

## CHATSWORTH PAST & PRESENT

By Ann Vincent

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Chatsworth's past cannot be remembered without mentioning our local farms and produce stands. One of those produce stands can still be seen today along Topanga just north of Chatsworth Street. The Vellone Family Farm is still producing fruits and vegetables at the same location since the early 1940's. The stand was in operation for 38 years, from 1958 to 1996. Most residents remember it shaded under a giant live oak, which collapsed in 1980, sparing the structure. Frank Vellone passed away in 2009, however his wife Lillian and son Bill are still farming on the land.

The family farm land was purchased by Frank's parents, Bill and Ida Vellone. In the 1950's they also owned the Blvd Market, where they sold their produce, operating it as a mom and pop grocery store. It was located on the southeast corner of Canoga and Devonshire (Chatsworth Karate today). Lillian remembers that the Boulevard Market was a regular stopping place for Desi Arnaz, who would come into the market every Sunday afternoon to buy a 5 cent Cigarillo.

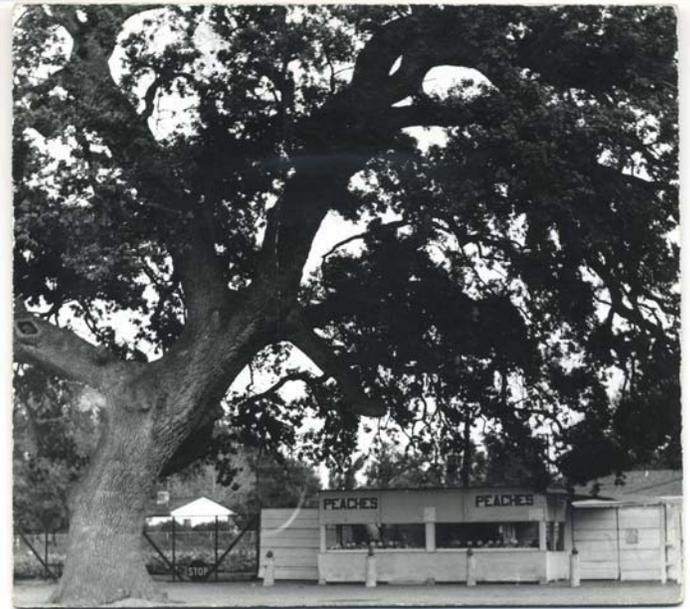
Frank Vellone and his wife Lillian built their home on two acres of the original 9 acres in 1953 on the corner of Andora, Chatsworth and Topanga. They built and opened the produce stand on July 10, 1958. Lillian tells of opening the stand each day, putting out the produce starting at 8:30 in the morning. Their daughter Edie would help after school and their son Bill would work with Frank in the fields, learning the farming business.

A seasonal business, May was always the peak of the season, but the stand would stay open from April to September each year. The hours were from 10 am to 7 pm daily.



Frank Vellone

Although they also provided produce from other nearby farms, they specialized in vine-ripened tomatoes, cantaloupe, green beans, tree-ripened fruit and freshly picked corn. Lillian is very proud that their produce has always been "Organic" by today's standards. In a quote from an old news clipping, she says "People come from



Vellone Family Farm produce stand, still standing today. The landmark tree on Topanga Canyon Blvd. that provided shade for many years fell down in 1980.

as far as Marina del Rey to buy our produce, which is picked fresh several times a day. Our produce is not sprayed."

In another article that Lillian shared, Frank talked about growing corn. He said that he didn't mind growing corn or hoeing it, but he did not like picking it. He explained that it was such a hot, dusty job that it required a shower several times a day. Since the ripe corn varies as much as 10 days between the very earliest cobs and the latest one, to get the maximum yield, he would have to go through cob by cob, cracking the husks to see if they were ready. If not, he took a leaf and wrapped it around so the bugs couldn't get in. Then, the exact day they were ready, they were sold at the stand.

While interviewing Lillian for this article, we sat in her ranch kitchen, surrounded by an orchard of fruit trees not far from the old stand. She reminisced about the celebrities that were regular customers including Andy Griffith, Dinah Shore (who used to buy eggs and beans), Roy Rogers, Dennis Weaver, Dom DeLuise and the Captain and Tennille.

The stand closed in 1999, but their produce is still marketed at various natural food markets in the area such as Mary's Secret Garden in Ventura, Erewhom Natural Foods on Beverly Blvd. in West LA, and Full O' Life Natural Foods and Restaurant in Burbank.

Bill was president of Future Farmers of America at Chatsworth High in 1971-72, and runs the farm now. Just for fun, he still sports his official school jacket occasionally when attending growing conferences. He has an old tractor on the ranch for sale....stop by and make him an offer!