

The Artist's Almanac

November 2004

*No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease,
No comfortable feel in any member
No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees,
No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds, -
November!*

Thomas Hood – English Poet, 1844

In the ancient Roman calendar November is ninth among the months. The earth has labored and delivered forth her bounty, which is now in our barns, pantries or memories. Now she deserves her silence and rest.

A few golden maple leaves hang as tattered reminders of life's cycle, until the rain and winds take them down to sodden mulch. We seek the last roses for a cherished place at table. Turnip greens transform the first frost into their chastening bounty for our fall tables.

The gray woods fall silent and open themselves to long views and meditative afternoon walks with the dog. Creeks weave their sinuous silver way through the landscape enlivening the valleys with the murmur of their falls.

November is a time for reflection – a time for taking inventory of ourselves and for summing up. We all need a fallow time - a time not to be pregnant - a time to be thankful, and to rest.

In Tennessee we have much to be thankful for – a year of ample rain, a cooler summer, an abundant fall. Perhaps if the poet Hood had lived in America rather than England he would have enjoyed a sunnier view of November.

The Romans also had a holiday which has now all but disappeared – All Saints Day on November 1st. *Saints* is but another word for our family, those whom we love and respect and who gave us who we are, or could be.

The only satisfying response to all the bounty we are given is to give thanks. That's what the artist attempts to do in his work – to pass the blessings downstream to others and to reflect the light.

That is why we in America seek out those we love this month – to acknowledge and to give thanks for that which we are given and to share it with each other.

It is my favorite Holiday! And it redeems November.