

1912, a quarter-page still hadn't been filled. Barton knew that the company had a surplus of Dr. Eliot's Five Foot Book Shelf, a compendium of great books marketed under the celebrity title of the president of Harvard College. So he ripped out a picture of Marie Antoinette being carted off to her beheading, centered it on the empty space, and wrote a caption: "This is Marie Antoinette Riding to Her Death. Have you ever read her tragic story?" In the copy below, Barton spun the books' unique benefit to readers—cultural enrichment in less than 15 minutes a day. The surplus sold.

What's important about this seemingly trivial act is that Barton sold product by telling a story with the implied promise that one would be a better person for possessing it. He was to tell such stories about General Electric, Jesus, and Dwight D. Eisenhower. In a scary way, the stories are almost interchangeable.

Bruce Barton was the guy selling us the goods, the man everybody knew but no one could name. In a provocative sense, that's why we had to wait so long for his biography. It's been worth the wait.

—James B. Twitchell

## Ye Olde Yankee Encyclopedia

BEFORE I TORE THE WRAPPER off *The Encyclopedia of New England*, I made a list of 10 subjects that I thought a reasonably well-researched encyclopedia of the region should include:

1. The first Harvard-Yale crew race, held on Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire in 1852.
2. At least one of three U.S. senators: George Aiken, Margaret Chase Smith, and Claiborne Pell.
3. The reason Connecticut is called "The Nutmeg State."
4. Marie Elizabeth Zakrzewska, founder, in 1862, of the New England Hospital for Women and

Children in Boston.

5. William Loeb, editor and publisher of New Hampshire's *Manchester Union-Leader*.
6. Boston Latin School.
7. Connecticut Valley cigar wrappers.
8. Vermont's anti-development law of 1969, Act 250.
9. The Radiation Laboratory at MIT, which helped perfect radar during World War II.
10. The 1970 Bobby Seale trial in New Haven, Connecticut.

Editors Burt Feintuch and David Watters, both English professors at the University of New Hampshire, score a solid 80 on this arbitrary test. Take away my fondness for rowing arcana—to their credit, they do include a meaty entry on the Head of the Charles regatta—and they get a 90.

Still, call me an old fuddy-duddy, but I think leaving out the Boston Latin School is worse than an oversight. Founded a year before Harvard College, Boston Latin is America's oldest school ("Sumus primi" is its motto, to drive home the point). Its students have included Cotton Mather, Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edward Everett Hale, Leonard Bernstein, and—though for some reason he goes unmentioned on Boston Latin's Web site—Louis Farrakhan.

One could play the exclusion game endlessly (racquetball and not squash?), but there's plenty to celebrate in this massive tome. It begins with one of the loveliest pieces of writing about New England that I've ever read, an elegiac foreword by the poet Donald Hall. He's the sort of ur-New Englander who can toss off a sentence like this with real authority: "New England is empty mills, new inventions, wooden scythes . . . and contrails from Logan and Pease Air Force Base streaking the blue air above the cellar hole of a farmer who came north after the Revolution to build his land."

What New England really is is six states, all of them pretty darned old by American standards: "the first old civilization . . . in America," as historian Bernard De Voto wrote. Generally speaking, Feintuch and Watters don't get suckered by the

### THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF NEW ENGLAND.

Edited by Burt Feintuch and David H. Watters.  
Yale Univ. Press.  
1,564 pp. \$65

*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.

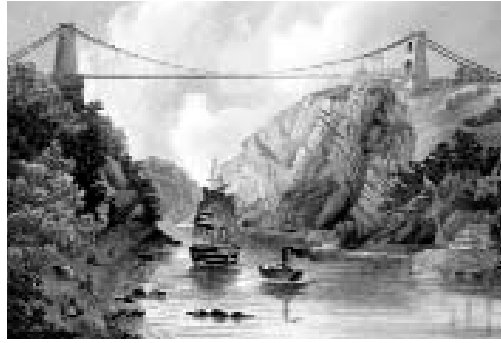
—Alex Beam

## The Key to America

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*:

### THE HUDSON: A History.

By Tom Lewis.  
Yale University Press.  
340 pp. \$30



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

*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.

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