

1121-092-GSM-gau (USMARC)

City of Savannah Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia [GSG (OCLC/LYRASIS)]

Record Series #: 1121-092

Name: Irene Mound collection

Dates: 1935-1998

Extent/Size: 1 document case, 1 oversized box (0.75 cubic feet)

Language: English

Irene Mound History:

The Irene Mound site is a historical and archaeological landmark associated with the Mississippian culture that was primarily occupied between 1150 and 1300 AD, though evidence exists that it was occupied as late as 1600 AD. It was named after a small missionary school established at the location by the Moravians in 1736. The site is located on the bluff of the Savannah River, approximately five miles northwest of downtown Savannah, Georgia. As of 2025, the site is within the property of the Georgia Ports Authority and has been completely destroyed.

The mound itself included a temple mound, burial mound, and a square building referred to as the Mortuary. The Irene Mound's significance lied in its use for both ceremonial and mortuary purposes. The Irene site is believed to be a Chiefly Compound, typically occupied only by a chief, his wives, and their children. The permanent resident population of the compound may have only included around thirty to forty individuals. In addition to serving as the chief's residence, the compound likely functioned as a community hub for families from the surrounding area, with a rotunda area that facilitated community meetings that also acted as a venue for social gatherings and celebrations for the broader population. Excavations at the site revealed a variety of artifacts, including pottery, tools, food debris, shells, and human remains, which contributed to a better understanding of the social structure, rituals, and daily life of the people who lived there.

The Irene Mound site was almost completely excavated between 1937 and 1940 as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) archaeological initiative. The team that prepared and excavated the site was remarkable because it was made up of at least forty-seven African American women, working alongside trained archaeologists like Preston Holder, Joseph Caldwell, and Vladimir Fewkes. In 1997, Armstrong Atlantic University graduate student Gail Whalen investigated the African American women employed at the Irene site, uncovering their identities and conducting oral history interviews to bring to light their historic contributions, which she published in her 1998 *Georgia Historical Society Quarterly* essay *Elusive Women, The WPA Excavation of Irene Mound*. Notable among these women were Gussie White, a trained educator and clerical worker; Annie Scott Grant, a minister's wife; and Mattie Smith, Hattie Coleman, and Eliabeth Heyward, who took on the job to supplement their household income during the Great Depression.

Dolores B. Floyd self-published a pamphlet titled *Yamacraw and the Indian Mound Irene* in 1936 which documented the Moravian building and Moravian interactions with local Native Americans at the site. The pamphlet was praised by the archaeological community and Dolores became a highly regarded ambassador for the site and project.

Scope & Content:

The Irene Mound collection includes published reports, photocopies of records related to Dolores and Marmaduke Floyd, photographic slides of the excavation of Irene Mound, a hand-drawn map of the site by Vladimir Fewkes and Joseph Caldwell, and two scrapbooks of original materials related to the project. Of particular interest is an annotated scrapbook containing original photographs and clippings from the site dating 1935-1937. A second scrapbook contains original clippings accumulated by Dolores Floyd related to the project dating 1937-1939.

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System of Arrangement & Ordering:

The Irene Mound collection is arranged by size then alphabetically by subject.

Conditions Governing Access:

None

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use:

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Related Collections:

Coastal Georgia Archaeology Society Collection on the Irene Mound (GHS 1621), Georgia Historical Society

Access Points:

African American Women
Archaeology
Caldwell, Joseph
Coleman, Hattie
Excavations (Archaeology)
Fewkes, Vladamir
Floyd, Dolores
Floyd, Marmaduke
Georgia – Savannah
Grant, Amy Scott

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Heyward, Elizabeth

Mississippian culture

Prehistoric Peoples

Smith, Mattie

United States – Works Progress Administrations

White, Gussie

Women-employment

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Processed by:

K. Zacovic, January 2025.

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Inventory:

Box 1121-092-0001

- Folder 1 Clipping, *The Women of Irene* by Melissa Pfizer, 1998. From *Creative Loafing*.
- Folder 2 *Elusive Women: The WPA Excavation of Irene Mound* by Gail Whalen, 1997.
[final version]
- Folder 3 *Elusive Women: The WPA Excavation of Irene Mound* by Gail Whalen, 1997.
[with reproduction photographs]
- Folder 4 Photographic slides showing women working at the Irene site. Labeled “From the City of Savannah Public Information Office” but may be reproductions of Marmaduke Floyd’s site photographs, no date.
- Folder 5 Reference materials related Dolores and Marmaduke Floyd, 1936-1938 (1 of 2). Includes photocopied correspondence, project status reports, and field notes.*
- Folder 6 Reference materials related Dolores and Marmaduke Floyd, 1937-1938 (2 of 2), Includes photocopied correspondence, status updates, a photocopy of *New Yamacraw and the Indian Mound* report, and thank you letters from institutions who received a copy of the report.*
- Folder 7 Scrapbook, annotated 1935-1937 [possibly assembled by Marmaduke or Dolores Floyd]. Contains original photographs with identifications, site plans, schematics, handwritten notes, and reports.
- Folder 8 *W.P.A. Excavations at Irene Mound (1)* by Vladimir J. Fewkes, May 4, 1938
[mimeograph copy]

Box 1121-092-0002

- Folder 1 Drawing of the Irene site made by Vladimir J. Fewkes and Joseph Caldwell, May 4, 1938.
- Folder 2 Scrapbook of 173 clippings, 1937-1939, covering the Irene Mound excavations. Compiled by Dolores Floyd.

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