

DR. WHITLEY'S OFFICE BUILDING



This report was written on October 3, 1988

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as Dr. Whitley's Office Building is located on Hillside Drive, Mint Hill, N.C.

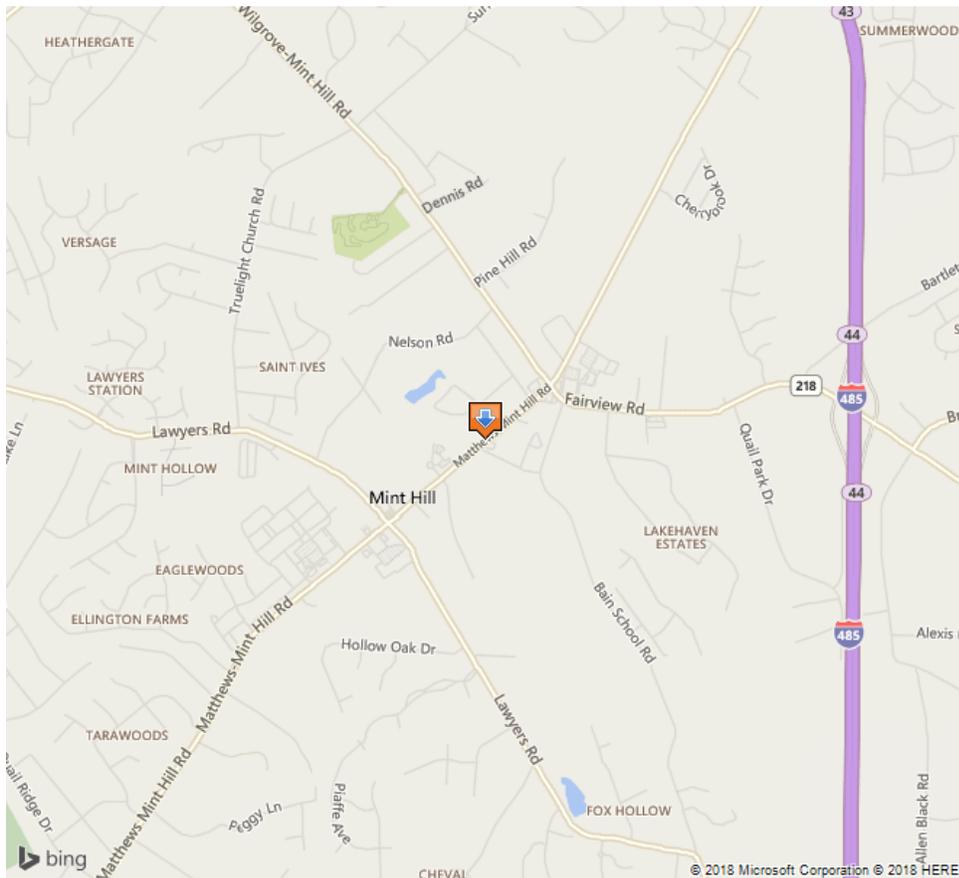
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The owner of the property is:

Mint Hill Historical Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 23086
Charlotte, N.C., 28212

Telephone: c/o Becky Griffin (704) 545-5766

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5172, Page 023. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 137-065-35.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4:

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as Dr. Whitley's Office

Building does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) Dr. Whitley's Office Building, erected c. 1909, is a remnant of the rural environment which once supported country doctors in Mint Hill and other outlying areas of Mecklenburg County; 2) Dr. Ayer Whitley and his wife, Esther Calcenia Mangum Whitley, served Mint Hill and its environs for about 40 years; and 3) the Mint Hill Historical Society plans to restore Dr. Whitley's Office Building and to make it part of a historical park.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description by Dr. William H. Huffman which is included in this report demonstrates that Dr. Whitley's Office Building meets this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The current appraised value of the improvement is \$0. The current appraised value of the land is \$23,960. The total appraised value of the property is \$23,960. The property is zoned B2.

Date of Preparation of this Report: October 3, 1988

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
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1225 S. Caldwell St.
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Historical Overview

*Dr. William H. Huffman
July, 1988*

The Dr. Whitley Office Building in Mint Hill is an unique early twentieth-century remnant of the town's and Mecklenburg County's once rural character. It appears to have been built by Dr. Ayer Manny Duncan Whitley (1884-1951) about 1909 as a

physician's office, but it may also have been built earlier by his predecessor, Dr. John McCamie DeArmon (1857-1945).

