

VLR-6/19/96 NRHP-12/16/96

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 10-90)

OMB No. 1024-0018

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 Bow 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 Burnett's Diner

other names/site number Main Street Lunch, S&K Diner, Chatham Cafe/VDHR File N° 187-0013

2. Location

street & number 19 South Main street not for publication

city or town Chatham vicinity _____
state - Virginia code VA county Pittsylvania code-143-
zip code 24531

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 _____ statewide X locally. (_____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]
Signature of certifying official

October 24, 1996
Date

VA Dept. of Historic Resources
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

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4. National Park Service Certification

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I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register _____
- See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register _____
- See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register _____
- removed from the National Register _____
- other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

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5. Classification

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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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 sites
<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 structures
<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 objects
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) Diners of Virginia

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6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Transportation Sub: streetcar
Commerce/Trade restaurant

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Commerce/Trade Sub: restaurant

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Other

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
roof METAL:steel
walls METAL:steel
other _____

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

See Continuation Sheets

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8. Statement of Significance
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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- _X_ 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.
X 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce
Architecture

Period of Significance 1939-1946

Significant Dates 1939

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Perley A. Thomas Car Company
(High Point, North Carolina)

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

See Continuation Sheets

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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

See 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: _____

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: Less than 1 acre

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	642830	4076510	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated property includes all of the land on Tax Parcel Lot 00A-158.

Boundary Justification: The boundaries include all the property that has been associated to the operation of Burnett's Diner since its opening in c. 1939. The remodelled gas station, now used for offices, is included because it was once connected to the diner. Henry Burnett operated the station before moving the diner into place. The diner, old gas station, and additions cover most of the small, urban, corner lot at Main and Pruden streets.

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title Marc C. Wagner/Architectural Historian
organization Virginia Department of Historic Resources date May 19, 1996
street & number 221 Governor Street telephone 804-225-4316
city or town Richmond state VA zip code 22903

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Additional Documentation
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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)

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

name Allen Easley
street & number P.O. Box 898 telephone _____
city or town Chatham state VA zip code 24531

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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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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Burnett's Diner
Town of Chatham, Virginia
Diners of Virginia
(Multiple Property Listing)

Association to Diners of Virginia Multiple Property Document

Burnett's Diner is submitted as part of a Multiple Property Listing, Diners of Virginia. The cover document was completed and accepted by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources' State Review Board and Historic Resources Board in 1995. Burnett's diner is specifically discussed in the cover document's Statement of Historic Contexts, Section E, page 6.

As a rare surviving example of a converted streetcar restaurant, Burnett's Diner fulfills the registration requirements outlined in the cover document's Section F, Associated Property Types. The first paragraph mentions "converted trolley, street car, subway car, or rail car." Burnett's Diner also satisfies the Registration Requirement in Section F, part IV (page 17): "Diners to be listed under this document must either be prefabricated, built in a factory and shipped to site, or they must have been constructed with the specific intention to closely resemble the prefabricated form."

Summary Description

Known longest as Burnett's Diner, this unusual restaurant building is one of two former early 20th century streetcars operating as eateries in the small Southside Virginia town of Chatham. Bill's Diner, a smaller streetcar is located about 150 feet south on the opposite side of Main Street (at the corner of Depot and Main streets).

The streetcar vehicle became a popular competitor to the factory-made Lunch Wagons of the early 20th century. The cross-design of rail vehicles and the mobile restaurants gave birth to the popular descriptive term "diner" for prefabricated, semi-mobile, restaurants.

Three brothers, Henry, Frank and Jessie Burnett bought the recently retired Danville Traction and Power Company Car No. 66 sometime around 1939. Hauled 20 miles north to Chatham on Booker Stone's flat bed truck, the Burnett brothers' diner opened for business sometime after 1938 and continued their service well into the 1960s. Burnett's Diner is one of the finest surviving examples of the streetcar-diner in Virginia and possibly in the eastern United States. Streetcar-diner conversions are extremely rare nationally, especially those that still operate as viable businesses.¹

¹ A great deal of the Burnett diner history was derived from three sources: Henry Burnett, Jr. (the son of the Henry Burnett, Sr., diner founder), interviewed August 30, 1995 in Chatham; current property owner, Allen Easley, interviewed August 30, 1995 in Chatham; and Steve Law, most recently interviewed on August 31, 1995. Easley and Law realize the unique value of the building. Law was responsible for the extensive restoration work, and he provided historical information for this study, including historic photographs.

