introductory essay, "An American Art Colony," to the present volume in which she reviews the Brown County group as part of the social history of rural artist colonies in the United States. At a price of fifty dollars this book is a bargain for those who appreciate the attainments of the Brown County artists and wish to know more about their origins and destinies.

DILLON HUSTIN is the author of If You Don't Outside Me: The Legacy of Brown County (1982). He is a self-employed folklorist working out of Hingham, Massachusetts.


The 478 generally long and substantial letters in this mammoth volume are from the collections of the New Harmony Workingmen's Institute. They begin soon after William Maclure and Marie Duclos Fretageot first met in Paris and end with Madame Fretageot's death, probably from cholera, in Mexico City shortly before her fiftieth birthday. Of the volume's more than one thousand pages, some six hundred deal with the Indiana period between 1826, when Maclure and Fretageot were attracted to New Harmony by the excitement of Robert Owen's social experiment, and 1832, when a much disillusioned and wearied Fretageot, who had been serving as agent for a long-departed Maclure, left the village. As befits two of the leading members of the famed "Boatload of Knowledge," the letters constitute a treasury of insight and information about numerous subjects but especially about progressive education, contemporary science, and radical social thought as well as day-to-day life in New Harmony.

Of the two, Maclure is the more commanding figure. An unashamed egotist, he emerges as a highly opinionated individual utterly convinced that he has found the truths that would benefit all humankind. Combining a cynical view of human nature with confidence in the eventual triumph of man's rationality over his short-sighted greed, Maclure placed his hopes in the overthrow of the "false education" of the past in favor of a Pestalozzian system of practical learning. Especially through work-oriented schools, the laboring classes of the world would eventually be empowered to overthrow the exploitative tyranny of a parasitic minority. Maclure intended to bring special benefit to women not only by advancing their claims to equality but by making them the leading participants in his system of education. He followed his dream through three distinct worlds: first Spain, then the United States, and finally Mexico. Of the three, he seemed to have the least confidence
in American society, treating it as a society spoiled by speculative greed.

Madame Fretageot emerges from these letters as the more practical of the two, maintaining her own successful school before taking charge of the one that Maclure established at New Harmony. After he left the village for Mexico, she managed his extensive property—building fences, repairing buildings, and doing anything else to protect his interests, while enduring a steady barrage of complaints, abuse, and pompous advice from her departed friend. Through her eyes one can see the realities of post-Owen New Harmony, of a village struggling toward a more permanent footing than its communistic past provided.

These letters provide insights into many of the leading figures in the New Harmony experiment, including Frances Wright, Thomas Say, Charles Lesueur, and Francis Neef as well as Robert Owen and his sons. It is Robert Owen who, of course, commands the most attention. Initially, both Maclure and Fretageot were awed by Owen's imagination and enthusiasm, but exposure to his weaknesses soon led to radically revised opinions. Maclure especially concluded that Owen was a fool and a fraud who had ruined his own experiment, particularly by his free spending which had left most of his followers too dependent on him. If in the end no one emerges from these letters as an appealing figure, at least all of the principals are interesting persons animated by the excitement of ideas and ideals.

The editor of this volume, Josephine Mirabella Elliott, has done a superb job. She only lightly annotates each letter, avoiding a distracting mass of footnotes, but more than compensates by providing substantial introductions to each of the seven sections into which she divides the book; each introduction is a solid essay that gives real insights into the principals and their times. She also includes numerous illustrations, especially of the New Harmony years, and appends a sizeable set of supporting documents.

This is a good work. Indeed, the only criticism it invites is that the decision to publish its more than 1,100 pages in a single mammoth volume has left it with a binding vulnerable to breakage, especially unfortunate in that at least some copies are likely to be frequently used. In every other respect, though, both Elliott and the Indiana Historical Society deserve thanks for a job well done.