

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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Sam's Diner

other names/site number Millie's Diner, Victory Diner, Uncle Sam's Diner

2. Location

street & number 2008 South Virginia Dare Trail not for publication N/A
city or town Kill Devil Hills vicinity X
state North Carolina code NC county Dare County
code 055 zip code 27948

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally X statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey J. Cron SHPO 11/30/98
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement: Streamlined Moderne

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick
roof Metal
walls Wood
Metal
other Glass

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

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 a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Sam's Diner
Property Name

Dare Cty., NC
County and State

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions):

Architecture

Period of Significance: ca. 1940

Significant Dates: ca. 1940

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above):

N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Kullman Dining Car Company

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

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

Primary Location of Additional Data

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

Name of repository: N.C. State Historic Preservation Office

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet,

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>18</u>	<u>441660</u>	<u>3983500</u>	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

_____ See continuation sheet.

Sam's Diner
Property Name

Dare Cty., NC
County and State

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

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Marc C. Wagner, Architectural Historian

organization N/A date June 27, 1998

street & number 2405 Buckingham Avenue telephone (804) 266-8525

city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23226

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

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

Property Owner

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

name Paul and Lisa Keevil

street & number 2008 South Virginia Dare Trail telephone 919-480-3463

city or town Kill Devil Hills state NC

zip code 27948

=====
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Sam's Diner, Dare Co., NC

Architectural Description

Introduction

Sam's Diner was built at the Kullman Dining Car Company in Harrison, New Jersey ca. 1940 as the Challenger model. This diner is a moveable building type: constructed in the factory and sold with the intention that it be moved to an appropriate site. Diners have a long history of mobility, often moved to a new site to take advantage of a better business market. Over the history of this building type, about 1880 to present, diners have been built in a variety of sizes, styles, and configurations. The Challenger was designed to be relatively modest in size and narrow in width to make shipping easy. This model could be placed on a standard flat rail car of the period. It could be operated as a self-sufficient unit or was easily expanded to the rear. Sam's Diner was used in several configurations, with and without additions. In general diners have become part of the American building tradition of vernacular additive construction. As of 1998, Sam's Diner has been located at four sites. Originally it stood in downtown Newport News, Virginia and was likely shipped via boat or rail directly from the factory soon after it was built ca. 1940. By 1946, the diner operated at 2305 West Broad Street on the west side of downtown Richmond, Virginia, an area of increasing development. By ca. 1950 before the widespread development of interstate highways, Sam's was moved to well-traveled U.S. 1, south of Richmond, in Chesterfield County. The building stood vacant for about two-and-a-half years until 1996, when Paul and Lisa Keevil restored and moved the diner to its present site on North Carolina's Outer Banks.

The one-story building is constructed with a steel frame, wood inner wall decorative trim members, and exterior sheathing that includes porcelain enamel panels and stainless steel trim. The interior space is one large room split lengthwise by a service counter. Stools line the decorative outer counter, while the backside functions as a food preparation area. Of the very few surviving pre-WWII diners in the American South, Sam's ranks as one of the least altered and most intact examples. On a national level, pre-WWII diners are more rare; larger 1950's models replaced many. In 1998, only seven diners have been documented in North Carolina. Of these, four are 1990s Starlite Company models. Sam's and the Four Corners Diner at Atlantic Beach are the only identified history diners in the state that are substantially intact. As a more complete survey becomes available, more historic diners might be discovered—some might be serving non-restaurant functions.

Exterior

The Kullman Company designed the exterior of the long, narrow diner with a low-hipped roof, trimmed with a molded stainless steel cornice. The lower exterior walls feature yellow

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and red porcelain enamel tubes. The walls are punctuated by glass block sidelights around a central entry, and showy glass block and stainless steel rounded corners. All of these original details remain intact.

During the restoration of exterior panels, the inner wall frame members were found in extremely deteriorated condition. Years of gutter failure had caused water to drain through the wall. In turn, the damp wood had attracted termites. A complete and much needed replacement of the structural wood members and repair of the roof and gutter systems was carried out. The porcelain enamel panels were removed and numbered and when the steel frame was exposed, it was cleaned and coated with a rust-resistant paint. The wood inner wall was rebuilt and the panels were reattached.

The window frame systems also suffered water damage. The original configuration of each window unit featured a large lower plate glass pane that raised about six inches. A fixed transom was located above each bay. The transoms were a ribbed, translucent glass. Most of the transoms had been covered with carpet and plywood by 1993. The operating lower panes were all frozen shut from corrosion and numerous applications of heavy paint and caulk. During restoration it was determined that the coatings were holding together much of the corroded metal. The new owners, the Keevils, decided to replace the frames. The same fenestration pattern, large pane and transom, was maintained; a lighter silver anodized metal for the frames subtly highlighted the introduction of new material.

