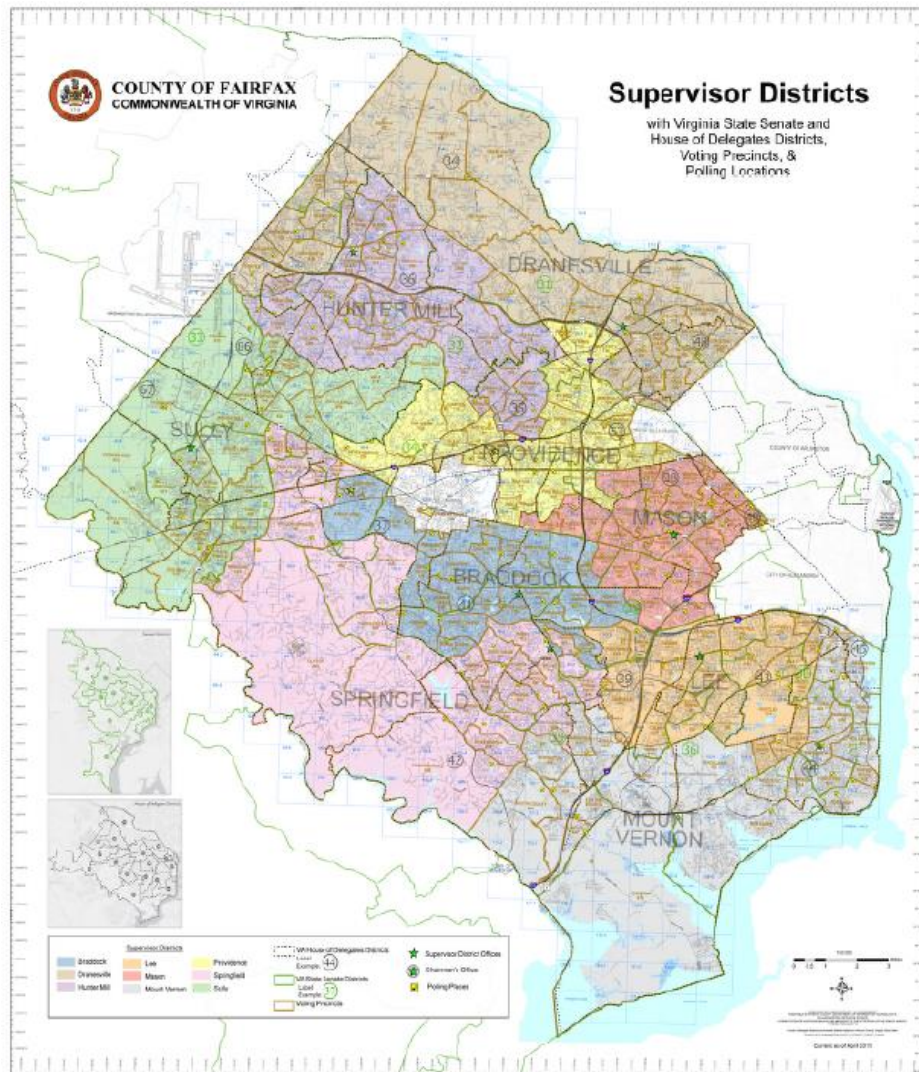


The History of the Naming and Redistricting of Fairfax County's Magisterial Districts: A Brief Report



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Virginia Room, Fairfax County Public Library

June 2020

A Timeline of the Naming and Redistricting of Fairfax County's Magisterial Districts

July 1869: Virginia voters ratify the Underwood Constitution which requires each county to divide into townships and establish a board of supervisors as the chief administrative agency.

April 1870: The Virginia General Assembly approves an act to divide counties into townships. A group of appointed commissioners divide Fairfax County into six townships: Centreville, Dranesville, Falls Church, Lee, Mount Vernon and Providence. No records have surfaced documenting why the commissioners selected these names.

