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) 824 Ellis Street

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Sabine-Laurent and Niello 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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted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 824 Ellis Street City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 718, lot 6

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

This is a two-story, reinforced concrete automobile repair shop that occupies the full width of its 80-foot lot and runs through the block to Olive Street. The building façade is covered with a coat of stucco that is lightly scored to resemble masonry. Pilasters with restrained floral capitals divide the façade into three bays of equal width. Aside from these pilasters, the principle ornament is a plain cornice located at the base of the parapet, and plaster shields superimposed over a string course beneath the blank frieze. A spandrel or frieze between the two stories stretches the width of the building and is defined by slightly molded belt courses above and below. Second story windows have original industrial steel sash with opening sections. In the first story, windows and the pedestrian entry have replacement aluminum frames. Two large vehicle entrances with roll-up metal doors can be found at center and far left. The first story openings are the only apparent alterations to the façade.

*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
1920; building permit

*P7. Owner and Address:
ABUYAGHI ROGER A & NORA R
824 ELLIS 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: July 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)

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 824 Ellis Street

B1. Historic Name: Sabine-Laurent and Niello auto repair shop

B2. Common Name: _____

B3. Original Use: auto repair B4. Present Use: auto repair, service, and sales

***B5. Architectural Style:** Classical Revival

***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
Built in 1920.

***B7. Moved?** ■ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown **Date:** _____ **Original Location:** _____

***B8. Related Features:**
none

B9a. Architect: William Helbing b. Builder: William Helbing

***B10. Significance: Theme** auto industry **Area** San Francisco
Period of Significance 1920-1964 **Property Type** auto repair shop **Applicable Criteria** 1, 3
(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

This building was designed and built in 1920 by William Helbing for owner O. H. Curtaz, a prolific real estate developer. The building was in continuous auto-related use from its completion to at least 1964, and retains that use at present.

Historically, this building had multiple occupants at any given time, at addresses 820-838 Ellis. The first occupants were John H. Sabine, who did auto body, tops, and trimming work from 1920-1929, and Charles G. Durand, who had an auto repair shop during 1920-1925. From 1927-1936 August Laurent and Lewis A. Niello, working as Laurent and Niello, did auto repair here, specializing in the repair of Packards. Four other auto repair shops, plus a piston rings distributor, occupied spaces in the building from 1927-1940.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 3.)

History

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

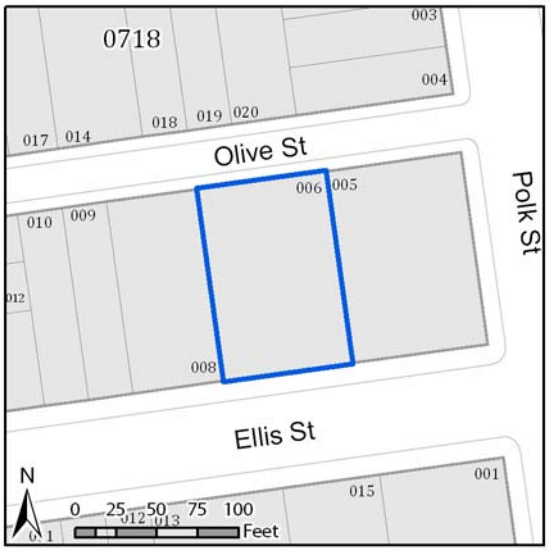
***B12. References:**
Building permit #92796, May 5, 1920
San Francisco city directory, and Kelts and PT&T reverse directories, 1921-1964, for occupants of this building

B13. Remarks:

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

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



History (continued):

The longest-lasting occupants of this building came in 1938 and 1946, respectively. Western Motor Company was a used auto wholesaler that occupied #824 Ellis from 1938 to at least 1964 (26-plus years). Its owner (or co-owner) for the first decade at least was Pete Landry. From 1946 to at least 1964 Monroe Body and Fender works occupied #838 Ellis.

In sum, auto repair shops of various kinds occupied this building almost continuously from 1920 to 1964, and a used auto wholesaler was here from 1938 to 1964.

The designer and builder of this building, William Helbing, was active in San Francisco as a builder from the 1890s through at least 1929. He began by building Victorian-style houses, but by 1906 he was building downtown commercial buildings and substantial apartment buildings. By the 1920s he was building tall steel frame and reinforced concrete apartment buildings. He was prolific, and often built on his own account as well as for others as a contractor. He generally designed the buildings he built (especially those he owned), and many of them are very attractive. Some of his better-known and more important buildings include Sam's Grill, at 364 Bush (1907); the York Hotel, at 940 Sutter (1925); six-story apartments at 801-809 Van Ness (1927); and six-story apartments at 2127 Broadway (1929).

Integrity

While the ground floor openings have been altered, the rest of the building façade is intact. On balance, the building retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and integrity.

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.*

Among automobile-related buildings in the study area of this report, 824 Ellis Street was built at a moderately early date (1920). Its use as an auto repair shop was moderately early (beginning in 1920) and had excellent longevity (44 years, counting through the year 1964). Its use as a used auto wholesale store was moderately late (beginning in 1938) and had good longevity (26 years). Because of the moderately early construction date of this building and the longevity of its automobile-related uses, this building appears to be eligible for the California Register at the local level under Criterion 1, for its overall use an auto repair shop, and used auto wholesale store. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1920-1964.

(Evaluation continued on page 4.)

History (continued):

This building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2, because none of the proprietors associated with this building were historically important in their fields. Two early proprietors, John H. Sabine and Laurent and Niello, were here for nine or ten years, and two later proprietors were here for much longer, but on balance they do not seem to have been particularly important compared to others in the study area.

This building also appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3, for its design. With its three wide bays that are clearly defined by sparely-ornamented pilasters, and its expanses of industrial steel sash windows, this building is an especially spacious and well-ordered example of an automobile repair shop. The loss of original window frames in the first story is a substantial alteration, but one that has become typical among industrial buildings in San Francisco, including in the study area. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1920, the year of construction.

Character Defining Features

The character defining features of this building are its height and width, its scored stucco surface, the cornice at the base of the parapet, the string course with shield ornament at the base of the frieze, the pilasters with floral capitals, the blank spandrels at the second floor level, the industrial steel window sash in the second story, and the size and shape of its window and vehicle entrance openings.