

INTRODUCTION

“Mapping Historic Scranton” seeks to utilize Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to show the sprawl of downtown Scranton and understand the factors that drove this growth. A broad history of the area was collected then compared to census data and maps to infer causation behind periods of growth or decline in urbanization and immigration.

Further, research focuses on the migration of African Americans to Northeastern Pennsylvania and their entrepreneurship.



The Lackawanna Valley, George Inness (1856)

It was hypothesized that the growth of downtown Scranton occurred over a broad period of time with the growth of industry.

BACKGROUND

Located in northeastern Pennsylvania's Lackawanna County, the area that is now Scranton was once populated by the Munsee tribe. European settlers first arrived in the mid-seventeenth century, spurring land conflict with other settlers and indigenous peoples, culminating in the Revolutionary War that drove Native tribes from the area. The land would soon become Slocum Hollow, growing rapidly due to its proximity to large cities and natural resources.

On September 11, 1840, the Scranton brothers purchased the land and immediately began construction of an iron blast furnace that would utilize Pennsylvania's anthracite coal and establish iron as the area's first industry. This was only the beginning of Scranton's journey to becoming an industrial giant and developing its historic downtown sector.

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE?

Scranton, 1840



A hand drawn map uses the Lackawanna River as a reference point in the farmland that would have appeared to the Scranton brothers. Coal fueled the production of iron that built the rail industry, further facilitating the use and sale of anthracite coal.

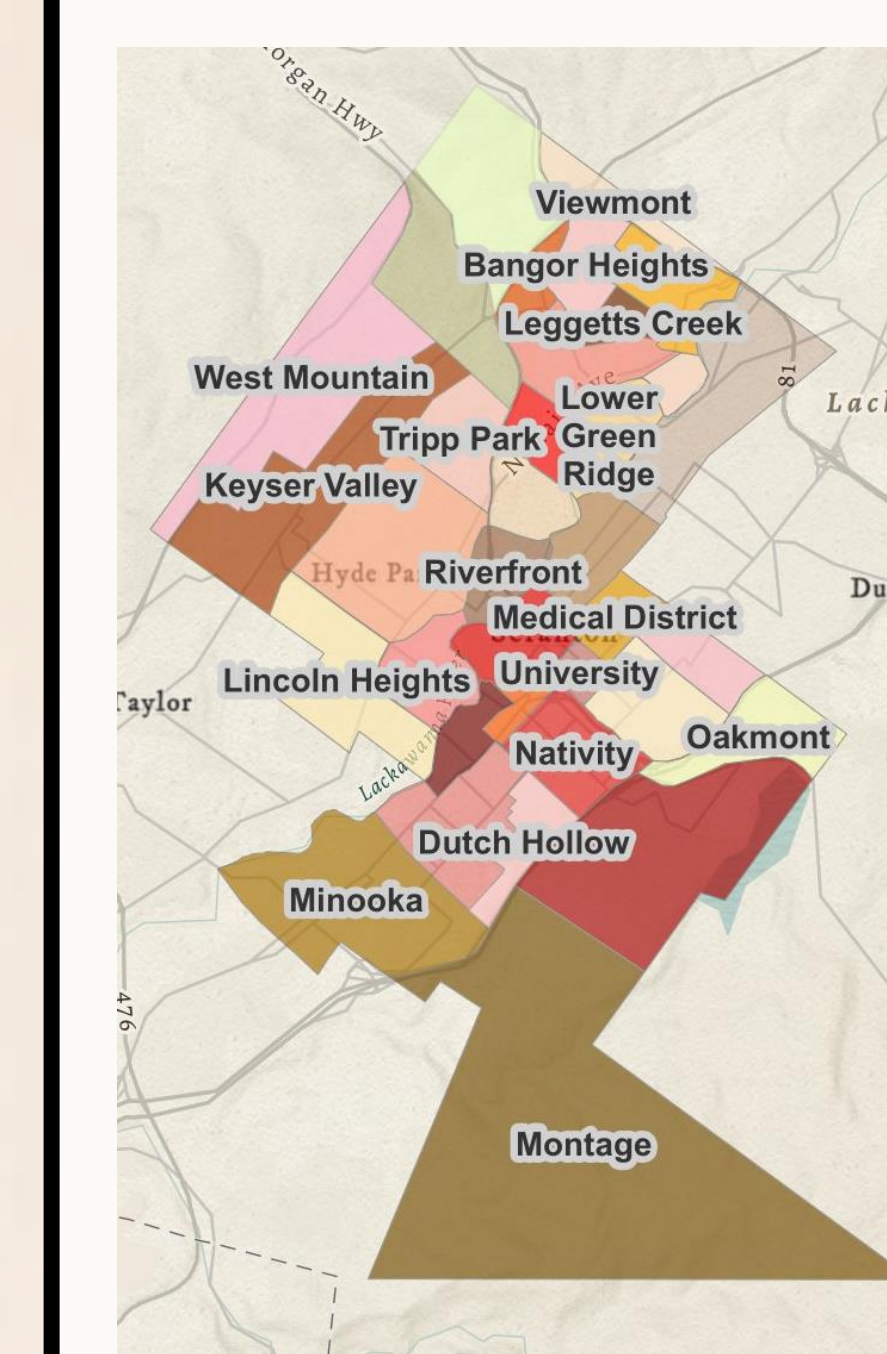
Scranton, 1857

The rapid industrial growth of the previous decade drew large numbers of European immigrants seeking labor. A growing population, as well as Scranton's 1856 incorporation, demanded urban development, producing Joel Amsden's original city plans for downtown's current boundaries unofficially set by the Lackawanna River, Olive St., and Jefferson Ave.



