

*Weir Farm
Historic
Painting Sites
Trail*



Weir Farm Historic Painting Sites Trail

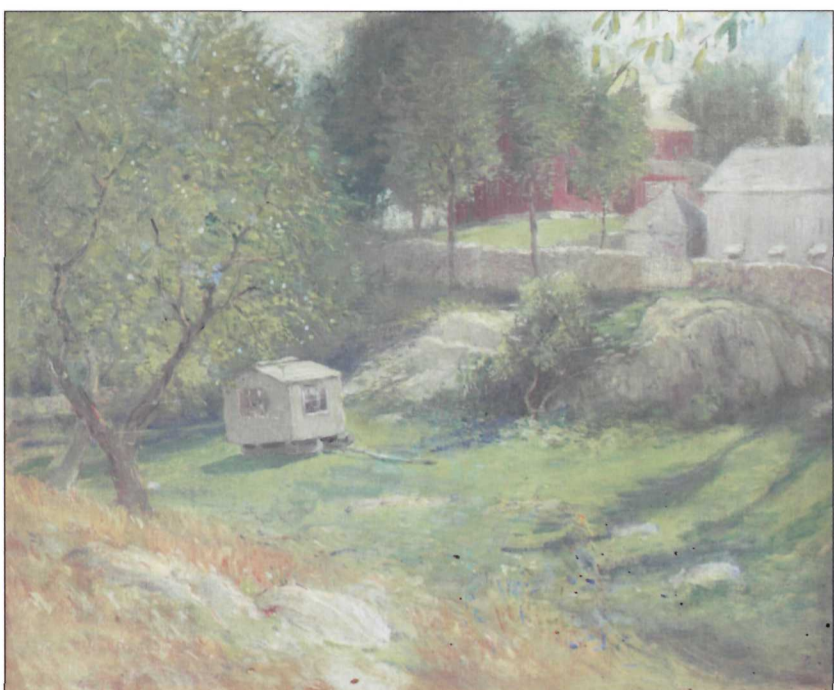


Return to Nod Hill Road and cross it to get onto the pond trail, which is designated by yellow trail markers. Follow the trail for a short distance and look for marker #6 on your right.

6. In November of 1890, Weir wrote to his then sister-in-law, Ella Baker, "I have been painting outdoors in a little house I have made with windows, and find it a great success." He was speaking of the "palace car," an ingenious portable studio on runners that could be pulled by oxen from place to place. In this way, Weir could roam his property comfortably and paint in inclement weather.

The composition is typical of Weir's style after 1890. He has chosen to tighten up the scale of the landscape; the spatial relationships seem smaller and more intimate in the painting than in reality. The intensified lights and darks reflect Weir's interest in the play of light and shadow, and the artist's skillful draftsmanship is apparent under the many tiny brush strokes and layers of pigment.

THE PALACE CAR (n.d.)
Oil on canvas, 20" x 24"
Museum of Art, Brigham Young University



Proceed south to the marker for #7 and #8.

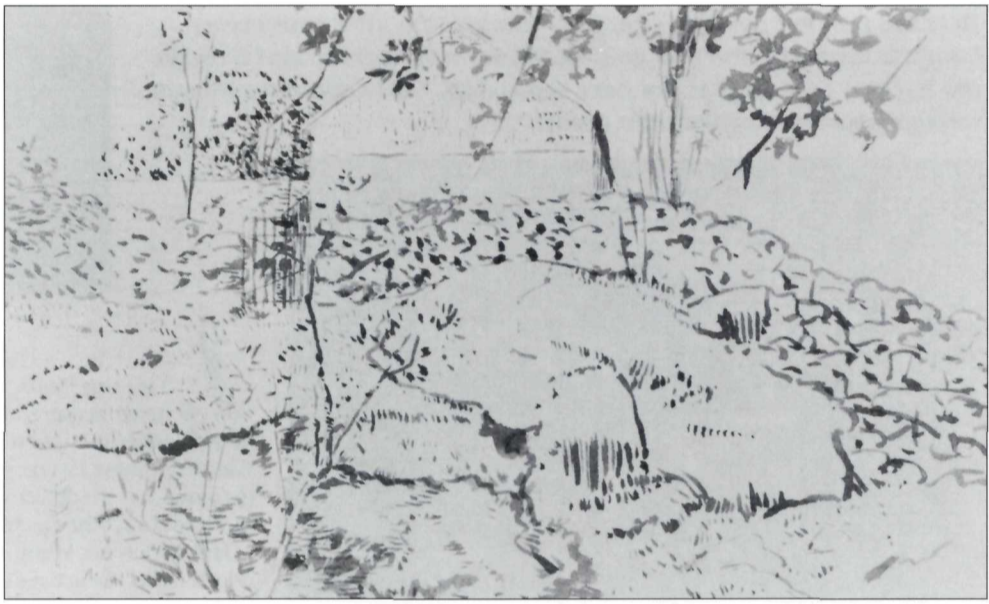
7. In response to mixed reviews generated by Weir's first, more individualistic Impressionistic works, the artist softened his technique in "The Truants," completed in 1895. It proved a great success: Exhibited at the Boston Arts Club show the following year, the work won a \$2,500 prize, which Weir later spent on building his pond.

