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) 1595 Van Ness Avenue

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Howard Automobile Company Buick and Ellis Brooks Chevrolet showrooms
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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted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 1595 Van Ness Avenue City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 647, lot 1

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

This four-story reinforced concrete building fills its 60-foot by 134-foot lot at the southwest corner of Van Ness Avenue and California Street. The surface of the building is covered with a coating of stucco, except at the base, where black granite has been recently applied to the bulkheads. In composition, the Van Ness Avenue façade is divided by plain piers into three bays of equal width, and the California Street façade is divided into six equal bays. Each bay is segmental arched at the top.

The building is topped by a plain cornice with a curved soffit running along both facades; this cornice is supported by simple stick rafters. The principle ornamentation on this building consists of a scroll key with plaster swags at the top of each bay. Small medallions can be found evenly spaced between the swags. The spandrels at the second, third, and fourth floor levels are paneled. Windows in the three upper stories are divided by mullions into four parts, and are further divided by transom bars. The sash in each part is divided by muntins into multiple lights; the material of this sash could not be determined from a distance, but matches the pattern shown in early photographs. The first story windows have been generally remodeled with modern aluminum sash.

*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
1913; published building notice
*P7. Owner and Address:
MARIE K BROOKS REVOC TRUST
1395 VAN NESS AVE
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94109
*P8. Recorded by: (Name, affiliation, and address)
William Kostura
P. O. Box 60211
Palo Alto, CA 94306
*P9. Date Recorded: _____
January 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, 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)

Detail of bays facing California Street

Photo of this building in 1913, from the San Francisco Newsletter, Christmas 1913 issue. In this photo the cornice is heavier than at present, and the first story has prism glass and a central marquis.

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 1595 Van Ness Avenue

B1. Historic Name: Howard Automobile Company Buick and Ellis Brooks Chevrolet showrooms

B2. Common Name: San Francisco Ford Lincoln Mercury showroom

B3. Original Use: automobile showroom B4. Present Use: automobile showroom

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

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

Built in 1913. First story window sash altered at an unknown date.

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

***B8. Related Features:**

none

B9a. Architect: M. J. Lyon b. Engineers: Heller and Wilson c. Builder: Northern Construction Co.

***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile industry **Area** San Francisco

Period of Significance 1913-1963 (passim) **Property Type** auto showroom **Applicable Criteria** 1, 2

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

History – Construction and architect

This building was built in 1913 as an investment for owner Dr. Albert Abrams. Before construction commenced the use of the building was announced to be an auto showroom, and it is highly likely the design was made in consultation with the first occupant, the Howard Automobile Company.

The architect was Moses J. Lyon, who worked in San Francisco from 1890 to 1931. He is best known for his Venetian Gothic-style Ohabai Shalome synagogue at 1881 Bush Street, which is the last survivor of his many prominent 19th century institutional and commercial buildings, many of which were designed for Jewish clients. Among his more important post-earthquake and fire buildings are the Hildebrand Stables, of clinker brick, at 721 Filbert Street (1906); and the J. E. Adams Building at 381-383 Bush (1907). Some very fine houses and apartments have been attributed to Lyon, e.g. 2209 Van Ness (1901), 2134 Van Ness (1909), and the half-timbered apartments at the southeast corner of Vallejo and Franklin. Also in the study area of this report is a minor auto repair shop, 1560 Pacific Avenue (1922).

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

***B12. References:** 1913, 1936 and 1951 Sanborn insurance maps

Building and Industrial News, March 11, 1913, 6:1, and April 15, 1913, 19:3

Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T yellow pages listings for occupants of this building, 1914-1964

"Howard Company Is to Move," SF *Call*, May 11, 1913, p. 49.

"Howard Company Joins New Row Colony," SF *Chronicle*, Nov. 4, 1913, p. 7.

"New Distributors of Cole Open Quarters," SF *Chronicle* May 29, 1921, p. A-5.

