

Ward Redistricting in Minneapolis, 1867-2013

By Tony L. Hill, Ph.D.

Redistricting of 1867

When Minneapolis was incorporated as a city, it had four wards. The 1st Ward included the area north of Hennepin Avenue. The 2nd Ward included the area between Hennepin and Minnetonka Ave. (now Marquette Ave.) and also included the area southwest of downtown (modern Lowry Hill). The 3rd Ward included the area between Minnetonka Ave. (now Marquette Ave.) and 5th Ave. S. The 4th Ward included the area east of 5th Avenue South, including the modern West Bank and North Seward.

These wards were used for the general elections of 1867, 1868, 1869, 1870, and 1871. In the text, they are referred to as the Ward (1867-1872) to distinguish them from the 13 wards we have today.

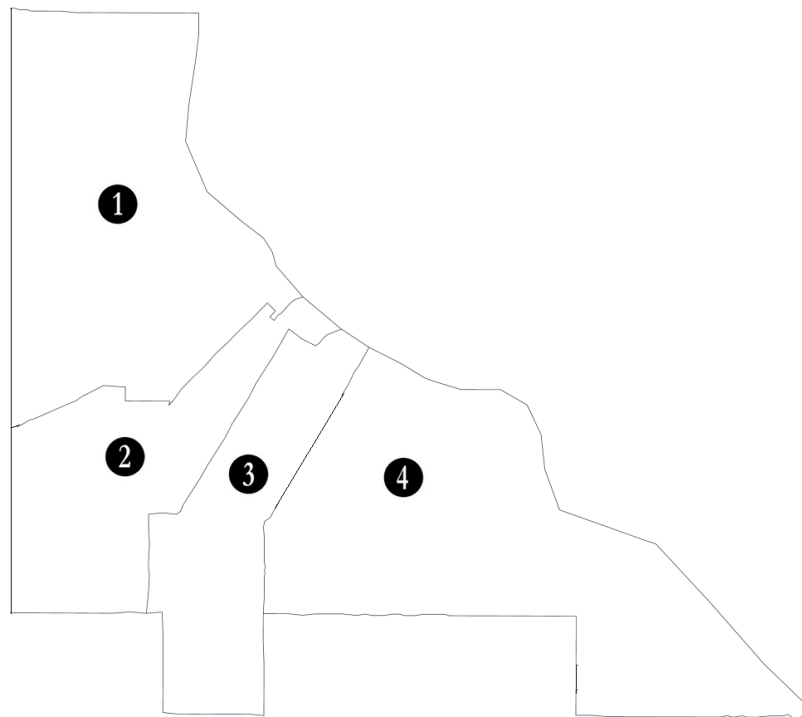


Figure 1. 1867 ward map

Redistricting of 1872

When Minneapolis and St. Anthony merged in 1872, St. Anthony desired to keep the four wards it already had. Since Minneapolis was larger, this meant the unified city needed to have ten wards, six for the West Side (Minneapolis) and four for the East Side (St. Anthony). The 1st Ward comprised that part of the East Side north of Broadway St. The 2nd Ward included the area between the railroad line (roughly 4th Ave. NE) and Broadway. The 3rd Ward was the heart of St. Anthony, taking in the western end of the modern Marcy-Holmes neighborhood. The 4th Ward was that part of the East Side west of a jagged line that ran mostly along modern 4th Ave. SE.

The 5th Ward was the northern part of the West Side, north of 6th Ave. N. (now Olson Memorial Highway). The 6th Ward included the area between Hennepin Ave. and 6th Ave. N., including the modern Harrison neighborhood. The 7th Ward included the area between Hennepin Ave. and 1st Ave. S. (now Marquette Ave.) and the modern Lowry Hill neighborhood southwest of downtown.

The 8th Ward included the area between 1st Ave. S. (now Marquette Ave.) and 5th Ave. S.; south of Grant Street, the boundary line was Nicollet Avenue. The 9th Ward included the area between 5th Ave. S. and 10th Ave. S. The 10th Ward included that part of the West Side east of 10th Ave. S., including the modern West Bank and Seward neighborhoods.

These wards were used for the general elections of 1872, 1873, 1874, 1875, 1876, and 1877. In the text, they are referred to as the xth Ward (1872-1878) to distinguish them from the 13 wards we have today.

