

The South Side Postcard

Rock Springs Park and the Geography of Early Chester West Virginia



The Springs, Rock Spring Park, Chester, W. Va. Rotograph Co., copyright 1905; mailed November 9, 1906. Douglas R. Lyon collection.

The handwritten clue

“This is East Liverpool’s park it is on the South Side.” The sentence places a named Chester attraction inside a larger, relational landscape: the West Virginia shore opposite East Liverpool.

PREPARED ON BEHALF OF

Douglas R. Lyon

RESEARCH AND INTERPRETATION

T. P. Calhoun • September 2026

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PRIMARY SOURCE READING

What the postcard establishes

The card is unusually valuable because three kinds of evidence agree: the printed place-name, the dated postal artifact, and an informal geographic description written by a contemporary sender. Together they document how people could speak of Chester and “the South Side” at the same time.



Front and back of the same postcard. The undivided address side is consistent with United States postal practice before March 1907. Images courtesy of Douglas R. Lyon.

Document transcription

Printed caption	G 4554. The Springs, Rock Spring Park, Chester, W. Va.
Handwritten note	This is East Liverpool's park it is on the South Side.
Postmark	East Liverpool, Ohio • November 9, 1906 • 11:30 p.m.
Address	Miss Vida V. [surname uncertain], Chester Co., Berwyn, Pa.

Finding

The postcard is direct evidence of vernacular usage in 1906. It is not, standing alone, proof that “South Side” was an incorporated name or that Chester had not yet acquired its name. The printed caption already says Chester.

The address-only back is more than a design detail. Smithsonian’s history of postcards identifies 1901–1907 as the “Post Card” or undivided-back period: messages remained prohibited on the address side until the divided-back change of 1907.¹

NAME AND USAGE

A place could carry more than one name

Local speech did not need to choose between Chester and the South Side. One was the settlement's place-name; the other oriented the river landscape from East Liverpool. Corporate and subdivision names then preserved that phrase in formal records.

Date	Evidence	What it supports
1899	Chester Rolling Mill Company plan labels "Chester W.Va." and shows Rock Springs Park.	Chester was already a mapped name before this postcard.
1906	Postcard caption says Chester; sender says the park is "on the South Side."	The two terms coexisted rather than replacing one another.
1921	Polk directory lists streets in the "S S Land Co addition" and the South Side Water Works Co.	South Side survived in corporate and development geography.
Later use	"Upper End" remained a neighborhood name in Chester.	Relational neighborhood language can persist after incorporation.

How the phrase worked

- **Relational geography.** From East Liverpool, the opposite bank was literally the south side of the Ohio River corridor.
- **Development identity.** The South Side Land Company and South Side Water Works gave the phrase institutional durability.
- **Everyday shorthand.** The writer explains an unfamiliar West Virginia attraction through the better-known East Liverpool: "East Liverpool's park."
- **Not a settled origin story.** Later accounts disagree about who named Chester and why. Those traditions must be reported as competing claims, not combined into a single certainty.

Best reading

"South Side" was a vernacular geographic identity that overlapped with Chester and later remained visible in company and subdivision names. Douglas Lyon's postcard is strong written evidence of that lived usage.

LANDSCAPE RECONSTRUCTION

Marks Run at the eastern edge



Reading the map

- Rock Springs Park occupies the eastern side of the early town plan.
- The Gardner property lies west of the developed area.
- The plan faces the Ohio River and East Liverpool, reinforcing the cross-river frame behind “South Side.”
- The Marks tract lay east of the park; the spring-fed creek later known as Marks Run occupied that eastern corridor.

Chester Rolling Mill Company plan, 1899. Reproduced by LaurelHollowPark.net; original credited there to Kenneth Louk / *Memories of Hancock and Brooke Counties*.²

Marks and Gardner

Local historical work places the Marks farm east of Rock Springs and the Gardner farm to the west, with a dirt road joining them. It also identifies the park's spring and creek with the stream later called Marks Run.³ This resolves the directional puzzle: the Marks property and Marks Run belong with the park's eastern or upstream side, the territory later remembered as Chester's Upper End—not beyond Chester in some unrelated district.

Local memory

T. P. Calhoun recalls bicycling and walking old Route 30 along Marks Run as a child, and once walking in the streambed. That memory is not documentary proof, but it preserves the experienced shape of the narrow creek-and-road corridor on Chester's eastern edge.

ASSESSMENT AND SOURCES

What we know and what remains open

Confidence	Conclusion
High	The card was mailed from East Liverpool on November 9, 1906; its printed caption names Chester and its handwritten note calls the location “the South Side.”
High	South Side continued in formal names including South Side Land Company, South Side Water Works, and the S S Land Co. addition.
Moderate	The phrase was principally relational—East Liverpool’s name for the developed West Virginia shore—and then became a development identity.
Open question	Whether South Side ever functioned as a formal pre-Chester settlement name requires an earlier deed, plat, directory, newspaper, or postal record using it that way.
Open question	Published traditions disagree on who named Chester: William Pusey, J. E. McDonald, or C. A. Smith in honor of Chester Mahan. ⁴

Recommended next searches

Search pre-1896 Hancock County deeds and plats for the Marks and Gardner tracts; East Liverpool newspapers for “South Side,” “Rock Springs,” and “Chester”; South Side Land Company incorporation papers; and bridge or street-railway records. The decisive discovery would be an item that uses South Side as the settlement’s address rather than simply as a direction or company name.

Sources and live links

1. **Smithsonian Institution Archives, Postcard History.** Explains the 1901–1907 undivided-back period and the March 1907 change. [Open source](#)
2. **Chester Rolling Mill Company plan, 1899.** Map and descriptive text reproduced by LaurelHollowPark.net. [Open source](#)
3. **Old Stone House Part 1.** Local-history account of the Marks and Gardner farms, Rock Springs, and Marks Run. [Open source](#)
4. **Who Named Chester and When Was It.** Summary of the competing Cashdollar, WPA-guide, McDonald, and Smith/Mahan traditions. [Open source](#)
5. **South Side Land Company.** Local-history compilation with excerpts from Roy Cashdollar on the land company and water works. [Open source](#)
6. **Polk East Liverpool City Directory 1921.** Searchable primary directory; see street guide and South Side Water Works entries. [Open source](#)
7. **A History of Chester The Gateway to the West.** Catalog record for Roy C. Cashdollar’s 266-page local history, Closson Press reprint, 2000. [Open source](#)

Research note: Online local-history compilations are used here as finding aids and attributed secondary sources. Their claims should be checked against original deeds, corporate records, newspapers, and municipal minutes wherever possible.