

Alice Wilder. . . for 40 years involved in SLV politics

By Lois Martin
Valley Press Staff Writer

One of San Lorenzo Valley's most colorful and controversial residents, who is often referred to as "the lady in the red hat", celebrated her 84th birthday last year.

Alice Earl Wilder has been an integral part of community activities within the Valley for the past 40 years and although she has met opposition to her stand on various issues along the way, she has worked tirelessly throughout the years for what she believes will benefit the Valley.

The knowledge of local history and government which she has amassed over the years, and the time she spends daily attending the various meetings of local governmental agencies is almost unbelievable. Most women half her age would find it a task to keep up with her pace.

Why does she do it?

Alice's father, Guy Earl, a prominent San Francisco attorney and former State Senator, taught his children that it was their duty to become involved in community affairs. He considered it an obligation and likened it to the tithing to the church which was done by their grandparents.

"Your tithing belongs to your community and you must find something to do for the good of that community. That's your responsibility for having the opportunity of being brought up in America," he said.

Alice was graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1912 with an AB in Social Economics. Her father was a graduate in the UC class of 1883 and later served on the Board of Regents for two terms.

"Father felt a college education was necessary for all his children, even his daughters, and that they should have a knowledge of what made things go in the community and how we could best help the people that couldn't help themselves. He also advised us to take a year of business law so we would know when to get a lawyer.

"Father did not approve of women lawyers, or I would most certainly have followed in his footsteps and been one," Alice explained.

His feeling was that a girl's first obligation was to get married and have a family, make her husband happy and bring up worthwhile American citizens.

"If you go through all those years of education, you will feel as though you have to work at it to make the education worthwhile—at least repay part of it by using it, and then you'll be a second

class parent and I want you to be a first class parent," he explained.

Alice began her community service work in the schools in Oakland where she and her family lived prior to moving to Ben Lomond in 1934 due to her husband Beverly's ill health. He died a year later leaving Alice with five young children—Beverly, Jr. who was in a high school military academy in New Mexico; Peter, in a local high school; Ann and Eleanor in elementary and Marian in kindergarten.

She continued working within the local schools while her children were growing up and was shocked that the Valley didn't have a public health nurse, so she made it her project to see that the local schools got one.

This led to her being asked to run for (which she did and was elected) the Ben Lomond Elementary School board and later as high school trustee on the Ben Lomond-Boulder Creek Union High School Board.

Her first actual paid job from 1944 to 1951 was when the Santa Cruz County TB Association was formed. She had begun her work voluntarily within the local TB chapter previously.

She has worked with the SLV Chamber of Commerce since its early years as its secretary. The chamber felt it would be beneficial to the Valley to have a contact with an office in Santa Cruz to keep them in touch with what was going on at the county seat with regard to the Valley.

The office was obtained at 825 Front street in 1951 where it still remains and Alice was put in charge. The office was given the name Community Planning and one of her functions is to direct persons to the proper governmental offices for their specific problems and needs. She considers herself the SLV people's representative in Santa Cruz.

Alice's salary as secretary of the Chamber began at \$25 per month and has remained the same ever since.

She is also the secretary of the Boulder Creek Recreation District for which she is paid \$40 per month and former secretary of Ben Lomond Recreation for which she received no salary.

"Being a good secretary is more than just keeping minutes. You have to know what's going on in the Board of Supervisors meeting. You have to be aware of everything that comes up that may affect our tax base, community planning and be a general all around lookout for the community's welfare. The minute keeping is incidental," she



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explained.

In addition to the board of supervisors, Boulder Creek Recreation District and SLV Chamber of Commerce meetings, she regularly attends the meetings of the Planning Commission, Zoning Administrator, SLV Unified School Board, SLV County Water Board, Ben Lomond Recreation District, County Welfare Advisory Commission, County Board of Education of which she is a former member, Historical Preservation Society of which she is a director and the committee to study the Valleywide recreation issue of which she is a member.

She is also a member of and attends meetings of SLV Property Owners, SLV Senior Citizens, Ben Lomond Businessmen's Association and SLV Republican Women and the Santa Cruz County Republican Central Committee of which she has been an elected representative for the past ten years.

She has followed her father's advice in working with the local government officials for the benefit of the Valley.

People should never ask a political entity to do things for them if they don't know their problems, because when they do and don't get it, they often go away mad. If they get it, they usually never go back again or say 'thank you'.

"Remember there are lots more people than you and your particular hobby to be considered. So go regularly to the meetings, find out their problems, see how what you want fits into what they can do and then when you get it, if you do, don't stop going to the meetings, but continue to go and see what's being done with it," Earl advised.

Alice attends usually no less than three evening meetings per week and many during the days of the at least 40 hours a week she spends at the office. Most of the meetings are held at the governmental center a half mile from her office and she attends them all on foot as she does not drive a car.

She has been one of the Greyhound bus's best customers over the years catching the 7 a.m. run in Ben Lomond and returning from Santa Cruz in the evening. Her home is about a half mile from the bus stop which she treks, rain or shine.

Night meetings in Ben Lomond she often walks to, but for those out of the area, she usually manages to get a ride with a friend.

Alice has been in the middle of some of the biggest political battles fought in the Valley including the unification of the school districts and

the Ben Lomond dam issue which resulted in the formation of the Ben Lomond Recreation District.

She has worked for the unification of water districts since the early days of getting the first water rights because she feels that the solidarity would give better service and provide for future growth. There have been many battles involved with this issue over the years and it is still not resolved, she explained.

"I have worked hard for good sanitation for the Valley over the years and gotten nowhere. Recently an article appeared in the paper about the new report on sewerage for the Valley which I compared to the 1948 report and it was almost identical. We went to bat for the original report and now that the second one shows the same situation, it's the time to act on the existing reports rather than make more studies that only show the same situation.

"The only way we'll get good sanitation here is if the people are sufficiently interested to put out the money to do it," Alice explained.

Why does she always wear a red hat?

"My father was told by his father that if you were going to do anything effectively in the public eye, you have to have something you are known by. Find a color and stick with it, was his advice," Alice explained.

Her grandfather always used pink stationery 'because it never gets lost in a stack of letters on white paper' and her father took his advice and always used blue stationery. Alice retains the family tradition and uses pink stationery.

"When I came down here, people weren't wearing red very much. I always liked red and had a new red hat which I was very fond of and consequently wore to all the meetings.

"Without really thinking about it at the time, I wore my old blue one one day to one of the important water commission meetings and after the meeting, the chairman came over to me and said, 'don't you ever do that to us again!'

"What do you mean," I asked.

"I looked for you all morning to ask you a question and couldn't find you and here you were all the time sitting here in that blue hat!" he explained.

"Thank you," she said, "You've just confirmed some advice my grandfather gave many years ago."

That advice has led to Alice Earl Wilder making a name for herself—"the lady in the red hat."