

The

# Great Lakes Dining Car WAGONEER



2010 Year in Review  
- A Special Ward & Dickinson Edition -

Continuing to tell the story of the lunch wagon and dining car business that prospered in the Great Lakes region.

With focus on the Great Lakes and neighboring states, and extra emphasis on Chautauqua County in New York.

## CONTENTS

<b>Ward &amp; Dickinson Research News - 3</b>
↪ Some of the news found this year including id tags and Toronto information.
<b>Focus on a Manufacturer - 4</b>
↪ Progression of Ward & Dickinson diners
<b>Ward &amp; Dickinson - 5</b>
↪ A look at some of today's Ward & Dickinsons.
<b>List of Manufacturers - 2, 6</b>
↪ The builders of the lunch cars.
<b>Discovered on-line - 7</b>
↪ From EBAY and other on-line "collections".
<b><a href="http://www.NYDiners.com/history.html">www.NYDiners.com/history.html</a> - 8</b>
↪ What's on the web-site and what's upcoming.
<b>Great Lakes Diner Book - Project - 8</b>
↪ Information on the project being contemplated.

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### Dining Car Manufacturers

**Ward & Dickinson Dining Car Co.** - Silver Creek, NY 1925-1938. The most prolific builder of the region. They started in mid 1924 building lunch cars in the open, and became a company in 1925. Their motto was, "They're built to last." Charles Ward left the company in late 1927. They would later start building double diners, which was one diner attached to another diner, length wise,

**Closson Lunch Wagon Co.** - Glens Falls, NY 1902-1912. Westfield, NY 1912-1917? The first known builder of the region. Albert Closson had his design patented in 1905. The lunch wagons had monitor roofs and tables for two inside the wagons. The lunch wagons were possibly the first to be wired for electricity.

**Sorge** - Built Ward like diners in Silver Creek, NY in the late 1940's. The interiors had ceilings made of stainless steel. They also advertised that they remodeled existing diners.

**Valentine** - Diners built in Wichita, Kansas from the late 1930s to the mid 1970s. These porcelain buildings were typically made with 8 to 12 stools and everything you would need for a one or two man show. Find a more complete history of the company on the Kansas State Historical Society's site. <http://www.kshs.org/diners/>

Last year we reported that Ward & Dickinson put id tags under the bread drawer. This year, we were able to find three tags! Upon entering the Tasty Acre of Chautauqua, outside the entrance of the Chautauqua Institution, I found the owner at the diner. After talking, I noticed that the original drawers behind the counter were still there. After asking to look under them, I noticed an unassuming tag which was painted over. After some cleaning, you can notice the number 306 punched in to the tag! This diner was said to have come to the location in 1944, so there is still a lot more research to do.

The research was helped shortly afterwards when news came from Middletown, Pennsylvania that Kuppy's Diner is number 310. More news out of Oneida, New York has Morey's as diner number 215.

As we know where diners #1-100 went, except for the diners that disappeared, here is the list of diners whose number we know above 100.

- 117 - Amsterdam, NY (July, 1927)
- 215 - Oneida, NY (1929-1930)
- 233 - Albion, NY (1930)
- 244 - Silver Creek, NY (May 1931)
- 306 - Chautauqua, NY (1944?)
- 310 - Middletown, PA (1938)



Tag in Tasty Acre - Chautauqua, NY

The last diner that could have a id tag is the former Steve's Diner in Silver Creek.

The diners in Toronto, Ontario were:

111, 112, 113, 115, 116 subjected to a lien in July, 1927(article says 1926, but this cannot be correct)  
 160, 162 subjected to a lien dated May, 1928 and finally diners numbered 161, 165 subjected to a lien dated August, 1928. The diners were being auctioned off on January 22, 1930. Five of these diners were in a pictured dated November 6, 1930 at the Terminal Warehouse. Four seemed to be awaiting their removal from Toronto and one seemed to be in business at the Warehouse. A January 9, 1930 editorial says that there is only one left on Yonge Street south of Charles, and *"that one is so bricked up and latticed, that it looks more permanent than many bungalows to be seen in the suburbs."*

A 1959 article in the Toronto newspaper shows that the diner was the scene of a robbery and murder. One can tell it is a Ward & Dickinson, but currently, I am unsure if this is one of the nine Wards that were part of the Electric Diner chain.

