second class citizens.” In her excitement to exercise her new right, she was the first person to arrive at the polls in Westfield at 6:15 in the morning for the November 1920 presidential elections.¹² Although she showed great enthusiasm to participate in the democratic process as a private citizen, Burke did not show an interest in running for public office for quite some time after casting her first vote.

ENTRANCE INTO POLITICS, 1933-37

Burke’s political career began with the abrupt end of her teaching tenure. In 1933 the Westfield School Committee fired Burke and all married women teachers who had working husbands in an attempt to open more opportunities for men struggling to find work during the Great Depression.¹³ That year she ran for a seat on the very committee that had removed her. She

won by four votes, becoming the only woman in that position, yet this was not the height of her ambition.¹⁴

Halfway through her School Committee term in 1935, she made her first attempt to run for mayor of Westfield against incumbent Raymond Cowing (1892-1952). Cowing had first been elected in 1931 after the Depression had already begun ravaging the nation and the city. He entered office at a time when Westfield was nearly broke and had pledged to reduce the local tax rate to alleviate the hardships residents faced. Although such promises ultimately failed, he remained a well-liked mayor with heavy support throughout most of the 1930s.¹⁵ His popularity proved to be a challenge to Burke's rise to power. Although Burke had registered as a Democrat and Cowing as a Republican, Westfield's elections were non-partisan, and candidates did not run their campaigns based on party affiliation. Both local and national papers heralded her debut as the first female mayoral candidate in the city's history.¹⁶

"Honesty and efficiency" were her major campaign themes. Just as she did on the School Committee, she spoke in favor of transparency and against proposals to bar citizens from official meetings. Assuming her opposition would attempt to discredit her campaign based on her sex, she challenged them to point to any benefits the city currently enjoyed that could not be acquired under her watch. This was her assertion of how a female mayor could just as capably administer a city as any man.¹⁷

Her run for mayor was not well received by her peers on the School Committee. In fact, they called on her to resign her position, as committee members were not allowed to run for another office. Regardless, she announced that she had every intention of finishing her term victory or not, continuing on the board as chairman in the event of her election as mayor.¹⁸ Although she claimed to hold no personal ill will towards Mayor Cowing, she targeted and included him in her criticisms of some of her fellow school board members whom she depicted as biased, cowardly, and secretive with the public.

I am a woman and there are those who possess abundance of courage when a woman is the opponent. . . . I have never voted, as did members of the committee, to have citizens barred from a committee meeting. I will not tolerate, as did the present mayor, a city solicitor who requests citizens to leave the meeting. Are not these incidents of invisible government?¹⁹

This was the first of many instances of Burke going on the offensive in her career. She continued her attacks by accusing fellow mayoral candidate George Brady, a city councilman, of being bought and paid for with “a fleet of automobiles and money” by a vague group of “special and monied interests” who convinced him to run for office.²⁰ This was the opening volley in a pattern that emerged throughout her career. Burke never shied away from direct, frontal attacks on her opponents.

Burke’s ambition and aggression won her a distant second place in the November 1935 primaries, obtaining roughly 21% of the vote compared to Cowing’s 62% and Brady’s 17%.²¹ However, she would have faced off against Cowing in a two-person match in the general election in December, but her campaign was quickly cut short. Brady charged that she should not have been eligible to run in the first place because the city charter forbade anyone on the committee from holding another publicly paid position. Although this would have been permitted if she had run for office as her term was ending, she still had another two years on the School Committee.²²

Ever determined, Burke attempted to stay in the race by pledging that she would forfeit the mayoral salary to avoid such disqualification, but to no avail. City Solicitor Harry B. Putnam (the very man she had criticized for barring citizens from public meetings weeks earlier) decided that it was not legal for her to run that year, and Brady took her place as nominee.²³ After this controversy cost her the opportunity to run, she refused to endorse Brady in the final election. Burke claimed that it “would have been much nicer of him” to have brought the issue to her attention privately, so that she could “withdraw my name gracefully” instead of publicly “stirring up the trouble that he did.” Although she had been barred from the 1935 election, she had every intention of trying again.²⁴

As her term on the School Committee neared its end in 1937, she was eligible to run unhindered. She promised to provide “the same independence of thought and action” she had demonstrated in her previous position. Burke appealed to the public by comparing the city to a corporation, with the citizens as its stockholders choosing their board of directors.²⁵ She qualified once again for the final elections, earning a distant second place in the primary (Cowing 51.5%, Burke 24.8%, and Clark 23.7%).²⁶ She made a statement after the primaries proclaiming how she had run a campaign free of mudslinging and derogatory statements, a claim that contrasts greatly with her prior (and future) actions.²⁷

In the same statement, Burke also defended her candidacy as a woman running for mayor by referring to other women already in positions of government, such as Nellie Tayloe Ross, Wyoming’s first female governor

(and the director of the U.S. Mint at the time), as well as Edith Nourse Rogers, congresswoman from Massachusetts who served from 1925-60.

There are legions of women holding highly important political offices . . . There is not any just ground for opposition to my aspirations simply because I am a woman . . . Having in the city of Westfield a woman mayor would be quite an innovation. It is my humble opinion an innovation of this nature will stimulate rather than retard the progress of the city.²⁸

The appeals to overcome sexism did not succeed in carrying Burke to victory that year, and she lost to Cowing by 561 votes (receiving 46% support). However, this election was notable as the smallest

One of These Three Will Lose



RAYMOND H. COWING



ALICE D. BURKE

Three candidates competed in the 1937 primary; Cowing & Burke won and ran in the general election where Burke lost. Cowing served four terms 1932-39. In 1939 Burke defeated him by 127 votes in a close election. A decade later in 1949, Cowing again defeated Burke. *Westfield Valley Herald*, Oct. 7, 1937.

victory margin Mayor Cowing had in all of his election campaigns, showing both his declining support and Burke's growing popularity.²⁹

1ST SUCCESSFUL MAYORAL RUN, 1939

Burke's next run in 1939 was more successful. Her level of appeal increased enough that she finally won against Mayor Cowing with 51% of the electorate supporting her by a narrow margin of 127 votes. Cowing demanded a recount but the results remained unchanged.³⁰ The reasons for her narrow victory range from policy proposals to lucky circumstances. Burke's campaign emphasized a return to Westfield's former "Pay-as-You-Go" policy introduced under Mayor Louis Keefe in the 1920s which had been abandoned during the Great Depression. This meant she supported making sure the city lived within its means and did not borrow or spend any more than it had budgeted for city services.³¹ She also spoke of lowering the city's property tax rate, which at that time was the second highest of all the nearby towns. After nearly a decade of economic hard times, Burke's fiscal conservatism resonated with struggling citizens. It was perhaps due to these policies that the voters supported her candidacy, but only by a narrow margin.

Politicians championing frugality were especially popular in the northern sections of the city—specifically Wards 1 and 2, mainly populated with recent Southern and Eastern European immigrants and their descendants. Described as "industrious and frugal" by the city's first mayor George Searle in 1920, these immigrants came from predominately Catholic nationalities and had been primarily voting Democratic in elections ever since they were inspired by the presidential candidacy of Al Smith, a Catholic, in 1928.

Wards 1 and 2 also had a fraught relationship with the local government. As early as the 1920s, the immigrant populations in these wards had voiced disapproval and complaints that their taxes were not being used for services that benefited their neighborhoods. As a result, they were distrustful of the city government. These were demographics with whom Burke gained large appeal, most likely due to her own Catholic background, Democratic party affiliation, and frugal personality and policy objectives. Their consistent support led to Wards 1 and 2 being dubbed Burke's "strongholds" in local elections throughout her career.³² That reputation began in the 1939 election after those voters propelled her to victory.

The local newspaper, however, offered a different theory as to why she had won. It claimed that Cowing's campaign had been discredited due to a stunt that backfired. The night before the election, a professional actor had

allegedly proclaimed in Westfield's Park Theater that Cowing had already won, a false statement presumably made in an attempt to discourage Burke's supporters from voting. According to the *Westfield Valley Herald*, this angered the public enough to tip the scales in Burke's favor. Cowing denied any involvement or knowledge of such antics.³³

This explanation, however, strains credibility: how could a victor be announced the night before the election had even taken place? The *Springfield Republican* offered a much more persuasive account of her victory that addressed Burke's personal strengths. One article began, "Businesslike of manner, crisp of speech, forceful of personality, Alice D. Burke knows what she wants and there's usually a good reason why, if she doesn't, get it." The reporter went on to describe Burke as "forthright, a straight-from-the-shoulder talker, and a determined fighter" with a "forceful personality" and provided readers with telling insights into her character:

Her chief interest is government and her particular indoor diversion is reading. Books on economics, municipal administration and political science furnish a major part of her literary diet. It is not books, however, one guesses, but her own character and philosophy that is responsible for her ambition to give Westfield an "honest and efficient government." She goes to City Hall free of any other promise and with a record of "square shooting" behind her.³⁴

The article concluded with accolades that mirrored Burke's own philosophy:

Mrs. Burke becomes mayor as an intelligent, capable, upright citizen, not as a woman, and feels that public curiosity regarding her culinary and housewifely accomplishments and her rise as a woman in politics is definitely misplaced. Sex, she believes, should not be considered the appraisal of the qualifications of a mayor. "It is entirely a question of individual capability," she states rigorously. "That person should hold office who is best fitted, whether man or woman."³⁵

The campaign generated a high level of interest. The 1939 election saw the highest voter turnout of almost any between 1935 and 1965, with 65% voting in the primary and 81% in the general election.³⁶ At the same time, three "younger and more aggressive candidates" came very close to unseating

three veteran city councilors, suggesting that there was general dissatisfaction with city government that year, which may have aided Burke's election.³⁷ Republican Mayor Raymond Cowing had served for eight years, from 1932-39, and voters may have been ready for a change. They may have also unfairly blamed him for his inability to solve the city's problems during the depths of the Great Depression. Although the city had seen recovery in previous years of Cowing's leadership as the federal New Deal benefited Westfield, the national recession in late 1937-38 affected it just as much. Jobs that had been gained over the buildup from the devastation of 1929 were again lost, and



Woman Mayor's First Week in Office

"No Petticoat Government in Westfield, Says Her Honor, Alice D. Burke—"I Am Not Domestic"—but She Passes Over to Chief of Police the Job of Issuing Pistol Permits

Newspapers around New England heralded her election. Throughout her career, however, Burke appeared to carefully distance herself from any accusations that she was championing women's issues or female candidates. Her purported quote, "No petticoat government in Westfield" and her self-description as a "business woman" were designed to downplay her gender. *Boston Globe*, Jan. 7, 1940.

welfare and unemployment levels were at their highest since the Depression began.³⁸ With the perception of the current administration failing them, the public may have felt ready take a chance on a new one advocating a different approach. We will never know how much Burke's gender played a role, if any, in her election success. Regardless of the reasons for her victory, the City of Westfield, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and New England now had its first female mayor.

