

Boston Ward History

Introduction

This resource documents the creation of the Historical Urban Ecological (HUE) data set Boston ward boundary shapefiles and feature classes. All sources pertaining to the delineation and numbering of each ward system (the unique configuration of ward boundaries over a defined period), encompassing cartographic materials, city ordinances, newspaper reports, and ward boundaries described in the historical literature, have been included. Exclusions are noted where applicable. This document also describes ambiguities found between sources and a discussion of how these ambiguities were resolved in our published data. Table 1 provides a general ward history, 1830-1930.

Date Range	# of Wards	Type of Change
1830-1835	12	--
1836-1837	13	Annexation
1838-1850	12	Redivision
1851-1855	12	Redivision
1856-1865	12	Annexation
1866-1867	12	Redivision
1868-1869	15	Annexation
1870-1873	16	Annexation
1874-1875	21	Annexation
1876-1894	25	Redivision
1895-1912	25	Redivision
1913-1914	26	Annexation
1915-1925	26	Redivision
1926-1930	22	Redivision

Table 1: General ward history of the City of Boston, 1830-1930.

Sources

The main source used in the creation of the Boston Wards is *A Catalogue of the City Councils of Boston 1822-1908 Roxbury 1846-1867 Charlestown 1847-1873 and of the Selectmen of Boston, 1634-1822 also of Various Other Town and Municipal Officers*. This document was compiled and printed in 1909 by the City of Boston. It contains written descriptions of each ward for the six main redivisions between 1822 and 1895.

This primary history has been supplemented by annexations that occur between redivisions and checked against ward maps that were periodically released during this time period. These include maps located at the University of Chicago Map Collection and the Library of Congress as well as maps available online through the Boston Public Library, the David Rumsey Map Collection, and ProQuest Sanborn Maps Geo Edition.

Throughout this period Boston expanded very rapidly by the incorporation of nearby areas and through landfill. Annexations added large areas of land and substantial numbers of new residents to the growing city at clearly specified dates; as such they initiate a new system in our ward history even if redivisions were not explicitly issued. Land fill occurred much more gradually, taking decades to complete. As a result land fill does not trigger a new ward system. Changes to the shoreline, however, are reflected generally. The shoreline most generally applicable to the period, taken at one point during the system's use is reflected in the shapefile. The document "HUE Shoreline Sources," available from the CPE, notes all sources used in the creation of shorelines. For more specific information please contact the CPE. Nancy Seasholes' authoritative volume *Gaining Ground A History of Landmaking in Boston* was critical in determining the extent and timing of landfill during the study period.

Street centerlines delimited many ward boundaries. We have checked the HUE ward boundaries for topological consistency against the CPE's HUE Street Centerlines for Boston. These streets were created from georeferenced historical maps, modern orthographic imagery, and Census TIGER Line files from 2007, that were edited to reflect the streets as they existed in 1922 according to Sampson & Murdock's street map. Many ward lines were set against these streets. Ambiguities between street names and instances where boundaries ran on streets that were no longer extant by 1922 are noted below. Georeferenced historical maps, contemporary orthoimagery, and GIS data were used in cases where abstract lines and natural features constituted ward boundaries.

The monthly and annual tabular data reported by various municipal departments that accompany and complement the HUE GIS resources reveal the effective (rather than legislated) timing of changes to ward and city boundaries. These reports are often quite clear, with references to "old" and "new" wards, or the expansion of tables to include new ward numbers. The HUE ward system dates pertain to the official implementation of the wards as reporting units, making many of them unsuitable for use in determining the passage of the ordinances and acts from which they were created due to administrative lags.

Ward Systems

1830-1835

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 12

Primary Source: "A Catalogue of the City Councils of Boston, 1822-1908, Roxbury, 1846-1867, Charlestown, 1847-1873, and of the Selectmen of Boston, 1634-1822: Also of Various Other Town and Municipal Officers." *Boston City Council*. Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1909: pg. 7-10.

