



M. Loren Hernandez/Brea Progress
Dean and Betty Millen recall the days of 2,500-acre citrus groves.

Pioneer lived on fruit of land

Orange grove manager recalls early north county

By Danielle Benson
Brea Progress

Dean Millen will never forget the day in 1941 when the citrus industry in Brea began its downhill slide. The vice president of Union Oil Company approached Millen as grove manager and said the company was liquidating \$1 million in citrus assets. The move dissolved what locals considered the largest citrus grove in the world. "That was really the beginning of the end," the 61-year Brea resident said. "I had the dubious honor of cleaning up. I was the last employ-

ee of Union Citrus." Dean, 87, is a member of the Orange County Pioneer Council, holding its annual picnic Oct. 6 at Craig Regional Park in Fullerton. Once a year since 1925, original county settlers and their descendants gather to celebrate the pioneers of the early 1900s. Dean has suffered three heart attacks and won't be attending the event, although he'd like to. Dean moved to Orange County at the age of 11 months, arriving on a train from Kansas with his mother. He grew up in Santa Ana and went to Oregon Agriculture College — now Oregon State University — where he played football. Dean said he couldn't hold a steady job after graduation due to a football injury. He did find work at a soil research company that dealt with the effects of dirt on citrus trees.

Please see PIONEER 3

Pioneer

FROM 1

That job led to a management position with Union Citrus Orchards. Dean arrived as a bachelor in Brea in early 1935. He began managing what was then regarded as the largest citrus grove in the world, with a "Sunkist" stamp and high quality "76" label on each product. Dean supervised hundreds of orange, lemon and avocado groves on Union's 2,500 acres north of what is now Central Avenue to Imperial Highway and east of Puente Street to State College Boulevard. His responsibilities included pest control, irrigation, fertilizing and harvesting. "When I moved here, Brea had about 2,000 people. It was a small oil town,"

PIONEER PICNIC

When: Noon Oct. 6
Where: Craig Regional Park, 3300 N. State College Blvd., Fullerton
Info: Orange County pioneers and their descendants are encouraged to attend, although anybody interested in history is invited. Bring your own lunch. Punch will be provided. A horseshoe-pitching contest and a golf-chipping contest will be held. Call Bill Gulley, (714) 640-5748 or Barbara Oldewage, (714) 543-9681.

Millen said, noting that about two-thirds of the city's population worked in the groves of Union Oil in Olinda. "At one time I think I knew everyone who lived here."

Soon after his arrival, Dean met and married his wife of 58 years, Betty. The couple moved into a small house in 1938 on Union Citrus Ranch on Imperial High-

way. They now live on Poplar Street. Dean managed the groves until Union abandoned the citrus market three years later. Dean had three months — October to Dec. 31 — to sell the groves, lease the land or bulldoze the trees. With Union Citrus out of the picture, Dean and 10 Brea residents bought a portion of the groves and formed Brea Groves, Inc. The partners also started the Arovista Municipal Water District with three water wells for irrigation. The water district later became city property. The owners parcelled the groves into 10 plots. Part of the land later became what is now Arovista Elementary. "We put 10 names in a hat, literally, and whatever name you drew, that was the parcel you owned," he said. "I took care of most of the 600 acres of groves there until the Orange Quick Decline disease

hit. Some years later (1955) people started to sell off." Dean didn't flounder long, going to work for Irvine Ranch as Agricultural Director in charge of developing a 200-acre research plot behind what is now El Toro Marine Air Station. He worked there until his retirement in 1973. Dean said the breakup of Union Citrus Orchards spurred residential development, leading to the city's booming post-war years. Brea was a bustling town back then, he said. Oil and oranges kept economic veins flowing through the depression, while kind-heartedness kept the community spirit alive, he said. "The people we got to meet who later became very prominent in the city and Union Oil. They all got their start here in Brea," Dean said. "It was a good little town with people who really cared."

