

MADISON LEWIS WOODLANDS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT



Chapter II: Madison Lewis Woodlands Landscape History

A. INTRODUCTION TO LANDSCAPE HISTORY

The Madison Lewis Woodlands is located in a geographic area known as Warwick Valley, defined by the rolling peaks and valleys of the Appalachian Mountains. The woodlands landscape reflects this broader landscape character, with the entrance situated in a valley framed by two adjacent hillsides. The acreage of the public preserve extends to the east, covering uphill slopes in that direction.

The development and improvement of the Madison Lewis Woodlands, from the initial purchase of the property by Thomas Powell Fowler in 1885, Fowler family improvements and occupancy through 1951, and the evolution of the Village-owned landscape of today is presented in this chapter. The discussion is organized by historical periods, using the ownership chronology of the landscape and supporting images to describe the character-defining features, as outlined in the methodology section of Chapter I. The first section focuses on the years that the area was part of the Fowler estate, Belair, from 1885 to 1951. This property focus is enlarged to include contextual information on the transformation of the Village of Warwick from a Native American settlement to a popular summer destination for wealthy families. The years from 1952-2003 after the Fowler ownership, are outlined with the transfer of the 14-acre parcel to Mr. Madison Lewis. The Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. becomes the property steward in July 1966 and used the landscape as an educational resource for the Village and the region through 2003. The final section addresses the most recent ownership by the Village of Warwick from 2004 to 2008. Together, the illustrated chronology provides an understanding of the continued evolution of the landscape, which sets the foundation for understanding existing conditions. The landscape evolution, from origins through the present day, is presented in this chapter.

B. BELAIR, ESTATE OF MR. & MRS. THOMAS P. FOWLER: BEGINNINGS TO 1951

Prior to the establishment of Belair, Warwick was inhabited by a small population of less than 1,000 Native Americans. The Native American tribes hunted in existing forests and fished in meandering streams, but also raised crops, including corn, beans, squash, and other vegetables. Fruit orchards surrounded the settlements and defined a scenic, agricultural landscape character. By the early 18th century, European settlers began to populate the Warwick area. Between the years 1730 and 1765,

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Warwick experienced a rapid increase in white, European-descended settlers. The settlers immediately began clearing vast forested lands for agricultural fields and pastures.¹

Growth of Warwick continued and by 1810, the Village of Warwick was one of a few population centers within the Town of Warwick. The village included 30 houses and 2 churches. In 1862, the Warwick Valley Railroad opened, transforming the Village of Warwick into the political, commercial, industrial, and financial center of the town. A rapid population growth ensued. As the population increased, improvements to the village were undertaken. In the late 19th century, Village president, Clinton Wheeler Wisner, improved Warwick with street tree plantings, sidewalk construction, and flower boxes laid out along the new sidewalks. Following these improvements, wealthy families from New York City began to establish vacation estates in the village.²

Thomas P. Fowler, President of the New York, Ontario and Western Railroad, was among those who chose the Village of Warwick as a summer retreat from New York City. Fowler purchased a house on Maple Avenue (formerly Main Street) for use in the summer. The Fowler family enlarged and improved the estate grounds primarily between 1885 and 1910. The property was developed into garden spaces, woodlands, and an entry drive. The woodlands were developed as an arboretum, augmenting the original trees by transplanting trees from nearby lands and adding trees from foreign countries.³ Scenic carriage paths and walks traversed the sloping grounds and rustic wooden arbors and benches enriched the naturalistic character. Historic views along these paths depict dappled light and shade and tended picturesque woods. The path system and rustic structures enhanced access to and enjoyment of the estate landscape.

The Madison Lewis Woodlands were originally part of the Belair estate, one of several estates established in the Village of Warwick in the 19th century. The 38-acre estate included a large mansion, Italian Garden, vegetable garden, orchard, playhouse and outdoor play fields, a natural stream, several rustic bridges and gazebos, and approximately 14 acres of woodlands. While the woodlands were a natural feature found throughout the Village of Warwick, the Fowler family developed them as a part of the estate grounds. These managed woodlands added an important dimension to the Belair landscape as a scenic passage of naturalistic, informal landscape that contributed to the overall landscape character of the estate. In this country estate landscape, the variety of spaces defined the landscape types by their unique character. The relationships among the canopy of predominantly deciduous trees, woodland shrubs and wildflowers, the curving paths, and the stream characterized the woodlands. The woodlands provided a contrast to the broad lawns, graceful drives, formal gardens, fountain pool and pond, and buildings of the estate. Overall, the naturalistic woodland landscape character contrasted the more formal character of the estate landscape.

