Districts of 113ᵗʰ Congress
http://nationalatlas.gov

In reality, though, the districts that result from these rules tend to grow more contorted every 10 years and, after the most recent district boundaries were finalized, significantly more Republican. In the 2014 congressional election, roughly 44 percent of voters were Democratic but two-thirds of the districts are filled by Republicans.

There are two ways that the parties can draw districts to their own advantage:

Packing herds opponents into as few districts as possible, creating more heavily Democratic and Republican districts.

Cracking divides the geographical stronghold of an opponent into as many districts as possible, diluting the influence of those voters.

The word gerrymander was [coined by a 19th-century cartoonist](#) to describe a politician's efforts to redraw electoral district boundaries in order to advantage his cronies and marginalize his opponents. It describes the kinds of contortions we see on district maps to this day.

Very often all this results in districts that resemble Rorschach test ink blots.

Here's a look at some of the most interestingly shaped districts Pennsylvania's process has produced.
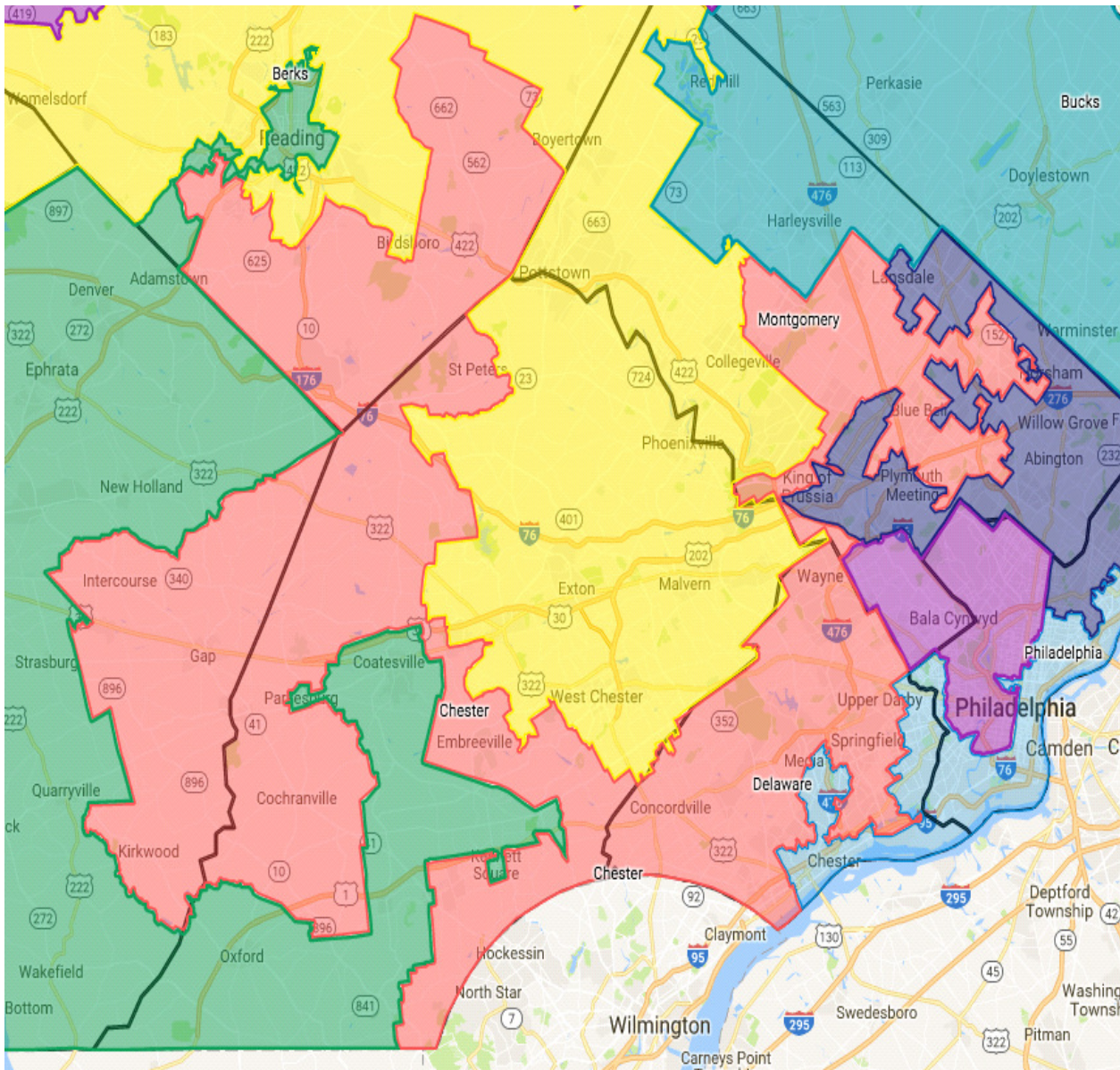
7th Congressional (Pat Meehan, R)

Pennsylvania's 7th is often cited as Exhibit A when it comes to congressional gerrymandering. David Daley, publisher of The Connecticut Mirror and the author of a book on the subject, described the district as cartoon character Goofy kicking Donald Duck.

"The only point that's essentially contiguous there is Goofy's foot and Donald's rear end," he said, on a recent episode of On the Media.

Indeed, the district (pink on the map below) sprawls out in jagged, haphazard lines across five counties: Montgomery, Delaware, Chester, Lancaster and Berks. In the process, it manages to avoid major population centers like Chester and Reading while diluting the impact of Democratic voters in the Philly suburbs with more conservative ones in rural Lancaster and Berks counties.

Prior to the most recent 2011 map, the borders shifted a lot but the shape generally remained pretty boring. The cartoon-character shape is an entirely recent phenomenon.
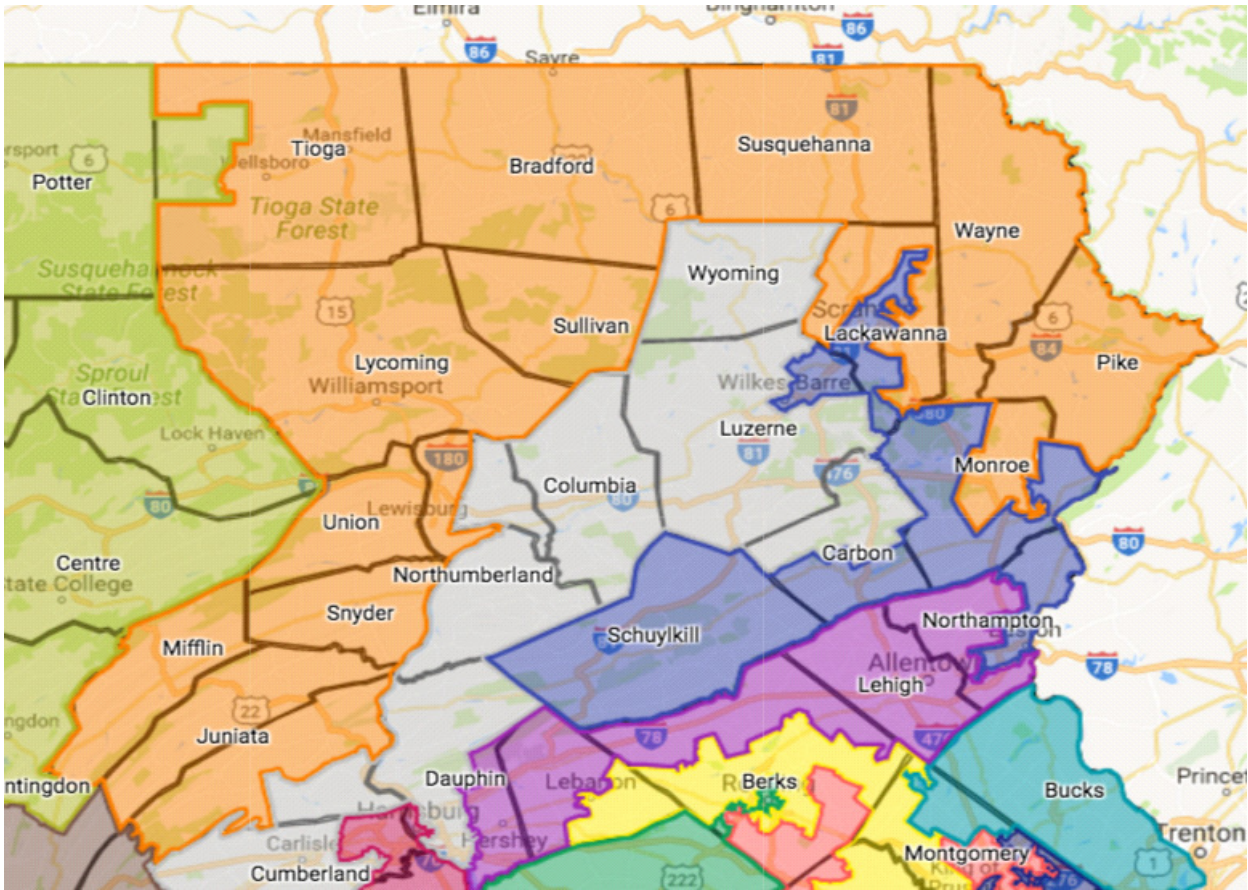

