

Batavia: What's In A Name?



**Batavia Public Library
2011**

The Ancient Batavi, 50 B.C.:



Around 50 B.C. a Germanic tribe called the Batavi migrated to present-day Netherlands and occupied an area near the Rhine delta. Conquered by Rome in 12 A.D., they served with Roman troops, and the Roman historian Tacitus cited their bravery. The Batavi led a rebellion against Roman rule in 69 A.D. that spread through Northeastern Gaul and ended in a favorable truce negotiated by Batavi chieftain Gaius Julius Civilis, who had been a Roman officer. Emperors Trajan and Hadrian brought the Batavi under Roman rule again in the 2nd century. During the 3rd and 4th centuries, Batavi lands were taken over by the

Salian Franks and the Batavi people were assimilated. In the 16th century, the humanist Cornelis Aurelius stated that the Batavi were the direct ancestors of the Netherlanders, and this claim was used to justify an uprising of the Netherlands Republic against the Spanish king Philip II.¹

Batavia Fortress, Java, 1619:

In 1619 the Vereenigde Oost-indische Compagnie (Dutch United East India Company) drove the Portuguese out of Java. When the Dutch built a fortress, Governor-General Jan Coen named it Batavia after the ancient Batavi. The fortress grew into a town with the same name that was the center of Dutch hegemony in the area. Today, the city is called Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia.²



Allain Manesson Mallet, *Citadelle de Batavia*
(Frankfort, Germany, 1685)

Batavia, Sailing Ship, 1629

For use in trade between the Netherlands and Java, the Dutch United East India Company built a sailing ship named the *Batavia*. Unfortunately, on its first voyage in 1629, the *Batavia* was shipwrecked off the west coast of Australia (then called New Holland). A reconstruction named *Batavia*, built between 1985 and 1999 in Holland, sailed into Sidney Harbor in Australia in 2000 to help celebrate the Olympic Games.³



Batavian Republic, 1795-1805:



Flag of the
Batavian Republic

During the French Revolutionary Wars, a French army invaded the Netherlands and occupied Amsterdam. With their support, an opposition party called the Patriots established the Batavian Republic, named after the ancient Germanic tribe that lived near present-day Leiden. A National Assembly adopted a new constitution, abolished privileges of the nobility, and nationalized the Dutch East India Company. The reforms were short-lived. After Napoleon Bonaparte came to power, he changed the Republic to the Batavian Commonwealth with a dictatorial council in 1805 and then created the Kingdom of Holland in 1806 with his brother Louis as monarch.⁴

Batavia, New York, 1801:

Located halfway between Rochester and Buffalo, the town called Batavia, New York, is the seat of Genesee County. The county was part of four million acres inhabited by the Erie and Seneca Indians, including nearly all of what became western New York State, claimed initially by both Massachusetts and New York. Robert Morris purchased the area from Massachusetts in 1791, and then sold it in 1793 to the Holland Land Company, organized by a group of Dutch bankers. After land rights were obtained from the Senecas in the Big Tree Treaty in 1797, Joseph Elicott surveyed the land for the Holland Land Company, began selling land to settlers, and founded Batavia in 1801. At that time the Netherlands was called the Batavian Republic, so Elicott named the new town Batavia. Genesee County was created in 1802, and eventually was divided into several additional counties.⁵



The Holland Land Company office
in Batavia, New York, is now a museum.

First White Settlement Here, 1833 :

According to *John Gustafson's Historic Batavia*, Christopher Payne and his family were the first settlers in the area that eventually became Batavia, Illinois. Payne, who was born in Pennsylvania, traveled in 1831 with oxen, wagon, wife, and six children from Ohio to Naperville, where he built a dam across the DuPage River for the Naper brothers.

