

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Donwell's Diner (Worcester Lunch Car Company Diner No. 774)Other names/site number: Miss Lorraine Diner, Squeak's Diner, Drake's Diner; Donovan's Diner; The Hotel Diner; Miss Lorraine Diner

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

2. LocationStreet & number: 560 Mineral Spring AvenueCity or town: Pawtucket State: Rhode Island County: ProvidenceNot For Publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D_____
Signature of certifying official/Title:_____
Date_____
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal GovernmentIn my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria._____
Signature of commenting official:_____
Date_____
Title :_____
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)
Name of Property

Providence County, RI
County and State

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
District	<input type="checkbox"/>
Site	<input type="checkbox"/>
Structure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Object	<input type="checkbox"/>

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)
Name of Property

Providence County, RI
County and State

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)
Name of Property

Providence County, RI
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Streamlined Moderne

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: BRICK
Walls: METAL/steel
Roof: METAL/steel

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Donwell's Diner is a prefabricated semi-streamliner diner manufactured in 1941 as No. 774 by the Worcester Lunch Car & Carriage Manufacturing Company, later the Worcester Lunch Car Company (WLCC). The one-story, steel-frame diner displays the monitor roof with long band of clerestory windows, and canted side walls that characterize the semi-streamliner form. The diner is modern in style, with its smooth-edged design and characteristic materials, including porcelain enamel, mahogany trim, ceramic tile, stainless steel, Formica ceilings, and chrome-plated fixtures. Originally sited at 357 Asylum Avenue in Hartford, Connecticut, it is one of twenty-five such semi-streamliner diners originally made by the company, only eight of which still survive. The diner is currently located within the ca.1868 Lorraine Mills textile manufacturing complex in the Fairlawn section of Pawtucket, an industrial suburb north of Providence, Rhode Island. It is set back approximately 50' from Mineral Spring Avenue to the north, and oriented with the primary elevation parallel to the street. The diner is situated on a heavily traveled route in a commercial and residential neighborhood, just north of the Fairlawn Veterans Memorial Park and southwest of Pawtucket's central business district and institutional core. Buildings in this historic industrial area are now occupied by a variety of mixed uses.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

From 2013-2019, Donwell's Diner was rehabilitated using Federal Historic Tax Credits to again function as a roadside diner. It is important to note that the relocation of Donwell's Diner is typical of the portable nature of diners and therefore has no adverse effect on the building's historic and architectural integrity.¹ The diner maintains a roadside orientation and setting at its current location within Pawtucket's former Lorraine Mills industrial complex. As part of the rehabilitation, the diner's significant character-defining exterior and interior features were retained or replaced in-kind with historically appropriate materials. The rehabilitation plan included integrating the with an existing mill building on the site and building three small brick passageways, two on the south elevation and one on the east elevation, to link the two structures together in a reversible manner. Both buildings continue to retain a sense of independent identity and appearance. Space inside the mill now houses the restaurant's kitchen, bathrooms, additional seating and a bar to supplement the seats in the diner.

Narrative Description

Exterior

Donwell's Diner measures fourteen-feet six-inches in width by forty-eight-feet in length. The wood and steel-framed diner sits on a new concrete and brick foundation and is eleven bays across and four bays deep. The front and sides of the new concrete foundation are faced with eleven visible courses of red brick veneer. The foundation wall and brick are curved to match the rounded edges of the diner. Exterior cladding on the diner consists primarily of new ivory-colored porcelain enamel panels with red accent trim. All that remained from the original porcelain panels were the rounded enamel corner trim pieces and the stainless-steel top rail detail; these elements were repaired as needed and retained. Replacements for missing or damaged pieces were fabricated of the same size, gauge and finish as the originals and returned to the exterior in the same manner as the originals. The original manufacturer – Cherokee Porcelain Enamel Corporation – was able to replicate the existing enamel panels in the same "Ivory" color with "Tomato Red" accent trim as the originals. As the Worcester Lunch Car Company routinely did when they took a diner in trade and rehabilitated it, lettering reflecting the new name "Miss Lorraine Diner" was added to the exterior panels. Additionally, common WLCC lettering stating "Booth Service" was located on each of the far right and left panels on the front of the diner. The lines and lettering on the replacement panels are baked into the porcelain in the same manner as the originals, and the lettering font is period appropriate and in the original red trim color. The horizontal striping and all other aspects of the panels remain the same. There are curved, fluted stainless-steel panels at the northeast and northwest corners of the diner.

The diner is regularly fenestrated with rectangular window openings separated by new, vertical, stainless-steel panels. All of the original deteriorated windows were replaced with mahogany-framed windows clad in stainless steel, with hand brazed aluminum at all joints. The windows are a single-light, fixed sash. Original window frames were used as a model to replicate the new window frames. Above the windows, the distinctive, rounded-hipped monitor roofline curves down to engage with a built-in, aluminum gutter system faced with a simple, stainless trim band. The original, built-in gutter system was modified to make it functional. The existing trough gutter system was removed, and a new, slightly wider trough gutter was integrated into the existing gutter. In order to accommodate the wider gutter system, a three-stepped, stainless cornice that widens at the top was added above the windows. The gutter fits inside the new cornice. Located at each end of the front of the diner are curved downspout leads that project away from

¹ Other examples of diners in Rhode Island that have been moved and are listed on the NR include the Modern Diner (NR 1978), Poirier's Diner (NR 2003), and Central Diner (NR 2010).

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

the diner's walls. The diner is topped with its original, rounded-hipped monitor roof featuring one long row of rectangular clerestory windows on each side. Original, built-in roof vents follow the curved edges of the roof on the east and west sides of the diner. As part of the rehabilitation, a new, gray-colored elastomeric coating was applied over a new EPDM membrane system on the roof's flat monitor. The original metal roof was repaired as needed and treated with liquid EPDM coating that is silver in color. The metal exhaust vent hoods were repaired and reinstalled in original locations.

The front (north-facing) façade is eleven bays wide. The words "Miss LORRAINE DINER" are displayed across the façade in red and black lettering, which is baked into the porcelain enamel panels. On both end panels of the facade, the words "BOOTH SERVICE" are displayed in red. The main entrance to the diner is centered on the north elevation, accessed by a new, short, two-sided, straight-run, red brick staircase with stone treads and a simple, black, metal handrail. The original main entry door was in poor condition and was replicated in-kind using the original front door as a model. The new door fits in the original opening and is a wide, stainless-clad, single-leaf door inset with a large, oval-shaped glass panel. Flanking the entrance are red porcelain enamel pilasters. At both ends of the facade, ivory porcelain enamel trim extends from the brick foundation to the red enamel sill, wrapping around to the east and west elevations. A red porcelain enamel windowsill runs the length of the structure beneath the windows. Below this, a horizontal red stripe runs parallel to the sill, and red pin-stripping is displayed at lower ends of the enamel panels on each of the building's four corners.

The west-facing elevation features four bays of rectangular window openings beneath a three-stepped stainless cornice. Located on the west side of the diner is a concrete staircase, which leads down to a single-leaf metal door that provides access to the crawlspace underneath the structure.

The rear (south-facing) elevation is covered with new galvanized metal panels that extend from the base to the roof. The rear elevation is connected in a reversible manner to the Lorraine Mills building via two, small, brick passageways. The two existing door openings on the rear wall of the diner historically led to a combined kitchen/restroom addition. The opening at the center of the rear façade was historically used to provide access to a kitchen and prep area, located in a separate addition. The door on the rear wall, right (west) side was historically used to provide access to restrooms in the addition. Presently, these two door openings each open to a short tunnel that connects to the mill in former window locations (the sills were dropped to create door openings). The mill contains the restaurant's kitchen, bathrooms, and additional restaurant seating and a bar to supplement the seats in the diner. The easternmost passageway on the south elevation provides access to the restaurant's kitchen, and the westernmost passageway to the additional seating and bathrooms. The diner is separated from the façade of the mill to the south by two feet and seven inches.

The east-facing elevation is four bays wide. A small brick passageway, located in the second northernmost bay, connects the east elevation of the diner to the west elevation of the Lorraine Mills building in a reversible manner. The opening on the east elevation was a later addition to the diner, first showing up in photographs while under Squeak's Diner ownership. This door historically provided a second means of egress for restaurant patrons. This opening now provides a second means of egress for the diner. The diner does not engage with the side wall of Lorraine Mill to the east, it is held back about two feet from the stair tower façade. The side walls of the brick tunnel are held back from the curved edges of the diner and inside this tunnel, the canted east side of the diner is fully exposed. The remainder of the east elevation is comprised of three rectangular window openings separated by vertical stainless-steel panels.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

Interior

On the interior, the diner's floor plan was returned to its historic configuration as part of the rehabilitation. A new two-part counter extends almost the full length of the diner, separating the dining area from the backbar serving area. The diner's original countertop was missing, but the original drawings showed that it was constructed of pink Tennessee marble. Historical research also identified the original quarry where the countertop was sourced from. The new countertop is cut from a block of the same pink Tennessee marble used in the original diner. Along the counter are 19, original, chrome stools,² which were repaired, reupholstered, and reinstalled. A cashier's stand is located immediately to the east of the main entrance. There are four sets of four-seat booths to the right (west) of the entrance, and three sets of booths to the left (east). The booths (only two of which are original) are mahogany and feature rounded mahogany arms. The two original booths were repaired in-kind and reupholstered, while missing booths were replicated using the existing pair as a model. The new booths are constructed from the same type of mahogany as the originals and are indistinguishable. The color scheme for the stool and booth upholstery is red, to match the interior trim. At the time of the rehabilitation, two original doors remained in the diner. The original interior mahogany door on the right rear leading to the original bathrooms was repaired and retained. As mentioned above, the main entry door on the north wall of the diner was in poor condition and was replicated in-kind using the original front door as a model. The interior of the main entry door is of exposed, finished sapele mahogany.