Notes:

- Descriptions of Ward 1, 2 and 3 describe the ward line running down 'North' and 'Middle' streets. Although these street names were not found on the most contemporary (Fuller) map, they are present on the Norman 1806 map as describing the Hanover St north of Mill Creek.
- Description of Wards 4 and 7 describe the ward line running through 'Bowdoin Square', which is an area along between Court and Cambridge Streets that doesn't show up in our GIS. This line has been imputed.
- Descriptions of Wards 4 and 5 include 'Leverett Place'. Our GIS uses its later name of 'Lyman St'. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Fuller 1826 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 4 and 5 describe the boundary lines as running directly from Prospect Street to Causeway street. These do not line up perfectly in our GIS, so we show them running for a short section along Merrimac Street in between the two.
- Descriptions of Wards 6 and 7 include 'Belknap Street'. Our GIS uses its later name of 'Joy St'. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Fuller 1826 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 7 and 8 include 'Cornhill', 'Marlboro', and 'Newbury' streets. Our GIS uses their later names of 'Washington St'. The placement of the older names is confirmed by the Norman 1806 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 7 and 10 include 'Common Street'. Our GIS uses its later name of 'Tremont St'. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Fuller 1826 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 8 and 9 include 'Atkinson Street'. Our GIS uses its later name of 'Congress St'. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Fuller 1826 Map.
- Descriptions of Wards 8 and 9 include 'Adams Street'. Our GIS uses its later name of 'Kilby St'. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Norman 1806 map.
- We have included the entirety of Long Wharf in Ward 4. There is some ambiguity in the Ward 9 description, the Ward 4 description seems to only cover the northern half of the wharf. The Eddy 1835 map depicts Long Wharf belonging to Ward 4 in its entirety.
- Descriptions of Wards 10 and 11 describe the ward lines as running directly from Boylston to Essex Streets. These do not line up perfectly in our GIS, so we show them running for a short section along Washington Street between the two.
- Descriptions of Wards 10 and 11 include 'Rainsford Lane'. The Norman 1806 map includes Rainsford Lane and it appears to have been connected to Harrison Street when land extension made this possible. We have thus used Harrison Street.
- Descriptions of Wards 11 and 12 describe 'Pleasant Street'. This street in the Fuller 1826 and Norman 1806 maps appears to cross Park Square and turn into Washington Street (c. 1922). This is reflected in the shapefile.
- Descriptions of Wards 11 and 12 describe 'Warren Street'. Our GIS uses its later name of 'Warrenton St'. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Fuller 1826 map.

- Descriptions of Wards 11 and 12 describe ‘Orange Street’. Our GIS uses its later name of ‘Washington St’. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Norman 1806 map.

1836-1837

Change: Annexation of East Boston

Number of Wards: 12 + East Boston

Primary Source: “Boston in 1880: Showing Areas and Dates of Annexations of Territory.” [map]. George E. Waring, Jr., 1880. *UT Library Historical Maps Collection*. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/boston_annexations_1880.jpg (Accessed Jan 31, 2013).

Notes:

- We were unable to find a source identifying a ward number for the newly annexed area. Tables from the period use “East Boston.” No ward number has been assigned but a new Field called “Ward Name” has been created to reflect these conditions.
- Ward 11 incorporates all made land south of Beach Street in S. Cove west of South St. and made land north of Worcester Railroad tracks as depicted in the Eddy 1835 map and Boynton 1838 map.

1838-1850

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 12 (East Boston incorporated into Ward 4)

Primary Source: “A Catalogue of the City Councils of Boston, 1822-1908, Roxbury, 1846-1867, Charlestown, 1847-1873, and of the Selectmen of Boston, 1634-1822: Also of Various Other Town and Municipal Officers.” *Boston City Council*. Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1909: pg. 10-14.

