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) 1932-1950 Polk Street/1567 Pacific Ave.

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Merwin, Holtzen, and Fiora 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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted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 1932-1950 Polk Street/1567 Pacific Avenue City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 596, lot 24

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

This property occupies a 136'-6" x 127'-8" lot at the southeast corner of Pacific Avenue and Polk Street. The older of the two buildings on this lot is reinforced concrete in structure and was built as two wings that meet in the rear. One of these is one story in height, and faces Pacific Avenue, and the other is two stories, facing Polk Street. The land in the angle between these two wings remains largely open, as a parking lot, but a sliver of this area is filled in with a wood-frame building devoted to retail use. That structure crowds against the Pacific Avenue wing, leaving a large area devoted to parking. The description below pertains to the older, reinforced concrete building of two wings.

Each wing is faced in stucco and is topped by a stepped parapet. The Pacific Avenue façade is divided into four bays, three containing windows and the other, an entrance. These bays are defined by plain piers. The Polk Street façade is divided into three bays and is roughly symmetrical. Both wings are devoid of ornament or style features other than the stepped parapets.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 2.)

*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 southeast
June 2009

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: ■ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
ca. 1930-1931; building permits

*P7. Owner and Address:
KSW PROPERTIES
244 CALIFORNIA ST
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94111

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

*P9. Date Recorded:
November 2009

*P10. Survey Type: (Describe)
intensive

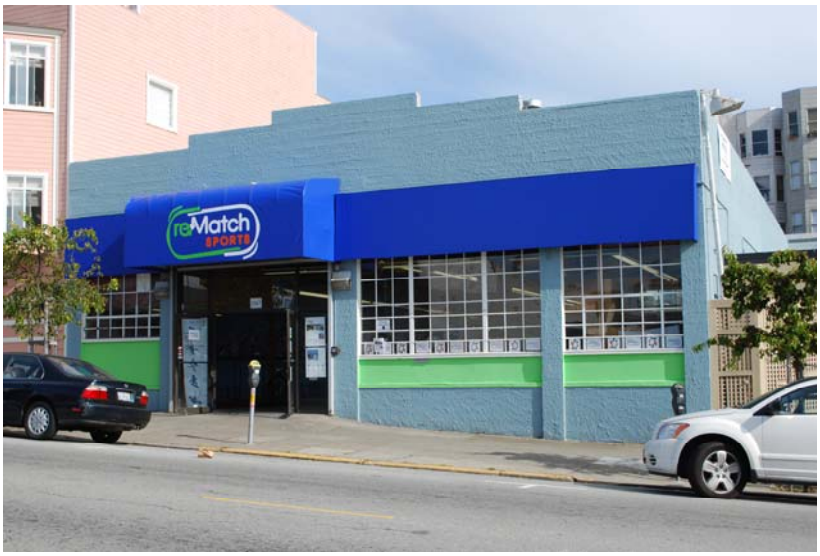
P11. Report Citation*: (Cite survey report.) William Kostura. *Van Ness Auto Row Support Structures*. San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2010.

*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):

Most windows in this building have original industrial steel sash with concrete sills. In the Pacific Avenue wing these include one industrial steel sash window to the left of the entrance and two to the right of the entrance. In the Polk Street wing such windows are found: in the second story of the main façade, in all three bays; in the first story of the main façade, in the far right bay; and finally, in the north façade (facing the parking area), where most windows are of this type. There are also three wood sash windows in the main façade of the Polk Street wing; all are in the first story, and all appear to be original. They include windows of six large lights to either side of the main entrance (in the middle bay), and a large storefront window in the bay at left.

The two main entrances, one in each wing, each have doors with modern metal frames. The secondary entrance in the Polk Street wing has a wooden door with full-length glazing.



Top photo: Façade of the Pacific Avenue wing. Bottom photo: Façade of the Polk Street wing.

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

*NRHP Status Code 6Z

*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) 1932-1950 Polk Street/1567 Pacific Avenue

B1. Historic Name: Merwin, Holtzen, and Fiora auto repair shop

B2. Common Name: _____

B3. Original Use: auto repair shop B4. Present Use: retail shops

*B5. Architectural Style: no style details; early-mid 20th century industrial

*B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
Built ca. 1930-1931. Wooden structure added before 1948. Gas station structure removed at an unknown date. Modern metal doors added to each wing more recently.

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

*B8. Related Features:
none

B9a. Engineer: Thomas H. Brown b. Builder: Standard Oil Company

*B10. Significance: Theme auto industry Area San Francisco
Period of Significance n/a Property Type auto repair shop 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

This is the second automobile-related building to occupy this site. The first was an inexpensive one-story wood-framed garage built in 1906 for the Bothin Real Estate Co. It had wood siding on the two street fronts and galvanized iron siding elsewhere. It was known as the Pacific Garage through 1918 and by 1921 had become the auto repair shop of George S. Merwin and Otto A. Holtzen. This building stood through the year 1929.

The present structure was most likely built during 1930-1931 by the Standard Oil Company, which was both the owner and builder, to designs by its engineer, Thomas H. Brown. The 1948 Sanborn map shows the current two-winged concrete structure; the adjoining wooden shed; and, near the NW corner of the lot, a small, open-sided L-shaped structure, probably of steel, that is no longer standing. The large concrete building was labeled "auto service – body and fender works" (in the north wing) and "auto painting" (in the east wing); the wooden shed was labeled "washing and oiling" and "battery shop"; and the now-vanished L-shaped structure was labeled "oil and gas."