January 1873: The Virginia General Assembly enforces an act to re-divide Fairfax County into three townships. In March, three appointed commissioners select the names Stonewall, Lee, and Mount Vernon for the new townships. The new boundaries were never implemented.

November 1874: Virginia voters ratify an amendment to the Underwood Constitution that require each county be divided into magisterial districts. In Fairfax County, the original six townships are converted into magisterial districts.

March 1951: After receiving several redistricting petitions from Fairfax County citizens, Circuit Judge Paul Brown orders Fairfax County's first redistricting since the establishment of the six magisterial districts in 1874. Judge Brown appoints a redistricting committee to determine the number of districts and their boundaries.

August 1953: The Board of Supervisors retains the six original districts and adds a seventh to prevent tie voting amongst the supervisors. The 1951 court-appointed redistricting committee names it Mason District in honor of George Mason, the author of the Bill of Rights.

May 1965: The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is passed by Congress which prohibits racial discrimination in voting. This includes the elimination of redistricting plans that are discriminatory. Under this Act, Fairfax County may not implement a redistricting plan unless it is precleared by the U.S. Justice Department or District Court.

November 1966: Fairfax County residents vote to adopt the urban county form of government which requires the Board of Supervisors to divide Fairfax County into 5 to 11 equally populated districts by February 7, 1967.

February 1967: The Board of Supervisors creates eight equally populated districts. They retain the names of five of the original districts. Falls Church District is abolished and divided between Mason, Providence, and the newly named Annandale District. Springfield District is also created. The newly named districts are named after the communities they will serve.

March 1971: As required by federal law, following the 1970 census the Board reapportions the eight districts to make them more equal in population. The names and number of districts remain the same.

January 1975: The Board approves another redistricting plan. Rapid growth occurring in Fairfax County since the 1970 census drove the Board to unanimously vote to redistrict again in October 1973. The names and number of districts remain the same.

1981: Following the 1980 census, the Board reapportions the eight districts to make them more equal in population. The names and number of districts remain the same.

1991: The results of the 1990 census require the creation of a ninth district entitled Sully, named after Sully Historic Site. Annandale District is renamed Braddock District after Braddock Road which traverses through the middle of the district.

December 1992: The U.S. Justice Department approves renaming Centreville District as Hunter Mill District. The confusion amongst Centreville area residents being told they were not living in Centreville District lead to community activism in the mid-1980s to have the district renamed. Robert B. Dix Jr. won the Centreville District supervisor election in 1991 after campaigning to rename the district by the end of his first year in office. An eight-member task force select the name Hunter Mill, a 19th century flour mill that once operated in the area.

2001: Following the 2000 census, the Board reapportions the nine districts to make them more equal in population. The names and number of districts remain the same.

June 2011: Following the 2010 census, the U.S. Justice Department approves Fairfax County's redistricting plan which had been approved by the Board on April 26, 2011. It cements the magisterial district's boundaries for the next decade. The names and number of districts remain the same.

June 2020: The 2020 census is underway. A redistricting in 2021 is anticipated. Fairfax County presently has nine districts: Braddock, Dranesville, Hunter Mill, Lee, Mason, Mount Vernon, Providence, Springfield, and Sully.

