

August 2017 Artist's Almanac

"The crickets felt it was their duty to warn everybody that summertime cannot last for ever. Even on the most beautiful days in the whole year – the days when summer is changing into autumn – the crickets spread the rumor of sadness and change."

—E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web*

Country life once meant *fulltime* farmers, milking in the dark, then sweating, sunrise to sunset in tobacco and corn, with water from cisterns, party lines, and privies. But nature's bounty graced a farmer's dinner table, laden with pork, creamed corn, green beans, squash, fried fish, creamy milk and fresh eggs. These were the riches of the poor, even in the worst of the great depression years and during rationing in World War II.

Their children, however, for the most part, abandoned unprofitable small farming and drove daily from a house on the family homeplace to "public work" at the shoe factory or other light industry in the county town, where paychecks were regular and indoor working traditions not as harsh. After the war, veterans in crowded rental flats in the larger northern cities flocked to their local *Levittowns* to own a tiny ranch house on an eighth acre. Recreation included mowing the yard, but it was *their* yard and it was *their* house they lived in. Those near the largest cities might commute by train, but for rural Americans it meant driving their car, or riding the train or bus into the city for work, movies and for ballgames – the *Great American Commute*. This trend continues, but in a different direction.

Today, middle class Americans, most of them with no memory of the costs and drudgeries of farming, want a place in the country, with acres to mow, and perhaps a mini-stable and a mega-mansion. There is still the cost of auto, gas, and lost time, but with better roads and early retirement looming, it is country contentment without the drudgery.

Or so it was for years, and still is, but now yet another countertrend impends. The so-called *Millennials*, born from 1980 to 2000, tend to be less interested in country life and in mowing large lawns than they are in social networking on the internet and frequent travels to faraway places. They send a median of 50 texts daily and have an average of 250 Facebook friends. They are less likely to put up with an unpleasant work environment and likely to change jobs and location more often than their parents did. Many new Nashvillians prefer living in the downtown area or near it. Two of their latest ideas are buying shares in a condo entity, which are easier to sell than real estate, and in BYOD, or bring your own device to the workplace. This idyllic life permits them to lock the door behind themselves when they leave on an impulse vacation in the Napa valley or a river cruise on the Danube.

Yet August, for those who live in the countryside, is, or has been, a month of beautiful clouds. As moisture rises from the baking earth into the cooler atmosphere above, it condenses as clouds. Towering clouds are a delight to the religious and artistic imagination. It would be difficult to imagine God without clouds. Artist John Constable spent one entire summer

sketching nothing but clouds, for future paintings. Fellow artist John Ruskin said of him, *Constable bottled clouds as my father bottled fine wines*. Bringing his summer's sketches back into his London studio, he painted a poetic evocation of idyllic country life in *The Haywain*, a romantic reaction to the industrial revolution consuming the English landscape.

Visiting a show of Constable's paintings at the Frist Museum in downtown Nashville several years ago I rounded a corner and entered a room to see this six-footer. I spent the remainder of my visit on a bench in front of it, transfixed by the view.



The Haywain, John Constable, Artist

In this, one of the most copied pieces of art in the western World, the dramatic clouds furnish a backdrop to his memory of his father's farm and the beauties of country life. Farmer Willy Lott has no interest in this magnificent array except as they might portend rain, while his faithful spaniel on the near bank awaits his master's command. The sweating horses, cooling in the stream, do not even look up.

We all of us looked up last week, at an once-in-a-lifetime sight - a total solar eclipse. Tens of thousands came here to rent parking space and rooms, from as far away as California and even Japan. Such a sight might have been seen as portending doom to our ancient ancestors, but

astronomers had prepared us well. Only the birds seemed confused and went fluttering to their roosts, fooled by the sudden duskless dark. Gallatin, predicted to be directly on the centerline of maximum darkness, was just that, and no photo can capture the sudden wonder as the eclipse reached totality.

