

## **ANDREW WYETH: HOME PLACES**

Over the course of a long and varied career, a consistent thread in the work of Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009) was his sustained attention to a small group of old houses around Chadds Ford. Across decades of immersion in these home places, the artist found layers of emotion, association, and abstraction in weathered buildings others might have overlooked or even scorned: a means of pursuing his abiding concern with that which lies beneath the surface of things. This uncommon practice over an extended timescale was not merely realist but

fundamentally transformative, reimagining built history to serve his goals.

The artworks on view are all drawn from the 7,000-object Andrew & Betsy Wyeth Collection of the Wyeth Foundation for American Art. Most have never before been exhibited. Betsy James Wyeth (1921-2020) developed and rigorously documented this collection and, in her estate planning, placed it under the management of the Brandywine Museum of Art. As this inaugural exhibition of the new era demonstrates, the Andrew & Betsy Wyeth Collection is a remarkable resource for the understanding of creative process

and partnership, with many more untold stories to come.

## **Material History**

The houses that Andrew Wyeth depicted around Chadds Ford largely made use of the available materials of the surrounding landscape. The structures were commonly of fieldstone or rubble: small pieces of rock in the same shapes in which they were found in the fields or roughly hewn to fit. Other building materials included manufactured bricks in a variety of colors and sawn lumber from local mills. It is evidence of the prosperity of the region's

Quaker settlers that a significant number of them were able to build not in wood but in costlier stone that has endured from the time of the Revolutionary War's 1777 Battle of Brandywine, an association that was especially compelling to Wyeth.

These evocative structures that continue to inspire artists and visitors, including the nineteenth-century brick Hoffman's Mill that houses this exhibition, are examples of what scholars call vernacular architecture: the design practices of people who may have had some acquaintance with the fashions of the cities but did not as a rule make use of trained architects, being guided by their

own requirements, tastes, and the materials that were available locally. As such, the buildings Wyeth depicted are all the more suggestive of their former inhabitants and the history they have witnessed.

*The Academy Study, 1974*

Watercolor on paper



*Untitled (The Academy), 1987*

Watercolor on paper



---

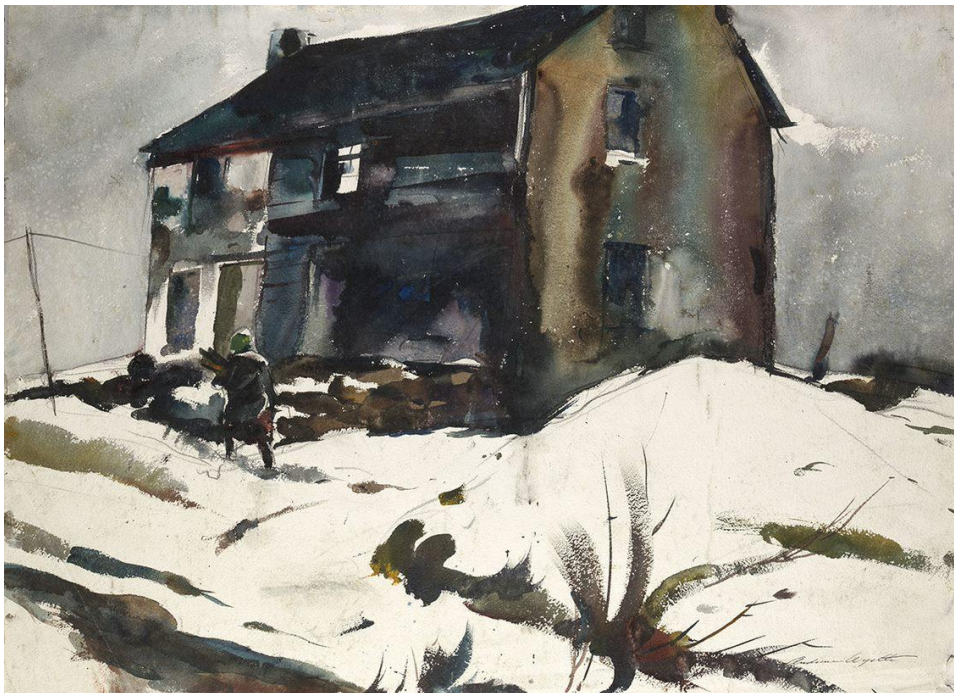
This house on Route 322, which has since been torn down like numerous others in this exhibition, produced two remarkably different creative responses with thirteen years between them. Wyeth first tackled this house in a tight application in an



unusual, short format. The later work demands a full sheet and gets bravura brushwork in the foreground. The two extremes suggest the range of expressive potential Wyeth found in these structures.

*Bringing Wood, 1937*

Watercolor on paper

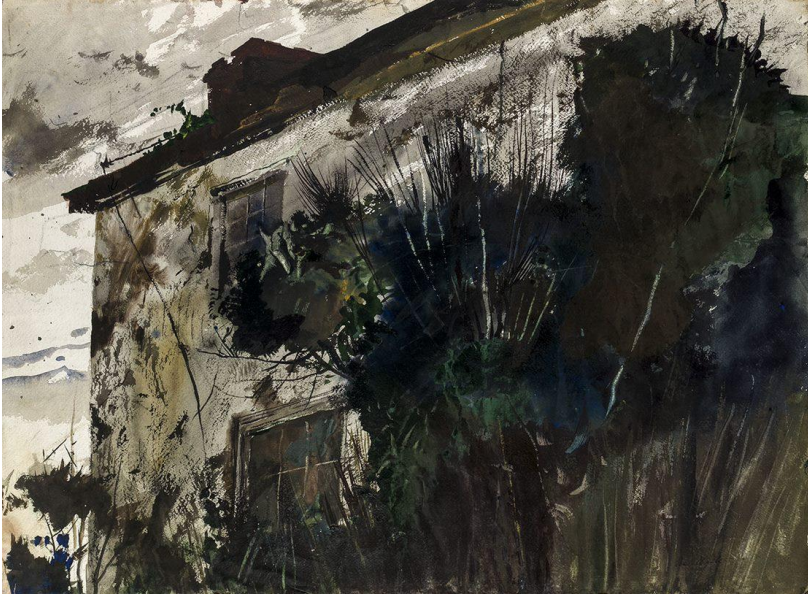


In *Bringing Wood*, Wyeth explores the shifting color effects in the play of light and shadow on a clapboard building. Made when Wyeth was just nineteen years old, this image of the home of his childhood friend David Lawrence and, later, of his frequent subject Adam Johnson was among the batch of watercolors that launched his reputation when exhibited at New York's Macbeth Gallery. As such, it demonstrates the lifelong importance of the subject matter of Chadds Ford's houses to Wyeth's career.



