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SHE'LL BE 88 THIS MONTH

The red hatted 6th supervisor—Alice

By Bob Ligon

Alice Earl Wilder.

Now how do you sum up a gal like Mrs. Wilder—whose San Lorenzo Valley residency pre-dates Highway 9 and whose political concept of public service is ahead of the times.

Most Valley residents know Mrs. Wilder as "the lady in the red hat" who hasn't missed sitting through more than a few meetings of the County Board of Supervisors since 1934.

She is known as the grand lady of Valley politics—the "sixth" member of the Board of Supervisors.

But what not too many people know is that her reason for sitting through all those meetings was her dedication to public service.

Since 1951 Mrs. Wilder has spent almost full-time as kind of a public ombudsman. She helps both individuals and organizations through the governmental political maze.

Earl. The other children were Eleanor and Guy, who were twins, and Martha.

Mr. Earl was an attorney, both in private practice and in the Alameda County District Attorney's Office. He served a four-year term as state senator and for 32 years was a member of the University of California Board of Regents.

He was a graduate of UC himself, in the class of 1883.

The Earls bought a summer home in Ben Lomond in 1901—the same home Mrs. Wilder lives in now. The house was built in 1876.

Each year the Earls would spend the summer months here, with Mr. Earl commuting between here and San Francisco on weekends by train.

This was the Valley's—and Santa Cruz's—hey-day period as a tourist spot for wealthy persons from the San Francisco Bay Area.

Mrs. Wilder recalls riding in horse and buggy to pick up her father at the depot. It was in Ben Lomond, during summer vacation, that Mrs. Wilder met her husband-to-be, the late Beverly B. Wilder, a building contractor, whose home then was also in the Bay Area.

The couple was married in 1912, the year Mrs. Wilder was graduated from the University of California at Berkeley.

They lived in the Berkeley area for 22 years, but each summer returned to Ben Lomond on vacation.

The couple dreamed of the day when they could move to Ben Lomond upon retirement. However, Mr. Wilder became terminally ill in 1934, and the couple decided to move here immediately. Mr. Wilder died the next year—within a month of the death of her father.

With youngsters still to raise, Mrs. Wilder moved into the home her father purchased years ago and has lived there ever since.

"My father used to say this home 'is the roots of the Earl family,'" said Mrs. Wilder.

And so it has remained. Scores of family reunions have been held on the Wilder property at 300 Hillside road in Ben Lomond. Family members for years have been spending vacations on the property.

There have been many weddings and birthday parties at the Wilder home.

When her husband died, Mrs. Wilder was left with five children, four of whom were still living with her. Her eldest son, Beverly, who now is retired and living in

for the Valley school board, representing the Ben Lomond area.

This was her first of many public offices, including being a member of the County Board of Education, the County Republican Central Committee, the old Board of Public Health, the Ben Lomond Recreation District board, and other offices.

For many years she has been secretary of the San Lorenzo Valley Chamber of Commerce, which she helped form, and has been secretary for the Boulder Creek Recreation District.

Mrs. Wilder recalls her first Board of Supervisors meeting back in 1934. She went there mainly to see about having the road in front of the Wilder property made a county road.

She recalls that George Ley, president of the Santa Cruz Lumber Company, was chairman of the board at the time.



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"He was right," she said. "People may forget your name, but they never forget that I am the person that always wears the red hat."

Why red?

She said that George (Hoot) Cress was also a good supervisor.

Other supervisors she has "covered" during her reign as public ombudsman were Frank Clement, Jim Maddock, Pat

she says it appears to be inevitable.

She thinks the day is coming when there will have to be another highway in the Valley, such as the one proposed in the Valley's first general plan.

The plan proposed a parallel highway, which would, roughly, follow the route of the old railroad tracks on the opposite side of the San Lorenzo River.

The route has been removed from the Valley's current general plan.

"Traffic is bad now," says Mrs. Wilder. "I don't know how we can help but build that road—at least some time in the future."

Anyone who has ever gotten a letter from Mrs. Wilder probably will recall it was on pink stationery. All of her correspondence is on pink stationery.

Why pink?

"For the same reason I wear a red hat," she said. "My grandfather always used pink stationery because it never gets lost in a stack of mail."

Mrs. Wilder has been honored a number of times for her public service, both in the Valley and county. Ben Lomond recreation hall was named Wilder Hall in her honor.

Pink stationery or no, Mrs. Wilder is a formidable political adversary. She has been involved in many political controversies.

"I've never said I was right all the time," said Mrs. Wilder. "But I always thought I was right at the time."

Mrs. Wilder has maintained an office in Santa Cruz since 1951. Her office for many years was on Front street, behind the old St. George Hotel.

Her office now is at 1011 Cedar street. Her sign out front says "Community Planning" and has her trademark on it, a red hat.

While interviewing her for this story, a young woman from the San Lorenzo Valley came in asking for help on a Valley matter.

"I'll come back," the woman said.

"No, you better wait," said Mrs. Wilder. "I'll be busy the rest of the day."

And so her days go. If she isn't attending a board—or some other Valley or county meeting—she is helping people and groups find their way through the bureaucratic maze of local government.

"As my father and his father have said



Wedding day, August, 1912, Oakland.



Alice, aged 22 months.

She literally is a human clearinghouse of information, which she gives out for the asking.

Why?

Mrs. Wilder's father, the late Guy Chaffey Earl, who was a California state senator, used to drill into the heads of his four children that if America is to escape the bureaucracy that comes with bigness, each—and he emphasized "each"—citizen must devote a part of his or her time to public service.

He required each of his children to take at least one year of business law, as preparation for their public service.

What's this about Mrs. Wilder pre-dating Highway 9?

She does. When she first started spending summer vacations here Highway 9 didn't exist.

A county road called "San Lorenzo road" was in use then. It pretty well followed the existing Highway 9, but the state didn't take over the road until years later.

Folks then took the train.

Mrs. Wilder recalls getting off the train at the Felton depot and riding in a horse and buggy to Ben Lomond, where the family maintained a summer home.

Mrs. Wilder, who will be 88 this month (September 23), was born in Oakland, the eldest child of Guy and Ella Jane (Eleanor)

Ben Lomond, was in college at the time.

Living at home with Mrs. Wilder at the time were her other children, Peter, Ann, Eleanor, and Marion.

Mrs. Wilder now has 11 grandchildren and eight great grandchildren.



Alice in 1905

After her husband's death, Mrs. Wilder worked as a volunteer for the County Tuberculosis Association, an organization that helped in the formation of the county's first health department.

About this time she was asked to run

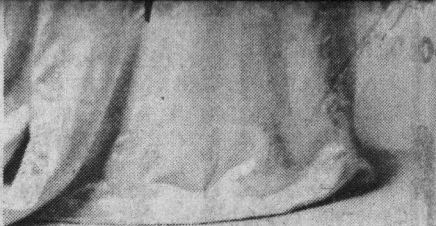
Portrait in 1908

"He told me what I had to do to make it a public road—that was my first, first-hand lesson in county government," she said.

From that time on, she has attended almost every single board meeting—and traditionally holds a Christmas party for the board each year.

Why—ever since 1935—has she worn a red hat?

"I have ever since that time," she said, recalling that her father told her that if she was to go into politics she must have some kind of symbol to be recognized by.



Alice today, a youthful 87 years.

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Liteky, and Ed Borovatz, the present Valley representative on the board.

What does Mrs. Wilder see in the Valley's future: "Lots more people and autos." Although this is not to her liking,

many times, every American has a duty to spend what time they can in public service," she said. "If each of us lived up to this responsibility, we would have the kind of government our forefathers envisioned."