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) 2000 Van Ness Avenue

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Medical Arts Building
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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted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 2000 Van Ness Avenue City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 595, lot 5

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

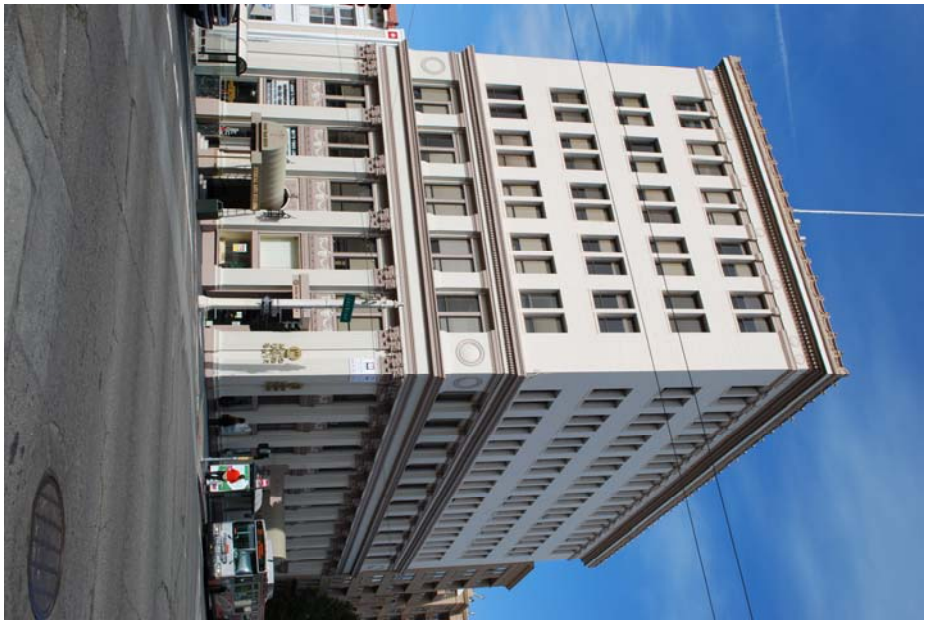
This seven-story, stucco-clad, reinforced concrete office building fills its 67' by 123' lot at the northeast corner of Van Ness Avenue and Jackson Street. The building was built in two phases – the first three stories in 1909 and the upper four stories in 1927 – the final result being a stylistically unified Classical Revival mid-rise building. The main entrance is on Van Ness Avenue, but both facades, on Van Ness and Jackson, have an equal level of architectural treatment. The composition is in three parts, with a base of two stories, a middle section of one story, and top of four stories. Entablatures with cornices and friezes crown the lowest and top parts, while the middle part has a simpler treatment, being topped by a cornice but no frieze.

The cornice at the top of the building is topped by a course of swags and (at the corners) anthemions. Below this is a blank corona, a course of dentils, and a frieze minimally decorated with medallions. The four stories below are plain in treatment, save for profiled capitals at the top of the piers that separate the windows. Windows are punched voids, are paired, and have shallow sills.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 2.)

*P3b Resource Attributes: HP7 – seven-story commercial 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
1909, 1927; building permit and published building notice

*P7. Owner and Address:
D & T COMPANY LLC
2000 VAN NESS AVE # 400
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94109

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

*P9. Date Recorded: December 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)

Description (continued):

The middle section (i.e., the third story) is topped by a cornice composed of (from top to bottom) a bead molding, a blank corona, an egg-and-dart molding, and a course of dentils. Windows are paired and set back from stubby piers with profiled capitals and bases. Medallions of concentric circles decorate the corner piers.

The bottom section of two stories is the most finely detailed. Bays are defined by fluted Corinthian columns and pilasters that are paired at the corners. They support an entablature of a profiled cornice and blank frieze. Spandrels at the second floor level are decorated with cartouches and swags. The spandrel over the arched entry on Van Ness Avenue is decorated with medical insignia. Decorative wrought iron lanterns are attached to the columns on either side of the recessed entrance. This entrance is finished in travertine and has paired bronze doors with full-length glazing.

The first story windows and spandrel panels have profiled metal sash and appear to date to 1927. Upper story windows appear to have metal sash from a later date. Aside from the upper story window sash, all elements described above appear to date to either 1909 or 1927.

