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

PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
HRI # _____
Trinomial _____
NRHP Status Code 1S, 3CS
Other Listings _____
Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____

 *Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 1699 Van Ness Avenue

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Paige Company auto showroom
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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted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 1699 Van Ness Avenue City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 642, lot 1

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

This four-story, stucco-clad reinforced concrete building fills its 102'-8" by 100' lot at the southwest corner of Van Ness Avenue and Sacramento Street. The building was constructed in two parts: the northern sixty feet (that is, the northern three bays on Van Ness) in 1919-1920, and the southern forty-two feet (of two bays) in 1923. According to the 1936 Sanborn insurance map, the older portion was rated as fireproof, while the southern portion, also of reinforced concrete, was not.

In composition, each of the two facades, on Van Ness and on Sacramento, are divided into five bays of equal width. At the top of the building, a profiled cornice supported by scroll modillions wraps around the two facades. These modillions are decorated with acanthus leaves. In the bed molding of the cornice, plaster florettes alternate with the modillions. Below the cornice are, in turn, a profiled molding, a frieze decorated with circular medallions, and another layer of profiled moldings.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 2.)

*P3b Resource Attributes: HP7 – four-story commercial building

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

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

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: ■ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
1919, 1923; building permits

*P7. Owner and Address:
SUSAN A SEELEY TRUST
250 EUCLID AVE
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94118

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

*P9. Date Recorded: April 2010

*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, 2009.

*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):

In the two upper stories, pilasters with profiled capitals and bases divide the facades into bays. These pilasters are decorated with raised triangular patterns near the top, center, and base. Windows in these two stories are divided by concrete transoms and mullions, and are further divided by muntins of unknown material.

The lower stories form a single arcaded zone that is topped by a profiled cornice at the third floor level. Within each bay, arched windows with scroll keys rise for almost the entire two-story height. The arches are supported by pilasters similar to those in the upper stories, save that they are decorated with raised circular and semicircular patterns, instead of triangular ones. Circular medallions can be found in the spandrels between the arches. Large storefront windows in these stories are divided by thin steel strips that match those shown in early photographs, and are probably original. Most of the glass in these windows has been tinted in recent decades. Low bulkheads form the base of the storefronts; these step up the slight rise of Sacramento Street.

The two westernmost bays of the Sacramento Street arcade are devoted to vehicle entrances with non-original doors. Two pedestrian entrances can be found in the Van Ness Avenue façade.

To summarize, this building is skeletal in its expression and light in feeling, with narrow structural members richly articulated with Classical Revival ornament. The arcaded lower stories serve as a visual base for the shorter upper stories; the latter posses greater texture due to the manner in which they are divided by mullions, transoms, and muntins.

Van Ness Avenue façade

Top photo: A bay on the Sacramento Street façade
Bottom photo: Detail of the Van Ness and Sacramento corner

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 1S, 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 1699 Van Ness Avenue

B1. Historic Name: Paige Company auto showroom

B2. Common Name: _____

B3. Original Use: auto showroom B4. Present Use: offices and retail sales

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

***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
Built in 1919-1920 and 1923.

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

***B8. Related Features:**
none

B9a. Architect: Sylvain Schnaittacher (1919 and 1923) b. Builder: Barrett and Hilp (1919)

***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile industry **Area** San Francisco
Period of Significance 1919-1937, 1957-1964 **Property Type** auto showroom **Applicable Criteria** 1, 3
(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

History – Construction and alterations

This building was built in two phases. The northern portion was built over a seven month period, from July 1919 to February 1920, for the Warbur Realty Company, which sold it soon after completion to the Florined Company, named for its owners, Florine and Edward Bransten, of the M. J. Brandenstein Company, coffee and tea merchants. The Florined Company had the southern addition built in 1923, and remained the owner of the building until 1973.

The principle alteration to this building since 1923 has been the loss of its original balustrade, which was removed before the 1950s. After the conversion of this building to office use in the 1980s the storefront windows were tinted, obscuring the second floor, which had been visible through these windows.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 5.)

