



Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist



(Weir Farm National Historic Site)



(Weir Farm National Historic Site)

Sunny north light streams into the small wooden studio built high on New England's rocky landscape. Paintbrushes, canvases, and sketchbooks still clutter the artist's work space. The acrid smell of oil paint pervades the atmosphere and brings to mind a time when an artist

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found creative energy at this rural escape from city life. Outside, the rolling green landscape is intersected by picturesque stone walls. The sweeping hillside is further punctuated by blossoming fruit trees and mature oaks and sugar maples. It is not hard to imagine a distinguished gentleman in a three-piece tweed suit standing before an easel, a paintbrush in one hand and a palette in the other. This is clearly the home of an artist. This is Weir Farm.

Weir Farm, in Branchville, Connecticut, exemplifies the "quiet marriage of art and tended landscape that so clearly defined the American Impressionist movement."¹ The painter Julian Alden Weir (1852-1919) acquired the farm in 1882 and summered at this country retreat for nearly forty years. During a period when railroads were expanding, populations were increasing, and America's agrarian system was being replaced by industry, Weir was one of a group of artists who found comfort and inspiration in the quiet everyday settings of New England, and, in many ways, defined our vision of the American landscape.



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Where this lesson fits into the curriculum

Time Period: Late 19th century and early 20th century

Topics: This lesson could be used in studying the Industrial Revolution, America's back-to-nature movement, the rise of middle-class culture and values, or as an introduction to American art history

Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

This lesson relates to the following National Standards for History from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools:

US History Era 6

- **Standard 1B:** The student understands the rapid growth of cities and how urban life changed;
 - **Standard 1D:** The student understands the effects of rapid industrialization on the environment and the emergence of the first conservation movement;
 - **Standard 2C:** The student understands how new cultural movements at different social levels affected American life.
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Relevant Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

This lesson relates to the following Curriculum Standards for Social Studies from the National Council for the Social Studies:

Theme III: People, Places, and Environment

- Standard A - The student elaborates mental maps of locales, regions, and the world that demonstrate understanding of relative location, directions, size, and shape.
- Standard G - The student describes how people create places that reflect cultural values and ideals as they build neighborhoods, parks, shopping centers, and the like.

Theme IV: Individual Development and Identity

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- Standard B -The student describes personal connections to place - as associated with community, nation, and world.

Relevant Common Core Standards

This lesson relates to the following Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies for middle and high school students:

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.2

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.5
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.6

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.7

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.10



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About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file, "[Weir Farm Historic District](http://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/4033eaa5-d6ed-42ea-a4f0-2b8a76f14178?branding=NRHP)," [http://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/4033eaa5-d6ed-42ea-a4f0-2b8a76f14178?branding=NRHP]. Weir's writings, correspondence, and the artwork he created at the site. It was written by Gay Elizabeth Vietzke, former Supervisory Park Ranger at Weir Farm National Historic Site. It was published in 2000. It was edited by Fay Metcalf and the Teaching with Historic Places staff. TwHP is sponsored, in part, by the Cultural Resources Training Initiative and Parks as Classrooms programs of the National Park Service. This lesson is one in a series that brings the important stories of historic places into the classrooms across the country.

Objectives

1. To describe how American Impressionism replaced earlier forms of landscape painting at the end of the 19th century;
2. To describe the techniques associated with Impressionism;
3. To explain the importance of his farm to Weir's creative process;
4. To investigate the work of artists currently working in their own community and where they get their inspiration.

Materials for students

The materials listed below can either be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students.

1. Two maps of the area, and the Danbury Norwalk Railroad line and train schedule;
2. Three readings that describe the American Impressionist movement, the experiences of artists at Weir's farm, and Weir's dedication to his farm;
3. Three historic photographs of the farm and Weir's daughter;
4. Two paintings of different scenes of the farm.

Visiting the site

Weir Farm National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service. The area is located approximately 45 miles to the northeast of New York City near the towns of Wilton and Ridgefield, Connecticut, and can be reached by taking Route 7 to Route 102 West in Branchville, left on Old Branchville Road, and left again on Nod Hill Road. For

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more information, contact the Superintendent, Weir Farm National Historic Site, 735 Nod Hill Road, Wilton, CT 06897, or [visit the park's Web page.](#)



Getting Started



(J. Alden Weir, The Laundry, Branchville, ca. 1894. Weir Farm Trust, Gift of Anna Weir Ely Smith and Gregory Smith.)

What style of painting is used in this painting?

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Photo Analysis Worksheet

Step 1:

Examine the photograph for 10 seconds. How would you describe the photograph?

Step 2:

Divide the photograph into quadrants and study each section individually. What details--such as people, objects, activities--do you notice?

Step 3:

What other information--such as time period, location, season, reason photo was taken--can you gather from the photo?

Step 4:

How would you revise your first description of the photo using the information noted in Steps 2 and 3?

Step 5:

What questions do you have about the photograph? How might you find answers to these questions?



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Setting the Stage

Between 1870 and 1890, the country's population increased from 40 million to 63 million people (nearly a third of these new residents were immigrants). The urban population grew much faster than the rural; by the year 1890, the cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago all had populations exceeding one million. Railroads crisscrossed the continent, not only making a national economy and mass market possible, but also introducing residents in highly populated areas to the possibility of commuting to work. But what most people saw as progress also brought problems. With the Industrial Revolution came crowds, noise, foul air, and, in some people's minds, questionable morality to the city.

Reacting to these issues, many city dwellers embraced a back-to-nature movement which gained great strength at the end of the 19th century. Middle-class Americans turned to the country club, the dude ranch, and the summer retreat to escape the problems and pressures of the city.¹

Julian Alden Weir was part of that movement. Born in 1852 in West Point, New York, where his father taught drawing at the United States Military Academy, Weir studied painting in Europe and became a major figure in popularizing the style that became known as American Impressionism. His farm in Branchville, Connecticut, served as his retreat from his winter home in New York City. As early as 1877, Weir had written to his parents from Europe exclaiming, "Nature seems more rich than ever and full of charm, which one can only appreciate by being away from it. The city life, where one is imprisoned amongst walls, makes one's faculties more appreciative."² In 1882, after he had spent nearly five years in New York City, Weir traded 10 dollars and a painting for the deed to 153 acres in the Connecticut hills.

That farm became Weir's primary summer studio and was home to his family for the next four decades. What drew Weir to the farm was the inspiration he derived from the landscape. He believed the opportunity to "experience nature" helped him to grow in both mind and spirit. Weir built a painting studio, twice enlarged his house, and continuously rearranged the landscape to suit his highly discerning eye. The farm also became, in a sense, an extensive palette; its buildings, stone walls, and gardens were all elements in the painter's evolving composition. It provided subject matter for much of Weir's work as well as that of his friends, many of whom were also leading figures in American art.

