

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name: Poirier's Diner

other name/site number: El Faro Diner; Kullman Dining Car #221

2. Location

street & number: 1467 Westminster Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Providence vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Providence code: 007 zip code: 02909

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

Property name Poirier's Diner, Providence County, Providence, RI

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

 See continuation sheet.

Frederick C. Williamson 14 May 03

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

 See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this 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 Keeper

Date
of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: COMMERCE/TRADE

Sub: restaurant

Current: WORK IN PROGRESS

Sub:

Property name Poirier's Diner, Providence County, Providence, RI**7. Description**

Architectural Classification:

Other: prefabricated dining car

Other Description:

Materials:	foundation	<u>N/A</u>	roof
	walls	<u>steel; glass</u>	other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.**8. Statement of Significance**Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: localApplicable National Register Criteria: CCriteria Considerations (Exceptions): BAreas of Significance: ArchitecturePeriod(s) of Significance: 1947Significant Dates: 1947

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder: Kullman Dining Car Company

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

Property name Poirier's Diner, Providence County, Providence, RI

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

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 -- Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>19</u>	<u>297870</u>	B	<u>4632280</u>	
C	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	D	<u> </u>	

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Kim A. Smith

Organization: PPS Revolving Fund Date: 12/12/02

Street & Number: 24 Meeting Street Telephone: 401.272.2760

City or Town: Providence State: RI ZIP: 02903

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Description

Poirier's Diner is a prefabricated dining car, manufactured in 1947 by the Kullman Dining Car Company of Harrison, New Jersey. The diner is Art Deco in character, with its characteristic smooth-edged design and its industrial materials, including porcelain enamel, stainless steel, Formica, ceramic tile, and glass block. The diner is in good condition and has experienced only minor alterations since construction.

Poirier's Diner was originally located at 579-581 Atwells Avenue in Providence. Here, the diner sat among the mills, shops, and houses of Eagle Square, an industrial neighborhood, for 55 years. A major redevelopment of the Eagle Square Mills forced the relocation of the diner in June 2002. It was removed from its foundation to a storage location near Admiral and Charles Streets. In August 2002, the diner was again moved, to its present location at Westminster and Harkness Streets in Providence. Temporarily located on cribbing, the diner will be moved in the near future to a more permanent foundation at this site.

The diner has a steel and wood frame. A combination of steel H- and I- beams, channels, and two tie rods with turnbuckles provide support beneath the walls and roof, which are made up of steel channel and angles connected to the base of the diner. Structurally, the components are in good condition, with the exception of the channel at the former location of the front steps, which is corroded due to prolonged water infiltration.

The three-bay front has a central entrance with stainless steel-trimmed glass door, flanked by alternating glass block and steel vertical panels. One-over-one, double-hung, steel-framed windows with horizontal vent panels line the upper front. Steel panels separate the window bays, and provide vertical continuity to the façade. Beneath the windows is a vertical series of porcelain enamel semicircular flutes interspersed with thin strips of stainless steel trim. Both front edges of the diner curve around the sides using rounded glass block panels. A plain horizontal stainless steel band underlines the fluted porcelain panels; the windows are capped with a pleated horizontal band. A windowless, monitor-style standing-seam metal roof adds to the fluidity of the diner's appearance.

The left elevation continues the front's details with a window bay to the left, and a stainless-trimmed door to the right. The door is flanked by two small fixed sash windows (one with a pane of decorative fluted glass), and full vertical stainless steel panels. Filling in the area

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beneath the windows are the porcelain semicircular flutes. The right elevation has pleated stainless steel panels in place of windows, with porcelain semicircular flutes beneath. The plain stainless band at the base and the pleated frieze band are repeated on both of these elevations.

The rear of the diner is clad in galvanized metal vertical panels, held in place with thin galvanized strips between. A centrally-located kitchen door opening exists, but the door has been removed. A plain stainless frieze band extends the length of the facade. The word "DINER" has been painted on the four panels nearest the left elevation.

As with most diners, the Poirier Diner has been at times remodeled. The fluted blue porcelain panels were painted white in the late 1990s, in a haphazard fashion. Some glass blocks that have broken have been replaced with non-matching block, and some of the blocks remain broken at the edges of the diner. The metal roof has been patched with tar, detracting from its appearance. Structurally, the steel channel at the former location of the front steps is corroded, and causes the flooring at that location to sag slightly. A few of the stainless steel panels are dented.