10th Congressional (Tom Marino, R)

Starting in 2002 and worsening in 2011, this northeastern district (orange on the map) grew a tail that has crept closer and closer to Harrisburg. Now, residents in far flung Wayne County share a congressman with those in Perry County. All the while, residents of Scranton are in an entirely different district than many of those who reside in bedroom communities like Clarks Summit.
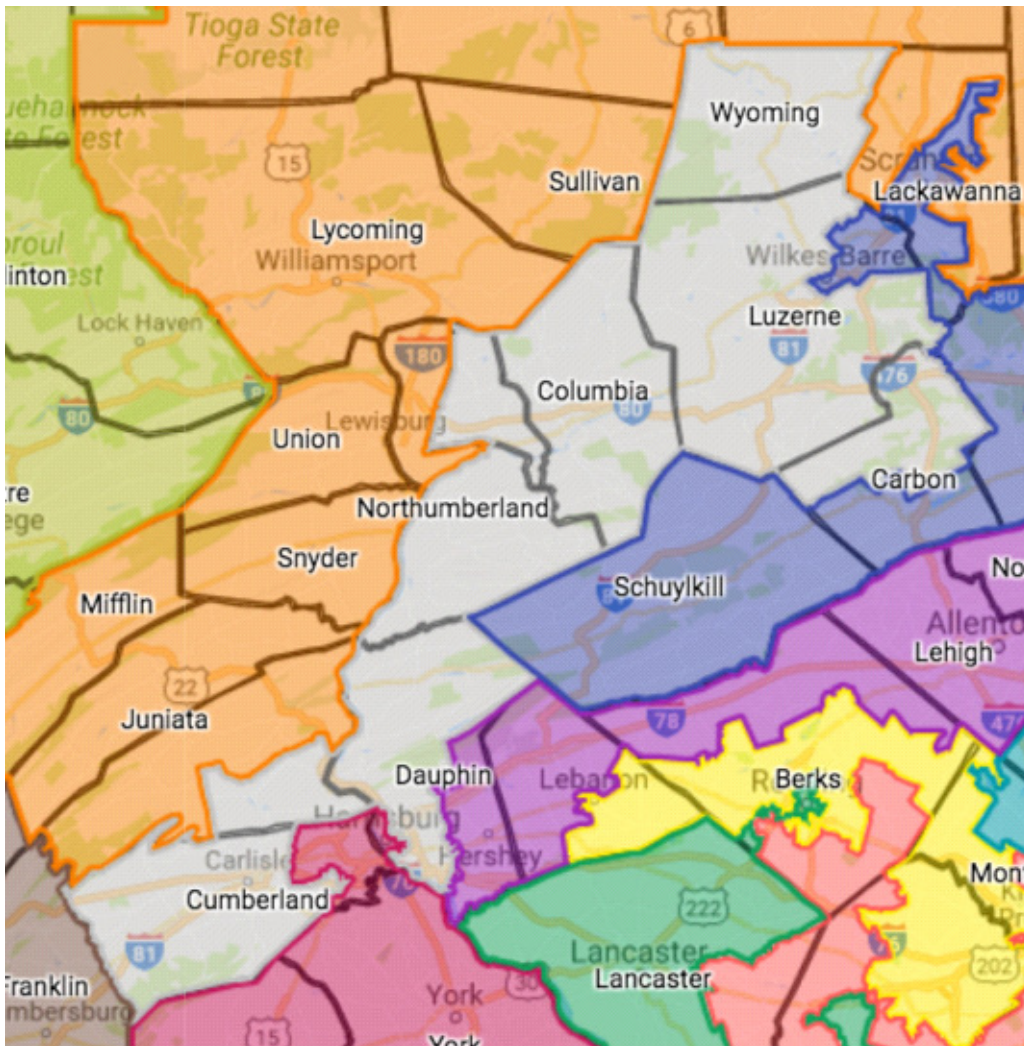
11th Congressional (Lou Barletta, R)

Another drastic change that took place in 2011 was to this district (white on the map), which was historically centered around Wilkes-Barre. What had been a fairly conventional district suddenly became an elongated piece of bacon stretching from Shippensburg north to Wyoming County. (And it lost Wilkes-Barre in the process.)
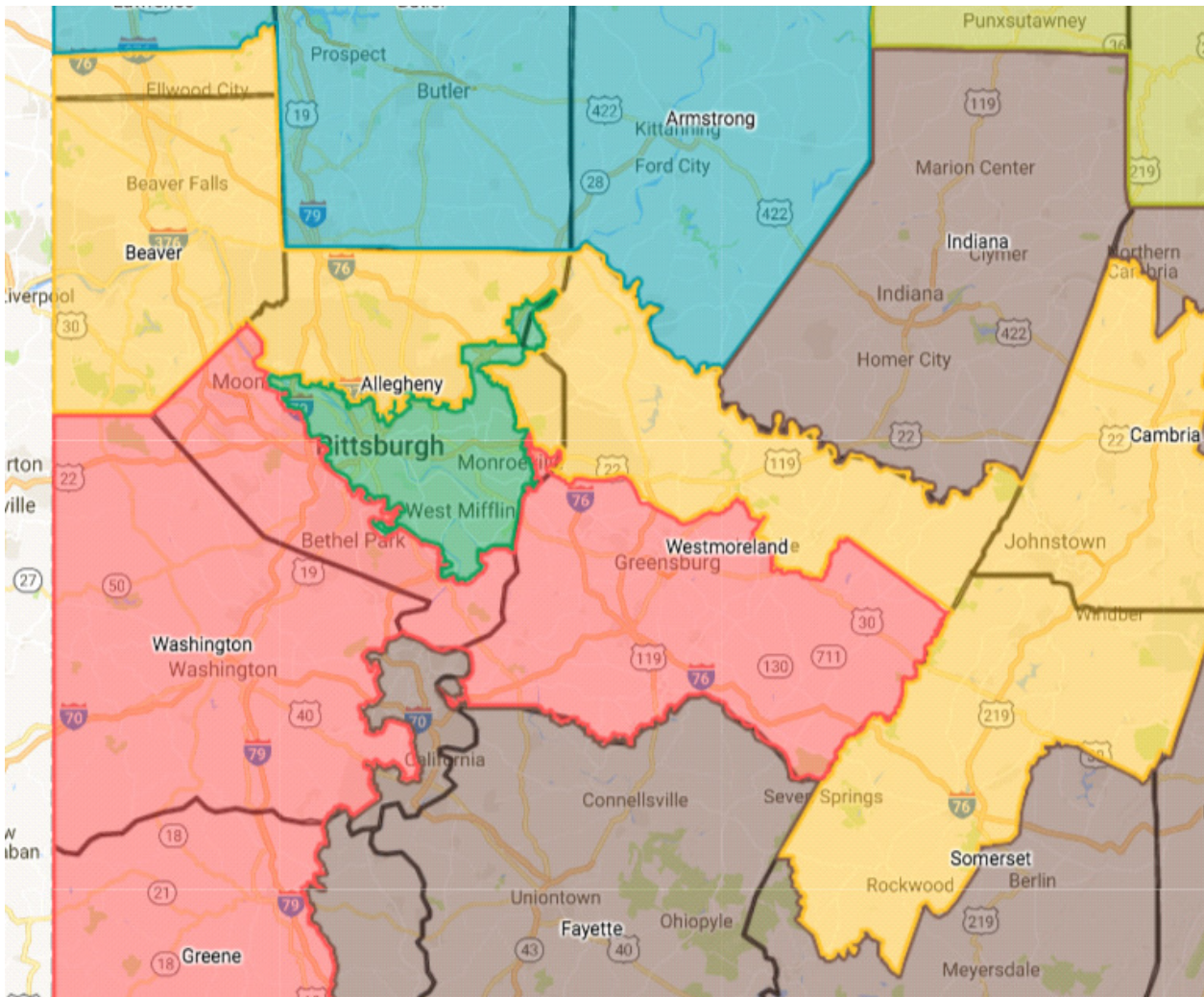
12th Congressional (Keith Rothfus, R)