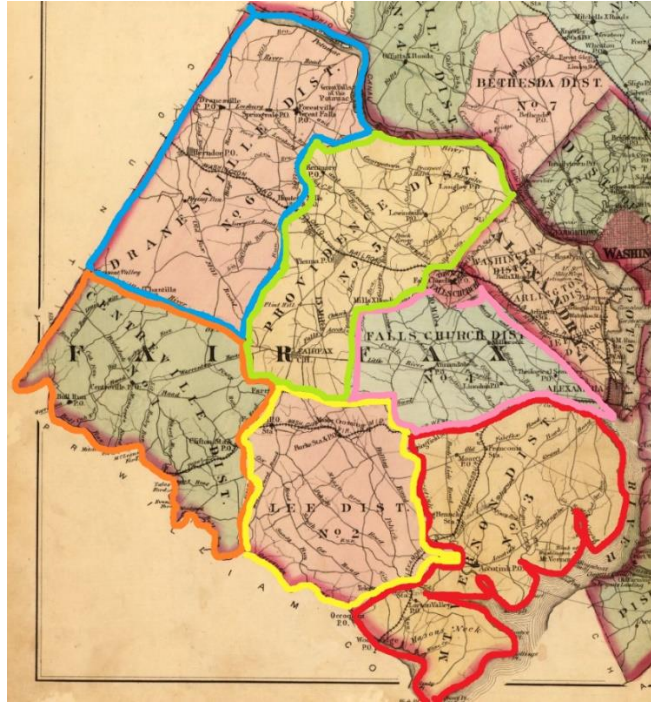


Figure 1: Fairfax County’s six original magisterial districts as mapped on the 1878 Hopkins Atlas

Origins of the Six Magisterial Districts

Following the Civil War, an assembly of delegates known as the Underwood Convention, named after the body’s president Judge John C. Underwood, met in Richmond, Virginia from December 3, 1867 to April 17, 1868, to establish a new state constitution. The convention approved the new constitution on April 17, 1868, and it was ratified by Virginia voters on July 6, 1869.¹

The Underwood Constitution required that all Virginia counties establish no less than three townships and a board of supervisors as the chief administrative agency. On April 2, 1870, the Virginia General Assembly approved “an act to provide for the dividing the several counties of this state into townships”.² Consequently, Virginia Governor Gilbert Carlton Walker appointed five Fairfax County citizens, O.W. Hunt, John Powell, Walter Powell, Warrington Gillingham, and R.L. Nevitt as commissioners to divide Fairfax County into townships. They completed this task on April 22, 1870.³

They divided Fairfax County into six townships: Centreville, Dranesville, Falls Church, Lee, Mount Vernon and Providence.⁴ There are no surviving records documenting the name selection process.

¹ Library of Virginia. “Constitutional Convention.” *Virginia Memory*, www.virginiamemory.com/online-exhibitions/exhibits/show/remaking-virginia/voting/constitutional-convention. Accessed June 24, 2020.

² Virginia., Virginia. General Assembly. *Acts and Joint Resolutions Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Virginia at its Session of 1872-1873*. Richmond: 1873, 21.

³ Fairfax County Deed Book L-4, Pages 326-329.

⁴ “Local News”. *Alexandria Gazette*, April 25, 1870, 3.

All but Lee District appear to have been named after geographical locations within their districts. It is not conclusive as to whom Lee District was named for. Sixty-six years after the creation of the townships, a February 27th, 1936, *Herndon News-Observer* article provides a possible answer stating, "When the county was organized one of the six units was Lee District, which was named for a famous family of Virginia, the Lees".⁵ The Lee family had a presence in Fairfax County since the 17th century.

On January 16, 1873, the Virginia General Assembly enforced an act to re-divide Fairfax County into three and not more than four townships which was to take effect on July 1, 1873.⁶ The Act required Gov. Walker to appoint three male citizens of the county to carry this out. He selected John Powell, Walter Powell, and John H. Chichester. The three men re-divided the county into three townships named Stonewall, Lee, and Mount Vernon and had the redivision recorded in the Clerk's Office of the County Court of Fairfax County on March 1, 1873.⁷

On March 31, 1873, the General Assembly amended their act of January 16, 1873, calling for a public vote to be taken on the matter of redivision in May 1873 before the new townships were implemented. If redivision was approved by the county's voters, the Stonewall, Lee and Mount Vernon townships would take effect on July 1, 1874. If most voters were against redivision, the act became void and the six original townships remained.⁸ It is unknown if the vote was ever carried out, however the re-dividing and creation of the three townships was never implemented.

