

# Introduction

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### Goals

This book mainly focuses on the history of Batavia, New York from 1801 when it was established by Joseph Ellicott to 2015 when the city celebrates its centennial. It also briefly reviews the history of the area prior to 1801 and offers predictions about the community's future beyond 2015. In doing these things, there are four goals:

1. A book that is highly readable for the average resident and is designed to make the subject matter readily accessible.
2. A book whose contents can be easily expanded, without major rewriting, when new information becomes available.
3. A book that is not only of interest to those now alive, but will be of interest and use to those alive decades, perhaps even centuries, into the future.
4. A book that offers speculation on the community's future, in part by extrapolating from the past and in part by considering a number of possible scenarios that have been offered regarding the future course of human affairs and the planet in general.

### Organization

There are 24 chapters in this book. The first chapter deals with an overview of the area's history prior to 1801. The last speculates about Batavia's future beyond 2015. The remaining 22 each cover a single decade beginning with the years 1801-1810 and proceeding by intervals 10 years in length. Within each decade, the subject matter is further organized into sections covering the following topics:

Infrastructure (including streets, roads, sidewalks, bridges, street lights, traffic signals, water supply, sewage and trash disposal, storm sewers)

Transportation (including travel by foot, horseback, wagon or other horse-drawn vehicle, boat or other water vessel, bicycle, trolley, train, bus, taxi, airplane or other aircraft, automobile, motorcycle, truck)

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Housing (including private homes, mansions, apartments, assisted living facilities, low/moderate income housing, subsidized housing, senior housing, facilities for mentally challenged/mentally ill, public accommodations—rooming houses, hotels, motels, inns)

Energy sources (including water, ice, wood, wind, solar, geothermal, coal, oil, gas, electricity, gasoline, diesel fuel)

Communication (including oral communication, the written word, the printed word, post offices, telegraphs, telephone, radios, televisions, newspapers, magazines, internet, social media, flyers, billboards, signs, broadsides, historic displays)

County, village, city boundaries

Government/governing structure (including federal, state, county, village, and city government and governing structure; zoning; codes; code enforcement; planning; historic preservation; political parties; taxation; government buildings)

Retail establishments/other commercial enterprises

Factories/industries

Banking/financial services

Education (including public schools, private schools, finishing schools, trade schools, parochial schools, colleges, institutes, home schooling, state schools)

Religion (including specific denominations, houses of worship, revivals, missionaries, funding)

Libraries/archives/museums

Cemeteries

Crime/crime control/law enforcement (including federal, state, county, village, and city crime control and law enforcement; crimes; punishment; jails; courts; judges; juries)

Firefighting (including equipment, volunteer fire fighters, paid fire fighters, fire stations)

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Healthcare (including illnesses, physicians, treatments, public hospital facilities, private hospital facilities, nursing homes, sanitariums, hospice care, veteran care, drug and alcohol treatment, family planning, health officer, health department, board of health, quarantines)

Care of the handicapped, aged, poor, and young

Disasters (including fires, floods, economic depressions and recessions, extreme weather—heat, cold, snow, wind, tornadoes)

Entertainment and recreation (including parks, theaters, opera houses, fairgrounds, fairs, professional sports, amateur sports, playing fields, ice arenas, roller skating rinks, boating, swimming, shooting ranges, gaming, casinos, legal vs. illegal entertainment and recreation, horse tracks, horse racing, automobile racing, water parks, drama groups, vaudeville, circuses, circus grounds)

War/impact of war (including War of 1812, Land Office War, Civil War, Spanish-American War, WW 1, WW 2, Korean War, Middle East wars)

Families/persons of special note

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

Sex/sexual services/sexual entertainment

Urban renewal

This organization allows a reader to focus on a single area of interest, e.g., education or religion, and note the course of development across a period of over 200 years by reading just the relevant sections in successive chapters. This organization also allows further additions (or deletions), e.g., to sections on infrastructure or housing, without re-writing whole chapters of the book.

Should another author, at some point in the future, wish to expand this book to include years beyond 2015, this organization provides an established framework for doing so. It is only necessary to add future chapters with each covering a later decade and each covering the same topics.

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## Sources of Material

The material in this book has been taken from a variety of sources. Chief among them are five other books that have been written about Batavia's history. These sources include:

