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) 1625 Van Ness Avenue/1821-1825 Sacramento St.

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Allen-Weaver-Durant-Smith 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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted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 1625 Van Ness Avenue City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 642, lot 3

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

This four story, reinforced concrete building occupies an ell-shaped lot. It has a frontage of 93'-3" on the west side of Van Ness Avenue and runs through the block to Sacramento Street, where its frontage runs for 77'. The building wraps around an adjoining building, a former auto showroom at 1699 Van Ness. An office building from the 1980s or 1990s is adjacent on the south.

The upper three stories of the Van Ness Avenue side are clad in variegated bricks, that are tan, brown and buff in color, and laid in Flemish bond; while the first story is clad in stucco. In composition, the upper stories of this façade are divided into three bays, with a broad central zone flanked by narrower side bays. Each of these bays is surrounded on three sides by the brick wall surface. In the first story, seven openings are arranged in general conformance with the three bays of the upper stories.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 2.)

*P3b Resource Attributes: HP6 – two-story commercial building

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

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

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: ■ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
1919-1920; published bldg notice

*P7. Owner and Address:
WHERCO
235 MONTGOMERY ST #1012
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94104

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

*P9. Date Recorded:
February 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):

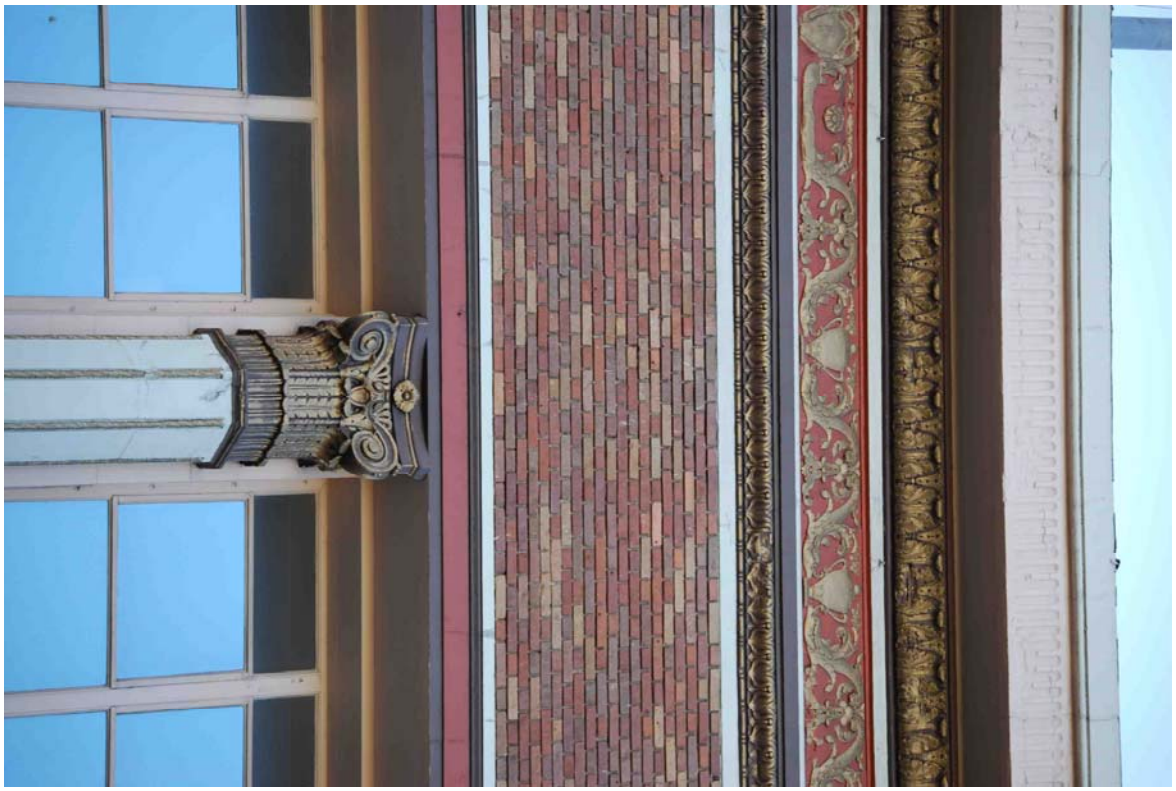
A highly ornate Classical Revival cornice runs across the top of the Van Ness Avenue façade. It consists (from top to bottom) of four parts: a rectangular crown, a half-round molding, a fluted corona, and a leafy bed molding. Beneath this is a frieze filled with a plaster arabesque of foliage and urns. Immediately below the frieze are moldings of calf's-tongue over bead-and-reel.