This district (yellow on the map) hasn't stayed in one spot since 1962. Each time, its shape gets a little more convoluted. The most recent version hugs a narrow strip from the Ohio border before cutting east across Pittsburgh's northern suburbs and on to Johnstown, where it spreads out into an anvil shape across Cambria and Somerset counties. Its most recent iteration, along with the other Pittsburgh area districts, was pointed to as an an example of gerrymandering by Fair Districts PA.
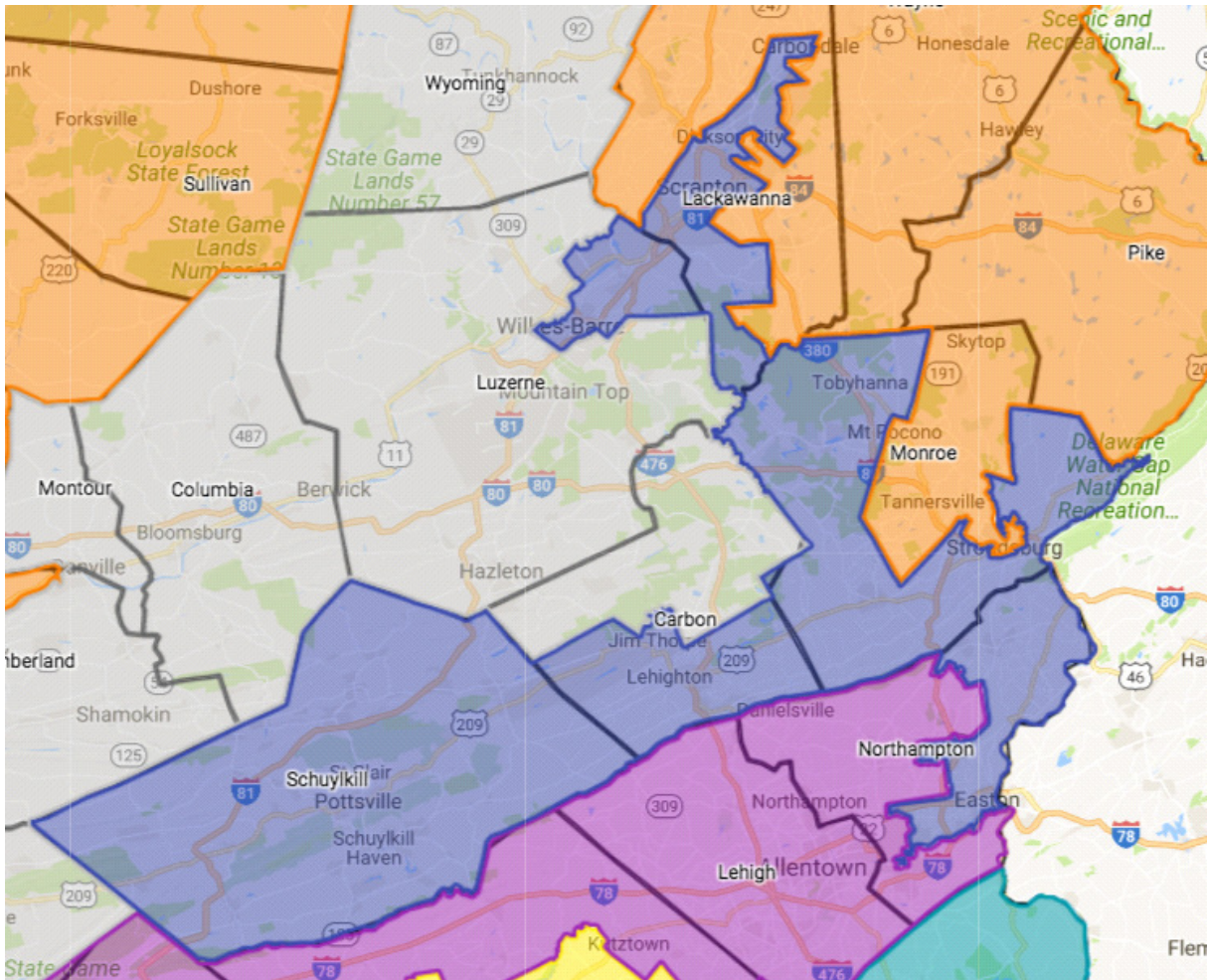
17th Congressional (Matthew Cartwright, D)

This Scranton-centered district (blue on the map) was part of the 11th district prior to 2011. Now it weaves drunkenly across six counties in order to include the Democratic population centers of Easton, Scranton and Wilkes-Barre.
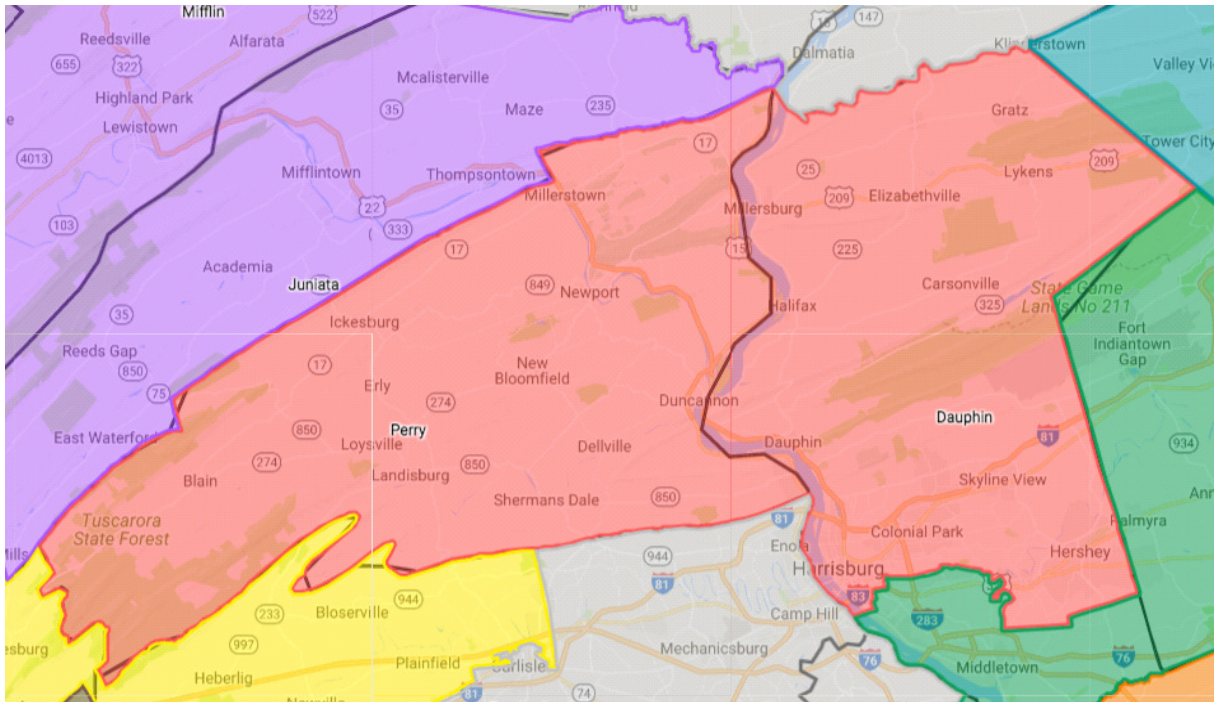
15th State Senate (John DiSanto, R)