*Untitled (John Andress House), 1943*

Watercolor on paper



---

*Winter Corn Fields Study, 1942*

Pencil on paper



*Winter Corn Fields Study, 1942*

Watercolor on paper



---

These three responses to the Andress house show the array of approaches Wyeth took, even to the same building. The gridded drawing is a technique he used on numerous occasions to work out a composition for translation to a larger

format. Wyeth zooms in and out compositionally, fascinated equally by the abstract forms and textures of vegetation overlaying a close-up wall and the distant presence of a house in full, standing out boldly from its surroundings.

## **The Barns-Brinton House**

This watercolor that has not been exhibited since 1967, along with the unseen preparatory drawings, is exceptional in many ways. The building is a relatively rare example of a brick structure in this context, and in his drawings Wyeth took an atypical approach to capturing and counting its materials. The watercolor

draws on the drawing practice by combining precisely rendered bricks and cornices with broad washes of subtly blending hues. Wyeth chose to present its geometry in isolation from its surroundings other than a sole, skeletal tree, transforming the building into a self-sufficient and abstract form. This stark and potent work presents a portrait of a house that is not unlike a studio composition of a nude figure.

At the time he made these images and a related tempera now in the collection of the Delaware Art Museum, the 1714 Barns-Brinton House was in disrepair. Happily the structure was acquired by the Chadds Ford

Historical Society and restored not long afterward.