MAYOR BURKE: FIRST TWO TERMS (1940-43)

Burke became mayor at the end of the Great Depression and served during World War II. At the national level, Westfield voters had embraced Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal and voted staunchly Democratic in presidential elections from 1932 through 1948, endorsing Truman's "Fair Deal" promises in his 1948 campaign. Indeed Westfield residents voted for Roosevelt and Truman in slightly higher numbers than both the Massachusetts and national averages.³⁹ In Westfield New Deal programs were both highly popular and highly visible. The Western Massachusetts Hospital was constructed in 1936-37 as a New Deal project. The Public Works Administration (PWA) funded over a third of its one-million-dollar cost. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided the labor to build the original Westfield Air Base and built the Bullens recreational complex, which consisted of ball fields, grandstands, a playground, and tennis courts in 1937. These projects provided sorely needed jobs during the depths of the Depression.⁴⁰

Despite her Democratic Party affiliation, however, throughout her life Burke remained a staunch fiscal conservative, if not a fiscal "hawk." In her first term as mayor (1940-41), Burke focused on lowering property taxes and reducing the city's debt. Westfield's tax rate was \$42 per \$1000 of property value when she was elected, in a time when the state average was \$34.10.⁴¹ Property taxes were a hot-button issue during the Great Depression; many Westfield homeowners had fallen behind on their payments due to unemployment and economic hard times, so resentment grew towards the tax. Much to the public's satisfaction, by the end of Burke's first year in office, Westfield's rates had been reduced to \$38.50.⁴² This accomplishment carried her to a second term in 1941, but not without a challenge to her credibility.

In a series of vicious attacks, Archie Agan (1886-1966), a local insurance agent and her opponent in the 1941 election, claimed that the tax reductions were not her own doing, but rather the result of an automatic correction by the city and state governments for surplus money taken from citizens in the



WOMAN MAYOR WINS AGAIN

In her 2nd election in 1941 Burke was still heralded as “Woman Mayor.” The large headline (not shown) declared “Woman Mayor to Keep Economy Program.” Thrift and economy would be the hallmarks of her political career. Bill Burke appears to her left (*Westfield Valley Herald*, Nov. 6, 1941). In 1939 the *Boston Globe* had run a full-page feature article that focused primarily on the genial and supportive Bill Burke and their marriage. Bill took credit for giving Alice the suggestion that she go into politics as a “hobby.” The reporter seemed pleasantly surprised to discover that “there is no boss – no domination in the Burke household, either on his part or on the part of the Mayor-elect.” The reporter noted that “at home he does things that Mr. Average Man would do,” except for the fact that Bill was “chef” and they occasionally hired a maid when the housework “piled up.” Another headline proclaimed, “Woman Mayor Doesn’t Like Housework.” *Boston Globe*, Nov. 12, 1939.

previous two years.⁴³ Agan averred that not only was Burke not responsible for the tax reduction, she was not responsible for anything in her administration. He accused Burke of being a powerless figurehead who had lied about her facts and figures; that contrary to her calls for transparency on the school committee, she herself now presided over an “invisible government” with a closed-door policy in City Hall complete with “implied threats” to any visitors to her office. Burke replied to these accusations during a heated debate against him with copies of her official figures from City Hall verified by state auditors, distributed at the event by her secretary, James Bresnahan. However, she walked out of the debate once Agan accused her of secrecy and veiled threats towards the public.⁴⁴

As serious as these allegations were, the public as a whole did not believe them, and Burke won the election by the largest margin any candidate had in Westfield’s history at the time with 1,041 votes (56% support). The *Springfield Republican* reported that “party lines were cut and Republicans, Democrats and Independents voted her back into office.”⁴⁵ Local papers also marked this as the first time in U.S. history that a female mayor had been reelected.⁴⁶ During her second term, she continued Westfield’s tax reductions, and they dropped as low as \$32.80 by 1943. Her administration also tackled the city’s debt and cut it down by more than half, bringing it from \$820,000 to \$400,000.⁴⁷

The *Boston Herald* published an article congratulating Burke and her administrative success, yet even as it praised her it drew upon condescending gender stereotypes. Her budget adjustments were compared to “the red-to-black change which often takes place in households when the little woman becomes chancellor of the checkbook,” and spoke of the city’s savings as “made up principally of woman-like pairings all along the line.”⁴⁸ Even praise for accomplishments reinforced the idea that they were rooted in supposedly innate gender traits.

Another major feature of Burke’s first two terms as mayor was the militarization and increased investment into Westfield’s Barnes Airport. It was during her first administration that the airport’s first three runways were developed, an addition that proved necessary due to outside events.⁴⁹ As World War II erupted and threatened to drag the U.S. into the conflict overseas, the airport shifted from civilian to military use to train new pilots for the Army Air Force. In a speech about the airport, Burke proclaimed the need to prepare for war before it was even declared:

While I beseech Divine Providence to keep America out of war, I nevertheless believe in complying with the mandate of that great

American [George Washington] who was ‘first in peace, first in war and first in the hearts of his countrymen’ for he clearly indicated the necessity of preparing for war in time of peace. Our airport affords the opportunity for the training of student pilots and incidentally constitutes a weapon of defense in this area.⁵⁰

CHALLENGES MOUNT TO HER ADMINISTRATION, 1943

Burke had been voted into her second term in 1941 with wide support (56%), but that backing evaporated before the next election. Throughout 1943 she faced challenges within the city and from the outside world for which even lower taxes could not compensate. A major source of internal conflict was her handling of finances and public workers. In an act that placed her and the city council at odds, she used her mayoral veto to prevent giving public employees and teachers pay raises using public funds. Burke reasoned that the push to give higher pay to these workers and the way they were asking for them was just the council “playing politics,” and that this should not be a focus during the stringent war years.⁵¹ This issue went back and forth between the council and the mayor’s office for six months, at which point in July the taxpayers had grown weary of the debates and wanted it solved.⁵² With the mayor and the councilmen at an impasse and city workers caught in the crossfire, citizens had a major negative example of what they could anticipate from a third term with Burke.

Other factors also conspired against Burke. Barely a week after her November 1941 election victory, the *Springfield Republican* published a perceptive analysis under the headline, “Westfield Sees Headaches Ahead for Mayor Burke.” The subheading declared that, “She must make a lot of appointments soon and these can cost her dear in popularity.” In 1942 “nearly every board and commission” anticipated vacancies. Even though most positions paid only a modest salary, the paper noted that, “None is highly paid but many are eagerly sought.” The reporter predicted that no matter who Burke selected, “she will be criticized,” and those who failed to win a position would be disappointed and disgruntled, if not “openly antagonistic.” The Westfield City Charter stipulated that the City Council had to confirm all appointments other than the mayor’s clerk or secretary. Although in the past, city council rejections were “the exception rather than the rule,” under Burke they became far more common. Thus the political stakes in Westfield were high in 1942, and the situation was ripe for conflict. Burke’s appointments would create resentment no matter whom she selected.⁵³

Outside of City Hall, World War II claimed millions of lives, dollars, and resources. Burke had been reelected one month before the attack on Pearl Harbor drove the U.S. into the conflict. Thus, her entire second term faced the unique challenges of the wartime economy. Male city employees either volunteered or were drafted into the military and sent thousands of miles away from the problems that Westfield now faced due to their absence. Over 1,500 men left Westfield within nine months of the declaration of war.⁵⁴ The resulting manpower shortages caused a slowdown in the normal functions of city life. The police force became strained in its duties as officers traded their badges and revolvers for helmets and M1 Garands.⁵⁵ The Highway Department suffered from having its workforce reduced to one-fifth of its pre-war size. With the diversion of resources from the city to the war effort, the result for Westfield was a time where streets were not cleaned, potholes from the harsh winter were not fixed quickly enough, and new streets and road projects were stalled.⁵⁶

Although these problems paled in comparison to the devastation wrought on dozens of nations across the ocean at this time, it was a pinch the Westfield voters could directly feel and a noticeable downgrade from their quality of life in Burke's first term. Politicians are often held responsible for what happens under their watch, whether or not they are truly at fault. A decline in the quality of city services under her leadership made her the target of blame for Westfield's wartime struggles. These challenges culminated in Burke being ousted by city councilman and local business owner Arthur Long (1889-1956) by a solid 732 votes (losing with 43.7% of the vote) in November 1943.⁵⁷

According to the *Springfield Weekly Republican*, female voters voted for Long over Burke, although no evidence was provided. The reporter claimed that women "apparently proclaimed by their vote that they preferred a male mayor to a female chief executive."⁵⁸ Although she had been voted out, Burke said in her concession statement that she was consoled by the fact that she was leaving Westfield in the best financial conditions it had been in since its incorporation as a city, and that she was going to be as honorable in leaving office as she was entering it.⁵⁹

Defeated but undeterred, Burke next attempted to win a political office beyond the City of Westfield when she ran for the Massachusetts State Senate in 1944. She lost to Republican Ralph Lerche in an election where she received roughly 20,000 votes to his 25,000, or 44% of the vote.⁶⁰ However, this was a respectable showing for a female politician in her first statewide campaign. Burke next campaigned for the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1946. Running in the primary in her home district, she ran on a platform

that included equal pay for equal work. However, she finished third in the primary and did not go on to the general election. Burke did not campaign for mayor in 1947. Indeed, 1945 and 1947 were the only mayoral elections between 1935 and 1965 that she was not a candidate in.

1945-47: BURKE DOES NOT RUN/ ACCUSATIONS OVER JAMES BRESNAHAN'S ROLE

Even though she was not a candidate in 1945, Mayor Arthur Long was not done battling Burke's administration and legacy. James Bresnahan (1902-1969), Burke's former secretary, ran for a seat on the city council in 1945, although he did so by attacking Long's administration and supporting his mayoral opponent, Dr. Dennis Shannon. Bresnahan had been one of Burke's major support 1939 campaign. After her election she appointed him as her mayoral secretary as well as the coordinator of the local office



James L. Bresnahan

Burke's opponents often claimed that he was the real power behind her mayoralty.

