

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

12/12

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bekins Storage Co. Roof Sign

other names/site number Standard Fireproof Storage Co. Roof Sign

2. Location

street & number 511 S. Fair Oaks Avenue  not for publication

city or town Pasadena  vicinity

state California code CA county Los Angeles code 037 zip code 91105

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Daniel Abeyta Deputy SHPO 9/3/97  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

California Office of Historic Preservation  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

10/15/97  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
1	0	objects
1	1	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

Early Automobile-Related Properties in Pasadena (1897-1944)

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Commercial Advertising  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Commercial Advertising  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Roof Sign  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A  
walls N/A  
  
roof N/A  
other METAL/Steel  
OTHER: Neon

**Narrative Description**  
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheet(s).

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1926-1944

Significant Dates

1926, 1929

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Design & Historic Preservation Archives

CITY OF PASADENA/Planning & Permitting Dept.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than an acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 1 1	3 9 3 9 7 0	3 7 7 7 7 1 6 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Brian Goeken, AICP, Planner; Design & Historic Preservation Section/Planning Division

organization CITY OF PASADENA/Planning & Permitting Dept. date 9/28/95 rev. 1/12/96

street & number Hale Building, 175 N. Garfield Ave. telephone (818) 405-4228

city or town Pasadena state CA zip code 91109-7215

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name California Real Estate Investment Trust,

street & number 131 Stuart Street, Suite 200 telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town San Francisco state CA zip code 94105

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1 of 1

DESCRIPTION

Bekins Storage Co. Roof Sign  
Pasadena, Los Angeles County, CA

## DESCRIPTION

The Bekins Storage Co. Roof Sign is a large, two-sided, neon roof sign atop the four-story Bekins Storage Co. Building. Each rectangular metal face is approximately 32 feet long and 12 feet high. The sign is mounted perpendicular to the street on a steel frame, some 60 feet above the ground. The sign is visible for several blocks in both directions along South Fair Oaks Avenue, originally part of historic Route 66 and a major transportation corridor in the city.

The two sign faces are identical, with individual, open channel, metal can letters with white returns and neon. The sign text, "BEKINS STORAGE CO.," all in serif capital letters, is broken into two lines separated by scrollwork on a dark green field. "BEKINS" extends across the top of the sign, with the individual letters distinctively skewed by an arced baseline like the Bekins company logo. "BEKINS" in green neon is separated from "STORAGE CO." in red neon by light blue neon scrollwork, also with metal cans. "MOVING" in dark blue neon, with no metal cans, alternately flashes over the "STORAGE CO." line of text.

The sign was originally designed and installed with bulb lighting in 1926 by Noice and Merrill Engineers and the Greenwood Advertising Company with the text "STANDARD FIREPROOF STORAGE CO." In 1929 the originally bulb-lit sign was converted by electricians J. E. Davies and J. F. Winn to neon and the text was apparently changed at that time to "BEKINS STORAGE CO."—replacing the first two words in the same style letters as the original and retaining the second two words—and the scrollwork was added. The sign remains unaltered from its 1929 appearance.

The Bekins Storage Co. Building is a four-story reinforced-concrete warehouse, industrial in appearance with modest Spanish Renaissance Revival-style ornamentation on the primary elevation. The building was designed by architect J. J. Blick and constructed by civil engineer and builder Clarence P. Day in 1925-26 for the Standard Fireproof Storage Company. The three-story walls of the Pasadena Biscuit Company, completely gutted by fire in c.1925, were incorporated into the new building. Bekins Van & Storage Company purchased the building in 1928. The building is non-contributing.

The Bekins Storage Co. Building is considered a non-contributor for purposes of this nomination since it is not associated with the context (Influences of the Automobile on Other Businesses, 1924-1944) under study for the multiple property nomination, "Early Auto Related Properties in Pasadena." Designating the building a non-contributor is not intended to convey an assessment that it is unimportant or non-historic. Future study may indicate the building has significance within another context, for example, industrial architecture in Pasadena. If such significance is established, the building will be re-classified.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 1 of 3