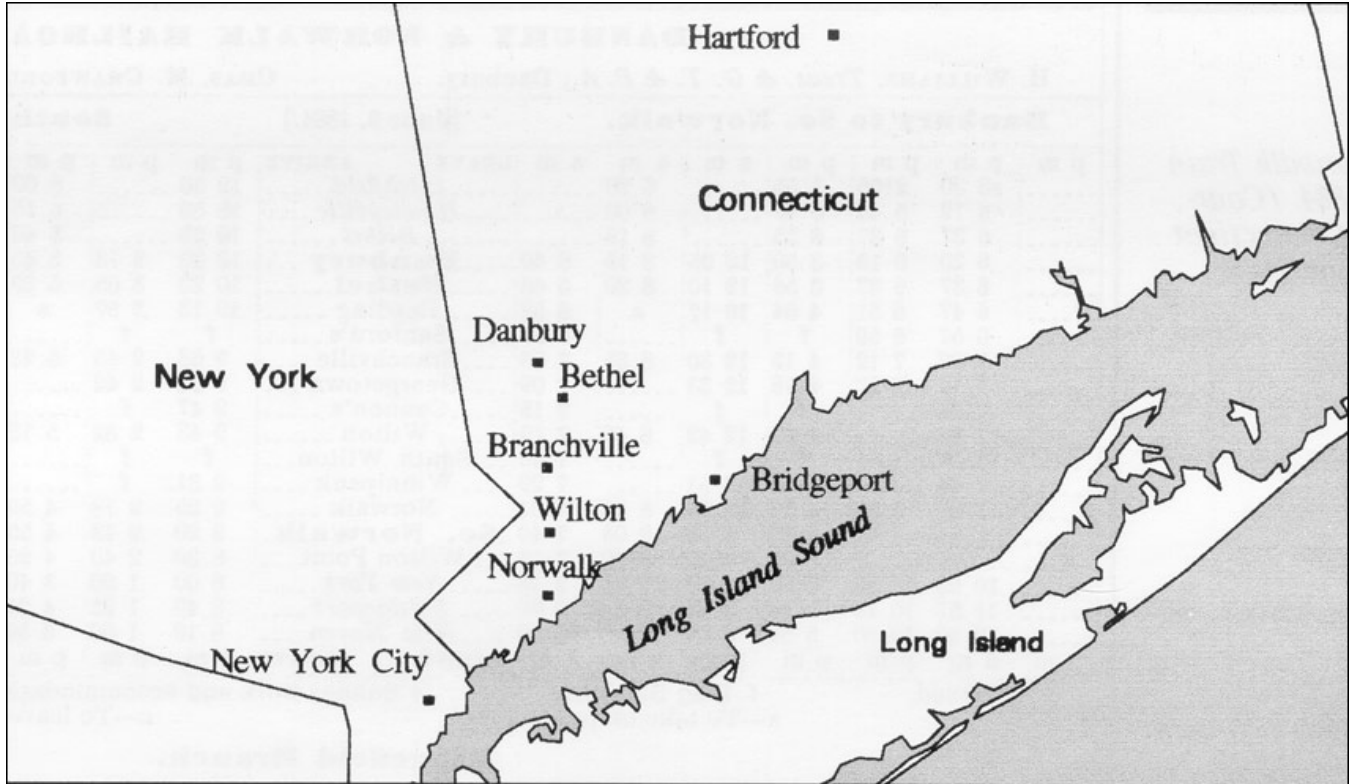
By 1890 Weir and his colleagues were increasingly painting outdoors, focusing on landscapes as subject matter. Unlike earlier generations who sought to make their subjects look real, they used a technique characterized by laying pure unmixed color on the canvas with dabs and broken brushwork to create a sense—or impression—of intense flickering light. Also, unlike American landscape painters of the previous generation (such as Moran or Bierstadt) who sought out the extraordinary, untamed and dramatic, the American Impressionists painted the familiar, cultivated landscapes located in their own backyards. Through their eyes, these ordinary domestic places in Connecticut and elsewhere in New England became part of everyone's sense of what was beautiful in the American landscape.



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Locating the Site

Map 1: Branchville, Connecticut to New York City

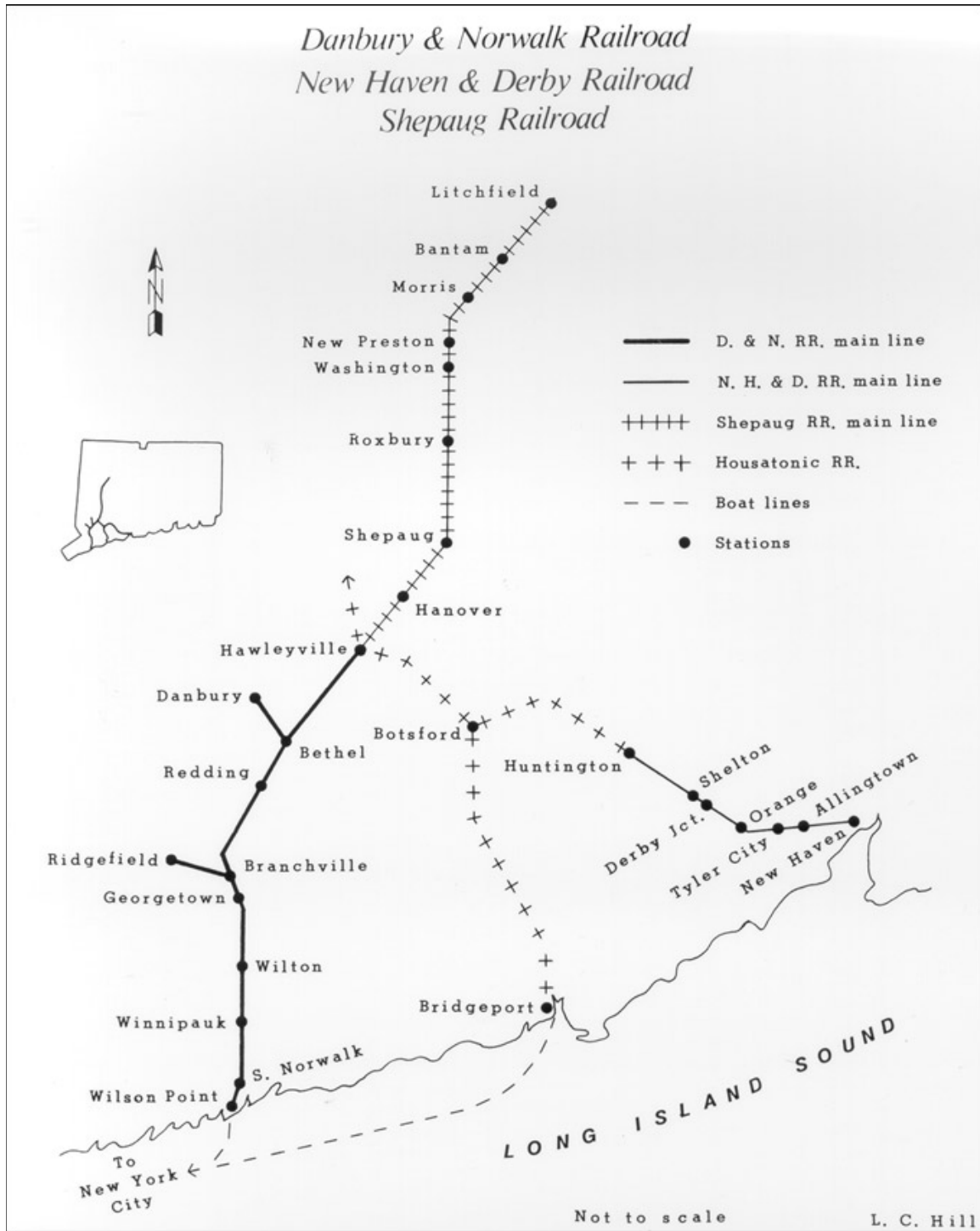


(Courtesy of the Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut)



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Map 2: Danbury Norwalk Railroad Line



(Courtesy of the Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut)

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Table 1: Danbury Norwalk Train Schedule, 1884

