

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
Continuation SheetDozier Mercantile Building (formerly The
Rock Front)

Name of Property

McIntosh County, Oklahoma

County and State

84003152

NR Reference Number

The Dozier Building

State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X additional documentation move removal X name change (additional documentation) other

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.

Signature of Certifying Official/Title:_____
Date of Action**National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register additional documentation accepted other (explain:) __________
Signature of the Keeper_____
Date of Action

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SUMMARY

The Rock Front (NRIS #84003152), located on Broadway Street in Vernon, McIntosh County, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 22, 1984, at the local level of significance under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage/Black and Commerce. The original nomination form indicates “1920-Present” as the period of significance and lists Bill Young and C. F. Dozier as builders. The property is the only extant commercial building in the All-Black Town of Vernon. It housed a variety of enterprises in its history, including a grocery/dry goods store, pool hall, tavern, and post office. As noted in the original nomination form in 1984, “The Rock Front has been a significant focal point for Vernon and stands as an historic monument to the once-thriving business district in this historic all-[B]lack town founded almost 90 years ago.”¹

The nominated property was actually constructed in 1915 as a two-story commercial building by Sim Bow (S. B.) Dozier, as indicated in the December 3, 1915 issue of *The Boley Progress*.² Both the Boley newspaper and a similar article in *The Topeka Plaindealer* incorrectly refer to S. B. Dozier as “G. P. Dozier.” Dozier placed his son, George W. (G. W.), in charge of the property. No records were uncovered to indicate a Bill Young ever having been associated with the building. The building was known as the Dozier Mercantile Building.

S. B. Dozier died in 1925. G. W.’s mother, Indiana (India) Dozier, passed in 1934, after which G. W. became the executor of the estate. G. W. moved to California the next year, at which time his younger brother, Crawford (C. F.), became the executor of the estate. Crawford and his wife Tennie owned the nominated property for several decades. Although the Rock Front Club was among the businesses that occupied the building, the nominated property was not referred to exclusively as The Rock Front during the period of significance. In addition to the Dozier Mercantile Building, the building was also sometimes called the Dozier Stone Building. Various enterprises occupied the building throughout the twentieth century, including a U.S. Post Office branch from 1963 to 1996. The building achieved its present appearance in 1971, when Tennie and her son, Billie Joe, removed the second floor due to structural concerns and added the existing gable roof.

The purpose of this technical amendment is as follows:

- 1) Change the historic name of the property from “The Rock Front” to “The Dozier Building.”
- 2) Credit Sim Bow (S. B.) Dozier as the builder.
- 3) Revise the period of significance to 1915 to 1971, which corresponds to when the building was constructed and the last significant alteration.
- 4) Update the Statement of Significance (Section 8).
- 5) Clarify the boundary of the nominated property, and provide current maps and photographs.

¹ National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, “The Rock Front, McIntosh County, Oklahoma,” NRIS #84003152, Section 8.

² “Vernon Oklahoma A Prosperous Little Negro Town,” *The Boley Progress*, December 3, 1915.

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1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Dozier Mercantile Building

Other Names/site number: Dozier Stone Building; Vernon Post Office

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 124279 South 3981 Road

City or town: Vernon State: Oklahoma County: McIntosh

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

7. Narrative Description

Having not undergone any significant alterations since the time of its listing in 1984, the building retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The exterior retains random ashlar stone exterior walls, horizontal wood siding in the east and west gables, and exposed rafters along the north and south side elevations. A metal roof was installed in 2003.³

The west-facing façade retains a central, wood-framed entrance containing a single-light door with wood panels. To each side of the door is a vertical, fixed, wood frame window with three lights. A metal grille is fixed to the exterior of each window. The door and windows each retain a plain stone lintel. The east (rear) elevation retains two small, 1/1 fixed windows with metal grilles and a central, wood panel door. There are no openings on the north or south side elevations.

The original nomination form mentions a flagpole and gravel parking lot in front (west) of the building. The flagpole is no longer extant and the parking lot is overgrown with vegetation. The "large deciduous tree" indicated as standing near the northeast corner of the building is still extant. The building is currently vacant and not in use.⁴

8. Statement of Significance

Mr. Sim Bow Dozier (S.B. as he preferred to be called), was born in Georgia in 1855. The 1865 dist. 772 McCrary Georgia census shows he worked for Clayborn Ogletree. In 1877 while living in Claiborne County Louisiana he married Indiana Brooks. By 1880 his mother Mary Dozier was living with him she was then 60 yrs. old. He and Indiana (India), as she was known, had 11 children Carrie was the oldest, John the youngest and Crawford was the 3rd youngest and George W. was child number five. They lived there until 1910 then the family moved to the newly formed State of Oklahoma answering the call for all to come Indian Territory in general and to Vernon in particular where they would be free to establish businesses farms and grow and prosper un-harassed by the shackles of bigotry and prejudice they confronted in the South. On

³ Interview with Herman Huffman, Jr., Roof Installer.

