

The Second Decade

Overview

The second decade was one that would prove very stressful for the inhabitants of both Batavia and the rest of Western New York. One of the stress-inducing factors was the War of 1812 which lasted from June 1812 until February 1815. The other was the weather which, in general, was less than favorable in the period 1812-1817, but was especially a problem in 1816, "The Year Without a Summer."

War of 1812

The War of 1812 was between the United States and British forces, in particular those of Great Britain and British North America. (The area that constituted British North America is today's Canada, a nation that did not come into being until 1867.) The British were aided by a large number of Native Americans. A much smaller number of Native Americans sided with the United States. While the War is a significant part of both American and Canadian history, it has relatively minor significance for the British who were, in 1812, preoccupied with a long-term and major military conflict with the French.

The War began when the United States, on June 18, 1812, by relatively close votes in both the House and Senate, declared war against Great Britain. Fighting took place on the oceans, on the Great Lakes, and on land areas in North America. The issues that led to a declaration of war included: 1) Restrictions on trade imposed by the British who were seeking to weaken France, 2) Forced recruitment of American sailors who were captured on the high seas and impressed into the British navy, and 3) British military support to Native Americans who were trying to stop U.S. expansion along the frontier. An additional motive for the declaration of war may have been a desire by some Americans to annex the territory which 50 years later became modern Canada.

From the standpoint of residents of Batavia and Western New York in general, the most important aspect of this war involved the military action that took place on the Niagara Frontier. Before it was over, the communities from Buffalo to Lewiston were burned, Fort Niagara was captured by the British, and the area west of Batavia emptied of settlers as individuals and families fled the devastation.

Elsewhere, in the War of 1812, Washington, D.C. was burned in retaliation for the American destruction of York (later Toronto). The British attacked Fort McHenry on the Chesapeake Bay as part of a plan to take Baltimore. (The American defense of this fort led Francis Scott Key to pen the words of a poem that later became the lyrics for our national anthem.) Ports along the

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Eastern Seaboard were blockaded by his majesty's warships. U.S. efforts to capture Quebec City failed. Detroit was lost to the British. Perhaps the two major bright points in the war, from the American perspective, were 1) a naval victory on Lake Erie under the leadership of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, and 2) the defeat of British forces at New Orleans in a meaningless battle that took place after a treaty had been signed ending the war. In the latter instance, the slowness of 19th-century communication prevented the warring parties from learning about the treaty until after the battle ended.

The War of 1812 officially ended on February 18, 1815 when the Treaty of Ghent was ratified by the U.S. Senate. Under the terms of the treaty, boundaries between the U.S. and British North America returned to where they had been when the war started. Historically, Canadians, whose militia played an important role in the fighting, have seen themselves as the victors. On the other hand, Americans have historically viewed themselves as being the victorious force. However, everyone seems to agree that Native American tribes, having suffered permanent losses in the conflict including the death of their leader, Chief Tecumseh, were clear losers in the war. Further discussion of this war occurs in a following section titled, "War/impact of war."

Year without a summer

It was bad enough that Batavians living in the second decade had to contend with war. Abnormal weather made matters even worse. The period of 1812-1817 was one of exceptional volcanic activity. The sheer volume of volcanic dust shot into the atmosphere, by blocking sunlight, caused a general, albeit temporary, cooling of the earth's climate. The most significant of these eruptions was the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora in the Dutch East Indies. Depending on the source one accepts, it was the largest known eruption in either 1,000 years or as much as 10,000. Either way, it was huge and during 1816 caused a significant drop in the temperature of the Northern Hemisphere.

The Northeastern United States was one of the areas most affected by the eruption. The impact was made greater by the fact that the cooling was most evident during the growing season. There were hard freezes in every summer month. Crop failures resulted and food shortages ensued. The year 1816 came to be known as "eighteen hundred and starve to death." Further discussion of this weather disaster is in a following section titled, "Disasters."

Holland Land Company

In the period 1811-1820, the Holland Land Company continued to sell parcels of land throughout Western New York including in Batavia. Joseph Ellicott remained the resident land agent. The most notable development was the construction of a stone land office building in 1815, the building that currently houses the Holland Land Office Museum. The stone land office replaced the land office that had been across the street and part of Joseph Ellicott's mansion.

