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) 1545 Pine Street

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Nordhoff Grill
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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ **Not for Publication** ■ **Unrestricted**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 1545 Pine Street City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN ***e. Assessor's parcel #:** Block 667, lot 16

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

This one-story building fills its lot, which measures 50'-3" in width along Pine Street by 120 feet in depth. According to Sanborn maps this building is wood-framed in structure. Within the building walls, vertical steel piers support steel trusses upon which the wooden roof rests. In composition, the façade is divided by wooden piers into three bays, with the middle bay devoted to a vehicle entrance and the two outer bays to windows. The vehicle entrance is closed by a non-original roll-up metal door. Window frames and sash are wooden, and describe a curve at the top. The style of the front is Art Nouveau. This style is imparted by curvilinear half-timbering made of wooden planks; drip ornament that descends from the tops of the piers; and an angular keystone from which floral ornament is suspended. The wall surface within the half-timbering, and the bulkhead below the windows, are coated in textured stucco. A pedestrian entrance with a non-original door can be found at far right. An inexpensive coating, possibly of plastic, has been applied to the lower reaches of some of the piers.

***P3b Resource Attributes:** HP6 – one-story commercial building; HP8 – industrial building

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

P5b. Description of Photo: (View, date, accession #)
View looking south
June 2009

***P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source:** ■ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
1906; published newspaper notices, Assessor's records

***P7. Owner and Address:**
AUSTIN COURT LLC
1875 MISSION STREET
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94103

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

***P9. Date Recorded:** _____
January 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, 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)

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 1545 Pine Street

B1. Historic Name: Nordhoff Grill

B2. Common Name: _____

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

***B5. Architectural Style:** Art Nouveau

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

Built in 1906. Entrance most likely altered for automobile use by 1917.

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

***B8. Related Features:**

none

B9a. Architect: unknown b. Builder: unknown

***B10. Significance: Theme** post-1906 commercial use **Area** San Francisco

Period of Significance 1906-1907 **Property Type** restaurant **Applicable Criteria** 1

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

History – Construction

This building was built during July-November 1906 as an investment for the owner, who was variously identified as Charlotte F. Clarke and Edward K. Clarke. Charlotte Clarke owned several pieces of San Francisco commercial real estate, some of great value, and redeveloped them with her insurance money after the earthquake and fire of 1906. 1545 Pine was one of at least three buildings she financed in this way.

Her other buildings – a four-story hotel on Turk Street, and a three story building in Chinatown – were of permanent brick construction. 1545 Pine, by contrast, was a one-story wood-framed building that was described as "temporary." It was located close to Van Ness Avenue, which served as San Francisco's interim shopping district while the downtown area was being rebuilt.

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, 1908-1964
1913 Sanborn insurance map: furniture factory
1918 Sanborn insurance map: auto body building
1929 and 1948 Sanborn insurance maps: auto sales
All four Sanborn maps show this as a one-story building.
Note: No building permits could be found for the original construction or for alteration for auto use.
See last page for further references.

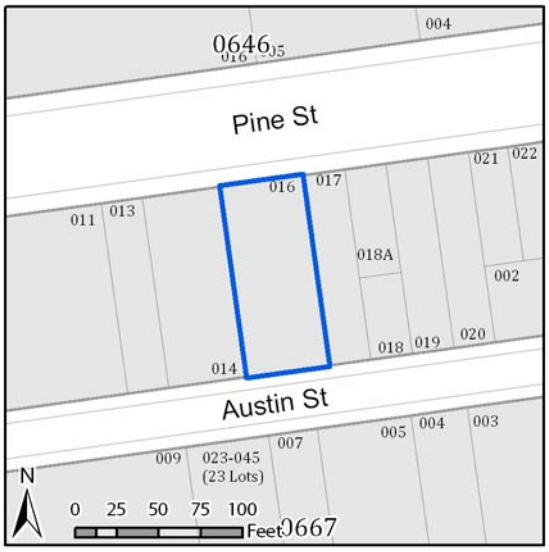
B13. Remarks:

***B14. Evaluator:** William Kostura

Date of Evaluation: January 2010

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



History – Early occupants

Three brief newspaper notices documented this building's construction and leasing in July and August of 1906, as construction of the building was under way. One notice stated that the building would be temporary in character, and two stated that its initial use would be as a restaurant. In July, while construction was just beginning, the Clarkes leased the building for three years to Sophie H. Truman, for a consideration of $15,600. The building was finished in November 1906, a slightly long period of construction (four months) for such a small building.

