

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 Property

Historic name: Aetna Diner

Other names/site number: Aetna Restaurant, Comet Diner, Hog River Grill, Oasis Diner, Dishes

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: 267 Farmington Avenue

City or town: Hartford State: CT County: Hartford

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐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 X statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

	SHPO 7/1/21
Signature of certifying official/Title:	
Date	
<u>Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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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:) _____

for Roger G. Reed
Signature of the Keeper

June 18, 2021
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
Public – Local ☐
Public – State ☐
Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
District ☐
Site ☐
Structure ☐
Object ☐

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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/restaurant

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

WORK IN PROGRESS

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Modern Movement

Modernistic

Streamlined Moderne

Other: Prefabricated Diner

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Concrete, Stainless Steel, Metal, Synthetics,
Glass

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

The Aetna Diner is a prefabricated, stainless-steel diner located on its original site at the corner of Farmington Avenue and Laurel Street in the Asylum Hill neighborhood of Hartford, Connecticut. Paramount Dining Cars, Inc. manufactured this custom diner in their Haledon, New Jersey factory in 1947. Paramount utilized their patented prefabrication technique to manufacture the diner in three longitudinal sections known as cells, which were individually transported to Hartford in 1948.¹ The diner measures 50' long and 32' wide, making it among the largest diner cars to be manufactured and assembled using this sectional transportation method.² Once the sections arrived on site, the diner was assembled on a poured concrete basement foundation which served as a "rathskeller" and later a club lounge. The diner was adjoined to a contrasting, one-and-one-half-story brick kitchen measuring 36' by 24' which was specifically designed for this diner in 1948.

¹ This technique was patented as the "portable diner", although most secondary sources refer to this method as "sectional diner" construction; Arthur Sieber, Portable Diner, United States Patent Office 2,247,893, filed March 16, 1940, and issued July 1, 1941. According to Richard Gutman, Paramount referenced the "split construction" method in their advertising and frequently gave the above patent number. *The Diner* magazine, January 1949.

² "Aetna Diner Replacement Announced" *The Hartford Courant*, August 22, 1948, B1.

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The Aetna Diner is an excellent example of modernistic road-side architecture and mid-twentieth-century diner design. The Aetna remains on its original location and retains its feeling and association as a large, mid-twentieth century diner. Three of the most character-defining features of Paramount-made diners are extant, including an entire stainless-steel exterior, barrel-step roof, and glass-block corners.

Narrative Description

Setting

The former Aetna Diner is situated on a 0.20-acre parcel at the southwest corner of Farmington Avenue and Laurel Street in the City of Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut (Figure 1). The diner sits atop a slight grade and the lot slopes toward Laurel Street and Farmington Avenue to the east and north respectively. The diner and its adjoined kitchen occupy the south-central portion of the lot corner of the lot. With the exception of a small grass area at the north entrance of the diner, the lot is covered in asphalt with concrete sidewalks along the east and north boundaries (Figure 2). The diner is located in the southwestern section of the Asylum Hill neighborhood, a dense urban area that includes a mix of commercial and residential structures. The diner faces north to the busy thoroughfare of Farmington Avenue and is bordered by residential, multi-unit housing on the south and west and mixed-used commercial and residential buildings on the north and east. It is set back approximately 50 feet from Farmington Avenue. The diner is within a quarter mile of two National Historic Landmarks, the Mark Twain House and Museum (formerly known as the Mark Twain Memorial) and the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center (originally the Harriet Beecher Stowe House). It is also near Aetna Inc., The Hartford Financial Services Company, the University of Connecticut School of Law, and the Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center. The property is located within the Laurel and Marshall Streets Historic District, listed on the National Register in 1979 as part of the Asylum Hill MRA, but was classified as non-contributing.³ An update to this nomination was not pursued because the diner has a different development history and period of significance than that of the Laurel and Marshall Streets Historic District.

Exterior

The Aetna Diner consists of two sections including the diner itself and the one-and-one-half-story brick kitchen. The diner sits on an original poured concrete basement foundation with a brick sill that is exposed and raises the diner several feet above grade. The most striking feature of the car's exterior is its original stainless-steel panels, which have a unique raised burnished circle design, and are a manufacturing hallmark of Paramount Dining Cars, Inc. The diner retains its corner glass blocks and roof shape, also characteristics of Paramount-made cars. The roof is flat with barrel-style steps along the edges, mimicking both mid-century streamlined railroad cars and older diners that traditionally had full-barrel roofs (Photograph 1).⁴ The roof is covered in a tar coating material, which is painted blue and is not original. Modern ductwork for air conditioning and other utilities

³ The property is identified as The Shipwreck Lounge Inc., 267 Farmington Ave. in the nomination.

⁴ Richard J. S. Gutman, *American Diner Then and Now* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

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are located on the roof; these are not original to the building. There is extant original air conditioning ductwork which runs along the interior ceiling (see below). Standing in contrast to the diner itself is the brick kitchen which measures 36' wide by 24' long and is attached at the diner's south end. This kitchen is also original to the site and was designed by Hartford architect Julius Berenson in 1948.⁵ The brick kitchen section to the south has a flat roof and houses a central steel and glass pyramidal skylight.

The diner façade is three bays wide and includes the building's main entrance (Photograph 5). The most prominent feature of the façade is the ca. 1980, large multicolored neon "Dishes Restaurant" sign attached to the roof. A series of three rounded steps with modern stone veneer and white-painted steel railings leads to a set of centrally located stainless-steel double doors, each door inset with a fixed oval window. The double doors are flanked by two vertically oriented, corrugated, stainless-steel panels and streamlined columns which serve as gutter downspouts. Both ends of the façade contain a set of windows identical to the eastern elevation (stainless-steel picture window flanked by two casements with etchings). The picture windows contain lettering stating, "Booth Service for Ladies" and "Take Out Service". At the northeastern and northwestern corners, the diner retains its distinctive seven-by-seven glass-block windows (Photograph 6). An entrance to the basement is accessible by a pair of steps that run parallel to the façade and lead to a modern stainless-steel double door.

The east (side) elevation faces Laurel Street and is one of the two most visible, prominent, and decorative elevations. It is four bays wide (Photograph 2). At the south end there is a concrete ramp leading to a stainless-steel door with a fixed glass panel on top. A stainless-steel column fills the corner between this door and the brick kitchen, which protrudes slightly. To the north there are four symmetrically spaced, rectangular picture windows; each is flanked by two smaller rectangular vertical casement windows with etched pattern designs (Photograph 3). The picture windows contain stenciling, which boasts some of the Aetna's original offerings: "Fountain Service", "Air Conditioned", and "Food that Pleases." Window sash throughout the diner is original; it is constructed of stainless steel and each of the windows are divided by simple sheets of stainless steel, stamped with horizontal bands or ribbing. The central panel retains stenciled lettering, which reads "Turn Lights on for Service." It is unlikely that the stenciled lettering is original but was added in the 1990s to recapture the 1950s diner aesthetic. Above the windows there is a band of stainless steel with a repeating pattern of one large and two small, burnished circles. This band serves to hide the building's integrated gutter system. Below the windows are two slightly wider horizontal stainless-steel bands. The stainless-steel decorative bands wrap around the structure unbroken and continue along the façade (north elevation) (Photograph 4). The northeast corner of the diner car is rounded with an original curved, glass-block window: another hallmark of Paramount Dining Cars Inc.

The west (side) elevation of the diner is a blind wall devoid of ornamentation, though it is still clad in stainless steel panels (Photograph 7). A cinderblock structure is located approximately 5' from this elevation. This structure, designed by Julius Berenson, is a garbage container shed built in

⁵ Original Drawings, Julius Berenson: Architect, Hartford, CT December 8, 1947 (collection of Wayne Benjamin, 2021).

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approximately 1952 (Photograph 8).⁶ The south (rear) elevation of the diner is not visible because it is attached to the kitchen. This elevation is flat, rather than curved with decorative glass-block windows. This design element was a typical design solution for Paramount diners that were to be adjoined to a traditional block building annex (Photograph 9).

The kitchen annex has a flat roof that contains ventilation equipment and is lined by a steel railing. The entire exterior is clad in red brick, which is painted blue with the exception of an interior chimney at the southwest corner. The only section that is not exposed brick, is the lower half of the east elevation, which is parged (possibly for a painted sign or mural). Three double-hung, vinyl windows that serve the bathrooms are also located toward the north end of the east elevation (Photograph 10). The south elevation is devoid of ornamentation and contains two boarded window openings and three basement window wells that are also boarded. The west elevation contains two rectangular windows, which are boarded and a modern door for the rear of the kitchen, which is accessible from a small concrete staircase that leads from the parking lot (Photographs 11 and 12).

Interior

The interior is divided into three sections: the main dining room (i.e., the pre-fab diner itself, consisting of a table and booth section and counter-seating area and backbar), the kitchen, and the basement. Upon entering the dining room from the main entrance on the façade, there is a small, tiled vestibule that leads to a modern set of double doors flanked by original glass-block walls on the east and west. Although the interior doors are not original, they are housed in original stainless-steel doorframes with corresponding stainless trim pieces. The interior trim of the doors retains the original bent stainless-steel paneling with a sunburst design (Photograph 13). Also, located above the door is an original custom General Electric stainless-steel clock which reads “Designed and Built by Paramount Diners Inc, Haledon, N.J.” (Photograph 14).

The bent sunburst, stainless-steel paneling continues along the west wall. This area served as the original “backbar.” The backbar with decorative paneling and trim remains intact though most of the original equipment is missing (Photograph 15). Above the backbar is a row of sunburst panels. Originally there were glass-fronted, changeable letter menu boards between these decorative panels. Additionally, there are two pieces of original stainless equipment along the backbar that were installed by Paramount at the factory (Photographs 16 and 17). These include a stainless-steel storage cabinet along the center of the backbar and a stainless double-door refrigerator at the southwest corner.

The east wall is lined with original windows and a set of three, square mirrors between the windows. These mirrors are used to advertise “Deluxe Platters—Mom’s Meatloaf—Chicken Fried Steak—Fresh Turkey—All Served with Mashed Potatoes.” However, according to diner historian Richard Gutman, this lettering is a modern addition created in a retro style (Photograph 18). All of the mirrors are intact and in good condition (Photograph 19). Additionally, each window has an

⁶ Julius Berenson, “Aetna Diner Site Plans,” September 3, 1952.

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original “special” stainless-steel ventilation slide, which allowed air to freely flow into the interior.⁷ There are also stainless-steel light housings above each window and mirror. A stainless easement door is also located at the southeastern corner of the eastern wall.