A thin molding runs around the perimeter of each of the three bays. The middle bay is divided into three parts by faceted columns with rope moldings at the corners and highly ornate Ionic capitals. Lintels over the windows are decorated with flutings filled with ornament; spandrels at the base of each window are plain. Each window is filled with steel sash that appears to be original.

At the second floor level, an entablature runs the width of the façade and forms a base for the composition described above. This entablature is composed of a cornice, frieze, and architrave. The cornice has a plain crown and a leafy bed molding. Beneath it are a blank frieze and a three-layered architrave. Store signage covers about half of this frieze and architrave but leaves the cornice above them fully visible. Corinthian pilasters filled with plaster palmettes and foliage support the architrave and frame the storefront area. Window and door openings are divided by plain piers and are filled with replacement metal frames. The storefront area beneath the entablature and between the pilasters is generally altered, although the two middle piers are very similar to the originals in this position.

The Sacramento Street wing is also four stories in height. A profiled cornice and blank frieze span its top, and windows are filled with steel sash. The permit history of this façade has not been examined, but from their appearance it seems the cornice and window sash may be original. The stucco surface of this façade is plain in treatment and is probably the result of an alteration. A vehicle entrance can be found at far left; it is one of three that were originally built into this wing. A pedestrian entrance is at far right.

1821-1825 Sacramento Street façade



Top photo: Detail of parapet area. Bottom photo: Detail of middle bay.

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 1625 Van Ness Avenue/1821-1825 Sacramento

B1. Historic Name: Allen-Weaver-Durant-Smith auto showroom

B2. Common Name: _____

B3. Original Use: auto showroom B4. Present Use: retail store

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

***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
Built in 1919-1920. First story façade facing Van Ness and Sacramento Street façade each altered at unknown dates.

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

***B8. Related Features:**
none

B9a. Engineers: MacDonald and Kahn b. Builder: MacDonald and Kahn

***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile industry **Area** San Francisco
Period of Significance 1919-1938 **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 architect

This building was built in 1919-1920 for L. D. Allen as a showroom for his automobile company (regarding which see page 5). His designing engineers and builders were MacDonald and Kahn.

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 structural 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 (see list on next page). 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.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 5.)

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

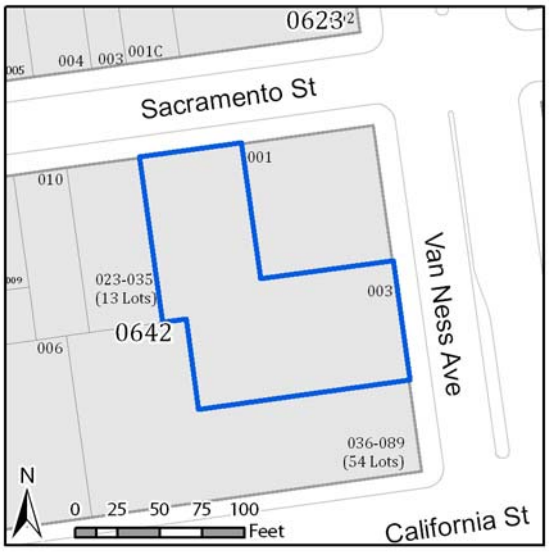
***B12. References:**
Building and Industrial News, July 23, 1919, 8:2; and August 6, 1919, 10:1
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1920-1964
1936 Sanborn insurance map (auto sales)
References continued on page 14.
Wikipedia entries for all auto brands sold here

B13. Remarks:

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

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



History – Construction and architect (continued)

MacDonald and Kahn usually performed all aspects of the design of the buildings they built. In such cases, they probably relied on their staff architects or draftsmen to perform the architectural aspects of their designs. One such person is known: George de Colmesnil, who had formerly been a partner of architect James R. Miller, then had his own architectural office; and who worked for MacDonald and Kahn during 1919-1921, when this building was built. It is quite possible that de Colmesnil performed the ornamental design for the main façade of 1625 Van Ness. On some occasions, outside architects were involved in the buildings that MacDonald and Kahn built, and in these cases the latter firm performed only the engineering design.

One of the partners, Felix Kahn, published his thoughts on industrial design slightly over a year before construction of this building began. In "Comments on Industrial Engineering," in *The Architect*, September 1918, he wrote:

> While the fundamental requisite of a factory building must be utility, allied with it now stands attractiveness, or beauty. Beauty does not mean a lavish display of over decoration in form or color. A proper regard for proportion, mass, balance, good taste in color, disposition of members, and in the use of materials will result in attractiveness. Above all, a factory building should appear to be what it is. This does not mean that it should have a cold, hard appearance and be devoid of all architectural treatment. The employment of a minor amount of decoration or enrichment is certainly permissible. A factory building of good architectural appearance redounds to the credit side of the ledger in a variety of ways. As an advertising medium it is of decided value. A building pleasing to the eye will undoubtedly produce in the minds of the workmen a different attitude towards their work, one tending to greater enthusiasm and contentment, unconsciously creating efficiency.