In 1908, Dr. Whitley took over the practice of the town's first physician, Dr. DeArmon. Descended from a pioneering Mecklenburg County family, Dr. DeArmon was the son of Richard Lawson and Pamela Alexander DeArmon. After an undergraduate education at Rutherford and Yadkin Colleges, he received his medical degree in 1886 from the Baltimore Medical College (now part of the University of Maryland) where he also served his internship. On his return to his parents' farm in Mallard Creek, his father told him to go to Mint Hill, twenty-four miles away: "They need a doctor there," ¹

Arriving on a skinny black bay horse named Wallace late on August 14, 1886, Dr. DeArmon had to shout loudly for some time to wake his host, Frank McWhirter, who put him up in an empty upstairs room of what was but a shell of a house. Hardly had he bedded down for the night, the house, which was covered with a tin roof, began shaking with great clatter of the tin, and McWhirter thought his young guest was having fits. After DeArmon made his way down the rickety stairs, they realized an earthquake was responsible for all the commotion. (It turned out to be a foretaste of the disastrous Charleston earthquake of August 31, 1886.) Thus began his 21 year stay as the town's first physician. ²

On May 27, 1890, Dr. DeArmon and Susie (Sue) Eliza Wolfe (1868-1944) were married in the Amity Presbyterian Church. She was the daughter of C. H. and Jennie Hunter Wolfe of Mecklenburg County, and an elocution teacher at the old Bain Academy in Mint Hill, a private secondary school. They honeymooned in Richmond, Va., at the Confederate Veteran's Reunion just for the excitement, since they were both youngsters during the war. ³ In 1891, Dr. DeArmon bought ten acres on what is now Fairview Road (N.C. 218) and built a modest house, which was added to over the years. ⁴ There he practiced medicine and they began their family, which came to number twelve children. Apparently Dr. DeArmon eventually had a growing practice in Charlotte, and in 1907 sold the Mint Hill home and moved to the bigger city. He continued to practice until the age of seventy-five, and was at one time the president of the Mecklenburg County Medical Society. ⁵

After about a year without a resident physician, Dr. Ayer Whitley, a twenty-four-year-old native of Union County, came to town in 1908 and began his practice. The son of Phillip and Mary Simpson Whitley of Union County, he also attended Rutherford College and the Baltimore Medical College, where he received his medical degree about four months before coming to Mint Hill. Arriving in October, 1908 with a nine-day-old baby, the Whitleys first took up residence across the road from the ten-acre DeArmon place, and bought it the following March, 1909. ⁶

It was probably about then that the detached office building was built (about forty feet from the house) where Dr. Whitley conducted a typical small-town/country general practice. It was set up with three rooms: a reception/waiting room in the front half, and two examining rooms in the back. (Dr. DeArmon had used a back corner room of the house as an office.) For house calls, he used the one-horse buggy familiar to all country doctors of the time. Later, he tried a motorcycle, but the bumpy ride apparently broke too many medicine bottles, so he ended up with an automobile equipped with fog lights.⁷

For about forty years, just up to a few years before his death, Dr. Whitley ministered to the needs of his Mint Hill-area patients. He also set up offices in Concord and Monroe, mixed his own medicines, made house calls 24 hours a day, and in the process delivered 6,784 babies. This included 12 of his own; eleven were born in the Fairview Road home, and the other just before they moved in the house across the road. Called "Professor Whitley" by some of his colleagues because he often referred to his medical books when faced with a difficult case, Dr. Whitley began practice charging \$3 to deliver a baby, plus \$1.50 for travel expense. At the end of his practice, he charged \$75 for the same service.⁸

Esther Calcenia Mangum Whitley (1884-1987), Dr. Whitley's wife, occasionally helped him in his practice, although she did not have any formal training, by assisting with his "labor cases," sutures, pulling teeth and administering anesthesia. She even delivered thirty-six babies under his supervision, and two others by herself.⁹

Mrs. Whitley was the third of ten children born to John Cullen Mangum, a well-known magistrate of Chesterfield County, S.C., and Ida Letha Funderburk Mangum. Married on January 5, 1908, the Whitleys lived in Baltimore while Dr. Whitley finished his residency, after which they moved for a short time to Union County. In an interview, Mrs. Whitley recalled that she always raised a garden, chickens, pigs and cattle, and instilled a sense of hard work in her children as good preparation for life.¹⁰

Although the country practice was always busy, it was not lucrative, since the poor country folk who were many of his patients commonly paid with livestock or produce, or couldn't pay at all. None were ever refused treatment for lack of money. Thus the ten-acre home place was utilized as a small farm to provide enough food for the large family. In addition to the main house, which was built over a well, and the office building, there was a barn, a crib and another outbuilding on the property that were used as part of the farm.¹¹