The interior of the diner displays wood, Formica, tile and stainless-steel finishes typical of diners built by the Worcester Lunch Car Company. Most of the original finishes, including all of the original floor tiles, most of the original wall tiles and portions of original mahogany trim, were retained and restored as part of the rehabilitation. The original mahogany trim throughout the diner was stripped, restored in a manner consistent with the original process, and reinstalled. The end walls and most cabinetry within the diner are finished in original mahogany. The ceiling panels were replaced in-kind with Wilsonart plastic laminate ceiling tiles in the color pink to match the existing. The original mahogany nailer strips were replaced in-kind and reinstalled in their original configuration. The original tile flooring in the dining area features a basketweave pattern in two colors, cream and salmon. The original floor and wall tiles were cleaned, repaired and retained. In areas where tile was missing or damaged, tile salvaged from the backbar area was used as replacements. Smaller tiles in the basket weave that were missing were sourced with replacements selected to match existing as closely as possible. The counter apron has a row of original glossy, black, square tiles above a field of glossy, cream-colored, square tiles accented with a horizontal stripe of red tiles between two bands of stainless steel. The footrest is topped with the same salmon basketweave tile as the floors, and its sides are clad in ivory and black glossy tiles.

The rear (south) wall of the diner was rebuilt as needed in kind. The backbar area had new, stainless-steel, sunburst-pattern panels installed on the upper half of the walls, since the ceramic tile was not fully salvageable after its removal to access the rear wall. The design of the new stainless panels is based on those found in other WLCC diners built around the same time. The original ivory-colored ceramic tile with red and stainless accents on the right rear wall of the backbar was retained. The missing mahogany backbar and mahogany-framed menu board were fabricated in kind using the same pattern, size, gauge and finish as the originals. The lower portion of the rear wall is covered by built-in kitchen equipment. All original built-ins, including the three-bay refrigeration unit, were made operable and remained in the diner. Additional, new back-bar equipment, including stainless-clad worktables, pie cases, etc., was installed at the same height as the originals. The floors in the backbar serving area are covered with

² All of the original chrome stools remained intact and in fair condition.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

original, black, square ceramic tiles, which were cleaned, repaired and retained. In areas where tile was missing or damaged, tile salvaged from the backbar wall was used as replacements.

New work on the interior focused on updating obsolete systems and increasing the diner's capacity in the adjacent Lorraine Mills building. The diner was completely rewired for electrical and plumbing using existing openings wherever possible. Existing overhead light fixtures were repaired as needed and retained in their original locations. Four of the eight light original fixtures were missing; these were remade by hand using the same manufacturing process as the originals and are indistinguishable. New lights were added at the front wall, between the windows. The new lights were sourced to closely match an original WLCC period light fixture found during the rehabilitation. An HVAC system for the diner was installed below grade in the basement and behind the retaining wall to the west of the diner. Interior ductwork is located in the crawlspace of the basement and in the wood-framed menu board, and is not visible on the interior of the diner.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)
Name of Property

Providence County, RI
County and State

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.

Criteria Considerations

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

- ☐ 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE

INDUSTRY

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1941-1970

Significant Dates

1941

1969

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Worcester Lunch Car & Carriage Manufacturing Company

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Donwell's Diner (Worcester Lunch Car Company Diner No. 774) is significant at the local level under National Register Criteria A and C as a rare surviving example of a semi-streamliner diner³, an important building type that greatly influenced the design of American fast-food restaurants. Donwell's Diner was manufactured in 1941 by the Worcester Lunch Car & Carriage Manufacturing Company, later the Worcester Lunch Car Company (WLCC), an early pioneer of the American diner industry and a leading manufacturer throughout the first half of the 20th century. The modern, prefabricated diner displays the distinct, round-hipped monitor roof with long band of clerestory windows and canted side walls that characterize Worcester's semi-streamliner form. Originally sited at 357 Asylum Avenue in Hartford, Connecticut, Donwell's is one of twenty-five such semi-streamliner models made by the company, only eight of which still remain.⁴ After operating from at least three different sites in New England during the last decades of the 20th century, Donwell's was moved in September of 2011 to its current location within the ca.1868 Lorraine Mills textile manufacturing complex in the Fairlawn section of Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The diner maintains a roadside orientation and setting at its current location within the industrial complex. Despite the loss of some historic interior finishes before the diner was moved to its current location, Donwell's still retains much of its original appearance, including porcelain enamel panels, Formica, wood, tile and stainless-steel finishes typical of diners built by the WLCC. Donwell's exemplifies the diner's evolution from horse-drawn lunch wagons to roadside restaurants, unique American icons that have had a profound social and architectural impact on the nation's cultural landscape. The relocation of Donwell's Diner is typical of the portable nature of diners and therefore has no adverse effect on the building's integrity; diners were made to be moved, and Donwell's derives its significance primarily from its architecture. Retaining integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, Donwell's Diner meets Criteria A and C and Criteria Consideration B for a moved property on the National Register at the local level. The period of significance is 1941-1971, reflecting the date of original construction through the fifty-year cut off for listing on the National Register.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Evolution of the American Diner

The American diner traces its history back to 1852, when an 11-year-old entrepreneur named Walter Scott (1841-1924) began selling newspapers, fruit and homemade candy on the streets of Downtown Providence to help support his family. When he later got a job working as a compositor and pressman, Scott began selling sandwiches and coffee to the late-shift workers at all three of the city's newspapers – the *Journal*, the *Star*, and the *Herald*.⁵ After the Civil War, Scott built himself a small handcart, allowing him to carry more provisions. In 1872, Walter Scott quit his job and began offering food for sale through the side window of a small horse-drawn wagon he had modified to serve sandwiches, pies and coffee to walk-up customers. It is generally accepted that the name "lunch wagon," as opposed to "diner," was most

³ For the purpose of this nomination, a "diner" is defined as a factory-built eatery hauled to its location of operation.

⁴ "Gimme a Memory, Over Easy," *The Hartford Courant*, October 16, 2003, <https://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-xpm-2003-10-16-0310160096-story.html> (accessed October 30, 2019).

⁵ Richard J.S. Gutman, *American Diner Then & Now*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, 13-14.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

widely used before 1925. In those days, most eating establishments closed by 8:00 pm. Mr. Scott successfully circumvented this by offering modest fare through the open window of his wagon to patrons out on the street who included late-night factory workers, newspaper employees and others in search of an inexpensive meal during the hours when most eating establishments were closed. Scott's innovation came at a time when urbanization, industrialization, and soon, mass electrification, meant Americans were traveling more and working later.⁶ The popularity of Scott's operation grew rapidly, spawning competition in both Providence and Worcester, another major industrial center in nearby central Massachusetts. Scott's concept was soon improved by Samuel Jones, who opened Worcester's first "lunch cart" on October 20, 1884. Three years later, in 1887, Jones became the first person to add fixed seating to his "rolling restaurant."⁷

While these early innovators developed a prototype for the American diner, a 1921 edition of *The World's Work* named Worcester resident T. H. Buckley the original "lunch wagon king," labeling him "a scarcely appreciated genius who built the first really noteworthy wagon."⁸ In 1888, a 20-year-old Buckley built himself a lunch-cart which he called the Owl, a play on the nocturnal hours the eatery kept.⁹ Within ten years, Buckley's firm, the New England Lunch Wagon Company, had lunch-wagons operating in 275 towns across the United States. The *Worcester Spy* reported that Buckley's first successful line of lunch wagons, the famed *White House Café*, had 36 syrup dispensers and a soda fountain constructed of Mexican onyx.¹⁰ After purchasing all of Jones' carts to start his own wagon empire, Charles Palmer, another Worcester resident, was awarded the first patent for lunch wagon design in 1891. Palmer's "Night-Lunch Wagon" design, which went on to become the standard wagon design for the next twenty-five years, featured an enclosed body with small front wheels and a narrower tail end between high back wheels; a counter separated the rear kitchen from the dining area, which featured stools or chairs and windows for passing food to more customers standing at the curb or waiting alongside in carriages.¹¹

The lunch wagons built during the last decades of the 19th century were generally simple structures, usually measuring around six by sixteen feet. They were constructed with wood frames and had painted exteriors that often displayed the wagon's name. Some owners chose to customize their wagons with elaborately painted landscapes and stained-glass windows.¹² The interior was typically divided into two parts: a "kitchen apartment," with enough room for the operator to store food and drinks, and prepare and serve simple meals, i.e. sandwiches, pies and coffee,¹³ and a dining area for customers. It was said that these establishments could accommodate about 20 standing patrons. One major benefit of these mobile eateries was that they did not require the owner to purchase an expensive piece of real estate in a bustling downtown location. Instead, the owner was only required to pay for a parking space and utilities hookup.