The distinctive glass block windows positioned at all four corners and as sidelights flanking the front door were repaired and reconstructed with fresh mortar. Of the numerous blocks used for these features, only four were replaced. The same size block is still manufactured.

The roof—constructed with flush-welded panels of tin—was replaced with flush-welded panels of copper. Of great importance, the gutter system was rebuilt. The gutter was designed to lay in the cornice detail. The earlier failure had evolved from clogged downspouts. About eighty percent of the original cornice exterior was reused.

In several areas, damaged stainless steel trim was refabricated. These replaced sections had contained perforations that allowed water leakage. These perforations were made when a porch was added to the front elevation in the 1970s.

Sam's Diner had a frame addition sometime during the period from ca. 1946-1950 when it was located on West Broad Street in Richmond, Virginia, according to Fred Shahda, Sam Shahda's son. When the diner was moved from Richmond to U.S. 1 in Chesterfield County, Virginia around 1950, the addition remained in Richmond. At its new site, a concrete block ell was constructed to accommodate patrons.

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After its move to Dare County, Sam's Diner—as it had been in two of its three locations—was attached to the front of a building in order to provide additional interior space. The ca. 1980 one-story frame wing originally functioned as a restaurant and has a gable-front orientation. The interior contains a large dining area finished in a 1940s or 1950s vernacular Moderne style. This new dining room relates to the original diner space in the same manner as the rear appendages that were attached to the building when it was located in Virginia. The opening that connected diner and back wing was reused without alteration for connecting this rear dining area to Sam's. When it stood on U.S. 1, the end oriented to the north—which is now facing south—featured an opening that led into a rear dining area that was located in the cinder block addition. The kitchen was located in the other half of the rear addition. At its new site in Kill Devil Hills, the diner retains this relationship with the rear addition: the opening leads into a dining room and the kitchen shares this rear space. Meals are served in both the original diner section and in the back wing.

There was careful attention given to avoid false history—or the possibility of overly sympathetic detailing between the old and new sections. There are clear material and design differences between the diner and its rear wing. The addition is sheathed in frame cladding and while the interior reflects some of the diner's color finishes, it does not include mahogany trim and ceramic tile.

Interior

An unusual pointed vault ceiling, a Formica counter, stainless steel back bar, and some lingering Art Deco-style design elements including hand-painted Deco borders around the mirrors characterize the interior. The tile floor—a mixture of yellow, dark burgundy, and some dark green—is original and was color-coordinated with the Formica and porcelain enamel.

Some of the finer details that were hidden under post-1950 finishes were uncovered and restored during the restoration. The counter wall, covered in the 1970s with indoor/outdoor carpeting, featured colored ceramic tiles in cream and mottled green with red tile trim lines. The same tile was also partially intact on the front and side outer walls and was also covered in carpet. After the carpet was removed, it was discovered that only about half of this tile was intact. The owners searched for a match with great difficulty. A color-match was found, but no standard modern tile made at the same thickness as the original. The owners replaced the outer wall tiles with the matching tiles and were able to replicate the red trim patterns. The salvaged surviving tile was used to restore the counter wall.

The counter was largely intact and consisted of a heavy frame structure with a ceramic outer wall and a wood and masonry footrest. The curved counter end, which originally tied

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into the back wall, had been demolished earlier to make room for a refrigerator. The owners decided to rebuild the counter featuring the salvaged tiles. Stool seating was restored around the rebuilt counter curve.

The counter's 1950 mustard-brown-colored Formica top was removed and replaced with a high-gloss Burgundy top. Portions of the original 1940s counter, under the replacement, yielded a perfect color and texture match.¹ The counter edging, a grooved metal strip with painted red lines, was reinstalled.

One of the most important historic features restored was the mahogany trim throughout the interior. Years of oil and latex paint covered what was originally a varnished finish. The wooden trim is featured around windows and forms the ventilator cabinets at either end of the ceiling. The cabinets include access doors with decorated mirrors. The subtle mahogany cornice molding caps the wall above the windows and below the ceiling.

The back bar, a crucial feature in diner design, remained mostly intact. The stainless steel wall panels were manually bent over iron forms to create the radiating line patterns. During the restoration, the badly damaged perforated panels were replaced with new stainless steel panels; the new sheets were once again hand formed. The grill area was maintained and more functional period machinery was installed including a 1940s Moderne-style glass-door refrigerator that had been used in New York City. The refrigerator was placed into a blank wall area that had been stripped of original material at an earlier period. The period refrigerator replaced one that had been removed when the last business moved out. The back wall features original stainless steel shelving between two matching color Formica-topped stainless steel cabinets. The hood that centers over the back bar was stripped of paint. During the 1996 restoration, the original Art Deco hood pattern—a spinning ball motif—was discovered. The Art Deco pattern frames the original menu board at the hood's center.