Population

Despite these trying circumstances, it appears that Batavia continued to grow. However, as in the first decade, there are no certain population figures available for the Village itself. Until 1860, Federal Census records continued to lump together the Town and the Village of Batavia. This unfortunate situation is compounded by the fact that the Township kept shrinking geographically as other townships were split off from it, e.g., Bergen, Alexander, Pembroke, and Bethany in 1812 and Elba in 1820. Beers claimed that the Village had 1,400 people in 1825 (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 183). Thirty-five years later, the 1860 Federal census for the Village reported 2,560 residents (“Genesee Community Information,” *Richmond Memorial Library*, online, accessed 3 January 2014). Assuming Beer’s figure was accurate and a steady growth occurred both before and after 1825, perhaps the Village had somewhere around 1235 people by the end of the second decade in 1820.

1: Infrastructure

With an increase in population, it seems probable that streets were regularly lengthened and/or new ones added during the second decade. However, Safford North makes a very interesting comment about such development. He writes:

“During the early days of the Village a favored few were permitted to purchase from twenty to forty acres of land fronting on [West Main, Main, and East Main streets], running back one mile in length...For years, these men held their broad acres undiminished by a sale. They were hostile to any street parallel to Main, which they would have considered an invasion of their sacred rights...As a natural consequence Main was filled with handsome residences. For years all taxes and improvements were lavished upon that broad thoroughfare. The result was that a residence upon that fine avenue became, to a certain extent, the arbiter of social position.” (Safford E. North, *Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* [Boston: Boston History Company, 1899] p. 274)

It’s not possible to ascertain the specific dates when the construction occurred, but North observes further that the first street opened by the “necessities of the pioneers” was Mechanic Street, now State Street. After that, he writes, there followed Center, then Bank, Liberty, Summit, South Liberty, Evans, Swan and Ross. He claims “they were generally occupied and built upon before they were legally opened...becoming streets from the demands of a growing population and not in conformity to any plan laid down in the original village plot.” (Safford E. North, *Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* [Boston: Boston History Company, 1899] p. 274)

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In the second decade of Batavia's existence, there was still no public water or sewer system. As earlier, residents presumably relied on private wells for water and outhouses or latrines for dealing with human waste. Some may have installed gutters, downspouts, and cisterns to collect and store rain water falling on building roofs. Trash and garbage would still have been disposed of in whatever manner was convenient for individual property owners.

2: Transportation

The chief transportation options remained the same as in the first decade: travel on foot, on horseback, or in a conveyance pulled by horses or oxen. However, with the improvement of roads, the speed of travel would have increased.

3: Housing

More people resulted in more houses, of course. In addition, those homes which had been constructed earlier and built of logs were being replaced with frame structures. An example was the dwelling of Dr. David McCracken, Batavia's first doctor. After living for several years in his log house on the south side of East Main Street, he built a small frame structure in which he lived until eventually moving to Rochester many years later. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 38)

The magnificent mansion that Joseph Ellicott was erecting in stages on the north side of West Main Street, at the current intersection of West Main Street and Dellinger Avenue, was beginning to be matched by other homes on East Main Street. Two examples are those of Trumbull Cary and George Washington Lay.

The Cary Mansion was a 24-room Greek Revival structure built in 1817. It was located on the north side of East Main Street between Bank Street and the current Wiard Street. An historic marker has been placed at the site. The impetus for the mansion's construction was allegedly an agreement between Trumbull Cary, erstwhile suitor, and his bride-to-be Margaret Elinor Brisbane, sister of James Brisbane. After years of courtship, supposedly Margaret finally agreed to marriage only after Trumbull promised to provide a mansion and a fine pair of horses to pull their carriage. (Larry Barnes, *The Cary Family of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: self-published, 2012] pp. 15-16) There will be several more references both to this structure and to Trumbull Cary in later sections of this book.

