

## The First Decade

### Overview

It's probably the case that most communities in this Country started when some settler, for personal reasons, chose the location for a farmstead, mill, or perhaps an inn and, over time, development evolved from this beginning. Batavia, however, was a planned community chosen to be a significant settlement from the very beginning, laid out in advance of development, and even given a name before anyone lived here. The location was selected because it served the interests of the Holland Land Company which was in the business of selling land to settlers. Most potential settlers would be coming from the East and likely following Indian trails and, later, the roads that followed the same routes. Joseph Ellicott recognized that a community where Batavia now stands would be well situated in that it would be near the eastern boundary of The Purchase and at the junction of the major Indian trails coming from the East. In response to Ellicott's decision to build here, his immediate superior, Paolo Busti, wrote in June of 1801, "It was to be wished that your first establishment should be central [i.e., in the center of The Purchase]...but I cannot but approve your selection in Township 12, Range 2...as a proper site for erecting a town." (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 6)

Among the very first matters undertaken was choosing a name. The correspondence between Joseph Ellicott and Paolo Busti regarding a proper name has survived the more than 200 years that have passed. Ellicott proposed to name the new community after Busti, suggesting "Bustiville." Busti, in turn, suggested "Ellicottstown." They finally settled on "Batavia," the name then given to an area of the nation now called "The Netherlands." (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 6-10) This choice appears to have been made to honor the homeland of the men who were the ultimate superiors of both Busti and Ellicott, the men who constituted the Holland Land Company.

In the decade from 1801 to 1810, the population of the community of Batavia can only be estimated. The available figures are all for the Town of Batavia of which the community of Batavia was just a part albeit the major part. That means the population of the community itself, in each case, was smaller than the numbers which follow. Unfortunately, it's not possible to know exactly how much of an adjustment to make. In any event, the population of the Town

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of Batavia including the community of Batavia was 40 in 1801, 56 in 1802, 230 in 1803, 300 in 1804, 415 in 1805, and 524 in 1806, 607 in 1807, 617 in 1808, and 1,160 in 1809. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 169)

### 1: Infrastructure

In 1801, Benjamin Ellicott and John Thompson surveyed out and plotted the community of Batavia (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 11). Street and road construction seems to have gotten underway in earnest starting in 1802. John Lamberton and Simeon Mayhew began cutting a thoroughfare in February 1802 that extended two miles east from the current location of the point where West Main Street and Lewiston Road intersect. The eastern point appears to have been near the current intersection of East Main Street and Trumbull Parkway. Their contract called for cutting a swath 100 ft. wide, cutting up the downed timber to make it fit for logging, but leaving to others the task of clearing the logs (principally the landowners bounding the road). (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 11) This stretch became what is today West Main, Main, and East Main streets.

In 1802, after finishing today's Main streets, Lamberton took a similar contract to cut and clear a strip two rods (33 ft.) wide all the way from Batavia to Attica (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 28-29). The section within the current City limits is present-day Walnut Street. The first bridge in Batavia crossed the Tonawanda at the north end of this thoroughfare (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] p. 13) and may have been built at this same time.

Also in 1802, Isaac Sutherland was employed to build a road north to the "Pinery" (present-day Elba) for the purpose of bringing pine timber to a saw mill on the Tonawanda (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 10). Ironically, the stretch within the present City limits became today's Oak Street.

Up until at least 1805 or 1806, a great portion of the central part of Batavia was swampy or low, wet land known among early settlers as the "Frog Pond." A high point at the approximate intersection of present-day Court and Main streets was referred to as "The Island." (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 20) Such land probably explains the decision to construct much of the main east/west

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thoroughfare with a corduroy surface built by laying logs crossways to the direction of travel ("Past and Present," *The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 16 July 1949). A *Daily News* article from 1910 reported coming across the old corduroy surface when current excavation work was being done on East Main Street (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 2 November 1910).

In the first decade of Batavia's existence, there was no public water or sewer system. Residents presumably relied on private wells for water and outhouses or latrines for dealing with human waste. The wells were most likely dug by hand, but because the water table was so high they didn't need to be very deep. Trash and garbage would have been disposed of in whatever manner was convenient to individual property owners.

