



# The Sketchbook

## From the Superintendent

Summer jobs for college and high school students are always at a premium. This summer, the park hired five college students and one high school student, and for a couple of them this was their very first job. First days on the job can be a blur with uniforms to order and new duties to master, but after ten weeks all of these new hires walk the park with confidence. Also on the job are student volunteers gaining valuable experience in resource management, history, customer service, architecture, museum services, horticulture, facility maintenance, and administration. Their work at a National Park Service site counts for community service hours, which in turn counts as on-the-job experience on their resués. In addition, every morning for three weeks, sixteen high school students made the trek from Bridgeport to learn landscaping and stone wall repair. They gained life skills that will put them one step closer to that first job, potentially with the NPS. The year-round staff at Weir Farm NHS takes very seriously the responsibility of helping students gain experience for future careers. After all, 20,000 people work for the NPS, and every dollar invested in our national parks generates at least four dollars in economic value to the public, totaling approximately \$13 billion in private-sector economic activity nationwide and nearly 270,000 private-sector jobs. One way or another there is a link to a park if you seek to make it so, and we hope you do.

*Linda A. Cook*

Linda Cook  
Superintendent

## Visitors Learn the Art of Restoration



Park Ranger Caitlin Sjaarda describes the ongoing restoration using a historic photo of the Weir House living room.

The winter of 2010 - 2011 seemed like it would never end. Snow piled high as temperatures plummeted, but nearly one hundred visitors had the opportunity to step out of the cold and into the park's historic structures. Weir Farm National Historic Site (NHS) developed a behind-the-scenes tour, *The Art of Restoration*, which offered visitors a rare opportunity to venture inside the Weir House, Weir Studio, and Young Studio. While the beloved home and workspaces of three generations of American artists are in the midst of a four-phase, multi-year restoration, they remain closed to the general public.

Conducted one Sunday each month from November through April, participants examined items from the park's artifact collection, saw original pieces of furniture, and even received a full tour of the new fire detection and suppression systems in the Weir House basement.

Visitors were again afforded a chance to go behind-the-scenes on June 11 for Connecticut Open House Day. Over fifty visitors toured the historic buildings, speaking with rangers and volunteers about the ongoing phases of restoration. These behind-the-scenes events were wildly popular, and visitors left with a new understanding of the enduring tradition of preservation and mandate for conservation at Weir Farm NHS.



Historic photo of the west end of the living room.

# Restoration Review



Sample of the William Morris style wallpaper of poppies to be used in the guest bedroom.

Restoration of the Weir House and Studios is divided into four phases: systems, exteriors, interiors, and furnishings. With Phase 1 complete, the structures contain new plumbing, electrical, as well as fire detection and fire suppression systems, and Phase 2 is now in full swing. A newly-created accessible path guides visitors from the visitor center to Pelham Lane, and will eventually be accompanied by an accessible

ramp on the porch of the house. The siding and windows have been repaired and painted on the studios; by April 2012, all three buildings will have new roofs. Experts have determined the original interior paint colors and wall paper designs, which will be reproduced in the first floor rooms of the Weir House. Keep watch for new and exciting updates as the restoration process continues!

## Legacy Landscapes On Exhibit



Margaret Waage, *Weir Garden*

In June of 2010, photojournalist Margaret Waage was assigned to cover Connecticut Historic Gardens Day, an annual event sponsored by an association composed of fourteen distinctive historic sites and gardens throughout Connecticut. But Ms. Waage's interest in photographing these sites continued long after her official assignment ended. She set out on a journey

of photographic exploration, which resulted in the new exhibit now on display at Weir Farm NHS, entitled *Legacy Landscapes*.

The sixteen photographs on display represent ten of Connecticut's Historic Gardens sites, including Roseland Cottage, the Bellamy-Ferriday House, Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, and, of course, Weir Farm NHS. The historic gardens surrounding these incredible homes serve as a legacy left behind for future generations to enjoy. "To see a flower where it resides within the landscape design," Ms. Waage noted, "is to look back in time and bear witness to a perspective that is both past and present."

The exhibit encompasses various seasons of the year, types of plants, and styles of photography. Ms. Waage uses photography as a means to record and interpret the world around her. "Through photography I tell stories and come to recognize and understand the relationship I have to things, places, and people," she explained, and by looking through her lens she captures not just the scene before her camera, but reveals "the beauty and mystery that lie beneath. Photography is my tool to focus on and record the fullness of being in a particular moment." *Legacy Landscapes* can be viewed in the Burlingham House Visitor Center, Thursday through Sunday from 10:00am to 4:00pm through October 9th.

# Hemlock Tree Removal

Standing on the east side of the Weir House, directly adjacent to the Greek Revival portico, a large Eastern Hemlock tree witnessed more than one hundred years of history at Weir Farm NHS. Seen in historic images dating back to the 1890s, the hemlock became something of a trademark of the property, beloved by artists and former residents for its natural beauty, and by park rangers and staff for the shade it provided on scorching summer days. But the hemlock's massive size and root structure were not only upending the portico, but harming the house foundation as well. And with the growing prevalence of an invasive infestation by the hemlock woolly adelgid, park staff determined the safest course of action was to remove the tree while it was still strong.

On June 27, experts cut down the tree, though large portions of it were saved for interpretive, educational, and horticultural purposes. A direct genetic descendent of the hemlock will be planted nearby. In the weeks leading up to the tree's removal, Weir Farm NHS invited local artists to paint, sketch, and capture it for posterity. These artists ensured that the park will have both a historical and artistic record of the hemlock which stood watch over the Weir House for more than a century.



