

Weir Farm

Weir Farm National Historic Site
Connecticut

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



American Impressionism—Home is the Starting Place



When Weir moved to Branchville in 1882 the countryside was parceled into farms with large open pastures. *Road to the Land of Nod*, painted by Childe Hassam in 1910, shows the nearly treeless approach along Nod Hill Road.

American Impressionist Julian Alden Weir acquired the 153-acre Branchville, Connecticut, farm in 1882. "Home is the starting place," Weir said, and for nearly 40 years he made this "quiet plain little house among the rocks" his main summer home. He built a studio, twice enlarged the house, added a pond, and acquired more land, bringing the total to 238 acres. The farm inspired subject matter for Weir and his friends Childe Hassam, John Twachtman, and Albert Pinkham Ryder.

From Portraits to Impressionism

In 1877 Weir returned to the United States after studying five years at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. While in Paris he visited an exhibition of the new French Impressionists and criticized their sketchy and brightly colored style. Weir began his career in New York as an art instructor and painter of portraits

Weir loved fishing and outdoor sports. He even built his own pond to ensure a plentiful supply of fish. *The Fishing Party* (left), 1915, shows friends on a bridge near the pond.

The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

and still lifes. With his marriage to Anna Baker in 1883, summers at Branchville, and the birth of their first child, he turned increasingly to domestic scenes. After 1890 Weir began painting more and more out of doors in an Impressionist style.



Private Collection



Albert Pinkham Ryder painted *Weir's Orchard* between 1885 and 1890. Of the farm, he said, "I have never seen the beauty of spring before; which is something to have lived and suffered for. The landscape and air are full of promise."

He did not paint with the intense broken colors that he saw in Paris but used subtle harmonies of color. Weir painted scenes of his family and nature in soft blues, greens, and silvery grays that evoked a feeling of security and permanence. His conversion to Impressionism was influenced by the beauty of his farm and by discussions and painting outings with Twachtman. In 1897 Weir and Hassam founded the influential Ten American Painters. The landscapes of Weir, Twachtman, Hassam, Metcalf, and other artists in The Ten are among the finest works of American Impressionism.

J. Alden Weir died on December 8, 1919. He was honored as a gifted painter, teacher, leader, and cherished friend who helped bring artists and American Impressionism into world prominence. His spirit speaks to us still through his art and the landscape of this farm.

In the Dooryard, 1894, (left), 80 1/8" by 47 1/8." Weir's family is shown here nearly lifesized. Ella, his second wife, holds Cora. Caro stands behind Ella. Dorothy holds a lamb.

A Celebration of Place Until Weir and other American artists turned to Impressionism, nature's beauty was often depicted as grandiose, with paintings of vast river valleys and western mountains. Impressionism offered a new vision of ourselves and nature. It was the first American art movement to look inward—it examined everyday American experiences and appreciated nature found close to home.

Weir and his friends painted the farm's stones, woodlands, meadows, and pond. Weir Farm has been painted by artists ever since. Today 60 acres remain—the buildings and grounds remarkably unchanged. Weir Farm is Connecticut's only national park, and it is the nation's only historic site to offer the home, studio, and landscape of an important artist whose home and land were integral to his artistic vision.

Highlights of J. Alden Weir's Life

1852 Born on August 30 at West Point, N.Y., to Robert, a Hudson River School painter and drawing professor at the U.S. Military Academy, and wife Susan; christened Julian.

1864-66 Spends time with older brother John Weir, also a painter, at 10th Street Studio Building in New York; first drawings, 1866.

1869-72 Studies painting at the National Academy of Design, New York.

1873-77 Studies in Paris; wins the highest award at Jean-Léon Gérôme's competition at the École des Beaux-Arts.

1877 In Paris visits third exhibition of French Impressionists; returns to New York; begins career as portrait and still life painter; elected a member of Society of American Artists; joins Tile Club.

1878-81 Exhibits at Society of American Artists and American Water Color Society; teaches classes at Cooper Union, then at the Art Students League, New York, where he remains for 20 years.

1882 Acquires 153-acre farm in Branchville, Conn., from art collector Erwin Davis; elected president of Society of American Artists.