### 2: Transportation

In the years 1801-1810, there were two ways of getting from one place to another: overland or on water. Travel overland was by foot, on horseback, or by riding in a conveyance drawn by horses or oxen. On water, the options were by watercraft one rowed or by watercraft driven by the wind via sails. None of these was very rapid.

When it came to travel overland, the trails or roads were in such a condition that progress could be excruciatingly slow. For example, when Joseph Hawks came to Batavia in 1802 driving a yoke of oxen and a wagon, it reportedly took him three days to go just 18 miles (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 170). In 1803, the newly-formed Genesee County Legislature formally resolved that 20 miles would be considered a full day's journey as it went about establishing remuneration of legislative members for time spent travelling to and from meetings (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 40). Given what was regarded as a full day's journey, it appears that most such individuals were presumed to be traveling on foot. It is a distance consistent with what recreational hikers of today are able to travel over hiking trails through fields and forests.

Travel by watercraft on Tonawanda Creek was not practical because it was generally very shallow and did not connect to likely destinations. Canoes and rafts may have been used on occasion, but the historic record makes no mention of such travel during this time period.

As roads improved, public stage coaches appeared. The first known stage coach is purported to have begun operation in 1808 and ran through Batavia on a route between Canandaigua and Buffalo. The conveyance was actually an old covered wagon without springs and was said to bear a strong resemblance to vehicles used by Connecticut peddlers. (William Seaver 2, A

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*Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 63) By 1809, someone named Horace Gibbs reportedly had a stable of 75 horses and operated a daily line of stages between Canandaigua and Buffalo (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetter and Biographical Record of Genesee County, NY., 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 176). It's not clear whether the first stage and those that appeared the following year were operated by the same proprietor or different individuals.

### 3: Housing

We don't know how many dwellings existed at the end of the first decade when the population of Batavia approached 1,000. Neither do we know much about their appearance in most instances beyond assuming that they were nearly all wood-frame structures. However, here are some highlights of what we do know about the earliest homes.

The first dwellings built in Batavia were necessarily made of logs. That is because there was no sawmill and it was too difficult to transport sawn lumber from places to the east where sawmills existed. The very first log house was reportedly erected by Abel Rowe, who arrived in March of 1801. It was located directly opposite where the Holland Land Office Museum now stands. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 5) Soon after, Stephen Russell put up a log house, the second in the community, on the same side of the street as Rowe's, but near where Main and Court streets now intersect (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 5). In June of 1801, John Thompson built a log house that was situated a little east of the current intersection of West Main Street and Dellinger Avenue. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 20).

When a saw mill was finally in operation on the Tonawanda, the first frame dwelling was erected. It occupied a "conspicuous position" approximately where the U.S. Post Office currently stands. It was built by Isaac Sutherland in the Spring of 1802 and briefly served as a residence for himself and his family. Within a year, he sold it to James Brisbane, first merchant and first postmaster. However, Brisbane did not himself occupy the dwelling until a few years later when he married Mary Stevens. In the meantime, it served as the home for James W. Stevens, Mary's brother and chief clerk of the Holland Land Office. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 14-15)

Although lumber for frame dwellings became available early in 1802, builders must have continued to erect log structures as well. A traveler who passed through Batavia in 1804 noted

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that it contained 20-30 homes and most of them were built with logs. The relatively few frame dwellings were described as generally small and chiefly one-story. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publishers, 1890] p. 180)

The most impressive dwelling in Batavia during this time period was the home that Joseph Ellicott began erecting in stages starting ca. 1802. This mansion was located at the current intersection of Main Street and Dellinger Avenue. It eventually consisted of a large 3-story main building and two wings. The first and second floors of the main portion each had ten rooms. The third floor was a finished attic having five rooms. The home was reportedly furnished in fine taste. A feature said to fascinate visitors was an 8-ft. tall musical clock built by Ellicott's father and willed him by his mother. (Ellicott Mansion file, archives, Genesee County History Department, Batavia, N.Y.)

