

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

The Modern Diner

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 13 Dexter Street After 9/84: 364 East Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Pawtucket

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Rhode Island

— VICINITY OF

1-Rep. Fernand J. St Germain

CODE

44

COUNTY

Providence

CODE

007

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDINGS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Wadea F. Covill

STREET & NUMBER

c/o The Modern Diner

13 Dexter Street

CITY, TOWN

Pawtucket

— VICINITY OF

Rhode Island

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Pawtucket City Hall

STREET & NUMBER

137 Roosevelt Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Pawtucket

STATE

Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Pawtucket Historical Survey

DATE

1975-77

— FEDERAL STATE — COUNTY — LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

R.I. Historical Preservation Commission, 150 Benefit Street

CITY, TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

CHECK ONE

CHECK ONE

___EXCELLENT

___DETERIORATED

___UNALTERED

ORIGINAL SITE

GOOD

___RUINS

ALTERED

___MOVED

DATE _____

___FAIR

___UNEXPOSED

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Modern Diner in Pawtucket is a Sterling Streamliner -- a line of customized, factory-built, "modernistic" diners manufactured in the late 1930s and early '40s by the J. B. Judkins Company of Merrimack, Massachusetts. The structure is in good condition and an excellent state of preservation. This one-story, steel-clad structure has a canted bow end with narrow, slit-like windows, and a barrel roof featuring a ridge-mounted fin upon which the words "Modern Diner" are inscribed in forward-slanting neon letters. The car's bow end, riding on a foundation of glass block, is unencumbered by adjacent structures and thrusts out toward the flux of a major intersection; the opposite end abuts the blank sidewall of a pre-existing, brick commercial block. As a result, the diner's visual impact has something of the arrested drama of a high speed train hurtling out of a tunnel -- caught in a still photograph.

The exterior (see photograph #1) is vitreous enamel in a yellow-beige tone accented with a maroon window band, maroon pin striping and stainless-steel trim. The roof, now maroon, was silver until recently. The street-facing side of the diner has banks of double-hung, steel-framed, one-over-one sash windows flanking a central entrance. The entrance door, a single panel of ribbed stainless steel with an oval window and a typically curvilinear Art Deco push bar, has been enclosed with a non-original, flat-roofed, utilitarian vestibule.

Attached to the back of the diner is a large, one-story, flat-roofed, brick kitchen wing devoid of any exterior embellishment.

The interior of the Modern Diner's main floor (see photograph #2 and the schematic floor plan) has an eleven-stool counter, seven four-customer booths, and two, two-customer booths; the bow end is fitted up as a long banquette with three segmental tables. In all, the seating capacity is about fifty-five. Beside the door is a curved cash register counter. The back bar is basically a serving area, save for the making of coffee and other drinks. Cooking is done in the kitchen wing accessible from a door at one end of the counter and two pass-throughs (one now blocked-up) in the back bar. The back bar itself (see photograph #3) is sheathed in stainless steel and two microphones mounted on it are used by counter personnel to relay orders via a public address system to the kitchen. Above the back bar is a hood faced in mahogany-grained Formica. Set into the hood are a pair of recessed, glass-faced menu boards flanking a square electric clock. Below the clock is the manufacturer's name plate indicating that this is a Sterling Diner, Car No. 4140, manufactured under U.S. patents 2089058, 2089059, 2089060.

See continuation sheet 1

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The segmental-arch ceiling is covered with beige Formica panels. Running along the axis of the ceiling is a wide mahogany strip to which are mounted two-bulb fluorescent fixtures; these alternate with circular, green enamel metal vents. The vents are part of a patented suction ventilation system featured in all Sterling diners.

The window casings are wood, stained to a deep mahogany tone, and the metal, railroad-type sash is screened by venetian blinds. In the two sections of wall not occupied by windows or the back bar there are large mirrors set in window-like mahogany casings. At each end of the diner are speakers (one evidently not original) for music.