BREA PROGRESS

A weekly newspaper with personality
PUBLISHED BY THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER ON THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 26, 1996



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AUGUST 13, 1998



Dean and Betty Millen

Millen recalled as historian who helped shape Brea history

By Vanessa Jezin
Brea Progress

Dean F. Millen will be remembered as a Brea friend, father figure, historian, contributor and leader, to name a few of the hats he wore.

Millen, 89, Brea's first "Ambassador at Large," died Aug. 4. The longtime Brea resident and historian threw himself into his local church, schools and

city's Citrus Division, supervising care of 2,300 acres of oranges, lemons and avocados. He established his own orchard-care business in 1940, managing more than 460 acres of avocados and oranges.

"I worked for him at different times during college, helping him irrigate his groves," lifelong friend Alan West said of Millen. "I think the thing you can say about a man like Dean is that he

MILLEN

FROM 1

the Melvin Jones Award, the club's highest honor.

In addition to being a former school board trustee, Millen served on the Parks and Recreation Commission and was a member of the Brea Historical Society.

"He had a keen sense of history and where the community comes from," said friend Wayne Wedin. "Obviously, he set a good example for the community."

An avid collector of city memorabilia, Millen played an important role in preparation of Esther Cramer's book, "Oil, Oranges and Opportunity," which chronicles Brea's history.

He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Betty, daughter, Nancy, son, Bob, and three grandchildren.

Private services were held Aug. 8 for Millen at Memory Gardens. A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m. Saturday at Brea Congregational Church. The family asks that donations be made in Millen's memory to the church, located at 300 E. Imperial Highway, Brea, 92821.



COLLECTOR — Dean Millen, resident of Brea since 1935, looks over May 1900 copy of an 1865 New York Herald newspaper announcing the assassination of President Lincoln. The newspaper is part of a large collection of family memorabilia that Millen is now hoping to preserve.

Dean Millen Has Museum In Own Home

By SUE BARBA
Star-Progress Staff Writer

BREA — As many of us scurry around to museums and exhibits during the bicentennial observance looking at artifacts from America's past, Dean Millen, a resident of Brea for the past 40 years, can find rare turn-of-the-century memorabilia right in his own home.

"I'm not a collector," said Millen, who has a collection of newspapers published in the early 1900s, a display of one-of-a-kind citrus box labels, old books and an assortment of antiques and documents, "but I am interested in learning how to preserve the things I do have."

After retiring a year ago from the University of California south coast agricultural field station where he was superintendent for 18 years, Millen has finally found the time to sort through his varied collection of memorabilia. Many items have been passed down from generation to generation and have been stored in boxes and closets until recently.

Millen's collection of old newspapers includes a May 1900 reproduction of the April 15, 1865 New York Herald which headlined the story of Lincoln's assassination; a 1901 copy of the Chicago Daily Tribune announcing the assassination of William McKinley; and several different local newspapers printed in 1923 which contained stories about the death of Harding.

Millen also has newspapers published in Los Angeles and Orange County during both World Wars.

Included in his file of old documents, Millen has the original copy of a land deed given to his grandfather Samuel Parr, signed by President Zachary Taylor in 1850. He also has copies of old tax bills from Peoria, Illinois showing that his grandfather paid \$4.40 in tax on 240 acres of land in 1842.

Millen appears to have inherited that trait of his forebearers in "hating to throw anything away." In his neat, well-filled display cabinet, Millen has an ordinary looking lead pencil with his name printed on it that is 60 years old and was given to him as a birthday present by an uncle.

On a windowsill in his newly added-on "memorabilia room," Millen has a pair of large old sleigh bells and an ancient flat iron. On his shelves he has old books on the Civil War, his father was the son of a Civil War veteran, and also a 1921 volume of the Orange County Illustrated which contains information and pictures of the men and women who first settled in Orange County and were a part of its development.