⁴ "The Rock Front," Section 7.

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October 10th, 1910 he purchased an entire block in Vernon from Thomas & Julia Haynes. Lots 1-32 block 34. By then he was 56 and his wife was 51.

Mr. S. B. Dozier like many of the men who would come to Oklahoma were well accomplished men of means and he wasted no time putting those resources to work establishing commerce in the town. He first built a sawmill, then simultaneously built a home, steam powered cotton gin, and a grist mill situated on the south side of the Fort Smith and Western Railroad tracks, which had begun operating in the town in 1903.⁵ In 1913 he began construction on the two story, native stone Dozier Mercantile Building. Construction was completed in 1915 and, to date, it was the only two-story building ever constructed in Vernon. Although subsequently reduced to one story, the building still stands today and remains in use by his descendants. All of Dozier's other buildings were of frame construction, including his home.

But Mr. S.B. Dozier intended to make a statement with this building and make a statement he did. It stood as, and still is a testament to the ingenuity, skill and forward thinking of Mr. S.B. Dozier and the other town founders. He wanted a building that would not just serve his need or the needs of the community but would stand for generations to come as a monument to his resourcefulness, talent and business skills. He succeeded in that regard beyond his hopes. Mr. S.B. Dozier was a true empire builder and original multi-tasker and one of, if not the most influential man in town. He accurately interpreted the needs of the town, and with an unlimited supply of wood his sawmill made short work (to use a term from that era) of making lumber for building homes, barns and business.

Vernon was an agricultural center for African American farmers who needed a place to sell their goods, and turn corn and wheat, into flour, meal and livestock feed. So he built a Grist mill. The major crop in the area was cotton and the African American farmer could not always expect a fair price from neighboring Gins. So Mr. S.B. Dozier built a Cotton Gin not just any gin but a steam powered Cotton Gin. All the time running a farm outside of town. Mr. S. B. Dozier did more to pragmatically situate the new town on a rocket path to being self-reliant than any other Vernon businessman, and he did all this within 6 years of arrival. He then continued to provide startup capital to new business and farmers. *Also active in social matters:* He was member of the Knights of Pythias Lodge, Deacon of New Hope Baptist church, W.B.F. Lodge, & The American Patriot Fraternity. Son Crawford returns from Arizona in time for his father's funeral (per obituary)

But he was not alone it was a joint effort and it did not end there. From all over the south those who wanted to escape the shackles of bigotry and hatred of post-civil war south answered the call with the same vigor and vitality they showed when they helped the Union defeat the Confederacy. This was a second call to freedom to them and answer they did. They came to Indian Territory and formed new free towns. Vernon was one of the many All-Black Towns in Oklahoma and was quite exceptional. Perfectly situated on the Ft. Smith and Western railway.

⁵ Vernon was founded in 1895 by Edward McCabe; it was platted in October of 1910; and, in June of 1911 was formerly established in what was then Hughes County.

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Mr. S. B. Dozier's Cotton Gin, Sawmill, and Grist Mill propelled Vernon now to become an agricultural hub for Afro-Americans attracting even more people to the area. The exodus that began during the roll back was now all out migration of Afro-Americans with dreams a new and full freedom and an unquenchable thrust to enjoy the American dream, and Mr. S. B. Dozier-Financier, Mr. Edward Woodard- commodities broker, Mr. John W. Grant – Owner & operator of Vernon Telephone Company, Mr. R. T. Spencer- gen contractor, Mr. Thomas M. and Mrs. Julia Haynes –realtors & developers, were here to make those dreams a reality. They were the right people at the right time. It cannot not be overstated how crucial and essential Mr. S.B. Dozier was to the development of what would become one of the largest of all the black towns in Oklahoma.