The lighting in the ca. 1940 space may have been a combination of fluorescent and incandescent fixtures. The ceiling ridge has been recently outfitted with Moderne-style fixed stem fixtures, an appropriate style for the period. Original fixtures below the ventilator cabinets were also cleaned and reinstalled.

The original stools had long-since been replaced with oversized 1950s models. The owners restored the period thin-stemmed square post stools. The tops feature a grooved metal band with painted red lines and red Naugahyde seats.²

Because the diner was designed to be narrow and long, booths and tables were installed at one end, while the counter, stools, and circulation area occupied the other end. The result is

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a somewhat unusual asymmetrical plan. Moderne-style tables with red Formica tops have been reinstalled.

The two original wooden doors were an important missing detail. One stood on the side, what is now the north end, and the other at the main entrance. The 1950s-1960s replacements had wood-panel bottoms with multi-pane glass tops. More appropriate Moderne-style doors were refabricated. The owners used a historic postcard and the 1940s Exmore Diner in Exmore, Virginia to guide them in the restoration of the doors. The new doors are mahogany with oval center openings. Stainless steel kick plates were added to the bottom of each. The original Moderne-style door handle was recovered and reinstalled on the main entrance door.

Site Considerations

An important aspect in the moving of historic resources is the degree of similarity shared by the original site and the new location. For forty-three years, Sam's Diner had been located on U.S. 1 in the Bellwood area of Chesterfield County, Virginia. The site was flat with other commercial buildings nearby. Most of the twenty-three-mile stretch of between Richmond and Petersburg was commercial strip development, dotted with numerous restaurants and hotels. Visually, the diner was more prominent than the two adjacent properties because of its bright-colored materials and roadside proximity. The Diner's immediate surroundings consisted of a parking lot. A signpost supported in a brick wall planter stood in front of the diner. Since 1940, U.S. 1 had grown from a two-lane road to an undivided four-lane local thoroughfare. While several trees stood at the rear of the property, the overall impression was of open-spaced strip development. U.S. 1 has historically been associated with tourist travel, especially during the boom-period of the automobile after WWII.

The site in Kill Devil Hills on the Virginia Dare Trail (U.S. 158) is very similar to U.S. 1. It has a major commercial strip area. This development has occurred more recently, but it is in a linear, roadside-clustering pattern like development along U.S. 1. The new site is flat and includes a parking area surrounding the rear ell of the diner. The diner faces U.S. 158 with its showy front acting as a road sign to motorists—the original intention. The Virginia Dare Trail has a similar tourist-based history as U.S. 1. Some of the buildings surrounding Sam's Diner at its North Carolina site date to the 1930s and 1940s and provide appropriate context. The two-lane U.S. 158 mirrors the approximate size of U.S. 1 before widening in the 1940s.

Statement of Integrity

Sam's Diner retains sufficient integrity for listing in the National Register. The tension rods, end-to-end rods tightened when the diner is in transit to ensure appropriate camber and

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spring, survive intact. This original feature ensures that the building can be moved without damaging the structure. The steel frame is intact and was repaired only where water rusted some of the bottom members. Virtually all of the interior wood inner-wall members were water damaged and infested with termites. The wood was replaced in kind. All of the porcelain enamel panels and about eighty percent of the exterior stainless steel are original. The window systems have been replaced in a pattern and proportion that match the original; where possible, the original glass was used. All but four glass blocks are original. The roof was rebuilt in the same flush plate method as the original. The 1940's tin roof had rotted in places and the weld areas were failing. The interior features the original mahogany trim. The counter is original and historic tile was used to repair and restore the face wall. The end counter curve was rebuilt to original specifications. The outer tile wall consists of tiles that match the original. The original floor needed no repair nor did the ceiling. The back bar panels were rebuilt to original specifications—hand-bent over forms like the 1940s panels. The back bar counter and cabinets were cleaned and repaired. Daniel Zilka, Director of the American Diner Museum, located the 1940s stools that were salvaged from a demolished 1940s diner. The salvaged stools were bolted in exactly over the original boltholes. The grill hood with menu board was cleaned.