On one wall, Millen has six different citrus box labels framed and displayed which he collected from various packing houses when he managed 2300 acres of citrus orchards for the Union Oil Company back in the 1930s and 1940s.

Millen arrived in Santa Ana from Kansas in 1909 when he was six months old. His father was a rancher and citrus farmer. During the depression Millen attended Oregon State University and later worked for a soils laboratory in Ahaheim before joining Union Oil in 1935 to manage its orchards.

When Millen first came to Brea in 1935, he said he moved into a small house that had previously been occupied by a Frenchman and his chickens. "It was a real mess," he recalled.

Later he moved to a little ranch house on Berry Street where he paid \$4.50 a month rent. In 1939 he married Betty Wiswall and raised two children.

"Life was good back then," Millen recalls. "We had lots of community activities. The Lions Club had been active since 1925. There were picnics, dances and athletic events and wherever you looked, there were orchards, miles and miles of citrus trees."

In 1955, Millen went to work for the University of California with the agricultural field station. One of the projects he remembers with an obvious sense of pride concerns the development of the Tioga strawberry and the fact that the strawberry yield in Orange County was 26 tons per acre, "which was unheard of," said Millen.

The average yield was 15 to 16 tons per acre and the national average was 3 to 5 tons per acre.

In explaining about the development of the Tioga strawberry, which is now known throughout the world, Millen said that it took about ten years of research to develop a \$2 million crop into a \$16 million crop, making strawberries Orange County's number one product at that time. Today, according to Millen, ornamental flowers now top the list.

Above his desk, Millen has a framed letter signed by Richard Nixon, dated April 6, 1971, thanking him for the tray of strawberries and commenting that they were "almost too beautiful to eat."

Millen explained that he took the strawberries to San Clemente for the President and his family as a way of making a point that "money for agricultural research was a good investment and accrued more returns than it cost." This was a period when government at all levels was cutting money for a variety of research projects.

Next to the Nixon letter are other awards and commendations which Millen has "collected" over the years. He was given the Old Monarch award for 30 years of service to the Lions Club and two commendations from the City Council of Brea — in 1963 and 1965. He also received a commendation from the Orange County Board of Supervisors in 1974 for his work with the field station.

Although he has retired from his agricultural field station duties, it is obvious from his desk stacked with correspondence, a busy telephone and a crowded calendar of meetings, that Dean Millen has not retired from playing an active role in the community that he has watched grow from 2500 to 22,000 people.



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Resident Lends Collection Of Citrus Labels To Library

Aug. 25, 1982

The Brea Library is displaying a few of the framed citrus crate labels from the Dean Millen collection. The citrus industry played an important role in the agricultural era of Brea's history.

Today, labels from the lemon and orange crates of yesteryear are popular collector's items. The Millen collection of citrus labels will be included in the Brea Historical exhibition, scheduled in the Brea Art Gallery at the end of the year.

According to Millen the entire California orange business started with a William Wolfskill who owned 17,000 orange trees, packed onto a grove around what is now Central Avenue and Fifth Street in Los Angeles.

In 1877 Wolfskill decided to load a boxcar full of his oranges and sending them east. It took the boxcar a month to reach its destination, St. Louis.

Fortunately, the oranges survived. The St. Louis burghers bought them all, and within 30 years California orange growers were shipping 10 million boxes of oranges a year to the east.

The packing companies had to have some identifying mark, and the most prominent and solid place to put such a mark was on the ends. The labels were designed by various long-forgotten artists hired by the lithograph companies that had contracted to produce them.

In 1956, the orange crate labels disappeared, victims of technology; the old wooden orange crate was replaced by cardboard.

The Brea Historical Society is collecting local memorabilia of all kind for the December historical display in it

A-2 STAR-PROGRESS WEEKLY SHOPPER Wednesday, September 1, 1982

Some Orange...

(Continued from A-1)

tic sky, rows of citrus trees kissed by a glowing sun and a Placentia cowgirl bedecked in riding apparel grace the various labels.

