

MADISON LEWIS WOODLANDS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT



Chapter I: Introduction, Scope of Work & Methodology

A. INTRODUCTION, LANDSCAPE CONTEXT & BOUNDARY

The Madison Lewis Woodlands is a remnant feature of Belair, the former Fowler estate in the Village of Warwick, New York. Belair was one of several estate grounds established in the Village by wealthy New York City residents. In the late 1800s, the Fowler family established a 38-acre summer retreat in the Village. The land included approximately 14 acres of woodlands, in which the family laid out winding carriage paths and rustic landscape features. A small natural creek separated the mansion and gardens from the sloping woodlands. The naturalistic character of the woodlands created a striking contrast with the rest of the more formal estate grounds.

The Madison Lewis Woodlands is located north of the center of the Village of Warwick, within a residential subdivision known as Robin Brae. Much of the original Belair estate grounds were subdivided and the landscape features removed. However, the 14-acre woodlands remain today, owned by the Village of Warwick and managed as a village park and “woodland preserve and wildlife sanctuary for the enjoyment of the general public.”¹ The public landscape is sited between two main roads in the Village, Maple and Colonial Avenues, tucked behind a number of private homes. (See Figure I.1.) Today, the 14-acre property is comprised of two landscape areas that remain from the historic estate—the formal garden space and the scenic woodlands. The former entry drive and tree allée at Colonial Avenue defines a third landscape area that remains intact today, although this feature is part of an adjoining private property and is not located within the public landscape. It should be noted that while the focus of the project is the 14-acre Village-owned property, the character and evolution of the 38-acre Belair estate will be discussed, giving context to the site as an element within a broader, designed landscape.

During the estate period, the Fowler family managed the natural woodlands as an arboretum, collecting specimens during foreign travel and replanting them on the estate grounds. A winding carriage drive brought visitors from the main house past formal garden spaces and through the sloping woodlands. The dense canopy shaded paths and nearby gazebos provided scenic resting spots. Today, these paths remain evident in the landscape. While the rustic landscape features have been removed, remnants of the former estate remain in the preserve today, serving as vestiges of the historic landscape character. (See Figures I.2 and I.3.)

The Village of Warwick has a rich, intriguing history, which is highly celebrated by its residents. The Madison Lewis Woodlands is a valuable part of the public historic landscape of the Village of

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Warwick. While the site is managed as a public park offering numerous natural resources, it also has strong interpretive opportunities, providing a unique glimpse into the grand estates that once characterized much of the Village landscape. A great deal of continuity to the historic period and character is exhibited in the landscape today.

B. SCOPE OF WORK & CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT METHODOLOGY

The Scope of Work for the Madison Lewis Woodlands Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) identifies the intent of this focused project to document the cultural value and outline a preservation treatment and interpretation strategy for the historic landscape. The planning effort undertaken for this landscape is at a thorough, but not exhaustive level. The project seeks an appropriate balance of historic integrity, public and visitor uses, recreation and education, functionality and maintainability to frame a vision for the future of the landscape that is harmonious with its past.

The scope further specifies that the report process includes reviewing historical documentation gathered by the Village of Warwick, field documentation, existing conditions mapping, and analyzing continuity, change, and historic integrity of the landscape. The discussion of landscape integrity helps to develop an understanding of the similarities and differences between the historic and existing character of the Madison Lewis Woodlands cultural landscape. From this multi-level foundation, strategies for landscape preservation treatment and interpretation are presented that respect the historic character and unique identity as a part of the former Belair estate, address current issues and needs, and envision a dynamic future for the landscape.

A variety of relevant materials including newspaper articles, published and unpublished documents, photographs, aerial photographs, plans, and maps revealed details of the evolving landscape character, serving as references for the report. Study of these materials revealed the early character of the Madison Lewis Woodlands and its continued evolution, serving as the basis for the landscape history.

Heritage Landscapes performed reconnaissance of the existing physical conditions at the Madison Lewis Woodlands, noting dominant and invasive species present, remnant historic features, and existing landscape elements. From the fieldwork, recent aerial photographs, and mapping, an annotated existing conditions plan graphically presents the existing character of the park landscape.

Based on the existing conditions plan, Heritage Landscapes identified distinct landscape areas or zones within the Madison Lewis Woodlands landscape to communicate the character of the property through time. Boundaries of landscape areas may be loosely delineated by vegetation or slopes or clearly defined by physical features such as a wall, path or road. Some of these features remain constant while others change over time. Three landscape areas were defined for the Madison Lewis Woodlands, which include the former garden space, the woodlands, and the privately-owned Colonial Avenue entrance with tree allée. While the entry and tree allée are not part of the public landscape, it is important to identify this extant feature because it retains a high degree of continuity from the historic estate and provides valuable insight into the historic landscape character. (See Figure I.4.)

