

BL Hall Renamed For Lady In Red Hat

By PAUL BEATTY
Sentinel Staff Writer

"I was so dumbfounded, I hadn't any words — it was a total surprise to me."

The naming of the Ben Lomond Recreation Hall as "Wilder Hall", with full renovation now almost complete, brought those words from Alice Earl Wilder, the lady honored by the name change.

Mrs. Wilder, who is also known as "The Lady in the Red Hat," "The County's Sixth Supervisor" and just "Alice," richly deserved the honor, it was agreed by the Ben Lomond Recreation Board when it made the award.

Alice was a member of the first three - member board which took office when the recreation hall and the Ben Lomond park came under the jurisdiction of the newly - formed recreation district established in 1948 for that purpose.

She recalled, "It all began with the Brooks Trust in 1915, when Elisha Brooks, the principal at the Girls High School in San Francisco, decided he wanted to do something for the community."

"Mr. Brooks' one daughter, Alice — he had two, the other one Myrtle Whitney who had the Brooks property later — was very interested in scouting and camping."

"She and her father had camped many years somewhere near Big Basin and then when that land changed hands, or however it was lost to their use, they came to Ben Lomond and bought the Brooks property."

"This 25 acres is still beautiful raw land, up off Old County Road."

"In 1915 Mr. Brooks got together with four other land owners and approached those people who owned land on the north side of the river, now between the river and Mill Street."

"They managed to get all the land down to where the dam is now, but one property owner east of there held out, so they dropped their options on the land that would have given us a park all the way to Highway 9."

"Elisha told my father (Guy Chaffee Earl) that the people of the community would be so proud of the park, they would contribute to continuously maintain it for the future."

"My father tried to tell him that might work for a while

fire department could not spend its tax monies on maintaining the park and library."

Alice explained that those supporting the maintenance of the Brooks Trust to keep the park for the town were primarily the members of the fire department, Chamber of Commerce and the Ben Lomond Community Club, of which she was an active member.

She became the club's representative to serve on the three - member board, with members from the chamber and the fire department.

Alice explained it was the "strong community" climate of the times in the valley that made it possible for a man such as Elisha Brooks to accomplish what he did.

During the time the Brooks Trust was administered by the fire department, the volunteers with community help built the town's first fire station on Brooks Trust land.

That fire station, taken over by the Ben Lomond Recreation District in 1948 when it was no longer used by the firemen, is now "Wilder Hall."

Alice remembered, "Our family began coming to Felton in 1896, when I was just in grade school (Alice is in her early 80s) and we were using the second home of my father's friend, Samuel P. Hall, who was the first judge of the appellate court in San Francisco."

"My mother (the former Ella Jane Ford) taught the children who were old enough at home during the two months of the school year we stayed in Felton."

"By 1901, with four children old enough for school, it was becoming quite a chore."

"It was then we began making the decision if we would spend the school year months in San Francisco, or move the family down here."

"During the months we did spend in the valley, my father commuted by train to the city."

"One of his friends who commuted with him was a man named Edgar Bishop, a real estate man who was one of those commissioned by the Ben Lomond Land and Lumber Company to sell off their holdings in Ben Lomond."

"In fact, their holdings were all of Ben Lomond and company President James Pierce laid out the town of Ben Lomond, which originally was known as 'Mill Town'."



Alice Earl Wilder

down during the logging operation, he enclosed the porch to provide room for his children."

Alice's mother and four children lived in Ben Lomond year round, and the father commuted to the city where he stayed during the week, coming home each weekend on the "Del Monte Special."

He would arrive, after the three hour trip, at about 6:30 p.m. on Fridays — "just in time for supper" — and leave on Sunday to go back to work on Mondays.

Alice remembers some interesting things of Ben Lomond in her youth:

"The first hotel here was the Ben Lomond Hotel and anyone who was 'anyone' stayed there during the summer — it was an elite crowd."

"Some time later, the Ben Lomond Hotel began to allow Jewish people to stay there, and so the Ben Lomond Land and Lumber Company built the Rowardennan Hotel."

"The elite group then moved to the Rowardennan Hotel because of prejudice."

"We knew it existed in our town, but there was none of that in the family."

"Later, the Rowardennan Hotel made its mistake."