The Lay Mansion was built in 1820 by George Washington Lay, a prominent Batavian who became a member of Congress and also charge d'affairs to the courts of Norway and Sweden. Fifty-four years after its construction, the mansion was enlarged by John Foote Lay, George Lay's first son. The building remains standing, located on the southeast corner of East Main Street and Masse Place. George Lay's wife, Olive Foote, whom he married a year after the mansion's erection, was a relative of Trumbull Cary. (Larry Barnes, *The Cary Family of Batavia*

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[Batavia, N.Y.: self-published, 2012] pp. 10 and 13) Intermarriage, of which this is the second example in as many paragraphs, linked together many of the early Batavia families.

4: Energy sources

From all indications, the energy sources available to Batavians in the years 1811-1820 remained the same as earlier. They included wood for heating and cooking, candles for illumination, and water power for operating mills.

5: Communication

As in the first decade, Batavians had only two means of communicating with each other and with the outside world: 1) oral exchanges face-to-face, or 2) the written word put down either by hand or by means of a printing press.

Mail delivery became more frequent in this decade. By 1817, mail reached or left Batavia three times weekly in contrast to once every two weeks back in 1802 (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 178). However, delivery to each home was many decades into the future. Individual recipients went to the post office to pick up their mail. A free-standing post office building was still a century away, as well. In these early days, the post office was always housed in someone's store.

When the "Cornucopia" newspaper ceased publication in 1811, with the assistance of David C. Miller, a printer, Benjamin Blodgett began publication of the "Republican Advocate" and continued to do so for several years. Eventually, he sold his interests to Miller, and the latter became the sole proprietor. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 22) In 1819, the first issue of "Spirit of the Times" went on sale. It was first published by Oran Follett. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 23) This newspaper survived over 125 years, undergoing several name changes during that period: "Genesee Herald and Spirit of the Times," back to "Spirit of the Times," and then, finally, just "The Times" (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] p. 72).

6: County, Village, City boundaries

In 1812, the Towns of Alexander, Bethany, LeRoy, and Pembroke were created. In 1813, the Town of Bergen came into being. And in 1820, the Towns of Byron, Elba, and Stafford were created. In many of these instances, the territory came out of the Town of Batavia, so by the end of this decade, the Town of Batavia was considerably smaller than at the start. In 1820, the Village of Batavia was still an unincorporated community and, therefore, still had neither legal boundaries nor its own governing body. However, pressure was building to address this situation and action was soon to occur in the next decade.

7: Government/governing structure

In the years from 1811 to 1820, the residents of the village continued to be governed by the County and Town of Batavia governments. The Court House built in 1803 at the corner of Main and Court streets continued to be the seat of government. In 1819, the County Supervisors expended \$2,500 to repair and modify this structure. Among the changes, John Hickox's tavern, which had been operating in the southern half of the building, was closed down. The whole upper part of the Court House was then transformed into court and jury rooms. Most if not all of the lower part, except for the jail, became the residence of the jailer. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 43; Safford E. North, *Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* [Boston: Boston History Company, 1899] p. 277)

Until the end of this decade, government records were kept in a variety of places that, in retrospect, seem quite risky. For example, records were stored at one point in the Main Street harness shop of Simeon Cummings. Later, they were stored in the second story of Ebenezer Cary's general store, a brick building across Main Street from the Court House. Then, in 1820, construction was started on a stone County Clerk's office on the south side of Main Street a little east of where the 1841 Court House now stands. Deemed "fire proof," it finally provided a reasonably secure place for the storage of government records. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 45-46)

8: Crime, crime control, and law enforcement

There appears to have been little change from the first decade in the matter of crime, crime control, and law enforcement. The chief law enforcement officer in Batavia remained the County Sheriff.

9: Retail establishments/other commercial enterprises

As the population grew, so did the number of establishments serving the residents of Batavia and the surrounding countryside. According to William Seaver, by 1819, there were six general stores in operation in contrast to only two 10 years earlier. Among them was still the first general store in Batavia, the one established by James Brisbane. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 39)

Also in 1819, according to Seaver, there were these other retail or commercial enterprises:

- 1 leather and shoe store
- 1 jeweler
- 1 milliner
- 3 tailors

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- 1 hatter
- 5 taverns
- 1 meat market
- 1 bookstore
- 1 print shop
- 1 grocery

Seaver indicated that the bookstore, print shop, and grocery store were located on the ground floor of a two-story wood building called “The Recess.” This structure stood on the north side of Main Street. (William Seaver, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 39) It is likely that the rest of the businesses cited above were also on Main Street.

