State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
HRI # _____
Trinomial _____
NRHP Status Code 3CS
Other Listings _____
Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____

 *Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 1540 Bush Street

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Electric Storage Battery Co. factory and Eugene S. Miner auto repair shop
P2. Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted
*b. USGS 7.5' Quad _____ Date _____ T ___; R ___; ___¼ of ___¼ of Sec ___; _____B.M.
c. Address 1540 Bush Street City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 666, lot 6A

*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

This two-story, brick masonry building fills the width of its 87'-6" wide lot. It is faced in red brick patterned with simple panels and diamond shapes. Courses in the brick line up precisely with the adjacent building to the east, which was built at the same time for the same owner. The façade composition is symmetrical and divided into three bays.

A narrow cornice stretches across the top of the building. Its leading edge is decorated with plaster ornament that has become obscured by deterioration and paint. Beneath the cornice are a course of dentils and a white belt course. Four curvilinear brackets of classical style support the cornice and interrupt the dentils and belt course. In the frieze below brick diamond patterns and wider diamonds of white can be found. Another, thicker white belt course defines the lower edge of the frieze.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 2.)

*P3b Resource Attributes: HP8 – industrial building

*P4. Resources Present: ■ Building ☐ Structure ☐ Object ☐ Site ☐ District ☐ Element of District ☐ Other

P5b. Description of Photo: (View, date, accession #)
View looking north
June 2009

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: ■ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
1916, published building notice

*P7. Owner and Address:
1540 BUSH ST LLC
1540 BUSH ST
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94109

*P8. Recorded by: (Name, affiliation, and address)
William Kostura
P. O. Box 60211
Palo Alto, CA 94306

*P9. Date Recorded: October 2009

*P10. Survey Type: (Describe) intensive

P11. Report Citation*: (Cite survey report.) William Kostura. *Van Ness Auto Row Support Structures*. San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2010.

*Attachments: ☐ NONE ☐ Location Map ☐ Sketch Map ■ Continuation Sheet ■ Building, Structure and Object Record ☐ Archaeological Record ☐ District Record ☐ Linear Feature Record ☐ Milling Station Record ☐ Rock Art Record ☐ Artifact Record ☐ Photograph Record ☐ Other (List)

Description (continued):

A band of wood-framed windows stretches across the second story of the building. Wooden mullions divide these windows into wide sections that pivot and flanking narrow sections that are fixed. Each of the above-mentioned sections is in turn divided into multiple lights by wooden muntins. A transom that has been similarly divided tops each window. All of the pivoting window sections remain intact. Five of the eighteen narrow sections are intact while the other thirteen have been replaced by metal louvers or other materials within the original openings. All of the transoms are also intact. In sum, about 80% of the second story window area retains its original materials.

A spandrel of brick separates the first and second stories. Diamond patterns similar to those in the frieze decorate this spandrel. Below, in the first story, a large vehicle entrance with wood-framed sidelights occupies the middle bay. A narrower vehicle entrance that leads to the second story can be found in the bay to the left, and a storefront window occupies most of the bay at right. This window has a wooden frame and appears to be original except for two modern metal dividers inserted into it. Areas of non-original sheet metal panels occupy about half the area of the two outer bays.

Detail of upper story. All of the windows and transoms that are divided into multiple lights are early or original, whereas the narrow vertical windows that are louvered, single pane, or filled in are not.

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 1540 Bush Street

B1. Historic Name: Electric Storage Battery Co. factory and Eugene S. Miner auto repair shop
B2. Common Name: _____
B3. Original Use: automobile batteries factory B4. Present Use: auto repair
***B5. Architectural Style:** restrained Classical Revival
***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
Built in 1916. Ramp to second story built in 1927.

***B7. Moved?** ■ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown **Date:** _____ **Original Location:** _____
***B8. Related Features:**
none

B9a. Architect: none b. Builder: MacDonald and Kahn
***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile industry **Area** San Francisco
Period of Significance 1916-1943 **Property Type** battery factory, auto repair **Applicable Criteria** 1, 2, 3
(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

History

Both this building and the one to the east (1522-1524 Bush) were built in 1916 for owner Lawrence A. Myers, a prolific real estate developer. Myers purchased the land these buildings sit upon in January 1916; had these two buildings constructed upon the land; and then sold both buildings upon completion. Both this building and the one to the west, 1522-1524 Bush (also built by MacDonald and Kahn), have brick courses that line up precisely, indicating their common development. The subject building (#1540) was sold in September 1916 to George W. Brooks, the secretary of the local Rainer Beer agency. He owned the building as an investment through at least 1938.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 4.)

