

The Eighth Decade

Overview

Batavia's location on major railroad lines began to pay off in the eighth decade. The first manufacturing plant attracted by superior access to railroads, the Wiard Plow Company, moved to Batavia in 1876. More information about this company is in the following section titled, "Factories/industries."

The community continued to experience significant growth. According to the Federal census, by 1880 there were 4,845 residents ("Genesee County Information," *Richmond Memorial Library*, online, accessed 3 January 2014). This was an increase of nearly 1,000 persons over a period of 10 years.

NOTE: In this chapter, the two preceding ones, and the chapter that follows, alert readers may often notice citations for a source with a publication date that seemingly precedes the events for which the citations are given. That source is "William Seaver, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* (Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849)." The dates at issue are those for 1850 and later. As mentioned in the introduction to this book, there are two publications in the local history collection of the Richmond Memorial Library with the above author, title, publisher, and date. However, one is actually the work of David Seaver, son of William Seaver, who was updating his late father's work at the time of his own death in 1892. In order to distinguish between these two publications, the numerals "1" and "2" follow the author's stated name in the citations.

1: Infrastructure

In the eighth decade, the streets in Batavia were still unpaved. There were no municipal sewers. Street lighting was still by gas light. However, in this decade, an extensive system of water mains was built. By October of 1877, workmen had laid 20,000 feet of water mains that served most of the principal streets. Hydrants were placed "at all desirable locations." Apparently the primary mains ran down Main Street (and East and West Main), since "strap valves" were reportedly installed at most of the streets "diverging from Main." These valves were provided in order to shut off water flow in an emergency. According to the *Spirit of the Times*, Batavia thus had water for extinguishing fires and for general purposes surpassed by no

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other village of its size in the State. (“Batavia Water Works,” *Spirit of the Times*,” Batavia, N.Y. 13 October 1877)

Water for the mains came from the Tonawanda Creek via a pumping station located south of the intersection of Ellicott and West Main streets. The pump (or pumps) was powered by steam. The steam was generated by either a wood- or coal-fired boiler, probably the latter. (It is known that new boilers installed a decade later were coal-fired, but it is not clear whether the earlier one was.)

2: Transportation

The railroads continued to be the preferred means for travel over any significant distance. In 1871, it cost 75 cents to ride from Batavia to Rochester (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 67). That doesn’t sound like a whole lot unless one considers that the average laborer in the U.S. earned only 16 cents an hour at that time (“Typical Wages in 1860 Through 1890,” *Outrun Change*, online, accessed 30 April 2014).

Local travel continued to be primarily on horseback or by horse-drawn wagons and carriages, if not walking. Reportedly, one day before Christmas in 1872, someone went to the trouble of counting the number of rigs tied up on Main Street between the Court House and Bank Street and discovered the total to be 200 (“Mere Mention,” *The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 24 December 1927). Presumably most of these belonged to Christmas shoppers.

Bicycles were just beginning to appear. The first bicycle owned by a Batavian was purchased in 1880 (“Mere Mention,” *The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 10 June 1880). This must have been a “penny-farthing” type of bicycle with a large front wheel and small rear one. So-called “safety bicycles,” with equally-sized wheels front and rear were not invented until the mid-1880s. (“History of the Bicycle,” *Wikipedia*, online, accessed 30 April 2014) Penny-farthing bicycles tended to be popular only with young men of means, given that they cost an average worker six month’s pay (“A Quick History of Bicycles,” *Pedaling History Bicycle Museum*, online, accessed 30 April 2014).

3: Housing

There were no mansions constructed during the years 1871-1880, but several homes were erected that were quite elegant. For example, in 1880, Rufus S. Howard had the house constructed that stands at 34 Ellicott Avenue. With its hipped roof, bracketed cornice, and

