

## The Westfield Standard: Safe Food Act Turned to Murder

--by Sarah Remy, Westfield State University Class of 2021

Western Avenue. It's the road every student here at Westfield State has come to call home. Lined with Victorian style houses and academic buildings, it is easy to forget that it wasn't always like it was today. Back in 1940, Western Ave was home to a very upscale neighborhood. However, on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1940, Westfield's history would forever be changed when Professor Lewis Allyn was murdered in his home at 69 Western Ave. Even though you can still see the hole left by one of the bullets, almost seventy seven years later, the murder remains as Westfield's only unsolved murder.



*Professor Lewis Allyn*

Born a native to Massachusetts in 1875, Allyn was the older of two children. He moved to Westfield to attend the Westfield State Teachers College, where he majored in chemistry and would eventually go on to teach at his alma mater. In 1903, Professor Allyn became the head of

the chemistry department. In 1904, Allyn's work became most beneficial to the town of Westfield when there was an issue of lollipops infecting the mouths of people who ate them with sores. Upon analyzing the pops, Allyn and his students determined that the pops were full of harmful chemicals, hidden in flavorings of strawberry. (O'Donnell) This discovery became the start of Allyn's legacy. For the next thirty six years of his life, Allyn would be an influential figure in the work of pure foods.

After the lollipop epidemic, Allyn would start purchasing groceries from local stores and would test them in his laboratory in the normal school with the help of his students. If they passed a test, they would be put on a good list; if they failed, they would be marked as "frauds" and published in magazines that would sell so quickly more would need to be printed (McCartney). These lists would anger those who sold the products, because of how it forced them to work harder to make sure they were selling products that would be approved by Allyn and his team, which would become to be known as being up to "The Westfield Standard". In 1906, the first Pure Food and Drug act was passed, although not enforced, it was beneficial to the well being of citizens. The food lobby and the American Chemical Association believed that Allyn's work was harming the image of other chemists and did not want the act to be passed because it would ruin jobs of those higher up. (McCartney) This backlash from influential associations would lead Allyn to quit his teaching job and focus solely on checking the safety of food, where he would go on to work with clean water, sugar refinement and other food products.

Allyn would not go without a target on his back, even though his work as a chemist in food industry was important. As previously mentioned, the pure food work angered many in the industry. Could a possible businessman have killed him out of anger for ruining their business? When Allyn was murdered in May of 1940, many people suspected the work was done by the

Nazi's who were after his "food formula for military rations" (McCartney) that Allyn supposedly refused to give up. This theory was not far-fetched considering Nazi's had visited Westfield on two separate occasions (Margarian). Also, it was believed the Chief of Police and Allyn shared a mistress. (McCartney). Could there be the possibility of a love triangle gone wrong? To this day the case remains unsolved.

Although questionable at the time, Allyn's work was the start of what we have today and food safety would play a large part in the years to come. The food and drug acts put in place would become the standard for the food we eat today. So next time you drive down Western Ave and pass the beautiful green victorian he called home, say a quick thank you to Professor Allyn that you are not eating dirt or worse when you sit down to dinner.

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