1883 Marries Anna Baker; spends time at New York studio, Branchville farm, and home of Anna's family in Windham, Conn.; work shows new focus: still lifes and portraits are smaller and less formal; paints series of domestic scenes showing Anna and, later, their daughters.

1884 Elected to American Water Color Society; daughter Caroline born March 24.

1885-6 Builds studio at Branchville; buys house at 11 East 12th Street, N.Y.

1887 Begins printmaking; produces about 140 etchings in next few years; son Julian Jr. born in February (dies from diphtheria after first birthday).

1888-9 Exhibits with the Society of Painters in Pastel and New York Etching Club; in Paris, wins silver medal for painting and bronze for drawings and watercolors.



Weir poses at his studio easel in 1915.

1890 Daughter Dorothy, future wife of Mahonri Young, born June 18.

1891 Major solo exhibition in New York launches him as American Impressionist; paints landscapes with lighter colors.

1892 Daughter Cora born January 29; wife Anna dies February 8; grieving, he avoids the farm; paints a mural 25 feet in diameter for World Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

1893 Exhibits with John Twachtman, Paul Besnard,

and Claude Monet at the American Art Association; begins series of life-size figures posed out of doors; marries Ella Baker (Anna's sister) October 29.

1894-7 Japanese prints increasingly influence his work; compositions feature cropping, asymmetry, and oblique angles; paints *The Red Bridge* and *The Factory Village* (both at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y.); uses \$2,500 Boston Art Club prize in 1896 to build farm's pond.

1898 Founding member and contributor to the first exhibition of The Ten American Painters; exhibits with group until 1919.

1900-7 Hires architect Charles Platt to expand house and porch and design new entrance; buys land, brings total to 238 acres; wins bronze medal for painting at Universal Exposition in Paris; wins gold medal for paintings and silver medal for engravings at Universal Exposition in St. Louis.

1908-12 Hires architect F. J. Adams to enlarge dining room; moves to 471 Park Avenue, N.Y.; suffers from heart trouble; paints in Nassau, Bahamas; retrospective exhibition travels to five cities.

1913-18 Travels to England; elected to American Academy of Arts and Letters, president of the National Academy of Design; receives honorary degrees from Princeton and Yale universities.

1919 Dies in New York on December 8; is buried at Windham, Conn.

Impressionism also featured intimate domestic scenes. Weir named this 1890 painting of Anna *In the Livingroom* (right).

Private Collection



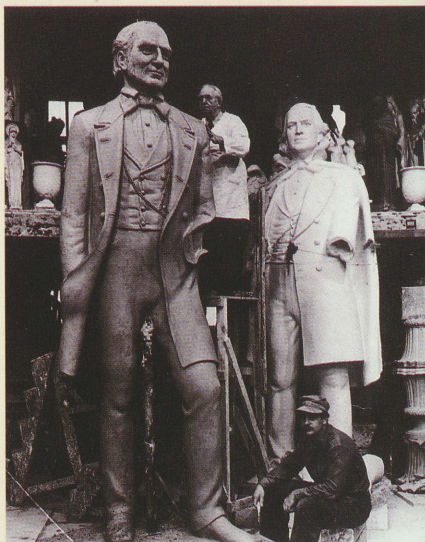
The Landscape Beckons



Jim Higgins

Weir's studio (left) was built in 1885 and Mahonri Young's studio (right) in 1934.

The farm's artistic tradition has continued since J. Alden Weir and other American Impressionists first painted this landscape in the 1880s.



Brigham Young University

Mahonri and Dorothy Weir Young Sculptor Mahonri Young and Dorothy Weir were married in 1931. A grandson of Brigham Young, Mahonri (ma HAHN rye) was famous for his small bronzes of athletes and laborers.

It was at Weir Farm that Mahonri Young created his most important public work. He built his studio (above right) in part to complete the commission for the *This is the Place* monument. Unveiled in 1947, the monument features a 12-foot statue of Brigham Young flanked by his advisors and life-sized figures of trappers and explorers. (At left, Mahonri Young works on the statue in a Long Island, N.Y. foundry.) A frieze depicts the story of the Mormons' move to Utah. Today the monument stands at the mouth of Emigration Canyon, outside Salt Lake City. His final work, a marble statue of Brigham Young, is in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Dorothy Weir Young, following the tradition of her father and grandfather, worked in oils and watercolor. She took over her father's Branchville farm and studio after he died.

