

## Rock Hill Estate History

### *A Pastor's Legacy*

Local history largely credits the design of the landscape at Rock Hill to Dr. Henry Alford Porter, Pastor of the First Baptist Church, and his wife Elizabeth B. Porter. They owned the property from January 1930 until December 1947.

While no plans or drawings have been discovered to date, there is evidence that the site has evolved over the years as it changed ownership and uses. Certain physical features of the landscape—particularly the stone terrace walls and stairways—illustrate varying construction methods and materials, suggesting various craftspeople working at different times.

### *Origins of a Name*

The name “Rock Hill” was first used in the 1820s to describe a 66-acre farm carved from the holdings of Thomas Walker Lewis, cousin of American explorer Meriwether Lewis. When the estate was offered for sale in 1860, the posted advertisement noted several key features, including rock fencing along the perimeter, possibly constructed using stone quarried on-site. By 1909, the property had been reduced to 7.7 acres containing a circa-1820s residence and a distinctive stone wall enclosure.

Sections of that rock wall on the southwest side of the property were realigned in the 1950s during construction of the Route 250 Bypass. In 1963, during the site's tenure as the Rock Hill Academy private school (1959–1979), the historic house was destroyed by fire. Today, the Rock Hill Landscape remains as evidence of the property's storied past.

### *An Eclectic and Picturesque Landscape*

Early photographs of the property indicate that the Porters incorporated pre-existing features such as the rock-lined driveway, orchards, and two stuccoed brick gateposts at the main entry. Based on construction methods and size of some vegetation, Dr. Porter is believed to have added early 20th-century Picturesque elements to the landscape's design, such as rough-cut stone features, an artificial pond, and hardy evergreen plantings, to balance the man-made and natural environment of the site. Dr. Porter used architectural features like rock walls and stone steps to manage the rugged terrain, particularly in the formal garden along the southwest side of the lot where terraces and a number of stairways set the space apart from the wooded, natural area in the northwest corner. In direct contrast to the rigidity of the formal garden, the woodland area is marked by stone-lined switch-back trails, an outdoor fireplace, and carefully crafted “natural” scenic vistas into McIntire Park and along Schenk's Branch. The Porters planted boxwoods, hollies, and rhododendrons, as well as beech, pine, and hemlock trees throughout the landscape.

### *Additional Resources*

In accordance with Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS) standards, the City of Charlottesville has recently developed historic documentation for this local property. HALS Level II documents were created, consisting of a written history, large format black & white photographs, and color field photographs. Copies are also available at the Virginia Department

of Historic Resources (Archives & Library); Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society; First Baptist Church of Charlottesville; Jefferson-Madison Regional Library; Library of Virginia; and University of Virginia Library (Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections).