

The Davis Bottom History Preservation Project

Nathaniel United Methodist Mission

Nathaniel United Methodist Mission has been the center of Davis Bottom since its establishment in a small chapel on DeRoode Street in the late 1920s. Nathaniel has provided spiritual, medical, educational and social services to families and individuals for eight decades (and counting). In many ways, Nathaniel embodies the strong, compassionate and tight-knit character of the Davis Bottom neighborhood, which has quietly served as a model for community cooperation and racial tolerance.



Figure 1: Nathaniel United Methodist Mission, 2012.



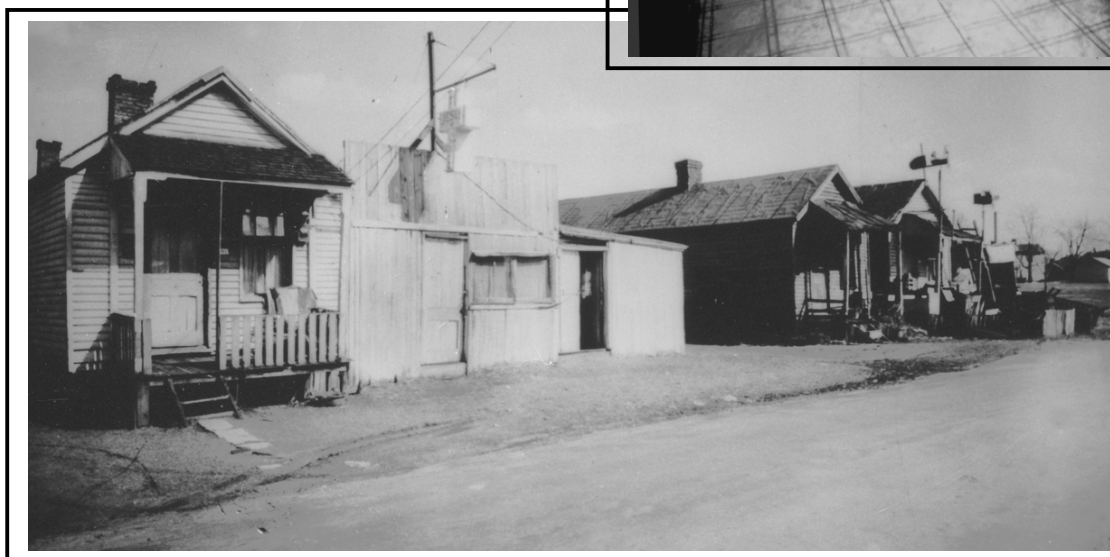
Construction of the Newtown Pike Extension Project will eventually force Nathaniel Mission to move to temporary quarters. But, the mission will continue to provide services to the community, and will return to Davis Bottom once the construction project has been completed. Nathaniel United Methodist Mission, under the guidance of Pastor David MacFarland, has been instrumental in the effort to document family photographs and oral histories as part of The Davis Bottom History Preservation Project.

Figure 2: Children in front of Nathaniel Mission, 1969. Courtesy, DBHPP_Lambert Collection.

The First Mission Chapel (1920s-1940s)

Nathaniel United Methodist Mission was started by students from the Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Jessamine County. Asbury seminary was part of Asbury College (now University), until founded as a separate institution by Henry Clay Morrison in 1923. Asbury Theological Seminary trained and sanctified pastors to "spread scriptural holiness around the world." Sometime in the late 1920s or early 1930s, Asbury Seminary students began to provide outdoor sermons on Sunday mornings in Davis Bottom, one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Lexington. The students came "honking their horns, getting people to come out to worship on the hillside by the abandoned railroad track," according to Reverend David MacFarland, Senior Pastor, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission. During the Great Depression, a homeless encampment was also located near Davis Bottom in a wood lot between the Southern Railway tracks and the Kentucky Association racetrack.

