



ABSTRACT

This senior thesis, “Will Rogers: Native American Cowboy, Philosopher, and Presidential Advisor,” presents the story of Will Rogers, indicating especially the different facets of his life that contributed to his becoming a legend and a tribute to the American culture. Will Rogers is known mostly as one of the greatest American humorist of his time and, in fact, of all times.

This work focuses on the specific events and experiences that drove him to break into show business, Hollywood, and the Press. It also focuses on the philosophy of Will Rogers as well as his best known sayings and oft-repeated quotations. His philosophy, his wit, and his mirth made him an important and influential part of everyday life in the society of the United States in his day and for years thereafter.

This project is presented in four parts. First, I discuss Rogers’ childhood and his life as a child-cowboy. Second, I detail how he became a show business star and a popular actor. Third, I recall his famous quotations and one-liners that are well known nowadays. Finally, there is a complete description of the honors and tributes that he received, and the places that bear Will Rogers name.

Reading, writing, and talking about Will Rogers, the author of the phrase “I never met a man I didn’t like,” is to tell about a life-story of “completeness and self-revelation,” because he was a great spirit, a great writer, and a great human being.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the people whom I love and who supported me in the fulfillment of this large project, especially my mother, my sister, and my husband.



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INTRODUCTION

The story of Will Rogers is one of the most amazing stories of a man who lived to tell his own story, and this fact has made it possible for us to hear it and to read it. Will Rogers, a young fellow who didn't know where he was going or what he wanted to become, began to make history when he took a shot at show business around 1900. He was a simple, working class guy who made a living in the ranch business. He had no formal education or preparation for business or a public life, but his wisdom and down-to-earth viewpoint led him to reach fame, fortune, friends, and happiness, which made him an accomplished man who had everything a man can imagine, including a great family who were his source of inspiration.

William was incredibly successful. He wrote six books during his lifetime. Since his death, about 240 articles have been written about him. He starred in seventy-one motion pictures. He went through show business to vaudeville, from vaudeville to Broadway, from Broadway to the Follies, and from the Follies to Hollywood. His story has been told again and again in books, movies, short stories, and articles. He has been honored with many tributes around the United States. There are many statues and memorials in his honor; and there are many places in cities of the U.S. where his name appears.

Will Rogers played an important role during the twenties and thirties, a period of extreme change in the history of the United States. The twenties, a decade of extreme wealth and waste, when new technology was introduced in the nation, and people began to buy on credit, borrow money from banks for house mortgages, and invest in the stock market, was the start of a very difficult time financially which climaxed in the worst depression in history that affected millions of citizens—not only in the U.S. but also world-wide. In this tragic situation, Will used his power and influences to help organize charity events to raise funds for the most needy people.

Moreover, he is still known for his famous quotations. William himself developed his own philosophy based on his readings from the newspapers and



his personal ideas about events, actions, people, and everyday life in general. As we read his articles, we can find so many interesting facts in his writings that we could compile a complete book of his quotes. In fact, there are about four books that contain his quotes. His quotes are famous in the present and people still learn much about him for them. The author of, "I ain't got much education, but I do have a powerful lot of common sense," is still a hero for many people who learned about him from their teachers who taught them the story of the *Oklahoma's favorite son*.

Will Rogers was a complete man; there was almost nothing he didn't do. He traveled around the world three times, met most of the influential people and leaders of other nations. He attended political conventions, peace conferences, and became friends with politicians in the United States. Also, he was a pioneer in Radio broadcasts and aviation. Today he is considered one of the most influential fathers of aviation. I would dare to say that even though not everybody liked him, everybody knew him by his name in his life time. He was perhaps as popular as any president during these years. The Story of the "Cowboy Philosopher" who never wasted a chance to twirl his rope and to make fun of something or someone has been written in countless books, and it continues to be communicated to new generations because Will Rogers was more than a story, he was a celebrity who was also a folk philosopher, and a genuine down-to earth human being.



CHAPTER I

1. BIOGRAPHY OF WILL ROGERS

1.1. WILL ROGERS: THE LEGEND

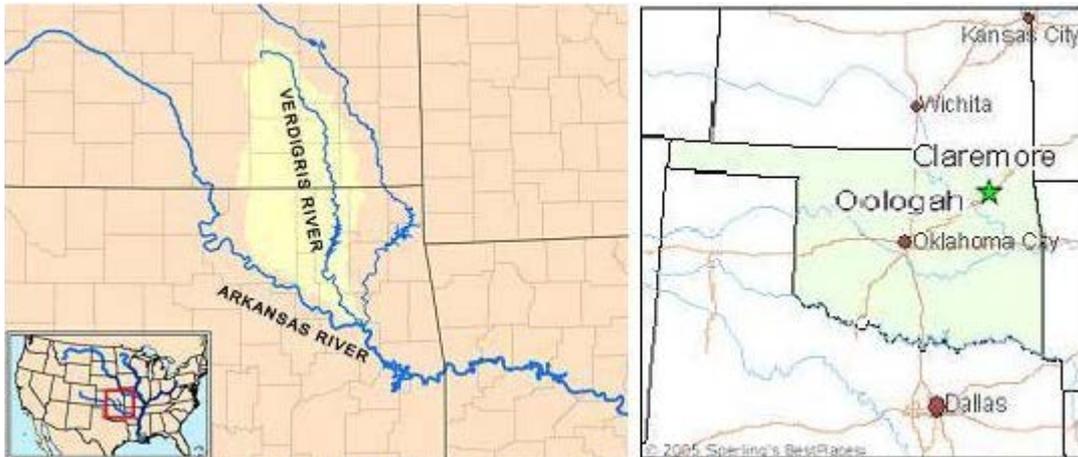
William Penn Adair Rogers, known as Will Rogers or as the “**Indian Cowboy,**” was perhaps the most popular humorist and entertainer of America and the most well-known character during the 1920s and 1930s. He was a roping performer, actor, comedian, movie star, humorist, radio commentator, newspaper columnist, philosopher, humanitarian, and ambassador. All in all, he was and still is a celebrity and a legend. Will was born on November 4, 1879, in Indian Territory, by the *Verdigris River*¹ in northeastern Oklahoma, close to Oologah that is located about 12 miles northwest of the present city of Claremore. His parents, Clement Vann Rogers and Mary America Schrimsher Rogers, were both born in the Cherokee Nation West, Indian Territory. Will’s father, a one-eighth Cherokee Indian and his mother a quarter-blood Cherokee made William a one-quarter Cherokee too. This fact officially identified William as an American Indian and this gave him a wider perspective on life since he had both opportunities of a U.S. (American) citizen and the aspects of disenfranchisement as an Indian at the same time. William always felt proud of his mixed-blood Cherokee heritage.

Will was named after the Cherokee leader and Confederate colonel William Penn Adair as a salute to the Indian military leader who was Clement’s battalion commander during the Civil War. Clem Rogers and his wife, Mary, had eight children, five of whom survived infancy. Only four of these survived to adulthood. William was the eighth and last child.

¹ The Verdigris River is a tributary of the Arkansas River in southeastern Kansas and northeastern Oklahoma.



Picture # 1



Map showing Oologah: William's Birthplace close to the Verdigris River and Claremore.

(Hider, Sperling)

People who have known Will Rogers have described him as a simple man. Despite of his fame and wealth he kept his humble attitude and nature both on and off the stage. His sons, Bill and Jim Rogers, said that he was stubborn about some things; especially that everybody had the right and freedom to express his or her thoughts. Although he was very wise and clever, he never considered himself a Child Prodigy. He had such a good sense of humor that he used to make fun about everything or anybody. He made fun of himself as well. For instance, he said that he is the only child in history who claimed his birthday to be on Election Day, November 4th; and as women did not vote in those days, his mother Mary had decided to do something that day, so she stayed home and gave birth to her last child. He even wrote a funny thought about his birth. He wrote that after wondering why he was born, he came to the conclusion that he was born because it was just a habit in those days. He explained that he was born because it was "the law of averages" during that time in which a family had to have at least eight children.

As William was the only male son that survived to adulthood, his father tried terribly hard to make something good of him. He was sent to almost every school in the area, yet in some of them he lasted just three or four months. He



only completed the tenth grade. He repeated the fourth grade for three years because he generally left before the school year finished and then he started in another school. William had no interest at all in going to school and studying since he thought that school was not a good business. For Will, the big game was horseracing. Instead of going to class, he would skip classes and go outside with some friends to practice twirling his rope. He only realized that he was wrong when it was too late to go back to school. In this way, he was very similar to his father who had dropped out of school too. Later on, in one of his interviews he said that there was not a day of his life that he did not regret at least taking a chance on finishing high school, and that he always felt sorry because he wasted his time and he did not learn anything when he had the opportunity.

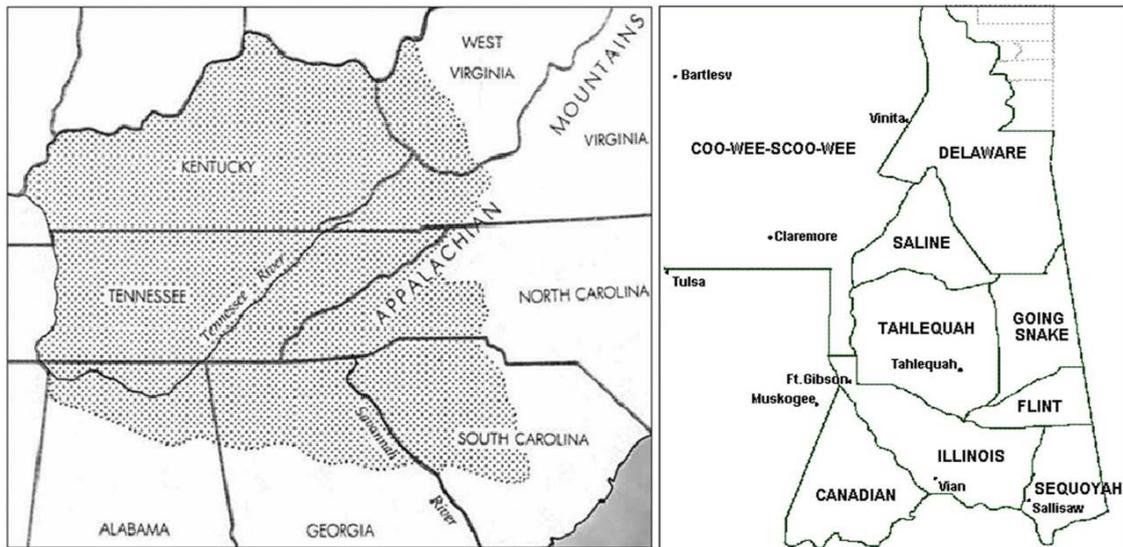
The *lariat*² handling attracted his attention from his childhood. When he was old enough, his father sent him to work on the ranch, but instead of learning to run the ranch he would go to a distant place and spent hours practicing with the rope and lassoing everything he could. He was so interested in perfecting his roping skills that he could not hold any job his father endorsed him. His words were:

My father sent me out on the ranch, but instead of riding the range, I went off into a shady place and there spent the time practicing with the rope, lassoing prairie dogs and things not made to be lassoed. Then he hired me out to other ranch-men, but I was so fond of using the lariat when there was no call for it that I couldn't hold a job. (Day, 8)

² The word **lariat** comes from the Spanish phrase **la riata** that means "the rope." Also called lasso; it was used in rodeos and in ranch work to catch cattle. Both, the vaqueros of Mexico and the cowboys of the Western United States used it to perform games and tricks with it.

1.2. CHEROKEE HERITAGE

Picture # 2



Left: Cherokee Nation before 1721. **Right:** Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, 1890.

(Norfleet, Trissell)

1.2.1. The Cherokee Nation

In the early 18th Century, the principal inhabitants of the southern Appalachian area of the United States were the people of the Cherokee Nation who were Native American People that settled in the Southeastern United States principally in Georgia, Alabama, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia. The total land area that the Cherokees claimed surpassed 120,000 square miles. It consisted of the Cherokee people of the Qualla Boundary; those who relocated voluntarily from the southeastern United States to the Indian Territory around 1820, known as the “Old Settlers;” those who were forced by the United States government to relocate; Cherokee Freedmen (freed slaves); and many descendants of the Natchez, the Delaware, and the Shawnee people.

They were Iroquoian-speaking people of Iroquoian lineage. Originally they migrated south in ancient times from the Great Lakes region. The Cherokee was the largest of the “Five Civilized Tribes” of the Southeast (Cherokee,



Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole). As an alternative, the Cherokees adapted ways of civilization instead of resisting changes like so many of the other tribes. During the 1820's, they had assimilated numerous cultural and technological practices of European American settlers, and they had developed their own method of writing their language; turning out to be the first and only literate American Indian tribe. They called themselves: 'Ani'-Yun' wiya' meaning "The Principal People." Some Cherokee families were of mixed blood because they had one or more white ancestors.

The history and culture of the Cherokees is an important part of the heritage of the whole American Southeast. They participated in the struggles between English, French, and Spanish over territory in eastern North America. Also, they participated during the Revolution between Great Britain and the American Colonists. Their history is one of survival, perseverance, and adaptability against many forces of change and deplorable treatment they suffered under the subjugation by white settlers. The story begins after the signing of the Cherokee Treaty of February 27th, 1819 when the Cherokee Nation in the east had been reduced to only twelve thousand square miles. From this time forward, both the State of Georgia and the United States Federal Government applied relentless pressure on the Cherokees to relocate them to the western side of the Mississippi River. Finally, on 29 December 1835, the Treaty of New Echota was signed by Major Ridge and his followers, which required the removal of all the eastern Cherokees to lands west of the Mississippi River. However, a majority of the eastern Cherokees, under the leadership of Principal Chief John Ross, opposed the Treaty and refused to relocate by the deadline (23 May 1838) established by the Treaty. Consequently, most of the remaining eastern Cherokees were forcibly removed by the United States Army during the period June 1838 to March 1839. This forced removal occurred over several routes and came to be known collectively as "The Trail of Tears."



1.2.2. Treaty of New Echota

The Treaty of New Echota was a treaty signed on December 29, 1835, in New Echota, Georgia by officials of the United States government and representatives of a minority Cherokee political group, known as the Treaty Party. Pressure on the Cherokees to sign a removal treaty became incredibly intense and intolerable during the year 1835. Under the government pressure, the Eastern Cherokees had broken up into two groups: The "Treaty Party," led by Major Ridge, who favored immigration because he believed further resistance would result in the destruction of the Cherokee Nation, and the anti-treaty or "Ross Party," led by Chief John Ross, who was determined to continue resistance to Cherokee removal regardless of the cost.

In December 1835, with the direction of the United States Government, three hundred members of the pro-immigration faction, or "Treaty Party" Cherokees, including Major Ridge, his son John Ridge, John Adair Bell, and Stand Watie, gathered at the Cherokee capital of New Echota to conclude the removal treaty. Although John Ross gathered over 15,000 signatures for a petition to the U.S. Senate insisting that the treaty was invalid because it did not have the support of the majority of Cherokee people, the Senate passed the Treaty of New Echota.

The treaty was edited and ratified by the U. S. Senate in March 1836, despite protests and disapproval from the Cherokee National Council and its lacking of the signature of the Principal Chief John Ross. The treaty established terms under which the entire Cherokee Nation was expected to cede its territory in the Southeast and move west to the Indian Territory. This was the last treaty involving the eastern Cherokees previous to their forced removal west to Indian Territory. Under the terms of the treaty, all the remaining Cherokee land east of the Mississippi River was ceded to the United States Government. At the end,

the *Removal Act*³ affected to the whole Five Civilized Tribes because those lands were not only inhabited by Cherokees but by Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole people.

1.2.3. The Trail of Tears

The Trail of Tears refers to the forced Eastern Cherokee Removal, starting in 1838 and continuing into 1839. In 1838, The United States government forcibly removed more than 16,000 Cherokee Indian people from their homelands in Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina, and Georgia, and sent them west to Indian Territory (today known as Oklahoma).

Picture # 3



Map showing the routes that the Indian Tribes had to travel to relocate in their new home.

(Hine, Faragher)

³ The Indian Removal Act was ratified and signed by President Andrew Jackson on May 28, 1830. This policy sought the relocation of Native American Indian tribes living east of the Mississippi River to lands west of the River.



After the Treaty of New Echota was signed on December 29, 1835, the Cherokees had to concede their last remaining land east of the Mississippi River to the U.S. government and relocate westward to the so-called Indian Territory. The Cherokee removal was supposed to be completed no later than May 1838 because the deadline for the migration was two years after the date of Senate ratification of the Treaty; and the United States Senate enacted the treaty into law in May 1836. In 1835, the U.S. Government began preparations for the relocation of 16, 542 Cherokees to the lands in the west, an area which is now in the State of Oklahoma.

In 1837, 2,103 Treaty Supporter Cherokees voluntarily removed under Government supervision, and 14,500 still remained within the eastern Cherokee Nation. On April 1838, President Martin Van Buren ordered the U.S. Army to start action to remove the remaining Cherokees. Finally, in June 1838, about 2,745 Cherokees were forcibly removed under U.S. Army supervision. These groups made the trip by water in which a lot of them died and many others were abandoned.

The Cherokees then were allowed to lead the rest of the migration under their own supervision. Thirteen detachments of Cherokees, each under their own leadership, made the trip. The effect upon the Cherokee people was overwhelming. Hundreds of Cherokees suffered from exposure, disease, and starvation during their trip. About 4,000 died and many others perished from the consequences of relocation.

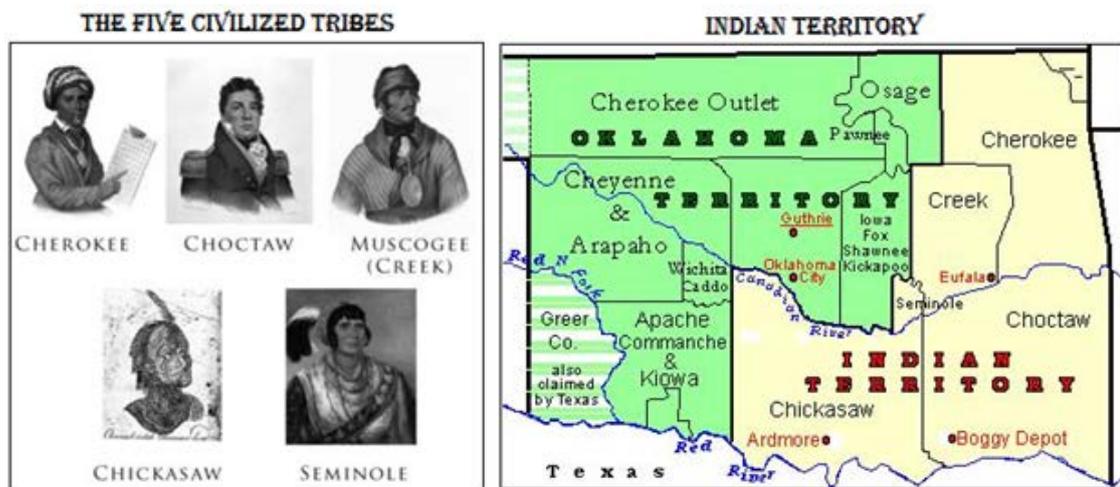
This “removal” also included the forced transfer of many members of the Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw nations, among others from their homelands to Indian Territory. By 1830, these people identified as the Five Civilized Tribes were living as autonomous nations in what would be called the American South.



In 1831, the Choctaw were the first to be removed. After them, in 1832, the Seminole were removed; the Creek in 1834; then the Chickasaw in 1837; and finally the Cherokee in 1838. A very few non-native Americans – African-American slaves – accompanied the Native American nations on the march westward. This tragic episode in American and Cherokee history became known as the Trail of Tears or the Trail Where They Cried.

1.2.4. Indian Territory

Picture # 4



(Graham, Ray)

The Indian Territory was land set aside in the United States for the settlement of American Indians. It served as the destination for the policy of Indian Removal. The Five Civilized Tribes relocated in what is now Arkansas and Oklahoma. They set up towns such as Tulsa, Ardmore, Tahlequah, Tishomingo, Muskogee, and others. Other tribes such as the Delaware, Cheyenne, and Apache also relocated in Indian Territory.

In the 18th century white settlers began migrating from the original thirteen colonies over the Appalachian Mountains and into the West. A decade later, in the 19th century, they slowly began to move into the eastern parts of the Northwest Territory, and into parts of the Old Southeast, or Alabama,



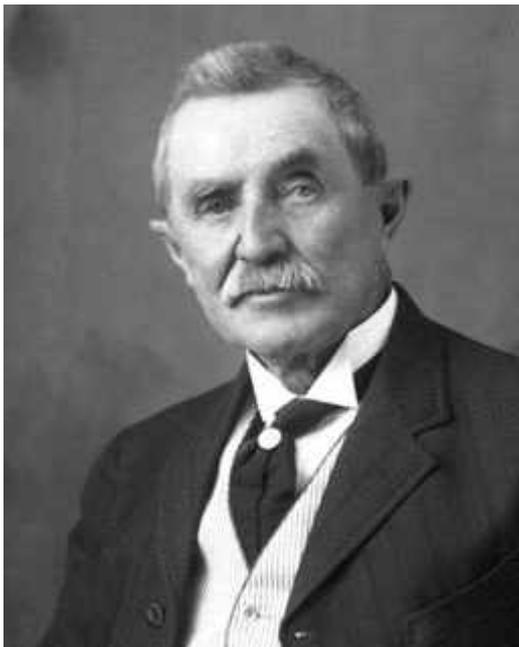
Mississippi, and western Kentucky and Tennessee. As settlers saw that the eastern part of the Mississippi was fertile and habitable, native people were an obstacle for their purpose to expand westward. First, the British Royal Proclamation of 1763, limited white settlement lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. Then the Indian Reserve was reduced under British administration and again after the American Revolution, until it included only lands west of the Mississippi River, present Oklahoma.

1.3. WILL ROGERS' BACKGROUND

1.3.1. William's Parents

Picture # 5

Clement Vann Rogers
(1839 – 1911)



Will Rogers Memorial Museums

Picture # 6

Mary America Schrimsher
(1839 – 1890)



(Family Matters)

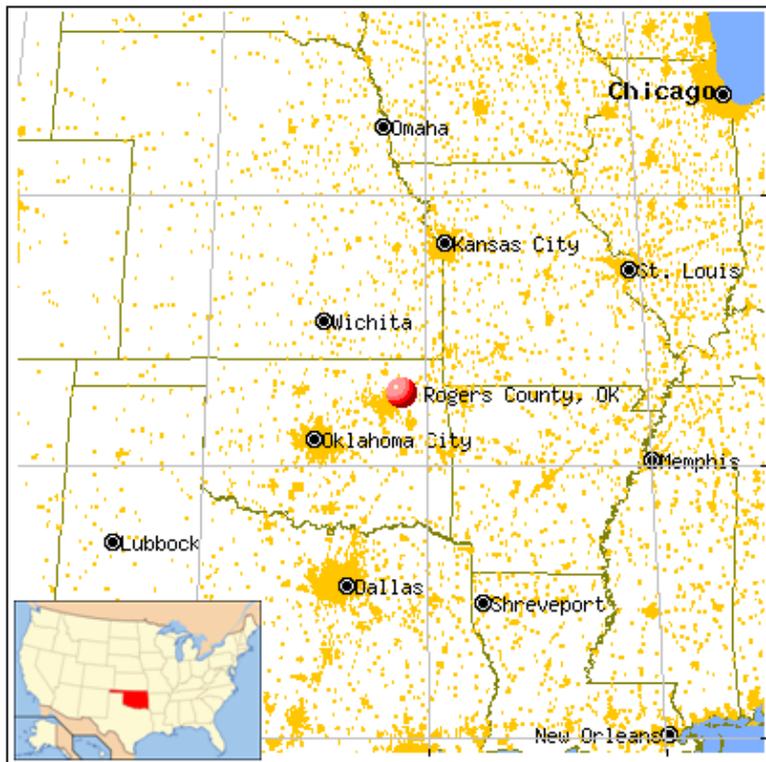


1.3.1.1. Clement Rogers

William's father, Clement Vann Rogers, better known as Clem Rogers was born on January 11, 1839 into a slaveholding family near the Baptist Mission School on the borders of what became the town of Westville, Oklahoma, near the Arkansas border. Clem Rogers pioneered in the Verdigris country with 60, 000 acres (24,000 hectares) of cattle-grazing land. He was a Confederate captain during the Civil War and served as ambassador to the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention. In 1854, Clem married Mary America Schrimsher. Soon after, the newlywed twenty-year-old couple moved west to the Cooweescoowee District just two years before the Civil War exploded. There, they started a successful ranch business that they named "*The Rogers Ranch*" which was located two miles northeast of Oologah. He was a man of influence in the community and in the businesses of the Cherokee Indian tribe. He was a successful-wealthy rancher and farmer, an influential political leader, businessman and banker. He became a Cherokee Senator and District Judge. He began his political career when he worked as Judge of the Cooweescoowee District. He also served five terms in the Cherokee Senate for the following years: 1879, 1881, 1883, 1899, and 1903. When his wife died in 1890, he moved to Claremore and began to work actively in local government, banking, and investments. In 1894, Clem Rogers became Vice President of the First National Bank of Claremore. He died on October 28, 1911. After Clement's death, the Cooweescoowee District was re-named *Rogers County* to honor him.

Clem Rogers' parents, Robert Rogers Jr. (1815-1842) and Sallie Vann Rogers (1818-1882) were part of the first Cherokee Indians to move from the Cherokee Nation East (Georgia) to Arkansas in 1832, and then to Indian Territory in the west in 1835. The Rogers family and other Cherokee Indians built the prosperous society known as the Cherokee Nation on the rich farmlands of Indian Territory that were perfectly suited to raising cattle. Cattle ranching became their way of life.

Picture # 7



Rogers County is located in the state of Oklahoma. Its county was originally created in 1906 and named Cooweescoowee, after John Ross's Cherokee name. However, it was changed to Rogers County, after Clem Vann Rogers.

(onboard informatics)

1.3.1.2. Mary Schrimsher

Will's mother, Mary America Schrimsher, was born on October 9, 1839 into a wealthy, slaveholding, mixed-blood Cherokee family in Eureka near Tahlequah. She was the granddaughter of Catherine, the Cherokees' Paint Clan princess who married a Welsh immigrant named John Gunter. Their half-blood Cherokee daughter Elizabeth Hunt Gunter (1804-1877), Mary's mother, married Martin Mathew Schrimsher (1806-1865), a full-blood of Welsh descent from Tennessee. Mary's parents were married in Creek Path (Guntersville), Alabama in 1831, and settled near Tahlequah in the Cherokee Nation West by 1835.

Opposite to her husband, who was a silent and serious man with a stern but fair personality; Mary was a sweet and talkative woman. She was a devout Methodist and loved her studies while Clem was not religious at all and



despised school. She had graduated from high school whereas Clem had dropped out.

Mary had a rich wit and sense of humor. She was refined, very social, cheerful, outgoing, and musically gifted. Also, she was pretty well prepared and educated, and she mastered the subjects of music and literature. She devoted long hours singing songs and telling stories to William. Since Mary was a very religious woman, she worked on charity in the community and organized social events. Her house was the social center of the area. They held big parties, feasts, meals, and dancing all the time. Mary died on May 28, 1890.

Clem and Mary met while attending a *boarding school*⁴ in Tahlequah. Despite the fact that they were very different in many ways; they had a happy and successful marriage. Clem had blue eyes and blond hair. Although he was part-Cherokee, he looked more Scottish or Irish. Mary had straight black hair and narrow cheekbones from her Cherokee ancestors. The Schrimsher and Rogers families were part of the Cherokee elite. While a great number of Cherokees were small subsistence farmers, these two families had ideas of “civilization” that included farming on slave-labor in the south. While the majority of Cherokees did not hold slaves, the Rogers and Schrimsher were slaveholders.

1.3.1.3. Schrimsher and Rogers Families

As was mentioned before the treaty marked the beginning of a period of political divisions that brought generations of violence to the Cherokee Nation West. Political divisions were partly ethnic and class divisions. The Treaty Party followers, also known as the “progressives”, including Will Rogers’ ancestors, tended to be wealthier, slaveholding people who spoke English and agreed with

⁴ **Boarding School:** is a school where some or all pupils study and live during the school year with their fellow students and perhaps teachers and administrators.



the black slave labor on huge agricultural plantations. On the other hand, the “conservatives” (people who sympathized with the Ross Party) tended to be small landholders who spoke and wrote in Cherokee and followed Native American traditions.

The year William’s parents were born, 1839, was highly significant because it marked the Cherokee history. Political assassinations began a period of violent divisions in the reconstituted Nation between 1839 and 1846 as new governmental institutions were developed. Major Ridge, John Ridge, and Elias Boudinot were killed in the Nation on June 22, 1839, for their part in the signing of the *Treaty of New Echota*. “The Murders represented deep social rifts that had developed in the Cherokee Nation over issues of acculturation, nationalism, and removal.”(Wertheim, Bair, 1996: 31)

Will’s great-grandfather Robert Rogers was part Cherokee of the Wolf Clan. Robert Sr., of Irish-Scotch blood, had married a half-blood Cherokee, Lucy Cordery. Their quarter-blood son, Robert Rogers Jr., born in Georgia in 1815, married a half Cherokee, Sallie Vann. Robert Rogers Sr. and Robert Rogers Jr. were suspected of signing the controversial treaty. In bed and very ill, Dr. Robert Rogers had written in his final testament that he had signed the treaty.

Sallie Vann and her husband had established a prosperous farm and business after moving from Georgia to the Going Snake District. In 1842, when Clement V. Rogers was three years old, his father, Robert Rogers Jr., who was only twenty seven years old, was killed by a Ross Party supporter for a political and personal issue. Many people thought that killing Will’s paternal grandfather was a mistake because he was only twenty years old when the treaty was signed. However, many Cherokee elders disbelieved that Will’s grandfather was innocent of signing the hated treaty, and assured he was assassinated in revenge.



When Clem was 17, his mother, Sallie Vann Rogers, financed him to start in the cattle business in the Verdigris country and gave him several heads of cattle and some horses. She also deeded him two African American men whom his father had held as slaves. Clem built a log house. While Clem watched over the ranch, the two brother-slaves established the ranch crops. Clem treated his slaves as free men and paid them for their job. After the war, the black men and their families were freed and gained full membership in the Cherokee Nation.

1.3.1.4. Civil War

Mary and Clem got married in 1858 in Fort Gibson shortly before the Civil War. Three years later, their first child - Elizabeth - was born during the first months of the Civil War. In 1861, the Confederacy was formed and Clem allied with its cause. He fought the war first as a lieutenant under Captain James Butler, and then continued as a Captain under the Colonel of the Confederate army and the Treaty Party leader, Stand Watie. Some battles took place in the Cooweescoowee District near his ranch. While Clem fought in these skirmishes, his wife Mary ran away from Verdigris county to her mother-in-law's home near Westville and continued to Tahlequah and then to Bonham, Texas, where they took refuge at a small farm near a Confederate refugee camp and waited for the duration of the war. During the eighty-mile journey through freezing rain from Verdigris country to Westville, Clem's and Mary's three-month-old daughter got sick and died from the exposure.

The Union Army forces invaded the Cherokee Nation and destroyed the Schrimsher plantation and the Rogers ranch. Their cattle were set free and all their goods were confiscated. Before the war ended, Clem and Mary had their second child, Sarah Clementine who was born in Texas in December 1863. When the War was over, they went to the Choctaw Nation and stayed with Clem's mother where they worked planting crops to live. There they had their third child, Robert Rogers, who was born in April 1866. In 1867, the Rogers



family moved back to Cherokee Nation, near Port Gibson, Oklahoma, where they rented a farm from Mary's sister, Elizabeth Alabama Schrimsher Adair, and worked the farm for a year. Then they moved to Mary's mother home in Fort Gibson, where their fourth child, Maud Ethel, was born in November 1869. There, Clem worked as a truck driver for Oliver Wack Lipe, a wealthy entrepreneur, and entered into a partnership in the cattle business with Lipe's son DeWitt Clinton Lipe. From 1865 until 1870, the family managed to collect funds to return to their home.

In 1870, Clement Rogers moved back to the Verdigris country. There, Clement and the family, paid \$25 to Tom Boot, a full-blood Indian, to regain rights over the land they had abandoned nearly a decade earlier. Then Clem built a ranch of sixty-thousand-acres. Using logs of walnut and oak trees, he built a two story house. "The house looked like a southern plantation, with sculptured flower beds, arching trees, a white picket fence, and white columns supporting upstairs and downstairs porches along the front." (Donovan, 7) Here, their fifth child, May, was born in 1873. After May's birth, Mary Rogers lost two children, Zoe who was born in 1876 and died the same year, and Homer who was born in 1878 and died the same year. The house faced a mile-wide valley that reached toward the Verdigris River. Clem had full rights to use the lush grasses across the area. It was a fertile land. The rivers that flowed from Kansas provided good water to nurture grasses and valleys, creating a perfect place for ranching and farming.