*Brick House, Study for Tenant Farmer,*  
1961

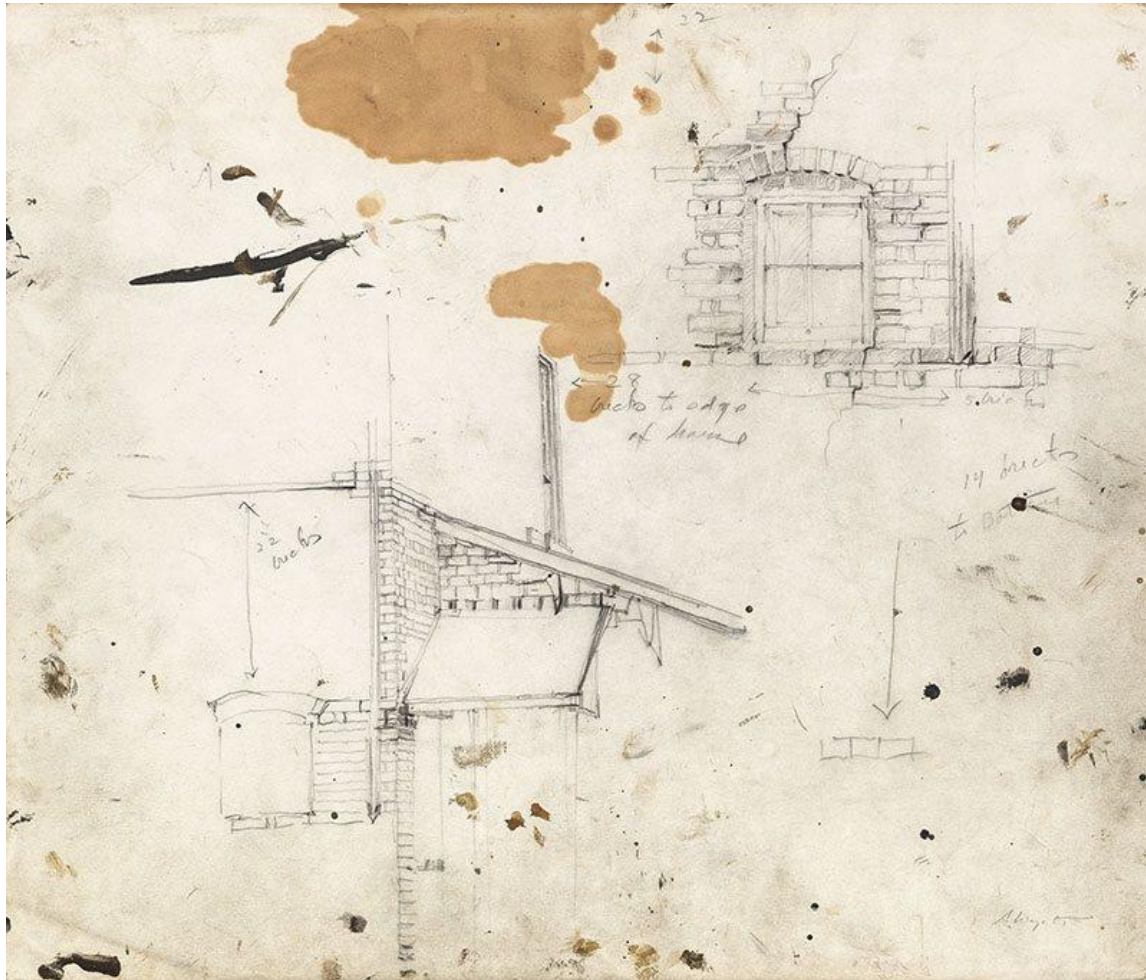
Watercolor on paper





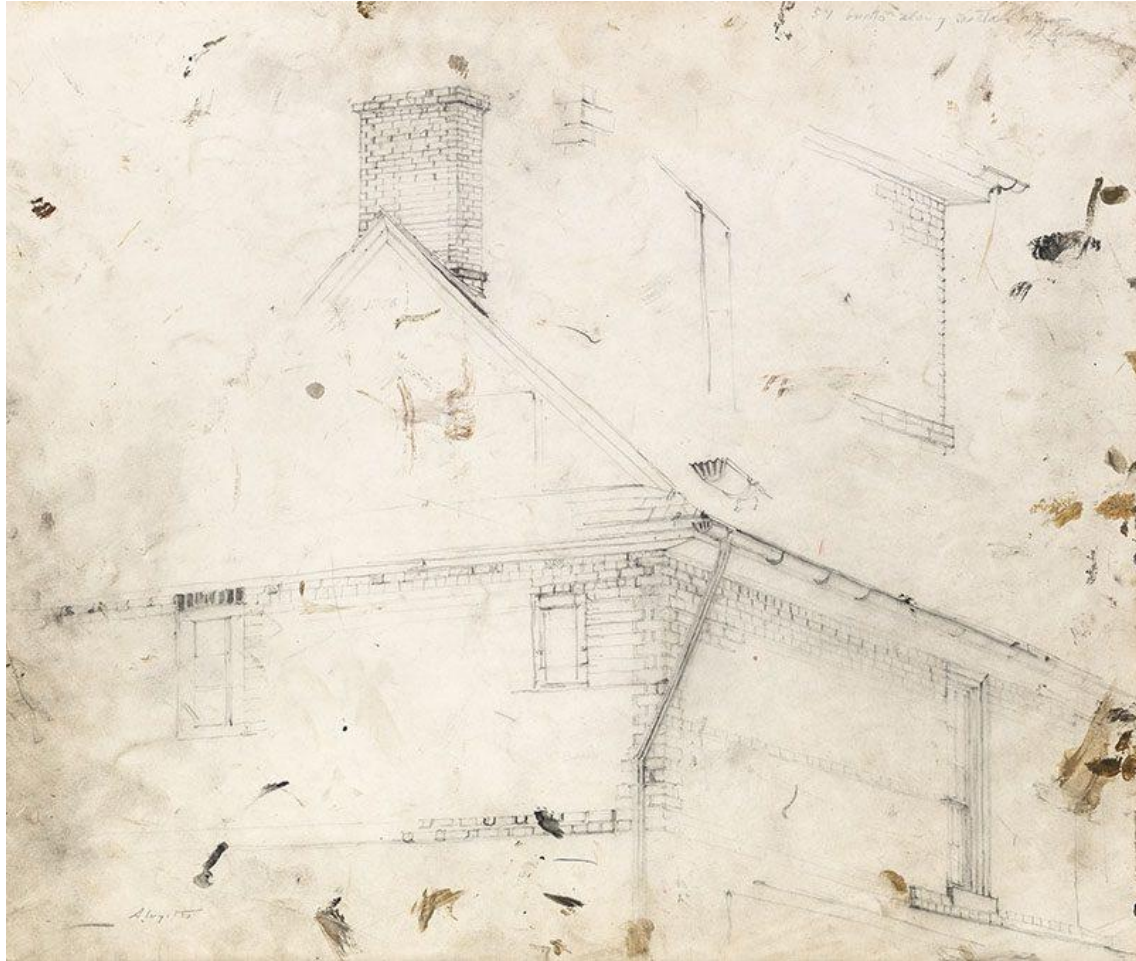
# Tenant Farmer Study, 1961

Pencil on paper



*Tenant Farmer Study, 1961*

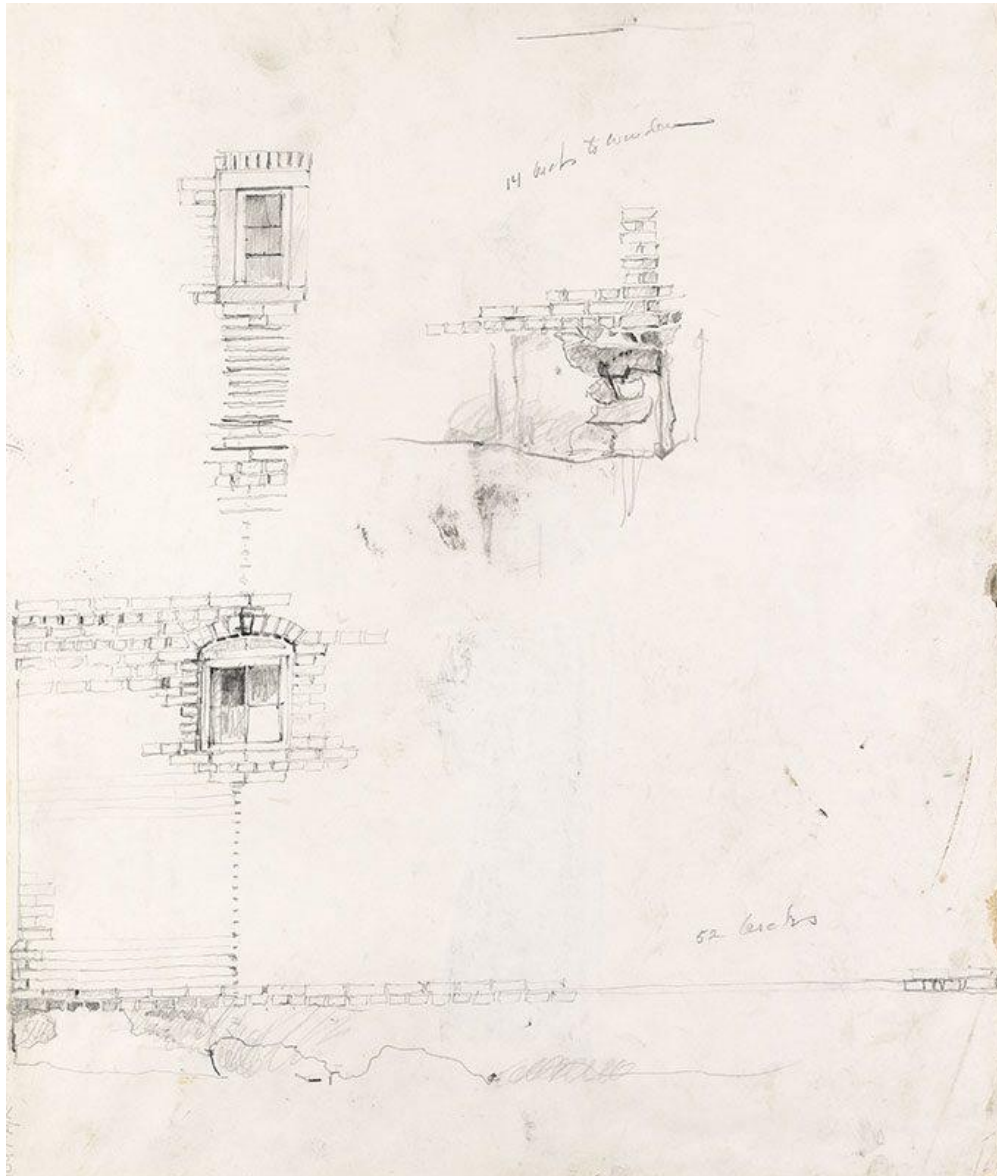
Pencil on paper





# *Tenant Farmer Study, 1961*

Pencil on paper



*Untitled (The Craig Farm), 2003*

Watercolor and pencil on paper



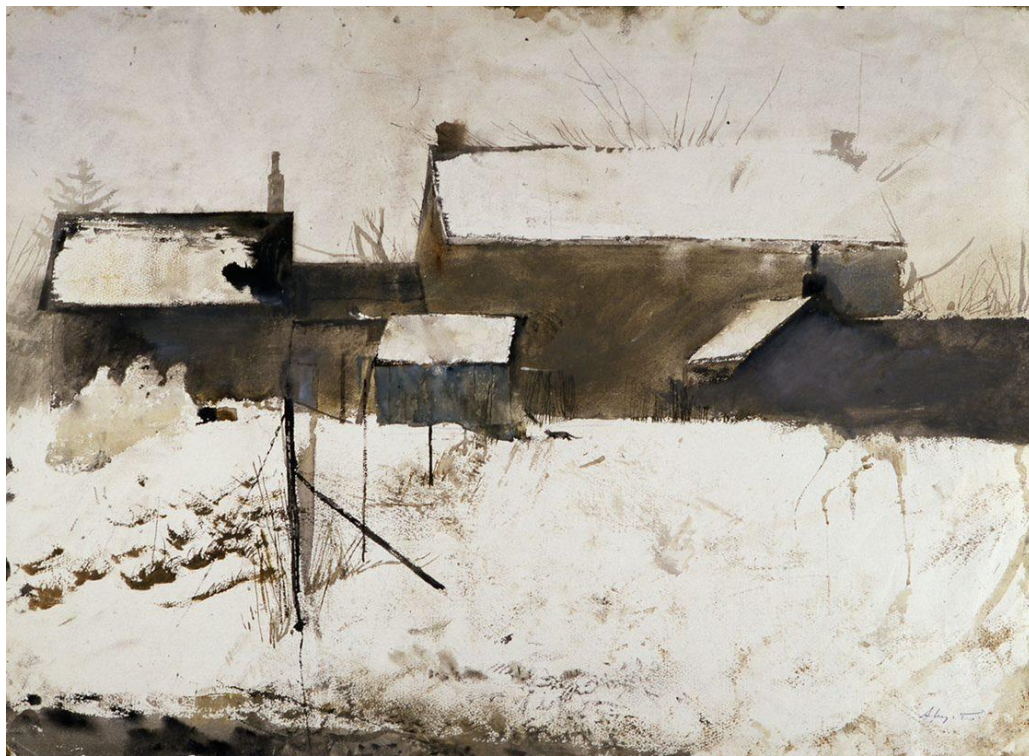
---

A bold and unusually free late work, this image of the Craig farm on Route 202 excises the nearby traces of modernity and presents the house as a world unto itself. As such, it is an especially explicit example of an operation at work in all the objects

on view: the artist responding to these structures through a visionary lens and not merely recording their outward appearances.

*Burning Trash—First Version, 1963*

Watercolor on paper





*Burning Trash, 1963*

Watercolor on paper



---

These large-format watercolors respond to the same structures on Brinton's Bridge Road, close to Andrew and Betsy Wyeth's home at Brinton's Mill. In their differences—the one heavy with black and tightly painted, the other evoking the structures with the most minimal of

gestures and broad swatches of single colors—they show the range of possibilities the artist found in the houses of this region.

