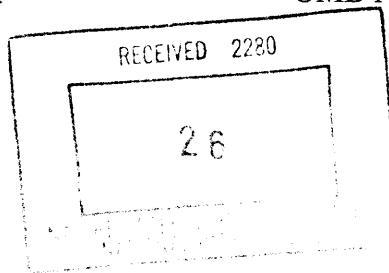


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**



1. Name of Property

historic name Skee's Diner

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 589 Main Street

not for publication

city or town Torrington

vicinity

state Connecticut code CT

county Litchfield code 005 zip code 06790

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)


Signature of certifying official
John W. Shannahan, Director

07/23/02

Date

Connecticut Historical Commission
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

Skee's Diner
Name of Property

Torrington, Litchfield County, Connecticut
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4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

entered in the National Register

Elsom H. Bell

9/6/02

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): _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

private

public-local

public-State

public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

building(s)

district

site

structure

object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing Noncontributing

1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

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

Skee's Diner
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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

Current Functions

COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

7. Description

Architectural Classification

other: Diner

Materials

foundation brick

roof wood

walls wood

metal

other metal

Narrative Description

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

Skee's Diner
name of property
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Description

Skee's Diner is a barrel-roof diner manufactured c.1920 by Jerry O'Mahony, Inc. of Elizabeth, New Jersey. The building was originally situated in Old Saybrook, Connecticut (exact location unknown). In 1944, the structure was acquired and moved to its current site, at the junction of Elm Street (Route 4) and Main Street (old Route 8) in Torrington. The building is installed on a small paved parcel. Its siting at this major intersection makes Skee's Diner a visually prominent feature in the urban landscape.

The barrel-roof diner is a typical form found throughout New England. While a number of companies manufactured these structures, they all share similar characteristics. The barrel-roof diner as a type is best described in the National Register of Historic Places nomination for *20th Century Commercial Architecture: The Diners of Massachusetts*.

Factory-built and hauled to its site, these diners generally have a boxy appearance, a symmetrical facade, and entries generally on the short (end) walls, though a center entry on the long elevation is sometimes seen. Typical features include a wood or steel frame, exterior panels of either painted steel or porcelain enamel, a brick or concrete foundation, and a continuous band of double-hung windows with transoms on the facade. The major distinguishing feature of this property type is the barrel roof, either with open eaves at the end walls or, less commonly, a closed barrel (rounded hipped) roof. On early examples the barrel roof extends over the entries on the two short walls; later examples tend not to continue the roofline over the entries but instead have flat projecting canopies at the ends. The interior typically features booths in the dining area, though also seen are the older layouts more commonly associated with lunch carts: a ten-stooler arrangement at the counter, an eating shelf along the inside facade wall, or even a dining area at one short end of the car with the kitchen at the other. More interior features and finishes include tile walls and floor; counters of white marble, white opalite, or Formica; white counter stools of white enamel; built-in refrigerators and other fixtures; and more equipment in the backbar area. Signage is painted on the exterior apron panels below the windows on the long elevation, or mounted above the windows. Examples of this property type are most susceptible to alterations in cladding and roof materials. [Section F, p.14]

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 2

Skee's Diner
name of property
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Skee's Diner is a combination of wood-frame and channel iron with sheet-metal construction. Measuring 11 feet wide and 30 feet long (11' x 30') the structure displays the characteristic barrel roof associated with the form. The roof is fabricated with tongue-and-groove boards and is covered with rolled asphalt. The eaves of the roof are open at the end walls. Two original sheet-metal exhaust fan vents remain on the roof, along with two air-conditioning units installed in 1979. There is an exterior brick chimney located at the northwest corner. A small restroom addition, which has access only from the exterior, occurs on the rear of the car.

There are three sliding entry doors: one on each of the short ends and one located at the center of the main facade within a projecting barrel-roof vestibule which was added in 1944. There are also two original service doors, which are hinged rather than sliding. One is located on the east end in order to provide access to the rear of the lunch counter; the other is in the center of the rear wall in the middle of the kitchen area. All the doors have two lower panels and a single upper light. There is also a metal bulkhead door at the rear of the structure that provides access to a full basement.