The ceiling of the main dining area is clad with a series of flat and curved panels (Photograph 20). While some of these have been repainted and/or damaged, many remain intact and they appear to be the original Formica-on-board panels that were installed by Paramount Diners Inc. The panels are held in place with original stainless-steel drop ceiling trim. Along the center of the ceiling is ductwork wrapped in stainless trim. This is the original air conditioning ductwork that was installed by Paramount Diners, Inc. (Photograph 21). Along each side of the air conditioning duct are two sets of stainless columns, which meet stainless trim at the ceiling (Photograph 22). The columns and corresponding trim conceal the steel structure of the diner.

Built between the structural columns are two privacy walls that separate the booth area from the counter. Along the eastern side of each wall is a series of booths, which have been reupholstered and replaced with newer Formica laminate tabletops. The internal structure of the booths may be original as the layout is consistent with other diners from this era. Other original elements include glass and stainless exit signs, stainless steel coat hooks on the costumers and booths, and decorative stainless circle elements.⁸ The main dining room floor is covered in mosaic tiles that are not original. Evidence of earlier layers of tile are visible in small sections where the tile is broken or missing.

In the northwest corner of the main dining room, there is a concrete staircase that leads to the basement. The basement is as large as the dining space above. There is also utility storage and modern bathrooms underneath the kitchen on the southern end. The basement is devoid of most features from when it was the original “rathskeller” except for some original ventilation equipment. The walls are adorned with large painted murals featuring blues and jazz musicians dating from when this area was used as a bar/nightclub for the Comet Diner after 1983 (Photograph 23).

The diner’s streamlined and futuristic look offers the sense that the diner is constructed of rigid materials. Though the diner is clad in stainless steel (both exterior and interior) that material is superficial, covering what is predominantly a light, wood-framed building. The floor and walls are framed with lumber similar to other small twentieth-century buildings with mostly standard 2” by 4” dimensional lumber. Some light steel does exist in the structure. This includes light steel beams on the floor and ceiling located in the two longitudinal sections where the diner cells were connected. These beams are supported by structural columns (clad in stainless) in the interior dining room and basement. These pieces of steel were affixed to the individual cells in Paramount’s factory and they would have allowed the cells to remain rigid enough for transportation. They would have also allowed for easy assembly, since it permitted the cells to simply bolt together.

⁷ “New Beacon Diner at Hometown opens Wednesday” *Standard-Sentinel*, May 27, 1941, 8.

⁸ “Costumer” is a technical term for an upright post on which patrons hang coats and hats.

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The roof structure contains a combination of steel and wood framing. Aside from the central steel spine, shaped steel brackets give the diner its distinctive stepped barrel roof.

The brick kitchen annex houses both the original kitchen and bathrooms. Two small bathrooms are accessible at the southeast corner of the main dining room. A double-wide opening along the center of the south interior wall allows access to the kitchen area. The kitchen has a tile floor, walk-in refrigerator, stainless steel sinks, ventilation hoods, and shelves (Photograph 24).

Integrity

The Aetna Diner remains on the location it was designed for. It was constructed with the “Portable Diner” patent, meaning that despite its large size, it could be manufactured off-site and transported. Because of the portability, a significant number of pre-1965 diners were moved from their original locations. This is especially true of diners located in dense urban areas, many of which were moved during urban renewal and other development. However, the Aetna maintains its original location and has remained a staple landmark in the Asylum Hill neighborhood for more than seventy years. Although there is later twentieth-century construction around the diner, it retains its setting. Much of the area retains its late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century architectural character. Historic, mixed-use residential/commercial buildings surround the area, keeping with the density and character of the area as it was in 1948. The Aetna also retains its connection to the parking lot; this is important because diners of this era were trying to compete with auto-related eating establishments such as drive-ins, which made diner parking a valuable commodity.

In terms of design, the Aetna Diner exhibits features that are distinctive to diners manufactured by the Paramount Dining Cars, Inc. The three most important exterior hallmarks of a Paramount diner are the all-stainless-steel exterior cladding, the step-barrel roof design, and the rounded glass-block corners. The Aetna’s exterior stainless steel is nearly intact in its entirety and has suffered little degradation. The Aetna maintains its original corner glass blocks and its original roof design. Many diners that survived into the 1970s have retrofitted roofs. Owners often eliminated the streamlined look of the 1950s in favor of a mansard roof or other design, as diners were trying to compete with traditional restaurants in terms of services and appearance. This same trend befell the Aetna in the 1970s, but the faux roof was removed and produced no permanent alteration in terms of the original design. The Aetna diner also retains its original integrated gutter system. On the interior, the Aetna retains its original layout, stainless-steel decorations, backbar, and some kitchen equipment.

Despite interior alterations, the Aetna retains a significant amount of original interior materials, specifically ones that are unique to Paramount-made dining cars. The exterior has little alteration and retains all of the features that make this dining car a uniquely Paramount creation. These features, the stainless steel, the roofline, glass blocks; overall futuristic design, in combination with the fact that the diner has stood in its original location for over seventy years, evoke the feeling of and exhibit an association with post-World War II diner culture.

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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

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce

Architecture

Period of Significance

1948-1970

Significant Dates

1948: Diner assembled

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Paramount Dining Cars, Haledon, New Jersey

Berenson, Julius, Hartford, Connecticut (kitchen annex)

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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.)

The Aetna Diner is eligible for listing on the National Register at the state level under Criterion A in the category of Commerce and Criterion C in the category of Architecture. Under Criterion A, the diner is representative of a transition in the diner industry and changes in diner culture during the postwar era. Specifically, the large size and amenities of the Aetna catered to an increasing number of people who dined out more. Post-war diner patrons often dined for leisure, not just for sustenance as was the case in traditional diner patrons in industrial centers. The diner meets Criterion C as an increasingly rare, prefabricated, and specialized building type. It is an archetypical example of the flexible and customizable designs of Paramount Dining Cars of Haledon, New Jersey. The mid-twentieth-century streamline aesthetic and materials, such as Formica and interior stainless steel, also set standards for other post-war American diners. The period of significance extends from 1948, when the diner was assembled in Hartford, Connecticut, to 1970 when the owners of the property began rebranding the diner as a traditional restaurant. Like other diners, the Aetna entered a period of decline in the face of market competition from chain restaurants that also offered inexpensive and convenient foods. Instead of competing directly with new chains, the Aetna's owners sought to create a restaurant dining experience which would draw customers from the city and suburbs. When this happened, many of the physical characteristics associated with diners were covered over and disguised, which was the fate of the Aetna. This also reflected a significant shift from the Aetna's original customer base, which largely consisted of nearby workers, to a more diverse clientele.

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

Criterion A: Commerce

The Aetna Diner meets Criterion A in the category of commerce for its association with the postwar transition of diners from compact facilities serving workers, to larger establishments that could accommodate a variety of clients, including families and patrons seeking a dining experience for entertainment purposes. The diner was manufactured and assembled during a post-World War II diner boom, which was engendered by a growing number of white-collar workers with both disposable income and leisure time. The Aetna's immigrant owners adopted common innovations such as increased space, air conditioning, booth service, drive-in service, and a varied menu aimed at keeping customers in their diner for longer periods of time. Not everyone patronized diners for quick and convenient meals as was the case a decade earlier; unique to the Aetna with its downstairs lounge, people stayed for food, music, entertainment, and socializing. However, success of this period was short lived and by the mid-1950s, the Aetna, along with the nation's diner industry, waned from competition from drive-ins and chain restaurants. Like most diners, the Aetna attempted to reinvent itself as a traditional restaurant but with limited success.

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Before World War II, American diners were small and catered predominantly to industrial workers as well as smaller number office workers and travelers. These small diners, originally known as “lunch carts,” began in mid-nineteenth-century New England cities, when food peddlers sold simple, cheap, and convenient meals from horse-drawn wagons to New England’s blue-collar workers.⁹ At the turn of the twentieth-century, these establishments became larger, stationary fixtures in industrial areas. Their designs began to emulate Pullman dining cars, giving clientele a taste of luxury railroad dining cars without the price.¹⁰ Despite this upgrade, the diner’s traditional service and connection with working-class Americans remained.¹¹ This was true of the original Aetna Diner, which was established in 1935. While specific details regarding the original structure are unknown, it was significantly smaller than the diner that replaced in 1948 since the principal reasoning cited for the new facility was needed space.¹² Like typical early twentieth-century diners, the original Aetna would have been designed for rapid service and high customer turnover to generate profit.¹³

Mimicking the design of railcars also fit the rapid-service business model of diners by creating efficient kitchens with everything in immediate reach of the cooks.¹⁴ In the age of Fredrick Winslow Taylor’s, scientific management theories, and the assembly line, it is unsurprising that the food service industry would adopt efficient tactics to keep operating—and food costs—low. Thus, efficiencies were both modeled into the layout of diners, and used as a major advertising tool for diner manufacturers.

The most significant effect of efficient management was a low cost for diner proprietorship. This made diners a popular entrepreneurial option for people of limited economic means and immigrants who could build and run diners with relatively little restaurant experience or financial investment.¹⁵ This trend was true of the Aetna, which was established in 1935 by Greek immigrants James and Sarah Kopteros and A. Athanacelous.¹⁶ Though not explicitly stated, the owners of the original Aetna presumably named their diner for their neighbor and a significant source of their

⁹Michael Gabriel. “From Lunch Wagons to Grand Restaurants: Dining out in America.” *Repast: Quarterly Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor* XXXI, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 9–12; “Lunch Wagon to Space Age Diner: Connecticut’s First Fast Food Emporiums.” Accessed September 11, 2018. <https://www.ctexplored.org/lunch-wagon-to-space-age-diner-connecticuts-first-fast-food-emporiums/>; Kathleen Kelly Broomer with Betsy Friedberg NR director, MHC, “The Diners of Massachusetts”, 1999; Joseph T Manzo, “From Pushcart to Modular Restaurant: The Diner on the Landscape.” *The Journal of American Culture* 13, no. 3 (1990): 13–21; Andrew Hurley. “From Hash House to Family Restaurant: The Transformation of the Diner and Post-World War II Consumer Culture.” *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 4 (1997): 1282–1308.

¹⁰ Gutman, 61.

¹¹ Gutman, 28-30.

¹² Aerial Maps from 1934 show that the original diner occupied the northwest corner of the parcel and sat parallel to Farmington Avenue; “Aerial Survey of Connecticut 1934 Photograph 09770,” accessed July 1, 2021, <https://cslib.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4005coll10/id/5042>.