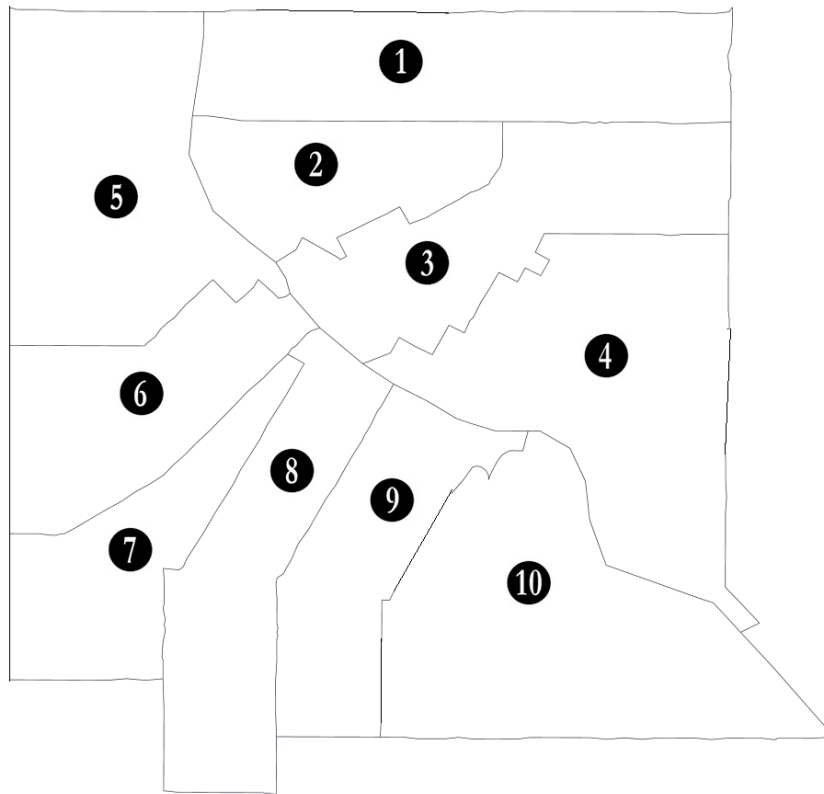


Figure 2. 1872 ward map

Redistricting of 1878

Having ten wards proved unwieldy for the young city. Since some of the wards were less than a handful of blocks wide, many had little to distinguish them from their neighbors. In 1878, the city went to six wards, two for the East Side and four for the West Side. This was the origin of the 13 wards we have today.

The 1st Ward comprised Northeast Minneapolis. The 2nd Ward was comprised of Southeast Minneapolis. The 3rd Ward was that part of the North Side north of 6th Ave. N. (now Olson Memorial Highway). The 4th Ward was that part of the city between Hennepin Ave. and 1st Ave. S. (now Marquette Ave.) in the downtown area, and between 6th Ave. N. (now Olson Memorial Highway) and Franklin Ave. west of Nicollet Ave.

The 5th Ward was that part of the city between 1st Ave. S. (now Marquette Ave.) and 10th Ave. S. The 6th Ward was the area east of 10th Avenue South.

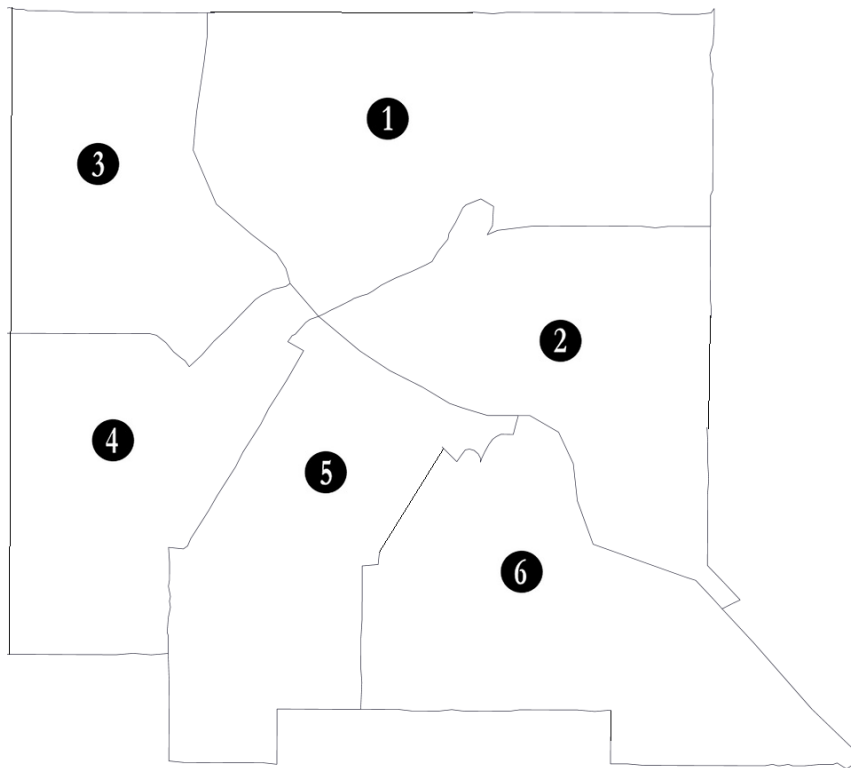


Figure 3. 1878 ward map

Redistricting of 1883

As the city grew, new wards were appended to the six created in 1878. In 1883, following the annexation of most of what is known as South Minneapolis and Southwest Minneapolis, including the lakes district, the city added two wards. The 7th Ward comprised that part of the city south of 24th Street and east of 8th Ave. S. (now Chicago Ave.) The 8th Ward comprised that part of the city south of 24th Street (Franklin Ave. west of Nicollet) and west of 8th Ave. S. (now Chicago Ave.)

