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) 1600 Van Ness Avenue

P1. Historic name of building: Chevrolet, Oakland, Pontiac and Hudson 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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted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 1600 Van Ness Avenue City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 643, lot 18

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

This three-story, reinforced concrete building fills its 142' by 100' lot at the northeast corner of Van Ness Avenue and California Street. The façade is covered with a coating of stucco that is lightly scored to resemble masonry. In composition, each façade is divided into four bays of equal width, with those on the Van Ness side being slightly wider than those on the California side. At the top of the building a profiled cornice supported by block modillions stretches across both facades. Beneath the cornice is a frieze that is blank except for diamond patterns at each bay division; and blow the frieze is a molding of three layers. Simple Ionic pilasters divide, and define, the bays in the second and third stories; each pilaster rests upon a plain block-shaped base. Windows in these stories are covered by very large metal grilles that were placed some time after the mid-1950s. The original window sash can still be faintly seen behind these grilles. In the first story, the transom windows over the storefronts have been covered by plywood. Most of the storefront windows below the transoms have wooden frames and steel sash that may be original; however the vertical dividers in these windows are of non-original aluminum. A former vehicle entrance on the California Street side has also been filled in, although the dimensions of the opening are still evident.

*P3b Resource Attributes: HP7 – three-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
1913; published building notice

*P7. Owner and Address:
ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHBISHOP O
1 PETER YORKE WY
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94109

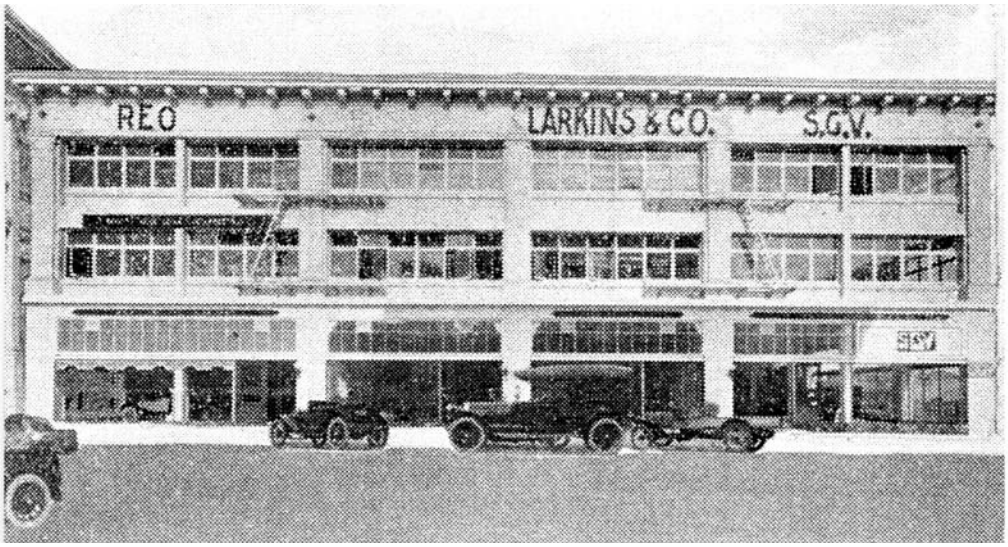
*P8. Recorded by: (Name, affiliation, and address)
William Kostura
P. O. Box 60211
Palo Alto, CA 94306

*P9. Date Recorded: April 2010

*P10. Survey Type: (Describe) intensive

P11. Report Citation*: (Cite survey report.) William Kostura. *Van Ness Auto Row Support Structures*. San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2009.

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



Top: Photograph of this building from a montage in the *San Francisco Newsletter*, Christmas number, 1913. In this photo the pattern of the original window sash can be seen; this sash appears to still exist behind the current metal grilles that were placed after the mid-1950s. Transom windows in the first story can be seen here as well. The signage in this photo is the result of retouching at the time, and reflects businesses that were in this building then.

Bottom: Advertisement for Larkins and Company, auto body builders and repairers, located in the upper floors of this building during 1913-1919. From the Crocker-Langley San Francisco city directory, 1913, p. 1996.

View looking east along California Street, from just west of Van Ness Avenue, 1936. The buildings on the four corners were auto showrooms from the time of their construction in the 1910s through at least the 1950s. They included:

- 1600 Van Ness, the building being evaluated here, on the northeast corner of the intersection, occupied by used car salesrooms at the time of this photo (partially visible at middle left);
- 1560 Van Ness Avenue, on the southeast corner (at near right), built in 1917 and occupied by a Hupmobile showroom at the time of this photo (now heavily altered);
- 1601 Van Ness, on the northwest corner (at near left), built to designs by the O'Brien Brothers in 1913, and occupied by a Buick showroom at the time of this photo;
- and 1595 Van Ness, on the southwest corner (at near right), built in 1913 and occupied by an Oldsmobile showroom at the time of this photo (extant).

