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) 800 Van Ness Avenue/790-798 Eddy Street

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Pioneer Motor Bearings Company shop

P2. Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ **Not for Publication** ■ **Unrestricted**

*b. USGS 7.5' Quad _____ Date _____ T ___; R ___; ____¼ of ____¼ of Sec ____; _____B.M.

c. Address 800 Van Ness Avenue/790-798 Eddy Street City San Francisco Zip 94109

d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN ***e. Assessor's parcel #:** Block 739, lot 5

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

This two-story-plus-mezzanine brick masonry building fills its 30-foot by 109-foot lot at the northeast corner of Van Ness Avenue and Eddy Street. The facades are clad in buff-colored brick that are textured with vertical tooling. In composition, the Van Ness façade is treated as a single bay that is divided by wooden pilasters into three segments. The Eddy Street façade is five bays in width, and each of its bays is similarly divided into segments.

Both facades are given an equal level of finish regarding detailing and ornament. A profiled cornice supported by block modillions stretches the full width of each façade. Second story windows are wooden, with casements of four large lights in the lower zone and fixed sash of smaller lights in the upper zone. The pilasters that separate the windows are paneled, and they relate to the spandrels below, at the second floor level, which are also paneled. Mezzanine windows of metal sash are divided into many lights, in a manner similar to those in the upper zone of the second story. In their pattern, they are identical to the mezzanine sash shown in a photo of this building in the S.F. *Chronicle*, Nov. 7, 1920 "Elgin Distributor…"). First story windows have modern metal sash or frames set in their original openings. The most prominent alteration is to the main entrance on Van Ness, where doors, sidelights, and transoms of modern metal are enframed by new tan brick. Considerable modern signage and a fire escape add visual clutter to the building facades.

***P3b Resource Attributes:** HP6 – two-story commercial building; HP8 – industrial building

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

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

***P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source:** ■ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
1920; published building contract

***P7. Owner and Address:**
VNRE PROPERTIES LLC
790 EDDY ST
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94109

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

***P9. Date Recorded:**
November 2009

***P10. Survey Type:** (Describe)
intensive

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

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

Detail of textured tan brick piers, cornice, second story windows, pilasters, and spandrel

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 800 Van Ness Avenue/790-798 Eddy Street

B1. Historic Name: Pioneer Motor Bearings Company shop

B2. Common Name: _____

B3. Original Use: auto showroom B4. Present Use: restaurants

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

***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
Built in 1920. Modern metal doors, transoms, and sidelights installed at unknown date.

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

***B8. Related Features:**
none

B9a. Architect: William L. Schmolle b. Builder: unknown

***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile industry **Area** San Francisco
Period of Significance 1920 **Property Type** auto showroom **Applicable Criteria** 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 1920 for owner H. H. Helbush as an investment, to designs by architect William L. Schmolle, who worked in San Francisco from 1909 to 1930. Schmolle's most important surviving work is probably the Chanslor and Lyon auto parts store at 730 Polk Street (1922), also in the study area of this report. Other works of his included the huge William L. Hughson Ford showroom at Market and 11th streets (1921, demolished), McNutt Hospital at 1045-1055 Pine (1910, altered), and a bachelor hotel at 334 Stockton (1910; extant).

(See Continuation Sheet, page 3.)

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

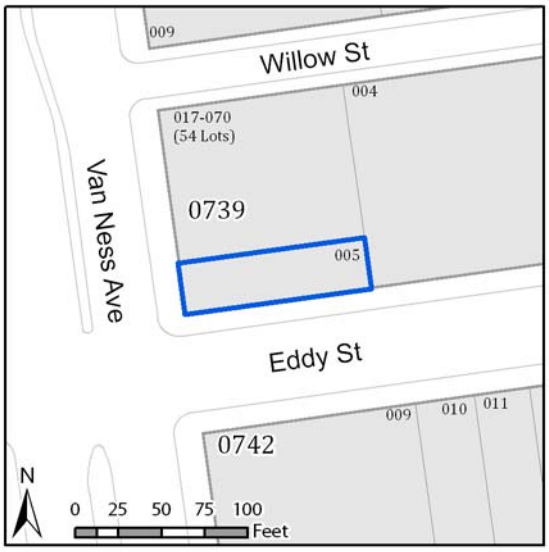
***B12. References:**
Edwards' Abstracts, May 29, 1920
"Mark Company Opens New Quarters," and "Elgin Distributor in New Headquarters," both in S. F. *Chronicle*, Nov. 1, 1920
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1921-1964
1929 Sanborn insurance map (auto sales and machine shop)
1948 Sanborn insurance map (restaurant at 800 VN; autos and machine shop at 1st and 2nd stories of 770 Eddy)

B13. Remarks:

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

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



History -- occupants

The initial, though brief, use of 800 Van Ness (1920-1922) was as an automobile showroom. Two firms were located here, each selling brands now considered obscure. They were:

1920-1922: The Mark Motor Company, named for its manager, Grant A. Mark. This company opened a showroom here in October 1920 in an ambitious bid to establish the Elgin automobile as an important brand in San Francisco and the western United States. Besides resident manager Grant Mark, the firm included a sales manager, H. A. S. Perch; a district sales manager, H. Clay Bernard; a territorial sales manager, Frank Bartels; a service department manager, F. Serls; and a parts department manager, F. C. Carey. Mechanics were trained at the Elgin home office. Service branches of Mark Motor Company were established in five western states, in an apparent attempt to induce dealerships to carry Elgin cars in those areas.

Sales of Elgins must have been disappointing, for within three months Mark added another brand to its line, the DuPont auto, and featured that car in its ads rather than Elgin. The Mark Motor Co. lasted for one more year, into early 1922, and then went out of business. Its place in this building was taken by:

1922: The De Bruton Motor Co., which sold Premier autos. This car featured an aluminum engine and an electric gear shift. The company's manager, E. C. De Bruton, was a little less ambitious than Mark had been; he expected to distribute Premiers only in northern California and Nevada. Within a year, perhaps by the end of 1922, this firm was also out of business.

After that year, the interior of the building became divided so that each floor was occupied by a different business. Neither of these was a showroom for new automobiles, which may be an indication that the field of obscure auto manufacturers and hopeful distributors had thinned out by this time. The first two occupants were:

1923-1955: The Pioneer Motor Bearings Company. This machine shop was located upstairs; it made and sold metal bearings, bushings, shims, nuts, and bolts. One city directory listing for Pioneer, in 1924, states that it manufactured bearings and bushings "for autos," but otherwise there is no indication that this firm specialized in such parts for automobiles. (Note that one other building that contained a roughly similar business still stands in the study area. That is 1033-1039 Polk, where Frank M. Cobbledick was a representative for makers of automotive and industrial ball bearings from 1920-1933.)

1924-1928: The Patterson Parts Company, an automobile parts store, occupied the first story during these years. After 1928 this firm moved nearby, to Turk Street.

For the next decade the first story was occupied by used car sales rooms. The proprietors (or business name) were:

1929: Milton J. Main
1930-1931: Warren Ellsworth
1933-1935: Fillmore E. Fritz
1936: Lion Auto and Loan Co.
1938-1939: J. B. McDonald

(See Continuation Sheet, page 5)

History (continued):

In about 1940 two small storefronts were carved out of the first floor of this building. One or both of these were usually occupied as a restaurant. The rear portion (the bulk of the first story) had unknown uses after this time.

To summarize the known uses of this building through 1964:

Sales of new automobiles: two years
Sales of used automobiles: ten years
Sales of auto parts: five years
Manufacturing of motor bearings and other parts: 23 years.

The total auto-related use (not counting Pioneer Motor Bearings) was for 17 years

The most interesting aspect of this building's history is that it housed auto dealers who sold three obscure auto brands very briefly in the early 1920s. This was typical of the early automobile industry, when hundreds if not thousands of hopeful manufacturers in the northern United States attempted to gain prominence in the industry by inducing local dealers around the country to carry their cars.