Notes:

- Descriptions of Wards 1 and 3 describe ‘Richmond St’. Our GIS uses its later name of ‘Parmenter St’ between Hanover and Salem Streets. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Fuller 1826 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 2 and 4 include ‘Dock Square’, which appears from the Norman 1806 map to be a continuation of Union St.
- Descriptions of Wards 3 and 5 include ‘Lyman Place’. Our GIS uses its later names of ‘Stanford’ and ‘Lyman’ Streets. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Boynton 1839 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 3 and 5 describe the ward lines as running directly from Prospect St to Causeway St. These do not line up perfectly in our GIS, so we show them running for a short section along Merrimac St in between the two.
- Descriptions of Wards 3 and 4 describe the ward lines running along ‘Bowdoin Square’. This square is at the intersections of Green, Court and Cambridge Streets and is not included in our GIS. (The square itself is placed in Ward 4).
- Descriptions of Wards 4 and 6 include ‘Belknap Street’. Our GIS uses its later name of ‘Joy St’. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Fuller 1826 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 7 and 9 include ‘Franklin Place’. Our GIS uses its later name of ‘Franklin St’.
- Descriptions of Wards 7 and 9 include ‘Chauncy Place’. We were unable to locate this on a historical map, but from the description ‘Chauncy Place’ is assumed to refer to ‘Chauncy Street’ between Bedford Street and Essex Street.
- Descriptions of Wards 7 and 9 describe ‘Rowe Street’. Our GIS uses its later name of ‘Chauncy St’. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Boynton 1839 map.

- Descriptions of Wards 8 and 9 describe ‘Berry Street’. Our GIS uses its later name of ‘Channing St’. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Boynton 1839 and Fuller 1826 maps.
- Descriptions of Wards 8 and 9 describe ‘Atkinson Street’. Our GIS uses its later name of ‘Congress St’. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Boynton 1839 and Fuller 1826 maps.
- Descriptions of Wards 10 and 11 include ‘Pleasant Street’. Our GIS uses its later name of ‘Broadway’ as well as ‘Park Sq’.
- The Boynton Map shows the ward line between Wards 10 and 11 going from Boylston directly down Carver to Pleasant. The Catalogue description moves this by extending Ward 10 to include the block bordered by Pleasant, Elliot, Carver and Boylston. We have used the Catalogue’s description.
- Descriptions of Wards 10 and 11 include ‘a new street crossing the South Cove’. The Boynton map shows the map going down ‘Orange Road’. Being the first road to the south of the Worcester Railroad at this location this street corresponds to ‘Way St’ in our GIS.

1851-1855:

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 12

Primary Source: “A Catalogue of the City Councils of Boston, 1822-1908, Roxbury, 1846-1867, Charlestown, 1847-1873, and of the Selectmen of Boston, 1634-1822: Also of Various Other Town and Municipal Officers.” *Boston City Council*. Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1909: pg. 14-17.

Notes:

- Descriptions of Wards 1 and 4 describe ‘Richmond St’. Our GIS uses its later name of ‘Parmenter St’ between Hanover and Salem Streets. The placement of the older name is confirmed by the Fuller 1826 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 4 and 6 describe Temple Street. Our GIS doesn’t include Temple Street running from Derne Street to Mount Vernon Street. The location is imputed.
- Descriptions of Wards 6 and 9 describe ‘Western Ave’. Our GIS uses its later name of ‘Beacon St’. The placement is confirmed by the Boynton 1853 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 9 and 10 describe ‘Warren Street’. Our GIS uses its later name of ‘Warrenton St’. The placement is confirmed by Boynton 1853 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 9 and 11 refer to the “Centre of the Boston and Worcester Railroad.” This line is imputed.

1856-1865

Change: Annexation of Dorchester Neck

Number of Wards: 12

Primary Source: Simonds, Thomas. *History of South Boston: Formerly Dorchester Neck Now Ward XII of the City of Boston*. Boston: D. Clapp, 1857: pg. 315.

1866-1867

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 12

Primary Source: “A Catalogue of the City Councils of Boston, 1822-1908, Roxbury, 1846-1867, Charlestown, 1847-1873, and of the Selectmen of Boston, 1634-1822: Also of Various Other Town and Municipal Officers.” *Boston City Council*. Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1909: pg. 17-20.