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

---

**Bekins Storage Co. Roof Sign  
Pasadena, Los Angeles County, CA**

**SIGNIFICANCE**

The Bekins Storage Co. Roof Sign is locally significant for its associations with the historic context, "Influences of the Automobile on Other Businesses (1924-1944)," under Criterion A in the area of Commercial Advertising and Criterion C in the area of Commercial Signage as a locally significant example of early large roof signs and projecting signs in Pasadena and of commercial signage primarily meant to be read from the passing automobile. The Bekins roof sign, with sign faces approximately 32 feet long and 12 feet high, was constructed as a bulb-lit sign in 1926 and converted to neon in 1929; it retains its 1929 appearance. The two-sided sign was strategically positioned atop the four-story Bekins Storage Co. Building—some 60 feet above the ground and mounted perpendicular to the street—to be visible in both directions for several blocks along South Fair Oaks Avenue, originally part of historic Route 66 (1926-1940; the route changed in 1940 with the opening of the Arroyo Seco Parkway) and a major transportation corridor in the city and the surrounding area up to the present day.

The Bekins roof sign is the best-remaining example of the many large roof signs and projecting signs constructed in Pasadena prior to World War II: it is one of the oldest-surviving roof signs, a once-common form of commercial advertising meant to be viewed at a distance and which took on added significance with the introduction of the automobile; it is one of the oldest-remaining examples and earliest large-scale uses of neon, whose introduction in the 1920s revolutionized commercial signage; and it is the most distinctive of the remaining pre-war roof signs—in terms of design, size, location/visibility, and use of neon—in the city.

Coinciding with the advent of the streetcar system in Pasadena in the 1890s and followed closely by the introduction of the automobile in the Los Angeles area in 1897, the orientation of commercial signage changed and signs became a more significant part of the local landscape in the first decades of the twentieth century. Large illuminated roof-top signs and projecting signs had an early association with theaters, movie palaces, and department stores, all dependent on attracting large crowds, but the use of large illuminated signs became more practical and widespread with turn-of-the-century advancements in electrification and illumination—and necessary when commercial establishments could no longer rely solely on foot traffic for business by virtue of the increased mobility of customers and the increased business competition it permitted. With the considerable growth of the southern California region during the subsequent decades, the interrelated ascension of the automobile as the chief mode of transportation, and the introduction of neon in Los Angeles in 1923, the 1920s-1930s was a tremendously prolific period for commercial signage in Pasadena and the greater Los Angeles area.

More and more signs were designed to be visible from greater distances, and at greater speeds, and to incorporate illumination, animation and special effects, novelty, color, and other features which could catch the eye and draw the attention of passers-by. Large wall signs were painted directly on the sides of buildings. Signs became larger in size, with bigger lettering, and were placed in more highly prominent locations, such as on roof tops or mounted on the sides of buildings. Signs were illuminated to increase their visibility and appeal to streetcar and

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2 of 3

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

---

Bekins Storage Co. Roof Sign  
Pasadena, Los Angeles County, CA

automobile passengers alike. Large signs and billboards appeared adjacent major transportation routes and the emerging highway system. Signage became an important component in commercial buildings and, in the extreme cases, the integration of architecture and signage became indistinguishable, as with programmatic or so-called "Roadside" architecture. Most significant in the design and illumination of signs was the use of neon, which completely transformed commercial advertising in the myriad of design possibilities it presented.

Neon was introduced in the United States in 1923 by a Los Angeles Packard dealer, who purchased two neon signs in Paris which virtually "stopped traffic in downtown Los Angeles. The police complained that the neon was causing a traffic jam and neon took California by storm."<sup>1</sup> Frenchman Georges Claude was the early leader in the use of neon and argon gas, having pioneered its development with key inventions in the commercial fractional distillation of neon in 1907 and the development of a corrosion-resistant electrode, patented in 1915. Claude granted a territorial franchise in Los Angeles in 1924. Neon offered many advantages in comparison to earlier light sources; with its flexible luminosity, limitless configurations, and range of color combinations, neon soon became the primary method of illumination for commercial signage. The use of neon in the United States, like the automobile, was closely associated with the economic, technological, and cultural shifts of the 1920s and 1930s—a period of popular consumerism and "Machine Age modernism"—apparent also in the rise of industrial design and the emergence of the Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, and International styles.<sup>2</sup>

