



## ALABAMA REGISTER OF LANDMARKS & HERITAGE NOMINATION FORM

### 1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: MITCHELL/WHITLEY MILL

and/or Common Name: SAME

Preferred name for Certificate:  Historic Name or  Common Name

### 2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 7687 LEE RD 54

City: AUBURN

State: Alabama County: LEE Zip: 36830

Is the property located within the city limits?  Yes  No

Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

Township: \_\_\_\_\_ Range: \_\_\_\_\_ Section: \_\_\_\_\_ USGS Quad Map: U-16

### 3. CLASSIFICATION

Category:  Building(s)  District  Structure  Site  Object

Ownership:  Public  Private  Both

Status:  Occupied  Unoccupied  Work in progress

Accessible:  No  Yes: restricted  Yes: unrestricted

### 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

Name: MICHAEL M. ARMOR

Address: 254 DECK RD

City: GRAY COURT State: SC Zip: 29645

Telephone: 864 423-1111

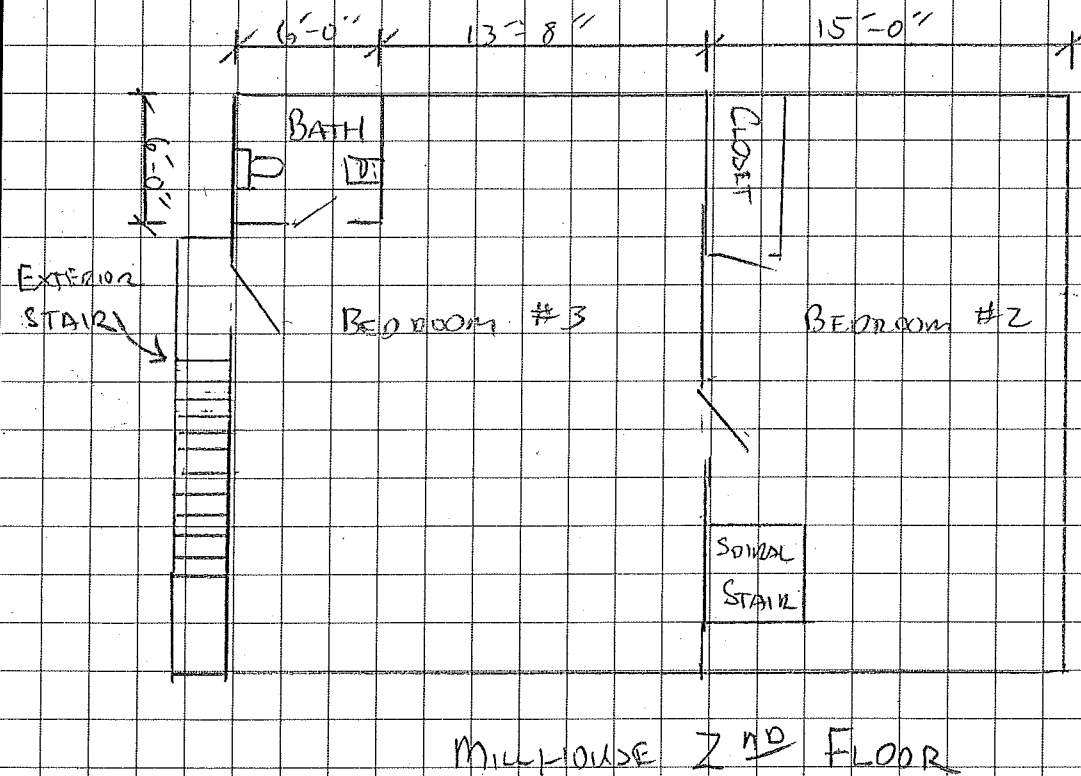
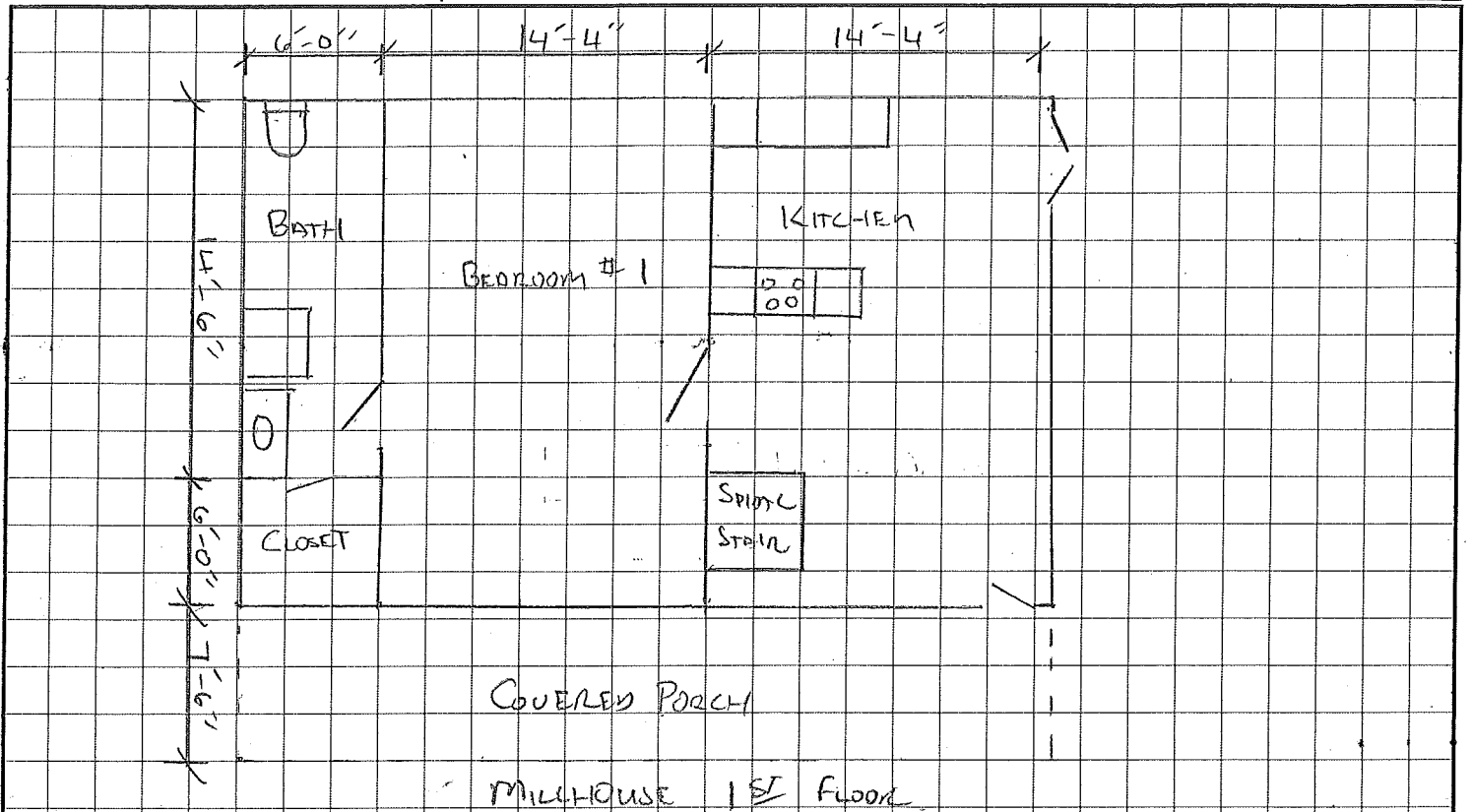
Email: MIKE.ARMOR@US.MICHELIN.COM