The materials used on the interior of the diner correspond to those on the exterior. The windowless monitor-style roof is clad in cream-colored porcelain enamel panels; the ends and sides are blue, accented by stainless trim bands. All interior porcelain panels were painted white in the late 1990s. The back bar features a wide variety of stainless steel: a vertically-pleated grill hood with rounded edges, and symmetrically-placed glass and stainless menu boards; a repeating sunburst pattern along the panels of the back wall; and pie case, refrigerator, and grill base, as well as other stainless steel back bar furniture.

Ceramic tile is used in the lower half of the diner. The floor has a combination of cream colored triangles, accented with green and maroon squares. The walls and counter apron are an alternating pattern of cream colored rectangles and squares, with alternating green and maroon squares at the base and top.

The upper part of the right wall consists of three mirrored panels; the left wall has an entrance, flanked by windows.

A countertop fully encloses the back bar area. A single, central passthrough is aligned with the front and rear entrances. The counter on

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the right side of the entrance curves around to meet the back wall of the diner. The left side is a straight run to the left wall.

Original stainless steel stools line the front of the linen Formica counter, which has been covered over with plastic laminate. Some of the stools are missing.

Many original booths remain, though they need to be reupholstered. The left and right side corner booths have rounded edges to match the glass block curves. The seating capacity of the diner is approximately fifty-eight persons: twenty-two counter stools, and thirty-six seats in the booths.

Interior lighting consists of paired fluorescent tubes located in the center of the monitor, and vertical stainless steel fixtures located between the windows on the front elevation, and ceiling-mounted at the curved glass block edges, and side elevations. The back bar has lighting recessed in the grill hood.

Photographs

Photographer: Clark Schoettle

Date: August 2002

Negatives: RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
150 Benefit Street
Providence, RI 02903

The above information applies to all photographs.

Photo #1: View: Left and front elevations.

Photo #2: View: Front elevation.

Photo #3: View: Interior.

Photo #4: View: Interior.

Photo #5: View: Counter and back bar.

Photo #6: View: Back bar, prep table and refrigerator.

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Significance

Poirier's Diner is significant as a rare and unusually well preserved survivor of a distinctive class of resources--diners were once a fixture of Providence's industrial neighborhoods, serving meals to the city's workers at hours which matched the factory's timeclocks. Poirier's Diner also has significance as a product of the Kullman Dining Car Company of New Jersey, one of the largest and longest-lived diner manufacturers in the U.S.

The lunch wagon, precursor to the diner, has its roots in Providence. In 1872, a man named Walter Scott began selling homemade food out of a converted freight wagon. He worked a dusk-till-four-a.m. shift, providing food for the night workers at the *Journal* and other Providence newspapers. Later, in 1883, a Providence patrolman named Ruel B. Jones turned in his badge, and became a night lunch operator, too. Jones did so well in the night lunch business that he contracted with a wagon builder named Frank Dracont to construct the first specifically designed lunch cart. By 1887, Jones had at least seven lunch carts operating in the city. Mike Stapleton's lunch cart at the corner of Snow and Westminster was the first to introduce hot dogs, in the 1880s.

Ruel Jones's cousin Samuel Messer Jones moved to Worcester in late 1884, and with him brought the first lunch wagon to Worcester, Massachusetts. It was Jones who designed the first lunch wagon that customers could enter, and eat inside. The eat-in lunch wagon was an instant success, and he began adding more wagons at different locations in Worcester. In late 1891, Jones moved to Springfield, and sold almost all his lunch carts to Charles H. Palmer.

It was Palmer who received the first patent for a lunch cart, and he began manufacturing them. Other prominent lunch wagon operators rose up in Worcester, including Thomas H. Buckley, who also manufactured lunch wagons under the T.H. Buckley Lunch Wagon Manufacturing and Catering Company.

Lunch wagons began to spring up in downtown areas and around large mills in industrialized cities such as Providence. Eventually, diners found permanent sites, and did not need to be carted around every afternoon and morning. In the early 1900s, three companies came into being which transformed the industry; the P. J. Tierney Company, the Worcester Lunch Car Company, and Jerry O'Mahony Company. Located in New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey, respectively, these companies led the way

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for lunch carts becoming "diners," larger, classier, and able to seat more people.