The painting is particularly interesting for its unusual point of view — one that could never actually be seen from a single location. Instead, Weir integrated several views from different vantage points, creating an original composition suited to his own purposes. The figures seated beside the fire also reflect this artistic license, as the men are actually too small for their setting.

THE TRUANTS (1895)
Oil on canvas, 29" x 38"
Private collection

8. This evocative ink wash depicts the Weir barn and stone wall, a scene that Weir painted and drew many times. Here, however, the sketchy and informal black-and-white view departs from the artist's more conventional renderings and is reminiscent of the Japanese prints that had a strong impact on Weir in the 1890s. This influence is best illustrated by the flattened depth of field and a simplified treatment of the individual landscape elements, especially easy to see in the central rock outcropping. The branches hanging into the top of the painting never actually existed in the landscape, but were added purely as an artistic device.

Return to the trail and proceed toward the pond. Look for marker #9 on your left, just before you reach a set of stone steps.



BUILDING AND STONE WALL (c.1894)
Ink wash on paper, 6 1/2" x 10"
Private collection



THE FISHING PARTY (c.1915)
Oil on canvas, 28" x 23"
The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

9. Weir chose a landscape full of personal associations for this canvas, considered an excellent example of American Impressionism. The painting reflects both the artist's sensitivity to nature and his appreciation for this particular place. Using consistent brush strokes throughout, Weir emphasized the effect of light filtering through the trees and drenching the open field with a palette limited to soft, pastel tones. Although the figures, who are probably friends and family, are incidental, they enhance the light mood of the scene. The rocky outcropping in the field beyond the bridge is only suggested, not fully rendered. This was characteristic of Weir's work in the last few years of his life, when his approach became less deliberately structured.



Path to the pond, after 1896
Private collection

Continue on the trail for some distance. As you near the pond, look for a post on your right marking a detour to site #10.

10. This lyrical composition reflects a period between 1905 and 1910 when Weir moved in a new direction with his landscape painting and worked on quiet, intimate nature scenes instead of the panoramic compositions he favored before the turn of the century. This allowed him to focus on effects of light and shadow. In "Afternoon by the Pond," Weir studied the patterns created by sunlight shining through foliage, a common subject of Impressionism. He also consciously used the paint itself to create a second series of patterns on the canvas. It is still possible to see the triple-trunk tree (one trunk is now dead). But, as was so often the case, Weir made slight adjustments to the view, creating his own composition rather than a literal rendering of what he saw.

Return to the pond trail and follow it around to the left along the north side of the pond. Stop at a white quartz boulder on your right at the beginning of the dam. Look across the pond to the densely wooded island that is the subject of painting #11.

AFTERNOON BY THE POND (c.1908-1909)
Oil on canvas, 25 1/16" x 30"
The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.