The Asbury missionary group built a small chapel at 743 DeRoode Street in Davis Bottom during the 1930s. The original Nathaniel Chapel was a small, wood-frame structure attached to the shotgun house at 745 DeRoode Street. From photographs, it appears the house may have also been part of the mission. For a period of time, Nathaniel didn't have a building for services or its mission work, according to Pastor MacFarland. "It was all outdoors."



All photos, 1930s.

*Figure 3: (top)
Nathaniel Chapel
interior.*

*Figure 4: (middle)
Nathaniel Chapel
exterior [note the
windmills in front of
homes.*

*Figure 5: (bottom)
Asbury missionaries
and residents.*

*Courtesy, Nathaniel
United Methodist
Mission.*



The Second Nathaniel Mission (1940s – present)



Figure 6: A group from Nathaniel's congregation, 1956. Courtesy, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission.

The First United Methodist Church in Lexington became involved with the Nathaniel Mission in 1946. That year, a second mission made of concrete and wood was built at 616 DeRoode Street. Over the decades, Nathaniel Mission has added facilities and programs to fit the community's needs. "Nathaniel Mission strives to serve Davis Bottom and Fayette County as a whole through three basic legs - medical, church and mission," says Pastor MacFarland. "We always try to respond to what we understand of the needs of those around us are," he adds.

In 1995, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission became a chartered member and agency of The Kentucky Methodist Annual Conference. Nathaniel Mission depends on donations to keep its three service areas strong.

Church

Nathaniel has been a spiritual center for area residents since its establishment in the 1930s. Worship services are held on Sunday and Wednesday at 6:00 p.m., following a 5:00 pm meal that is served to "anyone who is hungry." On Sunday mornings, Nathaniel also holds a bible study, breakfast, Sunday school classes and an 11: 00 am worship service.



Figure 7: Nathaniel's "young people," 1956. Courtesy, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission.



Figure 8: Sacraments at a worship services. Courtesy, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission.

Medical

In 1979, Nathaniel Mission started a free medical clinic with one volunteer doctor working out of the furnace room. Today, dozens of physicians and volunteers donate their time to the Nathaniel Mission and Refuge Clinic, which serves about 2,200 patients each year. The clinic provides such services as basic medical and pharmacy, dental and vision care, as well as programs for diabetes and pre-natal care.



Figure 9: Volunteer medical staff, 2012. Courtesy, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission.

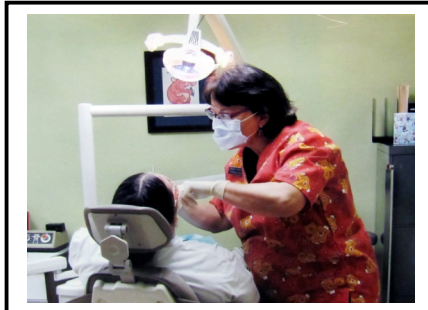


Figure 10: Dentistry. Courtesy, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission.



Figure 11: Optometry. Courtesy, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission.

Mission

Nathaniel Mission had 12,000 "mission" visits in 2012 for services including, Nathaniel's Market, weekly meal programs, special holiday events, educational programs and a veterinarian clinic.



Figure 12: Volunteers at Nathaniel's Market, 2012. Courtesy, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission.

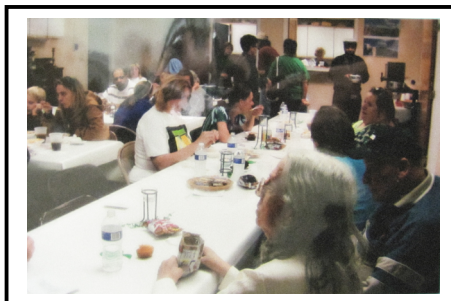


Figure 13: Mission meal service. Courtesy, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission.



Figure 14: Children in prayer. Courtesy, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission.

Contributing Scholars

The Rev. David MacFarland, Senior Pastor, Nathaniel United Methodist Mission

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