By the 1920s and 1930s, large roof signs and projecting signs were a common form of commercial advertising for theaters, department stores, banks, and other larger business establishments in Pasadena, including Jensen's Raymond Theater (c.1921), Clune's Pasadena Theater (c.1920), the Washington Theater (1925), Security National Bank (c.1920s), Sears Roebucks (c.1920s), Bekins Storage Co. (1926), and the Pasadena Star-News (c.1926-1930s). Most of the early signs were bulb-lit signs, but by the late 1920s many incorporated neon. Some roof signs, like the Bekins sign, were bulb-lit signs converted to neon. Most large roof signs and projecting signs were located on or oriented toward the city's major thoroughfares, with the largest signs meant to be visible from Colorado Boulevard even if the signs were located several blocks away. With the establishment of the National Old Trails Route in 1913 and the designation in 1926 of Colorado Boulevard and South Fair Oaks Avenue as part of Route 66, signage oriented toward these streets was meant not only for local and seasonal consumption, but for the many newcomers traveling the route as well.

The Bekins Storage Co. roof sign is the only surviving example of the large roof signs and projecting signs from the pre-war period constructed in Pasadena. Other large signs have been removed, the result of seismic concerns, failed businesses, or replacement with more contemporary signage. The City's zoning code no longer allows roof signs and some projecting signs, and a non-conforming sign abatement program in the 1970s-1980s required

---

<sup>1</sup> Stern, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 3 of 3

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

---

## **Bekins Storage Co. Roof Sign Pasadena, Los Angeles County, CA**

the removal of many of the remaining early signs. [The city created a Historic Sign Inventory, which includes the Bekins roof sign, in the late 1980s which exempts historic pre-1960 signs from the current code requirements. Most of the signs in the inventory are from the post-war period.] A few small roof and projecting signs also remain from the period, but none of the relative size, distinctive period design, use of neon, or prominence of location as the Bekins roof sign. The Bekins sign sits atop the Bekins Storage Co. Building, a non-contributor.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 1 of 1

**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

---

**Bekins Storage Co. Roof Sign  
Pasadena, Los Angeles County, CA**

**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Advertisement for Bekins Van & Storage Company, in the *Pasadena Star-News*, October 10, 1928.

Building Permit (May 1926), Electrical Permit #4212G (June 1, 1926), Electrical Permit (January 29, 1929), City of Pasadena.

"City of Pasadena Historic Context Statements," prepared by Pamela O'Connor for City of Pasadena, Design & Historic Preservation Section, Planning Division, unpublished draft 1992.

"Early Automobile-Related Properties in Pasadena (1897-1944)," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Submission, prepared by Historic Resources Group and the City of Pasadena, Design & Historic Preservation Section, Planning Division, draft January 12, 1996.

Historic Sign Inventory, Historical/Architectural Survey #42, City of Pasadena, Urban Conservation Section, Planning Division, 1987-88.

Historical/Architectural Survey #15: Arroyo Parkway, City of Pasadena, Urban Conservation Section, Planning Division, 1989.

Stern, Rudi. *Let There Be Neon*. New York City: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1979.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 1 of 1

