Guide to Voting Records of Fairfax County, 1854-1936

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Shelf Location: Unit 33 and Vault Map Drawer
Repository: Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center

Contents Summary:

Date Range: 1854 – 1936, non-inclusive
Geographical Location: Fairfax County
Materials & Media: Paper, cardstock, ink, graphite, staples and string binding
Formats: Poll books, voting lists/tallies, correspondence, clerk's records, booklets, certificates, tax bills/receipts, ballots, election tickets, notices of candidates, petitions, oaths
Topics Covered: Voting, elections, petitions, voter registration, capitation taxes
Prominent People & Organizations: F.W. Richardson, F.D. Richardson, Judge J. Sangster, Fairfax Circuit Court, local courts
Historical Events Covered: Presidential elections of 1892, 1896, 1900, 1904

Processing notes:

Heavily creased and folded documents were treated with humidity and flattened. Post-1870 poll books with no identifying information on the covers were described using pencil. Oversized documents were placed in flat files and stored in map drawers.

Biographical/Historical Note

The Commonwealth of Virginia ratified its first constitution in 1776, following the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Since its ratification, there have been regular amendments and six major revisions to the state's constitution: 1830, 1851, 1864, 1870, 1902, and 1971. The current constitution as of 2017 is an amended version of the 1971 constitution. These revisions to the Virginia Constitution are representative of the "political, social, regional, and racial climate of the times," according to the Virginia General Assembly.

The constitution of 1851 took significant steps in extending voting rights. In previous versions, only white male property holders could vote, but the 1851 revisions changed this law so that all white men were eligible to vote. Additionally, judges were to be elected rather than appointed and the position of Lieutenant Governor was created.

Article VII of the Constitution of Commonwealth of Virginia establishes the roles and duties of local government systems, with Section 4 of this article mandating, "There shall be elected by the qualified voters of each county and city a treasurer, a sheriff, an attorney for the Commonwealth, a clerk, who shall be clerk of the court in the office of which deeds are recorded, and a commissioner of revenue." The elections of which records are found in this collection fall under this section of the Virginia constitution.

Later significant extensions of voting rights in Virginia include granting the right to vote to African Americans under the 15th amendment to the United States Constitution in 1869, and to women under the 19th amendment in 1920. Our records of voter registration indicate that both African Americans and women in Fairfax County were eager to exercise their civic duties following the ratification of these amendments.

The voting records of Fairfax County are kept at the Fairfax Circuit Court under Title 17.1, Chapter 2 (Clerks, Clerks' Offices and Records) of the Virginia Code, which states, "The circuit court clerks shall have custody of and shall keep all court records, including books, evidence, records, maps, and papers, deposited in their offices or at such location otherwise designated by the clerk, as well as records stored in electronic format whether the storage media for such electronic records are on premises or elsewhere." The code also stipulates, "None of the records or papers of a circuit court shall be removed by the clerk nor allowed by him to be removed out of the county or city wherein the clerk's office is kept."

Scope & Content Note

Series 1: Poll Books*, 1854 – 1914,* contains the poll books of Fairfax County pre- and post-1870. Poll books prior to 1870 list the year and precinct, the candidates, their position, and the names of the voters and the votes cast (there was no anonymity in voting). The nature of how poll books were written changed in 1870, when voting became anonymous. Post-1870 poll books are simply a list of electors for each precinct—a list of those who voted but no indication of who they voted for. These documents have been grouped together due to the context in which they were used being the same.

The division of voting precincts also changed in 1870, when each precinct was assigned to a newly created district (also known as a township). The six districts were Centreville, Dranesville, Falls Church, Lee, Mount Vernon, and Providence. Pre-1870 poll books are arranged alphabetically by precinct only; post-1870 poll books are subdivided by precinct, then arranged alphabetically by township. The bulk of the series contains documents from 1854 to 1879. There are only two documents dating to after 1879, one from 1909 and another from 1914.

Series 2: *Elections, 1858—1936*, contains documents relating to the administration and results of elections in Fairfax County. This includes notices of candidates from 1899 to 1901; various voter lists (lists of those with the right to suffrage in each district in 1861, list of voters in each district in 1866, and the registrar's notes of voter registration from 1902 to 1936); commissioners' oaths; election returns; election tickets; and a record of a contested election for Commissioner of Revenue in 1879.

