

# Cows in Millbrae?

By Tom Dawdy

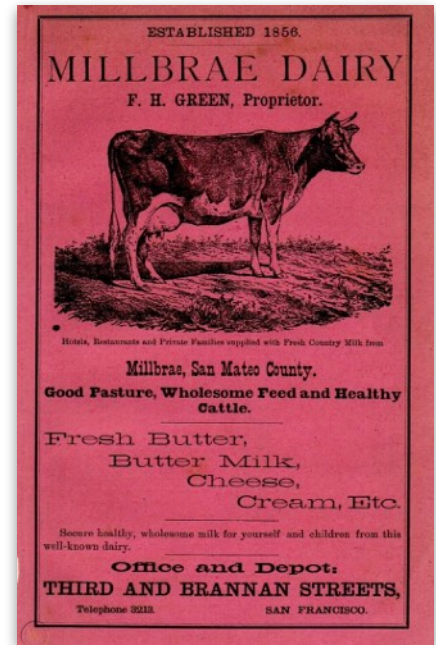
When I was a young kid growing up in Bayside Manor all we had to do is jump over our back fence and play in the cow pasture. Even today I think of all the good times me and my friends had in the field between our house and the airport. I remember one day we got stuck in the mud and we all thought it was quicksand. We thought we were all going to sink and die like in the movies we watched at the Millbrae theater. A group of neighborhood moms came to our rescue and pulled us out and we were certain that they saved our lives that day.



*Grazing over the  
Millbrae Highlands  
1953*

Strangely, it seemed like one day the cows just disappeared from the field. What happened to these cattle that all the kids in Millbrae remember so well?

Although the history of cattle grazing in San Mateo County goes way back, the first Dairy Farm was not opened in San Mateo County until 1853 when I.G. Knowles opened his Dairy in Daily City. In 1870 Darius Ogden Mills (Mr. Millbrae) was developing his estate and saw the need for milk, especially for the City of San Francisco. Mills Built the Millbrae Dairy in 1870 and partnered



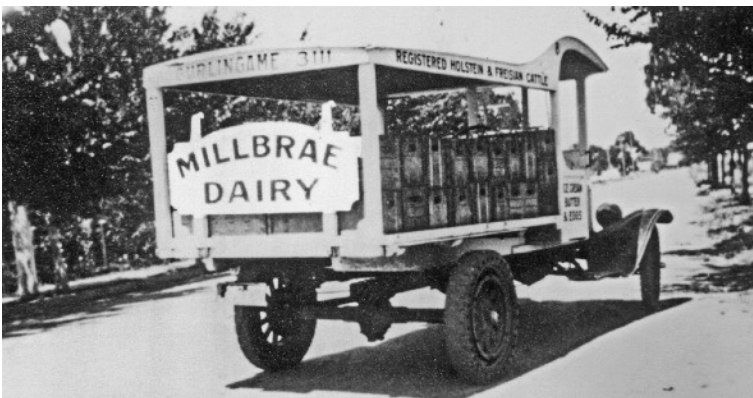
with local resident Alfred Green to run the operation.





**Hundreds of cows now made their home in Millbrae, these were not ordinary cows, they were the best fine purebred Holstein cattle in the country. At the**

**peak period Millbrae Dairy produced 750 Gallons of milk per day that were shipped by train to San Francisco to all the finest hotels. The Dairy also had daily milk routes on the Peninsula and in San Francisco. This immaculate facility was the largest dairy in San Mateo County and their fine Holstein**



**cattle were sold all over the world. There were stories from people in the early 1900's traveling through Millbrae on the dusty El Camino Real seeing cattle from the Millbrae Dairy being**

**herded along the highway to different pastures.**

**In the 1930's changes came to the Dairy, Bordens**



**Milk took over and in 1937 the Dairy went out of the retail milk business. In 1942 Frank Zwissig, a well known**

**dairy man leased the Millbrae Dairy, Zwissig added more cows and ramped up the production of milk to meet the emergency needs of World War II workers and the military in the Bay Area.**

**After the war Zwissig acquired a 780 acre ranch in Napa on the Silverado Trail. He remodeled all it's dairy facilities there and in 1948 moved 400 cows to his new ranch in Napa. He did leave a couple hundred of his young stock to graze on the pasture lands in Millbrae. At this same time in October of 1948 Leslie Moore the general manager of the Mills Estate announced the Millbrae Dairy, a 78 year landmark on El Camino Real would be demolished immediately. So**



**this was the beginning of the end of the “Cows in Millbrae”**

**Cattle grazing reached its peak on the Peninsula in the 1960's when there was an estimated 48,000 cattle in San Mateo County, 8,200 were dairy cows. It has been written that they gained a reputation as a destructive 1,000 pound beasts, turning creeks into mud holes over grazing lush fields and getting out of broken fences posing risks to drivers. As farmers retired and their land was bought up by the conservation districts the cows were evicted. Today there are fewer than 1,000 cattle in San Mateo County. So this answers my question I have been searching for all my life, the cows in the pasture were evicted. Long live the San Francisco Garter snakes and the red-legged frogs!**

