

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
Continuation Sheet

Halfway Diner
Name of Property
Dutchess Co., New York
County and State
87002297
NR Reference Number

State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X additional documentation move removal name change (additional documentation) other 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.



Signature of Certifying Official/Title:



Date of Action

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
- additional documentation accepted
- other (explain: _____)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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The Halfway Diner was listed on the National Register in 1988. While the history and context for the resource were well researched and generally accurate, we recently learned that the original nomination incorrectly identified the existing building to ca.1925. There was a previous diner on site, which was replaced in 1957 with a newer model dating to 1951. The 1951 diner is itself significant as a distinctive example of mid-twentieth century American roadside architecture surviving exceptionally intact from its date of manufacture (1951) and shares the same history and context as the original building on the property. This additional documentation revises and corrects the description and significance to accurately document the nominated building and its history. In addition, we have addressed criteria exception B, moved buildings, which was not addressed in the original nomination. And finally, the period of significance has been expanded to 1972, the fifty-year mark, as the diner is still serving its original function and is an active center of social life in Red Hook.

Section 7: Narrative Description of Property

The Halfway Diner, now known as the Village Diner, is a Silk City prefabricated metal diner manufactured by the Paterson Vehicle Company of Paterson, New Jersey, in 1951. It is situated on the east side of U.S. Route 9 (North Broadway) in the village of Red Hook, Dutchess County, New York, a few hundred feet north of the intersection of Route 9 with Main Street (N.Y. Route 199), the principal crossroads in this small commercial center. The diner was installed at its current location in ca. 1957. Originally commissioned for use at a location south of Red Hook on U.S. 9 in the town of Rhinebeck, it was moved twice locally in the intervening years before being moved to Red Hook in 1957, where it has remained ever since. It currently occupies a small lot measuring approximately 75 feet wide at the street frontage and 125 feet deep. The diner is located at the center of the parcel on a concrete block foundation and is surrounded by an unpaved parking area. It shares the streetscape with commercial and residential properties mixed in an array now typical of major highway corridors in the region. It is bordered by a small variety chain store on the north and a distinctive Queen Anne style house on the south. A supermarket, farm implement dealer, pizza parlor and a restored nineteenth-century inn (Elmendorf House, NRHP 1978) complete the streetscape on the east, while the west side of the highway remains fairly intact with nineteenth-century village residences.

The Halfway Diner, built in 1951, is an intact example of the type of streamlined, stainless steel diner that the Paterson Vehicle Company introduced in 1949 and manufactured until 1952. Silk City diners changed their designs roughly every four years in the post-World War II period. It was standard practice for the company to include a manufacturer's tag that included a serial number, consisting of year of manufacture, followed by the diner's number. For example, the Halfway Diner's manufacturing tag reads #5113, thereby identifying it as the 13th diner built in 1951. The tag with this serial number is on the interior above the entrance door. The diner is a long, rectangular box of welded steel-frame construction, with an arched roof and exterior monitor that is not reflected on the interior.

The principal entrance was symmetrically placed in the middle of the street (west) elevation. Another door is located on the south end. The exterior of the diner is sheathed in metal that is fluted and banded horizontally, a reference to the styling of the Budd Company's passenger railroad cars, which employed a similar exterior skin. All corners and edges of the diner are rounded and are consistent with the

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streamlined aesthetic. A round-ended metal sign with neon letters spelling out "DINER" extends above the roofline. Porcelain enamel panels are employed in a horizontal band in the middle of the façade beneath the windows, reading "HALFWAY DINER" – the original name. The rear (east) side is not fenestrated.

On the interior, the plan is typical of most single-unit, roadside diners constructed during the first half of the twentieth century. Along the length of the back wall is the area known as the backbar, where the equipment for the storage, display and preparation of food was built-in. Additional space for the shelving and washing of tableware was accommodated under the counter. The counter has fixed stools for seating, while booth seating runs along the front wall, separated from the counter by an aisle running the length of the dining car.

The later addition of a full commercial kitchen removed the majority of the food preparation and dishwashing functions and equipment (primarily the grill and sink) from the area behind the counter. This common alteration left only secondary service and display functions within the actual diner, such as the coffee urn, toasters, snack and dessert displays, and other quick-service items.

