

MOUND FARM
Home of Dr. Isaac Smith Whitten
Mount Zion - Hancock County
By Felice Floyd Dissmeyer, 3rd great –grandniece of Dr. Isaac Whitten

Mound Farm was known as the plantation home of Dr. Isaac Smith Whitten. (Sometimes his name was referred to as “J”. S. Whitten but documentation proves it was “Isaac” Smith Whitten. Thus an “I” instead of a “J”.

The name Mound Farm appears on an 1847 and 1864 Hancock County Historical map along with the names of other plantation owners who were known neighbors. Mound Farm also appears on an 1859 and 1882 Georgia map. (See below)

One Archeological researcher believes Mound Farm was a named town (See below)
A family letter written in 1851 states that “Uncle Isaac” (Whitten) lived two miles from Mt. Zion and that it was a small village consisting of three churches. We assume she is referring to Mt. Zion. When Dr. Whitten’s adopted daughter, Frances Meriwether, married Thomas C. Grimes in 1843 in the Whitten home, the name Mound Farm was used in the announcement instead of “The Whitten Place”. (See below)

The plantation home of Dr. Isaac Smith Whitten was often referred to as Mound Farm. And, sometimes the home was referred to as the Whiten Place. The plantation was located just a few miles from the community of Mt. Zion in Hancock County. The plantation home was located in an area where several Indian mounds were discovered. Whitten Creek in Hancock County is supposedly named after Dr. Whitten

Whitten’s plantation once stood a mile or so north of Governor Northen’s home and rose on a hill at what is today the northwest corner of the intersection of Highway 77 which leads to Eatonton and the Greensboro Highway (Highway 15). It was said to have been the largest in Hancock County.

The name “Mound Farm” is also found on the 1864 Hancock County Historical map. This map shows the names/locations of several plantations such as Belvedere, Cornucopia, and Northen. This map can be found <http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/histcountymaps/hancock1864map.htm>.

The conclusion is also drawn by some that there used to be a named town called “Mound Farm”. Mark Williams with the Lamar Institute states in his paper, *Archeological Excavations at Shoulderbone Mounds and Village* that “in 1847 the area around Shoulderbone was organized into the named town of “Mound Farm” as shown on an 1847 Georgia map by William G. Bonner of that date. The report goes on to say that a letter dated November 28, 1848 from “J.L. Whitten” was posted from Mound Farm, Georgia and is recorded in the US Congressional Record (US House of Representatives 1849). The town was still in existence under that name on the 1859 map of James R. Butts and the 1882 Georgia map of A.G. Butts. The town was no longer in existence by 1915. (Source: Mark Williams, Lamar Institute, *Archeological Excavations at Shoulderbone Mounds and Village (HKI)* p.14) ¹ Note that Dr. Whitten’s name was Isaac Smith Whitten (I. S. Whitten) rather than J.L. Whitten.

We know that Mound Farm (Whitten plantation) was not far from the town of Mt. Zion. As with most of the Mt. Zion houses, little is recorded about the Whitten Place or Mound Farm, but conclusions can be drawn about the magnificence of the beautiful Mound Farm Plantation from the few written reports and family letters from years ago.

¹ Web site:http://shapiro.anthro.uga.edu/Lamar/images/PDFs/publication_03.pdf

In 1854 the U.S. Gazetteer reported Mount Zion as “a thriving post-village of Hancock County, thirty miles N.NE. from Milledgeville, has a flourishing seminary and 3 churches with a population about 400.” There was also reported to be a post office in Mount Zion in 1846.² The village of Mount Zion was north of Sparta. The famous Mount Zion Academy that produced many politicians, religious leaders and educators was located there. It was well established by the time Dr. Whitten moved to Mount Zion. 1837 deed records reveal that among the shops were a blacksmith shop and a shoemaker’s shop located in the village on the main street.³

When the late Joe Sidney Davis Sr. showed the Whitten site in 1978, he pointed out the remains of old chimneys. Some distance away, toward Greensboro, lays Whitten Creek, which feeds into Shoulderbone (Creek). Mr. Davis remembered when all that was left of the huge house was taken down and used to build barns nearby. A captain’s walk on the roof provided a good view of fields in the distance. Davis recalled that the house contained mahogany stairs and stair rails.

