



CITY OF MONTCLAIR HISTORIC CONTEXT REPORT

1. Introduction

Purpose and Scope

Architectural Resources Group (ARG) has prepared the following Historic Context Report to enumerate the historic, urban, and cultural character of Montclair, California. The report comprises a narrative history of the community between the pre-contact period and the present day, and is organized within the framework of broad temporal themes that have played a hand in shaping Montclair's physical and social fabric. It is prefaced by a brief description of the community in its present state, and is followed by a set of policy recommendations relating to the enhancement and recognition of community character.

The prevailing goal of this Historic Context Report is to help inform the development of the Montclair General Plan Update that is currently in progress, and particularly the "Our Creative Community" section of the document. The report is intended to call attention to themes and characteristics that identify and distinguish the community, and are manifest in its built environment and social and cultural fabric.

Research Methods

A team of ARG architectural historians conducted a windshield survey of Montclair in September 2018, with the goal of understanding the community's physical fabric and ascertaining its distinguishing characteristics. The project team documented existing conditions with digital photographs and written notes. Supplemental research about the community and its history was gleaned from the collections of the Montclair Branch of the San Bernardino County Public Library and the Los Angeles Public Library; books and published materials relating to the history and development of Montclair and adjacent communities in the Inland Empire; the archives of the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and other periodicals; ARG's in-house library of architectural reference materials; and other primary and secondary source materials that were deemed valuable to the study of the community and its history.

This report was prepared by Andrew Goodrich, AICP, Associate, Architectural Historian and Preservation Planner, and Lakan Cole, Architectural Historian and Preservation Planner, with oversight by Katie E. Horak, Principal. Ms. Horak, Mr. Goodrich, and Ms. Cole meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards* in Architectural History.



2. Description of the Community

The City of Montclair, California is located in the greater Pomona Valley and is one of many suburban communities comprising the Inland Empire region of Southern California. Incorporated in 1956, it is moderate in size and occupies a trapezoidal shaped area between the adjacent cities of Pomona (west), Ontario (east), Claremont and Upland (north), and Chino (south). The city is located near the base of the San Gabriel Mountains and is notable for its dramatic mountain views. The city is bisected by the San Bernardino Freeway (Interstate 10). The freeway traverses Montclair and serves as an important regional circulation corridor, providing access between the city and other areas in Southern California.

Montclair is generally oriented around an orthogonal grid, wherein most major arterials conform to north-south/east-west axes. Most of the streets that are located in the blocks between these arterials are also oriented toward the cardinal directions but are more residential in character. Major north-south streets are (from west to east) Mills Avenue, Ramona Avenue, Monte Vista Avenue, Central Avenue, and Benson Avenue. Major east-west streets are (from north to south) Arrow Highway, Moreno Street, San Bernardino Street, Orchard Street, Holt Boulevard, and Mission Boulevard. The western and eastern city limits are delineated by Mills and Benson avenues, respectively; the northern city limit charts a diagonal course and is delineated by a former railroad right-of-way north of Richton Street; and the southern city limit is irregular in shape but extends as far south as Phillips Boulevard.

A majority of Montclair is zoned for single-family residential use. Residential subdivisions comprising modest, one-story single-family tract houses represent the most common type of development in the city. Almost all of these subdivisions appear to date to the post-World War II period and are associated with the rapid suburbanization that transformed Southern California into a regional metropolis during this time. Most appear to have been built for middle-class homebuyers, and represent very modest interpretations of the Ranch and Mid-Century Modern architectural styles that were immensely popular at this time. These houses are demonstrative of how developers were able to adapt and pare down popular trends in architecture as to appeal to the average, middle-income consumer. Over time, many of these houses have been remodeled and/or updated to account for the evolution of building materials and aesthetics, though even these remodeled houses continue to read as products of the postwar era.

Commercial development is generally confined to the city's foremost vehicular corridors, and demonstrates the profound and indelible impact that the car had on shaping the urban fabric in the post-World War II period. Holt Boulevard and Mission Boulevard - both of which were major highways prior to the construction of Interstate 10 in the 1950s - are replete with strip malls, gasoline and service stations, fast food establishments, and other commercial ventures that are oriented toward passing motorists. Strung along these corridors are vestiges of postwar automobile culture including a Googie style bowling alley at 4666 Holt Boulevard (Bowlum) and a drive-in theatre at the intersection of Mission Boulevard and Ramona Avenue (Mission Tiki Drive-In). Small shopping centers and other neighborhood-oriented commercial uses are strung along the north-south artery of Central Avenue.



