

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 \_\_\_\_\_

Page 1 of 3

\*Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 55 Oak Street

- P1. Historic name of building (if any):** Robbins and Francoz auto repair 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 Location:** \*a: County San Francisco  Not for Publication  Unrestricted  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 55 Oak Street City San Francisco Zip 94102  
d. UTM: Zone \_\_\_\_\_; \_\_\_\_\_ mE/ \_\_\_\_\_ mN \*e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 836, lot 7

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

This is a one-story reinforced concrete automobile repair shop that fills the width of its 66-foot wide lot. The building façade is coated in stucco, and is topped by a belt course, or very shallow cornice, that runs the full width of the building. Five pilasters divide the façade into four bays of equal width. Each pilaster is deeply grooved, or fluted, and has a capital that merges with the cornice. Within each bay, spandrels divide the façade area into a first story and a mezzanine. All four of the mezzanine level windows have industrial steel sash, and the same is true for the first story windows in the outer bays. Vehicle entrances fill the first story of the inner bays. A pedestrian entrance with a replacement door is inserted within the window sash in the westernmost bay. From the sidewalk one can see that, within, steel trusses support bowed wooden roof members.

\*P3b Resource Attributes: HP8 – industrial building



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

**P5b. Description of Photo:**

(View, date, accession #)

View looking south

June 2009

\*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source:  Historic

Prehistoric  Both

1929; building permit

\*P7. Owner and Address:

GARDNER ANNE MARIE

206 SOUTH RIDGEWOOD RD

KENTFIELD CA 94904

\*P8. Recorded by: (Name, affiliation, and address)