The materials and design of the interior are utilitarian and easily maintained, typical of the stainless-steel diner car design. The Halfway Diner retains much of its original interior fabric, notably ceramic mosaic tile floors and ceramic tile below the windows and on the counter apron. The latter utilizes the then-contemporary color combination of turquoise and black. There are cream-colored porcelain enamel ceiling panels; a divided Formica countertop with sixteen stools on tapered octagonal pedestals (the stool tops are not original); six booths (reupholstered) with integral coat racks, and a back wall sheathed with sunburst stainless steel panels, with shelving, pie racks, refrigerators, and counters. The stainless-steel hood is original, but the glass-fronted menu boards are not. There is a retro vintage-style neon clock mounted on the north wall. The original ceiling-mounted fluorescent lighting has been changed, replaced by schoolhouse-type lighting, and the original single-pane retractable sash windows on the facade have been replaced.

At some point during the 1960s the diner was enlarged creating an L-shaped layout on its northeast end to provide additional dining space and rest rooms. The exterior skin and windows from the north elevation were moved to the front of the diner to cover the façade extension. The three smaller windows at the north end of the facade and a vertical seam in the horizontal metal siding define the extension. Also by way of this extension, the original symmetry of the diner car was distorted, and while the sign was shifted to the new midpoint, the entrance remains uncentered.

The exterior north end wall of the addition was not treated to match the original south end elevation. It has no windows and was covered with corrugated iron. The addition extended further to the rear than the original dining car and was built in of conventional wood-frame construction, originally sheathed partially in corrugated metal. The east elevation of the addition at the rear has now been re-sided with a vinyl material.

The interior of the addition consists of an open dining space with freestanding tables and chairs. This addition resulted in two new interior doorways from the diner car into the dining room, one for staff

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behind the counter and another for patrons between the counter and booths. Part of the counter was removed adjacent to the dining room and a new display case was put in its place. New materials cover the walls of the addition. The entrances to the rest rooms at the rear are through metal clad doors with oval windows.

The addition's association with the diner's stages of movement, growth and development, its compatibility of design, and its physical representation of the evolving function of diners in the 1950s contribute to our understanding of the history of this type of resource in general.

Shortly following the diner's relocation to Red Hook and the dining room extension, a concrete block structure was built at the rear squaring off the L-shaped form, accommodating additional kitchen space for the expanded restaurant. While it does not contribute to the design significance of the diner, it does reflect the evolution of the building from a smaller dining car to a restaurant with an expanded kitchen and menu. Another design feature added on after the relocation of the diner to Red Hook, is the stone stoop at the entrance, which was built ca. 1957. Although the materials and form of the stoop are inconsistent with the streamlined style of the diner, they more aptly reflect the suburban taste of the period.

The National Register boundary remains the same as previously identified at the time of listing in 1988. The boundary was drawn to include the entirety of the parcel where the Halfway Diner was moved in 1957, and where it remains to this day.

Section 8: Statement of Significance

The Halfway Diner, known today as the Village Diner, is significant as a distinctive example of mid-twentieth century American roadside architecture surviving exceptionally intact from its date of manufacture in 1951. It embodies distinguishing characteristics of the type and period in its streamlined design, which was intended to evoke, at once, the ideas of travel, food, cleanliness and modern efficiency. The diner is additionally significant as a representative example of a Silk City Diner, a highly popular prefabricated dining car line manufactured by the Paterson Vehicle Company of Paterson, New Jersey, from 1927 to 1964. The Halfway Diner also meets criteria consideration B as a moved building primarily significant for its architectural integrity. Designed with mobility in mind, Silk City Diners were fabricated as a building intended to be moved, were the location and setting were only considered when analyzing accessibility and visibility from the roadway. Halfway Diner retains these characteristics with its prominent location along Route 9 (N. Broadway) in Red Hook. Additionally, the later expansions to the diner, like the dining room and rest rooms, reflect the buildings later history when it settled into community life in a more permanent way. The period of significance of the diner extends from 1951, when it was manufactured to replace an older model Silk City Diner on NY 199, through its move to Red Hook in 1957, until 1972, the current 50-year mark, demonstrating its continued use as a roadside diner in Dutchess County. After years of catering to travelers on Dutchess County's major highways, the Halfway Diner enjoys continued popularity as a community-oriented restaurant and the focal point of local nostalgia.