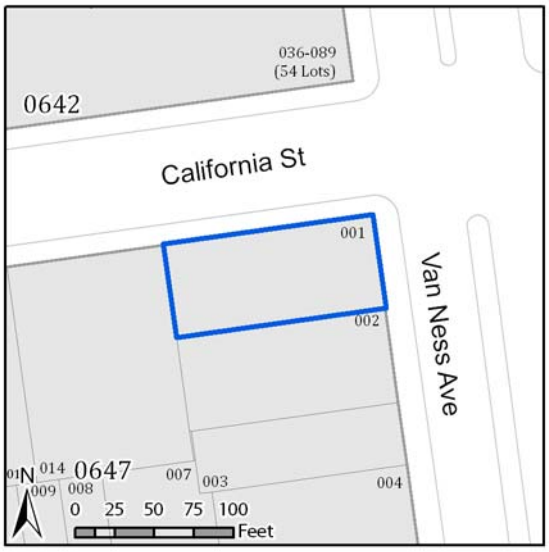
B13. Remarks:

***B14. Evaluator:** William Kostura

Date of Evaluation: January 2010

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



History – Occupants and auto brands sold here

The Howard Automobile Company and the Buick brand

The first occupant of 1595 Van Ness Avenue, beginning in November 1913, was the Howard Automobile Company, dealers in Buick automobiles. This firm remained for just over seven years, into the first half of 1921.

Howard Automobile Company

This firm was founded by Charles S. Howard in 1906. Howard was the son of a Boston piano manufacturer, came to San Francisco as a bicycle repairman, and became interested in automobiles. Reportedly, while still in his twenties he traveled to Flint, Michigan, met with William C. Durant, the head of the new Buick Motor Company, and secured from him the distribution rights to Buick for the entire west coast.

Howard returned to San Francisco and opened the Howard Automobile Company, apparently just before the earthquake and fire of 1906. He reopened after the fire in a small, wood-framed building at 404-408 Golden Gate Avenue. This building also burned down in 1907, along with eight of Howard's automobiles and all of his equipment. Howard then moved his business to two successive storefronts on Golden Gate Avenue, first at #489 Golden Gate, and then at #523 Golden Gate, where he remained for four years (1909-1913). The latter building was brick, one story high, and about fifty feet in width. When he moved again, to 1595 Van Ness, he had several times as much space as previously.

The showroom for Buicks was in the front part of the first story of this building. It had a high wooden wainscoting, with classically decorated walls of plaster above the wood and a cornice around the ceiling perimeter. Semicircular staircases led to a balcony landing at the mezzanine level, where the offices of president Howard, general manager R. K. Robert, the cashier, and the bookkeeper could be found. These offices were also finished in wood.

The rear of the first story was devoted to sales of "rebuilt" (used) cars. The rear of the mezzanine level, which was entered from California Street, was occupied by the service department. The second story was devoted to the parts department, the third story to auto storage, and the fourth to a modern machine shop. This arrangement of departments – with horizontal segregation of uses in the first two levels and vertical segregation through all floors – was typical of how other multi-story showrooms were planned in the 1910s and 1920s in San Francisco.

Numerous newspaper articles pertaining to Howard's Buick dealership were published during at least 1914-1917 (found via the ProQuest website, and accessed through the S.F. Public Library; later years were not checked for this report). In evaluating these articles, one has to make allowances for the sensationalistic boosterism that newspapers indulged in on behalf of local auto dealers and national auto brands. These articles included stories about the record-setting trainloads of hundreds of Buick autos

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants and auto brands sold here (continued)

sent from the factory in Flint, Michigan, to the Howard Automobile Company in San Francisco; the rapid sales of these autos; long-distance driving accomplishments of Buicks and the record times they set; their hill-climbing ability; their wins in the light auto class of auto races; and their endurance in traversing the rough winter roads of the Sierras.