The front facade is punctuated with a horizontal row of ten windows surmounted by ten segmentally arched lunettes, arranged symmetrically in two groups of five on either side of the center door. The windows are single-pane with down-sliding sash, allowing an opening of 12 inches at the top of each unit. These windows, and the glazed doors, feature a design created by a glue-chip process intended to simulate the appearance of frost crystals. The fixed-sash lunettes feature green and white slag glass.

The current exterior cladding consists of composition panels which are not original to the structure. The panels are installed within exposed metal frames with visible rivets. The foundation is common brick, laid in running bond with a soldier-coursed water table. Formerly, a raised-letter sign existed on the apron panels below the windows on the main facade.

The interior finishes are primarily green and black ceramic tile, mahogany-colored stained woodwork, and stainless steel. A long counter, with 17 stools on one side and the cooking area on the other, dominates the interior. The counter top is tan-colored marble. A stainless-steel pastry case, milk dispenser, and plate rack are incorporated into both ends of the counter. The face of the counter is pale green mottled ceramic tile with a black and white stylized floral tile band at the top and a plain black tile

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 3

Skee's Diner
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base. The round stools have white porcelain-enamel bases, foot rests, and red-striped chrome seats, which swivel, finished in red naugahide upholstery. To add seating capacity, a small banquette or booth has been added (c.1990) to the eastern end of the car, blocking an original entry door.

The floor is colorfully patterned in green and yellow one-inch ceramic tile with a bold black, green, and yellow border. The walls are green mottled tile, to match the counter face, and wood-paneled. The cooking area, which runs the entire length of the rear wall, features wood cabinets with brass fittings, stainless-steel back splashes, and tile. At the west end of the backbar is a large built-in refrigerator, or "reach-in," with eight paneled doors. Beveled mirrors occur within the center panels of the five top refrigerated lockers.

The kitchen also includes pastry preparation and chopping areas, grill, fryer, gas stove and burners, steam table, and other standard commercial kitchen appliances. The entire backbar is covered by an enameled metal hood faced in green marble-veined Formica. Two wood menu boards are mounted on the face of the hood.

The barrel ceiling of the car is enameled metal (now painted) with prominent metal strapwork that connects the ceiling to the side walls at four-foot intervals.

Skee's Diner
Name of Property

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.	Areas of Significance
<input type="checkbox"/> B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.	<u>Architecture</u> <u>Commerce</u> _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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.	Period of Significance <u>1920-1950</u> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.	Significant Dates <u>1944</u> _____ _____ _____

Criteria Considerations

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A	owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.	Significant Person
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> B	removed from its original location.	Cultural Affiliation
<input type="checkbox"/> C	a birthplace or a grave.	<u>N/A</u> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> D	a cemetery.	Architect/Builder
<input type="checkbox"/> E	a reconstructed building, object or structure.	<u>Jerry O'Mahony, Inc.</u> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> F	a commemorative property.	
<input type="checkbox"/> G	less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.	

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

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 1

Skee's Diner
name of property
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Statement of Significance

Skee's Diner is an important example of the barrel-roof diner in Connecticut (Criterion C). The structure is significant for its association with Jerry O'Mahony, Inc. of Bayonne and Elizabeth, New Jersey, which produced diners from 1913 to 1955. Skee's is the earliest known surviving O'Mahony diner in the state (c.1920) and displays an impressive level of integrity from its original date of manufacture. Alterations to the structure which have occurred reflect noteworthy trends in the design and function of diners over time.

Designed as a portable structure, the building has been located on its current site since 1944. The property has local historical significance as a resource which recalls the early years of Torrington's automobile-related commercial development (Criterion A).

The property is owned by a religious institution and has been moved from its original location, therefore, Criterion Considerations A and B apply.

Early Historical Development of the Diner (1872 to the early 1920s)

The diner is an American phenomenon which has its roots in New England. In 1872, Walter Scott of Providence, Rhode Island, created the first "night lunch" wagon (also known as night lunch carts) out of a converted freight car. This horse-drawn vehicle carried soup, coffee, sandwiches, and other light fare for late-shift workers at the newspaper and other all-night businesses. Food was passed to customers outside through service windows cut into the side of the wagon.

