

## EDITOR'S CORNER

"Where you bound?" curious Americans once asked those heading across the Great Plains, into unknown lands like those medieval cartographers routinely labeled *terra incognita* (sometimes with the subscript: "Here there be dragons").

"Why, I'm going to see the elephant!" came the jaunty reply.

"Going to see the elephant" encapsulates the diversity of the Plains adventure. No pilgrim knew how exotic and interesting the experience might be, but they could hope. It was an era in which the appearance of a single circus elephant in a small town was an event of rare and considerable magnitude.

For several summers of my childhood I traveled across America with a circus. We "back lot people" moved unimpeded between the midway's attractions on the front lot, through the liminal big top tent's arenas, to the back lot where circus folk dwelled.

The aerobats, clowns, and a chess game with the lion tamer to calm his nerves before he entered the big cat-infested cage...what an adventure. Every morning the "big top" tent went up, thanks to the labors of elephants. At night, the tent came down, another elephant-dependent task. "Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!" But elephants always retained pride of place as the favorite attraction for "townies" and circus folk alike.

Why that should be, I do not know. But the act of going to see an elephant and encountering the hulking animal, tail flicking, ears wagging, trunk swinging like a metronome, eyes alert to possibilities without betraying secrets—somehow reinforced one's spirit of adventure.

"Going to see the elephant." I often think of that phrase as managing editor Julie Johnson and I put together an issue of *Heritage*. Small town America exists but today we really do live in Marshall McLuhan's "global village." And diversity not only remains with us; it may be more of a factor in our lives than in our ancestors'.

The diverse subjects dealt with in this issue of *Heritage* reinforce my belief that any journey onto the Great Plains—undertaken afoot, on horseback, in a wagon, driving a car, or reading about it in a journal such as this—always involves one commonly shared point: "Going to see the elephant."

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Editor