

The Artist's Almanac November 2009

*No spring, nor summer beauty hath such grace,
As I have seen in one autumnal face.*

John Donne

November puts an end to October, the wettest one in eighty years, according to the National Weather Service. Yesterday I watched a robin feast on earthworms which had crawled onto the paved driveway to avoid drowning in the super-saturated soil. The cool, wet summer has turned into a New England autumn, and no one needs drive to Gatlinburg to see brilliant color.

Early November gives us a few precious days of the finest distillation of hues, and this year is no exception. The maples are resplendent against the backdrop of cedars. The hackberries have long since frittered away their tiny leaves, like teenage girls on a shopping spree, while the mighty oaks, like wise old men, hold on to their green for a change to dignified auburn later this month.

When first I moved to the farm forty some years ago I was fascinated when a friend discovered some Civil War era letters of an East Tennessee Union soldier bivouacked here to keep Morgan's Confederate cavalry from crossing the river and raiding into Kentucky. The private told of camping in "a big sugar orchard below the house of a rich old rebel". I puzzled over this for years, trying to picture tents in a field of sorghum, until I remembered that the common name of *Acer saccharum* is 'sugar maple'. We think of maple sugar as a product of New England, when in fact it was made here, until Louisiana cane sugar became plentiful and cheap.



Scouting the maple grove beneath the site of the old plantation house I selected the showiest saplings and dug and replanted them in my yard. Now, forty years on, they have lived perhaps a quarter of their natural life and today reward a young man's sweat by filling an old man's studio with reflected golden light this early November.

November is a time for summing up and taking stock. Later its dark, dank days with the golden maple leaves moldering underfoot will bring us face to face with reality. The inconvenient truth of global warming is now turning inconvenient for its prophets, as the weather is entering a cool phase and the ice caps are beginning to reform, just as they always have. The earth is round and rolls through very long weather cycles, contrary to the dogmatic predictions of the alarmists, who may one day be remembered with the disdain now reserved for the flat earth theorists.

Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday. One son likes it more than Christmas because he prefers giving thanks to giving gifts. Giving thanks costs us nothing - nothing save the most jealously guarded thing we hold - our pride. Satan's sin was pride and he manifested it in ingratitude. In the words of poet Anthony Esolen ... *We are taught by the world that we must heap burdens of work, self regard, and ambition upon our backs, to be what is called "independent". Imagine instead the light yoke of gratitude, free and noble and Godlike, acknowledging that were it not for love of God at every moment we might wink out of existence, as a mote in a sunbeam passing into darkness. At every moment we are made by God to depend upon his creation and upon our fellow men for all that we need to live. Imagine the freedom of a thankful heart.*

The harder we work and the more we heap up for ourselves the more we, like the evil one, are tempted to believe we did it all ourselves and scorn those who serve us. Is not the thankful heart the most beautiful thing in creation? May we recollect ourselves this season and be thankful for ...

- The parents who bore and nurtured us
- For the love of God, for faith, family, and friends
- For our jobs, for those who support us, for our education, and for the chance to serve.
- For those who labor at all hours to provide us food, warmth, light, clean water, and safety, often at great personal risk, including linemen, fireman, policemen, who are out at all hours and in all weathers.
- For our teachers and mentors who sacrificed themselves and their time to educate us, sometimes against our will, and to discipline us.
- For priests, pastors and rabbis, who keep the windows of heaven open for us.
- For ambulance drivers, nurses, surgeons, doctors and medical technicians who risk disease and work all shifts to care for us tenderly when we can not care for ourselves.
- For our nation, for freedom and peace. For the members of our military who serve at grave personal risk in faraway hostile lands to protect our security.
- For musicians who transport us into realms of glory.
- For our hobbies and pets, for happy memories, for our favorite things, for leisure and relaxation.
- For our gifts, talents, and abilities, for honors, for strength and energy.
- For struggles, sorrows, trials, and sufferings, For failures and rejection, for all the ways we have grown up and become better people
- For kindness, goodness, joy, and laughter, for the times we have helped others or made them happy.

- For all the wonders of creation, for beauty, music, sports, and art, for new opportunities and second chances
- For renewed hope and fulfilled dreams, for the providence and protection of heaven
- For the gift of life.

Thankfulness for all things is the one sure recipe for contentment, for with it comes the comfort of recognizing we are loved – loved by the One who gives everything to us. May we each of us this season enjoy the freedom of a thankful heart.



Venues

Listen to my interview with John Seigenthaler on *Word on Words - Founding of the Cumberland Settlements* at www.wnpt.org/productions/wow (turn off your pop-up blocker and allow time for the file to load). The book is available at 615-330-913 or at www.cumberlandpioneers.com

Art In Bloom – March 12-13, 2010, Annual show of Gallatin Junior League at Bluegrass Country Club, Hendersonville, Tennessee.

Watch for program news on *Tennessee Crossroads* on WNPT.