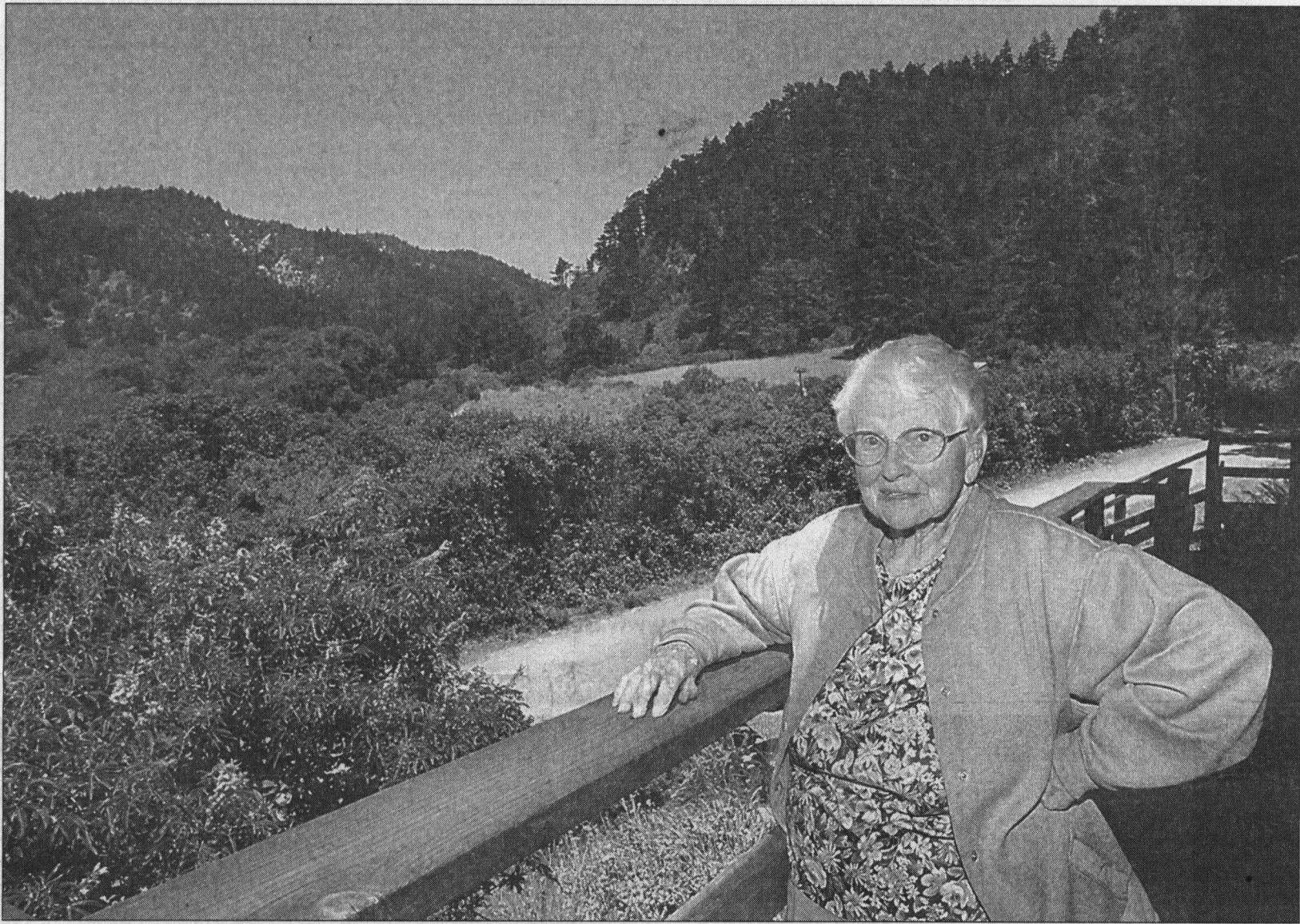


*'I'm very much honored that they'd recognize me, but it's puzzling.'*

HULDA HOOVER MCLEAN, HONORED AS FARMER OF THE YEAR BY SANTA CRUZ COUNTY FARM BUREAU



**LEFT:** Hulda McLean on the deck of her former home, Rancho Del Oso.

**BELOW:** McLean painstakingly puts together a shell collection that still hangs in the Rancho Del Oso Visitor Center.

Dan Coyro/  
Sentinel photos

# Farmer of the year plays down accomplishments

By **JOE ROSENHEIM**  
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Hulda Hoover McLean was honored Wednesday night as farmer of the year by the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, though she doesn't quite know why.

"It always puzzles me why people give these types of honors," said the woman who has never been a farmer but grew up on a local ranch. "My friend says it's because I'm 96 and still upright, which makes about as much sense as anything. I'm very much honored that they'd recognize me, but it's puzzling."

McLean has a keen, self-deprecating air, quick to downplay the litany of awards she's collected through the years. It's hard to tell if she's simply modest or just a little tired of answering questions the way she brushes them off.

"I'm no longer trying to save the world," she said. "I'm just trying to have fun."

She was chosen for the farming honor for her work years ago as manager of the California Farm Bureau, which included helping to pass legislation for the labor rights of farmers.

"I fought for wage laws and child-labor laws," she said.

McLean has lived an impressive life. She is the daughter of a Stanford University dean and the niece of former President Herbert Hoover.

She served on the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors from 1956-63. She said it was a fun experience but a frustrating one, too, because there was so much dissension.

"It was fun in a gruesome way," she said. "It really was fun, but there was so much opposition to everything. ... They did something really stupid when I was there, when they made Mission Street part of Highway 1. They wanted people to stop at the shops on Mission. It was ridiculous. Nobody's gonna



stop there. There's just a lot of traffic."

She said she made headway, however, with construction laws.

"One important thing I did on the board was get a Planning Commission going — against a lot of opposition. Before that you could build anywhere. (The commission) decided where industrial areas are and where residential areas are, so you don't have roads that are a bunch of both. Santa Cruz is a nice place because of the building restrictions."

Through the years, McLean served as president of the California Council on Children and Youth and on the California

League of Women Voters.

She is also an accomplished artist and writer. She illustrated "They Called It Home," a book by Margaret Koch, and has had her watercolor paintings included in various exhibits. She's written "Uncle Bert," "Hulda's World — Chronical of Hulda Minthorn," "In the Words of," and "Santa Cruz Tid-drift Shells." She is currently working on "Almost a Hundred Years."

She was named 1997's woman of the year by the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce.

More wry than spry, McLean walked gingerly around her old home on the North Coast on Wednesday afternoon. The home — known as Rancho del Oso — was converted into a nature and history center in 1975. It is at Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

The house has sweeping views of the ocean and neighboring hillsides — much of which are displayed in the museum and depicted in McLean's art.

It was in this idyllic spot that McLean grew up and spent much of her adult years working as a ranch hand, running tractors and driving horses. McLean and her husband Charles Alexander McLean Jr. inherited the land from Hulda's father, Theodore Hoover.

Theodore's brother, Herbert, is best be remembered as U.S. president at the start of the Great Depression in 1929. But McLean is quick to defend him: "Like Will Rogers said, 'Of course he was also responsible for the drought.' It was a worldwide depression. I'm afraid he didn't have anything to do with it."

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