



Mattes with John Giles (OTMA)



## EMIGRANT TRAILS HALL OF FAME

### OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

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# Merrill John Mattes

#### Biography

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- Born: 1910, Congress Park, Illinois
- Died: 1996, Englewood, Colorado
- Married: Eleanor Shutt; Clara Ritschard
- Preservationist, author, publisher, public official

#### Achievements

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- Chronicler of the Platte River Road
- Co-founder, Oregon-California Trails Association
- Worked with others to add Fort Laramie as a National Park Service Unit
- U.S. Department of the Interior Distinguished Service Award, 1959
- Nebraska Civil Servant of the Year, 1958

Merrill Mattes, preeminent scholar of the overland trails, spent forty years with the National Park Service. He served at Scotts Bluff National Monument beginning in 1935 where he oversaw significant development projects. From 1941 to 1946 he also served as Acting Historian for Fort Laramie National Monument. Appointed Historian, National Park Service, Branch of History in 1946, he transferred first to Chicago and then to Omaha. In 1959 he received the U.S. Department of the Interior Distinguished Service Award for research, writing and planning. He retired from the Park Service in 1975 as manager of Historic Preservation of the United States.

A prolific author, Mattes became widely-known for his meticulous research. His best-known works include *The Great Platte River Road* (1969) and *Platte River Road Narratives: A Descriptive Bibliography* (1988). He also wrote authoritative works on Chimney Rock, Hiram Scott, Robidoux Pass, Fort Mitchell, the Pony Express, Fort Laramie, and other Oregon Trail topics.

OCTA's annual award for the best article in *Overland Journal* is named in his honor. The Merrill J. Mattes Research Library at the National Frontier Trails Center in Independence, Missouri, includes his personal library.