The color scheme throughout is green, beige and brown with the back bar and certain accents in stainless steel. The walls below the window level are covered with mottled beige tile, as is the counter front. At the base of the counter is a footrest housing the heating units and parts of the ventilation system. The counter and table tops are Formica. The tables (most not original) have stainless steel pedestal bases. The booths (see photograph # 4) are oak and have hat rack arms, also of oak, rising from their aisle ends. The upholstery is green leatherette. The checkerboard-pattern floor is executed in two shades of green, marbled linoleum tile.

The kitchen wing contains not only the kitchen itself, but rest rooms and a hall and stair leading down to a basement dining room. Now unused and subdivided into smaller rooms, this undiner-like, subterranean dining room has knotty-pine paneling, indirect lighting hidden by scallop-edged valance boards, and photomurals of rural New England villages.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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date entered

Continuation sheet 1A

Item number 7

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April 24, 1987

Additional Information

1. The Modern Diner was moved to avoid demolition; its original site has been cleared.

2. The Modern Diner's integrity has been affected only marginally by the move. The Diner has lost integrity of location, but retains integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. By its very function, its sectionalized construction, and its design, the Modern Diner was intended to suggest its own mobility. In its original location, the Diner was attached to a large, 1-story, flat-roofed brick kitchen wing devoid of exterior embellishment; on its new site, the Diner's kitchen wing is of similar shape, size, and mass, though it is constructed of concrete block. The entrance vestibule, acknowledged to be non-original and utilitarian, has been replaced with a simple aluminum-frame vestibule which allows the original door to be seen.

3. The Modern Diner's new setting is in a mixed commercial-residential neighborhood along a major thoroughfare in Pawtucket. The Diner is sited, as it was in its original location, parallel to the streetline, its kitchen wing to the rear, and a parking lot on the side of the building.

The Modern Diner's new site had been the location of a late-nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century residential building, demolished several years ago. The site had been much disturbed and, in any case, the previous building did not have significance.

Acreage: less than 1 acre

Verbal Boundary Description and Justification: The boundary of the Modern Diner site is the line surrounding Plat 54, lot 790, and Plat 65, lots 656 and 657, which includes the Diner, its kitchen wing, and parking lot.

USGS Coordinates: A 19 301900 4637770

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1940

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Sterling Diners Division,
J. B. Judkins Co.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Erected in 1940 for its original operators, Joseph Zuromski and Arnold Wood, the Modern Diner is one of but two well preserved surviving examples of the Sterling Streamliners,* remarkable landmarks in the history of American design and food-service merchandizing and key monuments in the history of that uniquely American melding of the two -- the roadside fast-food restaurant, which had its beginnings in Rhode Island.

Diners originated in Providence with a horse-drawn canteen created by one Walter Scott in 1872 to sell pies, coffee and the like to people who worked at night (mostly newspaper printers) when restaurants were closed. The concept quickly caught on and soon such wagons could be found in many New England cities. From very early on, most lunch wagons were manufactured by specialty firms; when immobile diners became common in the 1920s, most of these structures, too, were pre-fabricated and then shipped to their sites for erection.

Signal modifications in diner design were brought about by a major new manufacturer, Patrick J. Tierney, in the early twentieth century. Tierney built much longer wagons and introduced counters set parallel to the wagons' long sides. He consciously invoked the appearance of railroad cars and borrowed the railroad term, "diner," applying it to his products; the name, of course, became all-pervasive for this type of facility. Though originally more-or-less exclusively male haunts, diners began to cater to women after 1924 when Tierney introduced table service in addition to the traditional counters. In the '30s booths became common and from then on diners were not only nightowl hangouts but family restaurants as well, serving over a million customers each day. After an hiatus during World War II, a great boom in diner construction occurred in the late 1940s and early '50s. During the late '50s and particularly in the 1960s and '70s, however, a new variety of limited-menu, retail chain outlet superseded diners in the fast-food business. Of an estimated 5,000 diners which once operated, fewer than half survive today -- most in altered condition,

*The other is the Salem Diner in Salem, Massachusetts.

