

Weir Farm

National Historic Site
Connecticut

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



J.A. Weir, *The Barn Lot*, courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Brigham Young University

Home is the Starting Place

For more than 100 years Weir Farm has been an inspirational focal point to many generations of artists. At few other places is an American landscape so intimately tied to the paintings, drawings, etchings and other works of art produced there.

The American Impressionist painter Julian Alden Weir (1852–1919) purchased this Branchville, Connecticut farm in 1882. The property included 153 acres, which Weir eventually expanded to 238 acres. The “quiet plain little house among the rocks” held special appeal for the painter. For nearly four decades, Weir made this his primary summer studio and home to his family. He built a painting studio, twice enlarged the house, and continuously worked the landscape, adding and massaging features to suit his highly discerning eye. The farm became, in a sense, a big sprawling palette, its buildings, stone walls, woods and gardens all elements in the painter’s evolving composition. It also inspired and suggested subject matter for much of Weir’s work and offered countless excursions, both recreational and creative, to his wide circle of friends that included many leading figures in American art. The painters Albert Pinkham Ryder, John Twachtman and Childe Hassam were perhaps closest to Weir and were regular visitors to Branchville. Known for a generosity of spirit, as well as the legacy of his professional life as an artist, Weir recognized early the importance of a creative center, a focal point, for both life and art. “Home is the starting place,” he wrote his future wife in anticipation of their marriage and move to Branchville, which would remain home and workplace to Weir for the rest of his life.

In 1931 the sculptor Mahonri Young (1877–1957) married J. Alden Weir’s daughter Dorothy and came to live at the farm. A grandson of Brigham Young, Mahonri Young was already recognized for his small studies in bronze of the common working man. The studio he built at Branchville, however, was custom designed to accommodate his monumental public work. A person of great creative versatility, Young worked in many artistic mediums and in time set up an etching room off the sculpture studio. Dorothy Weir Young was also an accomplished artist in both oils and watercolor. She trained at her father’s side and took over his Branchville studio following his death.

Since Mahonri Young’s death in 1957 the cultivation of both art and life at Weir Farm has been carried on by the artists Sperry and Doris Andrews. The Andrews recognized this as a place of extraordinary significance to American art and were instrumental in preserving the landscape and its artistic legacy for the visiting public and future generations of artists.

J. Alden Weir, An American Master

In 1877, at the age of 25, Julian Weir returned to America from five years of training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He was one of many American art students during the years following the Civil War who sought formal academic training in Paris. The long hours spent in the studios there with other students studying abroad formed the beginning of a communal habit of working and many close friendships that would last throughout his life. While in Paris Julian had the chance to witness firsthand the earliest exhibitions of French Impressionist work. Although he would later become a champion of the style in America, he regarded it with disdain in his youth, criticizing Impressionist works for their total rejection of drawing and form.

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