Since 2012, this district (red on the map) compromises all of Perry County and most of Dauphin County—cutting Harrisburgers away from their neighbors in Paxtang, Steelton and Swatara. In 2001, it was expanded to include a portion of rural York County. It had previously maintained much the same shape from 1874 through 2001. Notably, the most recent redistricting contributed to the ouster of Democratic Sen. Rob Teplitz in last year's election.
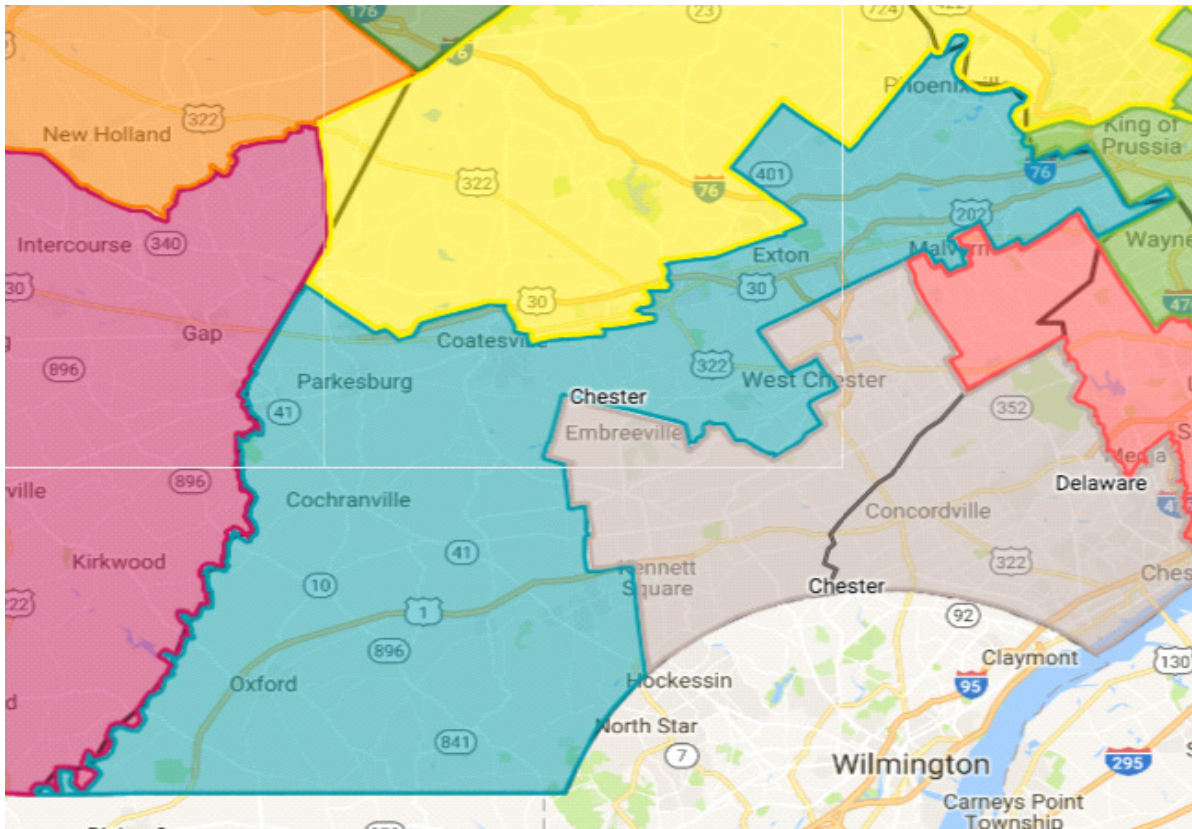
19th State Senate (Andrew Dinniman, D)

From 1874 through 1966, the district (teal on the map) maintained a fairly boring shape, extending from Pottstown and King of Prussia south to the Delaware and Maryland border. Ever since, each new redistricting brought a new contortion as the district expanded and narrowed. The most recent iteration divides West Chester from its sister city of West Goshen but includes a wide swath of suburban and rural southeastern Pennsylvania.
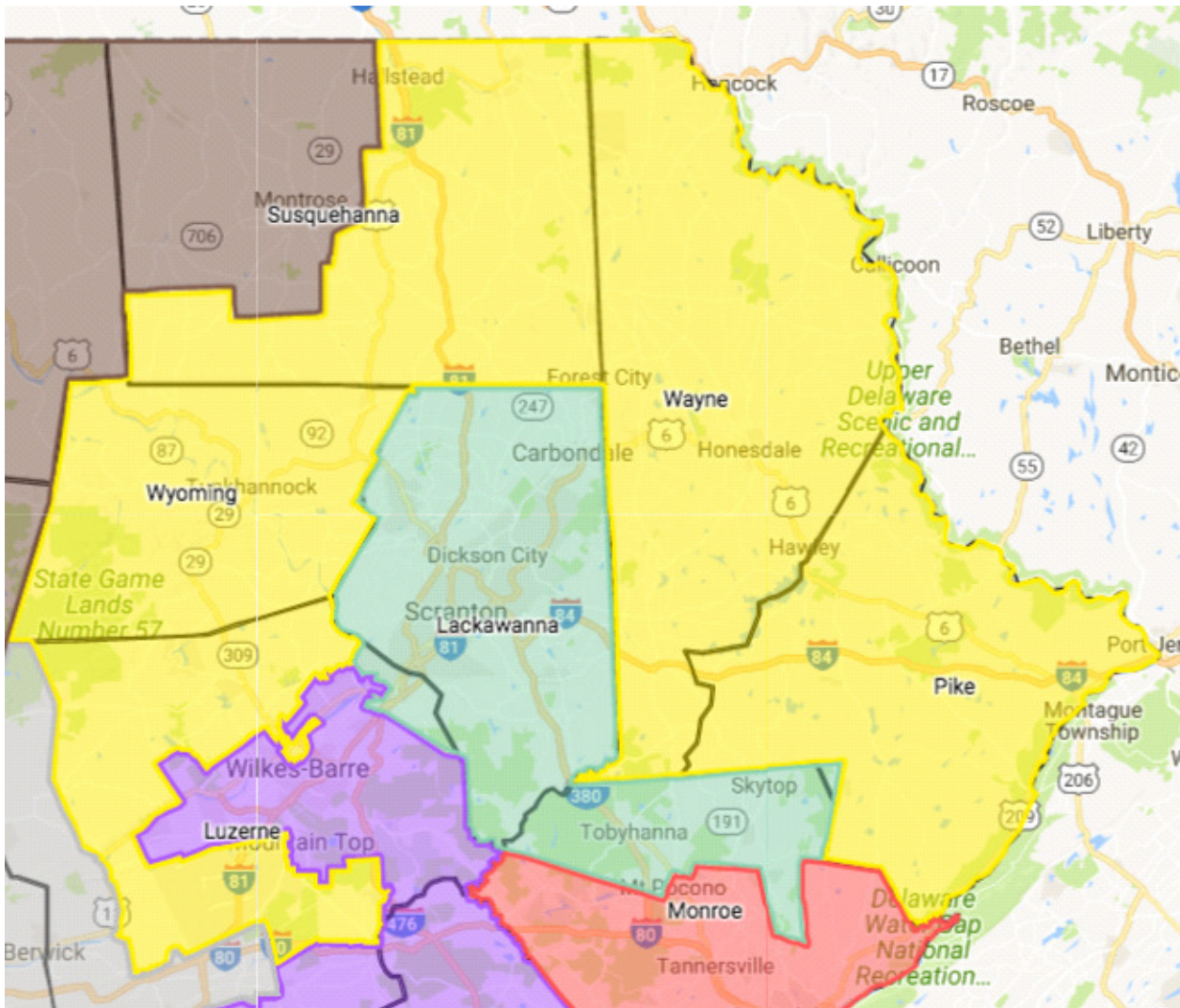
20th State Senate (Lisa Baker, R)