According to Richard Gutman, considered the leading expert on diner history, there were three companies that formed in the early 1900s and transformed the lunch car industry. These "Big Three" pioneers, as Gutman refers to them, were the Worcester Lunch Car and Carriage Manufacturing Company (WLCC),

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Richard J.S. Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia, 2004, 9.

⁸ Sarah Connell, "Long Live the Lunch Wagon King! Worcester's Diners Prove Resilient," *Mass Foodies*, May 15, 2017, <https://massfoodies.com/food-feed/social/worcester-history/long-live-lunch-wagon-king-worcesters-diners-prove-resilient/> (accessed November 1, 2019).

⁹ *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 4.

¹⁰ Cassidy Nemick, "The Evolution of the American Diner," *The Alliance for Networking Visual Culture*, November 14, 2016, <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/the-evolution-of-the-american-diner/come-get-your-american-dream> (accessed November 1, 2019).

¹¹ National Park Service, *Rosebud Diner*, Somerville, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, NRHP Reference No. 99001125, 16.

¹² Ashley Maria Berry, "Machines for Eating: The American Diner," Marymount University, 2007, 8.

¹³ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 9.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

the Patrick J. Tierney Company, and the Jerry O'Mahony Company. These early diner manufacturers capitalized on the optimism of the blue-collar worker by selling their own version of the American Dream, the idea that anyone could start a successful diner business, regardless of where they were born or what class they were born into. Gutman describes how, "In this fledgling business, the possibilities were so vast that many an entrepreneur could rightly earn the title of pioneer."¹⁴ Many working-class people saw this opportunity for success and took it. Similar to the appeal of owning your own business today, lunch wagons and early diners gave operators the freedom to be their own boss and follow their own rules. It was common for diners to offer different menu options based on their owner's background or individual preference. People from many different backgrounds pursued a career in the lunch wagon business, and the majority of diner builders, operators and customers were either immigrants or second-generation Americans.¹⁵

The popularity of lunch wagons grew so quickly that by 1912 there were almost fifty lunch wagons operating around the streets of Providence, Rhode Island, the birthplace of the lunch wagon industry.¹⁶ Many of these early eateries were historically placed in central business districts and near factories which operated 24 hours a day. Frequented primarily by working-class men, these eateries had a poor reputation with women and were not considered "family friendly." Before long, lunch wagons became so plentiful on city streets that city ordinances had to be passed to limit their hours of operation. By the 1920s, as electric trolleys and automobiles began to replace horse-drawn carriages, the traditional lunch wagon became obsolete for a society looking toward the future.

Desperate to revitalize their image and attract a larger customer base, lunch wagon manufacturers and operators looked to a form that had captivated Americans for nearly half a century: the Pullman railroad car.¹⁷ They began advertising mobile eateries as "dining cars," an allusion to the fine dining cars of 19th-century railroad lines; this was soon shortened to "diner."¹⁸ Diners began popping up on major roadways and near important crossroads, in addition to the more established downtown business and manufacturing district locations. The introduction of "Booth Service," "Tables for Ladies," and "Family Seating" in the dining area, which also occurred in the mid-1920s, was intended to encourage female customers, who may have been reluctant to sit at the counter on stools. Other efforts included changing the style and design of the diners, introducing ornamental sash-windows, geometric tilework, marble countertops, porcelain stools, frosted or stained-glass windows, metal appliances, mahogany finishes, wallpaper, flower boxes, and other characteristics reminiscent of late 19th-and early 20th-century railroad cars. These updates marked the diner's evolution from a dark and dirty lunch wagon into a respectable dining establishment.

As diners grew more popular and their number of seats increased, mobile wagons soon gave way to prefabricated buildings. A diner with equipment, furnishings, and finishes already installed was easy to move – by rail, barge, or truck – from the manufacturing facility to the operating site. Stationary diners continued to be built on wheels to facilitate transportation and installation on site, though most were covered up with boards or bricks to keep the wheels from being visible once the structure was

¹⁴ Gutman, *American Diner Then & Now*, 32.

¹⁵ Nemick, "The Evolution of the American Diner."

¹⁶ Gutman, *American Diner Then & Now*, 37.

¹⁷ Sarajane Cedrone, "Lunch Wagon to Space Age Diner: Connecticut's First Fast Food Emporiums," *Connecticut Explored*, June 29, 2016, <https://www.ctexplored.org/lunch-wagon-to-space-age-diner-connecticuts-first-fast-food-emporiums/> (accessed November 8, 2019).

¹⁸ By comparing terms used in manufacturer catalogs, Gutman traced the earliest use of the term diner as occurring in the year between March 1923 and March 1924.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

permanently in place.¹⁹ Transitioning from a mobile unit to a stationary structure was a significant turning point in the evolution of the diner because it allowed operators to build a clientele. A permanent site also allowed operators to install electric lights, gas stoves, and running water, improving the customer experience.

From the early-1930s through World War II, diner design took a distinctly modern turn, reflecting the changing styles and attitudes of post-Depression America. As the nation was transitioning from the exuberance and richness of the "Roaring Twenties" and into the grips of austerity and self-discipline of Depression-era 1930s, architects began to favor simpler, more streamlined designs that emphasized low, horizontal shapes, as opposed to the taller and more elaborate buildings associated with the earlier Art Deco and Revival styles. The Art Moderne style, often called Streamline Moderne, represented a simplification of these earlier styles by abandoning the use of costly hand-crafted sculptural ornament. Instead, Art Moderne favored bolder, more industrial, machine-derived aesthetic that celebrated mass production in its design scheme, utilizing manufactured materials overlaid with abstracted elements for decorative effect.²⁰

Inspired in part by 1920s and 1930s transportation design, streamlining was a forward-looking aesthetic which implied movement and efficiency. The diner, which already embodied mobility, was perfectly suited for the new aesthetic. Manufacturers began outfitting their diners with state-of-the-art materials like colorful porcelain enamel panels, Formica, and stainless steel, using new forms like slanted or round end walls.²¹ The shift from rigid lines to more malleable stainless-steel curves allowed the hard-edged box design of the earlier Pullman car to give way to smooth and rounded forms.²² Windows were stretched horizontally to look like the popular passenger railroad cars of the streamliner era, most notably the 1934 Burlington Zephyr. Around 1940, a modified version of the streamliner was introduced by the Worcester Lunch Car Company. The "semi-streamliner" form features either a barrel or monitor roof and slightly canted end walls. This new design became popular in roadside locations with parking lots, especially on heavily traveled highway routes. Both evoking the diner's early history as a mobile building and expressing a sense of modernity, the streamliner diner became the industry standard for a generation.

The post-WWII era saw diners boom in response to a roaring economy, the opening of the interstate, and returning crowds of service men and women. Diners continued to evolve functionally and stylistically during these years. A greater desire to attract families led to larger size diners with even more emphasis on table and booth service. Cooking was removed from the area behind the counter to a separate kitchen, typically located in an annex behind the main diner structure, in order to accommodate additional seating. New materials and products also became more popular. Stainless steel was widely used on exteriors, often in combination with colored accents in porcelain enamel, and the lingering influence of prewar streamlining was seen in rounded corners and horizontal detailing. Interiors also featured stainless steel lighting fixtures, decorative moldings, backbars, Formica countertops, porcelain tiles, leather booths, wood paneling and a combination of terrazzo and tiled floors.²³ Improvements in mechanical ventilation eliminated any need for a monitor roof with clerestory windows or even operable windows in the dining area, and fixed plate glass windows became the rule in most diners. During and after the war, the number

¹⁹ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 29.

²⁰ Omri Schwartz, "Art Moderne Design: Vintage Design Style: Nazmiyal Blog," Nazmiyal Antique Rugs, January 27, 2021, <https://nazmiyalantiquerugs.com/blog/art-moderne-design/> (accessed March 10, 2021).

²¹ National Park Service, *Four Sisters Owl Diner*, Lowell, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, NRHP Reference No. 03001207, 8.

²² Cedrone, "Lunch Wagon to Space Age Diner: Connecticut's First Fast Food Emporiums."

²³ Joan Russell, "The History of the American Diner," *Paste*, October 18, 2016, <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2016/09/the-history-of-the-american-diner.html> (accessed November 4, 2019).

