About Ontario

Ontario, California was founded in September 1882 by brothers George and William B. Chaffey, and named after their hometown, Ontario, Canada. The brothers purchased the “San Antonio lands,” which consisted of 6,218 acres with water rights and set aside 640 acres for the Community of Ontario. Half of the initial 640 acres was deeded to the Chaffey Agricultural College as an endowment.

The Chaffey’s established four principles for the colony that had social and economic implications including: a mutual water company concept, a prohibition of intoxicating liquors, a grand thoroughfare through the City, and an agricultural college for general education. On December 10, 1891, Ontario was incorporated as a city under the California Constitution with a City Council-City Manager form of government.

In 1903, Ontario was proclaimed a “Model Irrigation Colony” by an Act of Congress. The Ontario planned community had many modern innovations, many of which still show merit today. An impressive two-hundred feet wide and eight miles long, Euclid Avenue (on the National Register List of Historic Places) was the stately back bone of the colony. Provisions for an electric railway, water rights for each landowner, a local educational institution, electric lights, one of the first long distance telephone lines, and access to water and transportation set a new standard for rural communities and irrigation practices and ensured the success of the Model Colony.

Ontario first developed as an agricultural community, largely, but not exclusively, devoted to the citrus industry. The Sunkist water tower, a reminder of the heydays, remains to this day. In addition to oranges, the production of peaches, walnuts, lemons, olives and grapes were also important to the growth of Ontario and the neighboring city of Upland.

In 1887, Ontario’s unique “gravity mule car” made its first run up Euclid Avenue on a narrow gauge rail system. The uphill trip took 90 minutes, but the downhill ride was only 30 minutes. A special pull-out trailer allowed the mules to ride as passengers. The mule car served Ontario until 1895, when it was replaced by an electric streetcar. After the mules were retired, they became property of a nearby rancher and, as legend has it, the mules pulled the plough uphill, but because of their training, refused to work downhill.

In 1892 and 1893, Ontario was the site of the California Mid-Winter Fair. It was a cooperative effort of the City of Ontario, the Chaffey Agricultural College, and the National Park Service (NPS). The City partnered among local governments, the State of California, and the National Park Service (NPS). The City of Ontario, Planning Department.

In 1923, airplane enthusiasts Waldo Waterman and Archie Mitchell established Latimer Field. From that point on, Ontario became an aviation town. Urban growth pushed the fliers east until they took up their permanent residence located at the Ontario World Airport. During WWII, this airport was a busy training facility for pilots.

Since WWII, Ontario has become a diversified community. There are approximately 173,000 residents. Although the City boundaries have been extended from 0.38 square miles in 1891 to almost 50 square miles today, Ontario’s Historic Downtown still retains the original irrigation system and land subdivision pattern established by the Chaffey brothers. The Euclid Avenue corridor continues to remain the stately backbone of the city that it once was.

Other Historical Points of Interest

The Fallis House, 122 S. Vine Ave.—Built around 1892 in the Queen Anne style, William Barton Fallis bought this house in 1906. The same year Mr. Fallis and his brother, Fred G. Fallis, opened the Fallis Brothers’ Department Store. The building had been converted into apartments and, more recently, has been rehabilitated and adaptively reused as offices.

Graber Olive House, 315 E. Fourth St.—The C.C. Graber Co. is Ontario’s oldest continuously operating business, dating back to 1894. Graber came to Ontario in 1892 and bought one of Chaffey’s ten-acre plots with his brother Charles. Mr. Graber ran the olive canning business and Mrs. Graber typed labels and handled mail order sales.

Chaffey High School, 1245 N. Euclid Ave.—The original Chaffey College building was converted to Chaffey High School. Chaffey College, established in 1885, as an affiliate for USC. The original buildings were replaced in the 1930’s as part of the Federal Works Progress Administration.

Logan’s Candy, 125 W. 8 St.—Logan’s Candy has been making handcrafted candy in Ontario since 1933. Located in Historic Downtown Ontario, Logan’s Candy is one of Ontario’s oldest businesses.

