

Baltimore's Wards, 1797-1978: A Guide

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AS ELECTION DISTRICTS, ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS, AND SELF-CONTAINED AREAS of political and social activity, Baltimore's wards have traditionally served important functions. An understanding of these functions and of the wards themselves is necessary for fruitful study of the city's history. This article is meant to assist research in three ways. First is offered a brief description of the uses wards have served since their inception in 1797. Secondly, a chronology of ward boundary changes from incorporation to the last ward alteration in 1918 is included. The third section presents a descriptive checklist of extant ward maps.

Concerning the checklist of maps, all local research agencies thought to have ward maps in their collections were investigated. All maps located are noted, including copies held by more than one institution. No claim is made for absolute comprehensiveness of the compilation; some items probably have eluded the search. Those listed, however, represent all ward maps which are readily available to the researcher in the Baltimore area.

On the last day of 1796, the Act of Incorporation for Baltimore City gained final approval. Section 1 empowered the Governor and Council to appoint a commission for the division of the city into eight wards, each of which was "to contain, as nearly as may be, an equal number of inhabitants." Redistricting was to occur "as often as the increase or decrease of inhabitants in any ward or wards shall render it necessary, in order to [effect] a just representation."¹

Installation of a ward system in Baltimore closely followed the introduction of representative city government. Elections were held in the wards and a candidate was selected solely by the voters from the ward he wished to represent. Each ward elected two individuals to sit in the First Branch, the lower house of the City Council. The upper chamber, designated as the Second Branch, was selected by an electoral college composed of one elected delegate from each ward. The Mayor was also chosen by the electoral college.² In 1808, a convention attended by two delegates from each ward approved a charter amendment allowing the direct election of Second Branch representatives. The electoral college continued to choose the Mayor until 1833 when the practice was replaced by direct election.³

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Electoral organization of the city's wards changed continually. In 1845, the fourteen wards were redistricted into twenty. Coupled with this was a provision limiting representation in the First Branch to one representative per ward; the Second Branch was to be composed of delegates from every two contiguous wards—that is, one member from wards one and two, one from three and four, and so on.⁴ The newly created Board of Police Commissioners was authorized in 1860 to sub-divide each ward into election precincts.⁵ Second Branch representation was altered by the 1898 city charter through consolidation of the wards into four councilmanic districts, each of which elected two members. The two Branch system disappeared completely in 1922 with creation of a unicameral City Council. Four councilmanic districts were again established with each electing three representatives to the new body.⁶ City delegates to the Maryland General Assembly were, up to 1922, elected from districts composed of ward aggregates. After this date, legislative districts have been based upon conglomerations of election precincts.⁷ Similarly, city congressional districts were formed as blocks of wards until 1902, and as independent political subdivisions thereafter.⁸ No changes have been made in ward boundaries since the 1918 addition of four new wards formed by the enlargement of the city. To provide for equitable political representation, election precincts are altered whenever population shifts warrant it.

Wards were also used as tax collection and assessment districts, especially for the general state and local property levies. Soon after incorporation, the city was divided into three assessment districts, each of which was assigned an assessor to evaluate previously unassessed property. At this time, however, Baltimore county and the state controlled the process for reassessment of city property, a situation which limited both municipal authority and revenue.⁹ Reorganization of Baltimore county's government in March of 1827 benefited Baltimore city by transferring greater reassessment and collection powers to the Mayor and City Council.¹⁰

In 1832 and 1833, the General Assembly further extended the city's authority to levy and collect taxes and allowed the corporation to perform new assessments "whenever they may deem it expedient." Under the provisions of these acts, two assessors were appointed for each ward to carry out the first distinctly local reassessment of property in 1834-1835.¹¹ Following a procedure that remained consistent throughout the period, all persons liable to taxation were directed to prepare itemized lists that detailed the value of their property. The ward assessors checked the accuracy of the statements and passed them on to a supervisory body known as the Commissioners of the Tax. In 1841 the General Assembly ordered the city's twelve wards to be divided into six assessment districts as part of a comprehensive revaluation of property in the state. Three assessors were assigned to each district. The Appeal Tax Court of Baltimore was established to receive the assessor's reports and to act as a board of review.¹²

Six additional property reassessments were held in Baltimore between 1842 and 1896, and each was conducted in similar fashion as the 1841 revaluation. Baltimore was authorized by the state in 1845 to organize and conduct a

local property reassessment. The following year, five districts composed of four wards apiece were established; the mayor appointed three assessors for each district along with a five-member board review.¹³ In 1852 the General Assembly divided the twenty wards into ten districts as part of a general reassessment of property in the state. Three assessors for each district were appointed by the Governor with the Appeal Tax Court serving as a board of review.¹⁴ For the 1858 local revaluation, ten two-ward districts were created, each managed by three assessors appointed by the Mayor.¹⁵

Five assessment districts of four wards each were created for the 1866 state revaluation. Each district had three resident assessors and three resident members of a board of review.¹⁶ In 1876, another state reassessment was held with three assessors assigned to each ward. For every five wards the Governor appointed a board of review. The Appeal Tax Court was charged with general supervision of the operation.¹⁷ One assessor was delegated for every election precinct and each ward constituted a taxation district for the 1896 state revaluation. Coordination of the effort rested with six separate boards of review assigned to ward groupings.¹⁸

Apart from taxation and politics, wards served other administrative uses as well. A state law in 1818 provided for the appointment of at least one and not more than two individuals to serve as "justices of the Peace of the State of Maryland in and for the city of Baltimore." This act allowed the settlement of summonses by either the issuing Justice or by one from the defendant's ward of residence; the same option held for trial procedures.¹⁹ The method of Justice of the Peace distribution was changed in 1886. While each ward continued to have at least one Justice, specified numbers of at-large Justices were allowed for each of the city's three legislative districts and for the city as a whole. This approach has basically remained unchanged up to the present.²⁰

A city ordinance established a "house of Industry" in 1817 to allow the poor to work for their own relief. The Mayor and two appointees from each ward formed a board of trustees and supervised the enterprise.²¹ A similar organization was formed in 1818 to oversee the problems of Baltimore's poor in a broader, more realistic fashion. One "sensible and discrete" person was appointed from each ward to serve as a Manager of the Poor. A manager was empowered to direct to the county (later city) almshouse "any indigent sick or disabled person, infant or idiot, of the . . . ward for which he shall be appointed."²² Ward Managers of the Poor continued to function for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

Residents of Baltimore's wards often demonstrated a closeknit sense of community, especially when faced with common problems. For twenty years after incorporation, a high incidence of crime motivated ward residents to form voluntary dusk-to-dawn street patrols. The original system of watchmen, and later ward constables, proved so inadequate to subdue crime that a number of ward meetings were held in April, 1801, concerning the problem. Ward representatives were delegated to call upon various city officials to press for reorganization and expansion of police services. Little came of this effort, and in 1816 another series of ward meetings agitated for action. The city govern-

ment responded by reconstituting the watch into a corps of thirty-four men charged with preserving order and lighting the streets. Ward residents continued to complain of insufficient police services until the complete reorganization of the department in 1856.²³

Ward inhabitants energetically advocated a public school system in the mid-1820s. City-wide ward meetings discussed the issue, and in January of 1825, ward delegates formed a committee on education. This committee circulated a petition calling for a firm commitment by the city government to institute and maintain a system of public education. Another series of ward meetings held in September, 1825, served notice that political candidates on the state and local level must approve of a public school establishment to receive election support. The General Assembly, suitably impressed, provided in 1826 for the creation of publically funded schools in Baltimore.²⁴ Recognizing the importance of ward involvement in public education, the 1846 City Council authorized election of one School Commissioner per ward. Ward representation on the School Board was abolished by the 1898 charter in favor of nine at-large mayoral appointees.²⁵

Prevention of disease actively concerned Baltimore residents throughout the nineteenth century. One significant result of this effort was the formation in 1812 of the Baltimore Jennerian Society, founded to curtail smallpox by sponsoring vaccination programs among the city's poor. The Society organized itself into ward committees led by prominent citizens.²⁶ Lack of funding hampered these efforts, and in 1821 the city assumed the task of vaccination by dividing the wards into six districts, each of which was supervised by a vaccination physician. The program expanded in 1846 when an ordinance authorized the appointment of a vaccination physician for each ward. The appointee was required to reside within the ward he served and he was to systematically visit each dwelling in his ward for vaccination purposes. Later designated as health wardens, vaccination physicians were authorized to oversee ward health until the mid-1940s.²⁷

