

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Pocahontas Fuel Company Store

other name/site number: _____

2. Location

street & number: highway 52

not for publication: n/a

city/town: Switchback

vicinity: n/a

state: WV county: McDowell

code: 047

zip code: 24887

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

_____ buildings

_____ sites

_____ structures

_____ objects

1

0 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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4. State/Federal Agency Certification

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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. ☐ See continuation sheet.



Signature of Certifying Official

2/10/92

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property

☐ meets

☐ does not meet

the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Date

=====

5. National Park Service Certification

=====

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

=====

6. Function or Use

=====

Historic: commerce/trade Sub: department store
commerce/trade business
government post office
Current : vacant/not in use Sub: _____

=====

7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification:
late 19th and 20th century revivals/Classical Revival

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: 1917-1941

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.

See continuation sheet. x

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_ 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 # _____

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☒ State historic preservation office
☐ Other state agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other -- Specify Repository: _____

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

A	<u>17</u>	<u>465940</u>	<u>4135820</u>	B	—	—	—
C	—	—	—	D	—	—	—

220' northwest from the intersection of Turkey Gap Branch and Elkhorn Creek, the boundary forms a square 150' on each side around the store.

The boundary includes all of the property historically associated with the Pocahontas Fuel Company store at Switchback.

State:WV ZIP: 25305

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The Pocahontas Fuel Company store at Switchback is one of several company stores designed by the accomplished Bluefield architect, A.B. Mahood. The building was constructed in 1917 and during the years following, it provided a commercial, business, and social center for the industrial community. The actual store stands two stories under a flat roof. A one-story wing that housed the business office is attached to the main section. The building is outstanding for its size, high stone foundation, and its classical detailing. Although the company store has deteriorated, it still retains the qualities that prove its importance to the community and to the coal mining industry.

The company store stands along the railroad tracks and highway 52, the main route through the county. The two sections of the plan are roughly equal in size and together form a large rectangular box. Seven bays of windows with pilasters between extend the length of both sides of the store's two-story section. The west side includes the delivery entrance where there was an exterior overhang and an elevator shaft on the inside. The entrance facade is five bays wide on the second floor. All of its fixtures are gone now but it is clear from early photographs that two main entrances stood between display windows that extended to the corners of this section. All windows were multipaned with metal frames except for the display windows which were large panes under multipaned transoms.

The building had on three sides, a brick cornice with a concrete parapet. It was taller and more pronounced on the facade to accommodate the company's name and date inscribed in concrete. Beneath the facade parapet is a concrete entablature with dentils. This continues along the side of the building in a simplified brick form.

The simple but distinct classical detailing was not limited to the main part of the building. The one-story section has the same brick and concrete parapet and concrete entablature that is on the two-story section. One of the most distinctive characteristics of the entire building are the three arched openings on this single story. Each of these contained double doors and arched transoms. Concrete, classically detailed notice board frames stand between the doorways.

Magnificently-built stone walls and foundations are located throughout McDowell County, but rarely does a single building have as much stone work around it as the Switchback store. The high stone foundation provides the base for a concrete platform that extends across the facade and the west side. Steps from the southwest corner lead up to the store building. Behind the store and along the east side is a high stone retaining wall that separates the store from the residential community. Stairs descend

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from this area making the building easily accessible from all sides.

Years of abandonment have been hard on the Switchback store. It is littered with graffiti, all windows are missing, and its parapet is crumbling. Even in this condition, the building's shell is intact and it remains an architectural landmark that reminds passersby of southern West Virginia's industrial empire.

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The Pocahontas Fuel Company store at Switchback 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. A.B. Mahood, a well-known Bluefield architect, designed the building which was constructed in 1917. The store was central to the life of the isolated industry and to the lives of company town residents (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 has deteriorated and remains open to vandalism but even in this condition, the building conveys an image of the county's rich industrial history.

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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Before the Pocahontas Fuel Company built the mine at Switchback known as Lick Branch, residents in this part of the community traveled to the Maybeury store about a mile away. When the large company took control of the five area mines in 1917, it built the Switchback store to serve residents in the community's west end. This single building housed the store in one section and an office in the other. Because of its location within the residential area and near the mine complex, the building was the center of business and social activity in the active community.

The Pocahontas Fuel Company operated in the famed Pocahontas #3 seam that produced some of the richest coal in the world. The building this company constructed attested to its success and its power in the county. Pocahontas Fuel hired southern West Virginia's most prolific architect, A.B. Mahood to design the store and office building. Mahood (1888-1970), a native of Bluefield, West Virginia, studied architecture in the United States and then at the prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France. The trend during his tenure in Paris was in reviving earlier styles. When he returned home, Mahood was quick to seize upon the opportunity to design buildings in the wealthy coalfields. Although he proved adept in a variety of styles and property types, he is best known for his magnificent classical revival houses and commercial buildings. Welch, Bluefield, and a number of other southern West Virginia communities credit Mahood with their most impressive buildings. At the Switchback store, Mahood cleverly varied the design of the Jenkinjones store and office buildings only slightly, incorporating the design of the two Jenkinjones buildings into one at Switchback. Here, the office section is a one-story wing attached to the two-story store.

The building was accessible to all residents, including the company's Vice President and General Manager, James Ellwood Jones. His house sat on top of a hill over the Switchback store. The trip to the bottom was time consuming so he ingeniously suspended a cable between his house and the store. He could send a request to the store and have supplies transported to him on the cable.