DANBURY & NORWALK RAILROAD.																[Standard Time.]	
H. WILLIAMS, <i>Treas. & G. T. & P. A.</i> , Danbury.								CHAS. M. CRAWFORD, <i>Superintendent</i> , So. Norwalk.									
Danbury to So. Norwalk.								South Norwalk to Danbury.									
[June 9, 1884.]																	
p m	p m	p m	p m	a m	a m	a m	LEAVE	ARRIVE	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	MLS	FRS
	8 30	2 05	1 55		6 20		.....	Litchfield.....	12 50		8 00		1 10	8 20			
	6 12	5 45	3 40		8 00		.....	Hawleyville.....	10 53		6 15		8 45	11 15			
	6 37	6 37	3 55		8 18		.....	Bethel.....	10 25		5 40		7 30	10 55			
	6 20	6 15	3 50	12 05	8 15	6 40		Danbury	10 30	3 13	5 45	7 16	1 45	11 00		23 1/2	80
	6 37	6 37	3 56	12 10	8 20	6 46		Bethel	10 23	3 05	5 39	7 11	1 30	10 52		20 1/2	75
	6 47	6 51	4 04	12 17	A	6 52		Reading.....	10 13	2 57	B	7 05	1 10	10 44		17 1/2	70
	6 57	6 59	f	f		6 57		Sanford's.....	f	f		6 59	12 55	10 38		15 1/2	65
	7 07	7 12	4 15	12 30	8 35	7 06		Branchville.....	9 58	2 45	5 23	6 51	12 40	10 30		12 3/4	55
	7 14	7 27	4 18	12 33		7 09		Georgetown.....	9 52	2 42		6 46	12 24	10 25		11 1/2	50
	7 25		f	f		7 15		Cannon's.....	9 47	f		6 39	12 04	10 18		9	40
	7 32		4 27	12 42	8 46	7 19		Wilton.....	9 43	2 32	5 12	6 35	11 54	10 13		7 1/2	35
	7 39		f	f		7 25		South Wilton.....	f	f		6 29		10 05		5	25
	7 44		4 35	12 51		7 29		Winnipauk.....	9 31	f		6 26		9 58		3 1/2	15
	7 51	8 10	4 39	12 55	8 58	7 34		Norwalk.....	9 25	2 18	4 59	6 20		9 52		1 1/2	10
	8 01	8 25	4 45	1 00	9 03	7 40		So. Norwalk	9 20	2 13	4 55	6 15	11 30	9 45			
			5 05	1 20	9 20	7 55		Wilson Point.....	8 30	2 40	4 25	5 40				2 1/2	
	10 53	10 53	6 00	2 20	10 33	9 13		New York.....	8 00	1 00	3 40	4 45	10 00	8 00			
	11 57	10 16	5 19	2 21	9 48	9 20		Bridgeport.....	8 40	1 35	4 21	5 36	9 36	8 40			
	12 30	10 50	5 51	3 00	10 20	10 00		New Haven.....	8 10	1 00	3 50	5 07	9 03	8 00			
p m	a m	p m	p m	p m	a m	a m	ARRIVE	LEAVE	a m	p m	p m	p m	p m	a m	p m	MLS	FRS
† Mixed.		f Flag Stations.				s Sunday milk and accommodation.				* Mondays only.							
A—To take on passengers.				B—To leave passengers.													
Ridgefield Branch.																	
p m	p m	p m	a m	a m	LEAVE	ARRIVE	a m	p m	p m	p m	a m	MLS	FRS				
	6 00	3 55	12 10	8 15	6 45		10 17	3 03	5 43	7 08	7 48	16 1/2	80				
	6 20	4 13	12 30	8 33	7 05		9 58	2 45	5 23	6 51	7 30	12 1/2	55				
	8 25	4 45	1 00	9 03	7 40		9 20	2 13	4 55	6 15							
p m	p m	p m	a m	a m	AR.	LV.	a m	p m	p m	p m	a m						
Connects at So. Norwalk with New York, New Haven & Hartford R. R. At Bethel with Shepaug R. R. At Danbury with Housatonic R. R. and N. Y. & N. E. R. R.																	

(Courtesy of the Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut)

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Questions for Maps 1 & 2, & Table 1

1) Using Map 1, locate Branchville, Connecticut, and New York City. As a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the National Commission of Fine Arts, and president of the National Academy of Design, Weir often had to attend meetings in New York.

2) Examine Map 2 and Table 1, the train schedule used when Weir planned his two-hour long trips to the city.

3) What was the frequency of the trains, and the variety of destinations available for the commuter and tourist alike?

4) Why did the train make it possible for Weir to live on the farm?

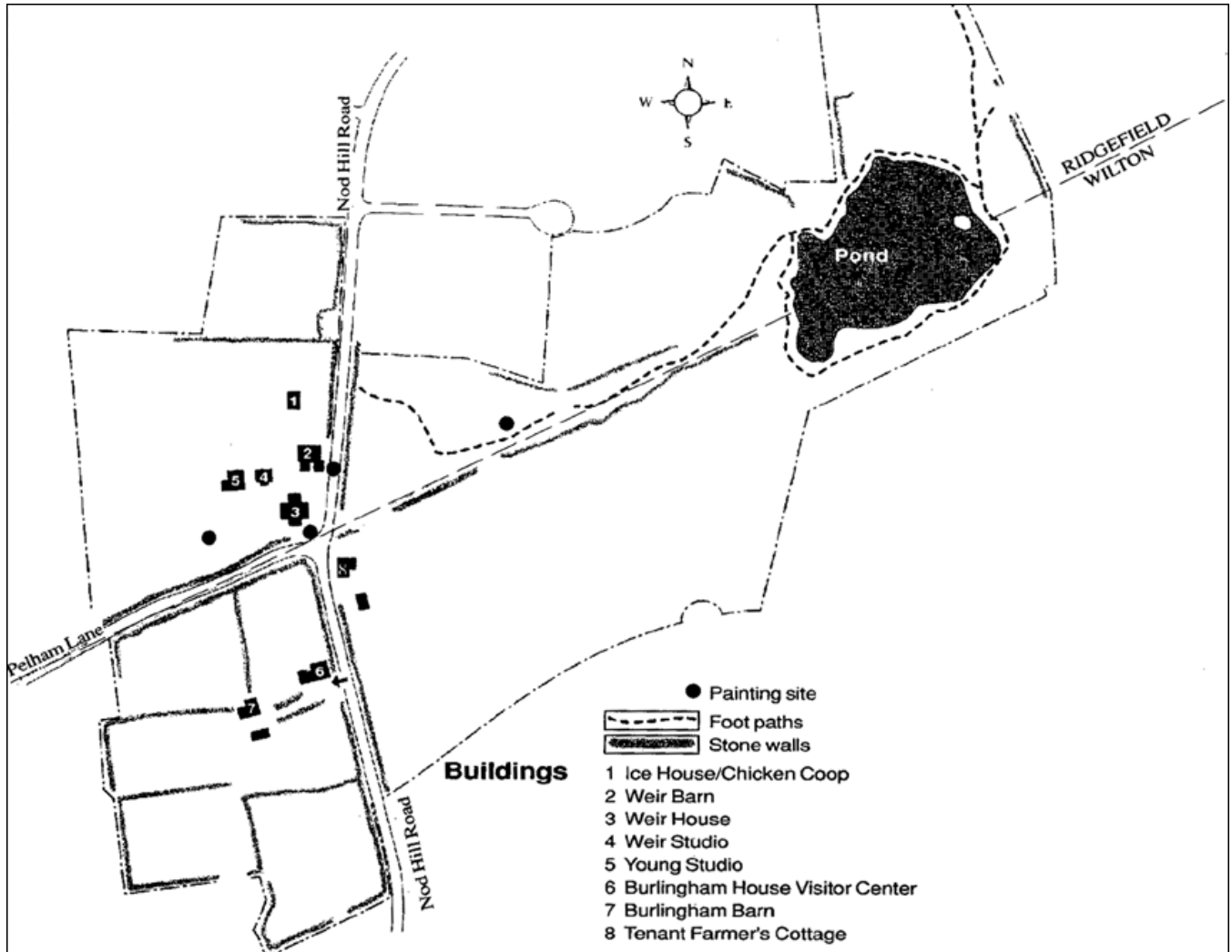
5) Would it have been possible for him to live there year round?