Picture # 8



Will Rogers' Birthplace Ranch and Childhood Home

(willrogers.com)

Following the Civil War, Clem Rogers purchased Texas longhorn cattle for \$1 each from near the Gulf of Mexico. He drove the herds northward to his ranch, and then fattened them. A year later, the herds were driven to Kansas and sold for \$40 each cow. Business was good; the year of 1874 was very prosperous for the family. In 1877, Clem Rogers had entered the Cherokee politics as a judge for the Cooweescoowee District.

By the time Willie -- as his family called him -- was born, Mary and Clem were in their forties. By then, the Rogers ranch had become known as "*The White House on the Verdigris.*" The ranch was the only sign of civilization for miles around, until years later a village named Oologah was formed. It had huge barns for horses and cottages for cowboys' families. Thanks to the influence of the cheerful Mary Rogers, the house quickly became a social center of hospitality, socializing, government meetings, weddings, funerals, dancing, and religious worship.

The relationship among the Cherokee families was beyond neighborhood only, they got along as family. Thus, everybody was "Aunt" or "Uncle." Homes were



hospitable, warm and friendly. Often a whole family would travel long hours to spend a few days in the house of some “Aunt” or “Uncle.”

1.4. EARLY YEARS: The Cowboy Child

As a child, William experienced many events that marked his life and his personality, and made of him the man he became. Even though Willie was born in his parents’ elegant house surrounded with luxury, his childhood was essentially a “Wild West cowboy experience.” He grew up among ranchers and cowboys. Therefore, from the time Willie was a little baby, he watched his father, his brother, and other ranch workers riding horses and throwing their lariats, not only to rope cattle, but also to have fun. As a toddler, while his father and brother were out working on the ranch, Willie spent the mornings of each day pretending to be a cowboy and the afternoons listening to his mother’s stories and songs.

In the spring of 1883, when he was three years old, his older brother, Robert who was almost 17 years old died suddenly of pneumonia. Will was now the only son, and his father quickly began to teach him to be a rancher. At the age of four, he had already learned to ride a horse and to use the rope as a tool to work. When he was five, his father bought him his own pony which he named Comanche. From that day forward, Willie spent long hours on Comanche, perfecting his riding skills. Although Willie became an excellent horse-rider and his riding abilities were amazing, he was more interested in roping. From his early age, he deeply wanted to become a great cowboy. To uphold this fact, Betty wrote:

“When Robert died, Willie’s father – Uncle Clem – as they called him, drifted into the habit of giving Willie everything he wanted. Willie had one of the first rubber-tired buggies in the country and always the best ponies to be had. Three of his horses, Comanche, Robin, and Monte were



considered by the punchers of the time as the ‘tree outstanding horses in the Indian Territory.’” (Rogers, Betty: 49)

When Willie was six years old, his sister Sallie married John Thomas McSpadden. Afterward, his sister, Maud, help his mother to look after Willie. Despite a difference of ten years in age, Maud and Will were much alike. They shared the same sense of humor and warm friendly personality. As reported by Maud, Willie always had a strong, stubborn temperament. She declared that it was so difficult to separate Willie from his baby-bottle. Even at the age of three, he protested when given milk in a glass. Another time, Maud had being leading him across a big pasture when their father galloped up on his horse and demanded them to run quickly to the fence. A wild bull was loose and coming their way. Maud fled, but Will refused to move. Clem came across the field on his horse and barely had time to reach down and yank the little boy to his saddle. Once both were safely on the other side of the fence, Clem gave Willie such a spanking that he never forgot. Clem himself had said that it was very hard for him to be patient with the contrary, stubborn little boy, and in exasperation he used to shake his head and said, “There’s a lot of mule in Willie.”

Willie’s father recruited cowboys from the Cherokee families and employed them on his ranch. They brought their wives and children to join the community. Will’s main playmates were the cowboys’ children. Willie liked to watch Dan Walker, a black cowboy worker and an experienced roper on his father’s ranch, throw his lariat to learn more about the cowboy business. Dan Walker was a first-class cattleman and a skilled roper who began to teach Willie the rudiments of lariat handling.

Clem and Mary assigned some responsibilities to Will, but he did not like to help his father with the duties around the ranch; instead he ran away with some of his Cherokee friends to practice with his lasso. He also practiced throwing loops



around a tree stump in his backyard for hours every time he could. As little Willie was the youngest child in the house, his mother devoted most of her time to his education. He was instructed on his mother's lap. She taught him reading, writing, simple arithmetic, and proper diction.

Willie inherited his mother's musical skills and rich wit and sense of humor. While Mary wanted Willie to become a Methodist preacher, Clem wanted the boy to follow his footsteps and someday take over the ranch. But Willie unaware of his parent's ambitions for him went with the cowhands around the farm to ask them to teach him their rope tricks. Will himself wrote: "the lariat-sliding business drifted into my system when I was pretty young." (Day, 7)

1.5. YEARS AT SCHOOL

Usually, Will joked about his experience with formal education. His dislike for schools was genuine. In one of his speeches he said:

"I was well liked – at least by my pals, if not by the teachers. When the year closed, I decided that school was not for me. I tried to persuade my father to let me stay at home. But he sent me to about every school in that part of the country. In some of them I would last three or four months. I got just as far as McGuffey's *Four Reader*. When the teacher wouldn't seem to be running the school right, and rather than have the school stop, I would generally leave. Then I would start in another school, tell them I had just finished the third reader and was ready for the fourth. Well, I knew this entire fourth grade by heart. Three years in McGuffey's *Fourth Reader*, and I knew more about it than McGuffey did." (Sterling, 1979: 6)



1.5.1. Drumgoole School

In 1886, at age seven Willie began attending school at Drumgoole, a co-educational Indian school near Chelsea. The tuition was one dollar per month, and most students were full-blooded Cherokee. Drumgoole consisted of a little one-room log cabin for about thirty students. The school was 12 miles from the ranch. Consequently, he had to move in with his older sister, Sallie and her husband, Tom McSpadden, whose home near Chelsea was four miles from the school. Every morning, Willie had to ride his horse to get to school. During the week he lived with his sister, and he went to his parent's ranch on weekends. Like his father, William had very little interest in school. Many times he missed school though his sister later remarked that she watched Willie as he rode away to make sure he was on his way toward the school. Instead being part of any activity in the school, he would get running Horse Races. As Willie lost interest in his classes and could not get along with the teachers, about the first month, he began to misbehave. Apparently, Clem was not satisfied with Willie's progress at Drumgoole because he realized that this school did not count with enough instruments and teachers. In addition, the curriculum they used was not the correct one for the students. The school only had such books as Ray's Arithmetic and McGuffey's first and second readers. Even worse, they did not have a stadium despite the building was surrounded by thousands of acres.

1.5.2. Cherokee National Male Seminary

After a year at Drumgoole School, Willie's father sent him to the Cherokee National Male Seminary where most of his fellow pupils were full-blooded Indians. Initially, The Cherokee National Male Seminary was an upper boarding school located southwest of Tahlequah. It was established in 1851, and offered students a high school education - grades nine through twelve. However, in 1873 the National Council expanded the seminary to include an elementary department – grades from one through five, and a preparatory department – grades from six through eight. It was known for its rigorous and challenging



curriculum. For Willie, life became misery because he was used to live outdoors and at the seminary he had to spend his days in a one-room schoolhouse. According to the school's record book which lists William Rogers during the fall term 1887, Willie stayed at the Seminary for three months only. This period - August 1887 to December 1887 – corresponded to a gap in Will Rogers' education between Drumgoole School and the Harrell International Institute. However, in an interview, Charles T. Watts, one of the Rogers' neighbors, said, "I can remember many times when Clem Rogers, Will's father, took him to the Male Seminary at Tahlequah." (Wertheim, Bair, 1996: 93)

1.5.3. Harrell International Institute

Almost a year later, on 15 September 1888, The Methodist Paper -- Our Brother in Red -- announced that Will Rogers was one of the new pupils at the Harrell International Institute, a Methodist boarding school in the town of Muskogee, Oklahoma. It began as a coeducational school, but in September 1883, it became a female institution. Although Harrell was a school for girls, Will was accepted because his father made arrangements with its president, Reverend Theodore F. Brewer, a Methodist minister to send his soon there. As Will was friends with Brewer's son, Robert, who was the same age as Will, they shared a room. He enjoyed this school even less. He later said that he felt as he was on an "island completely surrounded by petticoats." (Wertheim, Bair, 1996: 93)

By age 10, William had not improved at school. He was an average student considered mediocre by his teachers. But he had enriched his roping skills; his tricks were wonderful and he practiced whenever and wherever he had the chance. However, Will's joyous childhood came to an abrupt end when his mother died unexpectedly of a stomach virus (maybe typhoid fever) in May 1890. This loss made Willie become a sad-inward and insecure boy.



For most of his life, he did not talk about how difficult it was to lose his mother at such an early age. According to Betty Rogers' testimony, Mary's death devastated William who was closely attached to his mother. She added that it took him many years to overcome the pain because it left in him a lonely, lost feeling that persisted long after he became successful and famous. He had cried when he had talked about it with his wife. In his autobiography, William himself said, "Most of my life has been lived alone." (Day, vii)

In May 1890, Willie was at home recovering from measles when his sisters, Sallie and Maud and Sallie's baby - Mary Belle – became ill with typhoid fever and were brought to the ranch to be nursed by Mary Rogers. Willie was moved to the home of Gracey Greenleaf, the cook of the ranch. Apparently, he was being cared by her when his mother passed away. Mary Belle McSpadden, Will's niece, died on May 22, 1890; and Mary Rogers died a week later. After his mother's death, Will's performance at school was not good, and Clem received a letter from the director of the school, Rev. Theodore F. Brewer saying that William was not doing well at school and asking his father to remove him.

1.5.4. Willie Halsell College

In the fall of 1891, Will enrolled as a boarding student at Willie Halsell College. It was a co-educational school in the town of Vinita, forty miles northeast of the Rogers Ranch. It was known as the largest private school in the eastern part of the Indian Territory. Will despised the new school because the school year was longer than the old one. He was very concerned because he finished classes only by the middle of June and he did not want to miss the spring roundups. His father's ranch hands and other ranchers in the area got together to find and bring together all the young calves for branding.



Willie wrote several times to his best and closest friend Charles White McClellan, who was enrolled in the Cherokee National Male Seminary. On January 7, 1893, William sent the following letter to his friend:

[...] we have to wait till next summer. We will have the time then when I get back. I wish that I could come home in time to go on all of the spring roundups but I guess that I cannot get home from here till the middle of June and they will be over by then. (Wertheim, Bair, 1996: 106)

By the end of his first year at Halsell, Willie's friends nicknamed him "Rabbit" because he was a very fast runner and had big ears. After spending two years at Halsell, William began to enjoy the school. Here he took courses in the preparatory department – fifth and sixth grades – and enrolled in the list of students in elocution and art. Although his grades were not great, Rogers excelled in elocution. The Indian Chieftain, the local paper, wrote: "Willie Rogers was inimitable in each of his declamations and never failed to receive a hearty round of applause." (Wertheim, Bair, 1996: 107) He won two gold medals for his performances in elocution contests. The four years William spent at Halsell (from 1891 to 1895) gave him his happiest schoolday memories because most of the boys and girls at Willie Halsell College were from around the neighborhood and Willie had grown up with many of them.

In the summer of 1893, Clem with his thirteen-year-old son shipped a train loaded with cattle to Chicago where the World's Columbian Exposition took place. There the World-famous Buffalo Bill was staging his Wild West Show with the "Congress of Rough Riders of the World" which was featuring the great Mexican Vicente Oropeza – billed as the greatest roper in the world. Oropeza was a "wizard" with the lariat and his tricks were fantastic. Riding a horse and afoot, Oropeza twirled his lariat up and down, making a variety of shapes in the air. William was dazzled with Oropeza's performance and this experience sketched the pattern for Will's career. It gave William such a delight that he



returned to school with a new point of view about roping. Soon, William mastered all of Oropeza's rope tricks and invented new ones that he used later on stages around the world. Again, he began to get in trouble with his teachers and his classmates. His teachers were tired of taking his lariat away from him and his classmates were afraid of being caught with Will's lariat.

Picture # 9



Will Rogers at about the age of twelve.

(McSpadden, Paula)

Picture # 10



Willie with his best friend Charles McClellan.

(Donovan, Sandy)

1.5.5. Scarritt College

During the period of Will's adolescence, Clem became accustomed to receive reports saying that Willie was not doing well. After he lost his mother, "Willie grew careless and untidy. He was a spoiled, impetuous boy who had inherited a natural restlessness and love of freedom that would not submit to discipline of any kind. This made him slow in his studies, and his teachers thought he was careless and lazy." (Rogers, Betty: 47)



After four years at Halsell College, Will continued to do so poorly in his classes that in a moment of rage, Will's father decided to make a preacher of his son and he transferred William to Scarritt College. Despite its name, it was a boarding high school in Neosho, Missouri. William spent a year and a half there. At the beginning, he impressed everyone with his jokes, but he soon got into trouble again. Once, he lassoed a statue and broke her limbs. His father chose to pay the bill rather than take William back to the ranch. Then he roped the teacher's horse which destroyed the picket fence and tennis court backdrop. But he condemned himself when he caught his teacher's neck with his rope by accident. Afterward, Willie was driven out of the school just a few weeks before the term closed.

1.5.6. Kemper School

Picture # 11



Willie at Kemper Military School

(E. Museum)



At this point Will's father was tired of receiving complaints about his son. Besides, William had not improved in his lessons, and nobody wanted him at any school because of his constant misbehavior and witticisms. Because Willie did so poorly in his classes and caused problems everywhere, his father, thinking that perhaps strict discipline might tame his son, sent Willie to Kemper School in the winter of 1897. It was a military school in Boonville, Missouri. William arrived there on January 13, 1897.

Actually, William, later on, insisted that he had landed at Kemper School by someone's error. In fact, William and his buddy Ben Johnson were supposed to be sent to Missouri State reformatory which was located near the same town, and through somebody's mistake, they were enrolled at the Kemper Military Academy instead. This was the last of six schools he attended in which he lasted one and a half years.

By this time, William was almost eighteen and he was repeating the tenth grade. Here, he was not being appreciated because he was too sloppy, for his poor grades, for his lack of discipline and his jests. His studies included arithmetic, grammar, accounting, history, elocution, algebra, letter-writing, composition, physics, and political economy. He only earned average grades and he struggled with algebra, accounting, and physics.

At first, military discipline was great. Willie liked his cadet uniform and was fascinated with his gun. But one day, during vacation, he had borrowed a rifle from one of the cowhands, and began demonstrating the manual of arms. When he grounded his arms with such a strong movement, the butt hit the ground hard. The loaded rifle fired and the bullet grazed Willie's face. From then forward, he showed little affection to firearms because his scar remembered him the damage they can cause.



After some time at the school he began to hate the military academy more than any other. Students earned demerits, or points, when they got into trouble. For each demerit, students had to work one hour doing chores around the school. Will received plenty of them for making jokes.

By 1898, William finally passed the tenth grade. But, by then he had turned eighteen and he had gotten 150 demerits. He was exhausted of school and he wanted to experience life as a real cowboy. When an inmate advised him that jobs were available at a ranch in Higgins, Texas, he decided to finish with his formal education. One night, on February 1898, Will just walked away from the military academy and quit school for life. Will asked his sisters for money and went directly to Texas.

1.6. COWBOY ADULTHOOD ADVENTURES

Picture # 12



Will Rogers in his early twenties

(Memorial Museum)



Once in Texas, Will found a job at Ewing's Ranch in which he earned \$30 a month. William loved life as a ranch worker and he learned very fast how to take care of huge herds of cattle. After a few months on Ewing Ranch, the owner -- Mr. Ewing and his son Frank -- let William go on a cattle drive. He and other ranchers set out to move 400 heads from the Texas ranch to a town in Kansas, 160 miles away. With the money Will earned, he bought an old horse and went to Amarillo, Texas. During the journey he asked for shelter in the only three ranches he found on his way. After a long time ambling, he finally got into Amarillo where he found that many ranchers were shipping their cattle herds away. He had no money, no food, and no place to stay. He was so desperate to start working to make a living that he approached every cattle owner to ask for a job, but he did not succeed because nobody needed more people to work with them.

To describe this part of his life, Will compared himself with a dog. He wrote that as he had not find a job in Amarillo and he had nothing to do, one day, he began to watch an old dog. It was an ordinary dog that seemed to have no owner, but this dog had a way to survive. When a crowd of cowboys went into a saloon, the dog followed them and began entertaining. He performed all kind of tricks like turning somersaults, lying down and rolling over, siting up on his back feet, and running to the door and shaking hands with all the newcomers. Then, the people put a coin on his nose, and he threw it in the air and caught it with his mouth and pretended to swallow it. After a while working, the dog disappeared for a few minutes and then he was back and started again in a new saloon. When he got tired and seemed to be hungry, he mysteriously disappeared and then showed up with a coin in his mouth. Then the dog put the coin on the counter of a butcher shop and the butcher gave him a piece of meat or a bone. After seeing this amazing feat, Will realized that the dog had been a lot smarter than him and that even an ordinary dog found a way to make money and pay for his food. He, on the other hand, was unemployed and with no money at all. But one morning, a merchant told William that a cattle boss needed a boy to look after his ponies. Will went to see the old cowman and he



got the job the same day. Here he worked wrangling ponies. After a while, Will moved on to Panhandle City crossing the Canadian River at a famous ranch called "L.X." On this ranch near Woodward, Oklahoma, Will worked on the roundup and helped with branding the calves. When he got tired of this job, he went to California with another boy with a shipment of cattle and then to Frisco. There he was almost killed because somebody left the gas on, and he was about to die by asphyxia. As he was ill and weak, he had to go back home.

For six months Will alternated between working as a ranch hand and going on cattle drives. In the fall of 1898, Will returned to his father's ranch. His father was angry and disappointed when Will ran away from school, but he realized that his son was not cut out for school and that it was too late to make his son go back to study. Clement Rogers, then, offered William to give him the ranch, cattle, and supplies as long as he agreed to stay on the ranch and manage it. William took his father's offer but only to keep himself busy and not to satisfy his father. Then Clement married again and moved to Claremore. Once on the ranch, William did not do a responsible job because he wasted a lot of time and money on dances and roping contests. This way, he did not have much time for a serious ranching business. Will managed the ranch for two years; then he got bored and tired because this was not his idea of life as a cowboy. During this time, Will used to go to horse races with his neighbors. Also, he took his little cream-colored pony, Comanche, and went to steer-roping contests. He liked to assist to these events, not only to learn more of the business but to be part of them too. In 1899, Will discovered "cowboy competitions" where ropers performed lariat skills. The most awesome of these competitions presented steer-roping contests. On July 4, 1899, he competed in a steer-roping match near his home and won the first place. Willie immediately signed up in larger steer-roping tournaments. Because of his speed and agility, Comanche gained a reputation as a great roping horse. One of Will's friends, Jim Hopkins - a champion steer roper - called Comanche "the best horse that was ever wrapped up in so much hide." (Wertheim, Bair, 1996: 153)



Picture # 13



Painting by
Wayne Cooper
portrays Will
Rogers herding
horses at his
birthplace ranch.

(Memorial Museum)

William had developed a special talent for roping since he was a child. He learned by watching and imitating Dan Walker, by roping a stump in the ranch's backyard, and by catching the young calves his father gave him. Another thing that captivated William was the performance of roping stunts by the Mexican Cowboy Vicente Oropeza which gave him a glimpse of the Wild West show. In his attempt to imitate Oropeza's deeds, Will improved them. Also, his local cowboy friends helped him to enhance his tricks. All these experiences provided the basis for his trick-rope ability on the vaudeville stage.

Besides engaging in steer-roping, Will had an active social life with neighborhood friends and relatives his age. They participated in many social and recreational activities like picnics, dinners, dances, and parties that were held in the region. Will usually brought a large group of boys and girls on his wagon. Also, wooden platforms were constructed in the yard at the ranch to hold large parties. William was known for being the start of the party. Neighbors and friends recalled that he had such an energy that he could dance all night, and when the dance was over, he remained as strong as when the dance had started. William also began to develop a great interest in the popular music of the day. He bought the latest themes at stores in Kansas City. William entertained his friends at parties by singing the newest songs. Also, he was a



tenor singer in a local quartet. All these activities showed Will's interest in the world of show business. His friends considered him as a lucky young man because his popularity made him worthy of the sympathy of several local girls.

1.6.1. Roping and Riding Contests

“The steer-roping contests were the precursors of modern-day professional rodeo. These events evolved from the roping and riding skills that working cowboys used on the cattle range and during the roundup. Equestrian contests gave cowboys an opportunity to display and test important occupational skills needed for their rigorous work, as well as exhibit their horsemanship. Steer roping, for example, required skills used to rope and restrain a sick steer on the open range, to “cut out” a steer from a large herd, and to collar cattle for branding. The cowboy contests started when hands from the same outfit began competing against one another in bronco riding and steer roping as a form of recreation and as part of cow-camp entertainments. Roping and riding contests were also held among outfits during social times on the semiannual roundups. Competitions soon began to be held in the town square of the railhead at the conclusion of a long cattle drive.” (Wertheim, Bair, 1996: 153)

During the 1880s and 1890s cowboy competitions began in western towns, especially on Sundays and holidays. These popular entertainments were often held on the borders of town and featured the best local working cowboys in steer-roping and bronco-riding contests. People traveled miles to see the performances. Each competitor gave a small fee to create purses to reward the winners. Then merchants began to organize events to promote their town in order to formalize these competitions. Citizens and firms began to donate prized money, and champions from all over the country were attracted to compete. The largest events took place at county fairs, commercial expositions, conventions, stampedes, and Fourth of July celebrations.

Steer roping required great dexterity for it challenged the best of the cowboys. These contests were held on large grounds where there was enough space for



the participant to chase the steer. The animal had an advantage of 50 to 100 feet until it reached a chalk line, at which point the horse and rider rushed after the steer in an attempt to rope the animal by the horns or around the neck while throwing a rope over the opposite side of the animal, a feat call the trip. As the rider dismounted to go after the catch, a well-trained horse kept the rope firm so that the rider could bind three feet of the steer with a short rope. After the roper was done, he raised his hands gesticulating for time. The roper who made the shortest time won first prize.

Will's participation in these cowboy competitions played a formative role in the development of his show-business career, and these were his first introductions to performing before a large audience. From 1899 to 1901, Rogers appeared in many steer-roping contests at different fairs. In 1899, he participated at the St. Louis annual fair in which Will didn't get too far because he experienced a bitter defeat. He had taken Comanche from Oklahoma to the fair, but when the contest started, he realized that his horse was too small for the huge steer. He caught the steer and immediately both Will and his pony ended on the ground. But this incident didn't overthrow him. He kept entering and going to more roping contests. The same year, he went to the Elk's Carnival at Springfield, Missouri where Comanche became the main attraction of the contest. In 1900, he attended the Rough Riders reunion in Oklahoma City. In 1901, he played a part at the Des Moines Fair, San Antonio Fair, and the Union Confederate Veterans reunion in Memphis. However, Rogers' real show career began when he ran into the big annual fair in St. Louis handled by Colonel Zack Mulhall who was a pioneer showman that organized many of these events. This Oklahoma Territory ranchman, railroad livestock agent (at that time, Colonel Mulhall was the general of the Frisco Railroad), and Wild West show producer recruited William Rogers and other skilled cowboys from the Indian Territory for roping and riding contests at county fairs, cattlemen conventions, commercial expositions, local parks or anywhere else he could get a crowd. Colonel Mulhall had formed a Cowboy Band of about sixty musicians and some cowboys. They had to dress in ten-gallon hats, jackets, chaps, boots, and spurs. By this time,



Colonel Mulhall had two daughters, Agnes and Lucille. Agnes was a good rider but she never took it up in the professional way as Lucille did. Lucille was just a kid, but she was a very expert roper and the first girl that could rope and tie a steer. She became the country's first well-known female rider, and her feats promoted the word "cowgirl." This word had its origins when she started on the show business because before her there was not such a thing like a girl roping steers. Nowadays, she is known as America's first major professional cowgirl. When she was seven, her father had told her that she could have all the steers she could rope, and immediately she collected a herd of them. Her professional career began in 1899 and she became a teenage sensation with her father's Wild West show. Today Lucille Mulhall is recognized as one of the nation's foremost horsewomen and as an important figure in rodeo history for opening up the sport to women.

Although, William rarely finished among the top three contestants, he developed a reputation as a skilled steer roper during that time. During the next few years, Will along with the Band traveled around the southwestern United States, entering contests at state fairs, city festivals, and other events. Will learned a lot from men like Clay McGonagill, Tom Vest, Abe Wilson, and the rest of the top-ropers who were in those competitions. After three years with Mulhall, he left the camp because the pay was not good, and he began to hatch a new plan. These were Rogers' first public appearances as a steer roper in cowboy competitions organized by Mulhall from 1899 to 1902.

1.7. TRAVELS AND FIRST JOBS

1.7.1. Argentina

Will had been told that Argentina was a great Ranch country. Therefore he sold a herd of his cattle to his father, loaned Comanche to a friend, took a boy named Dick Parris with him and prepared for the trip to South America. In the winter of 1902, Will and Dick set out for New Orleans figuring they could get a



ship from there to Argentina. But when they arrived in New Orleans, they found out that the only ships to Argentina traveled from New York. So they took a boat to New York, where they learned that all the boats for Buenos Aires had just left and that the best way to get to Argentina was through England because they had regular trade-boats going to South America. After a week in New York, they finally sailed to England. Will said that he broke all records for seasickness. He could not eat anything and he had to lay down the whole trip. When he landed in England he had the thought that it might be a good idea to become a naturalized citizen until some enterprising party built a bridge back home. Will and his friend spent nine days in England before sailing to Buenos Aires, Argentina. They went to London to look around and see everything. When Will was recovered from the trip, they took another steamer, touching at Lisbon, Portugal, and at Vigo, Spain. Then they crossed the Equator and then to Rio de Janeiro. This 23-day- trip was another mess of misery for Will. He described this experience saying that it seemed like he was on the edge of dying. Once in Argentina, they could not find jobs, the weather was too cold, and the food was disgusting. Dick headed home almost immediately and Will stayed in Argentina for 5 months. He got “broke” very quickly because he loaned his friend money for the return trip. He looked for a job in many local ranches, but the Gauchos paid just 15 dollars a month. For Will’s surprise, his job with these Gauchos was not what he had expected from them. Although he had experience, these guys could catch the steer much before he could start swinging his lariat to rope and tie down the animal. He said to himself: “I’ll get fat showing these birds how to rope! They can rope an animal further than I could hit him with a rock.” (Day, 19)

This made Will to become so disappointed that he felt there was no reason to stay longer. But he had no money and he needed to work doing anything to get enough money to come home back. Figuring his father would help him, Will wrote a letter telling him he needed money and that he was suffering a lot down there. The letter said the following:



Dear Papa:

I don't think there is any use of my staying here and I may start home any time. Write and tell me all the news. Give all who might ask for me my best regards. Tell the boys to stay home, for that is the best place in the land for them. You don't know how good your country is until you get away from it. I will write more often from now on. I may see you soon though. I will close with all my love to a dear father. I am your loving son, Willie. (Rogers, Betty)

But Will's father did not send him money. The whole expedition had been Will's idea, so he had to solve his difficulties alone. But among foreigners who did not even speak the same language, working things out was not easy at all. Will's last month in Buenos Aires had been a very unhappy time. Will realized that his family thought he was irresponsible because he wasted all the money he got from the ranch. Besides he had let his father down. Consequently, he felt hurt about it and it made him think about another possibility instead which was to return home and ask his father for help. Now, William was terribly bad; he had been forced to leave his hotel for not paying it. One night he had to sleep in the park, and he was starving to death. Next morning, he wandered down to the stockyards where he found some Gauchos roping mules in the corrals. The mules were wild and an old gaucho was having a hard time trying to catch a mule. William tried to make them understand he could help them because he knew how to use a lasso, but they could not understand his weak Spanish and pushed him away. Finally, he climbed upon the corral fence, grabbed a rope and when the mule ran across, Will threw a loop and caught the mule by her neck with the first throw. The boss of the gauchos was delighted and recognized Will's ability, so he offered to pay him the equivalent of twenty-five cents for every mule he caught. Then Will was told that a boat was leaving in a few weeks for South Africa with a load of stock. Actually, Will did not really want a job as a 'cattle tender' because he had not enjoyed doing these odd jobs. He was homesick and lonely and he wanted most of all to go back home, but he



did not want to arrive in Oklahoma with empty hands. Thus he took the job for chaperoning their mules, cows, sheep, and horses. Before leaving he wrote another letter to his father on July 31, 1902. Despite the fact that Will and his father disagreed upon some matters, he had great respect for his father. In the letter he wrote:

My dear father:

I am leaving this country around the third of August or a few more days. I have given this place a trial and I know that there isn't any other place better than the U.S. for a man with small capital or none at all. I only wanted to see the country. I know I never cared for money; I just cared for the pleasure it gives to spend it. I have spent all the money I had, and I feel satisfied for I have got the good of it. Now I am going to spend my own money, and I am not afraid to work. Besides I am in good health, and I feel better than ever before. So, don't you people worry about me. I don't want anybody to say I wasted my father's money. I don't feel like bothering or worrying anybody. Now, I am making my own way.

Your loving son, Willie.

1.7.2. South Africa

William shoved off from Buenos Aires, Argentina on the fifth of August, 1902 for South Africa. They had boarded one of the largest cattle steamers bound for Port Natal 1,000 miles above Capetown, on the eastern coast of Africa. He was traveling on a specially fitted boat that had on board all kind of animals. Among them there were 750 head of mules, 300 cows, 700 sheep, 300 work horses, 50 thoroughbred race horses, 40 little Shetland ponies, besides food and water for the stock. Soon, Will began to suffer even more than what he had already suffered in Argentina. Will described this drama by detailing that he was seasick for days. In addition, he was surrounded by a crew of people who could not speak a word in English; and to make things worse, he could not eat anything without throwing it up immediately. In one of his letters to his family, William told



them that besides acting as a waiter for those three thousand heads, the Veterinarian spent most of his time working on him because he could not help with his seasickness. Finally, as they could not fire him, they assigned him to be the night watchman for the animals. Importing stock to South Africa had been a great business because the country was practically bare. During the Boer War, farms were emptied and property destroyed. So the farms were restocked.

On September 1902, after thirty-one days on the sea, they finally arrived to Durban –Natal. When they got at Durban Port, they found out that five ships, which were one or two days ahead of them had wrecked with all on board. The man who had shipped that load of animals to South Africa - a wealthy ranch owner – had done so to restock his farm which was said to be the finest in the country. He hired William to work looking after the horses. While he was driving stock from the port to his employer’s ranch at the Mooi River in the north, Will saw the natives passed by and he was astonished by them. He wrote to his father:

You have to see them to realize how wild looking people they are. All have rings, chains and all kinds of old scrap iron in their ears or noses. Lots of them have horns tied on their heads. They travel at a run all the time and they are always singing. They are as crazy as snakes. We are in Zululand and they are the hardest layout in the lot. (Rogers, Betty)

Will’s work at the ranch was basically to take care of the feeding of the thoroughbred horses and mules. He took them out for exercise gallops every day. When he had some free time, he helped the veterinary surgeon in the hospital with the sick or wounded horses or mules. Sometimes he helped to shoe the horses. He was one of the men responsible to exhibit the horses in big corrals to sell them.



It is often said that Will worked breaking wild Australian horses for the British Army in South Africa. Some writers like Donald Day quoted William saying such a thing. However, it is strange that William never mentioned this event on his letters to his family. Even his wife, Betty said that from his letters home and the explanation he gave on how he spent his time in Africa; he simply could not have worked taming wild horses. Nevertheless, it could have been possible. Though the War was over, there was still an Army of Occupation close to the Piccione's ranch in Mooi River where William worked.

After a few months doing this odd job, Will's luck changed. He had heard about Texas Jack's Wild West show and circus. Thus, around December 1902, Will had gone to Jack's camp looking for a job. When Jack asked Will what he could do, Will immediately answered he could rope a bit. Then Will showed him his little tricks and he was hired as an entertainer. The night William met Texas Jack and joined his Wild West Show at Johannesburg, his career in show business had officially started.

