been added in the 1860s after Office, the converted church yard — the playhouse is a Cape form, today, is mimicked by dere, an onion-shaped, almost he intended to create.

Hand laid out the town of Rom 1690s. Back then, three sons of John Hand built a number century whalers who plied tral piece of local history. The scores of theatrical produ

Cape May Stage acts as savior, caretaker of 1853 former church, now playhouse

By BOB DREYFUSS

CAPE MAY — One hundred and eighty-two years ago, the cornerstone of a small Episcopal church was laid in Cape May. The church was designed by Thomas U. Walter, the then-premier architect of the state. Walter’s New Church, now the Mariner’s Museum in Newport, R.I., is the best-known example of his work.

The church was dedicated on Jan. 7, 1833, and was the third Episcopal church in Cape May. The first two were both torn down in the 1820s because of their proximity to the shore. The third church was razed in 1921.

Walter designed the church in the Greek Revival style, with a Doric order and a central tower. The nave was 50 feet long and 30 feet wide, with seating for 250.

The church was known for its acoustics and its beautiful architecture. It was a symbol of the community’s commitment to education and culture.

In 1853, the church was purchased by the Cape May Historical Society, which used it as a meeting place.

When Cape May Stage first opened in 1984, it said, the roof leaked whenever it rained, and water would pour into the choir loft and drip onto the pews below. The acoustics were poor, and the windows were so small that light could hardly penetrate the building.

The church was finally torn down in 1930, and the land was sold to the municipality. The church was replaced with a small public library.

In 1984, Cape May Stage was founded by a group of local residents who wanted to bring professional theater to the area.

The theater’s first production was a one-woman show called “The Woman in Black.” The show was a hit, and Cape May Stage has been a popular destination ever since.

Cape May Stage’s new home. A great deal of the work, by architects and craftspeople — including the windows — was done at a cost of $40,000.

In 2005, the theater opened its new home, the Community Theater of Cape May.

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