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Burnett's Diner
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Built by the Perley A. Thomas Car Company² of High Point, North Carolina, Car No. 66 was purchased by the Danville Traction and Power Company along with four other double-truck closed cars, in 1923. Buses began replacing the Danville streetcars in 1936. The Schoolfield-North Danville route streetcars, which included Car No. 66, were replaced with buses in 1938, after a trail run of bus service. Rescued from the scrappers, the Burnett's purchased Car No. 66 for their restaurant space.³

Car No. 66 as a Vehicle

The double-truck Thomas Car was the largest, most modern streetcar to travel Danville's streets in the 1920s. The shape of the streetcar had evolved from the horse-drawn wagon type of the mid to late 19th century to a design that preceded the streamline designs of the Zephyr rail road passenger cars of the 1930s. Rounded at both ends with a generous amount of window area, Car No. 66 was a commodious means of travel. The car carried about 30 people.

The sturdy exterior construction of the car's body consists of heavy steel. The steel roof is supported by metal framing covered with wood trim at the window and door openings. The lower wall featured double-thickness riveted panels. The front lower wall of the car featured a lamp and a small projecting fender. Running lights were mounted into a frieze strip at the front and rear end.

The original fenestration consisted of three transom-topped large glass panels at the front end of the car and ten bays of transom-over-large panes on the side walls for the passengers. When used as a vehicle, there were seven horizontal protective steel bars across each of the passenger widows for protection.

There were four entries into this car model. The doors consisted of four wooden vertical doors that folded open on a track. The lower door was paneled, while the upper area was glazed with narrow vertical panes. The interior included wooden benches and trim. The woodwork was originally finished with a varnish.

The original color scheme of the Danville Traction and Power Company Cars was a dark green with cream trim. At various periods of maintenance work on Burnetts' Diner the dark green was still evident in small patches. The car no. painted

² The City of Danville only made one order of cars from the Thomas Company. Since 1886, the city used several different types of cars including one made by: J.G. Brill Company (Philadelphia); Jackson and Sharp Company (Wilmington, Delaware); Lamokin Car Works (Chester, Pennsylvania); St. Louis Car Company (St. Louis, Missouri); Southern Car Company (High Point, North Carolina).

³ The specific information about the Danville streetcar lines is available in Danville Traction and Power Co. (Provided by Steve Law). This short guide includes a photograph of Burnett's Diner when it was still in use as Danville No. 66.

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"66" on the drivers' left side wall is still barely visible (see historic photo of streetcar in service).

Car No. 66 becomes Burnett's Diner

Further research may reveal how the car was prepared for travel to the new stationary site on Chatham's Main Street, but several facts are obvious. To reduce the tremendous weight of the car, the heavy wheel assemblies were most likely removed before transporting the car. Presently none of the wheel assemblies are visible on the rear of the building where the under carriage is visible. The Thomas streetcars were powered by overhead electrical lines. It is likely that the contact frames on the roof top were also removed before transport.

The streetcar was sited between an attractive, early-20th-century, two-story, brick commercial building and a 1920s service station. Henry Burnett had operated the service station before starting the diner.⁴ The space between the two Main Street buildings is about 15 to 20 feet. The diner was sited at a slight angle in the narrow space. The angle closed off a triangular space on the two-story building side. With the windows blocked out on this side, this area became used for miscellaneous storage. The streetcar-diner does not have any substantial foundation, and still rests on low masonry piers.

The exterior needed very little alteration for its restaurant conversion. The interior underwent the needed remodeling to accommodate kitchen machinery and create a familiar diner-like interior of stools-counter-and-back bar defined space. The counter, including five 1930s square-post stools, was built towards the car's street end. The counter has a straight run section and curves to meet the wall area near the main entrance and features a formica top and individually-defined foot rest compartments.

With a rear yard area for stacked wood, it was convenient to place the wood-burning stove in the rear curved-end space.⁵ Additional heating, grill, and steam heat equipment were situated on a backbar and other spaces behind the counter. The wall behind the counter (an improvised backbar) was modified (cutaway) to include freezers, and a large Coca-Cola ice box. Because the front (conductor's area) window was used for outside walk-up service, a steamer was positioned near this area.⁶

⁴ Henry Burnett, Jr. and Allen Easley, interviews August 30, 1996.

