

## EDITOR'S CORNER

The first weekend in February this year was gorgeous—lots of sun and temperatures in the 50's. I walked late Sunday afternoon wearing only a windbreaker. But walking to work Monday morning I bundled up in my down jacket and warmest mittens. Mother Nature teased us into thinking that perhaps we were having an early spring, but her cold Arctic blast brought us back to reality.

Such occasions give credence to the old expression that "if you don't like the weather, just wait a while and it will change." A balmy winter day turns into a mighty winter storm with snow, wind and extreme danger to those unlucky to be out in it. A warm front and cold front colliding over the Great Plains produces tornados which cause incredible damage to persons and property lying in their path. Imagine the effect of the weather on early Plains settlers who didn't have the modern conveniences of radio, television and the National Weather Service to warn them of coming storms.

In this issue of *Heritage of the Great Plains* we focus on human response to the natural climatological phenomena of the Great Plains. Settlers on the Great Plains have had to learn to cope with the ruin of devastating tornado funnels. Sally Torpy details one city's response to such a natural disaster in "The Omaha Tornado of 1906." In "*Mankayla* and the Kiowa Indians: Survival, Myth and the Tornado" Michael Marchand provides the Kiowa view of tornados. Thunderstorms are a common occurrence on the Plains. Lightning from the thunderstorms often started prairie fires. Through the years settlers discovered that the grass that had been burned by a prairie fire was better for feeding livestock than the grass on areas where there had been no fire. So burning the pastures in areas such as the Flint Hills of Kansas has become a common practice. In "Prairie Fires: Pasture Burning in the Flint Hills" Jim Hoy outlines the practice of burning pasture. The photographs of prairie fires for both the cover and articles were taken by Larry Schwarm. Sam Kepfield describes community response to drought relief in Nebraska in the late 1880s in "A Great Deal Like Smallpox: The 'Destitution Business' and State Drought Relief in Nebraska 1890-1895." With the recent Florida hurricane, floods in the Midwest, and California earthquakes this article causes one to think about how our response to emergencies has evolved over the years.

I hope you enjoy reading about these natural Great Plains phenomena and our response to them.

Julie Johnson  
Managing Editor