

Roberta Bonnewitz

(1911 – 2016)

Roberta Bonnewitz was a founding member of the MRO Chapter. After many years of teaching, Roberta began a new part of her life as an author, historian, and trail enthusiast. Roberta spent many years in researching the history of the Santa Fe Trail in particular as it related to the Raytown, MO area. She was a Founder and Charter Member of the Raytown Historical Society. During her tenure as a teacher in the Raytown School system she discovered that there was just not much written history about the area. Determined to remedy that and provide material for the classroom she began her years-long research into the history of the area and in particular the impact of the Santa Fe Trail and later the Oregon and California Trails on the settlement of the region. As one of the original members of MRO and SFTA she provided great insight into the history of the Santa Fe Trail and its effect on the growth of the area. She was the author of numerous books on the Rice Family, the Barnes Family, and William Ray. Roberta would spend numerous hours in searching through old court records, land ownership records and trail diaries to determine the truth about the trails. Not only did Roberta do research and write about the area but she was also very active in the saving of historical sites along the trails. Among them was the Archibald Rice Home. She formed a group called the Friends of the Rice-Tremonti Home Association to help purchase the home and 3 1/2 acres. After many years of fund raisers, the home was finally purchased with a final grant from the Department of Transportation. This historic 1844 home on the National Register of Historic Places and a certified historic site by the National Park Service is now owned by the Raytown Parks Department and maintained by the Friends Group that Roberta formed back in 1978. We will long remember her and all the work she provided to relate the story and history of the Trail. Her work in preserving and protecting the Santa Fe, Oregon, and California Trails will remain for future generations. Roberta passed away at the age of 105 on September 18, 2016.