“It is known, too, that Dr. J.S. Whitten had a large and imposing house in that area which boasted its own adjoining race course. Miss Mary Moragne, on her visit in 1839, spent the day there but does not describe the place beyond saying that the Whittens were “very comfortably situated, in a pretty retired circle of hills and fertile valleys.”⁴ [Note that it should have been transcribed as Dr. I.S. Whitten rather than “J.S.” The “I.S.” has been proven in other documents with his signature and in family letters]

A niece of Dr. Whitten - Narcissa (Cis) Whitten visited her Uncle Isaac at Mound Farm and wrote from there to her sister Rebecca on November 4, 1850⁵:

I suppose you are all anxious by this time to know where we are and what we are doing. We arrived in Augusta on Tuesday evening, put up at the United States Hotel and stayed there until 9 o'clock Wednesday evening. Then we got in the cars and had quite a merry ride on the railroad to Warrenton. There we had to ride in the stage 23 miles to Sparta. We found Aunt Martha [Martha Meriwether, wife of Uncle Isaac Whitten] there with her carriage waiting to convey us to her house, and oh, how glad they were to meet us. Uncle Isaac seems very happy indeed to have us visit him. He is very affectionate. His health is very bad. That is the reason he did not meet us in Augusta. We have delightful weather now, very dry and warm. It seems very strange to think that I am really in Georgia. Uncle Isaac's land looks very much like our old place. The large oak trees remind me very much of home. The water here is not like ours but the people generally look very healthy. There is no small pox in Augusta now and the broken bone fever has got entirely through, so I believe the city is entirely healthy. Goodbye, I must stop. Your devoted sister, Narcissa

Narcissa visited Mound Farm again in January 1851 and wrote a letter from Mound Farm to her brother.

Have made very few acquaintances since I've been here. Uncle Isaac lives in two miles of Mt. Zion. It's a small village. There are three churches in it, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian. I have only been to Church twice since I left home.

.....They have commenced working in farm and garden here. They make a great deal of cotton in this part of the country. The people in this neighborhood are in good circumstances and some of them are very wealthy. One of Aunt Martha's sons in law owns two hundred Negroes and has a farm large enough for them all to work that's old

² Georgiagenealogy.org/hancock/2towns

³ Deed Book 0, page 561, Georgia, Hancock County

⁴ Shivers, Forrest, *The Land Between-A History of Hancock Co., GA to 1940*, p 136

⁵ Moore, William B. Jr., “*Letters to Rebecca*”

enough. [She is speaking of David W. Lewis or Thomas C. Grimes.] There are about seventy Negroes here, about forty field hands. The rest are house servants and children.

Uncle has a beautiful house. It has eight rooms above the basement and it's decidedly the handsomest furnished house I ever was in. All his furniture is of the very best. They use the library for a sitting room. He has a choice selection of books, takes a great many papers, so you see we have reading enough. They are all political except two. They are the *American Messenger* and *Southern Presbyterian*.⁶

From an article in the booklet, Down the Road⁷, the writer states:

Whitten Creek was named for a former doctor who built his house in that area and from my friend, the one and only, John Hight, "what a house it was, situated on many acres". A description of this house was from the mouth of my father's lawyer and esteemed friend, the late Col. G. Lee Dickens, Sr. The largest house ever built in Hancock County up until that time. The house and I quote: "It was by two stories of wood, painted a pretty shade of pink. From ground level a magnificent stair walked up to the second floor. There a most spacious veranda swept across the front. Two wide front doors let into the front hall. Once inside to the right and left, were twin parlors, or library, they might have been, or one may have been, for they were huge rooms 24 feet square with 14 foot ceilings. Also, all around the walls, from floor to ceiling were built in glass fronted book shelves. How I would like to have seen it, in all its glory about 1850."

