

Locating the Winter Quarters Wards

Brandon Plewe, March 2018

plewe@byu.edu

[This is a preliminary theory, not yet proven; feedback welcome]

During the fall of 1846, the many poor, sick, widows, and families of Battalion soldiers arriving in the nascent city of Winter Quarters needed personal care. Revelation had dictated that the bishop was the caretaker of those in need. Winter Quarters was divided into first 13, then 22 wards, each with a bishop to take care of his members. But how was this division laid out?

First, a basic timeline:

- September 19: The new site for the camp is surveyed on the “table land” next to the Missouri River. By the 27th, it is being called Winter Quarters.¹
- October 2: At a meeting of the high council and Twelve, three apostles are assigned as a committee “to divide the city into wards and appoint Bishops over them.”²
- October 4: “O. Pratt reported the city divided into 13 wards and read the names of the men selected to act as bishops.” **No map or description of this division is extant.**³
- October 24: first report from the bishops to the high council, focusing mostly on the sick, widows, and battalion families. Also, the first mention of the bishops names: 1st Ward: Levi Riter; 2nd Ward: William Fossett; 3rd and 4th: Benj. Brown; 5th and 6th: John Vance; 7th Edward Hunter; 8th David Fairbanks; 9th Daniel Spencer; 10th Joseph Mathews; 11th Abraham Hoagland; 12th David D. Yearsley; 13th Joseph B. Nobles.⁴
- Late October/Early November: after frequent raids by local Indians, the leaders decide to abandon the south half of the city, moving the cabins to form a close-set ring around the remaining settlement, which is also extended north across Turkey Creek. It is not known how many had settled in the southern city, if any.⁵
- November 25: High council appoints the bishops as a committee “to divide the city into smaller wards than it now is and nominate high priests to be ordained bishops over them.”⁶

¹ Willard Richards Journal, V.16 p.122, 167. Church History Library, MS 1490 box 2.

https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE583292

² Winter Quarters Municipal High Council Records, October 2 1846, p.70-72. Church History Library, LR 6359 21 box 1 folder 1 p.3. https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE565458.

Willard Richards Journal, V.16 p.177.

³ High Council, October 4 1846, p.73.

⁴ High Council, October 24 1846, box 1 folder 2 p.9,

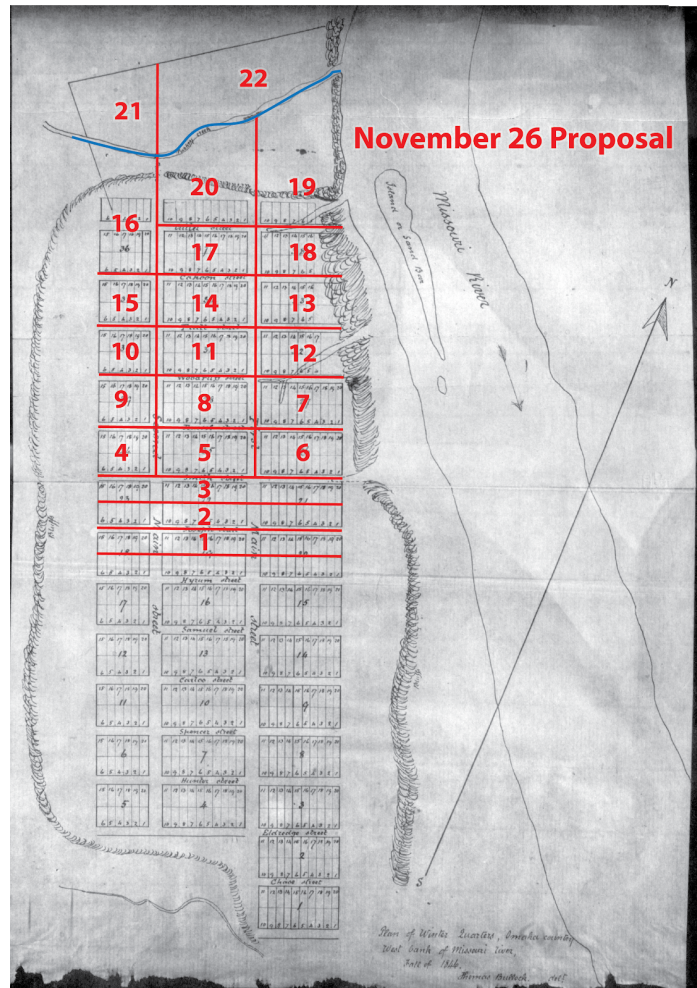
https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE570588; Willard Richards Journal, V.16 p.241.