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elongated segmentally arched windows, it displays characteristics of an Italianate style. In 1879, W. H. Homelius built the house at 39 Ellicott Avenue for John H. Ward, Sheriff of Genesee County. The building typifies “Victorian Gothic” design. In 1878, the house at 40 Ross Street was erected for David W. Tomlinson who, among other things, was President of the Batavia Gas Light Company. Of special note is the multi-gable roofline of the corner tower. Another elegant structure from this decade stands at 32 Ellicott Avenue. It was built in 1876 by W. H. Homelius for Howard Pease, a hardware dealer, and displays features of the Second Empire style. One more elegant home of this decade was erected in 1874. Standing on the northeast corner of State Street and Washington Avenue, it exhibits “Victorian Gothic” features. The building was owned by John H. Yates, a preacher, sales clerk, and editor of the *Progressive Batavian*. (Catherine Roth, *Architectural Heritage of Genesee County, N.Y.* [Batavia, N.Y.: Landmark Society of Genesee County, 1988] multiple pages; Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] p. 65)

At the beginning of the eighth decade, one of the first three frame buildings erected in Batavia was still standing, but no longer at its original location. It was now the front part of a dwelling occupied by an Alonzo Leonard and situated on the north side of Ellicott Street. The original building had been located just east of the current post office and was moved to Ellicott Street when the first Presbyterian Church was built in 1822. It was first erected by Isaac Sutherland in 1802 as a carpenter’s shop for himself and Samuel F. Geer, but was soon purchased by James Brisbane to use as a store. As of the early 1870s, the building was destined to soon be razed since the then current owner wanted to make room for a better structure. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 48).

As of this decade, a second frame building among the first three erected, was also still standing, and, like the first, had also been moved. That building was constructed in 1802 by Isaac Sutherland about where the current post office stands. It was first occupied by James W. Stevens, but subsequently served as a residence for James and Mary Brisbane. Probably sometime in the 1850s, it was moved across the Tonawanda Creek to a location on present-day South Main Street. David Seaver indicated that it had been well-built and, as of the 1870s, remained in good repair and could be expected to last many more years. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 48).

Finally, as of the eighth decade, the third frame building among the first three also remained in existence, but in two pieces at two new locations, one piece just west of the Land Office building and the other piece located somewhere on present-day Jefferson Avenue. Dating to ca. 1802, the original frame structure was built by William Munger and then enlarged by

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William Keyes as an addition to a famous log tavern known as “the Keyes House.” The Keyes House reportedly stood on the site of the current police station, i.e., the former Brisbane Mansion. (William Seaver, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 48-49)

4: Energy sources

There appear to have been no new developments in energy sources during the years 1871-1880.

5: Communications

The Daily News was founded on June 25, 1878 by Malcom D. Mix, Samuel P. Mix, and W. H. Bradish. Its offices were located on the third floor of the building at 68 Main Street. Although initially a morning paper, it became an evening publication a little over a year later in December of 1879.

6: County and village boundaries

There were no changes in Village boundaries.

7: Government/governing structure

There were no changes in government or governing structure.

8: Crime, crime control, and law enforcement

There were no remarkable occurrences or developments in this area.

9: Retail establishments/other commercial enterprises

Retail establishments continued to be locally owned, relatively small, and located primarily in the downtown area of the community.

10: Factories/industries

Breweries and malt houses continued to figure prominently in Batavia's economy. In 1872, R. A. Maxwell and H. J. Ensign erected a malt house on Union Street near West Main Street. It was a concrete structure, three stories high, and measured 100 ft. in width and 140 ft. in length. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 251)

The arrival of railroads began to really benefit Batavia in the eighth decade. The notable example involved the Wiard Plow Company. Wiard Plow originated in East Avon, dating back to 1806. However, by 1876, the business had grown to the point where better facilities for transportation were needed. That made Batavia a prime prospect for a new location. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 242)

As an added inducement for Wiard Plow to relocate to Batavia, local citizens offered to donate a site for the factory. That site was located on Swan Street between the Erie and New York Central tracks. After accepting Batavia's offer, George Wiard and C. W. Hough erected a factory in 1876. Wiard served as the President and Hough as the Secretary and Treasurer of the company. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher] p. 242) The company remained one of Batavia's leading manufacturers until the 1950s (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] p. 171).

