

Mershon, Crawford, Pitman Building 1929

There has been a locally owned mercantile store on this main corner of Fairhope Avenue and Section Street since 1895. The first was a wooden framed building which housed the short-lived Fairhope Mercantile Company and was purchased by the Mershon brothers, Arthur and Nathaniel. Their general store also housed Fairhope's first post office and looked out at the community's first utilities: a water well and pump at the main street intersection. Henry Crawford later bought and operated the wooden store. The Mershons and Crawfords were connected to the Gaston family, founders of Fairhope, and their legacies remain strong in the community.

In 1918, J.I. Pitman arrived at Fairhope on a Sunday afternoon bay boat from Mobile. He saw the For Sale sign on the Crawford store at the top of the clay dirt road. J.I. (Ivy) went home to the farm in Salitpa and returned to Fairhope with borrowed money and wife Ethel Waite and babies to begin a new venture as owner of J.I. Pitman Mercantile. The young Single Tax Colony on Mobile Bay offered opportunity. In 1929 he replaced the wooden structure with the present building of Clay City tile, which was stuccoed in a 1939 modernization.

In 1940, J.I. Pitman and Company, including sons Cecil and Ike and daughter Mary (Marvin Berglin), celebrated twenty years of serving Fairhope. During World War II, Mr. Pitman was unable to manage the store without his sons, and the building was leased as several different businesses, including a restaurant.

The business became Bedsole's and Gwin in 1952, and Wilkin's in the 1980's.

In 2005 the store was updated as several retail spaces. The Cat's Meow continues the tradition of the locally owned business. The Pitman family interests still own the building.