Euclid Avenue Nativity Scene, North Euclid Avenue Median—Created by world-renowned East Los Angeles artist Rudolph Vargas, the first two Nativity Scenes were first displayed on Euclid Avenue in 1959. The Euclid Avenue Nativity Scenes are displayed along the Euclid Avenue median during the holiday season.
Ontario Power Co. - 225 S. Lemon Ave. - The Ontario Power Co., est. in 1895, built this building in 1920 for their office and power house. Later, Edison used the building. During the 1950s, the building was relocated to be the "overflow" site. It is currently home to the Chaffey Community Museum of Art. Local Landmark No. 36 (1998)

G.E. Hotpoint Clubhouse - 225 E. Main St. - An effort to promote good fellowship amongst the employees, the G.E. Hotpoint Club was created in 1913. By 1917, the Clubhouse was built by its members and furnished by the company. Dinners, banquets, special events and appliance demonstrations were held here.

G.E. Hotpoint - 300-400 E. Main St. - In 1904, Earl Richardson developed the Hotpoint iron. This was the first iron that could heat to the tip, which was most practical for pressing ruffles and pleats. In 1917, the Edison Electric Appliance Co. merged with the Hotpoint Electric Heating Company.

Ontario City Hall - 225 S. Euclid Ave. - Built in 1927 with WPA funds, this Mediterranean style building served as City Hall until 1979. The Council Chamber remains intact with wooden auditorium seats. It is currently home to the Museum of History and Art, Ontario. Local Landmark No. 2 (1993)

Frankish Fountain - 225 S. Euclid Ave. - Built in 1886 as a symbol of prosperity, the Frankish Fountain was originally on the Euclid Avenue median. The Chaffey Brothers would turn the fountain on as nearby trains passed to show potential buyers Ontario’s adequate water supply. Local Landmark No. 3 (1993)

Citizens National Bank - 1/4 N. Euclid Ave. - This Art Deco building, built in 1939, replaced the Walker Building which had been built in 1914, and was used as a skating rink. The floor of the skating rink was incorporated into this building. Designed by architects Mitcham and Hernish. Local Landmark No. 16 (1998)

Lerch Building - 225 N. Euclid Ave. - Built in 1913 as a hotel by Jacob Lerch, the Lerch Building later became known as the "Park Theater" and then "Euclid Theater" until 1926. Lerch was located on the Euclid Avenue median, just south of Holt Blvd, at Empire Street.

Commercial Hotel - 126-132 N. Euclid Ave. - The 50 room hotel with first floor retail was constructed in 1910 by local partners D. Howard Allen. One year later, the property was sold to Mrs. Gribbin who operated a millinery (hat) shop from the second floor. Local Landmark No. 19 (1998)

Mule Car - 100 Block N. Euclid Ave. - Ontario’s twenty mule car was constructed in 1887 and ran along the Euclid Avenue median. The mules would pull the car up to the top of Euclid Avenue, then climb aboard a special platform built on the back of the car for the ride back down. By 1895, the system was electrified.

Bank of Italy - 200 N. Euclid Ave. - The Bank of Italy moved the way for modern branch banking, eventually becoming Bank of America. Secondo Gasti, Sr. and Jr. served on the Board of Directors during the 1920s. Local Landmark No. 86 (2010)

Ontario Power Co. - 227 S. Lemon Ave. - The Ontario Power Co., est. in 1895, built this building in 1907 for their office and power house. Later, Edison used the building. During the 1950s, the building was relocated to be the "overflow" site. It is currently home to the Chaffey Community Museum of Art. Local Landmark No. 36 (1998)

Burnstead Bicycles - 109 E. St. - In 1909, Lloyd Garrison Burnstead purchased the Caldwell Bicycle shop and moved it to "Burnstead Bicycles." In 1912, Burnstead Bicycles relocated to this building and is still being operated in Ontario by the Burnstead family. Local Landmark No. 87 (2010)

Ontario Town Square and History Mural - 224 N. Euclid Ave. - In 2001, the City completed construction of the "Ontario Through the Years" history mural in the new Ontario Town Square. The mural highlights people, events and places significant to Ontario’s history.

Euclid Ave. Median - Euclid Avenue was originally laid out by the Chaffey brothers as one of the main features of the Model Irrigation Colony. Euclid Avenue is a state scenic highway. Local Landmark No. 67 (2001) & National Register of Historic Places (2005)

WCTU Fountain - 300 Block N. Euclid Ave. - The Women’s Christian Temperance Union constructed the fountain in 1908. It was originally located on the corner directly in front of the Citizens Bank so that everyone could enjoy a fresh, drink of water. This fountain was moved in 1916 to the John Gables Park and moved to its present location on Euclid Avenue in 1973.

Bandstand - 300 Block N. Euclid Ave. - The first Bandstand was built on Euclid Avenue in 1892, beginning a tradition of being rebuilt and moved often. The bandstand was once located on the Euclid Avenue median, just south of Holt Blvd, at Empire Street.