The building was fitted up as a restaurant and opened in November 1906 as the Nordhoff Grill. The Nordhoff advertised in the newspapers as a dinner restaurant and stated that music was played there. Its life was brief, ending in the spring of 1907. On at least two occasions this restaurant was rented for large groups, e.g. the Bohemian Club for its banquet in January, and the Loyal Legion in February.

The next occupant of this building, from May 1907 to June 1909, was the Nordhoff Auction Mart. Here E. Curtis auctioned antiques, pianos, carpets, other furniture and household goods, equipment from a recently-closed restaurant, and so forth to the public. He then moved his auction house to Van Ness Avenue. By 1913, according to the Sanborn map of that year, this building had become a furniture warehouse, although for what business is unknown.

History – Discussion of the building's original (1906) appearance

As related below, this building's next known use was as an auto repair shop. The question arises: how similar was the original appearance of this building's façade, when the building was devoted to use as a restaurant, to its eventual and current appearance as an auto repair shop?

During the 1900s and 1910s, the Art Nouveau style of this façade would have been considered appropriate for a commercial use such as a restaurant, but not, probably, for an industrial use like an auto repair shop. This supports the likelihood that the Art Nouveau design of this building is original to 1906. On the other hand, this building has the three-bay façade composition, with a predominant center bay devoted to a vehicle entrance, which was common among garages and some auto repair shops in San Francisco during the 1900s-1920s. The simplest explanation, and the most likely one, is that this building was originally built with an Art Nouveau façade that was essentially the same as that now in place; and that, after the building's restaurant use ended, the original entrance was widened to meet the two middle piers (either for the auction house, for the furniture warehouse, or in ca. 1917 for an auto repair shop). It also seems somewhat likely that the window sash now in place was an early replacement for the original sash of 1906.

None of this is certain. Two efforts were made to resolve the question. An on-line search through the photographs at the San Francisco History Center at the Main Library, and photos from the Bancroft Library, under the key words "Pine Street," failed to turn up any historic photo of this building. The only 20th century photo that could be found is from the Department of City Planning's 1976 survey of historic buildings, in which the building looks the same as it does now (except for signage). Similarly, a search for this address through building permits at the Department of Building Inspection failed to turn up a permit for a façade alteration.

History – Automobile-related occupants

From 1917 to at least 1964 this building was occupied by a diverse assortment of automobile-related businesses. These included an auto body builder, an auto wheels sales business, an auto finance company, and three used car sales companies. They were:

1917-1923: Edward and Albert Peters, as Peters and Co., auto body builders, makers of auto tops, and performers of trimming, painting, and repairs
1923-1925: Motor Wheel Corporation, sellers of Disteel, Tulare, and Forsyth steel auto wheels
1926-1928: occupants unknown
1929-1933: Reliance Acceptance Corporation, auto finance
1938-1941: Neal McNeil, used car sales
1942-1944: occupants unknown; no used car businesses could be found here
1945-1953: C. B. McCormick, used car sales
1954-1964: California Wholesale House, used car sales

In sum, this building was occupied by an auto repair shop for seven years, an auto wheels shop for two years, an auto financing office for five years, and a used car sales room for 24 years. The total auto-related use of this building was for 38 years.

History – Context – Temporary commercial buildings of 1906 on or near Van Ness Avenue

Before the earthquake and fire of April 18-21, 1906, Van Ness Avenue was largely residential in character, with middle-class houses along the southern stretch of the avenue, residence hotels in the middle stretch between Ellis and Sutter streets, and mansions to the north. The east side of Van Ness, and a few blocks on the west side of the avenue, either burned during the fire or were dynamited to create a fire break.