Leon J. Pinkson, who had been a newspaper reporter on the San Francisco auto industry since the 1910s, looked back on its early days in a 1940 news article ("A History of Motoring Progress in San Francisco," San Francisco *Chronicle*, January 28, 1940). Regarding Howard, Pinkson said that by 1915 he had become Buick's distributor for California, Nevada, Oregon, Arizona, and part of Washington, and that he sold one-tenth of Buick's entire output. In fact, according to Pinkson, Howard was the "largest distributor of automobiles in the world." It seems quite possible that similar claims might have been made about dealers in other cities. Regardless, there is no doubt that Howard was very successful, and that before 1921 he was the west coast distributor for Buick. Biographical sketches on him in various websites (Pre-War Buick.com, Wikipedia) and in a book on Seabiscuit, his 1930s racehorse, agree on his success and wealth.

Display ads by Howard show that he offered five models of Buick in mid-1914, with prices ranging from $1,010 to $1,800 for roadsters and touring cars; and that he carried eight models of Buick in late 1917, for prices of $940 to $2,380. For the time, these were mid-priced to high-priced cars.

By 1920 Howard had outgrown the building at 1595 Van Ness (the subject building). In that year he leased or built a new four-story, reinforced concrete service building diagonally across the street at 1748-1754 California Street. In early 1921, after slightly over seven years at 1595 Van Ness, he moved the rest of his business – showroom, offices, auto storage, etc. – directly across the street to 1601 Van Ness, adjacent to the service building. He remained there through his death in 1950. (Both 1748-1754 California and 1601 Van Ness have been demolished.)

Buick Motor Company and William C. Durant

A short history on the Buick brand should be added here. The brand was founded by David D. Buick in 1903. Before he could offer any cars for sale he failed financially and his company was taken over by his principle financier, James H. Whiting. Whiting brought William C. Durant in to be the general manager (and soon, president). Durant produced the first Buicks for sale to the public in 1904.

Durant was very successful. With the profits he made from Buick he founded General Motors as a holding company in 1908. He purchased Oldsmobile as a GM brand in that year, and added Cadillac, Oakland (the predecessor to Pontiac), Reliance trucks (the predecessor to GMC trucks), and other brands in 1909. These acquisitions became an over-extension, and as a result Durant was forced out of GM in 1910. Starting from scratch, in 1911 he co-founded Chevrolet, which was so successful that he was able to purchase a controlling interest in GM stock, and became its president again in 1916. Two years later he brought Chevrolet in as part of General Motors.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants and auto brands sold here (continued)

At first, each GM brand functioned independently and competed with each other. According to Wikipedia, Durant put an end to that by marketing each brand to a different segment of the auto buying public. In the GM hierarchy, Buick was "near the top," below only Cadillac. Buicks were meant to appeal to those who wanted a very fine car, but one without the ostentation of a Cadillac. This has remained Buick's role ever since.

Durant lost control of General Motors again in 1920. Thus, his second stint as president of GM, from 1916-1920, corresponds fairly closely to the years that the Howard Automobile Company sold Buicks at 1595 Van Ness (1913-1921).

Cole Motors (1921-1924)

A local dealership named Cole Motors, Inc. occupied this building during 1921-1924 and sold the Cole brand of automobile here. This brand was moderately prominent for most of its existence, and was sold in several successive buildings in San Francisco. The Cole Motor Company had been founded in 1909 by Joseph J. Cole, in Indianapolis. This was an "assembled" brand, i.e., most of its parts were manufactured by other companies and were assembled at the Cole factory. Cole made an early reputation by winning auto races in 1909 and 1910, and in 1912 it began to build limousines for the luxury market. It was one of the early auto makers to install V-8 engines in its cars (in 1915), and in 1918 began to call its several models of high-priced cars the "Cole Aero-Eight" to call attention to its aerodynamically-styled body. The Cole brand was hurt in the recession of the early 1920s, and J. J. Cole voluntarily liquidated his company in 1925 to avoid going into debt.

The brand was first exhibited in San Francisco in 1910, and was sold almost continuously in this city during 1911-1924 by a series of dealerships, none of which lasted for more than three or four years. A large Cole showroom was built in 1920 at 1625 Van Ness Avenue by the local dealer L. D. Allen, but when he failed, his place as the city's Cole distributor was taken by Cole Motors.

