



A PARK FOR ALL FOREVER



THE LEGACY OF WILLIAM KENT AND JOHN MUIR

WILLIAM KENT (1864-1928) fulfilled many roles in his life. He was a congressman, businessman, rancher, philanthropist, and conservationist. However, today he is remembered mainly as a visionary and for his gift to the San Francisco Bay Area and park lovers across America and the world over—the purchase, preservation, and consequent transfer of the beloved Muir Woods to public stewardship.

Kent did more than just save the last remaining stand of redwoods in the heart of Marin County from the logging industry in 1905. He created a new model for environmental preservation through his ideals, hopes, and desire to demonstrate that private philanthropy and conservation are inextricably linked.

The inspiring story of William Kent begins in 1905, when he purchased the Redwood Canyon area from the Tamalpais Land & Water Company to save the trees from the looming threat of development. Kent had witnessed the systematic logging of the magnificent redwoods along the California coastline during the Gold Rush, and offered to buy 612 acres for \$45,000—a small personal fortune that his debt-laden family could not afford at the time. In fact, his wife, Elizabeth Thacher Kent, was initially opposed to incurring the additional debt. But Kent's resolve to save the old-growth forest of coast redwoods from commercial interests remained steadfast. He was willing to lose all his money, if required, to save the trees.

Soon after the Kents' acquisition, the North Coast Water Company made plans to take advantage of the topography

of the Redwood Canyon area to build a reservoir for nearby Mill Valley. The company filed condemnation papers in 1907 to obtain 47 acres of the land held by Kent.

Determined not to lose the redwoods, the Kents ended the threat by gifting 298 acres to the federal government. Under the Antiquities Act of 1906, the President of the United States could declare a national monument without congressional consent on land deemed important for its scientific and educational value. To summarize in John Muir's words: "(God) cannot save them (the redwoods) from fools—only Uncle Sam can do that." And Uncle Sam did just that, in 1908, when Theodore Roosevelt declared Muir Woods the nation's 10th National Monument. It all began with one savvy, conservation-minded individual—William Kent.

The decision to name the forest after **JOHN MUIR** (1838-1914)—an intrepid explorer, noted wilderness preservationist, and one of America's earliest environmentalists—came from the Kent family, even though Kent had not met Muir at the time and President Roosevelt had offered to name the monument Kent Woods. Often referred to as "The Father of our National Parks," and the "Wilderness Prophet," Muir was born in Scotland, but became famous for his adventures in California's Sierra Nevada and his relentless quest for natural beauty. Muir Woods is a living symbol of the early conservation ethic that has contributed to the Bay Area's environmental and civic conscience today. The majesty of the coast redwoods is a proud testament to 100 years of preservation and the foresight of two remarkable figures in California's history: William Kent and John Muir.