The Canadian Electric Diners placed an ad in the Toronto Star dated February 9, 1928, soliciting stockholders at \$100 a share, in the company. At the end, the company still owed half of the liens on the last four diners, but only owed less than \$7k on a \$50k lien for the first five diners.

Thanks for all of this Toronto information goes out to Mike Filey, host of Mike Filey's Toronto on AM 740, Sundays at noon.

**T**HIS Company is organized for the purpose of acquiring the exclusive right to operate and sell in Ontario the well-known "Ward's Standard Steel Dining Car." These dining cars, which are the last word in comfort, convenience and equipment, are installed on suitable locations, mostly vacant properties, which are obtainable at low rents. While the diners are established on a permanent basis, they have a distinct advantage of being able to change locations at any time for a nominal cost.

These diners are successfully operating in the principal cities of the United States, both individually and in system.

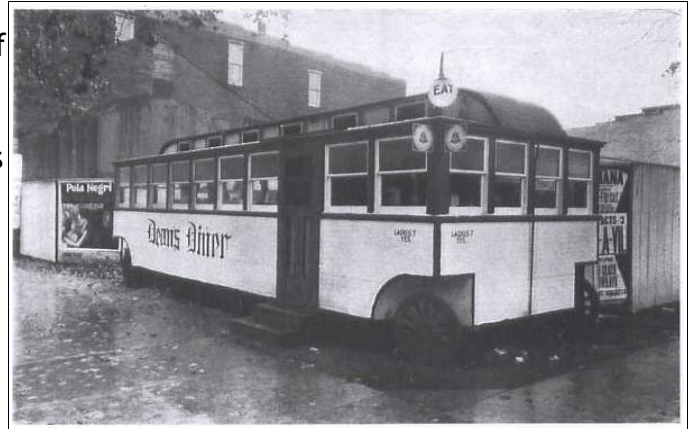
It is the intention of the Company to establish immediately ten cars in the City of Toronto, with plans to increase these throughout Ontario, to about 100 cars. Three cars are at present installed on prominent corners in Toronto.

The Company will be under the direct supervision of the management of the Walker House and the Carla-Rite Hotels, viz., Mr. E. M. Carroll and Mr. George Wright, both of whom are members of the Board of Directors.

The profits from this type of business have proven to be decidedly satisfactory, and we strongly recommend these preferred shares as a sound investment, with splendid opportunity for profit through the common stock bonus.

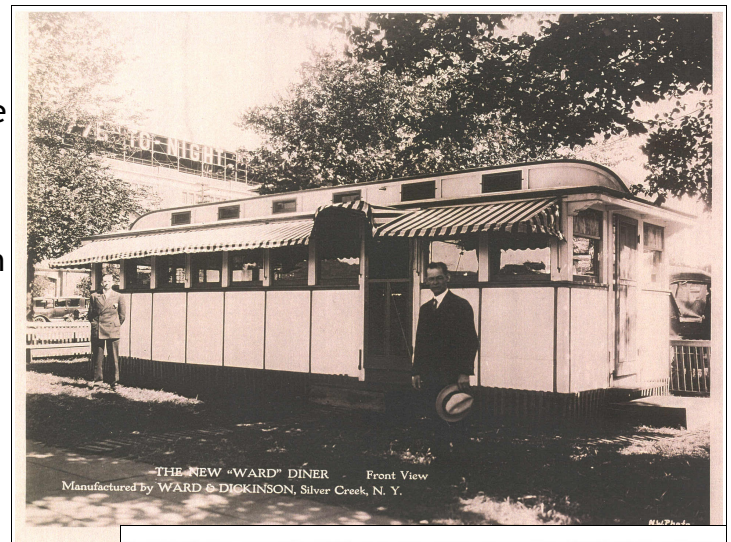
February 9, 1928 - Toronto Star

1925- Once Ward & Dickinson started to streamline the design, they built a number of diners that looked similar to Dean's Diner shown here to the right. Notice that there is no overhang on the end, and no stained glass green windows. It is tough to notice from this picture, but there were no metal panels on the exterior of these diners. The metal panels appeared in the middle of 1925 brought on by fire code issues.