The registrar's notes of voter registration starting in 1904 contain the earliest evidence in this collection that African Americans in Fairfax County were given the right to vote per the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution, indicated by noting voter race (i.e. "Color: Black"). The registrar's notes after 1920 also contain the earliest evidence that women had gained the right to vote per the 19th Amendment, despite the Virginia

General Assembly refusing its ratification until 1952, indicated by the division of registration lists into “Male” and “Female” columns.

The election returns from 1892 to 1911 contain the collection’s only oversized documents, which are large tabular compilations of votes for the entire county. The largest of these tables is over 3.5 feet in length

The election returns contain returns from votes for members of the Virginia Electoral College for the presidential elections of 1892, 1896, 1900, and 1904.

The records of the contested 1879 election of Richard F. Broadwater for Commissioner of Revenue are the only records in the collection of a contested election. The petitioners claimed that the election of Broadwater was “undue and illegal” and was the result of “false returns,” demanding that the court either “award a certificate of election to Amos Fox, who received the highest number of votes legally cast… or order a new election for the said office.” Broadwater denied all allegations of fraud and there are no records of the election being annulled or a new election being held.

Series 3: *Petitions, 1873—1888* (three undated), contains the documentation of petitions to the Fairfax County Court. Most petitions regard the changing of election precincts or voting locations according to shifts in population distribution, or due to the inconvenience of current precincts/locations.

One 1888 petition from the people of Mt. Vernon asks Judge Sangster to appoint a new registrar, due to the “inconvenience of the location of the present registrar… who lives in an out of the way place.” The petition also asks that the court order a new registration of voters, “as the old books, which have been in use nearly fifteen years, are so badly worn and mutilated as to be almost useless.”

The series also contains what appears to be a draft of a petition, undated and unsigned. The petition asks for an “alteration” to the boundaries of the sixth magisterial district, and on the reverse seems to contain a crude map of said alterations.

Series 4: *Capitation Taxes, 1911—1926*, contains lists of persons by district and precinct who had paid their capitation taxes (also called poll taxes) for the years noted, thereby ensuring their eligibility to vote. The lists categorize voters as “White” or “Colored,” and after 1920, women are included.

Although the U.S. Constitution, in Article I, Section 9, forbids the federal government from levying a capitation or other direct tax, this law did not apply to states until 1966, when the Supreme Court ruled that the poll tax as a prerequisite for voting in a state election was unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment. Thus, beginning in the late nineteenth century, southern states including Virginia made payment of a poll tax a prerequisite to the exercise of suffrage. This requirement disqualified many African Americans who could not afford the tax, or subjected their votes to influence by those who paid the tax for them.

Series 5: *Miscellaneous, 1854—1924*, contains miscellaneous documents relating to voting and elections in Fairfax County. These documents include oaths of office, certifications of votes, commissions, records of election spending, receipts, records of appointments, notices of voter registration, lists of registrars, and notes taken during the Dranesville district convention of 1897.

The contents of the collection and the years it covers are scattered, with many years missing entirely and the collection as a whole seeming incomplete. This is a result of a combination of factors over the years, one being that many documents belonging in the collection were burned or discarded, having been thought to be useless. It also seems as though previous archivists pulled certain documents from other collections and placed them with the voting records, believing them to belong there, resulting in the contents seeming slightly arbitrary. Thus, many documents in Series 5 may seem to be random additions to the collection. For example, the collection contains over 100 records of election spending from 1903, one from 1921, and one 1923. There are no other records of election spending in the collection. Another example is that there is only one record in the collection of a district convention, which took place in Dranesville in 1897, although presumably there was more than one district convention in Fairfax County between 1854 and 1936. Any guess as to how, when, and why the courthouse came to be in possession of the documentation of this specific district convention would be conjecture.

Container List

Series 1: Poll Books, 1854 - 1909

Subseries 1: Pre-1870

District	*Years*	*Box*	*Folder*
Accotink	1854, 1858, 1859, 1862, 1865, 1866	1	VR-001
Anandale	1854, 1858, 1859, 1862, 1866	1	VR-002
Arundle	1854, 1859, 1862, 1866	1	VR-003
Bailiss'	1858, 1859, 1866, 1867	1	VR-004
Burke Station	1865, 1866	1	VR-005
Centreville	1854, 1859, 1862, 1865, 1866	1	VR-006
Dranesville	1854, 1858, 1859	1	VR-007
Fairfax Court House	1854, 1858, 1859, 1862, 1865, 1866, 1867	1	VR-008
Falls Church	1858, 1859, 1862, 1865, 1866	1	VR-009
Hall's	1854	1	VR-010
Lewinsville-Crossroads	1854, 1858, 1859, 1862, 1865, 1866	1	VR-011
Millan's	1854	1	VR-012
Pulman's	1858, 1859, 1862, 1865, 1866	1	VR-013
Ross's	1854, 1858, 1859, 1862, 1866	1	VR-014
Sangster's	1854, 1858, 1859, 1862, 1865, 1866	1	VR-015
Spring Vale	1862, 1865, 1866	1	VR-016
Vienna	1862, 1865, 1866, 1867	1	VR-017
West End	1854, 1858, 1859, 1862, 1865, 1866	1	VR-018