⁵ Henry Burnett, Jr., interview August 30, 1996.

⁶ Henry Burnett, Jr., interview August 30, 1995. Mr. Burnett remembers the interior arrangement that his father and brothers had built. He was able to sketch out the original interior configuration. The present plan, with kitchen at rear, functioning forward backbar, and middle area tables maintains the original setup.

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Burnett's Diner
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The interior ceiling has always been maintained as it was built: open with rib-type framing. Clad in a thin tongue-and-groove paneling, the ceiling was painted in lighter colors to make the restaurant interior appear cleaner and brighter. Lighting fixtures were positioned along the ridge of the ceiling.

The seating has evolved over the years from booths to chair-surrounded tables, or a combination, but the custom built counter with stools has been a constant fixture. The counter curves to end near the front entrance. Whether the original streetcar seats were ever reused is not known. The floor has been covered with various synthetic materials over its history (presently, with a recent rubber floor).

Later Evolution of the Interior

Sometime after the service station closed in 1958, a small hyphen connection expanded the restaurant space. In the late 1960s, the kitchen was moved into the former auto repair bay, a considerably larger space. (The service pit was either covered over or filled in). The seating improved inside the streetcar. The hyphen was later closed, and it is now a small space with a booth.⁷ The former service station is completely closed off from the diner.

The diner was sold out of the Burnett family to Allen Easley, in 1981. After over 40 years of hard use, the building continued to provide viable restaurant space. Easley, converted the old service station into office space, closed the hyphen, and built a rear gable-roofed frame addition at the car's rear side (not visible from Main Street) in 1983. About 5 to 8 feet of the rear portion of the car was removed for the improvement. The newly outfitted kitchen improved service and met modern codes. A toilet was also installed in the new rear area.

In 1988, Steve Law and Kay Andrew leased the building and renamed it the S&K Diner (Steve & Kay). Law and Andrew devoted great efforts to highlight important interior features. The thick build-up of paint was stripped to expose mahogany roof frame with its fine wood paneling. The back bar was outfitted with a large stainless steel cabinet that cantilevered out the rear wall over support braces (duplicating a similar earlier cabinet). The cabinet contained a set of grills for more counter area cooking.

Law and Andrew spent 15-hour days during the late 1980s restoration. The 1941, neon-lit, National Clock Company clock was painstakingly disassembled and repaired. A typical feature atop diners, or often mounted on vestibules, the small curvilinear sign plate above the dial face had historically read "Hot Coffee

⁷ The former gas station is now used for Allen Easley's office. The diner and the gas station appear connected, but they are now separate buildings, with different current uses.

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Inside." The brass tow pin on the front skirt was stripped as was the head lamp. The lamp now operates.⁸

During the late 1980s work, Steve Law discovered vestiges of the building's vehicular days. While repairing the wiring, the original heavy-duty electrical collector wiring was found in a metal channel that runs down from the roof near the present front entry. While stripping paint from an area near the door, the remnants of the sign "No Smoking-Please do not talk to the Driver" was revealed.

The clock has been an important fixture on the building since the diner's early years. While no early photographs have been found to verify other type of signage from the 1930s, images from the 1960s show a variety of commercial signage. The Coca-Cola and Pepsi companies vied for signage space on both of Chatham's street car diners. The companies went as far as offering complete exterior color scheming (red and white or red and blue).

A historic photograph from the 1960s shows prominent roof signage announcing "Best Hot Dog" above "Drink Coca-Cola." Various other smaller signs were evident, but one of the most interesting was a hand-painted hot dog and hamburger on the front steel panel near the door.

A continuing concern in small diner space is exhaust venting and climate control. A 1930s General Electric nitrogen-charged air conditioner was used for many years. It was mounted in one of the passenger windows. Exhaust fans were probably mounted in the rear near the stove and definitely at the front grill near the take-out window. The strong exhaust of cooking hamburgers and home fries was strategically blasted towards potential customers passing by on the street and sidewalk. Now a modern air conditioner is set in the backbar wall and exhaust fans are placed at the rear-cantilevered grill area.

⁸ Steve Law has given a detailed account of the restoration work in several interviews, conducted from 1992 to 1995.