The island summerhouse, 1919
Private collection



IN THE SUMMERHOUSE (1914)
Oil on canvas, 34" x 24"
Private collection

11. One of a series of portraits of women in white dresses relaxing near the pond, this well-developed Impressionist work shows Weir's second wife, Ella, quietly sewing in a summerhouse that was located on an island in the pond. The rustic structure, which no longer exists, was a favorite spot for reading and meditation, and Weir has captured its serenity. In a typically asymmetrical composition, the half-moon shape of the table serves as an anchor, while Ella's white dress reflects the sunlight, demonstrating the artist's proficiency at rendering the effects of light on both fabric and face. The background is a classic Weir landscape; in fact, without the figure, the wooded backdrop would be a fine painting in itself.

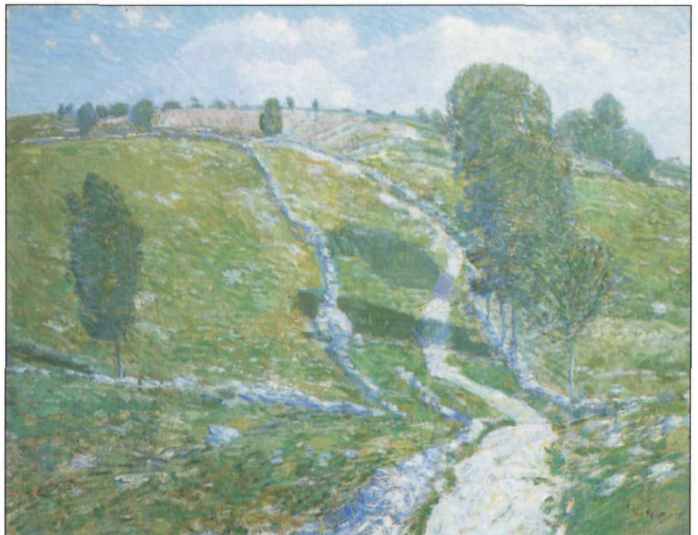
You have reached the end of the historic painting sites trail. You may choose to visit the Visitor Center or continue around the pond. If you choose to complete the pond loop, be aware that this route includes more difficult terrain than you have already encountered.

12. As you leave the farm and drive down Nod Hill Road, take a moment to imagine the landscape as Weir and his contemporaries knew it. The original underpinnings are clearly evident in "Road to the Land of Nod," painted by Childe Hassam. A close friend of Weir, Hassam was one of the leading American exponents of Impressionism, and the two were founding members of the "Ten American Painters," an important exhibiting group established in 1897 and closely associated with American Impressionism. Hassam's view of Nod Hill shows an open, rolling vista divided by the ever-climbing roadway. Over the last 50 years, second-growth forest has consumed much of the open landscape of Weir's day, when it was actually possible to see Long Island Sound from the artist's house.

In the future, we hope to selectively restore the character of the historic landscape so that the views painted by some of America's leading artists a century ago may continue to inspire artists and other visitors.

We hope that you have enjoyed your visit to Weir Farm and that you will take away your own impressions of this peaceful New England landscape.

ROAD TO THE LAND OF NOD (1910)
Frederick Childe Hassam
Oil on canvas, 23 1/4" x 29 1/8"
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund

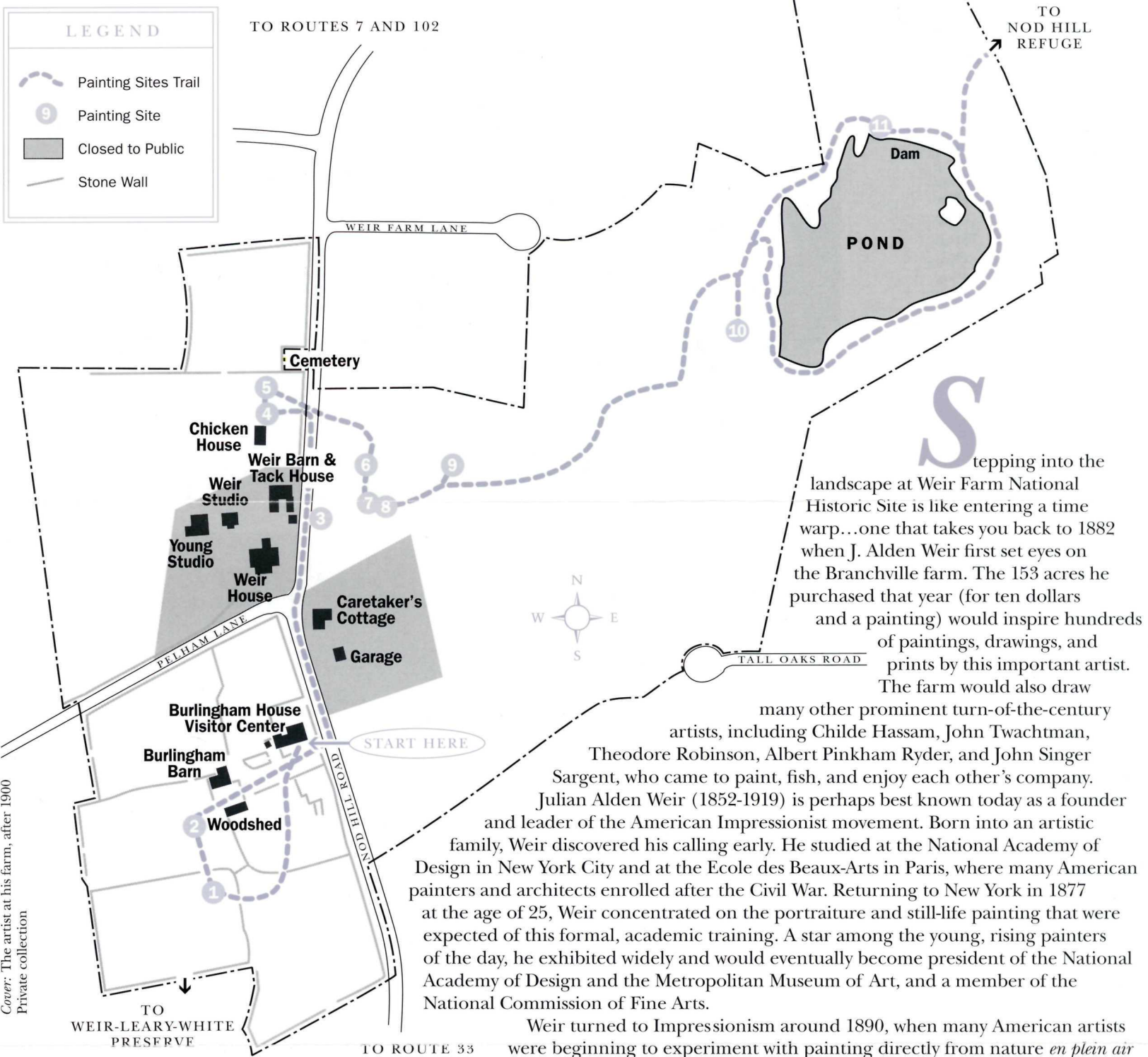


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735 Nod Hill Road, Wilton, Connecticut 06897, (203) 761-9945 Fax (203) 761-9116





Cover: The artist at his farm, after 1900
Private collection

Stepping into the landscape at Weir Farm National Historic Site is like entering a time warp...one that takes you back to 1882 when J. Alden Weir first set eyes on the Branchville farm. The 153 acres he purchased that year (for ten dollars and a painting) would inspire hundreds of paintings, drawings, and prints by this important artist. The farm would also draw

many other prominent turn-of-the-century artists, including Childe Hassam, John Twachtman, Theodore Robinson, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and John Singer Sargent, who came to paint, fish, and enjoy each other's company. Julian Alden Weir (1852-1919) is perhaps best known today as a founder and leader of the American Impressionist movement. Born into an artistic family, Weir discovered his calling early. He studied at the National Academy of Design in New York City and at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where many American painters and architects enrolled after the Civil War. Returning to New York in 1877 at the age of 25, Weir concentrated on the portraiture and still-life painting that were expected of this formal, academic training. A star among the young, rising painters of the day, he exhibited widely and would eventually become president of the National Academy of Design and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a member of the National Commission of Fine Arts.