Modern day Scranton is virtually identical to that of Amsden's original plan, speaking to how directly industrialization impacted urbanization. The bulk of downtown was developed between 1850-1880, aligning with the height of the coal, iron, and rail industries. Little growth has occurred since as industry began to decline with the onset of the Great Depression and WWII. Although tourism to the area has increased, a large part of the downtown district remains as it did over a century ago, acting as a reminder of the role Scranton once played as an industrial giant.

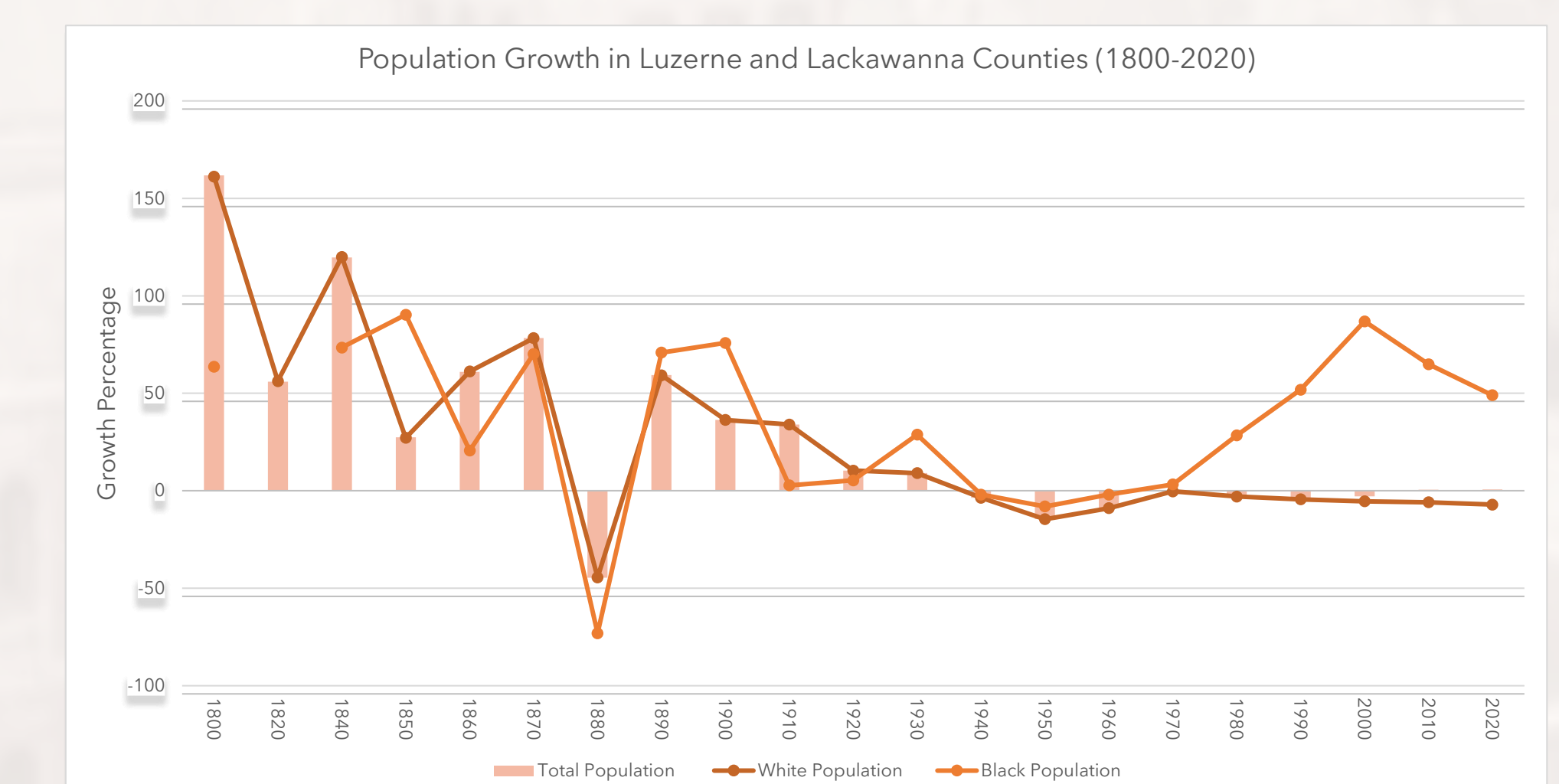
ETHNICITY



Ethnicity is crucial to Scranton's identity: its nineteenth century industrial success attracted European immigrants seeking new opportunity. Respective ethnic groups gravitated toward and lived near similar industries, producing neighborhoods with high concentrations of citizens with like origins.

AFRICAN AMERICANS

The scholarly work on the history of African Americans in Scranton is limited. It is generally agreed that a significant population wasn't established until the late nineteenth century in response to the Underground Railroad. The population saw another significant uptick in the second half of the twentieth century, as seen in the increase of black owned businesses from ten to seventeen between the 1940s and 2023.



A comparison of the total, white, and black population percent growth displays how African Americans were a severe minority while white Americans comprised an overwhelming majority of the population. The total population continues to increase until 1940. Although Scranton is past its industrial prime, the black population drastically increased following 1970 despite total population decreasing.

CONCLUSION

Scranton's rapid industrialization produced the majority of its downtown area between 1850-1880, partially contradicting the original hypothesis. Ethnic neighborhoods soon grew, with African American populations following significantly later, establishing Scranton as a case study for United States history.