

THE FLADER APPROACH: THINKING



CLASS SHOULD HAVE ENDED five minutes ago, but there is no rush to the door. Dr. Susan Flader's History of Missouri students continue to grapple with contradictory "facts" and information gaps discovered in their study of documents recorded during the 1700s.

The assignment: Assess the fate of orphaned siblings who lived some 200 years ago. The lesson: Don't believe everything you read.

Consider, for instance, the plight of Francois Dorlac, thwarted in his efforts to control his inheritance. On the surface, it may seem unfair that estate managers denied his request until age 25. But scrutiny of the documents suggests otherwise: The young man was unemployed and had not yet married, indicating a lack of maturity necessary to manage an estate.

Leading the discussion, Professor Flader (pronounced Flawder) exhorts the undergraduates to consider the evidence: "It may not necessarily be conclusive, but is it reasonable?" Interpretation, she teaches, is the key to understanding.

"I ENCOURAGE students to see a problem in its context, and to analyze the evidence as critically as possible," Flader explains. "I see problems as complex relationships, rather than simple problems with simple solutions."

Flader's instruction includes "human culture, history and institutions, as well as other factors in the biological and physical environment, which are all aspects of change." She calls this an "ecosystem perspective." At other uni-

LIKE A MOUNTAIN'

By Carol Again



versities, says UMC history Professor David Thelen, it's known simply as the Flader Approach.

"She's one of the leading environmental historians in the United States," confirms Samuel Hays, professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh. "She's very well respected."

THE FIELD of environmental history did not exist when Flader enrolled as a graduate student at Stanford University in the 1960s. She provided its foundation through her study of the late conservationist Aldo Leopold. In his essay, "Thinking Like a Mountain," Leopold championed ecological, objective thinking to preserve interrelationships in nature.

"I combined my profession, history, and my avocation, conservation and love of the outdoors," Flader says. "Without even knowing it, I was developing a field."

The blend of history and conservation is a natural in Flader's role as Missouri Parks Association president. "Missouri has the combination of natural parks and historic sites both in the same system. We're able to draw on

cultural features in natural parks, and on natural features in historic sites."

The citizens' group was formed in 1982 to combat multimillion-dollar budget cuts to Missouri's 70-plus state parks and historic sites. Its first funding victory came in August 1984, when voters approved a one-tenth cent sales tax for state parks and soil conservation. During its five-year duration beginning July 1, the tax is expected to generate \$30 million.

The association's first and only president, Flader has presided over a membership explosion from three to 400. She simultaneously helped organize the Citizens Committee for Soil, Water and State Parks, of which she is secretary.

"SOILS, WATER AND PARK resources are heritage resources. People before us cared enough to make the effort, and we have the responsibility to pass them on to the next generations," says the recipient of a 1983 Resource Steward Award from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. "If we don't fund them properly, we're going to lose them."

It's also vital for Missourians to understand that state parks are a system, not individual units, Flader says. "If we perceive it as a system, we have a guide in developing parks and in analyzing whether new units might be considered."

As a project director for the first Missouri Conference on State Parks held last summer, Flader will contribute to a book reinforcing the parks system concept. She also, last summer, served as co-chairman of the Symposium on the History of Soil and Water Conservation.

"She has organized and reorganized more darn organizations and committees and so on," Thelen says. "She's a genius at figuring out organizational problems."

Her talent is nationally recognized. In 1974 at age 33, Flader was the youngest person ever elected to the National Audubon Society's board of directors. During her six-year tenure, she served on the organization's long-range planning committee.

Her planning expertise was tapped last spring, when Flader was one of 12 professors asked to serve on the Campus



Program Review Advisory Committee. As part of the curators' long-range planning process, the committee was charged with the politically volatile task of recommending reallocation priorities.

The assignment to tag all Campus programs for enhancement, maintenance, reduction or elimination was a bit uncomfortable, Flader admits. But on the positive side, "Suggestions on the future of the institution relate to genuine faculty concerns that can result in a higher quality of responsiveness to the state of Missouri. The committee tried to emphasize some of the long-range issues that the University faces in planning that can result in some real improvement in the quality of the institution."

