

Dierks Lumber Company Building

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Dierks Lumber Company Building

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Location

Mountain Pine, Garland, 308 4th Street

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1927 lumber company office building.

Listed in Arkansas Register of Historic Places on 04/04/18

Summary

The Dierks Lumber and Coal Company Office building is being nominated to the Arkansas Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A**, with **local significance**, for its association with the history of the Dierks Lumber and Coal Company, later known as Dierks Forest, Inc., and the development of the community of Mountain Pine, Arkansas. The Dierks Lumber and Coal Company Office was constructed in 1927 as one of the earliest building in the company town of Mountain Pine, Arkansas, during the planning and construction of the nearby lumber mill and the surrounding company owned residential and commercial structures.

The Dierks Lumber and Coal Company

The company that would eventually become Dierks Forests, Inc., was started by brothers Hans, Herman, Peter, and Henry Dierks during the 1880s.[1] Two of the sons of Peter Henry Dierks, a German immigrant and successful Iowa banker and farmer, organized the Dierks Brothers Co. in the 1880s. In 1895, Henry, Peter, Hans, and Herman joined together and created the Dierks Lumber and Coal Co. which was headquartered in Lincoln, Nebraska. After expanding the company to include at least twenty-four lumberyards, the company moved its headquarters to Kansas City, Missouri, in 1896 to take advantage of the new railroad hub. [2] In early 1900, the company purchased the Williamson Brother's lumber mill in De Queen, Arkansas, and brother Herman Dierks moved to the Sevier County community to manage the company's new Arkansas operations. Soon, a new logging camp was established along the De Queen and Eastern Railroad near the community of Hardscrabble. This community was quickly renamed Dierks and grew to be a company town when a new lumber mill was established in the area in 1918. This new mill was created to replace the previous Dierks owned lumber mill in De Queen which burned in 1909.

During the early 1920s, the Dierks company began acquiring more land in the Ouachita Mountains and in Oklahoma. This was during a period of transition for the Dierks company from an era of "cut and get out" logging to experimentation in forestry practices that would allow the company a permanent timber base that could be used for multiple crops of timber. [3] This included the establishment of a program of selective cutting and the implementation of a fire protection system for their large land holdings. Although these new changes to their business practices initially decreased the company's profitability, it did provide the company with a foundation for future growth and development. [4] The creation of the Mountain Pine

mill and the Mountain Pine company town was a part of this new business direction and was echoed in a similar planned mill and town at Pine Valley, Oklahoma. Both the Mountain Pine and Pine Valley mills would be served by newly purchased large blocks of timber land and would operate as double-band sawmills.^[5] Also, by the 1930s, the Dierks Lumber and Coal Company had closed its original retail lumber yards in Nebraska, focusing its operations in Arkansas and Oklahoma, which now included five lumber mills and two railroad systems.

Mountain Pine, Arkansas

The first purchase of land by Dierks Lumber and Coal Company in the area of what would become the town of Mountain Pine occurred in 1922.^[6] Within a few short years, the new planned facility at Mountain Pine would have access to over a hundred thousand acres of pine timber. By November of 1926, the Dierks Lumber and Coal Company had decided on the site for their new planned town and mill. The *Sentinel-Record* newspaper of Hot Springs noted on November 21, 1926:

... the new mill will be located either on or close to what is known as the Henderson farm. It will be of steel construction. The houses that we will build for our people will be modern and comfortable, and no less than 150 such homes will be included in the first part of our program... We will give them a modern church and school building ... Then, too, they will have their own moving picture theatre for there must be a diversion, too. It will not be all work and no play. I anticipate that the construction of the new steel saw mill will start shortly after the first of next year.^[7]

By January of 1927, work on the new mill and town had started. The mill was estimated to cost over \$500,000.00 by the local newspaper.^[8] The mill at Mountain Pine was operational by the end of 1928 with a daily capacity of 165,000 board feet of lumber. The mill and its associated buildings and lumber yards covered an area of over fifty acres. The mill itself was located at the heart of the company town with two sections of gridded residential streets laid out to the north and west. The eastern most residential area, located directly north of the lumber mill was for the lowest paid and lowest ranked employees and included mostly shotgun type houses.^[9] The western residential section was for high paid and/or higher ranked employees, with the mill supervisors and company doctor living along Mountain View Street along the western edge of the community. During the mill's initial years of production, it employed nearly 350 people, with another 125 people involved in logging work of various kinds.^[10]

From the 1930s through the 1970s, Mountain Pine was the second largest community in Garland County, behind only Hot Springs in population.^[11] The town developed as a company town with the company built houses rented to employees for between five and twenty dollars per month. A company-owned store provided food and supplies to the local community and the company provided a doctor for the community. The town also included the promised school, church, and theater. In 1954, the Dierks Lumber and Coal Company changed its name