Wards were instrumental in activities ranging beyond official city functions. The severe winter of 1803-04 led Mayor Calhoun to appoint a person from each ward to solicit donations for those suffering from the elements.²⁸ A convention attended by ward delegates met in 1813 to organize a municipal loan for fortification of the city against British attack.²⁹ In March, 1826, a ward-by-ward collection was taken up to defray the costs of Thomas Jefferson's funeral.³⁰ Political parties depended greatly on their ward organizations to produce contributions along with votes, and ward political affiliations were often crucial for those seeking city favors.³¹

Chronology of Baltimore Ward Changes, 1797-1918

Date	Alteration	Authority
1797	Original division of city into 8 wards.	Act of Incorporation, sec. 1; for boundaries, see J. Thomas Scharf, <i>Chronicles of Baltimore</i> , p. 280-81.
1802	Boundaries of the 8 wards changed.	<i>Ordinances</i> , 1802, No. 35.

1817	Addition of 3 wards to form total of 11.	<i>Ordinances</i> , 1817, No. 40.
1818	Wards reorganized into 12 units.	<i>Ordinances</i> , 1818, No. 16.
1831	Boundaries of the 12 wards changed.	<i>Ordinances</i> , 1831, No. 270.
1841	Formation of 14 wards.	<i>Ordinances</i> , 1841, No. 14.
1845	Wards reorganized into 20 units.	<i>Laws of Maryland</i> , 1845, ch. 282; for boundaries see Mayor's Record Books, vol. 1, pp. 71-75, RG 9, Baltimore City Archives.
1860	Boundaries of the 20 wards changed; creation of election precincts.	<i>Ordinances</i> , 1860, No. 79.
1882	Boundaries of the 20 wards changed.	<i>Ordinances</i> , 1882, No. 36.
1888	Addition of 2 wards to form total of 22.	<i>Ordinances</i> , 1888, No. 92.
1890	Boundaries of wards 9, 11, 12, and 20 changed.	<i>Laws of Maryland</i> , 1890, ch. 186.
1898	Wards are reorganized into 24 units.	<i>Laws of Maryland</i> , 1898, ch. 10.
1901	All 24 wards renumbered.	<i>Laws of Maryland</i> , 1901, ch. 8.
1918	Addition of 4 wards to form total of 28.	<i>Laws of Maryland</i> , 1918, ch. 82.

Checklist of Baltimore Ward Maps, 1822-1978

Under the Location column, the following symbols are used to indicate where individual maps are found:

<p>MHS: Prints and Photographs Division Maryland Historical Society 201 West Monument Street Baltimore, Md. 21201</p> <p>UMCP: Maryland Room McKeldin Library University of Maryland College Park, Md. 20742</p> <p>LRRM: Department of Legislative Reference Records Management Division Baltimore City Archives 211 East Pleasant Street Baltimore, Md. 21202</p> <p>DLRL: Department of Legislative Reference, 100 North Holliday Street Baltimore, Md. 21202</p>	<p>EPCL: Maryland Department Enoch Pratt Free Library 400 Cathedral Street Baltimore, Md. 21201</p> <p>JHUL: Milton S. Eisenhower Library Johns Hopkins University Homewood Campus Baltimore, Md. 21218</p> <p>LC: Geography and Map Division Library of Congress Washington, D.C. 20540</p>
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Listed under the Notes column, the following symbols provide additional description for individual maps:

- B*: Streets named only where they figure in the various district boundries.
CoD: Councilmanic districts indicated.
E: Election precincts indicated.
I: Street names indexed.
LgD: Legislative districts indicated.
P: Peripheries of city excluded.
X: Ward numbers only, no boundaries indicated.