Subseries 2: Post-1870

District	Years	Box	Folder
Centreville-Centreville	1872, 1873, 1874, 1877	2	VR-019
Centreville-Clifton	1872, 1875, 1877	2	VR-020
Centreville-Clifton	1878, 1879, 1914	2	VR-021
Dranesville-Herndon	1909	2	VR-022
Dranesville-Spring Vale	1874, 1875, 1877, 1879	2	VR-023
Dranesville-Thompson's	1872, 1873, 1877, 1878, 1879	2	VR-024
Dranesville-Thornton	1873, 1874, 1875, 1877, 1878	2	VR-025
Falls Church-Anandale	1873, 1874, 1875, 1879	2	VR-026
Falls Church-Falls Church	1875, 1879	2	VR-027
Falls Church-West End	1872, 1874, 1879	2	VR-028
Lee-Arundelle	May 1875, November 1875, 1877, 1878, 1879	3	VR-029
Lee-Bayliss	1873, 1874, 1876, 1877, 1879	3	VR-030
Mt. Vernon-Accotink	1871, May 1875, November 1875, 1878, 1879	3	VR-031
Mt. Vernon-Deavers'	1875, 1877	3	VR-032
Mt. Vernon-Moore's	1879	3	VR-033
Mt. Vernon-Pulman	1873, 1874, 1875, 1878, 1879	3	VR-034
Providence-Fairfax Court House	1873, 1875, 1877	3	VR-035
Providence-Fairfax Court House	1878, 1879	3	VR-036
Providence-Langley	1873, 1874, 1875	3	VR-037
Providence-Langley	1877, 1879	3	VR-038
Providence-Vienna	1875, 1878, 1879	3	VR-039

Series 2: Elections, 1861 – 1936, undated
Subseries 1: Notice of Candidates

District	Years	Box	Folder
Fairfax County	1899, 1901	4	VR-040
Centreville	1899, 1901	4	VR-041
Dranesville	1899, 1901	4	VR-042
Falls Church	1899, 1901	4	VR-043
Herndon	1899, 1901	4	VR-044
Lee	1899, 1901	4	VR-045
Mt. Vernon	1899, 1901	4	VR-046
Providence	1899, 1901	4	VR-047

Subseries 2: Voter Lists

Sub-subseries 1: Lists of Persons with the Right to Suffrage

District	Year	Box	Folder
All districts	1861	5	VR-048
District #1	1861	5	VR-048
District #2	1861	5	VR-048
District #3	1861	5	VR-048
District #4	1861	5	VR-048
District #5	1861	5	VR-048
District #6	1861	5	VR-048

Sub-subseries 2: List of Voters

District	Year	Box	Folder
All districts	1866	5	VR-049
District #1	1866	5	VR-049
District #2	1866	5	VR-049
District #3	1866	5	VR-049
District #4	1866	5	VR-049
Unknown	Unknown	5	VR-050
Unknown	Unknown	5	VR-050

Sub-subseries 3: Registrar's Notes

District	Year	Box	Folder
Centreville-Centreville	1912-1914	5	VR-051
Centreville-Clifton	1920	5	VR-051
Centreville-Pender	1920	5	VR-051
Centreville-Swetnam	1920	5	VR-051
Dranesville-Dranesville	1905-1936	5	VR-052
Dranesville-Forrestville	1905-1928	5	VR-052
Dranesville-Herndon	1904-1936	5	VR-052
Dranesville-Pleasant Valley	1913	5	VR-052
Dranesville-Thompson's	1907-1936	5	VR-052
Dranesville-Thornton	1902-1916	5	VR-052
Falls Church-Anandale	1928-1936	5	VR-053
Falls Church-Falls Church	1904-1930	5	VR-053
Falls Church-McLean	1922-1936	5	VR-053
Lee-Burke Station	1922-1933	5	VR-054
Lee-Woodyard	1911	5	VR-054
Mt. Vernon-Accotink	1908-1936	5	VR-055
Mt. Vernon-Moore's	1910-1916	5	VR-055
Mt. Vernon-Pulman's	1920	5	VR-055
Providence-Fairfax	1905	5	VR-056
Providence-Lick	1915	5	VR-056
Providence-Vienna	1904-1936	5	VR-056
Unknown	1911	5	VR-057
Unknown	1914	5	VR-057
Unknown	1915	5	VR-057
Unknown	1928	5	VR-058