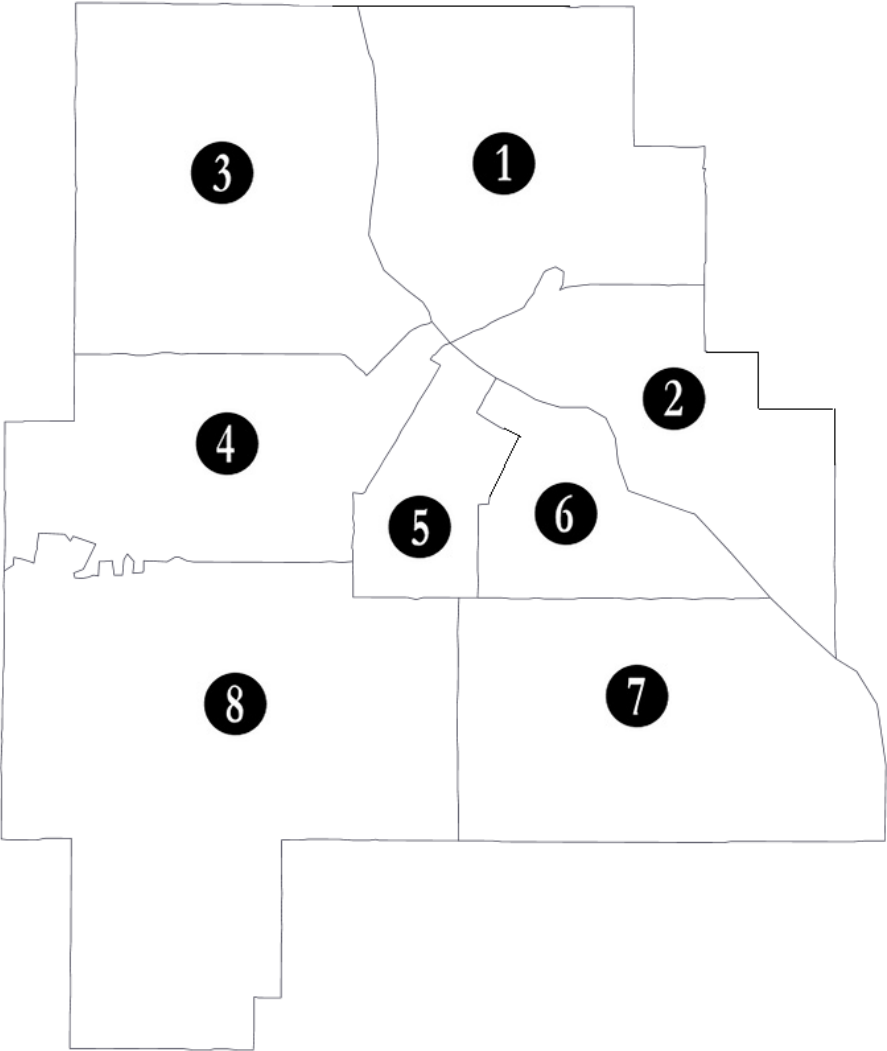


Figure 4. 1883 ward map

Redistricting of 1887

In 1887, the city annexed all of its current territory north of 54th Street (with the exception of two minor parcels added later). At this time, five new wards were appended to the existing wards. This brought the city to the 13 wards that we still have today.

The 1st Ward was divided along 5th St. NE. The area toward the river remained in the 1st Ward. The area east of 5th Street became the 9th Ward.

The 3rd Ward was divided along 26th Ave. N., with the area to the south remaining in the 3rd Ward. The area north of 26th Ave. N. became the 10th Ward.

The 6th Ward was divided along S. 7th Street. The area to the north remained in the 6th Ward. The area south of 7th Street became the 11th Ward.

The 7th Ward was divided along 34th Street. The area to the north remained in the 7th Ward. The area south of 34th Street became the 12th Ward.

The 8th Ward was divided along 34th Street east of Lake Calhoun and Lake Street west of Lake Calhoun. The area to the north remained in the 8th Ward. The area to the south became the 13th Ward.

Following the redistricting of 1887, the city election was harmonized with the state and national elections in November of even-numbered years. (City elections had previously been held annually in April.) In the election of 1888, 39 aldermen were elected, three from each ward, with one alderman from each ward elected to a four-year term and the other two to two-year terms. With the election of 1890, the number of aldermen was reduced to 26, two from each ward, with one elected each cycle for a staggered four-year term.