Eleven years later, the first custom-designed lunch cart was constructed for Ruel B. Jones, also of Providence, by a local wagon builder. Samuel Messer Jones, a cousin of Ruel B. Jones and a former mechanical engineer, is credited with creating the first mobile structure which included both a kitchen and interior eating area in 1887.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Section 8 Page 2

Skee's Diner
name of property
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The night lunch business for both wagon operators and manufacturers flourished for the remainder of the 19th century. Some of these early carts, most notably the White House Cafe models produced in both Worcester and Lynn, Massachusetts, were embellished with frosted, etched, or colored glass and featured painted murals on the exterior panels.

By the early 20th century, operators began to abandon their dusk-to-dawn rounds and park their vehicles on empty lots in order to conduct daytime business. In 1905, the New England Night Lunch Wagon Company of Worcester, Massachusetts, the most prolific of the early manufacturers, designed a new type of lunch car built on low wheels and intended to be hauled only from the factory to a stationary destination. This evolution afforded operators the opportunity to choose a suitable permanent site and to install electricity, gas, and running water. As a result, many operators expanded their service to 24 hours per day.

Jerry O'Mahony, Inc.

In 1913, Jeremiah Mahoney and his partner, John J. Hanf, established a manufacturing company in a garage in Bayonne, New Jersey, and produced two lunch cars. The slogan of Jerry O'Mahony, Inc. was "In Our Line We Lead the World," and the company promised "the most beautiful and the most rugged lunch car available." The business proved successful, and Jerry O'Mahony, Inc. became one of the most prolific manufacturers of the diner era.

The "Standard" early model design was a barrel-roof car approximately 26 feet in length. About 1924, a "DeLuxe" version was introduced. The next year, the business moved into a new plant in Elizabeth, New Jersey. As the company thrived, it continued to add new cars to the line. Prominent models included the "Aristocrat," which measured 14' x 40' and featured a double row of stools (1926), and the "Monarch," introduced in 1928, the company's busiest year when 184 diners were built. Typical plant production was 30 cars a year. Ninety percent of the company's product was sold on a time payment plan.

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During World War II, Jerry O'Mahony interrupted its production of diners in order to manufacture truck bodies. In 1946, diner manufacturing was resumed with a new model that featured larger windows and curved glass at the corners.

Jeremiah Mahoney sold the company for 1.2 million dollars and retired in 1950. In the years 1952 and 1953, Jerry O'Mahony, Inc. acquired the Standsteel Corporation of New York, Herman Truck Body Company of St. Louis, and Bennel Machine Company of Brooklyn, New York. Carl Strandlund, former head of Lustron Corporation, a company which produced prefabricated porcelain-enamel homes, was elected president and director of Jerry O'Mahony, Inc. in 1953. The last Jerry O'Mahony diner was manufactured in 1955. A reorganized company, Mahony Diners, Inc., produced only four diners prior to going out of business.

While there has been no comprehensive architectural survey of diners in Connecticut, the American Diner Museum has indicated that other, later examples of Jerry O'Mahony, Inc. diners exist in the state.

Barrel-Roof Diners

The barrel-roof diner was the prevalent design found in New England from the mid-1920s to c.1950. These structures are often considered the first true "diners," in the popular use of the term. The change of terminology from "night lunch" wagon or cart to "diner" or the even more elegant-sounding "dining car" seems to have occurred c.1923-1924 and reflects a positive association with the food service experience then found on passenger trains. The introduction of booths, during approximately the same period, was intended to encourage female customers, who were unlikely to sit at the counter on stools.

The inherent portability of diners made them one of the earliest restaurant types to take advantage of improvements in automobile transportation. In addition to busy downtown or commercial/industrial locations, these diners soon appeared along roadways on the outskirts of more traditionally developed areas as well as on state and federal highways. Recreational dining also experienced a marked increase during the 1920s as part of the "eating-out" trend that followed World War I. Diners, foodstands, soda

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Skee's Diner
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fountains, and ice cream parlors flourished in this era due, in part, to the growing number of men and women who worked away from home and a decline in the use of household domestic staff.