(See Continuation Sheet, page 4.)

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

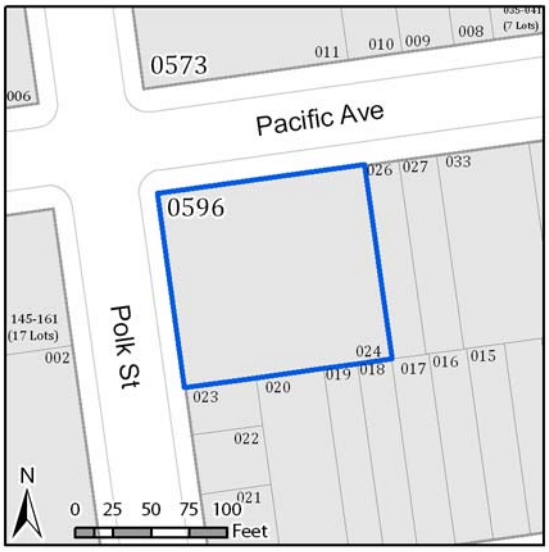
*B12. References:
Building permits #189791 and #189792 (both December 2, 1930; one for a steel building; both filed under "1950 Polk")
Building permits of 1906, 1945 and 1957
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, PT&T reverse directory and yellow pages listings for occupants, 1918-1964
1948 Sanborn insurance map (auto service, body & fender, gas st'n)

B13. Remarks:

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

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



History (continued)

The first occupants of the new building were none other than George S. Merwin and Otto A. Holtzen, who had occupied the earlier wood-framed building owned by Bothin Real Estate. By 1938 they added a third partner, James Fiora, and became known as Merwin, Holtzen, and Fiora. The partners ran an auto repair shop as well as a gas station here for 27 years, through 1958. Their ad in the 1939 yellow pages state that they performed automotive service and reconstruction, repairing, painting, ignition work, washing, greasing, polishing and towing. They specialized in repair of Cadillac, LaSalle, Buick, Olds, and Chevrolet.

The use of this property as a gas station is documented by telephone yellow pages of 1931 and later years, the 1948 Sanborn insurance map, and building permits of 1945 and 1957. By 1955 the partners sold Chevron gas (successor to Standard Oil), and it is likely they sold Standard Oil gasoline from the beginning. The yellow pages make clear, however, that this was an independent service station, not an official Standard Oil gas station, of which there were 66 in San Francisco by 1946.

During these years other businesses also occupied a small storefront in the Polk Street wing, e.g. Dave's Radio Shop (in 1940-1942) and Penny's Pet Shop (in 1953-1958).

After Merwin, Holtzen and Fiora left this building its space was divided among two different auto-related businesses: the repair shop of an auto dealer (the Reynold C. Johnson service department in 1961, and Van Ness Oldsmobile's service department in 1964), and a gas station named Walt and Larry's Chevron station.

Very few pre-World War II gasoline service stations survive in San Francisco. 1932-1950 Polk Street/1567 Pacific Avenue should not count as one of them, because the corner structure where gas was sold no longer stands. This building can evoke its history as an auto repair shop since ca. 1931, but not as a gas station.

Integrity

The reinforced concrete building is little altered; its two modern metal doors are, for an unadorned industrial building of this type, minor changes. The wood shed adjoining the north wing is probably not original to 1931 but was in place by 1948. In sum, the building, when considered as an auto repair shop, retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling and association. Because of the removal of the small corner structure where gas was dispensed the property has lost its ability to evoke its history as a gas station.

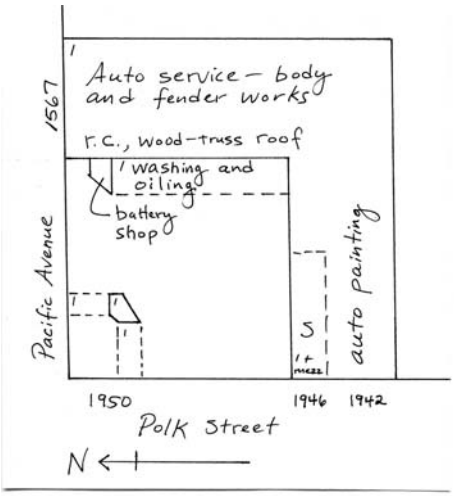
Evaluation

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 1931, this is a moderately late example of an automobile repair shop and gas station. With 33 years of such uses in its history (through 1964), it has excellent longevity in these uses. While the building's history as an auto repair shop is high, its integrity as a gas station has been lost. This fact, and the moderately late construction date, should probably be considered as outweighing the longevity of auto repair use in this building. For these reasons, this property does not appear to be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 1.

Merwin, Holtzen, and Fiora occupied this property for 27 years, and the previous building on this site for another decade, but other than that are not known to have been important in their field. Accordingly, this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2.

This building is almost devoid of architectural interest. Its L-shaped plan, with a large area for auto maneuvering between the two wings, is a design feature of some historical interest, but by itself is not sufficient to distinguish this property. Accordingly, this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3.



Drawing made from the 1948 Sanborn insurance map