*March Study, 1951*

Pencil on paper



*Untitled (Dr. Handy House), 1951*

Watercolor on paper



---

Dr. Margaret Handy delivered both of Andrew and Betsy's children and built the house depicted on the hill just above Wyeth's studio. The images are portraits of the house and its inhabitant from a time in

which the medical profession was much on the artist's mind as he recovered from surgery. One gets a sense of an invalid looking out at the world from the vague indication of a window framing the view in the watercolor.



*House Near Chadds Ford –Third Version,*  
1955

Watercolor on paper



---

This composition is an extreme example of Wyeth's interest in the formal geometry of Chadds Ford's houses. The characteristic material of stucco over fieldstone of the Eli Harvey house presses against the picture plane with a dense network of lines and abrasions that evoke its weathered texture.

## *The Hatton House, 1967*

Watercolor on paper

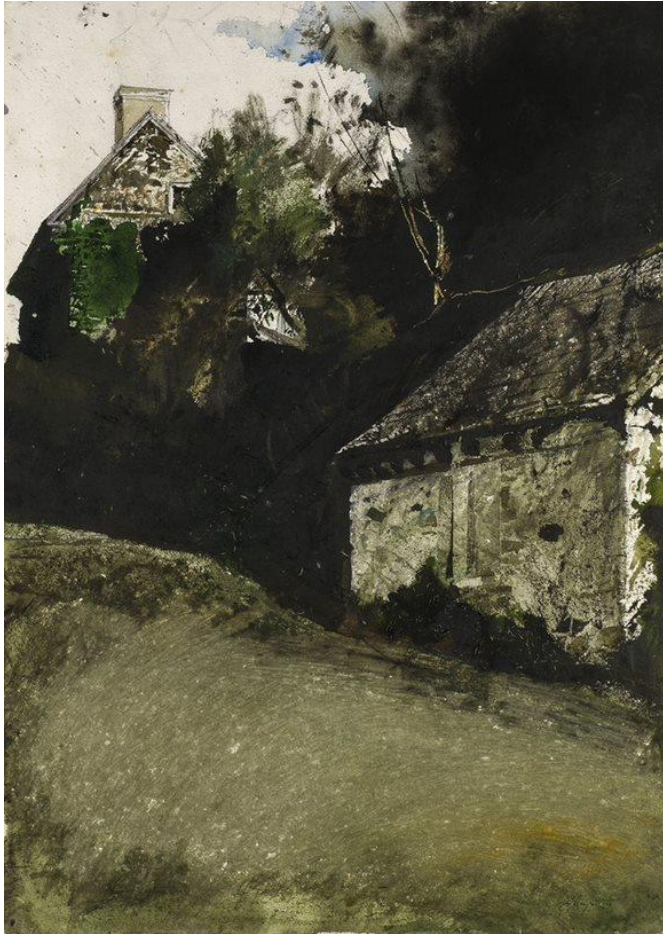


---

Wyeth's response to this house close to Brinton's Mill was akin to his Kuerner house works that often fill the frame with masonry. His own comments reveal his concerns about the state of preservation of the structure in the period.