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

of women working as counter staff steadily increased.²⁴ Waitresses made diners more appealing to the American family by domesticating the diner experience.²⁵

As America's suburban sprawl accelerated in the late 1940s and early 1950s, diners spread beyond their original urban and small-town markets to suburban highway strips as far as the Midwest. By the mid-1950s, there was a network of more than 6,000 twenty-four-hour diner destinations across the United States. Unfortunately, the "golden age" of diners was short-lived. The 1960s saw the attention and taste of the American people shift as the introduction of highways and the rising car culture of America brought competition from emerging fast-food franchises. The majority of diners, most of which were independently owned and operated, simply could not compete with the volume and quality of advertisements put out by major restaurant corporations.²⁶ Additionally, franchising ensured reliability and consistency, no matter what state or city the restaurant was located. It seemed that this standardization of menus, architecture, and image offered by fast-food franchises was more appealing to mid-century Americans than the non-standard offerings of independently owned diners.²⁷ The number of diners continued to wane as motorists and travelers began to choose convenience and speed over traditional dining. Within a decade, the fast-food boom had put a vast number of American diners out of business.²⁸

As the birthplace of the American diner, Rhode Island is home to several historic diners. In 1977, the Modern Diner in Pawtucket became the first diner to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.²⁹ The Modern Diner, a Sterling Streamliner Diner, originally opened on Dexter Street in downtown Pawtucket in 1940 and remained a bustling breakfast hub until its doors closed in 1978. During the 1980s, the Modern Diner was purchased at an auction and moved to a new location on East Avenue in Pawtucket to avoid demolition. After being relocated, the diner was restored to its former glory and today remains one of only two Sterling Streamliners still in operation.³⁰ The Central Diner, built in 1947 as WLCC No. 806, opened in Providence in 1947 and was subsequently moved to its current location at 777 Elmwood Avenue between 1953 and 1954.³¹ After going through a number of names and owners, the Central Diner was rediscovered by new operators who renovated the restaurant as the Ole Elmwood Diner in the mid-1990s. The Central Diner was listed to the National Register in 2010. It operated on and off until January 2021, when the owner of the diner (known as Paula's Kitchen at the time), announced that it would be closing, and the diner was once again listed for sale.

Poirier's Diner was built in 1947 by Kullman Dining Car Company and is one of only two surviving Kullman diners in the state of Rhode Island.³² The diner was originally located at 579-581 Atwells Avenue, an industrial area in Providence, where it operated for many years. The diner closed in 1999 and in 2002, it was forced off its land by redevelopment activity and placed in storage. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2003 and moved to 1380 Westminster Street in 2011. After

²⁴ Patrick Sisson, "Diners, the Original Prefab Success Story," *Curbed*, May 30, 2017, <https://www.curbed.com/2017/5/30/15716116/restaurants-diners-prefab-historic-preservation> (accessed November 1, 2019).

²⁵ Hurley, *Diners, Bowling Alleys, and Trailer Parks*, 78.

²⁶ Ashley Maria Berry, "Machines for Eating: The American Diner," Marymount University, 2007, 50.

²⁷ Berry, 3.

²⁸ Sisson, "Diners, the Original Prefab Success Story."

²⁹ National Park Service, *Modern Diner National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island, NRHP Reference No. 78000002.

³⁰ *Modern Diner National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, 3.

³¹ National Park Service, *Central Diner National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island, NRHP Reference No. 09001231, 16.

³² National Park Service, *Poirier's Diner National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island, NRHP Reference No. 03000657, 9.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

undergoing a full restoration, Poirier's Diner was reopened as the West Side Diner in 2013.³³ Jigger's Diner in East Greenwich was originally started in 1917, by Vilgot "Jigger" Lindberg. In 1941, the diner was sold to Leonard "Lenny" Boren, who replaced it in 1950 with a new diner built by the WLCC.³⁴ The diner was closed in 1983 and subsequently used for storage until 1992, when it was purchased by Carol Shriner. After undergoing a full restoration, Jigger's re-opened in the summer of 1992. The Brothers Diner (now the Right Spot) was built in the 1930s as WLCC No. 664 and originally operated in downtown Pawtucket. In 1966, the Diner was moved to 200 South Bend Street, where it continues to operate as the Right Spot Diner.³⁵ There are several other historic diners in Rhode Island currently undergoing or awaiting restoration.³⁶ Despite decades of changing trends and shifts in construction, the diner continues to be a potent icon in American popular culture.

Worcester Lunch Car and Carriage Manufacturing Company

Although manufacturers of dining carts sprang up in several cities along the East Coast around the turn of the 20th century, Worcester, Massachusetts, quickly emerged as the industry's capital.³⁷ In December of 1906, a new champion of the lunch car business emerged when Worcester resident and former real estate agent, Philip H. Duprey, formed the Worcester Lunch Car and Carriage Manufacturing Company (WLCC), with himself as president and Granville M. Stoddard as treasurer (Figure 1). Named after the city where the company was based, the WLCC specialized in manufacturing and shipping pre-assembled lunch cars, with prefabricated murals, lettering, frosted glass, ice boxes, and oversized wheels for navigating cobblestones, all over the Eastern Seaboard.³⁸ Duprey's first order of business as president was to purchase the newly established partnership of Wilfred H. Barriere, a former carpenter for Thomas H. Buckley, and Sterns A. Haynes. The men were each paid a salary of \$25 a week to run the operation, which they did out of their downtown offices at 69 Franklin Street.³⁹ Within a month, Charles P. Gemme, another former Buckley carpenter, was hired as the company's master designer.⁴⁰

The WLCC was initially staffed by a half-dozen woodworkers, blacksmiths, and painters. For the first year and a half, Charles Gemme worked alongside Barriere and Haynes, until he was put in sole charge of the WLCC factory on May 23, 1908. Under Gemme's direction, the WLCC became a national leader in lunch car design and standardization. He was responsible for developing new configurations, decorations, and finishes for Worcester lunch cars. His most prominent innovation was the characteristic Worcester roofline, which consisted of a round-hipped monitor roof with a raised clerestory featuring one long row of smaller operable windows on each side for improved light and ventilation.⁴¹ Gemme was also responsible for increasing the length of the Worcester lunch cars, introducing a center entrance in addition to one at the end of the car, and altering the interior layout by placing the kitchen along the length of the car, with a long serving and eating counter and row of stools running down the middle. The first Worcester lunch wagon, the American Eagle Café, was completed in early 1907 and given the serial number 200. It operated on Myrtle Street in Worcester, behind the post office. The exterior was adorned

³³ Paul Grimaldi, "Historic Poirier's Diner Moving to Westminster Street," Greater City Providence, May 13, 2013. https://feverberries4.rssing.com/chan-3641411/all_p36.html#c3641411a716?zx=813 (accessed March 18, 2021).

³⁴ "History of Jigger's Diner..." Hill and Harbour Diner, <http://www.jiggersdiner.com/About-Us.html> (accessed March 15, 2021).

³⁵ "Where Is The Comet? Diners & Dives 2," 61 Thrift Power, <https://61thriftpower.com/diners2.shtml> (accessed March 15, 2021).

³⁶ *Central Diner National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, 19.

³⁷ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 19.

³⁸ Sisson, "Diners, the Original Prefab Success Story."

³⁹ Richard J.S. Gutman, *American Diner Then & Now*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, 49.

⁴⁰ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 19.

⁴¹ National Park Service, Central Diner, Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island, NRHP Reference No. 09001231, 10.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

with fancy block lettering, florid scrolling, intricate pinstriping and landscapes and hunting scenes in the style of the Dutch Old Masters.⁴² The entire interior of the wagon was finished in highly varnished natural wood, the ceiling was decorated with gold-leaf striping and fleurs-de-lis, and a few wooden-topped stools were provided along the eating counter for patrons.

Almost immediately, WLCC products achieved a widespread reputation for their high-quality materials, craftsmanship, and durability. Each Worcester diner was built to the customer's specifications; everything from tile color to the designs on the plates was customizable, and the company assured customers that it would "never build two dining cars exactly alike."⁴³ Craftsmen drew on elements of shipbuilding (the mahogany cabinets and bolted-down furniture) and rail car design (the overall barrel-shaped, box-frame structure and use of stainless steel) in designing the custom-made diners.⁴⁴ Most featured shining porcelain panels on the exterior that were decorated with the name of the diner spelled out with Gothic script lettering.⁴⁵ Many early WLCC cars were also embellished with scenes of American patriotism, history, and hunting. The detail and extravagance of the wagons built by the WLCC made it easy to distinguish them from other manufactures. In his book, *Diners of New England*, author Randy Garbin explains how, "In northern New England, ... you could safely bet that any diner with porcelain on the exterior likely came from Worcester Lunch Car."⁴⁶ Interior materials included wood, marble, porcelain, and metals such as copper and nickel.⁴⁷ The WLCC advertised one particular feature that was exclusive to their diners: windows that were frosted on the lower half and clear on the upper. This allowed customers to have a clear view of the street, while also allowing a passerby to look in without being able to identify the patrons dining inside.⁴⁸

One of the major reasons the WLCC was able to enjoy five decades of booming success was due to their philosophy of "Yankee thrift and conservatism,"⁴⁹ essentially cranking out the same model year after year with slight modifications to fit the prospective owner's site and budget. Known for their small size, Worcester diners ranged from between ten and seventy seats. Their smallest model measured ten-feet 6-inches by twenty-two-feet three-inches and cost \$6,625 in December 1934. Another model added four feet of length and two feet of width to the overall size, which allowed for an extra row of stools at a counter along the front windows. Measuring twelve-feet six-inches by twenty-six-feet three-inches, this model was offered at a cost of \$9,075 in 1934. From 1906 to 1961, the Worcester Lunch Car Company built 651 diners, beginning with serial number 200 and continuing through 850. While most of their products were shipped to sites around New England, some of Worcester's signature diners were sent as far as Florida and Michigan.⁵⁰ WLCC sales materials described their legendary lunch car as:

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ National Park Service, Miss Bellows Falls Diner, Bellows Falls, Windham County, Vermont, NRHP Reference No. 83003226, 4.