William Kostura

P. O. Box 60211

Palo Alto, CA 94306

\*P9. Date Recorded: \_\_\_\_\_

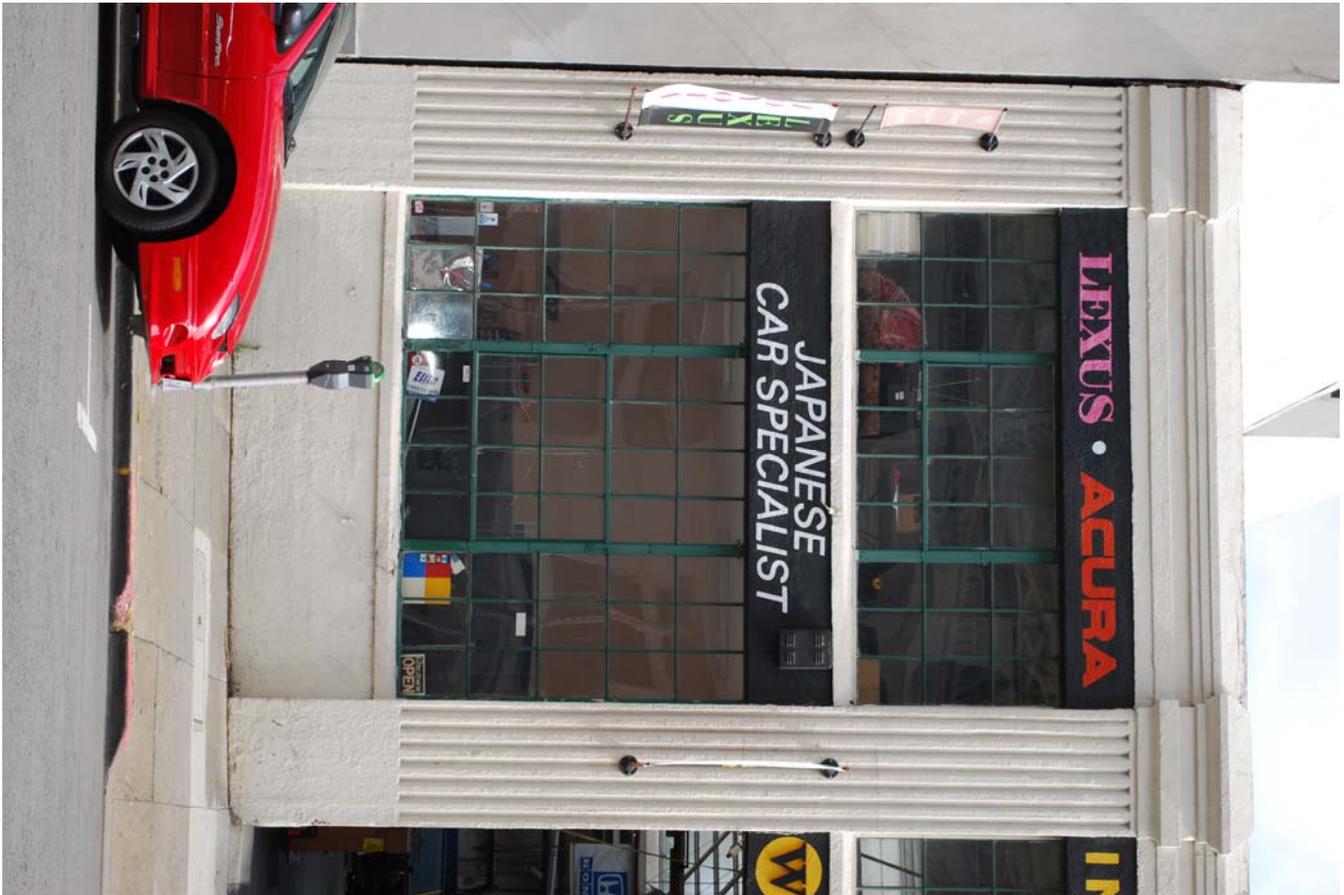
August 2009

\*P10. Survey Type: (Describe)

intensive

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

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



Detail photograph of one bay with industrial steel sash windows

**BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD**

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\*NRHP Status Code 3CS

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) 55 Oak Street

B1. Historic Name: Robbins and Francoz auto repair shop

B2. Common Name: \_\_\_\_\_

B3. Original Use: auto repair B4. Present Use: auto repair

\*B5. Architectural Style: Classical Revival

\*B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)  
Built in 1929.

\*B7. Moved?  No  Yes  Unknown Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Original Location: \_\_\_\_\_

\*B8. Related Features:  
none

B9a. Architect: none b. Builder: Richard H. Harms

\*B10. Significance: Theme automobile industry Area San Francisco

Period of Significance 1929-1964 Property Type auto repair shop 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**

This building was built in 1929 by contractor Richard H. Harms for owner John A. Sullivan, who was the president of Madison and Burke, a prominent real estate firm. The original occupant of this building was Earl E. Robbins, who owned an automobile repair shop here. Robbins had previously run an auto repair shop at 129 Grove Street. He had founded that business in 1917 with two partners, and by 1924 he was the sole owner of it.

In ca. 1929 the buildings at 129 Grove and on some adjacent lots were taken by the city, probably by eminent domain, to make room for the construction of the Health Department building (today's 101 Grove Street). The result was that Robbins would have to move his auto repair shop. It is possible that Robbins then contracted with John A. Sullivan to build the auto repair shop at 55 Oak Street and entered into a long-term lease with him. At any rate, 55 Oak was built at the same time the city planned the construction of 101 Grove Street. *(See Continuation Sheet, page 4.)*

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

**\*B12. References:**

Building permit #117880 (April 5, 1929), at S. F. Building Inspection Dept., 1660 Mission Street