DEVOTING the summer to reviewing programs stretched an already full agenda. But no matter how demanding her schedule, Flader says students remain her top priority. In addition to teaching Environmental History and History of Missouri this semester, she sits on committees for some two dozen graduate students.

Noting that prospects for new teaching positions in higher education are limited, Flader strives to prepare future historians for a variety of career opportunities. Parks, natural-resource agencies, museums, historical societies, government and business all are potential employers, she says.

A CHAMPION of strong writing skills, she assigns at least one paper in each of her courses, insisting that students exert their best effort. "Good writing is an aid to clear thinking," she says. "If you write sloppily, you have an excuse to stop the thought process before really thinking about a problem."

Testimony of Flader's own writing ability is the 1974 Curator's Publication Award, conferred for her intellectual biography of Leopold, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of an Ecological Attitude Toward Deer, Wolves and Forests*. The honor recognizes the best book-length manuscript published by the University Press each year.

Due next is the definitive biography of Leopold, perhaps to be published in 1987, his centennial year. Her

studies of the life and work of the conservationist often take Flader to her native Wisconsin, site of Leopold's farm that was the focus of his classic book, *Sand County Almanac*. Flader successfully nominated the farm's famous Leopold shack, a restored cowshed, for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

THE THOUGHT of building a rural hideaway intrigues Flader, whose home in an established neighborhood in west Columbia borders oaks and backyard bird houses. But her hectic schedule defies such a project. Even outdoor excursions, a favorite pastime, have become a luxury.

Still, Flader did squeeze in a weeklong canoeing trip in Canada after completion of the program review report. She then returned to her busy workaday world: students to teach, papers to edit, organizations to lead and projects to complete.

"She perseveres," observes history department Chairman N. Gerald Barrier. "When she sets a priority to something, she carries through. She finds a way to work it out." □

STE. GENEVIEVE: LIFE AMONG THE FRENCH

PROPELLED by Dr. Susan Flader's vision and energy, Mizzou researchers are conducting the most extensive study ever of a French colony in the Midwest.

As chairman of the steering committee that launched the Missouri Cultural Heritage Center in 1982, Flader secured \$150,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities to fund a study of Ste. Genevieve, Mo.

Located 70 miles south of St. Louis, Missouri's first European settlement boasts the best surviving collection of French colonial buildings in the country. Documentary records are similarly complete, numbering in the thousands.

The study of the community's history from the early 1700s to 1830 carries national significance, Flader says, because it examines French colonial culture. "Anglo-American communities on the Atlantic seaboard have been studied to determine the nature of their economy, inheritance laws, the role of women, and other charac-

teristics that we suspect may be influenced in part by people's cultural traditions and values. One way to get at that is to study different cultures."

Preliminary findings indicate that women in Ste. Genevieve enjoyed a higher status and greater involvement in economic activity than Anglo-American women on the Atlantic seaboard, Flader says. Evidence also challenges a standard assumption that everyone's economic situation improves as a community develops, even if the gap widens between the rich and the poor. As Ste. Genevieve developed, "We see a greater disparity between the rich and the poor, but it is coupled in the late 18th century with a general decline in average family wealth," she observes.

One mystery involves the large number of slaves who lived in the French colony. In 1770, Ste. Genevieve's 700 residents included 300 slaves, whose value outdistanced that of buildings and land. Flader suspects that slaves worked in fields and trans-

ported minerals from mines to the Mississippi River, but "we're not entirely sure what they were doing economically that would account for that tremendous value."

Overall, though, the volume of records has supplied a "relatively complete view of the elements of the community." Computerizing the translated records has provided a "documentary laboratory" that will aid researchers for years to come, Flader says.

The project will culminate in a book manuscript to be completed in 1985, the year considered by Ste. Genevieve residents to be their community's 250th anniversary. As part of the celebration, researchers will report their findings at a seminar in Ste. Genevieve Nov. 1 and 2, 1985.

Under Flader's direction, other principal UMC Ste. Genevieve investigators are Dr. Osmond Overby, professor of art history and archaeology; Dr. Walter Schroeder, instructor in geography; and Dr. Susan Boyle, research associate in history.