Payne served in Joseph Naper's company in the Black Hawk War, and after peace returned, he moved his family further west in 1833 to an area then known as the Big Woods. His farm was located a little northwest of what is now the intersection of Kirk Road and Wilson Avenue. According to Gustafson, this was the first white settlement in Kane County. As the settlement grew, it was known initially as Head of the Big Woods.⁶



Christopher Payne Cabin Display at the
Batavia Historical Society's Depot Museum

Batavia, Illinois, 1840:

By 1835 the settlement had grown enough to support a saw mill, flour mill, elementary school, church, and store. When Christopher Payne decided in 1835 to move to Wisconsin and build a saw mill near present-day Lake Geneva, he sold his Illinois farm to Isaac Wilson. Wilson, born in Vermont, was Judge of the Genesee County Court in Batavia, New York, before he moved to Illinois. The home that he built in 1843, located at what is now the southeast corner of Wilson and Prairie Streets, is considered the oldest residence in Batavia that is still standing. When settlers decided to rename their town in 1840, they accepted Judge Wilson's suggestion to change the name from Head of the Big Woods to Batavia. Wilson died in 1848. His son, Isaac G. Wilson, was a judge in the circuit court in Elgin and the appellate court in Chicago.⁷



Established in 1867, the Challenge Wind Mill and Feed Mill Company probably published this advertisement before 1906, when the name was changed to the Challenge Company.

Batavia, Illinois, 2010

Called both the Windmill City and the City of Energy, Batavia still has some historic windmills, but these were eclipsed after the 1968 groundbreaking for the Atomic Energy Commission's Fermilab National Accelerator Laboratory.

Population increased from 9,060 in 1970 to 12,574 in 1980, 17,076 in 1990, 23, 866 in 2000, and 26,045 in 2010. An estimate in 2007 indicated that the median income for a household was \$92,772.



Additional information:

- City of Batavia: www.cityofbatavia.net
- Chamber of Commerce: www.bataviachamber.org
- Batavia Parks District: www.bataviaparks.org
- Batavia Historical Society: www.bataviahistoricalsociety.org
- Batavia Public Library: www.bataviapubliclibrary.org

Histories of Batavia:

- *John Gustafson's Historic Batavia*, by Marilyn Robinson and Jeffery D. Schielke. 977.323 ROB
- *Batavia Places and the People Who Called Them Home*, by Marilyn Robinson. 977.323 ROB
- *Little Town in a Big Woods: The Story of the Young Years of Batavia, Illinois*, by Marilyn Robinson. 977.323 ROB

The Batavia Public Library's Local History Room, North end of the Main floor near the Adult Services Reference Desk.

Other Places & Things named Batavia:

Towns and cities in Arkansas, California, Iowa, Michigan, Montana, Ohio, and Wisconsin; and other places in Australia, Germany, Indonesia, the Netherlands, and Suriname.

An opera by Peter Goldsworthy in three acts commissioned by Opera Australia and called *Batavia* concerns the shipwreck of the sailing ship; and an Indonesian airline was called Batavia Air.

Notes:

1. "Batavi," *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th ed., ©1994), Vol. 1, p. 954; "Batavi," *Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition* (© 1994), Vol. 3, p. 343; *The Netherlands* (www.dhm.de/ausstellungen/mythen/english/niederl.html).
2. Lindsey Shaw and Martin Terry, *Batavia 1628, Australia 2000* (Sidney: Australian National Maritime Museum, 2000), p. 8.
3. *Batavia 1628, Australia 2000*, p. 3, 20; *The Batavia Story* (<http://members.iinet.net.au/~bill/batavia.html>), pp. 1-9.
4. "Batavian Republic," *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th ed., ©1994), Vol. 1, p. 954; "Batavian Republic," *Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition* (© 1994), Vol. 3, p. 343.
5. "Batavia," *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th ed., ©1994), Vol. 1, p. 954; "Batavia," *Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition* (© 1994), Vol. 3, p. 343; *The City of Batavia: All About Batavia* (www.batavianewyork.com/about.html).
6. Marilyn Robinson and Jeffery D. Schielke, *John Gustafson's Historic Batavia* (Batavia, IL: Batavia Historical Society, © 1962), pp. 8-10; Marilyn Robinson, *Batavia Places and the People Who Called Them Home* (Batavia, IL: The Author, ©1996), pp. 17-20.
7. *John Gustafson's Historic Batavia*, p. 24; *Batavia Places and the People Who Called Them Home*, 21-24.

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