

A

BRIEF HISTORY OF

161 JESSIE STREET

KENWOOD, CALIFORNIA

PARCEL # 050-263-071



Baseline Consulting
Glen Ellen, CA

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Researched, compiled and presented by Arthur Dawson, Baseline Consulting, 2011.

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OVERVIEW

The property at 161 Jessie Street has a number of connections with significant aspects of Sonoma Valley's rich history. With links to the railroad and subsequent growth of early Kenwood, it has also been the home of several prominent local people, and been visited by a number of well-known Californians.

Before the arrival of the Spanish in the early 19th century, the area was occupied by the native *Guiluc* people, who probably gathered food and other materials on the property. The edge of the original Kenwood Marsh was only a few hundred yards from 161 Jessie and many archeological sites are known in the area. Milo Shepard, grand nephew of Jack London, recalled how he used to find "some beautiful bird points" in the area, relics of the rich hunting the marsh provided before Mexican settlement began.

In 1810, the first known explorer, Gabriel Moraga, traveled through the Kenwood area on his way from Bodega to San Francisco. Thirteen years later, in 1823, the Sonoma Mission (Mission San Francisco de Solano) was founded and the Kenwood area came under nominal control of the church. In that same year, the first mention of the *Guiluc* people appears in the mission record, at San Rafael.

By 1837, California's missions had been secularized and their lands opened to settlement. One settler was Scottish sea captain John Wilson. Once he married Ramona Carrillo, General Vallejo's sister-in-law, and changed his name to Juan to obtain Mexican citizenship papers, he was eligible to apply for a grant. He was awarded the 19,000 acre *Rancho Guilucos*, which stretched from present-day Glen Ellen west to Rincon Valley, and included the Kenwood area. There may have still been some native peoples living a more or less traditional lifestyle at this time, though most probably perished in a smallpox epidemic the following year. Wilson brought in cattle, which increased tremendously in number within a few years, due to the fertility of the land.

Another Scotsman, William Hood, purchased the rancho in 1850. Over the next decade, as the population of Sonoma County increased twenty-fold, Hood lost much of his holdings to squatters. In 1868, Hood defaulted on a loan and over 7000 acres of the ranch, including what is now 161 Jessie, were sold to partners Decker and Jewett, who continued to use the property as a ranch.

In 1887, Decker and Jewett sold the future townsite of Kenwood to the Sonoma Land and Improvement Company. Anticipating the arrival of the railroad, the town was laid out, lots were surveyed, and a brisk business in real estate commenced. After the railroad reached Kenwood in 1888, several stores opened near the Kenwood Depot. One, the Kenwood Mercantile Company, was bought by Ned Wilson in 1908 and was described as a "hub of Kenwood's activities for many years." Four years later, Ned, and his wife Nell, now owners of a thriving business, bought the lots which make up 161 Jessie and built the house on the property. Their home was just a short walk from their store.

The Wilsons were active members of the Kenwood Congregational Church on the Plaza. Ned was one of the founders of the Kenwood Telephone Company. Nell was a poet who published at least one book of poetry. Jack London is said to have visited the house during this era.

Sometime around the middle of the century, 161 Jessie was bought by another prominent Kenwood family, the Kundes. They are said to have painted the house blue and built the front arbor. In the late 1980s, the property was purchased by yet another

well-known local citizen, lawyer and political lobbyist, Darius Anderson, and his wife Sarah. At least two California governors, Jerry Brown and Pete Wilson, are said to have visited 161 Jessie during the Andersons' residency.

The current owners, Tara Conrow and Taylor Greenleaf, bought the property in 2008 and are currently living there with their two children, Adeline and Harrison.

NATURAL SETTING

Two hundred years ago, the area in the vicinity of 161 Jessie probably supported a mosaic of large oak trees, open grassland and seasonal wetland. The perennial waters of nearby Kenwood Marsh would have attracted large numbers of animals in the dry summer months, and thousands of ducks, geese, and other birds during their fall and spring migrations. Father Altimira, founder of the Sonoma Mission, reported seeing many grizzlies in Sonoma Valley, as well as a herd of several hundred Tule Elk, and similar numbers of pronghorn. These animals probably roamed across the property from time to time.