*Untitled (John Chads House), 1971*

Watercolor on paper



---

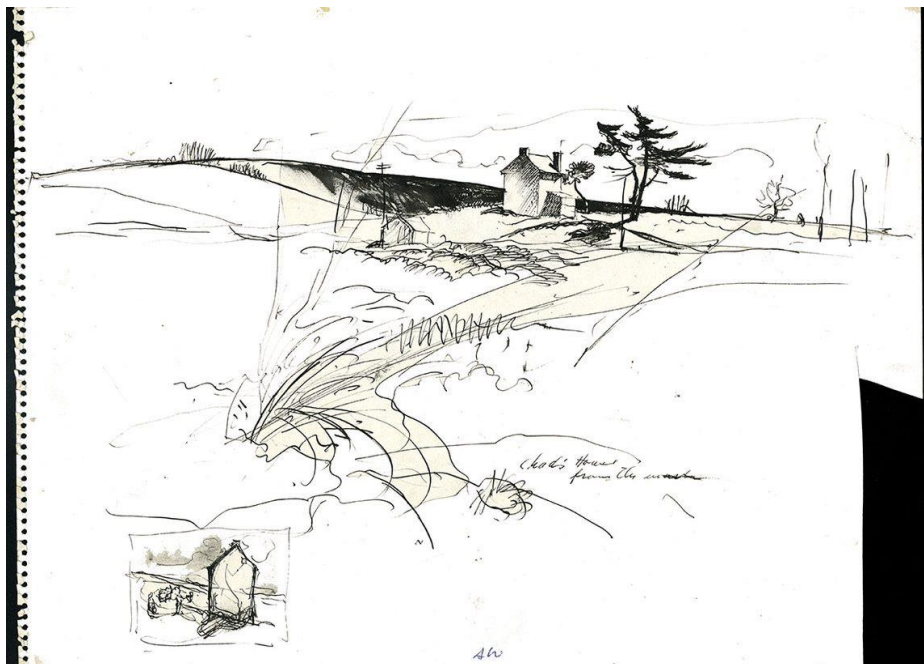
In this image of the circa 1725 house of the Quaker ferryman and tavernkeeper John Chads, from whom the town takes its name, and the related drawing in the case,

Wyeth tries various compositional strategies. Here, he immerses us in the house's environment with its springhouse in the foreground.

## [IN CASE]

*The Home of John Chads Study, 1943*

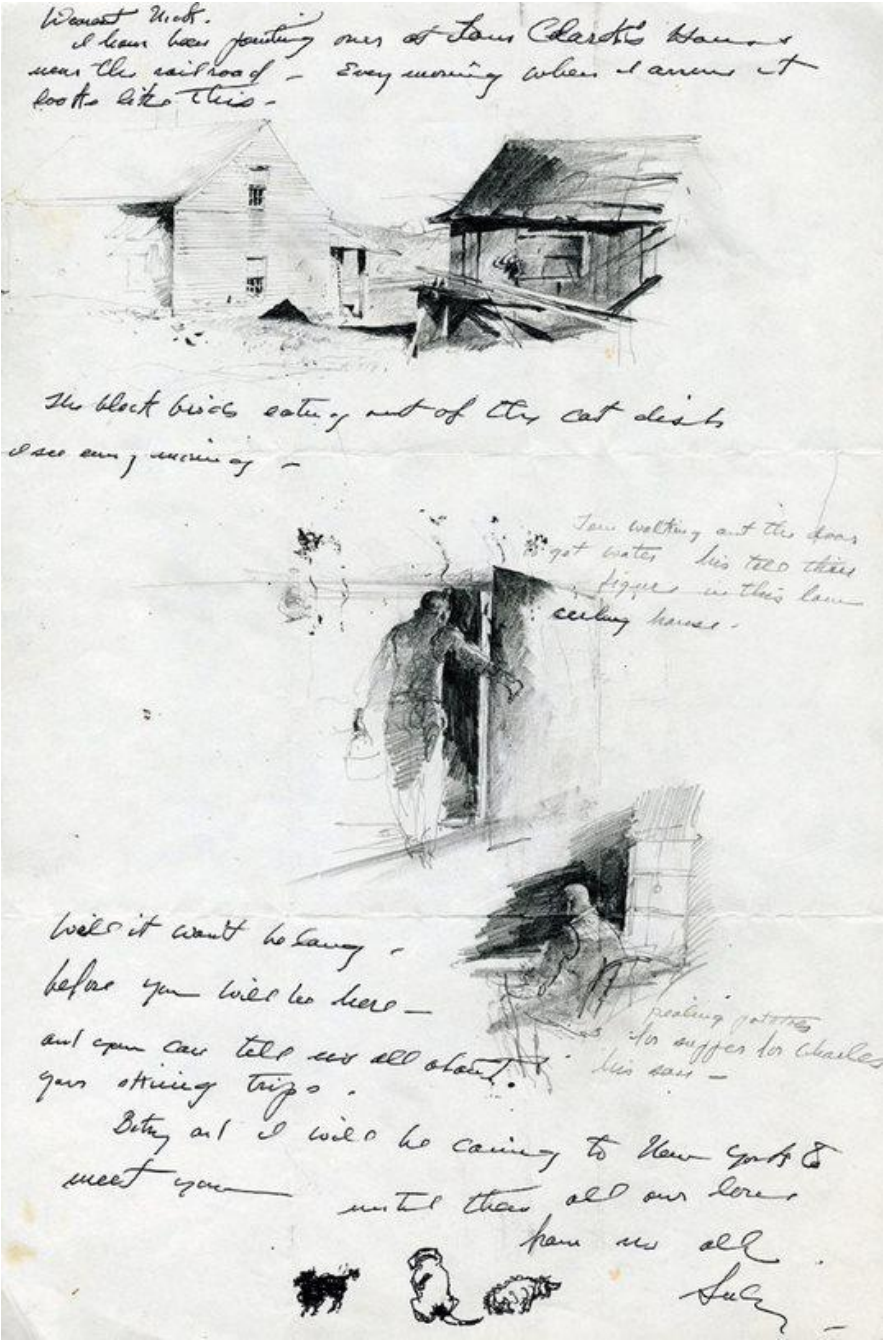
Ink on paper





*Letter to Nicholas Wyeth (Tom Clark's House), 1959*

Ink and pencil on paper



Charles William Heathcote, *History of Chester County, Pennsylvania* (inscribed by the author "To N.C. Wyeth,")  
West Chester: Horace F. Temple, 1926.