Generally speaking, these guidelines or principles were closely adhered to in the design of MacDonald and Kahn's buildings. 1625 Van Ness, by comparison, has a higher level of ornamentation than any of their other known works.

One other structural engineer was also prolific as a building contractor in San Francisco before the 1940s. That was James H. Hjul. He produced notable works, but MacDonald and Kahn had a much more important career than he did.

History -- Occupants

Automobile showrooms occupied this building for the first eighteen years after its construction (1920-1938). During those years five local dealerships and a factory branch sold nine brands of automobiles and one of trucks from this building. Afterward, occupants included a machinery manufacturing firm, a used car salesroom, and offices for the American Red Cross.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants (continued)

Automobile showrooms, 1920-1938

1920-1921: L. D. Allen and Co., sales of Cole and Stevens-Duryea autos, and Sandow trucks

L. D. Allen was a real estate developer who entered the auto dealership business in November 1917. His rise in this field was swift, as was his fall. He began by occupying a small storefront in the building at 1301-1305 Van Ness, where he sold the Lexington and Olympian brands, under the name California Motor Sales Company. Both of these brands are now little-remembered and were probably considered minor even in their own time. Only four months later (March 1918) Allen acquired the rights to the Cole brand, which had greater potential, and he moved into a larger showroom at 1412-1420 Van Ness. Here the Cole was Allen's primary brand, though he also sold Lexington and (briefly) Chevrolet here.

The Cole Motor Company, founded by Joseph J. Cole, made assembled automobiles in Indianapolis during 1909-1925. It made an early reputation by winning auto races in 1909 and 1910, and in 1912 it began to build limousines for the luxury market. In 1918 the Cole "Aero-Eight" was introduced. This name was intended to convey the sense that its body style was aerodynamically designed and that the engine had eight cylinders. Cole was, in fact, one of the first auto makers to use a V-8 engine. In 1918 Cole offered three models, all high-priced: a roadster, a touring car, and a "speedster." In 1919 it offered seven models.

Allen was clearly enthusiastic about Cole's prospects. Certainly, this was the brand that he pinned his hopes on when, in mid-1919, he began construction of 1625 Van Ness, one of the largest showrooms in San Francisco. The building alone cost $250,000, and Allen variously stated that land and construction costs came to $385,000 or $500,000. Either way, in 1919 this was a very considerable sum.

Allen had distribution rights for the Cole automobile for all of northern California and Nevada. Typically, an auto distributor with this territory would open his own auto showroom in San Francisco, appoint dealerships in other cities, and distribute cars to those dealers on a wholesale basis. Allen, however, chose to open his own showrooms around northern California. While construction of 1625 Van Ness was underway, Allen began construction of a three-story auto showroom in Oakland (at a cost to him of $250,000) and leased showroom buildings in Sacramento, Stockton, and Fresno.

He acquired two other brands to sell in addition to Cole. One was Sandow trucks, for which Allen had distribution rights for all of California, Nevada, Arizona, and Hawaii. The other was Stevens-Duryea, for which Allen was the distributor for northern California and Nevada. The Duryea name was legendary, for in the mid-1890s the Duryea brothers (Frank and Charles) had manufactured some of the first, if not the first, gasoline-powered autos for sale in the United States. One of the brothers co-founded a successor firm, Stevens-Duryea, in Massachusetts in 1901. By 1920 its glory days were long past. The company had failed and been revived, and according to its entry in Wikipedia the revived company produced very expensive automobiles. It is doubtful these cars competed very well with other luxury brands such as Duesenberg, Stutz, Packard, Pierce-Arrow, Peerless, and Cadillac.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants (continued)

Allen opened at 1625 Van Ness on May 2nd, 1920. An article in the *San Francisco Examiner* for that date ("Allen Opens New Building on Auto Row") explained the layout of the building. It included a showroom with vaulted ceilings for new automobiles, and offices for the salesmen, at the front of the first floor; general administrative offices in the mezzanine level; sales rooms for trucks and used cars at the rear of the first floor; a service department in the second story, with separate divisions for each of the three brands he sold; a parts department on the third floor; an auto repair department occupying portions of the third and fourth stories; and an auto painting department in the balance of the fourth story. There were three vehicle entrances into the building, all via the Sacramento Street wing. One of these entered into the truck and used car salesroom in the rear of the second story, and the other two entered into the second story. (Today there remains one vehicle entrance on the Sacramento Street side.) As his building opened, Allen told a reporter that he had more than 200 people on his payroll. This number must have included employees at his branch showrooms in other cities.