¹³ “\$40,000 Diner Planned for Farmington Avenue” *The Hartford Courant*, March 14, 1948, B1.

¹⁴ Gutman, 61.

¹⁵ Gutman, 95.

¹⁶ “Corporation Papers Files” *The Hartford Courant*, August 3, 1935, 3.

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future clientele. The Aetna Insurance Company's Hartford office was located only a third of a mile to the east on Farmington Avenue from the diner. The Kopteros family lived on nearby Dorothy Street and were members of St. George's Greek Orthodox Church.¹⁷ Shortly after James' unexpected death at age 40, the diner was sold to the Greek immigrants George Yamoyines, Constantine Vleclides, and Peter Tragakes in 1939.¹⁸ Though their wives and families are infrequently mentioned in contemporary sources, the Aetna was advertised as a family run restaurant. Diners were traditionally designed to limit the needs for additional staff other than a cook, which was a role traditionally held by men. This may have differed for the Aetna due to the larger size of its dining area and kitchen, which would have required additional staffing. Their proprietorship of the Aetna is representative of Greek immigrant ownership in northeastern diners. A survey of northeastern diners between 1945 and 1956 revealed that approximately 80% of diners were Greek owned compared to 10% of the national average. Between 1950 and 1970, 600 diners were established by Greek immigrants in the Greater New York Area alone.¹⁹

By World War II, the small diners operated by a single or small group fell out of favor. Larger diners with greater capacity became more desirable because of diversification and expansion of clientele. The Aetna's owners were a part of this trend and planned an expansion that was cut short by steel and personnel shortages during the war.²⁰ Despite these temporary shortages, demand for diners increased among working-class women and families. Although women had been patronizing diners since the 1920s, the number of female customers rapidly increased as women participated in wartime production. The hectic work hours and strict rationing during the war significantly disrupted domestic life, and diners began serving families to an extent not seen before the war.²¹ The trend of families eating at diners continued after the war, first because of persistent food rationing and later from disposable income in the post-war economic boom.²²

In response to the growing popularity of diners among diverse patrons and a desire for more space and amenities, the Aetna's owners ordered a custom diner from Paramount Dining Car, Inc. in 1948. The desire for growth was related to growth of the local economy and the expansion of the diner's local clientele. The Aetna Insurance Company, the diner's largest source of patrons, expanded its workforce in Hartford in the post-war years and themselves engaged in large expansion project adding a new wing to the Hartford office in 1952. The new diner prominently embodied the postwar changes in its construction. The 4,000 square-foot diner, three times the size

¹⁷ "James Kopteros Found Dead in His Garage" *The Hartford Courant*, January 5, 1939, 13.

¹⁸ "\$40,000 Diner Planned for Farmington Avenue" *The Hartford Courant*, March 14, 1948, B1; "Legal Notice 1" *The Hartford Courant*, July 24, 1939, 15.

¹⁹ "Aetna Diner Replacement Announced" *The Hartford Courant*, August 22, 1948, B1; Census Place: Hartford, Hartford, Connecticut; Page: 19A; Enumeration District: 0080; FHL microfilm: 2340000; Joseph T. Manzo, "From Pushcart to Modular Restaurant: The Diner on the Landscape," *Journal of American Culture* 13, no. 3 (September 1, 1990): 13; Garrison Leykam, *Classic Diners of Connecticut*, 2013, e-reader section 495.

²⁰ "Aetna Diner Replacement Announced" *The Hartford Courant*, August 22, 1948, B1.

²¹ Andrew Hurley, "From Hash House to Family Restaurant: The Transformation of the Diner and Post-World War II Consumer Culture," *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 4 (1997): 1286, 1288.

²² Chandler, Susan R. with Mark McEachern. *Skee's Diner National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, 2002.

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of the original Aetna, was entirely air conditioned and had a large parking lot.²³ Although the prefabricated diner could have been ordered with a ready-made kitchen, the Aetna was instead attached to a brick annex. The owners likely chose this route to maintain the characteristic American diner design, while doubling the occupancy by allowing for more seating space in the diner portion. When assembled, the Aetna was among the largest prefabricated diners. In 1948, a larger prefabricated option was not available. Another unusual addition to the diner, not built by Paramount, was a basement rathskeller, containing a men's bar as well as a cocktail lounge.²⁴

Advertisements for mixed dances, a plethora of booths, and window signage that reads "Booth Service for Ladies" and "Take out Service" reflect the postwar changes to dining service sought by the Aetna's customers. New clientele necessitated design changes, especially in terms of size. Traditional diners generally had a single row of stools, which were preferred over booths in prewar diners as they took up less space.²⁵ Booths necessitated building larger diners, a design change that all manufacturers accommodated as diners grew in width, eventually resulting in the need for multiple-section diners. Paramount's method for this was awarded a "portable diner" patent, in 1941. (see Criterion C).

Taking advantage of new postwar markets, the food served by the Aetna was as varied as its customers. Alongside its traditional American diner fare, the Aetna prided itself on a number of Greek dishes as well.²⁶ The Aetna offered high-end weekend specials such as lobster dinners served in the Rathskeller Lounge.²⁷ This would be followed by live music and dancing.²⁸ Holiday specials, including Mother's Day dinners,²⁹ traditional Thanksgiving dinners,³⁰ and New Year's Eve parties³¹ also kept the diner closely tied to the community. Most significantly, these events represent the trend of diners catering to families, especially as cars allowed people to travel farther distances to dine out, including into nearby suburbs.

The larger Paramount car served the Aetna's owners well. Looking back on the golden days of the Aetna Diner's success in the 1950s and early 1960s, Constantine Vlecidis' wife Helen recalled the wide variety of customers. She noted that the diner served everyone from factory workers in coveralls to finely dressed people bound for an evening at the Bushnell Performing Arts Center.³² One high-profile customer was Connecticut politician and eventual governor Ella Grasso, who frequently dined at the Aetna with her family. Grasso enjoyed the food so much that she had the Aetna deliver dinner to the governor's manor while she was entertaining First Lady Rosalynn

²³ "Aetna Diner will Reopen on Monday" *The Hartford Courant*, December 15, 1948, 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Gutman, 137.

²⁶ *The Hartford Courant*, October 26, 1975.

²⁷ "Display Ad 31" *The Hartford Courant*, November 10, 1950, 10.

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ *The Hartford Courant*, May 7, 1965.

³⁰ "Display Ad 8" *The Hartford Courant* November 22, 1950 3.

³¹ "Display Ad 9" *The Hartford Courant*, December 31, 1948, 3.

³² *The Hartford Courant*, September 29, 1983.

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Carter. Another notable customer was Harry S. Truman, who visited in 1948, while campaigning for his second term as president.³³

Despite growing popularity in the immediate postwar period, diners such as the Aetna faced new competition and loss of traditional patrons; there were two new competitors in the immediate vicinity: Scoler's across the street and the Maple Shade Sandwich shop a block to the west. As factories moved out of cities and into the suburbs, diners' traditional working-class customer base moved with them. Combined with the fact that factories began offering more cafeteria service for their workers, diners were forced to find new markets.³⁴ To adapt diners to the new economy, owners rebranded diners as middle-class family restaurants instead of working-class eateries.³⁵

Although the Aetna Diner remained successful through the 1950s, it gradually began to face the same challenges experienced by other diners around the country. Automobile culture and increased mobility affected American diners in a negative way. Though the Aetna tried to compete with these changes by offering drive-in service, diners in general were hampered by their "working-class heritage" compared to the more modern drive-ins.³⁶ New franchised restaurants like McDonald's found success at the expense of diners by offering consistency to travelers who were visiting new and unfamiliar areas.³⁷

The Aetna responded to these changes with an aggressive remodeling campaign beginning in the 1960s. First, the diner's name was changed to the Aetna Restaurant, and the now dated streamlined interior was covered with Mediterranean style carpeting.³⁸ Still more changes met the rathskeller, which was renamed and redecorated as the Shipwreck Lounge in 1964 and featured nightly piano and organ music.³⁹ Compared to the swing music associated with the Rathskeller, the owners showcased folk, piano, or traditional Greek music in the new lounge. A reporter for the *Hartford Courant* noted that the space had capacity for two completely different sets of customers; with older people staying in the restaurant while younger people flocked to the Shipwreck Lounge.⁴⁰ In 1975, a mansard roof bearing the name "Aetna Restaurant" covered the traditional stainless-steel exterior. Despite these changes, Helen Vlecidis noted that business declined with the neighborhood as their customers moved to the suburbs in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴¹

In trying to compete with larger restaurants, diner owners rebranded, remodeled, and reinvented their facilities until they were no longer diners. However, it did not take long for Americans to rediscover the streamlined style of the traditional dining car. Author and diner historian Richard Gutman listed dozens of diners that were saved from the cutting torch and renovated by new

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Hurley, 1287.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Hurley, 1302.

³⁷ Gutman, 172.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *The Hartford Courant*, August 1, 1964.

⁴⁰ *The Hartford Courant*, September 29, 1983.

⁴¹ Ibid.

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owners in his publications. Generally, the new owners wanted to revive the nostalgic feeling of the old streamlined diner.⁴²

Criterion C: Architecture

The Aetna Diner was constructed in a period (see statement of significance Criterion A) when the size and amenities afforded by diners began to compete with larger restaurants. Adequate interior dining space to provide comfort and privacy became paramount and many diner proprietors chose to forgo a kitchen contained within the diner in favor of an external kitchen. This was the case with the Aetna, which retains its original kitchen annex. Because the Aetna had a kitchen annex, it had original interior characteristics that differed from other diners. First, the entire interior was originally open with booths, counter service, and a backbar. Though the booths, backbar, and tables have been refurbished, the diner maintains this original layout. Sources indicate that Aetna Diner's interior originally consisted of the counter and backbar and booths, since the kitchen was located in a separate annex. Diners with integrated kitchens manufactured by Paramount, such as the Post Road Diner in Norwalk, Connecticut, have only half the interior space. This also means that much of the kitchen equipment that was offered through Paramount Dining Cars Inc. never existed in the Aetna. According to Richard Gutman, built-in kitchens and bathrooms were always options for Paramount customers; however, many opted to build those facilities in a separate space as it was more cost effective. Some original Paramount equipment, ordered by the original owners, such as stainless-steel cabinets and an icebox remain along the backbar.