Detail of the entrance

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 2000 Van Ness Avenue

B1. Historic Name: Medical Arts Building
B2. Common Name: Medical Arts Building
B3. Original Use: auto showroom B4. Present Use: medical office building
***B5. Architectural Style:** Classical Revival
***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
The first three stories were built in 1909-1910 as an auto showroom. (See photo on page 8 for its appearance then.)
The top four stories were added, and some decorative details were changed, in 1927.

***B7. Moved?** ■ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown **Date:** _____ **Original Location:** _____
***B8. Related Features:**
none

B9a. Architects: D. H. Burnham and Co. (1909); Clausen and Amandes (1927) b. Builder: Charles Wright (1909)
***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile industry **Area** San Francisco
Period of Significance 1909-1910, 1927-1964 **Property Type** medical office building **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 architects

The first three stories of this building were built in 1909-1910 as an auto showroom for owner Cuyler Lee (see photo on p. 8), to designs by D. H. Burnham and Co., a famous Chicago firm whose San Francisco branch was headed by Willis Polk. The list of major buildings designed by D. H. Burnham and Co. under Polk's direction, and by Willis Polk himself, is very large; this was one of the most important firms in the city's history.

In 1927, after seventeen years of use as an auto showroom, this building was converted into a medical office building through the addition of four stories and other alterations. The architects for the conversion were C. O. Clausen and F. Frederick Amandes. During their three-year partnership (1927-1930) they designed mainly residential buildings such as the Alexander residence hotel at 230 Eddy (1927) and apartment buildings at 2785 Jackson (1927) and 199 Chestnut (1930). Before and after this partnership, Clausen was extraordinarily prolific, designing hundreds of houses and apartment buildings in Pacific Heights, Lower Nob Hill, the Richmond district, and many other neighborhoods. Amandes' later career was slowed by the Depression, but he did design a few Art Deco theaters, including the Bridge Theater (1939), in addition to many Period Revival houses.

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

***B12. References:**
Building permit #24998 (Sept. 1909)
Architect and Engineer, June 1927, p. 107.
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1909-1933
1913 Sanborn insurance map ("Packard Service Building")
1918 Sanborn insurance map ("Western Motors")
1929 Sanborn insurance map ("Medical Arts Building")
B13. Remarks:

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

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)

History – Occupants – Cuyler Lee and his Packard distributorship

This is the second oldest automobile showroom still standing in San Francisco. The oldest, by one year, is 550 Van Ness Avenue, at the southeast corner of Golden Gate Avenue (built 1908-1909). That building conformed to the prevailing geography of showrooms at the time, for Golden Gate Avenue had been the main location for auto showrooms since before the earthquake and fire of 1906.

The subject building, Cuyler Lee's showroom at 2000 Van Ness, by contrast, was fourteen blocks to the north, far from any other auto showroom in San Francisco. Over the next several years the gap between these two locations would be filled by other buildings of this type. Over this period and afterward 2000 Van Ness helped to define the northern end of San Francisco's auto row. Only a few other showrooms were built farther north on Van Ness.

Cuyler Lee had begun selling automobiles in San Francisco in 1903. Then, and for the next seven years he was San Francisco's only Cadillac dealer. In 1907, re-established on Golden Gate Avenue after the earthquake and fire, he added a second luxury brand, Packard, to his line of autos. He must have been very successful, for in September 1909 he began construction of this building, which upon completion in May 1910 was by far the largest and most architecturally distinguished auto showroom in San Francisco.

Carved into the frieze of this building were the names of the brands that he sold: Cadillac and Packard. The same month he moved in, Cadillac yanked the distributorship of that brand away from him and gave it to another firm. Thus, Cadillac autos were only sold at 2000 Van Ness for about one month.

Cuyler Lee insisted to a reporter that relations between him and Cadillac had been cordial, and that rumors of difficulties between them had no basis. Cadillac simply had a policy that its dealers could carry no other brands besides Cadillac, and since Lee also sold Packards, his loss of the Cadillac distributorship was just a matter of business. (See "Cadillac to Have New Agents in this City, SF *Chronicle*, May 29, 1910, p. 45.) However, the new Cadillac firm for San Francisco, the Morrison-Cole Motor Company, was obscure, and its sales room was modest. It was probably only a placeholder for Cadillac until it could get the distributor they really wanted. Less than one year later, they found that person. It was a Los Angeles auto dealer, Don Lee, the brother of Cuyler Lee. (See "Cadillac Agency in New Hands in this City, SF *Chronicle*, February 26, 1911, p. 39.) Don Lee went on to be San Francisco's Cadillac distributor for the next thirty-six years. His showroom at 1000 Van Ness became the finest in the city.