A reading of the descriptions of the early dwellings suggests that they often not only sheltered their owners, but provided lodging to travelers. For example, in a letter dated May 1801 from Joseph Ellicott to John Minor of Geneseo, Ellicott refers to Abel Rowe's log structure as "Rowe's Hotel" (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 5).

### 4: Energy sources

The energy sources available to Batavians in the years 1801-1810 were very limited. One could burn wood and candles and one could use the falling water of a stream. Buildings were heated by burning wood in fireplaces or stoves. Food was cooked using the same wood-burning devices. Light after sunset was provided by burning candles fixed in holders of some sort.

Early on, the Tonawanda Creek was used to power a saw mill and, a little later, a grist mill. To achieve this, a dam was constructed across the Creek to create a reservoir. Then a raceway roughly parallel to the Creek carried water from behind the dam to a waterwheel. After turning the wheel and thus expending its energy, the water was returned to the Creek, now at a lower elevation than the water behind the dam.

The first dam was erected in May 1801 by Benjamin Ellicott (Joseph's brother) and John Thompson. Constructing a mill site was a challenge given Batavia's relatively flat topography. Ellicott and Thompson initially planned to place the dam a short distance downstream from the final location, nearer the footbridge now spanning the creek, but "on taking a level" discovered

that the banks of the Creek were not high enough to prevent the backed up water from overflowing the adjacent land. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 18) The final location was apparently close to where the current dam behind the 1997 courthouse stands, but not at the exact same location. The original dam remained in place over 30 years before it was torn down in 1833 (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 29).

Windmills were not unknown in 1801, but there is no record of wind power being used by Batavia's early settlers. Similarly, machinery powered by animals was also being used in one place or another, but again there is no record of this being the case in early Batavia. The oil of sperm whales was very popular, for burning in lamps to provide illumination, elsewhere in the country, but it seems rather improbable, given the challenges of transporting such oil, that it was used in early Batavia.

### 5: Communication

Communication in the years 1801-1810 was by two means only: 1) by the spoken word in face-to-face oral exchange and 2) by the written word, either through putting words to paper by hand or by the use of a printing press.

According to William Seaver, prior to settlement of the Holland Purchase, a "post road" had been established between Albany and Lewiston that passed by the bend on the Tonawanda, but except at Lewiston there was no post office west of the Genesee River. This changed in 1802 when Joseph Ellicott successfully petitioned Post Master General Gideon Granger for a post office at Batavia. Ellicott suggested James Brisbane for the position of Postmaster, a suggestion heeded by Granger; and in August Brisbane began keeping a post office in his general store located immediately east of the current post office on Main Street. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 15-17)

Initially, mail delivery to and from Batavia occurred only once every two weeks. It was sometimes carried on foot, other times on horseback. At first, the route proceeded from Canandaigua to Batavia to Lewiston to Niagara Falls to Williamsville to "the Indian Village" to Batavia and then back to Canandaigua. Soon, however, mail traveled from Canandaigua through Batavia directly to Buffalo and back. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 15-17)

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The post office at Batavia at first was identified as “Genesee Court House” (a court house having been built by then) because at the time there existed a post office in Greene County by the name “Batavia.” By 1804 when our post office finally acquired a sign, the situation had changed and the name “Batavia” was being used here. The sign, currently preserved in the archives of the United States Postal Service, was painted by Mary Stevens, sister of James W. Stevens and future wife of James Brisbane. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 15-17) Her offer to paint it may have been prompted by romantic interests she had in Mr. Brisbane.

The first newspaper to be printed in Batavia, the “Genesee Intelligencer,” was printed on a broken-down press brought from Manlius, NY in 1807 by Elias Williams. The first issue, described as “sorry looking,” featured ads from the Holland Land Co., the report of an elopement, and an item about a runaway apprentice boy for whose apprehension a bag of bran was offered as a reward. The “Genesee Intelligencer” was superseded by the “Cornucopia,” a newspaper that began publication in 1808. It was published by Benjamin Blodgett and a partner by the name of “Peek.” When Peek died in 1811, the newspaper died as well. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 21-22)

### 6: County, Village, City boundaries

At first, all of Western New York was part of Ontario County. Then, in 1802, Genesee County was split off from Ontario County, becoming the area in general encompassing present-day Niagara, Erie, Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Allegany, Wyoming, Genesee, and Orleans Counties, and encompassing parts of Monroe and Livingston Counties. Genesee County, at this time, was divided into four townships, one of which was the Town of Batavia. By 1810, four of today’s counties had been carved out of the original Genesee County: Allegany in 1806, Cattaraugus in 1808, Chautauqua in 1808, and Niagara in 1808. Batavia in 1801-1810 was not yet an incorporated community and, therefore, it had no legal boundaries nor did it have its own governing body.