Aside from the layout, the Aetna Diner retains original interior materials such as the stainless-steel trim, backbar paneling, clock, coat racks, fluorescent light fixtures and exit signs, and possibly the original tile floor. Stainless steel interiors, specifically the backbar paneling is another common characteristic of Paramount diners. The Aetna Diner also retains its original Formica-on-board panels that were installed by Paramount Diners Inc. Paramount was one of the first manufacturers to widely utilize Formica in their diners and although many diner manufacturers followed suit by the 1940s, use of Formica remained an important characteristic of Paramount-made cars. The Aetna also retains original features such as the air conditioning ductwork, which is integrated into the design and runs centrally along the ceiling. Since diners were manufactured rather than constructed, air conditioning was much cheaper to install than in a traditional building, making diners, and also modularly constructed motels some of the only buildings with modern air conditioning in the 1950s. This was a major draw for diners in the summer months and was often used in diner advertising to bring in customers.

The Aetna Diner is architecturally significant because it is an increasingly rare resource that embodies the specific design elements of the trendsetting manufacturer, Paramount Dining Cars, Inc., of Haledon, New Jersey. When the Aetna was manufactured, it was the pinnacle of Paramount design, incorporating the company's most significant advances in design and manufacturing made between 1939 and 1947. Many of its features, including its stainless-steel

⁴² Gutman, 213.

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interior and exterior, and its streamlined and flowing lines, were trademarks of Paramount and became synonymous with post-war diners and American mid-twentieth-century proclivity toward efficient, futuristic, and machine-like design.

Arthur E. Sieber established Paramount Dining Cars Inc. in New Jersey in 1932. Competing in the “Diner Capital of America,” with three other New Jersey manufacturers, Sieber chose to establish his firm in what seemed to be an inopportune time. The Depression stressed the most established manufacturing firms, but Sieber’s nascent company flourished. Unlike most industries, including the restaurant and hotel business, the Depression did not lessen the demand for diners. According to Richard Gutman, a survey of 1930s city directories showed that while some diners did disappear during the Depression, their general numbers held steady. Business was bolstered by cheap food prices as well as the low overhead costs associated with operating a diner. Some smaller diners and “dinettes” could be managed by a single person with low overhead costs.⁴³

Sieber took advantage of the Depression-era diner market by producing small, efficient diners, but by 1939, Paramount began to stretch its design language to include dramatic shapes, colors, porcelain enamel, fluorescent lighting, and ostentatious tile. Sieber introduced two of these dramatically designed diners—both extant and called the “White Manna”—at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York. The popularity of the display earned Paramount a maverick reputation in the diner industry, integrating modern materials and futuristic styles not previously used in diner manufacturing.

One of the most significant materials adopted by Paramount was Formica, a synthetic laminate developed in the 1910s, but not used in diner interiors until the 1930s. Sources credit Paramount as early adopters of the material and this was a significant contribution to diner designs since nearly every other manufacturer adopted Formica as the material of choice thereafter.⁴⁴ Formica was favored because of its availability of colors and patterns but also because of its durability, heat resistance, and stain resistance. As such, Formica became a preferred diner counter-top and table-top material throughout the industry. This was especially true after a cigarette-proof grade was developed.⁴⁵ Paramount took the use of Formica further by utilizing the material in ceiling panels. Paramount used Formica on the ceilings for their color and durability, but also because they could be shaped to make distinctive domed interiors as is seen on the Aetna diner.⁴⁶

Paramount’s most significant design contribution to the diner industry was the extensive use of stainless steel. Paramount did not invent the idea of using stainless steel in diners. Indeed, the material had started to become popular in the 1930s as diners came to emulate luxury mid-century rail cars such as Budd and Pullman cars.⁴⁷ However, a diner manufacturer had not completely

⁴³ Gutman, 105.

⁴⁴ Michael Karl Witzel, *The American Diner* (New York: Crestline, 2012, 73; Gutman, 117.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Witzel, 78-79.

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cladded a diner in stainless steel before Paramount, and this was a design element that was never replicated by any other diner manufacturer.⁴⁸

According to Richard Gutman, it was Paramount that popularized the use of stainless steel in diner interiors as well. The story, as described in Gutman's work *American Diner Then and Now* is summarized here:

Arthur Sieber, the owner of Paramount Diners hired the German sheet-metal worker Erwin Fedkenheuer to fabricate stainless-steel coffee pots. Fedkenheuer suggested that stainless steel on the interior would complement the exterior walls of the diner, and Sieber had him fabricate some window trims. After being installed on several Paramount Diners in the 1930s, the stainless-steel interior panels garnered the attention of other diner manufacturers and soon became the predominant interior wall material throughout diner manufacturing.⁴⁹

The growing popularity of stainless-steel led to Fedkenheuer's joining Paramount to run their metal shop. Stainless-steel replaced many traditional interior and exterior materials, turning the American diner into what Michael Karl Witzel called "an oversized appliance."⁵⁰ The use of stainless steel in addition to "the best materials...Glass blocks, decorative Formica, and outstanding tilework [all] combined to make the [Paramount's] diners among the most stylish."⁵¹

The Aetna Diner in Hartford retains these materials and design elements that made Paramount diners renowned for the innovation. These materials include the original Formica ceiling panels, use of glass blocks, interior stainless panels, and exterior stainless steel (see narrative description).

The Aetna diner is significant as a representative example of Paramount's design influences and their manufacturing process. The Aetna Diner was produced using Paramount's patented "portable diner" manufacturing and transportation technique, a method that was emulated by all other diner manufacturers. Sieber, no longer content making small dinettes, figured out a way to build some of the largest prefabricated diners in America. In July of 1941, the United States Patent Office issued Arthur E. Sieber of Paramount Dining Cars Inc. a patent for the "Portable Diner."⁵² Traditionally, diners' widths were limited to about 10'-6" and a length of about 30' to 40' when transported by rail. Most diners were transported by truck, however, and these could be as wide as 17' and as long as 60'. Sieber's patent allowed Paramount to produce diners in their New Jersey factory in two or more sections, which would be assembled upon delivery.

⁴⁸ Gutman, 124.

⁴⁹ Gutman, 120.

⁵⁰ Witzel, 80.

⁵¹ Gutman, 123.

⁵² Arthur Sieber, Portable Diner, United States Patent Office 2,247,893, filed March 16, 1940, and issued July 1, 1941.

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Paramount was not the first company to test the idea of a sectional diner. The Bixler Manufacturing Company of Norwalk, Ohio used their own method.⁵³ Also, the J. B. Judkins Company of Merrimac, Massachusetts, built sectional diners and received a patent for their design in 1937. Also, the J. B. Judkins Company of Merrimac, Massachusetts, built sectional diners and received a patent for their design in 1937. However, earlier sectional diners were transported with the diner divided latitudinally, which allowed for easier transportation but did not allow for a wider diner. In the patent description, Sieber articulated that traditional diners had enough room for kitchen equipment and a service counter with stools. However, a “modern diner”, like the Aetna, needed to have these traditional amenities in addition to washrooms and booths, hence a wider diner was necessary. Some diner owners opted to dedicate all of the car’s interior space to dining by constructing a kitchen and bathroom annex. This was true of the Aetna diner, which retains its original layout including 32 booths in three rows and a back bar with a 25-stool counter.

Sieber realized that latitudinal sections would be inadequate for constructing diners large enough to meet postwar demand. He wrote, “The main purpose of my invention is to provide a completely equipped modern diner which may be transported in two or more sections either by highway or railroad to location.” To accomplish this, he said that diners needed to be widened to 20 feet or more.⁵⁴ This feat would be accomplished by splitting the diner into multiple perpendicular sections that ran the length of the diner longitudinally. To make the structure rigid enough for transportation, the open sections of the diner contained temporary walls. Since the final layout was an open plan, the vertical walls were removed, and during assembly, the diner was joined by steel floor channels and roof channels.

The Aetna Diner was prefabricated, transported, and assembled using this “Portable Diner” method. To transport the Aetna from the Paramount factory in New Jersey to Hartford, the diner was manufactured in three separate sections, known as “cells”, which split the diner longitudinally (Figure 8). These three sections were transported by truck to its destination on the corner of Laurel Street and Farmington Avenue. The two outer cells each contained an exterior wall with the open elevation being supported by two steel columns and temporary shoring. The middle cell, with two open sides, was supported by two sets of steel columns and temporary shoring walls. The cells’ inner structure is made from steel channel beams which were bolted together along the roofline. The columns, which are today clad in stainless steel, hide the structural members where the cells were stitched together below the roof (Photograph 22). The sections were placed on a concrete basement foundation. Temporary shoring walls were removed, and the sections were connected quickly using three sets of channel beams on the floor and roof. At more than 32’ wide, the Aetna Diner was among the widest prefabricated diners at the time.⁵⁵ The original Sieber patent in 1941 reveals that the method was meant for a diner split into two cells, which when placed together, would make a diner about 22’ wide; this size accommodated enough space for a backbar and two

⁵³ Gutman, 102

⁵⁴ Arthur Sieber, Portable Diner, United States Patent Office 2,247,893, filed March 16, 1940, and issued July 1, 1941.

⁵⁵ Survey based list provided by Richard Gutman.

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rows of booths. An example of this size diner is located in Norwalk, Connecticut, and is known as the Post Road Diner. It was also manufactured by Paramount in 1947, but is significantly smaller and has undergone extensive renovation, including a rear addition.

Despite the size of the Aetna Diner, the owners opted to construct a kitchen annex allowing them to maximize seating in the diner car itself and to serve the large number patrons. The kitchen, which produced typical American diner fare as well as traditional Greek dishes, contained ovens, grills and wash stations located along the exterior wall of the annex. Prepping tables were located in the middle of the kitchen under a pyramid-shaped skylight. As a result, the Aetna boasted an impressive three rows of booth seating and an independent lunch counter. Along with the underground cocktail lounge, the Aetna could seat approximately 40 guests and hold up 200 total with additional room for coat racks, a vestibule, and half walls. (Figure 7).⁵⁶

The Aetna Diner's size, design, and materials are representative of changes in the diner industry that took place from the end of World War II to the mid-1950s (see Criterion A). Architecturally, the Aetna Diner represents a period identified in the 1999 Multiple Property National Register Nomination Form "The Diners of Massachusetts" as the "Diners Go Deluxe" period. It was during this time that post-World War II diners took on many of the characteristics pioneered by Paramount. Diners of the "Diners go Deluxe" period were "...usually stainless steel..." and ... "commonly featured fluorescent lights, mirrors, terrazzo floors...improvement in mechanical ventilating..."⁵⁷ Other character-defining features of this period included glass blocks, the novelty of air conditioning, curved edges, and windows that opened, all of which were featured in the Aetna.