Meanwhile, at 2000 Van Ness, Cuyler Lee continued to sell Packards. That auto was fully as prestigious a brand as Cadillac, if not more so. It was considered to be one of the "Three Ps" of luxury auto brands, along with Pierce-Arrow and Peerless. Sales must have been encouraging, for in 1913 Cuyler Lee built a new Packard showroom in Oakland, at 24th and Broadway, to a design by Willis Polk and Co. (extant).

In June 1917, however, Cuyler Lee lost his Packard distributorship. Earle C. Anthony, of Los Angeles, had proven to be such a dynamic seller of Packards in that city, Pasadena, and San Diego, that Packard

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants – Cuyler Lee and his Packard distributorship (continued)

awarded him distribution rights to the entire state. Packard was impressed with Anthony's service system (he had over 100 Packard service affiliates around the state) and his marketing ideas. As part of his plan for acquiring the Packard agency in San Francisco, Anthony leased the 70,000 square foot Jerome Garage at Jackson and Polk streets, which was already equipped with up-to-date equipment, to become his new service center in San Francisco. With these credentials and business plan, Anthony replaced Cuyler Lee as the Packard distributor for San Francisco. (See SF Chronicle, "Selection of New Dealer is Surprise," SF *Chronicle*, June 3, 1917, p. 45.)

Signs that Packard would switch to a new dealer may have been forthcoming. Early in 1917 Lee had added a budget brand to his line of autos, the Maxwell, perhaps to cushion any loss that might occur. Once Lee lost Packard, however, he folded up his shop. He sold 2000 Van Ness, his Oakland showroom, and the distribution rights to Maxwell to the Western Motors Company. The transfer between owners was immediate, for Western took over 2000 Van Ness and began selling Maxwells there only two weeks after the formal announcement that Lee had lost the Packard line.

History – Occupants – Western Motors Company, distributor of Maxwell and Wills Sainte Claire autos

The Western Motors Company sold autos at 2000 Van Ness for nine years, from June 1917 through 1926. This newly-formed company apparently came into existence for the purpose of taking over the Maxwell distributorship from Cuyler Lee. Its general manager was Robert L. Alvies, who had for the previous eight years worked for Cuyler Lee's brother, Don Lee, in selling Cadillacs. Under Alvies, Western gained Maxwell distribution rights for all of northern California.

Maxwell was founded in New York in 1904 as the Maxwell-Briscoe Co. It moved to Indiana in 1907, then reorganized in Detroit in 1913. Although it once made several models of autos, it dropped the larger ones to concentrate on its lowest-cost model, which it sold for $695. Thanks to this car, Maxwell became one of the most successful auto makers in the United States during the 1910s, and it must have been an attractive acquisition for Cuyler Lee and Western Motors. Due in part to its success, Maxwell over-extended, went into debt, and wound up with a huge unsold stock during the post-World War I depression. It was acquired by Walter P. Chrysler in 1921 and phased out in 1925. The years that Maxwell autos were sold at 2000 Van Ness – 1917-1920 – reflect its pre-Chrysler history.

In 1920 Western Motors added the Kissel Kar to its Maxwell line. In 1921 it stopped carrying both of these autos and switched to a newly-established brand, Wills Sainte Claire, as its primary auto. This brand had a brief life. Its founder, Childe Harold Wills, was 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 going out of business in 1927. Western Motors offered the Wills Sainte Claire during 1921-1926, almost the entire duration of that brand's existence.

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants – Western Motors Company, distributor of Maxwell and Wills Sainte Claire autos (continued)

During those six years Western Motors also offered a second brand in addition to Wills Sainte Claire. During 1921-1923 that brand was Liberty, now little remembered. In 1924 it was the Star, also very obscure. In 1925 it was the Oakland automobile, and in 1926 it added Pontiac, the eventual, very successful successor to Oakland.

Western Motors had a new general manager in 1926, none other than Cuyler Lee, who had built their building. In 1926 Western also opened a second location, at 1600 Van Ness Avenue. After that year Western closed 2000 Van Ness and removed to 1600 Van Ness plus two other locations, where it continued to sell Oakland and Pontiac autos. Although the firm was viable, it chose to leave 2000 Van Ness in favor of locations closer to the center of Auto Row.