⁵ Willard Richards, letter to Thomas L. Kane, Feb 24 1847, transcribed in *Journal History of the Church* V.22, 24 Feb 1847. https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE292116. NEED AN EARLIER SOURCE

⁶ High Council, November 25 1846, p.33

- November 26: proposal to redivide WQ into 22 wards. At the high council, the proposal “was not accepted but returned with instructions and for them to report again at our next conference.” However, 4 new bishops are ordained, indicating that at least some parts were accepted.⁷

- 1st south line of Joseph Street, Edward Hunter
- 2nd north side of Joseph Street, Wm Fossett
- 3rd south line of Smith Street, David Fairbanks
- 4th Block 24. Daniel Spencer
- 5th Block 25 Levi Writer
- 6th Block 26 George W. Harris
- 7th Block 27 Matthews
- 8th Block 28 Luman H Corkins [Calkins]
- 9th Block 29 Dr. Lang
- 10th Block 30 Isaac Davis
- 11th Block 31 Abraham Hogland
- 12th Block 32 Ephraim Badger
- 13th Block 33 David Yearsley
- 14th Block 34 John Benbow
- 15th Block 35 [no bishop proposed, but Isaac Clark ordained 11/26]
- 16th Bs 36, 41, & north to the creek. Benj Brown
- 17th B 37 Br. Lutts
- 18th B 38 John Vanes
- 19th B 39 John Higbee
- 20th B 40 & N to creek, Br. JB Nobles
- 21st all north of the creek and W of 2nd Main St, A Everett
- 22nd all east of 2nd Main Street and N of Creek, Willard Snow



- November 29: revised “report of the bishops read and handed back with instructions.”⁸

⁷ *Winter Quarters recommendations for ward divisions*, Church History Library LR 6359 25.

https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE2455567. *High Council*, November 26 1846, p.35.

⁸ *High Council*, November 9 1846 p.37

- December 13: “The committee of bishops made their report, which was accepted.” Also, a general policy for the function of the bishops is set forth, which sounds remarkably similar to modern wards. **No map or details of this final report are extant.**⁹
- December 15: When the bishops begin to report to the high council and Twelve, Brigham Young is dismayed at their inconsistency, and instructs them to standardizes their reports using a form (possibly the first standardized form in the Church).¹⁰
- December 20: Bishops deliver full reports of ward leadership, members, needs, and preparations for emigration. Only 7 reports and the summary table have survived, which gives us the final list of bishops:
 - 1st Edward Hunter, 192 members, full list extant¹¹
 - 2nd David Fairbanks, 139
 - 3rd Levi E. Riter, 185
 - 4th Daniel Spencer, 98
 - 5th Shadrach Roundy, 108, full list extant¹²
 - 6th William Faucett, 112
 - 7th Joseph Lee Robinson, 68, full list extant¹³
 - 8th Luman H Calkins, 228
 - 9th Thomas Lang, 78
 - 10th Daniel Carn, 159
 - 11th Abraham Hoagland, 179
 - 12th Ephraim Badger, 55
 - 13th Samuel Rolfe, 149, full list extant¹⁴
 - 14th Abraham O. Smoot, 214, full list extant
 - 15th Isaac Clark, 111
 - 16th Benjamin Brown, 296
 - 17th Albert Lutz, 301
 - 18th John Vance, 85
 - 19th John S. Higbee, 126
 - 20th Joseph B. Nobles, 213
 - 21st Addison Everett, 232, full list extant
 - 22nd Willard Snow, 155, full list extant
 - Total: 3,483