Ennion Cook, ed. *Two Hundred Fifty Years of Quakerism at Birmingham, 1690-1940*  
West Chester: Birmingham Friends Meeting, 1940.

These works on paper and books owned by the Wyeths show other facets of the artist's efforts to understand and make creative use of the layers of history with which local houses were freighted. The rough, cut sheet, in relation to John Chads' house, is

a precious survivor of the early stages of his process showing notes to himself and the working out of potential compositions, with the structure rendered precisely and the landscape only in general outlines. The illustrated letter to his elder son reveals how the interest in these structures manifested throughout his life in unexpected places.

## **The Kuerner House**

The house of the German immigrants Anna and Karl Kuerner, which was donated by their descendants to the Brandywine in 1999, was one of Wyeth's most important subjects, giving rise to hundreds of



temperas, watercolors, and drawings over the decades. While the family farm includes many other buildings and a landscape that also inspired his work, it was the austere house at the heart of the property with the stout power of a castle's keep that called to the artist most of all.

While the importance of the Kuerner property to Wyeth is widely known, the artist's tremendous output on this subject matter means that there is a great deal of Kuerner work that has rarely or never before been exhibited from the Andrew and Betsy Wyeth Collection. The selections on view here show the range of ideas and possibilities he found in this single building,

and the ways he found to make of inanimate architecture a portrait of its inhabitants.

*Wolf Moon Study, 1975*

Pencil on paper



*Tree House Study, 1982*

Watercolor, drybrush and pencil on paper



*Brown Swiss Study, 1957*

Watercolor on paper





*Untitled (Kuerner Farm), 1962*

Watercolor on paper



---

*Chimney Smoke—First Version, 1957*

Watercolor on paper



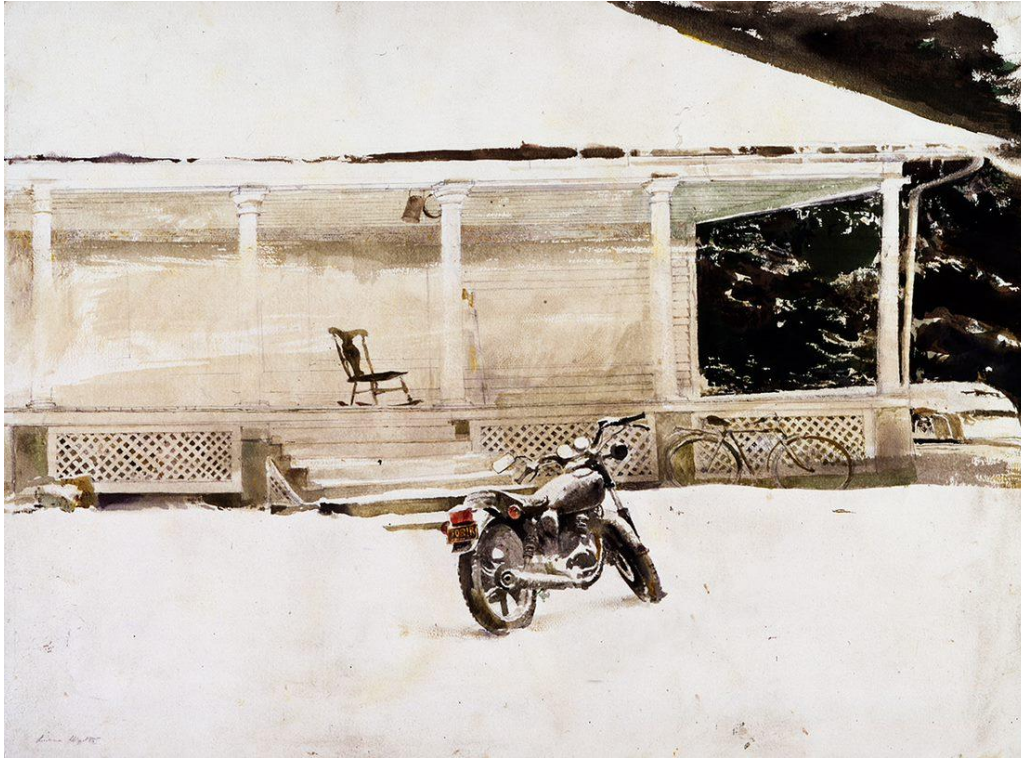
*Untitled (Painter's Folly and Kuerner Farm),*  
1967

Watercolor on paper



*Drifting Study*, 1991

Watercolor on paper



---

This is an image of the home of one of Wyeth's regular models, Jimmy Lynch, on Station Way Road. As the structure dissolves into snow, the rocking chair, motorcycle, and bike offer a collective portrait of the inhabitant.



## **Painter's Folly**

This house that has been associated with multiple painters acquired its romantic name not from that background but rather from its original inhabitant, Samuel Painter, a well-traveled farmer who adopted an unusual Italianate style for the region. Howard Pyle later rented it as a summer base for his influential art school, of which N. C. Wyeth was a student.

Painter's Folly, like the Kuerner and Olson houses, was a place Wyeth could explore as he liked with unusual freedom. The open access he obtained from George and Helen Sipala gave rise to works like



the unnerving tempera *Marriage*, showing the residents asleep in their bed. In the selected works, Wyeth focuses on the ornament of this alien, elite architecture in a landscape characterized by demure vernacular structures, including the charismatic cupola atop the building and the eccentric garden sculptures that surround the pool.