See continuation sheet 2

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many of them closed or converted to new uses. Several firms which once specialized in diner manufacture still exist, but now produce much larger, prefabricated, counterless modular restaurants.

One firm which has not survived, however, is the John B. Judkins Company, makers of Pawtucket's Modern Diner. The Merrimack-based firm originated as a coach manufactory in the mid-nineteenth century, turning in the early twentieth century to the production of custom-built cars and, finally, to the construction of diners. This evolution of their product line is not extraordinary; custom cars and diners require a great deal of coach work and the Judkins diner advertisements emphasized their traditions of quality, design and craftsmanship. The firm employed a patented method of sectional construction for their diners developed by Bertron G. Harley, as well as his system for suction ventilation. Harley's improvements were granted patent rights in 1937 and are readily apparent in the Modern Diner. The ventilation system is intact and the sectionalized construction technique made it possible to construct one end of this diner flush against a pre-existing building. The purpose of sectional construction, however, was not solely functional. The technique was supposed to have a fundamentally economic rationale: it "enables the Sterling owner to start small, then enlarge at a moment's notice, section by section, in direct proportion to increased business." So stated a Sterling advertisement.

The Judkins firm offered a high-quality but, aside from construction and ventilation, a fairly standard line of diners until they introduced the Sterling Streamliners. These self-consciously up-to-date units looked like the crack streamlined trains of the day and perhaps even more like oversize cousins to Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion car. Several hundred Streamliners were built before construction was curtailed by wartime shortages of essential materials, particularly steel. The streamlined modernism of the late 1930s and early '40s found expression in buildings as diverse in function as gas stations and world's fair pavilions (such as those at the New York fair of 1939), but nowhere quite so literally as in the Sterling Streamliners. With their bow ends, roof fins and pin striping, they capitalized on the latest visual imagery of speed and motion (abstractions long associated with diners) which became here the dominant aesthetic rationale. In this sense, the Modern Diner is a period piece, yet one both distinctive and engaging.

See continuation sheet 3

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The Sterling Streamliner's modernist aesthetic had two specific purposes: imageability and customer appeal. Their design made these diners highly visible roadside landmarks, attracting business by their sheer novelty. This is the "building as sign" approach to commercial architecture made particularly pervasive by chain retail outlets like gas stations or restaurants such as Howard Johnson's and White Tower. This branch of design is automobile-oriented and the Sterling Streamliners represent an early and, in visual terms, very successful response to it.

In addition, the Sterling Streamliners' modernism was intended to attract a prosperous, "with it" clientele who attached positive associations to the whole concept of modernity -- a concept with much currency in the 1930s. It was thought that their appearance would induce such people to come in and eat. According to an advertisement, "Patronage and profits never fail to increase when an operator chooses Sterling. For this modern streamliner of the eating world possesses the same magic eye appeal -- inside and out -- that has drawn thousands upon thousands of new customers to her sister streamliners of rail and air." In the case of Pawtucket's Modern Diner, if one missed the visual message, the name itself left no doubt that this was, indeed, the latest word in eating establishments.

Diners are an American invention which originated in Rhode Island; they are the precursors of the all-pervasive fast-food outlets of today. Simple, inexpensive fare and quick service have always been their hallmarks. Though once common in the East, diners are now growing scarce, outdone by newer competitors. Few surviving diners are well preserved, as is the case with the Modern Diner. As one of two extant Sterling Streamliners -- perhaps, in design terms, the most interesting diners ever built -- the Modern Diner is a classic of its type. Although not fifty years old, it merits nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Such roadside architecture is so subject to elimination, so ephemeral, that efforts must be made quickly to preserve those structures (like the Modern Diner) which possess unusual quality and are essential to its understanding.