The north section of Montclair, adjacent to the Interstate 10 corridor, serves as an important regional commercial and entertainment center. This area of the city is home to the Montclair Plaza (recently re-branded as Montclair Place), a large indoor shopping mall that opened in 1968. Areas around the mall are developed with large retail chains, restaurants, and other commercial uses that not only serve the residents of Montclair, but serve those residing elsewhere in the Pomona Valley/Inland Empire.

Consistent with land use patterns in a postwar suburban community, institutional uses are interspersed across the community as to serve the day-to-day needs of Montclair residents. Schools and churches constitute the most common types of institutional development, and are generally located along major arterials that frame and transect the city's residential neighborhoods. Several small neighborhood parks adhere to a similar pattern of development. A civic center complex comprising a city hall, public library branch, police station, post office, and recreational facilities is located at the southwest corner of Benito Street and Fremont Avenue, near the geographical center of the community. The low-slung civic center complex dates to the city's formative period of development in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The northwest corner of the city, to the east of the Montclair Plaza/Montclair Place, contains a small concentration of office parks and light industrial buildings. The northernmost section of the city is also home to a regional transit center comprising a bus terminal and a Metrolink commuter train station. The transit center, like the Montclair Plaza/Montclair Place, is an important regional asset that serves not only the constituents of Montclair but also caters to the residents of nearby communities. Access to the Southern California region's increasingly robust network of heavy rail, light rail, buses, and other modes of public transit network also represents an important opportunity with respect to future development.

Though the identity of Montclair is inextricably linked to postwar suburbanization, some of its most distinguishing characteristics and valuable assets pertain to the natural environment. Sited at the base of the San Gabriel Mountains, the city's low-scale development and unobstructed north-south corridors mean that it boasts some of the most dramatic and unrivaled mountain views in the Inland Empire region. The various parts of the community are also linked by the San Antonio Creek, a watershed that is largely channelized but is nonetheless an important natural asset. The creek channel also provides dramatic views of the mountains, and in places it is peppered with various species of mature trees and other types of vegetation that have become familiar and established visual elements of the community.



3. Development History

Early History

The earliest inhabitants of Montclair were the indigenous Serrano people. Derived from the Spanish word for “mountaineer,” the name Serrano was given by early Spanish settlers to describe the Native Americans living in the foothills of the San Gabriel and Bernardino Mountains, through the San Bernardino Valley and north into the Mojave Desert.¹ Within Serrano territory, independent villages were constructed of round-plan, thatched-roof structures near stable water sources, and occupants lived relatively sedentary, subsistence-based lifestyles. The Montclair-area Serrano lived along the banks of the “Arroyo de los Alisos,” or “Stream of the Sycamores,” as it was named by early Spanish explorer Lieutenant Colonel Juan Bautista de Anza during his legendary expedition through the pre-colonial lands of Alta California in 1774.² The creek approximated the route of present-day Mills Avenue.

The establishment of the Mission San Gabriel Arcángel in 1781 marked the beginning of the Spanish occupation of the San Bernardino region. Mission San Gabriel was the fourth of California’s Franciscan missions. The mission system was intended to convert the indigenous people to Catholicism and to assert Spain’s economic and military influence in California. Mission San Gabriel was one of the most profitable in California due to its establishment of outposts and agricultural holdings far beyond its physical base, on which to grow crops and raise cattle. Its land holdings stretched through the San Bernardino Valley as far as present-day Redlands. The Montclair area served as grazing land through the mid-nineteenth century, and its natural streambed also rendered the area useful as a watering hole.