In this estate period, the woodlands were shaped as part of the broader landscape of Belair. The most significant historic development occurred during this era as the gardens, woodlands, and entry drive were managed and enhanced. The following landscape chronology and supporting historical images present details of the landscape character of the Fowler property as it was laid out and improved during the period.

1863 Circa. A large, house is constructed near the center of the Village of Warwick. The home, which would eventually be purchased by Thomas P. Fowler, is constructed

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with a wide wrap-around porch. The driveway runs parallel to the public street, today known as Maple Avenue, with two entry points connecting to the street.⁴

- 1875 The land that will eventually become known as Belair, the future Fowler estate, remains largely unimproved. The house has been constructed on Maple Avenue and a semi-circular driveway curves along the west façade. An 1875 atlas identifies 'Miss Burt' as the property owner.⁵ (See Figure II.1.)
- 1885 Thomas P. Fowler purchases the house on Maple Avenue in the Village of Warwick. The house is located near the village center and across the street from Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin F. Dunning, the parents of Fowler's wife. The family uses the house and grounds, known as Belair, each summer from May through September. In total, the estate grounds encompass 38 acres.⁶
- 1880s The Fowler family plants trees on their property to mark the birth of each of their children.⁷
- 1890s Circa. Vegetation found along the stream includes forget-me-nots, dog-tooth violets, blue flag iris, and watercress, which grow in the stream bed.⁸
- 1890s Circa. The Fowler estate includes approximately 14 acres of woodlands. The main estate entrance is a semi-circular drive on Maple Avenue. Stone piers stand alongside the entry drive and a gate restricts access onto the grounds. (See Figures II.2 and II.3.) A carriage path and walking trails provide scenic routes through the woodlands and from the estate on Maple Avenue to a secondary entrance on Colonial Avenue (formerly known as East Main Street).
- 1890s A stable and carriage house are located north of the Fowler mansion. A curving carriage drive travels downslope, past the stable and carriage house and toward the gardens and woodland drive. A row of evergreen trees is planted along the edge of the drive. A large vegetable garden is planted outside the woodlands, to the side of the carriage path, on the hillside behind the carriage house.⁹ (See Figures II.4 and II.5.)
- 1890s Circa. The woodlands include both natural vegetation, such as deciduous and evergreen trees and flowering plants such as anemones and hepatica. Additional plant materials are purposefully selected and planted within the natural setting. Plantings include ferns and rhododendrons, among other plants.¹⁰ A bank of peonies is also planted within the woodland setting.¹¹
- 1890s In order to maintain the formal garden, planting beds, and woodland plantings, a network of underground pipes are laid that connect with a well located east of the stream.¹²
- 1890s Circa. A number of simple, rustic style landscape features are constructed with cedar posts. At least two gazebos or 'summer houses' are located on the Belair estate grounds. One is at the west edge of the woodlands and a second is located in a knoll

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within a woodland clearing, overlooking the stream.¹³ (See Figures II.6 and II.7.) The gazebo located at the west woodland edge and overlooking the constructed pond, shelters a carved figurehead of Fowler's Great Great Grandfather, Thomas Powell, which was carved in 1857 by Charles J. Dodge, a well-known wood carver.¹⁴ The figurehead was originally on the Thomas Powell steamship, which transported passengers between Albany and New York City.¹⁵ Other rustic features include arbors, benches, bridges, and fencing. (See Figures II.8 and II.9.)