When Cole Motors, Inc. formed in May 1921 to sell Cole autos at 1595 Van Ness, it hastened to assure the public that it was not a factory branch, and that it had no connection with any former Cole dealership. The latter statement may have been put forth to distinguish Cole Motors from the recent dealership of L. D. Allen, whose collapse had been rather sudden. Cole Motors was at 1595 Van Ness for three years, and its end was probably the result of the impending demise of the national brand.

The Benson Motor Company and Stutz autos (1924-1929)

Less is known about the next dealership to occupy this building, owned by William J. Benson. Benson sold autos of an unknown brand in 1924. In 1925 he sold Flint, Kissel, and Stephens cars here, and in 1926-1928 he sold Stutz autos. The Stutz dealership in this building seems to have been transferred in 1929 to the McCullough Motor Company, which soon moved to another location.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants and auto brands sold here (continued)

Along with Kissel (sold here only briefly), Stutz was the most prominent of the brands that Benson sold in this building. Stutz was founded in Indianapolis in 1911 and manufactured automobiles until 1935. In its very first year the company entered one of its cars in the Indianapolis 500 race and continued to enter important races (such as Le Mans) and to set world speed records in order to promote its reputation as a fast and powerful car marketed to the wealthy. The Stutz Bearcat was perhaps its best known model. Stutz was sold in San Francisco from the founding of the company in 1911 through at least 1933. Of the eight buildings in San Francisco where Stutz was sold, 1595 Van Ness is one of only two that still stand with good integrity.

Franklin Pacific Motor Company (1930-1931)

This firm was here during 1930-1931. It sold the Franklin auto, a brand that was made in Syracuse, N.Y. during 1902-1934. It was unusual in that it used air-cooled engines and most models had wood frames. These were light weight cars of relatively lesser power until 1921, when a re-design of the air-cooling system allowed for more powerful cars to be built.

Used car sales, 1932-1935

Auto showrooms often "filtered down" to become used car salesrooms during the Depression, and that was briefly the case at 1595 Van Ness. Charles S. Howard used this building as his used car salesroom in 1932, William H. Noble sold used cars here in 1933, and Earle C. Anthony, the prominent Packard dealer, sold used cars here in 1934-1935.

Sales of Oldsmobile autos, 1936-1937

As the Depression eased, new auto showrooms once again located in this building. For two years, Lloyd M. Dudley sold Oldsmobile autos from this building. He was in competition with Don Lee, who also sold Oldsmobile at his Cadillac showroom at 1000 Van Ness Avenue.

Sales of Graham-Paige autos, 1939-1941

For three years Graham-Paige automobiles were sold here, by two possibly-related firms: the Johnson Graham Pacific Company, in 1939; and the Transport Motor Company, headed by Luther N. Johnson and Reynold Johnson, in 1940-1941. These were the last years that Graham-Paige, a once-prestigious high-end brand, manufactured automobiles. Transport Motor also sold Willys autos here in 1940-1941.

The Paige was a luxury, or high-end automobile founded in Detroit in 1908. It was successful, and sales greatly increased when the company was purchased by the Graham brothers (formerly truck makers) in 1927. As Graham-Paige, the company did well through 1934, but then lost popularity due to unfortunate changes in body styles. Sales declined during 1938-1940 and production ceased in the latter year. The sale of Graham-Paige autos in this building thus represents that brand's declining years.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants and auto brands sold here (continued)

Ellis Brooks Motors, 1946-1963

Ellis Brooks Motors has been one of the most prominent and longest lasting auto dealerships in San Francisco's history. The founder of this dealership, Ellis Brooks, began his automobile career by selling used cars at various San Francisco locations for six years (1939-1945). In 1945 or 1946 he began selling new autos at 1415 Van Ness, and needing a larger building, he then quickly moved to 1595 Van Ness, where he remained for eighteen years, from 1946-1963.