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Statement of Significance

The historical context for the diner restaurant and the streetcar-type diner in Virginia is discussed at length in the Multiple Property Document Diners of Virginia. The following text accounts for the context more specific to Burnett's Diner in Chatham, Virginia.

Burnett's Diner, one of two streetcar-converted diners, in the town of Chatham, Virginia, is a rare surviving architectural form, statewide, as well as nationally. The diner is being nominated under criterion C for its architectural rarity. Because, the occurrence of streetcar diners was more centered around the events of the Great Depression, and the use of streetcars for other than vehicular purposes marked the end of an era in transportation, the diner is also nominated under criterion A, for its relation to the broad pattern of transportation and commercial history.

The diner is being nominated with the former gas station on the same lot. The gas station relates to the historical evolution of the diner, but has been remodeled, and is a non-contributing resource.

Historic Context

Burnett's Diner is one of two former early 20th century streetcars operating as an eatery in the small Southside Virginia town of Chatham. Bill's Diner, a smaller streetcar is located about 150 feet south on the opposite side of Main Street.

Bill's Diner was run by William Lewis Fretwell of Chatham. His business predates Burnett's Diner, possibly by as much as several years. Fretwell began his business with a simple hot dog stand, an establishment which reputedly sold the first commercially-produced hot dogs in Chatham. Fretwell's first operation consisted of a wooden-board counter set atop two fifty gallon steel drums with a canvas, tent-like, shelter overhead. Fretwell eventually bought a single-truck streetcar in Reidsville, North Carolina (nearby, across the border, on Route 29). Bill's lucrative operation influenced Henry, Frank and Jessie Burnett to buy the retired double-truck, Thomas Company Car, from the Danville Power and Traction Company sometime between 1938 and 1943.⁹

By the Great Depression, the streetcar vehicle had become a popular competitor to factory-made Lunch Wagons of the early 20th century. By the 1930s, many converted streetcar restaurants dotted the American urban landscape. Both prefabricated diners, which by the 1930s were called "diners" more often than "Lunch Cars," and streetcars usually bore the label "diner."

⁹ Kenneth Wayne Fretwell's The Fretwell Family provides an excellent account of Bill Fretwell's life. The streetcar history of Danville is chronicled in Danville Traction and Power Co., this was provided by Steve Law.

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The great numbers of operating streetcars that were replaced between 1930 and 1950 by buses created a ready-made market for the streetcar diner business. Occasionally old rail cars were also converted as was the case of the Virginia Diner in Wakefield which was a retired Sussex, Surry & Southampton paymasters car dating to the late 19th century. Until several years ago, a streetcar diner stood at Floyd, the county seat of Floyd County, and one of the more unusual streetcar constructions survives in New Kent County: two single-truck cars joined, side by side, for use as a hunting cabin.¹⁰

The Great Depression inspired an economic resourcefulness that has not been rivaled by any other period in this century. Streetcar diners were a common site on the Main Streets of small towns and cities. While Burnett's and Bill's diners survive as the last example in Virginia, Charlottesville had two streetcar diners on its University Corner, an area made famous by its relationship to the University of Virginia. It is safe to claim that finding two operating streetcar diners in one small town is extremely rare. They are the last two in Virginia.

Southside Virginia is famous for its tobacco industry, and Pittsylvania County, one of the focal tobacco-producing areas since the late 18th century, benefits from its relationship to the Southside industrial center, Danville. While the Great Depression caused disruption all aspects of the American economy, the popularity of tobacco products was strong and continued to grow in the pre- World War II years. Chatham was the courthouse town for a county with a vibrant agricultural business.

Courthouse days weren't the only periods when the town came to life. According to the Fretwell and Burnett families, weekends were boom business days. Day laborers, many of which were African American, had one opportunity to come into town to shop and take care of business. Chatham's streets were filled with farmers, farm workers, and Hargrave Military Academy cadets on Saturdays. The demand for affordable and quick meals was obvious to Bill Fretwell and the Burnett brothers.¹¹

Built by the Perley A. Thomas Car Company of High Point, North Carolina, Car No. 66 was purchased by the Danville Traction and Power Company along with four other double-truck closed cars. The cars were put into service on September 30, 1923, and riders were encouraged to celebrate the new cars by having a "One Cent Fare Day." For the most part, these larger cars traveled on the Schoolfield-North Danville run. The Great Depression and automobiles eventually reduced the use

¹⁰ David A. Edwards, Architectural Historian for the Virginia Department of Historic Resources discovered this unusual resource. He has photographed and mapped the building.