Image from *Westfield Valley Herald*.

of the Works Progress Administration (WPA).⁶¹ Bresnahan quickly became a controversial figure who cast a shadow over Burke's election campaigns for the next twenty years. Long accused him of corruption and portrayed him as representative of the worst offenses of Burke's tenure. He claimed that before endorsing Burke, Bresnahan had encouraged him to run against Mayor Cowing in 1939, promising to ensure Long's victory in Wards 1 and 2 in exchange for an appointment to WPA coordinator. Although Long refused this alleged offer, Bresnahan obtained his desired position after supporting Burke following her victory. Long implied that there was some "backroom arrangement" between Bresnahan and Burke where he was the real power behind the curtains, and that history was repeating itself with Bresnahan's backing of Shannon's candidacy.⁶²

In a 1945 campaign ad, Long characterized Burke's administration using similar accusations as Agan had in 1941. He asked voters:

Do you want a continuation of a Constructive Administration... or do you want to go back to the rule of fear—to the conniving—to the bickering—to the hidden government that existed in the years 1940-1941-1942 and 1943 [?]-A vote for Dr. Shannon for the office of Mayor will include a vote for Mr. James L. Bresnahan in either an appointed office or an important "behind the scene" position.⁶³

Year	Primary Voter Turnout	General Election Voter Turnout
1935	54%	>70%*
1937	56%	81%*
1939	65%	81%*
1941	48%*	79%*
1943	35%	70%*
1949	54%	83%*
1951	37%*	73%
1953	40%	74%
1955	50%	73%
1957	50%	77%
1959	54%	79%
1961	42%	73%*
1963	53%	73%
1965	31%*	70%

Westfield Mayoral Elections

General election turnout was consistently high, compared to contemporary numbers. *For these years estimates were based on available information from local newspapers. No data is listed for the 1945 and 1947 elections because Burke did not run then.

Long's public accusations reveal that the perception of Burke as merely a figurehead in her own administration, with the shadowy Bresnahan pulling the strings, was widespread and not confined to the opinions of just one of her opponents. Nevertheless these accusations did not keep Burke from running for mayor again. She sought to prove that she was her own person, not a puppet. Public sentiment against Bresnahan, however, appears to have run deep. He was defeated in his bid for city council in 1945. More tellingly, accusations about his role and his alleged machinations resurfaced repeatedly in future elections up until 1961.

Long had won the 1943 election with 56.3% of the vote and was reelected in 1945 with 55.3%, suggesting that his claims against Bresnahan and Burke were shared.⁶⁴ Long was the last two-term mayor for many years. From 1948 to 1960, the mayor's office became a revolving door (see the Mayoral Table at the end of this chapter). This suggests that local politics in Westfield were fractured and highly contested. During these decades, city politics failed to coalesce around a single, unifying mayoral figure. Never one to give up, Burke returned to the Westfield mayoral scene in 1949 to reclaim her old position. However, it took two more failed campaigns before she received the breakthrough she sought.

1949 & 1951: FAILED MAYORAL CAMPAIGNS—COWING & FULLER

In 1949 Burke returned to running for Westfield's mayoralty, facing off against former mayor Raymond Cowing once again. This time neither was the incumbent; both were trying to regain their position. With the two of them in the race and the incumbent one-term mayor, Homer Bush (1881-1963), also seeking reelection, Westfield faced the unusual spectacle of three politicians who had all held the executive office battling for its control. The two former mayors ultimately defeated Bush in the primaries to continue on to the general election (Cowing 40.6%, Burke 40.1%, and Bush 19.3%).⁶⁵

There do not appear to have been any major rallies or political meetings in 1949, yet even in this subdued election coverage Burke's presence was limited.⁶⁶ Her campaign ran mainly on name recognition and the same promises of lower tax rates, with a curious lack of local newspaper ads or articles to promote her candidacy. Comparing the costs of Burke and Cowing's campaigns shows this difference in their public presence, with Cowing spending \$551 to Burke's \$161.⁶⁷ With nearly three and a half times the funds for campaigning, Cowing released several political ads and statements in the *Westfield News Advertiser*.⁶⁸ He criticized Burke's promises

of lower tax rates as vague, claiming that she had failed to describe how exactly she planned to do so, and that he by comparison would only reduce taxes when it was possible, without sacrificing city services.⁶⁹

Burke's response to this charge was swift and direct. On the eve of the election, Burke threw a final insult at Cowing after their debates on this issue: "My opponent appears in his true light at last. Having been defeated on the issue of taxes, the great promiser turns cry-baby. I am confident that the electorate of this community can recognize his desperate and futile attempts to salvage a losing campaign."⁷⁰

The electorate, however, again rejected Burke. Cowing held the advantage with his more visible campaign presence, and the result was another election in which Cowing won by a comfortable 836 votes (Burke received only 45% support).⁷¹ Burke's final words reflected the increasingly sharp attacks and aggressive tone which would come to characterize her campaigns. Voters may have found such stridency less acceptable in a female candidate. The *Springfield Union's* acerbic headline read, "Biting Two Sentences Final Burke Offering."⁷²

Biting Two Sentences Final Burke Offering

Westfield, Nov. 7—In a biting two-sentence final statement, former Mayor Alceo D. Burke, candidate for mayor in Tuesday's city elections, in winding up her campaign today, accused her opponent, former Mayor Raymond H. Cowing, as being the "great promiser" who turned "cry-baby." Mrs. Burke's statement read: "My opponent ap-

Cowing Carries Four Of Five Wards As He Swamps Mrs. Burke

Winner in Westfield Mayoral Contest Has Margin of
836 Votes; Third Race Between Same Two
Opponents

Springfield Union, Nov. 8, 1949 and
Westfield News Advertiser, Nov. 10, 1949

After returning to office, Cowing and his new administration made a critical mistake that could have provided Burke with the perfect opening to successfully challenge him in the next election in 1951. However, unforeseen circumstances brought an end to that opportunity. The city passed a highly unpopular tax equalization bill in 1951 that resulted in increased property bills for hundreds of homeowners and sparked fears of the tax rate going up as high as \$50.⁷³ Had Cowing made it to reelection season, Burke would have certainly seized upon the opportunity to parade this bill as a failure of his office and a betrayal to the citizens of Westfield. Yet Cowing's health took a sharp decline before Burke could go on the campaign trail. He had taken ill and suffered a fall in his home, spending months bedridden between the state hospital and his house. His poor condition kept him from his mayoral duties for the rest of his term.⁷⁴

Realizing his health was too frail, Cowing eventually decided not to run again.⁷⁵ City Councilman Richard Fuller (1916-1964) became acting mayor in Cowing's stead. This negated Burke's advantage, as Fuller ran a fairly quiet administration aside from dealing with the fallout of the tax bill (although the public did not seem to blame Fuller for that issue). The predictability of his tenure as mayor may have provided a welcome break from the conflicts of the previous administration.

Burke's campaign struggled in this climate, and the problems came to a head just six days before the election in October 1951, when five officers of the "Burke-For-Mayor Club" resigned. Such an act had been unheard of in Westfield according to the city's veteran politicians.⁷⁶ The official reason given by those who resigned was that "circumstances beyond our control leave us no other alternative." There were reports, however, that they had recently met with Burke to discuss accusations of her continuing to work



Springfield Union Nov. 1, 1961

with her disgraced and disliked former Secretary James Bresnahan, and that the responses they had received from her failed to satisfy their suspicions.⁷⁷

Burke defended herself against these “deserters from the Burke ranks” by stating that she had made no promises to anyone and that she had refused to be coerced into signing the statements these former officials had written, as they had demanded of her.⁷⁸ The fallout of this political drama hurt Burke’s campaign even further, and brought about another defeat for her with only 47% support, losing by 532 votes.⁷⁹ Her campaign slogan—“Economy without Curtailment of Essential Services”—failed to resonate in this election.

1953 CAMPAIGN & SLIM VICTORY MARGIN

Burke continued campaigning in spite of these losses in the hopes of eventually reclaiming the mayor’s office. Her persistence finally paid off in 1953 when local events worked to her advantage. Fuller’s subdued style may have kept things quiet, but this also had the consequence of creating inaction over Westfield’s needs. In a letter to the editor of the *Westfield News Advertiser*, prominent resident Joseph Kozacki declared that Alice Burke was the only candidate that had expressed any concern for issues the city had to address, such as roads, sewers, fire protection, and water mains.⁸⁰

Furthermore the tax rate in Westfield had remained higher than her administration’s levels, standing at \$41 on the 1953 budget. Although this was celebrated by the city government as the second lowest in the state, the continued rise in rates after the tax bill of the previous administration did not seem to make that a reassuring proclamation for many.⁸¹ Burke’s long-held stance on taxes and reducing the cost of government lead voters to support her as a possible solution to this.

These issues may not have been enough to secure her victory had she been up against the mayoral incumbent, but this time fate worked in her favor. Mayor Richard Fuller found that “the pressures of business and personal affairs” were too much to continue governing, and he declined to run for a second term.⁸² This left the campaign field wide open for new challengers. The result was a four-way primary race.⁸³ In the lead up to the preliminary election, Burke laid accusations of cowardice against her opponents for starting a “whisper campaign” against her. She alleged that in light of having no valid critiques of her policies, they were spreading false rumors in a plot to undermine her campaign by claiming she had received a pension since she had left office and had made secret deals with people. In biting language, she condemned these “craven characters” for their purported immaturity:

Any opponent of mine should grow up and realize he is in a man's game and come out and fight like a man, and not like a coward hid behind innuendo and deceit. . . I defy any opponent to meet me face to face and I challenge him to debate and attempt to prove his "superior" ability, if any, on the real issues of the campaign. . . *I still believe in the truth of the statement that "he who is not with me is against me."*⁸⁴ (emphasis added)

Despite her increasingly sharp campaign rhetoric, Burke came in first place in the primaries, with Charles Avery (1886-1959) in a close second (Burke received 36% of the vote, Avery 34%, Warner 25%, and Ryan 5%).⁸⁵ Several of Avery's key endorsements came from former Burke challengers such as Archie Agan (her opponent in the election of 1941), Arthur Long (1943), and Homer Bush (whom she and Cowing had defeated in the 1949 primary).⁸⁶ This created a tight race, but in the end Burke won the election by a slim 154 votes with 50.9% support.⁸⁷

3RD MAYORAL TERM & ROUSING DEFEAT (1954-55)

Despite her narrow victory, Burke returned to the mayor's office on a wave of triumph and celebration. She even received a brief telegram from John F. Kennedy congratulating her on the victory and wishing her a successful term. Kennedy himself had just won his first seat in the U.S. Senate.⁸⁸ One of the largest projects of her third term was the creation of a new school on Southampton Road, one that still exists to this day.⁸⁹ She also focused on sidewalk repair and highway construction, such as Western Avenue, the road where Fuller's administration had established the new location of Westfield State College.⁹⁰ Under her leadership Westfield continued to boast the lowest tax rate in Massachusetts.⁹¹ However she was defeated after only one term in an election that ended with her losing by 1,373 votes (41.67% support), nine times the number of ballots that had carried her previously to victory. This massive backlash came down to the return of old issues, unfortunate acts of circumstance, and the betrayal of her political goals.