M.ARMOR@ATEP.GROUP.COM

### 5. FLOOR PLAN & SITE PLAN

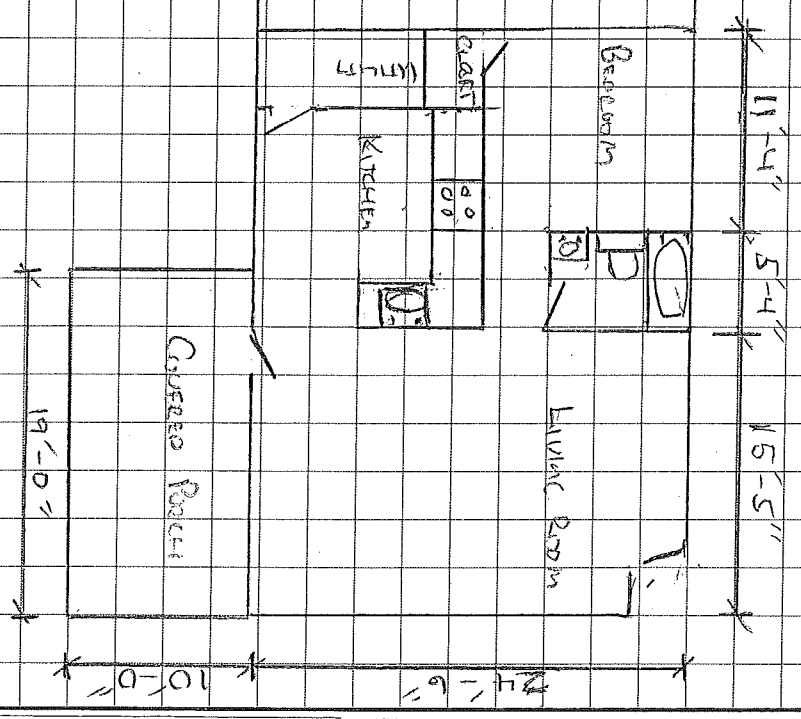
**Attach sketched floor plan. If the property includes more than one building, submit a site plan showing the locations, dates of construction, and uses of the buildings.**