Other examples, including those donated by Millen for display at the Brea Branch Library, depict Indian warriors guarding mesa homefronts or simple designs colored with flair.

Sometimes the names on the labels are as interesting as the artwork — maybe even a little more.

"Serge," "Little Red Riding Hood," "Rooster," and "Hope Chest," are a few of the titles, the latter coupled with a picture of a bathing beauty sunning herself next to a treasure chest of — you guessed it — oranges.

The titles were also used by the packing houses to identify the various grades of fruit, from high to low quality.

The El Ranchito Citrus Association in Rivera, Ca. sold its best oranges under the Montezuma label, named after the fallen emperor of the Aztecs.

A lower grade was sold behind the label of "Zarape," a colorful cloak woven from rough material and worn by the Mexican peasants.

From king to peon, an orange by any other name could mean a

great deal, top of the line or runt of the harvest.

Millen described another interesting title progression used by Irvine Valencia Growers.

The best fruit was packaged under the "Satin" label. Next came "Velvet," followed by "Linen" and finally "Tweed."

With the advent of cardboard, packers found it easier and cheaper to stamp the boxes with their names rather than slap on the lithograph labels.

As World War II raged overseas, wood became a valuable resource and the dye used in the labels grew less attainable.

Thus, while the Third Reich fell, so too did the labels.

Over the recent years, packing houses have also folded, leaving the label legacy to collectors rummaging through storerooms for the colorful specimens.

Streeter said that most all California labels have been snatched up by old collectors. However, some are still available — for a price.

"You can spend as little or as much as you want," he said.

Most label dealers can be found on weekends at the Rose Bowl Swap Meet, he added.

"Anyone can build a respectable collection on a small budget," said Streeter.

Some Orange Keepsakes Turn Gold For Brea

By Tony Saavedra
DSP Staff Writer

BREA — Longtime resident Dean Millen labels himself a saver and not a collector.

By any definition, Millen has amassed a small assembly of colorful orange crate labels, early California artwork that has splashed into a tidepool of popularity during the last decade.

From 1880 to 1956, the intricately drawn labels adorned the sides of hand-made, wooden orange crates, calling attention to the juicy citrus within.

The chromatic displays began dwindling after World War II and disappeared altogether, as the wooden crates bowed to the fruit of modern technology — cardboard.

However, Millen, a citrus grower during Brea's rural days, saved a few of the labels, unknowingly preserving the remnants of an artistic tradition.

Working first with the Union Citrus Orchard and later his own company, Millen decorated his office walls with framed labels from various packing houses.

"I suppose if I worked at a race track, I would have had pictures of horses," said Millen. Instead,

he hung the labels from packing houses that shipped his fruit.

Each new firm added a different stroke to Millen's interior design, covering another piece of empty wall.

He never expected the citrus labels to be worth anything more than the sentimental value reflected by the keepsakes, reminders of days gone by and old business partners.

