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) 1001 Polk Street/1000 Geary Street

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Pierce-Arrow automobile 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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted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 1001 Polk Street/1000 Geary Street City San Francisco Zip 94109
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 694, lot 4

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

This is a four-story reinforced concrete building that fills its 82'-6" by 120-foot lot at the northwest corner of Geary and Polk streets. (In archival sources the building is referred to as being three stories plus a mezzanine in height.) The surface of the facades is stucco that has been lightly scored to resemble masonry. Both facades received an equal level of treatment regarding composition, detailing and finish; there was no "primary" façade.

The top of the building takes the form of a full classical entablature. The cornice is profiled, with a paneled soffit that has leafy ornament within the panels. Immediately beneath the cornice are courses of leafy molding, dentils, egg-and-dart molding, and bead molding. There follows a frieze that is blank save for the inscription "PIERCE-ARROW" on both facades. Another course of leafy molding and an architrave of three fascia completes the entablature.

(See Continuation Sheet, page 2.)

*P3b Resource Attributes: HP7 – four-story commercial building

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

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

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: ■ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
1912-1913; published building notices

*P7. Owner and Address:
CITY & COUNTY SAN FRANCISCO
25 VAN NESS AVE STE 400
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94102

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

*P9. Date Recorded: October 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 building is stacked in a three-part composition, with the ground floor forming the base, the upper two stories the top, and the second story (or mezzanine) in between. Secondary cornices – profiled, with courses of leafy and egg-and-dart moldings – can be found between these levels. The corner of the building at Geary and Polk is chamfered from top to bottom, with cornices wrapping around the indentations.

The façade along Polk Street is divided into five bays of nearly equal width, while the Geary Street façade is divided into three bays of equal width. In the upper two stories, fluted Corinthian pilasters define the bays. On the Polk Street side the end bays are differentiated by pairing of pilasters, while on the Geary Street side all pilasters are paired.

In the lower stories, wall areas function as a visual base for the pilasters in the upper stories. In the second story (or mezzanine), short columns or pilasters can be found within the window area; these serve as thick mullions to create tripartite windows. The base of the building projects slightly, giving an impression of added strength.

All windows have replacement steel frames, or sash, within their original openings, and entrances have also been altered with new materials.

Corner detail

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 1001 Polk Street/1000 Geary Street

B1. Historic Name: Pierce-Arrow automobile showroom

B2. Common Name: _____

B3. Original Use: automobile showroom B4. Present Use: homeless shelter

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

***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
Built in 1912-1913. Window sash altered at an unknown date (before 1975).

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

***B8. Related Features:**
none

B9a. Architect: John Galen Howard b. Builder: Jesse D. Hannah

***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile industry **Area** San Francisco
Period of Significance 1912-1936 **Property Type** auto showroom **Applicable Criteria** 1, 2, 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 1912-1913 for an automobile manufacturer, the Pierce-Arrow Motor Car Company, and served as their San Francisco automobile showroom from 1913-1930. It was subsequently, from 1931-1936, the auto showroom for Reo Motor Car Company of California.

The Architect, John Galen Howard

The architect was John Galen Howard, who is very highly regarded today as the architect for the University of California campus in Berkeley during 1901-1924; and for his residential, commercial, and church buildings in Berkeley. Howard designed relatively few works in San Francisco, of which this automobile showroom is among the most important. Other notable, surviving works by Howard in the city include the façade of the Italian-American Bank at 460 Montgomery (1908); the Adam Grant Building at 114 Sansome (1908); the St. Francis Wood entrance gate and fountains (1913); Civic Auditorium (with Frederick H. Meyer and John Reid, Jr., 1915); and Le Conte School at 3125 Cesar Chavez (1924-1925).

(See Continuation Sheet, page 4.)

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

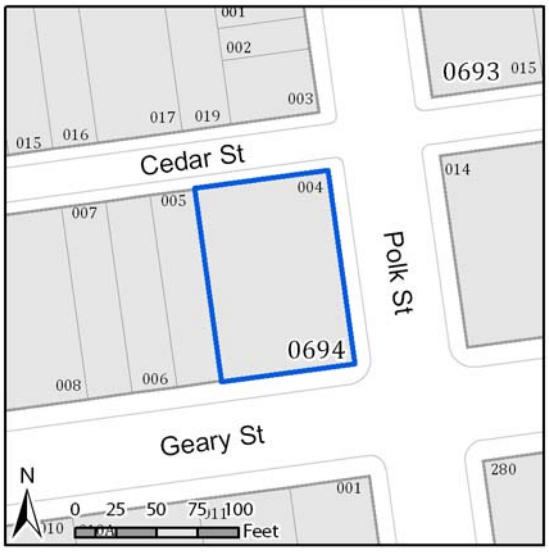
***B12. References:**
Building and Engineering News, August 13, 1912, 10:1; September 24, 1912, 5:3; and December 10, 1912, 17:3.
Architect and Engineer, January 1915, pp. 64-65.
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1913-1953.

