

'Sixth Supervisor' Alice Wilder Is 90 Years Old

By PAUL BEATTY

Sentinel Staff Writer

Alice is 90 years old today.

But, she is ageless.

Alice Earl Wilder, Santa Cruz County's "Sixth Supervisor" and "The Lady in the Red Hat" is celebrating another birthday in her long life of public service that began before Ralph Nader was born.

And speaking of Nader, he was a bit too much for Alice.

"He called me up and asked me to criticize our congressman (Burt Talcott) a few years back saying that the congressman did not represent the people.

"I told him 'certainly not'.

"How could I criticize him when every year he and his wife would invite students into their home in Washington and show them how the federal government works. How could I criticize that? It's something we all should know," Alice explained.

The history of Alice Wilder has been told and re-told and The Sentinel's files on her far outweigh those of any other significant community figure. Being Alice, when showed the files, she complained, "It's a waste of paper."

She's earned every story and every laurel that has come her way.

For over half her life she has been deeply involved in local government, serving on community boards and watchdogging county supervisors and the county bureaucracy.

One official said, "She is interminably involved," but then he is a Democrat.

Alice is still at it.

Tomorrow, beginning her 91st year, she will catch the 7:05 morning bus from Ben Lomond, open her small office on Center Street where under the business name "Community Planning" she runs a no-charge ombudsman service for citizens who are smothering in red tape.

She will then walk to the County Center, crossing the San Lorenzo River bridge and enter the huge cement offices of county government that she watched being built.

She prowls the halls of government and knows where the dusty and forgotten files are closeted.

"I go to all the supervisors meetings and then if anything comes up on planning or for LAFCO that concerns the San Lorenzo Valley, I go to those meetings," she explained.

"But, otherwise, I don't go to other meetings any more, there's just too many of them — government has gotten so complex, too complex for the average person to get any answers.

Alice seeks the answers during the day "and when I'm done, I catch the afternoon bus home.

"On Tuesdays when the board meets, if I get the 6:15 bus home I'm lucky," she said, then told the reporter, "you know all about that, because you take me home sometimes."

Taking her home is neither a burden, nor boring — it is a gift of Alice.

She will tell you the human side of community history, the break up of family lands in the valley, relate the romances that brought families together and produced community leaders, and nod knowingly of whispered scandals that broke the families apart and ended political careers.

One consistent criticism she has is that citizens are not getting enough information.

"Newspapers are better, they get the information faster," Alice says, noting, "in years past, I would get calls all day long from valley residents wanting to know about things."

In those earlier years, the 40s through 60s, Alice's information service gave her a great deal of influence in valley matters. She was the liaison between the valley and the county governing board.

Newspapers have taken some of that burden and power from her.

Asked along the drive if she believes what she reads in the paper, Alice answers, "Sometimes."

"But, you believe it when I write it don't you?"

"Usually," she says with a smile.

Are people improving with her age?

"No, they are about the same, people are the same."

Much, much earlier she believes things were worse.

Alice remembers that during her university days at Berkeley she read a restricted history about the early Apostolic Fathers and their political struggle to end the abominable practice of child abandonment.

"Outside town in that old Christian community there was a hill and people would take their unwanted babies and leave them out there overnight.

"In the morning, the procurers would come and take the children and train them for a life of prostitution," Alice related.

Adding, "So maybe in the long run, we are getting better, although no noticeably in my lifetime."

Alice was born in Oakland, the daughter of Guy Chaffee Earl, an attorney and state senator, and mother Ella Jane (Ford) Earl "a very intelligent woman."

The young family purchased land in Ben Lomond for a summer home.

"But the Ben Lomond land and home was more than that," Alice says, "my father told us as he looked at the land when we got it, 'you can sell the other property, but not this—this is to be the roots of the family.'"

"And, this is where the family returns, to come home and even to marry," Alice adds.

Her father was a Cal Berkeley graduate, but her mother attended an arts and crafts school in San Francisco.

"In those days, it was alright for a woman to study art, they believed, because it helped her run a nice home."

Alice and her two sisters and brother went to Cal and she graduated in 1912.