The district (yellow on the map) currently contains portions of Luzerne, Wyoming, Susquehanna, Wayne and Pike counties forming an arc around Scranton. It notably splits the suburbs of Wilkes-Barre off from the city proper. Since 1966, the district has maintained roughly the same shape. Previously, the district moved around the area between 1974 and 1966 but had more or less maintained a square profile.
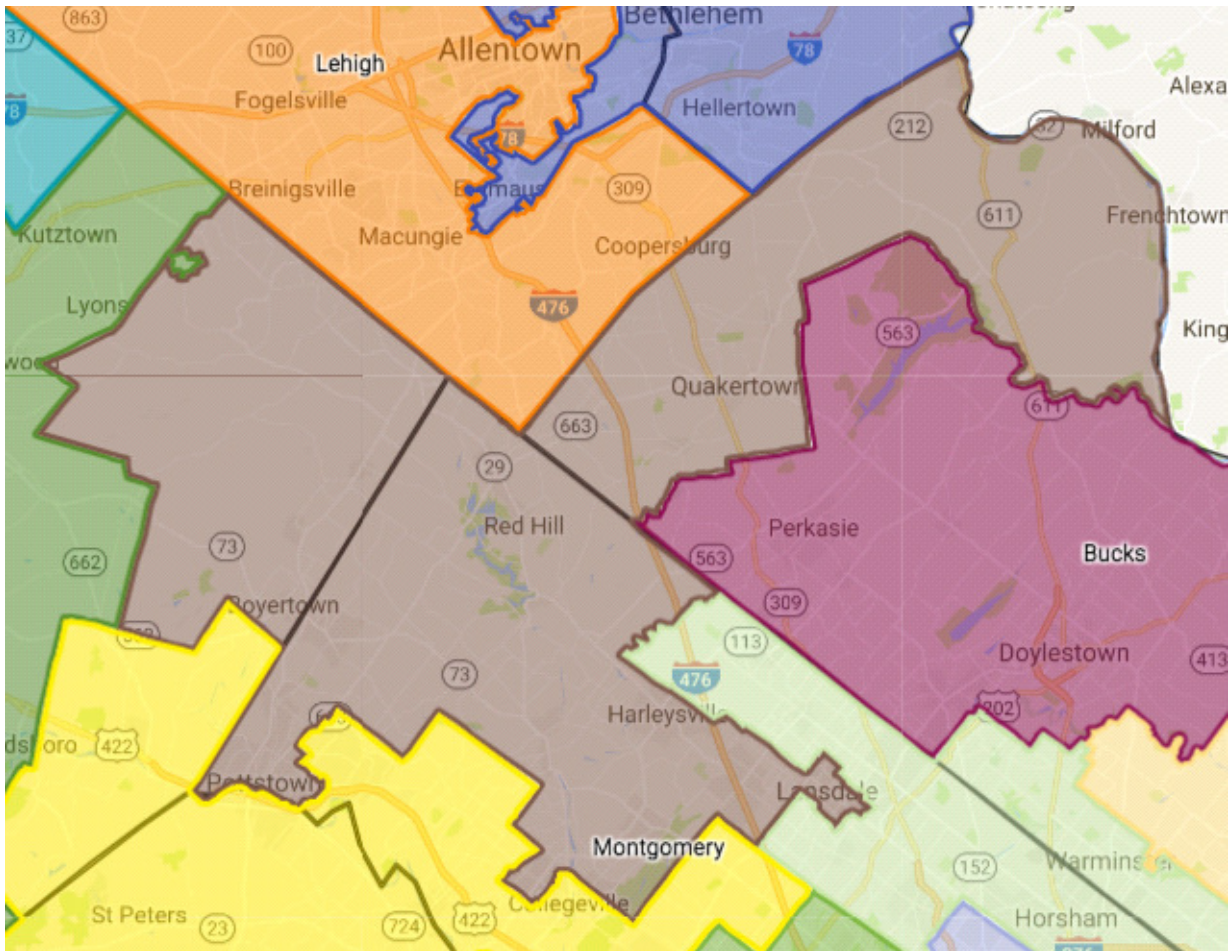
24th State Senate (Bob Mensch, R)

In its latest iteration, the district (brown on the map) takes the shape of a sailboat with its body spread across parts of Berks and Montgomery County with its slender mast and sail reaching northeast through Bucks County to the Delaware River. Between 1966 and 2001, the district had maintained a relatively boring boxy shape comprised of the suburbs north of King of Prussia and south of Quakertown. The two most recent maps led to more and more contortions.
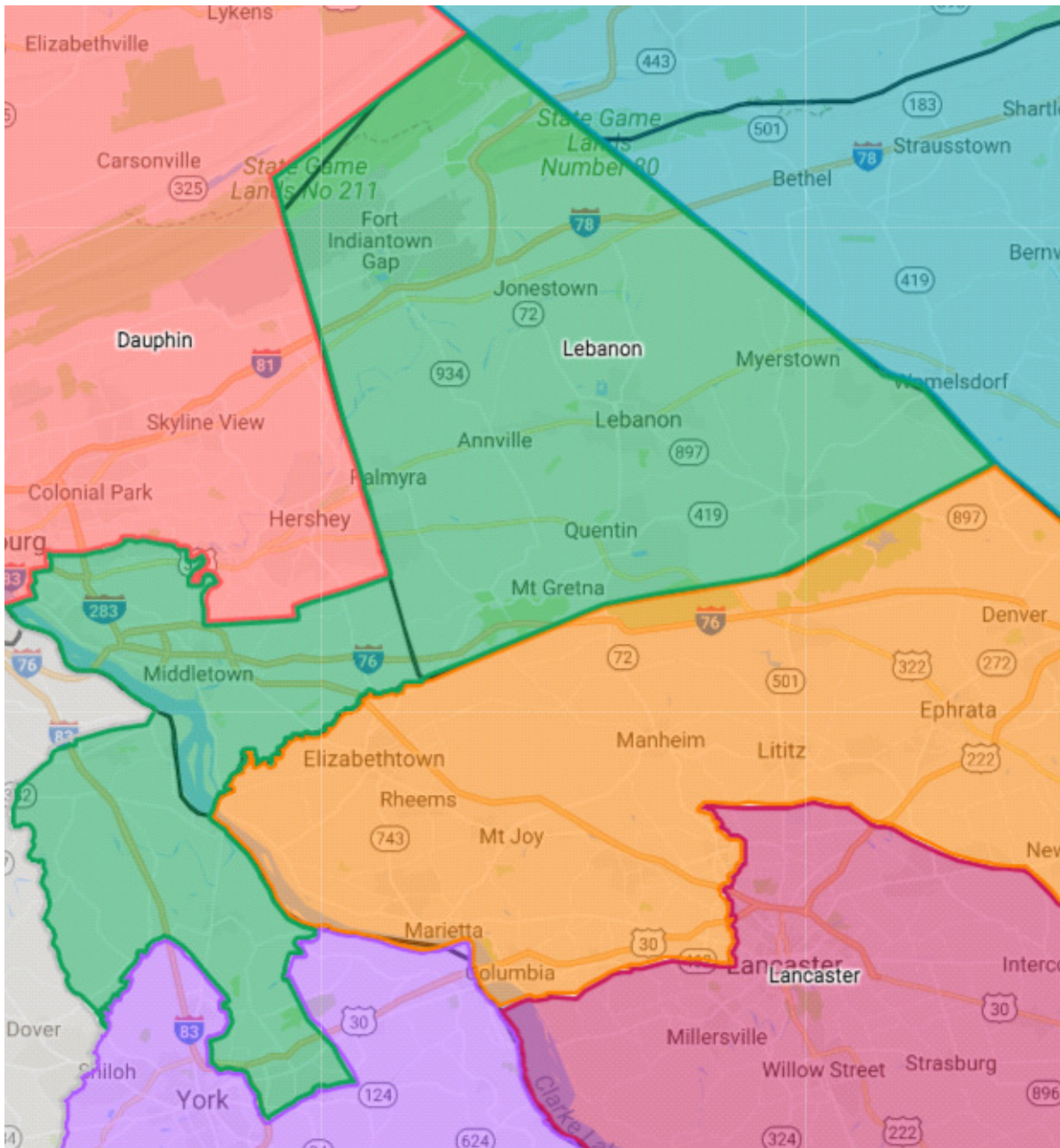
48th State Senate (Mike Folmer, R)

Since 1966, the district (green on the map) centered largely around Lebanon but its shape changes virtually every decade. In its first year, the district abutted Reading and stretched southward to Lititz. In 1971, it formed an arc north of Lancaster and followed a length of Route 78 to the north. In 1981, it lost Lititz and took on a more rectangular shape centered around Route 78. In 1991, it absorbed a section of Allentown. It changed drastically in 2001, when it lost Allentown and stretched its tentacles into contorted shapes that included both Elizabethtown and Elizabethville. Finally, in 2012, it lost both of the Elizabeths but took over the Harrisburg suburbs that District 15 lost.
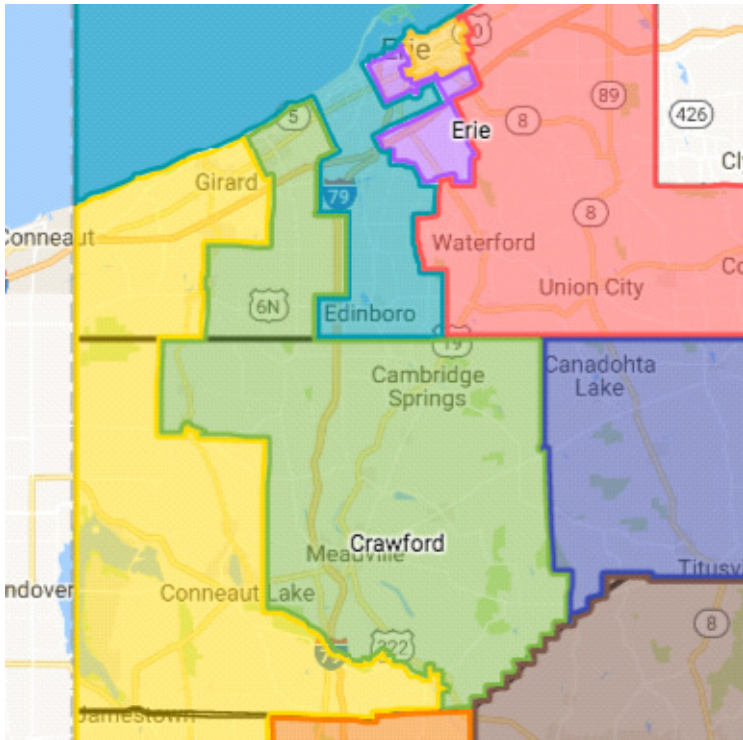
6th State House (Brad Roae, R)