Each performer had to have a name, so Will nicknamed himself "The Cherokee Kid." He baptized himself with that name because everybody called him "the kid." He worked with Texas Jack for almost a year, traveling and showing everywhere in South Africa. They showed in towns such as Johannesburg, Harrismith, Orange Free State, Capetown, Durban, among others. Will had the habit to take a shot at everything he saw from his fellows. First, he studied each movement and then he improved them. Later, he put them in his act on the stage. He also learned how to manage the show business from Texas Jack. Will said:

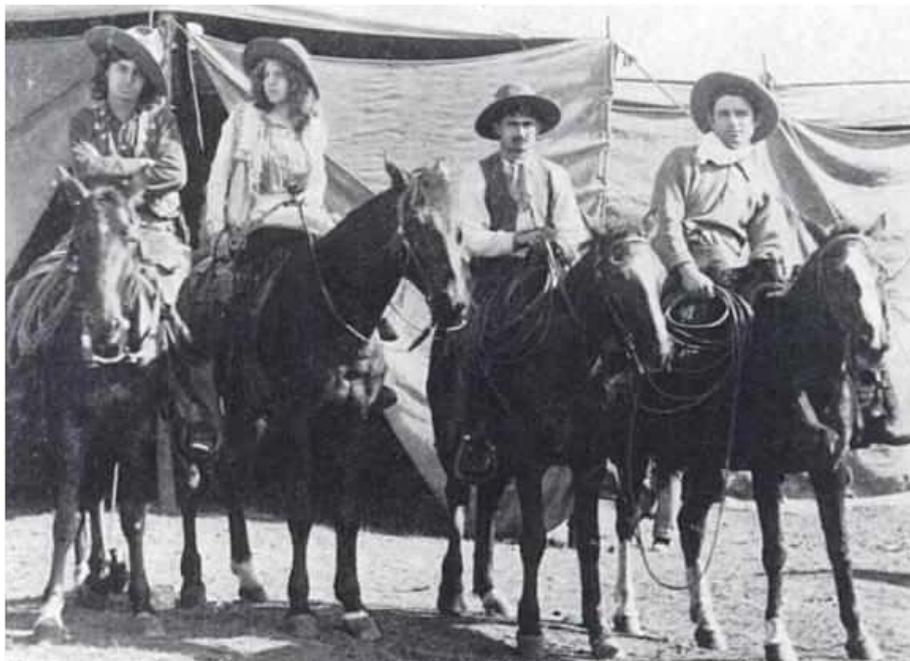
Texas Jack was one of the smartest showmen I ever met. It was him who gave me the idea for my original stage act with my pony. I learned a lot about the show business from him. He could do a bum act with a rope that an ordinary man couldent get away with, and make the audience



think it was great, so I used to study him by the hour and from him I learned the great secret of the show business – learn when to get off. It is the fellow that knows when to quit that the audience want more. (Day, 23)

William's job was very easy as he had nothing to do during the daytime because his act was only at night. Thus, his salary was very low since Jack only paid Will \$25 a week. Initially William's idea was to stay in South Africa until he could get the money to go home by the spring. But then he changed his mind and decided to experience a little more before going home. By this time, Will was a beginner circus performer at Jack's circus and wanted to join a bigger circus. He had heard that there was a famous circus in Australia, so Texas Jack gave Will a reference letter for the Wirth Brothers' Circus in Australia. With the money he had saved for a whole year, he bought a second-class ticket on a boat that set off to Australia.

Picture # 14



From left to right: Texas Jack, Mrs. Texas Jack, unknown rider, and Will Rogers.

(Wertheim, Bair)



1.7.3. Australia

The ship William took from Capetown, South Africa, across the Indian Ocean to Australia did not touch Australia but went directly to New Zealand first. After 25 days of agony for William, they landed in Wellington, New Zealand on September 3, 1903. From here, he wrote to his father a letter saying, "I left Africa and the show for I don't want you to think I definitely settled down there. I will go home soon, but I must see a bit more before. I will go to Australia and stay there for a couple of months. As you see, I am heading around this old Globe. I will land in America not later than December." During his five-day stop in Wellington, Will also wrote to his sister Sallie telling her about his nightmare on the boat and that he is getting homesick. He also asked her to write him more often and to send him some of his music.

Five days after they had stopped in Wellington, William was re-loaded on another boat to go back to Australia. This journey lasted 10 more days. After a new cruel torture on the ocean with seasickness as usual, Will finally arrived in Sidney, Australia where he joined the Wirth Brothers Circus, owned and operated by George and Philip Wirth. The Wirth Brother's Circus was considered Australia's largest and most outstanding circus. This circus was like a vaudeville show. They only had one act at a time, one show a day, no Sundays. William did his best rope and horse-vaulting act and continued to be billed as the "The Cherokee Kid."

The circus toured many different cities such as Sidney and Harden both located in the state of New South Wales at the east of the country; and Melbourne, Murchison, Benalla located in the state of Victoria at the southeast of the country. William wrote letters to his family and friends from every city he toured. In one of them he apologized with everybody for not being able to be in the United States for Christmas and for missing all the arrangements they organized to welcome him. After four months touring through Australia, Will received the good news that the circus was going on a tour in New Zealand. Again, his only consolation was that even the Captain got sick.



1.7.4. New Zealand

In January 1904, Will landed in New Zealand again. On February 4, 1904, he wrote to his sister Sallie saying:

I am back over in New Zealand, where I was when I first came from Africa. I have been here about two weeks. You see that it is on my way home since it is five days nearer Frisco than Australia. I didn't have quite enough money after touring Australia to come home, so I was offered an engagement with Wirth Bros, big circus at a very good salary, and I told them I would go over to New Zealand with them for a few weeks only. They want me for twelve months, but I have seen enough for me and want to come home. (Wertheim, Bair, 1996)

In New Zealand, they toured two big cities: Auckland and Whangarei. Will again christened himself, "The Cherokee Kid." However they billed him as "a gentleman from America with a large American accent and a splendid skill with the lasso." Will performed his best roping tricks in the circus, and he dressed in tight-fitting red velvet with gold embroidery.

When the tour ended in March 1904 and the circus was going back to Australia, William finally sailed for home. He left Auckland on March 18th and arrived at Frisco on April 11th, 1904, after being away from home for more than two years. With this two-year traveling adventure, he made a complete circuit of the world, traveling more than fifty thousand miles. He could not come back home earlier because it took him more than two years of working to get enough money to return to America.

During the time he stayed in New Zealand, Will found out that this country, though a very little nation that seemed to be a regular one, had the best system of government in the world, the greatest scenery and natural resources of the area.

1.8. SHOW BUSINESS

1.8.1. Wild West

Picture # 15



Will Rogers before 1900

(Taylor Lynn)

Picture # 16



Zack Mulhall with his daughter Lucille and his band of cowboys.

(Donovan, Sandy)

William arrived in the United States at the beginning of spring in 1904, before the opening of the St. Louis World's Fair. So he stayed less than a month in Indian Territory. He just spent enough time to visit his family and childhood friends. Then he told his father that he did not want to stay at home just to make a living depending on him, and that he felt it was time to make his own way. In late April, he left home to work with Zack Mulhall again.

William had become good friends with the Mulhall family including Zack's daughters Lucille, Agnes, and Mildred; his son, Charley; and his wife Mary Agnes. He had developed a close relationship with Lucille because both shared



the same passion for riding and training horses. He had also a special affection for Mary Agnes because she had filled a maternal gap that had been left by the death of Will's mother. William described Zack in the following way:

The Col. Was a natural showman who loved the spectacular but never had any fakes. Every cowboy was a real one. His shows were of the very best. Neatness was one of his hobbies. His life was miserable trying to keep me presentable. 'Look at the Injun (He always called me Injun), he won't wear a silk shirt and I have bought him a dozen!' He was generous to a fault. He never hollered; he never squealed; he took the misfortune with a smile. (Day, 30)

Only a week after William arrived, he contacted Colonel Zack Mulhall to ask him for a job. During that time, Mulhall was in charge. He was going to handle the horses and to hire and manage the cowboys to appear with the "Cummins and Mulhall Wild West Show on the Pike" throughout the upcoming St. Louis' Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Mulhall secured a job for Rogers, so Will set out for St. Louis and arrived there just three days before the Fair's inauguration. There he stayed with Colonel Mulhall at a second household he had established nearby.

The Exposition – most commonly known as the St. Louis World's Fair – took place in St. Louis, Missouri, from April 30 to December 1, 1904. The Fair had been organized to honor the centennial anniversary of the United States' purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France; although the celebration was actually one year late because the purchase took place in 1803.

When the Fair opened, William began to work as a rider and trick roper at the Rough Riders Congress with the Cummins North American Indians, managed by Colonel Zack Mulhall and Colonel Frederic T. Cummins. Zack Mulhall directed the "Rough Riders and Ropers Congress" integrated by Cowboys. Frederic Cummins directed the "Wild West Indian Congress and Rough Riders of the World;" integrated by Indians.



These popular Wild West performances between Cowboys and Indians were held in an open-air stadium outside the Pike⁵ on the exhibition grounds. The Pike was the amusement park and the concession section of the Fair. It stretched for a mile along the northern edge of the fairgrounds.

Will stayed with the Rough Riders Congress during the whole summer. During the show, Rogers performed roping tricks and played a cowboy in “Cowboy vs. Indian” scenes. With his performance of roping tricks, cowboy scenes, and show-business personality, Rogers quickly turned into the spotlight of the show, attracting attention of the crowds.

One night Mulhall had an altercation with Frank Reed, the man who was in charge of the horses, over Reed’s mistreatment of one of the animals. Enraged by the cowboy’s behavior, Zack drew his gun. In the struggle that ensued, Reed and two other cowboys were shut. One of them had stepped in to try to break up the fight. As a result of the shooting incident and the scandal it created, Mulhall was banned from working with the Cummins or appearing in the fairgrounds. After the Mulhall controversy, the businesses at the Pike did not have the same reception, and it lost their novelty. Consequently, William’s presentations were reduced to Sunday-performances and mid-week. With little to entertain, he got bored and began to look for something else, somewhere to work during his free time.

At the end of July, 1904, he appeared as part of a burlesque show at the *Standard Theatre* in St. Louis for a week. This performance was such a hit that it impressed an influential viewer, Colonel Hopkins, who had connections to John J. Murdock, vaudeville theater owner and booking agent in Chicago. As a result of Hopkins request to Murdock, Will was finally booked for a week’s engagement at the Chicago Opera House in the fall for thirty dollars.

⁵ The Pike was a street a mile long surrounded with a variety of amusements that had been more elaborated and more costly than any previous exposition. Along the whole street, about fifty entertainments had been installed, at a total cost of several millions. This street was the main attraction at night. About fifty or a hundred thousand people visited this street every day.



In October, William went to Chicago for his week's engagement at the Chicago Opera House; but he found out that the act had been canceled because he had failed to confirm the booking and provide publicity and photos. At the end of the month and by a stroke of luck, he got a small job for a week at the *Cleveland Theatre* on Wabash Avenue in Chicago. He dazzled the audience with his rope tricks. One night, in the middle of his act, a speckled doggy that was waiting to perform in another act, ran across the stage in front of Will. Reacting quickly, he used his lariat to rope the dog, and the audience howled with laughter and applause. This event gave him the tip to add something new in his act. He later said: "Instead of trying to keep on with this single roping act, I decided people wanted to see you catch something, so I went back home and got me out a plot of ground about as big as a stage and started to work on the horse act." (Donovan, 40)

After he lasted the week out at the Cleveland Theatre, Will traveled back to St. Louis to present a final performance with the Wild West show at the St. Louis fairgrounds. Then he headed home to Claremore and Chelsea for the winter. The next several months, he was seen training his new pony, Teddy, for a roping act on the stage. For his horse act, William had planned to use fancy throws to rope a man riding a horse across the stage. After years of perfecting his roping techniques, he produced spectacular throws for the audiences. Nevertheless, to make things work with a live horse on a tiny vaudeville stage, expert timing was necessary as well management of the animal, while maintaining awareness of the size of the stage.

Throughout the fall, Will continued to perform daily with the Mulhall Congress of Rough Riders and Ropers, and practiced the horse act during his free time. In late 1904, the *101 Ranch* -- also known as the "Largest Diversified Farm and Ranch in America" -- put on a Wild West Show in Kansas City Convention Hall for a week. The Mulhall's Troop joined the show. The outfit comprised the most skilled representatives and included Will Rogers. In the meantime, Colonel Zack Mulhall was also preparing to launch a new tour of the Mulhall's. William



joined Colonel Zack Mulhall Rough Riders Congress in New York. At the time, Will did not get too much money from their circuits. His salary was \$20 a week, but sometimes he did not even get that \$20 because there were hard times when they had nothing coming.

The following year, 1905, Will joined Mulhall's Wild West Show and they traveled West New York to start on a new circuit. Then they moved east for an exhibition with the Horse Association Fair at Madison Square Garden in New York City, in April. During his performances with Mulhall's show, Will along with a friend, took a side trip and traveled to Washington D.C., and performed astounding rope tricks that delighted President Theodore Roosevelt and his family at the White House. Both the Horse Fair and the Mulhall's show were a hit in New York. Although, Will was not the star of the show, he accidentally earned popularity during the show at Madison Square when he unexpectedly played the role of the hero. One afternoon, Will was doing the roping in the show when a wild steer jumped over the railing and run up the stairs to a balcony among the audience. So, Will chased after the steer and roped him, and he finally led him down. Meanwhile, women began to scream and the band had abandoned the show. Fortunately, nobody got hurt. The next day, the New York World published the episode and Will became famous in New York. Also, this great feat helped him to gain popularity not only for his heroic act but also because he was the first man ever to rope a horse on stage.

After the show closed at Madison Square Garden, Rogers and the Mulhall's family parted ways. The Mulhalls continued in their tours, appearing at the Miller-Brothers' 101 Ranch. Will, for his part, went to the Orange Horse Fair in New Jersey where he gave an exhibition of fancy rope throwing and acrobatic riding with his pony, Teddy. Then he left the Wild West Show behind. His new popularity made him decide to stay in New York. Although he did not have a job, he was determined to break into high-level vaudeville on the New York City stage.



1.8.2. Vaudeville

Vaudeville was the most popular form of mass entertainment in America from the early 1880s until the early 1930s. This type of theater consisted of different acts following each other onstage. These series of performances were separated and unrelated but grouped together on a common bill. These acts included popular and classical musicians, dancers, comedians, trained animals, magicians, impersonators, acrobats, minstrels, and movies. While singers and dancers were part of every bill, the specialty acts that set vaudeville apart were: mind readers, instrumentalists, escape artists, high divers, flash acts, quick-change artists, strong men, living statuary, contortionists, balancing acts, and freak acts, among others. For instance, an evening's program might feature a singer followed by a tap dancer, then a trapeze artist, a magician, a banjo player, and a comedian. From 1880 to 1820, vaudeville acts played at theaters in big cities and small towns across the United States for a few days or several months at a time.

1.8.2.1. Keith's Union Square Theater.

William spent a couple of months practicing his act and trying to convince theater owners to hire him. But managers did not believe that an act with a steer on the stage was possible. However, Will continued hanging around and kept trying to get on. Finally, in June, one of the booking men of Keith's Union Square put William in one of their supper shows. Managers did not really want William on the stage, but they just gave him one show for a week to get rid of him. The contract was to start on June 12th and finish on June 17th at \$75.

Keith's Union square Theater was a big New York vaudeville theater in those days. The supper shows were big acts that did two shows a day; and the little shows or extra acts were played at dinner time when the theater had very small audiences. William and his friend Buck McKee signed for the "Extra Act." Buck McKee was the cowboy that worked with William in a vaudeville set and rode the little pony, Teddy. Because it was a trial show, everybody thought they were



going to fail. But to the surprise of the audience and the disgust of the manager, they did pretty well and the crowd loved it. From that event onward, his reputation quickly spread. On the second day of his show, Will was offered a job for two weeks at \$140 per week to perform for Keith's Amusement Enterprises in Boston and Philadelphia. From June 26th to July 1st, he entertained at Keith's Theatre in Philadelphia; and from the 3rd to the 9th of July, he performed at Keith's New Theatre in Boston. Meanwhile he continued to receive other offers to work in new theaters.

1.8.2.2. Hammerstein's Theatre.

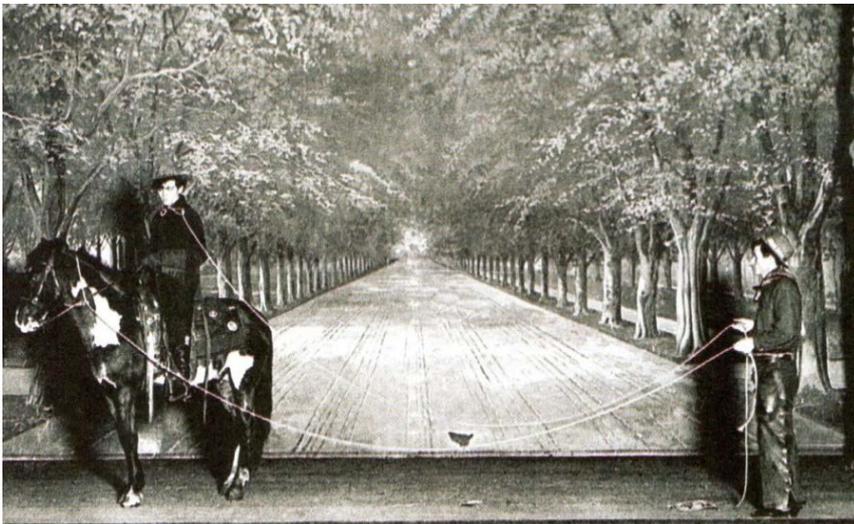
His popularity drew the attention *Oscar Hammerstein's Victoria Theatre*. Hammerstein's Victoria Theatre was considered the greatest Vaudeville theatre of all times. They held matinees downstairs and night-time performances on the roof garden. Will was contracted for a week at \$125 to start on June 19 and performed through June 25. William's successes made him worthy of a contract for five more months. He played matinees at Hammerstein's, and in the evenings, he appeared upstairs at the theater's Paradise Roof Garden. He worked on the roof for the whole summer and part of the fall.

By then, Will only had a roping act. He had never thought about talking on the stage while he was performing his show. During the first week he had to play a trick that consisted on a throw with two ropes at once to catch the horse and rider simultaneously. One of the actors advised Will to announce his throws because the audience did not know what he was going to do. He had not practiced any speech beforehand, but he addressed the public saying, "Ladies and gentleman, I want to call your attention to this next little stunt I am going to pull on you, as I am going to throw about two o' these ropes at once, catching the horse with one and the rider with the other. I don't have any idea I'll get it, but here it goes." (Day, 32) People laughed and William got really mad because he thought he did not say anything to laugh at. He did not like it at all, so he told the manager that he was done for that day, but the other actors and manager



kept telling him to do it the same way again in the following show that was to be opened in a short while. So this is how he started speaking on stage to explain what his stunt was about and to make little gags on it. His first gag came out when he tangled his rope up. Then he said; "A rope ain't bad to get tangled up in if it ain't around your neck." (Day, 32) It was a hit. From then on, Will began to miss his throws on purpose to make fun of himself. Soon, he began to prepare funny remarks for when he messed up, and people often howled with laughter. He even wrote down his favorite lines to use them when he failed to catch his horse. Of course, William credited his friends for this achievement because they drove him to include his voice and gags in his shows. Making fun of himself on stage would become Roger's trademark for the rest of his career.

Picture # 17



Will Rogers roping
Buck McKee and
his pony at the
same time.

(Donovan, Sandy)

1.8.2.3. New York and Europe Vaudeville Theaters

While Will was working at the Paradise Roof Garden Theater, he signed several long-term contracts with the most famous vaudeville theaters of New York, and he was regularly touring throughout the United States and Europe. He worked in two or more theaters at a time; or once he finished in one vaudeville theatre, he immediately started in another. Most of his performances were for one or



two weeks in each place; however sometimes he lasted the whole circuit in one place but had other engagements with more theatres in the meantime. For instance from August 14 to August 21, Will appeared at Patsy Morrison's Theatre at Rockaway Beach, Long Island, New York. Then from August 21 to August 27, he performed at William's Manhattan Beach Theatre in New York City. In summary, Will Rogers worked in more than one hundred theatres from 1904 to 1908.

In the spring of 1906, Keith's Theatre contracted Will Rogers for sixteen weeks to go on a circuit to Europe. In April, he played at the Winter Garden in Berlin. In May, Will performed at the Palace Theatre in London. In June, he returned to the United States and continued to work in new circuits throughout the United States. In 1907, Rogers traveled to England again. From April to June, he played his old act with the horse in three different theatres in London. Once he returned to New York, he stayed there working as usual in the old vaudeville shows until he got married.

1.9. MARRIAGE

1.9.1. Betty Blake

Betty Blake was born on September 9, 1879 at Silver Springs, Arkansas. Her father, James Wyeth Blake died when she was three. Her mother, Amelia Crowder Blake moved the family to Rogers, Arkansas after her husband's death. Betty's widowed mother supported the large family through dressmaking. Although Betty grew up in a happy home, their economic condition was tough which meant that all the family had to work. Betty was a good student but she had to postpone her studies at the local music academy to start working. She was a clerk in a mercantile store; also, she was a typist at the Rogers Democrat newspaper, and she was a railroad telegrapher too. Betty was talented in music, played several instruments and was a popular actress in the local theater.



It was in the fall of 1899 when Will Rogers and Betty Blake met at the train station of Oologah. Betty was stricken by typhoid fever and to regain her health, she went to Oologah to visit her sister Cora and her husband, Will Marshall, who was the depot station agent in the town. One night, the 20-year-old cowboy went to the station to get a package addressed to him with a banjo he had ordered. There he saw Betty, but he was too shy to talk to her and left immediately. As soon as he saw the slender, soft voiced, light complexioned, 20-year-old girl, he was captivated with the young beautiful Betty.

The following night Betty was invited for dinner with Mrs. Ellis, the manager of the local hotel. Among the guests was Will Rogers. He remained very still and quite during the supper, but when they gathered in the living room to sing, he lost his shyness and began to sing with his high tenor voice. Betty was impressed and charmed because he sang the latest and most popular songs of the time --“coo songs”-- he had brought to the city. From then forward, the two youths frequently spent time together at social gatherings, sharing their mutual interest in popular music and singing. They gathered almost every night to have fun with friends. Betty would play the piano while Willie and other friends sang.

By December 1899, Betty had recovered and was in excellent health, so she went back to Arkansas before Christmas. Will was infatuated with Betty from their first meeting. For William it was love at first sight, but for Betty it was the beginning of a long-lasting friendship. Shortly after she returned home, William began writing her letters. On the 5th of January 1900, Betty received the first letter from William in which he expressed his sincere desire to write her a few lines; but Betty did not answer him. Then in mid-March 1900, Will wrote:

My dear Betty,

Now for me to attempt to express my delight for your sweet letter would be utterly impossible so will you just put it mildly and say I was very much pleased. I was also surprised for I thought you had forgotten your [Cowboy] (for I am yours as far as I am concerned) [...] I ought not to have got so broken up over you but I could not help it so if you do not



see fit to answer this please do not say a word about it to any one for the sake of a broken hearted Cherokee Cowboy...

I am yours with love

Will Rogers.

(Donovan, 31)

After that letter, they wrote each other for a few months and met twice. Then in 1902 Will traveled abroad and they lost contact until the fall of 1904 when they met at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Betty had come to St. Louis to see the Fair with her sister Virginia and another girlfriend. While they were walking through the hall of the fair, Betty overheard a young woman saying that she had seen Will Rogers performing with the Cummins Wild West show. Betty sent William a note, and Will replied and invited her to come to see his show that night. Betty came to see his performance, but she got embarrassed when Rogers appeared onstage wearing his garish outfit. It was a tight-fitting red velvet suit he had brought from Australia and that he had worn that night in St. Louis especially to impress Betty Blake. She later said: "He looked so funny, and I was embarrassed when my sister and my girlfriend gave me sidelong glances and smiled at the costume, that I didn't hear the applause or find much joy in Will's expertness with the rope." (Donovan, 41)

After he got off work, they had dinner and enjoyed the exhibitions of the fair. Since then, Betty and Will began to correspond again. Letters came and went frequently while he was traveling around the United States on his many vaudeville engagements. Will was so impressed by Betty that he wrote a letter to her saying: "I just could love a girl about your caliber, see. You know I was always kinder headstrong about you anyway. But I always thought that a cowboy didnt come up to your Ideal." (Donovan, 42)

Will and Betty continued to write to each other over the next years. Their relationship was kind of weird because Betty considered Will as her best friend and even as a brother; despite she knew Will was in love with her since the



beginning. There is not any trace of letters from Betty to Will, so it is not clear what kind of friendship they had. According to Sandy Donovan, Betty and William just had a friendship and suddenly they married. According to Frank Wertheim and Barbara Bair, they had an on-again-off-again love relationship. But according to William's letters they were good friends from the day they met until the summer of 1905. During that time they corresponded regularly but saw each other only occasionally. In one of William's letters to Betty, he is very clear on how Betty saw him. In the following letter to Betty, William wrote:

My dear old pal:

Say you are the extremity; you are one kid that puts me on the guess list for fair. It's me to the dopey gang when I unfold one of your packages, you can make me feel better and worse than anyone I know. Look here Betty don't think I am kidding you on the level you are my best old pal and I like you for it and again I hate you for not allowing me to be more. You always kept me at a distance. Alright you know Bettie that's why I didn't write you after the Nowata affair. I just sized you up that night and I thought No she don't give a damn only to be a good old pal and honest it hurt me and I said I won't even write her for your letters are no encouragement to me. I wish that I could look at it as you do but I can't. I know you might laugh and say old Bill is just handing out this line as he always does but it ain't so I swear. You know I have had some experience and have been some to the flirt talk with lots of them but this has been maturing for years. I got to love someone and it don't take me many guesses to tell who it is. What would be my object in telling you all this and you there and me here if it wasn't so and so whatever you do believe me even if you won't do anything else. I know you will say this is a foolish letter and that you don't like me in this new role but that's why I am taking chances on losing a friend simply because you got to know some time. Here is a couple of clippings from a swell horse show I worked at in the swell suburb of N.Y. I have worked on the stage using my horse and I open June 12 at the swellest vaudeville house in N.Y. I



think I can make good, I am on a fair road to success in my line, I am having a swell time. I am acquainted with some pretty big men here and stand pat with them. But there is a little lacking some old place. See if you can't offer remedy for it in the way of honestly good encouragement, only truthfully tell me that you could some time learn to love me just a little and I bet there will be a cowboy doing 100% better act and feeling fine. Now Sister Betty I am as honest in this and if you don't like me a little bit Bettie don't even write to me for it would make me all the worse. But I hope you will be able to write this Nutty foolish Cowboy you will then get pictures in bunches.

Yours Bill

(Wertheim, Bair, 2000: 142-143)

This letter dates June 3, 1905 and was written when Will got a week contract at the Union's Square Theater. A few months after that letter Betty and Will began dating. They could not see each other frequently because William had too many commitments and he had to perform three or four shows a day. Although there was physical distance between them, they never stopped corresponding. On August 10, 1905, Will sent another letter to Betty expressing that he was anxious to see her soon, but that he had got a new contract and that he was going to Rogers, Arkansas, by October to see her. In that letter, William treated her like a lover and not like a friend as he used to do it in the previous letters.

Will loved to have lots of friends, but he felt it was time to settle down. His career was getting to the top, but he had another long-term goal – getting Betty Blake to marry him. He was firm on his purpose to marry Betty. He tried everything to convince her; he wrote long letters to her saying how much she meant for him. But around the summer of 1906, Betty turned down Will's marriage proposals by saying she did not like the show business lifestyle. Then a year later, she refused him again with the excuse that she did not want to be a vaudeville wife who had to be traveling around the country and even abroad with him. Besides, she had serious doubts because William's popularity



attracted the attention of other girls. Moreover, she viewed performing in vaudeville as an unstable job. Perhaps that was the main reason she did not want any commitment to William.

In the fall of 1908, William's life changed because Betty finally committed to marry him. Later Betty said that she was in love with William, but she did not want him to work in vaudeville; yet she accepted to marry him because he had promised her that they would settle down in Oklahoma after a final tour. Actually, Will was seriously considering the idea of ending his vaudeville career and returning to Oologah to run a ranch and work as a farmer. William was almost thirty years old, and he considered that vaudeville was a good business that would enable him to live comfortably; but he did not enjoy being on the road at different cities every week.

Picture # 18



Photograph of Betty Blake's engagement in 1908.

(Wertheim, Bair)



William had always loved Betty from the moment he met her at the Oologah train station. Once he said to his sister Sallie that Betty was the only real girl he ever saw. A few days before the wedding he wrote to Betty, "Oh, Betty I am so happy and so glad; you are just the grandest girl in the world. Oh I love you with all my heart." Both families were happy with the wedding. The Rogers family felt relief because William was finally marrying someone who they all knew, from a family of good reputation. Betty was the ideal woman for Will because she was opposite to the girls William used to date in vaudeville. Betty was a woman who would live a very private life centered on husband and family. The wedding took place on November 25, 1908, in Betty Blake's mother's home. The ceremony was performed by a family friend who was pastor of the local church. It was a simple and private ceremony among family members only.

After the wedding, the newlyweds spent their honeymoon in New York. Will's wedding present was to take his wife to see Caruso's – a tenor opera singer – concert and the Grant's Tomb⁶. They stayed in New York just for a few weeks while Will worked. They were living in the Albany Hotel just across from the theater where William was playing his act. Then they began traveling throughout the country as Will performed in vaudeville shows in the Orpheum circuit. Will took his wife everywhere because he wanted her to know the show-business life. Betty was not used to this kind of life, going to different parties, meeting new people, and moving around all the time. She was used to her small town in Arkansas, and she wanted a simple life on a ranch, but after her first taste of show-business life, she soon began to enjoy this lifestyle. At the beginning she was reluctant to live this way because she considered show-business an unstable occupation that might not provide security and stability to a family. But she found herself charmed by the big city and the lifestyle that vaudeville gave. After a short time in New York and a few weeks on the road,

⁶ Grant's Tomb, designated as the General Grant National Memorial is a mausoleum containing the bodies of Ulysses S. Grant -- American Civil War General of the Union Army and 18th president of the United States -- and his wife, Julia Dent Grant. This marble monument stands in Manhattan in N. Y. City.



she became accustomed to the different rhythm of her husband's employment. She liked the advantages of not having a fixed schedule which allowed them to go for a walk in the park, visit museums, and do different activities together. She wrote to her family to tell them that she enjoyed her new life meeting new people and new cities, and that she was having such a good time with his husband that she would not like to change anything. Then they left New York to go on the western Orpheum Circuit, the main vaudeville chain that operated in Chicago.

In addition to William's vaudeville career, he began to negotiate with his father to buy more land with good pastures and with water resources for a workable farm. He also gave his wife one of his rental houses he owned in Claremore in order to enable her to have her own income from the rent and to have something she could look forward to. Betty and Will traveled together for the first months of the circuit while he fulfilled his bookings.

After less than a year and after seeing much of the country, the idea of settling down on a farm seemed distant to Betty. Also, her thought about stability was not as important as it had been before. Once the Orpheum Circuit was successfully completed, on July 1909, they went directly to New York and rented their first apartment and settled down there. In October 1911, the couple had their first child, William Vann Rogers. Betty had to stay at home in New York City while William continued to travel around the country performing.

The marriage seemed to be ideal since Betty was not only William's wife and the mother of his children, but his advisor, his critic, and his support. William had said that he needed someone to love, someone who gave stability to his life, and someone who was there when he needed her. William found all these virtues in Betty. On their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, William said, "When I roped Betty, I did the star performance of my life." (Sterling, 1979: 9)

William's relationship with his wife proved to be long-lasting and solid. They supported each other during the early years on the road and during



separations, as well as the birth and nurturing of their children. The success of their marriage was the result of the strong confidence, dedication, and loyalty they shared.

Picture # 19



Betty and Will
during a tour in
Europe in 1929.

(Rogers, Betty)

Picture # 20



Left to right: Jim,
Bill, Mary, Will,
and Betty.

(Donovan, Sandy)



1.10. THE PEAK OF HIS POPULARITY

1.10.1. Broadway

After years performing roping tricks onstage with a cowboy and a horse, Will felt it was time to change his act and play it alone. Audiences seemed to enjoy his humor more than his lariat skills. Besides, he had a family to support and he needed the extra money. So, William decided to get rid of his horse and its rider. Then he began adding new gimmicks to his acts. He started roping with one hand while doing something else with the other. He also threw ropes while riding a unicycle. He even began singing in his presentations. Shortly after, he received an offer to appear in a musical show on Broadway, performing his act during a scenery change. His first performance on Broadway was in 1912 when he opened *The Wall Street Girl*. He played his show for a year. After it closed, Will went back to vaudeville.

Roger's career opportunities grew and his family too. In 1913, Betty and Will had their second child, Mary Amelia, named after her two grandmothers. The following year, William and Betty traveled to Europe to fulfill an engagement at the Empire Theatre London, which paid Will \$400 per week. During their stay in London, Will became aware of the political situation in Europe. Despite affirmations from their friends that there would be no war, Will felt uneasy. Thus, he left the show and bought tickets to return to the United States. Before they reached home, war had been declared in Europe.