1. William Seaver [1], *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* (Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849). This publication was written by an early Batavian who moved to the community in 1817. It appears to be the earliest effort to record Batavia's history in any kind of systematic manner. A copy can be found in the local history collection of the Richmond Memorial Library. Seaver was a drug store owner, printer, and the publisher of the newspaper, *Spirit of the Times*. He also served the community in a number of positions including postmaster and president of the village trustees.
2. William Seaver [2], *A Historic Sketch of the Village of Batavia* (Batavia, N.Y.: William Seaver & Son, 1849). At first glance, this publication appears to be simply a copy of the first. However, closer inspection reveals that it contains additional information including facts that postdate Seaver's death in 1871. It is known that Seaver's youngest son, David Seaver, was revising and updating his father's publication when David died in 1892. This appears to be the unfinished revision. It can also be found in the local history collection of the Richmond Memorial Library. In citations for information taken from these first two sources, they are distinguished by the numerals "1" or "2" after the author's name.
3. Safford E. North, *Our County and Its People: A Descriptive and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York* (Boston: Boston History Company, 1899). Born in 1852, North lived his entire life in Genesee County. After studying law in the offices of two area attorneys, he was admitted to the bar in 1878. Among other positions, North served as district attorney and Genesee County judge
4. F. W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N.Y. 1788-1890* (Syracuse, N.Y.: J. W. Vose & Co., Publisher, 1890). This publication is one of many similar publications printed in the Northeastern United States during the late 1800s.

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5. Ruth M. McEvoy, *History of the City of Batavia* (Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., Inc., 1993). McEvoy was the City of Batavia Historian from 1971 to 1985. She also served as Director of the Richmond Memorial Library from 1963 to 1971.

In addition to these five primary sources, three other books, two publications written by William Brown, Jr. and one by the author, have also been utilized. They include:

1. William F. Brown, Jr., *Genesee's Rich and Famous: Dean Richmond, Edward Newton Rowell, Orator Francis Woodward* (Batavia, N.Y.: Hodgins Printing Co., 1989).
2. William F. Brown, Jr., *The Mancusos of Batavia* (Batavia, N.Y.: ?, 1986).
3. Larry D. Barnes, *Batavia Revisited* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2011).

Beyond these books, the author has also drawn on research he has published in 27 monographs which are in the local history collection of the Richmond Memorial Library and/or in the archives of the Genesee County History Department. These monographs include the following publications:

1. A brief history of the League of Women Voters in Genesee County, New York.
2. A brief history of the Law Mansion.
3. Batavia City Council members who have served under the city manager form of government: 1958-2008.
4. A Polish revolutionary in Batavia, his wife, and a house divided: the story of Henry Glowacki and his family.
5. Batavia's "mobile homes:" houses in Batavia that have been moved from one location to another.
6. The Brisbanes of Batavia: a tale that includes an utopian dreamer, bigamy, great wealth, a libel suit between family members, major philanthropy, and decades of intrafamily litigation over property.
7. The Stevens family of Batavia: a story of four generations that began with a law student from Princeton who became Genesee County's first clerk.
8. The Cary family of Batavia: The story of a family that begins with the founding of Batavia and ends with the razing of the Cary Mansion in 1964.
9. A brief history of Batavia's public hospitals: from one to two, then three, back to two, and then one, again.
10. Batavia's route to becoming a city: a surprisingly difficult path 11 years in the making.

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11. The “naked lady” in Austin Park.
12. Bicycles built by the Cooley brothers.
13. A tale of two cities.
14. Batavia’s “first great tabernacle campaign.”
15. A sculpture’s sorry saga.
16. A brief history of the Batavia Youth Bureau with emphasis on the early years.
17. Gentner’s hotel and restaurant.
18. Batavia’s ever-changing streets.
19. A history of St. Mary’s rectory and convent.
20. An overview of the Joseph Ellicott mansion in Batavia
21. Wall photographs displayed at the Merrill-Lynch office in Batavia, N.Y.
22. 13-15 Jackson rear: an historical review.
23. The 1977 reapportionment of city wards.
24. A brief overview of the charter commission appointed in 2000.
25. The 1957 adoption of the city manager form of government: a brief overview.
26. A brief history of Batavia’s city historians: 1919-2009.
27. Hey mister! Want to buy a courthouse?

In addition to the above sources, the vast majority of the remaining historical references contained in this book consist of newspaper articles published in Batavia’s newspapers. Of particular value in this regard has been the index of selected *Daily News* articles, dating from 1878 to about 2001, that was developed by Ruth M. McEvoy. It is available through both the Richmond Memorial Library and the Genesee County History Department. Early newspaper articles have also been discovered through online digital copies accessed through [Fultonhistory.com](http://Fultonhistory.com).

Finally, other sources used in producing this book include deeds, early maps, minutes of the village and city government, historic documents stored in the City of Batavia vault, and miscellaneous online websites.

In most instances, when the author has stated an alleged fact, whether books, monographs, newspaper articles, or other sources have been used, a citation has been provided regarding its source. This has been done so that the reader can readily consult these same sources should he or she wish to do so.

A final observation: the author has found innumerable errors in many of the other local publications that pertain to Batavia’s history. The reader should be alert to this common problem and recognize that this book, subject as it is to human error, likely also contains

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mistakes despite the author's best efforts to minimize their occurrence. In short, don't automatically assume that everything you read is necessarily the "gospel truth!" The great majority of the time, it probably is, but sometimes it may not be so.