**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

---

**Bekins Storage Co. Roof Sign  
Pasadena, Los Angeles County, CA**

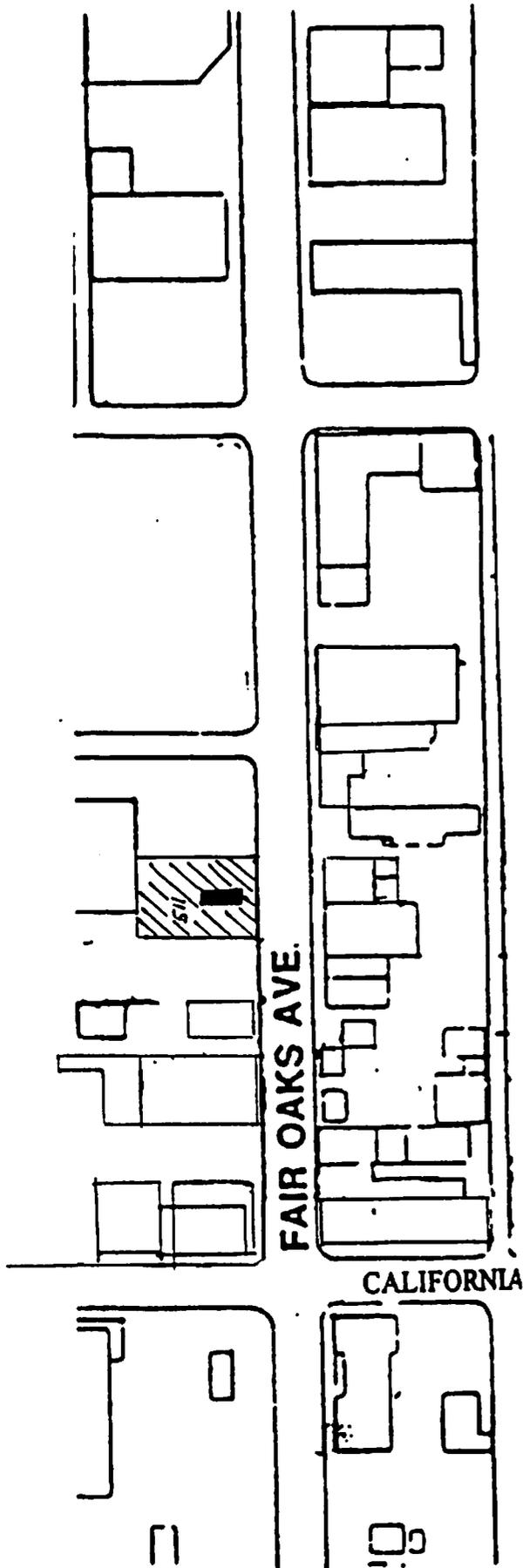
**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The nominated property is Parcel Number 5713-041-014.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundary includes the entire city parcel that historically has been associated with the property.

Bekins Storage Company Roof Sign  
Pasadena, Los Angeles County, CA



-  CONTRIBUTING
-  NON-CONTRIBUTING

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page 1 of 1

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

---

**Bekins Storage Co. Roof Sign  
Pasadena, Los Angeles County, CA**

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

Photographer:	City of Pasadena (Brian D. Goeken)
Date of Photographs:	September 1995
Location of Original Negatives:	Design & Historic Preservation Archives CITY OF PASADENA/Planning & Permitting Department