History – Occupants – Medical Arts Building

After Western Motors moved this building was sold and redeveloped into a medical office building. Four stories were added, and other changes were made to the existing three-story auto showroom. Floral ornament was removed from the top of the third story cornice. Medallions of concentric circles were applied to the end piers in the third story. Spandrels at the second floor level were raised in height to accommodate added ornament (a cartouche with swags). The pedestrian entrance in the middle bay on the Van Ness side became arched at the top, with medical imagery applied to its spandrel. Wrought iron lanterns were attached to the columns on either side of this entrance. Undoubtedly the interior was completely refinished to accommodate the needs of patients and staff. Although the fluted pilasters and columns and some other details remained unchanged from D. H. Burnham and Co.'s design, in most respects this became a new building in 1927.

The Medical Arts Building, as it was (and still is) called, became one of San Francisco's more conspicuous medical office buildings upon its completion. Analyzed for the period before World War II (based in part on a tally of 1929 city directory classified listings):

> It was the second largest medical office building in San Francisco outside of the immediate downtown area. It was much smaller than the Medical Building at 909 Hyde Street (extant), which retains high integrity and is the most important medical office building in the city outside of downtown. 2000 Van Ness was, however, much larger than the Medical Center Building at 1195 Bush (demolished) and the Lakeside Medical Building at 2105-2115 Ocean Boulevard (extant). Only two other buildings outside of downtown held at least several medical offices in 1929; they included the Sentinel Building, at 916 Kearny, and the Columbo Building, at 21 Columbus Avenue.
>
> During the 1920s, 2000 Van Ness contained many fewer medical and dental offices compared to eight buildings downtown. Those were the Medical-Dentil Building at 450 Sutter (extant), the Flood Building at 870 Market (extant), the Medico-Dentil Building at 490 Post (extant), the Fitzhugh

(Continued next page.)

History – Occupants – Medical Arts Building (continued)

Building at 384 Post (demolished), the Physicians' Building at 500-516 Sutter (extant), the Union Square Building at 350 Post (demolished), the Butler Building at 135 Stockton (completely altered), and the Head Building at 209 Post (extant). Only three of these (450 Sutter, 490 Post, and 500-516 Sutter) were built specifically to be medical office buildings.

The Medical Arts Building was not close to downtown, nor located near a major hospital, as 909 Hyde was, and therefore could not draw its clientele from these sources. It was well-situated in a another way, however, being near the intersection of four neighborhoods – Nob Hill, Russian Hill, Pacific Heights, and the Western Addition. It was also the closest medical office building to the Marina district. Physicians in this building may have catered to housewives and retired people in these neighborhoods who spent more time at or near their homes than they did downtown.

Integrity

The integrity of the auto showroom of 1909-1910 has been largely lost as a result of the addition of four stories, removal of some original details from the lower stories, and addition of new ornament to those stories, in 1927. Regarding the integrity of the Medical Arts Building of 1927, the only notable change to the exterior has been the apparent replacement of most original window sash. In sum, this building as rebuilt retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association.

Evaluation

This building had a rich history as an auto showroom during 1910-1926, but it has lost integrity for this period.