Notes:

- Descriptions of Wards 2 and 4 describe ‘Haymarket Square’. Our GIS displays the ward boundary running down N Charleston St between Haverhill St and Blackstone St. The placement is confirmed by the 1863 plan of Boston.
- Descriptions of Wards 5 and 7 describe ‘Federal St’ to ‘Mt. Washington Ave’. Our GIS uses Atlantic Ave to Kneeland St and a direct line to the water where the Mt. Washington Ave would be. The placement is confirmed by the 1863 plan of Boston.
- Descriptions of Ward 9 describe ‘Pleasant St’ between Carver St and Washington St. Our GIS uses the name ‘Broadway St’ as the ward boundary between Carver St and Washington St. This placement is confirmed by the 1867 plan of Boston.
- Descriptions of Wards 9 and 10 describe the ward boundary from Harrison Ave to Florence St crossing Washington St to ‘Chapman St.’ Our GIS uses ‘Compton St’ instead.

1868-1869

Change: Annexation of Roxbury

Number of Wards: 15

Primary Sources: “Boston in 1880: Showing Areas and Dates of Annexations of Territory.” [map]. George E. Waring, Jr., 1880. *UT Library Historical Maps Collection*. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/boston_annexations_1880.jpg (Accessed Jan 31, 2013); “Johnson’s Boston and Vicinity.” [map]. A.J. Johnson, 1870. *David Rumsey Historical Map Collection*. http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~219382~5504603:Johnson-s-Boston-and-Vicinity--Ente?sort=Date%2CPub_Date%2CPub_List_No%2CSeries_No (Accessed Jan 31, 2013).

Notes:

- The Catalogue does not include descriptions of the newly created ward boundaries. They have been derived from the Johnson 1870 map.

1870-1873

Change: Annexation of Dorchester

Number of Wards: 16

Primary Source: “Boston in 1880: Showing Areas and Dates of Annexations of Territory.” [map]. George E. Waring, Jr., 1880. *UT Library Historical Maps Collection*. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/boston_annexations_1880.jpg (Accessed Jan 31, 2013).

1874-1875

Change: Annexation of Brighton, Charleston, and West Roxbury

Number of Wards: 21

Primary Sources: “Boston in 1880: Showing Areas and Dates of Annexations of Territory.” [map]. George E. Waring, Jr., 1880. *UT Library Historical Maps Collection*. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/boston_annexations_1880.jpg (Accessed Jan 31, 2013); Map of the City of Boston and its Environs.” [map]. Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins, 1874.

Notes:

- The Catalogue does not include descriptions of the newly created ward boundaries. They have been derived from the Hopkins 1874 map.

- The northwestern boundary between Wards 20 and 22 is appears as Williams Street to the water on the Hopkins 1874 map, our GIS lacks this street, its location has been imputed.

1876-1894

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 25

Primary Source: “A Catalogue of the City Councils of Boston, 1822-1908, Roxbury, 1846-1867, Charlestown, 1847-1873, and of the Selectmen of Boston, 1634-1822: Also of Various Other Town and Municipal Officers.” *Boston City Council*. Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1909: pg. 20-28.

Notes:

- Descriptions of Ward 1 and 2 describe the ward boundary following Port St through Central Sq, Border St then to the water. Our GIS shows the ward boundary following Porter St to Meridian St to Central Sq to Border St to the water. .
- Descriptions of Wards 3 and 5 describe the boundary following ‘Chestnut Street.’ Our GIS uses the name ‘Lexington St’. This placement is confirmed by the A. Williams 1876 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 4 and 5 describe the boundary following ‘Lincoln Street.’ This street does not exist in our GIS, the location has been imputed.
- Descriptions of Ward 6 describe the boundary crossing ‘Dock Square’ from North St. to Devonshire St. Our GIS uses ‘Union St’. This placement is confirmed by the A. Williams 1876 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 9 and 11 describe the boundary following ‘Otter Street’. Our GIS uses part of Embankment Rd with a direct line to the water.
- Descriptions of Wards 10 and 12 describe the boundary from Devonshire St to Lincoln St. Our GIS map however does not have a direct intersection between Devonshire St and Lincoln St. Our GIS therefore displays the ward boundary extending from the intersection of Devonshire St and Summer St to the intersection of Lincoln St and Bedford St. This placement is confirmed by the A. Williams 1876 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 10, 11 and 12 describe the ward boundary running from Tremont St to Boylston St. to Arlington St. back to Beacon St. The additional portions of Ward 10 are the public gardens. This placement is confirmed by the A. Williams 1876 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 11 and 12 describe the ward boundary following Tremont St. to Chandler St. Our GIS however does not show an intersection between Tremont St. and Chandler St. so our GIS shows the ward boundary extending from Tremont St. to the intersection of Chandler St. and Arlington St. in a direct line following Chandler St.
- Descriptions of Wards 12 and 16 describe the boundary following Tremont St. to ‘Pleasant Street’ Our GIS uses the name ‘Broadway St’.
- Descriptions of Ward 15 describe the ward boundary following ‘Dorchester Street.’ Our GIS uses the name ‘Boston St’ which is the same as Dorchester St. but south of Southhampton St.
- Descriptions of Wards 16 and 17 describe the boundary following Tremont St. to Milford St. across Shawmut St. to Bradford St. to Medford Ct. to Washington St. to Ashland place to Harrison Ave. to Bristol St. to the water. Our GIS replaces Ashland place with Laconia St. This placement is confirmed by the A. Williams 1876 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 20 and 21 describe the boundary following ‘Grenville St.’ Our GIS uses the name ‘Greenville St’ This change is confirmed by the Sampson 1878 map.

