

The Artist's Almanac April 2010

*April is the cruellest month,
Breeding lilacs out of the dead land,
Mixing memory and desire,
Stirring dull roots with spring rain.*

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

My youngest granddaughter gave me a survival kit last Christmas. It consists of a compass, a whistle, a miniature flashlight and a tiny candy bar. She has been after me ever since to use it. Last Sunday I took her to the creek to explore.

There we scanned the gravel beaches, as I once did as a boy, collecting fossils: brachiopods, cephalopods and crinoid stems, or Indian money, evidence of life here in shallow seas eons before man came on earth. This never fails to load me with an awesome sense of Time, thinking of all that have come and gone here before us.

She was more interested in the present, wading and sweeping the current with her butterfly net lest any passing fossils or minnows escape her.



Next we turned to shelling German Battleships that cruised past disguised as floating sticks. We looked for crawdads under upturned rocks, but it was too early yet. I showed her how to use the compass to plot a bearing and distance to home. Then she hid from me and used the whistle to help me find her.

Then an ominous growl of an engine drowned out the chatter of the riffing water. I looked up to see coming around the bend what did not belong there – a Jeep plowing downstream splitting the current and muddying the water. It passed through us, went downstream and turned around and came back upstream, getting stuck briefly, churning up gravel, mud and fossils, clouding the clear stream. Our exploration day on the creek was over.



Fragile and fleeting as beauty is, how can we be thankful enough for a spring day? Yet there is a sense of melancholy mixed with it, as, in the words of the poet *we mix memory and desire, stirring dull roots with spring rain...* As I drag my aching bones over the sharp rocks looking for fossils and keeping an eye on the young girl with the big heart in a small body with boundless energy, I am most conscious of the passing of time and the need to savor every precious moment of it. We never step twice in the same stream.

Local authors earn prestigious state historical award

By Marjorie Lloyd
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The Founding of the Cumberland Settlements, The First Atlas 1779–1804 by Jack Masters, Doug Drake and Bill Puryear is the recipient of the Tennessee Library Association–Tennessee Historical Commission’s Annual Tennessee History Book Award. It is the first book to win the award in the last three years that is actually written by Tennesseans.

The book was nominated by the State Historian, Walter Durham, and was voted unanimously to receive the award by the selection committee over a group of 15 titles nominated. In March, at the annual Tennessee Library Association meeting, the announcement was made at the Trustees’ Luncheon.

“Founding of the Cumberland Settlements, the First Atlas 1779–1804, won the Tennessee History Book Award for 2009 because it is a fabulous work, the first of its kind,” said Durham. “Puryear, Masters, and Drake mixed documentary research with the technology (GPS) that unfailingly locates any place on earth by latitude and longitude. The result: great maps, an almost lyrical read, and an unmatched collection

of early land grants and surveyor plats.”

Puryear credits many reasons for the successful completion of the project, the first the resources available here in Sumner County.

“The book that won the award is a Sumner County book, in every sense,” said Puryear in a recent interview. “It was written entirely by Sumner Countians–Gallatin natives, Jack Masters and myself. And most of the research was done in the Sumner County Archives, in Gallatin, where copies of all the North Carolina land grants are on file.”

In addition to illustrations from numerous sources and paintings by Puryear, several paintings by nationally renowned artist David Wright are also included. “Gallatin artist David Wright was a major contributor,” said Puryear, “and is shown on the book jacket.”

“The book was first

presented publicly in a signing at the new Gallatin Public Library, sponsored by them, the Sumner

Hall—that settled in Middle Tennessee, details of their accomplishments and their daily lives, as well

from primary sources, not just stir old ashes,” writes Puryear in the introduction.

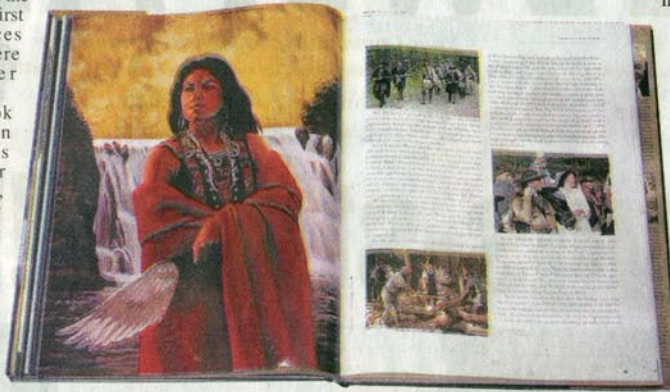
After selling out five months after publication, the book is already in its second printing, which will be available the end of April.

Puryear also reaffirms the three authors’ gratitude to those who aided them in the research: “The book would not have been possible without the generous help and support of many

to use it.”

Initially, the three men were drawn together in a search for a lost pioneer fort. But, as Puryear explains in the introduction, they discovered a broader subject: “As we mapped more surveys and stitched them together with pioneer traces, a pattern began to emerge, like a jigsaw puzzle. These were the foundation tiles of a civilization, building itself form the ground up, imposing the rule of law and property upon a savage wilderness. Surrounded by hostile foreign powers on all sides and isolated from help, it was attached repeatedly for fifteen years by hostile tribesmen and almost extinguished. Yet it survived and prospered, to become the heartland of Jacksonian Democracy that dominated American politics up until the Civil War.”

The books may be ordered through the publisher, the Book Foundry at 615.330.9013 or through the web site: www.cumberlandpioneers.com



A David Wright painting entitled “White Rose” along with photographs of early settler re-enactors provide visual information for readers. PHOTO BY MARJORIE LLOYD

County History Association and the Sumner County Museum,” said Puryear. Puryear also noted that the Sumner County Historical Society was the sponsoring organization for the book.

The large book, subtitled “Showing Who Came, How They Came, and Where They Put Down roots,” includes expansive documentation about the families—with familiar names like Mayfield, Martin, Spencer, Walton, Thompson, Desha, Winchester, and

as extensive information about the land itself and the Native Americans in nearby Territory who plagued the settlers for many years. A CD with 1,500 pioneer deeds and surveys from 11 counties in Tennessee is also packaged with the book. A second volume also is planned.

This collection of information has already demonstrated its value to historians, but also to the general public because it is written “to write a history

Sumner Countians nor without the use of the rich historic resources of our Sumner County Archives. We have one of the best in the nation and people come here from all over America

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