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) 159 Fell Street

P1. Historic name of building (if any): Balcom and Gingg Auto Wheel Aligning Co.
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 Location: *a: County San Francisco ☐ Not for Publication ■ Unrestricted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 159 Fell Street City San Francisco Zip 94102
d. UTM: Zone _____; _____mE/ _____ mN *e. Assessor's parcel #: Block 834, lot 15

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

This is a two-story shop building that fills the width of its 27'-6" wide lot. The structural type is unknown, but is most likely reinforced concrete. The façade of the building is covered in stucco that is very lightly scored. In composition, the second story is divided into three bays, with a wide central bay flanked by narrow outer bays; and the first story is divided into two bays of unequal width. Windows in the second story have industrial steel sash, with a tripartite center window flanked by paired windows. Wooden spindles separate these windows into parts. In the first story, a vehicle entrance is at right, and an original or early wooden door, whose glazing has been covered over, is at right. A small transom can be found over this door. At the top of the building is a parapet with imitation Spanish tiles flanked by short piers, and below this, in the frieze area, is a row of plaster shields. All of these elements appear to be original.

*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
1926; building permit

*P7. Owner and Address:
CHEVALIER RENE
167 SOMERSET ST
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94134

*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)

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

***NRHP Status Code** 3CS

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) 159 Fell Street

B1. Historic Name: Balcom and Gingg Auto Wheel Aligning Co.
B2. Common Name: _____
B3. Original Use: wheel aligning and brake shop B4. Present Use: auto repair
***B5. Architectural Style:** Spanish Colonial Revival
***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
Built in 1926.

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

B9a. Architect: unknown b. Builder: unknown
***B10. Significance: Theme** automobile industry **Area** San Francisco
Period of Significance 1926-1961 **Property Type** auto repair shop **Applicable Criteria** 1
(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 1926 for owners Charles A. Balcom and Edwun U. Gingg to house their business, the Auto Wheel Aligning Company, which also performed brake relining and service. This appears to have been a secondary business for them; they also had a long-lasting welding shop, first at 503 Van Ness and then at 660 Golden Gate Avenue. Balcom and Ging remained at 159 Fell until 1930, when they moved next door to 155 Fell, where they owned a fender and body shop.

The subsequent occupant at 159 Fell, from 1931 to 1944, was Elmo J. Sweeney, who continued the name Auto Wheel Aligning Company and performed the same kinds of services that Balcom and Gingg had here. Next, in 1948, R. F. Costello had an auto repair shop here. From 1953 to at least 1959 the Hydro-Sleeve Company, an auto parts manufacturer, occupied the building, and in 1961 the occupant was Reliance Brake Shop. Thus, the building was occupied by various kinds of automobile specialty service shops for at least 26 years.

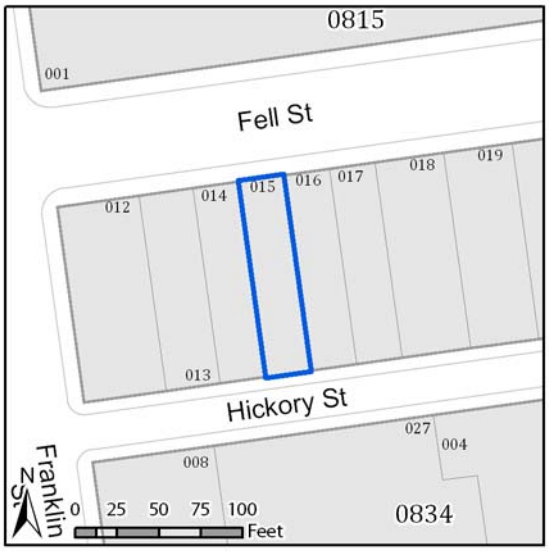
B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) _____

***B12. References:**
Building permit #154633 (November 10, 1926), at S. F. Building Inspection Dept., 1660 Mission Street
Crocker-Langley and Polk's city directory, and PT&T reverse directory listings for occupants of this building, 1927-1964

B13. Remarks:

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

(Sketch map with north arrow required)



(This space reserved for official comments.)

Integrity

The façade of this building is largely intact as built, and thus it 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 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*.

Built in 1926, this is a moderately early example of a shop offering automobile specialty services. With at least 26 years of such use in its history, it has good longevity in this use and is one of the better examples of such a shop building in the study area. For these reasons, and because of its good integrity, the building appears to be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources at the local level under Criterion 1, for its use as an auto repair shop and auto parts manufacturing company. The Period of Significance under this criterion is 1926 to 1961.

None of the individual occupants of this building were important in their own right, and accordingly this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 2.

Architecturally, this building is modest, and thus this building does not appear to be eligible for the California Register under Criterion 3.

This is part of a cluster of five auto-related buildings in a row of six lots. (The others are #s 131, 149, 155, and 165-167 Fell.) Only two of these, #s 159 and 165-167 Fell, possess more than 50% integrity, and thus no possibility of a potential automobile-related historic district appears to exist in this cluster.

Character defining features

The character defining features of this building include the stucco coating, the imitation Spanish tile parapet, the frieze of shields, the industrial steel sash windows with spindle separators, and the two kinds of entrances (vehicle and pedestrian) in the first story.