### 7: Government/governing structure

When Genesee County was created, Batavia became the county seat just as it is today. As one of the conditions for the creation of the County, a court house had to be erected at the expense of the Holland Land Co. The location chosen was that which today is occupied by County Building 1 at the intersection of Batavia’s Court and Main streets. (William Seaver 1, A

*Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 13) Prior to the incorporation of Batavia as a village in 1823, residents of the community were governed by the County and Town of Batavia governments which operated out of this court house.

The erection of the Court House was under the supervision of Joseph Ellicott and D. A. Ogden. The initial plans were obtained by Ogden from a New York City architect. Ellicott found them suitable for a place like London or Amsterdam, but not Batavia. Consequently, Isaac Sutherland and Samuel F. Geer were employed to design a more appropriate structure, one that would house the court facilities, jail, and jail keeper's quarters under one roof. Furthermore, a decision was made to construct the building of wood since, Ellicott claimed, brick "of this country" was scarcely fit for building unless constantly kept covered with thick paint and oil. Otherwise, it would molder away in a few years. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 14)

By late October or early November of 1802, the frame, made almost exclusively of oak, was up. Raising the frame was a "Herculean" task taking three days and requiring all the men that could be mustered in the surrounding countryside, even from as far as Buffalo. The structure was enclosed later in the fall. Although the building was not completely finished until 1804, it was possible for the first session of court to take place therein during the Spring of 1803. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 14) Many are surprised when they learn that the southern half of the Court House was later occupied by a tavern for a 10-year period beginning in 1808 (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 43). It would appear that it was possible to over-imbibe, be arrested and convicted of a related crime, and then be incarcerated all in the same structure! The building survived until 1918 when it was destroyed by fire.

### 8: Crime, crime control, and law enforcement

We presume that there were law-breakers in early Batavia that existed in significant numbers just as was true of other communities. This section is not intended to provide a full account of such misbehaviors. However, there are three facts that bear noting.

The chief law enforcement officer in early Batavia was the County Sheriff. In the very first year of the gaol's existence, the Sheriff, Richard M. Stoddard, went before the Genesee County Board of Supervisors and complained about the facility, declaring it insufficient for securing his prisoners. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 40) It's not known what action, if any, was taken by the Supervisors.

Within a year after the first court proceedings in the Genesee Court House, the first grand jury indictment against a woman occurred. In June of 1804, Catharine Hustler was charged with assault and battery. When her case went to trial, Hustler was found guilty and fined six cents. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 56)

In 1807, the first execution in Western New York took place in Batavia. In June of that year, James McLean had been found guilty of murder. In August, he was taken to the place of his execution, a public event that drew a huge crowd. According to reports of the occurrence that day, when McLean was being executed using a gibbet (not a gallows), the rope broke and McLean collapsed on the ground still quite alive. Although McLean expressed a strong desire not to be subjected to his punishment again, given that he had apparently killed two men, a second attempt was deemed fitting. Someone was sent to the general store for a second rope which proved strong enough to do the job. It has been recorded that William Keyes had been paid \$8.25 to build the gibbet and eight gallons of brandy were supplied to the guards for their role in the execution. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son] p. 58)

### 9: Retail establishments/ other commercial enterprises

William Seaver, in listing the residents of Batavia as of 1801, identifies five as carpenters, one as a blacksmith, and one as a tailor (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 20). However, none of these individuals appears to have been operating a retail establishment or other commercial enterprise housed in a commercial building.

