
Register of the Tillie Lewis Foods Collection, 1935-1978

Collection number: Ms52

San Joaquin County Historical Society and Museum

Lodi, California

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Tillie Lewis Foods Collection,

Date (inclusive): 1935-1978

Collection number: Ms52

Creator:

Extent: 2.5 linear ft.

Repository: San Joaquin County Museum.

Lodi, CA 95241

Language: English

Access

Collection is open for research by appointment only.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Tillie Lewis Foods Collection, Ms52, San Joaquin County Historical Society and Museum.

personal name

Lewis, Tillie (1904-1977)

Del Gaizo, Florindo (d. 1937)

corporate name

Flotill Food Products Corporation

Tasti-Diet Foods

Tillie Lewis Foods, Inc.

subject

Food industry and trade

Canned vegetables industry - California

Canned tomatoes - California - San Joaquin County

Soft drink industry - California

Women in the food industry - California

geographic name

San Joaquin Valley (Calif.) - History

Stockton (Calif.) - History

Biography

Named National Business Woman of the Year (1951), Tillie Lewis (1904-1977) achieved, during her lifetime, a stature unequaled by any other woman in the world food industry. Born Myrtle Ehrlich, she grew up in Brooklyn, New York, where she early married a wholesale grocer, and became involved in the wholesale food production and marketing business. Her first husband had marketed imported pomodoro tomatoes and she was struck by their special, tangy flavor. Following the break-up of their marriage, Tillie Ehrlich began to investigate the possibilities of growing the pomodoro in America. She managed to arrange a trip to Italy (1934), in the course of which she met Florindo del Gaizo, the part-owner of a Naples cannery. Del Gaizo showed her the various aspects of the pomodoro industry and gave her ten thousand dollars to use as a beginning fund for the acquisition of appropriate lands and the establishment of a cannery. He later sent seed and used machinery and together they formed the Flotill Foods Corporation. Tillie Ehrlich selected Stockton (Calif.) as the site for the Flotill cannery, which was completed in 1935. The following year Flotill went into full production. Florindo del Gaizo died in 1937 and Ehrlich persuaded the Bank of Stockton to lend her \$100,000 to buy Del Gaizo's interest. By December 1937 she had paid back the bank loan and was the sole owner and manager of Flotill Foods. Over the next decade Ehrlich branched out into other canned foods and acquired other canneries and a can manufacturing plant. During the Korean War Flotill was the largest supplier of Army C-Rations in the nation. With sales nearing \$20 million (1952), Tillie, now married to labor leader, Meyer Lewis, established Tasti-Diet Foods, and became one of the earliest marketers of artificially sweetened fruits and soft drinks. As a direct result of her personal involvement with the marketing and advertising of this highly successful line of products, Mrs. Lewis changed the name of her company to Tillie Lewis Foods and began selling shares on the American Stock Exchange (1961). Later, she expanded company facilities still further, adding the Anderson Split Pea Soup line (1962) and, ultimately, merging with Ogden Foods of New York (1966). By 1971 Tillie Lewis Foods had sales of over \$90 million per year.

Scope and Content

The Tillie Lewis Collection contains biographical materials, including clippings and typescript essays on Tillie Lewis and her business activities; as well as advertising copy, product labels and photographs of Tillie Lewis Foods facilities and products.

BOX 1: BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIALS

1.1: Wm. McCormack Jr. "Tillie Lewis" (1968) [23 pp., typescript; 2 copies]

1.2: "Who is Tillie Lewis?" (1976) [8 pp., typescript; 3 copies]

1.3: Tillie Lewis: Awards & Honors, etc.

a-NY Inst. of Dietetics: "Outstanding Woman in Food" (1952)

b-Stockton Port Commissioner (1968)

1.4: Tillie Lewis: Articles by TL

a-"14-Day Diet to the Queen's Taste," NY Journal American (8-9-53)

b-"When you've won the Battle of the Bulge," Chicago American (9-6-53)

c-"Take it off & keep it off," Chicago American (9-10-53)

d-"Here's the new way to cut calories," do. (9-10-53)

e-"Here's the new way to cut calories," Chicago American (9-20-53)