Joanne Agostinelli, *Long Time Companions*, pastel

# Weir Farm NHS Goes Green

Protecting the environment is not a responsibility limited to the National Park Service. It seems that everywhere in today's world, businesses are "going green." Weir Farm NHS recently attended the *Wilton Go Green* festival to showcase all of the different ways it stays "green."

First and foremost, park staff members are committed to recycling in every possible way. Common office supplies like paper, ink cartridges, light bulbs, and even cell phones are recycled. Volunteers diligently go through and cancel all of those pesky office supply magazines. Visitors must adhere to a strict "carry in - carry out" policy. There are no trash receptacles available throughout the park, in an effort to encourage visitors to generate less garbage.

Staff members also utilize a host of environmentally-friendly products, such as natural cleaning supplies, fluorescent light bulbs, an electric lawnmower, and sand in lieu of chemical de-icer in the winter. In the extremely rare event that there is left over food at lunch, it is put into a compost bin and later used in the gardens. Apples harvested from the Weir orchard are donated to local food kitchens. Space heaters and air conditioning units are energy-efficient models, though staff try to keep the windows open and A/C units off for the majority of the summer. Even as the site undergoes renovation and change in the coming years, a goal remains to reduce our carbon footprint. Weir Farm NHS stands at the forefront of this initiative, continually striving to find new ways to "go green."



Bridge on the Pond Trail, made from recycled materials.

## Conservation Corner

J. Alden Weir and his wife, Anna Dwight Baker, probably never imagined the massive c.1850 secretary they purchased on their 1883 European honeymoon would remain in their Branchville home until 2005. Over the course of 120 years, the mahogany secretary witnessed the occupancy of three generations of artists from its location in the southeast corner of the living room. With this incredible and prolonged connection to the home's history, however, also came 120 years of wear and tear. The secretary was transported to the National Park Service's conservation labs in West Virginia. Conservators faced a tall order: numerous scratches, loose or broken molding, chipped corners, cracked glass panels, and extensive ink stains. After an estimated 186 man hours in the wooden objects laboratory, the conservators completed their work in December 2010. They removed an outdated



Secretary after treatment.

opaque varnish, mended the leather writing tabletop, stabilized the cracked glass panes in the bookcase doors, removed the corrosion on the metal hardware, and applied a protective wax coating to the woodwork. Upon its return, the secretary will be placed in its original location in the living room, where it will bear witness to many more generations to come at Weir Farm NHS.



Secretary before treatment.

## Visitor Center Hours and Tour Schedule

### April through December

#### Visitor Center Hours

Thurs. through Sun. from 10-4

#### 30-Minute Introductory Tour

Fri. and Sun. at 11, 1, and 3  
Thurs. and Sat. at 11 and 3

#### 1-Hour Stone Wall Tour

Thurs. and Sat. at 1

### January through March

#### Visitor Center Hours

Sat. and Sun. from 10-4

#### 30-Minute Introductory Tour

Sat. at 11 and 3  
Sun. at 11, 1, and 3

#### 1-Hour Stone Wall Tour

Sat. at 1

\*3:00 tours on Saturdays include a visit to the Artist-in-Residence studio.

The grounds are open daily from dawn to dusk. Admission and tours are offered to the public free of charge.



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Weir Farm National Historic Site  
735 Nod Hill Road  
Wilton, CT 06897

Take Part in Art and  
add your masterpiece  
to our growing collection  
of visitor artwork!



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**Site Information**

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

## Things To Do:

### Legacy Landscapes On Exhibit 9/4 to 10/9, Thurs.-Sun., 10:00-4:00

Check out photojournalist Margaret Waage's photographs of some of Connecticut's most distinctive historic gardens.

### Jazz in the Garden

Sunday, September 25, 3:00-5:00

Enjoy an afternoon jazz concert performed by the Brubeck Brothers Quartet! All parking at the Branchville School, with shuttles running from 2:00 to 6:00 p.m. Tickets sold the day of the event. Sponsored by the Weir Farm Art Center, call (203) 761-9945 for further details.

### Ponder the Pond Walk\*

Sunday, October 9, 1:00-2:30

Join a park ranger for this eye-opening walk to the pond and discover sights that often go unexamined!

### Nature's Palette Walk\*

Sunday October 16, 1:00 - 2:30

Explore the stunning fall landscape of Weir Farm with a park ranger during prime fall foliage.

### Foreshadowing Fate Walk\*

Sunday November 6, 4:00-5:00

Join volunteer Bonnie Tremante and listen to letters written by Anna Baker Weir that foreshadow her tragic death in 1893. Anna's eerie sense of her own fate is reflected in autumn's cold, dying landscape.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter. To join our mailing list, send your name and email to [wefa\\_interpretation@nps.gov](mailto:wefa_interpretation@nps.gov)

### Artist-In-Residence Receptions

Once a month, meet the artist-in-residence at a public reception at the Wilton Library. Presented by the Weir Farm Art Center. Call (203) 761-9945 for specific dates and times, or visit [www.wiltonlibrary.org](http://www.wiltonlibrary.org)

### Take Part in Art

Visitor Center Hours

Discover your inner artist while sketching or painting *en plein air* with art supplies provided.

### Junior Ranger

Visitor Center Hours

Earn a Junior Ranger badge and patch while exploring Connecticut's only national park.

### Group Visits\*

Visitor Center Hours

Organized groups are encouraged to visit the farm year-round! School groups and scout groups should ask for information on the Art Alive! curriculum-based program and Scout Ranger program.

\* Registration is required. To register, please call (203) 834-1896 x12.