Again Rogers returned to Vaudeville. Although he felt his vaudeville career had reached its peak, this time, he felt discouraged because his career had come to a halt since he did not see how he could make any progress in it. He considered the idea of returning to Oklahoma and running a ranch, but Fred Stone -- Broadway famous star and one of Will's closest friends -- convinced him to stay. The family rented a house in Amityville, Long Island across from Fred's home. Here, James Rogers, Will's and Betty's third child was born in the summer of 1915. Here, too, William suffered an accident that could have



ended his career. One morning William, his family, and some friends went to the beach. Not realizing the tide was out; Will dived into the water and hit his head on a rock. He was dragged from the ocean semiconscious. Due to the accident, Will's right arm was paralyzed. Then William had to develop his skills with his left arm. Completely determined, he practice every single day his entire act with his other hand. When he regained the full use of his right arm, he was completely ambidextrous and could perform his rope tricks easily with both arms. Once again, Broadway wanted him. He appeared in two short-lived shows: *Hands Up* and *Town Topics*. Rogers did a great role, and he received good personal compliments; but the musicals did not have good reception. Again, William returned to vaudeville, despite not wanting to, but he felt the pressure to provide for his growing family.

1.10.2. Ziegfeld Midnight Frolic and The Follies

Picture # 21

Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. (1867 - 1932)



(Havel's House of History)

Picture # 22

Will Rogers Ann Pennington
(Follies 1918)



(Donovan, Sandy)



After ten years of hard work in the theatrical business, traveling on the road, building and earning a well-deserved reputation as a solid and popular performer, William had arrived at a transforming moment of his professional life. In the summer of 1915, Gene Buck, the assistant of the famous Broadway impresario Florenz Ziegfeld -- one of the country's biggest theater producers known as the "glorifier of the American girl" -- and Dave Stamper (the chief writer for Ziegfeld's Broadway production) signed Will to appear in a daily show called the Midnight Frolic. Gene Buck had seen William's performance in *Hands Up*. Thus Buck thought that William would bring a new kind of humor for the Ziegfeld's corporation, and he persuaded Ziegfeld to give Will a chance. Ziegfeld had two productions: the Follies, in the New Amsterdam Theatre, and the Midnight Frolic, upstairs on the theatre roof, which had been transformed into an ultrafashionable nightclub. The Follies were a regular revue, while the Frolic was an extravagant variety show that took place at midnight. It was the most lavish nightclub production ever attempted.

On August 23, 1915, William made his debut at the Midnight Frolic, performing his rope tricks and entertaining the audience with his humorous witticisms. Rogers became immediately popular. William started earning \$175 per week. His salary was less than what he earned in the vaudeville circuit, but it was worth it because Will was more exposed to influential people. Soon after, his salary was raised to \$250 a week. Only by then, Will had the opportunity to buy his first car, an Overland. He said that he drove it out on Long Island every night about two thirty in the morning until one night the cops arrested him because the car made such a noise that it was like an alarm clock at three A.M.; so he had to leave it at home.

Each night, people with lots of money attended the Frolic show. William's humble attitude helped him to gain the sympathy of the sophisticated New Yorkers. They had great musical numbers written specially for the show with 40 to 50 beautiful girls in it. About every four months, they had to put on a new



show, costumes and everything. In the case of performers, they could not use the same jokes to amuse the spectators. In Vaudeville, Will's acts consisted generally of the same gags every night. A performer could perfect one act and play it again and again, without a single change, all along the circuit because the audiences changed nightly. But the Midnight Frolic audiences had many repeaters, and new material was essential every night. Betty Blake came out with the solution. One day, taking into account that William liked to read the papers all the time, she suggested to him to use the daily news for his comedy. So William started to read the papers for hours each day to find something that may be interesting to make fun of it. He never thought that it would be very easy to make people laugh with this kind of stuff. William never altered the news; he always tried to keep the truth, and he never needed to use "hell," or "damn" to get a laugh. He enjoyed when he got great laughs, but he liked more when his gags made people reflect about it. He said, "Personally, I don't like the jokes that get the biggest laughs...and require no thought at all. I like one where, if you are with a friend, and hear it, it makes you think, and you nudge your friend and say; 'He is right about that.'" (Day, 39)

Rogers' humor about current events was so successful that he became a main attraction in the Frolic. In January, 1916, Florenz Ziegfeld asked William to act in the daily Follies as well as the Frolic, starting at once. Will did not hesitate and accepted. The Follies appeared in the theaters throughout the United States and Canada. This show was famous for having beautiful dancers who performed in stunning outfits. Between dance acts, comedians filled the time, while the dancers got ready. Soon, Will became so popular that more and more people attended the Follies for his comedy. Acclaimed by the critics, Will Rogers became Ziegfeld's greatest star. His words were repeated by those who heard them, and even prominent people like presidents and governors quoted him. Will Rogers became an important voice. People valued his simple humor. He made fun of himself and life's daily events. William soon earned a good income of \$600 a week which was enough to support his family of five



members. Now he was more prosperous than ever, both financially and professionally. He grew from being a New York celebrity to a national star during the first years in the Midnight Frolic and the Follies. However, he spent much of the year away from home because he had to travel all over the country.

During the four years that William worked with the Ziegfeld organization: The Midnight Frolic and the Follies, he worked very hard to enrich and time his gags for best effect. He expanded and refined the pieces he had used in his vaudeville routines. He never repeated the same act. Sometimes he had to change parts of it in the Frolics and other times he had to change to a whole new act. His act was the shortest monologue. In the Amsterdam Roof, his performance never lasted more than six minutes; and in the Follies he played nine or ten minutes.

Will's favorite topics for his act were politicians and political affairs, and anything that he could find interesting in the newspaper. Also, he joked about public figures, people in the audience and his fellow performers. Gradually his typical rope and chewing gum became mere diversions on stage while he let out a gag or a thought. His jokes could be daring, but they never meant malice. The Follies and the Midnight Frolic drew some of the most prominent people in New York City. William always introduced them during a performance by poking gentle fun at them which was characteristic of him. If the morning's newspapers headlines mentioned them, it was for sure that they were going to be William's target that night. No one, no matter how well-known, no matter how powerful, could escape Roger's wit. He even became friends with some politicians. A typical joke about government was the following: "People often ask me, "Will where do you get your jokes?" I just tell 'em, Well, I watch the government and report the facts, that is all I do, and I don't even find it necessary to exaggerate." (Donovan, 55)



CHAPTER II

2. ACTOR AND SOCIAL OCUPATIONS

2.1. HOLLYWOOD IN THE TWENTIES

The 1920s was a decade of much change in the United States. It was referred as the Roaring Twenties since it was a time of economic prosperity. New technology introduced the telephone, the radio, and the car. Some events such as, The Prohibition of alcohol, The Immigration Act, The Importance of Baseball, The Origin of Jazz, The Lost Generation, The Growth and General Acceptance of the Ku Klux Klan, The Scopes Trial, The Teapot Dome Scandal, among other events took place. It was also a period of great social change. Most American women began demanding equal treatment, such as voting rights and equal pay.

1920-1930 was the age between the end of the Great War and the beginning of the Great Depression, following the Stock Market Crash. Film theaters and studios were not initially affected by the Crash in late 1929. The basic patterns and foundations of the film industry and its economic organization were established in the 1920s. In the early 1920s, America was the leading producer of films in the world. Production was in the hands of the major studios that really succeeded after 1927 for almost 20 years. During this period, films bloomed, expanding early film foundations. At the start of the decade, most film production took place in Hollywood; while just a few films were still being made in New Jersey and in Long Island (Paramount). By the mid-20s, movies were big business with a capital investment totaling over \$2 billion. By the end of the decade, there were 20 Hollywood studios, and the demand for films was greater than ever. Throughout most of the decade, silent films were the predominant product of the film industry. As the films were becoming longer, more expensive, and more polished, their production was broken down and organized into writing, costuming, makeup, and directing.



Originally there were eight major and minor studios that dominated the industry. They had consolidated and integrated all aspects of a film's development. By 1929, five major film-making firms often dubbed *The Big Five* turned out to be the ones that ruled and monopolized Hollywood for the next-half century. They produced more than 90 percent of the fiction films in America and distributed their films both nationally and internationally. They were: *Warner Bros. Pictures*, incorporated in 1923 by Polish brothers (Jack, Harry, Albert, and Sam); *Famous Players-Lasky Corporation* (1916) became *Paramount studios* in 1927, and was officially named *Paramount Pictures* in 1935; *The Mutual Film Corporation* (1912) changed to *RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) Pictures* that was established in 1928; *MGM (Metro-Goldwyn Mayer)* was formed in 1924 from the merger of three US film production companies: *Metro Pictures Corporation* (1916), *Goldwyn Pictures Corporation* (1917), and the *Louis B. Mayer Pictures Company* (1918); *Fox Film Corporation/Foundation*, founded in 1912 by William Fox which later became *20th-Century Fox*, formed through the merger with *20th Century Pictures Company* in 1935.

2.2. THE PERFORMER ON HOLLYWOOD

2.2.1. Silent Movies

2.2.1.1. Goldwyn Pictures Corporation

By 1918, William continued working at the Follies. Although, Will spent much of his time away from home traveling with his work team, he got some free time to share with his family. During his free time, Will taught his kids how to ride and rope a horse. He also taught them his display of tricks with a lariat. That year, he and Betty were expecting their fourth child, Fred, who was born on July 15th.

In those days, there was a kind of entertainment that was considered the most adventurous than any other: silent movies. In the summer of 1918, William, along with other moving-picture actors, was invited to join this business. Samuel Goldwyn, owner of the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation Studio in New



Jersey, sought and recruited William to work with him. Edith Crater Beach -- the sister of Allene Crater, who was the wife of William's dearest friend, Fred Stone -- had suggested Goldwyn to look for William Rogers at the Midnight Frolic and to watch his show because she thought he would fit perfectly the lead character in the movie *Laughing Bill Hyde*. So, after Goldwyn caught Rogers' act at the Midnight Frolic, he was convinced that Rogers was the man who would fit the role. Thus, Goldwyn offered William the heading role in the movie, which was Will's first motion picture. They started filming on August and the movie was released on September 30. When William saw the finished film, he was shocked and disappointed. Then he said, "I am the world's worst actor!" Despite of that and to Will's surprise, Goldwyn offered him a two-year contract with a salary that tripled the Broadway salary. But there was a stipulation: William would have to move to California. After Rogers made his motion picture debut, his schedule was full. He spent his day-time between performing in the Follies and filming in New Jersey. He worked in the Follies at the New Amsterdam until they closed on September 14, but he continued to perform nightly in the Midnight Folic.

William continued to work in Broadway and Ziegfeld until he finally moved to California in May 1919. The rest of the family followed in June bringing everything they had in Long Island including the ponies. Will's \$2,250 weekly income allowed him to rent a large house on Van Ness Avenue which became their permanent home. Although the house was huge; there wasn't enough room in the yard to ride their horses. So the movie studio built a stable in the studio lot, which was surrounded by plenty of open land for riding.

By 1920, William was at the top of his career; he renewed his contract with the Goldwyn studio for one more year at \$ 3,000 a week. But then tragedy struck their lives. During a nationwide diphtheria epidemic the three boys became sick. Roger's youngest son, Fred, could not be saved and died on July 1920, just before his second birthday. This sad event devastated Will and Betty, but as



Will was very inward, he never talked about it. His other children later said that he grieved over the loss of his little boy for many years, but he threw himself into his work and refused to show his innermost sorrow publicly.

During the two years of his association with Goldwyn Pictures, William had already made a dozen movies. Even though he came to be known as one of the country's greatest comedian actors, his first films were not only comedies. He was making dramatic films as well, like *Almost a Husband*, which was one of his first of these. In this movie, Rogers plays Sam Lymna who is a new England schoolteacher that arrives in a small Southern town. He helps many local people in need, including a young woman named Eva who is oppressed by the unwelcome romantic intentions from a local useless young man, Zeb Sawyer who plays the movie's bad guy role as well. In order to help Eva to get rid of Zeb, Sam pretends to marry the girl to fool the unwanted suitor, but then finds that the marriage was accidentally legal.

Unlike most silent film artists, Will Rogers never overacted. William's films contained simple plots that reflected good moral values. His acting style was as fresh and relaxed as his presentations with live audiences. These silent movies consisted of moving pictures, and the only way to add humor or anything else to them was with subtitles. These subtitles contained dialogues or funny comments about what was happening in the movie. Most of William's movies displayed his roping talents. Many of them had very similar plots, and Will usually played the role of the good guy. For instance, in *Almost a Husband*, Sam is secretly in love with Eva, the banker's daughter. One night at a party, Sam plays a game in which he has to act out the part of the groom in a mock wedding. In accordance with the games rules, the wedding must be performed by the next man who enters the party. But when the next man to enter the house turns out to be a real minister, the pretended vows become official and Sam and Eve are legally married. Zeb, not pleased with the result, tries everything to break up the couple, but at the end Sam convinces Eva to honor



the marriage. Sam's good-guy character remains true to himself and wins the girl. This type of plot was repeated in several more of Rogers' films.

In *Jubilo*, a novel written by Ben Ames Williams, Rogers plays the role of a tramp. Although he is lazy and unsuccessful, he is an honest person that manages doing odd jobs on a farm to survive while he looks for his wife who abandoned him when he was out in the war. Then he discovers that he has a daughter with his former wife who had run off with another man years before. Mr. Goldwyn had said he chose William to play the tramp character because of the way William used to dress in his street clothes which was very similar to the movie's lead character, Jubilo. The movie Jubilo was named after a well-known spiritual short story called "In the Days of Jubilo." William himself included a comment for the plot explaining it. "Jubilo means a song, and old-time Negro Camp Meeting song IN THE LAND OF JUBILO." (Day, 62)

When the director, Sam Goldwyn wanted to change the title of *Jubilo*, William sent him a telegram to express his surprise at the producer's decision and to convince him that it was the perfect title to suit the story. The telegram said: "Thought I was supposed to be a comedian but when you suggest changing the title of Jubilo you are funnier than I ever was." (Day, 61) In addition, to convince the director that how good this title was, he included 10 suggestions for new titles:

Graph # 1

- 1 A Poor but Honest Tramp
- 2 He Lies but He Don't Mean It
- 3 The Farmers Virtuous Daughter
- 4 The Great Train Robbery Mystery
- 5 A Spotted Horse but He is Only Painted
- 6 A Hungry Tramp's Revenge
- 7 The Vagabond with a Heart as Big as His Appetite



- 8 He Loses in the First Reel but Wins in the Last
- 9 The Old Man Left but the Tramp protected her
- 10 What Would You Have Called the Birth of a Nation?

In the end, the director kept the name *Jubilo* and the movie was a hit. *Jubilo* was the only story that Rogers played that was filmed exactly as it was written. Nothing was changed in this story.

In May 1921, William's contract with Sam Goldwyn expired. Then Will asked his boss to renew his contract and to raise his salary, but Goldwyn decided to let him go because the studio's finances were not doing well. Besides, Will was told that his movies were not being as successful as they expected. According to Goldwyn, Rogers' motion pictures were not giving the projected profits. Several had won awards and some had made special merit, but they were not the great financial successes Goldwyn had hoped they would be. Under his contract with Sam Goldwyn Will made the following moving pictures: *Laughing Bill Hyde*; *Almost a Husband*; *Water, Water Everywhere*; *Jubilo*; *The Strange Boarder*; *Jes' Call me Jim*; *Cupid, the Cowpuncher*; *Honest Hutch*; *Guile of Woman*; *Boys will be Boys*; *An Unwilling Hero*; *Doubling for Romeo*; and, *A Poor Relation*.

Then William chose to stay in Los Angeles, and he began to produce and star in his own films. He gathered his funds, hired a director and a small crew. He made three pictures: *Fruits of Faith*, *The Roping Fool*, and *One Day in 365*. William wrote *The Roping Fool* himself. It was the first movie produced by Will Rogers Productions. In this movie, Rogers plays Reilly, a man who spends entire days roping anything that moves. Incredible tricks are performed with such ease, proof of the many hours Will practiced every day throughout his life. The film was released two years after it was filmed, and it was a great showcase in which he showed all the rope tricks he knew. After one year, financial problems arose. William had spent about \$50,000, and the company



that was supposed to release his films said that it was necessary to film five more to distribute them. William did not want to lose any more money, so he closed Will Rogers Productions. Will was forced to mortgage the house, borrow against his insurance policies, and liquidate most of his assets.

After a long time of a successful career, William got broken; so he left his family in California and went back to New York to the vaudeville stage. He began to perform in some theaters in which he had performed several years earlier. He started on November, 1921, at Shubert's Winter Garden where got \$3,000 a week. Soon he signed a contract with the Midnight Frolic at the New Amsterdam Theater where he became the main attraction again. By 1922, he was back with the Follies in New York. Although, he was the highest-paid entertainer in the city, his income was not enough to pay off his debts and to support his family. Then, with the help of an agent, he went into public speaking. Businesses and other large gatherings were always looking for speakers to highlight dinner engagements. Soon he became a novelty. He was one of the most sought after public speakers at formal dinners, Democratic conventions, and other forms of gatherings. Many evenings, he would give a speech at some meeting and then run to the New Amsterdam to perform in the Follies or the Midnight Frolic. Back in Hollywood, two of Will Rogers Production films were finally released. Between his salary from the Follies, his speaking engagements, and his share from the film profits, William was able to pay his debts. Two of his famous speeches are: *Speech to International Bankers Association New York, 1922*, and *Settling the Corset Problem of this Country*. In the first speech he joked about the bankers. For instance he said:

[...] I see where your Convention was opened by a Prayer, and you had to send outside your ranks to get somebody that could pray. You should have had one Creditor there; he would have shown you how to pray. I noticed in the prayer, the Clergyman announced to the Almighty that the Bankers were here. Well, it wasn't exactly an announcement; it was



more in the nature of a warning. He didn't tell the Devil, he figured he knew where you all were all the time. (Day, 70)

By this time, Will was busier than ever. In addition to his appearance on Broadway, Will started on two new phases of his career. He was in demand as an after-dinner speaker, and he began to write weekly articles. Rogers' weekly hours were filled to capacity. He appeared nightly in the Follies, he wrote weekly articles, read lots of newspapers, practiced roping for hours, played to audiences all over the country, entertained people at formal meetings, and filmed movies. His habits were uncomplicated. He never slept more than five hours. He took short naps during the day whenever he had the opportunity and within a few minutes he was totally refreshed.

In 1923, Will returned to California and signed a contract with Hal Roach for a year to star in a dozen two-reel comedies. He starred in the following films: *Jus' Passin' Through*; *Hustlin' Hank*; *Gee Whiz Genevieve*; *Two Wagons, Both Covered*; *The Cowboy Sheik*; *The Cake Eater*; *Big Moments Form Little Pictures*; *Highbrow Stuff*; *Going to Congress*; *No Parking There*; *Our Congressman*; and, *A Truthful Liar*. He did not want to continue working with Hal Roach because he was not enjoying this part of his life. The films were still silent and the comedies were reduced to slapstick and stupid gags. William could not remember the number of times he lost his pants while being chased. This was not what he wanted to do. So he left the family again in California and went back to New York.

2.3. THE JOURNALIST

From 1922 to his death in 1935, Will Rogers wrote a daily column. In December 1922, he wrote the first of 667 weekly articles. Between 1925 and 1927 he wrote 551 columns called "*The Worst Story I've Heard Today*"; and beginning in 1926 until 1935 he also wrote 2,861 daily satires, now called "*The Daily*



Telegrams.” Also, Will wrote syndicated articles covering Democratic and Republican national conventions, and he feature articles for the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, *The Theatre*, *New York American*, *New McClure*, *American*, and *Photoplay* magazines. He covered sixty-nine radio broadcasts. He also wrote the introduction of more than half a dozen books. It is estimated that his articles collect more than two million words.

During the same period, 1922 – 1935, Will created new material for the Ziegfeld Follies of 1922 and 1924 and for lectures for almost four hundred cities and towns across the United States, with original material specifically prepared for each community and/or situation.

2.3.1. THE WRITER: Syndicated Columnist

Picture # 23



William Rogers always carried a portable typewriter everywhere he went.

(Watson, Pamela)



William Rogers did not aspire to be a writer. It was his early ambition to be the best trick roper that led him to achieve this goal. In 1916, Will began to move professionally in new directions. In August 1916, he entered the world of writing when he wrote his first two newspaper articles about a large rodeo competition that was held in New York City by some of Rogers' friends from Oklahoma. The articles were published in the New York American – a morning newspaper. On April 1918, the New York American asked Rogers to write seven more articles. Five of them were published in local newspapers in Chicago and in Detroit. The same year, Will also wrote the article, "War of Washington," in which he told a bunch of funny situations that officers lived through the war. During these years, some of Rogers' topics in print were about baseball in Philadelphia, transit strikes in Detroit, crime in Chicago, upheaval in Rusia, and World War I. This crucial time, 1915 - 1918, was important to the United States because the nation was preparing to enter into the conflict. Therefore, the press was centered on the impact on American society. Also, Rogers' comments were primarily focused on the War in Europe.

Will's observations, philosophical views, and gentle criticisms were noted and quoted by his audiences and critics. He was very surprised when he found out that people wanted to remember the things he said. People liked to discuss his arguments and ponder the wisdom of his funny and salty quips. Thus, Will thought it was a good idea to compile all his gags into a book.

In 1919, before going to work at the Goldwyn' Studio, William entered serious print when Harper & Brothers published his two books: *The Cowboy Philosopher on The Peace Conference* and *The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibition*; both called Rogers-isms. In them he wrote the best jokes and gags that he had used in his act in the *Ziegfeld Follies* and the *Midnight Frolic* shows. *The Cowboy Philosopher on the Peace Conference* was published on May 1919 and compiled short humorous passages -- each about one paragraph long -- about the peace conference that was being held in Europe after the end



of World War I. *The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibition* was published in August 1919 and ridiculed the anti-booze law.

The same year, Will wrote his famous fourteen points over the moving picture business in *Wid's Yearbook* – a daily publication which was the main source of news on the film and television industries - published by the *Film Daily*. In 1920, Will wrote his suggestions on how to improve the Moving Picture Industry. In them, he advised the industry not to tell its audiences the cost of its pictures; not to hire a Press Agent but catch the attention of one; not to make thousands of poor pictures but a few good ones. He also suggested that the industry needed a sense of humor; audiences needed endurance; actors needed better doubles; etc.

William's success as a speaker in the following years called the attention of editors. They believed that any man who could hold an audience and entertain them as Will did would be a notable and very popular writer. In 1922, *The McNaught Syndicate* hired Will Rogers to write long Sunday columns to subscribing newspapers led by *The New York Times*. The articles were up to 1,500 words, about a wide variety of current events. Each newspaper had its own name for the column. *The McNaught Syndicate* advertised them as "Humorous Comments on Contemporary Affairs"; *The New York Times* called it "Slipping the Lariat Over"; *The Los Angeles Examiner* entitled it as "Roping the News"; and other newspapers wrote their own titles. At first, when *The McNaught Syndicate* asked William to write for them, he was reluctant to try anything at this medium because up to this time he had written only brief and sporadic humorous articles for various papers, and he felt he did not have enough experience in this area. Besides, he thought his writing was too simple and needed improvement. But when *The New York Times* offered him \$150 a week to write comments on the daily news, he accepted immediately.



On December 31, 1922, William began to write a series of weekly articles for the McNaught Syndicate. His first article was about the Ziegfeld Follies. He wrote of how much he enjoyed being in the Follies because it was here he had the chance to meet the most important people in the country. Will often met Governors, Presidents, Bankers, Senators, and other influential people at the stage door. From then onwards, Will's audience increased. Nearly everyone in the United States knew about William's life, and his popularity began to spread to other parts of the world. Suddenly, hundreds of thousands of people were reading his weekly columns.

Throughout the 1920s, Rogers was booked in concert halls, town halls, and school gyms in tours across the country to open a variety of events. Will became one of the richest men in the country, yet he kept the same humble personality and showed it to people when he expressed his care for other's worries and concerns. For his writings, Will used the same good-natured way and language that he had employed on stage. Will's topics focused on politics, values, families, and some celebrities. During the 1920s, Hollywood celebrities were known for their wild behavior. Although Rogers was friends with many movie stars, he often wrote about his disapproval of "Hollywood lifestyle." In order to prevent anyone from being offended, his comments were always mixed with humor, such as "Hollywood may not keep you young, but it sure keeps you marrying." (Donovan, 70) Once, William said that he only made fun of others if he was sure they could take his joking. He never said anything to hurt anybody's feelings because that was not his job. In fact, William was considered the cleanest star opposite to other actors that were known for their scandals. He was the only celebrity that ended with the same wife he started with. Rogers also criticized bankers. He disagreed on the way that banks loaned people money in the form of mortgages on their properties because the bank could take the property if the mortgage loan could not be repaid. Over this issue he said:



Borrowing money on what's called 'easy terms,' is a one-way ticket to the Poor House. Show me ten men that mortgage this land to get money and I will have to get a search warrant to find one that gets the land back again. If you think it ain't a Sucker Game, why is your Banker the richest man in your Town? Why is your Bank the biggest and finest building in your Town? (Donovan, 71)

From time to time, up to six hundred newspapers with more than forty million readers bought and published William's writings despite unfitting grammar, misspelling, and poor punctuation. He wrote as he talked, in an informal and careless but understandable manner, with no regard for grammar, syntax, or the formal rules of English. He used capital letters at random and countless commas; sometimes a period would be found where it was not supposed to be. He spelled words as they sounded to him, giving them an odd appearance. He made excessive use of such words as didnt, couldent, hadent, aint, 'em (for them), cuckoo, etc. People whispered that William was ignorant because he misspelled a few words, but they did not take into account that Will did it on purpose since he was a humorist and that this eccentricity only added humor to his pieces. When asked if he read his own stuff, he explained, "When I write 'em, I'm through with 'em. I'm not being paid reading wages. You can always see too many things you wish you hadent said, and not enough that you ought." (McSpadden, 23) The syndicate printed William's articles as he wrote them with no editing. A memo from the editor of the New York Times to his staff about Rogers' style admonished: "Please do not correct Will Rogers' English or spelling. His little pieces are unique because he makes his own English. When you 'improve' it you are taking away part of the personality he is selling to readers." (Carter, 2005: 34)

From January to December 1923, he wrote about his life, politics, and social problems that were happening at the time. President Warren Gamaliel Harding (1921-1923) was one of his favorite politicians he wrote about. For instance, on



June 3, Will wrote: “[...] you see the class of help a president gets in the Senate and Congress since immigration has been restricted, you can’t treat them with kindness. A Congressman or Senator is not used to kind treatment, even at home, so you have got to be rough with those Birds.” (Day, 80)

In 1924, William published *The Illiterate Digest*, a book that compiled the newspaper columns from 1922 to 1924 over a diversity of subjects. This hilarious collection of lectures, speeches and thoughts in form of satire, poking clean fun at politicians, nations, and everyday life infuriated the directors of *The Literary Digest* -- an influential, general interest weekly newsmagazine that placed emphasis on opinion articles and analysis of news events -- but Will calmed down the critic through humor. In September 1924, Will was engaged by the American Tobacco Company. His job was to write 26 advertisement pieces for Bull Durham, each with 150 words in length. Also, he had to permit the publication of an illustration of himself as a part of each advertisement as well as sign them. Will’s ads of the Bull Durham were unusual in the field of advertising, for instance, he began with the following:

I know you people might say, “Why is Will writing and endorsing ‘Bull Durham’?” Well, I am not endorsing it. I have never smoked a tobacco in my life, neither did Bull Durham. The reason why I signed up to write some pieces for these people is because I love animals. If you study the picture of Bull carefully, you will see how beautiful this animal is. So, after I thought that nobody who cares as much about dumb creatures as they do would put out anything but the best smoking tobacco possible. Then I decided I will write their stuff, and to be honest, the money has nothing to do with it; it isn’t much.

On May 15, 1925, Will began writing, “The Worst Story I’ve Heard Today,” and continued it until January 15, 1927. This was a daily article also released through the McNaught Syndicate. His first story was on the Prince of Wales,



who was visiting America at that time. As usual William wrote about political figures of the day, such as governors and mayors of different cities; actors of the theatrical and movie worlds; baseball players; Oscars, among others. In October, he went on his first lecture tour throughout America. Rogers' decision to tour America was something he always wanted to do. He had been invited to speak in almost every city and town, but his many occupations in California and New York had not allowed him to do it. At the conventions, he told people what no other speaker would have dared to speak to them, and the closer to the truth he came, the better they liked it. In the opening salutation to the National Bankers' Convention, Will called them "Loan Sharks and Interest Hounds." He called the advertising men "The Robbing Hoods of America," and when he spoke to the automobile dealers he named them "The Old-Time Horse-Trading Gyps with White Collars on."

In the spring of 1926, the editor of one of the most popular magazines in the United States, *The Saturday Evening Post*, offered Rogers a job to be a reporter from Europe. William pretended that he was really going as the "self-appointed unofficial ambassador," and that his articles were reports to President Coolidge. He was supposed to write weekly articles about life in Europe and send them to U.S. President Calvin Coolidge. William took his family to Europe and sent back his weekly reports to the magazine containing his realistic and humorous views about European life. Will reported these confidential findings in the *Saturday Evening Post* as "*Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President.*" The reports in the form of letters were incredibly popular in America, so much so that they were brought out and published in a book under the same title. These articles were his interviews with the leading figures of foreign countries and his visits to the tourist attractions and resorts. Along with his communications to the Post magazine, he started a new creative writing venture. On October 14, Rogers began writing a short daily telegram called "*Will Rogers Says*" which made him so well known. These brief emotional daily columns were focused on events that had taken place the day



before and contained about 100 or 200 words. Will sent his articles to the New York Times and they were handled by the McNaught Syndicate from wherever he was in Europe until he returned home in the fall. They appeared in over four hundred daily newspapers all across the country and were one of the first items read in America. On this trip, Will had a camera crew following him, filming his visits to various countries. He had the chance to talk with many of the greatest dignitaries of Europe. Also, he went to some meetings with the King of Spain, the Prince of Wales, and the dictator of Italy, Benito Mussolini. After covering England, Italy and Switzerland, William also traveled to Russia. There he had a short talk with Leon Trotsky, a Marxist revolutionary, Soviet politician, founder and first leader of the Red Army, head of the Fourth International, and above all, opponent of Joseph Stalin who was the Premier of the Soviet Union from May 1941 to March 1953. After Rogers met many public figures of Europe and Russia, he said that he wanted to see by himself the kind of humans they were and to meet them to see "their angle." While he was in Russia, he sent an article which read:

You can ask a Russian any question in the world, and if you give him long enough he will explain their angle, and it will sound plausible enough. Communism to me is one-third practice and two thirds-explanation...It is absolutely impossible for any Socialist to say anything in a few words. You say, "Is it light or dark?" and it takes him two volumes to say Yes or No...If the Communists worked as hard as they talked, they'd have the most prosperous style of government in the world [...] But these people is going somewhere and we better watch out while they are on their way! (Day, 132)

When Will finally returned to California in October 1926, after being in Europe for six months, a surprise awaited him. During his absence he had been elected Mayor of Beverly Hills. A large crowd had gathered to greet him at the station. Draping banners and handheld signs read, "Beverly Hills Welcomes Mayor Will



Rogers” and “We love our Mayor Will.” However, just a few weeks after his inauguration, Will was deposed as Mayor of Beverly Hills. The California Legislature had passed a law that ruled that Beverly Hills was obligated to make the president of the board of representatives its mayor. So William could not serve as its Mayor because he was not a member of any political association. Almost immediately, in October, Will was off on his second lecture tour to raise money for flood victims.

The following year, 1927, Rogers wrote the book, “*There’s Not a Bathing Suit in Russia & Other Bare Facts,*” which was a compilation of the facts he found interesting in Russia. In one of his columns it read, “While I didn’t see all of the country, ‘I got to see all of some Russians.’” (Carter, 2005: 36) During his national lecture tour, Will developed a stomachache and suffered slight pain attacks, but the first serious ache hit him when he was in West Virginia. Despite the severity of the attack, Will continued his tour until it closed. Once he arrived in California, he was very ill. After a complete examination, it was decided that William had to be operated on because he had a very severe case of gallstones. Will prepared his daily and weekly columns to cover the time he expected to be in the hospital. On June 16, from Beverly Hills, he wrote: “I am in the California Hospital, where they are going to relieve me of surplus gall, much to the politicians’ delight. I am thrilled to death. Never had an operation, so let the stones fall where they may.” (Day, 151) On June 17, Rogers was operated. After the operation William’s condition was far more serious than before, and for a while it was doubtful that he would survive. He was gravely ill until the twenty-first. After Will’s gall bladder surgery while he was recovering, he compiled about two thousand articles and wrote the book, “*Ether and Me or Just Relax.*” In this book, he described the experience of being ill and how he felt after the operation. “Just relax” were the instructions that a nurse gave William before the ether got into his system. That is why the book was called “Ether and Me or Just Relax.” Besides, Will had to relax after the operation because he had to stay in bed for about a month. But he made good use of that



time to write the book in order to “pay the doctor bills.” This was the last of six books Will published.

