Early History

When explorer G W Evans was on his way southwest from Bathurst in November 1813, he saw to the northwest what he described as "high, distant mountains". Doubtless this range was part of the chain from which Mt Canobolas and other peaks rise.

The name 'Canobolas' is derived from the Aboriginal name Coona Baloo (twin heads or two shoulders).

Surveyor-General Oxley travelled through the area to the east of Orange – now known as Lewis Ponds and Ophir – in 1817 and 1818; and Surveyor Meehan, hopelessly lost, passed to the west of Orange in 1820. By 1823, occupation of the country west of Bathurst had begun.

Lieutenant Percy Simpson, on his way to Wellington in 1823, drove his sulky across what is now the location of the City of Orange.

John Blackman, Chief Constable, who selected the route, accompanied him from Bathurst. Blackman's Swamp Creek, which runs through the centre of Orange, was named after him. For the next 24 years, the area was known as Blackman's Swamp.

Major Mitchell passed near Orange in 1835 on his way to the west. The name "Orange" was conceived by Major Mitchell as a tribute to the Prince William of Orange with whom he had been associated during the Peninsular War in Spain.

Mitchell camped at Boree and, while there, ascended Mr Canobolas.

The survey of the district began in 1828 and in 1829 the name 'Orange' appears on the maps as a Parish.

Settlers already had their eyes on the rich basalt soils of the locality, and in 1836 land on the outskirts of the village site (which had been reserved by Surveyor Richards) was sold. The first people to purchase land in the immediate vicinity of Orange were W E Sampson and J Moulder. These men subdivided their properties in the late 1830s and leased them to tenants who began to clear and cultivate the lands they occupied.

John Peisley, well known in Orange history, erected a brick building on Sampson's 'Campdale' property on the western outskirts of the village site, and in June 1838 obtained a licence for an inn known as the 'Coach and Horses'.

Some years later, Peisley moved to the eastern side of the reserve and opened another inn bearing the same name. A blacksmith with wheelwrights was also established on Moulder's property near the inn, thus forming the nucleus of a settlement.

With traffic to the west increasing, George Mills obtained a licence for the 'Boree Road' in 1844. These premises were in the north-eastern corner of the property now known as Duntryleague.

By 1845, a village had developed at Summer Hill to the north east of Orange, at the junction of Gosling and Fredrick's Valley Creeks. An inn named 'The Bush' had been opened by Duncan McKillop, and a shoemaker, two stores and a tannery were in business there. Dr Fawcett, the first doctor in the district carried on his practice there. Flour milling was the earliest industry carried on in the locality. The 'Phoenix' was the name of the first mill.

In 1847, the trustees of the marriage settlement of Mr J A Templer and Rosamund Darvall purchased 'Narrambla', a property three miles from Orange, from Simeon Lord. A large brick flour mill was erected there – it was horse-driven. It was in Mr Templer's home that the Australian poet, Andrew Barton 'Banjo' Paterson was born on 17 February 1864. His birth was registered at the Orange Court House and his baptism recorded at Holy Trinity Anglican Church.

The landmark known as Templer's Mill stood for approximately 116 years, however the ravages of time and lack of resources necessary to maintain the structure eventually persuaded the authority concerned to demolish the mill in the 1970s.

Village Proclamation

The site for the village of Orange was proclaimed on 18 November 1846. No land in the village itself was sold until 1849, and little development had occurred.

In 1848, there were only three buildings in the Village of Orange - an inn, a store and a private residence. In 1849, nearly all the buildings in the settlement were made of slabs and bark, and there were no streets that could be properly called so.

One of the earliest residents was John Arkins who kept a store and was postmaster and Clerk of Petty Sessions. A slab and bark hut served as a Court House and was also used as a church by visiting clergy. A Methodist Church, the first church in Orange, was built in 1849.

In 1858, a court was established at Orange, and for 19 years the local Justices of the Peace performed bench duties until Mr J T Lane, a local grazier was appointed Police Magistrate in 1867. The old Court House was demolished in 1881 to make way for the present building. During 2000/2001 new buildings to house the Court House were constructed.

The passage of The Robertson Land Act of 1861 was responsible for much development around Orange. Between 1860 and 1870, nearly a thousand settlers took up an area of over 20,234 hectares on which they grew wheat. For nearly fifty years, Orange was one of the principal wheat growing areas of the colony. In the early 1880s the planting of fruit trees began, and orcharding gradually displaced wheat growing as the major industry.