Dozier Building Chronology (Period of Significance)

1913 – 1915: Dozier Mercantile Building constructed and building opens as a general merchandise (dry goods) store. S. B. Dozier's fifth child, George W. (G. W.) and his son are placed in charge of operating the store. S. B. focuses his time on running the cotton gin, grist mill, saw mill, and his farm. S. B. also continues to work with Thomas M. Haynes to facilitate and attract new businesses to Vernon.⁶

1916: Plastering of interior walls continues. Store inventory stocked with \$1,000 in merchandise. Between S. B. and his son, Fred, the Dozier's own over 100 available lots in Vernon and offer them for sale to newcomers. Dozier continues to mill lumber for construction and grinds flour and feed to ensure the town's self-sufficiency.⁷

1917: Plastering of interior walls stops.⁸

1918: S. B. Dozier advertises his building for sale, as noted in an advertisement in *The Topeka Plaindealer* for a "Storehouse and Hardware business for Sale Contact C.M.D. at P.O. Box 756, Vernon, Okla. 74877."⁹ However, no sale is recorded.

1919 – 1924: Plastering of interior walls continues throughout the building, with work reported of being completed during the summer of 1921.¹⁰ Commercial operations continue within the building. S. B. Dozier purchases a new Dodge automobile in 1920 and begins construction of a new home in Vernon in 1924.

⁶ *The Boley Press*, December 3, 1915.

⁷ *The Topeka Plaindealer*, April 28, 1916.

⁸ *The Black Dispatch*.

⁹ *The Topeka Plaindealer*, January 11, 1918. We believe this is Mr. S. B. Dozier attempting to sell his building but cannot confirm it. Neither the Boley Progress in 1915 nor the Topeka Plaindealer 1916 article mentions any business matching that description or owners initials in existence. It is possible that someone else could have built a new business in the two years between 1916 and 1918 and attempted to sell and/or sold it. But we can find no mention of any other store that matches the description "storehouse & hardware business" other than S. B.'s two story storehouse building.

¹⁰ *The Black Dispatch*, April 4, 1920; *The Black Dispatch*, August 13, 1920; *The Black Dispatch*, December 13, 1920; *The Black Dispatch*, July 1, 1921; *The Black Dispatch*, August 1924

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1925: S. B. Dozier dies suddenly from a massive heart attack while driving home from his farm on February 16. The entire community mourns the loss of this pioneer, community leader, and financier.¹¹ G. W. Dozier closes the nominated property after his father's death, while Fred Dozier, S. B.'s eldest son, becomes executor of the estate.¹² Construction of S. B. Dozier's home is completed in December and India Dozier, S. B.'s wife and widow, moves in.¹³

1927 – 1934: G. W. reopens the nominated property and continues to operate a dry goods store until his mother's death in 1934, at which time he closes the store and moves to California.¹⁴

1935 – 1936: Crawford Dozier, the third youngest child of S. B. and India Dozier, re-administers his father's estate. Crawford and his wife, Jeanette (Tennie) Baccus, re-open the Dozier Mercantile Building as a dry goods and shoe store.¹⁵

1936 – 1943: Crawford and Tennie operate a tavern called the Rock Front Club in the building. The club closes in 1943, when Crawford is too ill to run it.¹⁶

1945: Crawford Dozier passes on June 1.¹⁷ Tennie leases the building to Lloyd Dozier, who operates a tavern on the first floor and a dance hall on the second floor.¹⁸

1950: Lloyd Dozier's club closes.¹⁹

1954 – 1959: Tennie Dozier leases the building to Mert Barnett, who reopens the Rock Front Club in 1954. The club closes in 1959.²⁰

1960 – 1962: Tennie Dozier leases the building as a recreation center and after-school club.²¹

1964: After becoming the new postmaster for Vernon, Tennie Dozier moves the post office to the Dozier Mercantile Building. Tennie and her son, Billie Joe, section off a small portion in the

¹¹ *The Black Dispatch*, February 19, 1925.

¹² *The Indian Journal*, March 26, 1925, and interview by author with Mattie Dozier-Robertson, 2023.

¹³ *The Black Dispatch*, December 17, 1925.

¹⁴ Interview by author with Mattie Dozier-Robertson and Ala Pearl Bowman, 2023; *The Indian Journal*, April 12 and June 7, 1934.

¹⁵ *The Indian Journal*, July 25, 1935. Author interview with Mattie Dozier-Robertson and Ala Pearl Bowman, 2023. Author interview with Jerry Emerson-Walker, 2019.

¹⁶ Author interview with Mattie Dozier-Robertson, 2023. Author interview with Jerry Emerson-Walker, 2019.

¹⁷ *The Oklahoma Eagle*, June 9, 1945.

¹⁸ Author interviews with Mattie Dozier-Robertson, Samuel M. Arterberry, and Ala Pearl Bowman, 2023. Author interviews with Jerry Emerson-Walker and Elder A. C. Fields, 2019.