Photo from the SF History Center, Main Library, photo AAB-0808.

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 1600 Van Ness Avenue

B1. Historic Name: Chevrolet, Oakland, Pontiac and Hudson showroom

B2. Common Name: _____

B3. Original Use: auto showroom, body shop B4. Present Use: retail sales

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

***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
Built in 1913. Windows in upper stories were covered with grilles, second floor transoms were covered with plywood, and the vehicle entrance on the California Street side was filled in at unknown dates (after the mid-1950s).

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

***B8. Related Features:**
none

B9a. Architects: O'Brien Brothers b. Builders: Peterson and Rupp (concrete and steel), Robert Dewar and Son (millwork)

***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile industry **Area** San Francisco
Period of Significance 1913-1964 **Property Type** auto showroom **Applicable Criteria** 1
(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

History – Introduction; construction, initial ownership, and use of building

This building was built in 1913 for the Royal Investment Company, on land owned by the Bradbury Estate Investment Company, for which Royal had a 30-year lease. During the early years, at least, the building was divided into four sections, and most sections were leased to automobile-related businesses. Auto dealerships, used car salesrooms, an auto body building shop, and auto supplies shops occupied this building through the 1950s and into the 1960s.

Before construction began, an article in the SF *Chronicle* ("Large Auto Structure," December 7, 1912, p. 12) described various aspects of it. Partitions between the four sections would be fireproof. The moving of automobiles between floors would not be accomplished by ramps, but rather, according to the article, "an immense electric elevator for hoisting cars will be installed." The four ground floor storefronts would be finished variously in hardwood and Oregon pine, and floors would be of red tile.

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

***B12. References:**
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1914-1964
1918 Sanborn insurance map (autos at 1600-1608, 1620; body bldrs at 1610-1614; auto ass'n at 1622-1628; auto repair 2nd-3rd floors)
1929 Sanborn insurance map (autos sales; repair and ptng 2nd sty)
1948 Sanborn insurance map (auto sales at 1600, used cars at 1610-1620, service dept at 1622-1628)
References continued page 17.

B13. Remarks:

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

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)

The O'Brien Brothers, architects

This building was designed by the O'Brien Brothers, architects. They are being discussed here at some length because they were a major firm and designed many buildings for automobile uses. References to the subject building, 1600 Van Ness, are in bold letters.

The firm consisted of Walter J., Albert L. and Arthur T. O'Brien, and practiced in San Francisco from 1907 through 1935. In 1925, after the deaths of his brothers, Walter J. O'Brien began working with Wilbur D. Peugh; the firm ultimately became known as "O'Brien Brothers and Wilbur D. Peugh."

O'Brien Brothers had a diversified practice concentrating on industrial and commercial buildings, but also including many apartment buildings and residences. Auto related buildings were only a small percentage of their output, but it might be accurate to say that they made a specialty of designing this building type, for the O'Brien Brothers probably designed more buildings for the automobile industry than did any other San Francisco architectural firm. Outside of the study area, their outstanding building of this type is the Palace Garage, at 111-127 Stevenson Street (1921). Other fine garage buildings by them include 1419 Pacific Avenue (1913-1914), 525 Jones Street (1922), and 640 O'Farrell Street (1924). Their Pickwick Hotel at 5th and Mission (1925) included a bus depot.

Within the study area, O'Brien Brothers designed two auto showrooms, at 1601 Van Ness (1912-1913; demolished) and **the building being evaluated here, 1600-1630 Van Ness (1913)**, plus several public garages. The latter group include the Jackson Garage at 1641 Jackson (1914), Kay's Garage at 1660 Pacific (1921), the Grand Central Garage at 66 Page (1924), and the Kern Garage at 1700 Pine (1925).

These buildings were designed in prevailing styles such as Classical Revival and Tudor Revival that were adapted to automotive needs. Wide expanses of industrial steel sash windows allowed generous amounts of light for automotive work and gave these buildings a functional or industrial feeling that was enlivened by the historical ornament. Three of the garages (640 O'Farrell, 66 Page, and 1650-1660 Pacific) are Tudor Revival in style and have three-bay compositions, and thus are markedly similar to each other, though they are not copies. **The subject building, 1600-1630 Van Ness, is the most restrained in its architectural treatment; its classical ornament is minimalist, and the skeletal expression of its bays (now obscured by grilles) was its predominant aesthetic**.