# FLOOR PLAN SCALE



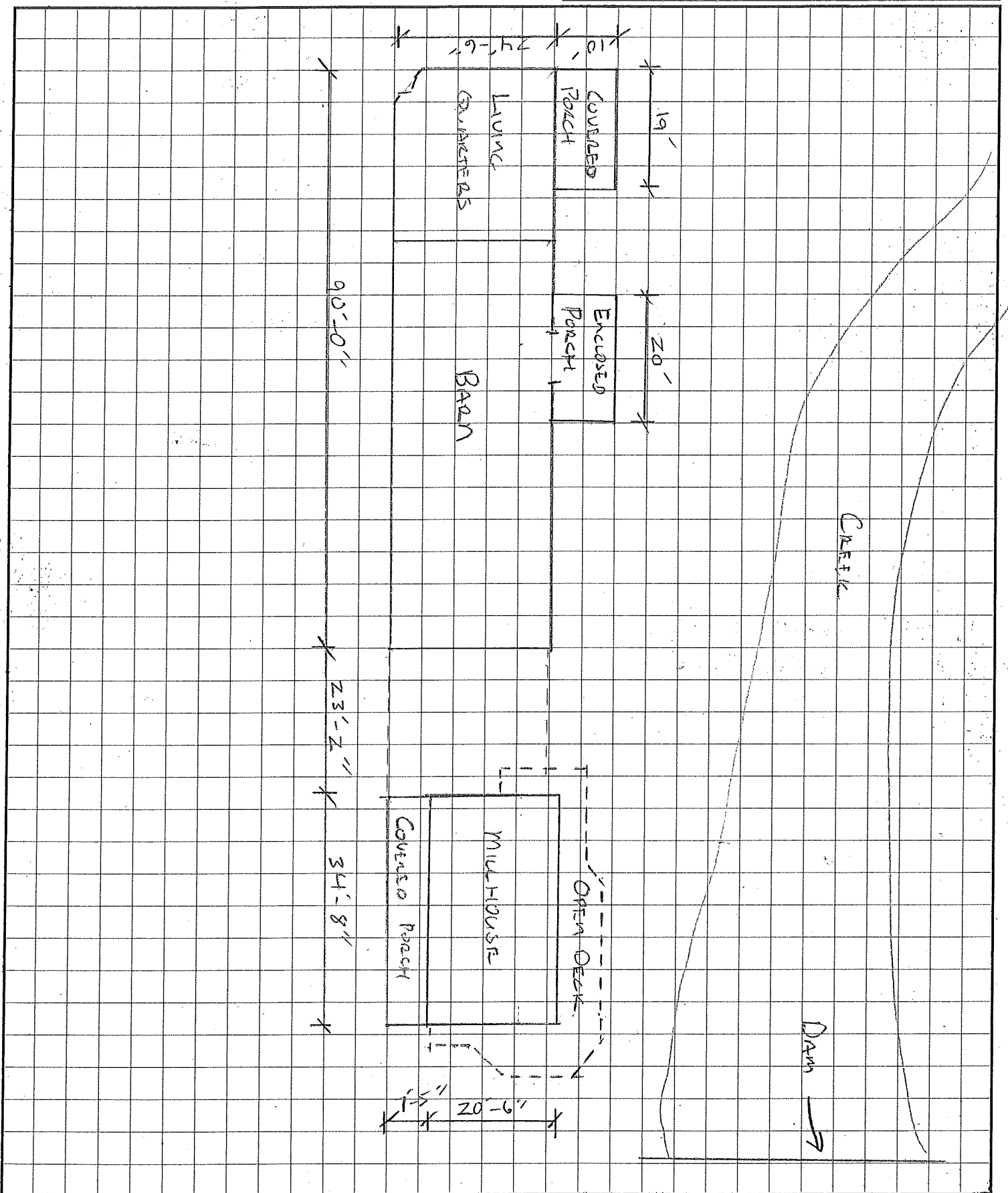
BARN LIVING QUARTERS

BARN



# SITE PLAN

SCALE



**6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION See  
Instructions for more information.**

**Construction date:** 1837 (original); 1905 (Rebuilt)      **Source:** Reference #1; photos

**Alteration date:** various      **Source:** Reference #1; photos; personal knowledge

**Architect/Builder:** James Mitchell (original 1837); Gera G. Mitchell (rebuild 1905)      **Contractor:** Unknown

**Physical condition:** Good (Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Ruinous)      **Remaining historic fabric:** Medium (High, Medium, Low)

