

EDITOR'S CORNER

Material culture (the term folklorists use to categorize homemade three-dimensional objects such as quilts, sod houses, cattle guards, etc.) can tell us much about a region and the people who live there. Whenever and wherever I travel, I try to “read” the countryside, to see what the built environment of the rural landscape has to say about the agricultural lifestyle of a particular region. In eastern Nebraska, for instance, you’ll see corn cribs, while out on the High Plains grain elevators predominate. When you get down around Lubbock cotton gins mix in with the elevators. In the pastures of the Flint Hills near Emporia, the recurring features are cattle pens in various states of repair. Some are relatively new, made from sturdy pipe, while others show folk ingenuity, although a lack of esthetics, in the choice of building materials. (I’m thinking of a set of pens lined with old bed springs out in Chase County. They turn cows, I’m sure, but they sure are ugly.)

Tom Isern and Tricia Velure Nissen take landscape reading to a new level in their article on “how to read a farm.” Perhaps I am overgeneralizing, but it seems that historians often tend to rely heavily on written records while overlooking physical evidence. Isern and Nissen suggest that a combination of the two approaches can provide a more complete picture than using either one or the other alone.

The other article in this issue gives insight into the post-Civil War Exoduster movement in which former slaves from the South were resettled into urban and agricultural communities across Kansas. I, and I’m sure most other readers, have known about Nicodemus, the best known of these settlements, and I knew of Dunlap because it is only a few miles from Emporia. I had heard of settlements in Hodgeman and Wabaunsee counties, as well as Quindaro in Kansas City and Tennessee Town in Topeka, but knew little about them, nor was I aware of the many other African American colonies that Kay Ellen Weller documents.

I hope readers will find this issue of *Heritage of the Great Plains* as interesting and informative as I do.