it would be ungracious to quibble too much about this pleasant and provocative volume.

GEORGE T. BLAKEY is professor of history at Indiana University East in Richmond. His study of Hoosier poet, journalist, and eccentric, Esther Griffin White, appeared in the Indiana Magazine of History, LXXXVI (September, 1990).


This book is not so much a biography as a celebration of life. It expresses the values of its author as much as the values of its subject. Harlan Hubbard, student of life and artist of a beloved Ohio River and rural Kentucky, provides the focus for essayist Wendell Berry's latest exploration into the relationships among people and environment and locality. That the two men shared many values and that the younger author's view of the world was influenced by his older subject (in respectful relationship rather like student and teacher) makes for an impassioned narrative artfully rendered.

Chapters stand as carefully crafted vignettes placing Hubbard into context. Here was a day laborer who painted, but who also read, wrote, played the violin, took long walks through the countryside, canoed and boated on the Ohio River, worked with wood as a skilled carpenter, and kept bees. Hubbard, as a latter-day Henry David Thoreau, sought his own special, independent relationship both with nature and with society. According to Berry, Hubbard's life represented a habitual willingness to reconsider fundamentally modern society and its uses of nature. "His effort was to move backward along the line of technological development toward a complex practical orientation to the landscape," a course that constituted "reuniting in his life many of the modern divisions of labor" (p. 28).

Outlined are Hubbard's eccentric bachelorhood, his marriage to Anna Eikenhout (his partner of forty-three years), their year-long trip down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to Louisiana in a houseboat of their own construction, their building a house and studio on the banks of the Ohio at Payne Hollow (downstream and across from Madison, Indiana, in Kentucky), his art, and his life alone after Anna's death in 1986. Here was a partnership of two extraordinary people, and if the book can be said to have a shortcoming, it is that Anna, as one of the partners, seems to be made overly secondary to her husband. Together at Payne Hollow they sought fully to respect its "essential dignity and integrity" as a place (p. 88) through the buildings they built, the gardens they tended, and the wilder aspects of nature they spared. They, not
Harlan alone, sought to take “life directly and lovingly from the country, and thus to belong to it” (p. 89).

The message is clear. Locality (and the distinctions and peculiarities of locality) counts. Familiar landscapes can never be exhausted as sources of inspiration. Awareness of place can be made a central focus of life.

JOHN JAKLE is a historical geographer at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has published numerous books and articles across a variety of subjects—travel and tourism, the American small town, common houses as a vernacular form, visualization of landscape, and the Ohio Valley as a region.


Published on the centennial of Thomas Hart Benton's birth, this collection of eight essays ranges in style from erudite to chatty and in content from psychohistory to personal reminiscences, all devoted to the substance and interpretations of Benton's major murals, but not to his artistic style. As such, the book provides little basic biographical information, except for the discussion of Benton's “rejection of modernism and the left,” a rejection based upon a Freudian interpretation of the artist's relationship with his father (p. xii).

However, the essays are provocative enough to arouse the interest of some readers, making them want to pursue one of the biographical works available on Benton or one of Benton's autobiographies: An Artist in America, originally published in 1937 and reissued in 1951 and 1968, each time with a new chapter, and An American in Art, in 1969. Elizabeth Schultz's essay is devoted to these works, which she calls Benton's “Song of Himself.” Other essays include discussion of the religious themes in his works; his New York years, when he vaunted regionalism as “affirmative of the social explorations of American society” (p. 211), before he returned to the Midwest; his series of murals in the statehouse in Missouri; and the pro-World War II mural series, Year of Peril.

Of most interest to Indiana readers is Benton's A Social History of the State of Indiana, a mural series done for the 1933 Century of Progress Exhibition in Chicago and now in three different locations on the Bloomington campus of Indiana University. Citing Benton's depictions of fur traders exploiting Indians, Eugene V. Debs speaking to a group of workers, and a Ku Klux Klan rally, Matthew Baigell discusses the murals in his essay, “Benton and the Left,” to support his position that Benton's early proleftist political leanings can be found in his art. The former two scenes are reproduced in black-and-white photographs. Other scenes from the