Several of O'Brien Brothers' auto-related buildings have been demolished or heavily altered. These include 401-425 Fourth Street (1912), 1360 Eddy Street (1921), 626-628 Golden Gate Avenue (1925-1926), and 140 Hayes Street (1928). Other works of theirs may exist that have not come to light.

To recapitulate, approximately ten of O'Brien Brothers' buildings for the automobile industry are known to still stand. Eight have high integrity, one (1650-1660 Pacific) has lost its original window sash and doors but is otherwise fairly intact, and **one (the subject building) has had most of its original windows covered over**.

History -- Occupants

Auto showrooms

Portions, or in later years all, of this building were occupied by auto showrooms from the completion of the building through at least 1964, save for a brief period during 1922-1925. Reference is given below to the address of each company. Note that the auto dealers named occupied not only the storefront at that address, but a portion of the stories above. The auto dealers included:

1913-1914: E. Stewart Automobile Company, sales of S.G.V. autos

The E. Stewart Automobile Company occupied the storefront at 1600 Van Ness only briefly, from July 1913 through at least March 1914. It sold autos made by S.G.V., a firm located in Reading, Pennsylvania during 1911-1915. It was founded when the three owners (whose last names began in S, G, and V) purchased an earlier automaker, Reber Manufacturing Company, which had made Acme automobiles. These were obscure, short-lived auto manufacturers.

1913-1921: Norman DeVaux and successors: sales of Reo (1913-1915), Chevrolet (1915-1917 and 1920-1921), and Oakland (1917-1919) autos

During these eight years a succession of related dealerships and a factory branch sold Reo, Chevrolet, and Oakland autos, plus some lesser brands, here. For most of this period auto sales were controlled by one man, Norman DeVaux. Under his direction, Chevrolet autos were sold in this building both before and after it became a part of General Motors.

Norman DeVaux's career as a San Francisco auto dealer began in 1908-1909, when he sold Maxwell autos in this city. He next went to Portland to sell Buicks, then returned to San Francisco late in 1910 to sell Reo autos. Reo was a popular mid-priced brand that had been founded in 1904 by Ransom E. Olds and lasted until 1936.[1] From 1910 to 1915 Reos were sold in this city by the Reo Pacific Company, of which Norman DeVaux was the manager and probably the principle owner. Reo Pacific moved from one temporary location to another during its first few years, finally settling in June 1913 at 1600 Van Ness Avenue. At first it occupied the northernmost quarter of this building, in the storefront then numbered 1622-1628 Van Ness.[2] In late 1914 or early 1915 Reo Pacific moved a few doors south to the storefront at 1600 Van Ness, when that storefront became available (after S.V. G. left).

Upon relocating at 1600 Van Ness, Reo Pacific began to function as a regional distributor of Reo, and retail sales were relegated to the Mathewson Motor Company, owned by E. Linn Mathewson. The regional wholesale offices of Reo Pacific and Norman DeVaux remained at 1600 Van Ness; Mathewson had retail showrooms both here and in Oakland.

(Continued next page.)

[1] Earlier, Olds had founded, and then sold, the Oldsmobile brand of automobile. According to the Wikipedia entry on Reo, this brand remained nationally popular through 1925 and continued to make automobiles through 1936. Reo had a San Francisco showroom continuously from 1905 through the latter year.
[2] Reo Pacific also briefly sold the Apperson brand of automobile here, in 1913.

History – Occupants (continued)

1600 Van Ness was in the heart of auto row, and was probably the best-located Reo showroom to date in San Francisco. Nevertheless, in June 1915 DeVaux dissolved Reo Pacific and joined the Chevrolet Motor Company. Chevrolet had been founded in 1911 by William C. Durant and the famous racing driver Louis Chevrolet.[3] During Chevrolet's first five years of existence, it had almost no presence in San Francisco.[4] This began to change in 1915 when Norman DeVaux established the Chevrolet Motor Company of California as a regional distributorship. His offices were at 1600 Van Ness, and his San Francisco dealer was, once again, the Mathewson Motor Company, which ceased selling Reo and began selling Chevrolet at the same address.

At 1600 Van Ness, DeVaux oversaw a network of Chevrolet dealers located in eighteen California cities, plus Honolulu; and with R. C. Durant (the son of William C. Durant) built a huge Chevrolet factory in Oakland. Meanwhile, the Mathewson Motor Car Company sold the extraordinarily low-priced Chevrolet auto, with models at $490 and $750. Along with Ford, Chevrolet soon became one of the low-priced leaders in the country. DeVaux (as a wholesaler) and Mathewson (retail) sold Chevrolets here for 20 months, from June 1915 to February 1917. Then, another local dealer, J. W. Leavitt, purchased or wrested the Chevrolet agency away from Mathewson and began to sell the brand at his own showroom. Norman DeVaux and the Chevrolet Motor Company of California then departed 1600 Van Ness.