10: Factories/Industries

Both the water-powered saw mill and, it appears, the water-powered grist mill remained in operation during the period of 1811-1820. During this decade, other businesses also began to appear. By 1819, Simeon Cummings was making saddles, Thomas Bliss was constructing cabinets and chairs, and two individuals, E. Towner and Oswald Williams, were tanning hides (William Seaver, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 39) In 1810, James Cochran had purchased property near Main Street on the east side of what is now Bank Street (Larry Barnes, *The Cary Family of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: self-published, 2012] p. 16). Then, at some unknown point afterwards, he built facilities for casting bells at that location (“Batavia Had Tokens Over a Century Ago,” *The Batavia Times*, Batavia, N.Y., 16 March 1944). The latter facilities may have already become operational by 1820.

11: Banking/financial services

As the second decade drew to a close, Batavia was still without local financial services or a bank.

12: Education

North observed in his 1899 book on Genesee County’s history that records of the early efforts to establish schools in Genesee County were either poorly kept or not kept at all (Safford E. North, *Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* [Boston: Boston History Company, 1899] p. 389). That was certainly true of Batavia where, except for a reference to a Thomas Layton as a teacher of the young from 1801 to 1810 and another reference to a “Center School House” in 1809, apparently no records exist from before 1813.

In 1811, a law was passed in the New York State Legislature that authorized the Governor to name five Commissioners who were to organize a system of common schools across the state. The law further required townships in the State to create school districts with three

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Commissioners elected in each town and three Trustees elected in each district. Funding of the schools was to be by funds from the State and matching funds from the towns. (Safford E. North, *Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* [Boston: Boston History Company, 1899] p. 391)

In November of 1813, a call went out in Batavia to all freeholders or taxable inhabitants of "School District No. 2," a district evidently created in response to the 1811 State law and which included much of the Village. According to this call, a meeting was to be held in December for the official formation of the district and the election of officers. At the December meeting, Simeon Cummings, Libbeus Fish, and Daniel B. Brown were chosen as Trustees, Robert Smith as Clerk, and James Cochran as Collector. (Frederic W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 208) The December 1813 meeting of District No. 2 freeholders and taxable inhabitants appears to mark the beginning of public schools in Batavia.

The location of the school building for District No. 2 was on the northeast corner of East Main and Ross streets. It was a structure that had been conveyed to Cummings and Fish in 1811. In later years, it purportedly came to be known as "the old brick school house." (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 208)

13: Religion

In contrast to the first decade, the years 1811 to 1820 saw considerable activity on the religious front. Several Protestant congregations were organized. They included a second Congregational Church, an Episcopal Church, something called a "Department" of the Genesee County Bible Society, and a Methodist Church.

The Congregational Church, formed in the previous decade, as earlier noted first met in Jesse Rumsey's barn east of the village. After that, it also met in a school house and private homes before, starting in 1813, meeting in the Genesee County Court House. It continued to meet in the Court House until a church building was erected 11 years later. The most significant development occurred in 1818 when the congregation shed its Congregational ties and became Presbyterian. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 218)

A second Congregational Church was organized in 1811 when a public meeting for that purpose was held at the Court House. It seems surprising that two Congregational Churches would be organized only two years apart in a community as small as early Batavia. On the surface, it could appear that confusing historical records might be causing one church to be viewed as two different ones. However, the 1811 church is clearly a different Congregational Church from the one organized in 1809. Lists of the early members from both churches have survived the passage of over 200 years; and the congregations were clearly composed of

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different persons. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 27-28)

The Episcopal Church in Batavia had its origins in 1815 when, in June, a meeting was held in the Genesee County Court House for the purpose of incorporation. "St. James Church in Batavia" was chosen as the name. Nine individuals were chosen as Vestrymen. Two Wardens were also chosen including John Hickox, keeper of the tavern in the Court House. Coincidentally, early Episcopal services were held in Hickox's tavern. (William Seaver, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 30)

The Episcopalians approached the Holland Land Company for aid in the erection of a church. The company subsequently provided land on the current Ellicott Street and, furthermore, agreed to donate \$1,000 toward a wood building or \$1,500 toward one of brick. Ground was broken for a brick church in the Spring of 1816. Walls were finished and a roof put on by the Fall. However, this exhausted the available funds and the building stood unfinished until the next decade. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 31) It was an inauspicious start for what became, in later years, the preferred church of Batavia's elite.