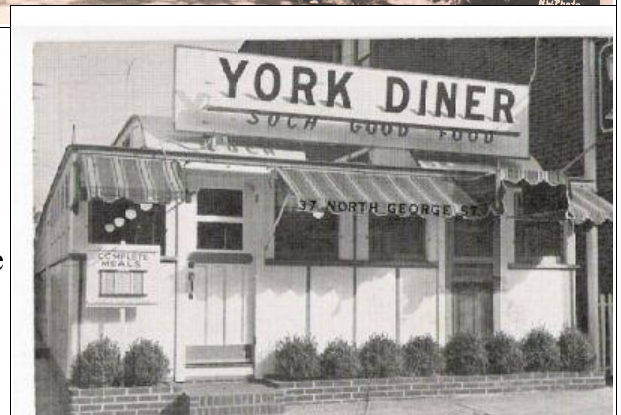


1926- The famous green swirled upper sash finally made its appearance and would stay as a Ward & Dickinson trademark. Still, no overhang on the ends of these diners. They would use this style up to around the diners numbered in the mid 90s. Note the Valley diner to the left. The wheel wells were often covered over with metal to make the diner look permanent, but most owners kept the wheels underneath, just in case they needed to move the diner.

1927- By 1927, Ward & Dickinson had overhangs on their diners. These allowed just a tad more space to store items in the ceilings. Diners at this time has little cabinets put into the ceilings, either sliding door or ones that were hinged. A tiny change was the extra little panel on the edges of each of these diners. At the same time, the company started offering 40 foot diners known as the DeLuxe models, and by 1929, they had what they called the Club diners, which were a "better" laid out 40 foot model. Both of these models had a 9 foot wide separate kitchen area.



The last thing Ward & Dickinson did to enlarge diners, was to graft two diners together. Here you can see the York Diner showing two Wards, side by side. Neither diner looks to have any overhang, except for a little on the front, for maybe a rain gutter. Even though this gave a diner that had an additional small dining room and a larger kitchen, and even bathrooms in some diners, this was still not enough to keep Ward & Dickinson alive.



### **Kuppy's Diner - Middletown, PA**

Opened by Percy Kupp in 1933. Business was so good that Percy was able to replace the older diner with a newer 1938 Ward & Dickinson that is still here today. The diner is now on its 4th generation of Kupps.

### **Westfield Main Diner - Westfield, NY**

The Westfield Main Diner has been on this spot since 1934. The diner may be the oldest Ward & Dickinson in existence as we have reason to believe it was built in 1926 and came from DelRay, Florida and Erie, Pennsylvania. In 1938, the first addition was added followed later by a second annex. Today it is the closest operating diner to Silver Creek.



### **Trolley Pub - Willimantic, CT**

Little is known about the history of this diner, but it currently serves as the front room for a pub. The owners still have one of the original booths. About a dozen Ward & Dickinson diners made it into New England.

### **Morey's Diner - Oneida, NY**

Saved by retired police officer, Lynn Morey, the former Miss Oneida Diner was days away from a scrap heap. Lynn spent about 5 years restoring the interior, which is a working monument to the craftsmanship of Ward & Dickinson. Typically open for breakfast only.

### **Coffee Cup - Hillsdale, MI**

Car number 100 has been in Hillsdale since 1927. This diner quietly serves Hillsdale and is also the oldest operating diner in Michigan. Ward & Dickinson sent over a dozen diners into the western Great Lakes.

### **Helen's Place - Port Henry, NY**

This 1927 Ward & Dickinson spent seven years as a traveling lunch wagon in Glens Falls. Willford Tario brought the diner to Port Henry in 1932. Over the years, the diner was covered over and then stripped of the interior furnishings during a bank foreclosure in the early 1990s when it went for sale. Michael Darius bought the diner and intended to restore the diner. Unable to get financial backing, he sold it to Linda Mullin and Hank D'Arcy who were able to have the diner restored to its grandeur. Over the past ten years, small changes have occurred, but the diner is still in very good shape.

