

Memorial ^{Wilder} for a 'giant'

Alice Earl Wilder eulogized

By Mary Barnett

As the text of his sermon Thursday afternoon at Calvary Episcopal Church, the Reverend Alexander Anderson chose Genesis 6:4 — "There were giants in the earth in those days."

It was the first time in over 50 years in the ministry he had used this verse for a sermon, the clergyman said. But he felt the occasion was appropriate. He was preaching at the memorial service for Alice Earl Wilder.

Mrs. Wilder, 99, died in her sleep Oct. 24 at her home at 300 Hillside Ave., Ben Lomond.

"Her stature as a leader in matters that affected her beloved Ben Lomond, Santa Cruz County and the State of California were so outstanding that I truly believe the

verse of the text could apply to her," Anderson said.

He cited Mrs. Wilder's many contributions to the San Lorenzo Valley and Santa Cruz County. He mentioned her service on school boards and the boards of the Ben Lomond Recreation District, the County Office of Education, the City-County Library and on the County Welfare Advisory Commission. He noted she assisted in the formation of the first county health department, welfare department, and planning commission. He referred to her role as the "Sixth Supervisor" of Santa Cruz County because of her 50 years of uninterrupted attendance at the weekly meeting of the Board of Supervisors.

"She insisted on being involved," he said. "I believe that Mrs. Wilder was known to more Santa Cruz County people than any

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✓ Alice Earl Wilder

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person who has ever lived here. That is why I chose the text I did.

"She was indeed a giant, standing above her generation."

Others who spoke at the memorial service for Mrs. Wilder expressed their admiration and affection for "the lady in the red hat."

"That amazing woman, Alice Earl Wilder, was for years a cornerstone of integrity in Santa Cruz County government," declared former County Supervisor Hulda McLain. "When something was wrong she spoke out against it, and stated her facts plainly. She got real satisfaction from seeing an official do a good job."

Fifth District Supervisor Joe Cucchiara, introduced to the assembly of Mrs. Wilder's friends, relatives and admirers who filled the church, praised his distinguished constituent.

Describing Mrs. Wilder as "a patriot and a community activist par excellence," Cucchiara praised her as "a woman of wit, who could raise a smile, but who could touch your soul; a hardy woman ... a woman of history and of vision."

Cucchiara recalled a Christmas present he once received from Mrs. Wilder, in one of her traditional Christmas parties for the supervisors — a replica of her red hat, along with the message, "If the hat fits, wear it."

"Well, Alice, given a lifetime or two or three, I may grow into it," he said.

Cucchiara read a proclamation from the Board of Supervisors honoring Mrs. Wilder and summarizing her life accomplishments. He then presented the flag of the County of Santa Cruz to Mrs. Wilder's eldest son, Beverly B. Wilder, Jr., representing the Wilder family.

Eleanor Wilder Edmunds, one of Mrs. Wilder's two surviving daughters, recalled, "This is my mother's favorite time of year. She would have cooked up her apple crop, after climbing the ladders to pick it well into her 80s, sending terror into the hearts of her family. Then, while normal families were buying presents for family members, she would be buying them for county supervisors for her Christmas party."

"If it was an election year she would be especially happy and busy, advising people how to vote. If she got tired of answering their questions, she would put an ad in the paper."

Mrs. Edmunds said that despite her mother's conservatism, "much of her life was associated with that L word. She was a liberated woman ... she was liberal with her time and energies for her family and her community. I feel privileged to have shared her life."

In his memorial sermon, An-

derson told of visiting Mrs. Wilder at her Ben Lomond home to give her communion during the last four years of her life when she was bedridden.

"Mrs. Wilder was never alone in; the last four years of her life when she was confined to her home," he said. "Her family would never send her to a rest home. But for the last year or so, when I gave her communion, she would say, 'I wish I could go home.' I know she is with her Heavenly Father, and He is saying to her, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'"