



American Impressionism—Home Is the Starting Place



When J. Alden 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's landscape inspired 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

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

began his career in New York as an art instructor and painter of portraits 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.



Weir's *In the Dooryard*, 1894 (left), depicts his family nearly life-sized. Ella, his second wife, holds Cora. Caro stands behind Ella. Dorothy holds a lamb.

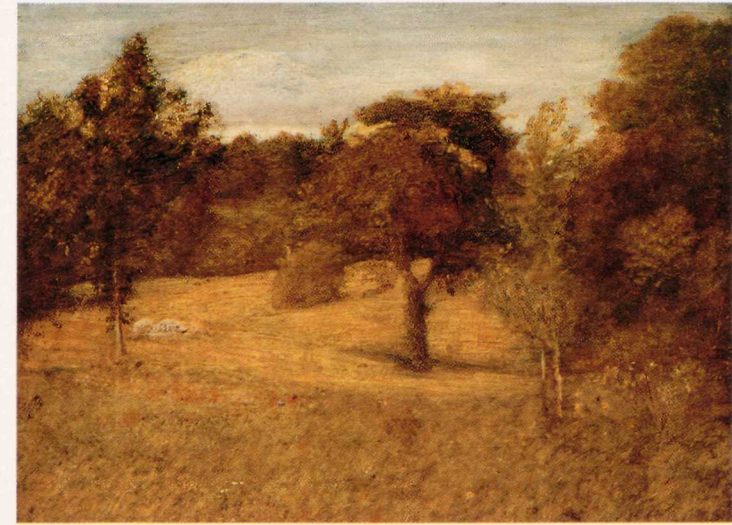
After 1890 Weir began painting more and more out-of-doors in an Impressionist style. He did not paint with the intense broken colors that he saw in Paris but instead used subtle harmonies of color. Weir painted scenes of his family and nature in soft blues, greens, and silvery grays that evoked a feeling 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, Twachtman, and Hassam founded the influential Ten American Painters. Their landscapes and those of others 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.

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. The first American art movement to look inward, it examined everyday experiences and appreciated nature found close to home.

Weir and his friends painted the farm's stones, woodlands, meadows, and pond. The farm has been painted by artists ever since. Today 60 acres remain—the buildings and grounds are largely unchanged. Weir Farm National Historic Site offers the home, studio, and landscape integral to Weir's artistic vision.



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."

Highlights of J. Alden Weir's Life

1852 Born August 30 at West Point, N.Y., to Robert W. Weir, 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 F. 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 highest award at Jean-Léon Gérôme's competition at the École des Beaux-Arts.

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

1878–81 Exhibits at Society of American Artists and American Water Color Society; teaches 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 Anna and, later, their daughters.

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

1885–86 Builds Branchville studio; buys house at 11 East 12th St., New York.

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

1888–89 Exhibits at Society of Painters in Pastel and New York Etching Club; in Paris wins silver medal for painting and bronze for drawings and watercolors.

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



Weir poses at his studio easel in 1915.

1891 Major solo exhibition in New York launches him as American Impressionist; paints landscapes in 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 Bernard, and Claude Monet at the American Art Association; begins series of life-sized figures

posed out-of-doors; marries Ella Baker (Anna's sister) October 29.

1894–97 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, New York); 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.

1900–07 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, New York; suffers from heart trouble; paints in Nassau, Bahamas; 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 Yale and Princeton.

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).





Weir's studio (left) was built in 1885 and Mahonri Young's studio (right) in 1932.

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



Mahonri Young works in a Long Island, N.Y. foundry.

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

At Weir Farm, Mahonri Young created his most important public work. He built his studio (above right) 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 larger than life-sized figures of trappers and explorers. A frieze depicts the story of the Mormons' move to Utah. Today the monument stands at 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 oil and watercolor. She took over her father's farm and studio after he died.

Sperry and Doris Andrews Sperry Andrews knocked on Mahonri Young's door in 1952 because he wanted to meet the noted sculptor. Artists Sperry and Doris Andrews became friends with Young and, when he died in 1957, they bought his farm. The Andrews family recognized it as a place of significance to American art and helped preserve the property and its artistic legacy for future visitors and artists.



Sperry Andrews paints Weir House, 1990.

