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

PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
HRI # _____
Trinomial _____
NRHP Status Code 6Z
Other Listings _____
Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____

 *Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 690 Van Ness Avenue

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Speedometer Electric 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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted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 690 Van Ness Avenue City San Francisco Zip 94102
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 763, lot 12

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

This is a one-story, brick masonry commercial building that fills its 50-foot by 109-foot lot at the southeast corner of Van Ness Avenue and Turk Street. The building is faced in brick that has been painted. At the top of the building is a parapet that is plain except at the corners, where piers rise to a height several inches above the rest of the parapet. Each of these end piers is capped by a molding and course of dentils of recent design and manufacture. A molded belt course – also recent – stretches across the bottom of the parapet, where a pent roof was originally located. Below this is a frieze that is blank save at the ends, where original ornamental brickwork can be found. Below the frieze, four piers divide the Van Ness façade into three bays; five other piers can be found on the Turk Street side as well. Each pier is capped by a course of original egg-and-dart molding and a squeezed, rounded pediment. The transom area, originally devoted to prism glass, is now filled with signage. The base, or bulkhead of the storefront is brick. Doors and windows have modern metal frames or sash. In sum, the original parts of the two facades are the parapet (excluding the dentilated caps and the molded belt course), the frieze, the piers and their capitals, and the brick buildheads.

*P3b Resource Attributes: HP6 – one-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 east
June 2009

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: ■ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
1910; building permit

*P7. Owner and Address:
690 VAN NESS LLC
P.O. BOX 8899
STOCKTON CA 95208

*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)

(Still need to take a Turk Street façade photo.)

Top photo: Turk Street façade. Bottom: detail of capital.

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 6Z

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 690 Van Ness Avenue

B1. Historic Name: Speedometer Electric Company shop

B2. Common Name: _____

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

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

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

Built in 1910. Pent roof and prism glass removed at unknown date. Belt course and parapet capitals added recently.

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

***B8. Related Features:**

none

B9a. Architects: Cunningham and Politeo b. Builder: Lillie P. Dana

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

Period of Significance n/a **Property Type** auto showroom **Applicable Criteria** n/a

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

History

This building was built in 1910 for owner Lillie P. Dana as an investment, to designs by architects Cunningham and Politeo. Occupants through 1912 are unknown. For the next thirty years this building held a wide variety of auto-related uses, and none of the individual proprietors remained for more than five or six years. During 1913-1915 this building was an automobile showroom where new Lincoln (1913), Autocar (1913-1914), Havers (1913-1914), and Saxon (1915) autos were sold. These were mostly minor brands not well remembered today. C. D. Martin performed auto repair here in 1915-1916; and from 1916-1919 the firm of Power, Turner and Marisch sold Racine and Goodyear tires and auto supplies. During 1924-1933 used cars were sold here, first by Coast Auto Co. (1924-1927) and then by James F. Waters (1929-1933). The latter went on to become a prominent dealer in DeSoto and Plymouth automobiles (from 1930-1963). The Coast Auto Finance Co. occupied this building during 1936-1938, and was followed in 1940 by Maggini Motor Co., which sold used cars.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 4.)

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

***B12. References:**

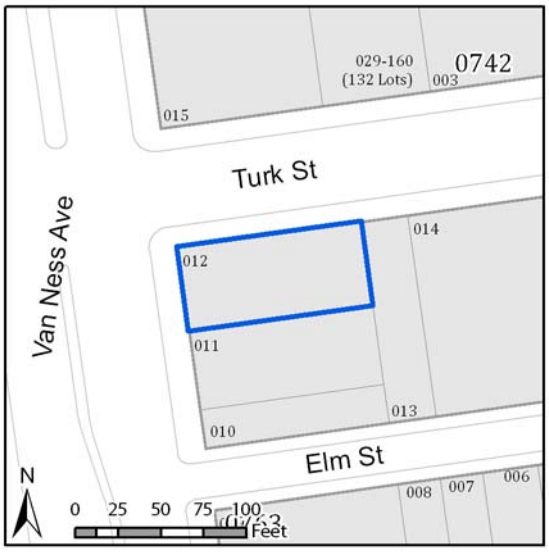
Building permit #29075 (April 13, 1910)
S.F. Newsletter, Christmas issue, 1913 (photo)
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1914-1964
1929 Sanborn insurance map ("auto sales")
1948 Sanborn insurance map ("auto service")

B13. Remarks:

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

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



History (continued)

The building's one long-term auto-related occupant followed next. From 1933 through the 1980s the Speedometer Electric Company performed speedometer, carburetor, ignition, radio, and automobile electrical service from this building. By the 1960s the business was also known as Speedo Ignition Service, a nickname that persisted into the 1980s. One other surviving building in the study area held an important business that did general auto electrical servicing for a substantial length of time: 950 Van Ness, which held the Automotive Service Agency during 1920-1941. That building has fair integrity.

The principle alterations to the exterior have been the removal of the pent roof and the replacement of the transom prism glass by signage. Doors and window frames have been replaced, and minor trim in the parapet area has been added. The cumulative effect is that the façade is a little over 50% intact.