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

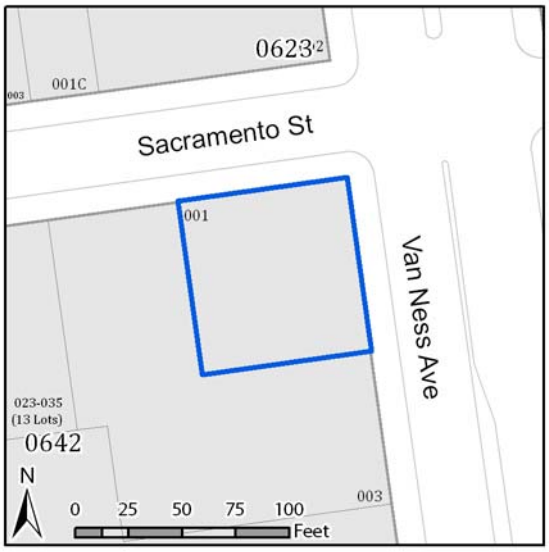
***B12. References:**
Building permits #86865 (July 19, 1919) and #113995 (April 21, 1923), filed under "1651 Van Ness", at the Dept. of Building Inspection, 1650 Mission St.
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1921-1964
1936 Sanborn insurance map ("autos sales")
References continued on page 10.

B13. Remarks:

***B14. Evaluator:** William Kostura
Date of Evaluation: April 2010

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



History – the architect

The architect of both the original portion of this building and of the 1923 addition was Sylvain Schnaittacher (1874-1926), who produced a large body of distinguished work during his career of almost thirty years in San Francisco. He was a native San Franciscan, trained locally, and apprenticed with architect A. Page Brown for several years, until the latter's death in 1896. Shortly afterward he opened his own practice, interrupted by a year-long tour of Europe to study its architecture.

Schnaittacher's practice was diversified, including commercial, industrial, club, institutional, and residential buildings. His best-known work is Temple Emanu-El, designed in association with Bakewell and Brown. Other important works include the Harcourt Hotel at 1105 Larkin Street (1906), the Argonaut Club at the northwest corner of Post and Powell (1909), a matching pair of Georgian style apartments at 735 and 747 Geary (1922), the Musicians' Union Local No. 6, at 230 Jones Street (1924), and the Post Arms Apartments at 839 Post Street (1925). Among his fine residences were several in Presidio Heights and a pair at 130 and 140 Sea Cliff Avenue (1920). Several large downtown commercial buildings by Schnaittacher no longer stand.

In the study area of this report, Schnaittacher designed four buildings in addition to the subject building. Three of thee were very fine: the Taxicab Company of California garage at 1270 Bush/1200 Larkin (1914; extant), Heald's College at 1201 Van Ness (1913; demolished), and the St. Francis Garage at 1240 Post (1916; demolished). The fourth building, the Vanpine Realty Company Building at 1430-1480 Van Ness (1912; extant, windows altered), was smaller and simpler in its treatment.

History – Occupants

Through the year 1964 (the end year of the period being studied in this report), this building was occupied by auto showrooms for 25 years and by used car sales rooms for six years, for a total of 31 years of auto-related uses. It was also occupied by a machinery manufacturing firm for about six years.

Auto showrooms

1920-1921: Max Arnold, dealer in King and Columbia autos and used cars

It appears that construction of this building commenced before an occupant was found for it. This was in contrast to the usual pattern of auto showroom development in the study area. As a rule, a speculative developer contracted with an auto dealership which committed to a long-term lease before the building was designed and construction began. Certain aspects of the building would then be designed to meet the needs of the lessee. Instead, at 1699 Van Ness, it appears that the owner, the Warbur Realty Company, began construction of this building with confidence that a major auto dealership could soon be found to occupy it. It may be that this building was made to be more ornate than almost any auto showroom that had been built before 1920 to attract a high-profile dealership that could pay top rents.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants (continued)

Instead, Warbur Realty settled for Max Arnold, a used car dealer, who moved into the new building in February 1920. Arnold had previously sold used cars at 512 Golden Gate (in 1918) and at 1600 Van Ness (in 1919-1920). He advertised that he purchased for resale only "high grade" autos, particularly Cadillacs and Pierce-Arrows, put them into good condition, and sold them with warranties that were the same as those offered for new autos. He called these used cars "Superbilt Cars."