Sperry and Doris Andrews Sperry Andrews knocked on Mahonri Young's door in 1955 because he wanted to meet the important sculptor. Artists Sperry and Doris Andrews became close friends with Young and when he died in 1957, they bought his farm. The Andrews recognized it as a place of extraordinary significance to American art and were instrumental in preserving its landscape and artistic legacy for visitors and for future generations of artists.



Ernest Braun

Sperry Andrews, in 1990, paints the main house.

Artists at Weir Farm Today

By the 1970s the future of the farm was uncertain because this area was being rapidly developed. In 1990, through a grassroots effort of people who would later form the Weir Farm Trust, Weir Farm was designated a national historic site by the U.S. Congress. Today the National Park Service and the Weir Farm Trust carry on the tradition that J. Alden Weir began more than 100 years ago.

The Trust, a nonprofit organization, offers educational programs, exhibitions, interpretive publications, a lecture series with leading American artists, and a Visiting Artists program. An Artists-in-Residence program is being developed. The Visiting

Artists program gives three to five artists a chance to spend up to a year at the farm creating a body of work based on their personal interpretation of the landscape. Their work is exhibited at the end of the year. Out of this has come a diversity of expression: paintings, prints, photographs, videos, and sculpture.

The Trust is also collecting art that is important to Weir Farm. Someday these works will be displayed in the park, making it possible for visitors to experience both the landscape and the art it has inspired.

Weir at Work

At right are some of the pigments, brushes, tools, and a kidney-shaped thumbhole palette that Weir used to create his artwork. He worked in oil, pastel, pen and ink, and watercolor.

All paint, basically, is a powdered pigment blended with a liquid binder to make a smooth paste. Weir mixed pigments (see glass jars and black tin) using linseed, poppy, and other oils as binders. With a palette knife (see flexible metal spatula in jar) he mixed the paint directly on his palette or prepared it ahead of time, storing it in metal tubes that were easy to carry around the farm. He painted with brushes and painting knives (pointed angular blades in jar) that were ideal for applying paint and creating texture.

Weir also enjoyed printmaking. He used the wood-handled tool (bottom left) to etch his designs into copper plates and the brayer (bottom right) to roll ink onto them. After etching the plate and wiping its surface clean, he used an etching press to transfer the ink that remained in the etched design onto the paper.



About Your Visit

Visitor Center The best place to begin your visit is at the Burlingham House Visitor Center across the road from the parking area. Here you will find publications, exhibits, a sales area, and a short video. Weir's art is not on display at the park, but a video monitor shows his paintings, watercolors, prints, sketches, and etchings. The staff can answer questions and help you plan your visit. The visitor center is open Wednesday through Sunday all year; it is closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. The grounds are open daily from dawn to dusk. Call for information.

Guided Tours The park staff leads scheduled tours of the Weir and Young studios and the grounds. Group reservations are required. Special events are scheduled year round. Call for tour schedules and information.

Self-guiding Tours The 60-acre park offers trails and quiet places to enjoy the beautiful landscape. Not to be missed is the *Weir Farm Historic Painting Sites Trail* brochure (fee) that tells you about the artists and compares their paintings to the scenes today. Other trails lead to the pond and connect with The Nature Conservancy's Weir Preserve.



Weir Farm, one of the last intact landscapes associated with American Impressionism, still beckons artists who work here in many mediums.

Activities This landscape is as inviting to the artistic spirit today as it was more than a hundred years ago. Bring your paints or your camera and discover your own talents. There are no picnic tables, but you are welcome to picnic on the grass.



The "secret garden," restored in 1995 by the Ridgefield Garden Club, was an oasis amidst the barn yard.

Accessibility and Restrooms At this time facilities and activities at the park are limited for visitors with disabilities. But, improvements are made every year. There are no flush toilets; portable toilets are located at the Burlingham Barn near the visitor center.

Educational Programs J. Alden Weir encouraged people to learn about art and to find their artistic talents. This tradition continues at the farm today. Weir Farm offers workshops and children's art classes. Artists may apply to the Visiting Artists program. For information about classes and programs call the Weir Farm Trust: 203-761-9945.