*Description of Views:*

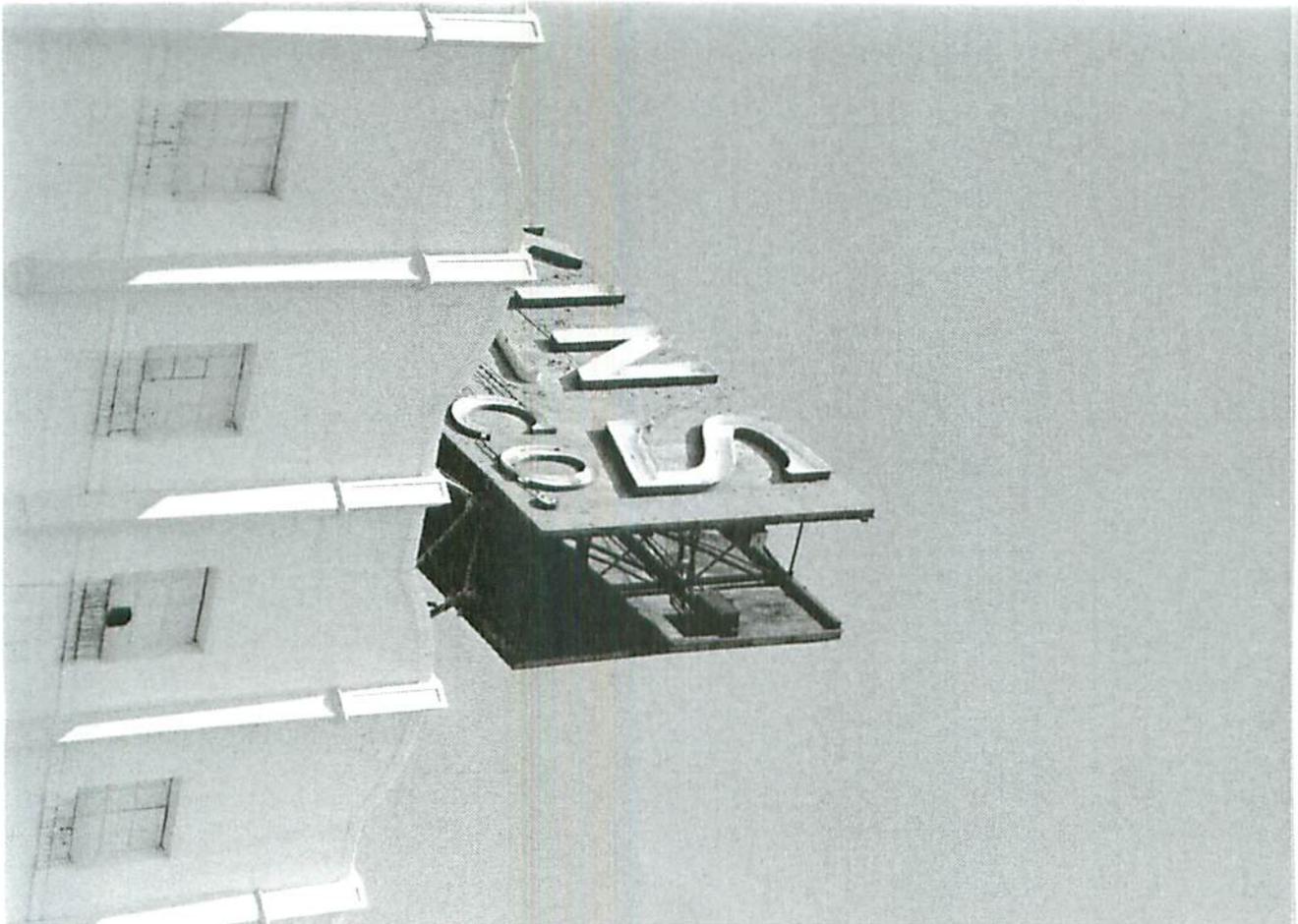
1. South face of roof sign, looking north along South Fair Oaks Avenue toward downtown Pasadena.
2. South face of roof sign, looking north along South Fair Oaks Avenue.
3. Street (east) elevation of building, with partial view of south face of roof sign.
4. Detail of roof sign, with partial view of south face, steel frame, and building parapet.
5. Detail of roof sign, with side view (east end of sign), steel frame, and building parapet.
6. North face of sign, looking south along South Fair Oaks Avenue.