In April of 1819, a meeting at "the Brick School House" was held for the purpose of forming a "Department" of the Genesee County Bible Society. No further information is available about this group. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p.37)

Finally, in December of 1819, a meeting was held in the Genesee County Court House for the purpose of organizing a Methodist Church. "The First Methodist Episcopal Church in Batavia" was chosen as the name. Five Trustees were also elected at this time. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 34)

14: Libraries/archives/museums

The library that had been founded in 1804 continued to function.

15: Cemeteries

Burials in Batavia during this decade probably all occurred in the cemetery then on the east side of the current South Lyon Street. The practice of burying bodies on private land before this burial ground became available is illustrated by the following incident. According to Seaver, in 1820 workmen digging a post hole for a fence on Main Street (East Main Street?) discovered a complete human skeleton in front of the S. C. Holden residence. Upon investigation, it turned out to be the remains of a Mrs. Crow who had died at a very early day in Buffalo and was interred here by her family on that spot. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 86)

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16: Firefighting

As in the first decade, in 1811-1820 there was no fire department and no fire-fighting equipment. As the village was growing and the risk of a major conflagration was also growing, there was increasing concern about this situation. It would prove to be a major impetus behind the move to incorporate during the following decade.

17: Healthcare

Healthcare in the second decade remained the providence of individual physicians. However, by 1819, their number had grown to five. Besides David McCracken, there was Ephraim Brown, John Cotes, Winter Hewitt, and John Z. Ross. By then, there also were two apothecaries: H. Tisdale's and Hewitt and Billing's. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 38-39)

While the "frog pond" and "island" in the center of the community may have been addressed by this time, apparently large areas of wet and swampy low land remained throughout the second decade. Thus, Batavia remained a relatively unhealthy environment. Safford North writes that sickness compelled many who had located in Batavia to leave. Many of them went to present-day Wyoming County where the surface was hilly. Malaria and its associated diseases created the greater portion of the sickness. (Safford E. North, *Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* [Boston: Boston History Company, 1899] p. 269)

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

During the second decade, a county poor house was still a few more years into the future, so care of the handicapped, aged, poor, and young was still left almost exclusively to their family and friends. None-the-less, County-appointed "overseers of the poor" continued, as in the first decade, to provide some support. An example of such support, appearing in an early county record, was the statement that \$4.00 had been expended for the care of Betty Tiddy, "a pauper." (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 41)

19: Disasters

There were two disasters effecting Batavia in the second decade: The "Year Without a Summer" in 1816 and the preceding War of 1812.

The effects of the cold weather in 1816, weather produced by volcanic eruptions half a world away, were far-reaching and severe. According to Orsamus Turner, who in 1849 wrote of the impact, there was an almost total loss of "small crops" in Western New York. In most of the

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settlements upon The Purchase, “an extreme scarcity of provisions prevailed.” (Orsamus Turner, *Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase of Western New York* [Buffalo: Jewett, Thomas & Co., 1849] p. 536)

Other sources, filed in the archives of the Genesee County History Department, provide further evidence of the extent of this disaster. For example, at the end of June, frost killed cucumbers in the LeRoy area. In June, a person living in the Albion area froze to death. South of Batavia in Alleghany County, corn was so badly frozen in August that it had to be cut up for fodder. There was not grain enough to provide seed for the next year. Daytime temperatures rarely reached 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Throughout June, July, and August, farmers found it necessary to wear overcoats and mittens. (“Genesee County Weather/Year of No Summer,” file, Genesee County History Department, Batavia, N.Y.)