Moreover, in 1927, Will began to write other articles for the *Saturday Evening Post*, which he called “*More Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to his President.*” These letters were about his trip to Mexico and about the leading political figures of the day. The same year, Will also wrote some articles for the *American Magazine* and introductions to the two Charles Russell books, *Trails Plowed Under* and *Good Medicine*; C.R. Coopers’ *Annie Oakley* and *Woman at Arms*; Chester Byers’ *Roping*; and *Around the World in Eight Days* by Willie Post and Harold Gatty. He even wrote an introduction to a cook book that was bought for several ladies of Beverly Hills.

In May 1928, during the presidential campaign between Republican Herbert Hoover and Democrat Al Smith, *Life* magazine started an editorial campaign to run Will Rogers as the Anti-Bunk party candidate for president. Will accepted to be nominated as its prank candidate and went into this nonsense with the promise that if elected he would resign. Besides, in answer to the call, Will Rogers wrote a weekly column until the week before the election. These pieces were called the “Anti-Bunk-Party.” They were filled with jokes about the campaign, party conventions, and an analysis of the “Political Hooch.” This mock campaign was endorsed by many influential democrats such as Henry Ford, William Allen White, Charles Dana Gibson, Nicolas Murray Butler, among others. On November 2, 1928, Election Day, Hoover was declared President of the United States. Less than a year later, the stock market collapsed. Will foresaw the problem the country was going to face when he warned that the country was not as prosperous as the government assured.

In some books, there are selections of Rogers’ best articles that he wrote from December 1922 to August 1935. These books published the most relevant articles of each month. They were selected because their topics had an



amazing greeting by Americans during the crucial period from 1920 to 1935, a time in which the United States suffered a complete flip-flop in its economic, political and social issues.

William never found it difficult to get ideas to write his wires. He could write about anything for anybody at any time. His articles included politics and politicians, big business, government, the different nations he visited, the wealthy and the poor. However, politics was his favorite topic on stage, radio, in his daily columns and public appearances. Extensive travels, reading many newspapers and “associating with smarter people” provided his sources. Wherever he went, he carried a portable typewriter with him and pecked his pieces. He kept up his weekly articles and his daily telegrams to the end of his life. In all, he wrote over 2.800 daily articles and more than 660 weekly columns.

2.3.2. Radio Commentator

Picture # 24



Will Rogers and his famous alarm clock

(Fritz, Jose)



Will Rogers first started talking in 1922 when he was invited to a radio and he started saying that it was “hard to make this little microphone laugh.” (Carter, 2005: 40). Then he broke into airwaves in January 1928 when he first had to broadcast from California to the whole country in a national coast-to-coast hookup. With millions listening, Will announced he had a great surprise for his listeners. The next voice they heard seemed to be the voice of President Coolidge giving the most humorous speech to the Nation. But it was hard to believe that the president could say such things. After the broadcast, Will explained: “The idea that anyone could imagine that it was him saying this nonsense made me think that it would be an insult to anyone’s sense of humor to reveal that it was not him.” People were shocked for they did not know Will’s ability to imitate voices. Will frequently amused his friends and family with his imitations of important politicians and movie stars. Will sent a letter to the President right away explaining the incident to which the President answered that Will should not worry at all.

In the early thirties, radio was the exciting new medium which was beginning to become the biggest form of mass communication. Because of Will’s ability to reach large numbers of people, radio producers were eager to have William working with them, so they offered him a platform in radio broadcasts. In 1930, Rogers signed a contract with E.R. Squibb & Sons to do a coast-to-coast radio talks for fourteen Sundays. Each network program lasted fifteen minutes. At the end, Will received a salary of over seventy thousand dollars. In 1933, he was offered his own half-hour live show on Sunday evenings. The show was called *The Good Gulf Show*, sponsored by the Gulf Oil Company. Also called *The Gulf Headliners*, it was another success with millions of listeners across the country. It ranked among the top radio programs in America. Many people began skipping Sunday worship to stay at home and hear what Rogers had to say because they found that his little jokes and gags were more penetrating and more motivating than mass sermons. He usually opened his program saying, “*All I know is what I read in the papers.*” He was also popular for his famous



alarm clock and his chewing gum. Because he easily changed from one subject to another, he often lost track of the half-hour time limit the show had; so many times, he was cut off in middle-sentence. In order to fix it up, he brought an alarm clock to the studio, and its buzzing alerted him to finish his comments. By 1935, his show was announced as “Will Rogers and his famous Alarm Clock.”

On October 18, 1931, Will performed a broadcast speech with the title “Bacon, Beans, and Limousine.” The speech focused on the many problems that the country had been going through in those years. He addressed to President Hoover the following words:

[...] The only problem that confronts this country today is at least seven million people are out of work [...] It is your job to see that every man that wants to is able to work, is allowed to find a place to go to work, and also to arrange for way of getting a more equal distribution of the wealth in the country.” (Rogers, Will, *Bacon, Beans, and Limousine*: 1931)

Will added that it was not prohibition that was the main problem to focus on, but it was food because people were starving. To conclude his nationwide broadcast, William said: “There is as much money in the country as there ever was, but only fewer people have it.” He remarked that people were asking for help, not for charity and that the only thing they needed was a job. Then he appealed to the goodwill of the richest men to work for a different distribution of things.

Will’s wise remarks raised him to a level of influence beyond compare in the history of the United States. His ability to express his ideas, thoughts, and fears in the common language bound together large numbers of people who shared his common sense. Since he was not tied to any political organization, his opinions and reproaches were never in favor of or against anybody. He



never changed; neither did he ever abuse the truth. He considered himself as a loyal witness and officer of the country.

Early in 1933, Will signed with Gulf Oil to broadcast seven talks coast to coast. When he fulfilled his contract, he told reporters that he had decided to leave the radio. Most of the member of the United States Senate signed a petition asking William to reconsider his resolution. William was touched and returned to radio, again with Gulf Oil.

2.4. AMBASSADOR

Will Rogers' was not a formal ambassador of the United States, yet he was considered ambassador of Good Will for his many good actions for the Country and for people in need. He started to work in charity at age thirty-nine. In 1918, during his annual road tour with the Follies, Will made special appearances at charitable events on Sunday nights. The Great War that started in 1914 and involved America in 1917 had ended, and the soldiers who returned home were receiving assistance from the government that organized many charitable works to benefit them. Besides, William was one of the main individual contributors to the *Red Cross* and the *Salvation Army*.⁷ He always attended to any charitable act when invited. When disaster struck anywhere, Will would be there to help.

2.4.1. Ambassador of Good Will

After the trip to Europe as an unofficial ambassador to write a series of articles as a "Self-Made Diplomat to His President," Rogers earned the title of "*Good Will Ambassador*" or "*American Ambassador to the World*." During his stay in

⁷ The Salvation Army is a Protestant Christian church known for its charity work. Its object is to relief poverty by providing food, shelter, and education to the poorest people around the world.



Europe and Russia, Will acted as a real ambassador. He reported a series of events that were taking place throughout those nations and his vivid experience from his interviews with the leading figures of foreign countries.

In the summer of 1927, Will traveled to Mexico as an unofficial ambassador. By the time, diplomatic relations between the United States and Mexico had deteriorated and were approaching the breaking point. Thus, President Coolidge had appointed Dwight Morrow as the ambassador to Mexico, hoping that he would help reestablish relations. Ambassador Morrow invited Charles Lindbergh and Will Rogers on this goodwill mission to Mexico. Morrow felt secured with the two guys because he had created a good feeling for the United States. Upon their arrival in Mexico, Will commented: "In France and America they like to tear up the plane to carry away souvenirs. Here hundreds took it up on their shoulders and carried it to the hanger. Here instead of being bombarded with ticker tape the streets were two inches thick with flowers." (ellensplace.net)

In Mexico, William established a warm connection with President Elias Calles. William's genuine friendship and humble attitude allowed Morrow the opening to discuss diplomacy in a closer and more relaxed way. Will's visit to Mexico was a success; he even joked with the Mexican President and with the presidential cabinet the same way he used to joke with the politicians of his country. Also, Lindbergh's nature charm and youthful openness captivated their Mexican hosts. Both Rogers and Lindbergh were of great help for Morrow's dialogue in an attempt to reestablish good relations with Mexico.

After he finished his second film with Fox Studio in 1930, Will Rogers travel to London to attend the Disarmament Conference. The intent of the conference was to reduce the armaments of the majority of nations and thus insure peace. By 1931, the winds of World War II began to increase. Thus, in December, Will traveled to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. First he toured Japan and had



tea with the country's war minister. Next, he visited Korea. After that, he took off to China where he was introduced to the Emperor and went around war-torn China. From there, Will reported about the Japanese invasion to Manchuria. By 1931, Japan had invested vast sums of money into the economy of Manchuria which was controlled by the South Manchuria Railway Company. Will's explanation was: "China owns the lot; Japan owns the house that's on it, now who is going to furnish the policeman?" (Carter, 2005: 44). From Malaya, he took a train to visit the west of the Soviet Union. Then he traveled to Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt. Finally, he went to Switzerland to attend the Geneva peace conference. There he also spent time with the Italian dictator Mussolini and had an interview with Germany's dictator, Hitler. Will reported the news about the coming war and warned that the best fight for America was to stay out of it.

2.4.2. The Great Depression

During the Roaring Twenties -- a decade of wealth and excess -- millions of American citizens increased their wealth by investing in fast-rising stocks and using mortgage loans to buy property. But in October 1929, the stock market crashed, leaving those people with no money to pay their bank debts. The crash signaled the beginning of the Great Depression of the 1930s which lasted approximately ten years and affected many countries in many parts of the world, too. The market lost about two billion dollars over a span of two days; the banks began to close and thousands of people lost their life savings. While most Americans were affected by the nationwide lack of money, jobs, and even food, those who had not invested in the stock-market or had fallen into debt with large mortgage loans were in a better condition than the others. The impact of the depression reached the whole American economy, yet William did not suffer the effects of the crisis because he had not bought any stock, nor he had acquired money loans. But he did not stay at home idle; he traveled



throughout the country, raising morale, contributing to relief, and playing in charity benefits.

For much of his career, Rogers used his fame to help others, especially poor people in need. For instance, in 1927, Will ended his spring lecture tour with a benefit performance in New Orleans for victims of a huge flood that killed more than two hundred people and left thousands homeless. In 1931, paying his own expenses, Will organized a tour to perform in 50 different cities within 18 days to assist the Red Cross' efforts that benefited victims of a devastating drought in Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas. That same year, he traveled to Nicaragua to assist victims of earthquakes and fires and contributed several thousand dollars from his funds. William's efforts raised more than \$230,000 in relief funds that lifted the spirit of many places knocked by natural catastrophes and calamity caused by the effects of the depression.

Despite the economic downturn, Will's writing continued to flourish. His daily and weekly works reached the attention of millions of readers who found in his words some kind of peace, relief, and valor. In 1930, he donated his check of seventy thousand dollars -- he received for his fourteen Sunday talks -- to the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. He argued that the most unemployed and the hungriest had contributed in some way to his career.

By 1932, after two years into a worldwide depression, many people who had lost their fortunes were committing suicide. It was common to find huge lines of beggars at the door of refuges. Men lost their jobs because factories closed. Farmers were also affected by the drought that destroyed the agriculture in the eastern and central parts of the United States during the summer of 1930; and the drought in early 1931 that left the Great Plains with scorched earth and evaporated ponds. To fight a war against hunger, poverty, and despair, William Rogers financed his own flying tour around the country, staging fund-raising shows and giving some speeches. All the money he obtained from his



presentations was shared between the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. He went to every town and every city in his attempt to work for the unluckiest who were suffering the worst part of the emergency. Despite the depression's sadness, people across the nation gathered around radios to hear their goodwill ambassador and noble humanitarian's observations because he offered cheer, hope, and laughter.

Picture # 25



Rogers with H. C. Couch, director of the Red Cross in Arkansas when the drought struck in 1931.

(Wertheim, Bair)

Picture # 26



William performing in Panama to raise relief funds for earthquake victims in Nicaragua during 1931.

(Wertheim, Bair)



2.5. PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR

Will Rogers was never a politician, nor was he a party supporter, even less he belonged to the board of representatives for presidential advisors. William's approach and observations about high dignitaries of other nations gave him the opportunity to learn real facts that were happening abroad the United States and provided him ideas he could use to write or to talk about in his articles and telegrams. Besides, his advice to the United States Presidents was through his writings run by the *Saturday Evening Post*. He used the "open letter" technique to address himself to each President.

William Rogers met most America's presidents during his adult life. First, he met Theodore Roosevelt when he performed at the White House while he was working with the Cummins and Mulhalls Wild West Show at the St. Louis Fair. Woodrow Wilson was a devoted admirer of Rogers. He often attended the Ziegfeld Follies to see William's performance, and later the president quoted many of Will's gags. Indirectly, President Wilson helped Rogers' career. Many times he referred to William as "one of our foremost humorist" increasing Will's importance and popularity.

The Republican President Warren Harding never developed a close relationship with Rogers. While he was running the country, scandals and corruption such as the Teapot Dome scandal, eventually pervaded his administration. Many of his appointees were eventually convicted and sent to prison for defrauding the federal government. As expected, Rogers' observations about Harding's administration were not welcome by Harding who felt a certain dislike about Will's humor. When the Follies were once in Washington D.C., the president preferred to go to another theatre to attend a mediocre play than to go to the most important show in town in order to avoid meeting Will Rogers. In one of Will's editorial publications, he ridiculed Harding by saying that while an emergency crisis threatened the United States, the president was busy playing a golf match.



The Republican President Calving Coolidge, who succeeded Harding, was the president of whom William joked more than any other president. While Coolidge was in the White House, Rogers was a guest there on several occasions. Both, Coolidge and Rogers liked each other, and Coolidge never felt offended with William's editorials about him. He took Rogers essays with humor. Both "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to his President" and "More Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to his President" were intended for President Coolidge. In October 11, 1926, William wrote:

Dear Mr. Coolidge: Well, I have been gathering up a lot of facts and I am just in shape to report. I have the biggest news for you that I have had since I have been your little "Shark" in Europe [...] Now I have been in all Kinds of Countries and I have looked them all over [...] But here is what I want to write you about [...] Everybody talks about how we are hated [...] We, unfortunately, don't make a good impression collectively. You see a bunch of Americans at anything abroad and they generally make more noise and have more to say than anybody and, generally create a worse impression than if they had stayed at home. They are throwing rocks to us, but sometimes you think it is deserved. There should be a law prohibiting over three Americans going anywhere abroad together [...] I may drop over to see you, as I have lots of stuff that I will have to go over with you personally. I think if you will take my tips I will be able to keep us out of war, and that will be more than any other Unofficial Diplomat has accomplished [...] I certainly want you to know that this is a labor of love that I am doing for you [...] (Day, 139 – 140)

Also, on December 3, 1927, Will wrote:

My Dear Calvin: Well, I just got down here as you suggested me doing. You said I ought to go somewhere, so I figured it was Mexico. We've started in to pay attention to our neighbors on the south. Up to now our calling card to



Mexico or Central America had been a gunboat or a bunch of Violets shaped like Marines. We could never understand why Mexico wasn't just crazy about us; for we had always had their good-will, and Oil and coffee and minerals, at heart. Of course, as you know up there, Mr. President, some were just for going down and taking Mexico over [...] It was a kind of an imposition on their part to even have to go to the trouble of going down and taking their country over. But our wiser heads got to thinking, "Well, we picked up the Philippines and now we got no place to lay it down." Then some that had studied History says, "Look at England! They took everything that wasn't nailed down and look at 'em." Then somebody got to figuring out: "We better find some other way." Now I don't know if it was you, Calvin, or not. I kind of give you credit for doping it out. (Day, 166)

Before the presidential campaign of 1928, Will Rogers wrote an article directed at Al Smith who was a candidate for president of the U.S.A. It was published by the *Saturday Evening Post* in October 1927. In it, Will gave Smith advice on how to be a President and not just a candidate. For instance, the letter read:

Al, it ain't that you aren't strong. Al, you are strong, you are the strongest thing that the Democrats have had in years [...] You politicians have got to look further ahead; you always got a Putter in your hands, when you ought to have a Driver. Now, Al, I am trying to tell you how to be a President, not how to be a Candidate. (Day, 160)

On January 1929, Rogers wrote one of his political articles giving some more advice to Al Smith. In summary, Will wrote:

Al, I want you to know that I am not trying to reproach you anything; I just want to highlight some facts that might have done good for the old Democratic body. If you look at the facts you will realize that Hoover is where he is today because he knew when to refuse something that he



knew wouldn't get him anywhere. He struggled for years to get there. Last time I wrote to you, I was trying to tell you that you had to wait until things were ready, and see if the things you do are going to lead you anywhere. I like how well you managed your defeat. Al, I like you Democrats because you are sorter my kind of people. But I am sick and tired to see how the whole thing is mismanaged. So, I would like you to take my advice from now on to see if we can do better for the party. 'Leave out old Political Leaders in the Senate where they can't do any good or any harm to anybody, and hide them when a campaign is on because they continue doing the same speeches since they were weaned.' Millions of citizens in this country don't like the way Republicans run things, but they prefer them than the Democrats' old-fashioned ideas. Al, you are a very progressive fellow, and if you and Roosevelt work together along with the help of some progressive young Democratic governors, senators, and congressmen, you can make out a Party instead of a Memory. (Day, 197)

President Hoover was bombarded with Will's humor, as he called him the "Doctor of Catastrophes." There was not much advice for him, yet he was the target of Rogers' mockery. Once he wrote:

Hoover says every man has the right to ask the following question: "Is the United States a better place for the average man to live in because the Republican Party has conducted the Government eight years? If we are privileged to ask the question, I will be the first one to bite. Is it? [...]" Hoover was against poverty and favored education, even if you couldn't get into a fraternity. He said prohibition was a "noble experiment," and he believed in noble things, even if they were only experiments. (Day, 184)

When many people blamed Hoover for the Great Depression, Will came to his defense, though in his own way: "Don't you go and blame the Republicans for



everything that's happened to us; they're not smart enough to have thought it up!" (Sterling, 1979: 49)

In March 4, 1929, Will's column read:

[...] Mr. Hoover! Here is just a few things we look to be settled no later than Saturday. Farm Relief – Now we have never had farm relief in all our history, but we look to him for it. Prohibition Enforcement – Never had it since it was established, but we expect it from him. Prosperity – Millions never had it under Coolidge, never had it under anybody, but expect it under Hoover. And women think he will wash their dishes and look after their babies. Nothing short of Heaven will we accept under Hoover. Good luck to you, Herb. (Day, 201)

In March, 1929, Rogers fulfilled his advice to the Democrat Party. In the editorial of the *Saturday Evening Post*, he said:

[...] Now that I took over the position as the Manager and Supervising Director of the great old Democratic Party, I need you to know that I believe in Democrats because they are loyal and never take from each other [...] The Republicans have run the country and made out money for themselves. Now, what we need is to show people that we can cut the Republicans' rate and make it cheaper for them. Government is the same as a mercantile business in town. Now, the Republicans are established and have the main store there. So, what we need to do is to open a new store, and give customers as good or better goods at lower prices. In order to accomplish this goal, we can't open a store with the same old goods we used to have when we used to run a little store years ago. [...] People had been buying Republicans because they don't have anywhere else to go to. But if someone offers them something good, they would not doubt to go there right away. (Day, 202 – 203)



In late November 1931, Will went on a trip to the Far East and around the world to make a report of conditions there. His reports were again published by the *Saturday Evening Post* and were addressed to Senator Borah. They were called "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to Senator Borah." From the facts he had seen abroad, Will concluded that the Second World War was about to explode because every nation was getting armaments and preparing people to fight.

By the time of elections in 1932, the economy of the country worsened, unemployment rose, and the government seemed powerless. Consequently, William endorsed a powerful campaign for Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt who won in a landslide election. Much credit for the victory was given to Rogers because he had forecasted in his radio programs a strong support to the Democratic Party. However, as soon as Roosevelt began solving some problems, Rogers regained his impartial posture.

Picture # 27



Will Rogers during a campaign tour by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932.

(Wertheim, Bair)



President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Will Rogers developed a good and very close friendship. Will liked Roosevelt very much; likewise Roosevelt felt the same about Rogers. Both men were two important figures in the country. Franklin Roosevelt and Will Rogers worked together during the worst years of the Great Depression. Roosevelt tried every possible way to help the country out of the misery, creating jobs for the unemployed, saving farms and houses from foreclosures. Will on his part, organized different programs to show up with his humor in order to raise funds. A few times, Will was invited to the White House to stay there overnight to report the President's schedule and activities. Will always talked about the problems the president discussed. By 1933, the country began to overcome the calamity, giving people some optimism.

2.6. RETURN TO BROADWAY AND HOLLYWOOD

2.6.1. Rogers' Last Performance in Broadway

In the summer of 1928, Will planned to attend the Republican and Democratic Conventions, which were the two large national political party conventions, to report the "national follies." The Republicans met in Kansas City, Missouri. Will boarded a passenger plane from Los Angeles. Upon arrival in Las Vegas, Nevada, the plane broke a wheel and turned over. However, Rogers changed planes. Later, he crashed again when the plane was taking off near Cheyenne, Wyoming. Undismayed, Rogers took still another plane that finally took him safe and sound to his destination, Kansas City. In those days, the airplane was still in its early stages of development, and accidents were part of the growing-up process. Unfortunately, his dearest friend and fellow aviation enthusiast, Fred Stone, did not experience the same fate as Rogers. That same day, August 3, on the other side of the country, Fred had been taking flying lessons when his aircraft suddenly crashed in the ground. The accident destroyed the plane. Fortunately, Stone survived but he was seriously injured. He had broken his legs and his ribs, so he needed a long time for healing and rehabilitation. In



the hospital doctors saved Stone's life, but they affirmed that he would not walk or dance again. Will comforted and gave hope to Fred, but he wept alone for the tragedy that had befallen his best friend. Then he appealed to his millions of readers to pray for Stone's return to the stage.

Before the accident, Stone had been rehearsing in New York for the Broadway musical comedy *Three Cheers*, a stage show written by Fred and his daughter, Dorothy Stone. Then under the possibility that the production might be canceled, causing a large financial loss on the producer and risking the job of the entire crew that were connected to the production, including Dorothy who was Fred's co-star; Rogers' offered his friend to take his place, allowing the show to go on. Dillingham, the producer, was pleased because Will's offer seemed to save the show. This act of friendship touched America since Will had to cancel a fully booked lecture tour that would have given him an income of about half a million dollars. Rogers repaid all expenses made by the promoters and paid each theater for lost profits that they expected from his appearance.

After two months of rehearsal, *Three Cheers* finally opened in New York at the Globe Theatre on October 15, 1928. The production ran for 210 performances, closing in April 1929. Then the show went on the road for seven more weeks and it definitely closed on the 1st of June in Pittsburg. Will along with the cast of *Three Cheers* made a hit of the comedy. Though he had rehearsed, he made no effort to learn his lines. In fact, he never entirely learned his part; he just carried the script in his pocket and read it occasionally. Most of the time, he made up his own lines. Dorothy's talent and charm were a perfect foil for Will Rogers. Together they presented a show like no other and the audiences loved it. However, the public spotlights shone more prominently on William than on Dorothy. Rogers won all the credits for the success of the comedy.



In the meantime, Stone worked the therapy persistently until he recovered almost completely. He proved the doctors wrong when he not only walked again but returned to the stage and danced in many Broadway performances. In October, Will received a letter from his former employer Sam Goldwyn congratulating him for his wonderful performance in *Three Cheers*. Rogers was congratulated because of his very natural and simple style. He never needed to use bad words or to curse. His theatrical comedies and movies never needed to introduce vulgarity to entertain the public. It was the style Will introduced in *Three Cheers*, which became one of the greatest works of Rogers.

Picture # 28



From left to right: musical comedy performer Andrew Tombes and Will Rogers – both dressed in their performance clothes for the comedy *Three Cheers* – Dorothy Stone, Fred Stone, and Allene Stone at the Stone family house in 1929.

(Wertheim, Bair)



2.6.2. HOLLYWOOD: Talking Pictures.

At the end of the twenties, the Rogers' family sold their house in Beverly Hills and moved a few miles west to a secluded hilltop ranch in Pacific Palisades in Santa Monica. William had bought the property in 1924, attracted by its quiet and private environment. However, the access to the property was difficult because there were no paved roads. So, Will managed the construction of a road, and the whole family helped to plant eucalyptus trees to stabilize the earth. In this 186-acre property, Will built his ranch which had 31 rooms, 11 baths, and seven fireplaces, surrounded by a stable, a riding ring, corrals to keep the horses, roping arena, golf course, a polo field, and riding and hiking trails. The ranch was constructed this way because William was a fanatic of polo games, and he invited his friends to play golf and polo with him.

The years that followed the crisis of the Great Depression were more lucrative for the Rogers' family. Finally, motion pictures had implemented sound. In 1929, Will broke into film production again and signed a contract with Fox Film Corporation. By August 1930, Will had finished two movies. His first talkie was *They Had to See Paris*. The comedy casts Will Rogers as Pike Peters, owner of an auto repair shop in Claremore. Unexpectedly, he finds himself part owner of an oil field. Then his pretentious wife decides that the family must go to Paris to meet the royalty and marry their daughter with a prominent man from France.

Lighnin' is a comedy film made in 1925 and directed by John Ford. It was based on a successful play under the same name that started in 1918 at the Gaiety Theatre in New York. It was remade by Henry King for Fox Productions in 1930. The sound-film version of *Lighnin'* stars Will Rogers as Bill Jones, a shiftless slowpoke who is sarcastically nicknamed *Lighnin'*. His wife Mary Jones owns and operates a hotel and works hard to keep the business making a bare profit. Finally, Mary gets tired of her husband who offers nothing else than his laziness and stupid opinions, and she asks to divorce him.



Graph # 2

They Had to See Paris	
<p>Picture # 29</p> 	<p>Gender: Comedy Film</p> <p>Directed by: Frank Borzage</p> <p>Produced by: William Fox</p> <p>Written by: Homer Croy (novel); Sonya Levien (story); Owen Davis (writer)</p> <p>Main characters: Will Rogers, Irene Rich, and Marguerite Churchill.</p> <p>Distributed by: Fox Film Corporation.</p> <p>Release date: September 18, 1929.</p> <p>(Will Rogers Memorial Museum)</p>

By Now, Will was the biggest star of the Fox Film Corporation with which he had signed a new contract to film *A Connecticut Yankee*, *State Fair*, *David Harum*, *Steamboat 'Round the Bend*, and *Ambassador Bill*, which became classics of the film industry. They were all released by the Fox Corporation. "Much of what is seen and heard is purely Will Rogers'. He rarely left dialogue as he found it, and he constantly added the word "business" and gags that neither the writer nor the director ever imagined." (Sterling, 1979: 23) Rogers himself said: "I fix up my own dialogue." William was never a tightly scripted performer or actor.

When William signed with the Fox Film Corporation, the studio built a complete apartment with a garden for him. But Will never went to the place. He always parked his car close to the playhouse; then he went to the car to stretched out in the back seat for a few minutes to relax, or he sat in it to type his column. He could never sit still; he had to be in motion all the time.

The Fox Corporation gave Rogers the best treatment for being its biggest star. They would send William a pack of papers with many titles of movies to make



William choose the ones he liked. William would just sign the paper and send a note saying that they had picked the correct ones. He was the least temperamental star Fox ever had. Whenever he could, he helped the smallest bit players and the extras to get better pay and treatment.

In 1934, Rogers attempted a new form of business that had been previously untouched by him – Opera. He starred in the West Coast production of Eugene O’Neil’s play, *Ah! Wilderness*. It was the first time that Will had to study the script exactly the way it was written without changin a single word. Also, it was the first time he had to sustain a role with no cuts and no retakes. Will did a great job, only one time he hesistated but with the help of his two dialogue partners Nat Miller and Anne Shoemaker, he retook his role and the play continued without further incident.

2.7. AVIATION

By the time William had conquered stage, films, and newspapers; a new technology was providing more ways of connecting people – Aviation. Will was fascinated with the innovation of the airplane. Aviation was a love affair for Will that started when he took his first flight in 1915, when he paid \$5 for a ride in a “flying boat” at Atlantic City. Will increasingly utilized and championed aviation; he usually flew in charter flights and even paid per-pound postage to ride in airmail planes. In the mid-twenties, Rogers became more interested in flying, and he sometimes flew between engagements around the country.

In 1925, before he started his first lecture circuit, Rogers was invited as a guest speaker at the annual Gridiron Dinner at the Congress in Washington. There he met General Billy Mitchell, who invited William to accompany him on a flight the following day. Although he had been aloft in a plne before, it was this flight that made William a firm believer in the future of aviation. This was the last flight that General Mitchell made because he had been demoted from the Air Force of the



United States for increasing investment in airpower to strengthen it, and for trying to keep the United States first in the air. Rogers took up Mitchell's cause for a strong United States Air Force and supported it for the rest of his life. Eight decades later, at the Paris Air Show, Will was proclaimed a top force in the history of aviation for his outspokenness.

Also in 1925, he met a famous flyer, Wiley Post, when Post flew Rogers to a rodeo in Oklahoma. Post was considered the second greatest American flyer next to Charles Lindberg. He was a famed American aviator, and the first pilot to fly solo around the world twice in a plywood plane with one engine called the *Winnie Mae*. Also, known for his work in high altitude flying, Post helped develop one of the first pressure suits. He was popular for being a daredevil pilot. Usually people became disgusted by his gruff manner and rough appearance. Post wore an eye patch for most of his life after losing an eye when he was a teenager. William admired Post's immense flying skills and risk-taking nature. Once, Rogers wrote an article about how enchanted he was with the job of this one-eyed Oklahoma fellow. After that, the two men struck up a long friendship. In 1933, Post set a speed record by flying alone around the world in seven days, 18 hours, and 49 minutes.

Rogers also became friends with another famous pilot on the day, Charles Lindberg, who was billed as the greatest American aviator. Opposite to Post, Lindberg was known for his quiet, modest behavior. He had charmed and electrified the world with his daring solo air flight across the Atlantic Ocean in May 1927. Rogers' usual joking about the issue read:

No attempt at jokes today. A slim, tall, bashful, smiling American boy is somewhere out over the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, where no lone human being has ever ventured before. He is being prayed for to every kind of Supreme Being that has a following. If he is lost it will be the most



universally regretted single loss we ever had. But that kid ain't going to fail. (Donovan, 79)

Four months later, Will was invited to speak at a banquet in San Diego honoring Lindberg, which was well accepted by Will. The next day, Lindberg invited Will and Betty to fly with him from San Diego to Los Angeles. A month later, Rogers took his own coast to coast flight. In those days, there were no passenger flights, but he was allowed to fly on a U.S. mail flight, paying about \$800 for his weight in postage stamps. From that day on, Rogers was a strong supporter of air travel. He was convinced that it would be the wave of the future. Also, Rogers travel with Lindberg to Mexico in the summer of 1927 for a goodwill mission which served to increase William's interest in aviation.

William became friends with many of the time's most famous pilots. He also worked hard to promote air travel in the United States and to show the public how safe it was. He was so fond of publicizing safety air travels that when he broke some of his bones in an emergency landing, he had to stay away from public appearances to keep the news out of the papers and to prevent people from being alarmed. Despite Will survived a few more plane crashes, he downplayed the dangers.

Soon, Rogers was flying all over the world, visiting England, Egypt, South America, Moscow, Indonesia, China, Japan, and other places. He often visited countries as a reporter, sending back daily and weekly columns and telegrams of his observations. He also used air travel when he required to move quickly to help people in need.

In 1934, William got special permission from the Department of Commerce to fly on any aircraft – passenger, freight, or mail. It was a gift that the government gave him for he had earned the title of the U.S. "Unofficial President." During the summer of 1934, the family planned to tour around the world. On July 22,



Will, Betty, Will Jr., and Jim sailed from San Francisco to Hawaii. Mary was the only one that stayed home to work in a Broadway musical. Then they went to Japan and Rusia. From Moscow Bill and Jim returned to California for college while Betty and Will continued to Europe. The trip lasted two months, and it was the last trip that Betty and Will took together.

Picture # 30



Will Rogers and Charles Lindbergh in Mexico City.

(art.com)

Picture # 31



Will Rogers and Willie Post.

(Whimpey, Jim)



2.8. TRAGIC DEATH

By the mid-thirties, Will Rogers was America's most popular personality. His huge success on the radio increased his fans, but his vast fame in movies and newspapers continued as well. His Sunday radio show was the most popular weekly show in the country. In addition, between his daily and weekly columns, he was the most widely read columnist in the United States. In 1933, he was recognized as the country's second-biggest Hollywood star, and its most popular male star. In 1934, he was the largest box-office attraction.