A few other Ward & Dickinson diners exist today, that have been either 90 to 100 percent remodeled. These include the Modern Diner in Wellsville, the Valley Diner and Good News Cafe in Syracuse. Wade's Diner in Oswego and the Redwood Diner in East Syracuse have been greatly remodeled but still show a few telltale signs of a Ward.

Dining Car Manufacturers (continued from page 2)

**Rich Dining Car Company** - Silver Creek, NY 1921-1926. Dayton, Oh 1926-1929. Earl Richardson came from Westfield, NY in 1909 and ran a lunch wagon until he started building them as a business. His son Raymond took over the business in 1925 after Earl's death.

**Liberty Dining Car Co.** - Clarence, NY 1928-1930? Owned by Charles A. Ward, who was previous part owner of W&D. The company had offices in Buffalo, NY.

**Silver Creek Dining Car Co. / National Dining Car Co.** - Silver Creek, NY 1923-31+ First ran by a Dr. Fitzpatrick, later by a Dr. J. J. Sharp who changed to the National name. National built barrel roofed diners.

**Orleans** - Albion, NY 1940's Built 3 diners, one being the Highland Park in Rochester, NY.

**Rochester Grills** - Rochester, NY 1936-1939+ Like Bixler, they built diners that were pieced together on site.

**Mulholland** - Dunkirk, NY 1925-1931+ Probably the first company to add metal to their diners in the Lake Erie region. They previously built car bodies and horse drawn vehicles.

**Bixler** - Fremont & Norwalk, Oh. Late 1920's-1935 The first company to build diners that were assembled in 4 ft sections.

**Goodell** - The Goodell Hardware store in Silver Creek, NY also built dining cars starting in 1926.

**Guy E. Russell** - Ripley, NY 1929. He is listed in the 1930 census as a "diner builder".

**Peter Schneider** - Gowanda or Silver Creek, NY ? Only one blurb in the newspaper mentions him building a dining car in 1922 in Gowanda.

**G. C. Kuhlman Car Co.** - A Cleveland, Oh. interest. They built diners for Brill. Brill had plants in Springfield, MA and St. Louis, MO.

**Dag-wood Diner** - Toledo, Oh., late 1940's Made kits called Dag-Wood Diners that were boxy rectangular diners. Rumor has it that they only made half a dozen kits.

**General Diners** - Built sectional diners in Oswego, NY in 1939-1940. Diners were installed on location in hours. In 1942, they tried again in Syracuse.

**Ellis Omnibus and Cab Co.** - Made at least one lunch wagon in Cortland, NY in 1896.

**Guedelhofer Wagon Co.** - Built at least one lunch car in 1910, in Indianapolis, IN.

**Classic Diners** - Lansing, MI. Stainless steel diners built around 2005-2007.

## Recently rediscovered information.

### **Matchbooks-Postcards:**

Carr's Lunch Car in West Liberty, Iowa. Either a Brill or a trolley remodeled.

### **Ward & Dickinson News**

Article on the diner in Palmyra, NY from 1950 mentions that the diner was placed on location on "March 20th, 1927 by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Belding from Charlotte, Iowa." The diner closed January 1st, 1950 and was moved to become a vegetable stand.

Modern Club Diner in Westfield, NY 1929-1934 was a Club diner built by Ward & Dickinson and moved to Bethlehem in the summer of 1934 by William Bourne and William Moore. There are two photos of this diner. A few months later, the current Westfield Main Diner was moved in from somewhere else and has been there since. The leading theory is that it came from Erie, PA.

I was sent pictures of Ward #39 from Ludlow, PA. It was located on US Rt 6 outside of the Wildcat Park, at a gas station.

Moore's Diner in Reading, PA was a double diner, opened on 11/22/1938

LeRoy, NY - A small blurb states that Ward & Dickinson placed the diner in LeRoy first, and that Clive Howard of Gowanda bought it a few weeks later.

### **Closson Lunch Wagon Company News**

Harley Bouch of Rome, NY had a Closson based on blurb 11/21/1904.