- 1890s-1910s Circa. The wealthy Fowler family travels abroad on numerous trips and brings back young exotic trees to plant in the estate woodlands. The estate caretaker, Clarence Wilson, travels throughout the region seeking out native plants from woodlots in the cascade area. Upon receiving permission from property owners, Wilson transplants the trees to Belair.¹⁶
- 1900 Circa. The Fowler estate, Belair, consists of 38 acres of sloping lawns, an orchard, arbors covered with grape vines, carriage and foot paths, and a formal Italian Garden. (See Figures II.10, II.11, and II.12.) A number of simple wooden bridges provide access across a narrow stream that traverses the property, separating the formal garden space from the woodlands.¹⁷ (See Figures II.13 and II.14.) One bridge that is wide enough to accommodate a carriage is located within the woodlands and crosses a dry depression. (See Figure II.15)
- 1900 Circa. A decorative wooden gate is constructed, exact date unknown, which extends over the entry drive from Colonial Avenue. Deciduous trees of varying sizes line the drive with the woodlands beyond. (See Figures II.16 and II.17.)
- 1900s Circa. The Italian Garden includes a central circular fountain that is sunken into the ground plane. Modest plantings extend east and west of the fountain. At the far end of the garden is a curved, white marble bench with a bust of Mephistopheles, which is a Greek name for the devil, and a pedestal in front. A second pedestal with a sundial is located on the opposite side of the garden near a vine-covered pergola. The pergola is constructed with simple, fluted Doric columns. A stone bench provides a pleasant resting spot under the shady roof. Planting beds line the north and south edges of the garden with an additional evergreen hedge to the north. At least one young tree is planted in the formal garden space, near the pergola. A rose-covered arbor marks the entry into the garden space, at its southwest corner.¹⁸ (See Figures II.18, II.19, II.20, and II.21.)
- 1900s-1910s Circa. The Fowler family spends time during the summer on the Belair house porch. Plantings surround the porch and vines climb the exterior, providing shade and framing views out to the estate grounds.¹⁹ (See Figures II.22 and II.23.)
- 1901 Circa. A new carriage house is constructed at Belair north of the main house. It includes stalls for horses as well as space for cows, feed, and hay. Storage space for wagons and carriages is also provided. A second-floor apartment provides a living space for the estate caretaker and his family.²⁰ (See Figure II.24.) Shortly after the

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introduction of the motor car, the Fowler's build a house for the caretaker and the chauffeur and his family move into the apartment above the carriage house.

- 1901 Circa. A building is constructed across the stream to provide recreation for the large family. It is sited on open lawn across the stream from the main house at the foot of the sloping woodlands and is constructed of materials salvaged from the original barn and carriage house, which had been recently removed. The two-story building houses a regulation length bowling alley, a billiard room, and a library. A deck provides seating area for watching tennis on the grass court. Another two-story, wood-frame playhouse is built for the children on the dam, or west, side of the pond. It had a porch, two rooms downstairs with a small version of an iron cook stove, and two tiny upstairs rooms.²¹
- 1901 Circa. A well with a stone base and wood cover is located at the north end of the bowling alley. A rustic wooden tête-à-tête chair is located near the well, although the family likely moved it throughout the estate grounds. Four deciduous trees are planted in a row along the front of the building.²² (See Figure II.25.)
- 1901 Circa. Fowler constructs a pond on the Belair grounds. Located at the foot of a sloping lawn southeast of the main home, it is across the stream from the children's playhouse. Deciduous trees are planted along the east pond edge. At least one source identifies these as willow trees.²³ A number of young evergreen trees are planted along the west edge and simple wooden benches are placed under the eastern tree canopy. A wooden dock allows the family to place small boats in the pond.²⁴ (See Figures II.26 and II.27.) Neighborhood children ice skate on the pond during the cold winter months.²⁵
- 1901 Circa. A stone icehouse is located on the Belair estate grounds, north of the pond.²⁶
- 1902 The Fowler estate improvements present at this time include the main house, formal garden, constructed pond, and carriage and pedestrian paths through the woodlands. Between the house and pond, an orchard is laid out on the gently sloping hill. A vine-covered arbor shades a roadway that leads to the pond.²⁷ (See Figure II.28.)
- 1903 Many of the natural woodlands that once blanketed the town of Warwick have been cleared. The remaining woodlands are primarily farmers' woodlots.²⁸ The 14-acre woodlands included in the Belair estate remain intact.
- 1903 The Fowler estate, Belair, is located toward the north edge of the Village of Warwick. Several other large estates are also located on Maple Avenue, opposite Belair. The Fowler estate includes the mansion, a carriage house and barn, north of the main house, an ice house north of a constructed pond, and a playhouse located on the opposite side of a natural stream. A small manmade canal may direct water from the stream to the constructed pond and dam. Other structures include rustic summer houses or gazebos. A bridge provides pedestrian and carriage crossing over the stream. A network of drives and pathways traverse the site, providing access from both Maple

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and Colonial Avenues and creating a scenic route through the woodlands.²⁹ (See Figures II.29, II.30, and II.31.)

