

# Records of the Commissioners of Elections for the City of Charleston, 1877–1879

*The Charleston Archive, Charleston County Public Library  
Compiled by Celeste Wiley, September 2008*

Collation: 7 boxes, 2.0 linear feet

Description: The collection consists of 0.25 linear feet of loose administrative records and two incomplete sets of ledgers that document the names and addresses of men who voted in the municipal elections of 1877 and 1879 in the city of Charleston, South Carolina. The loose materials include commissioners' notes, certificates, correspondence, and miscellaneous items, all relating to the municipal election of 1879. Each of the twenty-one ledgers included in this collection represents a specific precinct within the city, but not all the precinct ledgers have survived. Twelve volumes represent the election of 1877 (missing Ward 1, Precinct 1; Ward 3, Precinct 2; Ward 5, Precinct 2; and Ward 6, Precinct 1). Nine volumes represent the election of 1879 (missing Ward 1, Precinct 1; Ward 1, Precinct 2; Ward 3, Precinct 1 ; Ward 3, Precinct 2 ; Ward 3, Precinct 3; Ward 4, Precinct 1; Ward 4, Precinct 2; and Ward 6, Precinct 3).

The extant precinct ledgers measure approximately sixteen by ten inches, and are covered in green marbled paper with a dark gray cloth spine binding. Each ledger follows a consistent format, using a printed form to record an alphabetical list of the voters' names, addresses, ethnicity, date of registration, and voter number. A copy of the election notice, map of the voting precinct, description of the precinct borders and a copy of the Act to Regulate the Election are glued to the inside front cover of each ledger. Copies of the "Instructions for Managers" and a signed statement from the precinct managers are also glued on the facing pages. All of the extant ledgers appear to have weathered some extreme circumstances, exhibiting substantial damage from water, mold, and insects.

A compiled alphabetical index of the 1877 precinct ledgers, which contain 7,189 names, can be found in Celeste Wiley, ed., *The City of Charleston Voter Records of 1877: An Index of Names Transcribed from the Records of the Commissioners of Elections* (Charleston, S.C.: Charleston County Public Library, 2008). A hard copy of this index is available in the South Carolina Room at the Charleston County Public Library (CCPL), and as a PDF document at <http://charlestonarchive.org/collections/>. A transcription of the names in the 1879 ledgers is not yet available.

These records were held in the City of Charleston Records Management Division until 2002, when they were transferred to the Charleston County Public Library.

Historical Note: The details of the management of the municipal election of 1877 were prescribed by "An Act to Regulate the Election of Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Charleston," which was ratified by the South Carolina General Assembly on 8 June 1877. According to that act, registration for voting was to be held on three consecutive days (10–13 November) thirty days before the election, which was ordered to take place on the second

Tuesday in December at specific voting sites in the city.

At that time the city of Charleston was divided into eight wards, each of which elected an Alderman to represent the ward in City Council. For voting purposes, each ward was further divided into precincts depending on population density. In 1877 there were sixteen voting precincts in Charleston, the boundaries of which are illustrated in the compiled database. By 1879, a third precinct was added to ward six, expanding the city to seventeen precincts.

Upon arriving at the registration site in his precinct, each voter stated his name and address to an official who transcribed this information onto a blank Certificate of Registration in a stub book. The completed certificate was then torn from the book and handed to the voter, while the same information was also recorded on a stub in the stub book. In the days following the registration period, city officials transcribed the information from the individual stubs into separate ledgers kept by the Precinct Manager. On election day each voter presented his Certificate of Registration to an official at the polling site. Finding the voter's name and registration number in the precinct ledger, the official then recorded a sequential number next to his name to indicate the order in which the voter appeared and then filed the certificate for destruction. Similarly, the stub books are not extant and were probably destroyed in late November or December of the voting year.

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## Collection Outline

### I. Precinct Ledgers, 1877

Ward 1, Precinct 2	BOX 1
Ward 2, Precinct 1	
Ward 2, Precinct 2	
Ward 3, Precinct 1	
Ward 3, Precinct 3	BOX 2
Ward 4, Precinct 1	
Ward 4, Precinct 2	
Ward 4, Precinct 3	
Ward 5, Precinct 1	BOX 3
Ward 6, Precinct 2	
Ward 7, Precinct 1	
Ward 8, Precinct 1	

### II. Precinct Ledgers, 1879

Ward 2, Precinct 1	BOX 4
Ward 2, Precinct 2	
Ward 4, Precinct 3	
Ward 5, Precinct 1	BOX 5
Ward 5, Precinct 2	
Ward 6, Precinct 1	
Ward 6, Precinct 2	BOX 6
Ward 7, Precinct 1	
Ward 8, Precinct 1	

### III. Loose Materials, 1879

BOX 7

- Folder 1: Monthly Report of the Police Commissioner, November
- Folder 2: Commissioners Certificates
- Folder 3: Administrative Materials
- Folder 4: Voter List
- Folder 5: Correspondence, Undated
- Folder 6: Correspondence, October - November 6
- Folder 7: Correspondence, November 7 - 9
- Folder 8: Correspondence, November 10 - 21
- Folder 9: Correspondence, November 24 - 30
- Folder 10: Correspondence, December