B13. Remarks:

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

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



History (continued)

The Pierce-Arrow Motor Company

This is one of the very few auto showroom buildings in San Francisco that was constructed by an automobile manufacturer – in this case, the Pierce-Arrow Motor Company – instead of by a speculative builder or an auto dealer. Published building notices and Sanborn maps reveal how spaces in this building were used by Pierce-Arrow. The first floor was the auto showroom, the mezzanine level was used as offices and for storing spare parts, and the two upper floors were used for automobile storage and as an auto repair shop. This arrangement was typical of the way major automobile dealers dedicated entire floors in their showrooms to specialized uses.

The founder of Pierce-Arrow, George N. Pierce, manufactured his first automobile in 1901 after many years of making general household items (since 1865) and bicycles (since 1896). In 1903 he made his first automobile model named "Arrow," and in 1904 made a Great Arrow. This was the beginning of his company's focus on high-end, luxury automobiles. Pierce sold his company in 1908, and his successor, the Pierce-Arrow Motor Company, continued the luxury car philosophy. Unlike the great majority of automakers, Pierce-Arrow built its own auto showrooms around the United States instead of selling cars through dealerships. The company was extremely successful, selling autos to the wealthy and leasing them to the White House for over twenty years. Pierce-Arrow became one of the "Three Ps of Motordom," the others being the luxury car makers Packard and Peerless.

Studebaker purchased a controlling share of Pierce-Arrow stock in 1928, only to see sales plummet during the Depression. The two brands maintained separate operations at first, but eventually Pierce-Arrow began to sell its cars through Studebaker dealerships.

This account closely coincides with how Pierce-Arrows were sold in San Francisco. The cars were initially sold in this city through an affiliate of the George N. Pierce Co., the Mobile Carriage Company, at the northeast corner of Golden Gate and Gough, during 1907-1908. (That building no longer stands.) The Pierce-Arrow Motor Company next leased a small building at 330-340 Van Ness Avenue during 1909-1913. That building, however, was taken by the city through eminent domain, in order that the Civic Center could be built. Pierce-Arrow then built its own building, the one being evaluated here, at 1001 Polk Street. It was one of many auto-related businesses that were displaced by the Civic Center and that then relocated to new buildings on or near Van Ness Avenue.

Pierce-Arrow remained at 1001 Polk Street through 1930, but during the following three years Pierce-Arrows were sold through a Studebaker dealership at 1395 Van Ness Avenue. (That building has since been altered.) In 1933, as a result of the Depression, Studebaker became bankrupt, and sales of that automobile and Pierce-Arrow then ended in San Francisco. The Pierce-Arrow Motor Car Company was sold to investors and lasted to 1938 before going out of business in that year.

One man, William F. Culberson, was the president or manager of the George N. Pierce Co. and then the Pierce-Arrow Motor Co. at all three of their San Francisco showrooms from 1907 to 1930.

(Continued on next page.)

History (continued):

Reo automobiles

After Pierce-Arrow left this building it was occupied by Reo Motor Car Company of California for their Reo showroom, from 1931-1936. Reo was founded in 1904 by Ransom Eli Olds in Lansing, Michigan. Olds had previously founded Oldsmobile, selling his first cars in 1901, but due to a dispute with his financial backer sold his interest in that company in 1904 and founded a new one, Reo, named for his initials. The company was sometimes spelled with all capitals, as "REO." Like Oldsmobile, Reo became one of the nation's best-selling cars by 1907. It faded somewhat afterward, but remained important until about 1925, when sales declined more strongly.

Prior to occupying 1001 Polk, the Reo Motor Company sold automobiles in San Francisco at 307-309 Larkin (1905-1906; destroyed in 1906); 435-441 Golden Gate (1907-1908; demolished); 142-152 Fulton (1912-1913; replaced by the Civic Center); 1600-1628 Van Ness Avenue (1913-1915; extant, altered); 1400 Van Ness (1916-1922; extant); and 1100-1128 Van Ness (1923-1930; altered). Sometimes they sold cars through dealerships, most notably that of Earle C. Anthony at 1400 Van Ness. At other times, Reo leased a building, hired a local manager, and sold cars directly to the public. This was its method for two years at 1600-1628 Van Ness, at 1100 Van Ness, and at 1001 Polk Street.

