Yankee magazine, purely nostalgic vision of New England that tour bus operators sell to outlanders during fall foliage season. The six states are still very much alive and kicking, albeit subject to some disturbing population outflows, as the *Encyclopedia* duly notes.

Regional encyclopedias have been enjoying a miniboom, with publishers attempting to duplicate the success of *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (1995), which itself replicated the success of the much-praised *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (1989). The last was organized thematically rather than in dictionary fashion, and the New England editors adopt the same approach. Yes, the arrangement introduces some aleatory effects. I was delighted to find a charming and informative entry under "Weather Lore," but I wondered why the quackish *Old Farmer's Almanac*, which is mentioned in "Lore," also warrants a separate entry. On the other hand, I'm not complaining that Richard Henry Dana Jr. appears in "Maritime New England" while Herman Melville is under "Literature." There's plenty of information about both of them, and of course it's easily located with the index.

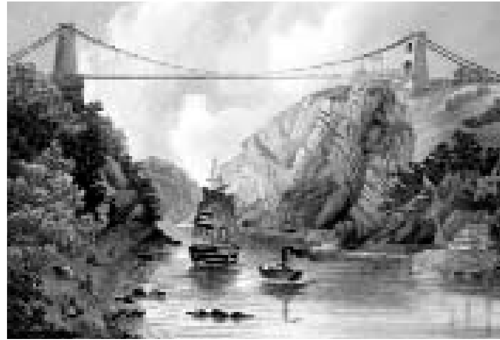
An encyclopedia has to be useful, which this one is, and it might as well be fun, too; otherwise, why risk lower back pain by hefting it off the shelf? How many editors would think to include an entry for Elm Street, a fixture of almost every New England town I've ever lived in? Feintuch and Watters do, and they surround it with thousands of other fascinating and informative entries.

—*Alex Beam*

The Key to America

THE HUDSON:
A History.
By Tom Lewis.
Yale University Press.
340 pp. $30

HOW DO YOU WRITE THE history of a river? The purist would probably stay within the banks of geology and geography, and that might suit some rivers just fine. But it won't do for New York's Hudson River. All the more reason, then, to salute Tom Lewis, author of *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (1997), who regards the Hudson as an epically beautiful stretch of waterway and landscape that did nothing less than shape the development of America.



Hudson River at West Point **(ca. 1889), by Olivia C. Starring**

Not that Lewis ignores geology and geography. Early on, he explains that there is more to the physical Hudson than its familiar lower course, running from Albany to New York City. The river originates many miles above Albany, in a small lake at the base of Mt. Marcy, the highest peak in the Adirondacks (the source was not discovered until 1872). And after it flows past Brooklyn and Staten Island into the Atlantic, it keeps on going, halfway to Bermuda, through a deep underwater Grand Canyon. When its flow ceases, the Hudson is some 895 miles southeast of its Adirondack source.

Having given the river its geographic due, Lewis launches into a fast-paced narrative that runs through four centuries of history more or less as straight and true as the lower Hudson runs through its abundant valley. That valley was a paradise of natural resources (especially timber) and wildlife (notably the beaver, a giant rodent much prized for its fur) when Henry Hudson sailed the river in 1609. The rodent attracted the Dutch, and fortunes were made, as they were to be made time and again over the centuries, courtesy of the river.

The history of the Hudson and its environs is, if anything, too rich, and Lewis cannot linger over events about which a reader longs to know more (his notes are a generous guide to additional

sources): the hit-and-miss existence of the colony of New Amsterdam; the settlers' relations with the Indians, and episodes of savagery and betrayal on both sides; the dominance of poltroons, those legendary landlords who owned hundreds of thousands of acres up and down the Hudson; the emergence of the British and French as successful rivals to the Dutch; the drama of the Revolutionary War, during which George Washington called the portion of the Hudson at West Point the key to America, and the British defeat at Saratoga altered the fortunes of the United States; the development of the steamboat, rival to the sailboat, encouraging faster travel on the river; the building of the Erie Canal, the waterway that joined the eastern and western slopes of the Appalachians and opened the center of the country to commerce and settlement; the building of a railroad, rival to the steamboat, along the river's eastern bank; the Hudson's progressive industrial fouling (it was an open trough of toxic water by the 1960s) and its eventual environmental redemption.

Familiar names drive these events—Stuyvesant, Arnold, Fulton, Clinton, van Rensselaer, Vanderbilt, Roosevelt—and Lewis deftly recounts how they earned their familiarity. But because there's more to the Hudson's history than war and politics and economics, he finds room as well, in a text enriched throughout by uncommonly appealing drawings, engravings, and paintings, for the writer Washington Irving and the painter Thomas Cole and the crowds of other artists and forever-anonymous tourists who traveled the river in search of the sublime.

The Hudson River deserves a noble adjective of its own, but after reading Lewis's expansive appreciation, you may be hard pressed to choose just one.

As Lewis tells the tale, the transformation of New York State impelled by the river seems to enact the larger economic, social, cultural, and environmental development of the nation. His narrative conveys something else, too, a reality more difficult to measure: the spirit of the Hudson River, which infuses the actions of all who experience its atmospheres, its lights, its roiling waters, its mountains, and its wild beauty. Rivers sometimes carry modifiers, such as the Mississippi's "Mighty." The Hudson deserves a noble adjective of its own, but after reading Lewis's expansive appreciation, you may be hard pressed to choose just one.

—*James Morris*

ARTS & LETTERS

Escape of a Salary Man

A MAN WITH NO TALENTS: Memoirs of a Tokyo Day Laborer.
By Ōyama Shirō. Translated by Edward Fowler. Cornell Univ. Press. 139 pp. $21

This memoir was published in Japan in 2000, after its author, a day laborer with a history of homelessness, submitted the manuscript on a lark and won the Kaikō Takeshi, a top literary award. The prose is so precise and dispassionate that one might suspect a put-on, but Ōyama Shirō—not his real name—is as committed to what passes for failure as most men are to what passes for success.

Born into a middle-class family in 1947, Shirō got off to a conventional start, graduating from university and becoming a "salary man." His yearning to fit in with corporate culture was overpowering but short-lived: "A sudden and unmitigated desire to absent myself from work would be accompanied by some psychosomatic disorder, which made me feel physically out of sorts." The process repeated itself in office after office, until, in 1987, he joined the ranks of the least skilled, working on cleaning crews and as a gofer on construction sites. Since forsaking his white-collar career, he has lived in squalid lodging houses or on the street.

"I have gone to very great lengths . . . to avoid the frustration and disillusionment that is brought about—inevitably, as far as I am concerned—by the kind of human interaction that accompanies nearly any job," Shirō writes, adding later, "When the time comes to take stock of things, it hardly matters to me if my existence has not been blessed by events