

Mrs. C. Sperry Andrews
Nod Hill Road
Wilton, Connecticut

Feb. 1971

Dear Alice & Charles,

We have invited a few people to dinner Saturday, March 6 that we feel you would enjoy and wonder if it would be possible for you to come down, having slept & muddled: Sue & John Verdery, he is headmaster of The Wooster School; Danbury, Katie & Baekeland Roll, Dorothy & Robert Andrew Parker, and Nancy & Roger Prince — he was director of Silksmine Guild for 9 years, & is now running the Wooster Community Out Center. If it would work out with your schedule to come, knowing you have had casual camping experience, we would be pleased to have you spend the night in the "Albert Pinkham Ryder" room with the old

scottish wallpaper falling off the walls.

am enclosing photo copy of letter I
just sent Mr. Biddle with history of
This house, thought you might enjoy
reading, also copy James Flexner
review mentioning house in N.Y. Times.
Saw you had acquired a John Weir.

Just drop card end of week if
convenient, we would enjoy so much seeing

you.

Hope all goes well.
Best from Perry

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Mr. James Biddle
National Trust for Historic Preservation
Lyndhurst
Tarrytown, New York

February 4, 1971

Dear Mr. Biddle,

As head of the National Trust for Historic Preservation I am writing to describe to you a home my husband and I now own. It is becoming difficult for us to manage the increasing taxes and the maintenance of the property and we worry about its future. It may not be old enough, historic enough, its history not important enough. We feel it is, but we are prejudice.

This place is located in Ridgefield, Connecticut. The old farmhouse dates to before 1800. Before 1882 it was a farmhouse of a family named Beers in then, Branchville, Connecticut. A small family cemetery lies at the end of the property. It came into ownership of Julian Alden Weir, the American painter, in 1882, given in trade to Weir by his friend Erwin Davis (a wealthy art collector for whom Weir had gone to Europe and purchased a large collection of Rembrandt etchings, 3 Manets, a Velasquez, Courbet's 'Violoncellist', a Reynolds and a Gainsborough) for \$10. and a painting Weir had acquired in Europe. It then included 150 acres. Here Mr. Weir lived, spring to fall, farmed the land and painted some of his finest portraits and landscapes: his studio is on the property. Here visited his brother, John Ferguson Weir, who taught and was Dean of the Yale School of Fine Arts from 1869-1913, one of his closest friends John Twachtman, Childe Hassam, Albert Pinkham Ryder, John Singer Sargent, Stanford White, Olin Warner. Mr. Weir was for two years president and trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1915 president of the National Academy of Design, 1915 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His life is wonderfully described by his daughter, Dorothy Weir Young through her written history and family letters in "The Life and Letters of J. Alden Weir" published 1960 by Yale University Press.

The farmhouse was enlarged in 1900 by Charles Platt, and in 1911 by McKim, Mead and White, so that it has a double living room, with two fireplaces, a large dining room with fireplace, porch with large white columns. The interior has old shutters and stained glass inserts brought from Europe by Weir, the inserts set in windows of small leaded glass panes. It retains the relaxed atmosphere of a farmhouse but is enhanced with a European flavor and artistic embellishments, dark green woodwork, William Morris wall paper. We have done little alteration to the interior, the old papers are still on the walls, in a state of some disrepair, Franklin stoves, some of Mr. Weir's 15-16th century furniture including a chandelier in the dining room which consists of a colored plaster upper torso and head of a woman, like a ship's figurehead, with elk or deer antlers coming out the back. We have been told that

the antlers are from the Black Forest and that this type of chandelier is found in baronial halls in Austria and Germany. Over the outside door has been painted by Stanford White an epigram written by John Weir who was spending a summer in Branchville while Julian was in Europe, "Here Shall We Rest And Call Content Our Home".

Mr. Weir died in 1919. His daughter Dorothy, herself an artist, continued to live in the house. In 1931 she married Mahonri MackIntosh Young, sculptor, etcher, painter, and grandson of Brigham Young. A large sculpture studio was built down the slope from the painting studio and here Mr. Young worked on his statue of Brigham Young, now in the National Hall of Fame in Washington D.C., his famous "This Is The Place" and "Seagull" monuments now in Salt Lake City, Utah. Here he painted drew and sculpt, the countryside, the Danbury Fair, mending walls.

The house and studio now held what were to become the nucleus of a small museum, some 500 works of art, to be catalogued in 1958 by Knoedler and Sons, New York. Here were several of Mr. Weir's finest paintings, his wife on Duveneck's balcony, portraits of his daughters, Cora, Dorothy and Caroline; Mr. Young's plasters for his sculptures, many bronzes, paintings and drawing, his head of Leo Stein, his statue of Walt Whitman; Olin Warner's head of Weir; paintings and drawings by Twachtman, Hassam, Carlsen, Constable, Sargent, Lepage, Homer, Millet, and etc.