¹¹ Wayne and Dale Fretwell, sons of Bill Fretwell, and Henry Burnett, Jr. recalled the peak business periods on the weekends.

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of streetcar travel and forced many of the transportation companies to switch over to the more efficient bus.¹²

Danville Traction and Power ordered 16 White Motor Company buses from the Richmond, Indiana, plant in January, 1938. Car no. 66 was reportedly sold to the H. E. Saltzberg Company of New York. Saltzberg specialized in streetcar relocation. Arrangements for reuse could not be secured so the cars were slated for scrapping.¹³

The Burnetts, purchased this large streetcar, probably aware that they would seat more than the already well-situated Bill's Diner, only a single-truck car at the corner of Main and Depot Street.

The Burnett family had already been in business for some years running the service station on the property before the diner was situated on the same parcel. Dr. Randall O. Reynolds, the owner of the property, eventually sold the 45'x 86' corner lot, which was at the intersection of South Main and Pruden Streets, to Jessie M. Burnett in 1946 for \$8,000. By this time the service station and the diner were both in place.

Henry T. Burnett, Sr. ran the service station and also ran a bicycle repair business. The diner was operated with his two other brothers, Frank and Henry. Henry's wife, Irma Burnett, a Chatham school dietician, was also part of the group that helped keep the diner operating long hours, sometimes offering service well into the evening.

Burnett's Diner had a uniquely functional interior set up. Henry T. Burnett, Jr., who worked in the diner as a youth, remembered the interior arrangement recently.¹⁴ The present counter and stools are original. A wood stove sat at the rear end where it was serviced from the wood stacks in the back yard. There was a seating area forward of the kitchen, which included a half booth. The area behind the counter included an ice cream freezer and a large Coca-Cola cooler box, both set into the wall. An additional freezer was near the front area, and a homemade steamer was located near the take out window, at the front.

In 1970, about the time Henry T. Burnett died, a hyphen was built to the old service station, just several feet away, to the north. The kitchen was moved out of the streetcar into the former service bay area of the station. Tootie Rowland

¹² Tosh, Francis B. and Ralph Kean, ed. Danville Traction and Power Co. Bethesda, MD: National Capital Historical Museum of Transportation, Inc., 1973. (Provided by Steve Law)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Interview in Chatham, August 30, 1996.

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(Lauwton Rowland, Jr.), who had been running a produce stand on the property leased the diner business and used the office area of the service station as a residence.

Before desegregation made a successful impact in Virginia, Blacks were not allowed to mix with white customers at lunch counters and diners. Bill Fretwell built an addition onto his small diner to seat Blacks separately, but segregated interior seating was not available at Burnett's. Instead Burnett's maintained a brisk take-out service for all customers at the former conductor's window, at the front of the car.

In 1981, the property was sold to Allen Easley, who converted the service station into commercial office space. Easley improved the diner by adding a gabled-frame rear section for additional seating space, modern kitchen facilities and a toilet.

Tootie Rowland ran the diner in the 1970s. Marie Meadows leased the diner for a period, and then in 1988, Steve Law and Kay Andrew undertook a major restoration effort to improve the marketability of the business. In 1993 David Sargent took over the business and ran it until just recently (1995).

Over the years the name of the business has changed. Originally it was known as Burnett's Diner. Main Street Lunch was one of its popular earlier names. Steve Law and Kay Andrew ran the business as the S&K Diner. The most recent name is Chatham Cafe.

Competition between Burnett's and Bill's diners was a friendly one. At one period, the Fretwell family lived in a apartment in the Whitehead Hardware Store. There window was just above Burnett's Diner. Eleanor Fretwell, Bill's daughter-in-law, recalls the Burnett brothers keeping as eye on the Fretwell children, who played near the window.¹⁵ For both restaurants, hot dogs and chili were primary parts of the menu. There always seemed to be enough business for both restaurants to survive. Both diners have filled Chatham's fast foods needs so well that the first corporate chain restaurant only appeared recently, several miles south of town.

¹⁵ Phone interview, April 3, 1996.

