
DOÑA ANA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Memorial

Dr. Donna R. Eichstaedt



The Doña Ana County Historical Society lost one of its most vital and well-loved members early this year with the passing of former DACHS president Dr. Donna Eichstaedt, who died January 2 after a brave fight against lung cancer. As a wife, mother, grandmother, friend, teacher, and a lover of animals, Donna touched many people over her 72

years, never losing her inquisitiveness and curiosity about life. As an historian and scholar, she also left a lasting contribution to the mission of the historical society, and toward the greater understanding and knowledge of New Mexico history.

Donna and her husband of 52 years, DACHS member Carl, first fell in love with New Mexico on a trip here in 1969 with their two daughters Ann and Susan, and they returned several times before retiring in Las Cruces in 1992. Though she spent much of her life in Illinois, New Mexico would figure strongly into Donna's focus as a historian, beginning with her work in the early 1970s collecting oral histories of Pueblo veterans of WWII. While completing her doctorate in history at the University of Illinois, she counseled and taught classes. Dr. Eichstaedt was then hired by Lincoln Col-

lege in Normal, Illinois, where she served as administrator and dean before retiring here.

Donna soon began a new career teaching history at UTEP and Doña Ana Community College. In the meantime, she and Carl also became active in DACHS, with Donna serving as president and secretary, as well as on several committees. She was also a prolific writer, contributing numerous articles to *Southern New Mexico Magazine*, *Southwest Senior*, and the *Southern New Mexico Historical Review*, including one in 2006 on J. Paul Taylor for which she earned the Gemoets Award for best article. She continued taping oral histories of local veterans, and was the editor of Gordon Owen's *Las Cruces, New Mexico: Multicultural Crossroads*. She also edited and helped produce *Once Enemies, Now Friends*, Felix Pfaeffle and Chuck Miles' account of their WWII experiences and their amazing connection today. In 2008, Donna published *Silver City's Bear Mountain Lodge: The Untold Story*, a book about Walter Langer's early 20th century residential facility for troubled boys. She was inducted into the DACHS Hall of Fame in 2007.

As important as history was to Donna, her five grandchildren and her work with animals were equally important. She and Carl took in a range of animals on their 18-acre farm, and Donna was a tireless volunteer for Animal Services of the Mesilla Valley, which dedicated a new infirmary room in her name last October called "Donna's Dream." At the time of her death, she was working with Buddy Ritter on a history of Las Cruces and the Mesilla Valley.

Christopher Schurtz