Her class had 250 students, about the size of graduating classes at San Lorenzo Valley High School these days.

One of her classmates was a young man named Earl Warren.

"Earl made it on his own," Alice said, "it wasn't his fami-

ly, he worked very hard, especially as a freshman."

Alice majored in "social economics," a discipline designed to train welfare administrators — a growing profession in America, then and possibly now.

"College for women was different then," Alice points out, "the purpose wasn't to go into a career, unless you were to be a teacher, but to educate the women to run a home and to get involved in community activities."

For the men "it was to get them a better paying job," she said.

Was Berkeley only for the rich in 1912?

"No, there were miners' sons there, if their academic record was good enough, and you could go through school on college loans, even then."

Alice remembers, with a trace of disgruntlement, that a family trip to the Middle East during her university days cost her two summer vacations to do makeup work and possibly cost her a place on the honors list, which she barely missed.

"My sister got scarlet fever in Egypt and the family had to

stay over there past the opening session.

"My father decided that Guy (brother) had to return because 'a man couldn't miss his classes,' but that the girls could stay on."

Alice graduated in June at the age of 23 and married her childhood friend, Beverly Burt Wilder, also a graduate of Berkeley.

"I ran the home and he ran the business," Alice said, but she did have the children raised in the Episcopal Church (she was raised Congregational) "because then he would go to church with the family."

He died at age 42, leaving Alice with the four children, one still an infant.

Money from the family estate was sufficient for the necessities, "but I made doll blankets, apple cake and chutney and sold it under the company name of Wilder Products for the extras we needed," Alice said.

All of her children were born in Oakland, two at home and two in the hospital.

Alice preferred home births where the children were also delivered by doctors.

Humane Society Director Charged

BELLEVILLE, N.J. (AP) — A Belleville man has formally charged the executive director of the Associated Humane Societies of Newark with stealing 28

of his more than 80 pets.

But Lee Bernstein, executive director of the society, said Michael DePasquale abandoned the animals and faces up to \$20,000 in fines on civil charges of cruelty.

DePasquale was sent to Essex County Jail on Aug. 9 for failure to make weekly \$15 alimony payments.

A day later, the Humane Society answered complaints from his landlord and neighbors. Bernstein said he found 14 dogs, 18 to 20 birds, four turtles, at least 30 mice, six toads and numerous cats in the home.

Outdoor Buffet

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Carter will entertain members of Congress at an outdoor buffet at the White House Sunday, it has been announced.

"We got to rest for two to three weeks after the births in those days," Alice said, "but today, the mothers are up the same day and walking the halls of the hospitals.

Alice agrees that the status of women has changed, but believes it is a mixed blessing.

"You can't really say they are better off in all ways, and it depends on what the community wants from its women.

"It is certainly better today for women going into professions, but it is worse for a woman to run a home and raise a family."

Her attitude is not sexist, she believes that either the father or the mother should be at home "or at least a close member of the family to keep the family together, to keep the children in the home."

The break-up of American homes disturbs her and she believes that, in part, it is due to the community's accepting divorce "without it being a black mark" against the couple.

The thing that keeps Alice running is her deep commitment to citizen involvement in the community and its government.

She is pushing for the coalescing of a family advocacy movement.

"I wish enough people would contact me, or a political leader, to lobby so that local decision would be made to improve family conditions."

The Santa Cruz scene has changed around her and the rural home that Alice came to in Ben Lomond and built as an institution in Santa Cruz County

"is now in a city.

"We were rural, but now we are a city in this county," she explained.

Alice worked within the change. Her record shows involvement every step of the way the past half-century.

She fought the good fight to preserve the river and timberlands in a day before "environmentalism" was a word and she continues to work for more and better parks for the county and her San Lorenzo Valley.

"I have learned that you must do it yourself if you want

help in getting it done," Alice advised.

She has done it herself, but she won't admit it.

Last week when state Sen. Bob Nimmo commended

Last week State Sen. Bob Nimmo commended Alice for her years of community work and in the state senate resolution he listed her many services and accomplishments.

Alice told us, "Those are the things my parents are responsible for, I have just been a spokesman for my parents.

"I have only done the things I was brought up to do."

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