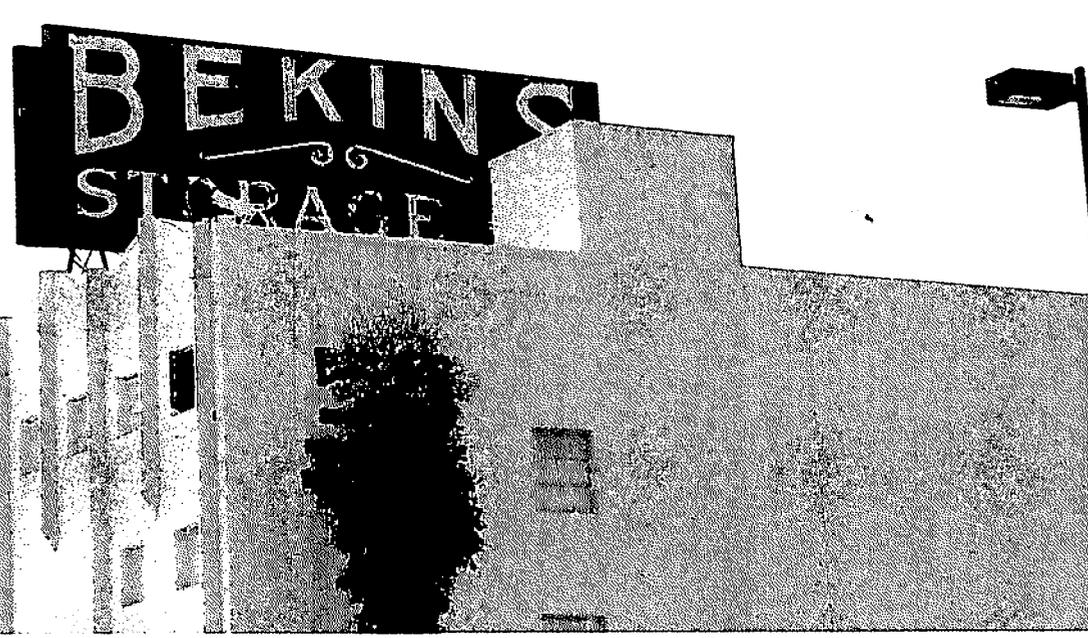
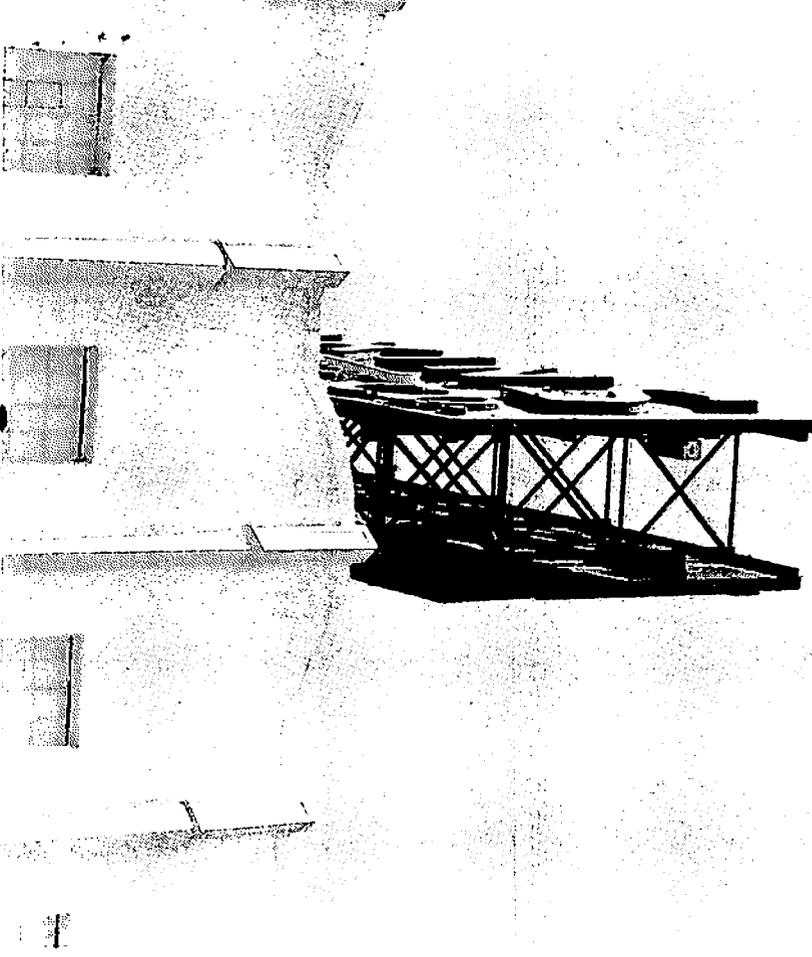


BEKIN'S  
STORAGE CO.



photo #3  
Missing





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Bekins Storage Co. Roof Sign

MULTIPLE NAME: Early Automobile-Related Properties in Pasadena.

STATE & COUNTY: CALIFORNIA, Los Angeles

DATE RECEIVED: 9/09/97      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 9/22/97  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/08/97      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/24/97  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 97001212

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N    DATA PROBLEM: N    LANDSCAPE: N    LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N    PDIL: N    PERIOD: N    PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: Y    SAMPLE: N    SLR DRAFT: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    \_\_\_\_\_ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

The Bekins Storage Company Roof Sign is eligible under National Register Criteria A and C in the areas of Commerce and Architecture (Commercial Art Design). The metal and neon tube roof-top sign is a rare and significant illustration of pre-World War II commercial advertising design in Pasadena and clearly reflects the evolving themes outlined in the MPS context for "Early Automobile-Related Properties in Pasadena." The nomination is based on a citywide "sign" inventory that places the Bekins sign in a comparative context and relates it to the strong automobile culture that developed in Pasadena during the historic 1920-1940 period.

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept Criteria A+C

REVIEWER Paul Lusignan      DISCIPLINE Historian

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_      DATE 10/15/97

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR (Y/N)