For unknown reasons L. D. Allen failed after only eleven or twelve months at 1625 Van Ness. The recession of the early 1920s may have contributed to this failure, but it was probably not the only reason. In all probability Allen had expanded much too quickly, for he began construction of this large building only one year and eight months after his first small showroom opened in November 1917. At this early stage of his automotive career it was probably unwise of him to build his own showroom instead of leasing a building like most other distributors did. Likewise, he could have reduced his financial risk by appointing dealerships in other California cities instead of trying to run his own showrooms there.

His line-up of brands seems, at this remove, to have been insufficiently prestigious to support a building the size of 1625 Van Ness. Not that Cole was an obscure brand; it had sold in San Francisco since 1911, and continued to sell at another San Francisco showroom for four years after Allen failed. Stevens-Duryea, however, did not find a San Francisco distributor after Allen failed; nor did Sandow trucks, which went out of business in 1922.

After leaving 1625 Van Ness in March or April 1921, Allen moved to a small (one-story, 27 feet in width) auto showroom that was not on, but near Van Ness, at 1157 Post. Here he sold an obscure auto brand made in South Carolina, named Anderson, but only for about three months, before going out of the auto business permanently in the latter half of 1921.

1921-1923: Chester N. Weaver, sales of Studebaker autos

On May 1st, 1921, Chester N. Weaver moved his Studebaker dealership into this building, and remained here for only two years before moving to a larger building.

Weaver worked for Studebaker, or owned a Studebaker dealership, for most of his adult life. He was born in Indiana, the home state of Studebaker, and appears to have been sent by Studebaker to San Francisco to work in its carriage and wagon repository at Market and 10th streets in 1898. Here he worked his way up from cashier, to secretary, and to general manager and vice president by 1905. The

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants (continued)

repository building was destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906, but within two months Weaver built a small, wood-framed sales room on the ruins. Here Studebaker Brothers of California sold carriages, wagons, and, for the first time in San Francisco, automobiles.

Studebaker Brothers had been founded as a wagon making company in South Bend, Indiana in 1852, and by 1875 was reputed to be the largest vehicle manufacturer in the world. During 1904-1910 they partnered with auto manufacturers Garford and E-M-F, making the bodies and distributing the automobiles through their vast network of carriage and wagon shops. Those partnerships were highly problematical, but by 1910, when they bought out E-M-F, Studebaker owned auto-making factories in South Bend, Detroit, and Canada.

In San Francisco, under Chester Weaver's management, Studebaker opened an auto showroom at 465 Golden Gate Avenue (1907-1908), then moved to Fremont and Mission (1908-1913). They delayed their move to Van Ness Avenue until it was clear where the center of Auto Row would be, then moved in 1913 to occupy half of the large auto showroom at 1200-1228 Van Ness. The following year, Studebaker ceased to sell autos in northern California through its factory branch system, and named its long-time employee, Chester Weaver, to be its local distributor. Weaver remained at 1200-1228 Van Ness for a few more years. He then moved his dealership to 1560 Van Ness (1918-1921), and finally to his largest building yet, 1625 Van Ness, in May 1921. Here he sold mid-priced six-cylinder Studebakers in three chassis designs and fourteen body styles.

Two years later, in 1923, Weaver moved to a still larger building, 1395 Van Ness, where he sold Studebaker autos until his death or retirement in 1931. His successors remained in this building for another three years. The last known Studebaker showroom in San Francisco was at 1155 Van Ness (during at least 1936-1938). All of the buildings mentioned above, except for 1625 Van Ness, have been demolished or heavily altered.

1924: J. W. Leavitt, sales of Oakland autos

For a brief period, in 1924, John W. Leavitt sold the Oakland brand of automobile at 1625 Van Ness. Leavitt had been a bicycle dealer in San Francisco since the early 1890s, began selling autos in 1904, and continued to sell autos through 1930. He switched brands frequently, but always seemed able to land a major brand to sell: Reo, Stoddard-Dayton, Willys-Knight and related brands (for almost ten years), Oldsmobile (for ten years), and Peerless.