During the last months of his life, William continued his unceasing work; he was completely busy working on new films, his weekly radio broadcasts, daily telegrams, his weekly articles, roping and riding, participating in polo games, and giving speeches. And somehow, he was still able to find some free time to share with his family and to enjoy his favorite pastime – aviation. Bryan Sterling said that William's unique talents made him a part of America because he belonged to all, and his family had to share him with the rest of the country.

Four months before his tragic end, a reporter asked Rogers: "You have done everything you wanted to do, and seen all there is to see. Is there anything else you would like to do?" Will's answer was: "I've never been to that Alaska." So, when he heard that his friend Wiley Post planned to fly to Alaska, Will decided to go along. They were on a mission to survey a route through Alaska for flying mail and passenger planes between Russia and the United States. For this mission, Post had spent long hours for several weeks piecing together an airplane made out of various other plane parts. Will had contributed with twenty-five thousand dollars, so Wiley could buy a secondhand Lockheed Orion, Model 9 E. He bought a brand new 550 horsepower Pratt and Whitney engine and installed it. Also, he replaced the wings, the propeller, the fuel tanks, and exchanged the wheels for pontoons because they were going to be flying over so much water. But the floats, which were made for a much larger plane, caused Wiley's plane to be nose-heavy and difficult to handle.



On August 7, 1935, Will and Wiley left Seattle, Washington. After a week flying over some parts of Canada and traveling throughout Alaska, William wrote to Betty: "No danger with this guy." Both men decided to complete their most daring adventure; they were determined to land in Point Barrow, the northernmost part in North America. Reaching Point Barrow required a dangerous five-hundred mile journey over the Endicott Mountains. However, Rogers insisted on reaching Point Barrow because he thought it would be a great topic for his newspaper column.

Ignoring reports of storms on their route, Will and Wiley took off for Juneau, Alaska. After eight hours aloft, covering a distance of 875 nautical miles, they landed in Gastineau Channel. By August 15, they were in Fairbanks. Anxious to leave, they did not pay attention to the weather reports and took off for Point Barrow. As the visibility was zero because the sky was overcast with dense fog and low clouds, Post decided to descend and landed the plane in a lagoon around eight o' clock in the evening. There they asked for directions from a group of Eskimos to get to their destination. After they were told that it was twelve miles away, they returned to the plane. Minutes later, the plane lost balance and the nose crashed into the lagoon. When the Eskimos who had given them directions got to the lagoon, they realized that both men were dead. One of the Eskimos walked fifteen miles to alert the authorities at the Army base nearby about the crash. When the sergeant on duty was told that a red plane had crashed with two men, one with a patch in his eye and other with a hat, he realized the Eskimo was talking about Will Rogers and Wiley Post. The following day, every newspaper across the United States headlined the tragic news. Almost the whole country was stunned, and millions of fans who enjoyed Rogers' humor mourned. According to the Eskimos, the plane's altitude was about fifty to two hundred feet when it lost control and plunged into four feet of water. There was no fire. William's body was complete, but the engine had torn apart Post's body, and they had to collect his remains. Also, they found a



typewriter at Rogers' side; it held a newspaper article telling a story about a fox terrier's fight with a bear that had to be shot. The last word typed was *death*.

The day of the burial, the networks were silent in reverence; planes dragging black banners flew over New York; people wept on the streets. More than fifty thousand people walked past the coffin of Will Rogers, and Hollywood carried his public funeral. Initially, Will Rogers' body was buried in California, but eight years later, his body was moved - along with his son Fred's body - to a fancy tomb on the twenty acres where he had planned a retirement home in Claremore, Oklahoma. Later the home was built and the Will Rogers' Memorial Museum was funded. When Betty died in 1944, she was buried next to Will and Fred.

Five years before his death, Will wrote:

When I die my epitaph or whatever you call those signs on gravestones is going to read: 'I joked about every prominent man of my time, but I never met a man I didn't like.' I am so proud of that I can hardly wait to die so it can be carved. And when you come to my grave you will find me sitting there proudly reading it. (Donovan, 95)

And so these words remain carved in stone on his tomb at the Will Rogers Memorial Museum.



CHAPTER III

3. THE PHILOSOPHER

Will Rogers had many appellations that people applied to describe him, but it was as a writer, a speaker, and a radio commentator that he became America's most common-sense philosopher. Will himself created his own philosophy. It was a natural philosophy based on his wide and deep perspective of life and his thoughts about many things that were happening around him during the years he was alive. Will's philosophical down-to-earth outlook contained great ideas based on real facts and his evaluation about them.

Will was a man with great mirth, and a boundless intelligence. He was able to put into words any thought, idea, or point of view to entertain the public; not only making them laugh, but also projecting onto the people new ideas and making them think about them. His purpose was not just to make people laugh all the time at the things he said; he also wanted to make people think about the facts and events he had studied beforehand in order to make his public draw their own conclusions.

Rogers' philosophy is a common-sense kind of philosophy. Each thing that he said is filled with humor and cleverness. His philosophical style is satiric; sometimes ironic, sharp, or mocking. However, his words never contained malice or hurt toward anybody. When he spoke, he always indicated to whom he dropped his comments. Most of the time, he spoke or wrote with his mocking style, but there were times when he addressed his speech in a serious way. Whatever he wrote or he said, he never changed or altered the truth. His deductions were so accurate that he easily earned the title of "Cowboy Philosopher" when he first began his monologue in the early stage of his career as a rope artist. Will usually spoke or wrote in his good-natured style and with a language that everybody could understand. He became America's champion, interpreter, and spokesman. His style was unique, since it was unlike any other writer in the press.



He was named the quotable Will Rogers for his countless quotations that were repeated so many times for thousands of Americans. Many writers compiled the best of his sayings and quotes and wrote them down in many books. For instance, Donald Day edited Rogers' collections into the book "The Autobiography of Will Rogers" that was originally written by Will Rogers. In this book he compiles the best of his articles. Also, Brian Sterling, Joseph Carter, and Paula McSpadden collected and published Rogers' gags, thoughts, ideas, articles, and sayings.

3.1. Will Rogers Writings or Sayings

Will Rogers had many famous sayings, but he was widely known for "I never met a man I didn't like," which indicated his love and respect for people all over the world. Will's works are also called "Will Rogers' Says." Every saying I will include in the following pages is a little cut that has been extracted from Will Rogers' articles that he wrote from 1922 to 1935. They have been reproduced exactly the same way they were originally written; nothing has been changed or altered. The purpose of this section is to quote the things Will said, with the same inaccurate grammar and wrong spelling he used. Will had a wide vision of the problems and situations that nations and people face every day. The facts he argues are real and happen everywhere.

As you will read, you will realize that Will Rogers was sometimes very serious about some issues that needed to be treated from a thoughtful perspective. At other times, he is very ironic about things he mostly disagreed with and about some kind of attitude he didn't like from people.

As Will himself said once, his articles represent a typical American view of important public subjects. He gathered all his material throughout his entire life because he said that he did not want his stuff buried away where nobody ever reads it. He wanted people to read his words, to know his work, to make something good of it. Unfortunately, he died when he was in the top of his



career and he was not in this world to see how much he was loved and that he had become a legend and a legacy for the United States.

3.1.1. ZIEGFELD FOLLIES

The Ziegfeld Follies was the place where Will Rogers grew up as a showman. Here he came to be known by every prominent man in the country and where he reached the pick of his popularity. He called it the school of hard knocks. About it he wrote: "Being in Ziegfeld Follies has given me an inside track on some of our biggest men in this country, who I meet nightly at the stage door." (Day, 76)

It was here that he was discovered by all those important business men that hired him to work in Broadway musicals, movies, newspapers, and radio. This was the starting point of all his fame and achievements he got in the following years.

3.1.2. POLITICS

Politics was an unlimited source of comment for Will Rogers. During the years he wrote for the press, he devoted much of his space to politics. In order to compile all the information he could possibly get about this topic, he traveled throughout the United States and many other countries abroad to find out circumstances to write about. While he toured the country on his lecture tours, he broadened his own horizon and made people like him all over the United States. Also, he assisted at every presidential convention, both Democratic and Republican to record the events for his public. He moved around, visiting the known and unknown politicians and attending functions with most of America's leaders. He expressed what he had in his mind; however he was careful when expressing his ideas about politics. According to Will's own words from the time he established himself as an entertainer, he rarely made a speech without



mentioning a political situation. Yet, he was never interested to enter politics. The only time he held a political position was as Mayor of Beverly Hills. But that did not last long since the California Legislature passed a bill which explained that the president of the board of trustees was constitutionally considered the mayor.

Will was more interested in politics than any other subject. He read every newspaper and magazines or anything that contained political discussions. For all his work, he talked and interviewed every elected or appointed official he could find and asked all the necessary questions to write the things we wrote. He once wrote:

I have written on nothing but politics for years. It was always about national and international affairs. I have been in almost every country in the last few years. I have talked with prominent men in those countries, our ambassadors or ministers, and I would be pretty dumb not to soak up some information. Now I read politics, talk politics, know personally almost every prominent politician; like 'em, and they are my friends, but I can't help if I have seen enough of it to know there is some baloney in it. I am going to keep on doing the same as I have in the past. I am going to call 'em like I see 'em. (McSpadden, 50)

1. Truth would ruin the very foundation on which our political government is run. If you ever injected truth into politics, you have no politics.
2. Common sense is not an issue in politics, it's an affliction.
3. You abolish salaries and you will abolish politics and taxes.
4. You can't beat an administration by attacking it. You have to show some plan of improving it.



5. Shrewdness in public life all over the world is always honored, while honesty in public men is generally attributed to dumbness and is seldom rewarded.
6. Party politics is the most narrow-minded occupation in the world.
7. All you would have to do to make some men atheist is just to tell them the Lord belonged to the opposition political party. After that they could never see any good in him.
8. Noble ideas don't belong in politics.
9. Two thirds of the men in politics are not "Free born Americans of lawful age and a fair break in intelligence."
10. Don't take politics serious, it's just another American racket.
11. Politics ain't worrying this country one-tenth as much as finding a parking space.
12. Politics has got so expensive that it takes lots of money to even get beat with nowadays.
13. American politics is the most obliging thing we have. One hundred million voters have six men in every state make up their minds for them every four years.
14. There is nothing certain in politics, except salary and rake-off.
15. There is not a voter in America that twenty-four hours later any speech could remember two sentences in it. Politics amuse more people than they interest.
16. Wherever you find poor soil, you will always find politics.



17. Politics hits a country like a pestilence. Somebody is going to make some money out of politics this year besides the politicians.
18. There is no more independence in politics than there is in jail. They are always yapping about "public service." It's public jobs they are looking for.
19. Party politics will never be changed because you can't change human nature. You can't broaden a man's vision if he wasn't born with one.
20. If we didn't have two parties, we would all settle on the best men in the country and things would run fine. But as it is, we settle on the worst ones and then fight over 'em.
21. It ain't much relief to just transfer your debts from one party to another adding a little more in the bargain.
22. This country runs in spite of parties; in fact parties are the biggest handicaps we have to contend with.
23. There is very little dignity, very little sportsmanship, or very little anything in politics. It's only: Get the Job and Hold It!
24. The platform will always be the same, promise everything, deliver nothing.
25. You could keep politics clean if you could figure out some way so your government never hired anyone.
26. There is no other business in the world that allows a man to work after he is fired except politics.
27. It's awful hard to get people interested in corruption unless they can get some of it.
28. The trouble with practical jokes is that very often they get elected.



3.1.2.1. Politicians

1. Governor Allen of Kansas said I was the only man in America who was able to tell the truth about our Men and Affairs. I was able to tell the truth because I have never mixed up in politics.
2. Politicians, after all, are not over a year behind public opinion.
3. Our Public men are speaking every day on something, but they ain't saying anything.
4. About Politicians: The least said about them the best.
5. A Lobbyist is a person that is supposed to help a politician to make up his mind, not only help him but pay him.
6. A politician is not a narrow-minded as he forces himself to be.
7. A politician is just like a pickpocket; it's almost impossible to get one to reform.
8. The trouble with politicians as they see, but they don't see far. They wear reading glasses when they are looking into the future; they got their putter in their hand, when they ought to have their driver.
9. I am just like a politician – the less I know about anything, the more I can say.
10. What this country needs is more working men, and fewer politicians.
11. Many a public man wishes there was a law to burn old records.
12. Everything is changing. People are taking their comedians seriously and the politicians as a joke, when it used to be vice versa.



13. Slogan: "Be a politician; no training necessary."
14. Cattlemen made the country, but it takes a politician to spoil it.
15. The party in power is always the worst, and every man looks good until he is elected.
16. A king is sort like a politician. It's hard to tell when he is making good or bad.
17. America has the best politicians money can buy.
18. A politician is nothing but local bandit sent to Washington to raid headquarters.
19. A man's thoughts are naturally on his next term more than his country.
20. Once a man holds a public office he is absolutely no good for honest work.
21. Politicians: They can ruin you quicker than unseasonable weather.
22. Politicians can do more funny things naturally than I can think of to do purposely.
23. What you say for humanity don't have near the appeal as what you say for political purposes.
24. You can't legislate intelligence and common sense into people.
25. Ain't it funny how many hundreds of thousands of soldiers we can recruit with nerve. But we can't find one politician in a million with backbone.
26. Everybody nowadays is suggesting ways of getting prosperous on somebody else's money.



3.1.2.2. Republicans and Democrats

Will Rogers was never part of any political party. He was neutral about them. However, many times, he claimed to be a Democrat; sometimes he said it humorously and other times he did it seriously. It can be proven with the many times he directed his speech to the Democratic Party to give them advice about their mistakes during the elections. Several times, he spoke and wrote to Al Smith, and in one of his speeches he said, "I like you Democrats; you are sorter my kind of people, but I am just sick and tired seeing the whole thing mismanaged." Even though Will sympathized with the Democrats, he often criticized both parties. He said, "I generally give the party in power, whether Republican or Democrat, the more digs because they are generally doing the country more damage."

Will was friends with people of both parties, and was such a lovely man that he was welcome by the Republicans and the Democrats whenever he met with them.

1. I am not a member of any organized political party – I'm a Democrat.
2. There is a mess of conferences going on, but they are just like the poor and the Democrats, they will always be with us.
3. Democrats: they are so funny, and I am supposed to be.
4. There are two main worlds in Russia. One is Bourgeois and the other is Proletariat. Now Proletariat means the poor people, or what would be known in America as the Democrats; and the other word Bourgeois means the rich people, which in America would be known as Republicans; or if they are very rich, the Conservative Republican Party.



5. Everybody is always asking, "What's the matter with the Democratic Party?" There ain't nothing wrong with it; it's a Dandy old Party. The only thing wrong with it is the law killed it.
6. You can't make the Republican Party pure by more contributions, because contributions are what got it where it is today.
7. No Republicans, no income tax, no cover charge, no disarmament conferences, no luncheon clubs, no stop lights, no static, no headwinds. Liquor was a companion, not a problem; no margins, no ticket speculators, no golf pants or scotch jokes.
8. There is one thing about a Democrat! He would rather make a speech than a dollar.
9. The Republican Party: its slogan is: "Stay with us, we can afford to pay more than our competitors."
10. Since the Wall Street crash, which the Republicans refer to as a "business readjustment," prominent men had done nothing but tell us of the strength of the country. We have been "stronged" to death in speeches and statements, but last night Mr. Coolidge said, "The heart of the American people is strong," and here over 500 died of heart failure during the late "Republican readjustment." What the really meant was that "the American public's head is strong but his heart is weak."
11. Republicans can't tax big incomes over here for they haven't got next year's campaign budget yet. Democrats still owe for their last three elections.
12. Asking a Democrat to feed the country is almost a 'believe it or not.' Young is in a tough spot. If he feeds 'em through the winter, he will only be keeping 'em alive to vote the Republican ticket next fall. Voters can't remember back over two months.



13. The Republican Platform promises to do better. I don't think they have done so bad; everybody is broke but them.
14. Democrats take the whole thing as a joke. Republicans take it serious but run it like a joke.
15. I will admit it has rained more under Republican Administration. That was partially because they have had more administration than Democrats.
16. The difference between a Republican and a Democrat is that the Democrat is like a cannibal – they are forced to live off each other – while the Republicans, why, they live off the Democrats.
17. Republicans take care of big money, for big money takes care of them.
18. A flock of Democrats will replace a mess of Republicans. It won't mean a thing. They will go in like all the rest of 'em. Go in on promises and come out on alibis.
19. It takes nerve to be a Democrat, but it takes money to be a Republican.
20. Each party is worse than the other, the one that's out always looks the best.
21. Both parties have their good times and bad times, only they have them at different times. They are each good when they are out, and each bad when they are in.
22. The Democrats and the Republicans are equally corrupt – it's only in the amount where the Republicans excel.
23. The Republicans and the Democrats parties both split. The Republicans have their splits right after election, and the Democrats have theirs just before an election.



24. The Republicans have always been the party of big business, and the Democrats of small business. The Democrats have their eye on a dime, and the Republicans on a dollar.
25. Their greatest trait to recommend the Democrats is optimism and humor. You've got to be an optimist to be Democrat, and you've got to be a humorist to stay one.
26. The only way in the world to make either one of those old parties look even halfway decent is to keep them out of office.
27. The trouble with the Democrats up to now has been that they have been giving the people "what they thought the people ought to have" instead of what the people wanted.
28. Democrats never agree on anything, that's why they are Democrats. If they agreed with each other, they would be Republicans.
29. It's really remarkable how the politicians think of us. Their every thought is of us every fourth year.
30. Millions of people in this country who are not even half pleased with the way these Republicans run things, but they prefer 'em to the Democrats' old-fashioned ideas.

3.1.2.3. Congress

Congress was one of the most frequent topics of Will Rogers' comments. He called its members "our hired help." Will knew most senators and congressmen personally, and many were his friends. He often traveled to Washington D. C where he got together with them and talked about national and international



events. Will was one of the men that new most about the political issues of America at that time.

Will referred to Congress as the “National Joke Factory” or the “Capitol Comedy Company,” for here was where most of his material came from. When people ask him where he got his jokes, he answered, “ I just watch Congress and report the facts; I don’t even have to exaggerate.”

1. The way to judge a good Comedy is by how long it will last and have people talk about it. Now Congress has turned out some that have lived for years and people are still laughing about them. Girls win a little State Popularity Contest that is conducted in some Newspaper; then they are put into the Movies to entertain 110 million people who they never saw or know anything about. Now that’s the same with the Capitol Comedy Company of Washington. They win a State Popularity Contest backed by a Newspaper and are sent to Washington to turn out Laws for 110 million people they never saw. They have what they call Congress, or the Lower House. That compares to what we call the Scenario Department. That’s where somebody gets the idea of what he thinks will make a good Comedy Bill or Law, and they argue around and put it into shape. Then it is passed along, printed, or shot, or Photographed. Then it reaches the Senate or the Cutting or Titling Department. Now, in our Movie Studios we have what we call Gag Men whose sole business is to just furnish some little Gag, or Amendment as they call it, which will get a laugh or perhaps change the whole thing around. Now, the Senate has what is considered the best and highest priced Gag men that can be collected anywhere. Why, they put in so many little gags or amendments that the poor Author of the thing don’t know his own story. They considered if a man can sit there in the Studio in Washington and just put in one funny amendment in each Bill, or production, that will change it from what it originally meant, why, he is considered to have earned his pay. Now, Folks, why patronize California-made Productions? The Capitol



Comedy Co. of Washington, D.C. has never made a failure. They are every one, 100 percent funny or 100 percent sad.

2. When Will Rogers was once called a Professional Joke Maker by a Congressman, he said: Calling me a Professional Joke Maker! He is right about everything but the Professional. THEY are the Professional Joke Makers. Read some of the Bills that they have passed, if you think they ain't Joke makers. I could study all my life and not think up half the amount of funny things they can think of in one Session of Congress. Besides my jokes don't do anybody any harm. You don't have to pay any attention to them. But everyone of the jokes those Birds make is a LAW and hurts somebody (generally everybody). "Joke Maker!" He couldn't have coined a better term for Congress if he had been inspired.
3. We got wind in the Senate where we had paid to get wisdom.
4. What do you suppose we are in Congress for, if it ain't to split up the swag?
5. Congress is so strange. A man gets up to speak and says nothing. Nobody listens, and then everybody disagrees.
6. If we could just send the same bunch of men to Washington for the good of the nation, and not for political reasons, we could have the most perfect government in the world.
7. Congress meets tomorrow morning. Let us pray: Oh Lord, give us strength to bear that which is about to be inflicted upon us. Be merciful with them, oh Lord, for they know not what they're doing. Amen.
8. We all joke about congress but we can't improve on them. Have you noticed that no matter whom we elect, he is just as bad as the one he replaces?



9. Never blame a legislative body for not doing something. When they do nothing, they don't hurt anybody. When they do something is when they become dangerous.
10. This new senator says he is going to use "common sense" in the senate. That's what they all say when they start in. But then, if nobody don't understand you, why, you naturally have to switch.
11. Politics and self-preservation must come first, never mind the majority of the people in the U.S. A legislator's thoughts are naturally on his next term more than on his country.
12. This country has come to feel the same when congress is in session as we do when the baby gets hold of a hammer. It's just a question of how much damage he can do before we take it away from him.
13. It's not really intent on the government's part that they don't do better, it's ignorance.
14. In Washington, one man could do what ten of them do. There could be only a quarter of a third as many congressmen or senators, and we would pick better ones then. But it's the system that we have always used, and there is no use getting all overcome with perspiration over it. Things kinder run themselves, anyhow.
15. Diary of the United States senate trying to find two billion dollars that it already had spent, but didn't have:
Monday – Soak the rich.
Tuesday – Being hearing from the rich.
Tuesday afternoon – Decide to give the rich a chance to get richer.
Wednesday – Tax Wall Street sales.
Thursday – Get word from Wall Street: lay off us or you will get no campaign contributions.



Thursday afternoon – Decide “we are wrong on Wall Street.”

Friday – Soak the little fellow.

Saturday – Find out there is no little fellow. He has been soaked till he drowned.

Sunday – Meditate.

Next week, same procedure, only more talk and less results.

16. Today congress went to work. What are you laughing at? Honest, they went to work. Well, they did come in and sat down.

17. You know how congress is, they will vote for anything if they think they vote for will turn around and vote for them. Politics ain't nothing but reciprocity.

18. There is nothing in the world as alike as two senators. No matter how different their politics, how different the parts of the country they come from, they all look alike, think alike, and want alike. They are all looking for an appointment for some guy who helped them get theirs.

19. Senators are a never ending source of amusement, amazement, and discouragement. But the rascals, when you meet 'em they are mighty nice fellows. It must be something in the office that makes 'em so honery sometimes. When you see what they do officially, you want to shoot 'em, but when one looks at you and grins so innocently, you kinder want to kiss him.

20. The trouble with senators is that the ones that ought to get out, don't.

21. Most all new Senators are earnest and mean well. Then the air of Washington gets into their bones and they are just as bad as the rest.

22. Washington D. C., has an underground tunnel running from the government officers to the Capitol. That's so when senators and congressmen receive their checks every month, they can get to their homes, without someone arresting them for robbery.



23. Papers say: “Congress is deadlocked and can’t act.” I think that is the greatest blessing that could befall this country.
24. I joke about congressmen but at heart I really like the rascals. They are all right. If one wants to do right, our political system is so arranged that he can’t do it. Mighty few retire rich, so there must be a lot more honesty about them than we give ‘em credit.
25. Most people and actors appearing on the stage have some writer to write their material. Congress is good enough for me. They have been writing my material for years.
26. Congress isn’t doing the best they can. They are only doing the best they know how.
27. We cuss the lawmakers, but I notice we’re always perfectly willing to share in any of the sums of money that they might distribute.

3.1.3. PRESIDENTS

Will Rogers met most of the U.S. presidents during his period of success and fame. The first president he became friends with was Teddy Roosevelt and the last one was Franklin D. Roosevelt. He wrote about the job these leaders did, and many of the things he said about them were according to the kind of relation he had with them. With some of them he had a very close friendship and with others he could not become friends because they did not like Rogers’ humor. One of the presidents that did not enjoy Rogers’ comments was Coolidge.

Will was considered a great power in the political world. However he never misused his power for bad purposes. His remarks were not always welcome by all politicians since he directly criticized their job. Woodrow Wilson was one of



the first to call Will Rogers a humorist when he said: “His remarks are not only humorous but illuminating.”

1. Presidents become great, but they have to be made Presidents first.
2. “ Do you want me to tell you the latest political jokes, Mr. President?’ I asked him. “You don’t have to, Will,” he said; “ I know ’em already. I appointed most of them.”
3. The president is in favor of economy in all our various defenses. If we had another war, he will vote to have “a cheap war.”
4. It’s a tough life, this being president and trying to please everybody – well, not exactly everybody, but enough to be reelected.
5. No president can be himself. They are eating and sleeping in a show window. They are acting every minute.
6. A president just can’t make much showing against congress. They lay awake nights, thinking up things to be against the president on.
7. America is just like an insane asylum; there is not a soul in it will admit they are crazy. The president, being the warden, us inmates know he’s the one that’s cuckoo.
8. Most of our presidents never went in much for plans. They only had one plan that said: “Boys, my head is turned; just get it while you can!”
9. Men in America live, hope, and die trying to become president. If they can’t make it, they accept the booby prize and go in the senate.



10. This president business is a pretty thankless job. Washington or Lincoln either, didn't get a statue until everybody was sure they was dead.

3.1.3.1. George Washington

1. A Virginia planter. A farmer that needs no relief but just wants to clean the British out and figures we can run it ourselves and cut out the overhead.
2. He was the most versatile President we ever had. He was a farmer, civil engineer and a gentleman. He made enough at civil engineering to indulge in both the other luxuries.
3. He was the Father of our country...He was a surveyor and he owned half of Virginia because he surveyed his own lines. He was a General on our side because England wouldn't make him one of theirs. He was a politician and a gentleman – that is a rare combination.
4. Washington was elected the first President because he was about the only one who had enough money to give a decent inauguration party.
5. He was a surveyor. He took the exact measure of the British and surveyed himself out about the most valuable piece of land in America at that time, Mount Vernon. George could not only tell the truth but land values.

3.1.3.2. Thomas Jefferson

1. He was the most far-sighted Democrat in either his or any other time and they named the Democratic Party after him. That is he was for the poor but was himself of the rich.



2. Jefferson sitting up there on that hill believed in equality for all. But he didn't divide up that hill with any poor Democrats. (For Democrats were poor in those days as they are today).
3. Jefferson seemed to be the only Democrat in history with any kind of business ability.
4. They haven't had a man that rode a horse to the White House since Jefferson.

3.1.3.3. Andrew Jackson

1. There's a lad that never missed a shot or a drink while he was in the White House.
2. Course I knew what a great man he had been but at the same time I had heard enough to know that an "Injun" didn't exactly rate high with him. I knew he had a lot to do with running the Cherokees out and making them go west, but I knew he had unconsciously favored us in the long run so I forgave him.
3. He was the first one to think up the idea to promise everybody that if they will vote for you, you will give them an office when you get it, and the more times they vote for you, the bigger the office.
4. About all old Andrew was responsible for was the system that made us all have to sit there and listen to such junk (speeches). Andrew was the one that said, "If you don't get out and work for the party you don't get in on the gravy after election."
5. Jackson brought undying fame to the glorious state of Tennessee. He did it by personal bravery and unmatched intelligence.



3.1.3.4. Abraham Lincoln

1. Lincoln was great. He freed that slaves and put the Southern whites in bondage for the duration of their natural lives. He furnished General Grant with cigars to smoke and poor Lee had no gas mask so he had to surrender. Lincoln tried his best to prevent that war between the Democrats and the Republicans. Since then, they have been settling their difficulties at the polls with about the same results.
2. The last few days I have read various addresses made on Lincoln's birthday. Every politician always talks about him, but none of them ever imitate him.
3. Lincoln made a wonderful speech one time: "That this nation under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that Government of the People, by the People, for the People shall not perish from this earth." Now, every time a politician gets in a speech, he digs up this Gettysburg quotation. He recites it every Decoration Day and practices the opposite the other 364 days.

3.1.3.5. Theodore Roosevelt

1. Teddy Roosevelt was my best bet for a laugh in those days (vaudeville). He was the best known public man that ever lived, and they kept up with everything that he did. So when you started in talking about something that he had just said or done, you didn't have to stop and tell what it was before going ahead with your comment.
2. Teddy was a man that wouldn't waste even hatred on nothing.



3. If we can spare men like Roosevelt and Wilson here is no use in any other politician ever taking himself seriously.
4. The reason I advocate electing our officials for life is that no matter what man is in office, the one that you put in his place is worse. If we had kept our original cast that we had to start with, we would have been better off. We had no business ever letting George Washington go. We ought to have kept him till we got a hold of Lincoln, then been more careful of the protection of his life and preserved him to a ripe old age down to where Teddy Roosevelt was say 15 years old. Then we could have turn it over to him. He would have run it as good at that age as most men could at 50.

3.1.3.6. Calving Coolidge

1. President Coolidge have a luncheon for visiting Governors where they discussed but didn't try prohibition.
2. Coolidge came in here with nothing but a valise and a speech on economy. Nobody begrudges him what he has been able to save up during these years and when he is up there (Vermont). In that town there aint much too took at –only what you bring in with you.
3. He kept his mouth shut. That was such a novelty among politicians that it just swept the country. Originally will be rewarded in any line.
4. Here comes Coolidge and does nothing and retires a hero, not only because he hadn't done anything, but because he had done it better than anyone.



3.1.3.7. Herbert Hoover

1. Hoover says every man has the right to ask the following question: *“Is the United States a better place for the average man to live in because the Republican Party has conducted the Government eight years?”* If we are privileged to ask the question, I will be the first one to bite. *Is it?*
2. Hoover was against poverty and favored education, even if you couldn't get into a fraternity. He said prohibition was a “noble experiment,” and he believed in noble things, even if they were only experiments.
3. This fellow Hoover is where he is today because he knew when to refuse something that he knew wouldn't get him anywhere.
4. Farm Relief – Now we have never had farm relief in all our history, but we look to him for it. Prohibition Enforcement – Never had it since it was established, but we expect it from him. Prosperity – Millions never had it under Coolidge, never had it under anybody, but expect it under Hoover. And women think he will wash their dishes and look after their babies. Nothing short of Heaven will we accept under Hoover. Good luck to you, Herb!
5. Hoover reaped the benefits of the arrogance of the party when it was going strong.
6. Herbert Hoover was the first elected presidential candidate I ever saw that kept his campaign promise. He had said he would follow Coolidge's policies, and he did! He went fishing too.



3.1.3.8. Franklin Delano Roosevelt

1. This Roosevelt is a mighty fine human man. Sometimes I think he is too nice a fellow to be mixed up in all this politics.
2. Say this Roosevelt is a fast worker. Even on Sunday when all a President is supposed to do is put on a silk hat and have his picture taken coming out of church, why this President closed all the banks, and called Congress in extra session. And that's not all he is going to call 'em if they don't get something done.
3. Roosevelt said he would take brains anytime in preference to politics. He just as good as admitted you couldn't get both in the same body.
4. An awful lot of folks are preceding Roosevelt's downfall, not only preceding but praying. We are a funny people. We elect our Presidents, be they Republicans or Democrats, then go home and start daring 'em to make good.

3.1.4. CONVENTIONS

William often attended National Conventions, both the Republicans' and the Democrats' to report the events that happened in them.

1. Our National Conventions are nothing but glorified Mickey Mouse cartoons, and are solely for amusement purposes.
2. I have been asked to cover the Republican Convention, to write something funny. All you have to do to write something funny about a Republican Convention, is just tell what happened.



3. Take any of those Party Platforms that they promise before election; why, they promise anything. The same fellows that make them out also make out these insurance policies. That is, what they say on one page, they can deny on the other.
4. One candidate has notified us that his acceptance speech will be very long. The other candidate says that his will be very short. I wonder why one of them don't announce that his will be very good?
5. Every seven years, some people have the itch; in a malaria country, every other day people have a chill; every forty years France and Germany fight; but every four years WE have politics and it hits our country like a pestilence.
6. It looks to me like any man that wants to be president in times like these, lacks something.
7. The Democrats already have started arguing over who will be the Speaker at the next convention. What they better worry about is who is going to listen.
8. As none of the politicians present knew how to pray, they called in a professional. Of course he had been told what to pray for.
9. It's a great game, this convention game. I don't suppose there is a show in the world with as much sameness in it as it has got. You know exactly what each speaker is going to say, before he says it; you know before you go who will be nominated; you know the platform will always be the same – promise everything, deliver nothing. You cuss yourself for sitting day in and day out and looking at such nonsense. But the next four years find you back there again.



3.1.5. CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS

William was not supporter of any political campaign because he did not want to mix up with anything related with politics; he considered that any political job was the worst job anyone could hold. However he did speak about the facts he thought were accurate during campaigns and elections. The only time he was part of a political campaign he said: “I don’t want it to go over and then have to go into politics, because up to now I have always tried to live honest.”