During the "Diners Go Deluxe" period, diners changed aesthetically as well as functionally. In addition to adopting modern materials, American diner manufacturers began dramatically expanding the size of the cars in the post-War era. This size increase was due to a demand for more private and spacious accommodations as diners began to compete for family and group business with traditional restaurants and drive-ins (see Criterion A).⁵⁸ To accomplish this goal, most new diners after 1955 (in the period referenced as "Diners Turned Restaurant") were so large that they needed to be constructed in multiple sections, even as many as 20 pieces, though they tried to maintain their streamlined and portable look. The "Diners Go Deluxe" period was transitional between the small prefabricated diners of the pre-war and the large constructed diner after 1955. It was during this period that the last and largest of the prefabricated diner cars were constructed.

The design of the Aetna Diner represents what most people think of as a quintessential diner: stainless and streamlined. Many diners—even modern ones—attempt to replicate and mimic this mid-century design. Though diners like the Aetna represent the archetype, diners of this style, produced in the "Diners Go Deluxe" period were manufactured for a short period of approximately ten years (ca. 1945-1955). Research has not revealed how many diners Paramount produced in this

⁵⁶ "\$40,000 Diner Planned for Farmington Avenue" *The Hartford Courant*, March 14, 1948, B1.

⁵⁷ Broomer, Kathleen Kelly with Betsy Friedberg, *Diners of Massachusetts MPS*, 10.

⁵⁸ Garrison Leykam, *Classic Diners of Connecticut*, 2013.

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period, but a survey of extant operating diners reveals that despite the popularity of their designs, their production numbers only account for an estimated 4% market share.

Out of roughly 1,200 extant operating diners identified by Richard Gutman in his book *American Diner Then and Now*, only forty-eight are Paramounts. A survey of each of these diners revealed that seven were less than fifty years old and at least twenty-six have been demolished or heavily modified. Five diners were of similar design to the Aetna, but at least two have been moved from their original location.⁵⁹ From this data, we can speculate that about 4% of American diners were produced by Paramount, a healthy number considering there were over 20 manufacturers in New Jersey alone over the entire 20th century.

Other data indicates that Paramount diners are particularly rare in Connecticut. Gutman, identified 69 total diners in Connecticut with only two manufactured by Paramount and only one produced in the “Diners Go Deluxe” era. The Aetna, not in service at the time of the survey, was not included. The only comparable Connecticut diner to the Aetna is the Post Road Diner in Norwalk, which is also a 1947 Paramount, but it is only two cells wide and has distinct differences including the absence of glass-block corners and the lack of a complete stainless cladding.

Because Paramount offered so many options to its customers, the Aetna is a one-off, custom diner. Like many proprietors, the Aetna’s original owners opted to build their kitchen and bathrooms in an adjacent structure. Because the Aetna was purchased with the intention of attaching it to the existing brick-kitchen and bathroom annex, the diner was built to suit that need. The backbar for instance, was not used as a kitchen and the diner was delivered without many kitchen appliances. The elevation that faces the concrete kitchen is also different. Instead of having the rounded corners associated with Paramount cars, the Aetna was designed with one flat, truncated side to accommodate the kitchen annex which was designed by Hartford Architect Julius Berenson (1891-1987).⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Gutman, 244-269.

⁶⁰ Berenson primarily worked on small commercial, industrial, and domestic buildings. Berenson began practicing in 1912 and subsequently worked in three (3) separate firms; *Berenson & Rosen*, *Berenson & Goodrich*, and *Berenson and Moses*. From 1933 to 1957, Berenson worked by himself, and was largely inactive during the Great Depression. In the 1950s, he began collaborating with the architect *Clifton C. West*, who continued to operate his practice as *Julius Berenson Associates* after Berenson’s departure; Dave Ransom, “Biographical Dictionary of Hartford Architects,” *The Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 54, no. 1–2 (Winter/Spring 1989); “Final Plans Made For Toll Facility At Baldwin Bridge,” *The Hartford Courant* (1923-1992); *Hartford, Conn.*, March 7, 1948.; “Five Model Homes Will Open Today In Newington,” *The Hartford Courant* (1923-1992); *Hartford, Conn.*, June 6, 1954.; “New Type Housing Units Near South Manchester,” *The Hartford Courant* (1923-1992); *Hartford, Conn.*, March 31, 1940.; “Deaths (4),” *The Hartford Courant* (1923-1992); *Hartford, Conn.*, August 4, 1987.

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Historic Photographs

Compliments of Richard J.S. Gutman. From the Richard J.S. Gutman Diner Collection at The Henry Ford.

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

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

The boundary of the nominated property is consistent with the boundary of the property identified as Parcel Number I-E 2016-21358 1, Map 179, Block 406, Lot 041, recorded by the City of Hartford assessor's office and shown in the city's online GIS database (2021). The property encompasses 0.20 acres in Hartford, Connecticut. It is bounded by Farmington Avenue to the north, Laurel Street to the east, a residential property to the south, and a commercial restaurant to the west (Figure 2).

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary is consistent with the limits of the property parcel while in use as the Aetna Diner.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Michael Forino and Samuel Christensen, consultants; Edited by Jenny F. Scofield, CT SHPO, with input from Richard J. S. Gutman

organization: _____

street & number: 50 Oriole Road

city or town: East Haddam state: CT zip code: 06423

e-mail forinocrm@gmail.com

telephone: (203) 592-3151

date: May, 2021

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.

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- **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.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Aetna Diner

City or Vicinity: Hartford

County: Hartford

State: Connecticut

Photographer: Ana Ponce, Maier Design Group, LLC.

Date Photographed: July 2, 2018

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

- 1 of 24: North elevation (façade), view south.
- 2 of 24: Detail of east elevation, view west.
- 3 of 24: Detail of east elevation, view west.
- 4 of 24: Northeast corner of the diner, view southwest.
- 5 of 24: North elevation (façade) detail, view south.
- 6 of 24: Northwest corner detail, view southeast.
- 7 of 24: West elevation, view northeast.
- 8 of 24: Garbage container shed located west of diner, view south.
- 9 of 24: East elevation, detail where the diner and brick kitchen join, view west.
- 10 of 24: East elevation of the brick kitchen, view west.
- 11 of 24: South elevation of brick kitchen, view north.
- 12 of 24: West elevation of the brick kitchen, view northeast.
- 13 of 24: Interior foyer, view northeast.
- 14 of 24: Detail of General Electric clock above the front interior doors, view north.

Aetna Diner

Name of Property

Hartford, Connecticut

County and State

- 15 of 24: West interior wall, view west.
- 16 of 24: Detail of original equipment along western interior wall, view west.
- 17 of 24: Detail of original equipment along western interior wall, view west.
- 18 of 24: Detail of emblazoned window along eastern interior wall, view east.
- 19 of 24: East interior wall windows, view northeast.
- 20 of 24: Detail of curved ceiling tiles, view east.
- 21 of 24: Detail of original air condition ductwork, view west.
- 22 of 24: Detail privacy walls and stainless columns or “costumers”, view southwest.
- 23 of 24: Detail of a basement mural, view west.
- 24 of 24: Detail of kitchen annex interior, view southwest.

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.

Aetna Diner
Name of Property

Hartford, Connecticut
County and State

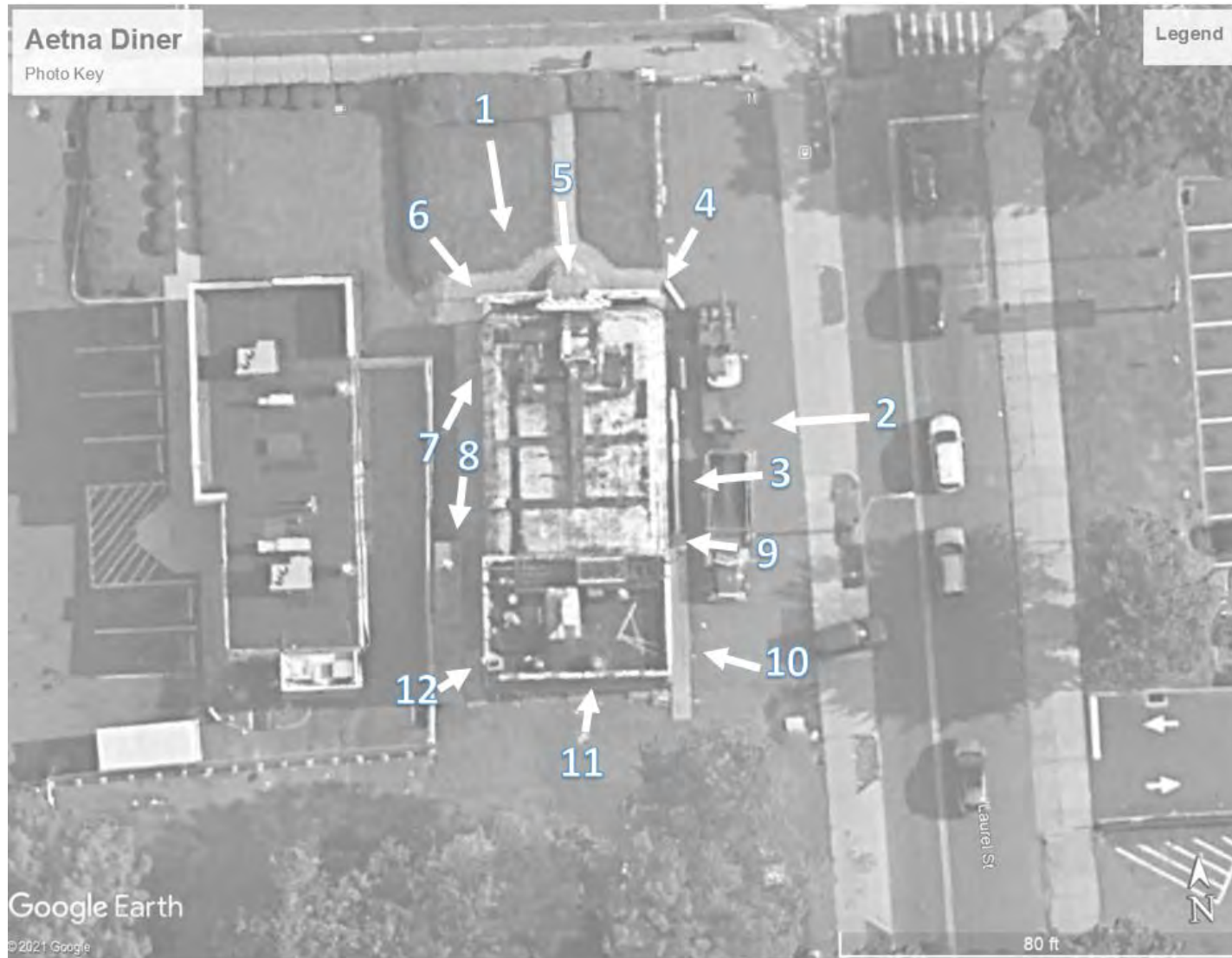


Photo Key 1: White arrows represent location and direction of exterior photographs.