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Locating the Site

Map 3: Weir Farm



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Questions for Map 3

1) Note the relationship of the cluster of buildings to each other and to the roads, open spaces, and stone walls.

2) This site lies at the top of a long high hill. Why might an artist choose a home in such a location?



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Determining the Facts

Reading 1: A Truly American Impressionism

Impressionism is an art movement that began in France in about 1874. The movement was characterized by painting outdoors, using small brushstrokes of pure color and depicting scenes of modern contemporary life viewed at a specific moment in time. Artists attempted to depict their "impression" of a scene by simulating the effect of reflected light and atmosphere in their work. Space was often distorted; figures were often flattened. Previously, the majority of artists had painted landscapes in a realistic manner, so the results of the Impressionists' work were at once shocking and exciting.

American artists studying in Europe were some of the first to see the French Impressionists' work. J. Alden Weir was a student at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* (School of Fine Arts) in Paris for five years during the 1870s and visited one of the first exhibits of the French Impressionists. Like most Americans studying abroad at that time, Weir was focusing on academic drawing and the techniques needed to represent the human figure as realistically as possible. When he saw this new style of painting he wrote home to his parents saying, "I have never in my life seen such horrible things.... They do not observe drawing nor form but give you an impression of what they call nature. It was worse than a Chamber of Horrors. I was there about a quarter of an hour and left with a head ache."¹ In spite of his first response to this new style of painting, Weir would, in the years to come, become one of the champions of American Impressionism.

There was already an American tradition of painting *en plein-air* (out-of-doors). The Hudson River School and Luminist painters of the 19th century had focused on scenes of grandeur and magnificence in the natural world. As Weir and his friends sought to evoke the spirit of more common or ordinary American landscapes, they turned to impressionist techniques to capture the sense of actually being in a particular place. Like the French, the American Impressionists used pure color applied directly to the canvas. Upon close examination of the paintings, one can see all the little dabs and strokes that make up the picture; from a distance, the colors create the illusion of flickering light. These painters did not use neutral tones and blacks and grays for shadows; instead, they used color for that purpose. They employed compositional elements borrowed from the new world of photography and from the art and prints of the Orient such as cropping, asymmetry, and various levels of focus. Even with this emphasis on new techniques, the Americans clung to their earlier training. Unlike the French impressionists who were primarily interested in depicting the surfaces of their subjects, the American Impressionists maintained a sense of three-dimensional volume in their paintings. This was particularly true of Weir's work.

Weir continuously painted his family and life at the farm. The people are recognizable; the places can be identified on the landscape. There is no doubt that his paintings were of his own backyard, the farm he loved and cherished. American Impressionism offered Weir a new and freer way of viewing his surroundings. He came to embrace this new style as a means of achieving greater truth. In 1892, Weir wrote of his work:

I am in a way to progress as I never have been before--My eyes, I feel have been opened to a big truth and whether or not I can develop in that direction I know not, but one thing I do know is that painting has a greater charm to me than ever before and I feel that I can enjoy studying any phase of nature which before I had restricted to preconceived notions of what it ought to be. I do not say that I am right but I do

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say that if nature and art have greater charms to me owing to my "hypnotism," as one of the papers calls it, then I cannot be far wrong, my art is my life.²

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Questions for Reading 1

- 1) What are characteristics of the style of painting known as "Impressionism"?

- 2) As a student in France, how did Weir respond to his first visit to an exhibit of French Impressionists?

- 3) What was special or unique about American Impressionism?

- 4) Weir found that his painting style changed greatly after he adopted Impressionism. How did he describe that change?



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Determining the Facts

Reading 2: Impressions of Weir's Farm

"Here shall we rest and call content our home."¹

J. Alden Weir's farm in Branchville became the favored retreat of many important American painters. Like Weir, many of these men had studied in Europe where they spent long hours painting and drawing together in the academic teaching studios of Paris. This communal habit of working was continued even after their return to America. Weir welcomed his friends and contemporaries to his "little house among the rocks" for painting, conversation, and good fellowship.

Perhaps the painter closest to Weir was his half-brother, John Ferguson Weir, a member of the Hudson River School and the first Dean of Fine Arts at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. John was a frequent visitor to the farm and also drew inspiration from the gentle landscape. The brothers exchanged thoughts and criticism about their work for their entire lives, always drawing support and encouragement from the other's opinions. They also shared a deep love of the Connecticut landscape. In a letter to J. Alden dated 1883, John informed his brother of his relaxing trip to the farm:

We often speak of you as we sit on the pleasant porch in the evening twilight. I imagine you and Anna [Weir's first wife], seated in your two armchairs, sitting in these twilights in the future summers. I advise you to hang on to this place, old boy, a "lonesome lodge" which is a pleasant place of retreat in storm and drought is no bad thing to have--for an artist--keep it trim and untrammelled, and you will find it a haven of refuge. The air is fine and healthy--and I see no drawbacks....²

Like John, J. Alden agreed that only good could come from time in the country. In fact, he provided the benefits of his farm to his friends and acquaintances, and invited many to come relax and recover at his retreat. A Weir family legend tells of the great John Singer Sargent visiting the farm for the first time, running around the backyard trying to catch fireflies which he had never seen before.

A third famous artist to visit Weir Farm was Albert Pinkham Ryder. Even today, art historians have difficulty categorizing Ryder. Reared in the city, he was an urban recluse, prone to illness and insomnia. Ryder was persuaded, however, to join the Weir family in the country on several occasions. Ryder used the visit to recover his health, coming and going undisturbed from the main house through a door Weir had cut into the guest room for this sole purpose. Ryder completed several paintings of Weir's landscape, and later thanked Weir for the pleasure of his visit:

I have never seen the beauty of spring before; which is something to have lived and suffered for. The landscape and the air are full of promise. That eloquent little fruit tree that we looked at together, like a spirit among the more earthy colors, is already losing its fairy blossoms. Showing the lesson of life; how alert we must be if we would have its gifts and lessons.³

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Questions for Reading 2

- 1) How did Weir's student experiences in Europe influence his life at Weir Farm?
- 2) Why do you think John Weir thought his brother should hang onto the "lonesome lodge"?
- 3) Compare the descriptions of the three visits to the farm. How would you describe the effect life in the country had on these grown men? Is there a place that makes you feel this way?



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Determining the Facts

Reading 3: Home is the Starting Place

J. Alden Weir was comfortable and confident with his art by the year 1900. As the new century began, Weir enjoyed his greatest success. He exhibited widely during the winters, won numerous awards, and sold paintings to the country's leading museums. Throughout the next two decades, his summer home at the Branchville farm remained his center, his home, the source of his inspiration. "Home is the starting place and love the guide to your actions,"¹ he told the son of his good friend John Henry Twachtman, a prominent painter.

Weir took great pride in his farm. He employed a tenant farmer to live on the site year round and grow crops of grains such as rye, buckwheat, and barley on the rocky fields. While the contrast of golden tall grasses against the stone walls and orchards provided a pleasing image, Weir was not content to leave the setting alone. Instead, he made the landscape of Weir Farm a work of art. Weir manipulated and reworked his property to create an environment that would continue to stimulate and soothe his creative spirit. He cleared some of the land to open up dramatic views, and he introduced new features to the property. One of Weir's students wrote:

Few artists of character I have known have escaped the diverting effect of the purchase and development of run down property. [Weir] was no exception. He had much property. It was lovely. It charmed him. He gave much thought, time and energy to its improvement. How he enjoyed clearing vistas, trimming trees well up from the ground revealing beautiful notes and things unseen before.²

The best example of Weir's improvement and rearrangement of nature was the pond he built at the farm. In 1896, Weir had won first prize (\$2,500) at the Boston Art Club. Using that money, he dammed a small brook to create a four-acre pond beyond the fields of crops at the farm. Not only did the small lake and surrounding woodland make great subject matter for an Impressionist, it also provided a place on the farm for fishing. Weir was an avid fisherman, and it was said of him that he always had in his hand either a paintbrush or a fishing pole. The pond was large enough for boating, so Weir soon added a boathouse. He built a summer gazebo and a rustic bridge so Victorian ladies in their long white dresses could cross the marshy expanse.