"The hotel management decided that during the off - season they would allow Jim

Corbett, or his opponent, I can't remember which, to use the hotel for a training camp."

"They were warned this would turn the elite crowd away, but they wouldn't listen."

"So Ben Dickerson, who had worked as an accountant with Ben Lomond Lumber and then went into hotel work, built the Dickinson Hotel (where Town and Country is now) and sure enough, the elite crowd went to him the next season."

Alice pointed out that the new historical and archeological

identification in the revised general plan fails to acknowledge the remaining structures, a two - story house and cabin, that was part of the Ben Lomond Hotel.

These buildings are located near the senior citizens center in Ben Lomond.

She also pointed to the still - existing cabin of Jason Brown, the son of John Brown, the revolutionary abolitionist, as a site that should be recognized:

"Jason Brown was a recluse and if he heard us children coming, he would climb up into the attic of his cabin and pull the ladder up behind him."

"If we approached quietly and found him before he heard us coming, then he would talk to us and tell us of his childhood."

"He was a fascinating man. His sister also lived in Ben Lomond and was married to a school teacher, although I never met her."

Also of general plan interest, and an explanation of why there are 10,000 building lots in the valley of which 5,000 are unbuildable, is Alice's revelation that building lots in the valley used to be given away as prizes at movie show raffles.

"Many of the cinemas in San Francisco, Oakland and Piedmont would give the winning raffle ticket holders small parcels of land in the valley to get people to attend the movies."

"Many of these lots were in the Rowardennan area, after the hotel burned in the 1920s and also there were raffle lots in the Glen Arbor area."

Alice further pointed out that parts of the original mill, north of Ben Lomond — before Pierce moved it to downtown Ben Lomond — are still to be found and should be declared of historical value.

And also, there is an "octagon house" in Ben Lomond that was made as a copy of John of Groats octagon house in Scotland.

Today, Alice's mind is on the future of valley recreation — she supports the enlargement of the present districts while maintaining their identity — and the renovation of Wilder Hall.

The renovation was under the direction of Recreation Director Leslie Robinson and includes the complete repaneling, ceiling restoration and lighting of the main hall, and the remodeling of the kitchen.

"It's going to look very nice — it will be much nicer to work in," Alice commented.

It was Mrs. Robinson, a director who has been on the other side of the political fence from Alice many times, who asked the board to rename the building Wilder Hall.

Alice summed up her reaction, "I was overwhelmed ... I hadn't any words to express my feelings."

I Have Had Four Aids Before My New MAICO MARK 120 ...

AND IT IS BY FAR THE BEST AID I have ever had. I can understand my TV better, don't have to ask my daughter to repeat, and understand people better. My batteries last 8 to 10 days.



Florence Hurlbut



AVAILABLE AT—

BOPPELL  MAICO

HEARING AID CENTER
1220 PACIFIC AVENUE, SANTA CRUZ
PHONE 423-6322

 L'HOMMEDIEU & Co. 

when the people are enthusiastic, but that some provision would have to be made to fund the park in the future. "The people did contribute for fixing the park and to build a library building.

"Sometime after that, it became apparent that a guaranteed means of funding for the park had to be found and the Superior Court judge in Santa Cruz — we only had one then — directed the Brooks Trust be taken over by the fire department because they had an interest in the reservoir in the park for emergency fire fighting.

"Just prior to 1948, the fire department's control of the Brooks Trust was challenged — by some of those people who didn't want the park anyway — and the same judge ruled the

"The lumber companies had logged out the valley in the 1870s and it was no longer worthwhile for them to remain, so they began selling land.

"My father told Mr. Bishop he was interested in some property and Mr. Bishop told him of a lot he should check out.

"He wrote my mother, and she and the children went up to see it.

"It was beautiful, covered with orchards with apples and pears, and the oak and madrone were still standing and there was a stream running through the property — it was beautiful. . . beautiful.

"We purchased the home site — a home that was put together by Mr. Pierce from two cabins he had moved from shanty town in Ben Lomond.

"Shanty town was where the mill workers lived. Mr. Pierce put the two shanties together — today there is a two inch difference in floor level of our floors, but that's all right — and then built a porch all around both of them.

"When his family had moved

