

First Baptist Church / Theater 98 Playhouse 1924

On July 27, 1924, Pastor Douglas J. Peters led the formal opening of Fairhope Baptist Church's new sanctuary located at 350 Morphy Avenue. 250 people attended the service.

The construction of the one story cross-gabled church building cost \$5000.00. In 1946, an educational building was added to the rear, the design of which is reported to have "not pleased many of the ladies of the congregation". First Baptist Church of Fairhope left the building in the early 1950s.

After decades of diverse uses, a local theater legend, Tom Pocase, converted the building into an intimate, three-quarter round theater where his company, Theater 8:15, specialized in musicals. In 1985, the community theater group, Theater 98, renovated the building and it became known as the Theater 98 Playhouse.

Theater 98 Community Theater Group

Community-theater groups have been an active part of the arts scene in Fairhope since 1912. Theater 98 was founded in 1960 when existing theater groups on the Eastern Shore merged. They performed at various venues around Baldwin County before becoming dormant in the 1970s. The group re-activated in 1983 and finally found a permanent home in 1985 when they signed a lease for 350 Morphy Avenue with the City of Fairhope. People often assume Theater 98 refers to the number of seats in the playhouse, but the name comes from Highway 98, the primary roadway along the Eastern Shore.

Theater 98, a non-profit organization, adds exceptional theatrical productions to the vibrant performing arts scene in Fairhope. The

group has won numerous awards at State and Regional Theater Festivals, as well as, the Mobile Arts Council's Arts Organization Award.

Historic Structure Designation

Baldwin County Historical Commission designated the Theater 98 Playhouse as a historic structure significant to the city's history. A plaque was presented as part of Theater 98's 50th Anniversary Celebration in 2011. The Fairhope Historic Preservation Committee also presented a historic structure plaque during the celebration.

Structural Description

350 Morphy Avenue, 1924, enlarged 1946. One-story cross-gabled church building, styled like a substantial gabled bungalow. Built of smooth white cement block with a Dyson block foundation and quoins; primary windows with Queen Anne upper sash (border of stained glass with single clear central light) over single-light lower sash; gabled entry portico on Morphy side, square stuccoed piers with carved brackets and double paneled entry. Brick sills and brick soldier floor course. Rear two-story section to backstage has block that appears to be a less fine aggregate, windows 6-over-6 and 3V-over-1 sash. The 1946 enlargement was the addition of a broad front-gabled utility building on concrete slab foundation; asbestos shingles, metal-roll-out windows which now have brick veneer on facade and fake Colonial decor, i.e., shutters, wrought iron post supports.