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Roadside Architecture

Roadside architecture, a twentieth-century genre of building types and styles responding to the economic and cultural changes nurtured by the automobile and the highway and the consumer society that followed the Industrial Revolution, has increasingly been the subject of historic analysis and interpretation. According to Chester Liebs in his 1985 study *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, the meaning of roadside architecture is best understood in spatial as well as chronological contexts.¹ As the character of roadside architecture evolved over time, it was also moving outward geographically from the inner core of Main Street to the developing highway strips in suburbia. As such, it becomes a metaphor for the changing living patterns and practices of mass society during the period.

Architecturally, roadside commercial buildings are a composite of building, sign and image that, in Liebs's words, "signals its message directly and with economy in a visual/verbal language that is not only easily understood by the customer but also, through simile and metaphor, plays on subtle and perhaps unconscious visual associations."² These associations have shifted over time and reflect the changing values and attitudes of the mass culture. Liebs also observed that, "Behind the exterior sales costumes, roadside businesses also provide some kind of service or product for their customers -- be it gas, food, lodging, and amusements or groceries and automobiles. In order to serve its specific function, each roadside building type evolves from an architectural program that changes over time in response to economic conditions and new technology."³ Thus, roadside architecture provides valuable information concerning the changing twentieth-century community in its form and design, its function, and its movement within the cultural environment.

Lunch Wagons in the Nineteenth Century

The history of diners predates the emergence of roadside architecture, extending back to 1872, when Walter Scott opened a "beanery-on-wheels" in Providence, Rhode Island, serving area factory workers sandwiches, eggs, pies and coffee from a horse-drawn express wagon.⁴ Similar in function to the present-day coffee trucks that frequent construction sites, the early wagons were conceived to provide food to a clientele at various scheduled locations. Buyers would line up at a service window to place an order to a proprietor within. Most of the food would have been prepared in a kitchen at another location and stowed in the wagon for transport and distribution. The idea of urban lunch wagons soon caught on and spread to other cities in the industrial Northeast. Initially, the vehicles were patchwork conversions of other types of wagons. Yet with increased demand, they assumed a status of their own, and a specific industry was born dedicated solely to the manufacture of "Night Lunch Wagons" and "Fancy Night Cafes." Inside, lunch wagons were carefully arranged and compartmentalized in response to the limited amount of space.

¹ Chester H Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p.vii.

² Liebs, viii.

³ Liebs, viii.

⁴ Liebs, 216.

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In the 1890s, when most of the major cities began to discard their horse-drawn trolleys in favor of electric-powered equipment, some would-be entrepreneurs purchased the decommissioned vehicles and converted some of them to food service uses. The design and technology of the lunch wagons continually underwent improvement and modification, often incorporating distinctive features such as flash glass and etched windows, elaborate hand-painted exteriors, and more sophisticated cooking equipment. There was also room for several customers to eat inside. By 1900, lunch wagons were a familiar sight throughout the Northeast.

Eventually, the lunch wagons became successful enough that they no longer needed to roam the streets in search of trade. Wagons began to move off the city streets onto open lots, and their clientele came to them. In many instances, the wagon wheels were concealed by foundation panels and/or plantings, a trend that continued with modern mobile facilities. In fact, the running gear used to transport later diners, such as the Halfway Diner, from the manufacturer to their various locations has sometimes been found attached to their underbodies when the diners were removed from their foundations.

Commercialization of Lunch Cars

The commercial manufacture of lunch wagons began in Worcester, Massachusetts, where in 1887, Samuel M. Jones started making wagons large enough to seat customers on stools inside.⁵ Charles Palmer modified Jones's design and obtained the first patent for lunch wagon design in 1891, naming his products "Night Owl Lunches." Palmer then set up a factory in Sterling, Massachusetts, for the mass production of lunch wagons. Thomas H. Buckley opened a competing factory in Worcester that by 1892 employed eighty workers, and he soon became known as the "Lunch Wagon King." His signature model was the "White House Café," with a richly ornamented exterior, distinguished by gilt scrolls and a body of wooden beadboard painted white with elaborate lettering and paintings. Worcester's leadership in the industry was ultimately consolidated with the formation of the renowned Worcester Lunch Car Company in 1906, an enterprise that grew out of the Buckley company after his death.