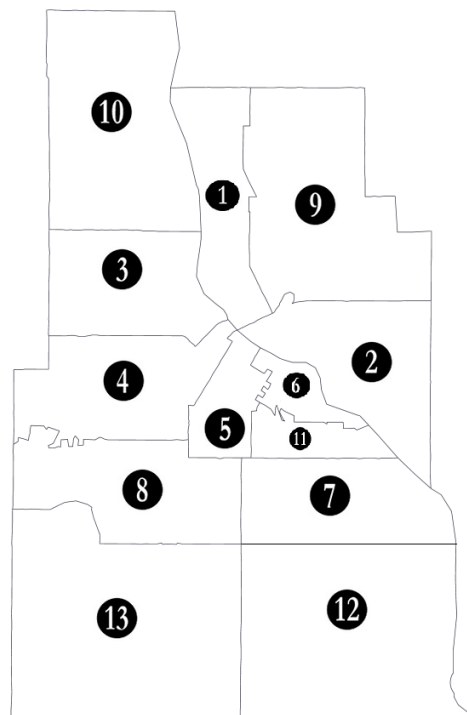


Figure 5. 1887 ward map

Adjustment of 1891

Controversy arose because the newly created 12th Ward was largely unpopulated. In 1891, the Minnesota Legislature adjusted the boundary between the 7th and 12th wards. Instead of being divided horizontally along 34th Street, the wards were divided vertically along 21st Avenue South. The area west of 21st Avenue South became the 7th Ward, and the area east of 21st Avenue South became the 12th Ward. The legislature also reassigned two of the aldermen of the two wards.

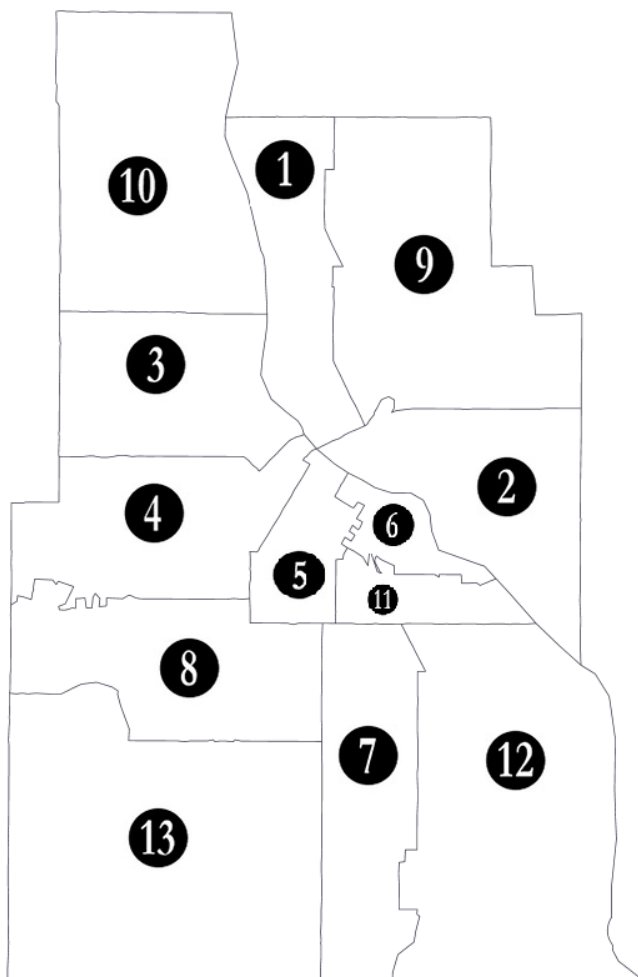


Figure 6. 1891 ward map after adjustment

Redistricting of 1931

After the redistricting of 1887 and the adjustment of 1891, ward boundaries in Minneapolis were not changed again for 40 years. Redistricting for the 1931 election greatly changed the wards of the southern half of the city but made only minor changes to the northern half. The southern boundary of Minneapolis now reached to 62nd Street. The 1st Ward and 9th Ward had only a minor adjustment with that part of the 9th Ward south of Broadway and west of Central moved to the 1st Ward. The 2nd and 4th wards were unchanged. The 3rd ward ceded only a small margin of what is now the North Loop to the 6th Ward. The 6th Ward expanded greatly west to take in most of downtown. The 7th Ward had its western boundary moved west to Nicollet, its northern boundary cropped at 36th Street, and its eastern boundary adjusted along Lake Nokomis. The 11th Ward expanded greatly to take in the Elliot Park neighborhood and that part of the Phillips neighborhood east of Chicago. Its southern boundary

now went well past Franklin Ave. to 36th Street. The 12th Ward ceded a relatively small amount of territory to the 7th and 11th wards.

The 13th Ward, which previously included everything southwest of 34th and Chicago, had its eastern boundary moved to Nicollet. The 8th Ward, which previously stretched from Chicago to France between 24th and 34th streets, was reduced to the area between Nicollet and the lakes between Franklin and 40th Street. The notion that the ward boundary was changed specifically to exclude the incumbent alderman from his ward is not true; the ward needed to be greatly reduced in redistricting, and the incumbent had the misfortune of residing at the northeast corner of the ward.

Two wards ceded their historic parts of downtown. The 4th Ward gave up its downtown projection leading to Bridge Square to become more firmly ensconced in the lakes district, taking in the area between Lake of the Isles and the city limits. The 5th Ward was moved south from its Lowertown origins (Lowertown by this time becoming nearly unpopulated) to take in the area from 10th to 36th streets between Nicollet and Chicago.