Weir turned to Impressionism around 1890, when many American artists were beginning to experiment with painting directly from nature *en plein air* (out of doors) using pure, unmixed pigments. As opposed to reproducing a literal image, followers of the Impressionist movement sought to evoke a mood or the feeling of a moment through the use of light and color. Weir had been aware of French Impressionism since the mid-1870s, but the development of his own style coincided with his growing love for the farm and his desire to capture its magic and spirit. He felt it was particularly important to experience the landscape firsthand and once advised a student to "...go out into the country and paint with a stick — look at nature and get the paint on anyhow." From his letters, we know that Weir himself drew immense pleasure from the meadows, stone walls, and wooded wetlands in Branchville, and they inspired some of his greatest work.

Weir continued to paint and draw until his death in 1919 and his deep-rooted connection to this particular New England landscape — both on an artistic and personal level — never faded. This affection passed on to subsequent residents, including his daughter Dorothy and her husband, sculptor Mahonri Young, Weir's younger daughter Cora and her family, and artists Doris and Sperry Andrews, who live here today.

To date, it has been possible to identify some 250 works of art done at the farm (and more than 60 painting sites). With this self-guided walking tour, we invite you to visit twelve sites and to compare them to the works of art — including one each by Weir's friends Childe Hassam and Albert Pinkham Ryder — that they inspired. We hope your walk will provide a greater understanding of the relationship of American Impressionism and the quintessential American landscape it celebrated. Take your time. Look carefully. And let the layers of history unfold before you . . .

TRAIL ORIENTATION

Each painting site, with the exception of #12, is identified by a numbered field marker. To orient yourself, stand facing the number on the marker and look in the direction of the arrow. The trail traverses fields and woods, including some uneven (and sometimes muddy or slippery) sections. Comfortable walking shoes or boots are recommended. At most times of the year, you will be able to follow a mowed path. At all times, we ask that you stay on the trail and respect the privacy of the family living in the Weir House. The shaded area on the map is currently off-limits to the public. Many of the buildings are in fragile condition and are not open to the public at this time. On this tour you will be walking through woods, fields, and wetlands, and past historic structures and landscape features, such as old stone walls. Please show respect for the natural and historic environment and leave it the way you found it.

To reach the first painting site, pass through the little gate across from the Visitor Center and go past the terraced garden and through the bar-way (opening) in the next stone wall. Turn right and continue through a second bar-way into a field.



SPRING LANDSCAPE, BRANCHVILLE (1882)
Watercolor on paper, 5" x 6 3/4"
Weir Farm Heritage Trust



Spring landscape, 1988
Photograph by Susan Lapedis

1. This tiny landscape is the earliest known painting done by Weir at his newly acquired farm. Although the artist worked primarily in oils, he also experimented with watercolors throughout his career. On trips abroad, Weir used these fast-drying paints to make quick sketches, capturing scenes in much the same way we take a snapshot today; perhaps "Spring Landscape" was meant to show Weir's friends his new country retreat. This sketch has vibrant, crisp colors and a loose, natural touch that some critics feel is lacking in the artist's oil paintings. The work is also important because it shows Weir was interested in landscape painting before his mid-career association with such artists as Theodore Robinson and John Twachtman, with whom he would more fully develop his Impressionistic landscape style. The textures, changing light, and colors of the property around the farm clearly inspired this new direction in the artist's work.

Turn right and walk north through a third bar-way to the next marker.

2. From 1887 to 1893, Weir devoted himself almost exclusively to making small etchings and drypoints, which provided a release from the rigors of painting. The artist treated the metal plates required by these printmaking processes much like the pages of a sketchbook, finding it "...easy to carry about in one's pocket a half dozen... which would fill up odd moments." As in his paintings, Weir concentrated on small-scale farm scenes, focusing on the effects of light and shadow, but the prints tended to be more informal and spontaneous.

When "Webb Farm" was done, the barn (now known as the Burlingham Barn) was part of a neighboring farm owned by the Webb family. Although the barn siding, stone wall, and gate have changed and new trees have grown in, the scene is still easy to identify.

