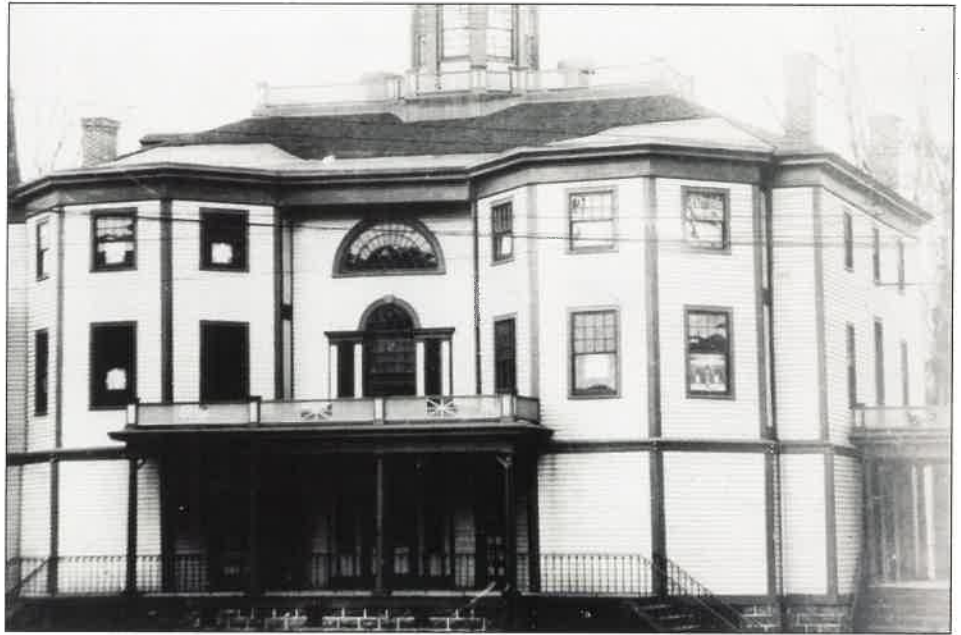**By David Neth**

Batavia's "Ellicott Hall"

G enesee County's original court-house was built by Joseph Ellicott as one of the conditions set by New York State when the county was formed in 1802. "Ellicott Hall," as it was called, stood at the corner of Main and Court streets in Batavia, about where County Building 1 sits today. It served as the county courthouse until the new stone courthouse was built at Main and Ellicott streets in 1841.

Having been neglected since being used as the county courthouse, Ellicott Hall was in need of serious repairs by 1849. County officials considered razing the structure until the Town of Batavia's leaders agreed to acquire the former courthouse in the village to serve as the Town Hall. On November 7, 1849, the Genesee County Board of Supervisors approved a lease agreement with the town, giving them the use of Ellicott Hall while the county retained owner-ship of the building and the property. The agreement also said that the town needed to repair the building and vote on a public officer who would have exclusive power over the building's use and occupancy.

By May 1851, the town had failed to repair the building and, apparently forgetting the lease agreement, gave the former courthouse and $1,000 to Levi Otis, Benjamin Pringle, Rufus Robert-son and William Mallory. The four men

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agreed to repair the building and reno-vate it to accommodate the village fire department and more office space, among other improvements.

With neither the Town of Batavia nor Genesee County adhering to the building's lease agreement, Ellicott Hall exchanged hands 11 times between 1851 and 1898. Levi Otis was the last of the original four the town gave the building to, but even he eventually sold his share. Each of the subsequent shareholders believed they owned the building. Throughout that near-50-year span, Batavia's *Daily News* featured ads reading "Ellicott Hall for sale!" with no mention of a lease.

By 1898, the wooden building was once again falling apart. Talk of razing

the structure resumed, however, resi-dents wanted it preserved for its histor-ical significance. With renewed interest in the building, the Town of Batavia "bought" back Ellicott Hall with the intention to restore it after a town vote.

Finally, at a rental agreement meeting between the new City of Batavia and the Town of Batavia on March 4, 1915, City Attorney Everett Judd pointed out the original lease agreement between the county and the town, showing that Genesee County actually owned the building and the property. Any further question of ownership came to an end when Ellicott Hall burned to the ground on February 5, 1918. In 1927, the county constructed County Building 1 on the site, which is still in use today.