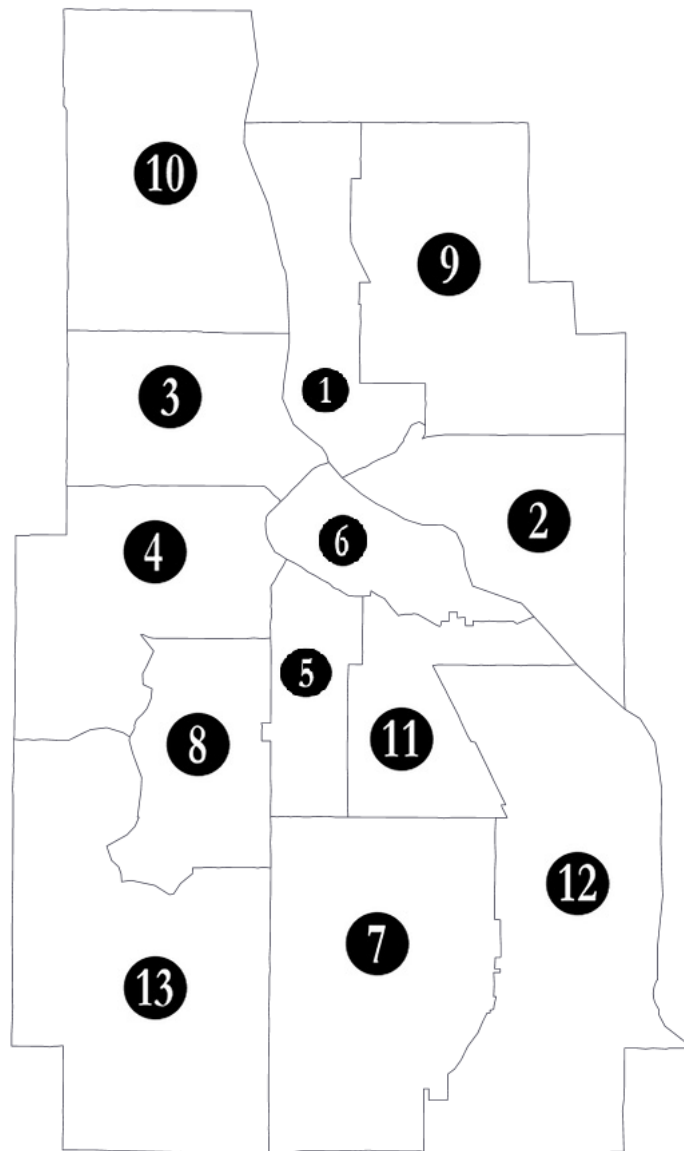


Figure 7. 1931 ward map

Redistricting of 1947

Two things make the 1947 redistricting the most important one in Minneapolis history. First, the wards were renumbered. The 2nd, 6th, 12th, and 13th wards kept their numbers.

Historic Ward Number	Modern Ward Number
1	3
2	2
3	5
4	7
5	8
6	6
7	11
8	10
9	1
10	4
11	9
12	12
13	13

Modern Ward Number	Historic Ward Number
1	9
2	2
3	1
4	10
5	3
6	6
7	4
8	5
9	11
10	8
11	7
12	12
13	13

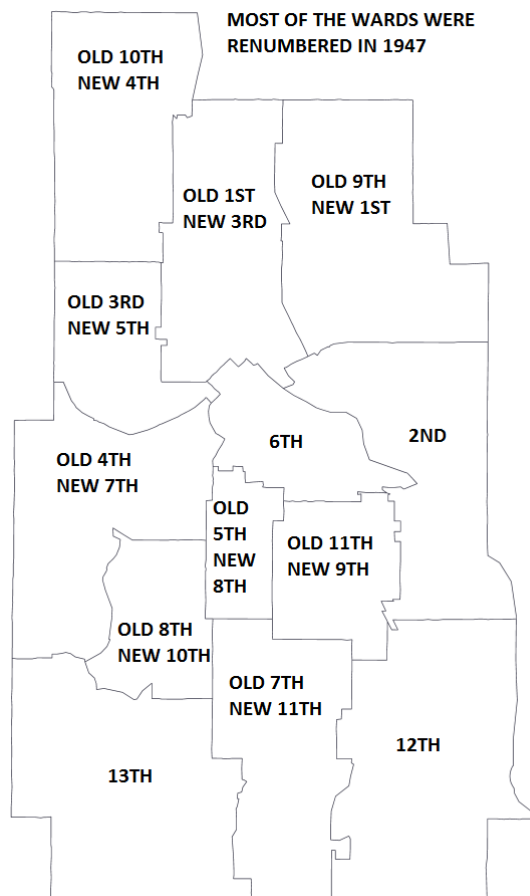


Figure 8. Ward renumber of 1947

Second, for the first time, the 1947 redistricting sought to achieve an equal-population ideal.