Reo quit making automobiles in 1936 and ended its occupancy of this building in that year. Afterward the firm survived in other cities as a manufacturer of trucks.

After 1936

When Reo left this building it became devoted to a number of governmental uses. It was the City and County Public Welfare Department #1 from 1938 into the early 1940s; the U. S. War Assets office in 1948; the U. S. Department of State, Division of Security field office in 1953; and is currently a homeless shelter owned by the city.

Integrity

All of the window sash and the entrances in this building have been altered, but the exterior is otherwise intact. Overall, the building retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association.

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

(Continued on next page.)

Evaluation (continued from page 5):

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 1913, this is an early example of an automobile showroom. With 23 years of such use in its history, it has good longevity in this use. These facts, along with the building's good integrity, would be sufficient to make it significant for its history as an auto showroom.

In addition, the automobile brand that was initially sold in this building, Pierce-Arrow (during 1913-1930), was exceptionally important in the United States. This was by far the most important building in San Francisco where Pierce-Arrows were sold, and is the only one still standing with good integrity.

The subsequent brand sold here, Reo, was also nationally important. This building is one of two Reo showrooms in San Francisco that still stand with good integrity, although the other building, at 1400 Van Ness Avenue, is more important in Reo's history than this one is.

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 showroom. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1913-1936, the years the building had this use.

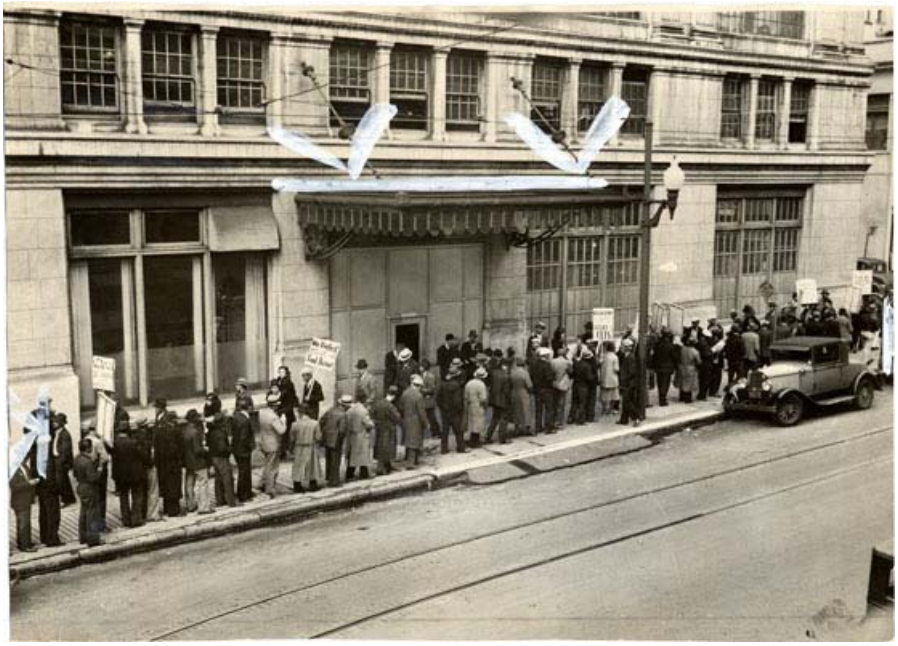
William F. Culberson was the president or manager of the S.F. branch of a major auto brand, the George N. Pierce Co. and the Pierce-Arrow Motor Co., from an early date in its history through the end of its independent existence (1907-1930). Though little else is known of him, this seems sufficient to demonstrate his importance in the history of the city's automobile industry. Accordingly, this building appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2 for its association with Culberson. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1913-1930, the years he worked in this building.

Architecturally, this building is an outstanding example of the Classical Revival style as applied to an automobile showroom. It is also one of the most important buildings by architect John Galen Howard outside of his institutional work for the University of California. Thus, this building appears to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3, for its design by Howard. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1912-1913, the years the building was constructed.

Character defining features

The character defining features of this building are its height, its width along both facades, the scored stucco surface, the shape of the chamfered corner at Geary and Polk, the main cornice with its paneled and leaf-decorated soffit, the various moldings of the entablature, the words "Pierce-Arrow" in both friezes, the secondary cornices with their moldings, the fluted pilasters in the upper stories, the short pilasters in the second story or mezzanine, and the slightly projecting base of the building.

Historic photos of this building. From *Architect and Engineer*, January 1915.



Newspaper photo of public welfare recipients in front of 1001 Polk in 1938, protesting a decrease in their benefits. This was the Polk Street side of the building. San Francisco Public Library, photo #AAK-0613.