- 1910 As the Fowler family grows, additions are made to the house. A wing is constructed on the north side of the Fowler house to accommodate the growing number of occupants. In total Fowler and his wife have nine children and a staff of over eight. The house is expanded into a 44-room mansion.³⁰
- 1910s-1930s Circa. Approximately 2 acres of land are cultivated for a vegetable garden near the Colonial Avenue entrance to Belair.³¹
- 1915 Thomas P. Fowler dies.³²
- 1915 Circa. Two of the Fowler sons, Ludlow and Powell, become close friends with F. Scott Fitzgerald when Ludlow and Fitzgerald meet at Princeton. Fitzgerald visits Belair numerous times. At one time, Fitzgerald is dropped off on the front lawn of the mansion by an airplane.³³
- 1920s Circa. Features are added to the constructed pond, including a sculpture of a swan that floats on the water and a rusticated rock fountain. (See Figures II.32 and II.33.)
- 1930s The Fowler family returns to Belair during the summers following Thomas P. Fowler's death. Improvements to the grounds continue and the estate caretaker transplants vegetation such as ferns and rhododendrons.³⁴ Peonies may also be planted along the edge of the carriage drive that curves through the woodlands.³⁵
- 1930s Circa. Alterations are made to existing landscape features. By the 1930s, the orchard planted on the sloping lawn behind the main house is removed, leaving an open hillside.³⁶
- 1939 Maintenance of the Belair estate grounds decreases. This is the last year the garden paths are trimmed and the white spruce hedge at the north and west edge of the Italian Garden is pruned.³⁷
- 1940 Circa. The playhouse located east of the stream is demolished.³⁸
- 1945 Circa. Following the death of Thomas P. Fowler, the Fowler family continues to use Belair as a summer house until World War II.³⁹ In spite of the continued use, the family did not spend as much time at the house each year, arriving later into the season and leaving earlier. Given the decrease in use of the estate and the cost to maintain such grounds, Belair begins to decline.⁴⁰

During the first historical period, the Madison Lewis Woodlands were improved as part of Belair, the 38-acre estate owned by Thomas P. Fowler. Several paths provided routes for carriages and pedestrians, traversing the shady understory of the sloping woodlands. Simple, wooden features were placed throughout the landscape, including bridges across the stream, gazebos, arbors, and benches.

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The rustic style of these elements complimented the woodland character, providing an intriguing contrast to the formal Italian Garden. (See Figure II.34.) The Fowler family increased the diversity of the natural woodland by transplanting trees discovered during family trips overseas. The woodland understory was also enhanced with plantings of fern and rhododendron.

Following the death of Thomas P. Fowler, family use of the estate gradually decreased. The decrease in use had a direct impact on the condition of the landscape including the gardens and woodlands. It is likely that following Fowler's death and the Depression, the family had limited financial capabilities to maintain the estate and its impressive but labor intensive grounds and Belair declined. While documentation on the condition of the property in the late 1940s is limited, it is possible that undesirable, invasive species began to self-seed into the woodland edges and openings. It is also probable that these years marked the deterioration of the distinctive rustic landscape elements constructed of cedar posts. The period ends with the estate landscape in decline.

C. MADISON LEWIS ERA: 1952 TO 1966

In the 1950s the woodlands were one naturalistic, scenic element in a declining estate landscape. The gardens and the Belair mansion were also in decline. While several estates, including Belair, lent a spacious, tended character to large sections of the Village of Warwick, by the early 1950s this era was over. The Warwick area became the object of extensive, suburban residential development. Historic estate properties including the former 38-acre Belair estate were replaced with suburban residential developments.⁴¹ Much of the original estate grounds were altered to accommodate the new neighborhood, Robin Brae Estates, but the garden area and woodlands were set aside as a public landscape. In 1952, ownership of the property was transferred from the Fowler family to Mr. Madison Lewis, who retained the parcel until 1966.

- 1952 September 3. Katharine F. Milbank, presumably a property heir or legally responsible member of the Fowler family, conveys Belair the Fowler estate, to Robin Brae Estates, Inc.⁴²
- 1952 In response to rising fuel costs and high maintenance costs, the mansion is demolished. The remaining members of the Fowler family move to a Colonial Avenue property that was once part of the original 38-acre Belair estate. This property is later known as New Belair.⁴³
- 1952 A corporation, Robin Brae Estates, Inc., forms to manage the future development of the property. Madison H. and Elizabeth Sanford Lewis, neighbors and family friends, are chosen as principal stockholders. Katharine Milbank and Ludlow S. Fowler are also involved in the corporation.⁴⁴
- 1952 June. Plans are developed to transform the Belair estate and surrounding land into the Robin Brae subdivision. One plan focuses on the Belair estate, showing the remaining buildings and circulation features, including the main house, carriage house and barn, entry drive, and carriage path that curves downhill toward the

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garden, pond, and stream. This initial plan proposed to subdivide and develop the woodlands beyond the stream as residential lots. (See Figure II.35.)

