

November 2023 Newsletter

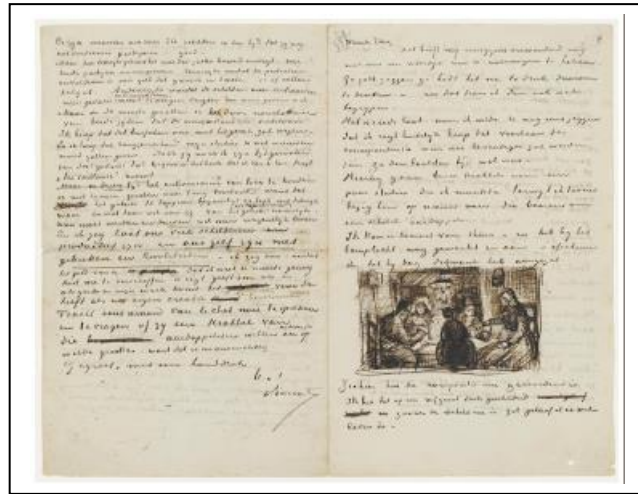
The Year of the Potato and A Season of Sharing



Hello: I hope this finds you well and enjoying a good book. Do you have a favorite book that you like to reread? If you do, please let me know so that I can share it in next month's newsletter. If you're like me and can't narrow it down to a dozen or so, that's okay, too. Re-reading favorite books is a sublime pleasure.

Meanwhile, I'm making good progress on my current novel-in-progress, "Saving Van Gogh." During my research, I've concluded that 1885 may have been, "The Year of the Potato," for Vincent Van Gogh, who writes:

"Anyway — I plan to make a start this week on that thing with the peasants around a dish of potatoes in the evening . . ." Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother, Theo, on or about April 9, 1885. (The letter is pictured below, along with an enlarged picture of the sketch.)



Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh with a sketch of The Potato Eaters, April 9, 1885



Enlarged sketch from the letter

Van Gogh also did a number of still-lives of potatoes in baskets or crates, a series on the stages of growing potatoes, the planting and lifting of potatoes, and a series of people digging potatoes.



Van Gogh: Basket of Potatoes, 1885



Van Gogh: Peasant and Peasant Woman Planting Potatoes, 1885



Pictured above is a preparatory work for one of his most powerful works, “The Potato Eaters.” Van Gogh wanted the painting to reflect the harsh reality of country life, so he gave the peasants coarse faces and bony, working hands. He wrote that they, “have tilled the earth themselves with these hands they are putting in the dish ... that they have thus honestly earned their food.”

Van Gogh used the earth tones of dusty potatoes for the people to emphasize their connection to the fields, and the result, when viewed in person, is magnificent and transcends the medium. The finished work is pictured below.



Van Gogh, The Potato Eaters, 1885



Please mark your calendars: I will be speaking about the slave trade in Kentucky at 2pm on Saturday, Feb 3, 2024 at the South Central Regional Library, 7300 Jefferson Blvd., Louisville,

KY 40219. I will be reading excerpts from my book, “A Promise Moon,” which evolved from a research grant I received to study the Underground Railroad in Kentucky.

A TIME FOR SHARING

November is a time for sharing and there has been an abundance of native seed and plant sharing going on. Our native plant and seed swapping group held 8 regional swaps this month!

This year, we held the city-wide swap at the Horine Conference Center in Jefferson Memorial Forest. It was a beautiful setting and as an added bonus, we were able to donate a considerable number of native plant seeds to Jefferson Memorial Forest. We were also able to donate a cornucopia of native plant seeds to the Nichols Branch Library in Bullitt County, since they are starting a seed library.

It’s not too late to start a native plant garden, since there are still plenty of seeds to go around. You can join the citywide group [here](#). For the cost of a few stamps, you can have a native plant garden. Here are some pictures from one of the regional swaps and the citywide swap.





I hope you've enjoyed this edition of my newsletter. If you haven't already, please take a moment to leave a review on Amazon. It is really helpful with sales. Here is the link to my latest book, "[Stealing Picasso](#)." Thank you.

If you know of anyone who is looking for a speaker, the Kentucky Humanities Speakers Bureau is great about helping to subsidize appearances. I'm available as a speaker to talk about "[Stealing Renoir](#)," and how World War II was the largest art theft in history.

Or, if Kentucky history is appropriate for audiences, the Speakers Bureau will subsidize my appearance to discuss the findings from my research grant into the Underground Railroad in Kentucky. I'm also available to talk about gardening with native plants and "[Let The Earth Breathe](#)." If you or anyone you know would like to schedule a talk, here's the [link](#).

Meanwhile, if you aren't already a member and are interested in gardening with native plants, here is the link: [Kentucky Native Plants Swap](#). The swaps are free, as are the plants and seeds, and a lot of fun, as you can see by the photos.

[Here is a link to my previous newsletters.](#)

Happy reading.

Stephen Allten Brown

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