

FROM THE EDITOR

Every now and then, the national press looks close enough at the country's middle to wonder what's going on here. Natural disasters—such as the Great Flood of 1993 discussed in this issue of *Gateway Heritage*—are certainly good for that, but more subtle, manmade disasters will do as well. Under the headline “Little Hope in Sight for St. Louis's Treasures,” the January 2 *New York Times* welcomed 1997 by placing downtown St. Louis in the nation's spotlight. “St. Louis's rich trove of mid-nineteenth-century office buildings is crumbling,” the article reported. “Intricate brickwork is falling apart, copper cornices are deteriorating, and fine terra cotta details are eroding. . . . Some of the most neglected buildings have been demolished.” Happy New Year.

In light of such discouraging news (though it's not news to anyone who lives here), remembering that good things occasionally gain national attention for this place—the region, the city, and the Missouri Historical Society—can remove some of the sting. A month prior to the *New York Times* article, the *New Yorker* magazine published a short article on the traveling exhibit *Plains Indian Drawings, 1865-1935*, which opened in New York during December. A stunning, two-page color drawing from the nineteenth-century Kiowa artist Wo-Haw opened the article; the credit line “Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis” ran up its side.

The exhibition *Plains Indian Drawings* has several important connections with both the Missouri Historical Society and *Gateway Heritage* magazine. Its curator, Janet Catherine Berlow, published an article on Wo-Haw's drawings in the Fall 1982 issue; the Summer 1995 *Gateway* reprinted the article in a special issue devoted to the Society's collections. In a side article to the 1995 reprint, Curator of Native American Ethnology Castle McLaughlin wrote, “As the Missouri Historical Society and other community museums strive to become forums for exploring the construction of multiple identities and the dynamics of their interaction, such materials [the Wo-Haw drawings] achieve a meaning and value quite apart from their original significance.”

In this issue of *Gateway Heritage*, McLaughlin explores another Native American artist, the contemporary sculptor Sherman Chaddlesone. In his work *Warrior from Above*, Chaddlesone gives “found objects”—a motorcycle helmet, synthetic rope, a phone jack—exactly the sort of new meaning that McLaughlin sees for Wo-Haw.

By pulling these items out of the trash heap of one culture and reassembling them into a rendition of a crucial symbolic object for another, Chaddlesone comments on both cultures and forges something new in the process.

Art critic Roger Angell, in his *New Yorker* article, writes that the Plains Indian drawings are “not just a record of loss but part of a process of preservation and survival.” So it is with Chaddlesone. But who is recording downtown's loss? Who is planning for its “preservation and survival”? What new forms can combine past and present, new and old, found and forged?

These questions are of great concern to the Missouri Historical Society and the city and region that it serves. *Gateway Heritage*, as the Society's quarterly journal, will strive in 1997 to address such central issues about this place.

Since I assumed the editorship in June, I have been thinking about ways to do this and to make *Gateway* more responsive to the concerns of its readers, the vast majority of whom are Missouri Historical Society members. A regular editorial column and a forum for letters to the editor are obvious steps in this direction, but other changes are planned for this year as well. By being more proactive in identifying community concerns, exploring those concerns' historical antecedents, and actively soliciting articles that address the present and future as well as the past, the magazine will work more closely with the Society to further its mission of providing “information about past human thought and activity which supplies critical context for analysis of persistent themes and significant issues in the present.”

After all, news—whether from New York City or local papers—is often only “bad” if it is received in a spirit of hopelessness and despair. By grappling with the issues raised by the *Times* article, or by striving to live up to the example presented in the *New Yorker*, we can make St. Louis a better place than we find it today.

—Tim Fox