- f-"Regain your figure the painless way," do. (9-21-53)
 - g-"Double helpings while you reduce," do. (9-23-53)
 - h-"Tillie Lewis slims you without hunger," Chicago American (9-24-53)
 - i-"Enjoy your daily meals while improving figure," do. (9-27-53)
 - j-"Final week of easy low calorie reducing," do. (10-4-53)
 - k-"The Tomato Lady," Guideposts (Apr 1977)
 - l-"Are friends noticing your new figure," n.s., n.d.
 - m-"You can be slim & stay that way," n.s., n.d.
 - n-"Variety adds spice to daily menus," n.s., n.d.
 - o-"Reducing fits you into fall fashions," n.d., n.d.
 - p-"Tillie Lewis Diet Booklet yours free," n.s., n.d.
 - q-"Tillie Lewis makes reducing pleasant," n.s., n.d.
 - r-"Folks are human---so make it tasty," n.s., n.d.
- 1.5: Tillie Lewis: Periodical articles about TL
- a-"Italian canners step into the American picture," Western Canner & Packer (Sep 1935)
 - b-Rep. Leroy Johnson. "Mrs. Tillie Lewis, Top Businesswoman of 1951," Congressional Record (3-3-52)
 - c-"Tillie of the Valley," Readers Digest (8-52)
 - d-"Woman's idea builds three canneries," PG & E Progress (Aug 1953)
 - e-Rep. Leroy Johnson. "Excellent food with low calorie content now available to everyone," Congressional Record (7-13-55)
 - f-"Pea soup meets Tillie," Pea Soup Andersen's Restaurant: The Hap-Pea Dispatch (10-4-62)
 - g-"She made a million plus," The Woman (Aug 1968)
 - h-"The Tillie Lewis Story: The girl who parlayed pomodoros into prosperity," Ogden Foods Spectrum (Dec 1968)
 - i-"Tillie Lewis is delegate to World Food Conference in Rome," Potpourri (Dec 1968)
 - j-"Port launches \$3.5 million container terminal," Tideways (1970)
 - k-"Some persons in the food industry from the distaff side," California Grocers Advocate (Sep 1972)
 - l-"Tillie Lewis: Most famous woman in food," Good Packaging (Dec 1975)
 - m-Judith & Neil Morgan. "California's surprising inland delta," National Geographic (9-76)
 - n-"Tillie Lewis: Pioneer in the food industry," The Hornblower (Mar/Apr 1977)
- 1.6: Tillie Lewis: Misc. Clippings, 1953-1976
- a-"Tillie Lewis paid high honor by Jewish community," Stockton Record (3-4-57)
 - b-Maury Kane. "Thoroughly Modern Tillie still growing," Stockton Record (n.d., ca. 1958)
 - c-Mario Falconi. "Successo al pomodoro," n.s. (May 22, 1963)
 - d-Margaret Kreiss. "A tycoon's grim view," Modesto Bee (2-8-76)
 - e-Bill Phillips. "Tillie's the Queen of Valley canning," Modesto Bee (1-28-77)
 - f-Helen Flynn. "The \$11.5 million Tillie Lewis left," Stockton Record (6-15-78)
- 1.7: Tillie Lewis: do. [photocopies]

BOX 2: ADVERTISING & COMPANY INFO

- 2.1: Advertising---Periodicals & newspapers
- 2.2: "Survey conducted among families who have sent for Tillie Lewis diet booklets" (1954)
- 2.3: Flotill Products---Physical Plant---Photos (1965)
- 2.4: Advertising---Sample labels
- 2.5: Advertising---Brochures & flyers [incl. Tasti-Diet plans c1955]
- 2.6: Advertising---Posters & display items

BOX 3: SCRAPBOOKS

- 3.1: "First Market Tasti-Diet, Des Moines, Iowa, May 1952" [chronicles 1st publicity campaign for Tasti-Diet]
- 3.2: "New 21 Day Diet by Tillie Lewis" (c1953) [contains clippings, radio press releases & advertisements]
- 3.3: Tasti-Diet Foods (c1954) [contains clippings, product labels, photographs & advertisements]
- 3.4: "Operation turnover" (c1955) ["factual presentation on the merchandising plans of Tillie Lewis Tasti-Diet Foods" prepared for retail grocery executives etc.]
- 3.5: "There can be only one leader: Tillie Lewis Tasti-diet" (c1956) [public relations book published by Tillie Lewis]