Poirier's Diner, a Kullman Dining Car #221, was manufactured by the Kullman Dining Car Company, of Harrison, New Jersey, in 1947. Kullman began making diners in 1927 when Samuel Kullman left diner manufacturer P. J. Tierney, where he was an accountant. Kullman Industries is still in business today, making diners and other modular construction units, one of only a handful of diner manufacturers still in business that have direct ties to the origins of diner construction. Kullman survived due to their ability to change with the times. When the economy was poor, they offered one-man "dinettes" called the "Kullman Junior." By incorporating the latest materials into diner designs, including stylized fabricated stainless steel and Formica surface laminates, they advanced the construction and design standards for diner manufacturing. Kullman Dining Car Company became a giant in the diner industry, making its mark before the onset of World War II, with the introduction of their Challenger model in 1941. Their advertising slogan was (and is) "In our line we lead the world."

The Kullman #221 is a Challenger model, and is one of only two intact Kullmans in Rhode Island; the other is the 1937 Silver Top Diner, now in Pawtucket. There are fewer than a dozen Kullmans left in New England; they are historically more prominent in the Mid-Atlantic states.

Joseph A. Poirier, Jr., opened Poirier's Diner in 1947, on a formerly residential site owned by Daniel Daly. Poirier operated the diner until 1955, when it came under a rapid succession of owners, including Armand P. Contois, Rudolph Kramer, Fred Demoranville, and Peter R. Riccio. From 1961 through 1968, the diner was a family affair, with Stella, Sam, and Anthony Neery working at "Squire's Diner." In 1969, Fred DeCesaris took over the business, and kept the name "Squire's." In the 1970s, there were five different owners, and the diner was closed at times. The seventies were hard times for diners in general, with the rise of the fast food industry. Poirier's was operated as "Arnold's Diner" for five years in the 1980's, followed by short periods as the "Top Hat" and "Krystal's," before it became the "El Faro" in 1999.

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Criteria Consideration B

Poirier's Diner has been moved twice in its recent past and will be moved once more in the near future. As a moved building, the diner would ordinarily be ineligible for the National Register. However, the diner's architectural significance is unaffected by these moves. Dining cars were designed for mobility; they can be lifted with relative ease; their size allows for moving; both the history of the type and the common features of dining car design suggest that moves are a possibility. Poirier's Diner was moved with care—it was lifted hydraulically, rolled onto large I-beams, and then onto a trailer. Its structural integrity and design were unaffected by the moves. The previous foundation was not integral to the design of the dining car, and its loss does not diminish the architectural significance of the car. Its new location is of a somewhat different character than the old—it is set in a residential-commercial neighborhood, rather among the mills of Eagle Square, but the diner is a unique presence wherever it is located.

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Major Bibliographical References

Carvell, Christopher G., Food Service Sales Executive, Kullman Industries, Inc.,
Personal correspondence, September through October, 2002.

Gutman, Richard J.S. *American Diner then and now*. Baltimore: John Hopkins
University Press, 2000.

Witzel, Michael Karl. *The American Diner*. Osceola: MBI Publishing Company,
1999.

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Geographical Data

The boundary of this property includes the Kullman Dining Car, and is limited to its dimensions of 16 X 50 feet.

Kullman Dining Car #221 is currently being stored on cribbing at 1467 Westminster Street in Providence, Rhode Island, in Plat 32, on Lot 109. This lot also includes three other buildings; a twentieth-century commercial building, a two-and-a-half-story building, and a multi-bay garage, all to the east of the diner.

The diner faces Westminster Street, approximately forty feet north of the sidewalk. The western edge of the property is bounded by Harkness Street.

The current owner plans to restore the diner and then move it south on the same lot to a site which abuts the pedestrian walkway of Westminster Street; here, in a more suitable site, it will function as a restaurant.

Verbal boundary justification

Only the diner itself is here nominated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The historical significance of Kullman Dining Car #221 lies in the structure itself rather than its particular location; in fact, the design of the car is meant to suggest a moveable resource. It is likely the diner will be relocated at some time in the near future to a more suitable site on the same lot.



