The first orange trees were planted in 1871, but the citrus industry Riverside is famous for began in 1873 with Eliza Tibbets’ receipt of two Brazilian navel orange trees sent to her by a friend at the Department of Agriculture in Washington. The trees thrived in the Southern California climate and the navel orange industry grew rapidly. By 1882, there were more than half a million citrus trees in California, almost half of which were in Riverside.

Within a quarter century of the city’s founding, major hotels and commercial buildings dotted the downtown landscape, wealthy visitors were spending winters in the community, and internationally known actors were performing at the opera house. In 1895, Riverside was listed in the Bradstreet Index as the richest city per capita in the United States.

Today’s downtown reflects a rich blend of history, activity, architecture, tree lined pedestrian spaces, cultural and entertainment facilities. Riverside is the urban getaway right next door.

Downtown Riverside occupies the heart of the city’s original Mile Square, settled in 1870 by John North and a group of well-educated, industrious Eastern investors.

When North and his fellow colonists arrived at the site which became the city of Riverside, they found a vast, open plain stretching along both sides of the Santa Ana River. They purchased a portion of the Rancho Jurupa, formed the Southern California Colony Association, and surveyed home sites within a mile square area in the center of the tract. An irrigation canal was completed in mid-1871 and free water was provided to help farms get established.