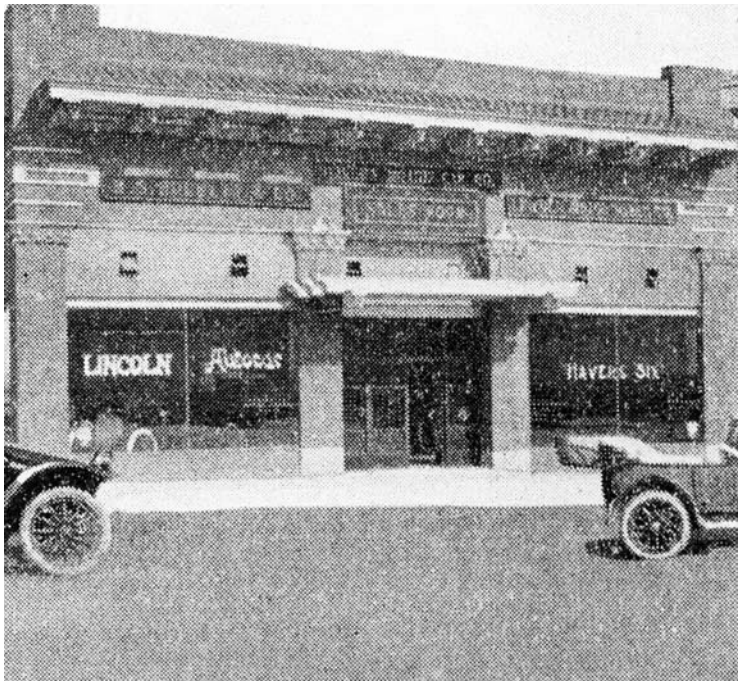
Integrity

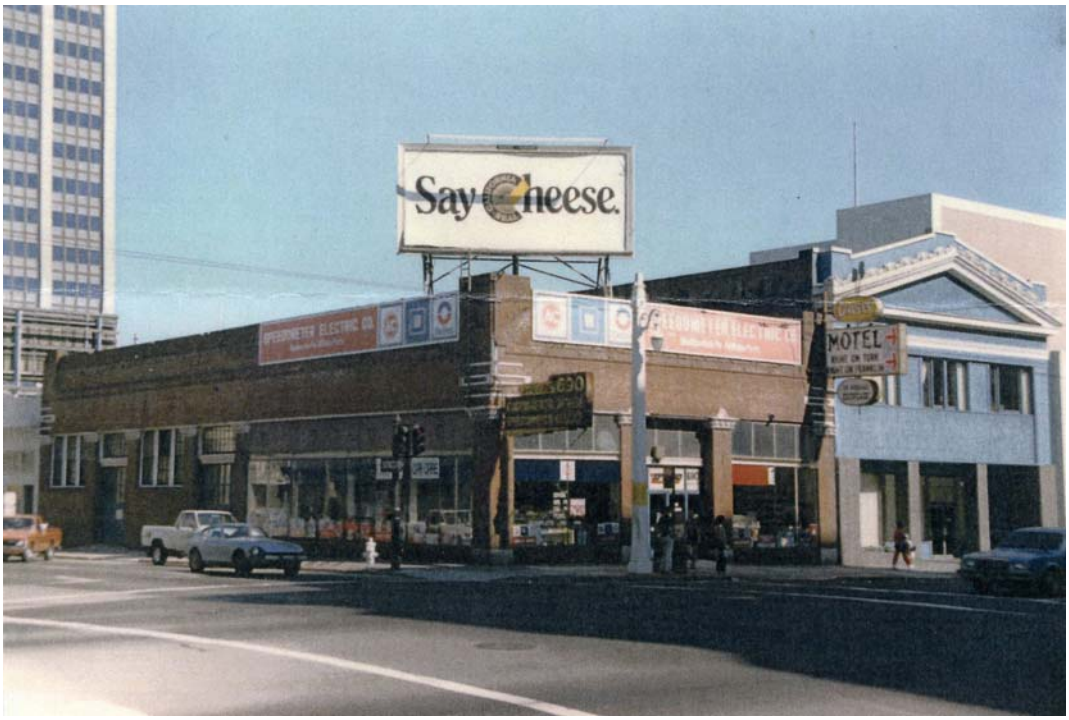
The basic form of the building remains intact, and the surviving brick elements – parapet, frieze, and piers – preserve the original outlines of the design. The only ornamental details that survive are the capitals of the piers and the brickwork at the ends of the frieze. In sum, this building retains integrity of location, while integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association are substantially diminished but not entirely lost.

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 1910, and first occupied (as far as is known) by automobile uses in 1913, this is an early example of an automobile-related building. With about fifty years of such use in its history (through 1964), it has excellent longevity in this use. All specific uses and occupants were brief until 1943, when a long-term occupant, a speedometer, carburetor, and electrical systems repair shop opened here. This building illustrates two themes: 1) the variety of minor businesses that proliferated, but often did not flourish, during the early decades of the automobile era in San Francisco, and 2) businesses that performed general auto electrical servicing. The former is an interesting, but not one of the most compelling, themes in the city's auto-relayed history; the latter theme is better represented by another building, 950 Van Ness Avenue, where a similar business existed at an earlier date. For these reasons, and because the integrity of this building is not good, the building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources under criteria 1 or 2. The integrity problems of the building also prevent it from being eligible under Criterion 3.





Top photo: The building in 1913 (from the S.F. Newsletter, Christmas, 1913). Note the pent roof at the base of the parapet and the prism glass in the transom area. Lincoln, Autocar, and Havers Six autos were sold here then.

Bottom photo: The building in the 1980s. Photo from the Department of City Planning.