Arnold probably intended to become a dealer of new autos even before he leased 1699 Van Ness. It may be that he intended to exploit this auto showroom, one of the finest on San Francisco's Auto Row, as a bargaining chip that would enable him to lure a major auto brand from another local dealer. The best that Arnold could do, however, was to land the distributorship for the King automobile, which he sold here during July 1920-December 1921. This mid-priced brand was made in Detroit during 1911-1923, and its chief claim to fame was that it made (in 1914) one of the first autos with a V-8 engine on the market. King's popularity peaked in 1916, when 3000 of its cars were manufactured, but by 1920 this was an obscure brand. During June-December 1921 Arnold supplemented his line with the Columbia auto, an even more obscure brand (made in Detroit during 1917-1924).

At the beginning of 1922 he moved his showroom to a smaller storefront at Van Ness and Geary. He claimed he wanted to be closer to the center of Auto Row, but it is more likely that he moved because the brands he sold could not support the rent he had to pay at 1699 Van Ness.

1922-1937: Paige, Graham-Paige, and Graham autos

In January 1922 the Paige Motor Company opened its factory branch in this building, and in 1923 the owners, the Florined Company, built a major addition (the southern two bays) to accommodate this automaker. Paige and its successor brands were sold from 1699 Van Ness for fifteen years, through 1937.

The Paige Motor Company of Detroit was founded in 1908 and continued under that name through 1927. In the latter year Paige was purchased by the Graham brothers, and the brand was then called Graham-Paige, until 1930, when it became simply Graham. The automaker continued production until 1940.

The Wikipedia entry for Paige states that they made "high-end luxury cars." A *San Francisco Chronicle* display ad of January 8, 1922, when Paige moved into 1699 Van Ness, reveals that ten models of Paige were sold here, with prices from $1,465 to $3,350, indicating a range of mid-priced to high-priced cars. Perhaps the best-known Paige model was the Daytona, offered from 1922-1926. The third seat of this three-seat car pulled out from the side, over the running board. Paige also made a budget model, the Jewett, from 1923 to 1926.

In 1927 Paige was sold to the three Graham brothers. The Grahams had made trucks during 1922-1925, then sold their company to Dodge, and after working with Dodge for two years left to purchase Paige.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants (continued)

Wikipedia states that after Graham purchased Paige the automaker's production increased enormously, from 21,881 cars in 1927 to 73,195 in 1928, a 335% increase in one year. During the early years of the Depression Graham continued to be successful. Their luxurious "Blue Streak" model of 1932 was called by Wikipedia, perhaps with slight exaggeration, the "single most influential design in automotive history." After 1935, however, Graham struggled to find a body style that was attractive to the public, and sales greatly decreased. Production of autos ceased in 1940, after which Graham reopened its factories for war-related production. Graham management joined forces with Henry J. Kaiser after the war to produce Kaiser and Frazer autos, but the Graham brand name was not revived.

1699 Van Ness was occupied by the local factory branch of the Paige Motor Company from January 1922 through 1927, and then by the Graham-Paige (later, Graham) factory branch through 1933. In the latter year Graham ended its factory branch system in San Francisco, and sales of the auto were continued at 1699 Van Ness by a local dealership, that of Herbert D. Bell. He remained here through 1937. In summary, 1699 Van Ness was a showroom for Paige, Graham-Paige, and Graham autos for fifteen years, during which period the famous Daytona and Blue Streak models, as well as the budget Jewett model, must have been sold here.

1957-1959: Earle C. Anthony, sales of Edsel

Earle C. Anthony, who was (and remains) better known for his Packard showroom several blocks to the south, sold Edsel autos at 1699 Van Ness during at least 1957-1959. This was the approximate lifetime of this Ford brand (1957-1960). Edsel was introduced by Ford Moor Company to fill the price gap between its Ford and Mercury brands. At first it had its own separate retail division, just as Ford, Mercury, and Lincoln did, but soon (in early 1958) Mercury, Edsel, and Lincoln were folded into a single division, known as M-E-L. Edsel, however, did not have its own factory. The two larger Edsel models were made at Mercury plants, while the two smaller models were made at Ford plants. The brand sold reasonably well in its first year, but then sales plummeted, and Ford ended the brand after tremendous financial loss. Edsel was a stylish car that was not accepted by the public, although today surviving cars are highly collectable.