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4

ITEM NUMBER

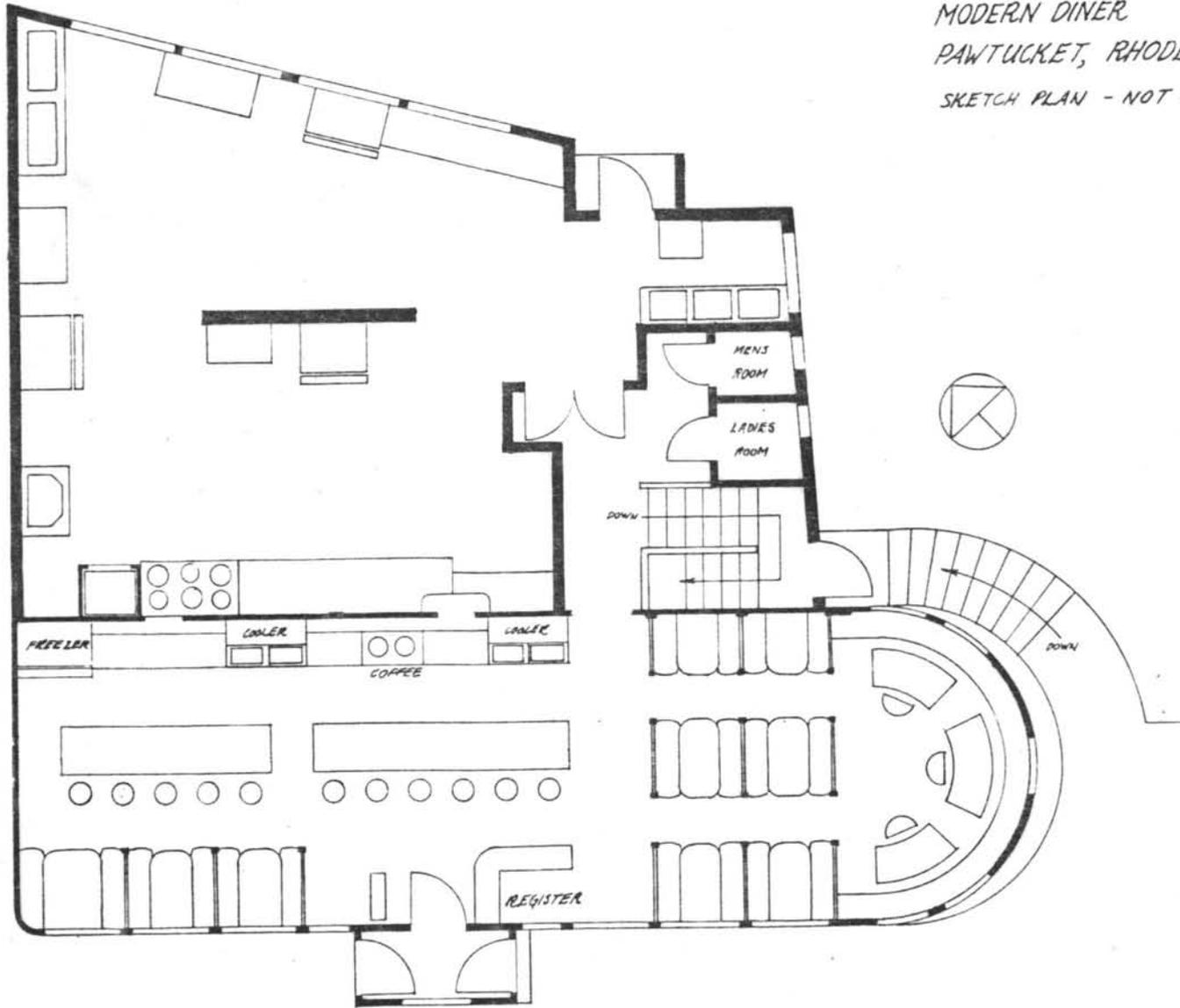
9

PAGE

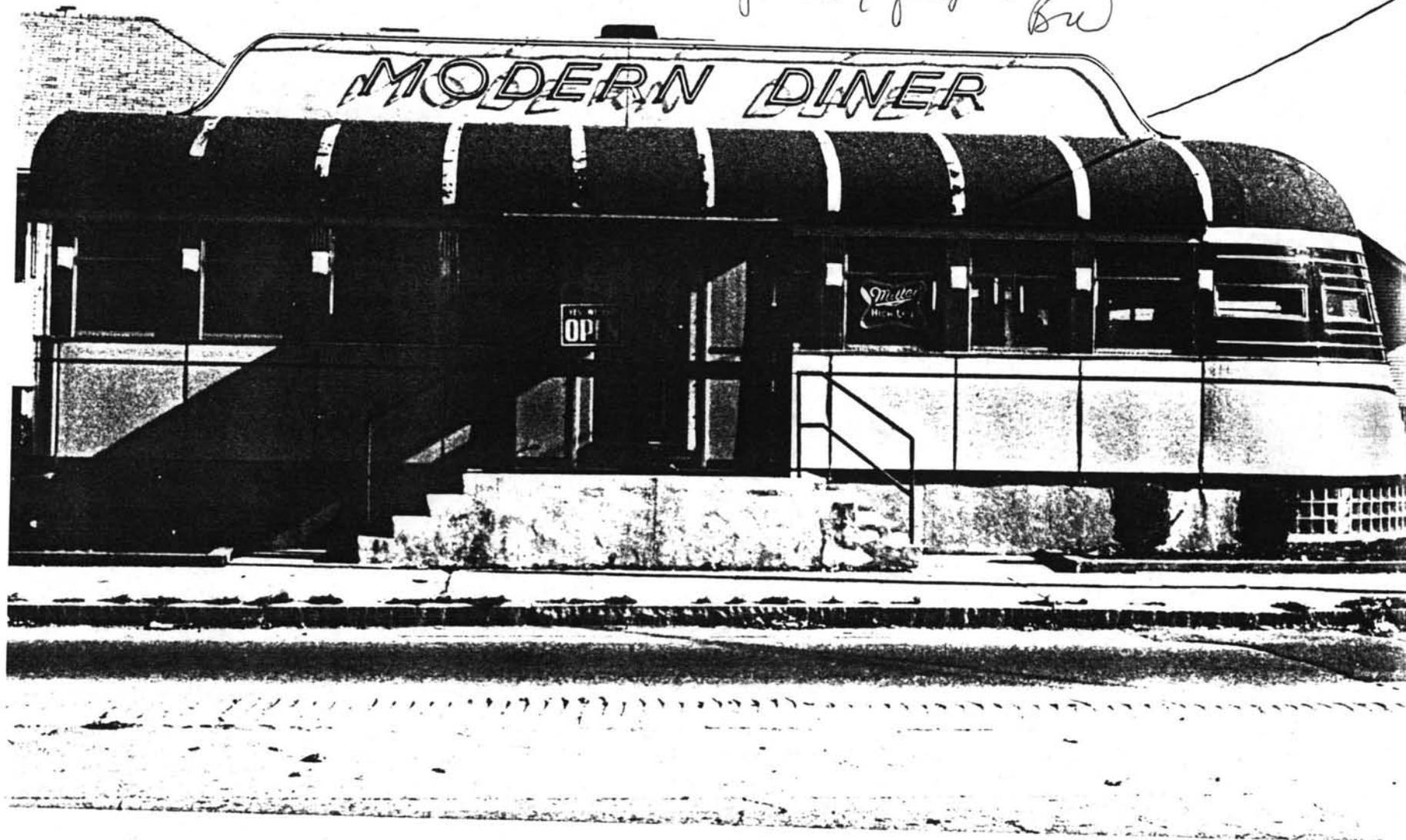
2

Arthur M. Menadier on the manufacture of Sterling Streamliners published in the trade magazine, The Diner, in April, 1941 (copies of this material are enclosed). In addition, the articles, "Stopping at Stars: The Architecture of the American Diner" by Douglas York, Jr. published in the Architectural Association Quarterly, London, Spring, 1976, and Gutman's article which appeared in the Boston Globe's Sunday magazine, New England, 4 April 1976, are useful overviews on the subject.

