

Statement for Public Hearing 2/19/2025
Linda Schwab, 318 Main St. Village Historian

Tonight I would like to focus my brief remarks on the significance of the “Boathouse/Glen Park Lawn Scenic Landmark.” It is not “just a lawn” or simply a public access point. My letter to the Board dated Jan. 15 goes through my documentation of “*Wells College as a Cultural Landscape*,” as defined by the National Park Service. Not only the buildings of a National Historic District but their setting in the landscape is acknowledged by expert and governing authority to be significant and worthy of preservation. The letter from Mr. Roblee and his preservation colleagues further substantiates the proposed lakeside landmark as a landscape designed both for and by Henry Wells. Cultural landscapes are tended landscapes.

Nor was this the only era of significance for the site. The Moravian missionaries on their journey to Onondaga in 1750 observed and described a long expanse of “farms” or “gardens” of the Cayuga all along the lakeshore. This open and human-tended expanse did not spring up overnight, but was already well-established. It remained tended open space through the era of settler farms and Henry Wells’ landscaping to what we see today, as confirmed by maps and (later on) photographs. Such proven long tenure, at least 300 years, as a village open space is rare and possibly unique in our region.

The Peach Orchard of the Traditional Cayuga at the south end of the designated landmark site represents this long history in a special way. It was established by oral agreement with Wells College, an agreement now in limbo and unanswered. This small orchard is not just a memory of Aurora’s past, but has in time become a memorial to the Chiefs and Clan Mothers who began it and are no longer living: Birdie Hill (Heron Clan), Inez Jimerson (Bear Clan), Mina Key and Manfred Miller (Snipe Clan). They gave the Cayuga children and youth the responsibility to tend this orchard; this continues today in the annual planting ceremony. Its words and rituals meet the criteria of “Hallowed Ground,” and I ask you to consider it so.

All this is less familiar to you than generations of our children's swim program, celebrations and events around the Boathouse, daily walks, and sunset watching, but both are iconic and equally to be treasured. No other view in Aurora is as expansive or as beautiful. The Peach Orchard reminds us that we are all the stewards of this well-loved place for our brief lives. I urge you to make this stewardship a gift to future generations by tonight's designation of this Scenic Landmark.

Thank you.