Aetna Diner
Name of Property

Hartford, Connecticut
County and State

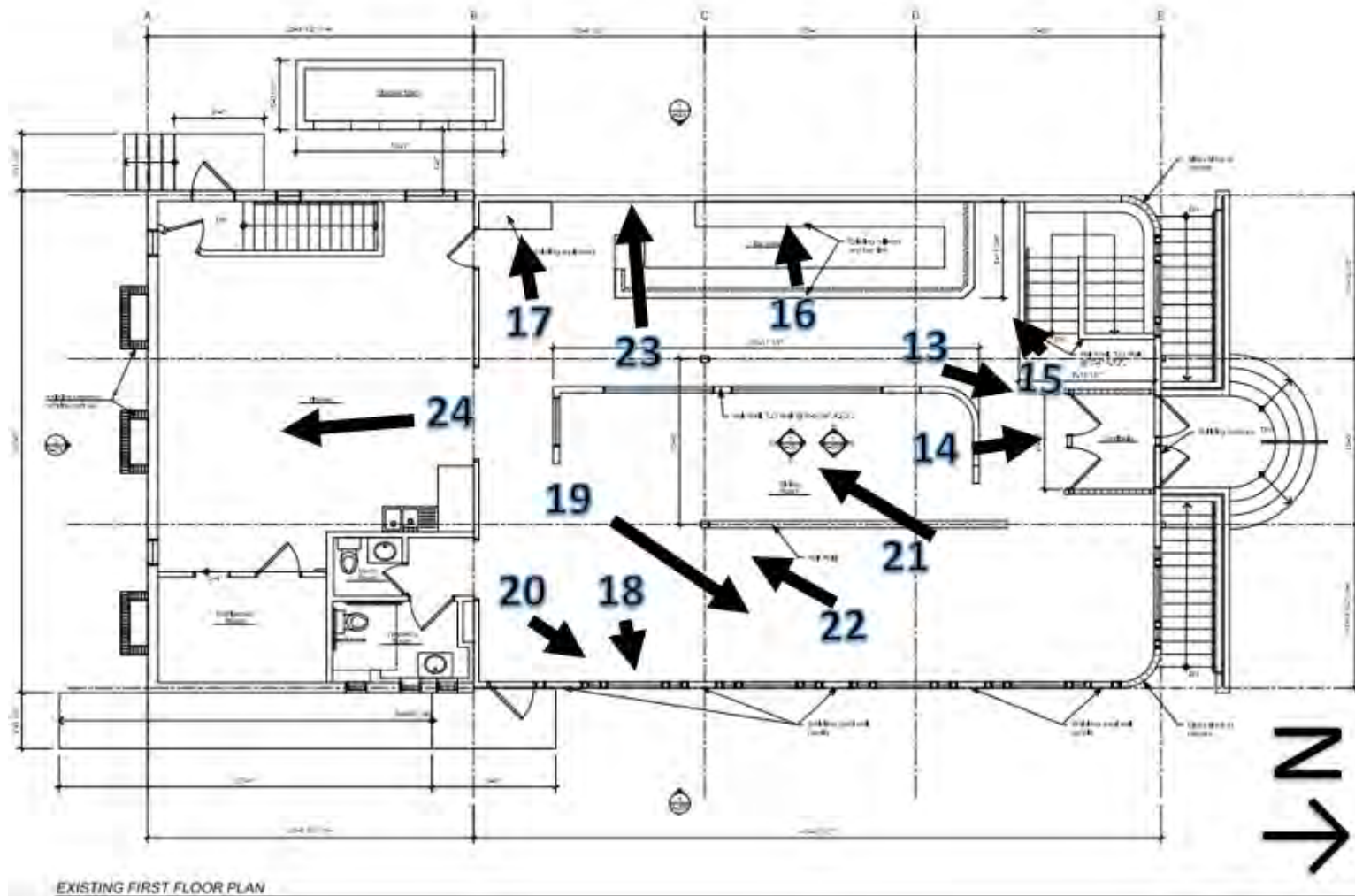


Photo Key 2: Black arrows represent location and direction of interior photographs. Drawing by Maier Design Group LLC, August 14, 2018.

Aetna Diner
Name of Property

Hartford, Connecticut
County and State



Figure 1: Location Map (Base Map Source: Google Earth 2020).

Aetna Diner
Name of Property

Hartford, Connecticut
County and State

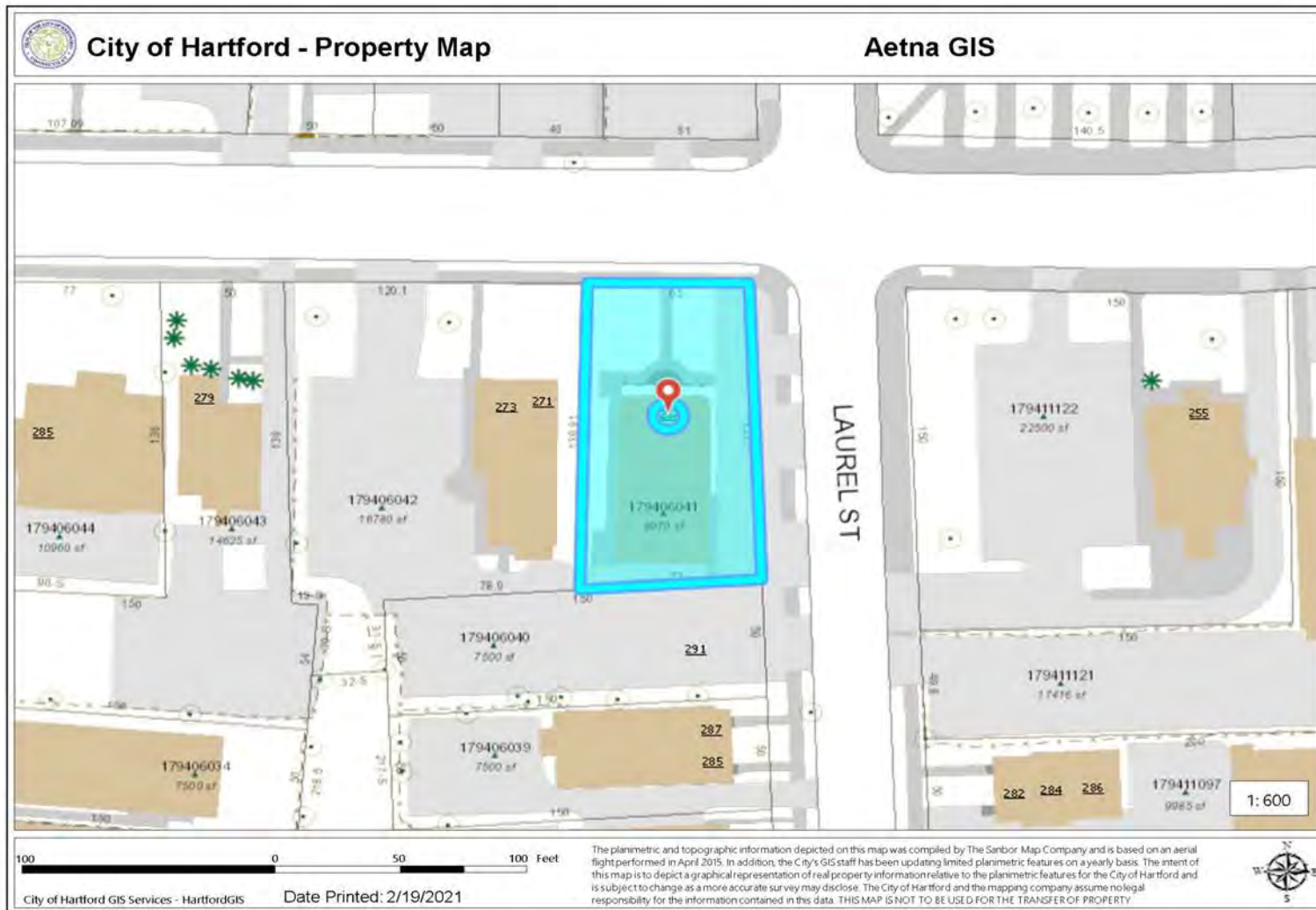


Figure 2: Aetna Diner Site Map (Base Map Source: City of Hartford Property Viewer, 2021).

Aetna Diner
Name of Property

Hartford, Connecticut
County and State

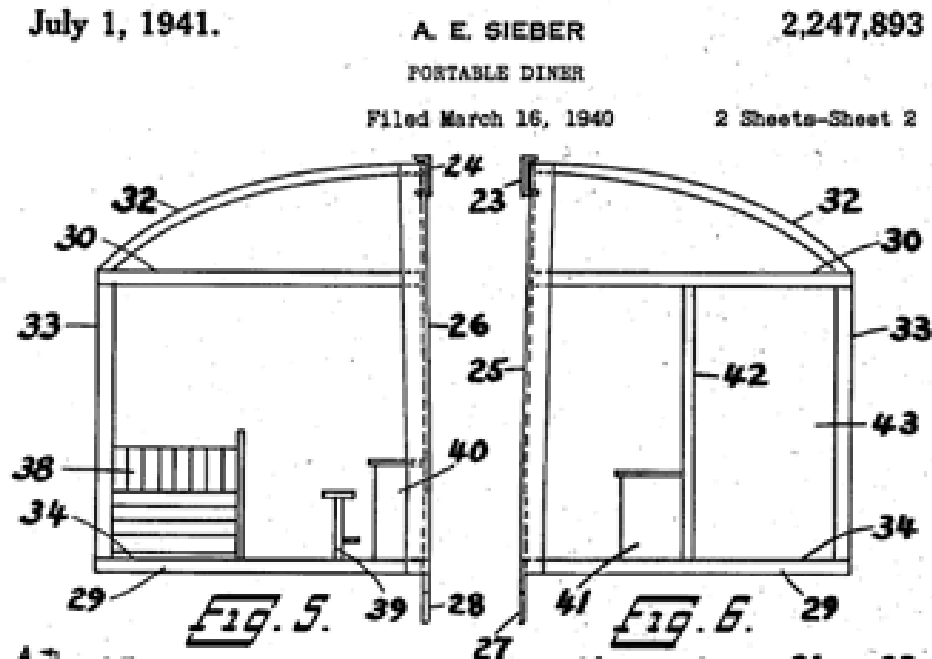


Figure 3: Detail of Arthur Sieber's "portable diner" patent.

