

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL REGISTER

1. Name of Property

historic name: Peerless Coal Company Store

other name/site number: _____

2. Location

street & number: off highway 52

not for publication: n/a

city/town: Vivian

vicinity: n/a

state: WV

county: McDowell

code: 047

zip code: 24891

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: public

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related property listing: Coal Company Stores in McDowell County

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6. Function or Use
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Historic: commerce/trade Sub: department store
commerce/trade business office
government post office
Current : vacant/not in use Sub: _____

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7. Description
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Architectural Classification:
modern movement

Other Description: n/a

Materials: foundation stone roof asphalt
walls brick other concrete

Describe present and historic physical appearance. x See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: statewide.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A,C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : n/a

Areas of Significance: architecture
commerce
industry

Period(s) of Significance: 1921-1941

Significant Dates : n/a

Significant Person(s): n/a

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: Mahood, A.B.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. x See continuation sheet.

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The Peerless Coal and Coke Company store sits in Vivian, a community built on a level area off highway 52. The building was designed in 1921 by A.B. Mahood, a Bluefield architect who was responsible for many of southern West Virginia's most notable buildings. The store's distinctive characteristics are its size, modern design, irregular plan, stone foundation, and simple decoration. Although the building has been vacant for several years except for storage, it has deteriorated little and it retains the characteristics that clearly define its role as a coal company store and office building.

The store's plan is basically rectangular, but with a mysterious wing on the west side that may possibly be an addition. The wing is one and two stories and is located toward the building's rear. The brick work and the stone foundation are the same as the main part of the building suggesting that it was either an after-thought that the architect incorporated into the original design or it is an early addition.

The main block of the brick store building is two-stories with one-story flanking wings. Mahood reserved nearly all of the decoration for the two-story facade. A concrete parapet defines the facade's roofline on both the two and one-story sections. At the two-story roofline, a narrow concrete fret extends across the facade just below the parapet. The company's name and date are inscribed boldly in concrete. This panel sits between a group of three multipaned windows on the second floor and the main entrance below. Small concrete brackets join the edges of the two-story section to the one-story wings in a manner reminiscent of some monumental buildings of the Italian Renaissance.

Enclosed window and door spaces have slightly altered the building's original appearance. The lower story window on the east wing's facade has been partially filled with brick. Originally, the space probably held a group of three sash windows similar to the windows on the other wing. Most of the entry space has also been covered. Its likely 1921 appearance would have been a typical facade configuration with a center door, flanking display windows, and a wide transom over all.

The facade's west wing includes four bays. Triple windows sit nearest the two-story section. In the next bay stands an arched opening that allowed passage into a short corridor with single door openings on either side. The other two bays contain single sash windows although one has been boarded. The store's west facade is the irregular section discussed before. The windows in this end are either sash or multipaned

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industrial windows and some have been covered. The stone work on this side is exposed more clearly than on the rest of the building. The perfectly constructed foundation was clearly built by a skilled mason.

The store's east side is the most utilitarian with its service entrance and two secondary doorways. Railroad tracks ran in front of the building instead of the side or rear which was the usual orientation. Goods had to be hauled from the train to the one-story east wing. An overhang and a concrete platform extend in front of the east side's doors. A projection on the outside of the building between two of the doors may be an elevator shaft.

The store is located on a flat area that was easily accessible from the mine and residential area. Other community buildings, such as the large school building and the clubhouse were located nearby making this central part of Vivian a true hub of activity.

The Peerless Coal and Coke Company store and office building has been altered little since it was built in 1921. It is in good condition remains an outstanding example of coal company construction.

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The Peerless Coal and Coke Company in Vivian is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A for its association with southern West Virginia's coal mining industry and under criterion C for its architectural significance. The building was designed by the well-known Bluefield architect, A.B. Mahood, and it played an important role as a commercial and social center in the mining community (for detailed historical information about the Pocahontas Coalfield and the significance of company stores, see sections E and F in "Coal Company Stores in McDowell County", multiple property listing). It illustrates the typical characteristics of company store construction with its size, large porch, location, and simple decoration. The building stands as an impressive and representative example of a coal company store and the necessity of its presence in the industrial community.