The Oakland auto was one of several brands sold by General Motors, being just above the inexpensive Chevrolet in price range and just below the mid-priced Oldsmobile. It was the precursor to the Pontiac brand, which superceded it in 1931. From 1909 through 1931 Oakland was sold in eight San Francisco showrooms. Leavitt sold this brand for only one year, in 1924 at 1625 Van Ness. He then moved on to another brand in another building. After he gave up Oakland, a different dealer took up the brand in a different showroom. If nothing else, Leavitt's selling of Oakland autos illustrates the musical chairs of dealers, brands, and showroom buildings that was common in the study area of this report.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants (continued)

1925-1927: Durant Motor Cars, sales of Durant and Star autos

The Durant auto and its sister brand, Star, were sold at 1625 Van Ness during these three years. It appears the cars were sold here by a factory branch rather than a local dealership.

Durant Motors was a product of William C. Durant, one of the most important names in the automotive history of the United States. Durant first gained prominence in 1904, when he became the general manager of Buick (then still in its infancy), and produced the first Buicks for sale to the public. He next, in 1908, founded General Motors and brought Oldsmbile, Cadillac, Oakland, Buick, and other brands into its fold. Losing control of GM in 1910, he co-founded Chevrolet in 1911 and with his profits from that automobile purchased a controlling interest in GM stock, becoming its president once again in 1916. Durant lost control of General Motors again in 1920. Attempting to make another comeback, he founded Durant Motors in 1922. This company was successful for a decade. It produced a mid-priced car, the Durant (named after the founder); an economy car, the Star, which was produced during 1922-1928; and a third brand, named Flint. Durant also purchased Locomobile, which became the company's luxury brand during 1922-1929. Durant Motors was successful during the 1920s, but William C. Durant lost heavily in the Depression and his auto company went out of business in 1933.

1927-1933: Stanley W. Smith, sales of Hudson and Essex autos

Hudson was a major auto brand that is little remembered today. It was founded in 1909 in Detroit by eight businessmen of that city, including J. L. Hudson, a merchant and banker. In 1919 the company added the Essex automobile as an economy brand to complement the more expensive Hudson and to compete with Ford and Chevrolet. According to Wikipedia, Hudson peaked in popularity in 1929 and was then the third largest auto brand in the United States, after Ford and Chevrolet. The Essex brand was phased out in 1932, leaving only Hudson. In 1954 Hudson merged with Nash (which also made Rambler) to form American Motors Corporation (AMC). AMC chose to emphasize its Rambler brand, and accordingly Hudson was discontinued in 1957.

The proprietor of the showroom at 1625 Van Ness during 1927-1933 was Stanley W. Smith. He sold new Hudson and Essex autos here through 1932, then, perhaps due to the Depression, lost the Hudson brand to Earle C. Anthony (at 901 Van Ness). Smith sold used cars at 1625 Van Ness in 1933.

1934-1938: H. O. Harrison Company, sales of Pontiac autos

H. O. Harrison was an early and long-lasting San Francisco auto dealer. His career began in Los Angeles in 1905 or earlier. His first San Francisco showroom, at 540 Van Ness (altered), opened in 1909, and in 1911 he built a very large showroom at 1200 Van Ness (altered). In these two buildings he sold Everett, Peerless, Hudson, Essex, Dodge Brothers, and Chrysler autos. In the 1930s his longtime associate, James W. McAlister, took over 1200 Van Ness, and Harrison moved to 1625 Van Ness. He sold Auburn automobiles here in 1934-1936, and Pontiac autos in 1936-1938.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants (continued)

Other uses of this building, 1938-1964

The Moore Machinery Company occupied 1625 Van Ness in 1938-1940. 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.

In 1941 this building served as an annex to Charles S. Howard's Buick showroom, next door at 1601 Van Ness Avenue. Uses of this building from 1942-1947 are unknown; possibly the building continued to be used by Howard as an auto warehouse. In 1948 the building was once again devoted to automobile use. In that year, C. Ken Rhodes sold used cars here.

In 1949 or 1950 the American Red Cross converted the building into offices for their own use; they remained here through the late 1960s. The activities of this office of the American Red Cross have not been researched for this report.

History -- Context

Cole showrooms in San Francisco

The Cole automobile was sold by three different dealerships in seven buildings in San Francisco during 1911-1924. The two earliest of these buildings have been demolished or heavily altered, and the others retain good or high integrity. The survivors are:

1915-1917: sold at 2050 Van Ness by the Cole Pacific Motor Car Co.
1917-1918: sold at 1415 Van Ness by the Cole Pacific Motor Car Co.
1918-1920: sold at 1412-1420 Van Ness by the California Motor Sales Co. (L. D. Allen)
1920-1921: sold at 1625 Van Ness (the building being evaluated here) by L. D. Allen, Inc.
1921-1924: sold at 1595 Van Ness by Cole Motors, Inc.

