

## Fifth Centennial News Release

Larry D. Barnes, Batavia City Historian

Release date: March 13, 2014

Batavia officially became a city on January 1, 1915, after having been an incorporated village since 1823. The transition involved a progression through several steps during 1914. During 2014, I will be recalling each of these events 100 years after their occurrence.

Earlier this week, I reported on a hearing that took place in Albany where competing charter proposals were presented before a joint committee of Senators and Assemblymen. One proposal, offered by a Charter Revision Commission appointed several years earlier by village leaders, was notable in that it proposed a city in which the government would consist of a city manager and five non-partisan councilmen elected at large. The other proposal, offered by the existing Board of Aldermen who currently governed the village, proposed a city in which the government would consist of a mayor and six councilmen, all with political affiliations. The relative merits of these competing proposals can be judged by what occurred 100 years ago this week.

Under the Village of Batavia charter that existed in 1914, village elections took place in March rather than in the fall as they do now. Going into the election 100 years ago, Republicans were in control of village affairs. However, after the election, a Democrat was the new mayor and the majority of the aldermen were also Democrats. Following the election, a headline in *The Daily News* read, "Democrats will sweep the deck: Little prospect of Republicans being left in Village positions."

This was not a surprise to anyone. It was the tradition of patronage politics in Batavia and elsewhere. Because there were political parties involved in our community's government, whenever the political majority changed, people like the village clerk, treasurer, police justice, village engineer, and even the fire chief traditionally lost their jobs because they belonged to the "wrong" party. The Charter Revision Commission sought to end this practice by establishing a non-partisan city government.

In two weeks, I'll let you know how the State Senate and Assembly responded to the competing proposals for Batavia's future, one continuing the practice of partisan political affiliations and the other designed to establish a city government free of party politics.