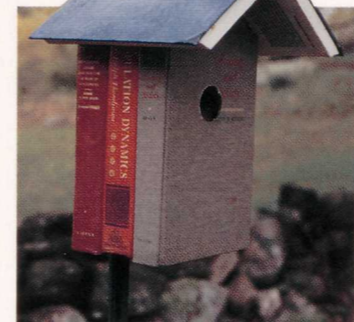
Artists at Weir Farm Today

By the 1970s the future of the farm was uncertain because of rapid development in the area. In response, a local community effort—which later evolved into the Weir Farm Trust, now known as the Weir Farm Art Center—called attention to the site's significance. Their work, along with that of other organizations, resulted in Congress designating the site as Weir Farm National Historic site in 1990.

The Weir Farm Art Center, a non-profit organization, offers educational programs, publications, a lecture series, and an Artist-in-Residence program for the site.

The Artist-in-Residence program gives artists the opportunity to create work based on their personal experiences or interpretation of the farm. Out of this has come a diversity of expression: paintings, prints, photographs, videos, and sculpture.

The Weir Farm Art Center conducts art workshops for adults and a summer Art Explorer program for children. For information contact the Weir Farm Art Center: 203-761-9945; www.weirfarmartcenter.org.



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



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."

Weir at Work

At right are some of the pigments, brushes, tools, and a 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 (*glass jars and black tin*) using linseed, poppy, and other oils as binders. With a palette knife (*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.



Planning Your Visit

Visitor Center Begin your visit at the Burlingham House Visitor Center across the road from the parking area. Here you will find information, interpretive programs, publications, exhibits, a book store, and an orientation video. The visitor center is open year-round; hours vary seasonally. It is closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. The grounds are open daily from dawn to dusk. Call or check our website for details.

Ranger-led Tours and Programs Park rangers lead scheduled tours and programs about Weir Farm National Historic Site. Reservations are required for large groups. Special events are scheduled year-round. For the tour and program schedule, call the park or visit www.nps.gov/wefa.

Self-guiding Landscape Tour The park offers trails and quiet places to enjoy the beautiful landscape. Ask about the *Weir Farm Historic Painting Sites Trail Guide* that discusses the artists and compares their paintings to the scenes today. Other trails lead to the pond, adjacent public lands, and the Weir Preserve.



Weir Farm, one of the last intact landscapes associated with American Impressionism, still beckons artists.

Activities This landscape is as inviting to the artistic spirit today as it was over a hundred years ago. Bring your paints or your camera and discover your own talents. You are encouraged to participate in the public art project *Take Part in Art* during scheduled times; free art supplies are provided. Junior Ranger activities are offered.



The Weir Garden, designed about 1915, was restored in 1995 by the Ridgefield Garden Club and National Park Service.

Accessibility and Restrooms Facilities and activities at the park are limited for visitors with disabilities. Improvements are made every year. The introductory video has open and closed captioning. Accessible restrooms are in the Burlingham Barn near the visitor center. A wheelchair and ramps are also available in the visitor center.

More Information
Weir Farm National Historic Site
735 Nod Hill Road
Wilton, CT 06897-1309
203-834-1896
www.nps.gov/wefa

Weir Farm National Historic Site, the first park to honor an American painter, was established in 1990. It is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

Important Things To Know Please be extremely careful if walking on Nod Hill Road; there are no sidewalks, and cars travel fast. The road is narrow with limited visibility. There is no turnaround for RVs or large vehicles.

Parking is limited. There is no parking for RVs. Call ahead if planning to arrive with multiple vehicles. A bicycle rack is available next to the parking lot. Bicycles are not allowed on park grounds.

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

Dogs must be on a leash at all times. Dogs are not allowed in the adjoining Weir Preserve. Be alert for poison ivy and ticks.

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

Emergencies: Call 911.

Getting Here Weir Farm is in the towns of Ridgefield and Wilton, Conn. • Vehicle: From I-95 or the Merritt Parkway take U.S. 7 north; go left onto Conn. 102 west; go 0.3 mile; go left onto Old Branchville Road; turn left at first stop sign and go to 735 Nod Hill Road. From I-84: take exit 3 to U.S. 7 south; go right onto Conn. 102 west; go 0.3 mile; go left onto Old Branchville Road; turn at first left and go to 735 Nod Hill Road. • Train: Metro-North to Branchville Station; arrange for a taxi or walk uphill 45 minutes to the park (about 1.5 miles).



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