Small remnants of the Kenwood Marsh still exist on Deerfield Ranch and a nearby property. It supports the rare and endangered Kenwood Marsh Checkerbloom, which is found only one other place on earth, in Knight's Valley. A few heritage oaks (trees that were probably already growing at the time of early settlement) persist in the neighborhood of 161 Jessie. One is on a property across the street, and another is the large oak at the Kenwood Plaza.

TIMELINE

7000 B.C.: or earlier: First humans arrive in Sonoma Valley at the end of the last ice age. These may have been ancestors of the *Guiluc* people who were living in the Kenwood area when the Spanish arrived in the early 19th century. The *Guiluc* people spoke the Wappo language, believed by some linguists to be the oldest native language in California. The word *tsonoma* (*Sonoma*) is probably of Wappo origin.

c. 1000 B.C.: Ancestors of the Coast Miwok people arrive in Sonoma Valley. At the time of Spanish contact in the early 19th century, their territory extended from Marin County north to the vicinity of Glen Ellen (however, marriage with neighboring groups was fairly common and many native people spoke more than one language).

1810: Gabriel Moraga travels through the Kenwood area while returning from an expedition to Bodega Bay to assess Russian activities there. Kenwood area is part of the Spanish Empire.

1815: Coast Miwok people living in the vicinity of what is now the City of Sonoma leave or are taken to live at the San Jose Mission. Lower Sonoma Valley may have been more or less unpopulated from this time until the founding of the Sonoma Mission eight years later.

1822: Mexico wins independence. Kenwood area is on Mexico's northern frontier.

1823: Father Jose Altimira founds Mission San Francisco de Solano. Much of Sonoma Valley comes under control of the church.

First mention of "*la nacion Guiluc*" in mission records.

1835: After secularization of the California missions in 1834, General Vallejo takes control of mission property and establishes the Pueblo of Sonoma.

1837: Scottish sea captain John Wilson is awarded the 19,000 acre *Rancho Guilucos*, including the property at 161 Jessie Street, by Mexican governor Juan Alvarado. Wilson had been sailing into Bodega Bay with cargo destined for Sonoma and picking up hides at the ranchos. He marries Ramona Carrillo, General Vallejo's sister-in-law, and changes his name to Juan to obtain Mexican citizenship papers so he can legally receive the grant.

1846: Bear Flag Rebellion in Sonoma, followed by annexation of California as a territory of the United States.

1850: William Hood and William Petit purchase *Rancho Guilucos* from John Wilson for \$13,000, or 70 cents an acre. By 1854, Hood owned the whole rancho.

1850s: Population of Sonoma County increases more than twenty-fold. Despite his efforts to keep them off, squatters settle on much of Hood's land.

1868: Through default on a loan, Hood loses title to all but 1,000 acres of Rancho Guilicos. Peter Decker and John Jewett buy 7,300 acres of the rancho, including the site of modern-day Kenwood, for \$51,000. The property is used to graze cattle and horses.

1887: Decker and Jewett sell the future townsite of Kenwood to the Sonoma County Land and Improvement Company.

Sonoma County Surveyor, P.R. Davis, lays out the townsite and surveys the streets and lots, including the three which make up 161 Jessie.

1888: Kenwood Depot built. Golden spike for the Santa Rosa & Carquinez Railroad driven on June 20th.

c. 1908: Ned Wilson buys Kenwood Mercantile Company, across the road from the Kenwood Depot. Wilson added a feed and grain business, and later sold gasoline. This store served as Kenwood's post office for many years.

Wilson's store was "the hub of Kenwood's activities for many years. The trains would arrive across the street and bring in the mail and the newspapers as well as all the people for weekends . . . The community would gather at the depot or the store when the evening train was due to find out what was going on in town and the outside world."