The actual cause of this dramatic change in the weather was not understood until several decades later. Consequently, many people living through the event became frightened and speculated that the sun had become exhausted. That fear could take extreme forms. For example, north of Batavia in what is present-day Orleans County, a farmer saw the situation as so hopeless that he killed all his cattle and hanged himself. Reportedly, he had unsuccessfully tried to induce his wife to also commit suicide in order to escape what he perceived as an inevitable death by freezing and starvation. (“Genesee County Weather/Year of No Summer,” file, Genesee County History Department, Batavia, N.Y.)

The cold of 1816 produced a severe impact in terms of depressed agricultural production and associated economic losses. However, an even greater effect on Batavia and Western New York was produced by the War of 1812, a man-made disaster. Details of the latter event have been reserved to a following section titled, “War/impact of war.”

20: Entertainment and recreation

It is important to note that early Batavians had to rely on themselves for entertainment. For example, if they wanted to hear music, they had to produce it. It is doubtful that they ever imagined a day when one could hear recorded music or listen to a broadcast from some distant location. That made the 1803 arrival of Russell Noble, the fiddler, a significant event. It also made the organization of the first band an important occurrence. The latter reportedly took place in 1820 when a band was formed under the direction of Phineas Todd and someone by the name of Hunt. According to Beers, the group survived six years. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 238)

21: War/Impact of war

Combat during the War of 1812 took place in several locations in North America. However, from the perspective of Batavians, the most significant military arena was on the Niagara Frontier. The American military strategy called for invasions of territory now composing the nation of Canada. Capture of this territory may have been seen as an opportunity to permanently expand the United States or it may have been seen as a temporary occupation to use as a “bargaining chip” in negotiating differences with the British. Historians apparently disagree on this point. In any event, what President Madison and some others envisioned as an easy victory proved to be quite the opposite.

The American forces, particularly early in the conflict, proved often to be inept. Militia forces, especially, performed badly, sometimes even refusing to advance on enemy soldiers once beyond their home states. (Safford E. North, *Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* [Boston: Boston History Company, 1899] p. 125) Fighting along the Niagara Frontier see-sawed back and forth as first the Americans, then the British, the latter aided by Native American allies, gained the upper hand.

During the war, the most significant chain of events in Western New York began in December of 1813 when American soldiers under Brigadier General George McClure, a militia officer from Steuben County, burned the Canadian Village of Newark (now present-day Niagara-on-the-Lake). This action destroyed all but one of the 149 dwellings and large numbers of women and children were forced into severe winter weather as they fled the community with nothing but the clothing on their backs. The destruction of Newark has been viewed historically as a cruel and pointless atrocity. (Safford E. North, *Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* [Boston: Boston History Company, 1899] pp. 132-133)

The British forces were quick to retaliate in kind. That same December, they captured Fort Niagara. Then they methodically burned Youngstown, Lewiston, Niagara Falls, Black Rock, Buffalo and intervening tenements and farm houses. American soldiers who were responsible for defending these communities, mainly militia men, performed badly and wound up fleeing in disarray. North, in describing their actions, characterized many of these men as “disgraceful cowards.” He claimed that soldiers from Batavia were an exception in this regard, but one has to wonder whether his partisanship as a life-long resident of the community may have colored his perceptions. Terrified civilians all along the Niagara Frontier also fled in the face of the British onslaught. Often times, so great and disorderly was their effort to escape that family members became separated from one another. For weeks afterwards, the Niagara Frontier remained both deserted and desolate. (Safford E. North, *Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* [Boston: Boston History Company, 1899] pp. 135-137)

As soldiers and civilians fled eastward, Batavia was perceived as being at a comparatively safe distance from the enemy. And so, Batavia became a rallying point of what was left of the American military forces. It also became a refuge for homeless refugees. (Safford E. North,

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Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York [Boston: Boston History Company, 1899] pp. 137-138) Private homes were thrown open, barns and sheds occupied by refugees, and separated families were re-united. Joseph Ellicott's home housed army officers. The Land Office (still a wing on Ellicott's mansion) served as a hospital. Meanwhile, the most valuable effects of the Land Office were taken farther east beyond the Genesee River. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 34)

Residents of Batavia reportedly made large contributions of provisions, clothing, and money for the refugees. A plea for further aid was made to the State which subsequently appropriated \$50,000 for relief. Another \$13,000 came from other sources. (Safford E. North, *Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* [Boston History Company, 1899] pp. 137-138)