The company store and office is important because of its crucial role in the community and because of its architectural merit. It sits on a magnificent stone platform and is partially enclosed by a stone retaining wall. Its size and the evenly arranged metal-frame windows gives the building an industrial appearance which is perfectly appropriate for a building that exists solely because of industry. The simple classical detail, the building's perfect proportions, and the arched entrances,

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however, add high-style architectural character to an industrial environment where other buildings were uniformly constructed.

When area mines closed, many residents left or continued to reside in Switchback but worked elsewhere. There were not enough people to support the store and good roads to larger communities made the large building unnecessary. The store was left vacant and has suffered as a result. The windows are gone opening the building to vandalism and further deterioration. Its immediate abandonment though kept the building from being ruined by offensive additions and extensive remodeling. Even in its current condition, the store is a county landmark and a witness to the industry's wealth and power. The building now stands representative of an industry that thrived for decades and left nearly as quickly as it started.

(NPS Form 10-900)

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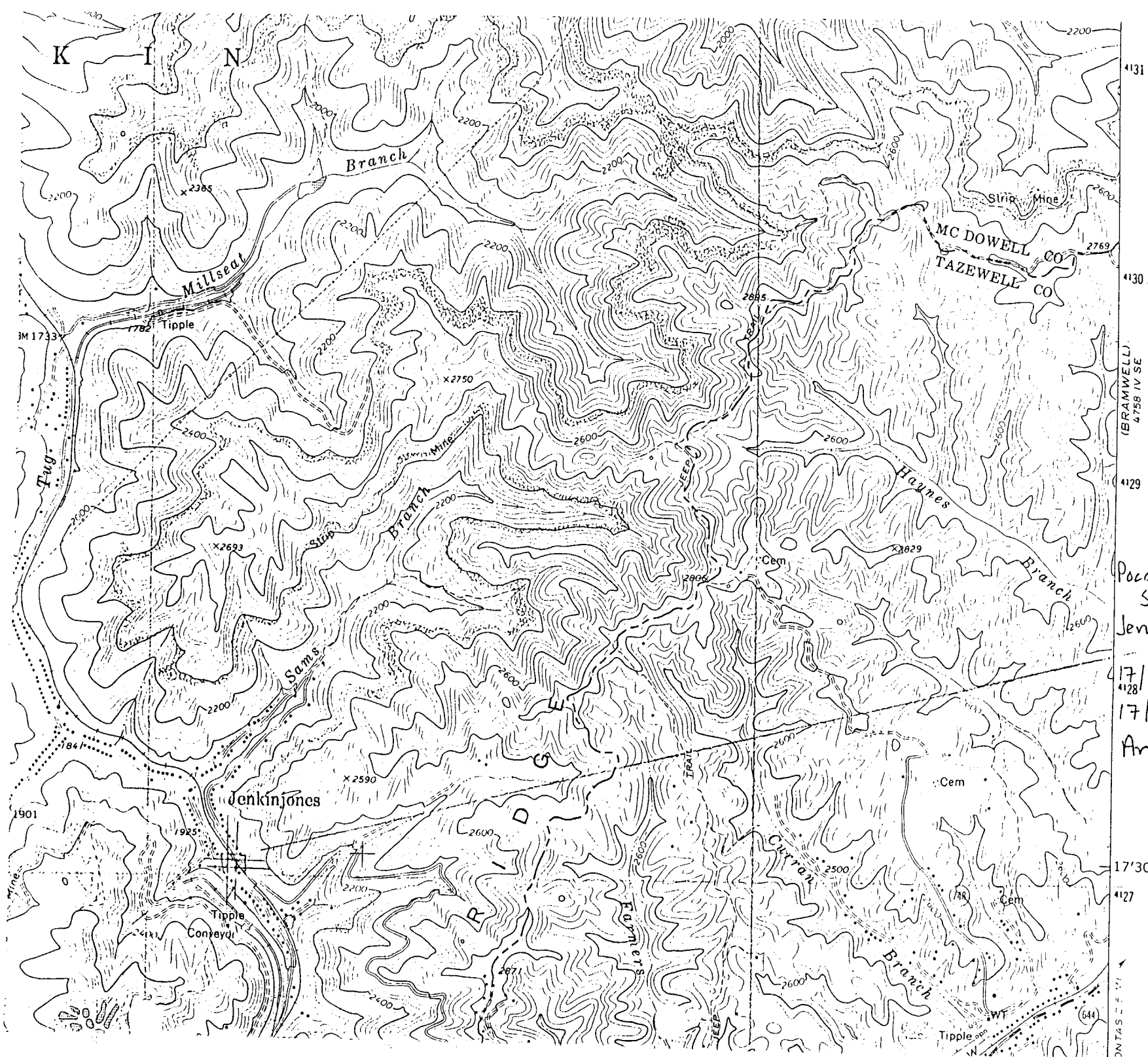
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Company Store, file, Eastern Regional Coal Archives, Bluefield, WV.

Eller, Ronald D. Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers. Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930. Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1982.

Haynes, Paul and Grace, Switchback residents, area site visit, October 10, 1991.

Mahood, file, Eastern Regional Coal Archives, Bluefield, WV.



Pocahontas Fuel Com
Store & Office
Jenkins, McDowell
W. Va.
17/462440/412704
17/462400/41270
Amawalt Quad.

4758 IV NE
(CRUMPLER)

37°22'30"
Pocahontas Fuel Co Store
Switchback, McDowell Co.,
4136 W. Va
17/465940/4135820

