

Sixth Centennial News Release

Larry D. Barnes, Batavia City Historian

Release date: March 25, 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 appointed several years earlier. The other was a more recent proposal created by the Village Board of Aldermen, the equivalent of today's City Council. The Commission's proposal entailed a city government consisting of a city manager and five non-partisan councilmen elected at large. The Aldermen's proposal provided for 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

In order for Batavia to be incorporated as a city within the coming year, one of these proposals or some variation of it, had to be approved by the State legislature and signed by the governor. A hearing on the two proposals was held on March 10, 1914 by a joint committee composed of senators and assemblymen. When the competing proposals were later taken up in the Assembly for final action, only the Aldermen's proposal had sufficient support to gain passage. Thus, it became clear that if Batavia was soon to become a city, it was going to operate under a traditional arrangement that featured partisan politics, a strong mayor, and councilmen elected from wards.

However, the matter was far from being settled. One hundred years ago, today, the Assembly was ready to vote. But, the current legislative session was scheduled to end the next day and it seemed doubtful that the Senate would have enough time to act. The prospects looked especially bleak when two key senators objected to efforts that were designed to speed passage of the Aldermen's bill. It seemed that time had run out and Batavia would not become a city in the next year.

Tomorrow, I will let you know what happened next.