

Manhattan Ward History

Introduction

This resource documents the creation of the Historical Urban Ecological (HUE) data set Manhattan 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, 1827-1930.

Date Range	# of Wards	Type of Change
1827-1831	14	Redivision
1832-1835	15	Redivision
1836	16	Redivision
1837-1845	17	Redivision
1846-1849	18	Redivision
1850	19	Redivision
1851-1852	20	Redivision
1853-1856	22	Redivision
1857-1862	22	Creation of Central Park
1863-1873	22	Expansion of Central Park
1874-1897	24	Annexation of the Bronx
1898-1930	22	The Bronx changes from Wards 23 & 24 to a separate borough

Table 1: General ward history of Manhattan Island, 1830-1930.

Sources

The main source used in the creation of the Manhattan Wards History is a collection of ward cards available at the New York City Municipal Archives showing New York City's wards from 1817 to 1913. The cards were compiled by the staff of the City Register, a unit of the Department of Finance. They do not have a call number. Drawings of each ward and years for which certain boundaries were in use are included on each card. The cards show 8 redivisions between 1827 and 1853. The creation of Central Park is also included as it dramatically impacts later ward size. While New York City grew beyond Manhattan Island during the study period we have not included the outlying islands, Marble Hill, or the neighboring boroughs save the Bronx and Brooklyn, which inhabits its own section of the HUE data set.

The primary source has been checked against ward maps that were periodically released during this time period. These include maps located at the New York City Department of Records, New York Public Library, the Brooklyn Historical Society, the University of Chicago Map Collection, and the Library of Congress as well as maps available online the David Rumsey Map Collection and ProQuest Sanborn Maps Geo Edition.

Throughout the study period Manhattan Island expanded slightly through landfill. Landfill occurred gradually, taking decades to complete. As a result landfill does not trigger a new ward system. The shoreline most generally applicable to the period, taken at one point during the system's use, is reflected in the shapefile/feature class. Maps collected from the archives listed above were used to determine 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 Manhattan. These streets were created from georeferenced historical maps, historical aerial imagery, modern orthographic imagery, and Census TIGER Line files from 2007. Many ward lines were set against these streets. 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

1827-1831

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 14

Primary Source: Municipal Archives Ward Cards

1832-1835

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 15

Primary Source: Municipal Archives Ward Cards

1836

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 16

Primary Source: Municipal Archives Ward Cards

1837-1845

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 17

Primary Source: Municipal Archives Ward Cards

1846-1849

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 18

Primary Source: Municipal Archives Ward Cards

1850

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 19

Primary Source: Municipal Archives Ward Cards

1851-1852

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 20

Primary Source: Municipal Archives Ward Cards

1853-1856

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 22

Primary Source: Municipal Archives Ward Cards

1857-1862

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 22

Primary Source: Rosenzweig, Roy and Elizabeth Blackmar *The Park and the People: A history of Central Park*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.

1863-1873

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 22

Primary Source: Rosenzweig, Roy and Elizabeth Blackmar. *The Park and the People: A history of Central Park*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.

1874-1897

Change: Annexation

Number of Wards: 24

Note: Wards 23 and 24 comprised the Bronx

Primary Source: New York Department of Health. *Annual Report of the Board of Health of the Department of Health of the City of New York for the Year Ending December 31, 1912*. New York City: J.J. Little & Ives Co., 1913.

1898-1930

Change: Redivision

Number of Wards: 22

Primary Source: Rosenzweig, Roy and Elizabeth Blackmar. *The Park and the People: A history of Central Park*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.

Additional Information

Wards 23 and 24

New York City annexed Wards 23 and 24 on January 1, 1874, changing the number of wards to 24. Wards 23 and 24 comprised the Bronx. In 1898, the Bronx became a borough of New York City and on January 1, 1914, Bronx county separated from New York county along borough boundaries. As a result, data for Wards 23 and 24 may be found on Manhattan related tables dated 1874-1914.

Note on Borough Data

Occasionally, data for boroughs other than Manhattan is found on tables related to the borough of Manhattan.

Citations

New York Department of Health. *Annual Report of the Board of Health of the Department of Health of the City of New York for the Year Ending December 31, 1912*. New York City: J.J. Little & Ives Co., 1913.

Rosenzweig, Roy and Elizabeth Blackmar (1992) *The Park and the People: A history of Central Park*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.