Dierks Forest, Inc.^[12] The company also continued to diversify into other wood-based products; including boxes, pressure-treated wood products, fiberboard, grocery bags, window frames and construction products.[13] Also during this time the company increased its land holdings to over 1.75 million acres of timberland holdings across Arkansas and Oklahoma. Dierks Forest, Inc., also developed the largest pressure treating plant in the United States which produced fence posts, telephone poles, railroad ties, and lumber. Due to its large presence in Arkansas, the Dierks Forest, Inc., headquarters was moved to Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1956. After over 75 years in the lumber business, Dierks Forest, Inc., was purchased by Weyerhaeuser for \$317 million in 1969.[14] This sale included all of the mills, plants, railroads and timberlands previously owned by Dierks Forest, Inc., as well as much of the property in the towns of Dierks and Mountain Pine, Arkansas.

After the sale to Weyerhaeuser, the mill at Mountain Pine continued to produce lumber; however, the community began to change. Weyerhaeuser offered employees the chance to buy their rented properties as it began to sell off all of the buildings and grounds previously owned by Dierks Forests, Inc. Weyerhaeuser only retained the mills, plants, and timber land; moving away from the company town model of ownership.[15] During the early 2000s, various economic downturns and changes in the timber industry eventually led to the closure of the Mountain Pine mill in 2006.[16] This led to the elimination of 340 jobs which were mostly worked by local residents. After the closure of the mill, Weyerhaeuser deeded several company buildings, including the original office building, and more than eighteen acres of land to the City of Mountain Pine. Over the next few years, Weyerhaeuser dismantled the Mountain Pine mill buildings. Today, the mill is gone and its large concrete foundation footprint is still visible to the east of the original Dierks Lumber and Coal Company Office building.

The Dierks Lumber and Coal Company Office

The Dierks Lumber and Coal Company Office was one of the earliest buildings constructed by the lumber company as they developed the site of the adjacent mill and the surrounding residential areas.[17] The building was completed and in use by 1927 as the company's community office. The office building was constructed to serve as office space for the Dierks Lumber and Coal Company as well as the real estate office for the various company-owned homes throughout the community. The building also served for a time as the company payroll office and the currency storage location for the local company-owned store. The original vault and safe still remain inside the building.

Also, the building was built to showcase the lumber products of the company. During the 1970s, after Weyerhaeuser purchased the assets of Dierks Forests, Inc., the original company office building was re-clad with the new company's wood siding products. Weyerhaeuser also used the building as office space, including for their forestry division. Eventually, the building was converted to a gym and health club for company employees and their families.[18] After

Weyerhaeuser closed the nearby lumber mill, this building was one of several donated to the City of Mountain Pine. Currently, restoration efforts are underway on the property as it is transformed into the Mountain Pine Historical Museum.

Statement of Significance

The Dierks Lumber and Coal Company Office building is being nominated to the Arkansas Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A**, with **local significance**, for its association with the history of the Dierks Lumber and Coal Company, later known as Dierks Forest, Inc., and the development of the community of Mountain Pine, Arkansas.

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[1] Nancy Hendricks, "Dierks Forests, Inc," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 29 November 2016, Accessed 5 February 2018.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Wendy Richter, "The Birth of a Company Town: Mountain Pine, Arkansas," Garland County Historical Society, *The Record* 42 (2001): 4-5.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Kenneth L. Smith, *Sawmill: The Story of Cutting the Last Great Virgin Forest East of the Rockies*, Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1986. pp. 77-78.

[6] Richter, "The Birth of a Company Town: Mountain Pine, Arkansas," p. 6.

[7] *Sentinel-Record*, 21 November 1926.

[8] Richter, "The Birth of a Company Town: Mountain Pine, Arkansas," p. 7.

[9] David Showers, "Man Builds Model of Mountain Pine, Arkansas, In Balsa Wood," *Associated Press, Sentinel-Record*, Newspaper, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 11 January 2015.

[10] Richter, "The Birth of a Company Town: Mountain Pine, Arkansas," p. 7.

[11] Wendy Richter, "Mountain Pine (Garland County)," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 26 January 2017, Accessed 5 February 2018.

[12] Hendricks, "Dierks Forests, Inc," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Smith, *Sawmill: The Story of Cutting the Last Great Virgin Forest East of the Rockies*, p. 208.

[16] "Weyerhaeuser Announces Closure of Plywood Mill in Arkansas." Weyerhaeuser News Release. Weyerhaeuser.com. 29 November 2006.

[17] Information provided by Brenda Long, Mountain Pine Historical Museum. Mountain Pine, Arkansas. <https://www.facebook.com/MPHMuseum/>.

[18] *Ibid.*

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