The Worcester lunch car, in its earliest incarnations, was a wood-frame structure with a barrel-vaulted roof and a continuous band of windows. Its interior plan had a longitudinal counter dividing the lunch car. Behind the counter was equipment for storage, cooking and serving, and a row of stools supplied seating for customers. Nearly all surfaces were wood, with the exception of a ceramic mosaic tile floor. As the company grew, diner design changed and modern materials were adapted on the interior and exterior. This firm dominated the New England diner market for the next fifty years, refining the distinctive lunch wagon design developed by earlier manufacturers.

Patrick J. (Pop) Tierney, a lunch wagon maker from New Rochelle, New York, was responsible for introducing the manufacture of lunch cars to the New York metropolitan area. The company run by his sons after his death in 1917 spawned many of the diner-building design features that proliferated in New Jersey.

⁵ Liebs, 216.

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The expansion of commercial activity at the turn-of-the-century in the downtown areas of cities created a prime market for the dining car industry. This expansion of the quick-lunch clientele marked the beginning of the twentieth-century diner boom. Locations for diners shifted from factory neighborhoods to the main streets, and their new image was conducive to attracting a more universal clientele, both by the cleverness of their design and by its visual departure from an association with working-class establishments.

Subsequent developments in diner history reflected the growing economic and social influences of the middle class: the proliferation of small retail establishments, the growth of centralized business districts as community centers, the cosmopolitanism provided by a growing transportation network, and the increase of activities centered around spending.

In the 1920s the automobile became a factor in everyday life and extended commercial activity out onto the highway. Along with the gas station and motel, the diner adopted a distinctive image to meet the demands of the roadside. Immediate visibility and attraction were crucial, and the architecture was conceived to create an effective sign as much (or more) as a functional building. Also, swept up in the excitement of the highway, businessmen were prone to consider avant-garde designs. By the mid-1930s, a trend toward streamlining in industrial design coincided neatly with the expansion of the diner trade and proffered a totally new vehicle type to mimic. As a result, the roadside diner outgrew the established trolley form and adopted more modern automotive models. The shiny, round-edged metal dining car was born in this pre-war period, and innumerable variations on the type appeared on the highways as they spread through the countryside.

New diner manufacturers appeared, a few of them already involved in vehicle-building industries. The locus of production shifted from New England to New Jersey. Although the Worcester Lunch Car Company clung to the traditional trolley car look, the New Jersey builders set the standard for the streamlined, stainless steel dining car style. The major manufacturers were the Paterson Vehicle Co., fabricators of the Silk City Diner, first built in 1927; Jerry O'Mahony of Elizabeth, the largest producer, established in 1913; and the Kullman Dining Car Company of Newark, established in 1927. Other builders included Paramount, Sterling, Mountain View, Fodero, DeRaffe and Manno, among others.⁶ The new diner design was organized around the modern influences of automobile transportation, family activities, cleanliness and efficiency. By 1930, there were approximately 4,000 diners in the Northeast, and the total approached 6,000 by the end of that decade.⁷

The diner's popularity continued through the 1940s and survived the commercial district shifts of the 1950s better than many businesses. Their mobility, in many cases, allowed for a direct relocation to the growing commercial areas along the highways beyond the city limits. Although they continued to prosper, diners changed in fundamental ways. Keeping the streamlined aesthetic, diners evolved in plan as they grew in size from a dining car format to a restaurant format with bathrooms and more fully equipped kitchens. Functionally, they became increasingly oriented to the needs of the permanent local community rather than to those of the traveler. Menus expanded, interior design lost its dining car

⁶ Donald Kaplan and Alan Bellink, *Diners of the Northeast, from Maine to New Jersey* (New York, N.Y.: Lippincott & Crowell, 1980), 15.

⁷ Kaplan and Bellink, 218.

