

Ralph Hathaway (1914 – 2009)



Ralph Hathaway was born August 30, 1914 on the farm in central Kansas that his grandparents homesteaded, and except for his college years and serving in the South Pacific in World War II, he resided there until his death in 2009. The Santa Fe Trail traverses that farm, and includes deep ruts which are among some of the best preserved evidence of the Trail. After he retired from farming, the Trail and its history became his passion. He took a Kansas History class from the late Barbara Peirce at Hutchinson Community College, and offered the class a “field trip” to see his pasture. When they disembarked from the bus, Barbara said, “Here they are, Ralph’s Ruts!” The name stuck, and “Ralph’s Ruts” have become known in trail circles as one of the most definitive sections of the Trail still visible.

Ralph spent countless volunteer hours for both the local historical society and the SFTA, including providing tours of

the Trail sites in Rice County, Kansas, and surrounding areas. Ralph also was an avid researcher and writer, and amassed an impressive research library. One of the documents he wrote was “My Half-Mile of Santa Fe Trail”, which included information on the Plum Buttes Massacre, which took place on the property. He also contributed regularly to *Wagon Tracks*. His library remains intact at his home which is now a “bed and bath” on the Trail and is known as Ralph’s Ruts Retreat.

Ralph was featured in many publications for his preservation efforts, most notably in the March, 1991 issue of *National Geographic*. Ralph was excited to be a part of an organization dedicated to the Trail, and always enjoyed the SFTA symposiums and other events. The Santa Fe Trail Association recognized his efforts by presenting him with an Award of Merit in 1986, naming him as a Santa Fe Trail Ambassador in 1989 and in 1997 and 2003, he received the SFTA Heritage Preservation Award. At the age of 94, Ralph elected to become a “Life Member” of SFTA. Ralph Hathaway passed away on June 30, 2009. After his death, the SFTA established the Ralph Hathaway Memorial Heritage Preservation Award to honor his commitment to the Trail.