11: Banking/financial services

In 1850, a bank previously in Alexander moved to Batavia and was reorganized as the Exchange Bank of Genesee. After becoming inactive, it was again reorganized, in 1876, this time as the Bank of Batavia. It was located in a new building erected at 69 Main Street. (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] pp. 66-67)

In April of 1879, the Genesee County Permanent Loan and Building Association was organized. Commonly referred to as "The Loan," its purpose was "to make funds available to persons of small means who wished to build, buy, or remodel homes." Funds were also available to small businesses just getting started. Reportedly, *The Daily News* was one such operation funded by "The Loan." (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] p. 67)

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12: Education

Recall that a public school building had been erected in 1847 on Liberty Street near School Street. By 1871, this building had become so crowded that it was necessary to provide additional space for students. A second building, described as a dilapidated tenement house in the vicinity, was rented for the purpose. It soon housed between 60 and 70 students. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] pp. 209-210)

In April of 1872, at an adjourned meeting of School District residents, a site for a new building on Ross Street was chosen and \$50,000 appropriated for building it. Apparently because the vote had been taken after adjournment, it was appealed to the State Superintendent of Public Institutions. While a decision by the State Superintendent was still pending, the School Trustees went ahead and purchased the site on Ross Street anyway. When the State Superintendent reached a decision, he set aside the vote taken at the April meeting, but apparently, for reasons that are not apparent, his action only impacted the authorization for a building. In any event, funding for a new building was again the subject of a vote; and in August of 1872, by a decisive margin, voters authorized \$40,000 plus proceeds from the sale of the old building to build a new school on the Ross Street site. In October of 1873, another \$25,000 was authorized. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] pp. 209-210)

The new school building, at the general location of the current Middle School on Ross Street, was dedicated on September 1, 1874. Then, in October, voters approved another \$5,000 for furnishing the building, grading the grounds, etc. The community anticipated that this structure would meet Batavia's needs for the next 50 years, but within only five years, the new school was filled to capacity. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890] p. 210)

In 1879, Ruth Beardsley Bryan retired from her operation of the finishing school for young women housed since 1852 in the former Ellicott Mansion on West Main Street. Operation of the school was taken over by Marian and Mary Smead, former students of Mrs. Bryan. They continued the school for another five years until it was closed and moved to Toledo, Ohio in 1884. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 27 October 1951)

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13: Religion

Prior to 1871, members of the German Evangelical Church met in a building (possibly a house) on Ellicott Street. Then, in 1871, a church building was erected on the corner of Center and School streets. Built of brick, it cost \$6,000. Services were conducted in German. (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] pp. 91-92)

In 1871, another German congregation was organized by a different group of German families. In 1872, they built a small church on the corner of Ellicott Street and Exchange Place and adopted as their name, "The German Evangelical St. Paul's Church." By the end of the century, they became "St. Paul's Lutheran Church." (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] pp. 117-118)

As noted in an earlier chapter, the First Baptist Church was organized in 1834. In 1835, the church adopted as its name, "The Baptist Society of Ellicott Village," and erected a building on the west side of Jackson Street about 1836. Then, in 1877, the congregation re-organized as "The First Baptist Church of Batavia."

As also noted in an earlier chapter, Free Methodists had met in the area as early as 1859, but did not form an organized society until 1861. Then, in 1880, they purchased the former Land Office building and met there for eight years. (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] pp. 116-117)

14: Libraries/archives/museums

The last library operating in Batavia had been the Batavia Lyceum which was established in the 1840s. From all indications, it appears to have become defunct by the eighth decade. Then, in 1872, the Batavia Library and Reading Room made its appearance. Incorporated as the Batavia Library Association by an act of the State Legislature on April 27, 1872, the library was located on the third floor of 51-53 Main Street. This location was just east of the Richmond Hotel which, in turn, was on the southeast corner of Main and Court streets. By the time it turned over its assets to the Richmond Library late in the 1880s, the library had over 4,000 books and \$3,500 in invested funds. (Safford E. North, *Our County and Its Peoples: A Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* [Boston: Boston History Company, 1899] p. 304; "Leading Meat Market 65 Years Ago," *The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 13 April 1940; Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] p.97)

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15: Cemeteries

In the Spring of 1872, Edward P. Morse began grading and setting out trees and shrubbery for what was to become the Elmwood Cemetery. He had acquired the land a year earlier. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890], p. 187.

The Batavia Cemetery had been in existence for several decades. However, it wasn't until 1880 that the Batavia Cemetery Association came into existence. That year, a number of lot owners organized the Association under State law and proceeded to develop a plan for purchasing more land, selling burial plots, and levying and collecting assessments to cover the costs involved in the maintenance and care of the grounds. (Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* [Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., 1890] p. 187)

16: Firefighting

There were no significant developments in the area of firefighting.