At the farm, Weir's intention was to enhance nature, not to change or spoil the character of it. Any boulder that was moved, every tree that was relocated, was done with the eye of an artist. Weir wanted his family and his guests to enjoy leisure activities on the land and to always be able to experience and enjoy the landscape that was so dear to him. Weir often painted his family and guests enjoying these surroundings.

Weir's commitment to nature was clear in an interview he once gave in connection with a large exhibit at the National Academy of Design. He was asked what interested him about painting. He answered after a moment with one word, "character," which he meant was to catch the essence of his subject. Weir went on to explain that he had once met a young painter who asked him for a few words of wisdom about his work. Weir replied:

I told him to throw away his brushes, go out in the country and paint with a stick-look at nature and get the paint on anyhow. [The young painter] was disgusted-

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-thought that was fool talk. But the next I heard of him, he had done it--actually gone out and tried to get the character of the scene and daub it on the canvas, and he got the real thing.³

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Questions for Reading 3

- 1) In what ways did Weir manipulate the landscape?
- 2) What types of activities did Weir and his family enjoy at the farm?
- 3) Why did Weir tell the young student to go "paint with a stick"? Do you think that was good advice?

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Visual Evidence

Photo 1: The fishing bridge on the path to Weir's pond, after 1896



(Private Collection)

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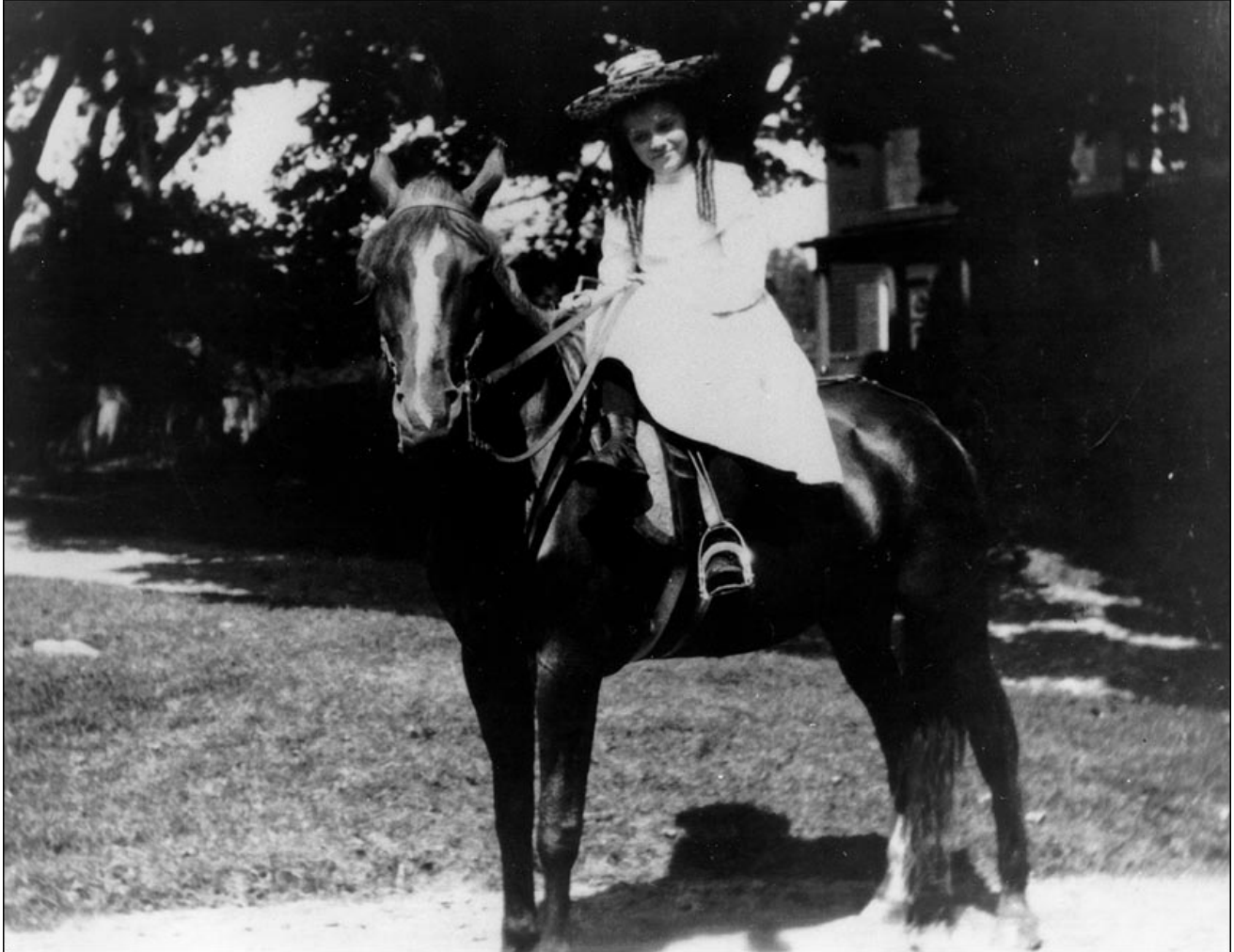
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Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist

Visual Evidence

Photo 2: Cora Weir riding side saddle, c. 1900



(Weir Farm National Historic Site)



Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist

Visual Evidence

Photo 3: View of Weir's house from the west, c. 1890



(Weir Farm National Historic Site)

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Questions for Photos 1-3

- 1) How can you tell these photos are in the country?
- 2) What are some distinguishing features of this landscape?
- 3) What types of activities are people engaged in?



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Visual Evidence

Painting 1: *The Fishing Party* by J. Alden Weir about 1915, oil on canvas, 28 x 23 in, unsigned



(Courtesy The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC)



Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist

Questions for Painting 1

- 1) Examine Painting 1, *The Fishing Party*, and compare it with Photo 1, a view of the fishing bridge.

- 2) How are the two images alike? How are they different?

- 3) Are the photograph and the painting showing the same place? How do you know? Has Weir changed reality in his painting?

- 4) Do you think both were created at the same time of year? Provide reasons for your answer.

- 5) How does Weir communicate the distinguishing features of the landscape in his painting?



Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist

Visual Evidence

Painting 2: *After the Ride* by J. Alden Weir, about 1903, oil on canvas, 24 1/8 x 34 1/4 in., signed



(Courtesy The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC)



Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist

Questions for Painting 2

1) Examine Painting 2, *After the Ride*, and compare it with Photo 2 showing the girl on the horse.

2) What is the subject of this painting?

3) How does it compare with the photograph? What does this tell you about Impressionist technique? For example, how does Weir communicate the grass at the girl's feet?

4) Do you think Weir distorted details too far beyond reality? What is your opinion of the work?

Teaching with Historic Places

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist

Putting It All Together

Each part of the country has unique vistas. Landscapes can be green stretches lush with trees and shrubs or dust-covered, flat land punctuated by jagged rocks. Landscapes can also be urban spaces densely packed with soaring buildings. The following exercises encourage students to look at their surroundings with a different eye--an artist's eye.