The ca. 1980 one-story building to which Sam's Diner was attached at its Kill Devil Hills site stands at a right angle and to the rear of the diner. From U.S. 158, the diner's horizontal massing obscures the modern, front-gabled wing. Although large in scale when compared to the diner, it does not negatively impact the property's overall integrity; the distinct streamlined Moderne building, not the rear wing, catches the eye of the passer-by. There is historical precedence for the rear wing; Sam's Diner had rear attachments at two of the sites it occupied in Virginia. The first ell was put on as early as 1946 when the diner stood in Richmond. All of the rear wings have made use of the same opening created on the back wall of the diner. This addition accommodates the large crowds the restaurant draws during the busy tourist season and is necessary to make the business commercially viable and for it to continue serving the purpose for which it was built.

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Sam's Diner, Dare Co., NC

Summary

Manufactured by the Kullman Diner Company of Harrison, New Jersey around 1940, Sam's Diner is one of the most intact pre-WWII Moderne-style diners surviving in the South. Originally located in Newport News, Virginia, and later moved to two different sites in the Richmond, Virginia area, Sam's stood vacant from 1993 until 1996, when the current owners purchased it and moved it to its present location on U.S. 158 in Kill Devil Hills on North Carolina's Outer Banks.

Sam's Diner is a one-story, steel-framed streamlined building with a flush-seam copper roof trimmed at the edges by a stepped stainless steel molding. Sam's Diner was known to have rear additions at two of its previous locations; the current rear addition is an early 1980s frame building with a front-gable orientation. The diner is sited in a commercial area in a setting very similar to its original location. Before it was moved to North Carolina, the diner was largely restored to address structural problems that developed in its steel frame. Through a careful and painstaking restoration, most of its original features including glass block, porcelain enamel panels, and exterior stainless steel trim were maintained and those features that were beyond repair were replicated to match the originals. The interior includes original varnished mahogany trim, ceramic tile, Formica counter, 1940s stools, stainless steel back bar wall cabinets, and an original Art Deco Kullman company spinning ball motif.

Sam's Diner is nominated under Criterion C for its architectural significance as a rare and intact example of a streamlined Moderne-style diner in North Carolina. It is one of two remaining pre-WWII diners in the state. Because it was removed from its original site and derives primary significance for its architectural value, Sam's Diner also fulfills Criterion Consideration B. The diner was historically designed to be a moveable building type, so the move should be considered part of its function. All parts that relate to its moveability—namely the underbody tension rods—are in operational condition.

Historical Background

Bought from the Kullman Diner Company of Harrison, New Jersey around 1940, Sam's Diner is one of the most intact pre-WWII Moderne-style diners surviving in the South.³ Between 1941 and 1945, Sam's Diner was known as the Victory Diner and was located at 3512-14 Washington Avenue in downtown Newport News. James Parianous and Nick Voura operated the diner. It is likely that the diner was brought to this site when it was new. The prohibition on non-military use of steel all but shut down the manufacture of diners during the war. Not a great deal is known about the diner's short stay in Newport News. None of

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the Shahda family can recall how Sam Shahda found out about the Victory Diner. By 1946, it stood on Broad Street in Richmond renamed Sam's Diner.⁴

Successful restaurants are usually testimony to a persevering and hard-working entrepreneur. Samuel George Shahda, born in Baidoa, Lebanon in 1900, immigrated to the United States in 1920. Shahda ran a confectionery business at 117 N. Third Street in Richmond. During the 1920s, he bought Eddie's Restaurant, also located in downtown Richmond, and ran this business throughout the WWII period. Shahda, aware of the city's up and coming restaurant areas, bought the Kullman Challenger diner in 1946 or 1947 and sited it on West Broad Street across from the Division of Motor Vehicles office, an area of rapid commercial development. This area was west of the traditional shopping district, but the presence of Broad Street (railroad) Station attracted commercial and residential development to the west. Just one block east of the diner was the Hotel William Byrd, the first high-rise building in west Richmond. Sam Shahda anticipated a brisk business. He decided to move his diner after several years at West Broad Street. The late 1940s saw the tremendous increase of automobile-accessed business.

Shahda saw better opportunities on U.S. 1 in Chesterfield County where land was cheaper and a guaranteed clientele flowed from the U.S. Army's Defense General Supply Depot. He moved the diner to the Bellwood area on U.S. 1 around 1950. This area was also called Rayon Park because of its proximity to the synthetic fiber mills in the area. As is often tradition in the restaurant business, Shahda ran the diner with the help of his family. His daughter, Virginia Puryear, and son, Fred Shahda, still live nearby and have been available to recount the diner's history.