Date	Location	Author/Publisher	Size	Notes
1822	MHS	Lewis Brant/ Fielding Lucas, Jr.	8" × 12"	12 wards. I/X; references to fire companies provided.
1830	MHS	R. J. Matchett	8½" × 13½"	12 wards. I/P.
1831	EPCL	R. J. Matchett	8½" × 13½"	12 wards. I.
1833	MHS; EPCL	R. J. Matchett	8½" × 13½"	12 wards.
1836	LC	Fielding Lucas, Jr.	21 × 27	12 wards. I.
1838	MHS	T. G. Bradford	11¼ × 14"	12 wards.
1841	MHS	Fielding Lucas, Jr.	21½" × 26½"	14 wards.
1842	MHS; EPCL	R. J. Matchett	9¼" × 15½"	14 wards. P.
1845	EPCL	Murphy's Baltimore Directory	9½" × 12½"	14 wards. P.
1845	MHS; LC	Fielding Lucas, Jr.	20¼" × 16¼"	20 wards. I/P/X. 2 pieces ea.
1849	EPCL	R. J. Matchett	12" × 13½"	20 wards. P.
1852	EPCL	R. J. Matchett	13¼" × 17½"	20 wards.
1852	MHS	A. Hoen & Co./ R. J. Matchett	13" × 13½"	20 wards. One inch right side missing.
1853	MHS	Isaac Simmons	17" × 20½"	20 wards.
1855	EPCL	R. J. Matchett	13¼" × 17¼"	20 wards. I.
1855	MHS	G. W. & C. B. Colton	11¼ × 14"	20 wards.
1856	MHS; EPCL	John W. Woods	13" × 17½"	20 wards. I.
1858	EPCL	John W. Woods	13" × 18"	20 wards. I.
1860	EPCL	John W. Woods	13" × 18"	20 wards. I/X.
1863-64	MHS	John W. Woods	13½" × 14½"	20 wards. E.
1865-66	EPCL	John W. Woods	14½" × 19½"	20 wards. E/I.
1870	MHS	John W. Woods	13¼" × 14½"	20 wards. E/I.
1872	MHS	F. Klemm	22½" × 25½"	20 wards.
1872	EPCL	John W. Woods	13¼" × 14½"	20 wards. E/I.
1873	MHS	F. Klemm	22½" × 25½"	20 wards. X.
1873	EPCL	John W. Woods	13¼" × 14½"	20 wards. E/I.
1874	MHS; EPCL	John W. Woods	13¼" × 14½"	20 wards. E/I.
1875	EPCL	John W. Woods	13¼" × 14½"	20 wards. E/I.
1876	EPCL; UMCP	John W. Woods	13¼" × 14½"	20 wards. E/I.
1876	LC	Wm. Sides/ Murphy & Co.	14½" × 21"	20 wards. E/I.
1877	EPCL	John W. Woods	13¼" × 14½"	20 wards. E/I.
1878	EPCL	John W. Woods	13¼" × 14½"	20 wards. E/I.
1879	EPCL	John W. Woods	13¼" × 14½"	20 wards. E/I.
1880	MHS; EPCL; LC	John W. Woods	14½" × 20½"	20 wards. E/I.

Date	Location	Author/Publisher	Size	Notes
1881	MHS	John W. Woods	13¼" × 14½"	20 wards. E/I.
1882	MHS	A. S. Abell & Co.	21½" × 24½"	20 wards. E.
1885	MHS; EPCL	John W. Woods	21½" × 24½"	20 wards. E.
1886	MHS; EPCL	John W. Woods	21½" × 24½"	20 wards. E.
1887	LC; JHUL	R. L. Polk	21½" × 25"	20 wards. E.
1889	MHS (Main Library)	Isaac Friedenwald	Folio Volume	<i>Plats of the 21st and 22nd Wards of Baltimore City.</i> Numerous highly detailed plats. E.
1894	LC	[Wm. A.] Flamm	15" × 28" 2 pieces ea.	22 wards. I.
1896	MHS	George S. Bromley	Folio Volume	<i>Atlas of Baltimore City.</i> Individual maps of City's 22 wards.
1898	MHS; EPCL; JHUL	Not indicated	32" × 33½"	24 wards. CgD/LgD.
1899	MHS; JHUL	Not indicated	33" × 35"	24 wards. LgD.
1902	MHS; EPCL	J. W. Bond Co.	31½" × 33½"	24 wards. CoD/LgD.
1906	MHS; UMCP	[Wm. A.] Flamm	69" × 63½" 4 pieces total	24 wards.
ca. 1908	LRRM	Not indicated	Folio Volume	<i>Ward Maps of Baltimore City.</i> Individual maps of City's 24 wards; also map of City displaying boundries of wards.
1909	UMCP	[Wm. A.] Flamm	69" × 63½" 4 pieces total	24 wards.
1910	EPCL	Not indicated	32" × 34"	24 wards.
1914	UMCP	Wm. A. Flamm	31" × 36" 4 pieces ea.	24 wards. I.
1918	MHS	Md. Geological Survey	18" × 23"	28 wards.
1919	MHS	[Wm. A.] Flamm/ Balt. News Co.	31" × 34" 4 pieces ea.	28 wards. I.
1920	EPCL	Not indicated.	27" × 32"	28 wards.
1924	EPCL	Not indicated	26½" × 34"	28 wards.
1927	MHS	Not indicated	36½" × 52"	28 wards. CoD.
1928	EPCL	Not indicated	26½" × 34"	28 wards.
1930	DLRL	Not indicated	27½" × 33½"	28 wards. CoD.
1938	EPCL	Bureau Vital Stat., Balt. Health Dept.	30" × 38" 4 pieces ea.	28 wards. B. Census tracts for 1930 are displayed.
1949	EPCL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	34½" × 43½"	28 wards.
1949	UMCP	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	34½" × 43½"	28 wards. LgD.
1951	EPCL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" × 22"	28 wards. B/CoD/E.
1954	EPCL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" × 22"	28 wards. B/CoD/E.
1954	EPCL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" × 22"	28 wards. B/CgD/E.
1954	EPCL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" × 22"	28 wards. B/E/LgD.
1958	EPCL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" × 22"	28 wards. B/CgD/E.