⁹ *High Council*, December 13 1846, p.46; *Willard Richards Journal*, December 13 1846, V.17 p. 6
https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE583181

¹⁰ Bishops Reports for 1846 December, *Winter Quarters Bishops Reports*, Church History Library LR 6359 23 folder 2 https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE2106363

¹¹ *Edward Hunter Bishop's Record*, Church History library MS 13345 p.12

¹² *Shadrach Roundy Company Record Book*, Church History Library MS 5771 p.36
https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE3928637. This report says “Ward No. 5, Block No. 26” which is different from the original proposal.

¹³ *J.L. Robinson Papers, Records 1846-1847*. Church History Library MS 7042 folder 4, p.5.
https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE5165923

¹⁴ *Gilbert Belknap account book*, image 251
https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE8328142

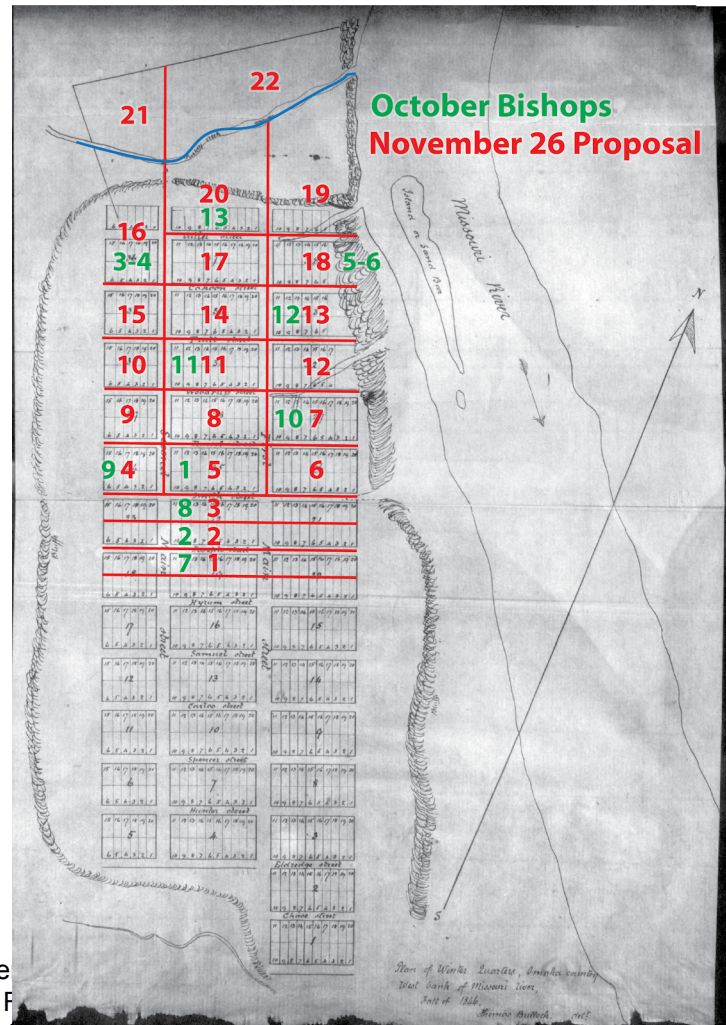
- July 1847: Among the almost 2,000 saints who emigrate this season are 13 of the 23 bishops. There is little clear evidence of their replacements, but there are occasional mentions in the high council records that bishops continued to function in some way, under the leadership of Presiding Bishop Newel K. Whitney.
- July 3 1848: Winter Quarters is officially abandoned as a large company leaves for the West.¹⁵

In the past, when historians have wanted a map of the wards in Winter Quarters, they have generally used the November 26 Proposal without question.¹⁶ This is because the document is the only detailed description available, has been widely duplicated, and because most duplicates (for example, in the *Journal History*), the fact that the proposal was rejected is not mentioned. Some have further assumed that the original 13 wards are the same as the first 13 of the 22 wards, just enlarged. Can this detailed proposal be used to reconstruct both the original and the final ward boundaries?