The early success of the Missions rested in the practice of coercing Native Americans to convert to Christianity, train in agricultural and ranching techniques, and provide free labor.³ Many of the Serrano people were integrated into the San Gabriel Mission via the San Bernardino rancho, an outpost that was located in the Redlands area.⁴ Some lived in *rancherías*, or bunkhouses, near the rancho, and worked as farmers or craftsmen on site. Others worked in the valley, grazing the cattle herds. Unfortunately, this integration had devastating effects on the Native American population. Traditional villages and lifestyles were abandoned, and over the course of the Spanish colonial period most of the Serrano converts (known as *neophytes*) were killed by European diseases for which they had no immunity. Those

¹ Cary Cotterman and Roger D. Mason, “Cultural Resources Survey Report for the Heritage Park Project, Redlands, San Bernardino County, California,” prepared by ECORP Consulting, Inc. for the City of Redlands, 2012, 6.

² City of Montclair, *Images of America: Montclair* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 8.

³ Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Layton, UT: Gibbs-Smith, 1946), 32.

⁴ California Missions Resource Center, “Native Americans of San Gabriel Arcángel,” accessed Sept. 2018.



who refused to give up their traditional way of life left the area for more inland regions.⁵

The Spanish period formally came to a close in 1822, when Mexico gained independence from Spain and subsequently secularized the missions. However, the missions and their land continued to serve as important points along the map of early exploration, trade, and settlement. After Mexico won its independence from Spain, what were historically used as mission trails were incorporated into the Old Spanish Trail. The Old Spanish Trail stretched from New Mexico to Los Angeles and was used “for trade, emigration, and the transportation of mules, horses and Native American slaves.”⁶ Later, in 1827, Jedidiah Smith, the first American to cross into California from the east, camped at Mission San Gabriel; and his route through the greater Montclair area paved the first American trail into California.⁷

Late Nineteenth Century Development and the Rise of Agriculture

In 1850, California became the 31st state in the American Union. San Bernardino County formed a few years later, in 1853. Early on, American development branched out from previously established Spanish and Mexican nodes. However, expansion of the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad through the San Bernardino Valley in the 1880s opened the lesser developed lands, such as the Montclair area, to new settlers and speculative real estate ventures.

The first development attempt in the area came at the hands of Edward Fraser, a lumber merchant from Marquette, Michigan. An 1887 *Los Angeles Times* article proclaimed that Fraser was the founder of a new township named Marquette, where he was clearing the land and investing heavily in various improvements. The article states that “hotel, stores, livery stable, fountains and sidewalk already there; magnificent view, abundant supply of pure water piped through the streets.”⁸ The town was located 300 feet north of Ontario, with a 2,640 feet frontage along the Santa Fe Railroad (present-day northeast Montclair).⁹ To lure buyers from Los Angeles, Fraser arranged for \$1.50 weekend excursions that included fare on the Santa Fe Railroad, lunch, and a property auction in the new town. Fraser also placed hyperbolic advertisements in local newspapers in an attempt to promote Marquette. One such ad read:

Forty miles out from Los Angeles, lying between two lines of transcontinental

⁵ McWilliams (1946), 32.

⁶ City of Montclair (2005), 6.

⁷ Jedidiah Smith Society, “Map: 1826-27-28 California Expeditions,” accessed Sept. 2018.

⁸ “Town of Marquette,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jun. 1887.

⁹ “Excursion and Auction June 14th. Marquette!!” *Los Angeles Times*, Jun. 1887.



railway—the Southern, and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe—is to be found the new town of Marquette...it is situated in the middle of the finest fruit-growing and agricultural valley in the world. That this immense acreage is being cut up into small tracts, and will soon be one immense field of gardens, rich in grape, orange, lime, walnut, lemon and other fruits. The rare condition and combination of soil and climate, air, sun and water, make the very best and (q)uickest returns possible.¹⁰

Despite these efforts, Marquette does not appear to have been a successful venture, and like so many of the new communities that were founded amid the railroad boom of the 1880s it fizzled out quickly. By 1888, newspaper advertisements indicated that improvements within the paper town of Marquette were being sold for \$100 each.¹¹ There do not appear to be any tangible remnants of Marquette today.

Some three miles south of Marquette was another early development called Narod, so named for a nearby stop along the Southern Pacific Railroad line. The Southern Pacific was a major competitor to the Santa Fe line that had facilitated Marquette. Narod was a nascent community that consisted of little more than a market, a hotel, a packinghouse, and a small church known as the Little White Church of Narod.¹² The market was reputed for fresh produce that attracted shoppers from nearby cities of Pomona and Ontario. The packinghouse was the center of the area's burgeoning citrus industry. The Ontario Fruit Exchange, also known as the Western Ontario Citrus Association, used the packinghouse as its primary industrial facility. While nothing appears to remain of this early town, the founding of Narod was nonetheless instrumental in setting down roots in this peripheral zone of Southern California.