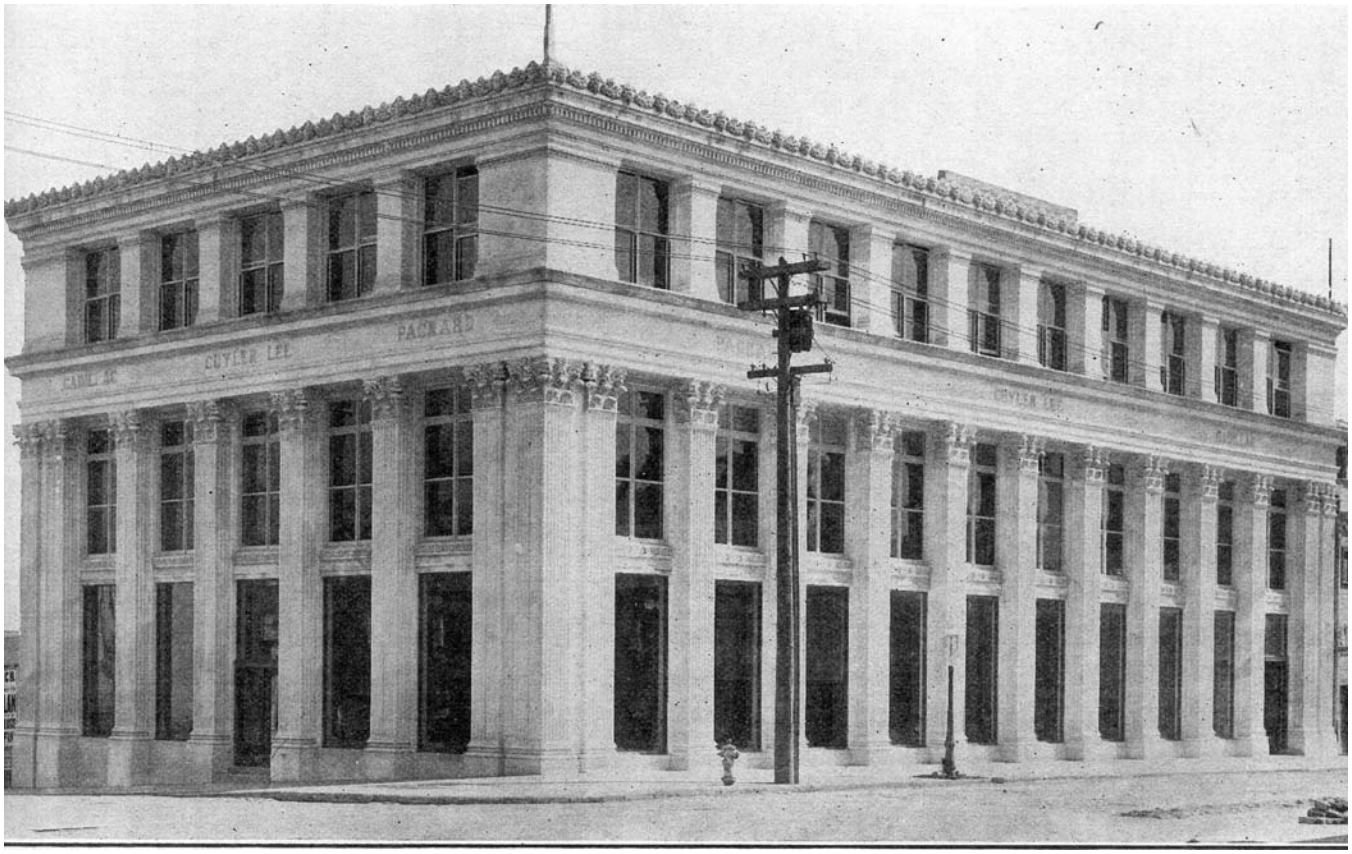
2000 Van Ness does appear to be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources at the local level under Criterion 1, as an early and important example of a medical office building outside of the downtown area. Before World War II only a handful of such buildings existed. Others have been built since then, some quite large, and most located adjacent to or across the street from major hospitals such as UCSF. 2000 Van Ness can be considered one of the oldest examples of this building type in San Francisco, ranking only after 909 Hyde in importance. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1927-1964, the years the building had this use (through 1964, the period being studied in this report.)

No physician that occupied this building is known to have had historical importance in his field. Accordingly, this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2.

Architecturally, this building is distinguished by a well-ordered composition, and by fine detail in the fluted columns and pilasters, in the spandrels at the second floor level, over the entrance, within the recessed entrance, and in each of the cornices. It is a fine example of the Classical Revival style as applied to an office building and thus this building appears to be eligible for the California Register at the local level under Criterion 3, for its design. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1909-1910 and 1927, the years of construction.

Character defining features

The character defining features of this building are its height and width, the stucco surface, the three cornices with their moldings, the capitals and bases of the piers in the third and seventh stories, the size and shape of the window openings, the fluted columns and pilasters in the first two stories and their Corinthian capitals, the decorative spandrels at the second floor level, the medallions that decorate the corner piers, the decorative arch over the main entrance, the wrought iron lanterns flanking the main entrance, the travertine finish of the recessed main entrance, and the bronze doors at this entrance.



Photograph of Cuyler Lee's auto showroom as completed in 1910. From *Architect and Engineer*, April 1911, page 64.