

ARTIST XIOMARO'S UPCOMING BOOK CELEBRATES WEIR FARM NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

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By: Anna Quinn

Photo Credit: *Xiomaro*, Contributed Photo/Hearst Connecticut Media

When New York-based artist Xiomaro applied to Weir Farm's artist-in-residence program six years ago, he didn't think he would be accepted, let alone write the first book about the national park. "I didn't think I was qualified," Xiomaro said, adding he had started photographing parks as a hobby only a few years earlier. "But, I applied anyway. I thought, 'I have nothing to lose.'"

The park selected him to live at Weir Farm National Historic site for a month in 2011. At the time, the park's buildings, where its namesake Julian Alden Weir lived and worked, were closed to the public for renovations. Xiomaro took photos of the grounds and the buildings before they were restored. Eventually, he was asked to return as a visiting artist and photographed the completed buildings in 2014.

"He has staying power," said Linda Cook, the park's superintendent. "He has been a stalwart partner."

Now, Xiomaro hopes a book featuring about 150 of the thousands of photos he has taken of Weir Farm will help readers share his love for the historical grounds. Many people he has shown the photos to, even those in Connecticut, did not realize the park existed, he said.

Weir Farm, which became Connecticut's first national park in 1990, is the only park dedicated to American painting. The park has been home to three generations of artists in its 130-year history, including Weir, who is called the father of American impressionist painting and died in 1919. It continues to be used by artists from around the world with its artist-in-residence program, which has housed more than 200 artists since it started in 1998.

The book will outline the decadeslong struggle for the property to become a protected park. Before it was established as a park, the grounds dwindled from 238 acres in 1919 to just 60 today, Xiomaro said.

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"I want (readers) to understand what attracted these artists to this particular location," Xiomaro said. "It's important for people to know there was this unbelievable lineage of artists who lived there, but it also could have ended under a bulldozer."

The book will likely be published in 2019, he said, to align with the 100-year anniversary of Weir's death and the 2020 release of a quarter featuring the park. Cook said the book will update the park's documentation of its buildings, where the renovations aimed to return each structure to its look during its historical "period of significance." It will teach people about the historical aspects of the park outside of its most famous reputation as the birthplace of American impressionism, such as Weir's daughter's role in the suffrage movement or his support for other forms of art. "There are other aspects of the story ... that you can put in a book, but you can't always convey in a 30-minute tour," Cook said. "It's really exciting for a park to have an artist who wants to build that relationship over time and can create a body of work that then gives the park a new look. We just feel very lucky."

Since working at Weir, Xiomaro said he has discovered a passion for photographing other historical sites across New England. He has since photographed Henry W. Longfellow's home, the Sagamore Hill National Historic Site where President Theodore Roosevelt lived, William Floyd's estate and others. He hopes his work, including the Weir book, will show people that smaller national parks on the East Coast can be as beautiful and important as the more well-known attractions like the Grand Canyon or Yosemite.

"There are more to parks than just the grand vistas they could see out in the West," Xiomaro said. "(These parks) do for the mind what the places out West do for the eyes. Here is where the country began, so all the history is really going to be based in New England. There's a lot of beauty – you just have to look for it."

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