In its current formation, the district (light green in the map) starts off as a fairly conventional box dropped in the middle of rural Crawford County. Then it veers crazily through the middle of Erie County to the lake's edge. The last two versions of the district had a more conventional boxy shape confined strictly to the contours of eastern Crawford County.
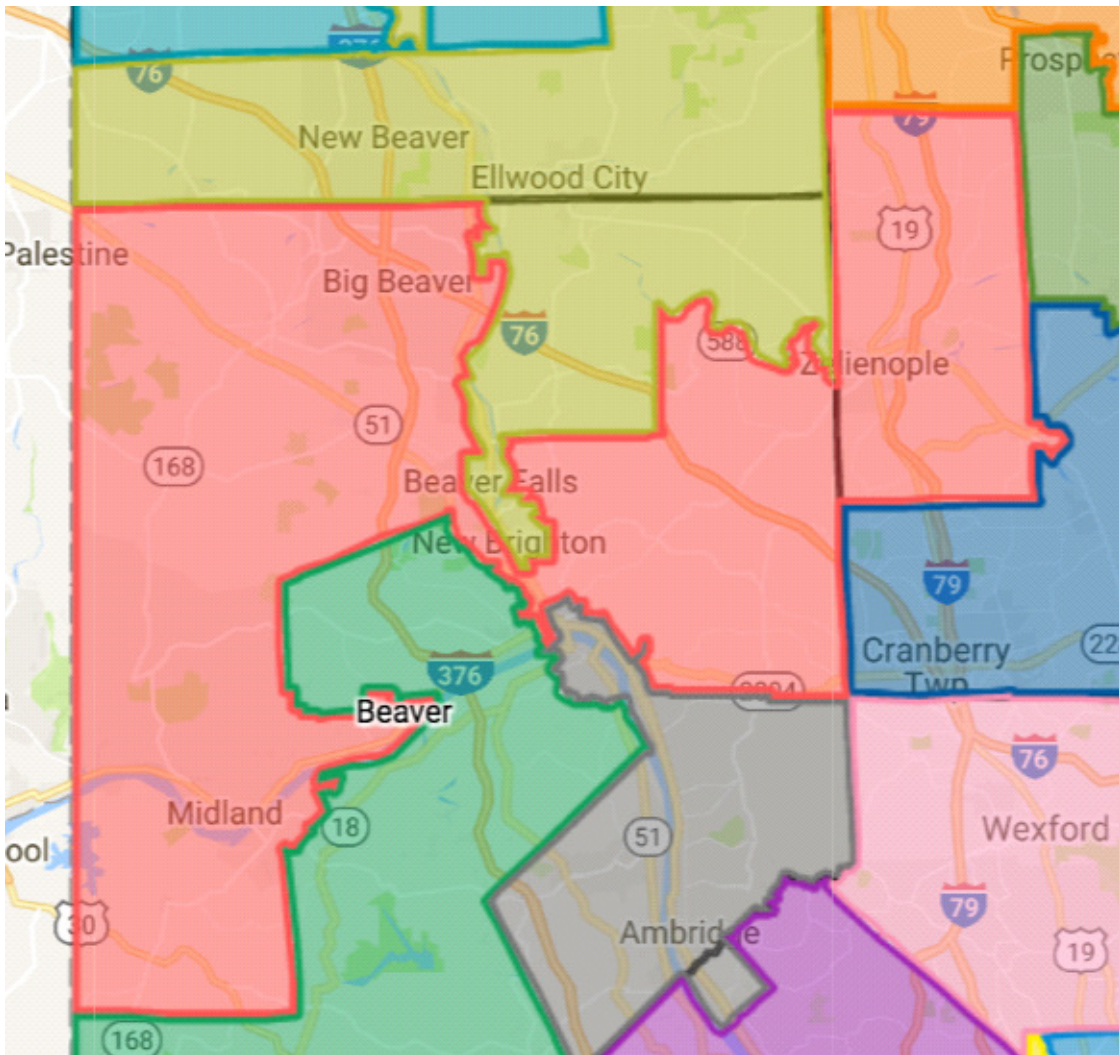
14th State House (Jim Marshall, R)

If you don't look too closely, it would seem this district (red in the map) is split in two at the Beaver River. That is not the case. The two sides of the river are conjoined by a strip of land about a mile wide while somehow managing to avoid the cities of Beaver and Rochester. Previous iterations followed a more rational contour, including Rochester but excluding Beaver.
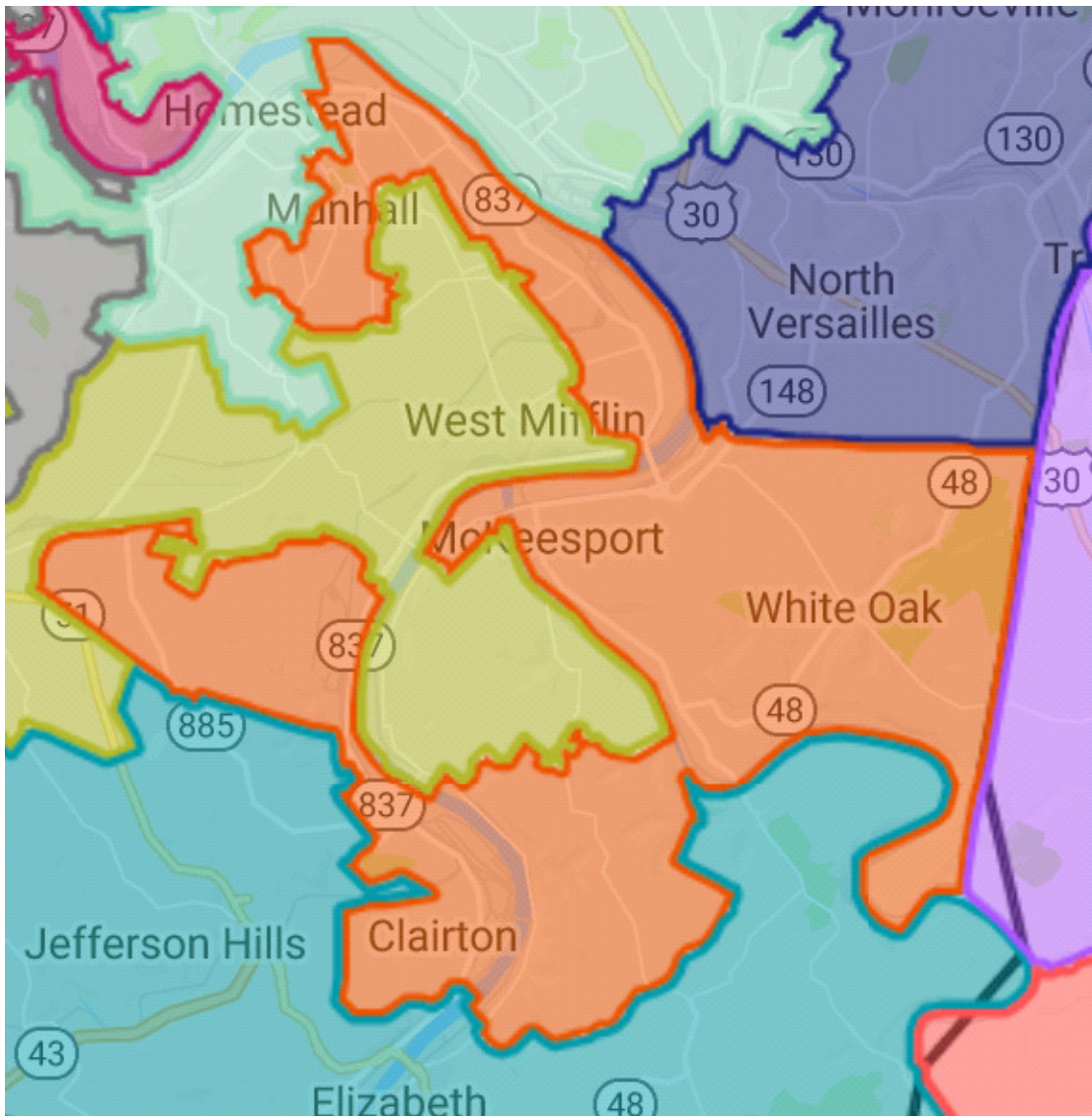
35th State House (Marc Gergely, D)