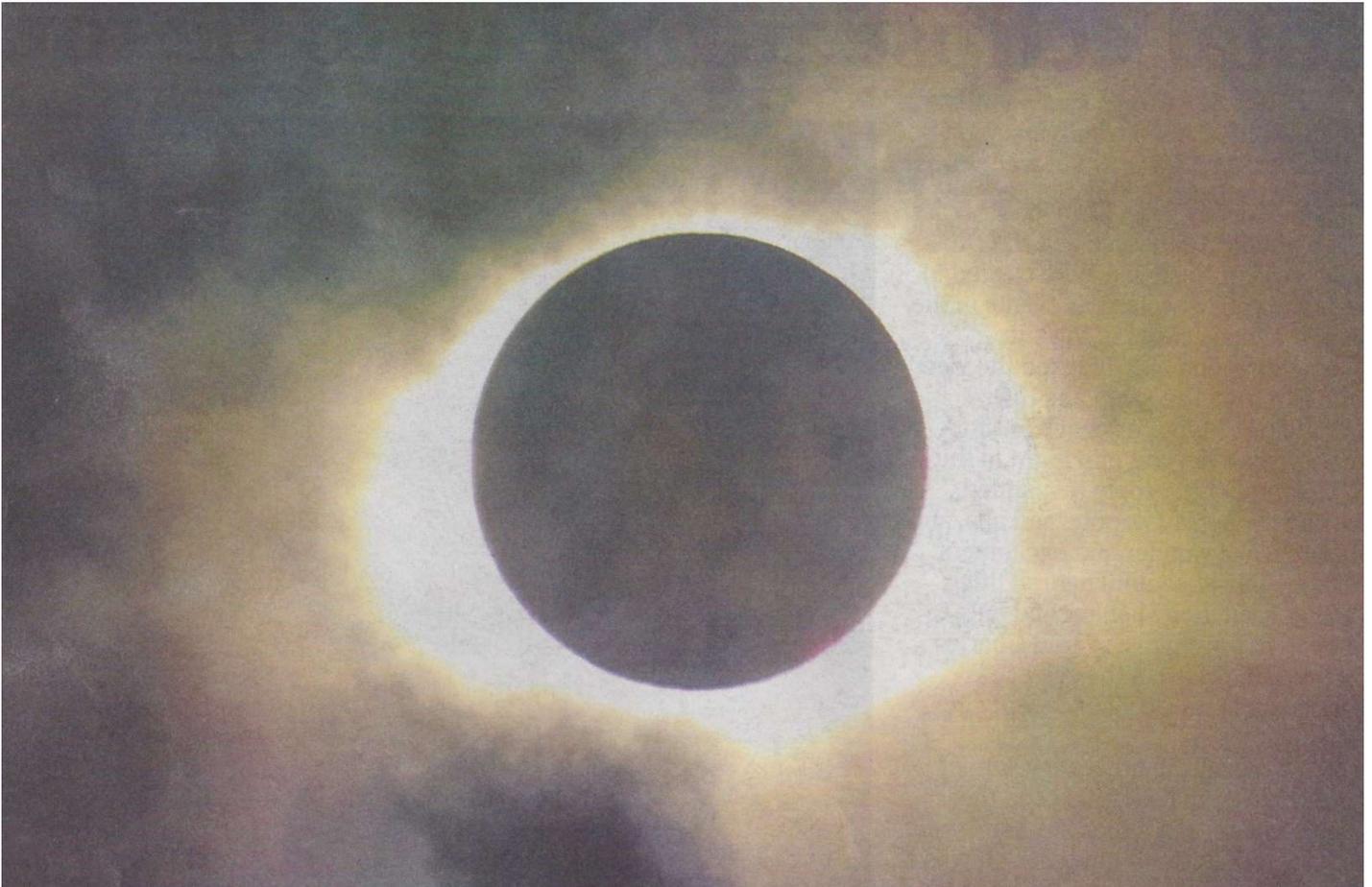


Photo by Rick Musacchio

AND FINALLY, you will receive, and I hope will welcome, the return of the monthly *New Artists Almanac*, a reflection on seasonal weathers, philosophy, and art. To it a new feature has been added for those of you who love art and writing: a section in the heading titled *Shop*, styled for those enjoy the convenience of internet browsing. There, by clicking *control enter* you will see a sampling of my recent paintings on offer, as well as my latest two books: <http://www.billpuryear.com/store.html>

The award-winning three volume history series, *Founding of the Cumberland Settlements*, is sold out, and is no longer available, except on the resale market. See, or call my co-author, Jack Masters, at 615-478-6382 for further information. See, <http://www.cumberlandpioneers.com>

And if you, like I, receive much far too much junk mail, you can stop these monthly blogs by typing *cancel* and hitting *return* on the top bar. But I hope you will stay with me in this monthly romp with beautiful Mother Nature, and sample the treats and the weathers she shows us.

A happy and healthy September to each of you. And please don't miss my upcoming signing on Friday the 29th at the Gallatin Public Library of my latest book, *An Artist's Almanac*.

Bill Puryear



The Wild Rose – Bill Puryear, Artist