In 1946-1948 he sold the Kaiser and Frazer brands of autos, both made by the Kaiser-Frazer Corporation of Willow Run, Michigan, in this building. Kaiser-Frazer (founded in 1945) was the first new U. S. auto manufacturer after World War II. It was founded by the industrialist Henry J. Kaiser, who had built Liberty ships during World War II and also founded Kaiser Hospital; and by Joseph W. Frazer, the president of the Graham-Paige Corporation, which had stopped making automobiles and soon (1947) sold all of its automotive assets to Kaiser-Frazer. In effect, Kaiser-Frazer was a partnership or merger between Henry J. Kaiser and Graham-Paige. It manufactured Kaiser autos until 1955.

After three years of selling Kaiser and Frazer cars, Ellis Brooks switched to selling Hudson autos in 1949-1954. Hudson had been founded in 1909 and during the 1920s was one of the most successful U. S. automakers, but it had passed its peak by the time Ellis Brooks sold the brand. In 1954, Hudson merged with Nash to form American Motors Corporation.

Instead of staying with Hudson (and perhaps adding Nash), Ellis Brooks began, in 1955, to sell Chevrolet autos at 1595 Van Ness, and this became the brand that he stayed with for the rest of his life. He acquired this dealership immediately after Don Gilmore stopped selling Chevrolets at 550-590 Van Ness, and it may be that in the eyes of Chevrolet, Ellis Brooks became a replacement dealership for Don Gilmore. There were then three Chevrolet dealerships on Van Ness Avenue: Ernest Gilmore's, at 999 Van Ness; Les Vogel's, at South Van Ness and Market; and Ellis Brooks'.

In 1963 Ellis Brooks moved from this building to a much larger one, two blocks to the south, at 1395 Van Ness, where he continued to sell Chevrolet and other GM brands. His widow and sons sold these brands there until 2008, and now sell used cars there.

Summary of occupants

1595 Van Ness Avenue was occupied by new auto showrooms for 41 years during 1913-1963 (i.e. during 1913-1931, 1939-1941, and 1946-1963). The most important was that of Charles S. Howard, who sold Buicks here during 1913-1921. Another prominent dealer, Ellis Brooks, sold Chevrolet autos from this building 1955-1963, Hudson during 1949-1954, and Kaiser and Frazer during 1947-1948. More briefly, Cole autos were sold here during 1921-1924, and Stutz autos from 1926-1929.

Counting used car sales, this building had about forty-five years of auto-related use (through 1964, the end year of the period being studied).

History -- Context

Surviving early auto showrooms of 1908-1919

For purpose of comparison with 1595 Van Ness, the oldest auto showrooms in the study area (i.e. those built through 1919) are listed below, in order of construction date, and with notes regarding their use and integrity. These are probably the oldest auto sales buildings in San Francisco as well as in the study area. Buildings that have lost half or more of their integrity are omitted from this list. Several other buildings that had only brief use as a showroom, and then became devoted to other uses, have also been omitted.

550 Van Ness. Built 1908-1909. This moderately-sized showroom (which first housed Ford and Velie brands) is the oldest in the city. The brick walls and ornament remain intact while the window sash has been altered.

1301-1305 Van Ness. Built 1911-1912. This large building has good integrity, but during its first five years its main use was as a tire dealership (Goodyear); its auto showroom use was secondary. Later in the 1910s the entire building became devoted to use as an auto showroom.

1430-1480 Van Ness. Built 1912. This building had early, but brief, use as an auto showroom. Window openings have been altered.

1001 Polk Street. Built 1912-1913. A large showroom built for the Pierce-Arrow brand. Its window sash has been removed, but the integrity of this building is otherwise high.

1400 Van Ness. Built 1912-1913. A large showroom with high integrity. Reo, Packard, Chevrolet, and Ford brands were sold here over the years.

1412-1420 Van Ness. Built 1912-1913. During this building's early years one of its two storefronts was used as an Oldsmobile showroom, and the other was a Firestone tires shop. Integrity is good.

1350 Van Ness. Built in 1912-1913. The cornice of this small showroom, built to house Stutz autos, has been removed.

1595 Van Ness. Built in 1913. A large showroom built for Buick sales; the building being evaluated here. The first story and cornice have been altered, but integrity is otherwise good.

2050 Van Ness. Built in 1913. A moderately-sized showroom with fifteen years of such use. For its first four years this building was a showroom and garage for electric cars.