James Brisbane is credited with operating the first retail establishment in Batavia. Brisbane, employed by the Holland Land Co. during the survey of The Purchase, had been the “principal clerk” of a company-owned supply storehouse located in Stafford from October 1798 until January 1800. At the conclusion of the survey, he returned to Philadelphia from whence he had come. However, just two years later, in the Spring of 1802, he was back in Western New York, financed by a \$3,000 loan from the Holland Land Co., for the purpose of setting up his own general store in Batavia. (Larry Barnes, *The Brisbanes of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: self-published, 2019] pp. 2-3). James Brisbane purchased the goods for this store in New York City and brought them to Batavia by going first up the Hudson River to Albany, then up the Mohawk River, next along Lake Ontario to near Lewiston, and eventually overland by way of Buffalo,

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then called New Amsterdam (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 15).

The general store itself was located in the second frame structure to be erected in Batavia, a building erected that same Spring by Isaac Sutherland and Samuel Geer and intended to serve as a joiner's shop. Brisbane purchased the building before it was completed and finished the construction in a manner making it suitable for a store. It was located just east of the current post office building (Larry Barnes, *The Brisbanes of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: self-published, 2009] p. 3). James Brisbane continued to own this general store, although not always under his direct management, until 1822 when it was torn down. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & son, 1849] p. 15; Larry Barnes, *The Brisbanes of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: self-published, 2009] p. 4) His customers were not only fellow settlers, but Seneca Indians as well. Apparently to serve the latter, he reportedly employed a clerk by the name of "Tiffany" who was proficient in the language spoken by the Senecas. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographic Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 179)

During the ensuing years in the period 1801-1810, additional retail establishments were built and operated by other individuals. For example, Timothy Burt of Canandaigua and Richard Stoddard of LeRoy in 1803 erected the second general store in Batavia, a small frame building not far from Brisbane's. A year later, Stoddard sold his interest in the store to Isaiah Babcock. In two more years, that business failed. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 19; William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 50)

In 1808, Ebenezer Cary occupied the former Babcock and Burt building and operated a store there until his own building was erected the next year. James Brisbane and Ebenezer Cary were the only merchants from 1808 until 1810 when Ephraim Hart built a store and hired Clark Heacox to manage the business for him. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographic Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 180)

As the population grew, so did the demand for taverns. By 1803, there were two or three (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 15).

## 10: Factories/Industries

It would be many decades before Batavia would become a community of factories, but even in the decade 1801-1810, certain operations were essential to a community on the frontier. The two most critical were a saw mill and a grist mill.

As indicated earlier, the first structures built in Batavia were made of logs because it was too difficult to transport sawn lumber from mills to the east. Early on, an effort was made to address this situation. In early December of 1801, Joseph Ellicott wrote to Paulo Busti about the progress to date. He wrote that a saw mill was costing a great deal of labor because the location was not “a natural seat,” but a “convenience” of this sort was absolutely necessary. He expected it to begin operation within a week. A few days later, Ellicott wrote that despite continuous rain, sickness, and 10 inches of snow, the saw mill shortly should be able to supply Batavia with boards, an article much wanted. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 9-10) The saw mill was built by Moses Eggleston and situated on the south side of the creek (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 19-20), a location suggesting that a bridge across the Tonawanda must already have been in place. The mill survived over 20 years, being torn down in 1822 (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 29).

Prior to the completion of a grist mill, all breadstuff for settlers had to be procured east of the Genesee River and brought to Batavia on pack horses. This led to shortages and, for example, on one of those occasions in November of 1804, Joseph Ellicott observed that not a “morsel of bread” was to be seen in Batavia, despite plenty of pork and potatoes. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 19-20.) Almost two years earlier in February of 1802, Ellicott had expressed the need to procure a good mill-wright to construct the running gear. So, when a mill was finally completed in December of 1804, it had been a long time coming. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 11). It appears that the grist mill was on the north side of the creek. Captain Elijah Spencer was the first miller (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 30).

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### 11: Banking/financial services

There were no local banking or financial services as such in the period 1801-1810. In fact, there was none west of the Genesee River. They weren't to come for nearly three decades.

