

The Mathiesen Clinic

By Mattie Buckner and Natalie Cajado

Introduction

The Mathiesen Clinic is a former medical clinic located in downtown Pittsboro, North Carolina. It was owned and operated by Dr. K.M. Mathiesen, for whom it is still named. The clinic was in operation for 26 years, from its grand opening in 1948 until its closure in 1974 due to financial struggles. After closing, the clinic was owned and utilized by a variety of individuals and organizations. Currently, it is owned by Greg Stafford who plans to restore it and open it up as a business to the public. Even though the Clinic closed almost 50 years ago, and Dr. Mathiesen is no longer alive, he and his legacy remain popular in the community. There are many testimonials from past patients that liked Dr. Mathiesen, and still remember him fondly! Overall, this clinic is a large piece of the town of Pittsboro's history, and hopefully will not be forgotten any time soon [1].



*Photo of the Mathiesen Clinic.
Courtesy of the Chatham Historical Association.*

Dr. Mathiesen



*Picture of Dr. K. M. Mathiesen.
Courtesy of Mainstreet Pittsboro.*

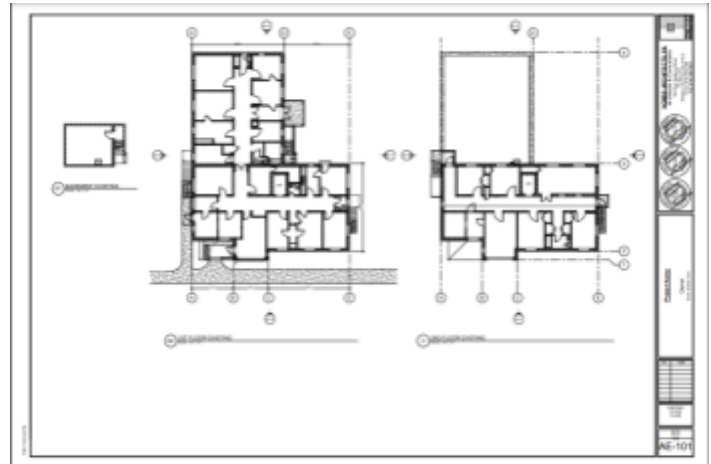
Dr. K.M. Mathiesen was a doctor who first opened and ran the Mathiesen Clinic. Before he became a doctor, Dr. K.M. Mathiesen graduated from Duke University around 1939, and later completed an internship at Watts Hospital in Durham. During his time working at the clinic, he was a community doctor. He treated many cases of wounds and sickness in his years. He also delivered many babies, and many current Pittsboro residents were born at his clinic. He was also famous for his groundbreaking asthma treatment that was so famous, the actor who played the Cisco Kid brought his son to receive the treatment [2]!

Dr. Mathiesen was also active in matters beyond medicine; he established the 7th Day Adventist Church in Pittsboro, and was even the mayor of Pittsboro for a time! It is said that as mayor, Mathiesen would occasionally sweep the streets of Pittsboro with a straw broom. Dr. Mathiesen is remembered as a very kind man and great doctor by many people all over Pittsboro [3].

Architecture

The clinic also has many interesting architectural features. One of these features is the large glass block window that is easily visible from the front of the building. Glass block windows were a popular style in the 1930s and 1940s for Streamline Moderne and Art Deco building styles. They were also popular for a variety of practical and functional reasons including low cost, light-transmitting and diffusing properties without any glare, high strength and durability, enhanced thermal resistance, sound deadening capabilities, fire resistance, and the fact that they are easy to clean, maintain, and replace [4]. This window is a main feature of the front of the building and is one of the first things that many people notice.

Another interesting architectural fact about the Mathiesen Clinic building is that, despite appearing to be fully made of bricks, the building is a brick veneer over concrete. The brick veneer is a common method of getting the look and feel of solid brick for a lower price [5]. This method began around the 1930s and became popularized by the 1960s [6]. This method is still very common today, with most “brick” buildings built since the brick veneer was popularized being built using this method [7]. Another interesting feature of the building is the elevator. Unfortunately, there is not much information available about what type of technology this elevator used, but most likely it was simply standard for the time period. The most interesting thing about the elevator is that it was the first-ever elevator in Pittsboro [8]!



*Outline of Mathiesen Clinic floor plan.
Courtesy of Gregory Stafford*

Patient Testimonials and Stories

Excellent schools add to the brightness of the picture
. . . . Mathiesen Clinic is described as one of the finest small hospitals to be found anywhere . . . Folks in the Pittsboro area are friendly, public spirited . . Historic Pittsboro is proud of its past, but it is now looking to the future . . . In the face of all of its recent progress, Pittsboro is now one of the finest towns in the State in which to live and to do business . . .

1949 newspaper article mentioning the Mathiesen Clinic. Courtesy of The Chatham Record.

The Mathiesen clinic had twenty beds and five bassinets [9]. Many current Pittsboro residents recall that they were born at the clinic, and also have stories about various visits to the clinic throughout their lives. One Pittsboro resident who went to the clinic during their childhood is quoted as saying: “They always took such good care of you. Dr. Mathiesen was the best” [10]. Many people also recall receiving unique lollipops after their visit. As stated by someone who went to the clinic as a kid: “If you were good, after your visit you could go by the pharmacy and get a sucker that had a little garden tool at the end of the stick!” [11].