⁴⁴ John Christie, "Squeak's Diner Hits the Road," *The Middletown Press*, October 11, 2003, <https://www.middletownpress.com/news/article/Squeak-s-Diner-hits-the-road-11913826.php> (accessed October 31, 2019).

⁴⁵ "Worcester Lunch Car Company - Manufacturer of Classic Diners." Gunther Toody's, November 24, 2013. <https://gunthertoodys.com/classic-diners/>.

⁴⁶ Nemick, "The Evolution of the American Diner."

⁴⁷ Berry, 8.

⁴⁸ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 29.

⁴⁹ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 81.

⁵⁰ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 130.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

"A smart looking business place that draws customers in and brings 'em back because it's as comfortable and modern as a streamlined parlor car...in short, if you're looking for a money-maker and the best buy in the dining field today.... Here it is: THE WORCESTER DINER!"⁵¹

For more than four decades, Arthur H. LeFleur was the trucker and rigger responsible for moving new Worcester diners from the factory to their operating sites.⁵² Upon shipping their diners, the WLCC would affix an individually numbered metal "tag" inside each dining car, in order to identify each one as an authentic Worcester diner (Figure 2). Company records, including sketches and framing diagrams, were also labeled with the corresponding serial number (200-851). When the company remodeled one of its diners, the original production number was retained. Additionally, if owners of newly purchased diners had any issues, the company would pick up the diner and bring it back to the factory for reconditioning.

In 1917, the WLCC relocated from their cramped headquarters on Franklin Street to a new plant at the corner of Quinsigamond Avenue and Southbridge Street (Figure 3). The company's new headquarters provided space to work on three to six diners at any given time, depending on their size.⁵³ By the 1920s, Worcester diners featured long counters of pink Tennessee marble, white-tile floors and walls, plate-metal kitchen equipment, and highly varnished oak woodwork. Equipment included steam tables, grills, refrigerators, exhaust hoods—all integrated with storage and food preparation areas in the "backbar" behind the counter.⁵⁴ In the late 1920s, the WLCC reintroduced a monitor roof to their diner designs, consisting of a raised clerestory with one long row of operable windows on each side for improved light and ventilation.⁵⁵ At a cost of \$14,025, the monitor-roof model was priced higher than those models without. The Worcester Lunch Car Company built most of the monitor-roof diners which survive today.

By the mid-1920s, women were patronizing lunch cars, which were finally considered "family friendly" and no longer only suitable for late night crowds of men. Up until this point, diners were geared towards a primarily male clientele. Richard Gutman highlights this trend in his book, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, by describing how the owners of the Flying Yankee Dining Car (WLCC No. 591) in Lynn, Massachusetts specifically chose "not to court female business, believing women took too long to order and would hinder the turnover rate at the busy lunch rush."⁵⁶ During the 19th and early-20th centuries, women in America were generally not allowed to dine out unaccompanied by a man. This eventually led to the creation of independent tea rooms largely focused on female diners. In her book, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn, A Social History of the Tea Room Craze in America*, author Jan Whitaker describes how, "For a woman to enter this business at the turn of the century, even as an unescorted patron, was a risk to her reputation...Women's exclusion from many public dining rooms in the 1900s and 1910s was undoubtedly a factor in their attraction to female-friendly tea rooms."⁵⁷ In addition to having a primarily female clientele, nearly all tea rooms in the United States during the early-1900s were owned, operated and fully staffed by women.⁵⁸ These independent tea rooms also played a vital role in the evolution of early roadside eateries. When the wealthy city-dwelling classes migrated to their summer homes and

⁵¹ Connell, "Long Live the Lunch Wagon King! Worcester's Diners Prove Resilient."

⁵² Gutman, *The American Diner Then & Now*, 30.

⁵³ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 28.

⁵⁴ *Central Diner National Register Nomination*, 11.

⁵⁵ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 54.

⁵⁶ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 61.

⁵⁷ "The Rise of the American Tea Room: Serving Women's Rights with a Cup of Tea," Destination Tea, September 21, 2016, <https://destinationtea.com/the-rise-of-the-american-tea-room-serving-womens-rights-with-a-cup-of-tea/> (accessed March 10, 2021).

⁵⁸ Cara Strickland, "The Top-Secret Feminist History of Tea Rooms," JSTOR, March 6, 2019, <https://daily.jstor.org/the-top-secret-feminist-history-of-tea-rooms/> (accessed March 10, 2021).

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

resorts, city tea rooms would often relocate to the country for the summer season. In the first decades of the 20th century, rural roadside tea rooms, often located within driving distance of a big city, began springing up to cater to recreational driving parties.⁵⁹

The high demand for Worcester-made diners kept the company running near constant overtime shifts up through the stock market crash of 1929, when a slower but steady output continued into the 1930s. In 1939, the WLCC introduced a new design known as the “streamline” model in their record books.⁶⁰ The streamline model featured a distinctive closed barrel (rounded hipped) roof, with curved end walls. In 1940, the WLCC introduced their “semi-streamliner” model as an alternative to the classic streamline models the company debuted in the 1930s. Worcester’s semi-streamliner combined the full-length monitor roof seen on the earlier streetcar-inspired diners with canted end walls rather than the curving walls of the streamliner. These semi-streamliner models reportedly were more popular among prospective diner purchasers than the more distinctive streamliners. The typical location of the streamliner and semi-streamliner diner reflected a shift from downtown business district and manufacturing areas to roadside sites with parking lots, especially on heavily traveled highway routes.

Following World War II, the WLCC got off to a strong start when they resumed construction in 1945, selling fourteen diners in 1946 and twelve in 1947.⁶¹ In 1947, Philip H. Duprey wrote an open letter to prospective operators titled “There’s more money in Worcester Diners,” in which he described the firm as the “pioneer builder of dining cars.” The 1950s, however, saw the attention and taste of the American people shift toward the emerging fast-food franchises, which quickly expanded across the American landscape. Within a decade, the fast-food boom had put a vast number of American diners out of business. The same “Yankee thrift and conservatism” that had skyrocketed the WLCC to the top of the diner industry soon became a liability. Phillip Duprey, who had been running the helm since Worcester’s inception in 1906, refused to sink any money into updating the company’s diner designs, and a new model hadn’t been turned out since the introduction of the semi-streamliner more than a decade earlier. According to Gutman, potential buyers had been complaining for years that the company was not building anything up to date.⁶² The company was still using wood trim and wooden booths on the interior of their diners, when most of their competition had switched to stainless steel and chrome years earlier.⁶³ The WLCC continued to turn out essentially the same model, which nobody seemed to want anymore.

The Worcester Lunch Car Company sold its last diner in May of 1957, after which the company ceased manufacturing. On May 23, 1961, the contents and assets of the Worcester Lunch Car and Carriage Manufacturing Company were sold at auction to Francis Van Slett. Keeping up with the long tradition of diner manufacturing for the city, he reorganized as the Worcester Deluxe Diner Manufacturing Company, even keeping on some WLCC employees, including Charles Gemme, who acted as a consultant.⁶⁴ Today, only a fraction of the original WLCC diners remain. Many of the surviving WLCC diners are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Historian Richard Gutman stated in 2004 that only about 90 of the 651 diners built by the Worcester Lunch Car Company survive.⁶⁵ No comprehensive record of all surviving WLCC diners exists at this time.

⁵⁹ “The Rise of the American Tea Room: Serving Women’s Rights with a Cup of Tea.”

⁶⁰ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 89.

⁶¹ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 101.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Larry Cultrera, *Classic Diners of Massachusetts*, Charleston, SC: History Press, 2011.

⁶⁵ *Central Diner National Register Nomination*, 19.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

In Rhode Island, there are five known WLCC diners that still survive, only one of which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Central Diner, built in 1947 as WLCC No. 806, opened at the corner of West Gaspee and Exchange Streets in Providence in 1947. The diner was moved to its current location at 777 Elmwood Avenue, just a few blocks north of Roger Williams Park, between 1953 and 1954. After going through a number of names and owners over its lifetime, the diner was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2010. The Central Diner (Paula's Kitchen at the time) closed in January 2021 and was once again listed for sale. The other four surviving WLCC diners in Rhode Island are: Brothers Diner (No. 664; 1930s; now the Right Spot), Donwell's Diner (No. 774; 1941; now Miss Lorraine), both in Pawtucket; Jigger's Diner (No. 826; 1950) in East Greenwich; State Line Diner (No. 846; 1955) in Foster; Champs Diner in Woonsocket (No. 416; 1922), which closed in 1989 and is now part of Heritage Place in Woonsocket.⁶⁶ Another half-dozen WLCC diners are in Rhode Island undergoing or awaiting restoration. While the Hope Diner in Bristol and the Wickford Diner in North Kingstown share some Worcester design attributes, their builders are presently undocumented.⁶⁷

There are at least 16 WLCC diners in Massachusetts that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Most of these diners are listed as part of the *Diners of Massachusetts MPS*,⁶⁸ though several are listed as a contributing resource in a historic district: Casey's Diner, Natick (1922; NR 1999); Chadwick Square Diner, Worcester (No. 660; 1928; NR 2003); Boulevard Diner, Worcester (No. 730; 1936; NR 2000); Monarch Diner, Lowell (No. 759; 1940; NR 2003; now Four Sisters Owl Diner); Rosebud Diner, Somerville (No. 773; 1941; NR 1999); Miss Florence Diner, Northampton (No. 775; 1941; NR 1999); Lloyd's Diner, formerly Whit's Diner, Framingham (No. 783; 1942; NR 2003); Town Diner, Watertown (1947; NR 1999; now Deluxe Town Diner); Miss Worcester Diner, Worcester, in its original location across the street from the WLCC former factory (No. 812; 1948; NR 2003); Miss Toy Town Diner, Gardener (No. 815; 1949; NR 2003; now the Blue Moon Diner); Wilson's Diner, Waltham (No. 819; 1949; NR 1999); Ann's Diner, Salisbury (No. 824; 1950; NR 2003; now Pat's Diner); Main Street Diner, Woburn (No. 834; 1952; NR 2000); Miss Northampton, Northampton (No. 702; ca. 1930; NRDIS, Northampton Downtown Historic District 1976; now Kathy's Diner); Kenwood Diner, Spencer (No. 713; c.1933; NRDIS, Spencer Town Center Historic District 1986); Moran Square Diner, Fitchburg (No. 765; 1939; NRDIS, Moran Square Historic District, 2018). Additionally, there are at least 29 Worcester Lunch Car Company diners in Massachusetts that are not listed on the National Register.