The October Wards

All of the 11 known bishops¹⁷ of the October wards are proposed as bishops of new wards on November 26, but only one (Abraham Hoagland, 11th) has the same number. This suggests that the original 13 wards and the first 13 of the 22 wards are not the same. In this figure that shows the correlations, the green numbers are the numbers of the October Wards in which the proposed bishops are already serving; for example, at the south end, Edward Hunter is serving as the bishop of the 7th [October] Ward, but is proposed as the bishop of the 1st [November] Ward.

At first glance, there does not seem to be any pattern to the locations of the



¹⁵ *Historian's Office Journal*, V.11 p.92
https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE3993500

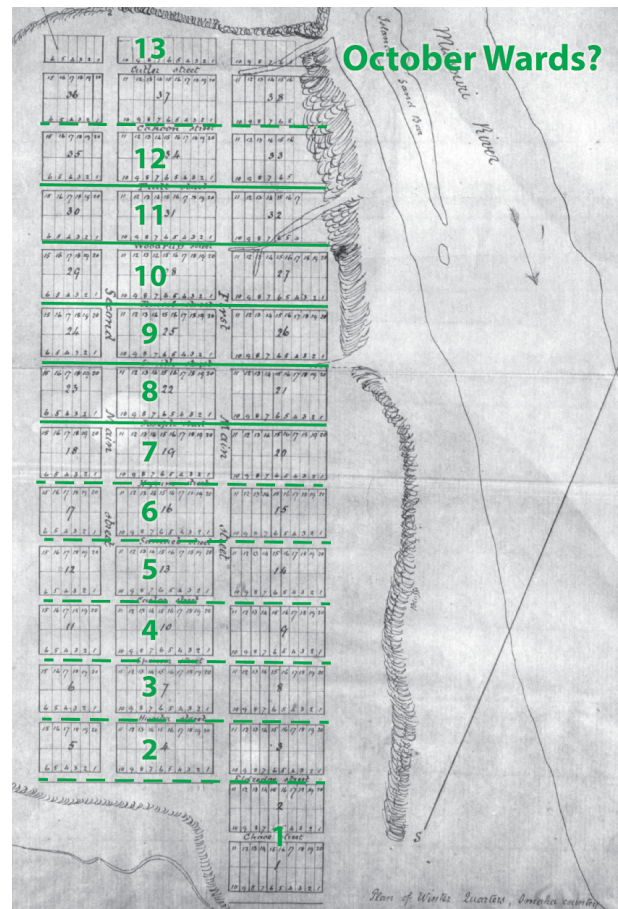
¹⁶ For example, Jennifer L. Lund and Janice F. List, *1846-1848*, Church History Library CR 100 392 folder 1 p.9,
https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE3993500; also
<https://winterquarters.byu.edu/Maps/WinterQuartersMap.aspx>

¹⁷ It is not clear whether the 3rd-4th and 5th-6th wards were always combined, or only in the October 24th Report. They are never mentioned either way after that.

October ward bishops. Some have posited that this could be due to two factors: 1) perhaps the Bishops had all moved, or 2) perhaps bishops didn't necessarily live in their wards, they were just assigned there. While both could be true, the few December wards for which we have extant records demonstrate that at least then, the bishops were members of their own wards. Also, given the clear difficulties of the settlers expressed in multiple sources, it is unlikely that anybody moved (and built a new cabin) unless absolutely necessary.

On further inspection, a partial pattern does emerge. Wards 7-13 are arranged in a general South-North order. Could these be a remnant of the original ward arrangement? It is in keeping with the general proclivity of the Pioneer-era Church to number wards from south to north.¹⁸ Therefore, it would make perfect sense if each of these seven wards occupied a tier of three blocks between two east-west streets. The only problem is the extra tier between the twelfth and thirteenth; this could be explained by including it in the 13th because the blocks in northernmost tier were only partial and therefore underpopulated.

