



Photo: Whiting Public Library

Mary Jancosek Bercik

Whiting, Lake County

December 27, 1914 – October 13, 1996

Mary Jancosek Bercik married William Bercik, who later was elected Mayor of Whiting in 1955. When he died in 1957, the city council appointed her to serve the remaining two years as mayor, making her the first woman to serve as mayor of an Indiana city. After completing his term, she ran her own campaign and was elected to serve another four years as the Mayor.

At the time when she assumed the office, Mary Bercik was a single widow raising her eight children who ranged in age from 17 months to 21 years. With the help of her mother, she developed a routine that enabled her to serve as Mayor. When interviewed for *The Hammond Times* newspaper in November 1957, she said, "If you enjoy your work, you will find time for everything... I do a lot of running here and there, but I still have time to enjoy my family."

Mayor Bercik assumed the office during a pivotal point in the city's history. In 1955, an explosion started a fire at the refinery, which was so massive that it could be seen from downtown Chicago and lasted eight days. The massive damage forced Standard Oil to modernize the facility that reduced the demand for employees and eventually led to layoffs. Likewise, her legacy was championing modernization for the city, which ultimately led to her political downfall. She ordered water meters to be installed in homes and businesses to determine more accurately the amount of water being consumed. She also was instrumental in building the Schrage Avenue fire station and paving Whiting's alleys.

Mary Bercik died in 1996 at the age of 82. But, one of Mary Bercik's greatest legacies was raising her eight children. One of her sons, Robert Bercik, later followed in her and her husband's footsteps to become Mayor of Whiting in 1988, serving in that office until 2003.

- For more information about Mary Bercik, go to: <http://www.whiting.lib.in.us/mayors.html>.
- For more information about *Writing Her Story*, go to: <http://www.in.gov/icw/2440.htm>.

Additional and more detailed references available at the end of Women's History Month



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