

## The Artist's Almanac December 2006

The oaks,  
their auburn tresses  
fallen now to forest floor display  
their graceful limbs  
to winter sun.

December is a time of rain and snow – of turning indoors to welcoming hearth. But not this year.

After a sharp beginning of freezing rain, this December has opened into a warm glory of balmy sun and dry weather. Daffodils and azaleas bloom, and today will touch 72. I turned on the car's air conditioner to counter its trapped solar heat. Prepared for snow and parties, we don't quite know what to do with ourselves. As I fight through traffic to fill up at the nearest market I make a mental note to take another look at global warming.

For those who long to know the land better, this is the best of times. Today we see ranges of distant hills through screens of bare trees, and even the smallest creek gives back the sky. The night sparkles with distant diamonds and we can sit out with our binoculars to search the firmament for signs and portents.

This week we experienced the thrill of discovering the pioneer crossing of Drakes Creek, right where the land grants had it placed. A highway engineer could not have designed a better ford than this one – a shallow solid stone base from bank to bank with gentle approaches from both sides. Here crossed settlers in the 1700s headed for Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas and, ultimately, the West Coast of a new America.



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Fellow explorers Doug Drake, whose ancestor named this creek, and published genealogist and archeologist, Jack Masterson, abroad on a summer's day in mid-winter.

Up from the creek we found an old road climbing between majestic white oaks to the site of an old stagecoach inn on a hill from where you could see clear to Nashville.



The contrast - then and now - was profound. This wooded hill is an island, with subdivisions and golf courses lapping at its northern and western shores. From the south, the hum of busy highways, railroads, and industries. Yet here the memories of a time of cotton, horses, slaves, and the river are still somehow palpable.

To the east lies Pilot's Knob. The pioneer Longhunters found it the highest hill nigh the river with a big spring issuing from its foot. Because it could be seen from miles away across the valley, they made their first station camp here and used the hill as a landmark to guide them back across the wilderness of the 1770s. Today it is a hollow shell, its backside gone to furnish limestone for four lanes of busy highway boring by below.

The knob is almost gone, but not quite. On the year's darkest day, when night falls in afternoon, a huge Star of Bethlehem lights up at the top of the knob, visible for miles, a beacon for weary travelers finding their way home through a cold and dark December.

For the warmth and light of this December, I am grateful, and while this midwinter thaw lasts, I'll take it for the miracle it is, and celebrate.

The Light came into the darkness and the darkness has never put it out.



*...And Glory Shone Around* – Bill Puryear, artist, ca 1970

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Those of you who live in or long for Sumner County should own this just-published art quality coffee table book. I first saw my author's copy today and the photography is absolutely breathtaking. The print quality is superb and it will be an heirloom for all who love Old Sumner. It is available now through The Booksmith Group. Click on the order link below to review.



**Sumner County: Living Working Playing**  
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Art directed by legendary creative force Chuck Creasy, and photographed by award-winning cinematographer Jim Spitler, *Sumner County: Living Working Playing* documents in words and images the rich and dynamic beauty of life in Sumner County, Tennessee. Essayist Bill Puryear introduces the volume in the evocative voice that fans of his weblog [www.billpuryear.com](http://www.billpuryear.com) have come to know and love, while prolific news columnist Tena Jamison Lee brings her comprehensive knowledge of Sumner County and its residents into exquisite focus.