While the 1931 redistricting had made only minor changes to the northern half of the city and greatly redid the southern half, the 1947 redistricting greatly changed the northern half of the city and made smaller changes in the southern half.

The 1st Ward (Historic 9th Ward) retook the section it had transferred to the 3rd Ward (Historic 1st Ward) in 1931. The 2nd and 3rd wards reached across the river for the first time. The 4th and 5th wards ceded their river territory in North Minneapolis to become more focused on the western edge of North Minneapolis. The 6th Ward expanded west and south.

Redistricting of 1951

The redistricting of 1951 was truly a minor-change redistricting. Most wards had their boundaries altered only slightly. Few of the changes need elucidation. According to legend, Ald. George Martens of the 9th Ward no longer wanted Powderhorn Park in his ward, and this area was moved to the 8th Ward, giving that ward a gerrymandered look. Nearly all of Lake Nokomis was moved from the 11th Ward to the 12th Ward.

Redistricting of 1961

The redistricting of 1961 was also a minor-change redistricting. The most significant for policy considerations was that the 3rd Ward was extended all the way south to Hennepin Ave. This meant that the Gateway district was no longer entirely within the 6th Ward and therefore the alderman of that ward lost his veto over the demolition process then happening. The 8th Ward assumed its distinctive shape of an upside-down F.

Redistricting of 1971

Unlike the previous two rounds of redistricting, the remap of 1971 made at least two large changes. The 3rd Ward, which since its inception had reached as far as Hennepin Avenue, now had its southern boundary fixed at Broadway. The 6th Ward gave up its West Bank territory and now stopped at Cedar Ave. Other changes looked minor on the map, but at least one had a significant political impact. The home of Russell Green was moved from the 9th Ward, where Green had lost the 1969 election by nine votes, to the 12th Ward. The 12th Ward was obviously a better fit for Green, and he was elected there by a large margin in 1971. Meanwhile, a different Green – Zollie Green – ran in the 9th Ward and was elected there. The notion has been alleged that some 9th Ward voters thought they were voting for Russell Green.

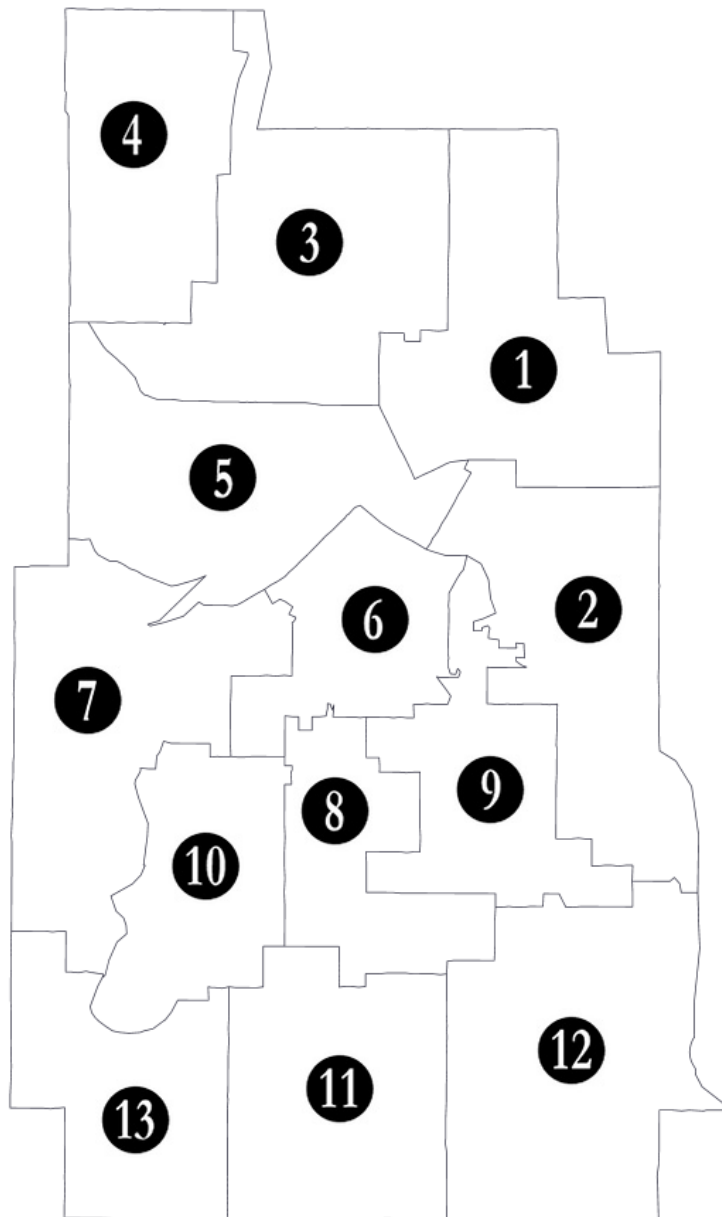


Figure 9. 1971 ward map

Redistricting of 1981

For the first time, redistricting in 1981 was carried out by an independent commission authorized by a 1980 charter amendment. The commission went well beyond minor changes to redefine some wards. The 7th Ward now took in a large area of downtown, reminiscent of its days as the Historic 4th Ward. The 6th Ward lost most of downtown and reached farther into South Minneapolis. Far from being the West Bank ward it once was, it now stretched all the way to Lake and Hennepin. Residents of Lowry Hill East (“The Wedge”) strenuously objected from being transferred from the elite 7th Ward into the downscale 6th. Residents of Linden Hills were opposed to being across a lake and cemetery from the rest of their ward. The 2nd Ward lost more of Southeast to the 5th and now had more of its population on the West Side. The 12th Ward ceded inland territory but reached northward along the river as far as the Milwaukee Road bridge.