The Mathewson Motor Company remained, however, and as a replacement for Chevrolet acquired the Oakland distributorship; it sold that brand of auto at 1600 Van Ness during 1917-1918. The Oakland brand had been founded in 1907 and became part of General Motors in 1909. It was GM's medium-to-low-priced car and was the predecessor brand to Pontiac. (See below for more information on Oakland.) To diversify, Mathewson also sold two auto brands at 1600 Van Ness that are now considered very obscure, Davis and Pilot. At any rate, Mathewson did not stay at 1600 Van Ness for very much longer. During 1918-1919 its place at 1600 Van Ness was taken by the A. G. Somerville Company, which continued to sell Oakland autos during these two years.

J. W. Leavitt, who had taken over the local Chevrolet agency, soon dropped this brand for unknown reasons, and the next two dealers to take up this brand in San Francisco did not do any better with it. In light of the brand's great success on the national scene, it is difficult to understand why early Chevrolet dealerships in San Francisco (that is, for the years 1914-1920) did not last for longer than they did. At any rate the Chevrolet Motor Company of California, which Norman DeVaux and R. C. Durant still ran, returned to 1600 Van Ness during 1920-1921. Here they operated a factory branch for one or two years. They soon relinquished it, however, in favor of a local dealership, the Anderson-Smith Motor Company, which had a showroom on Golden Gate Avenue and proved to be stable for many years.

(Continued next page.)

[3] Earlier, Durant had led the new Buick automobile to prosperity and founded General Motors. After over-extending GM, he lost control of it and so went on to found Chevrolet. He bought out his partner, Louis Chevrolet, in 1915. With his profits from this firm, he regained control of GM and brought Chevrolet into its fold in 1918.

[4] The first Chevrolet dealership in San Francisco was at 1100-1128 Van Ness Avenue. It lasted very briefly, in 1914. That building still stands but has been completely altered in appearance. 1600 Van Ness was the next Chevrolet showroom in the city.

History – Occupants (continued)

No auto dealerships occupied this building during 1922-1925. From 1926 onward, however, this business type was a constant in this building.

1926-1930: Western Motors Company; sales of Oakland, Pontiac, and Wills Sainte Claire autos

The Western Motors Company occupied the storefront at 1600 Van Ness from 1926-1930. Here it sold the Oakland (during 1926-1930), Pontiac (1926-1930) and Wills Sainte Claire (1926) auto brands.

Western Motors had been founded in 1917 at 2000 Van Ness Avenue, a showroom at the north end of the city's Auto Row. Like many auto dealerships, it added and dropped various brands with some rapidity as it searched for the right mix in order to stay competitive with other dealerships. While at 2000 Van Ness it sold, and then dropped, the Maxwell, Liberty, and Star brands of autos. It also sold three other brands that it carried over to 1600 Van Ness: Wills Sainte Clare, Oakland, and Pontiac. During 1926-1929 its president or general manager was Cuyler Lee, a longtime San Francisco auto dealer.

Western Motors added and dropped showrooms almost as frequently as it did brands. The reason is uncertain, but it may be that it felt the showroom at 2000 Van Ness was isolated at the north end of Auto Row, and that it could benefit from being closer to the center. In 1926 it opened a second showroom at 1600 Van Ness. The next year it left 2000 Van Ness, leaving 1600 Van Ness as its main location, and added branches at 1319 Van Ness (for used car sales, it appears) and 1299 Franklin (as a service center). In 1929 it added three more branches: at 2860 Mission, 5630 Geary, and 1929 Market, for a total of six locations. It kept all of these branches into 1930.

Western Motors sold Wills Sainte Claire at 1600 Van Ness only briefly (in 1926). This brand had been founded in 1921 by Childe Harold Wills, a skilled metallurgist who had worked for Henry Ford and who put his considerable savings and severance pay into creating his own automobile company. His car had a reputation for durability and developed a modest, if brief success, before ceasing business in 1927.

Oakland and Pontiac were the main brands Western Motors sold at 1600 Van Ness. The two were closely related. The Oakland Motor Car Company had been founded in the city of Pontiac, in Oakland County, Michigan, in 1907. It had initial success, and was purchased by the newly formed General Motors Corporation in 1909.