In that part of Hancock County known as Mt. Zion, "Pleasant Valley" plantation was near Dr. Whitten's plantation. This belonged to Dimos Ponce and was built in the 1840's or 1850's. Then there was "Cornucopia" Plantation, home of Judge Eli Baxter, built about 1823. And, not far from there was "Belvedere", the house of David W. Lewis. (David Lewis married Dr. Whitten's adopted daughter, Martha Elizabeth Meriwether at Mound Farm.) The "Jackson" plantation was built by James S. Jackson and is located on the Sparta-Greensboro Road. Of the many other fine houses in and around Mt. Zion none are left and only fragmentary recollections have survived.⁸ (Katherine Bowman Walters states in her book *Oconee River, Tales to Tell*, that the Jackson house was built between 1848 and 1852. Today it is the site of Shoulderbone Plantation.)

Behind the Jackson-Lanier (Shoulderbone) plantation was Dr. I .S. Whitten's plantation. Whitten is remembered as one of the agrarian reformers who led Hancock County to prosperity. Whitten built a large, imposing house. He not only raised fine livestock, including blooded horses, but had his own adjoining racecourse.⁹

Highway 77 toward Eatonton, Georgia meanders along Whitten Creek to Shoulderbone Creek. Some years before there was a Hancock County, the Shoulderbone lands attracted accomplished planters who became state and regional leaders. Few signs remain of what once was there, and pine trees have largely reclaimed the old lands. There are small streams that flow together to make up Shoulderbone Creek and they are still called by family names. The state highway map for the country shows them as Plunkett and Whitten, Copeland and Lundy, Cannon and Neal.

Dr. Isaac Smith Whitten, owner of Mound Farm, was born in South Carolina in 1800. He was the son of John Whitten and Mary Reagan of Virginia. Dr. Isaac Whitten's father had been a veteran of the Revolutionary War, serving as Matross in the Virginia Artillery. His father also owned considerable land and had been involved in politics in South Carolina. In fact, Dr. Whitten's parents were among the early settlers of upper South Carolina and became pioneers in the

⁶ Moore, William B., Jr., "Letters to Rebecca", p. 209-210.

⁷ Gaissert, John; publication found in the Hancock County Library

⁸ Shivers, Forrest, *The Land Between – A History of Hancock County, GA to 1940*, p 132,133

⁹ Walters, Katherine Bowman, "Oconee River, Tales to Tell", p 228

opening of western Tennessee. Like his father, Dr. Isaac Whitten was a medical physician. It is not known where he received his training or where he actually practiced medicine.

In November 1827 Dr. Whitten married Martha Jackson while he was still living in South Carolina. In 1831 Martha Jackson died at the young age of twenty-six. There were no children from this marriage.

Jackson, Martha, married Whitten, Dr. I.S., Abbeville Dist., SC. By the Rev. Mr. Reid. Dr. I.S. Whitten of this place to Miss Martha Jackson of the former place (Marriage and Death Notices from the Up-Country of South Carolina as taken from the Greenville newspapers 1826-1863-Greenville Republican.

Dr. Whitten married again sometime after 1831 to Martha Meriwether of Abbeville, South Carolina. Martha Meriwether was a widow of Robert Meriwether with two daughters named Martha Elizabeth and Frances Ann Meriwether.

In 1838 in the Inferior Court of Hancock County, Georgia, Dr. Whitten is granted guardianship of the Meriwether girls and of their property. Thomas Neel, Thomas Little, Alpheus Dickinson, Joseph Bryan & Thomas C. Grimes were appointed "to examine the slaves of said wards".

