Tillie Lewis Foods Collection, 1935-1979

Collection number: Ms52

San Joaquin County Historical Society

Processed by:
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Date Completed:
2012

Encoded by:
Leigh Johnsen
2012

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Tillie Lewis Foods Collection
Date: 1935-1979
Date (bulk): 1953-1966
Collection Number: Ms52
Location: Erickson Vault
Extent: 2.5 linear feet
Contributing Institution: San Joaquin County Historical Society and Museum

11793 North Micke Grove Road
Lodi, CA 95240

Language of Material: Records written in English

Abstract: The Tillie Lewis Collection contains biographical materials, including newspaper clippings and typescript essays, by and about Stockton, California, food entrepreneur Tillie Lewis (1904-1977). Also included are related advertisements, product labels, scrapbooks, photographs, and factory plans.

Access Information
Collection is open for research by appointment.

Conditions of Use
The library can only claim physical ownership of the collection. Users are responsible for satisfying any claimants of literary property.

Preferred citation: [Item name], Tillie Lewis Foods Collection, Ms52, San Joaquin County Historical Society and Museum, Lodi, California.

Biography
During her lifetime, Tillie Lewis (1904-1977) achieved a stature unequaled by any other businesswoman in the world. 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. Among the goods her husband sold were imported pomodoro tomatoes, which impressed her because of their tangy flavor. The marriage lasted only a short time. After it ended, Tillie Ehrlich began investigating the possibility of growing the pomodoro in America. She arranged a trip to Italy (1934), in the course of which she met Florindo del Gaizo, part owner of a Naples cannery. Del Gaizo taught her about the pomodoro industry and gave her ten thousand dollars to use as the beginning of a fund to acquire appropriate lands and establish a cannery. He later sent her seeds and used machinery, and together the couple formed Flotill Foods Corporation. Tillie Ehrlich selected Stockton, California as the site for the Flotill cannery, which was completed in 1935. The company went into full production the following year. In 1937, Florindo del Gaizo died, after which Ehrlich persuaded the Bank of Stockton to lend her one hundred thousand dollars to buy her partner's interest. By December 1937, she had paid back the loan and was the sole owner and manager of Flotill Foods. Over the next decade, Ehrlich branched out into other crops, acquired additional canneries, and purchased a can manufacturing plant. During the Korean War, Flotill was the largest supplier of Army C-Rations in the United States, and in 1951 she was named National Business Woman of the Year. With sales nearing

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twenty million dollars in 1952, Tillie established Tasti-Diet Foods and became one of the earliest marketers of artificially sweetened fruits and soft drinks. By then, she had married labor leader Meyer Lewis. Soon afterward, she changed the name of her company to Tillie Lewis Foods and began to sell shares on the American Stock Exchange (1961). Later, she expanded company facilities even further, adding the Anderson Split Pea Soup line (1962) and eventually merging with Ogden Foods of New York (1966). By 1971, Tillie Lewis Foods had sales of more than ninety million dollars per year.

**Scope and Content**


**Personal Names**

Lewis, Tillie, 1904-1977
Ehrlich, Myrtle, 1904-1977
Del Gaizo, Florindo, d. 1937

**Subjects**

Canned tomatoes--California--San Joaquin County
Canned vegetables industry--California
Food industry and trade
Ogden Foods
San Joaquin County (Calif.)--History
Soft drink industry--California
Stockton (Calif.)--History
Women in the food industry--California

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**Series 1 Biographical Material 1935-1979**

**Scope and Content Note**

Includes articles, manuscripts, and books by and about Tillie Lewis and her industry, as well as awards and honors.

- Box 1, Folder 1: *Articles by Tillie Lewis, 1953-1977*
- Box 1, Folder 2: *Articles about Tillie Lewis (1 of 2), 1935-1979*
- Box 1, Folder 3: *Articles about Tillie Lewis (2 of 2), 1935-1979*
- Box 1, Folder 4: *Awards and Honors, 1952-1968*
- Box 1, Folder 5: *McCormack, William, Jr. “Tillie Lewis,” 1978*
- Box 1, Folder 6: *Sigel, Eleanor Record. Good Food for Diabetics, 1951*
- Box 1, Folder 7: *Stillman, Irwin Maxwell, and Sam Sinclair Baker, The Doctor’s Quick Weight Loss Book, 1969*
- Box 1, Folder 8: *"Who is Tillie Lewis?" 1976*

**Series 2 Advertising and Corporate Information 1953-1968**

**Scope and Content Note**

Includes packaging labels, advertising copy, brochures, and various kinds of display material. Also contains survey of customers and annual business report of Tillie Lewis Foods.

- Box 2, Folder 1: *Advertising in Periodicals, 1953-1954*
- Box 2, Folder 2: *Brochures and Recipes, 1948-ca. 1968*
- Box 2, Folder 3: *Posters and Display Material, ca. 1955*
- Box 2, Folder 4: *Sample Package Labels, Undated*
- Box 2, Folder 5: *Survey of Customers, 1954*
- Box 2, Folder 6: *Tillie Lewis Foods Annual Report, 1962*
### Series 3 Photographs and Albums 1937-1973

**Scope and Content Note**
Includes photographs and photograph albums of Tillie Lewis and her business activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box, Folder 1</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 1</td>
<td>Photographs (1 of 2), 1937-1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 2</td>
<td>Photographs (2 of 2), 1937-1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 3</td>
<td>Photographs, ca. 1955-1965</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(See Oversize, Box 5) Photographs, 1967-1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 4</td>
<td>Photograph Album, 1935-1959</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Series 4 Oversize Scrapbooks 1952-1956

**Scope and Content Note**
Includes oversize scrapbooks of marketing initiatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box, Folder 1</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 4, Folder 1</td>
<td>&quot;First Market Tasti-Diet, Des Moines, Iowa,&quot; 1952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 4, Folder 2</td>
<td>&quot;Operational Turnover&quot; Marketing Plan, ca. 1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 4, Folder 3</td>
<td>Scrapbook of Twenty-One Day Diet, ca. 1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 4, Folder 4</td>
<td>Tasti-Diet Promotional Material, ca. 1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 4, Folder 5</td>
<td>&quot;There Can Be Only One Leader: Tillie Lewis Tasti-Diet,&quot; ca. 1956</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Series 5 Oversize Photographs and Plans 1951-1975

**Scope and Content Note**
Includes oversize photographs and plans related to construction of Tillie Lewis residence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box, Folder 1</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 1</td>
<td>Photographs, ca. 1935-1975</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 2</td>
<td>Building Plans for Tillie Lewis Residence, 1951</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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