*Painter's Folly, 1989*

Tempera on panel



---

*Widow's Walk Study, 1990*

Watercolor and pencil on paper



*Toward Atwater's Study, 1968*

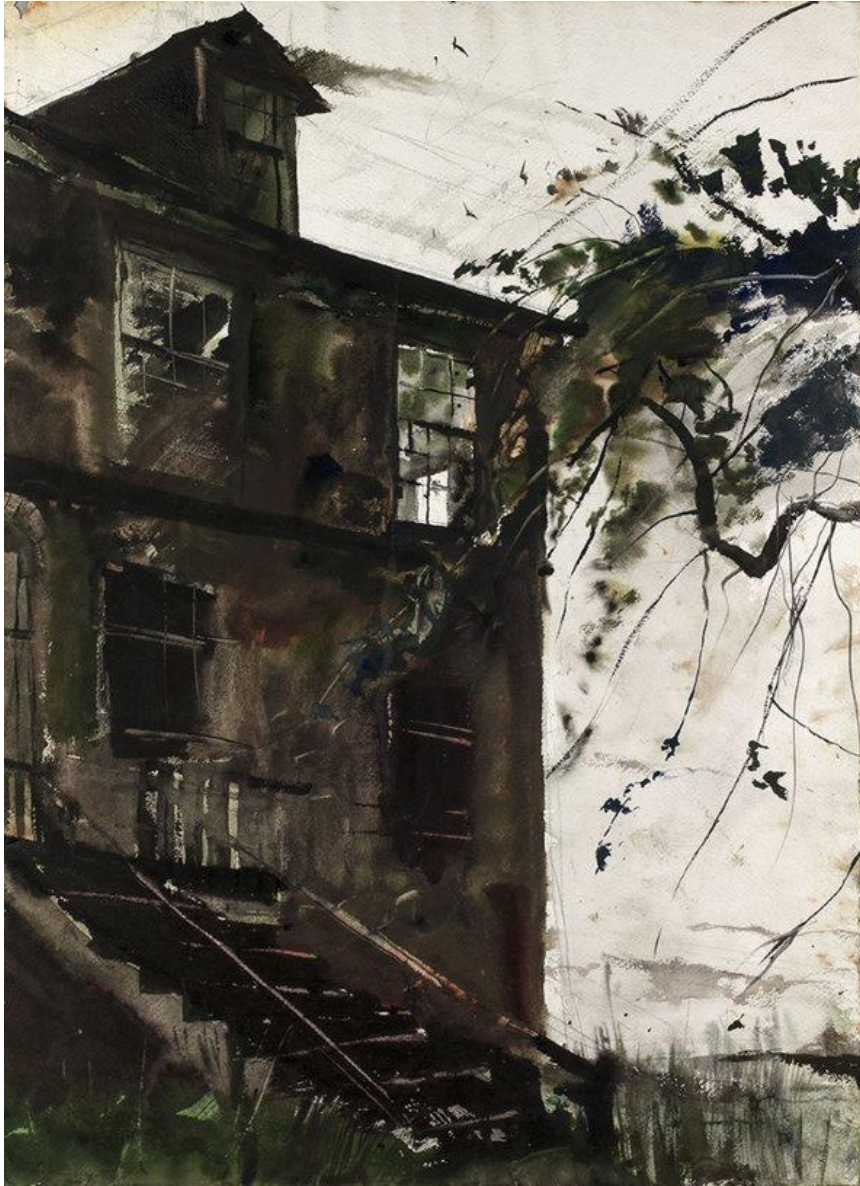
Watercolor on paper





*Untitled (Big Bend), 1946*

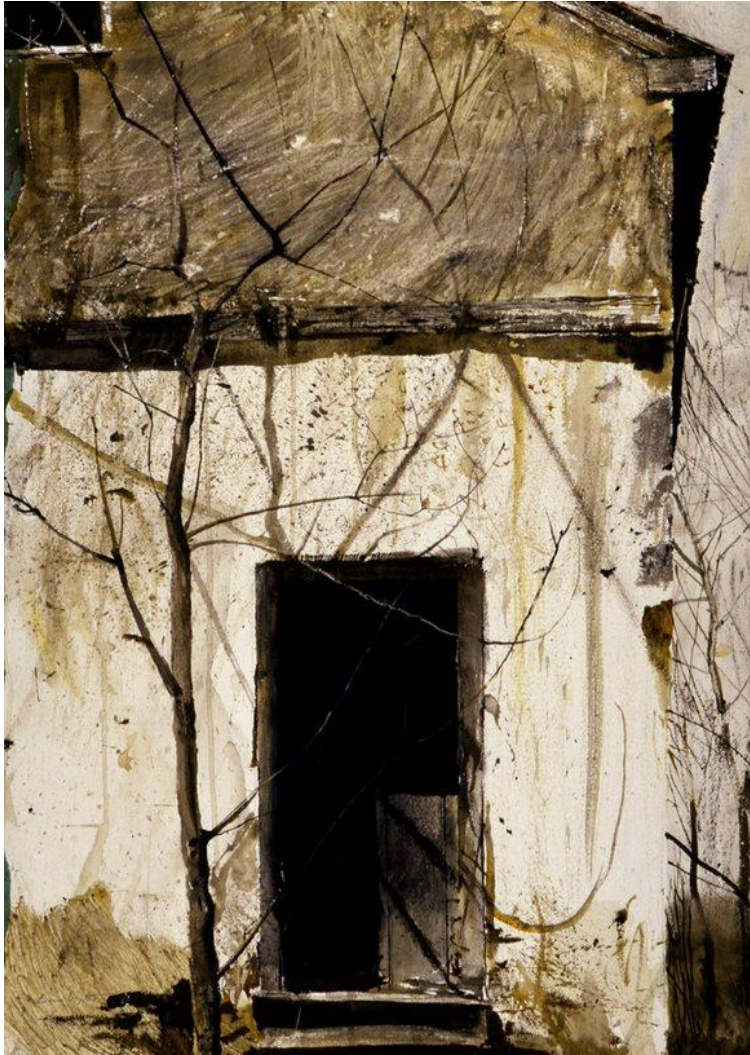
Watercolor on paper





*Untitled (Big Bend), 1961*

Watercolor on paper



---

The property that has been known variously as Horseshoe Farm and Big Bend is an imposing structure that dwarfs most

others featured in this exhibition. Wyeth's choices in depicting this stately home elide the house's scale and fragment its features. The 1946 watercolor is the product of a period when the structure was little more than a ruin, but the 1961 work is the product of a period of restoration and reinvention under one of the Brandywine's founders, George A. "Frolic" Weymouth.

## **Brinton's Mill**

Brinton's Mill is a former gristmill dating to the 1720s, supplemented by an 1824 granary and 1920s house. Wyeth began painting this local landmark, strongly

associated with the Battle of Brandywine— from the fact that British forces in that largest battle of the Revolutionary War are known to have crossed the creek close by— long before there was any prospect of owning the property. However, on one such sketching trip in 1958, Betsy Wyeth learned it was for sale, saw that it became theirs, and set about a lengthy restoration campaign that made it their primary residence until the end of their lives.

The works in this section speak to the transformative potential of inhabiting one's creative subject matter. Distant views of the property evoke its associations with the battle, kaleidoscopic responses to the

various buildings find diverse moods and meanings in their facets, and an important tempera showing Betsy herself against the structures she rehabilitated crystallizes this fertile site of creative partnership.