In the General Motors hierarchy, Chevrolet was the least expensive car, followed by Oakland, then Oldsmobile (a mid-priced car), Buick, and Cadillac (the most expensive brand). In 1926, General Motors developed a companion brand for Oakland, named Pontiac, in order to fill the price gap between other Oakland models and Chevrolet. Pontiac immediately outstripped the rest of the Oakland brand in popularity. For four years both brands were offered by GM and sold at 1600 Van Ness.[5]

[5] In 1931 the Oakland brand was discontinued, leaving Pontiac in its place. Today, the Pontiac brand is in the process of being discontinued by GM.

History – Occupants (continued)

In 1931 Western Motors left 1600 Van Ness, moving to 1100 Van Ness and closing most of its branches. It went out of business after 1932.

1932-1933: Robert A. Smith, and sales of Chevrolet

Robert A. Smith was the first long-time Chevrolet dealer in San Francisco. As part of the Anderson-Smith Motor Company he began selling Chevrolets at 399 Golden Gate Avenue in 1920, and this remained his main showroom through 1931. He also had a number of branch showrooms, some of them larger than the one on Golden Gate. His last showroom was at 1600 Van Ness, where under his proprietorship Chevrolet was sold for the third time, for two years (1932-1933). He then went out of business, and afterward three dealers emerged as major Chevrolet dealers in San Francisco: Ernest Ingold, Les Vogel, and Don Gilmore.

1937-1949: Glen C. Stater and sales of Hudson automobiles

During 1937-1949 Glen C. Stater sold Hudson automobiles from 1600 Van Ness Avenue. The account below is on Hudson as a national brand and is taken primarily from its Wikipedia entry.

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. Their initial purpose was to build a low-priced automobile, one that would sell for under $1,000. The company later broadened its scope and became noted for the technologically advanced features on its cars. 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. In 1936 Hudson revamped its cars with an improved suspension system, larger interiors, more powerful engines, and a column-mounted gearshift lever. During 1939-1941 stylistic changes to the exterior trim and the interior were made to designs by Betty Thatcher Oros, the nation's first female automotive designer, according to Wikipedia. In 1948 Hudsons introduced "step-down" bodies for improved handling, safety, and passenger comfort. The Hudsons that were sold at 1600 Van Ness by Stater during 1937-1949 incorporated these technological and stylistic development.

According to Wikipedia, Hudson ceased building automobiles during 1942-1945 in order to concentrate on wartime production, by order of the Federal government. From this it might seem that local dealerships around the country might have been unable to acquire new Hudsons to sell during these years. However, Glen C. Stater's ads in the "Buyers' Guide" section of the San Francisco city directories for 1944 and 1945 clearly state that he sold Hudson automobiles then.

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.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants (continued)

Minor and late auto dealerships

Other auto dealerships in this building included:

1934: Willys Distributors, Inc., sold Willys automobiles at 1600 Van Ness.
1935-1936: Carl L. Scott sold autos of an unknown brand at 1600 Van Ness.
1955-1959+: Reynold C. Johnson sold Volkswagen autos at 1600 Van Ness.
1964+: Carl Carlsen sold autos of an unknown brand at 1600 Van Ness.

Summary

This building was used as an auto showroom for 41 years during the period 1913-1964. Major brands that were sold here included Reo (during 1913-1915), Chevrolet (1915-1917, 1920-1921, and 1932-1933), Oakland and Pontiac (1917-1919 and 1926-1930), Willys (1934), Hudson (1937-1949), and Volkswagen (during at least 1955-1959). Minor or obscure brands that were sold here include S.G.V., Apperson, Davis, Pilot, and Wills Sainte Claire. Of these, only Hudson was sold here for more than ten years. Chevrolet was sold here for brief periods, both before and after it became a part of General Motors.

Used car sales rooms

Used car sales occurred here during the following years:

1919-1920: Max Arnold sold used cars at 1616 Van Ness.
1929-1931: The Graham-Paige Company had its used car branch at 1628 Van Ness.
1932+: Robert A. Smith had his used car branch at 1628 Van Ness.
1935-1936: Flynn and Collins had their used car branch at 1620 Van Ness.

Automobile body building, repair, and painting

One business of this type has been located in this building. This was Larkins and Company, which was located at 1610-1614 Van Ness from the opening of this building in 1913 through late 1919. Larkins and Co. was probably the most important auto body building firm in San Francisco's history; this was the earlier, and briefer, of its two locations.

