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 _____

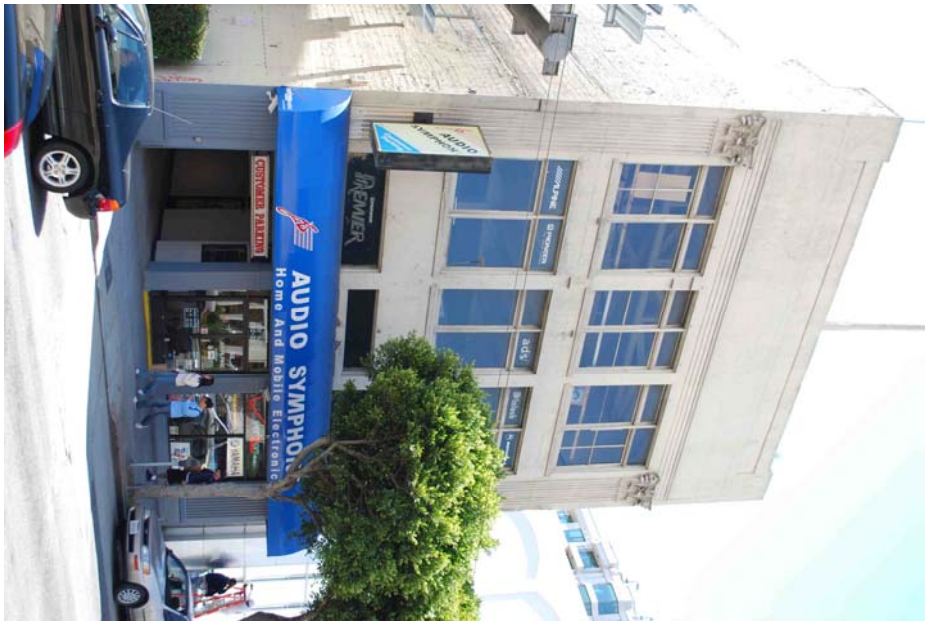
 *Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 1525 Van Ness Avenue

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Reliance Automobile Agency and Pacific Nash Motor Co. 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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ **Not for Publication** ■ **Unrestricted**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 1525 Van Ness Avenue City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN ***e. Assessor's parcel #:** Block 647, lot 3

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

This three-story, reinforced concrete, stucco-clad building fills its lot, which is 40 feet in width by 133 feet in depth. In composition, the façade forms a single pavilion of three bays that is flanked by fluted Corinthian pilasters. These pilasters are three stories in height, and rise from the base of the building to give visual support to the parapet and frieze area at the top. This parapet and frieze area is very plain, and was almost certainly once filled with a cornice and ornament. Spandrels and piers are also plain, whether originally or as a result of alteration is unknown. Windows in the two upper stories are paired, with wooden mullions, transoms, and sash. Two of the windows retain their original wooden muntins, which divide the windows into four lights each, but the rest of the windows have lost these muntins and now consist of a single light. In the first story, the storefront window (at right) and pedestrian entrance (center) have replacement steel sash; a vehicle entrance is found in the bay at left.

***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
1912; published building notice

***P7. Owner and Address:**
ROBARTS 1993 FMLY TR
300 MONTGOMERY ST #800
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94104

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

***P9. Date Recorded:** March 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)

Detail of third story, parapet area, and flanking pilasters.

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 6Z

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 1525 Van Ness Avenue

B1. Historic Name: Reliance Automobile Agency and Pacific Nash Motor Co. showroom

B2. Common Name: _____

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

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

***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
Built in 1912. Parapet/frieze and storefront areas altered, and most window muntins removed, at an unknown date.

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

***B8. Related Features:**
none

B9a. Architect: none b. Builder: Northern Construction Company

***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile 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 – Construction and Introduction

This building was built in 1912 as an investment for the owner, the Mutual Land and Investment Company. The first tenant, the Speedwell Motor Car Company, contracted to lease the building before construction began, and the building was designed to meet its needs. A search of published building notices in various periodicals failed to turn up an architect for this building, and it appears there was none.

This building was used as a showroom for the sale of new automobiles during its first thirteen years, through 1925. Occupants during the next few years are unknown. Afterward, from 1929 through the 1950s, this building was a salesroom for used automobiles. Auto dealerships (either new or used) continued to occupy the building through at least 1964.

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

***B12. References:**

Building and Industrial News, Aug. 27, 1912 (pp. 9-10) and Sept. 24, 1912 (p. 17, col. 1)
Edwards Abstracts from Records, September 19, 1912.
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1913-1964
1913 Sanborn insurance map (1531 Van Ness)
1936 Sanborn insurance map (1529 Van Ness, "auto sales")
References continued on page 7.