This lobster-shaped district encompasses portions of both the Pittsburgh suburbs and the old industrial corridor along the Monongahela River. It, along with a number of other highly contorted districts in the region, were pointed out as prime examples of gerrymandering by Fair Districts PA. Indeed, it's one of the districts that seems to constantly be shape shifting, although it consistently includes McKeesport.
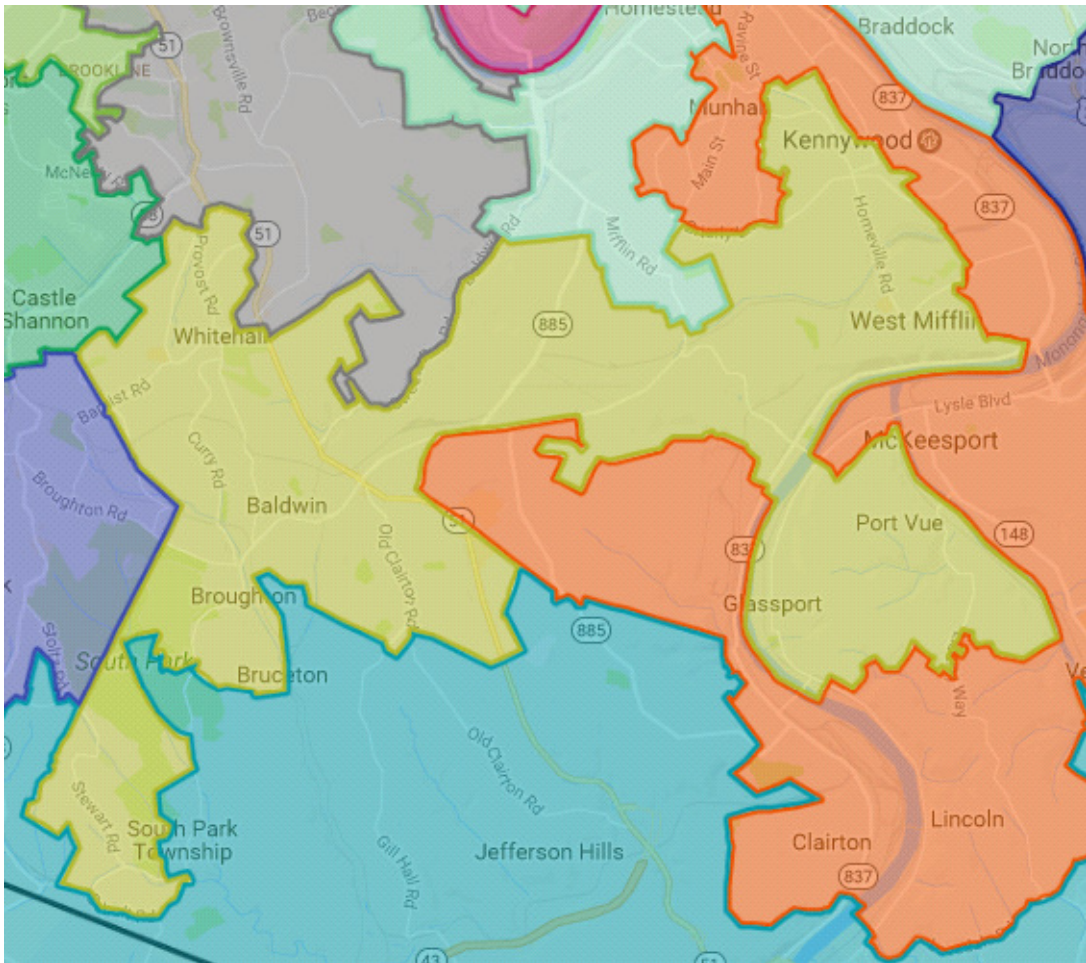
38th State House (William Kortz, D)

A lot of the districts in Allegheny County have crazy shapes but this one is arguably the most impressive. Squint and this contorted inkblot of a district (olive green in the map) looks like a woman in a mini-skirt holding a handgun. Like District 14, this one managed to cross a river—the Monongahela—at a narrow strip of land while failing to include the nearby city of McKeesport. It also manages to divide up the South Park Golf Course between separate districts. Earlier iterations followed a less contorted path while still avoiding McKeesport. Bonus points for being caught in District "The Lobster" 35's pincers.
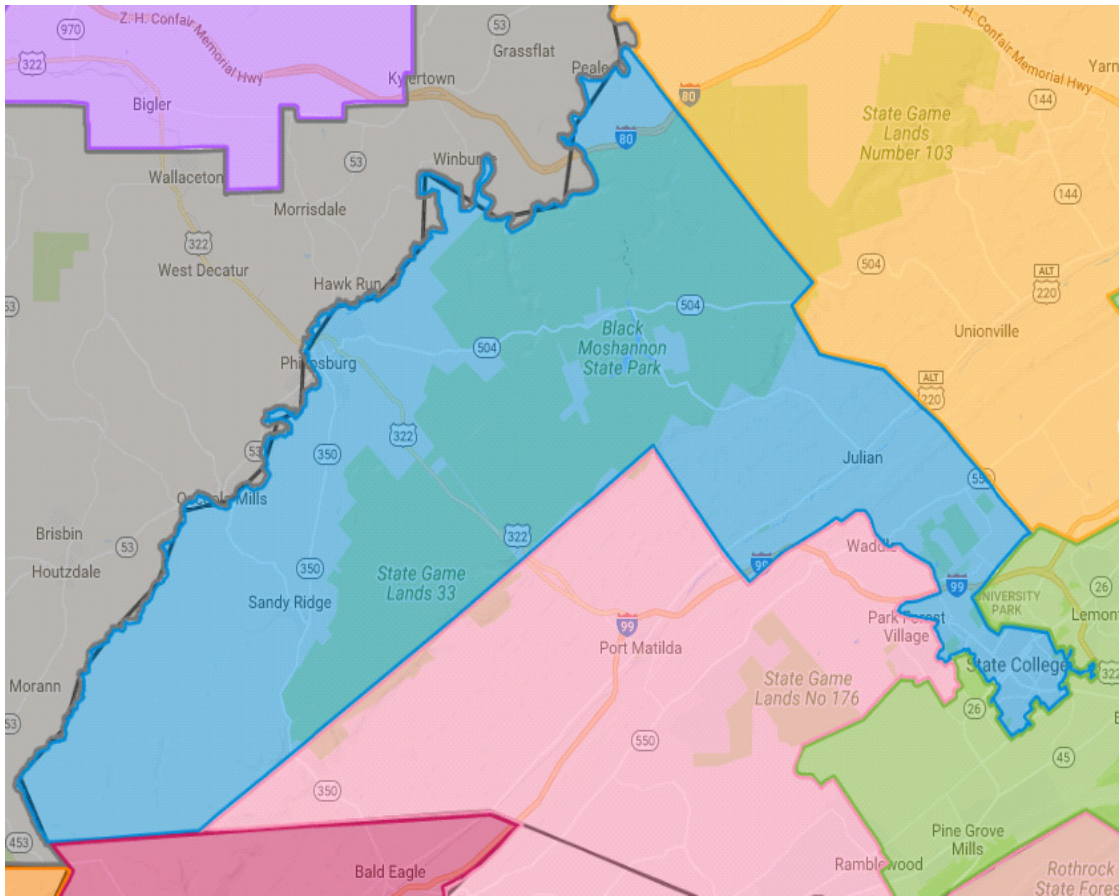
77th State House (Scott Conklin, D)