**No. of stories:** 2

**Historic use of property:** Processing - Grist Mill

**Current use of property:** Personal residence – non farm

**Architectural style category:**      **Architectural style sub-category:** ?

**Basic typology:** Split-level?      **Basic shape:** Rectangular

**Basic floor plan:** unknown      **Historic Construction material(s):** Wood frame; heart pine siding; corrugated metal roof

**Current exterior wall material(s):** Heart pine siding      **Roof finish material(s):** Corrugated metal

**Main roof configuration:** Gable roof w/ shed roof porch      **Foundation material:** Mortared Stone

**Porch type:** attached shed front porch

**Window type and materials:** Double hung synthetic

**Describe alterations:** Based on photos, several exterior alterations to window opening size and locations have occurred over the life of the building. The core building shape and construction have remained unaltered. An exterior deck/scaffold was added around 1985. Original (circa 1930) corrugated metal roof was replaced with corrugated metal roof in 2011. The (assumed) original heart pine siding (circa 1905?) was covered with a fiber board siding when our family purchased the property in 1963. The fiber board was removed in the mid seventies and the original heart pine siding was exposed. In 2013, due to deterioration and damage, the original rough cut heart pine siding was replaced with new rough cut heart pine siding. At the same time, electrical wiring and plumbing installed in the 1950's was replaced and HVAC was added. Existing (not original) wood

frame windows were replaced with identical size synthetic windows in 2013. The foundation, floor, and wall framing are believed original construction and have not been altered other than to add wall insulation when the siding was replaced.

**Number and type of all outbuildings on the property:** Barn

**Exterior Architectural Description:**

Two story wood frame structure. Gable roof with attached shed roof porch.

**Description of Setting:** The building address is 7687 Lee Road 54, Auburn, Alabama. The entrance to the property is off Society Hill Rd. (Lee Rd 54). The building structure is situated immediately beside Chewacla Creek (a portion of the foundation is submerged in the creek). Total parcel size is approximately 60 acres of undeveloped, wooded property and includes both sides of Chewacla Creek. Downstream property is owned by the Auburn Water Works Board and includes Lake Ogletree (Auburn's primary drinking water source).

## 7. SIGNIFICANCE

Criteria (check all that apply and explain below). See Instructions for more information.

**Criterion A:** Associated with historical events and activities relating to the property that are important to the history of the community, state, or nation.

**Criterion B:** Person or group with whom the property is associated is important to the history of the community, state, or nation.

**Criterion C:** Type, period, or method of construction represents architectural features that are significant in the development of the community, state, or nation.

**Criterion D:** Property has yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in Alabama's history or prehistory (archaeological component).

### AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (check all that apply and explain below)

- |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry    | <input type="checkbox"/> religion       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic    | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation           | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific     |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> education              | <input type="checkbox"/> law                    | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> architecture           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> social history |
| <input type="checkbox"/> art                    | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> military               | <input type="checkbox"/> theater        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce    | <input type="checkbox"/> funerary art           | <input type="checkbox"/> music                  | <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> communications         | <input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian           | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government    |   |

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

For each area of significance checked above, explain why this property is important. Use additional sheets as necessary.

SEE ATTACHED

## 7. Significance

The Mitchell/Whatley mill made a significant contribution to the development of agriculture and commerce in Lee (originally Macon) county Alabama beginning with its inception around 1837 and continuing through the 1930's. In addition, one of the mill's owners (J. Milton Whatley) made a noteworthy engineering innovation by designing and installing what is believed to be the first iron water wheel built in Alabama in 1936. Whatley also introduced another innovation to the area when he installed a power sheller to shell as well as grind corn in his mill.

The early mill was established in 1837 when James Mitchell purchased 400 acres of land and constructed the original dam on Chewacla Creek. The 1837 operation consisted of a grist mill and water powered saw mill. The saw mill provided lumber for many structures in Auburn and Opelika including the Mount Olive Primitive Baptist Church built in 1853.