Before the coal industry boomed in southern West Virginia at the end of the nineteenth century, the area consisted of scattered, self-sufficient farms and communities. Because of the absence of railroads and good roads, the southern counties had little interaction with the rest of the nation. After the Civil War, however, the nation's industrial market expanded and outsiders began to turn their attention to West Virginia's vast coal reserve to meet growing demands.

The major railroads extended their lines into southern West Virginia allowing the area to be developed. Without a sufficient labor force, however, coal mining could not be productive. Companies recruited thousands of workers first from the older coalfields in Pennsylvania, and then from Eastern Europe and the American South. To accommodate these new arrivals, coal companies built self-sufficient communities to house and provide for their workers. The construction of company towns was absolutely necessary in southern West Virginia. Unlike the northern coalfields of Pennsylvania, where mining operations began in regions that were already settled, southern mines opened in sparsely settled areas with few organized communities. The company town was the most logical solution because it provided efficient and inexpensive housing for a large labor force.

Central to each of these communities was the company store. The store was usually the town's most prominent building and was typically placed in an easily accessible location. The building often housed not only a store but also the company's business office, a post office, and sometimes, a doctor's office. Because of its location and multiple functions, the store provided each community with a center for social gathering.

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The store and office building served as the most important building in Vivian, a community built by the innovative Peerless Coal and Coke Company. Northern businessmen established the company in 1892 on land leased from the Crozer Coal Land Association. It would have immediately constructed houses for miners and probably a simple wooden company store. The company mined in the Pocahontas #3 seam that produced some of the world's highest quality coal. The operation soon proved successful and wealthy enough to construct its permanent buildings.

Once the company established itself as a leading coal producer, it hired A. B. Mahood to design its important community buildings. Mahood (1888-1970), a native of Bluefield, West Virginia, studied architecture in the United States and then at the famed Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France. When he returned home, Mahood was quick to seize upon the opportunity to design buildings in the wealthy coalfields. Although Mahood is best known for his magnificent classical revival houses and commercial buildings, he proved adept in a variety of styles including Moderne and Art Deco. Mahood was already well-known in the area because of his work in Bluefield, Welch, and the coal communities in McDowell and Mercer counties. In Vivian, he had designed the clubhouse prior to designing the store and office building. Mahood can probably be credited for the two-story brick school building also.

With the Peerless Coal and Coke Company store, Mahood departed significantly from his standard two-story, box planned stores designed several years earlier in Pageton, Switchback, and Jenkinjones. Mahood proved again that he could be flexible and design whatever arrangement a company wanted. The Peerless Coal and Coke Company needed a large building to serve its purposes but it seemed less interested in a perfect monumental box in favor of a solely functional plan. All of Mahood's other buildings were functional too and he proved clever enough to pack all functions neatly into a box. The Peerless company may have specified a different kind of arrangement that permitted an irregular plan. The end product was a monumental, efficient design with just enough decoration to indicate its importance to the community. The asymmetrical facade is unlike Mahood's other coal company buildings but its difference makes it quite distinguished and shows the architect's skill in varying the designs for buildings of the same property type.

Company stores were typically the center of commercial and social activity in the busy mining community and the Vivian store was no exception. Miners and their families typically visited the store daily

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to shop and to handle business matters. Because of its various functions and its location near the mine and residential areas, the company store was the center of commercial, business, and social activity in the industrial community.

The store's importance in the community decreased as automobiles and good roads allowed miners access to other commercial centers. The store and office closed after mining ceased at Vivian leaving the building vacant. Unlike so many stores that were simply abandoned, the Peerless Coal and Coke Company store has been maintained, retains its original fabric and is structurally sound. Although this store is less ornate and more functional looking than some of the county's other stores, it reflects yet another coal company's image and another coal operator's individual taste. It stands as an impressive and representative example of a coal company store and its significance in the industrial community.

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