B13. Remarks:

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

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)

History - Occupants

1912-1925: Auto showrooms

A series of auto dealerships and factory branches occupied this building for its first thirteen years, none of them remaining here for as long as four years. During this period ten brands of autos, three brands of trucks, and a tractor were sold here. The dealerships were:

December 1912-December 1913: Speedwell Motor Car Company.

Speedwell was located in Akron (or Dayton), Ohio during 1907-1914, initially as a manufacturer of trucks; and began to make automobiles in 1911. Before construction of 1525 Van Ness commenced they decided to establish a factory branch in San Francisco (supplanting an existing Speedwell truck dealership), and contracted with the owner of this property to build their showroom here. For one year Speedwell automobiles, and probably trucks, were sold here.

January 1914-June 1917: Reliance Automobile Company

Reliance was an ambitious but short-lived auto dealership that frequently switched the brands they sold. Their mainstay was Paige, an upscale brand that they sold here during 1914-1917. Reliance also sold Detroit Electric, the nation's leading electric automobile (during January-June 1914); Velie, a popular mid-priced car (January 1914-June 1915); King, a low-to-mid-priced car (October 1914-May 1916); Oakland, which was General motors' low-to-mid-priced car (July-August 1916); Allen, an obscure brand (May-June 1917); Dart light delivery trucks (1914); and Knox-Martin tractors (1914).

During these years, Reliance seems to have occupied not only this building, but the one adjacent to the north (now demolished). Their address was 1529-1541 Van Ness, a reference, it seems, to both buildings.

August 1917-February 1921: Pacific Nash Motor Company

Nash was the successor brand to the Thomas B. Jeffery Company and Rambler. When Charles W. Nash purchased Jeffery in 1916, he renamed the car after himself. Nash became a very popular mid-priced car and remained so for decades. Much later, in the 1950s, after Nash became part of AMC, the Rambler brand name was re-introduced.

The Pacific Nash Motor Company was a regional distributor headed by William G. Dandy, and it formed in mid-1917 to bring the Nash automobile to northern California, Nevada, Utah, and southern Idaho. 1525 Van Ness became Pacific Nash's regional headquarters and San Francisco showroom. Dandy actually preferred to focus on wholesale distribution throughout his region, and so in March 1918 he brought a local dealer, the DuBroy Motor Company, in to handle retail sales of Nash in San Francisco and San Mateo County. DuBroy had the first floor and basement of 1525 Van Ness, while Dandy's Pacific Nash company had the upper stories for its offices and parts department. DuBroy, apparently, did not work out very well, and Pacific Nash soon took over the retail sales again.

History - Occupants (continued)

Pacific Nash was successful at 1525 Van Ness, and after three and one-half years here moved on to a much larger showroom at 1835-1849 Van Ness, where they stayed for many years.

February 1921-1923: Seller-Cummings Company

This firm sold Dorris automobiles and Stewart trucks here during these years. Previously, during 1920, the H. A. Seller Company occupied the adjacent building to the north, then known as 1535 Van Ness, where it sold Dorris and paige automobiles. After acquiring 1525 Van Ness as well, it seems that Seller-Cummings sold Dorris autos here, and Paige and Auburn autos at #1535.

The Dorris brand was manufactured during 1906-1923 in St. Louis by engineer George Preston Dorris, who had earlier been co-proprietor of another auto company (since 1899). According to Wikipedia this otherwise obscure brand was distinguished by its invention of a floating carburetor that was used for decades after Dorris went out of business.

1924-1925: Rollin Motor Cars

This obscure brand was sold here first by a local dealer, T. E. McMeans (in 1924), and then, it seems, as a factory branch (in 1925).

1929-1964: Mostly used car salesrooms

Occupants for the years 1926-1928 are unknown. Subsequent occupants through 1964 (the end year of the period being studied) were mostly or entirely used car businesses. The following list is not complete but is probably nearly so:

1929: J. W. Leavitt. This building was the used car branch of Leavitt, whose Willys-Knight showroom was at 1414 Van Ness.

1932: Greer-Robbins Company. This was the used car branch of Greer-Robbins, whose Hupmobile showroom was at 1560 Van Ness.

1935: G. M. Flint, used car dealer

1936: W. G. Campbell, used car dealer

1939: Flynn and Collins. This was the used car branch of this dealership, whose Ford showroom was at 1701 Van Ness.