Downtown had burned, too, and so Van Ness Avenue became the city's new shopping district during the next two or three years, while downtown was rebuilt. Van Ness had the advantage of being immediately adjacent to the wealthiest part of San Francisco that survived the earthquake and fire, i.e., Pacific Heights and the Western Addition. Residents of those neighborhoods would naturally prefer to shop on Van Ness Avenue than to travel through an extra fifteen blocks of the burnt district to shop to the old downtown. Accordingly, then, Van Ness was developed as a temporary shopping district, while downtown was more gradually rebuilt. Surviving residences on the west side of the avenue were converted into stores, usually with new storefronts tacked on the fronts; and miles of one and two-story wood-framed buildings were constructed on both sides of the street. The city's best department, dry goods, clothing, jewelry, and book stores – The White House, the City of Paris, Davis-Schonwasser, D. Samuel's Lace House, Newman and Levison, Roos Bros., Andrews' Diamond Palace, Shreve's, Paul Elder, and A. M. Robertson – relocated to Van Ness Avenue. Nestled among them in smaller buildings were stationers, restaurants, tailors, and milliners.

(Continued next page.)

History – Context – Temporary commercial buildings of 1906 on or near Van Ness Avenue (continued)

The east-west streets between Van Ness and Polk Street, and Polk Street itself, were also developed, in part, with small, wood-framed commercial buildings in 1906. These, too, were probably considered to be temporary at the time they were built; once the shops that first occupied them removed to a rebuilt downtown, these buildings would likely be replaced by larger structures of brick or reinforced concrete. In this sense they were like the "earthquake refugee shacks" or "camp cottages" that were built in the city's parks after the earthquake and fire to house the recently homeless. Probably no one at the time considered that some would still be standing over a hundred years later.

How many wood-framed "temporary" buildings from 1906 survive on Van Ness, or in the blocks immediately east of that avenue? Only two are known of at present. One stands on Van Ness Avenue, namely, a wood-framed store built for Roos Brothers at 1415 Van Ness. The other is the building being evaluated here. It is possible that a few others still stand on the east-west streets between Van Ness and Polk.

Other buildings might be considered to share some aspects of this pattern of history. 819 Ellis Street (between Polk and Van Ness), for instance, is a brick building that was built for occupancy by Joseph Fredericks and Co., a major furniture store, during July-November, 1906 (at the same time that 1545 Pine was built). Although its materials and structure were considered permanent, the initial use was definitely temporary, for Fredericks and Co. soon moved to its new home on Union Square. 819 Ellis' façade has been altered, but other buildings in the study area of this report might have a similar history.

It might also be useful to mention that Fillmore street also became a major shopping district immediately after the earthquake and fire of 1906, although one subordinate to Van Ness Avenue. No survey has been made to determine which, if any, commercial buildings from that time and place still survive with high integrity.

Integrity

This building's integrity to 1906-1907 is difficult to assess. It is probable, but not certain, that the half-timbering, piers, ornament, and stucco siding date to 1906; and it is highly likely that the entrance was widened to meet the piers since that date. The original appearance of the window sash is highly uncertain. In sum, for the period 1906-1907, this building retains integrity of location; it probably retains integrity of design, feeling, and association, while integrity of materials, workmanship have probably been slightly diminished. Integrity of setting has been lost, as few if any buildings in the immediate vicinity date to 1906-1907.

For the period since 1917, this building appears to be little altered. For this period it retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Integrity of setting has been diminished by new construction and alterations in the vicinity.

Evaluation

Criterion 1 – Events and pattern of history

The most important aspect of this building's history is its earliest history, as one of the immediate post-1906 commercial buildings built along the Van Ness Avenue corridor. These buildings were considered to be temporary in nature at the time they were built; but at least two of them (this building, and 1415 Van Ness) have survived for over a century.

These buildings represent the city's temporary "downtown" after its greatest physical disaster, and thereby are an important aspect of San Francisco's post-1906 commercial life and rebuilding. This history has been overlooked compared with the attention given to the four days of the earthquake and fire itself, but it is an important part of San Francisco's history.