Although Will was born on November 4 – Election Day – and that most of his time was filled with reading, talking, and writing about politics, he never voted. He knew so much about political affairs that perhaps he wanted to avoid any responsibility for a bad choice.

1. So much money is being spent on the campaigns that I doubt if either man, as good as they are, are worth what it will cost to elect them.
2. Take your campaign contribution, and send it to the Red Cross, and let the election be decided on its merit.
3. Most men that emerge from a campaign with any spoils were more lucky than competent. A good campaign manager can do more than an able candidate. “Trades,” more than ability, make presidents.
4. You see, if we didn’t have to parties, we would settle on the best man in the country, and things would run fine. But, as it is now, we settle on the two most eager ones, and then fight over ’em.
5. The trouble with our candidates is that after nomination they take things serious and lose the touch that put ’em where they are.



6. “Common Sense” and “Honesty”: Neither is an issue in politics, it’s a miracle.
7. Of all the bunk handed out during a campaign, the biggest is to flatter the intelligence of the voters.
8. Honest, did you ever read as much bunk and applesauce piled into one campaign? There wasn’t any more truth in over half of what any so-called orator said; if it wasn’t a “deliberate lie” why, it was an “exaggerated falsehood.”
9. Let’s have one issue where we can stand divided. What’s the use of having elections if everybody wants the same thing.
10. The truth can hurt you worse in an election than about anything that could happen to you.
11. Elections are a good deal like marriages, there’s no accounting for anyone’s taste. Every time, you see a bridegroom, we wonder why she picked him, and it’s the same with public officials.
12. Elections is just what we need. We don’t know what we need ’em for, but it’s for something, if only to get one-half of our folks sore at the other half.
13. Elections mean nothing in our lives. All we do is just dig up their salary, and they all get the same, Republicans or Democrats – so you see, there is no way we can win.
14. One of the evils of democracy is you have to put up with the man you elected, whether you want him, or not.
15. Elections are like mosquitoes, you can’t very well fight ’em off without cussing ’em.



16. Democrats: Leave out old Political Leaders in the Senate, where they can't do anybody any good or harm, but hide 'em when a Campaign is on; they been making the same speeches since they were weaned.
17. The South is dry and will vote dry. That is everybody that is sober enough to stagger to the polls.

3.1.6. AMERICA

Will Rogers loved the United States and for him there was no better place to live than his country. In one of his letters from Argentina to his father, he wrote that America was the best place in the world to live and that no matter how better can another nation be, there was nothing like home. He traveled throughout the county, meeting people, seeking for facts that were happening in every town and city he visited, raising funds for charitable causes, visiting friends, or participating in rodeos or polo matches. In every place he stayed, he became familiar with the people, be he a rich man or a poor one. He talked to them and found out the way of life and the affairs of the farmer, the banker, the housewife, etc. Millions of common and ordinary or uneducated and poor Americans loved Will for he was their voice and he was their common sense speaker because he spoke for all the people of America.

1. One-third of the people in the United States promote, while the other two-thirds provide.
2. There's one thing no nation can ever accuse us of and that is secret diplomacy. Our foreign dealings are an open book, generally a check book.
3. There are more mortgages in this country than there are votes. This country right now is operating on a dollar down and a dollar a week. It ain't taxes



that are hurting this country; it's interest. No, it's not politics that is worrying this country; it's the second payment.

4. We are the only nation in the world that waits till we get into a war before we start getting ready for it.
5. This country is not where it is today on account of any man. It is here on account of the real common sense of the big normal majority. The next time a politician get spouting off about what this country needs, either hit him with a tubercular tomato or lay right back in your seat and go to sleep.
6. This country has got too big to need a damn thing.
7. America has the great habit of always talking about protecting American interests in some foreign Country. PROTECT 'EM HERE AT HOME. If America is not good enough for you to live and make money in, why, then you are privileged to go to some other country. But don't ask protection from a country that was not good enough for you. If you want to make money out of a country, why, take out their citizenship papers and join them. Don't use one country for money and another for convenience.
8. Everybody generally admits that we are better off than we ever were in our lives, yet we owe a national debt of almost 30 billions of dollars. We owe more money than any nation in the world, and we ARE LOWERING TAXES. When is the time to pay off a debt if it is not when we are doing well? All government statistics say that 70 percent of every dollar paid in the way of taxes goes to just the keeping up our interest and a little dab of amortization of our national debts. Well, if two-thirds of what you pay goes to keeping up just interest, why don't we do our best to try and cut down the principal, so it will lower that tremendous interest?
9. See where America and Mexico had a joint earthquake. That's the only thing I ever heard that we split 50 – 50 with Mexico.



10. We ain't got exactly what you would call a corner on democracy.
11. When you belong to "America Only" you are the last word in organizations.
12. We owe thirty billion dollars, but we couldn't think of applying it on that; it's too near election.
13. It takes years in this country to tell whether anybody's right or wrong. It's kinder a case of just how far ahead you can see.
14. We are the first nation to starve to death with a storehouse that's over-filled with everything we want.
15. On account of us being a democracy and run by the people, we are the only nation in the world that has to keep a government four years, no matter what it does.
16. We are a good-natured bunch of saps in this country. When the president is wrong we charge it to inexperience. When the tariff is wrong we laugh it off. When Congress is wrong we charge it to habit. When the Senate is right we declare a national holiday. When the market drops 50 points, we are supposed not to know it is manipulation. When a bank fails we let the guy go start another one; when a judge convicts a murderer, that's cruelty; when enforcement officers can't capture it fast enough to fill orders, that's good business. Everything is cockeyed, so what's the use kidding ourselves.
17. If we could have eaten and digested "optimistic predictions" during 1930 we would have been the fattest nation on earth.
18. If we ever pass out as a great nation we ought to put on our tombstone "America died from a delusion that she had moral leadership" over 'em – even if they had one. We mean well, but wind up in wrong, as usual.



19. We are a great people to get tired of anything awful quick. We just jump from one extreme to another. We are much more apt to make a whole change than we ever are a partial change.
20. We got one thing to be thankful for anyhow; the country is not in as bad shape as the rumors have it. If ever a land was rumored to death it's us. There is not a bank in America that is not closed a thousand times a day by whispers. In fact there is no unemployed. We got one hundred and twenty million people working overtime just repeating rumors. If we did pass out as a great nation our epitaph should read "America died from fright."
21. This country has got one problem...we have seven million of our own out of work, that's our only problem, and to arrange the affairs of this "prosperous country", to so arrange it so that a man that wants work can get work, and give him a more equal division of the wealth the country produces. Now if our big men in the next year can't fix that, well, they ain't big men, that's all.
22. It's food, not drink our problem now. We were so afraid that the poor people might drink, now we fixed it so they can't eat.
23. There is not an unemployed man in the country that hasn't contributed to the wealth of every millionaire in America. The working classes didn't bring this on, it was the big boys that thought the financial drunk was going to last forever, and over brought, over merged, and over capitalized. Now the people are not asking for money, they are asking for a job, but as there is no job, towns and cities can't say they haven't got the money, for the same amount of money is in the country as when these folks had their share – somebody's got it.
24. No matter what we do, we are wrong. If we help a nation, we are wrong; if we don't help 'em, we are wrong. There just ain't any such animal as International Good Will. It just lasts till the money you lent 'em runs out.



25. America means well, we mean better than any country in the world, but we just seem to come out wrong. We send men and money and everything. For a so-called smart nation I believe we can be the biggest yaps sometimes. And the funny thing is America never enters anything with any thought of gain. It's just as well that we don't.
26. What's the matter with us? No country ever had more, and no country ever had less. Ten men in our country could buy the whole world, and then millions can't buy enough to eat.
27. America invents everything, but the trouble is we get tired of it the minute the new is wore off.
28. That's what makes us a great nation – we take the little things serious, and the big ones as a joke.
29. We are always doing something through the kitchen door. We like the glory but not the responsibility.
30. Now if there is one thing that we do worse than any other nation, it is try and manage somebody else's affairs.
31. We might be the wealthiest nation that ever existed, we might dominate the world in lots of things and because we are richer than all our neighbors or than anybody else, that don't necessarily mean that we are happier or really better off. The difference between our rich and poor grows greater every year. Our distribution of wealth is getting more uneven all the time. We are always reading "How many men paid over a million dollar income tax" but we never read about "how many there are that are not eating regular."
32. One thing that we do worse than any other nation, it is to try and manage somebody else's affairs.



33. That's all America is, a business institution.

3.1.6.1. The U.S. Government

Will Rogers was sort a representative of the people, he was the voice of the citizens. He kidded about senators, congressmen, presidents, and every political figure. He remarked about the abuse of power they practice while they are in office. His points were like a claim for all the mismanagement of their public obligations. At that time most politicians could pass a bill easily, raise taxes anytime, award contracts or jobs that represented millions of dollars from the budget they had in Washington. So, people agreed with Will and supported him. Will was the most prominent spokesman for the average American and used his power to say what people would like to say. Many times he reminded the government that it should not forget that the people were the ones who ruled.

1. You see the class of help a President gets in the Senate and Congress since immigration has been restricted, you can't treat them with kindness. A Congressman or Senator is not used to kind treatment, even at home, so you have got to be rough with those Birds.
2. People don't change under Governments, the Governments change, but the people remain the same.
3. We are a nation that runs in spite, and not on account of our government.
4. Our government is the only people that just love to spend money without being compelled to, at all. But the government is the only people that don't have to worry where it is coming from.



5. We say the government is nutty, and throwing away money. But any time any is thrown our way, we have never dodged it. Well, if the government is throwing the money away, the only thing I see for the ones that they are throwing it to, have 'em refuse to take it. But you haven't heard that, have you? So don't be so critical of the present plans as long as you are living on the loot from them.
6. Just been reading of a fund the government has, called the Conscience Fund. If you feel that you have cheated the government, you send them the money. Say, how about the government having a Conscience Fund? They have skinned us many a time!
7. You see, what will have to come eventually in government affairs, will be to consider ability, instead of numbers. They law won't just say: "Elect so many men each time!" No! It will say: "Find some man that knows just as much as a hundred others put together. Well, take him, and get rid of the hundred!"
8. America is the only consecutively losing business in the world that keeps on losing, and still keeps going.
9. Government: as bad as they are, they can't spoil it, and as good as they are, they can't help it. We are just flowing to the sea. Corruption can't retard us, and reformers can't assist us; we are just flowing along, in spite of everything.
10. When a man is working for the government in an elected office, he never knows how long it will last. He can only give half his time to his job. He has to give the other half to trying to find out where he is going when this is over. So, I believe, if we guaranteed them something permanent, they would do better. At least we always have the satisfaction to know that they couldn't do worse.
11. If there is one thing that we want to inculcate into the minds of the youth of this country, it is that honesty and fair dealing with our own government is



the foundation of this nation. Our history honors many names whose morals would not stand the acid test, but our history honors no man who betrayed, or attempted to betray, a government trust.

12. Being serious or been a good fellow has got nothing to do with running this country. If the breaks are with you, you could be a laughing hyena and still have a great administration.
13. I understand the type of man you all want for president. We want a man in there who can handle men, a man who when his hired help gets acting up, down at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, can hop in his car, go down there and tell 'em who is boss and where to head in. Don't confer with them – just sock 'em.
14. It is not a disgrace not to be able to run a country nowadays, but it is a disgrace to keep on trying when you know you can't.
15. The only way to keep a governor from becoming senator is to sidetrack him off on the presidency. Isn't the presidency higher than senator? Why, no! The senate can make a sucker out of any president, and generally does.
16. The government has never been accused of being a business man.
17. As our government deteriorates our humor increases.
18. There is no dishonesty in government. If there is, let's don't dig it up. That's what made our government is our faith in it.
19. No one is going to spoil the country but the people. No one man can do it and all the people are not going to do it, so it's going to run in spite of all the mistakes that can happen to it.
20. Always remember this, that as bad as we sometimes think our government runs, it's the best run I ever saw.



21. We have killed more people celebrating our Independence Day than we lost fighting for it.
22. Liberty don't work as good in practice as it does in speeches.

3.1.6.2. U. S. Citizens

1. American people like to have you repent; then they are generous.
2. Nobody wants to be called common people, especially common people.
3. We do more talking progress than we do progressing.
4. Everybody wants to hear accusations and nobody wants to hear denials.
5. The American people would trade ten investigations for one conviction.
6. We changed with the times, so we can't blame the children for just joining the times without even having to change.
7. Americans are getting like a Ford car. They all have the same parts, the same upholstering and make exactly the same noises.
8. It's the Americans, or it is the American in any country that cause the Ambassador or Minister or Consul all the trouble. There is more renegade Americans abroad than there is at home.
9. A liberal is man who wants to use his own ideas on things in preference to generations who, he knows, know more than he does.
10. Temperament is liable to arrive with a little success, especially if you haven't been used to success. The best cure in the world for temperament is hunger. I have never seen a Poor temperamental person.



11. A Made Man is a finished Man. A real Self-Made Man would have to be one who had received no learning or knowledge, or assistance from any Person or Source.
12. Young John D. Rockefeller says: "Love is the greatest thing in the World." You take a few words of affection and try and trade them to him for a few Gallons of Oil, and you will discover just how great Love is.
13. The great criticism of the Movies is that People are suddenly thrown into possession of Money who never were accustomed to handle it before, and that they lose their heads. Did you ever think of Oil People? Why, they are rich so quick they are Millionaires before they have time to get the grease off their hands.
14. People's minds are changed through observation and not through argument.
15. We like prosperity but we are having so much of it that we just can't afford it.
16. There is no country in the world where a person changes from a hero to a goat and a goat to a hero.
17. It's not our public men that you can't put your finger on, it's our public. We are the only fleas weighing over 100 pounds. We don't know what we want, but we are ready to bite somebody to get it.

3.1.6.3. U. S. States and Cities

1. New York: That City from which no weary Traveler returns without drawing again on the Home Town Bank.



2. The only way to lick a Texan is with bad liquor. Any State that can make worse liquor than Texas can lick 'em, but it's hard to make worse. That's why Texas licked Mexico, Texas had the worst. They fattened on Mexico's "tequila."
3. Beverly Hills and Hollywood are the Sodom and Gomorrah of the west.

3.1.6.4. Americanism

1. When an Office Holder, or one that has been found out, can't think of anything to deliver a speech on, he always falls back on the good of subject, AMERICANISM. The first thing I find out is there ain't any such animal. This American Animal that I thought I had here is nothing but the big Honest Majority, that you might fight in any Country. He is not a Politician; He is not a 100 percent American; He is not an organization, either uplift or downfall. In fact I find he don't belong to anything. He is no decided Political faith or religion. I can't even find out what religious brand is on him. From his earmarks he has never made a speech, and announced that he was An American. He hasn't denounced anything. It looks to me like he is just an Animal that has been going along, believing in right, doing right, tending to his own business, and letting the other fellows alone. He don't seem to be simple enough minded to believe that EVERYTHING is right and he don't appear to be Cuckoo enough to think that EVERYTHING is wrong. He don't seem to be a Prodigy, and he don't seem to be a simple. In fact, all I can find about him is that he is just NORMAL. This Normal breed is so far in majority that there is no use to worry about the others. They are a lot of Mavericks, and Strays.



3.1.7. TRAVEL

Will Rogers traveled extensively and absorbed a great deal on his trips because he was interested in everything he saw and everybody he met. He liked to keep the date line on his daily telegram, so he toured from city to city and country to country. Will felt it was essential in his work as a speaker and writer to get firsthand information on world events he intended to write about. Despite the fact that William was a very poor sailor, and hated the idea of crossing an ocean he visited many nations around the world. As he stated, "I crossed and uncrossed about all the oceans we got, but it's always been because I wanted to get somewhere. It was never just really for relaxation and pleasure." Traveling was fun for Will, no matter how he traveled or where he headed. Betty Rogers had remarked that Will was like a little boy that never grew up because he always wanted to go someplace. Will Rogers liked to be busy every minute, and his impatience and thirst of knowledge made him keep moving around to get it.

3.1.7.1. Foreign Nations

Will Rogers was a very lucky guy because he knew how to take advantage of the opportunities to grow up as a showman professional. He could take the chances or the breaks in his career. That is how he could travel abroad and visit other nations in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Twice he traveled as an unofficial ambassador to recollect information about the way of life and habits of the countries he visited. Other times, he traveled as a guest to join a circus or a theatre to be part of the show. Also, he traveled abroad just for pleasure and by chance to know a country he did not know yet. Besides, he liked to travel to any nation that was going through any disgrace to raise funds and help them. This way he became acquainted with the realism that other people lived.



1. Nations are just like individuals. Loan them money and you lose their friendship.
2. When the big nations quit meddling then the world will have peace.
3. These other Nations have got it on us. They can play half a dozen Conferences at once, while with us, if we can find a man to send to one, why, we are lucky, and we always feel uneasy till he gets home. They always bring a Pack of Experts and Technical men along to advice. I have always noticed that any time a man can't come and settle with you without bringing his Lawyer, why, look out for him.
4. Nations are just like individuals. They get mad and fight just like individuals. Their feelings are hurt even quicker than individuals. They do everything just like one person. So that's the way it is with wealth and position. We might be the wealthiest Nation that ever existed, we might dominate the world in lots of things, but as Nations are individuals, why we are just an Individual, and because we are richer than our Neighbors or than anybody else, that don't necessarily mean that we are happier or really better off. We don't all envy our Town or State's most wealthy man. We see lots of reasons why we wouldn't trade places with him. We not only look at his wealth but we look at all the other sides to him. We may know how he is all wet in lots of ways. So we may say, "Yes he has got money, but what else?"
5. No sir, Europe has nothing to recommend it but its old age.
6. Belgium is the Gettysburg of Europe. It's really not a Country, but a military highway.
7. Canada is a mighty good neighbor and a mighty good customer. That's a combination that is hard to beat.



8. Rome has more churches and less preaching in them than any city in the world. Everybody wants to see where St. Peter was buried, but nobody wants to try to live like him.
9. Switzerland – the rumor factory – is the most independent country in the world. Its sole commodities are Conferences and Neutrality. When Nations get ready to make peace or war, why they always go to Switzerland. Geneva and Locarno are the principal conference towns. It has had fewer wars and has been the starting place of more of them than any Nation that ever lived. They just sit around and remain Neutral during these wars and then collect from all ends. It's the only country where both sides can go and meet and have a drink together during that particular war. Switzerland is a kind of a Speakeasy for any and all sides. It's the Blind Tiger of Europe.
10. The thing that really makes any two nations a little more sympathetic towards each other is the fact that they may be able to use each other.
11. Every nation in Europe goes to bed with a gun under its head.
12. China, even if they never shot a gun for the rest of their lives, is the most powerful country in the world. You could move the whole of Japan's seventy million into the very heart of China, and in seventy years there wouldn't be seventy Japanese left.
13. The Japanese are mighty polite and nice, and they want you to see and like their country. They got everything we got, and if they haven't, you show it to 'em and they will make it.
14. I see by the papers that they say "Germany is going insane." I wish you could name me a nation that is competent of judging insanity.



3.1.7.2. England

1. England wants to settle one way with Germany and France has a different plan. Now, as Germany owes both of them, there is no reason why each couldn't settle in their own way. But no, that's too easy. Nations don't do things that way. If they did they would be no Diplomats, and Diplomats are nothing but high class Lawyers (some aint even high class).
2. England elects a Labor Government. When a man goes in for politics over here, he has no time to labor, and any man that labors has no time to fool with politics. Over there politics is an obligation; over here it's a business.
3. Now here is one thing about England's government where they are more democratic than ours. When a guy don't suit them, there is no waiting to oust him. The minute the majority are at outs with the reigning Premier, why, they can call for a new election and he is out, maybe before he even has time to learn where the icebox is at 10 Downing Street.
4. England has been the daddy of the diplomat, the one with the smooth manners. Still going after what he wants, but always a gentleman. You know, that's one thing about an Englishman, he can insult you, but he can do it so slick and polite, that he will have you guessing until away after he leaves you just whether he was friend or foe.
5. Englishmen live slow and move fast; we live fast and move slow. Englishmen are the only race of people that never travel for just fun.

3.1.7.3. Russia

1. Russia is a country that is burying their troubles. Your criticism is your epitaph. You simply say your say and then you are through.



2. The Russians got a five-year plan. Maybe it's terrible, but they got one. We have been two years just trying to get a plan. We will just about have to save ourselves accidentally. That's the way we stumbled on prosperity.
3. A Russian thrives on adversity. He is never as happy in his life as when he is miserable. So he may just be sitting pretty, for he is certainly miserable.
4. The Russians figured out everything in their communistic system, except how to get enough to eat.
5. A Russian just loves misery. He thrives on adversity. He is never as happy in his life as when he is miserable. So, he may just be setting pretty, for he is certainly miserable.
6. What they need in their government is more of a sense of humor, and less of a sense of revenge.
7. If the Communists worked just as hard as they talked, they'd have the most prosperous style of government in the world.
8. Communism is one-third practice and two-thirds explanation.... It's absolutely impossible for any Socialist to say anything in a few words. You say, "Is it light or dark?" and it takes him two volumes to answer Yes or No.
9. A Conservative thinks you ought to divide with him what you have while a real Communist believes that you ought to give it all to him. Communism is like Prohibition; it's a good idea, but it won't work.
10. The old Communist preaches his doctrines, but he wants to do it where he is enjoying the blessing of capitalistic surroundings. He preaches against the pie, but he sure eats it.



3.1.8. DIPLOMACY

Will Rogers accepted the job of Diplomacy three times. Although it was an informal task since he was not appointed by any official to do any diplomatic work, he traveled abroad as a diplomatic aid. In May, 1926, he was sent to Europe by the *Saturday Evening Post* as an unofficial Ambassador. From the information he got with those travels he wrote many articles which he called, *Letters from a Self-Made Diplomat to his President*. Later, these articles were published in book form, followed by another book named *There's not a Bathing Suit in Russia, More Letters from a Self-Made Diplomat*, which were written during his visit to Mexico, and "*Letters from a Self-Made Diplomat to Senator Borah.*"

1. Diplomacy is a great thing if it wasn't so transparent.
2. The only real diplomacy ever performed by a diplomat is in deceiving their own people after their dumbness has got them into war.
3. That's called "diplomacy," doing just what you said you wouldn't.
4. Diplomacy was invented by a man named Webster, to use up all the words in his dictionary that didn't mean anything.
5. Diplomacy is the art of saying 'Nice doggie' until you can find a rock.

3.1.8.1. Diplomats

1. A Diplomat is a man that tells you what he don't believe himself, and the man that he is telling it too don't believe in any more than he does. Si Diplomacy is always equal. It's like good bookkeeping. He don't believe you and you don't believe him, so it always balances. Diplomats meet and eat,



and rush home and wire their Governments in Code that they fooled the Secretary of State so-and-so.

2. We don't have diplomats over in the Western World, and naturally we don't have any wars with each other.
3. Diplomats have a thing they call diplomatic language. It's just a lot of words and when they are all added up, they don't mean a thing. A diplomatic language has a hundred ways of saying nothing but no way of saying something. Because he has never had anything to say, that's why they call 'em diplomats.
4. Diplomats are just as essential to starting a war as Soldiers are for finishing it. You take diplomacy out of war, and the thing would fall flat in a week.
5. A Diplomat and a stage Magician are the two professions that have to have a high silk hat. All the tricks that either one of them have are in that hat, and are all known to other Diplomats and Magicians.
6. A diplomat has a hundred ways of saying nothing, but no way of saying something.
7. Diplomats are nothing but high-class lawyers – and some ain't even high class.
8. Diplomats write notes because they wouldn't have the nerve to tell the same thing to each other's face.
9. Nowadays we have diplomats work on wars for years before arranging them. That's so that when it's over, nobody will know what they were fighting for. We lost thousands and spent billions, and you could hand a sheet of paper to one million different people, and tell 'em to write down what the last war was for, and the only answer that will be alike, will be "d_____ if I know!"



10. It's a funny thing that you can't deal with nations like you can with businessmen. That's on account of having what they call, diplomats. A diplomat is a fellow to keep you from settling on a thing so everybody can understand it.

3.1.9. BUSINESS

Will Rogers was successful in almost everything he attempted, but he was not successful in the field of business. Once he tried to make his Film Corporation, but he found out that it was too expensive and it closed three years later when he was completely broke. Yet, he knew about land, and he always bought the best available.

William never hired agents or advisers to work with him. He often said that sometimes an advice can be more dangerous than a gun. He did not want anybody telling him what to do and how to run his life or how to run his affairs.

Although William was friend with a great number of businessmen and the most influential men of his time, he never used his friendship to benefit himself or take advantage of a situation.

Will and Betty managed their finances. They never invested in the Stock Market, and never took any chances on anything he did not have to work for. He explained: "I never in my life made a single dollar without having to chew some gum to get it."

William always said that money was made for spending and giving. It was made to do things and to bring joy to people, not to be hidden away. He never denied a little bit of his share to the people who really needed help. If he had a friend or a stranger in a hard situation, he would do anything to help them.



1. You have a budget like you have a limit in a poker game. You're not supposed to go beyond it till at least an hour after the game has started.
2. No nation in the history of the world was ever sitting as pretty. If we want anything, all we have to do is buy it on credit. So that leaves us without any economic problem whatever, except perhaps some day to have to pay for 'em. But we are certainly not thinking about that this early. Yours for more credit and longer payments.
3. Big business don't go broke any more. The minute it looks bad for them, they combine with something else and issue more stock.
4. Don't make the first payment on anything. First payment is what made us think we were prosperous and the other nineteen is what showed us we were broke.
5. This open-door stuff is a lot of hooey. Any door is only open to those that have the best product at the cheapest money.
6. No nation has a monopoly on good things. Each one has something that the others could well afford to adopt.

3.1.9.1. Wall Street and The Stock Market

1. If Wall Street paid a tax on every "game" they run, we would get enough revenue to run the government on.
2. Every day now stock market "faw down go boom," so tomorrow no session. Called off on account of the "flu." And a funny thing it was on account of the "flu." If it had "flu" up they wouldn't have had to call it off on account of the "flu," but as it "flu" downward, why everybody has to "flu" around Saturday and get ready for not only the "flu" Monday but maybe pneumonia.



3. This Stock Market thing has spoiled more appetites lately than bad cooking. The Stock Market is just like a sieve (one of those pans with holes in it). Everything and everybody is put into it, and it is shaken, and through the holes go all the small stuff. Then they load it up again and maby hold it still for a while and then they start shaking again and through the little investors go. They pick themselves up, turn bootlegger or do something to get some more money, and then they crawl back in the hopper and away they go again.
4. Course I haven't been buying anything myself. I wanted to give all the other folks a chance to have confidence first. There is none of the Greedy Pig about me. This confidence was for sale and I wanted them to have the very first chance of buying it.
5. All the big financiers and stock-market writers are saying; good values are worth as much as they ever were! But that's the trouble, nobody knows what they ever were worth.
6. Stocks, why anything that looked like a stock, would sell. People would wire in: "Buy me some stocks!" The broker would answer: "What kind?" They buyers would wire back: "Any kind, the Republicans are in, ain't they all supposed to go up?"
7. This stock-market thing was a great game, but, after all, everybody just can't live on gambling. Somebody has to do some work.
8. The Stock Market has spoiled more appetites than bad cooking.



3.1.9.2. Taxes

1. Income tax has made more liars out of the Americans people, than gold has.
2. The crime of taxation is not in the taking of it, it's in the way it's spent.
3. I see a good deal of talk from Washington about lowering taxes. I hope they do get 'em lowered down enough so people can afford to pay 'em.
4. A tax paid on the day you buy is not a tough as asking you for it the next year when you are broke.
5. We have it on the best of our information that taxes will be relieved, but not until after your death.
6. The good old days with most of us was when we didn't earn enough to pay an income tax.
7. Nothing has improved but taxes.
8. We don't seem to be able to even check crime. Why not legalize it and put a heavy tax on it. Make the tax for robbery so high that a bandit couldn't afford to rob anyone unless he had a lot of dough.
9. Baseball is a skilled game. It's America's game – it, and high taxes.

3.1.9.3. Recession: The Great Depression

1. Why don't somebody print the truth about our present economic condition? We spent years of wild buying on credit, everything under the sun, whether we needed it or not, and now we are having to pay for it, and we are howling like a pet coon. This would be a great world to dance in, if we didn't have to pay the fiddler.



2. The depression won't end till we grow a generation that knows how to live on what they got.
3. This recession has taught us one important fact, that we haven't got as many "big men" as we thought we had. We used to think every head of a big organization was a "big man," and he was, as long as everything was running in spite of him.
4. The trouble with us today is we are in such bad shape that it takes us all day to tell about. We keep yapping for the good old days. Well, we might just as well wake up, for those cuckoo times are not coming back any more.
5. Well, the old year is leaving us flat, but in reality it's been our most beneficial year. It took some of the conceit out of us.

3.1.10. LAWYERS AND BANKERS

Lawyers and Bankers were also one of Will's favorite subjects for his jokes. Will tried to live as correctly as he could in order to avoid problems with the law. He never hired any lawyer to look after his business. Once, when *The Literary Digest* magazine accused him of illegal competition for his publication called the "*Illiterate Digest*", he defended himself and was his own lawyer. His argument was that since *The Literate Digest* was a serious and the most influential weekly publication of the time, the *Illiterate Digest* was completely opposite and that all he meant was to make fun of his own experiences during his early years of his show business career.

3.1.10.1. Law and Lawyers

1. The minute you read something and you can't understand it, you can almost be sure that it was drawn up by a lawyer. Then if you give it to another



lawyer to read and he don't know just what it means, why then you can be sure it was drawn up by a lawyer. It it's in a few words and is plain and understandable only one way, it was written by a non-lawyer.

2. Law is complications and complications are Law. If everything was just plain, there wouldn't be any lawyers.
3. Personally, I don't think you can make a lawyer honest by an act of legislature. You've got to work on his conscience. And his lack of conscience is what makes him a lawyer.
4. Lawyers are like a lot of the crafts that many of us live by, great, but useless.
5. Every time a lawyer writes something, he is not writing for posterity, he is writing so that endless others of his craft can make a living out of trying to figure out what he said. Course perhaps he hadn't really said anything, that's what makes it hard to explain.
6. Corruption in politics: It's what lawyers call "sharp practice." So it's going to be awful hard to make an issue of corruption.
7. The Legal Record: "Dedicated to the interest of the legal profession," it's a paper that has nothing to do with news. It tells you right off we take nothing but the lawyer's side.
8. A jury should decide a case the minute they are sworn in, before the lawyers have had a chance to mislead 'em.
9. There has never yet been a course at college devised in "What makes a lawyer like he is?"



3.1.10.2. Bankers

Will had a great respect for bankers as a whole because his father was a banker in Claremore during the last years of his life. Clem Rogers known as “Uncle Clem” for being a generous-hearted man, helped many local citizens to get started in business and helped others to recover from financial ruin. However, William did not always approve the way some of them managed business. Because he was a generous man like his father and used some of his fortune to help the unfortunate in disgrace, it was difficult for him to understand why the bankers were not more merciful.

He was a popular speaker at bankers’ meetings and conventions and often referred to them as the “Loan Sharks,” “Shylocks,” or “Skinflints.” Under the guise of his good-natured mockery, Will could drive a point like a guided missile. It was a way to defend the class of people who were not able to speak for themselves.

1. Show me ten men that mortgage their land to get money and I will have to get a search warrant to find one that gets the land back again. If you think it ain’t a sucker game, why is your banker the richest man in your town?
2. Banking and after-dinner speaking are two of the most nonessential industries we have in this country. I am ready to reform if they are.
3. All newsboys become politicians and all bootblacks become bankers.
4. Is there any way of checking up on a bank president or vice-president to see what he can actually by his own efforts draw into his bank?
5. There is nothing as scary as a banker. He don’t wait for the grave yard to whistle, he will do it passing a hearse.



6. The Banker, the Lawyer, and the Politician are still our best bets for a laugh. Audiences haven't changed at all, and neither has the three above professions.
7. All these big moneyed people, they are just like the underworld – they all know each other and kinder work together.
8. Borrowing money on what's called “easy terms” is a one-way ticket to the poorhouse.
9. If you notice, they are always trying to put through some kind of bill in congress, but nobody ever puts through one to do something about bank interest. No, Sir, you couldn't do that, because then you are getting into the business of the boys that really hold the hoops while the jumping is going on.

3.1.11. WAR

Will Rogers lived during the World War I Era and was a witness of the destruction and damage it caused to the world. After the Great War, countless conferences were held in some European countries. There were peace conferences, economic conferences, arms limitation conferences, naval disarmament conferences, etc. So, Will attended these conferences to recollect material and report the news. He wrote about the terrible aftermath of any war. He never felt optimistic about disarmament because he suspected that each nation that participated in those disarmament conferences had a personal motive. Though he did not live to see the outbreak of World War II in 1939, he warned the country that War was around the corner rather than peace or prosperity. After attending his first disarmament conference in London in 1930 he wrote:



Nobody is going to disarm in the least. You know these men that are gathered are not the idealist that think: 'Oh, we can't have war; it's too terrible, we must not have war!' That would be wonderful, but these men know history too well, they know each other too well, and they know that war is not only a possibility, but a probability. (Sterling: 137)

Just nine years later, the world was at war once again.