*Poirier's Diner
Providence County, Providence, RI
Photo # 1 of 6*



Poirier's Diner
Providence County Providence, RI
Photo #2 of 6



Poirier's Diner
Providence County, Providence, RI
Photo # 3 of 6



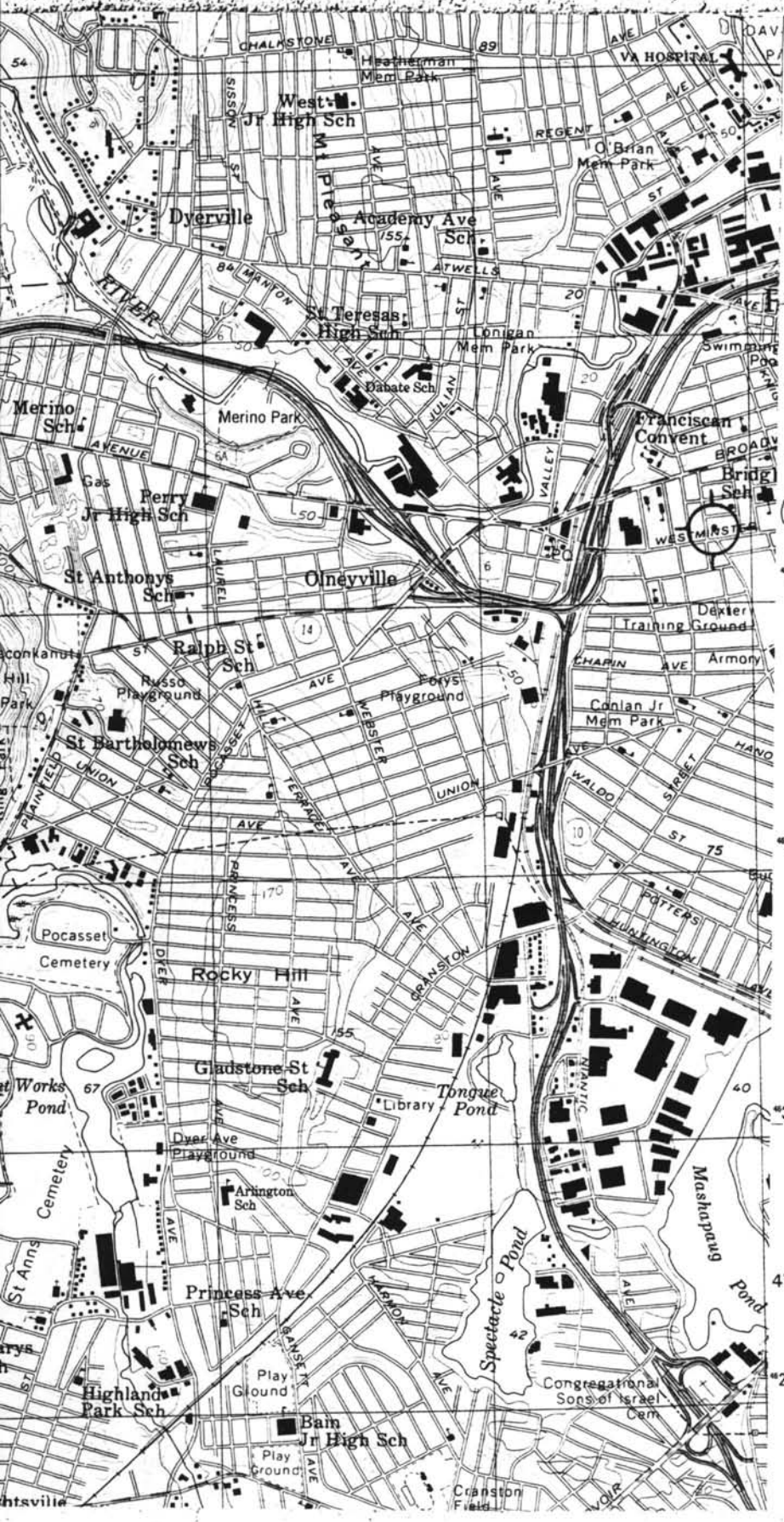
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Poirier's Diner
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Pairier's Diner
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Poirier's Diner
 Providence County
 Providence, R.I.
 19-297870-4632290



Edgewood