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In addition to landscape areas, cultural landscapes can be subdivided into character-defining features. Federal guidance including the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* and *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* refer to and define the character-defining features of a landscape.² Character-defining features are identified and enumerated in the CLR as a series of interrelated, specific aspects of the cultural landscape. They include:

- *Spatial Organization, Land Patterns, Land Use & Visual Relationships* – These features address the three-dimensional organization and patterns of spaces in the landscape, land uses, and visual relationships, shaped by both cultural and natural features; the uses of the land and the views and visual relationships that organize the landscape as defined by topography, vegetation, circulation, built elements, and often a combination of these character-defining features to create the overall patterns of the landscape. At the Madison Lewis Woodlands, the organization of the woodland canopy, walking trails, garden space, natural stream and surrounding residential properties are dominant features that define the spatial and visual relationships.
- *Topography & Natural Systems* – Topography is the shape of the ground plane and its height or depth. Topography occurs in relation to natural systems and as a result of human manipulation. Natural systems include landforms, watershed systems, climate, surface and underground flows, and their effects. The topography of the Madison Lewis Woodlands landscape slopes toward the east with the woodland trails crossing the hillside. The surrounding topography is defined by comparable slopes, with the residential subdivision sited upslope to the west. The public entrance is situated at the valley between the two slopes. Drainage is an important issue related to topography and natural systems. At the Madison Lewis Woodlands landscape, surface runoff travels over the sloping site toward the stream.
- *Vegetation* – Vegetation can include groups of plants, individual plants, agricultural fields, planting beds, formal or informal tree groves, woodland, meadow, or turf. Vegetation at the Madison Lewis Woodlands landscape is dominated by the deciduous and evergreen trees that define the woodland canopy and a shrubby understory.
- *Circulation* – Circulation features may include roads, drives, trails, paths, and parking areas individually sited or linked to form a network or system. Alignment, width, surface and edge treatment, and materials contribute to the character of circulation features. Vehicular circulation is limited to a gravel parking area at the park entrance. Landscape use focuses on the compacted earth walking trails that curve under the tree canopy.
- *Water Features* – Features of water systems may be aesthetic as well as functional components of the landscape. Water features may include fountains, pools, cascades, irrigation systems, streams, ponds, lakes, and aqueducts. The natural stream that crossed the estate historically remains in the landscape today, as does the basin of the former pool in the garden area. The larger pond constructed during estate improvement efforts also

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remains. It is located on private property, although it is visually accessible from the parking area.

- *Structures* – Landscape structures are non-habitable constructed features such as pavilions or features such as walls, bridges, arbors, terraces, steps, and fences. Structures at the Madison Lewis Woodlands include the wooden bridge that crosses the stream, historic well, and remnant retaining walls.
- *Site Furnishings & Objects* – Site furnishings such as signage and light fixtures are generally considered small-scale elements in the landscape while items such as garbage cans and benches are considered landscape objects. The Madison Lewis Woodlands landscape incorporates few site furnishings and objects.

These landscape character-defining features are used in the report to focus on the definition and details of the Madison Lewis Woodlands cultural landscape as it evolved through time to the present. The same vocabulary is used throughout the landscape analysis and preservation treatment approach.

Additional terms are used throughout the report to refer to the Madison Lewis Woodlands and its components. The name of the site today is somewhat of a misnomer. The name does not reflect the historic origins of the place, nor does it acknowledge the remnants of the former garden and entry drive landscape areas. Heritage Landscapes suggests that the Village consider reintroducing the Fowler family name or “Belair” into the naming of this local treasure to link it more strongly to the historic shapers of this landscape. The term “preserve” or “park” more adequately describes the site today, which is comprised of a formal garden space and woodlands. Park and preserve are used throughout this document to refer to the entire site.

Heritage Landscapes approached the Madison Lewis Woodlands Cultural Landscape Report in accordance with federal guidance for cultural landscape preservation. Relevant professional guidance includes the following: *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, *National Park Service Cultural Resource Management Guideline 28*, *National Register Bulletin 18: How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes*, *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*, *NPS Preservation Brief 36 Protecting Cultural Landscapes*, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, and *National Park Service Director’s Order #28: Cultural Resource Management*.

The Madison Lewis Woodlands CLR is organized into five chapters. Chapter I: Introduction, Scope of Work & Methodology offers an introduction to CLR’s, the project scope, and implemented methodology. Chapter II: Madison Lewis Woodlands Landscape History details the history and evolution of the landscape from its origins as part of the Belair estate in the 19th century through recent times. The existing conditions are presented in Chapter III: Madison Lewis Woodlands Landscape Existing Conditions. Chapter IV: Madison Lewis Woodlands Landscape Analysis, Integrity & Significance compares findings from the site history and existing conditions to analyze continuity and change through time. Chapter IV also includes a discussion of the landscape integrity of the Madison Lewis Woodlands, following National Register of Historic Places guidance. Recommendations and strategies to guide the future of the Madison Lewis Woodlands are presented

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in Chapter V: Madison Lewis Woodlands Landscape Preservation, Interpretation & Management.
The Appendix provides reference materials for the CLR.

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CHAPTER I: ENDNOTES

¹ Declaration between the Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties, Inc. and the Village of Warwick, dated 12 January 2004.

² Robert R. Page, Cathy A. Gilbert, Susan A. Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, NPS, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnerships, Park Historic Structures and Cultural Landscapes Program, 1998.