The Collins family (the Collins and Mitchell family intermarried) owned the mill in the 1880's. They were the owners of the mill in 1889 when the mill washed away in a flood. In 1905, Gera Mitchell (the grandson of James Mitchell, the original owner) bought the mill, built a 9 foot dam, and replaced the wooden wheel which washed away in 1889. In 1935, Gera Mitchell's grandson, J. Milton Whatley, began operating the mill under contract with his grandfather. Milton Whatley raised the dam by 5 feet (to 14 feet) and replaced the wooden wheel with an iron wheel which he designed and built. The iron wheel was put into operation in 1936. Between 1936 and 1940, J. Milton Whatley operated the mill, shelling and grinding corn for local farmers and providing a source of food for both people and animals in the surrounding area. In 1940, the mill ceased operation when Milton Whatley and his new wife moved from the area.

The mill had a series of owners between 1940 and 1963, when my father, F.M. Armor, purchased the property. F.M. Armor began restoring the mill and had just restored the iron wheel to operation when a three-day freezing rain occurred in January, 1964 and caused a portion of the 5 foot addition to the dam to give way sending a wall of water down the creek. The surge of water broke the wheel loose from its supports sending it rolling down the creek where it eventually fell on its side approximately 250 feet downstream. The wheel was later salvaged and rebuilt by Merrell Jones (a fifth generation descendant of the James Mitchell family) and is mounted on a lake located about 3 miles from the original mill.

The mill has remained in our family since 1963 and is a popular scenic landmark in Lee County having been featured in numerous paintings, photographs, and local brochures. Recently, I have made efforts to stabilize and preserve the structures and restore as much of the original design and materials as possible. An area of concern is a recent study by the Auburn Water Works Board which is considering raising the water level of Lake Ogletree (immediately downstream from the mill) to an even higher level than the current elevation of 486'. At the current elevation, water backs up on the mill property. My concern is that raising the water any higher jeopardizes the stacked stone retaining wall that supports the mill structures.

It is my hope that the Mitchell/Whatley mill will be recognized for its historical significance to the development of the area and will continue to be a scenic resource for the county.



frame windows were replaced with identical size synthetic windows in 2013. The foundation, floor, and wall framing are believed original construction and have not been altered other than to add wall insulation when the siding was replaced.

**Number and type of all outbuildings on the property:** Barn (see separate description)  
(if significant, fill out separate survey form)

**Exterior Architectural Description:**

**Description of Setting:** The building address is 7687 Lee Road 54, Auburn, Alabama. The entrance to the property is off Society Hill Rd. (Lee Rd 54). The building structure is situated immediately beside Chewacla Creek (a portion of the foundation is submerged in the creek). Total parcel size is approximately 60 acres of undeveloped, wooded property and includes both sides of Chewacla Creek. Downstream property is owned by the Auburn Water Works Board and includes Lake Ogletree (Auburn's primary drinking water source).

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Use attached sheets as necessary

SEE ATTACHED

## 9. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of nominated property: 60 ACRES

Attach a map showing the location of the property.

## 10. Person Applying for Historic Register Designation

Name: MICHAEL M. ARMOR  
Address: ZSH DECK ROAD  
City: GRAY COURT State: SC Zip: 29645  
Telephone: 864 423-1111  
Email: M.ARMOR@ATEPGRUP.COM

## 11. PHOTOGRAPHS:

Images are essential to the review process. Submit current, good quality digital images on a CD/DVD. Interior and exterior photos are required. Good quality 4" x 6" photos will be accepted, but do NOT staple or tape photographs. All images will become the property of the AHC and will not be returned.

## 12. REMINDER:

Along with this completed application, include attachments for Items 5, 9 and 11 and send them to:

Alabama Historical Commission  
Attn: Jennifer Bailey  
468 S. Perry Street  
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-0900  
334.230.2643  
[Jennifer.Bailey@preserveala.org](mailto:Jennifer.Bailey@preserveala.org)

## **8. Bibliographical References**

1. Montgomery Advertiser-Journal, February 14, 1971, "A Dream Came True" Alabama Sunday Magazine pp. 5-7, by Sam Whatley
2. Edna Ward; *Tap Roots*, volume 32, no. 2, p. 104, October 1994. Published by The Genealogical Society of East Alabama
3. Wright, John Peavy. 1969. *Glimpses Into the Past from My Grandfather's Trunk*, p. 141
4. Interview; Sam Whatley (author of Montgomery Advertiser-Journal article and son of the mill's builder and operator from 1935 – 1939); via telephone by author on August 23, 2014.