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Bibliography

Note: This is a partial list that includes general context sources, as well as sources that specifically relate to Burnett's Diner. For a more completed Virginia diner bibliography consult Section I, Major Bibliographic References, in Diners of Virginia multiple property document.

- Babcock, Pamela. "On Lee Highway, A 1940s Flashback," in Washington Post, 5 April 1990.
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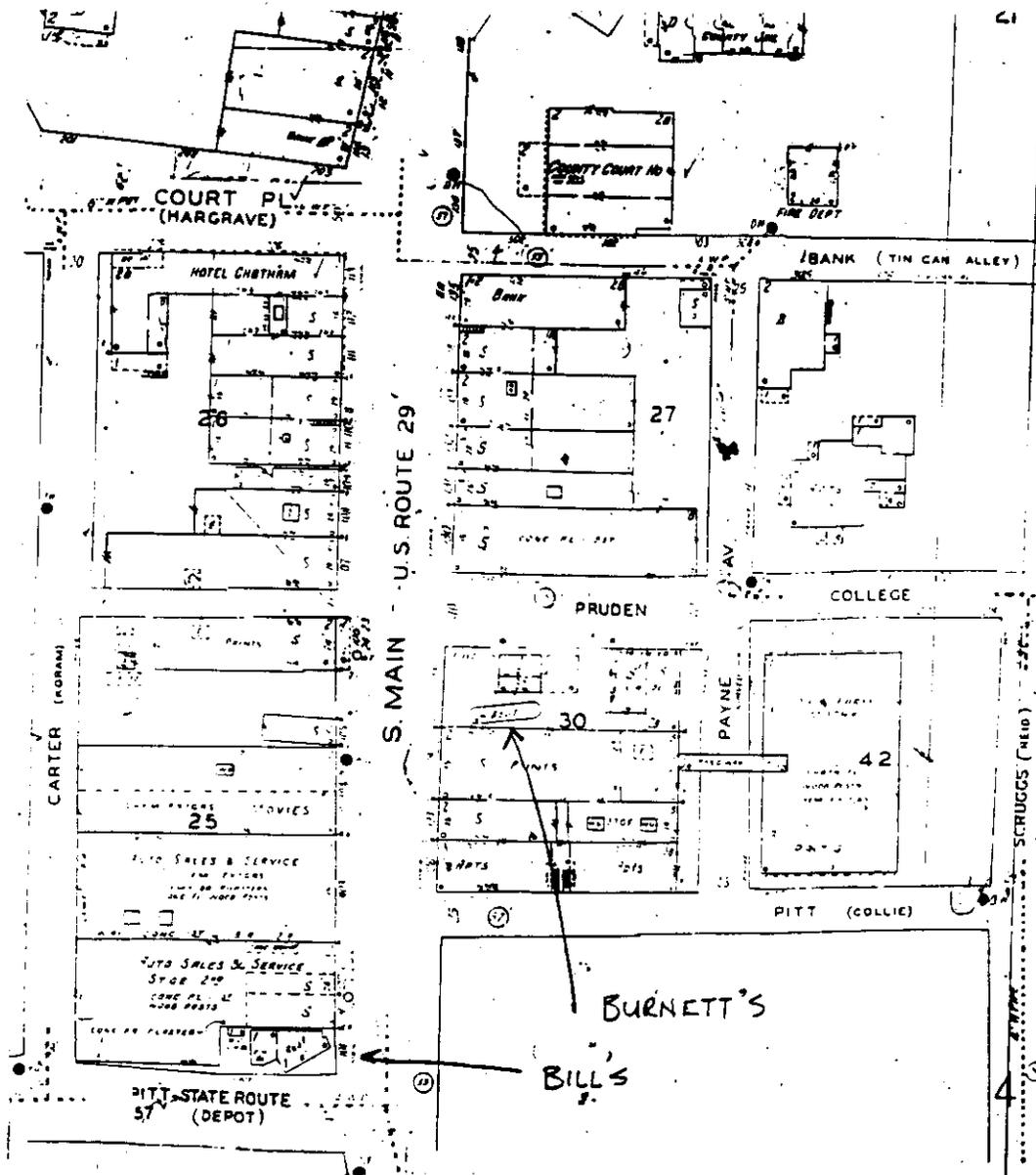
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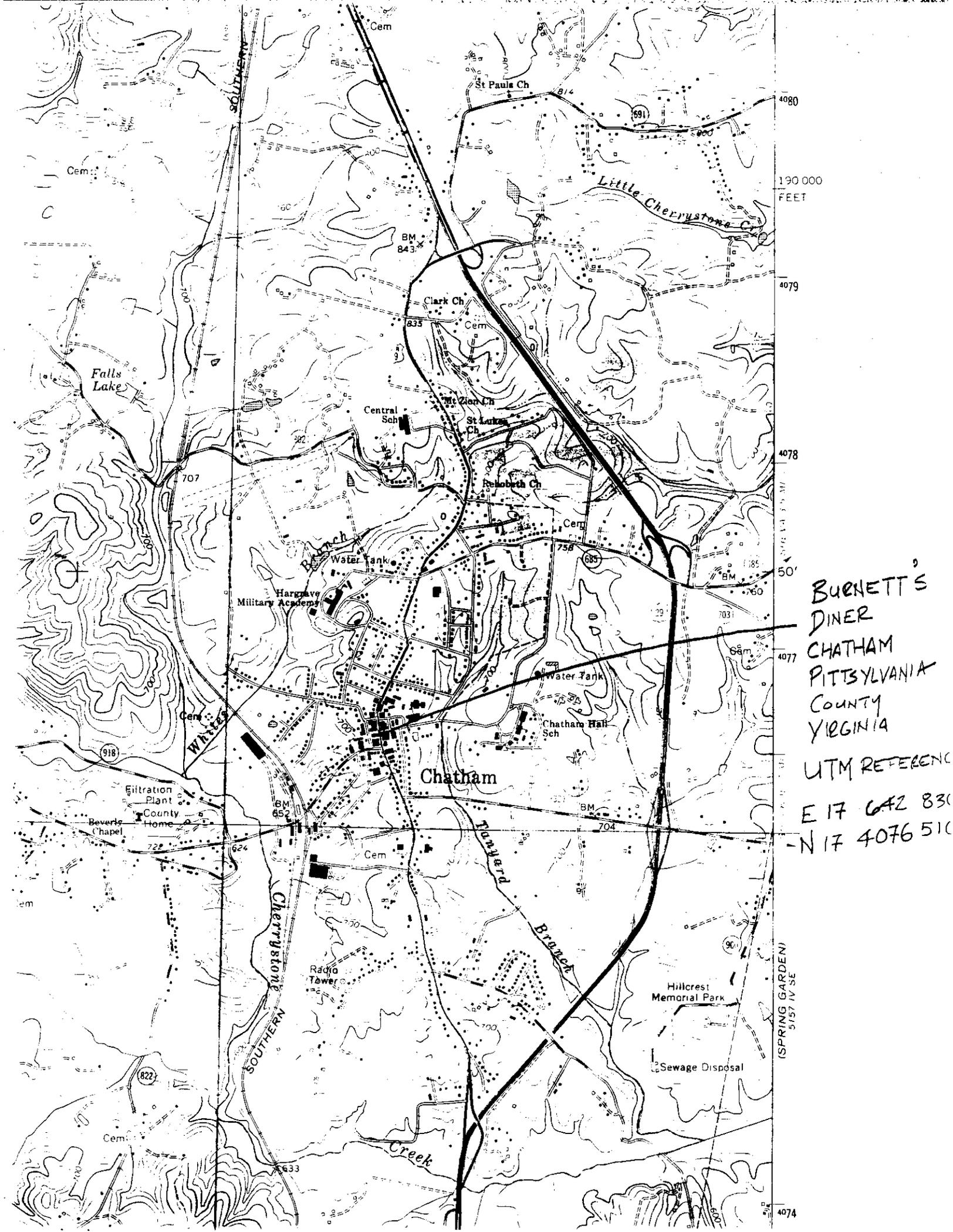
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section Additional Page 14
Documentation

Burnett's Diner
Town of Chatham, Virginia
Diners of Virginia
(Multiple Property Listing)

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map, originally from September, 1926, amended through February, 1947. The map shows both streetcar diners. Burnett's was still operating with a kitchen inside of the streetcar. The rear frame addition was added in the early 1980s. The filling station was in operation at this period





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(SPRING GARDEN)
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BURNETT'S
DINER
CHATHAM
PITTSYLVANIA
COUNTY
VIRGINIA

UTM REFERENCE
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