As one can see, Cole was sold at 1625 Van Ness only briefly, for only one year.

Studebaker showrooms in San Francisco

Studebakers were sold from 1906 to at least 1938 in eight different buildings. During the early years (1906-1914) Studebakers were sold from a factory branch under its local manager, Chester N. Weaver. Over the next twenty years, Weaver owned his own Studebaker dealership. Finally, for a few or several years in the 1930s, Studebakers were sold by other dealers. Of these eight buildings, seven have been demolished or heavily altered, and only one, 1625 Van Ness, still stands with good integrity. Studebakers were sold here for only two years, 1921-1923.

(Continued next page.)

History – Context (continued)

Oakland showrooms in San Francisco

The Oakland automobile was sold from 1909 through 1931 in eight San Francisco buildings. Of these, three retain good or high integrity, two are roughly 50% intact, and three have been demolished. The five survivors include:

1912-1914: sold at 550-590 Van Ness (windows altered, else intact)
1916: sold at 1525 Van Ness (about 50% intact)
1917-1918 and 1926-1930: sold at 1600 Van Ness (about 50% intact; windows covered with grilles)
1920-1923: sold at 1946-1960 Van Ness (retains high integrity)
1924: sold at 1625 Van Ness (the building being evaluated here)

Of these, the best examples of Oakland showrooms are 550-590 Van Ness and 1946-1960 Van Ness.

Durant and Star showrooms in San Francisco

Durant autos were sold in five San Francisco buildings from the founding of the company in 1922 through 1932, a year before the demise of the brand. During almost half this period the brand was sold from factory branches, which is what 1625 Van Ness appears to have been during 1925-1927. The other years it was sold by local dealerships. The surviving buildings include:

1922: sold at 1400 Van Ness by dealer Earle C. Anthony (extant)
1923-1924: sold at 1730-1750 Van Ness as a factory branch (about 50% altered)
1925-1927: sold at 1625 Van Ness (the building being evaluated here) as a factory branch
1929: sold at 1535-1599 Market by dealer Harry J. Lee (about 50% altered)

Thus, 1625 Van Ness is the best example of a Durant showroom in the city, despite the fact that these cars were sold here for only a few years.

Durant's sister brand, Essex, was also sold at 1625 Van Ness (during 1926-1927). The other surviving building where Star was sold is 2000 Van Ness (1924), which has lost integrity as an auto showroom.

Hudson showrooms in San Francisco

Hudson was sold in nine San Francisco showrooms from 1909 through at least 1954. The first five buildings, where Hudson was sold during 1909-1925, have been demolished or heavily altered. The surviving buildings include:

1927-1932: sold at 1625 Van Ness Avenue, the building being evaluated here
1933-1935: sold at 901 Van Ness Avenue (extant)
1937-1949: sold at 1600 Van Ness Avenue (windows altered)
1949-1954: sold at 1595 Van Ness Avenue (extant)

(Continued next page.)

History – Context (continued)

All of these buildings are of interest as Hudson showrooms. 1625 Van Ness is probably the most important example because it is the oldest and because sales of Hudson reached their peak (according to Wikipedia) while it was sold here.

Auburn showrooms in San Francisco

The Auburn automobile was founded in 1900. In 1925 it was purchased by industrialist E. L. Cord, who turned the brand into a stylish luxury car; it persisted under his ownership to 1937. Auburn was sold in seven San Francisco showrooms, of which three still stand with at least fair integrity:

1917: sold at 2050 Van Ness. Integrity uncertain.
1926 and 1929-1930: sold at 1946-1960 Van Ness. Integrity is high.
1934-1936: sold at 1625 Van Ness (the building being evaluated here).

Pontiac showrooms in San Francisco

Pontiac was the sister brand and then the successor brand to Oakland. The longest-term Pontiac showroom in San Francisco was at 1560 Van Ness (1938-1950s), which has been thoroughly altered. Other Pontiac showrooms in San Francisco included:

1926-1930: sold at 1600 Van Ness, along with Oakland autos (windows covered with grilles)
1936-1938: sold at 1625 Van Ness (the building being evaluated here)
1963 and afterward: sold at Ellis Brooks' showroom at 1395 Van Ness (along with Chevrolet)

Summary

1625 Van Ness was a showroom for Cole autos, an important brand, for only one year (1920-1921). The building is the last remaining Studebaker showroom that has good integrity, though this car was sold here for only two years (1921-1923). As an example of an Oakland showroom, two others are clearly better, for this brand was sold here for only one year (1924). It is the best surviving example of a Durant showroom, although that car was sold here for only three years (1925-1927). Of four surviving Hudson showrooms, this building is the best example, though the brand was sold here fairly briefly (1927-1932). Finally, this was a Pontiac showroom for two to four years. In sum, six important brands were sold in this building. Despite the brief period that each was sold here (up to six years), 1625 Van Ness is the best example of a showroom for three of these brands (Studebaker, Durant, and Hudson). Three comparatively minor brands (Stevens-Duryea, Star, and Essex) were also sold here.

