

LOCAL SIGNS AND WONDERS

Essays about Belonging to a Place

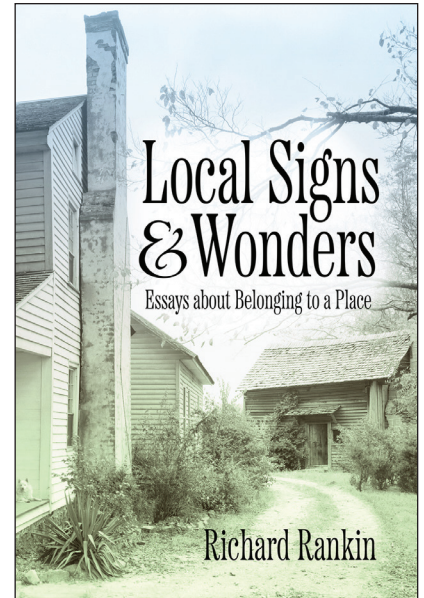
by *Richard Rankin*

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Publisher Contact: Mary Beth Kosowski, Director of Marketing
(478) 301-2880 kosowski_mb@mercer.edu



Macon, Georgia—LOCAL SIGNS AND WONDERS is an essay collection describing how attachment to a family homestead creates a sense of well-being, fulfillment, and belonging. Richard Rankin lives on family property settled in the mid 1760s and farmed until the 1970s. The Rankin home place sits in a shrinking countryside about twenty miles west of fast-growing Charlotte, North Carolina.

The desire to belong to a place grows out of a deep yearning to feel at home in the world and to find a particular location where that feeling is best satisfied. Individual essays treat diverse local topics including the disappearance of family farms, complicated racial history, soil conservation, physical labor as recreation, the influence of a great tree, chicken fighting, folk history, folk healing, the disappearance of bobwhite quail, black bear restoration, and exemplary outdoorsmen. As a whole, the pieces reveal how a settled inhabitant's personal identity grows from a local landscape and its history and culture. How the Creator invites the settler to join an ongoing partnership to re-create and steward a beloved place and its creatures. And how this creative process leads to a greater appreciation of local things and people.

With local farming gone, suburban development exploding, and the planet warming, several essays focus on land stewardship and conservation as a remedy. Despite rural decline and environmental peril, these essays show how staying on family land benefits personal wholeness, rich relationships with family, neighbors and wildlife, and service to creation.

"My relationship with the Rankin homeplace grows out of faith, which for me is a mainline, progressive Protestant Christianity," says Rankin. "I believe the Creator unites and sustains everything in an intricate, infinitely complex natural order, full of beauty and bounty. But creation also suffers from human deceit, greed, and predation. In response, belonging to family land necessarily involves stewardship and agency. That means working to protect the natural world and its creatures, repairing them when they are harmed or hurt, and grieving their losses. It also means looking for wildflowers, eating hand-picked blackberries each spring, and experiencing a host of other simple pleasures. Joys and consolations abound when living in a familiar place."



Photo courtesy
Gaston Day School

Richard Rankin writes books and articles on cultural history, nature, and hunting. After a long career as a college professor and administrator and an independent school headmaster, Rankin directs the Interlaken Wildlife Center in Cameron, South Carolina. An outdoorsman, conservationist, and Presbyterian layman, he and his family are the sixth generation living on family land in the North Carolina Piedmont.

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