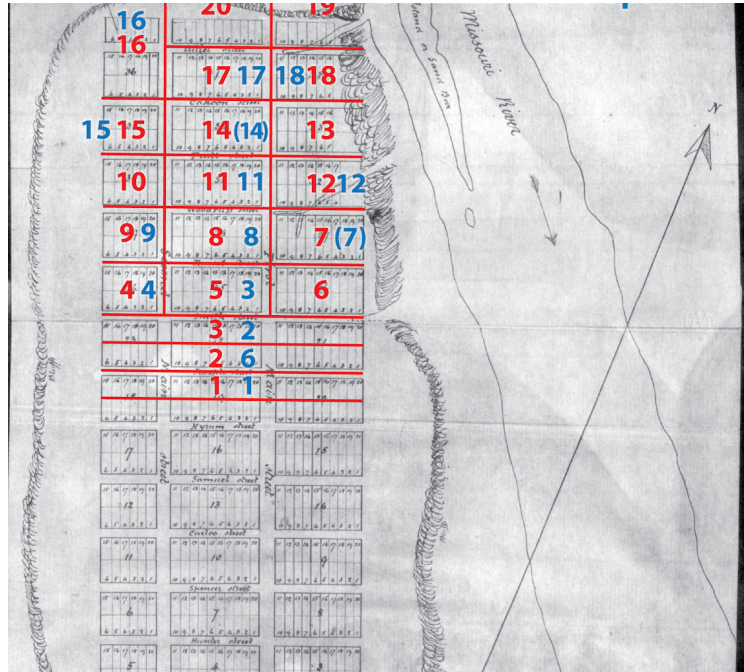
So what of the first six wards? Well, there is just enough room for them in the southern part of the city, as shown in this map. This only makes sense if this area was being settled before it was abandoned, requiring the members and their bishops (Riter, Fossett, Brown, and Vance) to mix into the other wards. The fact that the 3rd-4th and 5th-6th wards were combined in some way lends credence to the hypothesis that this southern area was not settled as densely as the north. The resultant arrangement is very plausible, but not proven.



¹⁸ In 19th Century Utah, urban wards were *always* numbered from south to north; when there are more than two created originally (Salt Lake City, Provo, Ogden, Logan, etc.), they are *always* numbered in a serpentine pattern starting clockwise from the southeast corner. Why this practice was followed so “religiously” is unknown; I have never found a statement of policy to this effect.

The December Wards

To what degree did the final arrangement of wards, accepted on December 13, match or differ from the November 26 proposal? The most obvious correlation is again, the bishops. Most of the bishops in the two lists match, as displayed in this map. In the 7th and 14th wards, the proposed bishop was not ordained as such, but was called as a counselor, so the locations still match. One additional piece of evidence is that the December Bishops Report for the 5th Ward says that it is on “Block 26,” which doesn’t match.¹⁹ This suggests that the 7th-22nd Wards were basically accepted as they were originally proposed.



But what of the south? The blue numbers should represent the approximate locations of the December bishops, but no pattern is apparent. The tithing records of the October 8th Ward (Bishop Fairbanks) only list a few members before he is reassigned to the 2nd Ward in December; a few of these appear to correlate with the 1st, 2nd, and/or 3rd wards. In this case, there is a decent chance that some bishops may not have been located where we think they were, or moved during November-December. Thus, these locations remain a mystery.

Future Directions

To verify these theories, or further develop them, the following sources would be helpful if ever found:

- Any details about the October and December divisions, such as location descriptions or maps. Maps of the town were made along with both events (by Willard Richards and Orson Pratt?), which could include some indication of ward locations. Unfortunately, the only maps I have been able to find (CHL MS 8744 and at BYU Special Collections) are later copies by Thomas Bullock.

¹⁹ *Shadrach Roundy Company Record Book*, Church History Library MS 5771 p.36
https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE3928637.

- Any records from the October wards other than the 8th, which can be correlated with the membership records of the later wards. Some of these have been found in personal papers, so there is hope.
- Any land records, such as people being granted specific lots. There is no indication of allotments or other land transactions ever taking place, so this is a longshot.