Aetna Diner
Name of Property

Hartford, Connecticut
County and State



Figure 4: Example of manufacturer tag seen in the Aetna Diner.

Aetna Diner
Name of Property

Hartford, Connecticut
County and State



Figure 5: Aetna diner during assembly, 1948. Richard J.S. Gutman Diner Collection at The Henry Ford.

Aetna Diner
Name of Property

Hartford, Connecticut
County and State



Figure 6: Aetna Diner shortly after assembly, 1948. Richard J.S. Gutman Diner Collection at The Henry Ford.

Aetna Diner
Name of Property

Hartford, Connecticut
County and State

Custom-built to fit the location

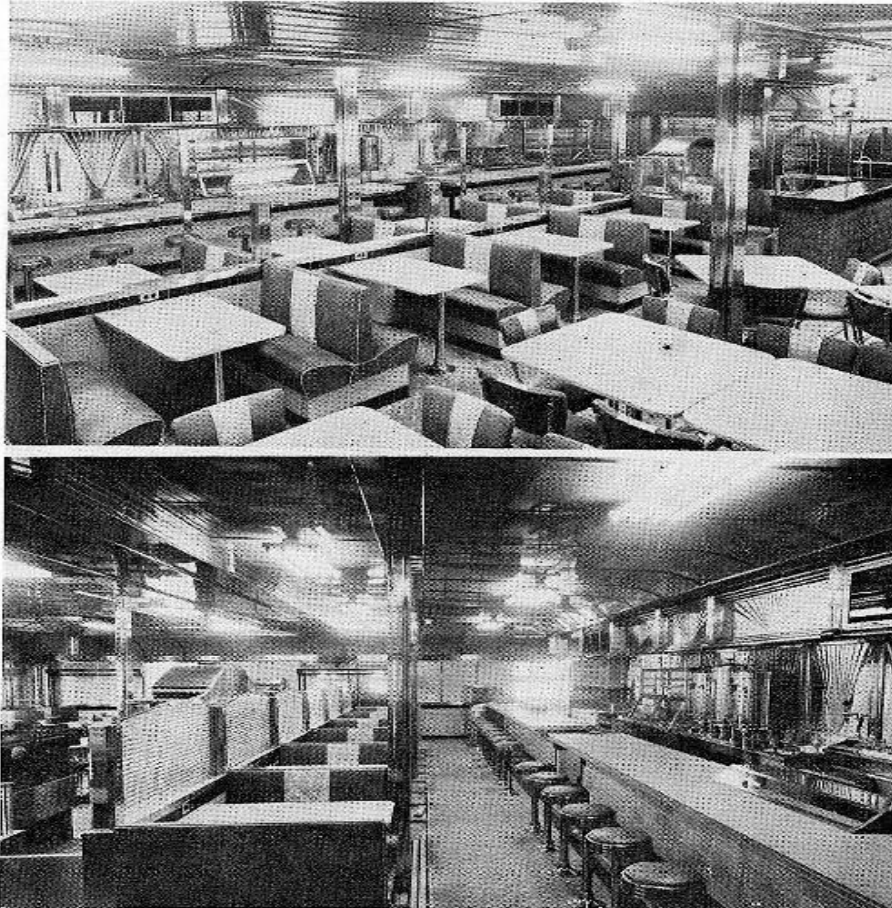


Figure 7: Paramount Diners, Inc, Advertisement featuring the Aetna, December 1948. Richard J.S. Gutman Diner Collection at The Henry Ford.

Aetna Diner
Name of Property

Hartford, Connecticut
County and State

Aetna Diner, Hartford

Red lines represent approximate location of individual cells.

North is Up



Figure 8: Red lines represent approximate location of individual cells which make up the Aetna Diner's construction.

Aetna Diner, Hartford County, Connecticut
Selection of National Register Nomination Photographs (July 2018)



1 of 24: North elevation (façade), view south.



4 of 24: Northeast corner of the diner, view southwest.



7 of 24: West elevation, view northeast.



11 of 24: South elevation of brick kitchen, view north.



13 of 24: Interior foyer, view northeast.



19 of 24: East interior wall windows, view northeast.



21 of 24: Detail of original air condition ductwork, view west.



22 of 24: Detail privacy walls and stainless columns or “costumers”, view southwest.



23 of 24: Detail of a basement mural, view west.



24 of 24: Detail of kitchen annex interior, view southwest.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:	Nomination	
Property Name:	Aetna Diner	
Multiple Name:		
State & County:	CONNECTICUT, Hartford	

Date Received:	Date of Pending List:	Date of 16th Day:	Date of 45th Day:	Date of Weekly List:
7/6/2021	7/20/2021	8/4/2021	8/20/2021	8/20/2021

Reference number:	SG100006804
Nominator:	Other Agency, SHPO

Reason For Review:

<input type="checkbox"/> Appeal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PDIL	<input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue
<input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo
<input type="checkbox"/> Waiver	<input type="checkbox"/> National	<input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary
<input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Period
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> TCP	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CLG	

☒ Accept ☐ Return ☐ Reject 8/18/2021 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:	
-------------------------------	--

Recommendation/ Criteria	
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Reviewer	<u>Roger Reed</u>	Discipline	<u>Historian</u>
Telephone	<u>(202)354-2278</u>	Date	<u></u>

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



Department of Economic and
Community Development

State Historic Preservation Office

July 6, 2021

Mr. Roger Reed
National Park Service
National Register and National Historic Landmarks Programs
1849 C St., NW
Mail Stop 7228
Washington, D.C. 20240

Subject: Aetna Diner, Hartford County, Connecticut, National Register Nomination

Dear Mr. Reed:

The following National Register nomination materials are uploaded via electronic submission, for your review:

- National Register form. This PDF is the true and correct copy of the nomination for the Aetna Diner to the National Register of Historic Places.
- PDF of Select Photographs. The full photo documentation (CD with TIFF files) will be mailed when requested by NPS.
- Correspondence: 1 CLG response and 7 letters of support

The Connecticut State Historic Preservation Review Board (SRB) approved this National Register nomination on March 26, 2021. The property is located within the Laurel and Marshall Streets Historic District, listed on the National Register in 1979 as part of the Asylum Hill MRA, but was classified as non-contributing. An update to this nomination was not pursued because the diner has a different development history and period of significance than that of the Laurel and Marshall Streets Historic District.

The nomination was initiated by property owner who is rehabbing the building. SHPO sent notice of the SRB meeting to the owner, City of Hartford Mayor and Planning and Zoning Commission, and the Hartford Preservation Alliance. A positive CLG response was received from the Historic Properties Commission. Seven letters of support were received from Mr. Richard J. S. Gutman (author, historian, and diner restoration specialist), the Northside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (NINA), the CT Main Street Center, Hartford Chamber of Commerce, Hartford Community Loan Fund, Hartford Business Improvement District, and Capital Region Development Authority. The property owner, consultant for the nomination, and representative for the Hartford Preservation Alliance attended the SRB meeting. At the request of SHPO, Mr. Gutman also reviewed and provided guidance throughout the nomination process; his comments were incorporated.

If you have any questions, or if this office can be of assistance, please email me at jenny.scofield@ct.gov.

Sincerely,

Jenny F. Scofield, National Register Coordinator

State Historic Preservation Office

450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 5 | Hartford, CT 06103 | ct.gov/historic-preservation

An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer An Equal Opportunity Lender

Certified Local Government Program
Historic District Commission Form
For Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places

District/Property Name Aetna (Comet) Diner

Address (For individual nomination) 267 Farmington Avenue

As Historic Preservation
Commission

Representative for: City of Hartford

(Name of Municipality)

I hereby:



Approve



Do not Approve

of the submission by the State Historic Preservation officer of the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the district/property noted above to the National Park Service for review and listing of the resource on the National Register of Historic Places.

Jeffrey W. Jahnke

[Signature]

Name /Signature

03.23.21

Date

Chair - Historic Properties

Preservation Commission

Title

March 12, 2021

Chair of the State Historic Preservation Review Board
c/o Jenny Fields Scofield, AICP, National Register & Architectural Survey Coordinator
State Historic Preservation Office
Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD)
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 5
Hartford, CT 06103

RE: Aetna/Comet Diner and National Register of Historic Places listing

To Whom It May Concern,

On October 10, 1975, I participated in the “Commercial Archaeology” session of the 29th Annual Meeting and Preservation Conference of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. One of three panelists, I spoke on “Styles of the American Diner,” at the first conference where roadside vernacular architecture was on the agenda.

Admittedly, this was a controversial topic then (and now), and it generated a fair amount of discussion in the press, after an AP article by Seth Mydans — “Wanted: Museum of the U.S. Highway” — was published in the *International Herald Tribune* and picked up by countless newspapers across the country.

Then, on October 19, 1978, the Modern Diner, a 1941 Sterling Streamliner in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, became the first diner individually listed on the NRHP. Subsequently, more diners were slowly added, with 17 (by my count) currently on and another 25 as part of multiple property listings.

I am writing in support of adding the Aetna/Comet Diner, which I feel is a good fit, based upon my work in the field of documenting diner history in books, articles and lectures, and working on preservation efforts, over the last 50 years.

Two of the many influential individuals involved in the nearly-150-year-old history of the diner industry played a major role in creation of the diner under consideration.

The Aetna (its original name) was built by Paramount Diners Inc., founded in 1932 in Haledon, NJ, by Arthur E. Sieber, who had previously worked for the Paterson Vehicle Co., which built Silk City Diners.

Erwin Fedkenheuer, Sr. joined the firm shortly after its founding and had a profound influence on the masterful stainless steel work for which Paramount became known. As a sheet-metal worker in the employ of S. Blickman, Inc., food service equipment manufacturers in Weehawken, NJ, Fedkenheuer was moonlighting at Paramount when he first introduced stainless steel trim to the interior of one of their diners under construction.