Did you know that Old Main is in a different House district than Beaver Stadium? Such are the realities of gerrymandering. To be fair, that was true in the 1991 map of District 77 (blue in the map), but its borders have grown increasingly convoluted with time.
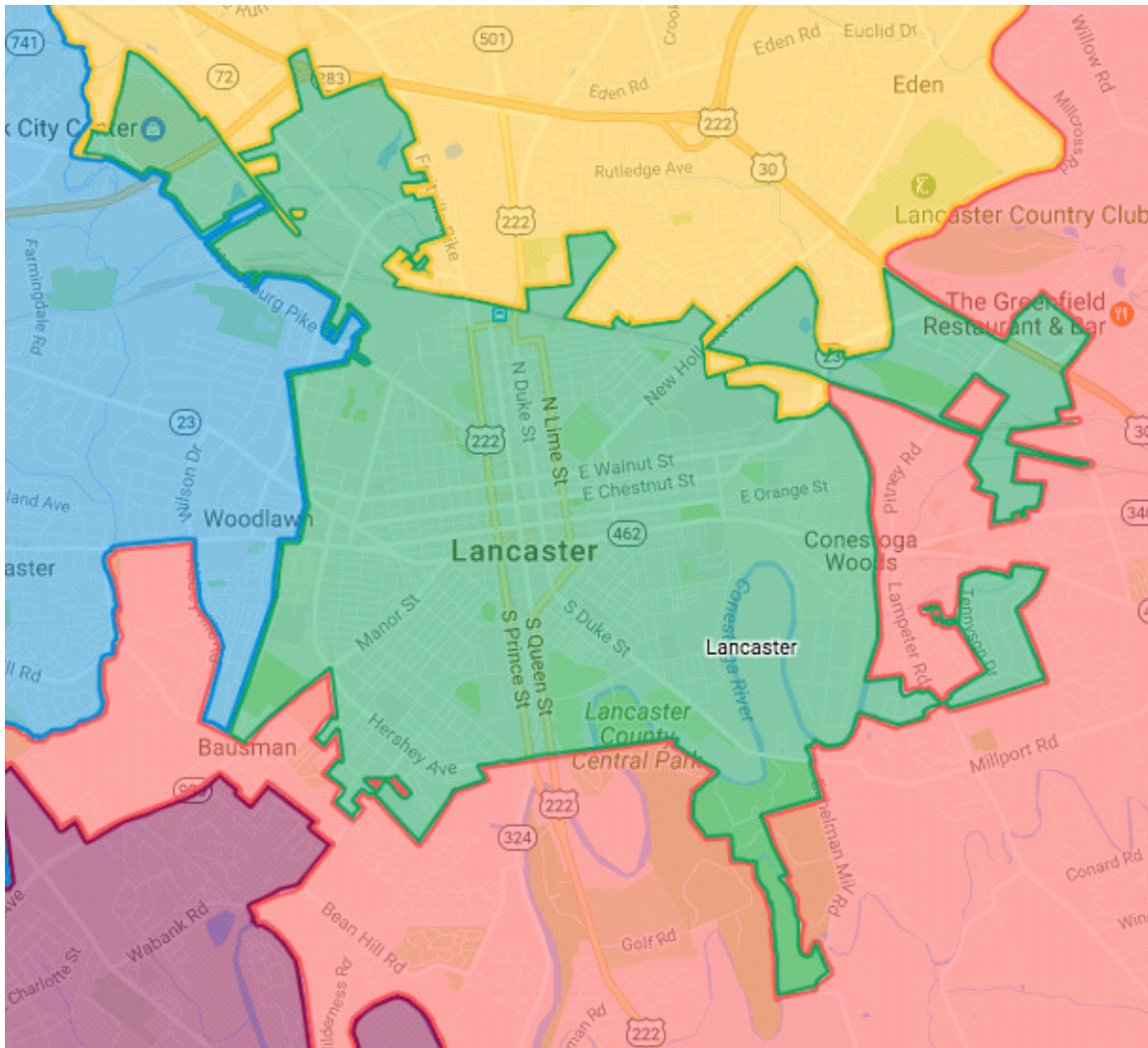
96th State House (Michael Sturla, D)

The borders of this raggedy district (green in the map) may appear nonsensical but it's actually for an understandable reason: For the most part, they follow the (nonsensical) contours of the Lancaster city limits. Consider it proof that not every crazy district shape is the result of gerrymandering.
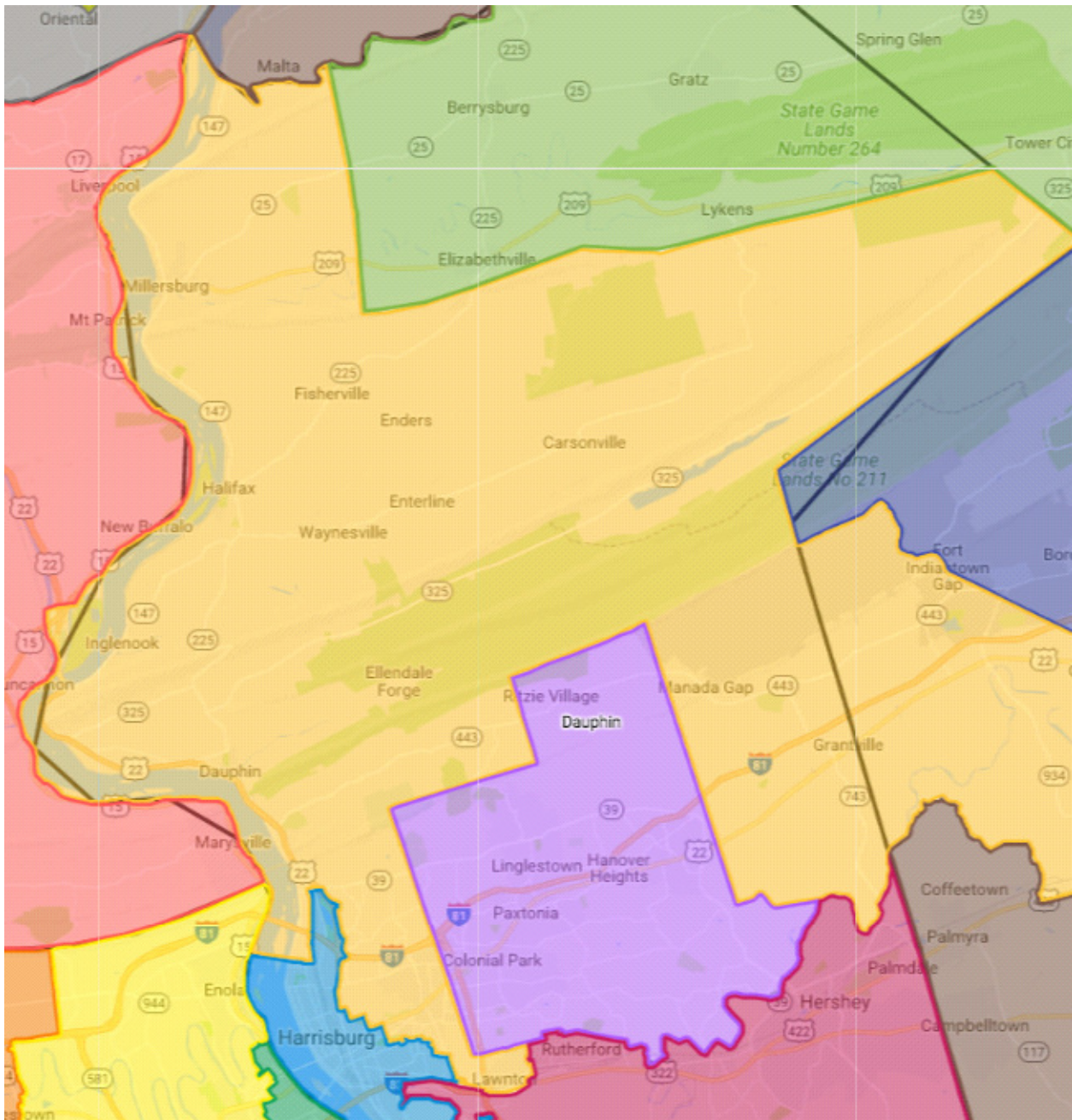
104th State House (Sue Helm, R)

In its first iteration in 1991, this district had the familiar sailboat profile as the district wove together both rural and suburban areas of Dauphin County. 2001's redistricting actually normalized the district's shape but that correction was thrown out the window in 2012. Now, residents of Lawton share a district with Millersburg and part of Fort Indiantown Gap.