The barrel-roof diner thus illustrates a critical phase in a fascinating transition of the type from horse-drawn "fast food" for late-shift workers to around-the-clock "family dining" in the automobile era.

Skee's Diner

Based on its design, the diner now known as "Skee's" was manufactured about 1920 (no exact date of construction or model style is known). First located in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, it was purchased in 1944 by Rudy Cielke, Tom Ryan, and John Miran, who moved the structure to Torrington. It is assumed that the moratorium on new construction in place at the time, as a result of World War II, prompted the sale and relocation of the diner. The building was set on a stone and brick foundation at the junction of two well-traveled state roads on a small rented lot, owned by the adjacent Church of Saint Maron.

Tony Cisowski saw the diner, then called "Rudy's," being set up for business when he returned to Torrington in 1944 after serving as aviation radio operator in the Pacific during the war. He immediately approached Cielke, Ryan, and Miran to express interest in the building. He and his brother Edmund, also a veteran, purchased the diner soon thereafter in 1945. The Cisowski brothers, who both had professional cooking experience, opened the diner renamed as "Skee's," a reference to Tony's navy nickname. The spelling was chosen in order for the number of letters in the sign to remain the same. They operated a restaurant together there for 30 years.

During this period of ownership, the diner became a local "hot spot." In the beginning, it served "hotel-menu" food 21 hours a day, opening at 5:00 a.m. and closing at 2:00 a.m., seven days a week. Daily specials were an important component of the menu, which featured pot roast, swordfish, sauerkraut and sausage, and goulash. Desserts included rice pudding, tapioca, and Frisbee pies (one of the few offerings not made on site). Later, the brothers agreed to scale back the hours of business, first to midnight, and then to 8:00 p.m. to take advantage of peak activity.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 5

Skee's Diner
name of property
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The years immediately following the war, 1946 and 1947, were particularly busy. Because of the shortages of meat, butter, and sugar, people flocked to Skee's Diner to enjoy foods not easily procured for use in private households. According to Tony Cisowski, "the seats never got cold" during those years. Lines of people would often form outside, especially after popular events and activities such as bowling and attending movies. The brothers never advertised and credited their success to word-of-mouth. They particularly prided themselves on using top-quality ingredients in all their dishes and charging reasonable prices.

The diner catered to a broad cross-section of the local population (one mayor had breakfast there every morning), but was particularly frequented by workers from several industries in the north end of the city: Torrington Company, Fitzgerald Manufacturing Company, Union Hardware Company, and Warrenton Woolen Company.

In 1975, the brothers sold the diner to Judith A. Belmonte. Ms. Belmonte operated the diner as both "Skee's" and "Jude's Place" for a number of years until the building was purchased by the Church of Saint Maron, the longtime landowner, who continues to offer the structure for rent as a restaurant.

Skee's Diner
Name of Property

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage 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>655960</u>	<u>4630440</u>	3	_____	_____
2 _____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is described in the Torrington Land Records, Volume 616, Page 685.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the land historically associated with Skee's Diner during its period of significance.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan R. Chandler, Historical Architect, with Mark McEachern, Director, Torrington Historical Society and Dan Zilka, Director, American Diner Museum

organization Connecticut Historical Commission date March 21, 2002

street & number 59 South Prospect Street telephone 860-566-3005

city or town Hartford state CT zip code 06106

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9 Page 1 Skee's Diner
 name of property
 Torrington, Litchfield County, Connecticut
 county and State

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_____. Interview with Susan Chandler. January 11, 2000.

Skee's Diner
Name of Property

Torrington, Litchfield County, Connecticut
County and State

Additional Documentation

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

Photographs 1 and 2 were taken by Mark McEachern in June of 1984. Photographs 3 and 4 were taken by Susan R. Chandler on March 12, 2002. Negatives are on file at the Connecticut Historical Commission.