17: Healthcare

At the local level, there do not appear to have been any significant developments in the area of healthcare.

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

There do not appear to have been any significant changes in this area.

19: Disasters

Batavia managed to get through the eighth decade without a major fire, flood, or other damage. David Seaver observed that despite the many disastrous fires that had occurred in earlier years, in 1871 the first six frame structures still stood, a notable achievement (William Seaver 2, *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849] p. 49).

20: Entertainment and recreation

The Dellinger Opera House opened in February of 1874. It was located on the south side of Main Street between Jackson and Center streets. John Dellinger built the opera house and then operated it until his death in 1911 when his son, Edward J. Dellinger, took over. The stage was large enough to handle any road show that might stop in Batavia. The floor of the opera house was level with seats that could be removed to permit space for it to function as a dance hall. About half of the orchestra seats were for reserved seating; they were identifiable by strips of carpeting. Three boxes with seats were located either side of the stage and were reportedly especially popular with “courting” couples. A balcony with several entrances provided additional seating. (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] pp. 61-62)

Many different forms of entertainment were presented in the Dellinger Opera House. Over the years, road companies stopped regularly and put on plays in which local actors often were able to join the cast. Ralph Waldo Emerson read his essays (before a crowd said to have been the smallest on record). The entertainers who drew large crowds included Buffalo Bill Cody. On another occasion, a troop of trained horses performed. A horse-shoe making contest once took place in the Opera House. (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] pp. 61-62) Vaudeville performances were a popular entertainment (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 2 June 1909). Wrestling matches, first allowed, then banned, then allowed again, also drew crowds (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 10 February 1884; “Sat Upon by the Trustees,” *The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 9 May 1884; *The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 11 November 1901).

21: War/impact of war

Perhaps due to the exhausting impact of the Civil War, the United States did not embark on military action during this decade beyond conflicts with the Native American populations in the West.

22: Families/persons of special note

In the eighth decade, Batavia remained a largely homogeneous community in terms of ethnicity and race. It was still mainly composed of English-speaking residents with origins traceable to Pennsylvania and New England. However, by the late 1870s, there were enough German immigrants to support two congregations of German-speaking people served by

pastors who preached in German. (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] p. 251)

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

A Pamona Grange formed in 1877. Apparently, it never had a regular hall of its own, but met in several different locations including on the County Fairgrounds and at the Dellinger Opera House. (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] p. 152) For most readers, a little background information may be in order at this point.

The Grange is a hierarchical organization ranging from local communities to the National Grange organization. At the local level are “community Granges,” otherwise known as “subordinate Granges.” In most states, multiple subordinate Granges are grouped together to form “Pamona Granges.” (“The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry,” *Wikipedia*, online, accessed 4 May 2014) The Pamona Grange in Batavia was apparently formed from community Granges that had been organized in 1874 in Bergen, Corfu, East Pembroke, and Batavia (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] p. 152).

The National Grange, formally known as “The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry,” was founded in 1867 as a fraternal organization that encouraged families to band together to promote the economic and political well-being of the community and agriculture. Significant causes over the years have included the temperance movement, direct election of Senators, women’s suffrage, regulation of railroads, and Rural Free Delivery. As a non-partisan organization, The Grange has supported only policies, never political parties or candidates. (“The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry,” *Wikipedia*, online, accessed 4 May 2014)

According to Ruth McEvoy, the Pamona Grange in Batavia lobbied for many different causes. Among its early concerns was the quality of school textbooks. Members were also particularly active in later efforts to persuade the State to build an overpass over the railroad tracks just east of Batavia. (Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993] pp. 152-153) As of 2015, a Pamona Grange continues to exist in Genesee County, but it is not clear whether it can trace its origin directly to the Pamona Grange formed in 1877.

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24: Sex/sexual services/sexual entertainment

There is nothing new to report from this decade. However, the upcoming decade from 1881 to 1890 will be a different story.

25: Urban renewal

With no major fires in this decade, there was no major rebuilding and, hence, no “urban renewal” in any sense.