Ontario Fire Dept. - 210 N. Euclid Ave. - A fire hall building was constructed of concrete block in 1911, at this site. A new 6-cylinder Mitchell fire truck was purchased and provided by local auto dealer F. A. C. Drew. Originally, the fire hall employed two full-time employees, one to work during the day and the other to work at night. The fire station has since been demolished.

Ontario Laundry Co. (Blue Seal) - 401 N. Euclid Ave. - In 1912, the Ontario Laundry Co. Modern Art Deco style building was built in the early 1940s, but the site has been used as a laundry since 1976. The circular tower element was originally a washing machine. Local Landmark No. 6 (1995)

Granada Theater - 303 N. Euclid Ave. - The 954 seat Granada Theater was built in 1926 and was the second Fox Theater built on the West Coast. In addition to operating the theater, the theater employees, one to work during the day and the other to work at night. The theater has since been demolished.

People’s Mutual - 231 N. Euclid Ave. - Constructed in 1904, this building served as the People’s Mutual Building. The style represents an eclectic mix of Spanish, Moorish, and Mauresque columns. Local Landmark No. 22 (1998)

Masonic Hall - 231 & 233 N. Euclid Ave. - This two-story brick commercial building was constructed in 1904. Originally, the second floor served the Ontario Lodge No. 201 and the Masons of America, a social organization. The ground floor. The building represents Ontario’s early commercial enterprises. Local Landmark No. 21 (1998)

Ostran’s Dept. - 203 N. Euclid Ave. - For over sixty years, the Ostran’s Department Store served Ontario and efficiently operated this building. Local Landmark No. 20 (1998)

Gemmill’s Pharmacy - 137-143 N. Euclid Ave. - Gemmill’s Pharmacy was established by John Henry Gemmill on 30th April, 1894. The two-story brick building was constructed in 1888. It had an upstairs public meeting hall and was originally occupied by Smith’s Brothers Furniture. The contractor was John Gerry. He was responsible for several buildings throughout Ontario and Upland.

Rose Block - 107-111 N. Euclid Ave. - Dr. Henry J. Rose, George Chaffey’s brother-in-law, came to Ontario in 1895 from Toronto. The northern portion of the site was used by Mr. Rose for his pharmacy and hardware store. Local Landmark No. 15 (1998)

Citizens Bank Block - 101 N. Euclid Ave. - This building was originally designed and constructed with a tower that gave the building a sense of dignity and importance. The building was altered in 1948 and again in the 1990s. Local Landmark No. 13 (1998)

US Post Office – 223 W. Holt Blvd - Designed by architects Louis A. Simon, the Post Office is one of only a few buildings in Ontario constructed by the WPA. Murals done by Mural Best depicting the growth of the Model Colony still remain inside the building. Local Landmark No. 39 (1998)

First National Bank - 100 S. Euclid Ave. - This 1920 building is one of the best examples of Art Deco architecture in the City. The bank occupied the site from 1903 until 1965. Local Landmark No. 10 (1998)

McCann Block - 108 S. Euclid Ave. - In 1917, Lewis J. McCann hired the Campbell Construction Company to build this 2-story reinforced concrete building which housed his hardware store. Local Landmark No. 1 (1998)

Emory Hotel - 110 & 112 S. Euclid Ave. - The first floor was built by the Frankish Company in 1920. The second and third floors were built in 1921, and were used as the 50 room Emory Hotel “in the most modern style.” Local Landmark No. 11 (1998)

Old Post Office - 125 W. Transit St. - This Italian Renaissance Revival style building has a red tile roof and rounded arches. It was designed by famed Los Angeles architect Paul Williams and built by Charles Latimer in 1926. Local Landmark No. 38 (1998)

Frankish Building - 200 S. Euclid Ave. - Built in 1916, this Italianate style building was built by Charles Frankish, founder of Frankish’s Land and Improvement Company. Local Landmark No. 12 (1998) and National Register of Historic Places

Salvation Army Building - 101 S. Euclid Ave. - This Art Deco building was built in 1931 for the Salvation Army. During the “Great Depression,” the Salvation Army relocated to these new quarters to provide services to those in need.

Salvation Army Building - 124 S. Euclid Ave. - The Salvation Army’s new Art Deco building was built in 1931 for the Salvation Army. During the “Great Depression,” the Salvation Army relocated to these new quarters to provide services to those in need.