Though early efforts at establishing towns were largely futile, the presence of the railroads rendered this area of Southern California valuable for agricultural purposes. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, large swaths of land in the area were used to cultivate citrus and other cash crops for export.

One of the earliest agricultural developments in the area was the Reeder Citrus Ranch. The Reeder Ranch property, located at 4405 Holt Boulevard, was purchased in 1900 by John C.

Reeder.¹³ At this time, the property consisted of five acres and was undeveloped except for a barn. The existing house was moved to the site in 1903, and the planting of citrus groves soon followed. By 1905, the groves around the house were planted with citrus trees, particularly

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "Cheap Homes on the Installment Plan! Marquette!" *Los Angeles Herald*, Feb. 1888.

¹² Mark Gutglueck, "From Narod to Monte Vista to Montclair," *San Bernardino County Sentinel*, Jan. 2015.

¹³ The Reeder Heritage Foundation, "Montclair History," accessed Sept. 2018.



Washington navel oranges. As citriculture became increasingly lucrative, the Reeder Ranch property expanded to include more than fifty acres.¹⁴

Evidence of the rich soil and productivity in bearing fruitful trees at ranches like the Reeder's caught the attention of Emil Firth, an experienced Los Angeles land developer. In 1907, Firth reportedly paid \$250,000 for a 1,000-acre tract of land between Holt and Philips boulevards and the incorporated cities of Pomona and Ontario, which he named "Monte Vista."¹⁵ The Monte Vista tract was platted in 5-, 10-, 20- and 40-acre parcels. Firth offered special financing terms to entice buyers to take up "the free, healthy, and independent suburban life," by planting citrus orchards and constructing their homes.¹⁶ A 1907 article in the *Los Angeles Herald* illustrated the potential of the Monte Vista tract with vivid photographs depicting the full-grown citrus orchards and oiled roads already existing. Advertisements depicted the packinghouse in nearby Narod and stately houses that were being constructed along Holt Boulevard, and painted Monte Vista as a community that was most certainly worthy of investment.

Buyers were attracted to Monte Vista shortly after the tract opened. In 1910, Emil Firth reported the sale of twenty-six lots in the originally platted Monte Vista tract, in addition to 36.5 acres beyond that, to seven different families.¹⁷ Most of these early houses were designed in the Craftsman style with low-pitched roofs, wide bracketed eaves, and porches with supported by squared columns. The homes were sited at least a half mile apart and were typically accompanied by surrounding citrus groves. The house of Mr. and Mrs. George Pantazin, located at 11096 Central Avenue, was constructed ca. 1911 as the anchor of an avocado ranch. It is one of the earliest extant buildings in the Monte Vista tract.¹⁸ A handful of other modest residences that were historically associated with larger agricultural plots can also be found along many of the major thoroughfares in present-day Montclair, and are vestiges of the community's agricultural roots and inextricable association with the proliferation of the citrus industry.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, citriculture had grown into a booming local industry. The area's temperate climate, rich alluvial soil, and access to major railroad lines rendered it well suited to the cultivation of citrus and other cash crops, and indeed

¹⁴ The ranch today encompasses an area of 1.25 acres, including the original Reeder house, barn, some ancillary structures, and remnants of the citrus grove.

¹⁵ "Big Pomona Acreage Deal," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 1907.

¹⁶ "Important Deals Show Confidence," *Los Angeles Herald*, Dec. 1907.

¹⁷ "Monte Vista Transfers," *Los Angeles Times*, Jul. 1910.