Traditionalists in ward design objected to the outrageous shapes of these wards. The 7th Ward was said to resemble a chicken, the 5th Ward a fish, the 2nd Ward a ping-pong paddle. Rep. Phyllis Kahn contended that were the 6th Ward measured the way one measures a snake, it would not meet the city charter’s compactness mandate that a ward be no more than twice as long as it is wide. The commission had moved a small triangle along Broadway from the 4th to the 5th Ward to make the allegedly fish-shaped latter ward meet the compactness mandate.

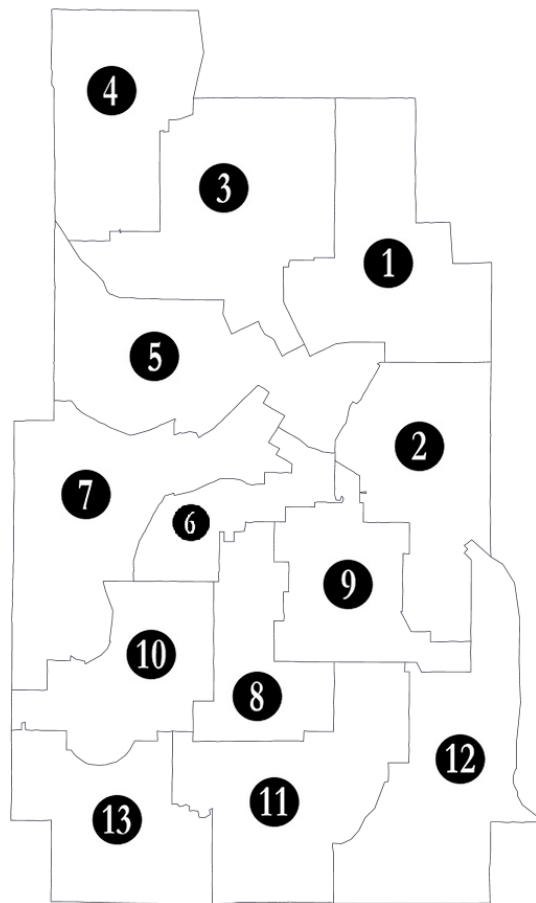


Figure 10. 1981 ward map

Redistricting of 1993

Redistricting for the 1993 election made only minor adjustments to the northern third of the city. The 5th Ward no longer took in as much of Southeast or downtown as it had from 1981. The 2nd Ward was greatly changed, losing its South Side territory south of the Milwaukee Road, and extending westward to take in the entire West Bank and a large chunk of downtown. The 6th Ward assumed a saddle shape, taking in a larger area of the Phillips neighborhood and keeping only a smidgen of downtown and none of its historic West Bank base. The 9th Ward touched the river for the first time since it was the Historic 11th Ward. Lake Nokomis once again reverted between the 11th and 12th wards. The 13th Ward returned to its roots by once again reaching to Lake Street. Lowry Hill East ("The Wedge") was made part of the 10th Ward, making that the mostly oddly shaped in the city.