On November 3, 1874, Virginia voters ratified amendments to the 1870 Underwood Constitution which included the elimination of county townships. In place of townships each county was to be divided into no less than three magisterial districts. Each district would elect a supervisor, constable, overseer of the poor and three magistrates all of whom would have two-year terms.⁹ Fairfax County chose to retain the original names of the six townships for the new magisterial districts.

⁵ "Historical Facts of Lee District". *Herndon News-Observer*, February 27, 1936, 8.

⁶ Virginia., Virginia. General Assembly. *Acts and Joint Resolutions Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Virginia at its Session of 1872-1873*. Richmond: 1873, 20-21.

⁷ Fairfax County Deed Book P-4, Pages 255-258.

⁸ Virginia., Virginia. General Assembly. *Acts and Joint Resolutions Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Virginia at its Session of 1872-1873*. Richmond: 1873, 298-299.

⁹ "The Constitutional Amendments". *The Alexandria Gazette*, October 22, 1874, 2.



Figure 2: Map of the newly added Mason District. *The Washington Post*, February 20, 1953

Addition of a Seventh District named “Mason”

Beginning in the 1940s, a movement to redistrict Fairfax County’s magisterial districts for the first time since their creation gained momentum. On November 17, 1949, the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations voted to enlist public support in a push to redistrict Fairfax County into seven magisterial districts to ensure equal representation on the Board of Supervisors.¹⁰

The redistricting issue remained unresolved after Fairfax County voters chose the county executive form of government over a county manager plan in a referendum on November 7, 1950. In what had been a bitter campaign, the outcome of the referendum drove proponents of the county manager plan to increase their efforts to move for a redistricting plan to resolve the county’s inequalities in representation.¹¹

The law required that the motion to redistrict the county had to come from citizens in the form of a petition signed by fifty qualified voters and submitted to the judge of the Circuit Court. Upon receiving the petition, it was up to the judge’s discretion on moving forward with redistricting.

¹⁰ “Fairfax Group Seeks Support in Drive for County Redistricting”. *The Evening Star (Washington, D.C.)*, November 18, 1949, B1.

¹¹ Birchfield, James. “Fairfax Redistricting: Voters Expressed Desire to Continue Present Method of Electing Supervisors”. *The Evening Star (Washington, D.C.)*, November 12, 1950, C2.

After the November 1950 election, the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens immediately set out to drum up support for a signed petition advocating redistricting. By January 1951, they had drafted their own redistricting plan featuring an odd number of magisterial districts to prevent tie votes by the Board of Supervisors.¹²

On March 9th, 1951, after receiving several redistricting petitions, Circuit Judge Paul Brown ordered the first redistricting of Fairfax County's magisterial districts since their establishment in 1874.¹³ The petitions had asked for an odd number of districts to be implemented.¹⁴ Judge Brown issued a court order approving the creation of a seven-member redistricting committee chaired by State Senator John W. Rust, "to effect a realignment of existing district boundaries".¹⁵

Two years later, on August 31, 1953, Fairfax County added a seventh magisterial district increasing the number of Board of Supervisors to seven. The intent of this seventh district was to give the county an odd number of Board members which would deter the possibility of tie voting.

The court-appointed redistricting committee chose to name the new district Mason. In their report to the Circuit Court, the committee explained they chose the name Mason "in honor of that illustrious citizen of Fairfax County, George Mason, of Gunston Hall, who was the author of the Bill of Rights, one of the greatest documents ever penned by the hand of man".¹⁶ Mason District was carved out of Lee and Falls Church districts. Consequently, its creation made it necessary to rearrange the boundaries of all six existing districts and a change of voting precinct boundaries.¹⁷

¹² "Fairfax Citizens Draft Plan for Redistricting". *The Evening Star (Washington, D.C.)*, January 21, 1951, B1.

¹³ "First Fairfax Redistricting Since 1874 Set". *The Evening Star (Washington, D.C.)*, March 10, 1951, A21.