In the period before Interstate 95, U.S. 1 was an unrivaled tourist highway. The twenty-three miles of U.S. 1 between Richmond and Petersburg contains some of the highest concentrations of surviving early- to mid-twentieth century roadside architecture in Virginia including cabin, motel, and hotel courts; road houses; dance halls; drive-in movie theaters; and barbecue restaurants. Since the early 1960s, the U.S. 1 corridor, also known as Jefferson Davis Highway, has been in transition ever since most of the tourist traffic shifted to the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike (Interstate 95) which is less than a mile to the east. Sam's Diner was one of several of the older U.S. 1 restaurants to survive the decline of business after the completion of Interstate 95. Shahda's success allowed him to purchase the nearby Stratford Motel.

A mural commemorating the importance of tourism in Sam's Diner's success was discovered during a pre-move demolition of the diner's rear addition. The wall painting, found under some paneling, depicted the east coast from Maine to Florida and was positioned horizontally (Florida on the left, Maine on the right). Enlivened with pelicans, lobsters, and pine trees, the map showed the diner as the halfway point between the two

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states. The map depicted an era when U.S. 1 catered to the through-traveler heading north or south.⁵ It is likely that diners were located along the two main north-south pre-interstate roads in eastern Virginia and North Carolina, U.S. 301 and U.S. 1. Both significant East Coast highways were upgraded during the first wave of Federal and State highway improvement initiatives beginning in the late 1920s.

Serving a long life from its first site in Newport News, Virginia to its two later sites in the Richmond area, Sam's had been vacant since 1993. Paul and Lisa Keevil, successful owners of Millie's Diner in Richmond's Tobacco Row Historic District, discovered the vacant diner by contacting diner historian and restoration architect Richard Gutman.⁶ The Keevils desired a historic diner that would fit the requirements of their site on U.S. 158 in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. They purchased it and have restored the diner according to the *Secretary of Interior Standards for Historic Rehabilitation*.

Sam's Diner was one of twenty diners included in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) entitled "Virginia Diners." In October 1995, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources National Register Evaluation Team determined Sam's Diner potentially eligible for individual listing in the National Register for its architectural significance.

Architecture Context: Brief History of the Diner Building Type

The diner is purely an American form of building. The first diner was the mobile Pioneer Lunch Wagon, operated by Walter Scott of Providence, Rhode Island, beginning in 1872.⁷ By 1884 lunch wagons had developed from walk-up eateries to indoor stool-at-counter service restaurants. During the Second decade of the twentieth century, the lunch wagon became less of a mobile restaurant and the introduction of elaborate materials and decorative features became part of the customized package for purchase. During the 1920s the lunch wagon was more often called a diner because of its similarity to railroad dining cars. It was during this period that the diner began to take on its classic form: a stationary restaurant that included the new luxury of booths (initially an idea to attract more families and female patrons). Essentially, by the 1930s the business of constructing and operating diners had become a standardized industry, as had the manufacture of the automobile.

With the popularization of industrial design, the diner evolved from a humble wooden wagon to the streamlined design of the 1940s. The streamline strain of American modern architecture was derived from several sources. Coming originally from high style architecture movements such as European Art Deco and early International style, American architects and industrial designers translated these styles into uniquely American forms that evoked static movement through the use of shaping, horizontal massing, and modern materials such as highly polished stainless steel.

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Sam's Diner, Dare Co., NC

The Machine-age restaurant was manifested in the diner. It was the common man's restaurant of the future. Sam's Diner exhibits many of the fine design characteristics of this period.

After WWII, the diner was transformed into its famous form and image. Baked porcelain enamel was out and the sheen of stainless steel was preferred. Stainless steel and the tremendous amount of surplus metal produced a market for a new aesthetic. Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion house led the way to the less radical ranch-house form of metal Lustron houses. The war effort had interrupted diner production, but by 1947 the business was back into full swing. While several diner models still used the colored porcelain enamels, there was a move towards tool-machined, patterned stainless steel. Very often the only color introduced into the metal scheme were horizontal trim lines executed with green, red and blue fleck glass. There was a gradual move away from the train-like monitor roof to a simple flat pitch with a stainless steel crown often strategically positioned to hide the kitchen fan ducts.

The stainless steel-clad diner, usually flat-roofed, is the diner symbol that most Americans remember. It was this diner that was romanticized in movies like *American Graffiti* and *Diner*. By the early 1960s the classic age of the diner was over. The success of chain restaurants forced the diner to seek other markets by the 1970s. While numerous older diners were able to survive, the new buildings, produced by a dwindling number of manufacturers, were built on a larger scale. Larger diners had been constructed in multiple sections since the 1940s, but 1970s diners were very substantial looking buildings. Older diners were remodeled or replaced. As a reaction to modernism, a movement to soften design occurred where flat roofs were altered to mansards or gable forms.