- 1950-1960s Following the demolition of the Fowler home, the Robin Brae subdivision is constructed, dividing the former estate into several properties.⁴⁵ The carriage house and barn are retained and eventually converted into a single family home. The historic vegetable garden area is included as the backyard of one lot and is converted to mown turf. The ice house and constructed pond and canal remain intact and a post and wire fence is constructed to restrict access to the pond, which is located in a private yard.
- 1966 May 16. Robin Brae Estates, Inc. conveys the approximately 14-acre parcel, formerly part of Belair, to Madison H. Lewis.⁴⁶ Lewis is a prominent Warwick resident who, together with his wife Elizabeth Sanford Lewis and his parents, purchases a number of historical sites in the Village and donates them for public use.⁴⁷
- 1966 May 22. A “Plan of Lands of Robin Brae Estates Inc.’ is completed. It includes little information of existing landscape features aside from measurement points and property owner names used in determining the 14-acre property conveyed to Lewis on May 16. Presumably the survey is completed in anticipation of Lewis transferring ownership of the remaining parcel of Belair.

D. GARDEN CLUB ERA: 1966 TO 2003

Initially saved from development by Madison H. and Elizabeth Sanford Lewis, ownership of the property was transferred to the Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. The Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties stewarded the property, although details of improvements or alterations carried out in the landscape are limited. It is likely that the rustic landscape features found in the garden and woodlands, including the gazebos, arbors, and benches, deteriorated and were removed during the early years of this period. Throughout this era, the Madison Lewis Woodlands transitioned from a portion of a private estate into a public landscape set aside for passive recreational and educational use. The public park landscape encompassed the original Belair Italian Garden and the augmented woodlands and carriage paths.

- 1966 July 25. Madison H. Lewis sells the approximate 14-acre parcel that was formerly part of the Fowler estate to the Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. for ten dollars (\$10.00). This is the same property that Robin Brae Estates, Inc. conveyed to Madison H. Lewis on May 16 of that same year. Included in the deed is the statement that the Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. and its successors will hold and maintain the garden space and woodlands “solely as a woodland preserve and wildlife sanctuary.”⁴⁸ The remnant piece of Belair is named Madison Lewis Woodlands, in honor of Lewis.
- 1966-2003 The Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. stewards the garden and woodlands of Madison Lewis Woodlands. While much of the vegetation remains

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from the Fowler period, the Garden Club plants additional vegetation. Plants evident in the woodlands include: skunk cabbage, dog-tooth violet, bloodroot, rue anemone, wild lily of the valley, bellwort, wakerobin, wild geranium, columbine, bedstraw, silverbell, forget-me-not, bluebells, yellow violet, Solomon's seal, false Solomon's seal, Venus' looking glass, speedwell, rattlesnake plantain, habernaria, turtlehead, virgin's bower, lousewort, periwinkle, rocket day lily, daffodil, hosta, clematis, and watercress. Fern species present in the woodlands include Christmas, sensitive, interrupted, and hayscented. Poison ivy also grows in the woodlands.⁴⁹

- 1970s The Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. stewards the property with the overall objective of creating an outdoor classroom focusing on studying plants and wildlife. Study guides are developed outlining specific study topics for various grade levels.⁵⁰
- 1970s Circa. A home is constructed on the estate grounds on Colonial Avenue, near the secondary entrance of Belair. A dispute arises regarding the property line between the Fowler estate and the new home. As a result, Harold Wilson, nephew of Belair caretaker, Clarence Wilson, installs a split rail fence along the property line. A few rails may remain evident today.⁵¹
- 1980s The Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. produces the "Madison Lewis Woodlands Trail Guide" that outlines the trails through the woodlands and the locations of specific plant materials that grow along the trail. It also includes a checklist of trees, shrubs, ferns, wildflowers, and ground covers found in the woodlands.⁵² (See Figure II.36.)
- 1980s Mrs. Philip Gordon, chair of the preserve committee, and a Boy Scout troop, clear the overgrown tangle of plants from the formal garden to make a walking path to the brook.⁵³
- 1998 Robert C. Burns and several boy scouts improve the walking trails throughout the woodlands as part of an Eagle Scout service project, Boy Scout Troop 38.⁵⁴ While the exact work performed by the scouts is unclear, it appears that at least one new trail was laid out, which traverses the woodland at a considerably steeper angle than the historic carriage paths.
- 2001 An updated trail guide and map is prepared for the Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. by Roger and Susan Metzger.⁵⁵ The printed guide is available at the trailhead and contains a brief history of the woodlands and the former gardens as part of the Belair estate as well as information on the types of plants that grow in the woodlands. As part of the updated guide, yellow markers are painted on trees, marking the trail through the woodlands.
- 2003 The Warwick Heritage Tree Project performs restoration work in the woodlands as part of the Warwick-in-Bloom annual program. The precise work undertaken is unknown.⁵⁶