Gold and Communications

In April 1851, the first payable gold in Australia was discovered at Ophir, approximately 28kms from Orange, and thousands of people flocked to the diggings. The discovery was made by two local lads, William Tom and John Lister, who had been taught the art of prospecting by Edward Hargraves.

Gold was found at Lucknow, 10kms from the Village of Orange, shortly afterwards and many more people came to the district. An impetus was given to the development of the village.

The population of Orange in 1851 was only 28. In the 1850s, over 700 men were working in the mines at Lucknow, while in Orange ten years later the population had reached only 581. However, by 1871 the population of Orange was 1,456 and in 1881 had nearly doubled – the census figure was 2,701. During the twenty years 1851-1871, there was a constant movement of gold seekers on their way to new rushes west and south of Orange. All this meant more business and more population. Furthermore, some of the disappointed miners remained as settlers.

In June 1862, Cobb & Co established its headquarters at Bathurst and the following month coaches were passing through Orange on their way to and from the Forbes diggings. The company provided gold escorts, mail and passenger services throughout NSW and Queensland till the end of the 19th century.

In 1863, a tollgate was established on the Bathurst road on the outskirts of Orange. Tolls would have been collected on vehicles using this road on their way to the Ophir diggings and to Templer's Flour Mill.

The opening of the railway in 1877 was an important historical landmark, since improved transport enabled farmers to move the produce of the land to market more quickly and cheaply. For a number of years, Orange was a railhead, and teams from the Far West loaded wool and other products for export on railway trucks and returned with stores for stations in the outback. Cobb & Co coaches still ran from Orange and Wellington, en-route to Dubbo and Bourke, after establishment of the railhead at Orange.

Municipal Government

In 1853, the roads in the township were in deplorable condition. Day after day there were accidents to horses, bullocks and drays. Occasionally, the Government provided a little money to do urgently needed repairs to the streets. On 18 July 1859, a meeting to discuss the incorporation of Orange was held at the Royal Hotel, when it was unanimously decided to take steps to establish a municipality.

Within a week, 74 signatures had been obtained on a petition which was sent to the Government praying that the town be incorporated. The document was favourably received, and the Town became a Municipality on 9 January 1860.

The first election was held on 9 February 1860, when John Woodward, James Dale, George McKay, Denis Hanrahan, John Peisley and W T Evans were elected Aldermen. As soon as the poll was declared on 10 February 1860, the Aldermen met and elected John Peisley as Chairman. The first recorded meeting of the Council was held in the Court House on 18 February 1860, when George Dolquhorn was appointed Town Clerk. The first work carried out by the Council was the removal of the stumps in the streets, a job of some magnitude.

Questions concerning the legality of the Constitution of the Orange Municipal Council arose in 1866 and the Council was suspended in February of that year owing to a decision of the Supreme Court. The Council was reconstituted after the passage of a new Municipalities Act in 1867, and the first election under the new order was held on 14 February 1868.

The Council's big problem was Blackman's Swamp Creek which overflowed periodically, doing much damage to properties in the vicinity of Lords Place. The work of concreting the creek bed began in 1887 but many years passed before the job was completed.

The Town Hall was built in 1887 and in the same year, the work of beautifying Cook and Robertson Parks was begun. Tree planting in the streets was commenced in 1886. A gas company was formed in 1877 and ten years later the Council purchased the plant. In 1923, electricity displaced gas as street illuminant, and the Council erected a power plant which was used until it was decided to obtain bulk supplies of current from Lithgow.

Water was laid on in 1890, and work on a sewerage system was begun in 1915 and completed in 1918.

East Orange was incorporated in March 1888 – the area of the new municipality was 277 hectares. In 1912, it was decided to amalgamate with Orange. In 1900, Orange was almost chosen - out of 45 towns considered – for the proposed Federal capital but was discarded in favour of Canberra.

After 1900, subdivision of lands on every side of Orange began and building allotments and cultivating blocks were marked out.

In 1927, the area of the town was increased to 6.96 square kms and later further extensions were made. Orange was proclaimed a City on 19 July 1946 when its population was over 15,000. By 1948 the City had increased in area to 20.8 square kms. On 1 October 1977, the City of Orange was extended in area to 298 square kms with the amalgamation of surrounding shires.

Check the Orange Library for photos, especially material from the Holtermann collection.