

The Twentieth Decade

Overview

This decade was witness to several changes. Among them, the Monroe County Water Authority moved toward supplying water to an extensive area of Genesee County, more senior and low-income housing was constructed in Batavia, residents began connecting to the Internet, another prominent manufacturing concern closed its doors, the City celebrated a new baseball stadium, and the Sisters of Mercy gave up St. Jerome Hospital leaving the community with just one hospital for the first time in 93 years.

Once again, Batavia's population declined. In 2000, there were 16,256 residents ("Genesee County Information," *Richmond Memorial Library*, online, accessed 3 January 2014), a loss of 54 since 1990.

1: Infrastructure

The bridge carrying traffic from South Jackson Street over railroad tracks to Creek Road was closed in 1980. However, the decision to demolish the structure didn't occur until 1993 (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 10 August 1993). Then it was another six years before demolition actually occurred (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 1 September 1999).

In 1992, blue boxes were provided for residents to use in leaving out recyclables for collection (*The Daily News*, 29 August 1992). At that time, paper, glass, and metal were accepted for recycling purposes. A year later, in 1993, recycling in Batavia was expanded to include plastics. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 25 March 1993)

During this decade, extensive discussion occurred regarding the need for public water throughout the County and how to provide it. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 14 October 1998) In 1999, *The Daily News* reported that an agreement had been reached between the City and the County whereby Batavia would become a member of a County-wide water agency. However, while the Monroe County Water Authority would supply water to much of the eastern part of the County, the City would continue to rely primarily on its own Cedar Street wells and water from the Tonawanda Creek. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 15 September 1999). As this system was eventually constructed, a physical connection between Batavia's

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water plant and the Monroe County Water Authority lines was made so that water could flow in either direction between the two as conditions warranted. (Interview with Matt Worth, Batavia Bureau of Water and Wastewater, Batavia, N.Y., conducted by the author, December 2014)

2: Transportation

In the early 1970s, Dial-A-Bus service was begun in Batavia. At the time, it was expected to serve as a model across the nation and was touted as an answer to urban transit problems. Twenty-five years later, with the support of the Bus Service Advisory Board, City Council, Batavia School District officials, and the County Legislature, the service was terminated. It was replaced with a conventional loop system. The rider fees were \$1 for an adult, 75 cents for a student, and 50 cents for seniors. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 13 August 1996)

3: Housing

In this decade, additional housing for seniors with limited income was erected. This included a two-story apartment complex at 172-1/2 South Main Street just west of the former sewage treatment plant. Named, "The Meadows," it opened in 1992. There were 24 units. Built by V & V Development, funding was provided by a low-interest mortgage from the Federal Farmers Home Administration (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 24 October 1992)

Monsignor Kirby Apartments, a 40-unit complex at 203 Oak Street, was next. It was dedicated in 1996. Funding totaling \$2.5 million was provided by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Renewal. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 24 October 1992)

Park Place, located at the intersection of Richmond Avenue and Park Road, provided 32 units for low-income elderly residents. It was officially opened in late 1999 (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 23 November 1999). The facility was funded with State monies (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 11 July 1998).

In this decade, an apartment complex for more affluent seniors was built on East Main Street, just east of Vine Street, on the site of the former McCool Mansion. It was sponsored by St. Jerome Hospital. The facility initially included a restaurant open to both residents and the public, but the restaurant was soon closed to the latter although it continued to serve residents (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 25 September 1998). The first apartment was occupied in March of 1995. While the complex was initially financed with private, short-term loans, soon after long-term, tax-free bonds were sought from the Batavia Housing Authority. (*The Daily News*,

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Batavia, N.Y., 2 March 1995). Originally named, “Trocaire Place,” the complex was renamed “Victorian Manor” after changing hands in 1998 (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 23 July 1999). As this book is being written, its name has changed once again, this time to “Manor House.”