In his will, Whitten refers to the Meriwether girls, Frances and Martha, as his adopted daughters. From all accounts he had a close relationship with them for he provides well for them in his will and for children they might have in the future. He also makes a special provision for any later grandchild that may bear his name. (In his will we read that his adopted daughter, Martha Elizabeth (Lizzie) Lewis, had a daughter she named Martha Whitten Lewis. Dr. Whitten makes special mention of this in his will: "*I will that Martha Whitten Lewis, my granddaughter, receives upon her marriage, on account of her name, two likely young negroes, not otherwise disposed of, to be selected by herself over and above her share of my estate made the foregoing items.*" Later, in the final dispersal of his estate we see that his adopted daughter, Frances, and her second husband, Michael Dennis, name their son Whitten Dennis.

It is not clear when Dr. Whitten and his new family moved to Hancock County, Georgia from South Carolina, but court records do indicate that they were in Hancock in 1837 when he was granted guardianship of the two young girls. Dr. Whitten obviously had some money when he arrived in Hancock for he was able to build one of the largest plantation homes in the community of Mt. Zion at that time. He would have been around thirty-seven at that time.

The growth of cotton had already brought prosperity to Hancock County and this wealth was reflected throughout the county. The county was also known for its strong educational institutions and religious affiliations. There were several nationally known male academies and one female school located in the county. One male academy was located in Mt. Zion.

(Source: www.georgiaencyclopedia.org)

At one time Dr. Whitten's real estate was valued at \$20,000 and included 2,400 acres of land. The valuations, probably low, placed him among the top 28 wealthiest landowners in the county, the largest being David Dickson with 25,000 acres of land worth \$200,000. Whitten's personal property (probably slaves) was valued at \$60,000, placing him 18th in the local planter hierarchy. In that year before the Civil War, Whitten's plantation was seventh in cotton production, with 200 bales. Again Dickson led the list with 760. Like other major planters, Dr. Whitten must have had occasional financial crises. In 1850 he was sued for unpaid work by David Demarest, a builder. On October 18th of that year the jury awarded Demarest \$1,518.04 plus 20 percent damages and the cost of the suit (*Minutes*, Hancock Superior Court, 1850-58). This sum would have paid for a respectable house at that time.

Dr. Isaac Whitten was also connected to many of the prominent plantation owners in Hancock and Putnam counties. David Dickson, a leading planter and wealthy landowner was a neighbor

of Dr. Isaac Whitten. David William Lewis, another large plantation owner and later Dr. Whitten's son-in-law, became the founder and secretary of the Southern Central Agricultural Society which was organized on a regional level. Another neighbor diversified and experimented with fruit orchards and vineyards and the production of wine and in 1843 was the first to plant peaches in the Piedmont. He began to practice crop rotation, taking land out of production and turning under everything except the harvest. "The plantations of Dimos Ponce, John Bonner, Myles G. Harris, and Isaac Whitten, all of whose land was in the Shoulderbone Creek area, were considered to have "brag farms."¹⁰ Records show where Dr. Whitten even had some racehorses.

In early 1864, General John C. Breckinridge was appointed Secretary of War in the Confederate Government. A few months later it was evident that the North had won the War against the South and the members of the Confederate Government began their flight to safety. It was during this escape to avoid capture by Union forces that General Breckinridge and his party found themselves traveling near Sparta in Hancock County. General Breckinridge's horse threw a shoe just outside Sparta and he sought help at the "commodious home of a local doctor named Whitten and stepped up onto a wide porch where a number of paroled Confederate soldiers had stopped to ask for water and bread on their walk homeward." In addition to the soldiers hanging around, Breckenridge discovered Sutton S. Scott, commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in his own War Department also there. In order to not betray the identity of Breckenridge, Scott introduced Breckenridge as "Captain Thompson" but to his host, Dr. Whitten, he revealed Breckenridge's true identity..."Dr. Whitten, permit me to present to you.....General Breckenridge!

Dr. Whitten had been an admirer of General Breckenridge for years. Needless to say, he was very surprised to come face to face with the General whom he had never met. Dr. Whitten welcomed him into his home and set about getting the horse shod and preparations for a "hearty" luncheon prepared at his table. It is reported that they augmented their meal "by the last two bottles of prewar champagne left in his cellar and that they stood and drank the final glass in silence, sobered by the sadness of the hour, and then after a handshake at last, Breckinridge rode off to rejoin his companions."¹¹

At the end of the Civil War, Dr. Whitten is listed as a Confederate Amnesty Applicant from Hancock County.¹² Most of those listed owned taxable property valued at \$20,000 or more. Here his last name is spelled "Whitton". Former Confederates made applications for Presidential Pardon after the War.