The rediscovery of diners developed with a renewed interest in American modern design during the 1970s. Architectural historians like Richard Gutman (*American Diner*) and Chester Liebs (*Main Street to Miracle Mile*) refocused attention on the uniquely American character of roadside architecture. In the 1980s, there was a renaissance of the diner exemplified by buildings that incorporated stainless steel, glass block, counter and stools, and booths. In Silver Springs, Maryland, the Silver Diner, designed by Richard Gutman, spurred several other new-diners in the Washington, D.C. area, including new built-on-site diners in Potomac Mills, Arlington, and Fairfax County, Virginia. The Starlight Diner Company of Holly Hill, Florida started building retro-diners. These new factory-built stainless steel buildings are found in at least four locations in North Carolina: Boone, Cary, Conover, and Grandy. They were all built and sited in the 1990s.⁸

What distinguishes a diner from other types of buildings? While some very convincing diners are now built on site, the most authentic diner is factory-constructed and shipped to

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site. Diners are usually more long than wide and they always have a counter, usually with stools. Most diners built after WWII include enough space for booths, although there are exceptions. These buildings have an overall feeling of sunlit, polished cleanliness. There are other buildings that are diners in name only. Prefabricated diners are distinctly different in construction than built-on-site types also called diners. Another distinction exists between diners and converted streetcar restaurants. Since the early twentieth century many rail vehicles have been recycled as restaurant spaces. The design similarity encouraged the former vehicles to be considered diners.

Sam's Diner is descended from the lunch wagons of the 1920s. By the time the Kullman Challenger was produced it had metal panels and bright enameled colors complemented by glass block—not the Victorian features of its ancestor. Corners were often rounded, and the tile and woodwork on the interior included Art Deco motifs. The interior wood was a vestige of the wagon interiors, including wood booths; however, wood gave way to more stainless steel and tile materials after the war; post-war booths were padded and Naugahyde-sheathed. The Kullman Challenger was marketed as an economical diner. It was long and narrow for shipping ease and it was more efficiently run with a kitchen addition on the rear. Earlier wagons and diners of the 1920s and 1930s incorporated kitchen equipment within the diner.⁹

Diner Rarity in the Region and State

Less than one hundred diners have survived east of the Mississippi into the last half of the twentieth century. While survey of these buildings has not been comprehensive in the region, it is safe to assume that architectural historian Richard Gutman's list of fifty-seven diners accounts for at least eighty percent of the existing diners.¹⁰ Of this group, less than ten date to the pre-WWII period. The greater numbers of diners surviving in the South are 1950s and recently built re-creations.¹¹

One of the earliest surviving diners in the South was originally a mainstay in Mount Airy, North Carolina. Moved about twenty miles north in 1946, the Hillsville Diner is still running strong in the courthouse town of Hillsville, Virginia. Some preliminary research in Mount Airy reveals that several diners were once located in or near the town. The Hillsville is a Tierney Diner, ca. 1925-1930, manufactured in New Rochelle, New York. The diner has been determined eligible for the National Register.

There is the likelihood that many diners were once located in major North Carolina urban areas, and especially along the earlier, well-traveled tourist routes such as U.S. 1, 21, 29, 301, and 401.¹² Several diners remain in North Carolina. The Midway Diner stands in very poor condition on Rock Creek Dairy Road between Greensboro and Burlington just off U.S. 70. The Midway is a converted railroad car. Conversion of subway, street, and railroad cars

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into diners was a common occurrence from the second decade of the twentieth century through the 1950s. One of these converted streetcars served as a diner in Fayetteville. Thompson's Cottage Court and Diner was located on U.S. 15A (see postcard reproduction in Additional Documentation). This diner was a streetcar attached to a frame building.¹³ The unusual diner building included a frame gabled section parallel to the streetcar and a rear front-gabled ell, probably expanded kitchen space. Judging from the date of the postcard image of Thompson's, the small Cape Cod cottages are most likely from the late 1930s to the mid 1940s.

Like Sam's, the Four Corners Diner, a stainless steel-clad building at Atlantic Beach, is also located on the Outer Banks. Not much is presently known about the building, but it appears to date to the 1950s, but possibly the late 1940s.

Sam's Diner has been rehabilitated carefully to extend the building's life and maintain its ability to move again, if need be. In Kill Devil Hills, Sam's is adapting to its fourth site of business. True to the American ethic of "go where the business is," Sam's continues on in 1940's entrepreneurial spirit. It is hoped by the new owners, the Keevils, hope that the preservation of this roadside landmark will serve as a model for other diners and bring attention to significant vernacular pre-interstate architecture of America's recent past.