MODERN DINER
PAWTUCKET, RHODE ISLAND
SKETCH PLAN - NOT TO SCALE



removed 8/9/91
for a flyer (bu)



Credit Mike Cassidy, 1987



The Modern Diner
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Ellen Weiss, Photographer December, 1977
Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation
Commission

General interior view from the north end of the diner.

Photograph 2

former site



The Modern Diner
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Ellen Weiss, Photographer December, 1977
Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation
Commission

Interior view: detail of back bar.

Photograph 3

former site



MODERN DINER
364 East Avenue
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Photographer: Michael Cassidy

Date: January, 1987

Negatives filed at: Rhode Island Historical
Preservation Commission
150 Benefit Street
Providence, RI 02903

View: Modern Diner, from the northwest, kitchen
wing to the left.

Photo #4



MODERN DINER
364 East Avenue
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Photographer: Michael Cassidy

Date: January, 1987

Negative filed at: Rhode Island Historical
Preservation Commission
150 Benefit Street
Providence, RI 02903

View: Modern Diner, from the southeast, kitchen
wing seen at the rear of building.

Photo #3



The Modern Diner
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

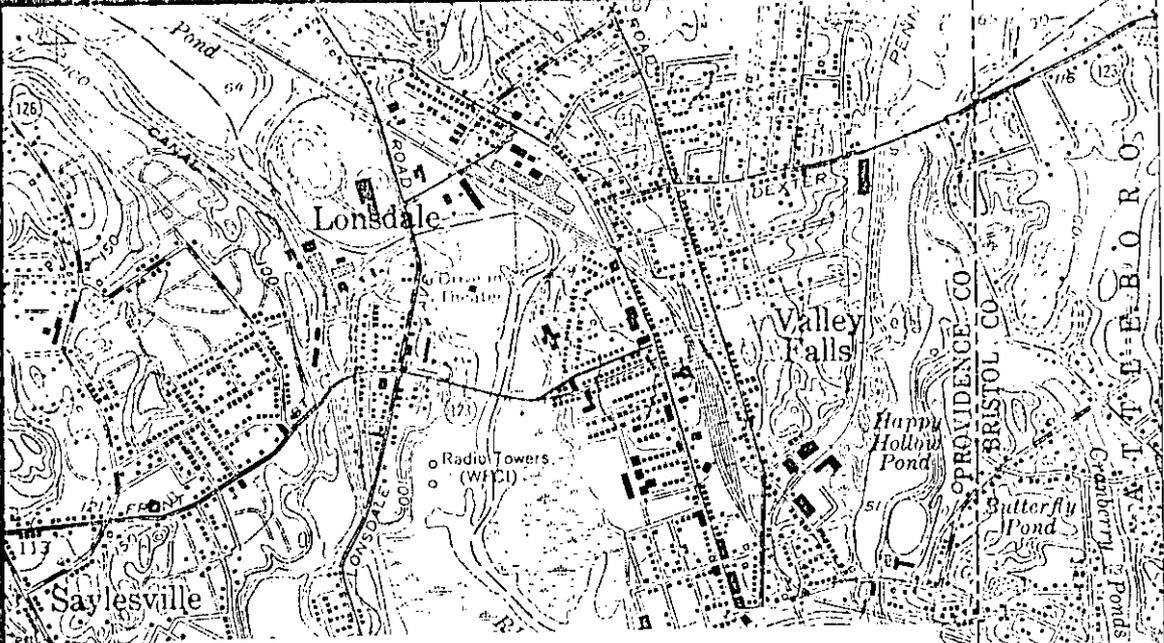
Ellen Weiss, Photographer
December, 1977
Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

Interior detail of booths.