There is one WLCC diner listed in the state of Vermont, the Miss Bellows Falls Diner (No. 771; 1941; NR 1983), in addition at least six other WLCC diners that survive in Vermont but are not listed on the National Register: Buckley's Diner, Brattleboro (No. 424; 1925); Chelsea Royal Diner, West Brattleboro (No. 736; 1939); Ten Eyck Diner, Springfield (No. 768; 1941); Farmers Diner, Quechee (No. 787; 1946); Windsor Diner, Windsor (No. 835; 1952); Parkway Diner, South Burlington (No. 839; 1953). The Peterborough Diner in Peterborough, New Hampshire (No. 827; 1950) and the Miss Portland Diner in Portland, Maine (No. 818; 1949) both still survive, but neither diner is listed on the National Register. The Henry Ford Museum in Michigan contains a notable example of a WLCC diner, the Hudson Diner (No. 789; 1946; now Lamy's Diner).

⁶⁶ "Where Is The Comet? Diners & Dives 2," 61 Thrift Power, <https://61thriftpower.com/diners2.shtml> (accessed March 22, 2021).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ National Park Service. *Diners of Massachusetts MPS*. NRHP Reference No. 64500250

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

Donwell's Diner (Worcester Lunch Car Co. Diner No. 774)

The classic Worcester semi-streamliner diner originally known as Donwell's was manufactured in 1941 by the Worcester Lunch Car and Carriage Manufacturing Company, also commonly referred to as the Worcester Lunch Car Company (WLCC). Donwell's Diner bears the production number 774, being the 575th unit constructed by the now-defunct company under a numbering scheme that started at 200 in 1906.⁶⁹ The modern prefabricated diner displays the distinct round-hipped monitor roof with clerestory windows and canted side walls that characterize Worcester's semi-streamliner form. Donwell's Diner is one of twenty-five such semi-streamliner diners originally made by the company, only eight of which still survive. The WLCC had introduced the semi-streamliner model in 1940 as an alternative to the classic streamliner diners they debuted in 1939. This design feature could be seen on certain parlor, sleeping, and railroad dining cars built between ca.1865 and ca.1920, as well as certain models of streetcars built between ca.1900 and ca.1935. Ornamental detailing in a contrasting red color ran horizontally on the exterior corners to accentuate the appearance of mobility conveyed by the semi-streamliner form.

As Worcester's lead designer, Charles P. Gemme kept a series of notebooks detailing individual diner plans and notes on refurbishments and moves. One notebook, a copy of which was provided by Colin Strayer (formerly part of a collection held at the American Diner Museum), contains heavily notated drawings showing the diner's actual appearance and layout (Figure 4).⁷⁰ For Worcester Lunch Car Company diner #774 — Donwell's Diner, Gemme noted that the fourteen-foot six-inch by forty-eight-foot diner would have a "Streamline Steel Frame," with an exterior clad in ivory porcelain enamel with "red tomato" trim, which would match the red tile trim on the interior of the diner. The diner's tin roof was also painted red to match the trim. The plan shows a stainless-steel door with a chrome push bar centered on the long front elevation. It also notes that the back of the diner was clad in galvanized steel and that the outside lights had a "chrome brush finish."

Inside the diner, twenty-one stools with "grooved + striped red" seats lined the two-part Tennessee marble and glass counter that extended from the left end wall.⁷¹ Located adjacent to the entrance was a cashiers' booth with a glass top. Located on either side of the cashiers' booth were "light mahogany" booths upholstered with "Red Leatherette" cushions and backs, fitted with "chrome hat trees and flat racks" and Formica tabletops with red borders and "metal edges and pedestal legs." The floors and walls of the dining area were covered with ivory-colored tiles with "bright red 1" wide" trim and "stainless-steel channels." The round-hipped ceiling was lined with pink Formica panels. On the right (west) side of the diner were wired glass windows. The back wall of the diner was clad in a mixture of galvanized painted steel and tilework. The backbar area had "hardwood floors with tile border." The back countertop included (from left to right): stainless three-bay refrigeration unit with porcelain lining and galvanized wire shelves; Toastmaster Bun Toaster with stainless relish stand above; stainless toaster; Welsbach Broiler and Griddle; electric fryer with double plug; stainless steel Hedlund's Urns with Pyrex linings; a griddle and burner plates; space for "thermotainer" with window space above; electric waffle baker with double plug under a "slide to kitchen"; stainless steel china jars; electric auto egg boiler and poacher; a work bench under an electric fruit juicer; space for a soda fountain, and a single-leaf door opening. A streamline mahogany hood with stainless steel lining and a clock in the center were located above.

⁶⁹ National Park Service, *Miss Bellows Falls Diner National Register Nomination*, Bellows Falls, Windham County, Vermont, NRHP Reference No. 83003226, 4.

⁷⁰ Worcester Lunch Car Company Records, Collection of Colin Strayer (formerly part of American Diner Museum), Lincoln, R.I.

⁷¹ At some point, the left countertop was truncated and two of the stools removed, leaving 19 stools remaining.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

Upon completion, Donwell's Diner was hauled by road from the WLCC factory to its original site at 357 Asylum Street in Hartford, Connecticut and installed on August 12, 1941.⁷² The site was located in the heart of the downtown, a major New England transportation center in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, just steps away from the busy Union Station, and just across the street from Bushnell Park and the Hotel Bond. An advertisement announcing the opening of Donwell's, "Hartford's newest and finest diner-restaurant," was posted in the *Hartford Courant* on September 7, 1941 (Figure 5):

"Conveniently located, this diner-restaurant is a handy meeting place for Hartford people at any time of day or night...we will feature 24-hour service...Surroundings are beautifully appointed, and our service is the best...This DeLuxe restaurant is well lighted by units of specially designed, modernistic, chrome-plated fixtures...inside trim of Solid Honduras Mahogany...ceilings of Formica, stainless-steel cooking equipment...mahogany booth...floor and walls of tile...counter tops are of pink Tennessee marble...a large open kitchen, designed to insure good food and prompt service! Cleanliness—comfort—speed...Enjoy Good Food at Donwell's!"⁷³

According to Richard Gutman, the name "Donwell's" came from combining the original owners' names, J. Edward & Edith Donnellan and Chester L. Wells,⁷⁴ who ran the twenty-four-hour eatery as Donwell's Diner from 1941 until 1945. Wells hailed from Chester, Connecticut, and the Donnellans from Cleveland.⁷⁵ The diner's strategic downtown location meant that it welcomed a near-constant stream of foot-traffic both during the day and at night, when travelers from the train station had few late-night dining options. In 1946, Chester Wells sold his share in Donwell's to Raymond M. Parker, who ran it with Mr. Donnellan until 1948 or 1949. An article published in the *Hartford Courant* on March 21, 1948 described how:

"Charles N. Paliocha has bought the land at 349-359 Asylum Street from Donwells Inc., at a cost of nearly \$40,000. Donwells own and operate a dining car which stands on the site and Mr. Paliocha gave its owners a 10-year lease... J. Edward Donnellan of Cohasset, Mass., and Raymond M. Parker of Keene, N.H., own the diner."⁷⁶

By the summer of 1949, the diner was owned by Elliot Drake and John J. Hibben, who ran it as Drake's Diner, according to an advertisement posted in Trinity College's student yearbook that year (Figure 6). Drake's diner operated until 1953, when Drake was arrested and charged with failure to pay wages.⁷⁷ After this, the diner operated for a brief time as Donovan's Diner, according to an advertisement posted in the *Hartford Courant* in March of 1955 seeking an "experienced waitress" for Donovan's Diner at 357

⁷² Gary Thomas, interview by Kim Smith, October 31, 2019.

⁷³ "Announcing the Opening of Donwells Inc.," *The Hartford Courant*, September 7, 1941, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/370267059/?terms=Worcester+Lunch+Car+Diner+Asylum+Ave+Hartford> (accessed October 31, 2019), 13.

⁷⁴ Larry Cultrera, "Worcester Lunch Car # 774," Diner Hotline Weblog, March 6, 2020, <https://dinerhotline.wordpress.com/tag/worcester-lunch-car-774/> (accessed March 18, 2021).