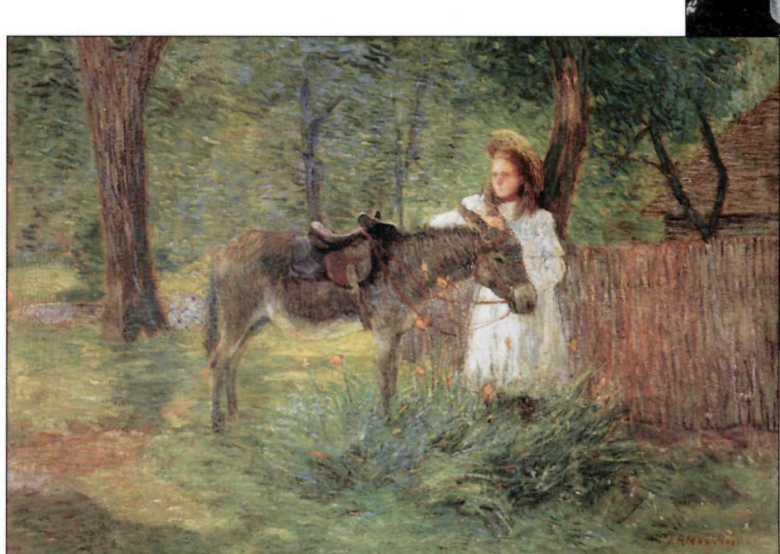


WEBB FARM (n.d.)
Etching and drypoint on paper, 5 1/2" x 7 7/8"
Collections of the Library of Congress

Walk out of the driveway and turn left on Nod Hill Road. Follow the road north to site #3 across the road from the Weir barn. Please watch out for cars as this is a busy road.

3. In his later career, Weir preferred painting outside to indoor studio work. Around 1903, he began a number of landscapes, including "After the Ride," that incorporated screens of trees and other strong linear patterns to break up distant views. This charming scene shows his youngest daughter Cora and a donkey standing next to the Weir barn's tack house; Nod Hill Road is merely a dirt path crossing the lower left hand corner of the picture.

Here, Weir's palette is light and colorful, enlivened by quick, energetic brush strokes. Typically, Weir has manipulated scale for artistic effect: The donkey seems small, while the fence and barn appear large in proportion to Cora. An invisible diagonal linking the roof line to the girl's figure and the donkey's back and tail, however, helps to anchor the figures and strengthen the composition.



Dorothy and Cora Weir on their donkey, c. 1900
Private collection

AFTER THE RIDE (c. 1903)
Oil on canvas, 24 3/8" x 34 1/4"
The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.



Continue north on the road and pass through a bar-way on your left, opposite the entrance to the pond trail. Look straight ahead for the next marker.

PATH IN THE ORCHARD (before 1900)
Oil on wood panel, 16" x 12"
The Tweed Museum of Art



Artist Sperry Andrews on the path, fall 1988
Photograph by Susan Lapedis

4. "Path in the Orchard" illustrates a wonderful view back to the Weir barn and the house, shown before it was remodeled and enlarged in 1900. While Weir lived here this was a working farm, of hay, alfalfa, and fruit were grown. The large trees were in ruin, yielding several barrels of cider each year. The orchards have long since fallen to ruin, but it is still easy to recognize the gnarled silhouettes of several of the old trees. In this interesting painting, Weir took the liberty of rearranging that brings elements to suit his needs, "relocating" the path, for example, to create a diagonal that contains the viewer's eye up into the center of the picture. As distinct vertical features, the foreground trees help to "ground" the composition. The crowded, asymmetrical arrangement of images is typical of Japanese prints, which had a strong influence on American Impressionism.

Turn around and walk north to find site #5 and the remnants of Weir's orchard.

5. Weir met Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847-1917) around 1870 in New York and maintained a long friendship with this highly regarded artist. Ryder himself was not an American Impressionist; rather, he was an extremely individualistic artist who actually defied any categorization. A very shy and private man, he visited the farm on several occasions. The story goes that Weir cut an exterior doorway from the guest room so Ryder could come and go without having to face the family. "Weir's Orchard" must have been started during one of Ryder's visits here but was undoubtedly finished in the artist's own studio, as he typically reworked his paintings for several years. This scene shares some of the characteristics of Ryder's more mystical work, including the palette of somewhat somber colors. Ryder used an "indirect" technique, building layers with repeated underpainting, overpainting, and glazing. As a result, his canvases were thick with paint, with a rich texture and a kind of inner glow.

WEIR'S ORCHARD (c. 1885-1890)
Albert Pinkham Ryder
Oil, 17 1/8" x 21"
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund

