

# Brooklyn Ward History

## Introduction

This resource documents the creation of the Historical Urban Ecological (HUE) data set Brooklyn 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, 1834-1930.

Date Range	# of Wards	Type of Change
1834-1839	9	Incorporation
1840-1849	9	Redivision
1850-1854	11	Redivision
1855-1856	18	Redivision/Annexation
1857-1863	19	Redivision
1864-1867	20	Redivision
1868-1872	22	Redivision
1873	25	Redivision
1874-1886	25	Redivision
1887-1891	26	Annexation
1892-1893	28	Redivision
1894-1895	31	Annexation
1896-1924	32	Annexation
1925-1930	32	City boundary change

*Table 1:* General ward history of Brooklyn 1834-1930

## Sources

No single source provides a satisfactory overview of Brooklyn's ward boundary changes. A broad collection of historical maps, city ordinances, and laws recorded by the State of New York were employed in the creation of the Brooklyn Wards GIS data.

This ward boundary history combines Brooklyn's ward redivisions with all of its annexations from incorporation in 1834 up to 1930. Annexations for any one year include the addition of one or many towns in Kings County. The inauguration of a new ward system in the HUE Brooklyn ward boundary data accounts for either a change in internal ward boundaries, significant annexations, or historically significant changes to the city boundary. Changes to the Brooklyn City Charter discovered in archival city-issued documents and proceedings detailed in the Laws of the State of New York form the core of this composite ward history. The Laws of the State of New York describe all acts taken up and passed by the state legislature and encapsulate nearly every change to Brooklyn's city charter, including all minor amendments.

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

Changes to the shoreline, are reflected generally in this data set. 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.

Street centerlines delimited many ward boundaries. We have checked the HUE ward boundaries for topological consistency against the CPE's HUE Street Centerlines for Brooklyn. 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 1916 according to Ullitz's map, *Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn: City of New York*, and Tuttle's *Sectional Aerial Maps of the City of New York* in 1924. Many ward lines were set against these streets. Ambiguities between street names and instances where boundaries ran on streets that were no longer extant 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

### 1834-1839

Change: City Incorporated

Number of Wards: 9

Primary Sources: "Map of the Town of Brooklyn in the County of Kings" [map]. Jeremiah Johnson, 1834; New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1834.

#### Note:

- Wards formed on incorporation based on the wards of the village of Brooklyn.

### 1840-1849

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 9

Primary Source: New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1840.

### 1850-1854

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 11

Primary Source: New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1850.

#### Note:

- Despite divisions presented and accepted to convention in 1847, Act adopting new ward boundaries not passed until April 4, 1850

### 1855-1856

Change: Redivision/Annexation

Number of Wards: 18

Primary Sources: New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1854; City of Brooklyn. "Charter of the City of Brooklyn," in *Brooklyn City Charter and Ordinances*. Brooklyn: Brooklyn City Clerk, 1855

#### Notes:

- Williamsburgh and Bushwick annexed.
- The eastern boundary of the 18th ward is described as running southeast along Newton creek to "the intersection of the Williamsburgh and Jamaica turnpike, thence in a southeasterly direction to a certain rock called 'Arbitration rock;' thence south twenty seven degrees east one hundred and fifty five chains to a heap of stones; thence in a direct line until it is intersected by the western boundary of New Lots." This boundary was recreated from georeferenced historical maps as the historical location of Arbitration Rock is disputed and the heap of stones unknown.

### 1857-1863

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 19

Primary Source: New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1856.

### **1864-1867**

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 20

Primary Source: City of Brooklyn. "Boundaries of Wards," in *Manual of the Common Council of the City of Brooklyn*. Brooklyn: Brooklyn City Clerk, 1864.

Note:

- Ward boundary change not found in index of the Laws of the State of New York, but municipal reports issued 1864 through 1867 specify 20 wards

### **1868-1872**

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 22

Primary Source: New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1868.

### **1873**

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 25

Primary Sources: "New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1873; "The City of Brooklyn" [map]. F.W. Beers, 1873. *David Rumsey Map Collection* (Accessed July 22, 2013).

Note:

- Enacted 6/28/1873

### **1874-1886**

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 25

Primary Source: "New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1874.

Notes:

- Only change to a small part of boundary of ward 7, passed 6/1/1874
- Only 25 wards in all digitized and collected Brooklyn HUE data for 1886 despite annexation timing of New Lots (see 1887-1891 ward history).

### **1887-1891**

Change: Annexation

Number of Wards: 26

Primary Sources: New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1886; City of Brooklyn. "Charter of the City of Brooklyn," in *Brooklyn City Charter and Ordinances*. Brooklyn: Brooklyn City Clerk, 1888.

Note:

- New Lots annexed 8/1/1886. All HUE tabular data excludes ward 26 (New Lots), reporting only the original 25. First instances of 26 wards appear in 1887 data, although some tables continue to report 25. All reports include all 26 wards by 1888.

### **1892-1893**

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 28

Primary Source: New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1892.

### **1894-1895**

Change: Annexation

Number of Wards: 31

Primary Source: New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1894.

#### Note:

- Flatbush annexed 4/25/1894; Gravesend annexed 5/8/1894; New Utrecht annexed 7/1/1894; though changes to city charter discuss annexation of Flat Lands, town is not officially added to the City of Brooklyn until 1896

### **1896-1924**

Change: Annexation

Number of Wards: 32

Primary Sources: New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1894.

#### Notes:

- Flatlands annexed 1/1/1896
- Greater New York City Charter enacted in 1897 (taking effect in 1898), does not interfere with ward numbering scheme nor boundaries (all Boroughs maintain their own ward systems).

### **1925-1930**

Change: City Boundary Change

Number of Wards: 32

Primary Source: (none)

#### Notes:

- Brooklyn-Queens boundary redrawn in 1925, interior ward boundaries remain unchanged
- Shoreline drawn to contemporary infill in Jamaica Bay
- The redrawn boundary is based on the “Administrative and Political Districts” shapefile, edition 13b, released May, 2013 by the New York City Department of Planning

## Citations

“The City of Brooklyn” [map]. F.W. Beers, 1873. *David Rumsey Map Collection* (Accessed July 22, 2013).

City of Brooklyn. “Charter of the City of Brooklyn,” in *Brooklyn City Charter and Ordinances*. Brooklyn: Brooklyn City Clerk, 1855 & 1888.

City of Brooklyn. “Boundaries of Wards,” in *Manual of the Common Council of the City of Brooklyn*. Brooklyn: Brooklyn City Clerk, 1864.

“Map of the Town of Brooklyn in the County of Kings” [map]. Jeremiah Johnson, 1834.

New York State Legislature. *Laws of the State of New York*. Albany: New York State Legislature, 1834–1894.