¹⁸ "Dies Shortly After End of Damage Suite," *San Bernardino County Sun*, Jul. 1934.



agriculture emerged as a linchpin of the local economy. Agriculture remained profitable through the following decades despite a few environmental hardships, including devastating freezes in 1913 and 1936, which wiped out crops; the San Antonio Wash Flood of 1938; and economic downturns during World War I and the Great Depression. All in all, “the citrus industry attracted more people to California than did the Gold Rush; between 1894 and 1946, the industry produced over \$2 billion in income for the people of Southern California.”¹⁹

Supporting the citrus industry was a diverse labor force. By the 1890s, there was already a sizable Chinese American settlement in North Ontario.²⁰ Many Chinese laborers arrived in California during the Gold Rush and later worked as laborers for the railroad and agricultural industries. The Chinese laborers were skilled in picking and packing and are credited with harvesting innovations, such as scissor clipping the fruit instead of pulling it from the tree, which improved the quality and quantity of the product for sale. However, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 led to extreme bias against employing Chinese laborers, and they were quickly replaced by new laborers of Japanese descent.²¹

A sizable immigrant labor force played a hand in the agricultural industry in and around Montclair. The 1910 federal census enumerates the presence of a Japanese labor camp near Reeder Ranch on Holt Boulevard.²² Subsequent census records indicate that there were also small Mexican, Filipino, and Sikh enclaves located nearby; specifically, the 1930 federal census notes the presence of a Filipino labor camp on Kingsley Street. However, there do not appear to be any tangible remnants of these enclaves in the present day.

Postwar Development and Suburbanization

Like many communities in Southern California, Monte Vista experienced an unprecedented wave of growth and development after World War II that transformed what had historically been an agricultural town into a sprawling postwar suburb. Rapid development in the postwar era is attributed to a variety of factors including an increased demand for new and affordable housing, particularly among military veterans who had recently returned from World War II; federal policies and programs that promoted homeownership and the mass construction of detached, single-family houses; proliferation of the car and the construction of a vast regional freeway network; and pent-up consumer demand.

¹⁹ The Reeder Heritage Foundation, “Montclair History,” accessed Sept. 2018.

²⁰ “Historic Context for the City of Ontario’s Citrus Industry,” prepared by GPA Consulting for the City of Ontario, Feb. 2007.

²¹ Ibid.

²² The Reeder Heritage Foundation, “Citrus History,” accessed Sept. 2018.



Cognizant of the fact that residential development was quickly becoming more lucrative than agriculture, many landowners in and around the Monte Vista tract began selling off their holdings to developers and other real estate interests, who cleared the acreage of citrus and avocado groves and subdivided the land into sprawling new residential tracts. “Citrus-bearing acreage in the southern counties of California decreased by 25 percent between 1949 and 1955 alone; by the end of the 1950s, citrus had all but disappeared from the Montclair landscape.”²³ The Reeder’s expansive citrus ranch on Holt Boulevard, for example, had been reduced to only a single acre of land by 1956.

Monte Vista’s suburban development was predicated on the construction of the San Bernardino Freeway/Interstate 10 in the 1950s, which was routed through the community. This stretch of Interstate 10 that passes through present-day Montclair opened in 1958. The highway enhanced Montclair’s connection to the region between downtown Los Angeles and the numerous cities of the San Bernardino Valley, and ushered in a wave of unprecedented suburban growth in the area and beyond.

Monte Vista remained unincorporated through the 1950s. During this time, many requests for new residential subdivisions within the Monte Vista tract were processed and approved by the San Bernardino County Planning Commission. In 1952, zoning hearings were held to change large swaths of land in the southern and central areas of the tract from agricultural to residential zoning. The southern tract was bounded by Howard Street, Phillips Boulevard, Monte Vista Avenue, and Pipeline Avenue, and the central tract was bounded by San Bernardino and Orchard streets.²⁴ This trend - wherein large swaths of agricultural land were re-zoned to accommodate residential use - continued in subsequent years.

Development within these new residential tracts consisted of modest single-family tract houses. These houses abided by the design principles set forth by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in the Community Builders Handbook so that developers could secure FHA financing.²⁵ Suburban tract designs were required to include curvilinear street patterns laid out in an arrangement of U-shaped loop-streets and cul-de-sacs, which discouraged non-resident and fast-paced through-traffic. Lots within the tracts were modest in size and included concrete sidewalks, curbs, driveways and uniform front yards as part of the public services and community realm. Houses on the lots were small, one-story edifices with attached garages and fenced yards. Architecturally, the houses were modest interpretations of the Ranch or Mid-Century Modern styles that were immensely popular choices for residential architecture at the time. Montclair’s residential landscape largely consists of these modest postwar neighborhoods.

