



**Small Towne Short Stories**  
*Orange Daily News: Part II*  
By Amber Montgomery

There is no question that 44 Plaza Square has character—and a rich history. It was built in the 1880s and was just a small newspaper office that grew to house the *Orange Daily News* for a large portion of its life. But there are more subtle clues hinting at other lives it has lived.

Various signs still adorn the weathered building, like faded tattoos calling back to bygone eras. “Orange Daily News” in vintage lettering sits just beneath the bold, lamp-lit Starbucks sign at the front of the building. And if you walk out the side door into the alley, you can make out the word “architects” in white paint clinging to the 110-year-old brick.

Over 50 years of Orange’s proud past were documented in the *Daily News*. In my research and interviews, I realize it is impossible to tell the complete story of this place without telling the story of one man whose life intimately intertwines with the history of the building itself.

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It was my first time in The Courtyard, a cluster of boutiques and eateries at the end of a narrow alleyway just down from the Plaza on North Glassell. The aroma of pizza wafted out from Zito’s. I looked to my right and read the print on the glass doors that led to the lofts upstairs: 201—LP3 Architecture, Inc.

I walked upstairs to a single office with a drafting table in the center over which a man with white hair and a mustache to match stood. He looked up and smiled.

We introduced ourselves and sat down for a cup of coffee and a chat. There were so many questions I had, so many memories I wished I could harness in the span of two hours. I decided we had better start from the beginning.

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Leason Pomeroy's grandparents moved to Orange in the 1900s. His mother Dorothy grew up in Orange, where she raised her three sons, Leason, Jon and Lynn during the 1940s.

Leason got his first job when he was 10 years old working as a newsie for the *Orange Daily News*. The newsies were a small army of local youngsters who delivered papers on their bicycles after school Monday through Saturday. They would congregate in the alley next to the building to fold papers and launch into their respective routes. It only paid a few dollars a week, but it was a steady job and a good place to make connections.

As he got older, Leason and a few of the other boys took jobs melting lead for McInnes Printing just behind the *Orange Daily News* offices. The lead was used for the linotype machines located in the center of the building. This job was definitely more difficult, not to mention dirty, but it paid and Leason enjoyed working for the owner, John T. McInnes, from whom he always sought advice.

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After he graduated from Orange High School in 1955, Leason went on to Fullerton Junior College where he met and fell in love with his wife, Marlene. After a rather long college career, being drafted into the military (and chasing after Marlene for a significant amount of time), he finally graduated from Arizona State University with a fine art degree and shortly thereafter a degree in architecture from the University of Southern California.

He had already moved back home to Orange and started his family while finishing up his second degree. Leason worked all around the city for various architecture firms, interning and gaining experience. His daughter Joselyn was a toddler when he decided to start his own firm with his brothers.

They started small—out of a little apartment-sized office down the street—but it wasn't long until an opportunity arose. Leason got a call from his old newsie boss, Ranald Fairbairn, who had sold the *Orange Daily News* along with the building to the *The Register* some years before. The building was being used for storage and *The Register* was looking to get rid of it.

Leason borrowed everything he could and for \$40,000, became the new owner of 44 Plaza Square, Orange in 1965. But the building was in desperate need of repairs.

"It was completely dilapidated, the ground was cracked and they had poured melted lead into the cracks to fill them and level the floor," he recalls.

There was a sunken space in the center of the room where the old linotype machines had sat for decades that needed to be filled with concrete. The windows were broken and pigeons had taken up residence. Chunks of plaster were missing from the walls, the roof had a significant leak and the decades old electrical wiring needed replacing.

Leason, his two brothers and a friend and colleague Jack Selman drew up plans.

Bit by bit, Leason, his brothers and associates fixed the bones of the place. The masonry was restored, new windows went in and the old *Orange Daily News* sign came down. They took turns painting the exposed trusses and walls. And as was fitting for the time, supergraphics with geometric shapes and vibrant colors were imprinted on the walls.

The exterior got a coat of dark paint, awnings were installed above the windows, signage went up and in white lettering, "architects" was painted along the sides of the building in the surrounding alleys. Finally, Leason Pomeroy & Associates Architecture & Planning was open. The year was 1971 and the building won the American Institute of Architects design award, Leason's first of many.

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Within just a few years of Pomeroy & Associates opening, the three brothers drifted their separate ways professionally. First Lynn moved to Hawaii. Jon followed before venturing out to Colorado in 1973. But Leason stayed home at his office in the Plaza. Although he confesses he travelled a lot, Orange, particularly Old Towne, would always be home.

Leason Pomeroy & Associates was a space where he and his brothers, not to mention many employees, were able to create. During his years there Leason designed and built well over 80 buildings including residences, schools, malls, medical centers, resorts, airports, recital halls and centers for sports and performing arts.

Beyond buildings, Leason built relationships at 44 Plaza Square—and made the memories of a lifetime.

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"Here's a newspaper from when Marlene hired the Orange High School band to surprise me for my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday," he smiles as he hands me the paper. "The band

came marching down the Plaza and right to the door of the firm with my staff all around me.”

That was only the tip of the iceberg. The Pomeroy's hosted annual Christmas parties that started out with just the staff and quickly escalated to include hundreds of people who spilled out of the firm's doors and into the surrounding alleys.

Friends, colleagues, neighbors, local shop owners, beatniks and old pageant winners—just about everyone in Leason and Marlene's world—would come out for live music, dancing and no shortage of wine. Of course the food was a big highlight of the parties; they brought in cases of wine, whole wheels of cheeses and meats from a local charcuterie and a half-dozen smoked turkeys. Much of this was thanks to Marlene, who was the hostess extraordinaire or as Leason jokingly refers to her, “the party animal.” The parties became legendary in town.

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It was only a matter of time that LPA, Inc. grew to be one of the top 50 corporate design firms in America—and too big for its humble beginnings.

In 1990 Leason moved the firm out of the building and leased it to Diedrich's Coffee, which was bought out by Starbucks in 2007.

Today the building serves yet another purpose to another group of people. But Leason says it still holds a lot of sentimental value to him.

“It looks completely different inside,” he says. “When I go in there for a cup of coffee, I look around and remember where my desk was, where we had meetings, where the computers were. It's a really special building to me and I think it always will be.”

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Leason has travelled the world and worked in more places than he can count, yet he always returns home to Orange, where his roots run deep. Everyday he works in the loft of The Courtyard from 7 a.m. to just past dusk. He looks out his window down at the easy Plaza traffic with its array of characters: shop owners and employees, residents, tourists and now more than ever, Chapman college students. Even after 70 years, Old Towne Orange is ever dear to his heart.

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kitchen or garden and frequents the local mountains to spend time in nature. Although her foundation is in nonfiction, she always keeps a few fiction pieces in the works.

Inside Leason Pomeroy & Associates Architecture & Planning located at 44 Plaza Square, circa 1975 after winning an award from the American Institute of Architects for the building's renovations. Courtesy of Leason Pomeroy. Copy and Reuse Restrictions Apply.