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association, streamlined efficiency was no longer an evident feature and the counter, although retained, was no longer the focal point of activity. Ironically, this complacency ultimately contributed to the diner's decline, for their hold on the market was ultimately supplanted by the fast food chains that adopted their earlier streamlined ethic – in service, if not in design.

Silk City Diner Design & The Halfway Diner

One of the most popular streamlined diner types from their "golden age" during the third quarter of the twentieth century was the Silk City Diner. It was manufactured by the Paterson Vehicle Company, which was owned and operated by the Cooper family from 1886 to 1964. Originally, the company made carriage, automobile, bus, and truck bodies, but in 1927 it expanded its line to include diners. Precisely when the Silk City name was coined is unknown, but it appears in a 1928 listing for the company in the Paterson Directory. (Paterson was known as the Silk City because of its involvement in that aspect of the textile industry.) The Paterson Vehicle Company advertised that it produced sturdy but inexpensive diners. It patented its own system of arc-welded steel construction, creating a strong and durable structure. The company assured potential buyers that the steel buildings were insulated against the effects of lightning, addressing what must have been a general concern at the time. The company's expertise in the automobile business contributed to its faith in steel as the preferred material for diner construction.

Silk City Diners were built as standard production units, six or eight at a time, in different color schemes; because they were not custom built, a Silk City was the lowest price diner you could get, and the company advertised that fact. Generally, the Silk City Diners of the post-World War II period were sheathed in stainless steel. Corners were rounded and flat surfaces were fluted to add strength to the sheet metal. On the interior, all surfaces were easily washable, including tile floors, tile walls, porcelain enamel ceiling panels, and stainless steel equipment and wall panels behind the counter. By 1953, Silk City had introduced a new model with a façade of horizontal panels of porcelain enamel in alternating colors and an overall boxier design that eliminated the monitor style roof. Each of the major manufacturers generally followed the same design and engineering standards but had distinctive design features that subtly distinguished them from their competitors.

The buildings themselves were part of a very fluid, upwardly mobile enterprise. Diners were factory-made, which allowed their particular form and character to be assembled from innumerable variations of standard components, either at the factory or over time. Buyers could order an elaborate model or a basic one, depending on the price they were able to pay or the requirements of their location. They could upgrade them as their situation permitted or trade up for a newer or better model as their business prospered. The diner's very mobility contributed to the process of self-improvement. They could be easily relocated if business warranted it or replaced with the newer and better model.

The original Halfway Diner, later replaced by a 1951 model, was purchased from the Paterson Vehicle Company around 1927. Its owner, Lou DuBois, travelled with his sister, Emma Lasher, from their home in Kingston, New York, to Paterson, New Jersey, to pick out a Silk City Diner. He had bought a parcel of property on U.S. Route 9 just north of the village of Rhinebeck in an area called Astor Flats. After he placed his order for the diner, DuBois began to clear his lot, build a foundation and put in drains for the

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parking lot. His brother-in-law, Al Lasher, who owned trucks, hauled the fill and gravel to level the property. When the Silk City people delivered the fully equipped diner, DuBois was ready for business. It was his wife who actually managed the diner and cooked, as Lou worked for the Rupert Beer distributorship in Newburgh and helped at the diner on his off-hours. They named it Halfway Diner because it was halfway between New York City and Albany.⁸

The story of how Lou DuBois got his diner, as recounted in 1987 by his sister, Emma Lasher, follows the steps promoted nearly twenty-five years earlier by the Paterson Vehicle Co. in their advertisements. These steps include visiting a Silk City Diner and talking with its owner, visiting the Silk City factory, getting a piece of property with business potential, ordering a diner, preparing your site, and hiring help and ordering food. Then, as the advertisement stated, "just open the doors...[and enjoy] a profitable business THE SILK CITY WAY."⁹

Diner manufacturers offered small entrepreneurs like Lou DuBois an opportunity to enter the restaurant business with little capital and "years to pay," promising buyers success and all its trappings. The company's formula for success even extended to assisting buyers to learn management skills. Every Silk City Diner came equipped with its own bookkeeping system, as well as aids for hiring staff and a start-up shopping list.