Subseries 3: Commissioner's Oaths

- Box 6 Folder: VR-058

Subseries 4: Returns

Year	Box	Folder
1892	6	OS-002
November 1892	6	VR-059
November 1894	6	VR-060
1895	6	OS-001
May 1895	6	VR-061
1896	6	OS-002
November 1896	6	VR-062
May 1897	6	VR-063, OS-001
November 1897	6	VR-064, OS-001
November 1898	6	VR-065
May 1899	6	VR-066, OS-001
November 1899	6	VR-067, OS-002
May 1900	6	VR-068
November 1900	6	VR-069
1900	6	OS-002
1901	6	OS-001
May 1901	6	VR-070
November 1901	6	VR-071
1903		OS-001
November 1903	6	VR-072
November 1904	7	VR-073
1905	7	OS-001
November 1905	7	VR-074
1906	7	OS-002
November 1906	7	VR-075
1910	7	OS-002
November 1910	7	VR-076
1911	7	OS-001
November 1911	7	VR-077
Undated	7	VR-078

Subseries 5: Certifications of Returns

Year	Box	Folder
1858	7	VR-079
1862	7	VR-079
1863	7	VR-079
1866	7	VR-079
Undated	7	VR-079

Subseries 6: Election Tickets

- November 1911 Box 7 Folder VR-080

Subseries 7: Contested Election

- Commissioner of Revenue 1879 Box 7 Folder VR-081

Series 3: Petitions, 1873 – 1888, undated

Location	Year	Box	Folder
To re-divide Fairfax Co. into townships	1873	7	VR-082
To establish Annandale Precinct	1873	7	VR-083
To change election precinct, Herndon	1876	7	VR-084
To change voting place, Mt. Vernon	1879	7	VR-085
To est. precinct with Gum Spring School House	1882	7	VR-086
To change voting place, Herndon-Thornton's	1884	7	VR-087
To change registrar, Mt. Vernon		7	VR-088
To move voting place from Langley to Lewinsville	Undated	7	VR-089
To establish voting place at JT Wells Stone/Bull Run	Undated	7	VR-090
To re-divide voting districts, draft	Undated	7	VR-091

Series 4: Capitation Taxes, 1911 - 1926

District	Year	Box	Folder
Centreville District	1911-1913	8	VR-092
Dranesville-Herndon	1918-1920	8	VR-093
Dranesville-Herndon	1920-1922	8	VR-093
Dranesville-Herndon	1924-1926	8	VR-093
Fall's Church-Fall's Church	1918-1920	8	VR-094
Fall's Church-Fall's Church	1920-1922	8	VR-094
Fall's Church-Fall's Church	1924-1926	8	VR-094
Providence-Fairfax	1921-1923	8	VR-095
Providence-Vienna	1920-1922	8	VR-095
Providence-Vienna	1921-1923	8	VR-095

Series 5: Miscellaneous, 1854 – 1923, undated

Document description	Year	Box	Folder
Certificate of oath taken by election commissioners	1854	8	VR-096
Conductor's oath of impartiality	1862	8	VR-096
Registrar's oath of office	1884	8	VR-096
Certificate of Justice of the Peace's oath of office	1885	8	VR-096
Certificate of prohibition vote	1855	8	VR-097
Dranesville District Convention	1897	8	VR-098
Commissions for members of the electoral board	1898	8	VR-099
Election spending	1903, 1921, 1923	8	VR-100
Misc. receipts	1904	8	VR-101
Receipts from Auditor of Public Accounts	1908	8	VR-102
Appointment to the electoral board	1924	8	VR-103
Persons appointed to divide magisterial districts	Undated	8	VR-104
Notice of commencement of voter registration	Undated	8	VR-105
Notice to divide Lee District into election districts	Undated	8	VR-106
List of registrars	Undated	8	VR-107