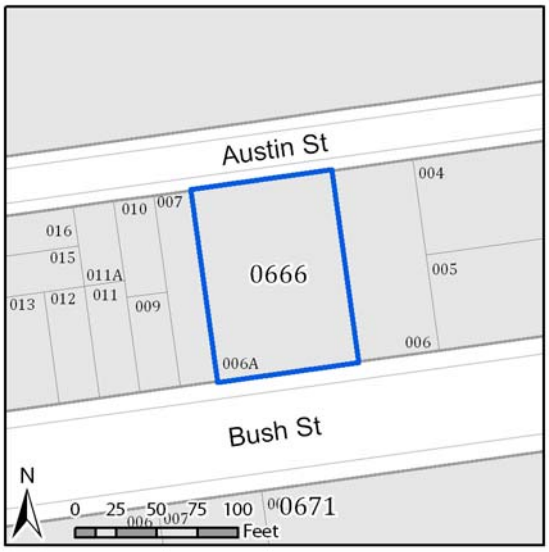
B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) _____

***B12. References:**
Building and Engineering News, May 17, 1916.
Building permits #58917 (April 2, 1916) and #157927 (Feb. 9, 1927)
Sales Ledgers, 1914-1938 (at the Recorder's Office)
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1917-1964
References continued on page 7.
B13. Remarks:

***B14. Evaluator:** William Kostura
Date of Evaluation: October 2009

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



History (continued)

MacDonald and Kahn

The engineers and builders of this building, MacDonald and Kahn, formed their partnership in 1907 or 1908, undoubtedly to capitalize on the rebuilding of San Francisco after the earthquake and fire of 1906. Both Alan MacDonald and Felix Kahn were engineers, and the latter co-owned a consulting firm specializing in reinforced concrete with offices in Detroit, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland, and Seattle. By 1916 they were designing and building substantial, four-story reinforced concrete buildings in San Francisco. Within the study area of this report they built at least ten buildings, seven of them of reinforced concrete. Due to their expertise in this material they became, during 1931-1935, one of the "Six Companies" that built Hoover Dam on the Colorado River.

The first occupant, the Electric Storage Battery Company

The first occupant of this building was the Pacific Coast branch factory of the Electric Storage Battery Company of Philadelphia, manufacturers of Exide batteries. This company had been founded in 1888 by W. W. Gibbs, and made its first automobile battery (for electric taxicabs) in 1900. That battery was named the "Exide," short for "excellent oxide." Prior to 1916 Exide batteries were shipped to San Francisco from the east for sale, but as automobile and battery sales in the west increased, the Electric Storage Battery Company elected to create a branch factory in San Francisco. The manager of the new branch, George R. Murphy, selected the just-completed 1540 Bush as its home, and the factory opened in late August, 1916. According to a newspaper article touting the opening, this was the largest storage battery factory west of Chicago.

Murphy and all of his staff at the time of opening had reportedly been trained at the home factory in Philadelphia. Equipment on site included (by 1918) a switchboard that could charge about 4,000 batteries. It is probable the factory made batteries for a variety of purposes, but it is clear from the company's newspaper ads that automobile batteries were the primary product. The branch factory had two functions: to manufacture new batteries for distribution to sub-agents and service stations along the entire Pacific Coast, and to overhaul or repair used batteries. Agents of the company working under Murphy were located (by 1918) in California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Arizona, Idaho, and Montana. There was a retail aspect to the San Francisco factory as well: the general public was invited to drive their automobile into the factory and have their old batteries rehabilitated. During the United States' involvement in World War I, Exide batteries from this plant were used in American battleships, submarines, airplanes, and field telephones.

The Electric Storage Battery Company remained in this building, under George R. Murphy as manager, for ten years, through 1926. It then moved to a new location in the Bayview district. Exide remains in business today as a worldwide battery manufacturer.

(Continued on next page.)

History (continued):

This is by far the most important of four buildings in the study area that were devoted to use as an automobile battery service shop for ten years or more. The others include:

- 1348-1380 Bush Street. Willard Storage Batteries, an important brand name, were sold here for almost twenty years, from 1917 to 1936. The integrity of the building is poor, however.
- 1660 Pine Street. This building was home to the Gould Storage Battery Co. of California from 1917-1927. The battery shop shared this building with a tire shop for this entire period. As a battery-related business it was less important than the Electric Storage Battery Company was.
- 500 Turk Street. This was built to house Kahn and Keville, which sold mainly tires but also auto batteries, radios, washing machines, and refrigerators for many years beginning in 1936. Kahn and Keville was much more important as a tire shop than as a battery shop.

As far as is known, 1540 Bush is the only building in the study area where auto batteries were actually manufactured in large numbers.

The second occupant, Eugene S. Miner

In February 1927 a ramp was built within this building leading from Bush Street to the second story. According to the building permit for this work, the building would be divided into two uses: auto repair and servicing on the first floor, and auto top, body work, and painting on the second floor. Presumably each floor would be occupied by different tenants.

For the next fourteen years, to 1941, Eugene S. Miner occupied the ground floor of this building for use as an auto repair shop. This was the third and last of his auto repair shops in San Francisco, which he ran for a 31 year period.

Born in California in 1880, he began working as a machinist in 1901 for the Sunset Automobile Company, managed by engineer and inventor Dorville Libby, Jr. at 1814 Market Street. It was one of the first automobile dealerships in San Francisco, and Miner was thus one of the city's early auto repairmen. In 1909 or 1910 the two men, engineer and machinist, under the firm name of Libby and Miner, opened an auto repair shop at 1415 Van Ness Avenue (extant). After two years Libby left the partnership, and the firm became Miner and Sargent, later Miner, Sargent and Barre. In 1916 the three auto repairmen moved their shop to 1540 Van Ness (demolished). It remained there until 1927 when Miner, by then working solo, moved his shop into the subject building, 1540 Bush.

Eugene S. Miner ran this shop until his death in 1941. From then to 1943 it was run by a relative, E. W. Miner, under the name Eugene S. Miner Company. That was the last year the shop was in this building; it afterward moved to Post Street.

Only two of the upstairs occupants for the period 1927-1943 are known. They include Pete Boatman (1938), and Parnell Battery and Electric Service (1940).

(Continued on next page.)

History (continued):

After 1943

Occupants of this building during 1944-1960 are unknown. The current occupant, the Charles Henry Company, an auto body repair shop, moved into the building sometime during 1960-1961.

Integrity

The vehicle entrance at far left was probably created in 1927, along with the ramp to the second story; it falls within the period of significance. Sheet metal panels in the first story are non-original, and in the second story about 20% of the original window sash has been replaced. The rest of the façade appears to be unchanged since the time of construction. Overall, the building retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association.

Evaluation

This is one of more than 100 buildings along the Van Ness Avenue corridor that have a history as automobile support structures, and that are being evaluated for possible historic significance according to the criteria of the California Register of Historical Resources. With a few exceptions, these buildings were auto showrooms, public garages, auto repair shops, auto parts and supplies stores, and auto painting shops. The time period that is being studied is from the initial years of the automobile industry in San Francisco through 1964. Among the factors that have been considered when evaluating a building are its date of construction, its longevity of auto-related use, the importance of its occupants in local auto industry history, integrity, and architectural quality. These factors, and how they apply to evaluations of buildings, are discussed in a cover report, *Van Ness Auto Row Support Structures, 1908-1964*.

Criterion 1

This building had continuous automobile-related use from its completion in 1916 through 1943, and again from 1961-1964 (the end year of the period being studied), a total of 31 years. This is thus an early example of an automobile-related building, with excellent longevity as such. The two main businesses here during these years were both important ones:

> The Electric Storage Battery Company of Philadelphia (1916-1926). 1540 Bush served as their west coast factory for making Exide batteries and as their battery service shop. This firm was of nationwide importance as an automobile battery manufacturer, and this, its branch factory, supplied batteries for the entire west coast of the United States. This is probably the most important automobile battery factory and repair shop in San Francisco's history.
>
> Eugene S. Miner, auto repair shop (1927-1941). This was the third, and longest-lasting location for Miner, who repaired automobiles as an employee of others during 1901-1909 and as the owner or co-owner of his own shop during 1910-1941. He was one of the earliest and longest-lasting auto repairmen in San Francisco's history. His son continued in business here until 1943.

(Continued on next page.)

Evaluation (continued):

For these reasons, 1540 Bush appears to be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 1, at the state level, for its use as a battery factory and service shop, and at the local level as an auto repair shop. The Period of Significance is 1916-1943, the years the building had these uses.

Criterion 2

There is no direct evidence showing that Eugene S. Miner was considered to be especially prominent as an auto repairman in his own time. He was, however, one of the earliest auto repairmen in the city, with one of the longest careers as such; and the size of his shop in this building is indicative of a certain level of success. He seems sufficiently important in retrospect that this building appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2 for its association with him. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1927-1941, the years Miner's shop was in this building.

Criterion 3

Architecturally, this building is restrained in its use of ornament. However, the pivoting windows and transoms in this building, each divided by muntins into multiple lights, are a dramatic design feature. Pivoting wooden windows, once fairly common, have become rare in San Francisco as older windows are removed and replaced with aluminum or vinyl substitutes. Because of the rarity of such windows and the length of this row, the texture that the brickwork and wooden elements give to the façade, and the generally pleasing three-bay composition, this building appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3, for its design. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1916, the year the building was built.

Character defining features

The character defining features of this building are its height and width; the brick façade with diamond-shaped patterns; the cornice, brackets, course of dentils, belt courses, and frieze; the second story windows with their wooden mullions and muntins; the first story windows with their wooden frames; and the dimensions and locations of the two vehicle entrance openings. The metal louvers in the second story and the sheet metal panels in the first story are not character defining.

References (continued from page 3)

"Battery Firm Opens Coast Branch." *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 27, 1916, p. 47.
"Exide Station Located Here." *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 17, 1918, p. A-18.
"Exide Batteries Play Important Part During War." *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 6, 1919, p. A-3.
California Death Index for Eugene S. Miner, via SF Genealogy website.
Wikipedia entry for Exide.

Display advertisement for Electric Storage Battery Company, 1536 Bush Street (now #1540).
San Francisco Chronicle, May 2, 1921, p. 9

Austin Street façade