Lou DuBois died unexpectedly in 1928 and his family sold the diner, not the land, to a Red Hook resident, Bert Coons. It was during Coons's ownership that the original diner was traded in for the more current Silk City model, #5113. When purchased, the new diner was located on a site near the newly completed Taconic Parkway's intersection with Route 199, about ten miles east of Red Hook, to take advantage of parkway travelers. The diner was moved in about 1957, back to its predecessor's original location in the village of Red Hook along Route 9—where it stands today.

This relocation of the diner reflects changing travel patterns in the area during the early 1950s, as the newly laid Taconic Parkway became the major north-south route in the region. However, Emma Lasher speculates that the traffic created by the completion in 1957 of the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge over the Hudson River just west of the village, restored traffic to Route 9, and business was better in Red Hook than near the Taconic. It is significant, however, that the movement of the diner appears to have paralleled a major shift in the regional transportation network.

After the Halfway Diner was returned to its predecessor's location in Red Hook, Coons rented it for a while to other proprietors before selling it altogether in the 1960s. By this time the diner had acquired the addition to its north end, extending its eating space into a small dining room and providing bathrooms. At some point after 1973, the Halfway was renamed the Village Diner. The current owners, Arleen Harkins, bought the diner in 1983 and appended "Historic" to its name.

The Halfway Diner is a well-preserved example of the "Golden Age" of the roadside dining car. Its shiny, banded metal exterior and monitor roof recall the sleekness of a railroad car and reflect the

⁸ Interview with Emma Lasher, sister of original diner owner, July 26, 1987.

⁹ Advertisement, *The Diner*, published by the Paterson Vehicle Company, n.d. (c1950).

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popular interest in streamlining that captured much of the design world during and after the Great Depression. Typical of its building type, the diner is as much a sign as a building, a readable structure whose function and purpose are obvious from a moving automobile. (You know what it is by the way it looks.) Surviving mostly intact from its date of construction, the diner maintains associations with that period of diner history, as well as features that represent important transitional points in the evolution of the type, along with its function in the roadside development genre. The Halfway Diner is a survivor and a landmark in the architectural and transportation history of northern Dutchess County.

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Photo Log

Name of Property: Halfway Diner

City of Vicinity: Red Hook

County: Dutchess State: New York

Photographer: Richard J.S. Gutman

Date: September 2020

NY_Dutchess_HalfwayDiner_001

Halfway Diner façade (west Elevation) as seen from North Broadway

NY_Dutchess_HalfwayDiner_002

The west and south elevations as seen from North Broadway

NY_Dutchess_HalfwayDiner_003

The main entrance located on the west elevation. The modern stoop was constructed c.1957

NY_Dutchess_HalfwayDiner_004

Image showing the meeting point of the c.1960s addition and the original 1951 diner at the north end. Three smaller windows and a vertical seam in the horizontal metal siding outline the addition.

NY_Dutchess_HalfwayDiner_005

North elevation showing the where the diner meets the c.1960s addition

NY_Dutchess_HalfwayDiner_006

Interior of the diner looking north showing the counter and fixed stools

NY_Dutchess_HalfwayDiner_007

Interior of the diner looking south

NY_Dutchess_HalfwayDiner_008

Image of the counter showing original material finishes

NY_Dutchess_HalfwayDiner_009

Interior view of the windows looking west

NY_Dutchess_HalfwayDiner_010

Plaque attached to the stainless-steel appliances behind the counter indicating the model and manufacture of the diner

NY_Dutchess_HalfwayDiner_011

Plaque above the main entrance indicating the serial number of the diner, Silk City Diner #5113

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Silk City Advertisement, Diner magazine, 1951



Stewart's
Shops



DINER

OPEN

845-768-5222
Sun - Thurs
6:00-8:00pm
Fri Sat 6:00am-10:00pm
CURBSIDE
TO-GO
OPEN
THANK YOU
FOR YOUR
SUPPORT

The Historic
Village Diner

PARKING
FOR
TENANTS
ONLY

DINER



TAKEOUT
758-6232
CURBSIDE

WAY DINER













A dark, textured surface, likely a book cover or endpaper, featuring a faint embossed design of a classical building with four columns and a pediment. The design is composed of raised, light-colored lines. At the bottom center, there is a rectangular label with the number '5113' and the text 'PAT. NO. 2145970'.

5113

• PAT. NO. 2145979