

An Artist Rediscovered and Coming to Your Pocket

By Xiomáro | Arcadia Author

Author Xiomáro first learned about Connecticut's first national park when he began photographing it in 2011. Awareness of this "hallowed site" has risen steadily as residents continue to rediscover its historic namesake. Read on to learn more about how, starting in 2020, Americans from coast to coast will also become reacquainted with the country's most beloved Impressionist painter – by reaching into their pockets.

Although Connecticut was the fifth state to enter the Union, it would not be until 1990 when it saw its first national park unit – well over a century after Yellowstone was established. Being the third smallest state in square miles, it is no surprise that some Connecticut residents – even today, almost 30 years later – find it hard to believe they have a national park. In 2020, more Americans beyond Connecticut's borders will gradually rediscover the artist behind one of the most unique parks in the nation.

When President George H.W. Bush signed the law that created Weir Farm National Historic Site, which straddles the towns of Wilton and Ridgefield, a rare landscape was rescued from residential development. The 68 acres remaining from the original 238 have been a source of artistic inspiration for three generations of artist families and colleagues that have continuously resided and worked on the property from 1882 to 2005.



A rarely-seen photograph of Julian Alden Weir, some time after 1896, engaged in his favorite activity next to painting – fishing in his own pond. (Courtesy of Weir Farm National Historic Site).

It all began with Julian Alden Weir (1852-1919) who purchased the farm for \$10 plus a painting he owned. Although he continued to operate the farm, he cultivated the features of the property to advance his creative interests. Thus, the farm buildings, gardens, stone walls, undulating topography, dramatic rock formations, wetlands and a man-made pond all became sources of inspiration for his art. During this time period, Weir transitioned away from his traditional realistic painting style and adopted – and championed in the US – the radical dabs of bright paints and off-center compositions developed by the controversial French Impressionists.



A photograph through the window of Weir's studio. The antique glass distorts the view Impressionistically. Photographed by the author and reprinted from *Weir Farm National Historic Site* by Xiomáro and foreword by Senator Joe Lieberman (page 68, Arcadia Publishing, 2019).

The farm was also a source of inspiration and respite for his family and some of the most influential creative minds of the era such as Childe Hassam, Frederic Remington, Albert Pinkham Ryder, John Singer Sargent, John Henry Twachtman and Stanford White. After Weir's death, his daughter Dorothy (1890-1947), also an artist, and her husband, sculptor Mahonri Young (1877-1957), lived and created on the farm followed by Mahonri's friends Sperry and Doris Andrews who became the last artist-owners. The creative output of these artists is held in prominent collections across the country and in Europe. Weir's paintings, sketches and other works can be seen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Phillips Collection and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

These are just a few of the many special qualities of Weir Farm that propelled it to the attention of legislators like Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman, the Congress and then the president. In addition to being Connecticut's first national park, Weir Farm National Historic Site is only the second in the nation to honor an artist and the only one – out of over 400 park units – for a painter. Today, visitors can take tours of the restored house, studios, farm buildings and grounds to see what it was like to live and work as a leading artist – and to see the views that inspired over 250 works of art. The park continues the tradition that began with Weir by presenting exhibits, offering art programs for all ages and experience levels and developing professional talent through a world renowned Artist-in-Residence program.



Some of the many historic structures at Connecticut's Weir Farm National Historic Site. Photographed by the author and reprinted from [Weir Farm National Historic Site](#) by Xiomáro and foreword by Senator Joe Lieberman (page 93, Arcadia Publishing, 2019).

Next year, awareness of Weir Farm will be further elevated within the broader public consciousness when the US Mint issues a special America the Beautiful quarter commemorating the park. These collectible coins are described by the Mint as enshrining “hallowed sites” with a design on the back that captures “the breathtaking beauty of America’s natural landscapes that have inspired countless poets, adventurers, and artists.”



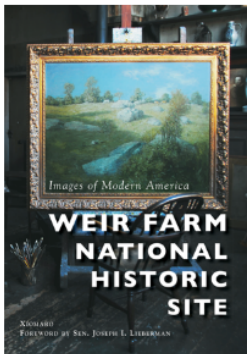
Designs under consideration for the back of 2020's Weir Farm quarter. Reprinted from [Weir Farm National Historic Site](#) by Xiomáro and foreword by Senator Joe Lieberman, courtesy of US Mint (page 95, Arcadia Publishing, 2019).

About the Author

Xiomáro was born in Brooklyn before it became cool. A graduate of New York University School of Law, he left corporate litigation at a large law firm to represent celebrities such as disco icons Village People, pop artist Lisa Lisa and hip hop artist MC Shan. After recovering from cancer, he found solitary peace photographing the national parks. Accepted into Weir Farm's Artist-in-Residence program, he began receiving commissions from the National Park Service to create artistic photographic collections. Xio continues as a nationally exhibited artist, curator, writer, public speaker, photography teacher, National Park advocate and frequent media presence. In 2016, Xio's daughter Jessica – a poet and painter – died from a drug overdose after years of struggling with Borderline Personality Disorder. His Arcadia book is dedicated to her with a portion of profits going to Emotions Matter, Inc. – a nonprofit mental health care advocacy group. "Xiomáro" (pronounced SEE-oh-MAH-ro) is a Spanish name that means "ready for battle."

For more information about Xio's art and to get a free 5x7" Weir Farm print, visit his website at www.xiomaro.com.

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