Photograph 4

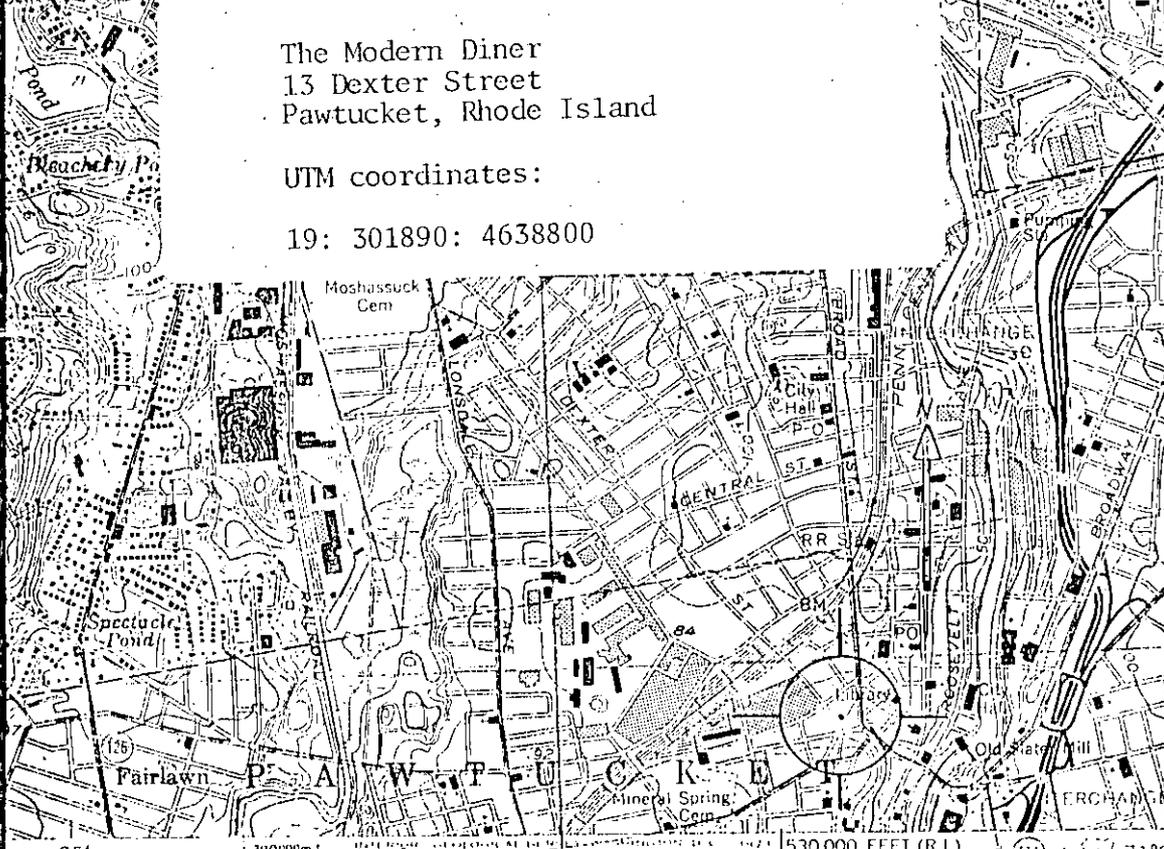
former site

former site



The Modern Diner
13 Dexter Street
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

UTM coordinates:
19: 301890: 4638800



100000 FT
200000 FEET (R.I.)
530000 FEET (R.I.)
71°22'30"

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

- Heavy-duty 4 LANE (6 LANE) Light-duty
- Medium-duty 4 LANE (6 LANE) Unimproved dirt
- U. S. Route State Route
- Interstate Route

PAWTUCKET, R. I.-MASS.