It is not easy to evaluate this building in light of this pattern of history, for two reasons. One is that no survey has been conducted of buildings that share this pattern of history, and thus it is not known how many other such buildings exist. Only one such building survives on Van Ness, but others besides 1545 Pine might survive on the cross streets. If any others survive with high integrity, they are probably very few in number.

A larger difficulty is that it is impossible to be certain to what degree this building retains its 1906 appearance. Assuredly the entrance was altered by the time this building became an auto body building shop in 1917. As mentioned above, it seems somewhat likely that the window sash and frames are an early alteration, and that the Art Nouveau piers and half-timbering are original. But none of this is known for certain.

On balance, this building appears to be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources for its history as one of the immediate post-1906 commercial buildings built on or near Van Ness Avenue. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1906-1907, the years this building was occupied by the Nordhoff Grill.

Regarding the automobile-related history of this building, this was an auto repair shop for seven years beginning in 1917, and thus was an early example of such a shop, with brief longevity in this use. Subsequent uses of this building -- as an auto wheels store (briefly), an auto finance office (also briefly), and a used car sales room (for 24 years) – were minor in importance, and are not very compelling. Overall, this building does not have an important history for its auto-related uses compared to many others in the study area of this report. Accordingly, it does not appear to be eligible for the California Register for its auto-related history under Criterion 1.

Criterion 2

None of the individual proprietors associated with this building had importance in their fields. Accordingly, this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2.

(Continued next page)

Evaluation (continued)

Criterion 3

Architecturally, this building is one of a fairly small number of Art Nouveau style buildings in San Francisco. Given the rarity of this important style in this city, most good examples with high integrity should be considered significant. However, this seems like a minor example of the style. The detailing on the piers and the angular keystone at the top of the parapet lack both fineness. The latter overlaps and slightly obscures rather fine floral ornament below it. In sum, this building 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 half-timbering, the piers with their drip ornament and caps, the stucco surface of the façade, and the ornament at the top of the parapet. It being uncertain whether the window sash dates to the Period of Significance (1906-1907), it seems bets to exclude it from this list of character-defining features.

B12. References (continued from page 2)

"Real Estate Sales." San Francisco Chronicle, July 16, 1906, 5:7. Mrs. Charlotte F. Clarke to lease a building being built on this lot, to be used as a restaurant and café, for three years, for $15,600.

"Realty Market Spirited." San Francisco Call, July 29, 1906, 40:3. Edward K. Clarke has leased a one-story frame building in the course of construction on this lot for three years for $15,600.

"Much Building Is Under Way." San Francisco Chronicle, August 8, 1906, 12:4. Charlotte F. Clarke is to improve three of her lots using insurance money, including a frame restaurant on this lot.

"Leases." Edwards Abstracts from Records, January 23, 1907, p. 3. Lease of July 12, 1906: Edward Clarke to Sophie H. Truman, lease of this property for three years for $15,600.

"Acceptances." Edwards Abstracts from Records, January 24, 1907, p. 2. A completion notice: Charlotte F. Clarke to John G. Sutton Co. and George Lang (contractors), for a building on this lot.

"Real Estate Transactions." San Francisco Call, December 13, 1907, 13:1. Sale of this lot by Edward to Charlotte F. Clarke.

The following sources are brief advertisements or notices of the use of 1545 Pine as a restaurant called the Nordhoff Grill:

San Francisco Call: Nov. 8 (7:4), Nov. 15, and Nov. 24 (10:2), 1906; and Feb. 2, 1907.
San Francisco Chronicle: Nov. 11 (p. 52), Nov. 15 (p. 16), and Nov. 16 (p. 7), 1906.
San Francisco Newsletter: Nov. 24, 1906.
Bohemian Club Annual Report for 1906-1907 (re: banquet on Jan. 5th, 1907).

The following sources are brief advertisements or notices of the use of 1545 Pine as the auction house of E. Curtis, called the Nordhoff Auction Mart:

San Francisco Chronicle, May 5 (p. 63) and Dec. 9 (p. 13), 1907; Feb. 27, 1908, p. 15; Jan. 25 (p. 11), May 3 (p. 15), June 6 (p. 53), and June 13, 1909. The latter source is a removal notice, indicating the end of this building's use as an auction house.