Frances Ann Meriwether was the eldest daughter of Dr. Whitten's wife, Martha Meriwether. Frances married Thomas C. Grimes in the Whitten home in a ceremony in July 1843. The Reverend Bowman of Greensboro performed the ceremony. The name "Mound Farm" instead of Whitten Place was used in the announcement and appears on an 1847 map of Hancock County as well as on an 1864 map. The Whitten lands were near the Indian mounds, but the name Mound Farm disappeared in later years as neighbors often called plantations by the appellation he had chosen.

The following announcement appeared in the Southern Recorder July 18, 1843 which mentions "Mound Farm" as being the residence of Dr. Whitten.

July 18, 1843

Southern Recorder

*MARRIED, On the 29th June, at **Mound Farm**, the residence of Dr. Whitten, in Hancock county,*

¹⁰ Walters, Katherine Bowman, "Oconee River, Tales to Tell", p 207-212

¹¹ Davis, William C. , *An Honorable Defeat, The Last Days of the Confederate Government*, Harcourt, Inc. p. 321-323

¹² Confederate Amnesty Papers Publication Number: M1003; 1865-67, Georgia. Actual papers on individuals can be accessed at what was formerly footnote. Com but now referred to as www.fold3.com

by the Rev. Mr. Bowman of Greensboro, Mr. Thomas C. Grimes to Miss Frances A. Meriwether, the eldest daughter of Mrs. Whitten.

After Thomas Grimes' death, Frances married Michael Dennis in 1860 – again in the home of Dr. Isaac Whitten at Mound Farm. The census records for 1860, Hancock County, show that Michael Dennis had been married several times before. When he married Frances both brought children into the marriage. Dennis had two daughters and two sons living at home at the time of this marriage. Frances Meriwether Grimes had her daughter and two sons, ages eight through fifteen. It was a short marriage for Michael Dennis passed away in 1866. They had a son together whom they named Whitten Dennis.

Martha Elizabeth, Dr. Whitten's other adopted daughter, married David W. Lewis in 1847. David W. Lewis was born in Hancock County in 1815 or 1816. Lewis became a major figure in politics and agriculture. He represented Georgia's fifth district in the Confederate Congress. He attended the University of North Carolina for two years and then returned to Georgia and entered the University of Georgia from which he graduated in 1837. After holding the position of private secretary to Governor George R. Gilmer for two years, he took up the study of law and was admitted to the bar in 1841. He was elected as a representative in the Georgia legislature in 1845, and was afterwards twice re-elected. As a legislator he proved himself one of the ablest in the state. Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, Lewis was chosen as a member of the Confederate Congress in which capacity he served the Southland. He was a leader in the agricultural renaissance in the old cotton belt during the 1840s and 1850s and he helped establish the Georgia State Agricultural Society, served as its president and was secretary of the Southern Central Agricultural Society, editing its transactions for ten years. Both the society and David W. Lewis came to have wide influence in middle Georgia and stimulated the organization of other Agricultural Associations and exhibitions.¹³

The Lewis's home, Belvedere, burned around the turn of the century. No description of Belvedere has been found, but its history probably goes back to Hancock's earliest days. David Lewis must have acquired Belvedere after the previous owner's death. Previously they owned a home located on the Augusta Highway, Sparta¹⁴

David Lewis was later appointed by Reconstruction Governor Rufus Bullock to a committee to plan a public school system for the state. He was named president of the struggling new North Georgia College at Dahlonega in 1873 and served there until his death in 1885. An interesting note is that David and Martha's daughter, Millie, was the first female to graduate from North Georgia College.¹⁵ Lewis was one of those remarkable men who made Hancock County a leader in farming and education in the 20 years before the Civil War. He passed away in 1885 and his wife, Martha Elizabeth in 1899.