During the War of 1812, Batavia also played a role in two other ways beyond that which was just described. At some point in the course of the war, a cavalry regiment from New Jersey was quartered at the southwest corner of the current South Main and Walnut streets. Unfortunately, typhoid fever broke out among the soldiers and over 30 of these men died. The victims were buried in the South Lyon Street cemetery. ("Bodies Disinterred by Street Workmen," *The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 29 October 1903)

It appears that there was also a prisoner of war camp in Batavia. According to records in the possession of Orleans County historians, in 1813 a group of militia men from Gaines, led by Captain Eleazer McCarthy, stumbled across some British soldiers and their Indian allies at a tavern 12 miles east of Lewiston. The soldiers and Indians had stacked their guns and were heavily into drinking the liquor they had found. McCarthy and his men, sizing up the situation, immediately went on the attack, killing several Indians and wounding at least one soldier before the rest surrendered. The prisoners are reported to have been taken first to Lewiston, then to a prisoner of war camp in Batavia. This is the only known reference to such a camp and exactly where it was located and the duration of its existence is unknown. (Dan Winegar, "89 Cent Item Becomes Big Deal," *The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 31 August 1976)

At the close of the war, the wood arsenal that had been erected on the current Walnut Street was replaced with a more substantial stone structure. The latter, erected under State supervision by Isaac Sutherland, was located on the north side of the junction of Lewiston Road and West Main Street. (William Seaver 1, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 38)

The War of 1812 can properly be viewed as a disaster. It brought great harm to a civilian population that was an innocent victim of international politics. Furthermore, it retarded growth in Western New York for years afterwards, at least until 1819. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 180)

22: Families/persons of special note

There are many individuals who were alive in this decade and already cited who could be regarded as of special note. However, in several respects one who has not been mentioned is perhaps the most interesting when taking the long view. That individual was still a child, the first son of James and Mary Brisbane. Albert Brisbane, born in 1809, went on to inspire at least 40 utopian communes, marry four women, bed many more, and sire Arthur Brisbane, the highest paid and most famous newspaper man of the 20th century. In Albert's memoirs, he made clear that the direction of his life was significantly shaped by the home-schooling provided by his mother and other formative experiences of his childhood in early Batavia. A detailed accounting of Albert's life can be found in other publications including one by the author.

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

Two organizations of importance appeared in this decade. A Masonic lodge, Olive Branch No. 39, made its appearance in 1811. Its first meeting was in the public tavern of William Keyes. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 233) The lodge later moved to LeRoy. The Masons figured in one of the biggest mysteries of the next decade, the disappearance and presumed murder of Batavian William Morgan. (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] p. 137)

The Genesee County Agricultural Society was formed in June of 1819. At the time of its formation, the Society pledged to raise \$500 for a meeting and exhibition in October, with \$350 of that amount for premiums awarded to exhibitors. This was the beginning of the annual Genesee County fairs. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 106.)

24: Sex/sexual services/sexual entertainment

As with the first decade, we know little of the sexual lives of early Batavians in the years 1811-1820. Of some curiosity is the wide difference in the number of children born to healthy couples in a time when birth control options were limited or unknown. For example, in an era when women commonly bore eight or more children, some couples such as Mary and James Brisbane and Margaret and Trumbull Cary were exceptions. In these two examples, the women gave birth to only two children and one child, respectively. All three children were born early in the marriages and then there were no more. Some readers may find it of interest to speculate as to why this occurred. Difficulty in conceiving would not, on the surface, appear to have been an issue. Therefore, was the low level of childbearing a conscious decision in either instance? Did these couples practice abstinence after the early years of their marriages or is there another explanation? The Brisbanes and Carys were two of the three wealthiest families in

1811-1820

early Batavia. In what way, if any, did the wealth and status of these two particular couples play a role in terms of their childbearing? Answers to such questions have been discovered in modern research on the behaviors of 20th century men and women, but they are likely to forever remain a mystery in attempting to understand Batavians living on the frontier in the early 1800s.

25: Urban renewal

In the years 1811-1810, there was still no real “urban” to renew. A planned “renewal” wouldn’t happen until more than 140 years later.