Integrity

The upper three stories of the Van Ness Avenue façade remain unchanged. At the second floor level, the original entablature, consisting of cornice, frieze, and architrave, also remains intact, as do the Corinthian pilasters that flank the storefront. The storefront area between the pilasters and below the

(Continued next page.)

Integrity (continued)

architrave has been generally altered, with the possible exception of the two central piers. On balance, this façade retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association.

The Sacramento Street side appears to have been generally altered, although the cornice and frieze and the window sash may be original. One of the original three vehicle entrances is still evident, with a replacement vehicle door. On balance, this façade retains integrity of location, has diminished integrity of setting, has mostly but not entirely lost integrity of association (because it retains one of three vehicle entrances), and has mostly lost integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and feeling.

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

Completed in 1920, this is a moderately early example of an automobile showroom. With 18 years of such use in its history, it has moderate longevity in this use. During these years, this building was a showroom for six important brands of automobiles, including Cole, Studebaker, Oakland, Durant, Hudson, and Pontiac, and is the best surviving example in San Francisco of a showroom for three of these (Studebaker, Durant, and Hudson). Three minor brands were also sold here: Stevens-Duryea, Star, and Essex. Each of these brands was sold here only briefly – for six years or less – but cumulatively, this building's history of automobile sales is impressive; few other buildings in the study area were showrooms for as many auto brands. Although the building's Sacramento Street façade is largely altered, its primary façade, facing Van Ness Avenue, is largely intact, and sufficient integrity remains for this building to evoke its history as an auto showroom. 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 1920-1938, the years the building had this use.

Criterion 2

Three of the proprietors of businesses in this building were individually important in San Francisco's automotive history: Chester N. Weaver, J. W. Leavitt, and H. O. Harrison. Given the brief span of years that each was here, however, this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2. *(Continued next page.)*

Evaluation (continued)

Criterion 3

Architecturally, the Van Ness Avenue façade of this building is richly ornamented and textured. The ornate cornice and frieze at the top of the building relate to those at the second floor level and to the pilasters that flank the storefront area. The visual focus of the building is in the central bay, and the columns in this bay help to hold that focus through their fine detailing. The variegated brick surface of the upper stories supplies much of the texture. Adding to this building's architectural importance is the fact that it is one of the best buildings by MacDonald and Kahn, an important engineering and contracting firm. The building is unusually ornate for this firm, but this does not detract from its interest. For these reasons, the building appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3, for its design. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1919-1920, the years of design and construction.