Dr. Isaac Whitten died July 5, 1866 at Mound Farm. The Macon Telegraph (newspaper) reported Dr. Whitten's death in the July 21, 1866 issue¹⁶. [Mistakenly, the "J" was printed instead of "I" for Isaac] If a person examined Dr. Whitten's handwriting, they would understand why the "I" was often mistaken for a "J". His letters were very "fancy"!

July 21, 1866

Macon Telegraph

Dr. J. S. Whitten, a prominent citizen of Hancock county, died on the 5th inst.

We know from family letters that Isaac Whitten loved his family and sought closer ties with his brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews. Records also reveal that he had a close relationship with

¹³ Shivers, Forrest, *The Land Between, Agricultural Journals*, p. 80

¹⁴ Rozier, "The Houses of Hancock 1785-1865", p.88-89

¹⁵ Cain, Andrew W., *History of Lumpkin County*

¹⁶ Web Site: Hancock County News: 1860-1869

his adopted daughters, Martha Elizabeth and Frances Ann and with their husbands and their children. Dr. Whitten was buried in Hancock County. In the settlement of his estate after his wife's death, there is an accounting of expenses to settle the estate which reveal \$10 was spent to move his body from Hancock to nearby Eatonton.

Dr. Isaac's wife, Martha Meriwether, died in 1884. Found in the Putnam County Extracts Vol II 1835-1889, p 299: *June 10, 1884 – the following deaths occurred recently in Putnam, Mrs. G. H. Buckner, Mrs. Carrie E. Pearson, Mrs. M. F. Whitten, grandmother of Mrs. A.S. Reid.*

Records indicate that when his estate was settled after his wife's death, his remains were moved from Hancock County to Eatonton, Georgia. Presumably, both are buried in Putnam County. At the time of her death, his wife was probably living with her granddaughter, Mary Lizzie Grimes Reid, wife of Sidney Alexander Reid of Putnam County. Reid was an attorney in Eatonton for many years.

How long Dr. Isaac's wife, Martha, continued to live at Mound Farm after his death is not known. This would have been in the reconstruction period following the Civil War. Dr. Whitten stated in his will that his three heirs would continue to live off the revenue produced by the plantation and upon the death of the last one the property would be divided among the remaining heirs (grandchildren).

After the death of Dr. Whitten's wife, Martha, the estate was held by their two daughters, who by an agent each year, rented the lands of the estate to renters and croppers and derived such income as could be had from such a course. In 1901 one thousand nine hundred and forty-nine acres was subdivided into ten lots considered of equal value in an agreement among the remaining heirs. Previously four hundred acres which had become know as the "Walker place" was sold and divided among the grandchildren. Now they all met together in Atlanta to apportion the separate land lots by the drawing of lots. A disinterested party was selected to make the drawing. He was given a box with ten slips numbered from one to ten and another box with the names of the ten legatees. He drew a name and a number alternately and the result of the lots went to the said heirs.

Those receiving distribution of the Whitten estate in 1901 were Martha Meriwether (Whitten) Lewis and David Lewis' children, Martha W. Lewis Ramsaur, Fannie Lewis Perry heirs (Fannie deceased), Anna Lewis Jarrett, Millie Lewis Littlefield and Mary R. Lewis Crusselle. The children of Frances Meriwether (Whitten) Grimes and Michael Dennis children were Mary Lizzie Grimes Reid (Mrs. M.L.), Thomas S. Grimes, Robert M. Grimes and Whitten Dennis.¹⁷ (Frances had previously married a Grimes and had Thomas and Robert; Whitten Dennis was by her second husband Michael Dennis)

The distribution of the land lots can be found in the Hancock County Courthouse where Dr. Whitten's will is located. Copy of this will and related papers have been copied by the author of this document.

¹⁷ Will on file in Hancock County Courthouse and copy in this author's possession