Other buildings in the study area, roughly fourteen in all, also held showrooms for obscure auto brands during the 1909-1920s. The six with the best integrity, and the brands that they sold, include:

550 Van Ness (sold Velie, Baker Electric, Stoddard-Dayton, Regal, Kline, and Grant during 1909-1917)

1301-1325 Van Ness (sold Simplex, Mercer, Henderson, and Maxwell autos during 1912-1916; Jordan, Falcon-Knight, and Viking during 1922-1930; and the more popular brands Velie and Dort during 1917-1922)

1625 Van Ness (sold Cole and Stevens-Duryea autos in 1920; Star autos in 1926-1927; and the more popular Durant, Hudson, and Essex autos during 1925-1933)

1595 Van Ness (sold National autos in 1913; Cole, Flint, and Stephens autos during 1921-1925; plus the more popular Kissel, Stutz, and Franklin autos during 1925-1931)

1946-1960 Van Ness (sold Auburn and Deluge autos during 1926-1930)

2050 Van Ness (sold Rauch and Lang Electric, Owen Magnetic, Baker Electric, Cole, Hupmobile, Lexington, and Gardner autos during 1914-1928)

The first five of these also sold much more prominent brands (such as Ford, Buick, Oakland, Chevrolet) in addition to the brands that are listed here. The sixth had an interesting history as a salesroom and garage for electric automobiles.

In sum, these six buildings have a substantially better history of having sold now-obscure auto brands than 800 Van Ness does. Another eight buildings stand that also sold such autos, some for longer periods of time than 800 Van Ness did, but that have lesser integrity than 800 Van Ness does.

Integrity

The brick walls, cornice, upper story windows, and spandrels of this building remain unchanged, and the first story and mezzanine window openings remain the same. Window and door frames in the lower levels have been replaced. In sum, this building retains integrity of location, design, feeling, and association, while integrity of materials, workmanship, and setting are somewhat diminished.

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, this is a moderately early example of an automobile showroom. With only two years of such use in its history, it had very brief longevity in this use. This building also had brief longevity as an auto parts store (five years), moderate longevity as a used car salesroom (ten years), and moderate longevity for all known auto-related use (17 years). The longest-term occupant was the Pioneer Motor Bearings Company, which remained for 33 years, for excellent longevity. Its role as a maker of auto parts is uncertain.

As mentioned above, the most interesting aspect of this building's history is that it housed auto dealers who sold obscure brands in the early 1920s. However, six buildings in the study area have substantially better histories in this area; they also have an overall auto-related history that is much more compelling than that of 800 Van Ness. For these reasons, this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 1. For similar reasons, this building also does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2.

Architecturally, this building is typical of small brick commercial buildings for its period. Its best features are the textured, tan brick surface, which imparts a warm feeling; the finely molded cornice; and the wooden second story windows. As buildings with such features become less common, those that remain, even modest examples, become more significant. Better examples of buildings with features such as these remain fairly numerous in the general downtown area. By contrast, brick buildings with such warm coloring and with wooden windows and cornices of this quality are becoming scarce in the general Van Ness Avenue and Polk Gulch corridor. This building stands out for its pleasing color and texture, and so, despite its first story window and entrance alterations, appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3, for its design. The Period of Significance under this criterion in 1920, the year it was built.

Character Defining Features

The character defining features of this building are its height, width, and depth; its textured tan brick walls; its wooden profiled cornice with supporting block modillions; the profiled molding at the base of this cornice; the wooden casement windows and transoms in the second story; the paneled spandrels at the second floor level; the paneled pilasters that divide the windows and spandrels; the pattern of the mezzanine level windows; and the size and shape of the first story windows. The new window sash and door framing in the first story, and the modern tan brick surrounding the main entrance on Van Ness, are not contributing elements to the historic building.

800 Van Ness Avenue, shown in the middle distance (at right), with the sign of the Pioneer Motor Bearings Company. Photo from the San Francisco History Center, Main Library, photo AAB-5698.