Following the death of Dr. Whitley, the DeArmon/Whitley home place was sold to a son, Dr. Ayer C. Whitley (d. 1978) in 1971, and in turn to his son, Ayer C. Whitley, Jr. in 1980.¹² The latter donated the doctor's office building to the Mint Hill Historical

Society on November 4, 1986, and the Society moved it to its present location on Hillside Drive (on property donated by the family of the late Carl J. McEwen) July 21, 1987.¹³

With a seed grant from the North Carolina General Assembly of \$10,000, a restoration design plan from UNC-Charlotte architecture students and the offer of other donated goods and services (which include some of Dr. Whitley's medical equipment), the Society is undertaking the restoration of the office and plans to incorporate it into a historical park with other buildings and artifacts representative of Mint Hill's early history. Thus will a unique remainder of both the medical and rural heritage of Mint Hill and Mecklenburg County be preserved and available to future generations.

Notes

¹ *Charlotte Observer*. April 23, 1945, Sect.2, p. 1; letter from Dr. DeArmon to Gladys DeArmon Robinson, printed in Mint Hill Historical Society Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 3, Sept.1986.

² Letter, cited above.

³ *The Southern Echo*. January id, 1986, p.1.

⁴ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 81, p.409.

⁵ *Charlotte Observer*. cited above; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 220, p. 134.

⁶ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 242, p. 325; *Charlotte Observer*. December 29, 1951, p. 12B; unidentified newspaper article by Avery Phillips on file with Mint Hill Historical Society.

⁷ Undated *Charlotte News* article by Carol Lowe Timblin on file with Mint Hill Historical Society.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.; article by Avery Phillips cited in note 6.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Mecklenburg County Deed Books 3342, p.338; 4376, p.427.

¹³ Donation Agreement on file with Mint Hill Historical Society; *Mint Hill Historical Society Newsletter*, Vol.2, No. 4, Sept. 1987; *Charlotte Observer*. July 26, 1947. "Mecklenburg Neighbors" Section, p. 12.

Architectural Description

The Dr. Whitley Office Building was built about 1909 as a physician's office and examining room by Dr. Ayer Duncan Whitley (1884-1951). It is presently the only structure occupying a one hundred feet by two hundred feet gently sloping lot on Hillside Drive in Mint Hill, and is sited along a northwestern-southeastern axis, with the front facing northwest. Dr. Whitley's grandson donated the office to the Mint Hill Historical Society in 1986, and in 1987 the Society moved the building to the present site.

Originally the building was constructed about forty feet west of Dr. Whitley's house on Fairview Road in Mint Hill, which was about three-tenths of a mile east of the present site. Both the office and the house (which is no longer extant) faced south, and directly to the west of the office was a blacksmith shop on an adjacent corner property. Physical and interview evidence has revealed that the office was reconstructed to its present size in the Twenties or Thirties. ¹ Originally the building had a front section that served as a pharmacy. Entry was through recessed, glass-paneled double doors, and inside was a counter for serving customers. There were glass windows on either side of the front doors, and a lean-to porch across the width of the facade was supported by four posts. A decorative parapet false front rose above the roof line from the point where the porch roof attached to the facade, so that the whole gave the appearance of a storefront. Sometime in the Twenties or Thirties, the front section of the building was sawn off, rolled on logs to the rear of the Whitley property, and turned into a tenant house. it is no longer extant.

The resulting present building is rectangular in plan, one-story with a front-gabled roof, covered with tin, and rests on ten brick piers. It is covered with drop board siding, and has one chimney on the eastern side near the front, which has been reconstructed in stretcher bond. On the front of the office, which was newly built when it was cut in two, two eight over eight double-hung sash windows with simple surrounds are on either side of a six-panel solid wood door. A small, one-bay gable-roofed porch extends out over the front door that is supported by two simple wood posts.

The two other extant windows are in the rear of the building, and are six over six double-hung sash. One is near the rear on the northeast side, and the other on the rear near the southwest side. There is a six-panel rear exit door that is not original: it appears to have been put in where a window that matched the other rear window was located. Another door is located near the rear on the southeastern side; the opening appears original, but not the door. This would have been where Dr. Whitley entered the office from his house.

Except for the front wall, all the interior walls are covered with tongue-and-groove board. The front half of the building is a single open room, presumably a waiting room. The rear half is divided into two rooms, both of which were examining rooms; the one on the west side was also an office, and the one on the east side still has a sink and original tongue-and groove board ceiling.

When moved, the roof and some wall sections were in considerable need of repair, but restoration efforts to date have corrected the most serious problems. Much of the interior tongue-and-groove board interior is in good condition, as are the extant winders.

Notes

¹ From oral history gathered by Becky Griffin and others of the Mint Hill Historical Society.