

## Sunrise in the Smokies

### NEWS THAT AFFECTS YOU

# Church, downtown Dandridge on endangered list

Submitted report

Sevierville's New Salem Baptist Church has again made the East Tennessee Preservation Alliance list of endangered heritage sites in the region.

Also on the list: Tanner School in Newport and Historic Downtown Dandridge.

Endangered historic places are selected by the Board of Directors from nominations. The goal is to bring attention to these threatened heritage assets and encourage property owners and communities to develop preservation strategies for saving them.

The New Salem Baptist Church was built in 1886 by Isaac Dockery and is Sevierville's oldest surviving building, Sevier County's oldest brick church building, and the only historically black church

in the county. The Gothic-revival church served the thriving black community until the 1950s when the last services were held by the original congregation.

Since that time, the church's historic integrity has eroded. The original bell tower and pulpit furniture have been removed and the overall interior has been altered. The church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2003, and a Tennessee Historical marker was placed on the grounds in 2006.

Today the church and grounds are used for the Annual Dockery Family Reunion, which draws hundreds of descendants to the church and idyllic grounds. The Dockery Family Association has been working with the East Ten-

nessee Community Design Center, the African American Heritage Alliance, and ETPA to find a long term preservation solution. The building suffers from lack of maintenance and ventilation issues, which are compromising the structure. It also sits in a floodplain and the main level needs to be raised.

Dandridge appears to be at a significant crossroads. In March 2016, the Dandridge Community Trust dissolved, ending the town's participation in the Tennessee Main Street program. There is growing concern about proposals to relocate the Jefferson County Courthouse operations away from downtown and the historic courthouse due to maintenance demands. The Jefferson County Board of Education had to vacate the 1845 jail

building that is adjacent to the courthouse due to mold issues.

The 1927 Barber McMurry designed Dandridge School has been on the East Tennessee Endangered Heritage list since 2012. The 1817 Roper Tavern has been on the Endangered Heritage list since 2014; there is concern about the overall structural integrity.

Dandridge is the second oldest city in Tennessee and is home to the oldest operating courthouse in the state. Founded in 1783 and established as the county seat in 1799, the town is named after Martha Dandridge Washington.

The Newport Consolidated School, later called the Tanner School, was built in 1924 with financial support from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Rosenwald helped fund hundreds of

black schools across the country. In April 2011, The Tanner School, now known as the Tanner Cultural Center, received significant roof damage from a tornado that swept through Cocke County. Eventually, the roof was replaced, but not before significant water and mold damage had occurred inside the building.

The City of Newport, the owner of the building, has begun extensive cleanup efforts. The Tanner Preservation Alliance (TPA) was established in 2012 and continues to seek funding. Heat and air units have been repaired and or replaced. There is a lack of funding for repairs, and grants are being sought.

To learn more about the East Tennessee Endangered 8, visit [www.knoxheritage.org/ETPA](http://www.knoxheritage.org/ETPA).