The firm was founded by William Larkins in 1865 as a carriage manufacturer. Burned out of his South-of-Market factory in 1906, William Larkins re-established his carriage-making factory on Guerrero Street. In 1913 he sold the business to his son, William B. Larkins, who moved it to 1610-1614 Van Ness, in the subject building, on the new auto row. Upon moving to this location William B. Larkins added a new line of service, namely the building, repairing, and painting of automobile bodies. The manufacture of horse-drawn carriages was a fading concern when Larkins and Co. opened here, and the firm seems to have ceased such work by 1918.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants (continued)

At the end of 1919 Larkins and Company moved to a spacious former streetcar barn at 3700 Geary, at Arguello. The business remained there through 1935. (That building still stands with good to high integrity.) After 1935 one of William B. Larkins' sons established his own auto repair shop and garage at 1528-1540 Pine Street, which remained in business into the 1960s. (That building still stands with fair integrity.)

Auto springs, supplies, and tire stores

Three such firms are known to have briefly occupied this building. They were:

1918-1919: Westinghouse Air Spring Company, at 1610 Van Ness.
1918: Phelps Motor Supply Company, at 1620 Van Ness.
1922: Guarantee Tire and supply Company, at 1628 Van Ness.

History – Context:

Surviving early auto showrooms

For comparative purposes, the oldest auto showrooms in the study area (i.e. those built through 1913) are listed below, in order of construction date. These are probably the oldest auto sales buildings in San Francisco as well as in the study area. The integrity of these showrooms ranges from high to low, and the number of years that they were used as showrooms varies similarly, from a few years to several decades.

550 Van Ness. Built 1908-1909. A moderately sized showroom. The brick walls and ornament remain intact while the window sash has been altered.

2000 Van Ness. Built 1909-1910. This building has lost integrity due to alterations and major additions of 1927.

690 Van Ness. Built 1910. A small showroom with only a few years of use as a new auto showroom; its integrity is fair at best.

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; its auto showroom use was secondary. Later in the 1910s the entire building became devoted to use as an auto showroom.

1525 Van Ness. Built 1912. This moderately-sized building has only fair integrity.

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. Its window sash has been removed, but the integrity of this building is otherwise high. *(Continued next page.)*

History – Context (continued)

1400 Van Ness. Built 1912-1913. A large showroom with high integrity.

1414-1420 Van Ness. Built 1912-1913. During this building's first decade one of its two storefronts was used as a showroom, and the other was a tires shop. Integrity is good.

1350 Van Ness. Built in 1912-1913. The cornice of this small showroom has been removed.

1595 Van Ness. Built in 1913. A large showroom. Windows have been altered, but integrity is otherwise good.

1600 Van Ness (the building being evaluated here). Built in 1913. Large grilles cover the windows, diminishing the integrity.

2050 Van Ness. Built in 1913. A moderately-sized showroom with fifteen years of such use, including a few years of electric auto sales.

1062 Geary. Built in 1913. This small building had only brief use as an auto showroom, and has fair integrity.

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, and 1301-1305 Van Ness. Each of these four also served as showrooms for major brands.

After 1913, many more auto showrooms continued to be built. For the subsequent six years, 1914-1919, the best surviving example is 1699 Van Ness. Other autos showrooms were built in the study area during the 1920s-1930s and still survive. Many other showrooms were built during all of these decades (1900s-1930s) but no longer stand or have been heavily altered.

Surviving Reo showrooms

The Reo automobile brand was in existence from 1904-1936 and was sold in San Francisco for every year of that period, except possibly the first year. Eleven buildings in this city held Reo showrooms during 1905-1936, all of them located within the study area of this project. The first six of them have been demolished or burned in 1906. The surviving Reo showrooms include:

1600 Van Ness (the building being evaluated here): Reo sold here during 1913-1915 (integrity is fair)

1400 Van Ness: sold here during 1915-1921 (integrity is high)

1730-1750 Van Ness: sold here during 1921-1922 (integrity is fair)

1100 Van Ness: sold here during 1923-1930 (heavily altered)

1001 Polk/1000 Geary: sold here during 1931-1936 (integrity is good)

Because of its high integrity and the early date Reo was sold there, 1400 Van Ness is by far the best example of a Reo showroom in San Francisco.

History – Context (continued)

Surviving Chevrolet showrooms

Chevrolet autos were sold in San Francisco by short-lived dealerships during the 1910s, and were represented by long-lasting dealerships after that decade. The most important Chevrolet dealers, i.e., those with the greatest longevity, have been Robert A. Smith (1920-1933), Ernest Ingold (1933-1960s), Don Gilmore (1933-1954), Les Vogel (1935-1961), and Ellis and Marie Brooks (1955-2008). Each of them is represented by surviving showrooms, albeit of varying degrees of integrity.