Mr. Young died in 1957 and left the home and its contents to his son, Mahonri Sharp Young, (director of the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts) and his daughter Agnes Lay. My husband and I had the great privilege of knowing Mr. Young and Bill for about five years. In 1958 Bill Young sold us the house and studios with 12 acres for a moderate sum, I think it was helpful to him for us to be here and watch over the collection until its future was resolved. This came about a year later when The Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, contracted to acquire the complete collection for a museum to be specially built for it.

My husband is a painter so he has used the studios. We have done nothing to change the land or the buildings. There is a barn on the property, an ice house, corn crib, wagon shed with wagons. Mr. Weir's daughter, Cora, now Mrs. Charles C. Burlingham lives part time in a farmhouse on the adjoining property. She has many of her father's paintings and drawings here and in her New York apartment. She also has here a handsome self portrait of her grandfather, Robert W. Weir who was teacher of drawing at the United States Military Academy, 1846-1876. He also painted "The Embarkation of the Pilgrims" in the rotunda of the Capitol at Washington, D.C.

It is a marvelous history and a beautiful place. We may be unable to maintain the property at some future date for financial reasons and are worried for its future. We would appreciate knowing if it might be of interest to you and your organization, or if you might have any suggestions for us. We would enjoy showing you the place if you would have an interest to see it.

Sincerely

Dan B. Andrews

Mrs. C. Sperry Andrews
1 Nod Hill Road
Ridgefield, Conn. 06877

November 9, 1978

Mr. William Murtaugh
National Landmark Section
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

Dear Mr. Murtaugh:

I have had the great pleasure of visiting the home and studio of Julian Alden Weir which is situated in Ridgefield, Connecticut. It is now the home of my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Sperry Andrews. He is a distinguished landscape painter.

The Weir home, studio, out-buildings and surrounding land (pastures, bedrock slabs and stone walls) must be preserved as it is and should be restored to its hayday condition. It was once the center for many distinguished artists of the late 19th and early 20 Centuries. Few homes exist as this one does now in a condition which is preservable. The Weir homestead is a rare site which drew American artists to it like a magnet. Albert Pinkham Ryder stayed there. A door was even cut, I am told, through to the exterior just for him so that he could avoid the gathering in the living room.

The Weir place abounds with the ghosts of other now famous American artists. Many of the so-called "Ten," of which group Weir was a member often spent time at the Weir home. These are the artists now whose works are in the great private and museum collections: Hassam, Twachtman, Benson, deCamp, Metcalf, Dewing, Tarbell, Simmons and Reid.

The New Britain Museum owns two works by J. Alden Weir (1852-1919): "The Black Feather Hat," an oil, 24 x 20" which was acquired in 1947 and "Landscape" which is also an oil, dated 1894, size 24 x 36", which was acquired in 1945. A small oil, "The Blacksmith Shop," 1868, 10 x 16" by John Ferguson Weir was also acquired in 1970. I consider J. Alden Weir to be a very good painter in the style of the impressionists. Weir adopted French Impressionism to his own taste, one which relates to that of Whistler rather than Monet. He was not sentimental nor cloyingly sweet as many of his contemporaries tended to be.

I consider the Weir home in its nearly original state, its past history and its attractive natural setting to be too valuable as an artistic site,

Mr. Murtaugh

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to be sold for future building lots. It is a small bit of beautiful Connecticut which should be preserved for future generations to enjoy and to be looked upon as an example of an unusual way of life by emerging American aesthetic talents of a hundred years ago. In this respect, it is unique as a gathering place for artists in much the same way as the Old Lyme (Connecticut) Art Colony became slightly later and Rockport (Massachusetts) is today.

America does not have many artistic traditions. Hopefully, this one can be preserved.

Sincerely yours,

Charles B. Ferguson
Director

CBF:lb

CC: Ms Sarah Bridges
Mr. George Emory

cc. John Frisby, Dir Endangered Properties Fund
Nat. Trust for Hist. Preservation
740-748 Jackson Pl., N.W.
Wash. D.C.

Douglas Wheeler, Exec V.P., Nat. Trust

Wm. B. Hart, Jr. Dir. Adv. Serv., Nat. Trust

Ridgefield Pres. Trust

Down Hall, 400 Main St. Ridgefield 06877

State Hist. Pres. Office

59 N. Prospect St. Hoped. 06106



United States Department of the Interior

HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H32-NR

DEC 04 1978

Charles B. Ferguson, Director
The New Britain Museum of American Art
56 Lexington Street
New Britain, Connecticut 06052

Dear Mr. Ferguson:

Thank you for your letter of November 9. We understand that the
Weir property nomination has not ever gone before the State review
board as yet. If and when the nomination is received in this office,
rest assured it will be given careful scrutiny.

Sincerely

William J. Murtaugh
Keeper of the National Register