Activity 1: Find a Painting Site

Have students find places in their community that date from Weir's time at the farm--1882-1919--and that they think would be good subjects for an impressionist painting. Have them consider the time of day and the types of places that Weir and his friends looked for. They might consider parks, scenic roads, streets where houses have deep front yards or gardens, or even a building with interesting shapes and surfaces. Some interiors may even be appropriate. Have each student find a view they believe would make a good painting. Ask them to sketch or photograph their "place," and then share their impressions about that place with the class. Do they think Impressionist techniques would be better than realism in conveying the sense of what being in this place is like? Allow time for discussion about students' choices.

Teaching with Historic Places

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist

Activity 2: The Impressionist Experience

If possible, plan this activity cooperatively with an art teacher. Choose an interesting site at or around your school and ask each student to prepare a finished work using pastels, cray-pas, crayons, watercolors, chalk, or poster paints. Encourage the students to experiment with impressionistic techniques. Have them paint outdoors, use bright colors, paint with dabs and small strokes, and include light and shadows at different times of the day or in different weather conditions. Make it clear to the students that no one is expected to produce a masterpiece. As the American Impressionists did, have the students work side by side and encourage one another--each student should try to produce some sort of personal "impression" of the subject. Then have students share their work and discuss the experience as a group. You may wish to post some of the completed works on a bulletin board or in a showcase.



Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist

Activity 3: Art in Your Community

American Impressionism was centered around the New England countryside and reflected the popular back-to-nature movement. Have the students conduct research to discover local artists who depict images of their region's landscape. These works need not be traditional landscapes. Some abstract painters respond to the landscape in unique ways and many Native American, Hispanic, and African American artists imprint their own interpretations of place on their works. Invite educators from local art museums, historical societies, galleries or libraries to the classroom to discuss and show slides of the different styles of art popular in the region. If possible, arrange a field trip to a gallery or museum.

When research is completed, have students make short presentations about the artist or artists studied. Then have the class discuss what is artistically unique about your region and how the artists were inspired by that uniqueness.



Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist

References and Endnotes

Introduction

¹Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, quoted in the Weir Farm National Historic Site General Management Planning Newsletter No. 2, Spring 1993.

Setting the Stage

¹Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America*, reprint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), x-xiii.

²Letter from J. Alden Weir to his mother and father, dated April 6, 1877, Barbizon, France. Reprinted in Dorothy Weir Young's *The life and Letters of J. Alden Weir* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 122.

Reading 1

Reading 1 was compiled from Dorothy Weir Young, *The Life and Letters of J. Alden Weir* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

¹Letter from J. Alden Weir to his mother and father dated April 15, 1877, 3 Bis Rue Des Beaux-Arts, Paris. Young, 123.

²Letter from J. Alden Weir to John Ferguson Weir, c. 1892. Young, 176.

Reading 2

Reading 2 was compiled from the *Dorothy Weir Young Scrapbooks* and other sources at the Weir Farm National Historic Site.

¹Letter from John Ferguson Weir to J. Alden Weir dated August 2, 1883. *Dorothy Weir Young Scrapbooks: 1882 to December 1883*, Weir Farm National Historic Site.

²*ibid.*

³Letter from Albert Pinkham Ryder to J. Alden Weir dated May 5, 1897, Branchville, Connecticut. *Dorothy Weir Young Scrapbooks: January 1892 - December, 1900*, Weir Farm National Historic Site.

Reading 3

Reading 3 was compiled from David F. Ransom, "Weir Farm Historic District" (Fairfield County, Connecticut) National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1984; "Weir Farm National Historic Site Bulletin;" and *Dorothy Weir Young, The Life and Letters of J. Alden Weir* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

¹Letter from J. Alden Weir to Alden Twachtman dated January 3, 1892. Young, 177-8.

²Account of Branchville farm by Joseph Pearson from a letter to Dorothy Weir Young. Young, 193.

³Young, 248.



Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist

Additional Resources

By looking at *Weir Farm: Home of An American Impressionist*, students learn about Impressionism and the life of J. Alden Weir. Those interested in learning more will find that the Internet offers a variety of interesting materials.

Weir Farm National Historic Site

Weir Farm National Historic Site is a unit of the National Park System. Visit the [park's web pages](#) to view Weir's art work, tour the farm, and learn about Weir's life.

Connecticut Impressionist Art Trail

The [Connecticut Impressionist Art Trail](#) provides a guided visit to ten museums boasting some of the finest American Impressionist paintings in the world. The site also details the places where the movement was born, the places where artists lived, and where they created images that linger in the mind.

Online Tour of the History of Impressionism

This [online tour](#) explores turn of the century France and the interesting concepts that defined the Impressionist art movement.

American Impressionism from the National Gallery of Art

Explore the [National Gallery of Art's online tour](#) to learn about the history of Impressionism in America and to view images by different Impressionist painters.

Internet Modern History Sourcebook: The Industrial Revolution

Use the [Internet Modern History Sourcebook](#), created by Paul Halsall at Fordham University, to read a variety primary source materials to learn more about the Industrial Revolution.

