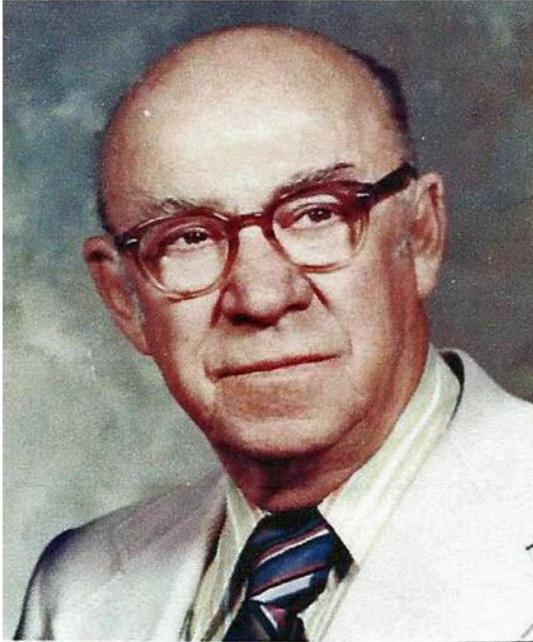


Bill Wheatley

(1902 – 1993)



William C. (Bill) Wheatley (1902 - 1993) was born in Iowa and moved to New Mexico when he was 14 years old. He grew up on a ranch near Clayton, NM. In 1932 he opened Clayton Automotive Service which he operated until 1973. Bill served many years on the Clayton Fire Department and was the oldest fireman in New Mexico when he retired at age 86.

In 1947 he entered politics and served 18 years in the state legislature, 14 of those in the senate, including two terms as president pro tem. In 1966 he was acting governor of New Mexico for 10 days. While in the legislature, he became interested in promoting the historic Santa Fe Trail, and he led the effort to designate U.S. Highway 56 in Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico, and Highway 85 in New Mexico, as the Santa Fe Trail Historical Route. He led the effort to organize the Santa Fe Trail/Highway 56

Association, forerunner of the Santa Fe Trail Association (of which he was a charter member), and he served as president and director for the Highway 56 Association for many years. He worked closely with Grace Collier, secretary of the Highway 56 Association, to organize the 1961 Santa Fe Trail caravan that followed the Trail from Missouri to New Mexico and held parades in some 30 cities with crowds up to 40,000 people. He was responsible for creation of the "Clayton Complex," a registered National Historic Landmark, which includes Trail campsites, landmarks, and geographical features in Union County, including McNees Crossing, Turkey Creek (Cottonwood Creek or Alamos Creek) Crossing, Rabbit Ears Mountain, Rabbit Ears Creek campground, and Round Mound (Mt. Clayton).

Wheatley received a Santa Fe Trail Association Award of Merit at the first symposium in 1986. In 1988 he served as local guide for the National Park Service team surveying the Santa Fe National Historic Trail (designated in 1987). After his death in May 1993, the SFTA symposium in September that year named him "Grandfather of the Santa Fe Trail Association." The 1997 SFTA symposium in Clayton was dedicated to "the memory of W.C. 'Bill' Wheatley." He maintained his interest in the history of the Trail until his death and was never happier than when talking about the Trail and showing his magnificent photographs of it.