Character defining features

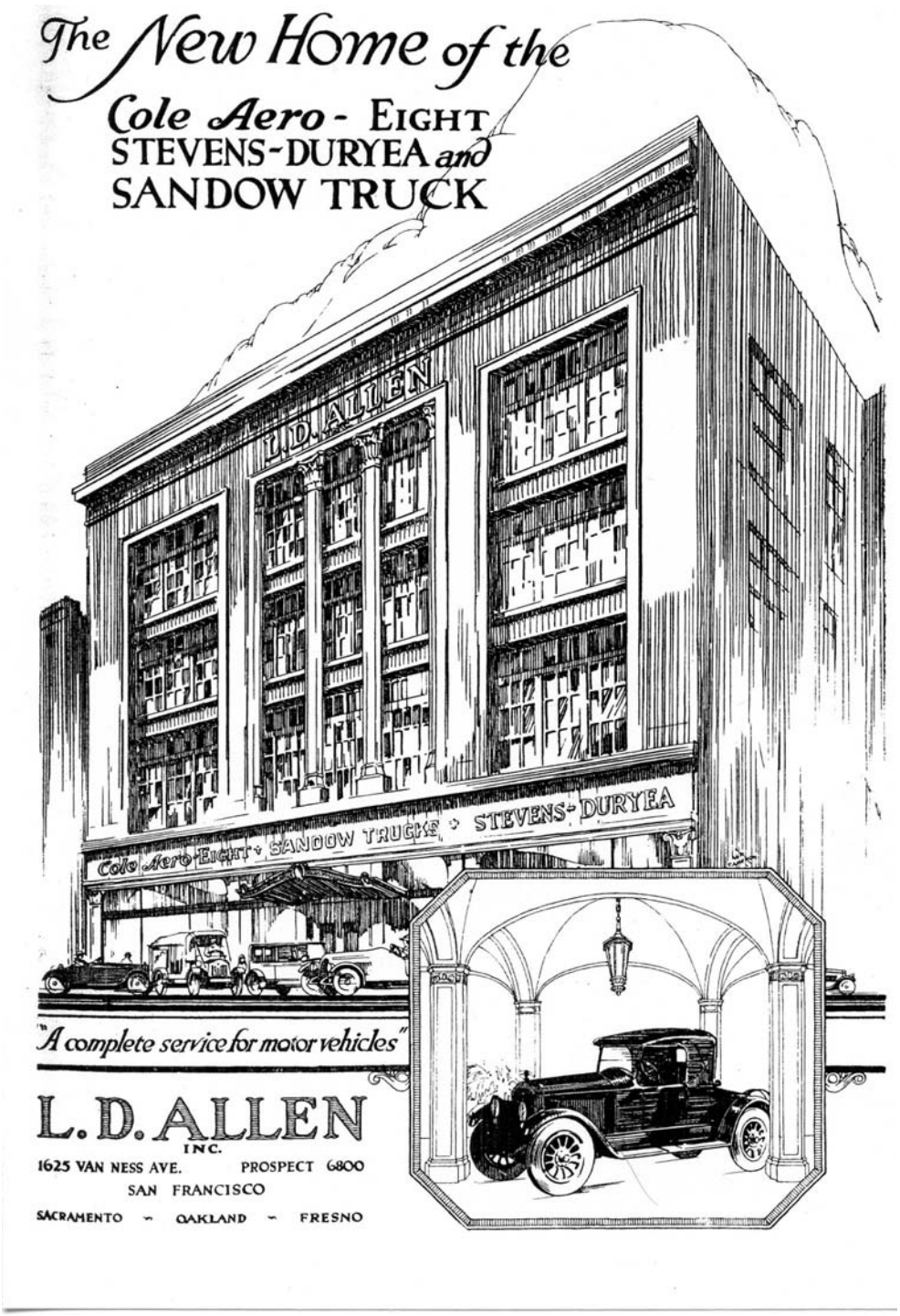
Under Criterion 1, the character defining features of this building are the height and width of both wings (Van Ness and Sacramento). On the Van Ness Avenue façade, the character defining features include the brick façade, the window sash, the main cornice and frieze at the top of the building, the secondary cornice, frieze, and architrave at the second floor level, the columns in the middle bay, the trim molding around the perimeter of each bay, the pilasters that flank the storefront, and the two middle piers in the storefront area. The altered finish and window frames of the storefront area (beneath the architrave and between the pilasters) are not contributing features. On the Sacramento Street façade, contributing features include the cornice if it should prove to be original, the window sash in the upper stories if it should prove to be original, and the size and placement of the single remaining vehicle entrance. The altered finish of this façade is not a contributing feature.

Under Criterion 3, only the Van Ness Avenue façade contributes to the historic architecture of the building. On this façade, the character defining features are the same as those mentioned in the paragraph above. The Sacramento Street wing does not contribute under this criterion.

References (continued from page 4.)

W. H. B. Fowler, "Studebakers Move Auto Business to Van Ness," SF *Chronicle*, July 11, 1913, p. 10.
"New Sales Plan Is Inaugurated by Studebaker," SF *Chronicle*, February 1, 1914, p. 45.
"Allen Company to Handle Stevens-Duryea," SF Chronicle, March 14, 1920. p. A-2.
"California Motor Sales Co. Changes Name," SF Chronicle, March 14, 1920, p. A-2.
"Allen Opens New Building on Auto Row," SF *Examiner*, May 2, 1920, p. 6A.
"New Building Here Opened," SF Chronicle, May 2, 1920, p. A-6.
"New Building for Auto Row." SF *Chronicle*, July 26, 1920.

Display ads in the SF Chronicle: May 2, 1920, p. A-5; September 20 (or 22?), 1920 (illustration showing all five of L. D. Allen's Cole showrooms); February 18, 1921, p. 4; May 1, 1921, and May 8, 1921, p. 23 (Chester N. Weaver moves into 1625 Van Ness); February 12, 1922, p. A-2 and November 12, 1922 (list models and prices of Studebakers sold here).



Advertisement for L. D. Allen's newly opened Cole, Stevens-Duryea, and Sandow showroom. From the 1920 Crocker-Langley city directory.

1625 Van Ness ca. 1950s. Photo San Francisco Public Library, Assessor's negatives, block 642