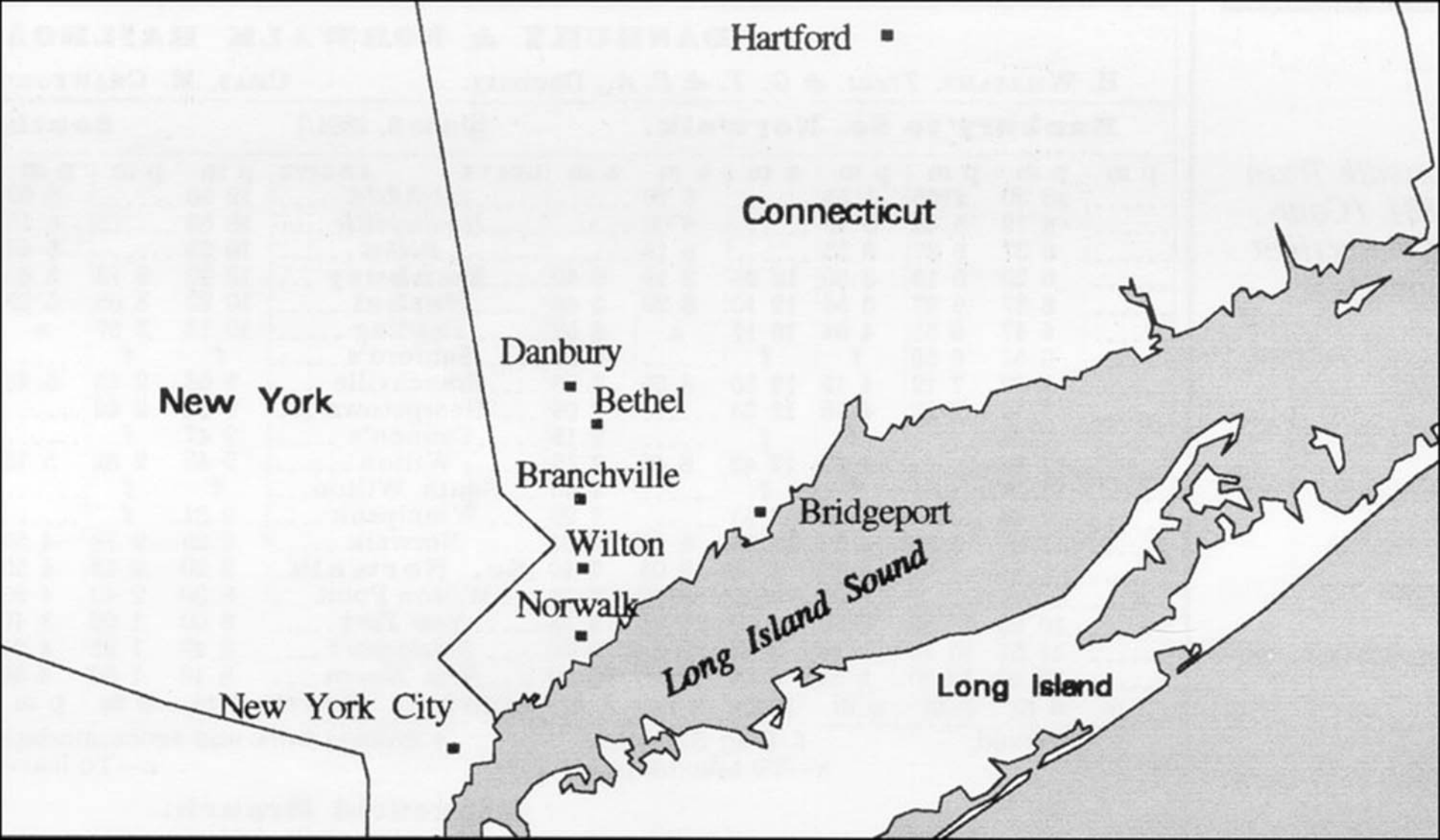
For Further Reading

Students and educators wishing to learn more about the American Impressionists may want to read: Ulrich W. Hiesinger, *Impressionism in America: The Ten American Painters* (Munich: Prestel, 1991) or William Gerdts, *American Impressionism* (New York: Artabras Publishers, 1984). For more specific information on J. Alden Weir, try Dorothy Weir Young, *The Life and Letters of J. Alden Weir* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), Doreen Bolger Burke, *J. Alden Weir: An American Impressionist* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983), or *J. Alden Weir: A Place of His Own* (Storrs, Connecticut: William Benton Museum of Art, 1991), an exhibit catalog available at the William Benton Museum of Art, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut.









Hartford ■

Connecticut

New York

Danbury ■

Bethel ■

Branchville ■

Wilton ■

Norwalk ■

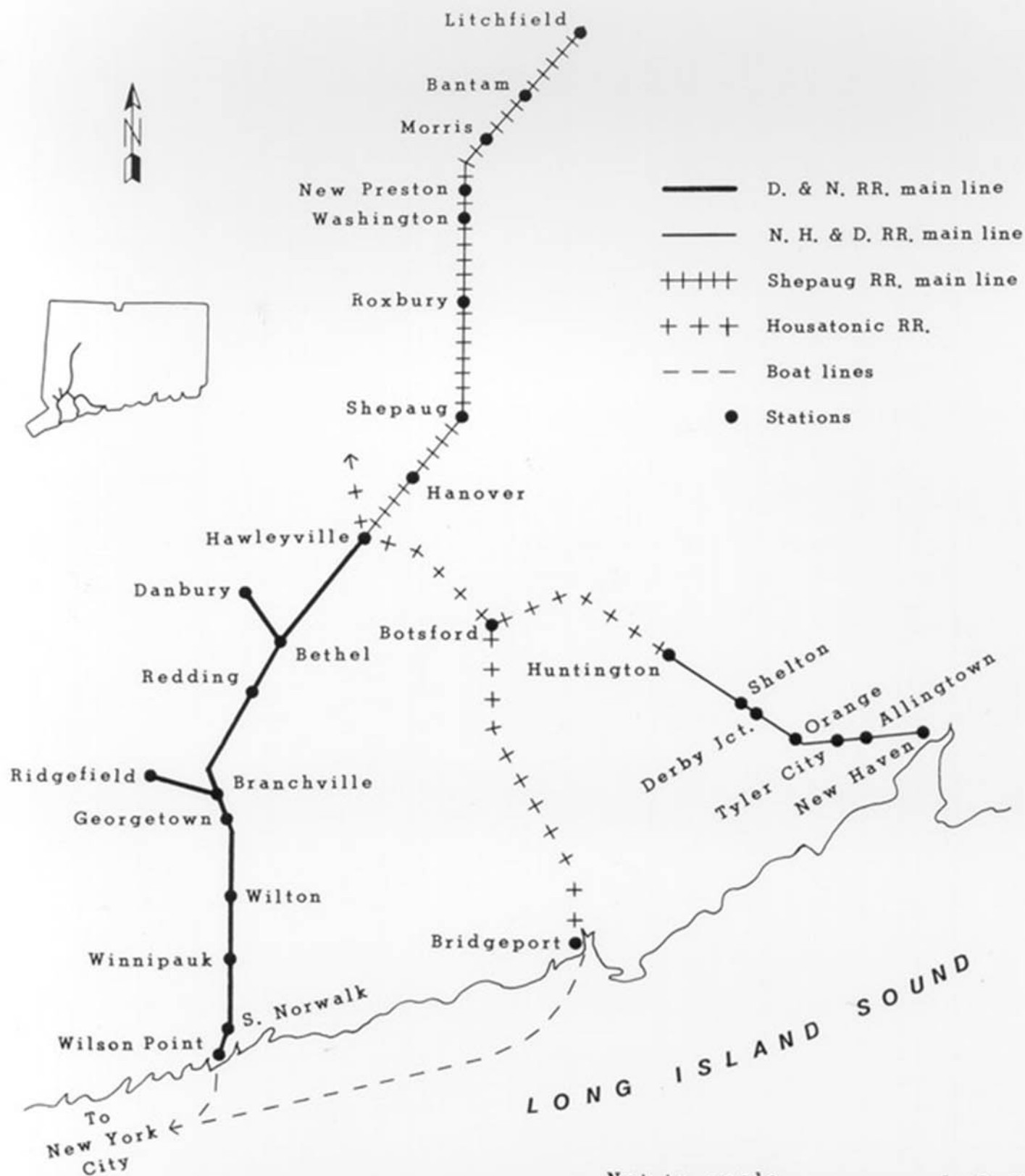
Bridgeport ■

Long Island Sound

New York City ■

Long Island

*Danbury & Norwalk Railroad
New Haven & Derby Railroad
Shepaug Railroad*



Not to scale

L. C. Hill

DANBURY & NORWALK RAILROAD.

[Standard Time.]

H. WILLIAMS, *Treas. & G. T. & P. A.*, Danbury.

CHAS. M. CRAWFORD, *Superintendent*, So. Norwalk.

Danbury to So. Norwalk.

[June 9, 1884.]

South Norwalk to Danbury.