¹⁴ "Redistricting Ordered in Fairfax County". *The Evening Star (Washington, D.C.)*, March 9, 1951, A2.

¹⁵ "Fairfax Gets 7th Supervisor". *The Washington Post*, September 1, 1953, 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

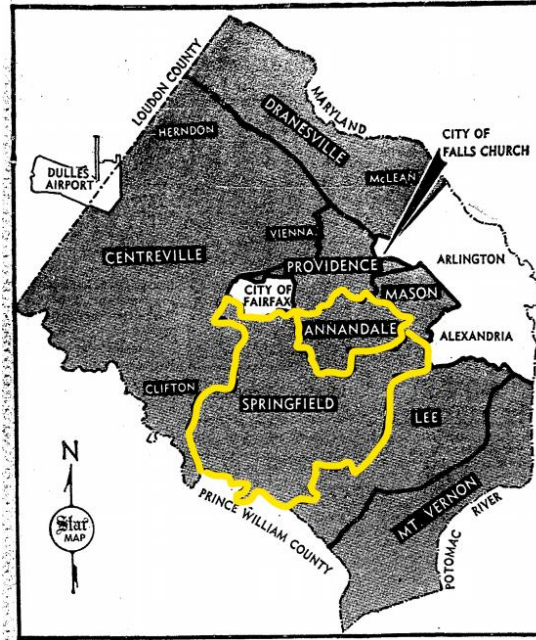


Figure 3: Map showing the newly named Annandale District and addition of Springfield District. *Evening Star*, February 5, 1967

Addition of an Eighth District named “Springfield” and Falls Church District is Replaced with “Annandale”

On November 8th, 1966, Fairfax County residents voted to adopt the urban county form of government. A major land use scandal in 1966 instigated this change which ended with the imprisonment of Board members and other county officials. The adoption of the urban county government required that the Board divide Fairfax County into five to eleven equally populated districts by February 7, 1967.¹⁸

The Fairfax County Federation of Citizens recommended to the Board that the concept of “community of interest” should be used to establish the new districts. The Federation did not want communities like Vienna, Annandale, or Springfield to be fragmented between districts.¹⁹

On February 6, 1967, after a 2 ½ hour public hearing and thirty minutes of discussion, the Board unanimously adopted new magisterial district boundaries for the county.²⁰ Evidently, the Board heeded the advice of the Federation. They abolished Falls Church District and divided it between Mason, Providence, and the newly named Annandale District. The creation of Annandale District consolidated the community of Annandale into one district.

Additionally, the Board carved out and created a new Springfield District, named for the Springfield community. This was the first time in Fairfax County’s history that elected officials undertook the redistricting process. Previous redistricting had always been accomplished by a redistricting commission appointed by the Fairfax County Circuit Court.

¹⁸ Yenckel, James T. “Fairfax County Redistricting To Be Aired at Dec. 14 Hearing”. *The Washington Post*, November 17, 1966, B7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Springfield Is a District”. *The Springfield Independent*, February 9, 1967, 1.

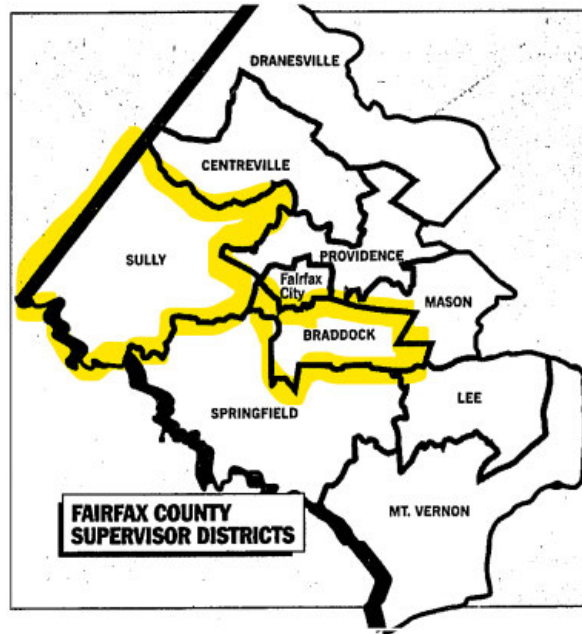


Figure 4: Map of the newly created Sully District and renamed Braddock District, *Washington Post*, October 24, 1991