²³ The Reeder Heritage Foundation, “Family History,” accessed Sept. 2018.

²⁴ “Monte Vista Area Zoning Hearing Set,” *The San Bernardino County Sun*, Aug. 1952.

²⁵ California Department of Transportation, “Tract Housing in California, 1945-1973: A Context for National Register Evaluation,” prepared 2011, 46-49.



As residential subdivisions in the area multiplied, commercial and institutional development followed suit. Many new schools, churches, and other public facilities were constructed to serve the day-to-day needs of those who were purchasing new houses within the litany of new residential subdivisions that were sprouting up. Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, located at 10191 Central Avenue and Orchard Street, was established in 1955. A butcher shop was located at 5326 San Bernardino Street, at the corner of San Bernardino and Central Avenue; and the B.B. Bliss Grocery Store (not extant) was located at the southwest corner of Central Avenue and State Street.²⁶ Businesses were concentrated along the east-west thoroughfares of Holt and Mission boulevards, which both served as major vehicular corridors prior to the construction of the San Bernardino Freeway/Interstate 10 in the late 1950s.

Incorporation and Cityhood

Amid this wave of rapid growth, the Monte Vista Improvement Association laid the groundwork for the incorporation of the Monte Vista Land Tract as an independent city. In an election held in April 1956, residents within the community voted in favor of approving a proposal to incorporate. The first official City Council meeting was held on May 8, 1956. Monte Vista moved quickly to build the new municipality. Within the first year of incorporation, “a master street lighting plan was drawn up, zoning ordinances were passed, provisions were made for the City’s streets to be swept, engineering data was gathered, and a City recreation program began.”²⁷ The early administrators also took up planning for a civic center complex and made requests to establish a post office branch within the newly-founded city.

Establishment of a post office branch proved problematic, however, as there was another community named Monte Vista in Northern California. This, in turn, created confusion for the United States Postal Service, and they refused to open another branch under the same name. This was resolved by a vote of approximately 1,600 residents in 1958 to change the name of the city to “Montclair.” The first U.S. Post Office branch in Montclair was opened in the new Mayfair Market at 9850 Central Avenue.

Plans to construct a new civic center for the City of Montclair were circulated in 1959. The site was planned at the center of town, at the corner of Benito Street and Fremont Avenue. At the time, this site was occupied by a sixteen-acre orange orchard, and the proceeds from harvesting the oranges helped finance the lease-purchase of the land and construction of the buildings. The Civic Center was dedicated in 1964. It is a multi-building complex that consists of a city hall, police department, branch library, and recreation center, all of which are designed in a Mid-Century Modern style. Its construction utilized a material known as slag, a

²⁶ City of Montclair (2005), 50.

²⁷ Ibid.



granulated steel furnace byproduct that was recycled and mixed with Portland cement to create a “fractured block” façade.²⁸ Typical of Mid-Century design, the cement masonry is painted in natural tones, the façade is interspersed with large rectangular and clerestory windows, and a cantilevered canopy caps the entrance. Some structures within the complex, including the library and recreation center, feature a folded plate roof that was a common feature of Modern architecture.

Additional institutional growth was initiated in the area around the Civic Center. A new Post Office branch was constructed as a companion building to the Civic Center. Located on the north side of Benito Street, it has a compatible concrete block façade that unifies it aesthetically to the buildings across the street. Several public school campuses were erected to accommodate the increase in the youth population. Margarita Elementary School (not extant), Lehigh Elementary School, Vernon Junior High School, and Montclair High School were all constructed in the period between 1955 and 1960.

In the early years of cityhood, the San Bernardino Freeway/Interstate 10 had not yet been completed, and commercial development was primarily concentrated along the area’s two foremost commercial corridors: Holt and Mission boulevards, both of which transected Montclair and were major vehicular arteries for motorists passing between San Bernardino and Los Angeles. Consistent with their desire to attract the attention of passing motorists, businesses that were constructed along the Holt and Mission corridors were typically low-slung edifices that were accompanied by ample on-site parking and various other features that directly catered to the automobile. Some of the buildings that were built at this time featured evocative architecture and/or dramatic, eye-catching signs to draw motorists’ attention.