⁷⁵ Gary Thomas, Interview by Kim Smith, October 31, 2019.

⁷⁶ "Some Activity Reported In Area By Realty Men." *Hartford Courant*, March 21, 1948, 45.

⁷⁷ "Diner Proprietor Held on Pay Charge," *Hartford Courant*, August 5, 1953, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/370203966/?terms=George%2BSwan%2BHotel%2BDiner%2B357%2BAsylum> (accessed March 18, 2021).

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

Asylum Street.⁷⁸ Between 1955 and 1956, the diner was owned by George Swan, who ran it as the "Hotel Diner." On December 2, 1956, the "Hotel Diner" at 357 Asylum Street was up for auction (Figure 7).⁷⁹

After twenty-five years in Hartford, Donwell's Diner relocated to an unknown site in Kensington, Connecticut in 1966. Unfortunately, after sitting vacant for several years, the interior of the diner was stripped of its furnishings by creditors. The diner was then purchased at auction in 1969 by Ida and Stanley "Squeak" Zawisa, who relocated it to 190 East Main Street in Middletown, Connecticut and re-opened the eatery as Squeak's Diner. Squeak's quickly became one of Middletown's staple eateries, a favorite of the utility crews, police officers, tradespeople, students and factory workers who worked in the area. Mr. Zawisa's obituary described how "Squeak was the 'mayor' of the corner of Silver Street and East Main Street for 62 years."⁸⁰ Squeak's continued operating for almost thirty years, until 1997.

In 2003, the diner was purchased by Colin Strayer, a filmmaker and diner buff, who subsequently moved it to storage. While an article published in *The Middletown Press* in October of 2003 stated that Strayer was having the diner towed "to his home in Syracuse, N.Y., where the building will be put into storage for possible restoration,"⁸¹ it does not appear that the diner ever made it to Syracuse. The next owner, Jonathan Savage, acquired the diner in 2011 after finding it in a field in Connecticut several years prior, and relocated it for the fourth time in its existence to its current site outside the ca.1868 Lorraine Mills textile manufacturing complex in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. A temporary structure was immediately built to enclose the diner and protect it from the elements. Beginning in 2013, Donwell's Diner underwent a six-year-long rehabilitation using Federal Historic Tax Credits so that it could re-open as a roadside diner.

⁷⁸ "Classified Advertising," *Hartford Courant*, March 12, 1955, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/369969460/?terms=The%2BHotel%2BDiner%2B357%2BAsylum%2BSt> (accessed March 18, 2021).

⁷⁹ Gary Thomas, Interview by Kim Smith, October 31, 2019.

⁸⁰ Gary Thomas, Interview by Kim Smith, February 7, 2020.

⁸¹ John Christie, "Squeak's Diner Hits the Road," *The Middletown Press*, October 11, 2003, <https://www.middletownpress.com/news/article/Squeak-s-Diner-hits-the-road-11913826.php> (accessed March 18, 2021).

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

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Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

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Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

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Worcester Lunch Car Company Records. Collection of Colin Strayer (formerly part of the American Diner Museum), Lincoln, R.I.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

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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 # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☒ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)
Name of Property

Providence County, RI
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.02 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 41.872939 Longitude: -71.406378

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of this property includes the footprint of Worcester Dining Car No. 774 and is limited to its dimensions of 14'-6" X 48 feet.

The diner faces north onto a parking lot and Mineral Spring Avenue, approximately 50' 2" south of the sidewalk. The property is bounded on the south and east by a narrow alley and the adjacent four-story, red brick Lorraine Mills industrial complex, and on the west by a parking lot.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)
Name of Property

Providence County, RI
County and State

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Only the diner itself is being nominated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The historical significance of Worcester Dining Car No. 774 lies in the structure itself rather than its particular location; in fact, the design of the car is meant to suggest a moveable resource. The diner structure is connected, rather than structurally integrated, to the Lorraine Mills building immediately to the south and east in a way that is sensitive and easily reversible. The boundaries therefore do not include the kitchen and restroom annex, located within the Lorraine Mills building to the rear.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Ryan Cameron
organization: MacRostie Historic Advisors
street & number: 313 Washington Street, Suite 308
city or town: Newton state: Massachusetts zip code: 02458
e-mail rcameron@mac-ha.com
telephone: (617) 531-7158
date: November 2020

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

Photo Log

Name of Property: Donwell's Diner

City or Vicinity: Pawtucket

County: Providence

State: Rhode Island

Photographs 1-3

Photographer: Jeffrey Emidy (RIHPHC)

Date Photographed: April 6, 2021

Photographs 4-21

Photographer: Kim Smith

Date Photographed: June 2020

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 21: Donwell's Diner (north elevation) with Lorraine Mill behind, facing south
- 2 of 21: Donwell's Diner (north elevation) with Lorraine Mill behind, facing southwest
- 3 of 21: Donwell's Diner (west and north elevations) with Lorraine Mill behind, facing northeast
- 4 of 21: Front (north) elevation, facing south
- 5 of 21: Front (north) elevation, facing southeast
- 6 of 21: Front (north) elevation, facing southeast
- 7 of 21: West elevation, facing southeast
- 8 of 21: Front (north) and east elevations, facing south
- 9 of 21: Interior, facing west
- 10 of 21: Interior of north elevation, facing northwest
- 11 of 21: Interior, main (north elevation) entrance detail, facing north
- 12 of 21: Interior, facing east
- 13 of 21: Interior, facing southeast
- 14 of 21: Interior, facing southwest
- 15 of 21: Interior, facing east
- 16 of 21: Interior, southeast corner, facing southeast
- 17 of 21: Interior, facing northwest
- 18 of 21: Interior, facing southwest
- 19 of 21: Interior of west elevation, facing northwest
- 20 of 21: Interior, facing south
- 21 of 21: Interior, detail of door at southwest corner, facing west

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

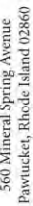
Providence County, RI

County and State

Photo Keys



County and State



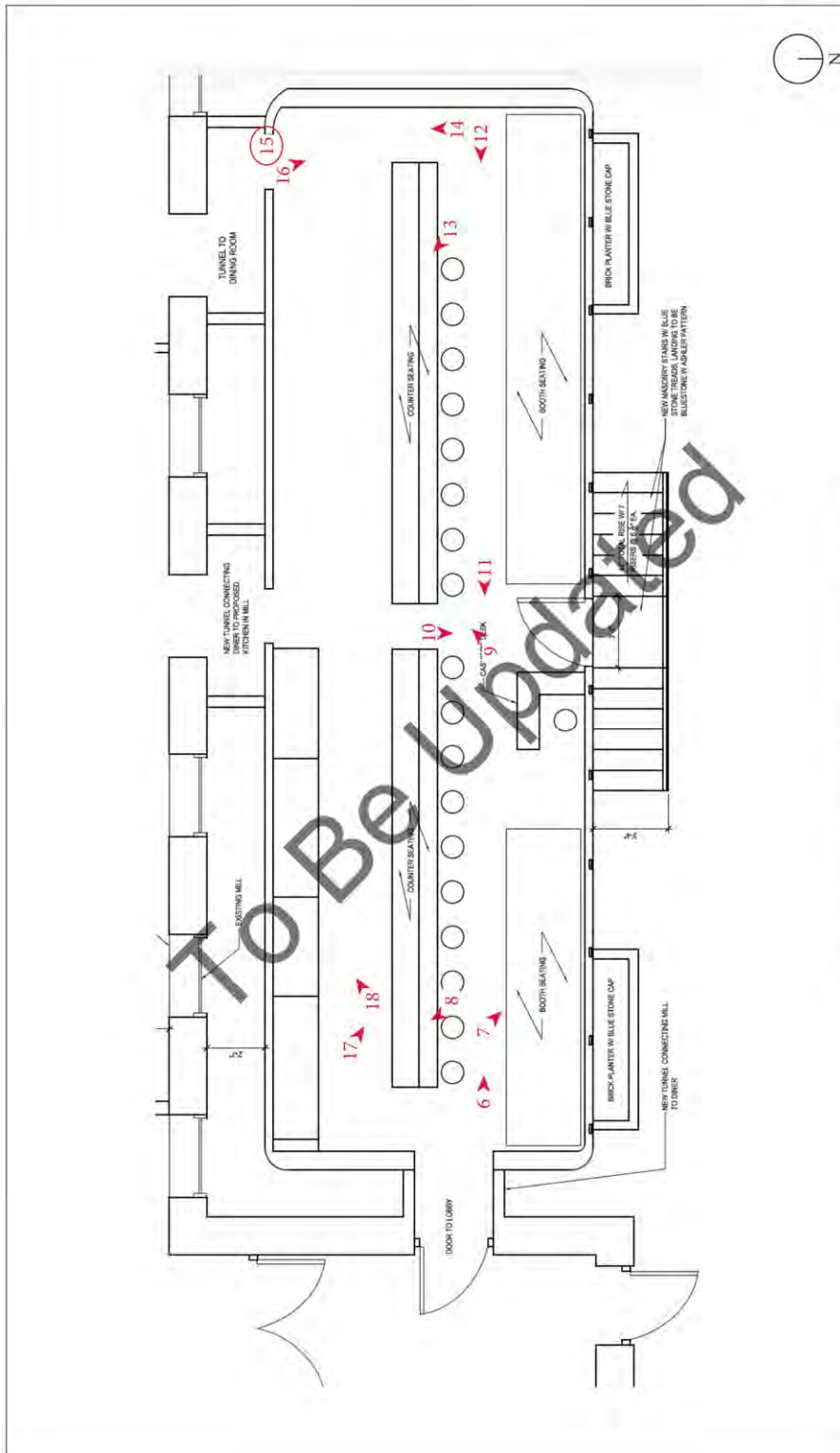
Sections 10-11 page 33

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State



First Floor Plan

Donwell's Diner (Worcester Lunch Car Co. Diner No. 774)

560 Mineral Spring Avenue
Pawtucket, Rhode Island 02860

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

Figures



From the collections of Worcester Historical Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts

Figure 1: Granville M. Stoddard (left) and Philip H. Duprey (right) of the Worcester Lunch Car Company posing next to Murphy's Café (No. 201), c.1907.⁸²



Figure 2: Worcester Lunch Car Company Authentication Tag from Lamy's Diner, 1946.⁸³

⁸² Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 22.