1699 Van Ness. Built in 1919 and expanded in 1923. A large showroom with high integrity; it was principally a showroom for the Paige brand of autos.

The best of these, in terms of integrity, longevity of use as an auto showroom, and size or capacity are 1400 Van Ness, 1001 Polk, 1595 Van Ness, 1301-1305 Van Ness, and 1699 Van Ness. Each of these five also served as showrooms for major brands.

History – Context (continued)

Surviving Buick and Howard Automobile Company showrooms

Within the study area of this report (i.e., the Van Ness Avenue corridor), Charles S. Howard was San Francisco's only Buick dealer from 1906-1940s. Two or three other dealers also carried Buicks in the Mission district or on outer Geary Street briefly in the 1930s-1940s. Other than these, Howard's showrooms were the only places in San Francisco where Buicks were sold through this time period.

His three early showrooms on Golden Gate Avenue have all been demolished. 1601 Van Ness, which served as his showroom from 1921-1950, has also been demolished, as has his service building at 1748-1754 California. The building being evaluated here, 1595 Van Ness, his showroom during 1913-1921, is his only surviving showroom in the study area.

Howard also had branch showrooms in the Mission district, e.g. at 640 Valencia (in 1927; demolished) and at 2853 Mission (beginning ca. 1929). The latter address may be an extant, one-story wood-framed storefront. A Buick showroom of Howard's also stands in Berkeley.

Two buildings in the study area where Buick was sold beginning in the 1960s still stand: at 1395 Van Ness (extant; story added), and at 1535-1599 Market (altered). Buick showrooms for the 1950s in San Francisco have not been researched.)

Surviving Cole showrooms

The Cole brand of automobile was sold in six showrooms in San Francisco during 1911-1924. All of them still stand, and five of the six retain good integrity. They are listed below:

March 1911-1914: Sold by the Pacific Motor Car Company at 500 Golden Gate Avenue (altered.)

November 1915-April 1917: Sold by the Cole Pacific Motor Car Company at 2050 Van Ness (extant).

April 1917-early 1918: Sold by the Cole Pacific Motor Car Company at 1415 Van Ness (extant).

March 1918-April 1920: Sold by L. D. Allen at 1412-1420 Van Ness (extant).

May 1920-ca. March 1921: Sold by L. D. Allen at 1625 Van Ness (extant).

May 1921-1924: Sold by Cole Motors, Inc., at 1595 Van Ness (the building being evaluated here).

Surviving Stutz showrooms

The Stutz brand of automobile was sold in eight buildings during 1911-1933. Only two of the eight stand with good integrity. They are:

1913-1914: Stutz was sold at 1350 Van Ness during these two years. This small building has lost its cornice, its frieze has been obscured, and the pedestrian entrance has been changed, but the rest of the main façade and the two secondary facades remain largely intact.

(Continued next page.)

History – Context (continued)

1926-1929: Stutz was sold at 1595 Van Ness, the building being evaluated here, during these years. This building is larger, has better integrity, and was a Stutz showroom for a longer period of time, albeit still for a brief period, relative to 1350 Van Ness.

Surviving Franklin showrooms

Of six San Francisco showrooms where Franklin autos were sold during 1907-1931, two survive with good integrity. Each was a Franklin showroom only briefly. They were 1412-1420 Van Ness, where Franklin was sold in 1923, and 1595 Van Ness, where Franklin was sold in 1931.

Surviving Paige and Graham-Paige showrooms

Of the several showrooms in the study area where this auto brand was sold, three survive. The earliest is 1525 Van Ness, where Paige autos were sold 1914-1917. That building has only fair integrity. During 1922-1937 Paige, known after 1927 as Graham-Paige, was sold at 1699 Van Ness. These were the brand's peak years, and the building has high integrity. Graham-Paige's final years of 1939-1941 are represented by 1595 Van Ness, the building being evaluated here.