4: Energy sources

Batavia Energy Facility of Sithe Energies USA, Inc., a co-generation plant on Cedar Street, became operational in 1992. The facility, fueled by natural gas, generated 56 megawatts of electric power, enough to serve 18 to 20 thousand homes. Steam produced in the plant was sold to O-At-Ka Milk Products Corporation. The electricity was sold to Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation. Most power plants had a thermal efficiency of 30%, but this one had an efficiency rating equal to 50%. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 16 November 1992) In 1998, O-At-Ka ended purchase of steam from the Batavia Energy Facility and this appears to have ended the co-generation aspect of the latter’s operation (*The Daily New*, Batavia, N.Y., 18 March 1999).

In 2000, *The Daily News* reported that Nationalgrid was acquiring Niagara Mohawk (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 6 September 2000).

5: Communication

In this decade, home computers were appearing in increasing numbers, but internet access was rather limited at first. Initially, access was available locally only by long-distance dial-up connections over telephone lines to Buffalo or Rochester. Then, in 1995, a local company called Xcalibur began offering dial-up internet service via a local telephone number. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 11 November 1995) Aside from being slow by more modern standards, an additional frustration stemmed from the inability to place and receive telephone calls while connected to the internet. Batavians from this era may recall trying to reach someone by telephone only to get endless busy signals because the resident was “on the internet.”

6: County and city boundaries

There were no changes during this decade.

7: Government, governing structure

In March of 1994, the County and City agreed on setting an 8% sales tax (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 4 March 1994). Three months later, the State approved the new rate (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 7 June 1994).

An addition was built on the west end of County Building No. 1, in 1998 (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 14 July 1998).

In 2000, a City Charter Review Commission considered and then rejected a proposal to switch back to a mayor/city council form of government (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 14 July 2000).

On April 25th of 1995, City Council created an Historic Preservation Commission consisting of seven members appointed by the Council for 3-year terms. The Commission was granted the power to designate landmarks and historic districts. The Commission was also granted authority to grant or withhold certificates of appropriateness for proposed alterations or changes to the exterior of designated structures. (General Code, City of Batavia, Section 100)

On August 14th of 2000, City Council created a Historic Overlay District intended, in part, to protect buildings, structures, and areas within the district which were recognized as historic and/or landmarks. The district was also intended to insure that new development was compatible with the character of the area. The Historic Preservation Commission was charged with reviewing all plans for construction and alterations and then forwarding its recommendations to the Planning and Development Committee. The district included much of the area from Court Street west to the Holland Land Office Museum. (General Code, City of Batavia, Section 190-28)

8: Crime, crime control, law enforcement

For decades, in fact for nearly the entire history of the Police Department, officers had patrolled on foot. Then the practice ended. In a 1991 article that appeared in *The Daily News*, Chief David Mullen of the City Police Department was reported as saying foot patrols had been dropped due to changes in the downtown area brought about by Urban Renewal (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 30 October 1991). Nonetheless, in 1993, Chief Mark Robinson reinstated downtown foot patrols (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 23 October 1993).

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In 1995, the Police Department announced that it was setting up bicycle patrols. The patrols were to be in operation for 20 weeks out of the year with three officers who shared a single bicycle and were on duty for a total of 8 to 10 hours a week. It was hoped that the bicycle patrols would reduce vandalism downtown, in parks, and in the cemeteries. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 20 June 1995).

Early in the previous decade, the Police Department acquired a police dog. Eventually, there were two dogs employed at a cost of \$10,000 per year. The animals were trained for tracking, building searches, crowd control, and suspect arrests. However, by 1996, officials concluded that there was insufficient need for a “canine corps” and the practice of using police dogs was discontinued. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 24 January 1996)

In February of 1991, the domestic violence agency operating out of the Y.W.C.A. acquired a permanent shelter for victims of domestic violence. The location was confidential. Prior to that time, the agency had used a dozen private homes where women could stay for up to three days. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 4 February 1991)

On November 29th of 1994, *The Daily News* reported that the County Legislature, after seven years of discussions about the matter, had decided to build a new two-story building for housing the County, Family, Surrogate, and City courts (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 29 November 1994). Two weeks later, the Legislature voted to spend \$9.8 million on the project (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 15 December 1994). Ground was broken in June of 1996 (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 28 June 1996) and the structure was dedicated in early September of 1997 (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 4 September 1997).