The clinic once even had a celebrity visitor! Duncan Renaldo, who played the Cisco Kid, brought his son to the clinic to receive Dr. Mathiesen’s famous asthma treatment. During this time, Renaldo visited local schools. “Duncan Renaldo, who played the Cisco Kid, did visit the clinic. While he was in the area, he visited Moncure High School, and all of us students went into the auditorium to see

him...My recollection is that he had gone to the clinic to have his son treated for asthma by Dr. Mathiesen” [12]. This asthma treatment was incredibly well-known and was said to be quite effective.

Additionally, the clinic was known as a place where everyone was welcome. One person stated that there was a black gentleman who worked at the clinic, which, at this time, was unusual in the segregated South. As quoted by a Pittsboro resident: “Does anyone remember, Sampson, an extremely kind black gentleman that worked there as a nurse, orderly, janitor, etc. He took the best care of me when I was a kid in the 60’s” [13].

Overall, the clinic was known as a welcoming place with great staff, and Dr. Mathiesen was well-liked by pretty much everyone. Most of the people who spent time there look back on it fondly and wish the clinic was still open today [14]. The clinic eventually closed to due financial troubles; reportedly, Dr. Mathiesen was struggling to pay for things after offering free services to people who were unable to afford to pay their medical bills [15].

Previous Uses and Future Plans

Although initially used as a medical clinic, the building itself has served many purposes throughout its existence. For 26 years, the building has had tenants across multiple areas. One of these was the Chatham County Democratic Party, who used it as their headquarters for some time. Another previous occupant includes the Chatham Arts Council, which used to be headquartered there. The clinic also has held a bail bondsman and numerous different shops such as: a jewelry repair business, a children’s dressmaker, and the Rusty Rooster antique shop.

Additionally, the clinic was owned by the Marlowe family for a while and may end up being called the “Marlowe Building.” Most recently before the current owner, it was owned by a lady who rented out the rooms to other people as office space. As people left it slowly became a place to store and dump items, however, leaving it needing a bit of “sprucing up” [16].

Currently, the Mathiesen Clinic is owned by Greg Stafford, who is a business partner with SoCo Pittsboro. He plans to fully renovate the clinic to turn part of it into a rooftop bar, and also wishes to create an apartment upstairs for him to live in at least part-time. As of March 2022, the building is being cleared of toxic chemicals that were left there due to how common they were at the time the clinic was built [17]. Due to restrictions placed upon it due to being a historical place, it is difficult to make extensive changes to the building. The hope is that this historical building can become a place modern people will want to patronize, allowing more people to learn about the building’s rich history so that the legacy of Dr. Mathiesen and his clinic will never be forgotten [18].



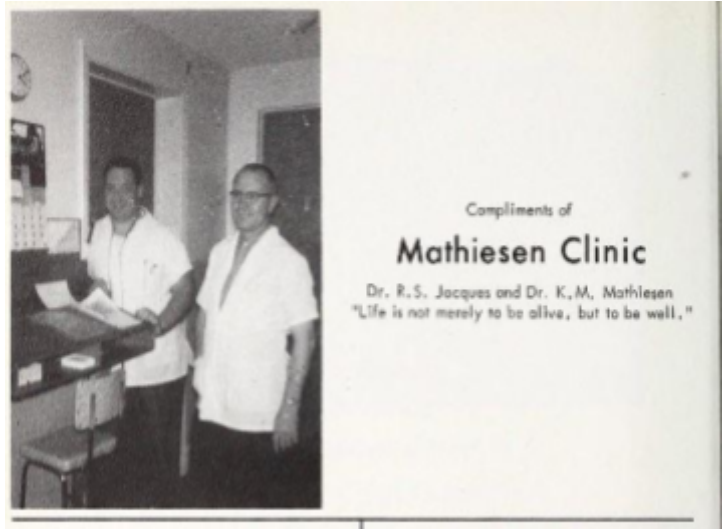
Photo of the Mathiesen Clinic in 2010. Courtesy of the “Mathiesen Clinic, Pittsboro, NC” Facebook Group.

Legacy

The Mathiesen Clinic has a lasting legacy that continues through the present day. Many current Pittsboro residents were born there, while multiple others visited the clinic for a variety of medical needs.

According to a woman who gave birth to one of her children there: “My oldest son was born there July 1, 1970. The hospital had closed when I was expecting my second son. I begged Dr. Mathiesen to deliver him in his office! That’s how much I trusted in him. Best doctor and clinic ever!”[19] Her story does a wonderful job of capturing just how well-liked and trusted Dr. Mathiesen was. It also shows how much people appreciated the clinic and its welcoming atmosphere.

Stories ranging from patients to former employees show the legacy of the Mathiesen Clinic remains positive. There are no plans to tear down the building and the current owner wants to preserve its history while also turning it into a place people will want to visit [20]. The people who were born at the Mathiesen Clinic may not live forever, but the legacy of this clinic will continue in future generations.



*Photo of Mathiesen Clinic doctors.
Courtesy of the Chatham Historical Association.*

References

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12. Ibid.
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14. Greg Stafford, personal communication, Pittsboro, February 21, 2022.
15. Gibbs, Milburn. "Early Pittsboro Medicine Studied."
16. Gregory Stafford, interview by Mattie Buckner and Natalie Cajado, Siler City, February 22, 2022.
17. Greg Stafford, personal communication, Pittsboro, February 21, 2022.
18. Ibid.
19. DiNardo, Francis. "Historic Pittsboro: The Mathiesen Clinic."
20. Gregory Stafford, interview by Mattie Buckner and Natalie Cajado, Siler City, February 22, 2022.

For Further Information

- [Historic Pittsboro: The Mathiesen Clinic](#)
- [Early Pittsboro Medicine Studied](#)
- [Greg Stafford is ramping up the SoCo Pittsboro project - Chatham Journal Newspaper](#)