

'Sixth supervisor' removed

■ The painting of Alice Wilder has been 'rotated' out of the Santa Cruz board room.

BY LEE QUARNSTROM
Mercury News Staff Writer

For half a century, Alice Earl Wilder, wearing one of her trademark floppy, red hats, religiously attended weekly meetings of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, always there to discourage any wasteful spending of tax dollars to succor the poor or

help the needy.

Even after age and infirmity prevented the tight-fisted Ben Lomond resident from heading down to the board chambers, her presence as "the sixth supervisor" was felt in an oil painting of her that gazed out over the room, the stern visage still a warning to profligate politicians.

But on Tuesday, the venerable portrait of the late "lady in the red hat," as she was often called, was gone from the supervisors' meeting room. It had been "rotated" to another part of the government center by the county arts commission and replaced by a modern painting the conservative Wilder would have hated.

"Hey," Supervisor Ray Belgard asked when the painting's absence was pointed out to him, "they can't move things out of here without asking us, can

they?"

"Darn," said County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello, "I just knew somebody was going to notice that it was gone."

While Mauriello didn't know where the portrait had been "rotated" to, Liz Lindsley at the arts commission did.

"We moved it down to the third floor," she said, "right outside the sheriff's office."

Lindsley said the county owns about 40 works of art, mostly paintings and sculpture, and



The "lady in the red hat" was against spending tax dollars for social services and planning.

moves them around from time to time. Any fears that the grim-faced Wilder would be "rotated" into a bureaucratic cubicle where

See WILDER, Page 2B

Supervisors escape 'lady in red hat'

JUN 15 1994
SJMN

■ WILDER

from Page 1B

she would stare down disapprovingly at a hapless clerk-typist are unfounded, she said.

The new work in the board room, titled "Emerging Into Freedom," is on loan from Chris Robles, a Harbor High School student painter. But it, too, could be rotated elsewhere.

"If they want Alice back up on the fifth floor," Lindsley said, "they can have her back."

Former county Supervisor Ralph Sanson, whose liberal bent often put him at odds with watchdog Wilder, said he didn't think the painting should fall under the purview of the arts commission.

"It's not art," he said. "It's a monument."

Wilder, who began her regular attendance at supervisors' meetings in 1934, traditionally sat in the front row, rising to speak in favor of expenditures of public monies to benefit Ben Lomond and against spending tax dollars for social services and planning projects. On her 80th birthday, in 1969, supervisors placed a brass plate at her regular seat in the old board chambers dubbing her "the sixth supervisor." A decade later, in their new meeting room, supervisors dedicated another brass plaque to her.

She stopped attending meetings when she was 95. She was 99 when she died in October 1988.