9: Retail establishments/other commercial enterprises

For most of its existence, the retail center of the area had been in downtown Batavia. However, beginning with the era of Urban Renewal, activity began to shift to the Town of Batavia. Sometimes businesses actually moved out of the City. One such example was the K-Mart store, originally located in Eastown Plaza, which moved to the Town in 1994 (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 17 May 1994).

10: Factories/industries

In 1996, the Melton Shirts factory, located on Harvester Avenue in the Batavia Industrial Center, closed its manufacturing facilities and moved them to Mississippi (*The Daily News*,

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Batavia, N.Y., 24 July 1996). Less than two years later, in 1998, Melton's closed its outlet store as well (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 26 March 1998).

By May of 1997, The Genesee Center for Industry, established in the former Doehler-Jarvis plant, had 10 companies renting space. It was nearly full. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 23 May 1997)

11: Banking/financial services

There do not appear to have been any particularly significant developments in this decade.

12: Education

In 1995, plans were announced for additional classrooms for Robert Morris School (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 13 October 1995). Less than 20 years later, the school would be closed.

In 1997, St. Paul's Lutheran Church on Washington Avenue announced plans to begin offering elementary-level classes (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 31 October 1997).

Two major additions were made during this decade on the Genesee Community College Batavia campus. An arts center building that included a "state-of-the-art" theater opened in 1991 (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 14 December 1990). The theater was named, "The Stuart Steiner Theater," in honor of the college's longest-serving president.

The second addition to the college was the Conable Technology Building, dedicated in August of 2000. It was named in honor of Rep. and Mrs. Barber Conable, both of whom were long-time supporters of the college. (*Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 26 August 2000).

13: Religion

In 1997, City Church was organized by Marty and Karen Macdonald and Kathy Cervone. Initially, the congregation met in the Macdonald's Stafford home. However, beginning in 1998, services were held in the Batavia Y.W.C.A. (Marty Macdonald and Kathy Cervone, conversations with the author, 25 November 2014)

For many years, a nativity scene had been erected every Christmas season on the front lawn of City Hall. The crèche was provided by the Jaycees. In December of 1999, Councilwoman Ann

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McCulloch questioned the appropriateness of the display, noting that guidelines from the New York State Council of Mayors advised against religious displays on public property. She asserted that taxpayers should not be required to pay for the sponsorship of other people's beliefs. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 15 December 1999) The following year, the Jaycees erected the display on the Oliver's parking lot at the corner of West Main and Oak streets (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 1 December 2000). Since that time, a menorah has been added to the display.

14: Libraries/archives/museums

In the 1980s, the Richmond Memorial Library had a computer it made available to patrons. Then, in 1998, it set up two internet terminals for use by the general public (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 26 June 1998).

In 1998, the County Historian's Office and Genesee County History Department were moved from the Holland Land Office Museum to 3 West Main Street where it shared the building with the County's Department of Buildings and Grounds (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 3 August 1999).

15: Cemeteries

There were no significant developments during this decade.

16: Firefighting

There were no apparent developments of particular significance during this decade.

17: Healthcare

By July of 1991, Genesee County Hospice was ready to become accredited and to provide care of its first patient. The goal of the organization was to provide pain relief and psychological support in the last six months of life. To aid in providing this care, a hospice room was established at Genesee Memorial Hospital by the Hawley family in memory of Ellen S. Hawley. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 15 July 1991)

In 1993, *The Daily News* reported that a nursing home was being designed for erection on the grounds of the Veterans Administration Hospital (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 9 August 1993). Two years later, the 126-bed facility was opened for use (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y.,

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29 August 1995). Nursing home care was available not only to veterans themselves, but also to their family members.

As of 1997, Regional Action Phone (RAP) had provided 25 years of service to the community. It had received over 300,000 calls during that period of time. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 7 October 1997) The goal of RAP was to aid individuals experiencing psychological distress.