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Endnotes

¹ A matte finished counter top was installed during the 1996 restoration—a treatment not common in the 1930s and 1940s. The owners were dissatisfied with the result and decided to purchase the special order high-gloss Formica. The top will scratch and mar more noticeably, but this is the historically correct appearance.

²The original seats tops might have been leather. The use of leather and Naugahyde overlapped. As with options that are available with cars today, there was a choice. By the 1950s Naugahyde was the mainstay.

³The Kullman Company is one of few diner companies that has survived. Now called Kullman Industries, the company builds huge multiple-section diners. The sales record for Sam's Diner was not available when the Keevils (the owners) visited the plant in New Jersey. Records may no longer exist. The company was not sure whether any construction drawings for the Challenger model exist.

⁴ Sanborn Fire Insurance map, 1925 Base, updated 1945-1949, corrected 1951.

⁵ Sam's was located several miles from the well-known Half-Way House, one of the few eighteenth-century taverns remaining on the old highway.

⁶ Richard J.S. Gutman's *American Diner* and *American Diner: Then and Now* are considered the most scholarly works on the diner building.

⁷ Gutman, *American Diner*, p.2-3.

⁸ Randy Garbin, *Deep South Diner Finder in Roadside*, vol. 26 (1998), p.18-19.

⁹ Fred Shahda recalls that all the cooking was done inside the factory-made section when Sam's Diner was located on Broad Street. Sam eventually added a wood frame kitchen to the rear at that site. It wasn't until the diner was moved to Chesterfield County around 1950 that a large addition was added to accommodate the kitchen, storage space, and dining room.

¹⁰ It should be emphasized that it has not been a priority for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) to identify historic roadside resources. Also, some diners are difficult to identify because of architecture integrity problems. Valentine Diners—painted steel boxes—are difficult to read as a diner form.

¹¹ A list of diners by state is found in Gutman's *American Diner: Then and Now*.

¹² Architectural historian J. Daniel Pezzoni provided some research on Coleman's Diner in Jacksonville, North Carolina. The Marine Corps base's proximity created an ideal entrepreneurial environment for diners. A converted streetcar was reborn as Spec's Diner run by Spec Cowell. By the early 1940s, Coleman Bonum bought the business and changed the name to Coleman's Diner. Coleman rebuilt the business, selling the streetcar. The streetcar was moved to New Bridge Street and renamed the Victory Diner. The streetcar was thought to have been retired from the Wilmington city rail system. The diner no longer survives. See period photograph in Additional Documentation. J. Daniel Pezzoni shared material from his draft manuscript of *An Architectural History of Onslow County, North Carolina* in 1997.

¹³ The conversion of streetcars to diners was a cheap and easy way to start a diner business. It is possible that converted streetcar diners may have out-numbered factory made diners in the South. In the recent past, an abandoned streetcar diner was sited in Roxboro. In 1993, a town resident told me that the streetcar was probably retired from the Danville (Virginia) line.

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Bibliographic References-Selective

The field work and the subsequent ongoing study has relied on the important research and data gathered by Richard Gutman. His work provides a national historic context. Architectural historian, Richard Guy Wilson, has provided valuable support for the study of recent architecture, and Roadside editor, Randolph Garbin, has also encouraged public interest in diner heritage. Daniel Zilka, Director of the American Diner Museum in Providence, Rhode Island has contributed to the research of this nomination as well as playing an active part in the restoration consulting work on Sam's.

This bibliography includes national sources for diner study, as well as various local primary resources specific to Virginia. This was compiled for Virginia Diners, Multiple Property Document.

Institutions vital to this study include the University of Virginia's Fiske Kimball Library; the Library of Virginia, and the Society for Commercial Archeology at the Smithsonian Institution.

There are numerous individuals that have contributed to the Virginia research.

Those listed below are authors; those who participated in interviews, and/or contributed significant information and artifacts.

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Additional Material

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Photographs

All Photographs share the following information:

Subject: Sam's Diner
Location: Kill Devil Hills, Dare County, North Carolina
Date: September 1993
Photographer: Marc C. Wagner

1. Exterior view towards west.
2. Exterior view towards west.
3. Exterior view towards southwest.
4. Exterior-detail of primary entrance.
5. Interior, primary space-towards south.
6. Interior, primary space-towards north.
7. Interior, primary space-rebuilt counter curve and corner mirror and stools.

Additional Information

1. Enlarged color copy of Sam's Diner post card, c. 1950-51. Photographer, James E. Hess, Mellinger Studios, Lancaster PA.
2. Enlarged color copy of Thompson's Cottage Court and Diner post card, c. 1950. No photographer identified, Aquarelle, Dexter Press, Pearl River, NY.
3. Copy of documentary photograph of Victory's Diner, c. 1945. No photographer identified, Jacksonville vicinity, NC.