⁸³ "Worcester Lunch Car Company Tag from Lamy's Diner, 1946," The Henry Ford, <https://www.thehenryford.org/collections-and-research/digital-collections/artifact/364384/#slide=gs-346772> (accessed March 23, 2021).

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State

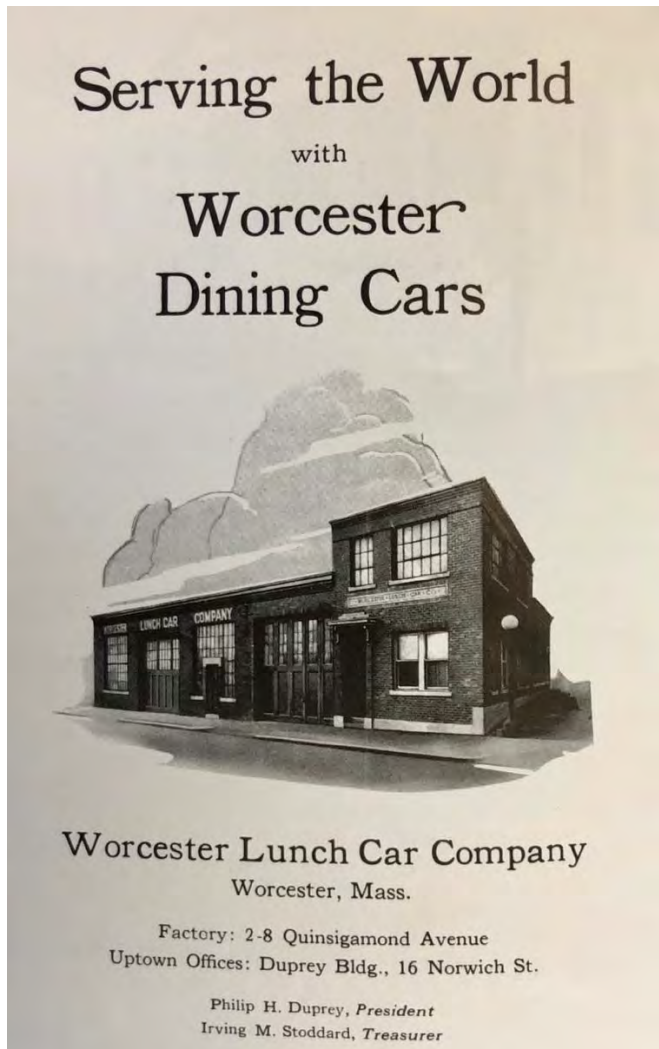


Figure 3: WLCC advertisement featuring the company's new Quinsigamond Avenue plant, date unknown.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Gutman, *The Worcester Lunch Car Company*, 28.

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)
Name of Property

Providence County, RI
County and State

*All Steel
Deluxe Diner!*



★ Quality Food
★ Good Service

*Announcing
the
OPENING
of
DONWELLS
INC.*

Hartford's Newest and Finest
DINER—RESTAURANT!
357 ASYLUM ST., Opp. HOTEL BOND

Conveniently located, this diner-restaurant is a handy meeting place for Hartford people at any time of day or night . . . we have thrown the key away . . . we will feature 24 hour service. Stop in for breakfast, lunch, dinner, or a midnight "snack," and enjoy some really delicious food! Particular attention to dainty and appetizing salads for our lady guests. Surroundings are beautifully appointed, and our service is the best. Whether it's a dinner you want, or just a "snack" . . . DONWELLS DINER-RESTAURANT is the place!

This DeLuxe diner-restaurant is well lighted by units of specially designed, modernistic, chrome-plated fixtures . . . inside trim of Solid Honduras Mahogany . . . ceiling of formica . . . stainless steel cooking equipment . . . mahogany booths . . . floor and walls of tile . . . counter tops are of pink Tennessee marble . . . a large open kitchen, designed to insure good food and prompt service! Cleanliness—comfort—speed . . . Enjoy Good Food at DONWELLS!

Figure 5: Advertisement announcing the opening of Donwell's Diner-Restaurant, posted in the *Hartford Courant* on Sept. 7, 1941.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ "Announcing the Opening of Donwells Inc.," *The Hartford Courant*, September 7, 1941, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/370267059/?terms=Worcester+Lunch+Car+Diner+Asylum+Ave+Hartford> (accessed March 23, 2021).

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)
Name of Property

Providence County, RI
County and State

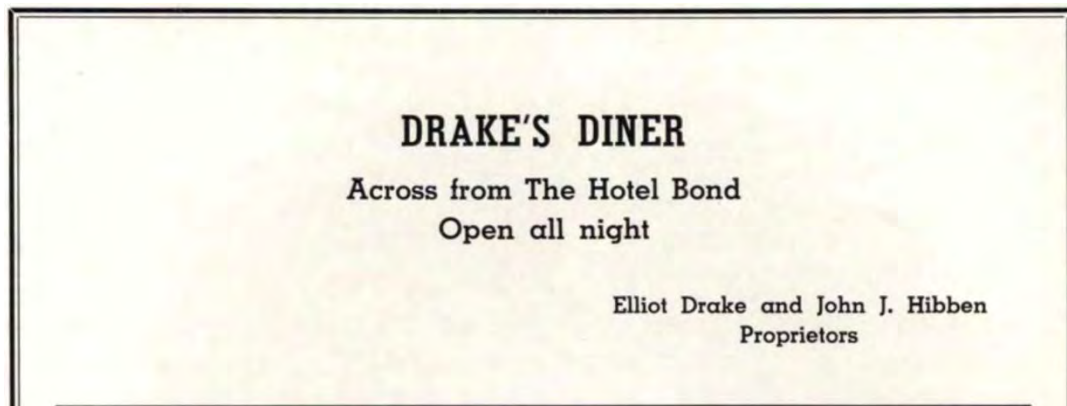


Figure 6: Advertisement for Drake's Diner (No. 774) published in Trinity College's 1949 student yearbook.⁸⁷



Figure 7: Advertisement for the 1956 auction of Donwell's Diner, *Hartford Courant*, December 2, 1956.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ "The Trinity Ivy, 1959," Trinity College Digital Repository, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/ivy/61/> (accessed March 23, 2021).

⁸⁸ "Public Auction," *The Hartford Courant*, December 2, 1956, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/367757043/?terms=Diner+auction+357+Asylum> (accessed March 23, 2021).

Donwell's Diner (WLCC No. 774)

Name of Property

Providence County, RI

County and State



COLIN STRAYER of Syracuse cranks a hand winch this week while working to move the former Farm Hill Diner, commonly known as "Squeaks." The 48-foot "Streamline" was built in 1941 by the Worcester Lunch Car Co. in Massachusetts and is one of only nine of its kind left in the country.

Figure 8: Donwell's before its most recent relocation to Pawtucket, *Hartford Courant*, October 10, 2003.⁸⁹

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

⁸⁹ Josh Kovner, "Old Diner Moving To A Brighter Future," *Hartford Courant*, October 10, 2003m 167, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/257356749> (accessed March 23, 2021).



1 of 21: Donwell's Diner (north elevation) with Lorraine Mill behind, facing south



2 of 21: Donwell's Diner (north elevation) with Lorraine Mill behind, facing southwest



3 of 21: Donwell's Diner (west and north elevations) with Lorraine Mill behind, facing northeast



4 of 21: Front (north) elevation, facing south



5 of 21: Front (north) elevation, facing southeast



6 of 21: Front (north) elevation, facing southeast



7 of 21: West elevation, facing southeast



8 of 21: Front (north) and east elevations, facing south



9 of 21: Interior, facing west



10 of 21: Interior of north elevation, facing northwest



11 of 21: Interior, main (north elevation) entrance detail, facing north



12 of 21: Interior, facing east



13 of 21: Interior, facing southeast



14 of 21: Interior, facing southwest



15 of 21: Interior, facing east



16 of 21: Interior, southeast corner, facing southeast



17 of 21: Interior, facing northwest



18 of 21: Interior, facing southwest



19 of 21: Interior of west elevation, facing northwest



20 of 21: Interior, facing south



21 of 21: Interior, detail of door at southwest corner, facing west