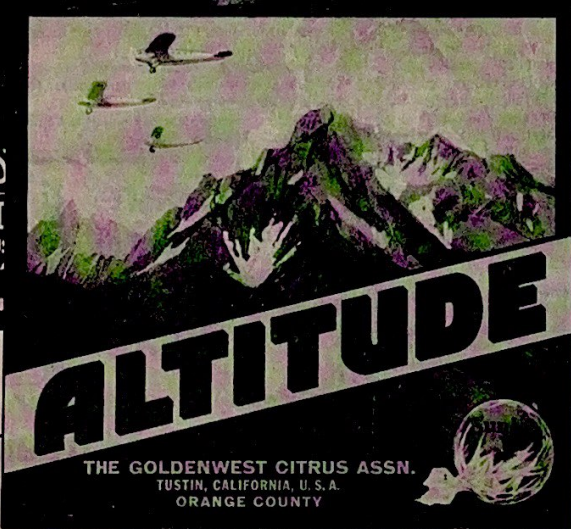
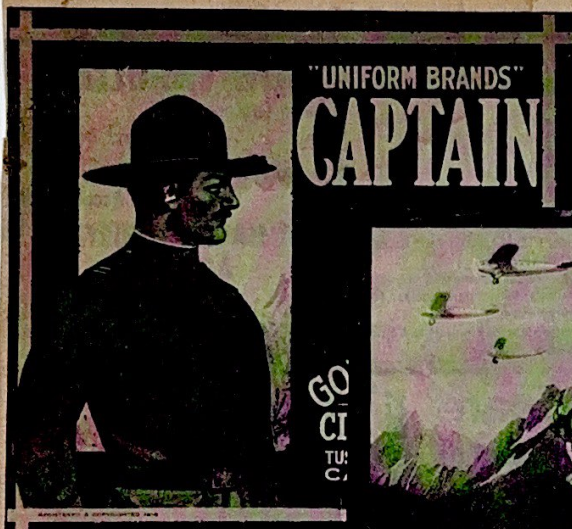
But the colorful pictorials, depicting bright California landscapes, storybook figures or anything else that captured the artists' fancy, have spiraled in a nostalgic craze.

David Streeter, curator for the Pomona Library's 4,000-piece label collection, said the pictures are worth anywhere from \$5 to \$500 apiece.

Age, availability and intricacy are important factors in value, said Streeter, adding that California labels have outshined those from other states.

"Ours are more alive with design and color," he explained. "Also, no other labels portray landscapes from their home states."

Mountains rising into a majes-



ORANGE ARTISTRY — California landscape and heroic men were among the inspirations for the citrus industry's crate labels.

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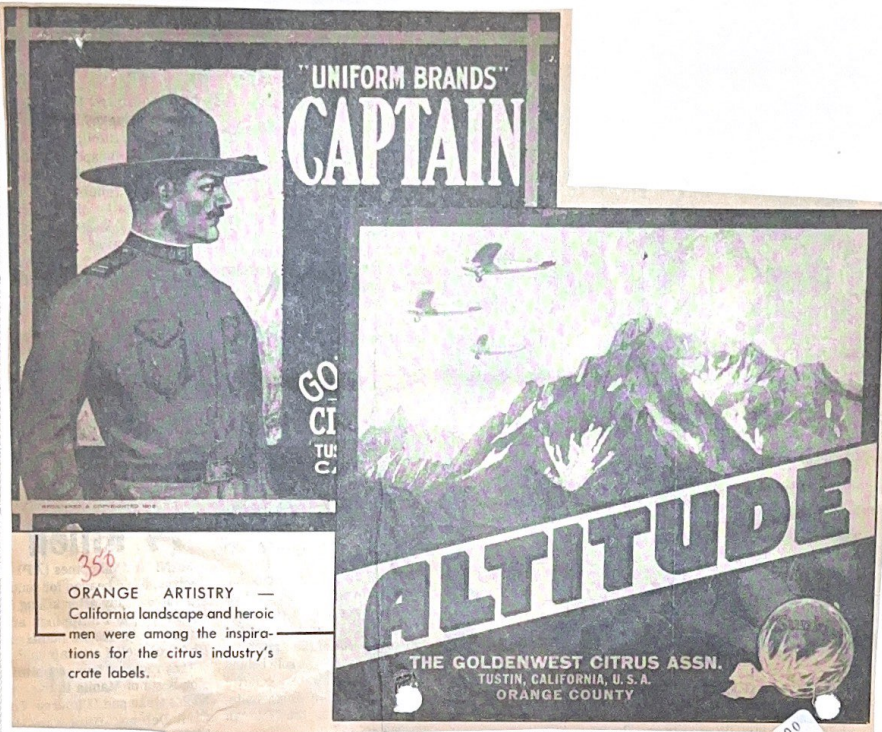
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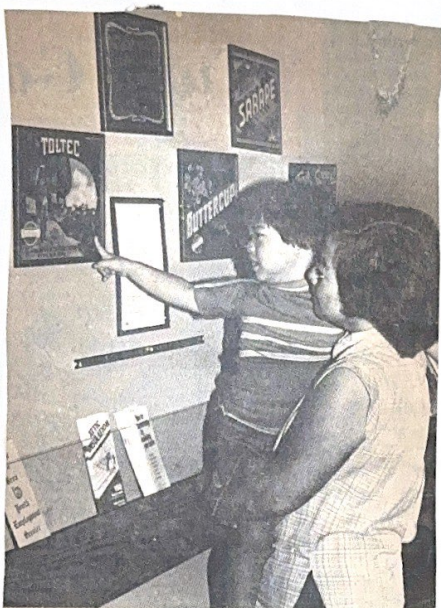
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350
ORANGE ARTISTRY — California landscape and heroic men were among the inspirations for the citrus industry's crate labels.