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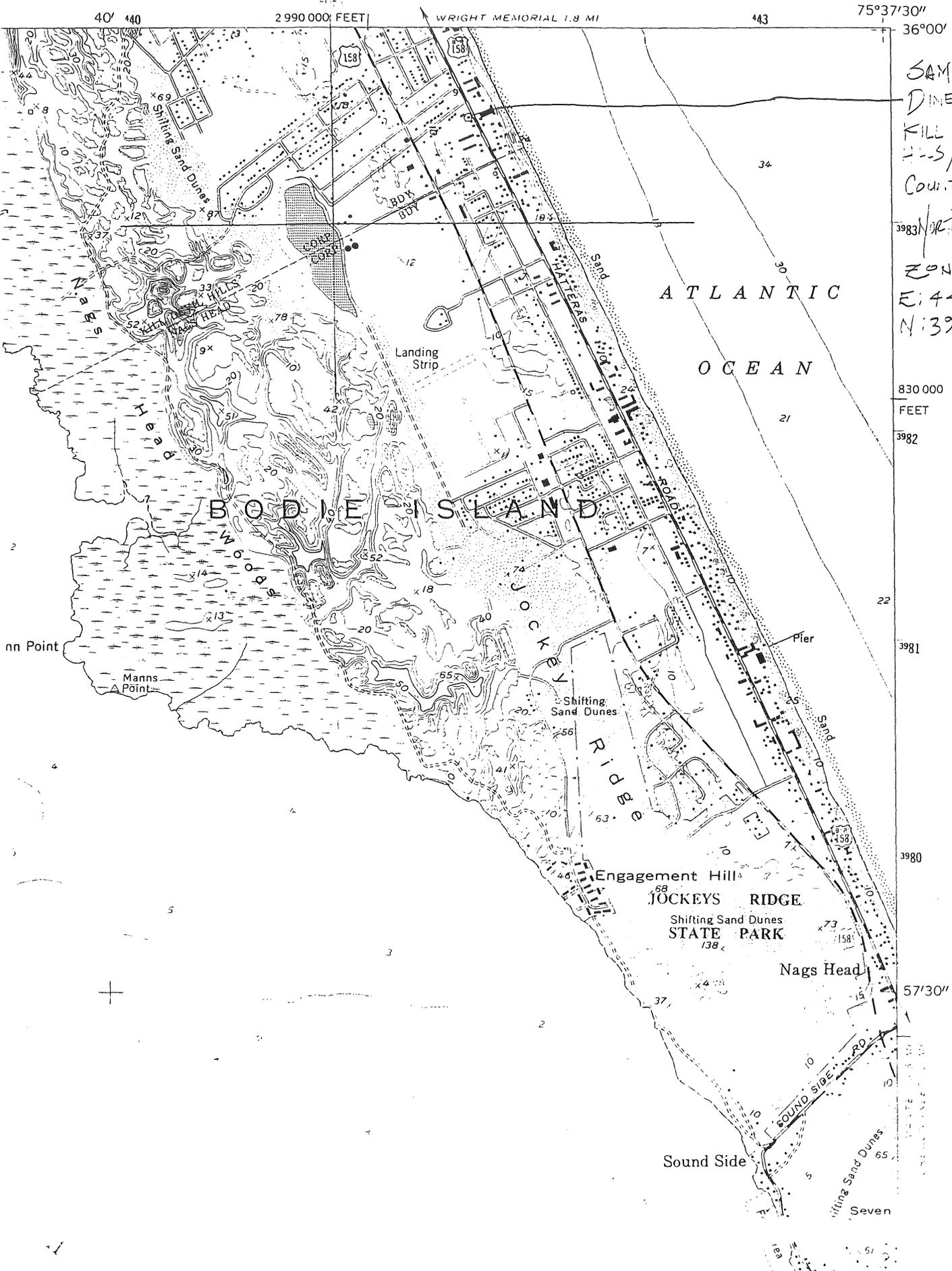
Section 10: Boundaries

Verbal Boundary Description The boundaries are defined by all the land within the two tax parcels officially recorded in Kill Devil Hills property records as 000493-010 and 005151-001.

Boundary Justification The two parcels include Sam's Diner and land to accommodate parking lots and other landscape features that support the integrity of the buildings appropriate setting.

MANTEO QUADRANGLE
 NORTH CAROLINA—DARE CO.
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

5856 II
 (KITTY HAWK
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