1942: G. A. Daniels, used car dealer

1946-1953: Von Walker, used car dealer

1959: Continental Car Company

1964: Paul Felton Imported Cars

(Continued next page.)

History - Occupants (continued)

Summary

New auto dealerships occupied this building during 1912-1925, for a total of thirteen years. Used car salesrooms were here more or less continuously during 1929-1964, for up to 35 years. The total auto-related occupancy of this building was for up to 48 years (through 1964, the end year of the period being studied).

History – Context

Most of the auto brands that were sold here were at least somewhat important in the history of the automobile industry. This section will identify those buildings in San Francisco (besides 1525 Van Ness) that housed the more important of these brands, and that still stand with good integrity.

Detroit Electric: No other buildings in the study area where Detroit Electric autos were sold survive to this day. One other electric auto brand (Rauch and Lang) was sold during 1914-1917 at 2050 Van Ness/1675 Pacific, which also served as a garage for electric cars.

Paige: Paige and Graham-Paige autos were sold during 1922-1937 at 1699 Van Ness Avenue. Given the far greater integrity of that building, and the longer period of time that this brand was sold there, that building is much more important than 1525 Van Ness as a Paige showroom.

Velie: This brand was sold at 1301-1305 Van Ness during 1917-1922. Given the far greater integrity of that building, and the longer period of time that this brand was sold there, that building is much more important than 1525 Van Ness as a Velie showroom. Velie was also sold at 550-590 Van Ness during 1909-1910.

King: After Reliance stopped selling King autos at 1525 Van Ness, this car was sold, also briefly, at 1415 Van Ness (in 1918) and at 1699 Van Ness (1920-1921).

Oakland: This brand was sold for only two months at 1525 Van Ness. Other surviving showrooms are, therefore, easily more important examples than this one is. They include 550-590 Van Ness (1912-1914), 1600 Van Ness (1917-1918 and 1926-1930; integrity is only fair), 1946-1960 Van Ness (1920-1923), and 1625 Van Ness (1924).

Nash: 1525 Van Ness is most important as the first showroom in San Francisco where Nash was sold (after its change of name from Jeffery and Rambler). Nash was later sold for much longer periods of time at 1835-1849 Van Ness (1921-1935) and at 1301-1305 Van Ness (1936-1954). Both of those buildings have better integrity than 1525 Van Ness does. Earlier, Jeffery and Rambler autos were sold at 68 Twelfth Street (1912-1915).

Speedwell, Allen, Dorris, and Rollin were all minor brands. As far as is known, no other buildings stand in San Francisco where they were sold.

Integrity

This building's flanking pilasters and the general fenestration of the upper stories remain intact. It also retains a vehicle entrance, with (as is usual in the study area) a non-original roll-up door. All ornament and detail have been removed from the frieze and parapet area, the first story has been generally altered, and muntins have been removed from all but two of the windows in the upper stories. In sum, this building retains integrity of location, while integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association have been substantially diminished. Integrity of setting is also largely gone due to the demolition of adjacent buildings to the north and south.

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 1912, this is an early example of an automobile showroom. With 13 years of such use in its history, it has moderate longevity in this use. With up to 35 years of use as a used car salesroom, this building has excellent longevity in this use. It has up to 48 years of total auto-related use, for excellent longevity. As described above, the integrity of this building is only fair. Because of this building's diminished integrity, and because the dealerships in this building were here only briefly, all of the important brands of automobiles that were sold here are better represented by other auto showrooms in the study area, except for one, Detroit Electric. Paige, Velie and Nash, especially, are mush better represented by other buildings.

For these reasons, and because of the diminished integrity of this building, it does not appear to be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources under criteria 1 or 2. Regarding the design of the building, it probably lacked distinction when it was new, and is much less striking due to the alterations it has undergone. Accordingly, this building also does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3.

References (continued from page 3)

"Speedwell Opens Big Branch Here," and display ad, SF Chronicle, June 2, 1912, p. 46.
Leon J. Pinkson, "Reliance Company to Have Larger Quarters," SF Chronicle, Jan. 7, 1914, p. 17.
"Detroit Electrics for 1914 Placed on Display," SF Chronicle, March 3, 1914, p. 15.
"New Medium Priced Car on Display," SF Chronicle, October 4, 1914, (re: King autos).
"New Distributor for Nash line," SF Chronicle, August 5, 1917, p. A-1.
"DuBroy Now to Handle Nash Line," SF Chronicle, March 10, 1918, p. 31.
Display ads for this building's dealerships 1913-1923, found via the ProQuest website.
Wikipedia entries on some of the auto brands sold in this building.