Date	Location	Author/Publisher	Size	Notes
1958	EPCL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/E/LgD.
1963	EPCL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/E/LgD.
1965	EPCL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/E/LgD.
1965	UMCP	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/E.
1966	EPCL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/E.
1967	EPCL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/CoD/E.
1971	UMCP	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/E.
1972	UMCP	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/CgD/E.
1974	UMCP	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/CqD/E.
1974	UMCP	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/E/LgD.
1975	EPCL; UMCP	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/CgD/E.
1975	UMCP	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/CoD/E.
1975	UMCP	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/E/LgD.
1978	DLRL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/CoD/E.
1978	DLRL	Board Supervisors Elections, Baltimore	17" x 22"	28 wards. B/E.

REFERENCES

1. Act of Incorporation, sec. 1.
2. *Ibid.*, sec. 2-6.
3. Thaddeus P. Thomas, *The City Government of Baltimore*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1896, pp. 22, 26-27.
4. *Laws of Maryland*, 1845, ch. 282.
5. *Ibid.*, 1860, ch. 9.
6. *Charter and Public Local Laws of Baltimore City*, Baltimore: King Brothers, 1938, sec. 768.
7. *Ibid.*, sec. 768. Legislative districts initially were created for Baltimore by the 1864 Maryland constitution. Prior to this point, a complex system involving quotas by population and electors were in force. See John H. Michener, "The History of Legislative Apportionment in Maryland," *Maryland Law Review* 25 (Winter 1965): 1-20 for a detailed treatment of the subject.
8. *Laws of Maryland*, 1902, ch. 136.
9. Jacob H. Hollander, *The Financial History of Baltimore*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1899, pp. 74-75.
10. *Laws of Maryland*, 1826, ch. 217.
11. Hollander, *Financial History*, pp. 140-41.
12. *Laws of Maryland*, 1841, ch. 23; *Ordinances and Resolutions of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore*, 1841, No. 1.
13. *Ordinances*, 1846, No. 71.
14. *Laws of Maryland*, 1852, ch. 337.
15. *Ordinances*, 1858, No. 25.

16. *Laws of Maryland*, 1866, ch. 157.
17. *Ibid.*, 1876, ch. 260.
18. Hollander, *Financial History*, pp. 257-59.
19. *Laws of Maryland*, 1818, ch. 209.
20. *Ibid.*, 1886, ch. 66.
21. *Ordinances*, 1817, No. 19.
22. *Laws of Maryland*, 1818, ch. 122; *Public Local Laws of the City of Baltimore*, 1890, sec. 61-64.
23. Dennis Rankin Clark, "Baltimore, 1729-1829: The Genesis of a Community," Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1976, pp. 196-199.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 258, 262; *Laws of Maryland*, 1825, ch. 130, ch. 162.
25. *Ordinances*, 1828, No. 22; 1846, No. 1; 1898 charter, sec. 99.
26. Clark, "Baltimore, 1729-1829," p. 340.
27. *Ordinances*, 1821, Resolution of Dec. 17, 1821; 1846, No. 3; 1846-47, No. 567, No. 568.
28. Clark, "Baltimore; 1729-1829," pp. 309-310.
29. Hollander, *Financial History*, p. 90.
30. Clark, "Baltimore, 1729-1829," p. 323.
31. For abundant examples of the importance of ward politics see The Baltimore Mayoral Records, RG 9, Department of Legislative Reference, Records Management Division, Baltimore City Archives.