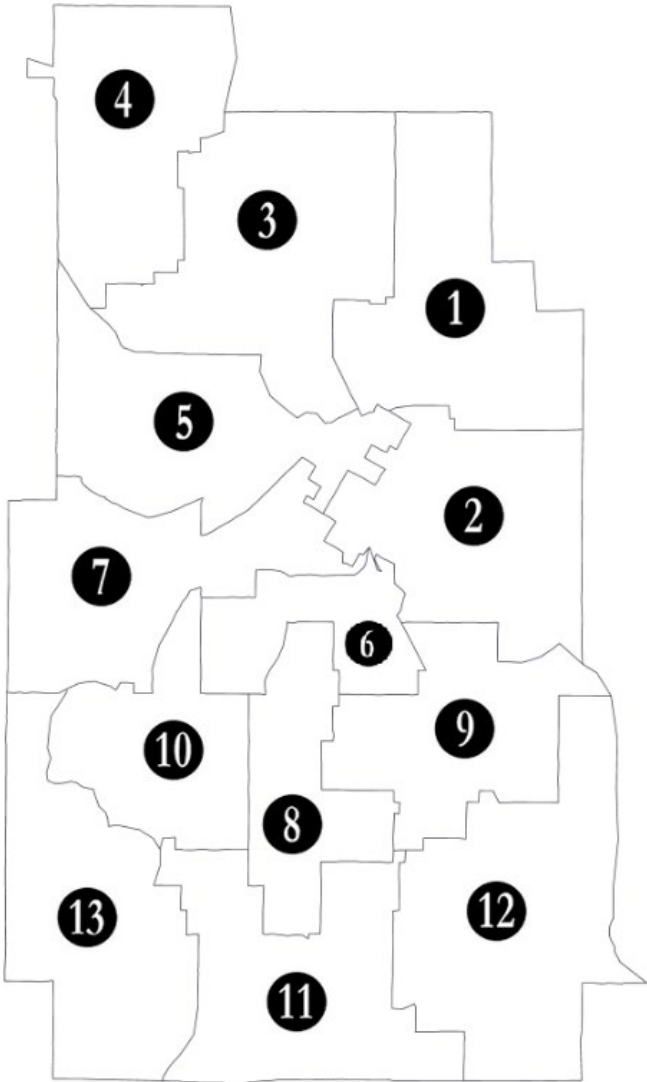


Figure 11. 1993 ward map

Redistricting of 2005

The wards were greatly overhauled in redistricting for 2005. The Reapportionment Commission decided to use neighborhoods as the building blocks of wards as much as practicable. The 1st Ward for the first time occupied the entirety of the northern boundary of Northeast Minneapolis and touched the river for the first time. The 3rd Ward now took in the Marcy-Holmes neighborhood of Southeast Minneapolis. The 5th Ward looked remarkably like the Historic 3rd Ward it had been from 1887 to 1947. The 7th Ward now took in almost all of downtown. This was the most of downtown that had ever been contained in a single ward, completely reversing the decision of the Reapportionment Commission in 1981 to consciously divide downtown among three wards. Most of the wards of the South Side shifted boundaries in order that neighborhoods be kept together. Two council members were removed from their wards as a result of redistricting. Both chose to run in their new wards. Don Samuels, incumbent from the 3rd Ward, was elected in the 5th Ward. Robert Lilligren, incumbent from the 8th Ward, was elected in the 6th Ward.

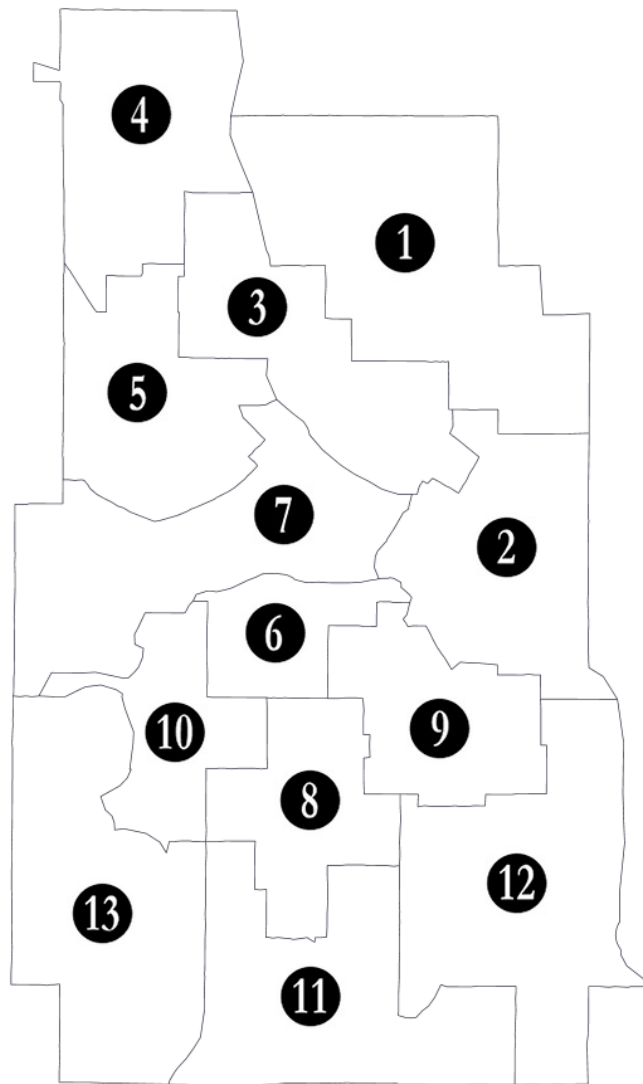


Figure 12. 2005 ward map

Redistricting of 2013

The Reapportionment Commission did not favor neighborhoods as heavily as building blocks as they had in 2005. Overall, the wards became less compact; shapes of some inner city wards were made more severe. The 3rd Ward slid again southward from its Northeast Minneapolis roots. It now included a significant mass of downtown. The 7th Ward, which previously included nearly all of downtown, shed most of downtown. The 10th Ward now includes the Whittier neighborhood. Redistricting brought the 8th Ward southward and westward and the 9th Ward northward and eastward. Lake Nokomis was again shuttled between the 11th and 12th wards.