### 12: Education

There were no public schools in the very earliest years of the period 1801-1810. For the most part, children were probably home-schooled to the extent that they received a formal education. On the other hand, Beers reports that a Thomas Layton, who settled in Batavia in 1801, was a teacher of the young prior to 1810 (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 182). We don't know exactly what that means. Did some children go to Layton's dwelling for schooling? Did he go to their homes? How was he remunerated, assuming he was? What was the nature of the schooling he provided? Did it extend beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic? Many of Batavia's early settlers were well-educated adults, so it seems likely that they would have wanted the same for their children.

There is indirect evidence of there being a school building erected at some point within the decade, perhaps towards the end. William Seaver, in writing of the organization of a Congregational Church society in 1809, states that a meeting was held for that purpose "at the Center School House" (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the History of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 27-28.) Exactly where the Center School House was located, when it was erected, and whether it was a public or private school is unknown.

### 13: Religion

According to Seaver, for several years after the first settlement of Batavia, little attention was paid to religious matters except that religious meetings were occasionally held by pious laymen or, at irregular intervals, by itinerant preachers. Many early Batavians were described as men of particularly liberal views, "almost free thinkers." One Presbyterian of the time later noted, "Mr. Ellicott disregarded the Sabbath and was hostile to religious institutions...it was a common observation that Sabbath-day did not extend westward beyond the Genesee River." When a member of a missionary society arrived in Batavia in 1805 to preach, he notified residents of his planned evening lecture, "but nobody came." (Larry Barnes, *The Brisbanes of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: self-published, 2009] p. 6)

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The first organization of a religious society didn't occur until mid-September in 1809. At that time, the Rev. Royal Phelps, a missionary from the Hampshire Missionary Society in Massachusetts, presided and officiated at a meeting forming a Congregational Church. Eleven persons became members. About a week later, Phelps preached at Jesse Rumsey's barn and administered the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. This was probably the first time that the sacrament was ever administered in Batavia. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 27-28)

### 14: Libraries/archives/museums

Consistent with the educated status of many of the first settlers, Batavia's first library came into existence just three years after the community's establishment. In November of 1804, subscribers met at the home of Abel Rowe to elect officers and trustees. They resolved to call themselves, "Chairman, Trustees, and Associates of the Batavia Library." The library was incorporated pursuant to an act of the New York State Legislature passed in April 1796 for the purpose of governing the creation of public libraries in the state. This first Batavia library survived at least until 1826 when the last recorded reference was made to it. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 83-84 and Miscellaneous Record, Liber 1: 33, Genesee County Clerk's Office, Batavia, New York.

### 15: Cemeteries

The first land set apart for a cemetery was lot 180 in the then western part of Batavia. Before then, burials would likely have occurred on private property. This first burial ground was located near the Tonawanda on land along the east side of the current South Lyon Street. Although the record shows that the lot was deeded in August of 1820 from Joseph Ellicott to Benjamin Ellicott, James W. Stevens, and others in trust for public use, its use as a burial ground reportedly began about 1810. In any event, it was a poor location because it was semi-annually subjected to floods. By 1822, a need for other arrangements became obvious. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 86-87)

### 16: Firefighting

In the years 1801-1810, there was no fire department and no fire-fighting equipment. The best that could be hoped for in the instance of fire was a hastily organized bucket brigade throwing water on the flames with the water secured from wells or perhaps the Tonawanda.

### 17: Healthcare

Batavia in the early years was not a particularly healthy place to be living. The swampy environment was the perfect breeding ground for swarms of mosquitoes. In fact, the Senecas, who were perhaps too smart to ever have built one of their own communities here, referred to Batavia by the term, “Ge-ne-an-da-sase-ka,” which translates as, “Mosquito Town.” (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 27) In an 1801 letter from Joseph Ellicott to Paulo Busti, he noted that almost the whole of the people in Batavia had been afflicted with the bilious and other fevers (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 9). The symptoms of bilious fever include, besides fever, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Among the other “fevers” to which Ellicott was likely referring, a common one was called, “ague.” It was a malarial fever marked by recurring chills.