1961-1964+: J. E. French and successor, sales of Dodge autos

In 1961 J. E. French, a long-time Dodge representative and dealer in San Francisco (since 1914), sold this brand here at the end of his career. His successor, Van Ness Dodge, sold the brand here through at least 1964.

<u>1938-1940, 1953-1955: Used auto sales</u>

During 1938-1940 this building became an annex to Charles S. Howard's Buick showroom, two doors to the south at 1601 Van Ness. A building permit dated 1938 indicates that this was Howard's used car sales room during these years. J. L. Glickbarg sold used cars here in 1953, and L. E. Von Schultheis sold used cars here in 1955.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants (continued)

1941-1946: Moore Machinery Company

The Moore Machinery Company occupied 1699 Van Ness in 1941-1946. It is uncertain, but this was probably the same Moore Machinery that was a major shipbuilding firm on the Oakland waterfront during World War II.

History – Context

Surviving Paige and Graham-Paige showrooms

Paige, Graham-Paige, and Graham autos were sold in San Francisco every year from 1911 to the end of the brand's existence in 1940. Of the eight showrooms in the city where this auto brand was sold, three survive. The earliest is 1525 Van Ness, where Paige autos were sold during 1914-1917. That building has only fair integrity. During 1922-1937 Paige, Graham-Paige, and Graham autos were sold in the subject building, 1699 Van Ness. These were the brand's peak years, and the building has high integrity. During Graham's final years, 1939-1940, it was sold at 1595 Van Ness, which has good integrity.

Surviving Edsel showrooms

This may have been the only Edsel showroom in San Francisco, and it is almost certainly the only one still standing in the study area of this project.

Surviving Dodge showrooms

The major surviving Dodge showroom in San Francisco is 1835-1849 Van Ness, where J. E. French sold this brand during 1937-1960. By comparison, 1699 Van Ness is a very late example of a Dodge showroom.

Architecturally distinguished auto showrooms in San Francisco

The most distinguished auto showrooms in San Francisco that still stand with good to high integrity, and their architects, are listed below, in chronological order by construction:

1001 Polk Street/1000 Geary Street; John Galen Howard; 1912-1913
1400 Van Ness Avenue; Herman Barth; 1912-1912
1699 Van Ness Avenue; Sylvain Schnaittacher; 1919-1920, 1923 (the subject building)
1000 Van Ness Avenue; Weeks and Day; 1920-1921
901 Van Ness Avenue; Bernard Maybeck; with Powers and Ahnden, 1926-1927
999 Van Ness Avenue; John E. Dinwiddie; 1937, 1950.

A few others are also fine but rank below these in quality. Several others of high quality have been demolished or extensively altered.

Integrity

Alterations to this building include the removal of its original balustrade, replacement of the original vehicle and pedestrian doors, and the tinting of the storefront-level windows. Window sash, ornament, and façade cladding have otherwise been retained. In sum, this 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*.

Completed in 1920, with an addition in 1923, this is a moderately early example of an automobile showroom. With 25 years of such use in its history (through 1964, the end year of the period being studied), it has good longevity in this use. Counting its years of use as a used car salesroom, the building has 31 years of total auto-related use, for excellent longevity. In addition, this is by far the best example of a Paige and Graham-Paige showroom in San Francisco. This was an important mid-priced to luxury brand of automobile that was sold here for fifteen years, during its peak years of popularity. Less importantly, this is also the only known Edsel showroom in San Francisco. Finally, the integrity of this building is at a very high level, with nearly all of its ornament and window sash intact.

For these reasons, the building appears to be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 1, at the local level, for its use as an automobile showroom. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1920-1937 and 1957-1964, the years the building had this use.

