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Introduction

**A map of a city

Description automatically generated** A common question I (and others, I imagine) get asked is “where are you from?” Oddly enough, it is a question I struggle to answer. This is not because I do not know where I am from, but because the name of where I am from is, in a way, vague. My suburban neighborhood is not centered around any one thing, nor is the “Census-designated place” I live nearby. This causes the boundaries of “places” I live in and near to be vague, and largely unknown to those not from nearby. Since starting college, I have given 5 different answers to the question of where I am from: an hour west of Philadelphia (the most legible answer to most people), Lionville (technically where I am actually from), Exton (the city listed in my home’s address), Downingtown (where my high school was located), and West Chester (the county seat for Chester County). Generally, the farther from where my house is located, the more easily legible where I am from is to others. The

Pre-19th Century History

The historical record of Lionville and Exton is rather scarce before the 19th century.

Farming County

In an 1879 article, the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* described Lionville as “…inhabited by plain and wealthy Quaker farmers”.

Suburbanization and the Railroads

Across the U.S., there was rapid suburban growth outside of cities. These suburbs were dominated by White homeowners that were protected from racial integration of the suburbs through various policies.

Developing Marchwood

Present Day: Where Even Is “Exton” or “Lionville”?

Today, suburban sprawl has resulted in places being decentralized, with Exton and Lionville being no different. An aerial view of Lionville shows a decentralized neighborhood with two adjacent shopping centers, both with large parking lots for neighborhood residents to drive through. While there is technically a bus, its route and stop locations make it not particularly useful for travelling within the Lionville area. Exton is perhaps even more extreme; an even larger shopping center with a mall that is largely in disrepair (e.g., there are several trash cans and containers scattered throughout the interior to collect dripping water) surrounded by an often empty parking lot; there is little housing nearby. Additionally, despite having a stop along the Philadelphia – Harrisburg mainline, the Exton’s development is not tied to the train station; walking to the station requires walking next to 6 lanes of traffic and the parking lot entrance when coming from north of the station is rather convoluted. This makes it quite difficult to discern where one place begins and one ends, as they all look quite similar.

Contrast this with another place located along the Philadelphia – Harrisburg mainline in Chester County: Parkesburg. Aerial imagery shows homes clustered around a commercial core and a train station. Additionally, the perceived extent of Parkesburg is more easily delineated given the surrounding farmland.