

# HOG RIVER JOURNAL

## Destination: Destination: Weir Farm National Historic Site

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In June 1882, the young artist J. Alden Weir purchased a European still-life painting in New York City for \$560. Later that day, Weir's friend, the art dealer and collector Erwin Davis, who in the past had hired Weir to acquire works for his collection from Europe, offered to purchase the work from Weir. Negotiations ensued. Erwin Davis ended up with the painting (which is now unknown), and, in exchange, Weir was given a rocky 153-acre farm in southwestern Connecticut, now known as Weir Farm National Historic Site.

The modest farm in Branchville would prove a perfect summer retreat for the artist and his family and for his many artist friends. As Weir noted, "One cannot help but feel that wonderful something that the

landscape in nature suggests, somewhat like the soul of a human being." The fields and stone walls provided infinite artistic opportunities. Noted artists Childe Hassam, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and John Twachtman all found inspiration in this landscape, creating numerous significant works during their visits with Weir.

During the 37 years he spent at the farm, Weir would establish himself as one of the leading figures of American art, serving as president of the National Academy of Design, and on the board of directors at the Metropolitan Museum Art, and teaching at Cooper Union and the Art Students League in New York. He was also a founding member of The Ten American Painters, a group that broke away from the Society of American Artists to display their work on their own terms.

After Weir's death in 1919, the artistic legacy of the site was continued by his daughters, most notably Dorothy, a talented painter in her own right and the family historian. In 1931 she married noted sculptor Mahonri Young, grandson of Brigham Young. Young constructed a second studio on the farm to accommodate his large-scale work. He completed his most ambitious creation at the farm in 1947, the massive "This is the Place" Monument, which stands just east of



J. Alden Weir's Studio. Photo: Peter Margonelli, Weir Farm National Historic Site

Salt Lake City on the spot where Brigham Young, one hundred years earlier, had proclaimed that “this is the right place” for the Mormons to settle.

A few years after Dorothy’s death in 1947, Young was befriended by a local artist couple, Sperry and Doris Andrews. They acquired the farm after Young’s death in 1957 and almost immediately began to preserve the site. Their efforts, along with those of several like-minded preservation organizations such as the Weir Farm Art Center, the Trust for Public Land, and the State of Connecticut, led to the site’s designation in 1990 as Connecticut’s first National Park Service site. Today, the 60-acre National Historic Site preserves the historic core of the property, including the Weir House and the neighboring Burlingham House Visitor Center, the Weir and Young studios, two historic barns, several gardens, orchards, and original outbuildings. The charm and simplicity of the farm remain virtually unchanged.

With the help of the Painting Sites Trail Guide, the public can walk in the footsteps of the many artists who painted here. Painters, artists, and photographers are welcome to explore the historic gardens and grounds, sketch, draw, paint, and take photographs. Our new Take Part in Art program invites visitors to paint on site with watercolor materials supplied by the park. Nature walks, wildlife viewing, bird watching and ranger-led programs on topics ranging from art history to stonewall construction are other popular activities. The visitor center offers rotating exhibitions, an orientation video, a digital slide presentation featuring paintings by the artists who have worked at the farm, and a Junior Ranger activity booklet for children. Events take place throughout the year coordinated by the site’s cooperating association, the Weir Farm Art Center.



The landscape at Weir Farm that inspired artists Childe Hassam, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and John Twachtman. Photo: Christopher Gezon. Weir Farm National Historic Site

The grounds at Weir Farm National Historic Site, 735 Nod Hill Road, Wilton, are open year round from dawn to dusk. For information about visitor center hours, programs, and special events call (203) 834-1896 or visit [www.nps.gov/wefa](http://www.nps.gov/wefa).

The Weir Farm Art Center offers programs and activities that promote and sustain the Weir Farm legacy, from art history lectures to children’s art and nature classes. For more information call (203) 761-9945 or visit [www.weirfarmart-center.org](http://www.weirfarmart-center.org).

Weir Farm is one of 15 museums and historic sites on the Connecticut Art Trail. The Art Trail is the centerpiece of a variety of vacation experiences, detailed as [www.arttrail.org](http://www.arttrail.org). [Artrail.org](http://www.arttrail.org) also offers suggested itineraries and lodging packages by geographic region and detailed listings of and lin