Throughout 1954 and 1955, Burke repeated the events of 1943, fighting with the city council over pay raises for both hourly paid and full-time salaried public employees. Once again, she vetoed the legislation, and once more the city council unanimously overruled her decision.⁹² This process repeated itself with the proposal for extra pay for police officers.⁹³ It is here that Burke's stated belief that "those who were not with her were against her" came back into play. This mindset could make her very determined and

confident, but it also made her increasingly confrontational and arrogant in the face of opposition.

Another major criticism of Burke was that citizens were not receiving the benefits of the low tax rates she always lauded. In early 1955, William Flagler, the president of the local Pine Grove Improvement League, condemned Burke and her administration after a deadly fire in the Hampton Ponds area killed two children and wounded three others. He blamed the government for keeping the fire and police departments underpaid and undersupplied, therefore neglecting to provide proper safety inspections and fire equipment in the area. The complaint mentioned of Burke that "possibly she'd give us a little return for our tax money other than the worn-out cry 'I'm saving the taxpayer's money.'"⁹⁴ Burke's government took steps to prevent this tragedy from happening again, but the damage had been done. The idea that she had been aloof towards an entire section of the city and that her tax reductions had severely strained city services and failed to show an improvement in the lives of citizens placed doubts in the minds of voters regarding her abilities.

Another major argument that damaged Burke's reelection that year was a challenge to her core goal as an elected official. That August, city councilman Samuel Wise published an editorial in the *Westfield News Advertiser* criticizing Burke and her use of the city's finances. He accused her of "fooling" citizens by lowering the tax rate, only to then spend more from the city's savings to pay for the services those taxes should have funded. He declared his intention to ban Burke from pulling any more of Westfield's savings for use in her projects. Wise reported that she had spent \$203,000 out of the city's savings by mid-1955 (almost \$2 million in 2020 dollars).⁹⁵ He continued by asserting that she was spending four dollars out of the city's reserves for every one dollar she reduced in the tax rate, leaving Westfield with little left in the event of an emergency.⁹⁶

His words proved prophetic three weeks later. It was then that twin hurricanes caused the dams to break and water and mud to overwhelm the city. Known today as the Flood of '55, this was one of the most destructive natural disasters Westfield had ever witnessed.⁹⁷ Reports after the flood estimated the total cost of repairs were anywhere from five to ten million dollars. Burke and the city council approved moving \$25,000 in funds from the city savings to an emergency flood account as a start towards rebuilding.⁹⁸ Yet this action proved Wise's warning true, and the timing of these events destroyed any hope of reelection. An accusation of reckless spending of city reserves immediately followed by an expensive disaster that required those funds spelled doom for Burke's chances. Although she may have hoped her

Year	Burke % Primary	Burke % General Election	Win/Lose # Votes	Mayoral Winner
1935	21%	<i>Disqualified</i>	n/a	Cowing
1937	25%	46%	-561	Cowing
1939	26%*	51%	+127	Burke
1941	n/a	56%	+1,041	Burke
1943	41%	44%	-732	Long
1949	35%	45%	-836	Cowing
1951	40%	47%	-532	Fuller
1953	36%	51%	+154	Burke
1955	26%	42%	-1373	Warner
1957	32%	54%	+693	Burke
1959	25%	43%	-1340	O'Connor
1961	25%	30%	-3603	O'Connor
1963	16%	<i>Lost Primary</i>	n/a	Martin
1965	29%	46%	-603	Martin

Election Statistics

Westfield's city elections were "nonpartisan." Candidates did not run as members of a party. Typically, three or four candidates ran in the primary, although there were two elections in which six candidates ran. The highest two vote-getters then competed in the general election.

Burke was among the two highest candidates in twelve primary contests, although she won in the general election only four times (1939, 1941, 1953 and 1957). However, except for her 1961 and 1963 defeats, she always had a respectable showing in the general election, garnering between 42% and 56% of the vote in eleven of her mayoral campaigns. This was an impressive record for a female politician. (Burke did not run in 1945 or 1947.)

personal interview with the *Westfield News Advertiser* would ingratiate herself to the public, it did not.

Indeed, the nickname "Ma" Burke may have originated at this time. However, this may not have reflected a warm, maternal image as the "mother" of Westfield. As longtime Westfield resident Dr. Robert Brown explains, "One of the most popular movie series of the late 1940s and early '50s was Marjorie Main's 'Ma and Pa Kettle' series. 'Ma' was *not* a sweet, gentle motherly figure but rather a loud brassy, aggressive, hillbilly type who was ambitious but could also be easily fooled. That's the more accurate source for her nickname."⁹⁹

The city elections in the fall of 1955 still carried on even while Westfield worked to repair the flood damage. Leonard Warner, a former member of the School Committee who had faced off against Burke in the 1953 primaries, ran again for mayor on a claim that he would restore the office to "the dignity and leadership that it demands."¹⁰⁰ The fact that he chose that as his opening phrase and it was accepted by voters reveals the level of disapproval that faced Burke in the months after the flood. Anti-Burke campaigners had stronger material to work with during the election of 1955 to urge voters to support Warner, especially since a central campaign promise of his was faster flood control.¹⁰¹ Warner's claims resonated with voters who were looking for new leadership. Most felt that Burke's administration had failed them, not unlike Burke's own advantage against Cowing sixteen years earlier. She faced a steep defeat in November, losing to Warner with less than 42% of the vote.¹⁰²

1957: ANOTHER CONTENTIOUS CAMPAIGN — WARNER

Burke tried again to reclaim her position, determined and aggressive as ever. In the next election in 1957, Warner and Burke went after each other on their political records and the status of the city after the economic and environmental hardships of 1955.¹⁰³ Warner's major criticism was that Burke's administration did not represent thrift, but rather stinginess and stagnation. In a scathing article in the local papers, he highlighted this charge, along with further insults towards her time in office. He began by asking rhetorically:

Does Westfield Want to Turn Back the Clock? Does Westfield want to return to a tyrannical and self-centered administration in which false economy was always the rule. . . which caused progress within the city to grind to a halt, where it stood hopelessly bogged down in petty bickering and controversy? . . . No one appreciates true thrift and economy more than I, but is it

thrift or true economy when a property owner avoids spending a few dollars to repair a hole in the roof of his house, only to have a few rainstorms . . . ultimately result in a tremendous bill? This, briefly, explains the kind of government that was practiced by my opponent and this is what Westfield will get again, if it permits the return of an outmoded, hesitant, politically bankrupt form of management to City Hall.¹⁰⁴

Burke countered by arguing that the current mayor was unworthy of the office.¹⁰⁵ She defended her previous administration’s handling of the flood emergency and attacked Warner for his claims that she did little for the city with its money. Regarding her supposed “do-nothingness,” she stated that her office had been the one to obtain the funding assigned for projects Warner eventually signed off on, such as traffic lights and playgrounds, thereby implying that she had begun some of the projects for which he was taking credit. Burke also cited several streets and sidewalks built under her



Mayor Leonard Warner (1956-57)



**Sept. 9, 1958
Senator John Kennedy's visit to H.B. Smith Co.
Burke was known for her hats.**

administration along with the modernization of the police department as actions she had taken to improve Westfield. Finally, she brought up the construction of a new school under her leadership and the expansion of another one, while pointing out that there had been no such improvements under Warner. "All your false statements that nothing was done cannot detract one iota from this record of accomplishment," she proclaimed.¹⁰⁶

Another one of Burke's major criticisms was how Warner paid for projects compared to her administration. She accused Warner of "political immaturity and financial irresponsibility" through increasing taxes to pay for new programs. She railed against his endorsement of the sales tax, in addition to a six-dollar property tax hike and a 50% increase in water rates.¹⁰⁷ As always, Burke opposed the levying of any new taxes or additional debt, regardless of its impact on city services, and this became the central issue addressed in her campaign. While he had to borrow \$200,000 for his own street construction projects, Burke stated, she was able to pay for ones under her leadership out of funds the city already had.¹⁰⁸ Overall, Burke defended herself as someone who could offer the same city services and more without increasing the city's debt or how much residents would have to pay.

Warner fired back one week before the election with a challenge to her strongest selling point with voters—her reduction of their tax bills. Like her old opponent Archie Agan in 1941, he claimed that Burke and her first administration were not truly responsible for the tax reductions of the time. He charged that the decreases under her leadership were not her doing, but the result of the federal New Deal programs and the recovery of the nation from the Great Depression. The WPA and other federal agencies took over "pumping the limp economy," reducing the number of citizens on unemployment and welfare. He also argued that it was the efforts of the WPA that were responsible for modernizing Barnes Airport. As more citizens went back to work, state and federal tax revenue increased, and more money was able to be returned to the local level. Warner concluded by proclaiming "thus we see that coincidence, rather than financial wizardry, was responsible for the tax deduction during Mrs. Burke's initial term of office."¹⁰⁹ He failed to mention, however, that it was a Burke appointee (Bresnahan) who coordinated the WPA during her administration. Despite this allegation, the public sided once again with Burke, returning her to the mayor's office by a respectable 693 votes (with 54% of the vote).¹¹⁰



Alice Burke and James Bresnahan shown reviewing plans for Westfield's new City Hall

Bresnahan was a controversial figure who cast a shadow over Burke's administration throughout her mayoral career (*Springfield Republican*, March 8, 1959). Headlines from the *Springfield Union* Dec. 19, 1957 and May 8, 1959. Original photo courtesy of the Westfield Athenaeum.

**BRESNAHAN
NAMED BY
MRS. BURKE**

Secretary During 1940-43
Terms Chosen to Serve
Mayor Again

**Bresnahan Censure
Defeated by 6-5 Vote**

Council Upholds Kirby's Ruling That Wise's Motion Out of Order; Debate Stormy

4TH MAYORAL TERM & A HUGE DEFEAT (1957-59)

It is difficult to determine what this election reveals about Westfield's politics in the 1950s. Throughout the decade, the city seemed unable to coalesce around a single mayor with a single vision or unified political philosophy. Perhaps this was indicative of sharp divisions and divides within the community. While Burke's and others' promises of fiscal conservatism appealed to many voters, the results (in poor city services, underpaid city workers, and lack of infrastructure investments) often seemed to lead to voter dissatisfaction, backlash, and the election of another one-term mayor.¹¹¹

A long-time resident offers an additional factor that may have eroded public support for Burke. "The most important job of all city elected officials up through the 1970s was to provide jobs to their relatives and supporters. Thus, Burke was in trouble and without allies whenever she tried to remove people from jobs, cut salaries and oppose raises, all of which she took pride in and which has remained her claim to fame."¹¹²

In her fourth term, Burke focused on infrastructure expansions and saving money wherever possible. In her 1958-59 term, expansions were made to Barnes Airport and an addition was added to the school on Franklin Avenue, while Westfield once again had the lowest tax rate in the state of Massachusetts. Her greatest accomplishments during this term, and indeed in her entire career, is often said to be the present-day Westfield City Hall. Instead of creating an entire new building for the city, Burke took the existing buildings at the old location of Westfield State College and converted them into the new municipal center. This decision offered Westfield a modernized city hall at a fraction of the cost.¹¹³

Yet despite these achievements, her fourth term ended as quickly as her third. In the 1959 election, she lost to John O'Connor by 1,340 votes (57%-43%), almost the same margin as her loss to Warner in 1955.¹¹⁴ One of Burke's major drawbacks was the return of the controversial James L. Bresnahan (or "Cookie" as he was known). While in the past she had unequivocally stated that no one connected to her previous administration would have a position in her new government, Bresnahan was brought back as her secretary for her fourth term. She had originally intended to appoint her husband Bill to that position (which he had filled in her third term), but Bill Burke had recently suffered a heart attack and was not in any condition to serve. (Nepotism was an ongoing problem in city government well into the 1980s.¹¹⁵) Burke then hired Bresnahan for what was supposed to be a temporary assignment for six weeks until someone else could replace him.¹¹⁶ In 1959, he was still there.

City officials complained of Bresnahan's influence over the mayor to the point that Samuel Wise, running as one of her opponents that year, referred to her government as the "Burke-Bresnahan Administration."¹¹⁷ Former Mayor Leonard Warner accused Bresnahan of encroaching "on the executive powers that should be exercised only by the mayor."¹¹⁸ Wise released a statement

A MAN OF ACTION

**THE MAN TO MAKE WESTFIELD
BETTER FOR YOU**

ELECTED City Councilman (1953)

ELECTED President, Westfield Development Corporation (1957)
Builders of Westfield Industrial Park

ELECTED President, Westfield Rotary Club (1958)

ELECTED President Jr. Chamber of Commerce (1952)

ELECTED Recipient of Distinguished Service Award (1959) from Jr. Chamber of Commerce as Outstanding Young Man of Year.

ELECTED Chairman Industrial Development Commission (1957)



JOHN O'CONNOR

Has Been Entrusted with Important Offices in Civic, Business and Municipal Affairs because he is

Honest • Efficient • Enthusiastic • Able Leader • Proud of His Community • A Tireless Worker To Improve Our City For All Of Westfield.

**NOW IS THE TIME TO ELECT
JOHN D. O'CONNOR
MAYOR**

Oct. 29, 1959

during election season about Bresnahan receiving a \$500 pay raise by “our so-called mayor” that year, at the same time that all other city employees were expecting only a \$45 increase.¹¹⁹ There was even an attempt to have Bresnahan censured through a public request for Burke to remove him from office, only losing by one vote in the city council.¹²⁰

In the midst of all this drama, John O’Connor, the co-founder of a local industrial park, claimed that he would bring “a cure for the growing pains of the city,” by expanding city facilities to increase industrial growth.¹²¹ Burke believed that O’Connor’s proposed programs would require tax increases, and she ran her campaign based on this fear. In an advertisement against him, she compared the rates of nearby cities to show how low property taxes on Westfield homes were, and stated “My opponent’s program will make you pay from \$50 to \$100 more on this home. Do you want to pay more?”¹²² She continued by claiming that O’Connor’s policies could lead to the current tax rate of \$45.50 increasing to as much as \$70.¹²³

Burke’s attempts to dissuade voters from supporting O’Connor failed, and she once again found herself voted out of office. O’Connor represented a younger generation of businessmen coming to power in the city. However, it was Bresnahan’s role in her administration that was widely perceived as the primary reason for her loss. In a statement by the local Republican City Committee, the group asserted: “We would like to remind Mayor Burke that her recent defeat was not so much due to her own policies as it was to a growing public desire to evict Mr. Bresnahan and all his works from the municipal government.”¹²⁴ In her concession statement, Burke took solace in one fact: her successors would have to conduct business in the new City Hall she established. “The civic center that my successor inherits will always stands [sic] as a memorial to the Burke administration.”¹²⁵ Although she ran in every mayoral election through 1965, this was her last time in the executive office.

FINAL DEFEATS: 1961, 1963 & 1965

1961 was Burke’s most challenging year, both politically and personally. It was during that spring that Bill, her husband of nearly forty years and the man who had supported her unfailingly in all of her political endeavors, died after a long illness in the aftermath of his heart attack.¹²⁶ One can surmise that this loss hit her hard, as she moved out of their old home shortly afterwards and relocated to a house just around the corner, presumably to avoid the constant reminders of his absence.¹²⁷ She pushed past her grief to start off her next campaign against John O’Connor only two months later, although the results were devastating.¹²⁸ Not only did she lose again in the

general election, she lost by the widest margin of her entire life, falling short by 3,603 votes (only 30% support) against O'Connor.¹²⁹

This unusually poor showing was caused by a major controversy in which she came out on the losing side. Ever on the attack, Burke had accused O'Connor of serious corruption, stating that he handed over water access rights to the Westfield River to the city of Springfield. Burke claimed that, using his family's lumber company, O'Connor ran a secretive front operation to receive the materials of cement and sand used for Springfield's water pipe cleaning project. Overall, she accused O'Connor of standing by silently and giving away Westfield's future water supply rights for his own personal gain.¹³⁰

O'Connor responded by denying this charge as outrageous and characterizing her claims as "untrue and irrelevant." He stated that the information she shared about the business transactions were not connected to his company. "I do not question your list of dates of delivery and weight amounts, Mrs. Burke, but it was a bad guess on the seller." Even if it was true, he claimed, there was nothing illegal about any of this. Moreover, he was able to provide quotes and sources showing that he did indeed speak out against the bill regarding this issue and its negative ramifications for Westfield. He also stated that Springfield's Water Department head released "a statement taking 'strong exception' to [his] stand against them."¹³¹ Satisfied with his defense, O'Connor concluded: "And so what does Mrs. Burke's big revelation amount to? Absolutely nothing. . . . You were warned, Mrs. Burke, that you would go too far. I'm afraid that in this instance you have done it."¹³²

Burke had clearly gone too far. This baseless allegation made her appear foolish, if not downright deceptive and bitter. The campaign season continued to be one marked by accusations and insults. O'Connor revived claims made against Burke in the previous election by announcing that "it's James Bresnahan who is running for mayor, not Alice Burke."¹³³ However, the major determinate of this election had been the water controversy, and O'Connor's refutation resonated with voters more than Burke's increasingly strident accusations. As a result, she was soundly rejected at the polls. Even her "strongholds" in Wards 1 and 2 no longer stood by her.

The next two elections ended the same way. O'Connor did not seek a third term, resulting in a crowded six-person primary in 1963. Burke finished in third place (Martin 32.5%, Trant 25.5%, Burke 16%, Kozacki 15.15%, Pitoniak 10.25%, Rios 0.6%), and therefore was ineligible to qualify for the general election—the first time she had ever failed to win a mayoral primary.¹³⁴ Harold Martin was the winner of the preliminary and final

elections that year. Martin, much like O'Connor, ran on a platform that promised industrial progress and expansion for the city.

In 1965 Burke again ran against Martin. As usual, she ran a campaign based on tax issues, criticizing Martin for allowing "hired strangers" to evaluate tax bills after he had opposed such an act in the previous election.¹³⁵ Although she gained back some support in light of this deception, she did not convince enough of the public of her cause. She lost by 603 votes (with 46% support).¹³⁶ After this defeat, Burke never again ran for mayor.

A CHANGING WESTFIELD, 1939-65

The reasons for Burke's difficulties in her later electoral campaigns may have been linked to her being out of touch with the times. In 1960 Burke turned 68 years old. Her age may have played a role in her defeats from 1959-1965, as she ran against far younger opponents. John O'Connor, in fact, became the youngest mayor in Westfield's history after defeating her in the 1959 election at the age of 32.¹³⁷ Harold Martin was 56 years old during her final mayoral loss at the age of 73 in the 1965 election.¹³⁸

The city had also grown and changed in the twenty years between her first year as mayor (1940) and her last (1960), yet her ideas and policy proposals remained the same—and perhaps in the eyes of many residents, rooted in the past. When she was first elected in 1939, the city had just endured two decades of wrenching economic change from both local and national hardships: the final collapse of Westfield's whip industry in the 1920s followed by the destitution wrought by the Great Depression. In such an environment, a platform of lower taxes and thrifty government had widespread appeal, even as Westfield voters warmly embraced Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal programs.

By contrast, the 1940s and '50s saw the continued diversification of Westfield's industrial base and a steady, growing prosperity in the post-WWII era. By 1967 the city's industry was reportedly the healthiest it had ever been.¹³⁹ Although Burke was reelected twice in the 1950s, her calls for smaller government and lower property taxes may not have resonated with a younger generation of residents and local business leaders who wanted increased city services and a more activist government committed to funding economic development. John O'Connor, for instance, ran his 1959 campaign against her based on expanding industrial growth and bringing "a fresh, progressive approach to Westfield's problems."¹⁴⁰ In this new era, Burke's policies may have seemed outdated to city residents. The city's political center also shifted in unpredictable ways. From 1928-48 city residents had voted

Democratic in presidential elections, but in 1952 and 1956 Westfield voters embraced Dwight D. Eisenhower (55% and 60%), but then returned to the Democratic fold in 1960 (voting 58% for John F. Kennedy). This pattern continued in 1964 (74% for Lyndon B. Johnson) and 1968 (Humphrey).

Burke's career had spanned three decades of the most turbulent years of the twentieth century, from Great Depression to WWII to Cold War and then Vietnam. Yet she did not retire from politics after her mayoral defeat in 1965. Despite approaching seventy-five years of age, in 1967 she was elected a councilor-at-large and reelected two years later. It was here that she found herself serving at the time of Westfield's 300th anniversary in 1969.¹⁴¹ In 1973 she attempted to become city councilor for Westfield's Ward 2, the section of the city that had most consistently supported her throughout her career, but she lost.¹⁴² Ward councilor was the only elected position in the city that she never obtained.

On the afternoon of May 14, 1974, Burke visited a beauty parlor just down the road from her home. Although she had long ago been forced to give up cycling on account of her age, she still enjoyed frequent walks around the city, and this short trip did not seem to be very strenuous. While there

Bay States' First Woman Mayor



MRS ALICE D. BURKE



Alice D. Burke in 1939 and 1950s

Source: *Westfield Valley Herald* (1940) and Westfield City Hall

she was reportedly "stricken" and a city ambulance was called to take her to Springfield Hospital. The medical staff could not save her, and she was pronounced dead at the age of 81. After nearly forty years of persistence in the face of challenge, her tenacity had finally run out.

The city's mood was reportedly somber over her loss. Four hundred people attended her funeral at St. Mary's Church in Westfield, where she was buried alongside her husband. Local newspapers referred to her as "one of Westfield's best loved and highly regarded public servants." Flags across the city were flown at half-mast. Mayor John Rhodes, as well as the chiefs of the police and fire departments, made appearances to pay respects at her funeral, and the city councilmen carried her coffin into the church.¹⁴³ Her grave is located at the edge of St. Mary's cemetery near a firehouse on Southampton Road, not far from the school she had built on the same street.

Burke was active in city affairs until the very end, with her final written communication being an opinion piece for the *Westfield Evening News* about her thoughts on a public initiative for a new skating rink, a story received by the paper around the same time they learned of her passing.¹⁴⁴ In an interview shortly before her death, Burke mentioned her continued devotion to the city, even in her advanced age: "I will always be interested in what happens in Westfield and I have no intention of sitting back and watching. I like to take an active part in what goes on, and if I can help in any way, I certainly intend to."¹⁴⁵ Although she had her fair share of detractors, there was no denying Alice Burke's dedication to the city she had called home for over sixty years.

And, despite her many losses, Burke could take great pride in her record. She was among the two highest vote-getters in eleven primary mayoral contests (typically competing against two or more opponents), even though she won in the general election only four times (1939, 1941, 1953 and 1957). Except for her disastrous 1961 and 1963 losses, she always had a respectable showing in the general election, garnering between 42% and 56% of the vote in eleven of her mayoral campaigns (see previous Table). This was a legacy that she could be proud of.

CONCLUSION: PERSONAL INTERVIEWS & BURKE'S LEGACY

Alice Burke's legacy is decidedly mixed. She died over fifty years ago; few survive who have any direct memories of her, and many residents would not even recognize her name. Fortunately, I was able to interview six people who had had known her. Several still celebrated her as one of Westfield's greatest executives who built new schools, developed the city's airfield into a

modern airport, and was dedicated to saving the taxpayers' money any way she could.¹⁴⁶ According to these residents, she was "nice, pleasant, engaging, dignified, and insightful" as well as "kind as heck." In their reckoning, she loved Westfield and took care of the city. One of my interviewees cited the moving of Westfield State College to its present location and the conversion of the old campus into the modern-day City Hall as her greatest accomplishments.¹⁴⁷

Others, however, claimed that in her obsession with tax rates, she did nothing else for the city and neglected the rest of its needs. These residents held far more negative and skeptical assessments. One fifty-year resident stated that Burke "was notorious for being the cheapest human being alive," that she "gained her fame on the back of city workers" [due to low salaries and pay cuts]. She "cut the city budget over and over," and failed to fund many critical, long-term city needs and services.¹⁴⁸

Similarly, another interviewee claimed that she "let things go" in the city and that it had to spend more money to make up for her actions.¹⁴⁹ Several recalled old accusations that she was a "crook" and that money had gone missing during her administration. One interviewee brought up Bresnahan's name and the old allegation that she was "not her own independent person."¹⁵⁰ These critics described her as "reserved, stern, and not a people person."¹⁵⁰ Several interviewees also recalled with some bemusement her practice of using the police department to drive her around the city, as she never obtained a driver's license. One respondent mentioned how an elected official "would go to court for that nowadays."¹⁵¹ Some conceded that she was popular among residents, although they did not know why.¹⁵²

Burke's mixed legacy can also be attributed to debates over the direction of the city's future. Westfield's history from 1930-65 can be viewed as that of the city stumbling and regaining its footing following its identity crisis from the end of the "Whip City" era. It was a time of simultaneous growth and financial troubles. Expansions to city services were demanded and added, while a common problem throughout the time period remained tax rates and city debt. The more services that were provided, the more taxes had to be raised to pay for them.¹⁵³ This debate—over which situation the public would rather have (lower taxes or more city services)—led to voters seemingly erratic support for Burke. She had remained consistent in her frugal beliefs, but Westfield's population was unsure of its priorities. Even so, she had admirers who appreciated her devotion to the city in spite of any defeats she suffered in elections over the years. Such dedication transcended the political differences of the time and earned her the nickname, the "grande dame of Westfield politics."¹⁵⁴

MAYOR	Began Term	Ended Term	# of Terms
Michael McCabe	2022	----	----
Donald Humason	2020	2021	1 term
Brian P. Sullivan	2016	2019	2 terms
Daniel M. Knapik	2010	2015	4 terms
Michael Boulanger	2008	2009	1 term
Richard K. Sullivan	1994	2007	7 terms
George A. Varelas	1986	1993	4 terms
Michael E. O'Connell	1982	1985	2 terms
Edward McDermott	1980	1981	1 term
Garreth J. Lynch	1978	1979	1 term
John J. Rhodes	1974	1977	2 terms
John J. Palczynski	1968	1973	3 terms
Harold Martin	1964	1967	2 terms
John D. O'Connor	1960	1963	2 terms
Alice D. Burke	1958	1959	1 term
Leonard J. Warner	1956	1957	1 term
Alice D. Burke	1954	1955	1 term
Richard E. Fuller	1952	1953	1 term
Raymond H. Cowing	1950	1951	1 term
Homer C. Bush	1948	1949	1 term
Arthur B. Long	1944	1947	2 terms
Alice D. Burke	1940	1943	2 terms
Raymond H. Cowing	1932	1939	4 terms
Louis L. Keefe	1929	1931	1 term
Harry B. Putman	1927	1928	1 term
Louis L. Keefe	1925	1926	1 term
George W. Searle	1921	1922	1 term
Richard Fuller - Acting Mayor April to Dec. 1951			
Charles W. Medeiros - Acting Mayor June to Dec. 1985 and July to Dec. 2007			
Brian Sullivan - Acting Mayor Nov. to Dec. 2015			
Ralph F. Figy - Acting Mayor Nov. 2019 to Jan. 2020			

A NOTE ON SOURCES

Although Burke received extensive newspaper coverage during her many campaigns and years in public service, she rarely spoke about her personal history and few primary sources have survived. In my reconstruction of Burke's personal life, I have mainly cited information from her brief, two-page, "Alice Burke - Short Autobiography" typewritten document, circa 1969 along with the few newspaper interviews that focused on her personal life. Works referencing the history of Westfield have been sparse in their coverage of Burke, with some ignoring her altogether.

The richest source of information on Burke's political career are the numerous thick scrapbooks she donated to the Westfield Athenaeum. These are a treasure trove of newspaper clippings and other materials. However, they are completely disorganized; the clippings often reveal little chronological order. The newspaper articles appear to have been pasted in haphazardly, and the newspaper's name, date, and page are often missing. Moreover, given that Burke personally compiled these scrapbooks, they most likely provide a biased view of her career in her own favor. For example, coverage of some events that portrayed her negatively, such as the resignation of her entire campaign committee in 1951, were not included in these scrapbooks.

My research was based on: a review of all these scrapbooks, checking local Westfield newspaper coverage from the week before and after every primary and every mayoral election with which she was involved 1935-65 (using the microfilm reels at the Westfield Athenaeum), and a review of newspaper coverage in the *Springfield Republican* from the days before and after every mayoral election 1939-65. There was concern that the local newspaper might exhibit some biases which could be corrected for by comparing coverage of her campaigns in the *Springfield Republican*, which was available through the *Republican's* online archive.

Notes

1. Alice D. Burke Obituary, *Boston Globe*, May 15, 1974 (p. 43). This quote first appeared in the *Westfield Evening News*, November 1, 1935.
2. Phil Slater would like to give special thanks to the Westfield Athenaeum for access to their microfilm archive and Alice Burke's personal scrapbooks which were essential for this research, as well as thanks to all of those who answered the author's public request in *The Westfield News* for information about Burke, including the late Lynn O'Connor-Chirico, who sadly passed away before its publication. Also special thanks to the Westfield State University history department for the graduate assistantship that allowed me to perform this research over several years, and for the research assistance and editing of Dr. Mara Dodge throughout this process, which involved reviewing and editing nearly a dozen drafts.
3. *Five Feet and Rising: The Flood of '55*, Westfield River Watershed Association, Hayward Communications, Westfield State College Department of Communications, DVD (2005).
4. "S. J. Wise Attacks Free Cash Spending," *Westfield News Advertiser* (hereafter abbreviated as WNA), Aug. 4, 1955. Microfilm. Westfield Athenaeum. All citations from the *Westfield News Advertiser*, the *Westfield Valley Herald* and *Westfield Evening News* are from Westfield Athenaeum microfilm reels unless otherwise noted.
5. *Five Feet and Rising*.
6. "New Mayor Wants to Boost Westfield," *Springfield Sunday Union and Republican*, Nov. 12, 1939, 1, 8; "Mrs. Burke Denies Any Deals or Tie-Ups; Says Whisperers Should Speak Up," WNA, Sept. 23, 1953.
7. "Westfield Endorses Record of Woman Mayor at Polls," *Boston Traveler* (Reprinted in the *Westfield Valley Herald*). Nov. 20, 1941.
8. "History of Fitchburg State University," www.Fitchburgstate.edu (Accessed 9/24/19). When Burke attended Fitchburg, it was an all-female teacher's college with a two-year program. The year she graduated, the school expanded to include its first training course for men. Teachers' colleges were called normal schools. The French had developed a system of teacher training schools referred to as "écoles normales." Their purpose was to develop teaching standards or norms, hence the name. Massachusetts' normal schools changed their names to State Teachers Colleges in 1932, just before Burke entered politics.
9. "Woman Mayor," *Boston Globe*, Nov. 8, 1939, 14; "Rise Has Been Gradual," *Boston Globe*, Nov. 8, 1939, 14.
10. "Mayor-Elect Alice Burke Wants to Boost Westfield," *Springfield Sunday Union and Republican*, Nov. 12, 1939.
11. "Profile of the Week: Mayor Alice D. Burke," WNA, Aug. 25, 1955.
12. "Profile of the Week," WNA; Burke Scrapbook. "Alice Burke - Short Autobiography."
13. "Profile of the Week," WNA. Firing married female workers from their jobs was a common practice in the U.S. during the Great Depression due to the popular idea that married women worked to earn spending money, not to pay bills.
14. James R. Adams, "Westfield History 1920-1940," in Edward C. Janes and Roscoe S. Scott (eds.), *Westfield, Massachusetts 1669-1969: The First Three Hundred Years* (Westfield Tri-Centennial Association Inc. 1960), 315. This chapter on the history of Westfield from 1920-40 provides excellent background on the state of the city during that time. The author discusses

a range of topics, such as the impact of Prohibition and the Great Depression on Westfield, the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in the area, the creation of Barnes Airport, and ward politics; “Mrs. Burke Secures Papers; Cowing Certain to Run Again,” *Westfield Valley Herald* (hereafter abbreviated as WVH), Sept. 26, 1935. The *Westfield Valley Herald* was the predecessor to the *Westfield News Advertiser*, changing its name in 1942.

15. Adams, 314.

16. “Mrs. Burke Secures Papers,” WVH, op. cit.

17. “Mrs. Burke’s Initial Move, If Elected Mayor, to Secure New Industries for City,” WVH, Sept. 19, 1935. See also “Mrs. A. D. Burke Plans Aggressive Campaign,” *New York Times*, Nov. 14, 1935, p. 15.

18. “Mrs. Burke Attacks Fellow Members of School Board,” WVH, Oct. 24, 1935. According to city law, Westfield’s mayor is also the de facto chairman of the School Committee.

19. “Mrs. Burke Attacks Fellow Members of School Board,” Op. cit.

20. “Mrs. Burke Now Attacks Brady,” WVH, Oct. 31, 1935.

21. “Mrs. Burke and Cowing in Race,” WVH, Nov. 14, 1935.

22. “Rules Mrs. Burke’s Name Off Ballot; Brady Goes On,” WVH, Nov. 21, 1935.

23. “Rules Mrs. Burke’s Name Off Ballot; Brady’s Goes On,” Op. Cit. City Solicitor Harry B. Putnam had served as Westfield mayor from 1927-28.

24. “Mrs. Burke Will Run in ’37; Will Not Aid Brady, She Says,” WVH, Nov. 27, 1935.

25. “Cowing’s Administration Criticized by Mrs. Burke,” WVH, Aug. 12, 1937.

26. “Cowing, Mrs. Burke Nominated in Primary; Clark Eliminated,” WVH, Oct. 24, 1937.

27. “Cites High Posts Women Now Hold,” WVH, Oct. 21, 1937.

28. Ibid.

29. “Cowing Reelected Mayor By 561 Votes Over Mrs. Burke,” WVH, Nov. 4, 1937. The election of 1937 was the first time Westfield held an election in November rather than December.

30. Adams, 316.

31. Adams, 307, 315.

32. Adams, 304, 306, 312; “Former Mayors Beat Present Mayor in Primary Race; Cowing in Top Spot,” WNA, Oct. 13, 1949. This article is one of many examples of references to Wards 1 and 2 as Burke’s safest areas of support, stating “Mrs. Burke... led the four-cornered race in Wards 1 and 2, her strongholds.”

33. Burke Scrapbook. “Park Theatre Announcement Blamed for Defeat,” WVH, Nov. 10, 1939. The scrapbook notes label this article “advertiser,” presumably standing for the Westfield News Advertiser. This is assumed to be an error in labeling, as the paper was still titled the Westfield Valley Herald in 1939. This purported stunt was not reported in the Springfield Republican, throwing the veracity of the WVH report even further into doubt.

34. “New Mayor Wants to Boost Westfield,” *Springfield Sunday Union and Republican*, Nov. 12, 1939. P.1,8.

35. Ibid.

36. 1939 election saw the highest voter turnout in both primary (65%) and general election (81%) between 1935 and 1965, except for the 1949 general election when voter turnout was 83%.

37. "Recount Assures Mayor's Post for Mrs. Alice Burke," *Springfield Republican*, Nov. 18, 1939, 1-2.
38. Adams, 315.
39. Westfield residents voted for Roosevelt in the following numbers: 1932-50.8%, 1936-55.6%, 1940-56.1%, and 1944-55.9%. They gave Truman 52.7% of their vote in 1948. From 1936-44 Westfield's voters averaged 3.5% percentage points higher for FDR than the Massachusetts state vote. This embrace of New Deal policies is intriguing in light of Burke's fiscal conservatism. More research is needed on Westfield during the Great Depression.
40. From the website: www.livingnewdeal.org. Accessed March 1, 2020.
41. "Average Tax Rate in State, \$34.10," WVH, Dec. 14, 1939.
42. Burke Scrapbook. "Westfield Cuts Tax Rate \$3.50, Fixing It At \$38.50," June 20, 1940.
43. "Agan Issues Tax Statement," WVH, Sept. 25, 1941.
44. Burke Scrapbook. "Mayor Burke and Archie Agan 'Remove Gloves' in Debate," *Daily Republican*, Oct. 30, 1941; Burke Scrapbook. "Agan and Mayor Burke Engage in Hot Debate at Hanover Hall Rally," Oct. 30, 1941.
45. "Westfield Sees Headaches Ahead for Mayor Burke," *Springfield Republican*, Nov. 16, 1941, 4A.
46. Burke Scrapbook. "Mrs. Burke Reelected Mayor of Westfield," 1941; "Mayor Burke Gains 2d Term Victory," WVH, Nov. 6, 1941.
47. Alice Burke, "Mayor Burke Gives a Review of Her Service to City," *Daily Republican*, Oct. 19, 1943. Scrapbook.
48. Burke Scrapbook. "Mayor of Westfield," *The Boston Herald*, June 23, 1940.
49. "Alice Burke Dies," *Westfield Evening News*, May 15, 1974. In 1937 Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.) labor worked to develop Westfield Air Base.
50. Alice Burke speech, Office of the Mayor, Westfield, MA, 1940. Scrapbook.
51. "Mayor Disapproves Salary and Wage Increases," WNA, May 28, 1943.
52. "Everyone Wants Salary Increases Settled," WNA, July 9, 1943.
53. "Westfield Sees Headaches Ahead for Mayor Burke," *Springfield Republican*, Nov. 16, 1941, 4A.
54. Adams, 319.
55. "Good Work by the Depleted Police Force," WNA, Oct. 30, 1944. Scrapbook. Although this particular article came out a year after Burke lost the election, the effects of the war on the police department started as early as 1942 as the U.S. government increased conscription and men volunteered for service.
56. "Highway Repairs and Maintenance," WNA, March 12, 1943; "Our People Asked to Be More Considerate," WNA, May 21, 1943.
57. "Elected Mayor of Westfield: Councilman Arthur B. Long Mayor-Elect," WNA, November 5, 1943.
58. "Westfield Elects Long to Succeed Its Woman Mayor," *Springfield Weekly Republican*, Nov. 4, 1943. Note that the reporter did not provide statistics to support his claim that Westfield women had switched their allegiance to Long.
59. "Westfield Elects Long," Op. cit.
60. "Profile of the Week," WNA, 1955.

61. "Mayor-Elect Burke Appoints Atty. Ferriter City Solicitor; Bresnahan as Her Secretary," WVH, Dec. 21, 1939. Despite his unpopularity, Bresnahan was a local Westfield resident. See his brief obituary *Springfield Union*, Dec. 13, 1969, 6.
62. "Mayor Arthur B. Long Answers Shannon-Bresnahan Rap," WNA, Nov. 2, 1945
63. Ibid.
64. "Westfield Votes Long Mayor Again," *Springfield Republican*, Nov. 7, 1945, 1.
65. "Former Mayors Beat Present Mayor in Primary Race; Cowing in Top Spot," WNA, Oct. 13, 1949.
66. "City Primary Comes Next Tuesday," WNA, Oct. 6 1949.
67. "Election As Mayor Cost Cowing \$551," *Springfield Union*, Nov. 23, 1949. \$551 would be \$5,972 in 2020 dollars, and \$161 would be \$1,745, according to the CPI Inflation Calculator.
68. "Raymond H. Cowing for Mayor" (political advertisement), WNA, Oct. 27, 1949; "Mr. Cowing Discusses Tax Question," WNA, Nov. 3, 1949.
69. "Cowing Puts His Case in Voter's Hands," *Springfield Union*, Nov. 5, 1949.
70. "Biting Two Sentences Final Burke Offering," *Springfield Union*, Nov. 8, 1949.
71. "Cowing Defeats Burke by 836 Votes," WNA, Nov. 10, 1949.
72. "Biting Two Sentences Final Burke Offering," *Springfield Union*, Nov. 9, 1949.
73. "Jolt for Taxpayers \$37,000 Loss to City," WNA, Jan. 25, 1951; "Reimbursement is Down \$100,000, Tax Rate Will Have to Be Raised," WNA, Feb. 1, 1951.
74. "Mayor Cowing in Critical Condition," WNA, April 19, 1951.
75. "Mayor Not to Run For Reelection," WNA, July 12, 1951. Cowing died one year later on September 24, 1952.
76. "Wouldn't Be Coerced, Mrs. Burke Declares," *Springfield Union*, Nov. 2, 1951.
77. "Burke Club Officers Resign at Westfield," *Springfield Union*, Nov. 1, 1951, 1 and 14.
78. "Wouldn't Be Coerced, Mrs. Burke Declares," *Springfield Union*, Nov. 2, 1951, 30.
79. "Richard E. Fuller Elected Mayor: Defeats Alice D. Burke by 532 Votes," WNA, Nov. 8, 1951.
80. "Mr. Kozacki Says Mayor Candidates Are Slow to Say How they Will Help City," WNA, Sept. 23, 1953.
81. "State Officials Praise City's Financing," WNA, Jun. 11, 1953.
82. "Mayor Fuller is Not Candidate for Anything," WNA, Sept. 10, 1953.
83. "Winners in Primary Contest for Mayor," WNA, Oct. 8, 1953.
84. "Mrs. Burke Denies Any Deals or Tie-Ups; Says Whisperers Should Speak Up or..." WNA, Sept. 23, 1953.
85. "Winners In Primary Contest For Mayor," WNA, Oct. 8, 1953.
86. "Charles E. Avery For Mayor," WNA, Oct. 29, 1953.
87. "Alice D. Burke Elected Mayor," WNA, Nov. 5, 1953.
88. Burke Scrapbook. Telegram from Senator Kennedy (Western Union). Jan. 4, 1954.
89. "Council Authority Secures School Site," WNA, April 21, 1955.
90. "Mayor Requests Highway Work," WNA, Aug. 4, 1955; "Mayor Burke Replies to Opponents," WNA, Oct. 6, 1955. Note: According to Westfield's 300th anniversary book, it was under Fuller's administration that the land for Westfield State's current location was granted, not Burke's (Reach 331-2).

91. "Westfield Has Lowest Tax Rate," Aug. 18, 1955.
92. "Council Overrides Mayor's Salary Veto," WNA, Feb. 3, 1955.
93. "Mayor Burke Vetoes Police Extra Pay," WNA, July 28, 1955.
94. "Hampton Ponds Leader Blasts City Officials," WNA, Feb. 10, 1955.
95. "U.S. Inflation Calculator." Coinnews. Accessed Jan. 20, 2020.
96. "S. J. Wise Attacks Free Cash Spending," WNA, Aug. 4, 1955. Throughout the fall Burke repeatedly requested various types of reserve fund transfers, generating criticisms from vocal city council members. See articles in the *Springfield Union*, Nov. 17, 1955, 32; Nov. 18, 1955, 30; and Nov. 19, 1955, 28.
97. *Five Feet and Rising: The Flood of '55*, op. cit.
98. "Total Flood Damage \$5 to 10 Million;" "City Council Votes \$25,000 For Flood Work," WNA, Sept. 1, 1955.
99. Robert Brown. Interview May 20, 2019.
100. "Leonard Warner is Candidate for Mayor," WNA, Mar. 17, 1955.
101. Warner ad, WNA, Nov. 3, 1955. In this advertisement, Warner was endorsed by former mayor Louis Keefe (1923-26, 1929-31), who served as Westfield's second mayor after its official designation as a city.
102. "Election Results," WNA, Nov. 10, 1955.
103. Burke Scrapbook. "Mrs. Burke Back at Warner Charge She Left City Broke," Aug. 11, 1957.
104. "'Sensible Economy' Is Warner's Policy," WNA, Oct. 17, 1957.
105. "Former Mayor Burke Charges Present Mayor With 'Political Immaturity,'" WNA, Aug. 8, 1957; Burke Scrapbook. "Warner Once Again Proves Unworthy," circa 1957.
106. "Mrs. Burke Points Out Some Accomplishments," WNA, Oct. 31, 1957.
107. "Former Mayor Burke Charges Present Mayor With 'Political Immaturity,'" WNA, Aug. 8, 1957.
108. "Alice Burke Asks Warner Some Questions," WNA, Oct. 3, 1957.
109. "Mayor Warner Answers Mrs. Burke's Allegations," WNA, Oct. 31, 1957.
110. "Victors in Tuesday's Election," WNA, Nov. 7, 1957.
111. Some mayors weren't one-term due to losing elections, but merely decided not to run again. Cowing was too frail to run another campaign (although his acting-mayor Fuller won that year, so his administration continued). Fuller then decided it was too much work to want another term. Even O'Connor, who served two terms, decided not to run for a third.
112. Robert Brown, Letter to author, April 20, 2020.
113. "Samuel J. Wise Favors Mrs. Burke's Candidacy," WNA, Oct. 29, 1959.
114. "Westfield Voters Turn Out All But Four Incumbents," WNA, Nov. 5, 1959.
115. Robert Brown recalls that Westfield newspapers in the 1970s and '80s "went through a 'muckraking' phase and investigated employees who could not be fired and salaries, especially in police, fire, gas and electric departments"—which were all homes for interrelated families who monopolized city jobs. Letter to author, April 20, 2020.
116. "Bresnahan Named by Mrs. Burke," *Springfield Union*, Dec. 19, 1957, 38. In his review of this chapter, Dr. Robert Brown, a fifty-year Westfield resident, commented that: "More needs to be known about Bresnahan. He might have been a Democratic party operative, perhaps

from the Springfield machine, which still controlled many of the political jobs in Westfield as late as the 1970s and '80s." Brown writes that, "During that era, 1930s-60s Westfield was a hotbed of corruption and incompetence. In the late '40s or early '50s several major scandals in the police department and city government revealed Springfield mob control in the city with illegal gambling drugs and liquor. At one point there was a state investigation of the police department." These claims require further investigation and were beyond the scope of this research. Letter to author, April 20, 2020.

117. "Proposed Pay Hike Seen 'Too Little and Too Late,'" *Springfield Union*, Sept. 3, 1959, 28.
118. "'Better Westfield' Group Forms Organization Unit," *Springfield Union*, Apr. 22, 1959, 40.
119. "Proposed Pay Hike Seen 'Too Little and Too Late,'" Op. Cit. Samuel Wise changed his approach to Burke after losing the primary elections, and acknowledged her accomplishments in a letter endorsing her against O'Connor, insisting that his opposition to her was merely against Bresnahan. See "Samuel J. Wise Favors Mrs. Burke's Candidacy," WNA, Oct. 29, 1959.
120. "Bresnahan Censure Defeated By 6-5 Vote," *Springfield Union*, May 8, 1959.
121. "Constructive Approach Is Highlighted in O'Connor Statement," WNA, Oct. 29, 1959.
122. "Westfield Taxpayers," Burke ad, WNA, Oct. 29, 1959.
123. "Opponent's Program Could Mean \$70 Tax Rate, Mayor Charges," WNA, Oct. 29, 1959.
124. "Appointment of Bahleda Hit By GOP," *Springfield Union*, Nov. 19, 1959, 26.
125. "Mayor Burke Issues Post-Campaign Statement," WNA, Nov. 5, 1959.
126. "Obituaries: William T. Burke," WNA, May 11, 1961.
127. "Obituaries: William T. Burke," WNA; "Ex-Mayor Alice Burke Dies," *Westfield Evening News*, May 15, 1974. Before the 1961 election, the Burkes lived at 16 Connor Avenue. After Bill's death, Alice moved to 62 Orange Street, just around the corner.
128. "'Restoration of Financial Solvency' Offered by Candidate Alice D. Burke," WNA, July 20, 1961.
129. "Mayor O'Connor Overwhelms Mrs. Burke In Heavy Voting," WNA, Nov. 9, 1961.
130. "Mrs. Burke Comments on Some Sand and Cement Shipments," WNA, Sept. 14, 1961.
131. "Mayor O'Connor Says Mrs. Burke's Statements Were 'Untrue and Irrelevant,'" WNA, Sept. 19, 1961.
132. "Untrue and Irrelevant," WNA. Op. Cit.
133. "O'Connor Hits Methods Used By Mrs. Burke," *The Springfield Union*, Nov. 4, 1949.
134. "How Westfield Voted," WNA, Oct. 10, 1963.
135. "For a Mayor You Can Trust," Burke ad, WNA, Oct. 28, 1965.
136. "Mayor Martin Wins," WNA, Nov. 4, 1965.
137. "Upsets Occur," *Springfield Union*, Nov. 4, 1959.
138. "Reelected in Westfield," *Springfield Union*, Nov. 3, 1965.
139. Adams, 368-9.
140. "Constructive Approach is Highlighted in O'Connor's Statement," WNA, Oct. 29, 1959.
141. Burke Scrapbook. Burke autobiography.

142. "Alice Burke Dies," *Westfield Evening News*, May 15, 1974. All contemporary articles about her death use the phrase "stricken" to refer to her ailment. This is assumed to mean that she suffered a stroke.

143. "400 Pay Tribute to Alice D. Burke," *Westfield Evening News*, May 17, 1974.

144. "Lauds Rink Verdict," *Westfield Evening News*, May 16, 1974.

145. "Ex-Mayor Alice Burke Dies," *Westfield Evening News*, May 15, 1974.

146. Jeffrey Gosselin. Telephone interview. Dec. 15, 2019. Although Gosselin's information about Burke is second hand (he was only seven years old by the time of Burke's death), his mother, Sharon Murlow Gosselin, was a three-term Westfield School Committee member and the second woman to run for mayor of Westfield in 1991; Matthew Roman. Telephone interview. Dec. 14, 2019. Roman was a Westfield resident during Burke's first term and knew of her through an issue his father sought help with.

147. Edward Marth. Telephone interview. Nov. 27, 2019. Marth lived in Westfield from 1947-72. His mother was friends with Burke, and he met her personally, sometimes driving her around in her later years; Matthew Roman.

148. Robert Brown. Interview May 20th, 2019. Bob Brown was a history professor at Westfield State and city resident since 1970.

149. Myrna Butler. Telephone interview. Dec. 17, 2019. Myrna was the wife of the late Roger W. Butler Sr. (1924-2015), a prominent resident of Westfield who ran the Roger Butler Insurance Agency. For more information about Butler, see The Westfield News obituary Nov. 19, 2015.

150. Jeffrey Gosselin.

151. Jeffrey Gosselin; Matthew Roman; Edward Marth. Galanek. Telephone interview. Jan. 13, 2020.

152. Lynn O'Connor-Chirico. Telephone interview. Jan. 15, 2020. She was the ex-wife of former mayor John O'Connor and lived in Westfield from 1950-70. She only met Burke herself once, so most of her recollections were from her husband's time in office and his reasons for campaigning against her.

153. Milton B. Reach, Jr. "The Last Quarter Century" in Edward C. Janes and Roscoe S. Scott's *Westfield, Massachusetts 1669-1969: The First Three Hundred Years* (Westfield Tri-Centennial Association Inc. 1960), 330, 333.

154. "Ex-Mayor Alice Burke Dies," *Westfield Evening News*, May 15, 1974; "End of an Era," *Westfield Evening News*, May 17, 1974; Obituary, *Boston Globe*, May 15, 1974, 43.