- Descriptions of Wards 21, 22 and 23 describe the boundary following the Boston and Providence Railroad to the junction of Centre St. and Amory St. Our GIS shows the boundary following Columbus Ave.
- Descriptions of Wards 21 and 23 use the name ‘Codman St.’ Our GIS uses the name ‘Dimock St.’ This is confirmed by the Sampson 1878 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 21 and 23 describe the boundary following Egleston square from Washington St to Seaver St. Our GIS uses the name ‘Columbus Ave’ instead.
- Descriptions of Wards 21 and 23 describe the boundary following Pynchon St between Roxbury St and Tremont St. Our GIS shows the boundary running along Gardner St from Roxbury to Tremont St.
- Descriptions of Wards 23 and 24 describe the boundary following Back St from Blue Hill Ave. Our GIS used the name ‘Harvard St.’ This change is confirmed by the Sampson 1878 map.

1895-1912

Changes: Redivision

Number of Wards: 25

Primary Source: “A Catalogue of the City Councils of Boston, 1822-1908, Roxbury, 1846-1867, Charlestown, 1847-1873, and of the Selectmen of Boston, 1634-1822: Also of Various Other Town and Municipal Officers.” *Boston City Council*. Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1909: pg. 29-40.

Notes:

- Descriptions of Wards 1 and 2 describe the ward boundary following Front St to Marion St to Bennington St to Central Sq to Border St. Our GIS does not contain a Front St. Our placement is confirmed by the Sampson 1896 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 3 and 5 describe the boundary following ‘Chestnut St’. Our GIS uses the name ‘Lexington St’.
- Descriptions of Wards 4 and 5 describe the boundary following High St to Walker St to Main St to Lincoln St. Our GIS follows this description except Lincoln St does not exist on our GIS. Our placement of the ward boundary and between Frothingham St and S Eden St is confirmed by the Sampson 1896 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 7 and 10 describe the boundary following ‘Pleasant St’. Our GIS uses the name ‘Broadway St’. This name change is confirmed by the Sampson 1896 map.
- Descriptions of Wards 10 and 19 describe the boundary following ‘Rogers St’. Our GIS uses the street name ‘Ruggles St’. This name change is confirmed by the Sampson 1896 map.

1913-1914

Changes: Annexation of Hyde Park

Number of Wards: 26

Primary Source: Bromley, George W. and Walter S. Bromley. “Atlas of the City of Boston.” Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1912.

1915-1925

Changes: Redivision

Number of Wards: 26

Primary Sources: “Drastic Shifts in New Wards.” *Boston Daily Globe* 29 Dec. 1914; “Map of the City of Boston.” [map]. Sampson, Daveport & Co, 1922. *University of Chicago, Regenstein Library Map Collection*.

1926-1930

Changes: Redivision

Number of Wards: 22

Primary Sources: “New Wards Split Democratic Vote.” *Boston Daily Globe* 31 Dec. 1924.;
“Wards 1-22: Boston.” [map series]. Boston: Board of Election Commissioners, c1930.

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