Dallyce Sand, *Kenwood: Yesterday and Today*

1912: Ned Wilson buys town lots 13, 14 and 15 from Delia Westrup. Lot 16, where the current side lawn is, was added to the property at a later date. Lot 13 was sold at some point. Current lot at 161 Jessie consists of lots 14, 15 and 16.

The house at 161 Jessie was reportedly built in this year. Many of its features probably date to this era, including wainscotting, heavy sliding doors, and the intricately patterned windows. The well and water tower were probably constructed at the same time as the house.

Both Ned Wilson and his wife, Nell, were active members of the Kenwood Congregational Church (now the Kenwood Community Church), on the town Plaza. Nell was a poet and published a book that included a poem about Kenwood.

c. **1915:** Jack London is said to have visited the house, perhaps to see fellow writer Nell Wilson.

1925: Fifteen people, including Ned Wilson, start the Kenwood Telephone Company, contributing \$35 each.

1930s: Wilson's store is set on fire by burglars hoping to destroy evidence of their crime. Citizens had a hard time fighting the fire because bullets were flying from exploding ammunition which was on the shelves. The thieves stored their loot at the Maple Ring, but were later caught when they tried to sell it. One received a fourteen year sentence.

Mid-20th century: Property is bought by the Kunde family. They are said to have painted the house blue and built the front arbor.

c. **1988:** Property is bought by prominent lobbyist Darius Anderson and his wife, Sarah. They put in stonework and converted the garage to an office. A number of well-known California politicians are reported to have visited the house over the next few years, including Jerry Brown, Pete Wilson, and Willie Brown. Anderson was a chief fundraiser for Gray Davis' gubernatorial campaign and is said to have golfed with President Bill Clinton.

c. **1998:** David and Virginia Scott purchase 161 Jessie.

2008: Property is bought by Taylor Greenleaf and Tara Conrow. They move into 161 Jessie with their two children, Adeline and Harrison.

KENWOOD BY ANY OTHER NAME

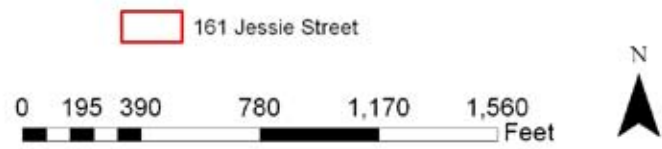
Kenwood has two stories about its name. Like El Verano, the town sprang up with the arrival of the railroad. In 1887, the Sonoma Land & Improvement Company, which owned the property, laid out lots, anticipating the arrival of trains the following year. The infant community tried on several names: Rohrerville, for one of the owners of the Land Company; Los Guilicos, the title of the original Mexican land grant in the area; and then, when William Hood, the owner of the grant, objected, the name was altered slightly to South Los Guilicos.

A number of townspeople still weren't happy, grumbling that Guilicos was hard to pronounce. Around 1895, a vote was taken to change the name again. One story says that Kenwood won because many of the settlers had come from Kenwood, Illinois. Another traces the choice to the fact that many landowners in the area were from old English families and familiar with a London landmark known as the "Kenwood House." Perhaps both accounts are true and Kenwood stuck because it pleased people of different backgrounds.

from: *The Stories Behind Sonoma Valley Place Names*

MAPS & PHOTOS

161 Jessie Street, Kenwood
Rancho Guilucos map, 1851



Courtesy of Bancroft Library, Berkeley. Modern features and labels added to original map.



**KENWOOD STREETS & LOTS C. 1895
SONOMA COUNTY RECORDERS OFFICE 'BREADBOARD' MAP**

161 Jessie Street, Kenwood
Aerial photo, 1942



Courtesy of Natural Resource Conservation Service, Petaluma



VIEW FROM JESSIE STREET



WATERTOWER BEHIND HOUSE



WINDOW DETAIL

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