¹⁹ Author interviews with Mattie Dozier-Robertson, Samuel M. Arterberry, and Ala Pearl Bowman, 2023. Author interviews with Jerry Emerson-Walker and Elder A. C. Fields, 2019.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

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front of the building to house the post office. The post office would become the longest-tenured occupant in the building, remaining until 1991.²²

1971: Tennie and her son, Billie Joe, remove the second story of the nominated property, converting it to a one-story building, because the upper floor had become structurally unsound. A gable roof is added to replace the original flat roof. In addition to the post office, Tennie's son, George, opens Mr. G's Grocery in the building in 1973.

10. Geographical Data

The verbal boundary description provided in the original nomination form lists "Lot 14, Block 14, Town of Vernon, Oklahoma." Per information provided by the McIntosh County Assessor, the boundary description should read as Lots 14, Block 14 in the Town of Vernon.

Latitude and longitude coordinates are as follows: 35.213019, -95.926539.

11. Form Prepared By

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date: March 13, 2024

²² Ibid. Also see Joan M. Biskupic, "Vernon's Post Office Stands Time's Test," *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 30, 1984.

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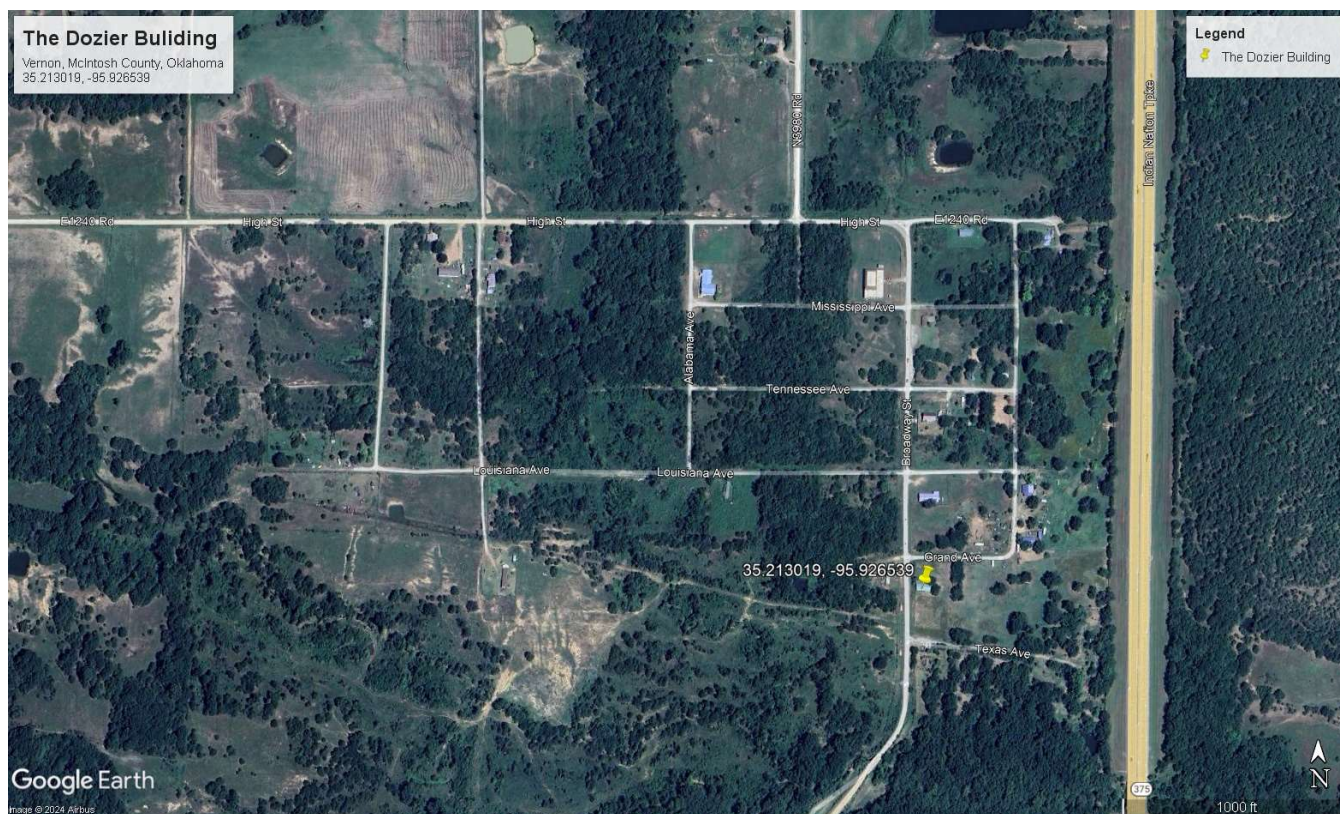
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