N4152.5—W7122.5/7.5

1949
PHOTOREVISED 1970
AMS 6767 IV NW--SERIES V815

Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs taken 1970 This information not field checked
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

(EAST PROVIDENCE)
6767 IV SE

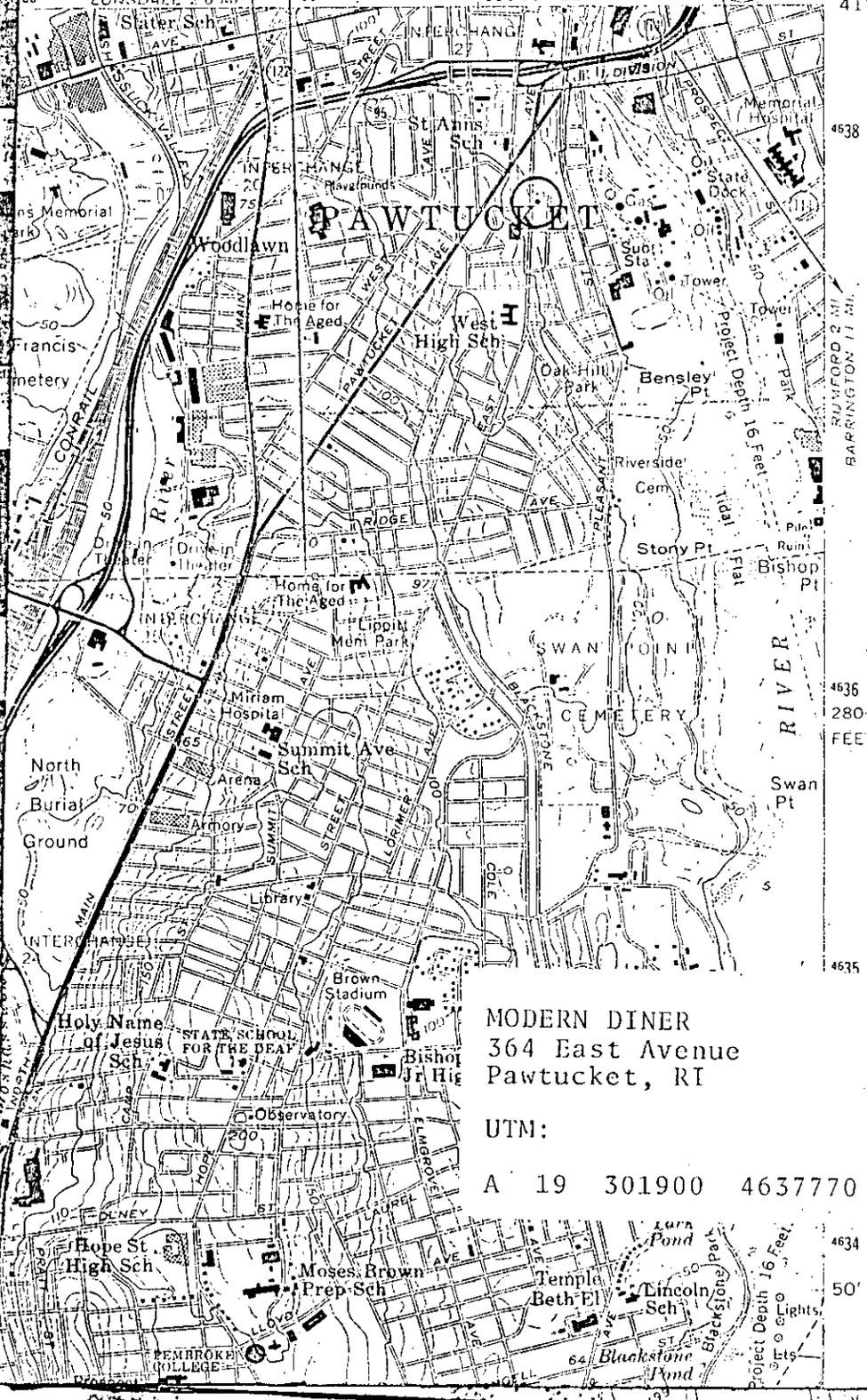
PROVIDENCE QUADRANGLE
RHODE ISLAND
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

BOSTON, MASS. 40 MI
SOUTH ATTLEBORO, MASS. 2.2 MI
5300.00 FEET

67° 14' NE
(ATTLEBORO)

71° 22' 30"
41° 52' 30"

new location



MODERN DINER
364 East Avenue
Pawtucket, RI

UTM:
A 19 301900 4637770