Administration Weir Farm National Historic Site, the first park to honor an American painter, was established in 1990. Weir Farm is part of the National Park System, one of more than 370 parks that are important examples of our nation's natural and cultural heritage.

More Information Write: Superintendent, Weir Farm National Historic Site, 735 Nod Hill Road, Wilton, CT 06897-1309. Call: 203-834-1896. Or find information at www.nps.gov/wefa on the Internet.

© GPO: 1999-454-767/00048
Printed on recycled paper.

For a Safe Visit For a safe and enjoyable visit, please be alert and observe these regulations.

The Weir house is a private home; please respect the privacy of the occupants. The house, studios, (except on guided tours), and other buildings are closed to the public.

Please be extremely careful if walking on Nod Hill Road; there are no sidewalks, and cars travel fast.

Some trails have uneven footing and exposed tree roots. Be careful when crossing wetland areas on pathway stones. Swimming or wading are not allowed. Fishing is permitted; state regulations apply.

Dogs must be on a leash at all times. Be alert for poison ivy and ticks.

All historical and natural features in the park are protected by federal law. Do not damage, harass, or remove any stones, plants, or wildlife.

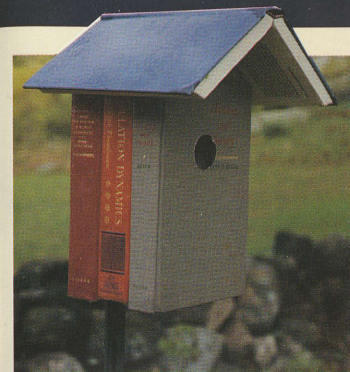
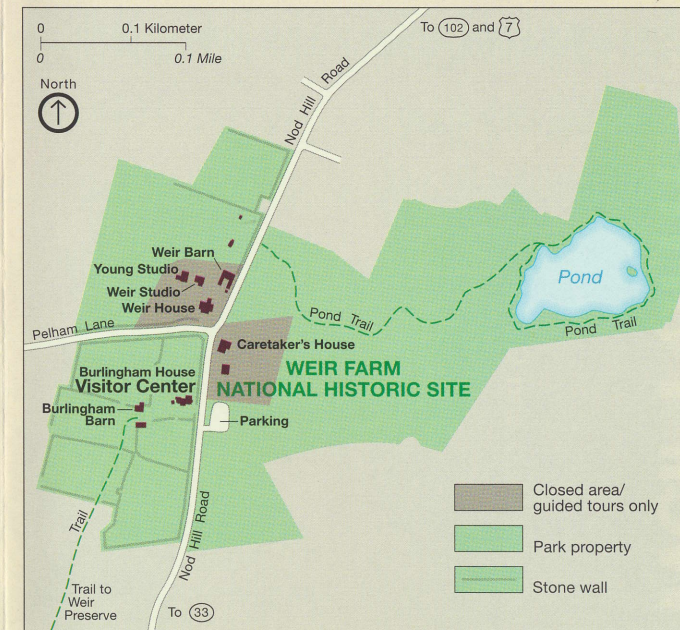
In an emergency, call 911.

Getting Here Weir Farm is in southwestern Connecticut in the towns of Ridgefield and Wilton. • Vehicle: From I-95 or the Merritt Parkway:

take U.S. 7 north; turn left onto Conn 102; go 0.3 mile; turn left onto Old Branchville Road; turn at first left and go to 735 Nod Hill Road. From I-84: take exit 3 to U.S. 7 south; turn right onto Conn 102; go 0.3 mile; turn left onto Old Branchville Road; turn at first left and go to 735 Nod Hill Road. • Train: Metro-North to the Branchville Station; taxi or walk to the park (it is about 1.5 miles). **Warning:** Nod Hill Road is narrow with limited visibility. There is no turnaround for RVs or large vehicles. Call the park for information.



This jar contained "Spike Oil of Lavender," an ingredient Weir sometimes used when mixing his paints.



Weir Farm Trust



Weir Farm Trust

Gerard Doudera, a visiting artist, produced 24 paintings in 1992. "Before finishing a painting," he says, "the idea for the next would appear out of the corner of my eye."

The Bluebird, 1995, a temporary landscape installation at Weir Farm by visiting artist Charles McQuillen. Poems mounted on podiums and birdhouses made of hollowed-out textbooks honor the bluebird.