In all, seventeen buildings are known to have held Chevrolet showrooms in the study area of this project. Nine of them still stand with at least fair integrity; they include (in chronological order):

1600 Van Ness (the building being evaluated here): Chevrolet sold here for six years by the Mathewson Motor Co. (June 1915-February 1917), the Chevrolet Motor Company (1920-1921), and Robert A. Smith (1932-1933) **(**integrity is fair)

1412-1420 Van Ness: sold here for four months by L. D. Allen, during April-August 1918, immediately after Chevrolet became a part of General Motors (integrity is good)

1740 Van Ness: sold here by Anderson-Smith in 1921 (integrity is fair)

1400 Van Ness: sold here by Robert A. Smith during 1927-1931 (integrity is high)

999 Van Ness: sold here by Ernest Ingold and his successor George Olsen during 1937-1970s (high integrity)

550-590 Van Ness: sold here by Don Gilmore during 1936-1954: Don Gilmore (integrity is fair)

1535-1599 Market: sold here by Les Vogel during 1935-1961 (integrity is fair)

1595 Van Ness: sold here by Ellis Brooks during 1955-1963 (integrity is good)

1395 Van Ness: sold here by Ellis and Marie Brooks during 1963-2008 (integrity for this period is good)

Of the above, the most important is clearly 999 Van Ness, due to its high integrity, its great longevity as a Chevrolet showroom, and the importance of its proprietor, Ernest Ingold. However, having been built in the 1930s, it does not represent the early period of Chevrolet sales in San Francisco.

Other Chevrolet showrooms of interest include 1600 Van Ness (the only surviving building that held a Chevrolet showroom before its acquisition by General Motors in March 1918[6]), 1400 Van Ness (a Chevrolet showroom for five years, during a moderately early period), 550-590 Van Ness (for its longevity as a Chevrolet showroom), and 1595 Van Ness (as representative of Ellis Brooks' early years).

On a related note, 1600 Van Ness is the only surviving San Francisco building that served as a showroom in this city for any future GM brand (e.g. Buick, Cadillac, Oakland, or Oldsmobile, as well as Chevrolet), before being acquired by GM.

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[6] "Chevrolet Absorbed by General Motors," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 4, 1918, p. 12, is the source for this date. Wikipedia, however, says Chevrolet became part of GM in 1917. It may be that Chevrolets were sold at 1412-1420 Van Ness (briefly, during April-August 1918) before the transaction was fully completed.

History – Context (continued)

Surviving Oakland and Pontiac showrooms

Approximately ten buildings in the study area housed showrooms for Oakland automobiles from 1909 until 1931, when the Oakland brand name was discontinued; and for Oakland's sister brand, Pontiac, from 1926 through 1964. Six of these buildings survive with at least fair integrity; they include:

550-590 Van Ness: Oakland sold here during 1912-1914 (integrity is fair)

1525 Van Ness: Oakland sold here in 1916 (integrity is fair)

1600 Van Ness (the building being evaluated here): Oakland sold here during 1917-1918; Oakland and Pontiac sold here during 1926-1930 (integrity is fair)

1946-1960 Van Ness; Oakland sold here during 1920-1923 (integrity is high)

1625 Van Ness: Oakland sold here in 1924; Pontiac sold here during 1937-1938 (integrity is good)

1395 Van Ness: Pontiac sold here beginning in 1963 (integrity is good)

Of the above, none held an Oakland or Pontiac showroom for as long as ten years. The building with the greatest longevity as a showroom for these brands is 1600 Van Ness (seven years; fair integrity). The earliest example is 550-590 Van Ness (1912-1914; fair integrity). The building with the highest integrity is 1946-1960 Van Ness (1920-1923). Not listed above is 1560 Van Ness, which held a Pontiac showroom for many years (1938-1953+), but which has been thoroughly altered.

Surviving Hudson showrooms

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

1625 Van Ness: sold here during 1927-1932 (integrity is good)

901 Van Ness: sold here during 1933-1935 (integrity is high)

1600 Van Ness (the building being evaluated here): sold here during 1937-1949 (integrity is fair)

1595 Van Ness: sold here during 1949-1954 (integrity is good)

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.

Surviving auto body shops

As mentioned above, Larkins and Co. was probably the most important automobile body builder in San Francisco's history. It not only repaired auto bodies, it built them from scratch for many years. 1600

(Continued next page.)

History – Context (continued)

Van Ness represents its early years (1913-1919), whereas 3700 Geary held this firm for a longer period (1920-1935) and has better integrity. Within the study area of this report, a few other auto body shops of some note exist: 1545 Pine, which held a small auto body building shop during 1917-1923; 824 Ellis, (during 1920-1929); and 1644 Pine (during 1938-1964).