*Blizzard Study, 1966*

Watercolor on paper





*Mill Buildings, Study for The Mill, 1959*

Pencil on paper



747, 1980

Tempera on panel



*Swifts—First Version, 1991*

Watercolor on paper





*The Forge Study, 1984*

Watercolor on paper





*Battleground Study, 1981*

Watercolor on paper



---

*Flood Plain Study, 1986*

Watercolor on paper



*Noah's Ark Study, 2004*

Watercolor on paper





*Untitled (Brinton's Mill), 1985*

Watercolor on paper



*The Miller's Son*, 1934

Oil on canvas





## **Betsy's Buildings**

While Andrew Wyeth was reimagining Chadds Ford's houses, his essential partner in life, art, and business Betsy James Wyeth took up a unique and complementary role. Betsy set about researching, acquiring, restoring, and suitably furnishing numerous houses, schoolrooms, and workspaces, both in Pennsylvania and in Maine. Her restoration to working order of Brinton's Mill and the outfitting of the adjacent granary and millhouse for the creative and domestic needs of their new inhabitants is a key context for this exhibition. This property stands as a testament to her own vision of

a built environment in which the lines between past and present blur.

Betsy's major projects in Maine may be less well known to Brandywine visitors but are no less important. There, across three islands in Muscongus Bay, she accomplished her greatest creative work across hundreds of acres, designing and constructing ponds and meadows, trails and harbors, and a remarkable collection of buildings that she restored or built anew in these harsh surroundings.

## **The Winfield-Davis House**

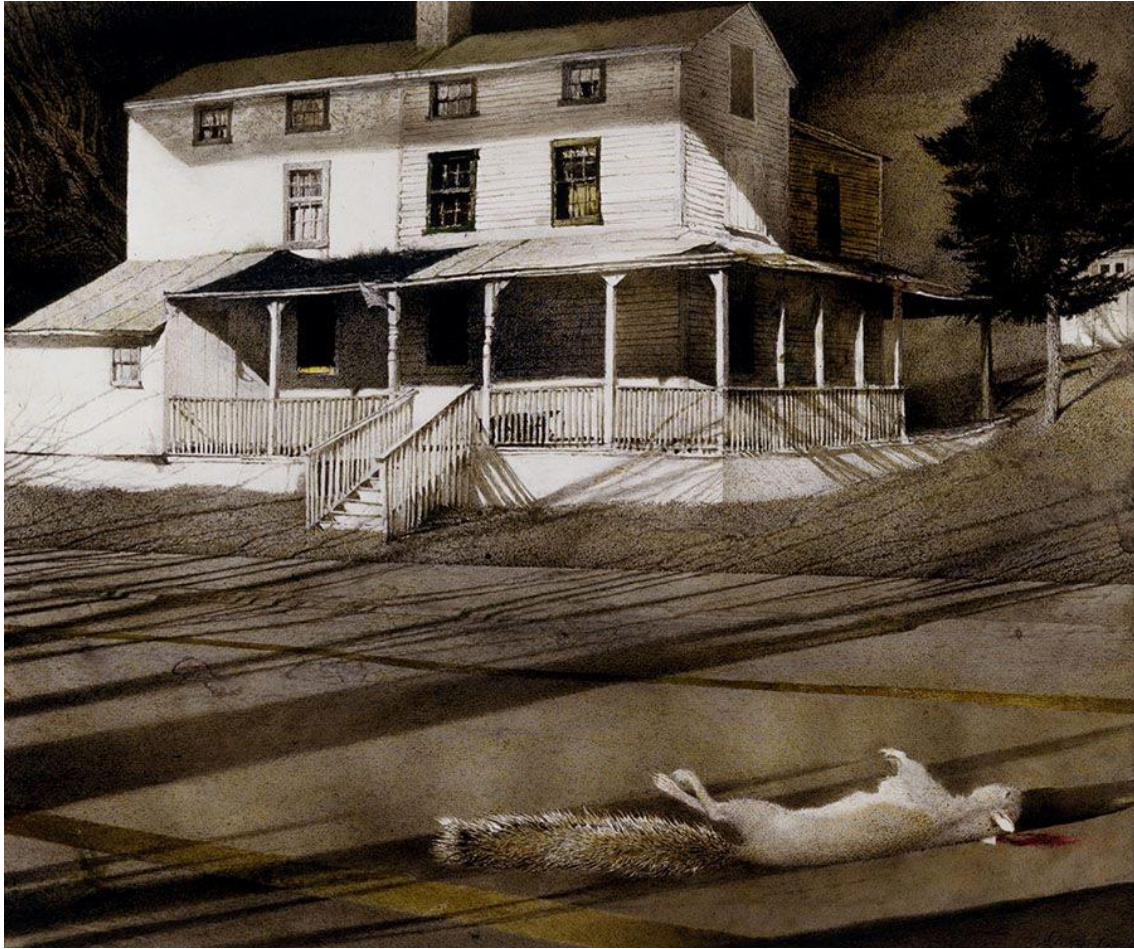
This house was associated with multiple members of the established African

American community of Chadds Ford, including Andrew Davis and Othaniel Winfield. It served as the focus of a number of major temperas and watercolors over multiple decades centered equally on the prominent porch and the traces of the human inhabitants. As is evident from *Fast Lane*, Wyeth was fascinated by the uncanny proximity of this eighteenth-century structure to speeding traffic its builders never could have anticipated.

After the demolition of the structure in 1995, Wyeth created one further image lamenting its fate.

*Fast Lane*, 1987

Drybrush watercolor on paper





*Rag Bag Study, 1986*

Watercolor and pencil on paper



---

*Winfield's Porch Study, 1982*

Pencil on paper



*Slight Breeze Study*, 1968

Watercolor on paper





*Slight Breeze, 1968*

Tempera on panel



---

Wyeth called this subject a portrait of his son Jamie's wife, Phyllis Mills Wyeth, who was known for wearing a broad-brimmed hat not unlike the bell beside the Woodward farmhouse. The pair together

invite us to look back and forth at the distinct choices he made, and the license he took, in the two media with which he is most associated: watercolor and tempera.

*7-Up—First Version, 1985*

Watercolor on paper





*Untitled (Wylie Farm), 1985*

Watercolor on paper



---

This house served Wyeth both for one of his classic architectural detail works and for a most unusual composition with a passing hot-air balloon, capturing an unexpected moment he witnessed. The mixture of structural materials, including

the traditional exposed rubble construction of the main house and the wooden additions and outbuildings, is characteristic of the traditional regional building practices that called to Wyeth throughout his career.