Addition of a Ninth District named “Sully” and Annandale District is Renamed “Braddock”

The results of the 1990 census lead to the Board of Supervisors redrawing the boundaries of the magisterial districts, which they were required to do so by federal law to guarantee that all of its citizens had equal representation.²¹ Redistricting had also occurred in 1971, 1975 and 1981, however the number of districts and names remained the same throughout that time.

The 1990 census revealed that the population of western Fairfax County had dramatically increased, which required the creation of a ninth district. The Board voted in May 1991 to add an unnamed ninth magisterial district, however the Fairfax County branch of the NAACP filed a complaint that the redistricting plan diluted the voting power of minorities in the county. The Justice Department rejected the NAACP’s argument and approved the redistricting plan on July 24, 1991.²²

The new ninth district was called Sully, named after Sully Historic Site in Chantilly. Sully District was carved out of Centreville District. During the 1991 redistricting process, Annandale District was renamed Braddock District after the main arterial, Braddock Road, which crossed through the middle of that district.²³

²¹ Anderson, John Ward. “NAACP Targets Fairfax Redistricting: Group Says Plan Dilutes Minority Votes, Asks U.S. to Reject It”. *The Washington Post*, June 19, 1991, C4.

²² Baker, Peter. “Justice Department Backs Fairfax County’s Redistricting Plan”. *The Washington Post*, July 25, 1991, C4.

²³ Bulova, Sharon. “Welcome to the Braddock District of Fairfax County, Virginia”. June 1994, 2.

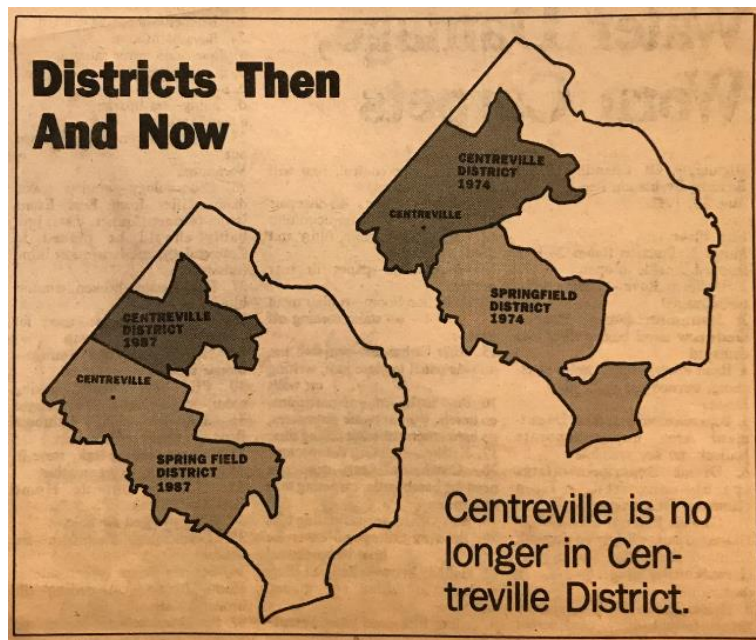


Figure 5: By 1987, Centreville was no longer included in the Centreville District but rather Springfield District. This caused much confusion among its residents, prompting its eventual renaming. *Centre View* August 1987

Centreville District is Renamed “Hunter Mill”