Of related interest is the fact that Larkins and Company also built horse-drawn carriages here during the fading years of this industry. In all likelihood, no survey of carriage and wagon factory buildings in San Francisco has ever been performed. Larkins and Company's earlier buildings on Howard Street and Guerrero Street have all vanished. 1600 Van Ness may be the last such factory in San Francisco; however it is a very late example that occupied only a portion of the building it was in.

Integrity

The alterations of note to this building include the grilles over the second and third story windows, the covering of the transom windows in the first story with plywood, and the filling of the vehicle entrance on California Street. These alterations probably occurred in the 1960s or 1970s as the building became devoted to non-automotive uses. The cornice, piers, and some first story window sash remain in place.

Judging the integrity of this building is somewhat problematical because the original window sash can be seen, however faintly, behind the grilles that cover them. The best estimate is that the building retains integrity of location; while integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association are moderately diminished. Integrity of setting is diminished by new construction and alterations in the vicinity. To put it another way, the integrity of this building can also be summarized as "fair."

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 1913, this is an early example of an automobile showroom. With 41 years of such use in its history (considered through 1964), it has excellent longevity in this use. If the building had good or high integrity, these facts alone would make it one of the best examples of an auto showroom in the study area, and thus eligible for the California Register. The building has only fair integrity, however, and so greater historical distinction is required to counteract the alterations it has undergone. In addition to the above facts:

Evaluation (continued)

A portion of this building was occupied by a Chevrolet showroom on three occasions, in 1915-1917, 1920-1921, and 1932-1933, for a total of almost six years; thus, at an early date, and for brief longevity. More interestingly, this is the only San Francisco building that was occupied by a Chevrolet showroom before that brand was acquired by General Motors (in 1918).[7] Similarly, this is the only surviving auto showroom in San Francisco that housed any General Motors brand (e.g., Buick, Cadillac, Oakland, or Oldsmobile) before that brand became part of GM.

This building was also an Oakland showroom for a total of about seven years, during 1917-1918 and 1926-1930. This was longer than any other building held an Oakland showroom for. Two buildings (550-590 Van Ness and 1525 Van Ness) were Oakland showrooms at an even earlier date, but very briefly, for only a year or two. A building with high integrity (1946-1960 Van Ness) also held an Oakland showroom, but for a briefer period (1920-1923). This is also the only building that served as a showroom for Oakland's better-known sister brand, Pontiac, before the 1930s.

This building was also occupied by a Hudson showroom during 1937-1949, at a moderately late date and for moderate longevity. Other buildings with better integrity (1625 Van Ness, 901 Van Ness, and 1595 Van Ness) sold Hudsons at earlier and later dates, but for much briefer periods (up to six years).

Finally, this is the earlier of two buildings that housed a Larkins and Company's auto body building shop. When longevity and integrity are considered, however, the other Larkins building (at 3700 Geary Boulevard) should be considered as more important than this one is.

The cumulative automobile-related history of this building is impressive. Particularly notable is the fact that this building is the only remaining one that held any of the General Motors brands (Chevrolet) before that brand became part of GM. Against these facts the integrity of this building must be considered. The relevant question is: does the building have sufficient integrity to evoke this history? Given that the cornice, the frieze, and the pilasters that define the bays remain in place, and the first story storefront windows – albeit only the storefront area below the transom level – remain generally intact; and given that the outline of the former vehicle entrance on California Street remains evident, this building does seem able to evoke its automobile-related history.

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 1913-1964, the years the building had this use.

Criterion 2

Robert A. Smith is the most important proprietor associated with this building; he ran a Chevrolet dealership here at the end of his career as a dealer in this brand (1932-1933). His earlier showroom at

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[7] This does not count 1100-1114 Van Ness and 1701 Van Ness, which are very heavily altered, and each of which held Chevrolet showrooms for less than a year, in 1914 and 1917-1918, respectively.

History – Context (continued)

1400 Van Ness (1927-1931) has much better integrity and is better able to evoke his career. Accordingly, this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2.

Criterion 3

Architecturally, this building is very restrained in its detailing and appears to have been a lesser example of the works of the O'Brien Brothers, architects. In addition, its integrity is only fair. It thus 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 lightly scored stucco surface; the cornice with its block modillions; the frieze with its diamond patterns, and the molding of three layers beneath the frieze; the Ionic pilasters and the bases they rest upon; the general division of each façade into four bays; the outline of the former vehicle entrance on California Street; and all original window sash.

References (continued from page 4)

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