1. Skee's Diner
Exterior view, 1984 (facing northeast)

2. Skee's Diner
Interior view, 1984 (facing west)

3. Skee's Diner
Exterior view (facing northwest)

4. Skee's Diner
Interior view (facing east)

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

Property Owner

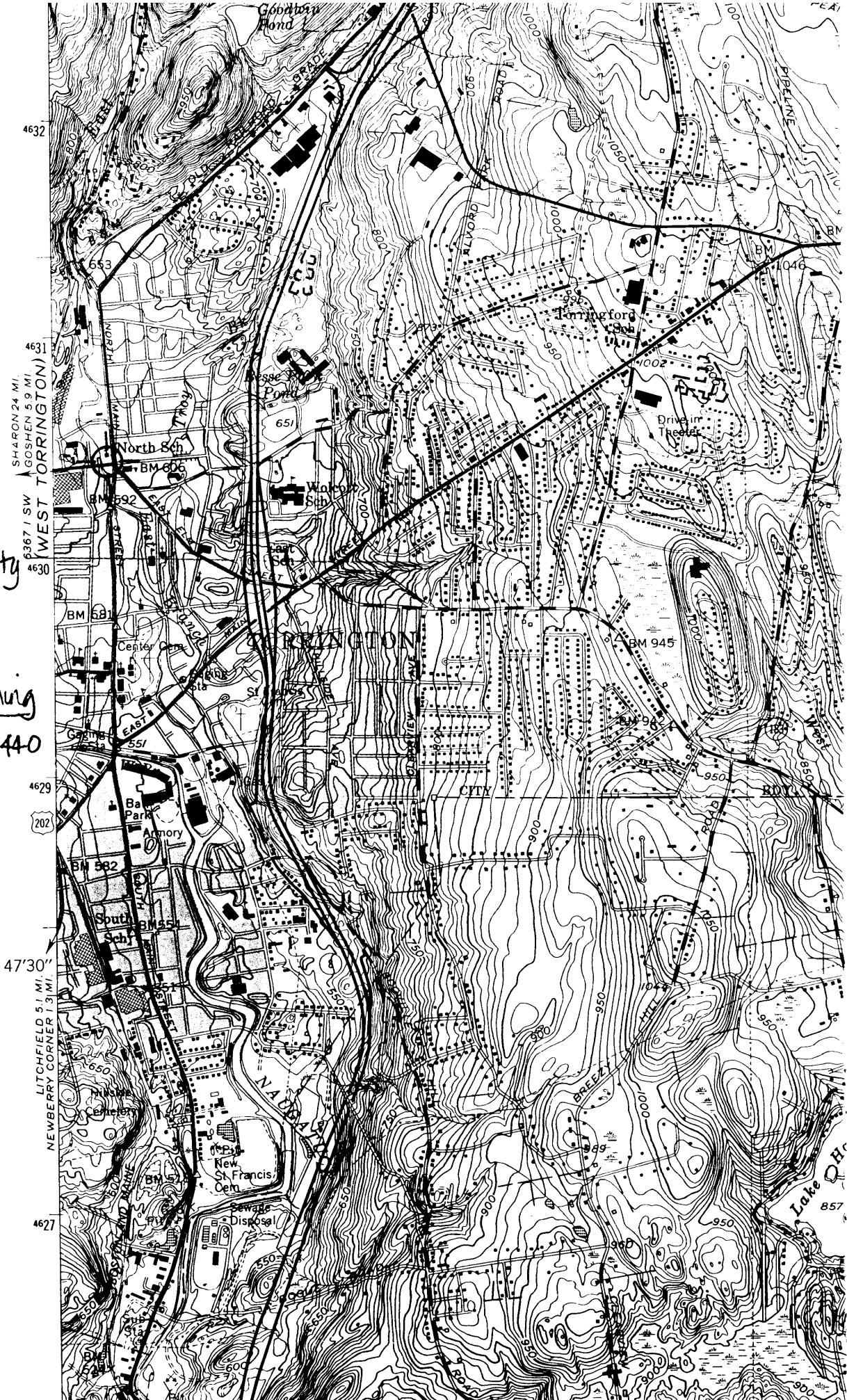
name Church of Saint Maron
street & number 613 Main Street telephone 860-489-9015
city or town Torrington state CT zip code 06790

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.

Skee's Diner
Torrington
Litchfield County
Connecticut

Zone Easting Northing
18 655960 4630440



PHOTOGRAPH KEY

Skee's Diner
589 Main Street
Torrington, CT