(SA)

AUG. 26, 1982
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(Star-Progress Photo by Tony Saavedra)
SUITABLE FOR FRAMING — Three - year - old Ryan Utsumi of Fullerton and mother, Lea, examine a few orange crate labels on display at the Brea Branch Library. The framed labels are part of a small collection belonging to longtime Brea resident Dean Millen, a former orange and lemon grower.

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"Anyone can build a respectable collection on a small budget," said Streeter.

However, those with lint-lined wallets may just have to settle for a bit of browsing at local exhibits, like the one at the Brea library.

Brea history project passion for resident

By Lore Wingard
News Tribune Writer

BREA — Dean Millen doesn't like to be called a local historian.

But Millen, a Brea resident since 1935, does consider himself one of the "self-appointed volunteers" currently working on the Brea Community History Project.

The project, which started last year, is the joint effort of local citizens and the Oral History Program at Cal State Fullerton.

The goal of those involved in the historical endeavor is to use a \$7,500 grant from the California Council on the Humanities and \$13,500 in donations from individuals, businesses and service clubs to collect the bits and pieces from Brea's early days.

The target date for completing and transcribing the interviews is September, Millen said.

And while students from the college's Oral History Program work on the interviews, Millen and other local residents are trying to gather artifacts, old magazine and newspaper articles, photographs, family records, documents and school annuals that help to tell the story of Brea.

Already, Brea's Walter Daetweiller has convinced Standard Oil Co. to donate oil field tools used when the city was an oil boom town.

Individuals interested in donating or loaning documents or artifacts to the project may call Millen at 529-3289, Barbara Vasquez at 990-7979 or Shirley Stephenson at 773-3580.

If enough pieces of the city's history are collected, the group wants to hold an exhibit in the Civic-Cultural Center gallery in December to spotlight the heritage that helped make Brea what it is today.

The 76-year-old Millen, who came to Brea to work in the Union Oil Co.'s citrus groves, said a desire to know what happened before he arrived on the scene is what fuels his efforts on the community history project.

"I'm interested in what went before me. Brea didn't just happen," he explained. "People from the past shaped its destiny. It hasn't been the 20,000 people who have arrived here in the last 20 years."

Some people, Millen admitted, will be "turned on by the history" which tells how major oil companies put Brea on the map in 1917 and shows what role the citrus industry played in the community.

Others won't share the same enthusiasm for the city's history, but so far the project has received a "great reaction" from local citizens, Millen said.

And Millen is quick to give credit for that "great reaction" to the others involved in the project including Mrs. Vasquez, Karl Fanning, Frank Schweitzer, Pat Fox, Catherine Seiler, Volony Siebenthal,



Dean Millen

News Tribune Photo

Vivian Weddle, Dyer Bennett and local librarian Jesse Thompson.

He said he also appreciates the work of Lawrence deGraaf and William Comford, professors in CSF's Oral History Program.

Without all these "self-appointed volunteers," Millen said the history he finds so interesting might never be gathered for others to enjoy.