In January of 1998, Crossroads House, was opened and accepted its first resident. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 8 January 2008) Operated by a non-profit organization, it provided personalized comfort 24 hr. a day, seven days a week, for terminally ill patients. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 18 September 2003)

In the late 1990s, the City's two hospitals were finding the cost of maintaining ambulance service exceeding the revenue such service generated. The problem was said to stem from restrictions on the fees that hospitals were allowed to charge. In late July of 1998, by a vote of 6-2, City Council agreed to spend \$203,000 for the purchase of the ambulances and equipment. It also agreed to add 14 full-time union employees and nine part-time non-union employees to the City Fire Department in order to provide an ambulance service for the community. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 28 July 1998)

For 70-plus years, Batavians had been receiving health care from two hospitals: Genesee Memorial and St. Jerome. By the 1990s, continuing to have two independent facilities in one relatively small community was becoming increasingly problematic. After earlier discussing ways to collaborate, in 1995 the two hospitals began to propose an actual merger. (Larry Barnes, *A brief history of Batavia's public hospitals* [Batavia, N.Y., self-published, 2013] pp. 11-12)

In 1998, organized opposition to the proposed merger emerged with the formation of a group calling itself, "People Against Lost Services" (PALS). A major focus of the opposition was on by-laws of the merged hospital that would require it to follow the Ethical and Religious Directives for Health Care Services published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Larry Barnes, *A brief history of Batavia's public hospitals* [Batavia, N.Y., self-published, 2013] pp. 14-15)

Throughout 1998, the debate over the proposed merger intensified. As 1999 began, the necessary State approval for a merger had not yet been forthcoming and the merger process seemed to have stalled. Then, abruptly and without warning, the conflict came to an end. As reported in *The Daily News* of February 17th, 1999, the hospital merger was suddenly called off.

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(Larry Barnes, *A brief history of Batavia's public hospitals* [Batavia, N.Y., self-published, 2013] pp. 16-17)

Under the terms of the agreement ending the proposed merger, the Sisters of Mercy ended their sponsorship of St. Jerome Hospital, St. Jerome Hospital property was transferred to the Genesee Memorial Hospital Group, and a new name was to be chosen for the resulting medical facility. (Larry Barnes, *A brief history of Batavia's public hospitals* [Batavia, N.Y., self-published, 2013] pp. 17-18) In May of 1999, *The Daily News* reported that "United Memorial Medical Center" had been selected as the new name for Batavia's sole remaining hospital (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 15 May 1999).

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

In January of 1995, the Association for Retarded Children was renamed, "Association for Retarded Citizens" (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 12 January 1995).

Later the same year, the Youth Center moved from its Bank Street location to the former pool house at MacArthur Park (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 26 September 1995).

Three years later, in 1998, the Senior Center at 2 Bank Street was sold to the County by the City for \$1.00. Under terms of the sale, the County agreed to keep senior programming at the site for at least 20 years. The Office for the Aging, housed in the Senior Center, was a County agency since its inception. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 22 October 1998).

Also in 1998, \$7 million was bequeathed by Roxanne Marshall to the Muriel H. Marshall Fund to pay for non-medical services for the elderly in Genesee County. A few years earlier, she had created the fund in honor of her mother. The bequest was to be administered by the Rochester Area Community Foundation with a local advisory committee recommending specific grants. Marshall had suggested using the money to purchase a van to transport seniors free of charge, to purchase halogen lamps, to buy special telephone devices for the deaf, to acquire amplifying devices for TVs and radios, for subscriptions to magazines and newspapers, and for special outings such as a trip to a show, among other uses. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 18 June 1998)

Roxanne Marshall was born in Genesee County in 1932 and was a graduate of Batavia High School. After completing her higher education, she taught at the 12-Corners Middle School in Brighton until her retirement in 1987. Her father, Arthur H. Marshall, was the Chairman of the Board of Griswold and McWain, the publishers of *The Daily News* at that time. He was also

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President of Genesee County Savings and Loan. The money Roxanne Marshall inherited from him was the core of her estate. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 18 June 1998)

19: Disasters

In what was termed at the time as the biggest fire in the City's history, the Eastern Molding International plant on Elizabeth Street was destroyed in April of 1999 (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 1 April 1999). The facility covered 4,600 sq. ft. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 6 April 1999). Nearly a month later, a local man was arrested on charges of arson (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 29 April 1999) and then, after the passage of several more months, he was found guilty of the crime (*The Buffalo News*, Buffalo, N.Y., 11 December 1999). The plant was rebuilt (*The Buffalo News*, Buffalo, N.Y., 27 February 2000)