Buildings that held Ellis Brooks dealerships

This prominent San Francisco dealership has occupied two buildings: 1595 Van Ness, where Kaiser, Frazer, Hudson, and Chevrolet autos were sold during 1946-1963; and 1395 Van Ness, where Chevrolet and other GM brands were sold through 2008.

Surviving Chevrolet showrooms

Chevrolet autos were sold sporadically in San Francisco during the 1910s, and were represented by long-lasting dealerships after that decade. The prominent dealers and their showrooms include:

1920-1933: Robert A. Smith, principally at 399 Golden Gate (demolished), but also at 1400 Van Ness (1927-1931; extant).

1933-1970s: Ernest Ingold (and his successor George Olsen), principally at 999 Van Ness (extant).

1933-1954: Don Gilmore, principally at 550-590 Van Ness (extant).

1935-1960s: Les Vogel, principally at SW corner Market and South Van Ness (altered).

1955-2008: Ellis and Marie Brooks, first at **1595 Van Ness (during 1955-1963; the building being evaluated here),** then at 1395 Van Ness (1963 onward; extant).

The most important Chevrolet showroom is clearly 999 Van Ness. Showrooms of secondary importance include 1400 Van Ness (a Chevrolet showroom of brief duration, but during an early period), 550-590 Van Ness (for its longevity as a Chevrolet showroom), and 1595 Van Ness (as representative of Ellis Brooks' early years).

Integrity

This building's cornice has been replaced or modified. Windows in the first story have replacement sash or frames, and the entrances have also been altered. The upper stories, including ornament and window sash, remain intact. On balance, this building should be considered as retaining 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 1913, this is an early example of an automobile showroom. With 40 years of such use in its history (counted through 1964, the end year of the period being studied), it has excellent longevity in this use. In terms of longevity of auto showroom use, the size of the building, and integrity, this is one of the five best examples of an early auto showroom in the city. These facts alone would be enough to establish its importance as an automobile showroom. Additionally, this building is the only early example of a Buick showroom to survive in San Francisco. It was also a showroom for other important early brands, namely Cole and Stutz, albeit briefly. 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 1913-1931, 1936-1941, and 1946-1963, the years the building had this use.

Two of the proprietors of auto dealerships in this building were individually important. The first was Charles S. Howard, who remains well-known as an early and long-lasting Buick dealer. He occupied this building for a fairly short period of seven years, 1913-1921, but these were the years he rose to prominence, and this is the only one of his San Francisco showrooms that survives. The other important dealer was Ellis Brooks. This building served as his showroom during 1946-1963. These were the first eighteen years of his career in new car sales, and they also include the first eight years of his career as a Chevrolet salesman. This building thus appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2 for its association with these two auto dealers. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1913-1921 and 1946-1963, the years this building was occupied by these men.

Architecturally, this building is retrained in its treatment compared to other auto showrooms in the study area. The architect, M. J. Lyon, was important, but other works of his were more distinguished. The most important aspect of this building's design was the manner in which showroom departments were segregated among different stories, a practice that was common to other showrooms of the period. On balance, this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3.

Character defining features

The character defining features of this building are its height and width, the stucco surface of the building, the division of the facades into bays by unarticulated piers, the segmental arched heads to the top story windows, the scroll keystones and plaster swags at the top of each bay, the circular medallions at the top of each pier, the windows with their mullions, transom bars, and muntins, and the paneled spandrels at the second, third and fourth floor levels. The cornice appears not to be original, but the building did have a cornice when built, and thus the existing cornice should be considered as contributing to the historic character of the building.

View looking south along Van Ness from California Street, 1936. 1595 Van Ness, which then contained an Oldsmobile showroom, is visible at right. Photo: SF Public Library, photo AAB-3099.

Looking east along California Street, from just west of Van Ness Avenue, 1936. 1595 Van Ness is visible at near right. Charles S. Howard's last Buick showroom is visible at near left. Photo: SF Public Library, AAB-3099.

Customer Floyd Gass, at left, trades in his 1929 Auburn for a new Hudson Super Jet sedan at 1595 Van Ness in 1953. At center is Ellis Brooks, and at right is his general manager Hart Shadrick. SFPL photo AAD-4666.