

EDITOR'S CORNER

O Those Pioneer Women!

Sometimes it's hard predicting what *Heritage* will look like. Usually, we offer a potpourri of regional themes spotlighting diverse subjects. But occasionally, the issue nearly put to bed, managing editor Julie Johnson or I remark, "You know, there *is* a focus here after all." This issue's unplanned focus lights squarely on frontier women. *O Those Pioneer Women!*, to borrow and bend the title of one of Willa Cather's better known novels.

Speaking of Cather (hard not to when talking about Great Plains writing), she provides grist for Marilyn A. Carlson Aronson's exploration of a trio of fictional female characters, each a "manifestation of the earth itself." Harl A. Dalstrom calls attention to Bess Streeter Aldrich's uncanny talent for limning a complex frontier community and its Janus-like visage. Richard Nielsen provides valuable insight into the hows and whys whereby Mari Sandoz penned *Capital City*, an unusual novel at once both typical and atypical of her work. Finally, Ellen Simpson Novotny explores the challenging terrain of the Mary-Laura sibling relationship in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books.

Often billed as "civilizers" of a rough frontier, pioneer women lived lives of more depth and dimension than that description allows. Above all, they existed as a part of the saga, not apart from it. Frankly, one reason I'm happy this issue of *Heritage* serendipitously turned out the way it did is because we didn't need to tack a sign on the cover proclaiming: "Look, it's about women!" Issues of gender and ethnicity on the Great Plains still require special attention, but I hope we're moving up on a time when the Great Plains experience will be seen as an integrated whole, rather than a collection of rigidly compartmentalized parts. That's what *Heritage* is all about.

Ron McCoy
Editor