By 1973, Centreville’s population had swelled to the point where it needed redistricting again. Even though only two years had passed since the 1971 redistricting based on the 1970 census results, the Board unanimously voted to redistrict for a second time in October 1973 to remedy the sudden discrepancy in the sizes of the districts. While federal law requires Fairfax County to realign its districts based on population after every census, it is allowed to redraw districts once during the ten-year intervals between censuses.²⁴

The Board considered five separate redistricting plans all of which called for slicing up Centreville District. Ultimately, the Board voted on January 4, 1975, to cut Centreville District in half.²⁵ They shifted Centreville District north of Centreville to include Reston and Vienna. The Centreville area itself was pushed west into Springfield District.²⁶ A 1981 redistricting pushed other areas of Centreville into Providence District. After a 1991 redistricting, some Centreville residents found themselves placed in Sully District.

Much confusion occurred amongst Centreville’s populace about no longer being located in Centreville District. Residents would call in and send Centreville area complaints to the wrong supervisors causing much irritation. By 1986, the community wanted the issue resolved. John Litzengerger, president of the West Fairfax County Citizen Association wrote a letter to Board Chairman John F. Herrity pleading to rename Centreville District. In an interview with the

²⁴ Bredemeir, Kenneth. “Fairfax Sets Redistricting By 6-2 Vote”. *The Washington Post*, April 1, 1971, B1.

²⁵ Nunnes, Donald. “Fairfax Votes Area Change in Districts”. *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1975, K1.

²⁶ Arvantes, James. “District Name Causes Confusion”. *Centre View*, August 1987.

community's newspaper *Centre View*, Litzenberger expressed hope that the Board would do what every Centreville resident desired: "The overwhelming majority of us want Centreville to have its own district".²⁷ There was hope that the 1990 census would lead to the district's renaming during the 1991 redistricting process, but the Board disregarded the issue.

While campaigning for Centreville District supervisor in 1991, Robert B. Dix Jr. vowed to rename Centreville District by the end of his first year in office. "A lot of community leaders felt that this area was not being served in the sense of a having a... name that was connected to the community," said Tom Julia, an aide to Dix.²⁸ After Dix won the election, an eight-member task force formed to consider more than 85 nominations for a new name for the district. They decided on Hunter Mill, a 19th century flour mill once operated by a family of Scots along the Snakeden Branch creek. The Board approved the new name in October 1992, but the change was not made official until December 1992 following approval from the U.S. Justice Department as required by the Voting Rights Act of 1965.²⁹

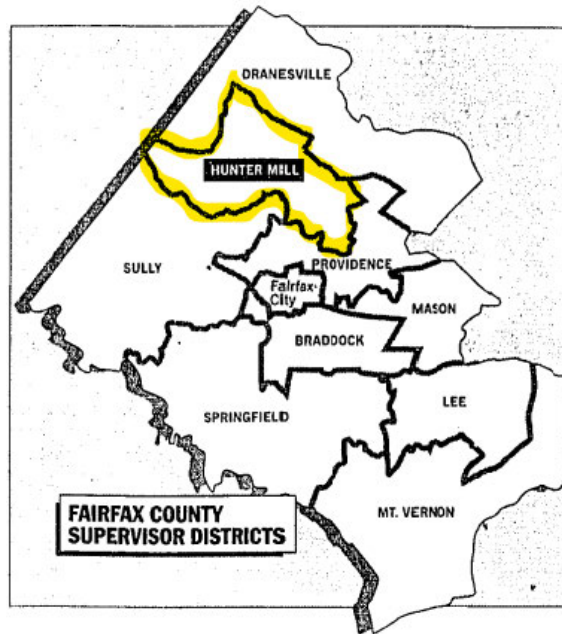


Figure 6: Map of the newly created Hunter Mill District. As of June 2020, these are the present names of Fairfax County's magisterial districts. *Washington Post*, January 14, 1993

²⁷ Allen, Rick. "District Renamed Hunter Mill". *The Washington Post*, January 14, 1993, Va. 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

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