Newman Peabody bought the "Kenmore" lunch wagon of A.H. Closson which he rented for the past 3 years - 10/20/1903

M. W. Peterson bought "Modern Excelsior" lunch wagon on Leaven's lot on Ridge St. The wagon is 20'x7' and 8 ft high. - 6/10/1907

A Closson booklet was being distributed and named J.E. DeGrush ironer, G.A. Roby artist, W.C. Hartman master mechanic. - 3/25/1907

Utica was sent one of the largest lunch wagons - 8/08/1908

### **Blurbs: (Can you give us some information on these places?)**

Glens Falls, NY - Lunch wagon on Park Place is being shipped to Hoosick Falls by Mr. Baker - 5/27/1903 + Merrill A. Dingman opened the Crescent Lunch Car on Ridge St. near the Wonderland Theatre - 10/17/1908

Sherman, NY - Sherman's Diner was moved to town in 1946 and came from Corry, PA. The diner had to be cut into pieces to move it to Sherman.

Winona, MN - The Purity Chain of dining cars was started with a restaurant in Winona and diners in Rochester and Minneapolis. Arthur Roberts and Everett Tawney of Winona were involved.

Rochester, MN - There may have been a Valentine diner in Rochester.

Milwaukee, WI - The Master Auto Body Co. built 6 diners to be placed at roadside locations for the New York Coffee Pot.

Mt. Morris(Main St.), Geneseo(2: Lakeville Rd. & Bank St.) and East Avon may have had real diners. Ralph Zingaro may have also had a diner at Buck Run Gully in 1940.

Perry, NY - The Howards from LeRoy also owned, "the only real diner in Perry." In 1940, they decided to move the diner to the junction of Rt 36 & US Rt 20.

Plymouth, PA - The Bradford Comopany of Buffalo, NY was given credit to placing a diner on east Main Street in Plymouth in July of 1934.

Canastota, NY - Sergio's Club Diner opened up in 1968, after it was moved from Oneida. It was enlarged over the years. The restaurant now sits closed.

Oneida, NY - Frank Webster opened his first diner in Oneida in 1925 on Madison Ave. He later bought a new one in 1941 on Ferrier St.

## [www.nydiners.com/history.html](http://www.nydiners.com/history.html)

### **Lists:**

From Sanborne Maps – Indiana and Ohio  
User created list of diners once in Ohio.  
City directory databases searchable by city or by name. Over 50 cities available.

### **Michigan Pages:**

[www.nydiners.com/Michigan/michigan6.html](http://www.nydiners.com/Michigan/michigan6.html)  
Lists of past and present diners by region.  
Photos of current diners in the state  
Roadside related links for the state.

The Ohio diner pages at nydiners.com are now open.  
Point your browser to :  
[www.nydiners.com/ohio/ohiomain.html](http://www.nydiners.com/ohio/ohiomain.html)

### **2010 Website Plans**

- Improve list of Ward & Dickinson diners, add to list of first 100 diners with info on their other known diners.
  - Continue to update various pages.
- Utica diners in depth, similar to the Capital District in depth pages.

### **2011 Research Plans**

- Continue to research diners as I am able to get on the road.
- Erie, PA - continue city directory and check if building permits are available.
- Research in Indiana and Illinois as possible.

### **About this Newsletter:**

This newsletter is created yearly by Michael Engle as a chance to update interested parties concerning any recent discoveries and news about the former forgotten diner industry dotted around the Great Lakes region. It is my hope that this newsletter will find its way into the hands of historians and historical societies who can share their local knowledge, and to remind them of the social importance diners played in their respective communities.

## **Project - Great Lakes Diner Book - Project**

### **Idea:**

Richard Gutman's book, "American Diner – Then and Now" is the ultimate authority on diners. But still, it barely touches the minor but significant history of the lunch wagon and diner in the Great Lakes states. A combination of builders and owners made the lunch wagon and diner an important social aspect of a majority of communities throughout the region from the 1910s to the 1960s. While there is a great amount of history lost, the good news is that there are still diners out there today in the Great Lakes.

I see this book almost as an addendum to Mr. Gutman's book, an important document in the history of diners.

### **How you can help:**

I have a good deal of information, but any picture, story or recollection can only add to the whole picture. Plus, you get to see your communities' diner in writing. Think of all the residents whose daily lives revolved around partaking of a meal with their second family at the diner.

If you have information, or are just curious to how it is progressing, please write to:

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