Building and Engineering News, April 6, 1929, 25:3

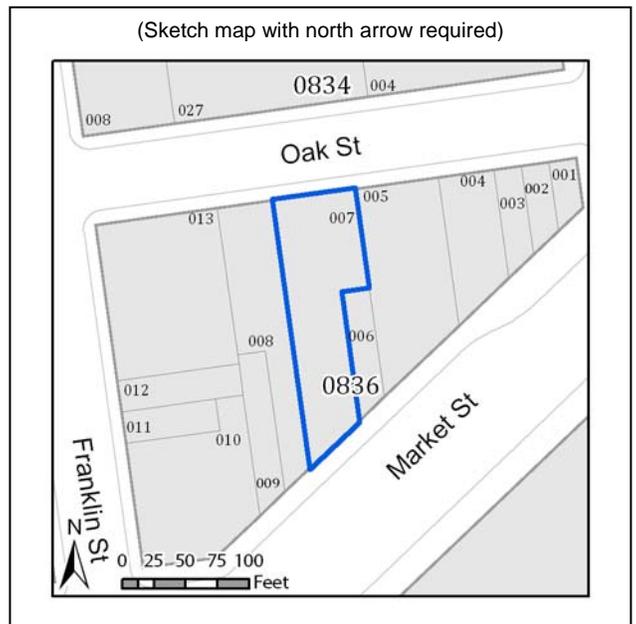
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, PT&T reverse directory, and PT&T yellow pages listings for occupants of this building, 1917-1964

B13. Remarks:

\*B14. Evaluator: William Kostura

Date of Evaluation: August 2009

(This space reserved for official comments.)



**CONTINUATION SHEET**

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Recorded by William Kostura

Resource Identifier: 55 Oak Street  
\*Date August 2009     Continuation     Update

**History (continued)**

Earl E. Robbins remained at 55 Oak Street through 1943. In 1942 he shared this space with another auto repair shop, that of Robert A. Francoz, who then succeeded Robbins in this building. Judging from Robert Francoz' advertised listings in the yellow pages ("Robert Francoz" and "Formerly Earle E. Robbins") for the following years, it appears that he purchased Robbins' business.

A list of all auto repair proprietors at 55 Oak Street through 1964 (the end year of the period being studied) is as follows:

Earl E. Robbins	1929-1943
Robert J. Francoz	1942-1951
Francoz and DeValle (Victor)	1953-1961
Robert J. Francoz	1962
L&M Motors	1963-1964+

Thus, auto repair shops occupied this building for 35 years (through 1964). If one considers the shops of Robbins and Francoz to be the same business, that business remained here for 33 years.

**Integrity**

The exterior of this building is little changed from the time of construction, and so the building retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The setting has changed somewhat with the construction of new buildings in the vicinity, although some buildings that were nearby in 1929 still stand.

**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 1929, this is a moderately early example of an automobile repair shop, and the building has excellent longevity as this use. The building also retains unusually high integrity. 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 repair shop. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1929-1964.

*(See Continuation Sheet, page 5.)*

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

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Recorded by William Kostura

Resource Identifier: 55 Oak Street  
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**Evaluation (continued)**

This building also appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3, for its design. It has clarity of expression as an auto repair shop, with bays of equal width, the devotion of the middle bays to large vehicle entrances, and large windows that admit generous amounts of natural light. The use of industrial steel sash in the windows, which divide them into many lights, along with the minimalist classical detailing in the pilasters and cornice, give texture to the exterior, and are effective in relieving what would otherwise be a severe façade. Although this is a modest building, and although there are much better automobile showrooms and public garages in the study area, this is one of the better examples of a building in the study area that was built specifically as an auto repair shop, and its integrity is high. For these reasons it appears to be eligible under Criterion 3. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1929, the year of construction.

This building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2. Earl E. Robbins owned auto repair shops in San Francisco from an early date (1917) and for about 26 years (to 1943). Both of his shops were modest in size. Compared to Ernest Hanni, who began owning auto repair shops before 1908, and who co-owned a very large auto repair shop at 1745-1771 California (for many years beginning in 1921); or Eugene S. Miner, who owned auto repair shops in the study area for many years beginning in 1910; he does not seem very important. On balance, this building does not appear to have significance due specifically to its association with Earl E. Robbins, nor for his successor, Robert Francoz.

**Character Defining Features**

The Character Defining Features of this building include its height and width, its stucco coating, the belt course (or cornice) at the top of the building, the five pilasters with their flutings and capitals, the spandrels, and the industrial steel sash windows.