p m	p m	p m	p m	a m	a m	a m	LEAVE	ARRIVE	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	MLS	FRS	
.....	s3 30	2+05	1 55	.....	6 20	.....	.....	<i>Litchfield</i>	12 50	.....	8 00	.....	1 10	s1 20	.....	.....
.....	6 12	5 45	3 40	.....	8 00	.....	.....	<i>Hawleyville</i>	10 53	.....	6 15	.....	8 45	11 15	.....	.....
.....	6 37	6 37	3 55	.....	8 18	.....	.....	<i>Bethel</i>	10 25	.....	5 40	.....	7 30	10 55	.....	.....
.....	6 20	6 15	3 50	12 05	8 15	6 40	.....	Danbury	10 30	3 13	5 45	7 16	1 45	11 00	.....	23½ 80
.....	6 37	6 37	3 56	12 10	8 20	6 46	.....	Bethel	10 23	3 05	5 39	7 11	1 30	10 52	.....	20½ 75
.....	6 47	6 51	4 04	12 17	A	6 52	.....	Reading	10 13	2 57	B	7 05	1 10	10 44	.....	17½ 70
.....	6 57	6 59	f	f	.....	6 57	.....	<i>Sanford's</i>	f	f	.....	6 59	12 55	10 38	.....	15½ 65
.....	7 07	7 12	4 15	12 30	8 35	7 06	.....	<i>Branchville</i>	9 58	2 45	5 23	6 51	12 40	10 30	.....	12¾ 55
.....	7 14	7 27	4 18	12 33	.....	7 09	.....	<i>Georgetown</i>	9 52	2 42	.....	6 46	12 24	10 25	.....	11¾ 50
.....	7 25	.....	f	f	.....	7 15	.....	<i>Cannon's</i>	9 47	f	.....	6 39	12 04	10 18	.....	9 40
.....	7 32	.....	4 27	12 42	8 46	7 19	.....	<i>Wilton</i>	9 43	2 32	5 12	6 35	11 54	10 13	.....	7¾ 35
.....	7 39	.....	f	f	.....	7 25	.....	<i>South Wilton</i>	f	f	.....	6 29	.....	10 05	.....	5 25
.....	7 44	.....	4 35	12 51	.....	7 29	.....	<i>Winnipauk</i>	9 31	f	.....	6 26	.....	9 58	.....	3¾ 15
.....	7 51	8 10	4 39	12 55	8 58	7 34	.....	<i>Norwalk</i>	9 25	2 18	4 59	6 20	.....	9 52	.....	1¾ 10
.....	8 01	8 25	4 45	1 00	9 03	7 40	.....	So. Norwalk	9 20	2 13	4 55	6 15	11 30	9 45	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....	5 05	1 20	9 20	7 55	.....	<i>Wilson Point</i>	8 30	2 40	4 25	5 40	.....	.....	.....	2½
.....	10 53	10 53	6 00	2 20	10 33	9 13	.....	<i>New York</i>	8 00	1 00	3 40	4 45	10 00	8 00	.....	.....
.....	11 57	10 16	5 19	2 21	9 48	9 20	.....	<i>Bridgeport</i>	8 40	1 35	4 21	5 36	9 36	8 40	.....	.....
.....	12 30	10 50	5 51	3 00	10 20	10 00	.....	<i>New Haven</i>	8 10	1 00	3 50	5 07	9+08	8 00	.....	.....
p m	a m	p m	p m	p m	a m	a m	ARRIVE	LEAVE	a m	p m	p m	p m	p m	a m	p m	MLS	FRS

† Mixed.

f Flag Stations.

s Sunday milk and accommodation.

* Mondays only.

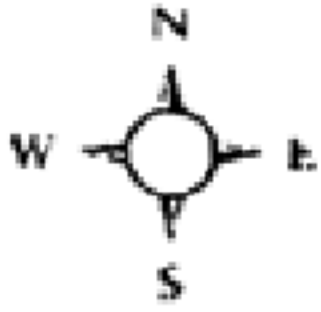
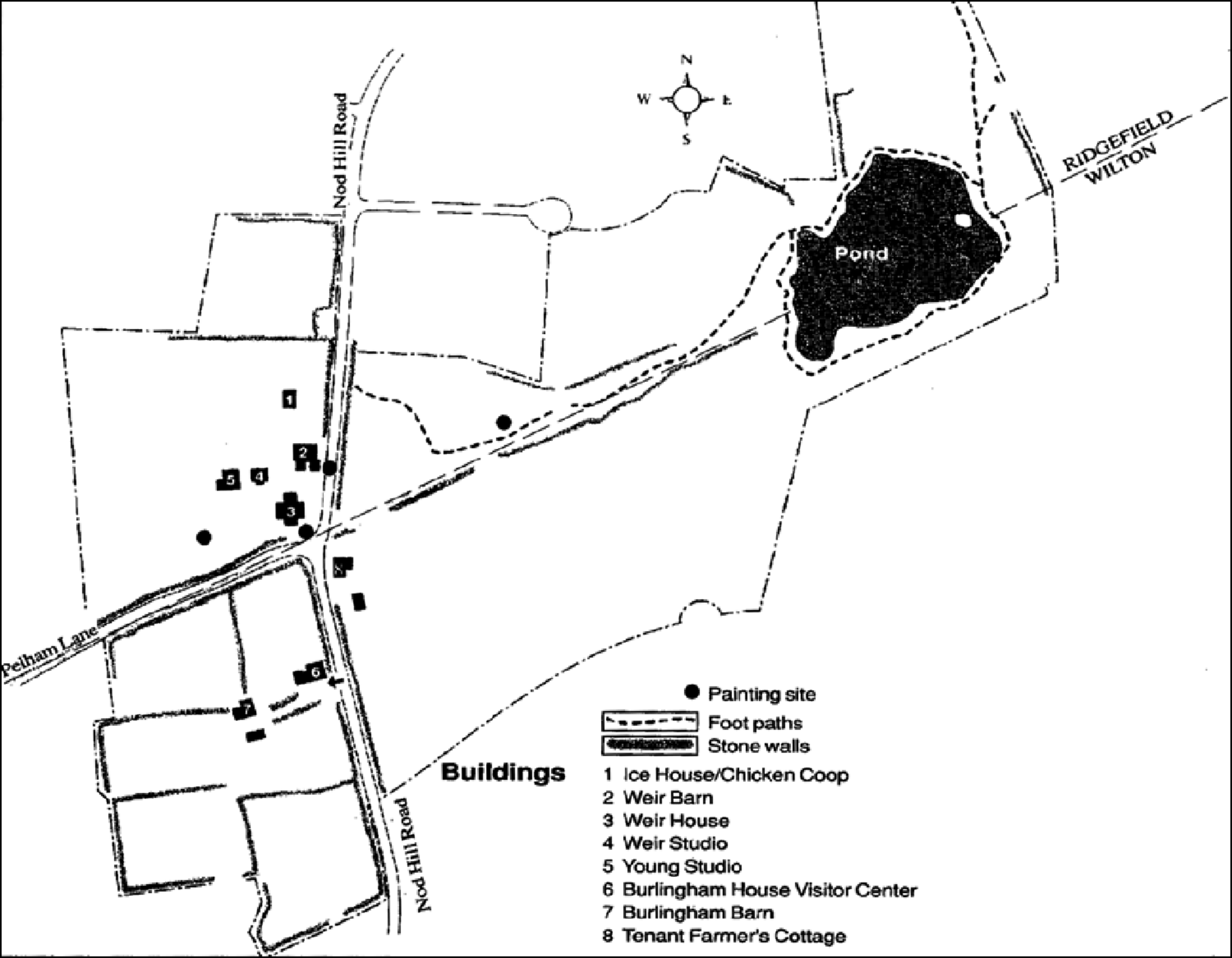
A—To take on passengers.

B—To leave passengers.

Ridgefield Branch.

p m	p m	p m	a m	a m	LEAVE	ARRIVE	a m	p m	p m	p m	a m	MLS	FRS	
.....	6 00	3 55	12 10	8 15	6 45	.....	.....	Ridgefield	10 17	3 03	5 43	7 08	7 48	16¾ 80
.....	6 20	4 13	12 30	8 33	7 05	.....	.....	<i>Branchville</i>	9 58	2 45	5 23	6 51	7 30	12¾ 55
.....	8 25	4 45	1 00	9 03	7 40	.....	.....	<i>So. Norwalk</i>	9 20	2 13	4 55	6 15	.....	.....
p m	p m	p m	a m	a m	AR.	LV.	a m	p m	p m	p m	a m	.....	.....

Connects at So. Norwalk with New York, New Haven & Hartford R. R. At Bethel with Shepang R. R. At Danbury with Housatonic R. R. and N. Y. & N. E. R. R.



Nod Hill Road

RIDGEFIELD
WILTON

Pond

Petham Lane

Nod Hill Road

Buildings

● Painting site

--- Foot paths

▨ Stone walls

- 1 Ice House/Chicken Coop
- 2 Weir Barn
- 3 Weir House
- 4 Weir Studio
- 5 Young Studio
- 6 Burlingham House Visitor Center
- 7 Burlingham Barn
- 8 Tenant Farmer's Cottage