Two proprietors in this building, Earle C. Anthony and J. E. French, were important in their field. Each is much better represented by his showroom at 901 Van Ness and 1835-1849 Van Ness, respectively, and thus, this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2.

Architecturally, this building is one of the six finest auto showrooms in San Francisco, and it was designed by a very important San Francisco architect, Sylvain Schnaittacher. The arcaded composition, the rich ornamental scheme, and the skeletal expression are distinguished, resulting in a feeling of lightness; and the level of integrity is very high. It thus appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3, for its design. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1919-1920 and 1923, the years of construction.

This building is also eligible for the California Register by virtue of the fact that it has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Character defining features

The character defining features of this building are its height and width; its stucco cladding; all of its ornament, including the cornices, modillions, frieze moldings, pilasters, circular medallions, and keyed arches; the mullions, transoms, and muntins of the second story windows; the steel sash in the storefront windows; the bulkheads at the base of the storefront windows; and the outline (but not the doors) of the vehicle entrances on the Sacramento Street side.

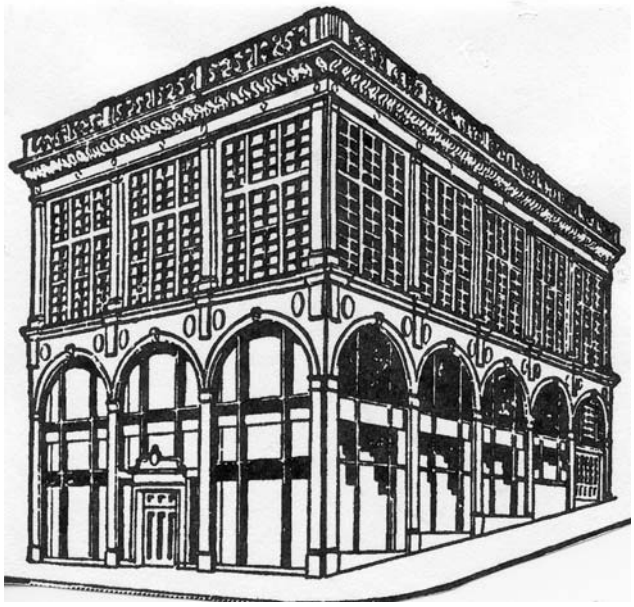
References (continued from page 4)

General sources
Anne Bloomfield, National Register nomination, Paige Motor Car Co. Building, 1699 Van Ness Avenue (1982).
Wikipedia entries for King, Columbia, Paige, Graham-Paige, and Edsel brands of automobiles.

Regarding Max Arnold:
"Four-Story Auto Row Sales House Now Is Building," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 25, 1919, p. R-12.
Display ad for Max Arnold, Superbilt Cars, *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 15, 1920, p. A-14. This ad includes a drawing of the building as it appeared before the 1923 addition.
"Arnold Throws Open Door of New Site," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 15, 1920, p. A-8.
"Max Arnold Plans to Handle New Car," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 16, 1920, p. A-6.
"Max Arnold Is Appointed as Distributor of King Models," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 18, 1920, p. A-4.
"Max Arnold in New Role," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 19, 1921, p. A-2.
"Max Arnold in New Home on Auto Row," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 8, 1922, p. A-7.

Regarding Paige autos:
"Factory Opens Branch Here," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 8, 1922, p. A-3.
Display ad, *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 8, 1922.

The ground floor of this building in 1929, when the Graham-Paige factory branch showroom was here. Photo from the San Francisco Public Library, AAC-6822.



1699 Van Ness as completed in 1920. From a display ad for Max Arnold in the SF *Chronicle*, February 15, 1920. The classical entrance shown in the middle bay, if built, was removed when the building was enlarged in 1923.

The building as enlarged for the Paige Motor Company in 1923. From *Pacific Coast Architect*, May 1924. This is the only available photograph showing the original balustrade in place.

Top photo: 1699 Van Ness in ca. 1953. Photo from Assessor's negatives, San Francisco Public Library
Bottom photo: From the Department of City Planning 1976 survey of historic buildings
In these photos, only the skeleton of the original balustrade atop the building remains.