20: Entertainment and recreation

A three-day airshow at the County airport in the Summer of 1994 drew an estimated 70 thousand of spectators. This was the first time the event, sponsored by the Warplane Museum in Geneseo, had been held in Batavia. Previously, it had taken place only in Geneseo, starting there in 1981. The event, named "Wings Over Batavia," was intended to be an annual attraction. In fact, the Warplane Museum President was quoted as saying, "I think we'll be here for a long time." (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 23 August 1994) Unfortunately, that was not to be and later in the decade the promoters moved the airshow to the Southern Tier.

In 1996, a new baseball stadium opened on the site of the former MacArthur Stadium. Named "Dwyer Stadium" in honor of Edward Dwyer, long-time president of the Genesee County Baseball Club, it cost \$3.4 million and could seat 2,600 baseball fans. The stadium it replaced, with a capacity of only 1,680, had been built in 1939. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 18 June 1996)

Western Regional Off-Track Betting Corporation (OTB) purchased Batavia Downs in 1998. It paid \$2.48 million for the 45-acre site that included the grandstand, clubhouse, track kitchen, and 22 stables. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 1 October 1998)

21: War, impact of war

This decade was free of any war that took lives of Batavians.

22: Families, persons of note

During the 20th century, the Mancuso family was arguably the most prominent family in the community. Early in the 1900s, Vincenzo (Charles) Mancuso and his son Rosolino (Benjamin) Mancuso came to Batavia, the latter by the way of the sugarcane fields in Louisiana. As described by their biographer, William Brown, Jr., Benjamin recognized that he needed to master a trade and consequently went to a trade school in Chicago where he learned plumbing. When he returned to Batavia, he and his father connected households to the community's new sewer system. Later, Benjamin and Charles purchased some plumbing tools and opened a plumbing business on Hutchins Street. (William F. Brown, Jr., *The Mancusos of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: self-published, 1986] p.iii)

The plumbing business was the beginning of a dynasty. Within a few years, Benjamin and his four younger brothers: Dominic, Joseph, Lawrence, and Thomas built a retail and wholesale empire unlike anything the community had seen or would likely later see. It included automobile dealerships for all six General Motors vehicles, a restaurant, bowling alleys, a theater, a furniture store, a plumbing and hardware store, and extensive real estate holdings that included offices, shops, and homes. The Batavia Industrial Center, a pioneering venture in developing incubators for start-up businesses, was also a Mancuso undertaking. (William F. Brown, Jr., *The Mancusos of Batavia* [Batavia, N.Y.: self-published, 1986] pp. iii and 102) The family's influence continues into the current decade.

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

In 1992, the Orleans and Genesee arts councils consolidated into the Genesee-Orleans Regional Arts Council (GO ART!). The merger provided several advantages including the prospect of additional funding opportunities and savings from consolidation. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 20 February 1992).

Also in 1992, the local Red Cross celebrated its 75th anniversary (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 6 March 1992).

Two years later, in 1994, *The Daily News* reported that the Batavia Club was in financial trouble with significant cash flow problems. It had 120 members, each of whom was being assessed \$600 annually. In 1992, the club had taken out a \$125,000 mortgage from several of its members to cover the costs being incurred. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 21 April 1994)

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Leadership Genesee, operating under the auspices of Cornell Cooperative Extension, held its first meeting in December of 2000. The organization's mission was to discover and nurture emerging community leaders. Additional members were selected once each year on the basis of their commitment to the well-being of the community, their desire for a shared vision for the County, and their desire to work to bring about positive change. They met once a month for day-long programs led by community experts in various fields. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 4 December 2000)

24: Sex/sexual services/sexual entertainment

Batavia's only top-free female performers lasted just a few days. In late 1994, Topper's Playground Theater opened at 220 West Main Street. It advertised "exotic dancers." In less than a week, the business was closed by a court injunction for failing to have a permit. (*The Daily News*, Batavia, N.Y., 4 November 1994 and 8 November 1994)

25: Urban renewal

Formal urban renewal had ended a decade earlier.