

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Charles Whitten

PERSON

Whitten, Charles F.

**Alternative Names:** Dr. Charles Whitten; Charles F. Whitten

**Life Dates:** February 2, 1922-August 14, 2008

**Place of Birth:** Wilmington, Delaware, USA

**Residence:** Detroit, Michigan

**Occupations:** Pediatrician

## Biographical Note

Pediatrician and sickle cell anemia expert Dr. Charles Francis Whitten was born on February 2, 1922 in Wilmington, Delaware to school teachers Emma Clorinda Carr Whitten and Tobias Emmanuel Whitten. He grew up on Wilmington's East Side next door to future jazz trumpeter Clifford Brown. Whitten attended Number 5 Elementary School and graduated fourth in his class from Howard High School in 1940. In 1942, he earned his B.S. degree in zoology from the University of Pennsylvania. Whitten then studied medicine at Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee and earned his M.D. degree in 1945 at age twenty-three.

After his internship at Harlem Hospital, Whitten worked as a general practitioner in Lackawanna, New York from 1946 to 1951. Whitten then served two years as a captain in the United States Medical Corps before returning to the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Medicine for a year of advanced study in pediatrics. In 1953, Whitten began a two-year residency in pediatrics at Children's Hospital in Buffalo, New York. In 1955, he moved to Detroit, Michigan for a one year fellowship to study pediatric hematology under Dr. Wolf Zeltzer. Whitten became the first and only African American to head a department in a Detroit hospital when he was selected clinical director of pediatrics at Detroit Receiving Hospital in 1956. Whitten worked as an attending pediatrician at Children's Hospital of Michigan from 1962 to 1999. He started teaching medicine as an instructor in pediatrics at Wayne State University in 1956. Whitten was named assistant professor in 1959, served as full professor of pediatrics from 1970 to 1990, and became associate dean of curricular affairs in 1976 and of special programs in 1992.

Whitten joined Dr. Charles Wright in establishing the African Medical Education Fund in 1960. In 1969, Whitten instituted Wayne State University's Post Baccalaureate

Enrichment Program to better prepare black students for medical school. In 1971, Whitten with Dorothy Boswell spearheaded the National Association for Sickle Cell Disease, now the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America. He also formed the Sickle Cell Detection and Information Center. Whitten became program director for the Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center at Wayne State University in 1973. In 2002, Whitten was named Michiganiaan of the Year, and in 2004, was named distinguished professor of pediatrics, emeritus at Wayne State University.

Whitten passed away on August 14, 2008 at the age of 86. He is survived by his wife, Eloise Culmer Whitten, an expert in family and social policy who has served on many boards of directors, including Planned Parenthood (local, national, and international) and First Independent Bank. Together, they supported a number of worthy causes, including a clinic in Haiti.

Whitten was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 8, 2007.

## Related Entries

**University of Pennsylvania** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Bachelor's**

**Meharry Medical College** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**M.D.**

**Howard High School of Technology** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**No. 5 School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Wayne State University School of Medicine** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Professor, Dean**

**Detroit Receiving Hospital** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Chief of Pediatrics**

**General Practice** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Physician**

[EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Sickle Cell Disease Association of America** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Founder**

**Omega Psi Phi Fraternity** [MEMBER**Of**]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**