

Seventh Centennial News Release

Larry D. Barnes, Batavia City Historian

Release date: March 26, 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.

In 1914, there were two competing proposals for how Batavia should function as a city. One had been prepared by a Charter Revision Commission several years earlier. The other was a more recent proposal created by the Village Board of Aldermen, the equivalent of today's City Council. One hundred years ago, yesterday, the State Assembly voted in favor of an amended version of the Aldermen's proposal, one that entailed a city government consisting of a mayor elected at large and six councilmen, each elected from a city ward, with all seven individuals having affiliations with a political party.

One of the amendments addressed a provision in the Aldermen's original proposal that would have doubled Batavia's representation on the County's Board of Supervisors. After hearing objections from the County, led by a supervisor from LeRoy, the Assemblymen returned the level of representation to the then current level.

The other amendment to the Aldermen's original proposal was made in response to those who challenged a straw vote taken in February. The amendment added a provision requiring that the Aldermen's charter proposal be submitted to a referendum vote on June 9th. This amendment was to satisfy those who argued that the sentiments of Batavia's residents had never been properly determined.

When the Assembly sent the amended Aldermen's bill to the Senate, it was feared that there was insufficient time for the Senate to act before the legislature ended its current session. The Senate was scheduled to end its work within 24 hours. However, somehow, despite the pressure of business in the closing hours of the Senate's final meeting, time was found to act on the bill. At 2 a.m., one hundred years ago, today, the amended Aldermen's bill was formally reported out by the Senate Cities Committee and its passage immediately followed.

It now remained for the Governor to sign the legislation. However, that was not a sure thing, either. It was anticipated that members of the Charter Revision Commission who opposed the Aldermen's bill would lobby the governor not to sign it. In three weeks, I will let you know what happened in that regard.