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- 2003 December 22. In anticipation of the Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. transferring ownership of the property to the Village of Warwick, Alpine Environmental Consultants in Montgomery, New York completes a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment of the site. The purpose of the assessment is to identify potential environmental liabilities, such as the presence of hazardous substances. The assessment process includes interviews with the property manager and local officials knowledgeable about the site, review of regulatory and historical information, and site reconnaissance. The assessment concludes that no hazardous substances were detected on site.⁵⁷

In spite of the limited information available for the Garden Club era, certain changes in the landscape can be assumed. Given the age of the woodlands, it is likely that many of the regeneration of some species and decline of aged plantings and native trees began to occur naturally. For example, present today are several offspring of the grand yellowwood on the yellowwood hillside and young sugar maple that regenerated during this time period. Additionally, because the garden and woodlands were no longer maintained as part of an estate, invasive species likely spread in specific areas of the understory. The Garden Club added new vegetation to the site, although the types of plants and locations of new plantings remain unknown. The Garden Club stewardship focused on the exploration and nature education using the property as an educational site for school and organization tours. They helped convert the 14-acre parcel into a valued public space for village residents. However, after nearly 40 years of ownership, the Garden Club could no longer maintain the property and began to explore conveyance to the Village of Warwick.

E. VILLAGE WOODLANDS PRESERVATION: 2004 TO 2008

As use of the landscape shifted from an estate arboretum to a public recreation site, the approach to management of the garden space and woodlands and associated landscape features shifted. Individual trees began to decline and invasive species spread, impacting the character and quality of the landscape. At the start of this period, the Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. became aware that the organization did not have the resources to continue to maintain the 14-acre Madison Lewis Woodlands. The Garden Club could also no longer carry the liability of owning a public recreation site.

- 2004 January 12. The Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. conveys the Madison Lewis Woodlands to the Village of Warwick for one dollar (\$1.00). The property encompasses approximately 14 acres. The deed notes that the sale is subject to a Declaration of Restrictive Covenants.⁵⁸
- 2004 January 12. The Declaration of Restrictive Covenants emphasizes that the Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. conveyed the Madison Lewis Woodlands to the Village of Warwick specifically for use as a “woodland preserve and native plant and wildlife sanctuary” for the enjoyment of the general public and that it shall be forever maintained as such. Restrictions defined for future alterations limit improvement projects to trails, benches, interpretive signs, and an unpaved parking

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area for no more than five vehicles. The area is to be used for passive recreation. Construction of roads, lights, play fields, tennis courts and swimming pools is prohibited.⁵⁹