Healthcare in 1801-1810 was limited to the care that an individual physician could provide. Such doctors were typically not graduates of a school of medicine, but rather individuals who acquired their knowledge and skills through a combination of association with another “physician” or through trial and error. Batavia’s first doctor, Dr. David McCracken, was one such person. William Seaver described him this way: he was “not well trained, but that was balanced by a natural endowment” (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 38).

Dr. McCracken came to Batavia in 1801 and took two lots of 40 acres each on the south side of Main Street, between the current Liberty and Jackson streets and extending south to the Tonawanda Creek. He erected a log house at that location. McCracken was said to be the most extensive and popular practitioner in the region and one of the most conspicuous personages in the early history of Batavia. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 38)

Not long after Dr. McCracken settled here, another physician, a Dr. Town, also moved to Batavia, but apparently left after only four or five years. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 38)

### 18: Care of the handicapped, aged, poor, and young

Unlike later in the development of Batavia, in the years 1801-1810, the care of the handicapped, aged, poor, and young was left almost exclusively to their family and friends. Still, it should be noted that there were “overseers of the poor” (sometimes called “poor

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masters”) from the very beginning. The first two, David Cully and Benjamin Porter, were elected in 1803 (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 169). Such persons were charged with taking care of the poor using funds provided by the Town.

### 19: Disasters

There are no records of any true disasters besetting Batavia in its first decade. They will happen, but that’s still down the road.

### 20: Entertainment and recreation

The earliest parties for pleasure were arranged by first designating the home of some settler and then each party-goer contributing something to the entertainment. One would carry some flour, another some sugar, another eggs, another butter, etc., the aggregate making up a feast. Parties alternated from home to home. These “frolics” typically occurred in the evening and would follow events such as husking bees, barn raisings, and quiltings. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 170)

By 1803, the arrival of a celebrated left-handed fiddler by the name of Russell Noble (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 170 ), combined with the existence of two or three taverns, set the stage for a “ball” every two or three weeks (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 15). Early Batavians obviously worked hard. It appears that they took time to enjoy themselves, as well.

### 21: War/impact of war

Militias were made up of all able-bodied males between 18 and 45 years of age, with a few exemptions (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 200). Evidently, by 1808, there were enough such men in the area to begin general training on an annual basis (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 202).

One day each year between September 1<sup>st</sup> and October 15<sup>th</sup>, at a place designated by brigade officers, the regiments were directed to assemble for training purposes. All the officers

of each regiment or battalion were also required to rendezvous two days in succession in June, July, or August for drill under a brigade inspector. General training was usually regarded as mainly a pleasant occasion to meet friends. The officers of the volunteer companies were said to be commonly selected chiefly for their handsome appearance and martial bearing rather than leadership skills. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] pp. 201-202) The short-comings of these latter practices would become evident when the War of 1812 came to Western New York.

In 1810, as the tensions that eventually led to the War of 1812 became of increasing concern, New York State authorities contracted with Joseph Ellicott to build an arsenal made of logs (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890]). This arsenal is believed to have been located on the east side of the present Walnut Street, probably not far from West Main Street.

### 22: Families/persons of special note

In the course of reviewing the development of Batavia during the first decade, many individuals have already been cited. To them should be added these two that the reader may find of interest. The first child to be born in Batavia, John S. Rowe, was born in 1802 (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 19). The first death was a Mrs. Layton who died in 1803. Her place of burial is unknown. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 86) Since there were no cemeteries as yet, Mrs. Layton's interment presumably would have been on private property somewhere.

### 23: Private clubs/social organizations/service organizations/non-profit groups providing services

There do not appear to have been any private clubs, social organizations, service organizations, or non-profit groups providing services in the years 1801-1810.

### 24: Sex/sexual services/ sexual entertainment

Places of sexual entertainment or places providing sexual services would eventually appear in Batavia, but there is no indication of such places early in the community's existence. Information about the sexual lives of Americans in general, let alone just those in Batavia,

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would not become available before the next century, so we know essentially nothing of this aspect of life in the early days.

### 25: Urban renewal

In the years 1801-1810, there was, of course, no “urban” to renew. That wouldn’t start to happen until years later.