Neon signs were often used to mark these establishments from miles away. Midway Building Materials was located at Ramona Avenue and Holt Boulevard until 1998. Its iconic neon sign, featuring a mason holding a brick in one hand and pink trowel in the other, is now displayed at the Museum of Neon Art.

Other iconic businesses that arose along these corridors included the Valley Drive-In Theater, Mission Tiki Drive-In Theater, Shakey’s Pizza Parlor, and Bowlum Lanes, all of which included signage and/or architectural features that called attention to passers-by. The Mission Tiki Drive-In Theater, located at 10798 Ramona Avenue, opened in 1956 as “The Mission” and was marked by a massive billboard. The theater was originally constructed with a single-screen and snack bar with boomerang-shaped neon signage, and has hosted a regional Swap Meet since 1960.²⁹ In 1975, the theater was expanded to four screens. (The current Polynesian aesthetic is a result of a 2006 renovation.) The Valley Drive-In Theater, which closed in the late 1970s, featured “the world’s largest neon mural” illustrating a scene of the California

²⁸ “Model Ready of Montclair Civic Center,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1959; “Business and Industry: A process, new to the West Coast, of using slag instead of gravel,” *The San Bernardino County Sun*, Dec. 1963.

²⁹ Mission Tiki Drive-In Theater, “About: The Mission Tiki Drive-In Theatre,” accessed Sept. 2018.



Mission period.³⁰ Shakey's Pizza Parlor, located at 5639 Holt Boulevard, includes a large pylon sign and corporate iconography and is one of the oldest operating locations in the chain. Bowlmum Lanes was opened at 4660 Holt Boulevard in 1958. The building was designed by Gordon Powers, a notable Long Beach-based architect whose firm (Powers, Daly and DeRosa) was well known for designing dramatic, expressive postwar bowling alleys. Powers, Daly and DeRosa is credited with reinventing bowling centers, "opening up to women and families what had mostly been a men's sport played in smoky saloons."³¹ The building's distinctive Googie style architecture, with its concentric round arcs and neon signage, was effective in expressing bowling as "cool fun" for the entire family and community, and in due time the bowling alley became an iconic presence in the local community.³² It remains open for business.

The opening of the San Bernardino Freeway/Interstate 10 through Montclair in 1958 also facilitated commercial development in the northern reaches of the city, which at this time still consisted primarily of orange groves and large swaths of agricultural land. The presence of the freeway facilitated the construction of a large, regional shopping mall known as the Montclair Plaza, which instantly became a regional attraction and put this diminutive suburban community squarely on the regional radar.

Montclair Plaza was designed by Ernest Hahn, a nationally recognized shopping mall developer. The original mall was designed in a Mid-Century Modern style, spanning 875,000 square feet, and was anchored by three major department stores (Broadway, J.C. Penney, and Macy's). It also featured 64 smaller shops, as well as space to accommodate 5,000 cars. On August 3, 1968, 15,000 eager patrons attended a Preview Ball for the new complex. The mall was extremely successful, drawing in shoppers from across the entire San Bernardino and Pomona valleys. "During its first year of operation, the mall increased the city's sales tax revenue by more than 30 percent."³³

The construction of the Montclair Plaza facilitated the construction of other commercial buildings and other types of development in the northern part of the city. In 1967, the cornerstone for the Mid-Century Modern designed Crocker-Citizens Bank (now known as Chase Bank) was laid at the southeast corner of Central Avenue and Moreno Street. A new fire station was constructed at the southeast corner of Arrow Highway and Monte Vista Avenue, occupying the site of the former Montclair City Corporate Yard. A Grand Prix Raceway was constructed to

³⁰ Charles Phoenix, "Valley Drive-In Theatre, Montclair, California, 1954," accessed Sept. 2018.

³¹ Chris Nichols, "Modern Architect Gordon Powers Turns 100 Today," *Los Angeles Magazine*, 2016.

³² "Bowling's Cool Fun!" *The San Bernardino County Sun*, Jul. 1960.

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³³ City of Montclair (2005), 52.



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the east of the mall, near Moreno Street and Benson Avenue, on land that had previously been but sparsely developed.



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