- 2004 January 12. A Management Plan for the Madison Lewis Woodlands is prepared that notes the restrictions set forth in the Declaration. Additionally, it outlines allowed uses, to include biking, walking, cross-country skiing, snow-shoeing, nature study, environmental and outdoor education, and picnicking. Village maintenance of the park includes litter removal and trail clearing, including debris and fallen trees and limbs. The Village is further required to install and maintain an entrance sign noting the name of the property and the donation by the Garden Club. The Village is also required to maintain the wooden bridge that crosses the stream, which was rebuilt after the Fowler period.⁶⁰
- 2005 Remnants mark the presence of the historic 38-acre Belair estate. The historic features present include two cut stone piers marking the south end of the former driveway entrance on Maple Avenue and four round rock piers marking the former estate entrance on Colonial Avenue.⁶¹ Historic Fowler-era trees include the tree allée along the former drive at Colonial Avenue, the large yellowwood, sugar maple row, formerly pruned spruce hedge, and large yews. Stone walks, drives, woodland trails, gazebo foundations, and overall topography also remain from the Fowler era. Other remnants include the constructed pond and canal, which are located in the rear yard of a private residence; the carriage house and barn, which have been renovated to accommodate single-family housing; and the icehouse. Remnants within the 14-acre Village-owned parcel include the well, sunken pool in the former Italian Garden, woodland trails, stone bridge abutments, and a portion of a former stone stairway. The underground piping installed during the Fowler period remains as well, with portions visible in the woodlands.
- 2005 May 1. Village organizations Warwick-in-Bloom and the Warwick Conservancy sponsor the first Land Awareness Day. Event programs focus on the history of the Madison Lewis Woodlands as part of the former Belair estate and its continued use as a public park.⁶²
- 2007 The Village of Warwick seeks to understand the history and increase access and use of the preserve by submitting a grant proposal to the Preservation League of New York State to study the Madison Lewis Woodlands.
- 2007 The Village receives a Preserve New York Grant from the Preservation League of New York State as a source of partial funding for the Madison Lewis Woodlands Cultural Landscape Report and sets aside Village funds as well. Heritage Landscapes, Preservation Landscape Architects & Planners, is commissioned to prepare this cultural landscape report, which serves as a guiding document for the preservation, management and interpretation of the Village-owned landscape.⁶³

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2008 Heritage Landscapes studies the existing conditions and historical Fowler documents and images to find considerable intact remnants of the former Fowler estate. Remaining features today include topography, general woodland composition, , the large yellowwood, sugar maple row, formerly pruned spruce hedge, large taxus, sunken pool basin, stone walks, stone steps, drives, portion of cobblestone gutter, woodland trails, and gazebo foundations. The constructed pond, canal, carriage house and barn, two stone piers on Maple Avenue, and tree allée and four round stone piers along the former drive at Colonial Avenue also remain, but are located on privately owned property.

During this recent period, limited physical changes were undertaken at the Madison Lewis Woodlands. The site of the Belair playhouse, tennis court lawn, and well east of the stream was included in a conservation easement during this period. Although not included within the 14 acres owned by the Village, visually, this area appears as part of the overall woodland landscape. Today, the Madison Lewis Woodlands is a public park open to all Village residents, but it is primarily used by members of the surrounding neighborhood. Located within a private residential development, the preserve has limited visual access from public streets. The Village has sponsored tours of the park, using historic images to interpret the historic landscape character and provide visitors with an understanding of the landscape evolution. Regular maintenance conducted by the Village has been limited, though the wood chip entry path at Robin Brae Drive is regularly redressed. Instead, the Village of Warwick has focused on celebrating the history of the park to increase awareness of the historic landscape as a contemporary recreation and nature exploration site.

F. CONCLUSION TO LANDSCAPE HISTORY

The Madison Lewis Woodlands is a unique cultural landscape. Historically, it was a scenic element with rustic built features, contributing to the overall character of the 38-acre Belair, the Fowler estate laid out during the late 19th to early 20th century. Preserved through the efforts of prominent Warwick residents Madison H. and Elizabeth Sanford Lewis, the property has transitioned from a former estate landscape to a public park with a remnant formal garden, woodlands, and paths. The former Colonial Avenue entry drive with tree allée also remains and reveals a sense of the historic landscape character, although this parcel is not included in the public land. For the last four decades, the Madison Lewis Woodlands has been maintained as a “woodland preserve and wildlife sanctuary” with the natural processes of vegetation growth and decline impacting the landscape character. Today, the remaining part of this larger site includes a garden area and a woodland ramble along the adjacent stream and through an upland white oak woods. A number of historic character-defining features remain in or near the garden and woodlands, conveying a sense of the former landscape character. Because the remnants from the historic period are difficult to discern, interpretation is an important part of the overall management of the landscape. Further, interpretation of historic landscape character and features needs to be appropriately balanced with woodland management strategies, such as suppression of invasive species, trail maintenance, and stormwater management. Planning efforts are proposed to enhance the stewardship of the Madison Lewis Woodlands and reveal its historic legacy and the experience of this unique place as part of the historic Belair estate grounds.

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CHAPTER II: ENDNOTES

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- ¹⁷ Jean Beattie May, “Warwick’s ‘Belair’ – A Glimpse Into the Past,” *Warwick Valley Dispatch*, 21 December 2005.
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