

The Artist's Almanac October 2009

*Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.*

-Tennyson

I don't shed tears with the poet; October is my favorite month, the beginning of my favorite season. There are football Saturdays, reunions, street fairs, days of plein air painting, and long walks along the bluff above the lake, when the searchlight sun picks out a golden maple on the far bank and immortalizes it in luminous memory. The poet's "*days that are no more*" are lit in golden remembrance, safe there from harm or alteration, for us to enjoy when we will. We see things clearest in October's golden light.

We celebrate these memories at All Saints, *El Dia de los Muertos*, All Hallows Eve and Halloween, a favorite of the marketers that now rivals Christmas. This year, if it does not rain, we shall have a full moon to light our Halloween memories.

October days have a mystery all their own. We enter a new world, without leaving our own. Far vistas, the smells of mulching leaves beneath our feet, sounds clearly heard from horizon to horizon, the feel of the creek's cool water rippling bright leaves downstream, and the taste of frost-nipped turnip greens: all combine to sharpen our senses in October. We know it is too beautiful to last.



Indian Summer above Desha's Station – Bill Puryear, Artist

October opens our sense of time. Distant memories haunt me as I tread the leaf-strewn floor of a grove of mighty beech and maples looking for shiny buckeyes. My father first brought me here seventy years ago and I have come back since to search for what some say are good luck charms and others call boy makers. For me, they were both.

We call October *Indian summer* and the name has a clear derivation: the pioneer settlers wrote of it in the 1790s. It is the time after first frost when summer returned long enough for settlers and Indians both to travel to the others' villages to make war (Adam Sweeting, *Beneath the Second Sun: A Cultural History of Indian Summer*, University Press of New England, 2003, p. 16). The trails were dry, the rivers and creeks were fordable, and a war party could travel fast, leaving no tracks. The Indians came for horses and hostages and killed settlers who got in their way. The settlers went to the Indian villages for revenge, and wreaked it aplenty.



The Captives – David Wright, Artist

Living subject to nature and the seasons, the Indians were more than just hunters and savage warriors – they were natural pantheists. Their lunar calendar was rational and their months, unlike ours, were equal. Observing all that surrounded them and lacking a written language, their spoken tongue was filled with natural images and metaphors and sometimes rose to poetry. The most eloquent of them carried the day in tribal councils and often became their chiefs.

In these councils all might be heard, warrior or female. Appeals to custom, memory or mystery often prevailed. Here Kattuaha, the Beloved Woman of the Cherokee at Chota, addresses Benjamin Franklin, President of the Continental Congress in 1787, pleading for an end to the killings and a lasting treaty of peace

I am in hopes that if you rightly consider it that woman is the mother of all and that woman does not pull children out of trees or stumps nor out of old logs, but out of their bodies, so that they ought to mind what a woman says, and look upon her as a mother - and I have taken the privilege to speak to you as my own children and the same as if you had sucked my breast.... The great men have all promised to keep the path clear and straight, as my children shall keep the path clear and white The talk you sent to me was to talk to my children, which I have done this day, and they all liked my talk well.

Tennessee is an Indian name and its map is filled with streams bearing names as musical as the waters rippling down their valleys - Nolichucky, Hiwassee, Chatata, Sequatchie, Watauga, Loosahatchie and Warioto. Only the names survive, as the people who named them have been forced to abandon their fields and villages and move westward. But a tincture of their blood survives here in a few, many of whom do not even know it.

Yet, in a land filling with developments there are still places where one, late of a fall afternoon, may imagine warriors on their stalk. As we tread the dank woodlands this month, the trees above us blazing with glory, we may sense the presence of those who walked here before us and ask Great Spirit to help us treat this land with the same love and respect for its beauty as did they, this Indian summer.

Bill Puryear

Upcoming Events

- **Book Launch and Signing Parties, *Founding of the Cumberland Settlements—The First Atlas - 1779-1804***, at Gallatin Public Library on the Square, **Thursday, October 15th, 4-6:30 PM and Saturday, October 17th, 12 Noon -2:30 PM**. Hosted by **Sumner County Historical Society**, with authors Doug Drake, Jack Masters, Bill Puryear and artist David Wright signing books and art. Prints and Giclees of nationally-acclaimed pioneer artist David Wright will also be displayed and available. For further information see www.cumberlandpioneers.com.