Fedkenheuer remained at Paramount until starting his own company, Erfed Corporation, in 1956, at which time he wrote: "I have had the privilege of being one of the pioneers in the use of stainless steel in Diners and food service equipment and I have been instrumental in the design and fabrication of some of the most modern innovations in the industry."

The beautiful metalwork inside the Aetna Diner was done by Fedkenheuer and his team, along with the unique all-stainless exterior. No other manufacturers employed a façade of this style — flat stainless steel panels with raised burnished circles. Only three other examples of this design are known to have survived, and only one (the 11th Street Diner in Miami) is currently in operation.

Another important innovation by Paramount was the split construction method for which Arthur Sieber received a patent in 1941, detailing his method of building diners in two or more sections, which were shipped separately and assembled on site. This method was used for the installation of the Aetna Diner.

The Aetna belongs on the National Register of Historic Places as an excellent example of the highly stylized post-World War II trend in diner design to produce larger buildings in the familiar aesthetic that defined the building type: a multiple-unit structure with distinctive detailing in stainless steel, glass, Formica and ceramic mosaic tile.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard J. S. Gutman
75 Gardner Street
West Roxbury, MA 02132
617 785-0651
www.richardgutman.com



Hartford Chamber of Commerce
31 Pratt Street, 5th Floor
Hartford, CT 06103
860-525-4451
Hartfordchamberct.com

March 22, 2021
Jared Edwards, Chairman
State Historic Preservation Review Board
450 Columbus Boulevard
Hartford, CT 06103

Subject: Aetna (Comet) Diner 267 Farmington Avenue Hartford Connecticut 06105

Mr. Edwards:

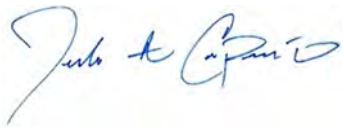
This letter supports Triumph Venture Capital, LLC's application for the Aetna (Comet) Diner nomination to the National Historic Register. This is a significant step towards the rehabilitation of this structure. The building sits within the City's Marshall – Laurel Historic District and is near the Mark Twain House and Museum and the Harriet Beecher Stow Center. Nomination of the Diner would certainly enhance the district's status.

The renovation and return of this vacant and iconic structure would provide residents and visitors an amenity that is needed in the area. The restaurant will allow patrons to enjoy both the diner experience and this unique architecture. Moreover, the nomination will assist Triumph Venture Capital in securing Historic Tax Credits to alleviate the cost of rehabilitating the building.

The Hartford Chamber of Commerce is happy to support this effort. The rehabilitation will achieve many of the essential goals and objectives of the City's Plan of Conservation and Development. This development will help stimulate and encourage other projects within the city, particularly in the Asylum Hill Area.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 860-728-2282 or jconcepcion@metrohartford.com

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Julio A. Concepcion". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a stylized "C" at the end.

Julio A. Concepcion, Executive Director

Cc: Wayne Benjamin, Triumph Venture Capital

Jenny Scofield, SHPO

NINA

Revitalizing Asylum Hill

March 16, 2021

Jared Edwards, Chairman
State Historic Preservation Review Board
450 Columbus Boulevard
Hartford, CT 06103

Re: Aetna (Comet) Diner 267 Farmington Avenue Hartford Connecticut 06105

Mr. Edwards:

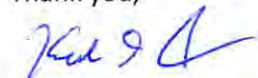
I am writing in support of Triumph Venture Capital, LLC's application of the Aetna (Comet) Diner (267 Farmington Avenue, Hartford, CT) for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The inclusion would represent a significant step towards the rehabilitation of this structure. The building sits within the City's Marshall – Laurel Historic District and is near the Mark Twain House and Museum and the Harriet Beecher Stow Center. Nomination of the Diner would certainly enhance the district's status.

The renovation and return of this vacant and iconic structure would provide residents and visitors an amenity that is needed in the area. The restaurant will allow patrons to enjoy both the diner experience and its unique architecture. Moreover, the nomination will assist Triumph Venture Capital in securing Historic Tax Credits to support the cost of rehabilitating the building.

NINA is happy to support this effort. The rehabilitation will achieve many of the essential goals and objectives of the City's Plan of Conservation and Development. This development should help stimulate and encourage other projects within the city, particularly in the Asylum Hill neighborhood.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (860) 244-9390.

Thank you,



Kenneth D. Johnson

Cc: Wayne Benjamin, Triumph Venture Capital

Jenny Scofield, SHPO



Patrick McMahon
CEO

March 17, 2021

Jared Edwards, Chairman
State Historic Preservation Review Board
450 Columbus Boulevard
Hartford, CT 06103

Subject: Aetna (Comet) Diner - 267 Farmington Avenue, Hartford CT

Dear Mr. Edwards and Members of the State Historic Preservation Review Board:

This letter supports Triumph Venture Capital, LLC's application for the Aetna (Comet) Diner nomination to the National Historic Register. This is a significant step towards the rehabilitation of this iconic structure. The building sits within the City's Marshall – Laurel Historic District and is near the Mark Twain House and Museum and the Harriet Beecher Stow Center. Nomination of the Diner would certainly enhance the district's status and act as a catalyst for the revitalization of other nearby vacant or underutilized historic buildings. Visitors to a restored Diner will likely patronize the other local small businesses that call this mixed-use commercial corridor home.

The renovation and return of this vacant and iconic structure would provide residents and visitors an amenity that is needed in the area. The restaurant will allow patrons to enjoy both the diner experience and this unique architecture. Moreover, the nomination will assist Triumph Venture Capital in securing Historic Tax Credits to alleviate the cost of rehabilitating the building. In addition, the application is in keeping with the goals of diversity, equity and inclusion in historic preservation efforts.

Connecticut Main Street Center is pleased to support this effort. The rehabilitation will achieve many of the essential goals and objectives of the City's Plan of Conservation and Development including enhancement of a very important commercial and residential corridor in the community. This development will help stimulate and encourage other projects within the city, particularly in the Asylum Hill Area.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 860-985-2083.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. McMahon, CEO

Cc: Wayne Benjamin, Triumph Venture Capital
Jenny Scofield, National Register & Architectural Survey Coordinator, SHPO



**HARTFORD
COMMUNITY
LOAN FUND**

215 Garden Street
Hartford, CT 06105
860.296.7005

March 15, 2021

Jared Edwards, Chairman
State Historic Preservation Review Board
450 Columbus Boulevard
Hartford, CT 06103
Subject: Aetna (Comet) Diner, 267 Farmington Avenue, Hartford Connecticut 06105

Mr. Edwards:

Hartford Community Loan Fund (HCLF) is a community development financial institution (CDFI) which has financed the rehab of approximately 250 properties throughout the city of Hartford. The majority of these properties are 75-100 years old or more, and dozens are designated as historic on either the State or the National registers. We're proud of our role in preserving and renovating the history of Hartford.

HCLF enthusiastically supports the proposed nomination of the Aetna (Comet) Diner to the National Historic Register. Triumph Venture Capital, LLC's application for historic designation represents a critical step towards the rehabilitation of this structure. The building sits within the City of Hartford's Marshall – Laurel Historic District and is in proximity to the Mark Twain House and the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center. Nomination of the diner will enhance and complement the district's status.

Once renovated, the return of this vacant and iconic structure could provide residents and visitors a sorely needed amenity in the area. The property could potentially house a restaurant in the low-food retail neighborhood of Asylum Hill (where HCLF is also based, along with prominent employers such as Aetna/CVS, the Hartford, and Trinity Health/St. Francis Hospital), while allowing patrons to enjoy a unique experience in the historic steel and chrome structure. The nomination and designation will assist Triumph Venture Capital in securing the Historic Tax Credits needed to help finance the property's rehabilitation.

Hartford Community Loan Fund is pleased to support this effort. The rehabilitation will achieve many of the essential goals and objectives of the City's Plan of Conservation and Development. This development will also help stimulate and encourage other projects within the city, particularly in the Asylum Hill neighborhood.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 860.969.3001.

Respectfully,

Rex Fowler
Chief Executive Officer
R.Fowler@HartfordLoans.org

cc: Jenny Scofield, SHPO
Wayne Benjamin, Triumph Venture Capital



Jordan Polon, Executive Director

March 19, 2021

Jared Edwards, Chairman
State Historic Preservation Review Board
450 Columbus Boulevard
Hartford, CT 06103

I am writing this letter in support of the Triumph Venture Capital, LLC's application for the Aetna (Comet) Diner nomination to the National Historic Register.

The Hartford Business Improvement District (HBID) is a 60-block non-profit 501c(3) special services district located in the commercial core of Hartford, Connecticut. Our mission is to bring about positive and lasting change by enhancing the economic vitality and quality of life within the District.

We understand that historic preservation and restoration of properties like these can extremely costly, and endorse any efforts on the part of the current ownership to restore this beautiful, iconic Paramount-designed diner to its former glory.

In 2015, the Connecticut Main Street Center awarded a *Preservation of Place* grant to the Hartford Business Improvement District (Hartford BID) for the creation of a community vision plan for a six block area on the Asylum Hill neighborhood. The Hartford Preservation Alliance worked closely with the Hartford BID to develop the study, which noted the Diner as an important factor in the development of this crucial gateway between Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe's historic homes and the commercial core of Downtown Hartford.

We hope that this designation will assist Triumph Venture Capital, LLC restoration, and secure a future for this neighborhood treasure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jordan Polon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Jordan Polon
Executive Director
Hartford Business Improvement District

Ms. Jenny F. Scofield
National Register Coordinator
State Historic Preservation Office
450 Columbus Blvd, Suite 5
Hartford, CT 06103

March 23, 2021

RE: "Aetna Diner"
267 Farmington Ave
Hartford, CT

Dear Ms. Scofield:

I am writing on behalf of Wayne Benjamin and Triumph Venture Capital LLC's petition for the above property to be considered for the National Register of Historic Places. The diner represents not just a distinctive design from an era before franchises, repetitive commercial construction styles and monotonous architecture took over American roads and neighborhoods, but it also was a late-night gathering place for many of Hartford's leaders and its average citizens. It really served as a community meeting hall and an urban oasis. I know, I was one of those who caught a late-night coffee or a Sunday morning breakfast, just a quick walk from my residence in the West End.

Having said this, it is my hope that this is more than just a designation, a commemorative plaque, or a note on some land use map. Frankly, as someone experienced in real estate development and economic analysis, a good case can be made to demolish the building despite its role in my life and that of many others. In some ways, I would rather have a good memory than the current image of that sad deteriorating building today. Hopefully, this starts the old Aetna Diner on the road to recovery.

Sincerely,



Michael Freimuth
Executive Director