

# ARTI FACT

## Mythic Footsteps



**JUST 12 MILES FROM THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY STANDS** “the best tree-lovers monument that could possibly be found in all the forests of the world,” John Muir once said, where sequoias soar almost 300 feet into the sky. Muir Woods National Monument, named for the famed naturalist, might not exist at all if not for conservationist William Kent’s love of the magnificent specimens, the oldest of which is over 1,200 years old. A recent study of the monument—written by John Auwaerter and John F. Sears for Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation—details how the California congressman kept the 612-acre Redwood Canyon from becoming a public reservoir by donating it to the federal government. **ALTHOUGH KENT HAD ACQUIRED THE TRACT IN 1905**, it was still threatened by eminent domain. A few years later, Frederick E. Olmsted suggested it could become a national monument under the recently passed Antiquities Act. And just one month after that, on January 9, 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt signed a proclamation declaring 295 acres, the property’s core, as the Muir Woods National Monument. **THE PRESIDENT WANTED TO NAME IT FOR KENT**, who demurred in the name of the great naturalist. Muir wrote to him: “You have made yourself immortal like your sequoias and all the best people of the world will call you blessed.” Not only did Kent and his wife become the first citizens to donate land for a monument, he also helped develop rail access to make it easier to visit the site, and played a crucial role in the early years of its management. **IN 1916, KENT INTRODUCED THE BILL** establishing the National Park Service, which took responsibility for the monument’s care. He once said: “Live and let live, say the redwoods. Sun, air, water, soil, and shade for all.” Today, Muir Woods National Monument amazes almost a million visitors each year. **THE REPORT IS ONLINE AT** [www.nps.gov/muwo/historyculture/upload/muwo-hsr2006.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/muwo/historyculture/upload/muwo-hsr2006.pdf)