1. Wars will never be a success until you have a referee and until they announce before they start just what it's for.
2. I have a scheme for stopping war. It's this – No nation is allowed to enter a war till they have paid for the last one.
3. There has been war since the beginning of time and we are no smarter than the people that have gone before us. There is apt to be some more war.
4. Asking Europe to disarm is like asking a man in Chicago to give up his life insurance.
5. No nation can tell another nation what they need to defend themselves. That's a personal affair. There is nothing that makes a nation or individual as mad as to have somebody say, "Now this is really none of my business but I am just advising you." If I sleep with a gun under my pillow, I don't want somebody from across the street to "advise" me that I don't need it.
6. When you take boys away you take everything they have in the world, that is, their life. You send them to war and part of that life you don't lose you let him come back with it.
7. I am only an ignorant cowpuncher but there ain't nobody on earth, I don't care how smart they are, ever going to make me believe they will ever stop wars. The only way to do is just stay out of them as long as you can.



8. Nations are nothing but individuals, and you can't stop even brothers from fighting sometimes.
9. History don't record that "Economy" ever won a war.
10. In wars the slogan is Honor, but the object is Land.

3.1.11.1. Conferences

1. I have one suggestion to offer for international goodwill, that is, have an international national anthem that goes for everybody when it is played. It's for all. Make it short and it will please every nation.
2. Congress ought to pass a law to prohibit us conferring with anybody on anything – till we learn how.
3. The best omen of international good-will is that conferences are getting shorter. Now if they will do away with 'em entirely there will be no war.
4. War talk in Europe has pretty near died out on account of no international conferences being held. They haven't got much chance of getting sore at each other.
5. Every war has been preceded by a peace conference, that's what always starts the next war.
6. People talk peace but men give their life's work to war. It won't stop 'til there is as much brains and scientific study put to aid peace as there is to promote war.
7. It takes a sense of humor for these people to understand us shaking hands with one hand and shooting with the other.



8. A conference is just a place where countries meet and find out each other's shortcomings, and form new dislikes for the next conference.
9. Conferences: It's kinder like Hollywood weddings. I get a bundle of invitations every day to attend a wedding, but I would rather wait a few weeks and take in the divorce.
10. I'll bet there was never a war between two nations that had never conferred first.
11. A conference is held for one reason only, to give everybody a chance to get sore at everybody else.

3.1.11.2. Disarmament

1. Wars don't diminish our preparedness. It's peace that's devastating, that's when we are attacked by disarmament conferences.
2. This disarmament thing is only a tax-saving conference and not a humanitarian one. They want to eliminate the battleships, and not a word is said about restricting the things that you are going to be killed with in the next war.
3. We are in the midst of a disarmament conference to disarm ourselves of the things we figure won't be used in the next war, which will leave more money to develop the things that will be used. You can't say civilization don't advance, however, for in every war they killed you in a new way.
4. Take these disarmament conferences now, why, it's like holding a traffic conference and just discuss the limiting of horses and buggies. I wonder if we ever get so civilized that one will be held to limit submarines, airplanes, and chemicals.



5. The way to make 'em disarm is to start building and quit begging 'em to disarm.
6. I been reading a lot about this disarmament conference that's been going on for a while. So far it seems to be a Disagreement Conference.

3.1.11.3. Armed Forces

1. Soldiers: You promised them everything but the kitchen stove if they would go to war. We promised them EVERYTHING, and all they got is \$1.25 a day and some knitted sweaters and Sox. Everybody's alibi for not giving them the bonus is, "We Can't commercialize the Patriotism of our Noble Boys." "They didn't go to war for money, they went for glory." I think the best insurance in the world against another war is to take care of the boys who fought in the last one. YOU MAY WANT TO USE THEM AGAIN.
2. These big wars over commerce are pretty bad. They kill more people, but one over religion is really the most bitter.
3. Why shouldn't we have the biggest army and the biggest navy and the biggest air force in the world, we are the greatest nation.
4. A country is known by its strength, and a man by his checkbook.
5. I tell you, war is a business with some of these other nations. Their soldiers are trained between wars – not after one starts.



3.1.11.4. Aviation

Will was a loyal defender of aviation. He always argued that aviation was the best way to travel in the future. It was a delight that he championed from the time he began traveling in mail flights.

1. When we nearly lose the next war, as we probably will, we can lay it onto one thing and that will be the jealousy of the army and navy toward aviation. They have belittled it since it started and will keep on doing it till they have something dropped on them from one.
2. Aviation is not a fad; it's a necessity and will be our mode of travel long after all the people who are too valuable to fly have met their desired deaths by the roadsides on Sunday afternoons.
3. I tell you, any experiment that is being made in the air is not a waste of time or money. Our defense, offense, and all, have got to come from the air.
4. If we were told tomorrow that the future and safety of our country depended on football and athletics, why, everybody, the whole country, would be out practicing. But when any sane person absolutely knows that the success of the next war is in the air, why, they just drag along and think somebody is kidding 'em.

3.1.12. EDUCATION

Although William attended a number of schools in his early years, he never dedicated enough time to book learning. Will himself announced: "I am practically world famous for my ignorance." Despite the fact that Will did not get a college degree, he learned by himself through extensive hours of reading



newspapers, magazines, books; through his traveling, and his contact with people. All of this made him a very educated man in those days.

1. Everybody is ignorant, only in different subjects.
2. There is nothing as stupid as an educated man if you get him off the subject he was educated in.
3. All I know is just what I read in the papers, and that's an alibi for my ignorance.
4. When ignorance gets started it knows no bounds.
5. I believe the Lord split knowledge up among his subjects about equal after all. The so-called ignorant is happy. Maybe he is happy because he knows enough to be happy. The smart one knows he knows a lot, and that makes him unhappy because he can't impart it to all his friends. Discontent comes in proportion to knowledge. The more you know the more you realize you don't know.
6. It's been said that "when you graduate from Harvard or Yale it takes the next 10 years to live it down and the next 40 to try to forget it."
7. The papers today say that illiteracy has decreased. The more that learn how to read the less learn how to make a living. That's one thing about a little education. It spoils you for actual work. The more you know the more you think somebody owes you a living.
8. Education never helped morals. The most savage people we have are the most moral. The smarter the guy, the bigger the rascal.
9. A man only learns by two things; one is reading and the other is associating with smarter people.



10. More words ain't good for anything in the world only to bring on more argument.
11. Instead of giving money to found colleges to promote learning, why don't they pass a constitutional amendment, prohibiting anybody from learning anything. And if it works as good as the prohibition one did, why, in five years we would have the smartest race of people on earth.
12. Does college pay? It does if you are a good open field runner.

3.1.13. LABOR

William believed that any man that was willing to work ought to have the opportunity to work and get a fair wage for his labor. When America was devastated by the stock market crash, beginning the worst depression, around twelve million were unemployed. William advocated public programs to provide people at least a couple of hours on any kind of occupation and pay them for their service. He also supported the creation of an organization for the betterment of the working man. He always reinforced the idea that workers ought to speak out and claim their rights, but he did not support the idea of strikes. He always said that it was the last means to be applied.

1. Every child, regardless of age, shall receive the same wage as a grown person. That will stop Child Labor. They only hire them because they pay them less for the same work that they would have to pay a man.
2. You can't give people something for nothing, you got to do something for what you get.
3. Labor leaders don't do any laboring after they are able to lead.



4. Unions are a fine thing, for they are in every line of business. Bankers have their association for mutual benefit, governors have theirs, all big industries are banded together in some way. But a strike should be the very last means, for it is like war, it always falls on those who had nothing to do with calling it.
5. It's a tough time for any group to start making demands. The farmer deserves a profit, but the guy that's not eating deserves a meal more. The stockholder deserves his dividend, but the unemployed deserves his job more.
6. Mussolini had said: A strike is just like two men shooting at each other out there on a public square that is crowded with people. Everybody gets hit more than the two men shooting at each other.

3.1.14. PERSONAL

Will Rogers was America's most reassuring voice and the most beloved man during his time. It was a calamity for America to lose him at such an early age. Many things have already been said about this character, so now let's read what William said about himself.

1. I was born on Nov. 4, which is Election Day. . . . My birthday has made more men and sent more back to honest work than any other days in the year.
2. In Claremore, my people know me as "Willie, Uncle Clem's boy who wouldn't go to school but just kept running around the country throwing a rope, till I think he finally got in one of them 'Shows.'"
3. I am just an old country boy in a big town trying to get along. I have been eating Pretty Regular, and the reason I have been is because I have stayed an old country boy.



4. All I used to know was just what I read in the papers. Now all I know is just what I see myself.
5. I ain't got much education but I got good common sense
6. I am no believer in this "hard work, perseverance, and taking advantage of your opportunities." The successful don't work any harder than the failures. They get what is called in baseball the breaks.
7. There is no inducement that would make me foolish enough to run for any political office. I want to be on the outside where I can be friends and joke about all of them, even the president.
8. When I write em I am through with em (weekly articles). I am not being paid reading wages. You can always see too many things you wish you hadent said, and not enough that you ought to.
9. Just give me some beans and I will follow you off.
10. I am the world's worst sailor anyhow. I get sick before the boat unties from the dock, but you know I says, "I am going to lick this, I am going to eat everything they got, drink..."
11. Here is a queer streak in me, I'm not a hunting man – or fishing, either. I wish I was, for there must be a lot of pleasure in it, but I just don't want to be shooting at any animal, and even a fish, I haven't got the heart to pull the hook out of him.
12. I get all my quiet amusement talking about politics and making them think that I am taking it all serious.
13. I sure used to envy General Grant and Jesse James when they had cigars named after 'em, but here I am sitting in the brand new, most up-to-date



hotel in the Southwest, the Will Rogers Hotel in Claremore. It's six stories high. I know now how proud Christopher Columbus must have felt when he heard they had named Columbus, Ohio, after him.

14. Today is my wife's and my twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. It kind of sneaked up on me. I, of course, being just an ordinary husband, didn't know it was coming. Why is that wives want to keep those things secret, and then, when you don't notice it, they tell you afterwards and make you feel bad. I just got the news on time, late in the afternoon yesterday, so I bought her a pretty present.

15. Well, all I know is just what I read in the papers. The old paper in the morning is my breakfast. Course, I don't entirely depend on it. I like it accompanied by some ham and eggs, and a few biscuits, a series of cups of coffee, a few wheat cakes to help get your mind off the editorials. So, with my California grapefruit, raised in Laredo, Texas, I like a paper.

16. A breakfast without a newspaper is a horse without a saddle. You are just riding bareback. Take away my ham, take away my eggs, even my chili, but leave me my newspaper.

17. We are always drilling into our children: When I was a boy we didn't do that! But we forget that we are not doing those same old things today. We are always telling 'em what we used to not do, but we didn't do it because we didn't think of it. We did everything we could think of. I tell you, they got to do some to keep up with us. If any one of us had a child that we thought was as bad as we know we are, we would have cause to star to worry.

18. I endorsed chewing gum one time and almost like to had to take up chewing tobacco, to win my "fans" back again. Nothing can get you in wrong quicker than an endorsement.



19. These Irish, you got to watch 'em. There was a few of 'em sneaked into Oklahoma and got mixed up with the Rogerses and the Cherokees, and I am a sort of an offshoot – an Irish Indian.
20. Darkies raised me. I wasn't only raised among Darkies down in the Indian Territory, but I was raised by them. And Lord, I was five years old out at the ranch before I ever knew there was a white child. There wasn't any other around there. The first one showed up when I was about five years old. You see, I was raised with the Darky children. Now, one of these white children showed up about the same time that Hereford cattle come in. I thought for sure this white child and this bald-face Hereford was the same breed.
21. I did everything in the circus, Wild West show, rodeo, the *Follies*, and now I've done the play *Ah! Wilderness* by O'Neil; you know, a real play where you had to remember lines, and everything. Oh well, there is only one other amusement line I haven't been in, and that's go to the senate. But I ain't going to try that – I've got some pride left.
22. I traveled a good deal all over the world, and I got along pretty good in all these foreign countries, for I have a theory that it's their country and they got a right to run it like they want to. After all, you never heard of the Republicans trying to send a lot of dough to try and carry Alabama, have you? And the Baptists are not rushing any money into Rome to swing it their way, either.
23. Will you do me a favor? If you see or hear of anybody proposing my name humorously, or semihumorously, for any political office, will you maim said party, and send me the bill. I not only don't *choose* to run, I will say I won't run! No matter how bad the country will need a comedian by that time.
24. The *Fourth Reader* McGuffey is as far as I ever got in school. I am not bragging on it, I am thoroughly ashamed of it, for I had every opportunity. Everything I have done has been by luck; no move was premeditated. I just



stumbled from one thing to another. I might have been down. I didn't know at the time, for I don't know what "up" is.

25. I have often said in answer to inquiries as to how I got away with kidding some of our public men, that it was because I liked all of them personally, and if there was no malice in your heart, there could be none in your gags; and I have always said I never met a man I didn't like.

26. A comedian is not supposed to be serious nor to know much. As long as he is silly enough to get laughs, why, people let it go at that. But I claim you have to have a serious streak in you or you can't see the funny side of the other fellow.

27. My ancestors didn't come over on the *Mayflower* – they met the boat.

3.1.14.1. Rogers' Family

William was a family man. He had a very close relationship with his sisters and some of his nephews and nieces. Once he got married, Betty developed a very deep and close friendship with her sisters-in-law and her father-in-law whom she called "Uncle Clem." Rogers also was an affectionate father with all his children. Every time he was away from home he exchanged letters with them as well as with his wife. He always corresponded with his sisters and his father too.

When his sister Maud Ethel – known as Mrs. C.L. Lane – died Will wrote:

"She and my other sister started in this little Western Town – Chelsea, Oklahoma – some 35 years ago. They helped build the Methodist Church, the first church there. They have helped every movement that they knew was for the best upbuilding of their community. They have each raised a large family of Boys and Girls who are today a credit to their community. They have carried on the same as thousands of



Women have carried on in every small and Big Town in the World. They don't think they are doing anything out of the ordinary. They don't want credit. They do good simply because they don't know any other thing to do. Some uninformed Newspaper printed: 'Mrs. C.L. Lane sister of the famous Comedian Will Rogers.' It's the other way around. I am the brother of Mrs. C.L. Lane, "the Friend of Humanity."

3.2. PHILOSOPHY

William's philosophy was mostly every circumstance or event that happened around the people every day. Each experience was a source of learning for him because he tried to get the best of each event that he went through and the same of each person that surrounded him. His idea of a good life was to enjoy what nature had given to mankind, to live right, to help others and never do evil to anyone.

William said: "I don't have a philosophy. I don't even know what that word means." But he had his own philosophy. Everything he thought, everything he said, and everything he wrote was his philosophy. His wit was a combination of humor and philosophy. He used to say: "My humor is not so hot, my philosophy don't phylo and my jokes are pre-war, but my good feeling toward mankind is one-hundred per cent." He always tried to see goodness in people, and he never bothered about the weaknesses of people, but he mocked them in a good manner.

3.2.1. Everyday Life

1. Writers: Shakespeare is the only author that can play to losing business for hundreds of years and still be known as an author.



2. Royalty: A king can stand people's fighting but he can't last long if people start thinking.
3. Hospitals: A hospital is the only place you can get into without having baggage or paying in advance. They don't hold the trunk like a hotel does – they just hold the body.
4. Thanksgiving: It was started by the Pilgrims, who would give thanks every time they killed an Indian and took more of his land. As years went by and they had all his land, they changed it into a day to give thanks for the bountiful harvest. When the boll – weevil and the protective tariff didn't remove all cause for thanks.
5. Show Business: About the only thing an actor can start, is a fad, or a divorce.
6. Women: Although the gamest women can keep back tears in sorrow, they can't keep back in happiness.
7. Death knows no denomination. Death draws no color line.

3.2.2. Religion

1. I was raised predominately a Methodist, but I have traveled so much, mixed with so many people, in all parts of the world, I don't know just what I am. I know I have never been a nonbeliever. But I can honestly tell you that I don't think that any one religion, is *the* religion. Which way you serve your God will never get one word of argument or condemnation out of me.
2. Fanatical religion driven to a certain point is almost as bad as none at all, but not quite.



3. Do anything in this world but monkey with somebody else's religion.
4. We pray for anything, whether we got any dope on it, or not. The trouble with our praying is, we just do it as a means of last resort.
5. Any Sunday could be made as popular (as Easter) at Church if you called 'em fashion shows.
6. Of course the Pilgrims would always pray, mostly for more Indian corn.
7. The Lord so constituted everybody that no matter what color you are, you require the same amount of nourishment.
8. Every man's religion is good. There is none of it bad. We are all trying to arrive at the same place according to our own conscience and teachings. It don't matter which road you take.

3.2.3. Civilization

1. We will never have true civilization until we have learned to recognize the rights of others.
2. There ain't no civilization where there ain't no satisfaction and that's what the trouble is now. Nobody is satisfied.
3. If we see anything we want, we take it. The more so-called civilized we get the more we kill and take.
4. Civilization has taught us to eat with a fork, but even now if nobody is around we use our fingers. Civilization is nothing but acquiring comforts for us.



5. Indians: Indians and primitive races were the highest civilized because they were more satisfied and they depended less on each other and took less from each other.

3.2.4. Philosophy

1. When you meet people, no matter what opinions you might have formed about them beforehand, why, after you meet them and see their angle and their personality, why, you can see a lot of good in all of them.
2. More words ain't good for anything in the world only to bring on more argument.
3. It's better to let people die ignorant and poor, believing in what they have always believed in, than to die prosperous and smart, half believing in something new and doubtful.
4. Sometimes a thing second can be almost as good as something that's first.
5. Work hard and do the best you can, but don't try to hold a clinic over the body.
6. There is one rule that works in every calamity. Be it pestilence, war or famine, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The poor even help arrange it.
7. If Armistice Day had stopped speeches, it would have done more than to have stopped the war, for speeches is what starts the next war. It's not armament; it's oratory that's wrong with this country.
8. He, who laughs along toward the finish, generally carries more real merriment in his tones.



9. You take confidence; it's one of the hardest things in the World to get restored once it gets out of bounds.
10. Half our life is spent trying to find something to do with time we have rushed through life trying to save.
11. You got to sorter give and take in this old world. We can get mighty rich, but if we haven't got any friends, we will find we are poorer than anybody.
12. Peace is kinder like prosperity; there is mighty few nations that can stand it.
13. Nothing makes a man or body of men as mad as the truth. If there is no truth in it they laugh it off.
14. Geography don't change human nature. If you are right, people are for you whether its in Africa or Siberia.
15. What's the matter with the world? There ain't nothing but one word wrong with everyone of us, and that's selfishness.
16. The best way to condemn a thing is know something about it.
17. The best way to judge just how good a man is, is to find out how he stands around his home and among his kind of people.
18. We may elevate ourselves but we should never reach so high that we would ever forget those who helped to get there.
19. Be sure you are right and then go ahead, but don't arbitrate.
20. There is nothing as easy as denouncing. It don't take much to see that something is wrong, but it does take some eyesight to see what will put it right again.



21. The older we get the more “standpat” we get. The only change we want as we grow older is a change back to the things of our early life. We don’t want a lot of new ones. Just because a thing is new don’t mean that it is better.
22. Those were the great old days, but darn it, any old days are great old days. Even the tough ones, after they are over, you can look back on with great memories.
23. There is nothing like congenial friends to just sit around with nothing in particular to knock and a good word for all.
24. Everybody has got a scheme to get the world right again. I can’t remember when it was ever right. There has been times when it was right for you and you and you, but never all at the same time. The whole thing is a teeter-board even when its supposed to be going good. You are going up and somebody is coming down. You can’t make a dollar without taking it from somebody. So every time you wish for something for your own personal gain, you are wishing somebody else bad luck, so maybe that’s why so few of our wishes come to anything.
25. What constitutes a life well spent? Love and admiration from our fellow men is all that anyone can ask.
26. We are here just for a spell and then pass on... So get a few laughs and do the best you can. Live your life so that whenever you lose, you are ahead.
27. After eating an entire bull, a mountain lion felt so good he started roaring. He kept it up until a hunter came along and shot him... The moral: When you're full of bull, keep your mouth shut.
28. If you're riding' ahead of the herd, take a look back every now and then to make sure it's still there.



29. There are three kinds of men: The ones that learn by reading; the few who learn by observation; the rest of them have to pee on the electric fence and find out for themselves.
30. Eventually you will reach a point when you stop lying about your age and start bragging about it.
31. Some people try to turn back their odometers. Not me, I want people to know "why" I look this way. I've traveled a long way and some of the roads weren't paved.
32. When you are dissatisfied and would like to go back to youth, think of Algebra.

3.3. ONE-LINERS

One-liners refers to all the simple ideas of life. This section contains the most famous short quips or sayings that William used to add in between his speeches. These quotes are famous nowadays, and they are repeated very often since they have become morals for different situations.

1. It's great to be great, but it's greater to be human.
2. Memoirs means when you put down the good things you ought to have done, and leave the bad ones you did do.
3. Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.
4. If I killed two Birds with one stone I would want the stone back.
5. It's hard to stamp out selfishness and Greed.



6. Fight for yourself instead of for your Country.
7. If you live right, death is a Joke to you as far as fear is concerned.
8. The better lives you live the better you will finish.
9. When the necessity arises somebody always arises with the remedy.
10. No man is great if he thinks he is.
11. Humanity is not yet ready for either real truth or real harmony.
12. Liberty don't work as good in practice as in speech.
13. Rumor travels faster, but it don't stay put as long as truth.
14. That's all there is to success is satisfaction.
15. Once a sap, always a sap.
16. Oratory is an organic exercise but a digestive failure.
17. Everything that makes money and gives pleasure is not art.
18. A remark generally hurts in proportion to its truth.
19. Happiness and contentment is progress. In fact that's all progress is.
20. You must judge a man's greatness by how much he will be missed.
21. A thing that is free is of no earthly importance.
22. The quickest way to double your money is to fold it and put it back in your pocket.
23. If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging.
24. If you don't learn to laugh at trouble, you won't have anything to laugh at when you are old.



25. Being young is beautiful, but being old is comfortable.
26. One must wait until evening to see how splendid the day has been.
27. When in doubt, tell a funny 'til you see what the other fellow is going to do.
28. A fool and his money are soon elected.
29. Even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just sit there.
30. Being a hero is about the shortest-lived profession on earth.
31. Broad-minded is just another way of saying a fellow is too lazy to form an opinion.
32. Advertising is the art of convincing people to spend money they don't have for something they don't need.
33. Death knows no denomination. Death draws no color line.
34. Nothing breaks up homes, country and nations like somebody publishing their memoirs.
35. When you straddle a thing, it takes a long time to explain it.
36. Everybody likes to hear it straight from the boss, even if you are going to get fired.
37. Popularity is the easiest thing in the world to gain and it is the hardest thing to hold.
38. People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing.



CHAPTER IV

4. THE LEGACY OF WILL ROGERS

4.1. HONORS

Now, more than half century after William's death, his legacy continues to grow. He had been given so many talents and was such a multi-faceted phenomenon that he has been - and is still - remembered for his well-known daily telegrams, weekly articles, books, radio broadcasts, and famous quotes. His boundless genius and endearing humor are the greatest qualities that are remarked about him. And as recognition of such a man, there are many places that were named after him as a tribute to his vast knowledge and cleverness. Also, a great number of books have been written and published about his life and his work, as well as the so many recognitions that were given to honor him.

4.1.1. Oklahoma Honors

Oklahoma has named many places and buildings for Will Rogers. His birthplace is located two miles east of Oologah, Oklahoma. The house has been moved about $\frac{3}{4}$ miles to its present location overseeing the Oologah Lake. The family tomb is at the Will Rogers Memorial Museum nearby Claremore, which stands on the land purchased by William in 1911. In 1944, Will's body was moved from a holding vault in California to the family tomb. His wife and his son Fred were buried next him a year later upon Betty's death.

The main Oklahoma City Airport was named for Rogers, as well as the Will Rogers Turnpike. In addition, there are 13 public schools, including Will Rogers High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with his name. The University of Oklahoma named the large Will Rogers Room in the Student Union for him, as did the Boy Scouts of America with the Will Rogers Council and the Will Rogers Scout Reservation near Cleveland. Also, in 1947, a college football bowl game was named in his honor, but the event folded after the first year.



Oklahoma has one statue of Will Rogers in the *National Statuary Hall Collection*⁸. It was sculpted in clay by Jo Davidson, a close friend of Rogers. It was dedicated on June 6, 1939 in a ceremony before a large crowd of more than 2,000 people. It faces the entrance of the House of Representatives Chamber next to the National Statuary Hall. According to the papers, Oklahoma leaders had asked Will Rogers to represent the state as one of their two statues in the Capitol, and Rogers had agreed on the condition that his image would be placed facing the House Chamber, so he could “keep an eye on Congress.” The Rogers sculpture is the only statue in this part of the Capitol that is facing the Chamber entrance.

4.1.1.1. Will Rogers Memorial Commission

Created by the Oklahoma Legislature in 1937, the Will Rogers Memorial Commission honors the legendary Oklahoma cowboy humorist, Will Rogers. The mission of this commission is to collect, preserve, and share the life, wisdom, and humor of Will Rogers for all generations. There are fifteen people working in this organization.

4.1.1.2. Will Rogers Birthplace Ranch

The Will Rogers Birthplace Ranch, also called Dog Iron Ranch is Located on the shores of Lake Oologah, one mile north of Oologah and two miles east of Highway 169, precisely on 9501 East 380 Rd., Oologah, Oklahoma 74053. Now, completely restored, it is open 365 days a year from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and the admission is by voluntary contributions.

⁸ The National Statuary Hall Collection in the United States Capitol comprises statues donated by individual states to honor people who have been notable in their history.



It was built in 1875; the Oologah house is a rare surviving example of buildings on the former Indian Territory frontier. At that time it was called “The White House on the Verdigris.” The ranch always has been under ownership of the Rogers family or as a donated national icon.

Its main attractions are:

- Living history Dog Iron Ranch and log-walled, two story post-Civil War home where Will Rogers was born and that is authentically conserved and open to the public.
- Era-correct barn with a climate-controlled classroom and video program operating all day.
- Texas Longhorn cattle and other livestock on a 400-acre spread located on the shore of Lake Oologah.
- Picnic areas
- Grass airstrip

Picture # 32



(Memorial Museum)



4.1.1.3. Will Rogers Memorial Museum

Picture # 33



(Memorial Museum)

The Will Rogers Memorial is a 19,052 square-foot museum in Claremore, Oklahoma that memorializes entertainer Will Rogers. It was originally purchased by him in 1911. He bought it to build a ranch for his retirement, but it was given to members of the Rogers family after his death. However, it was donated by Mrs. Rogers and her children to the State of Oklahoma in 1937. On its 20-acre grounds is the Rogers' family tomb.

The eight-gallery museum was opened in 1938, three years after his death. In 1982, the commission added the east wing, and from 1990 to 1995 the entire museum was remodeled. Approximately \$3.500.000 has been invested for the construction and repair of the museum provided by the Oklahoma Legislature, and public and private funds.

The museum with its nine galleries, four theaters, interactive displays, and children's area exhibits:



- Will Rogers' artifacts.
- Memorabilia.
- Saddle collection.
- Photographs and manuscripts depicting a career as:
 - Trick roper
 - Vaudeville and Ziegfeld Follies performer
 - Movie star
 - Radio commentator
 - Author and philosopher
- Rogers' family tomb.
- Research library and archives.

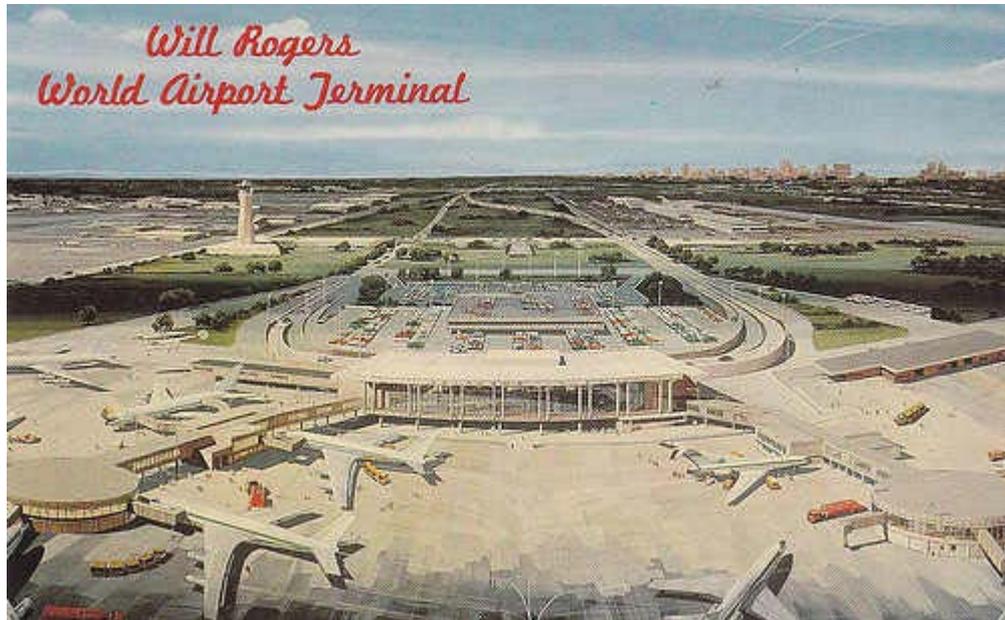
The library, a 2,400-square foot library serves as offices of the staff of the Will Rogers Memorial. Its research area is available for scholars and writers. Included in the library are about 2,000 volumes by, about or referring to Will Rogers. In addition, there are books about Indians, vaudeville, and early motion pictures.

The archives, the world's largest collection of documents related to Will Rogers, include 18,000 photographs and thousands of original manuscripts, private letters, contracts, and personal papers.

Located on the west edge of Claremore, 1720 West Will Rogers Boulevard on State Highway 88, off I-44 and Highways 66 and 20, the museum is open 365 days a year from 8 a. m. – 5 p. m. The entrance for its members, 17 and under is free; for adults \$5; for seniors and military \$4.

4.1.1.4. Will Rogers World Airport

Picture # 34



(Knapp, Adam)

Will Rogers World Airport, named after the unique humorist and Oklahoma native, Will Rogers, is located in southwestern Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, about six miles from downtown. It is the principal commercial airport of the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area. The named was given to honor a person who pioneered and endorsed aviation. Will firmly believed that it was the best way to travel around the world. Coincidentally, Will died in an airplane crash while he and his friend, Wiley Post, were exploring Alaska. Their intention was to make the first transpolar flight from Point Barrow to Moscow in a test flight. The unusual detail about this airport is that it is the only airport that uses the designation “World”, and that its name makes no reference to its city location. Even though it is the busiest airport in the state and serves nineteen destinations, it doesn't offer international destinations. The other major airport in the city is the Wiley Post Airport.

A recent expansion and renovation of the Will Rogers World Airport includes a statue of Will Rogers on horseback in front of the terminal.



4.1.1.5. The Will Rogers Turnpike

Picture # 35



(Scooter)

It is also known as the section of Interstate 44 between Tulsa and Joplin, Missouri. It is a *toll road*⁹ in northeast Oklahoma that runs from Tulsa, Oklahoma to the Missouri state line. It is 88 miles long and the tariff to drive all the way is \$4.00. The Will Rogers Turnpike was opened to traffic in 1957 and along with the Turner Turnpike it connects Tulsa and Oklahoma City. Also, a statue of Rogers stands outside the west anchor of the McDonald's that spans both lanes of the Interstate 44.

4.1.1.6. Will Rogers High School

Will Rogers' High School, located in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was built by Tulsa Public Schools in 1939. In 2007, the Will Rogers High School building was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

The school has a group of alumni who run the Tulsa Will Rogers High School Foundation Inc., which provides grants and scholarships to students. The Foundation was established in the 1990s and continues to this day. This school

⁹ A toll road is a privately or publicly built road for which the driver is required to pay a fee or toll.



is called “a model progressive high school” with one of the most progressive school systems in the study.

Picture # 36



(Tulsa Preservation Commission)

4.1.1.7. Will Rogers Room at the University of Oklahoma at Norman

Named for Will Rogers, this room is available to students, faculty, and staff for eating, studying, or informal meetings. It is also rented for receptions, with a capacity for 350 people.

4.1.1.8. Will Rogers Scout Reservation

The Will Rogers Scout Reservation, the first Boy Scout Summer Camp of the Cimarron Council, is located 4.5 miles west of Cleveland, Oklahoma, on Highway 64 in Pawnee County and serves as the summer camp facility of Cimarron Council. It serves as host to many Council and District events.



The camp consists of 340 acres of Oak and Hickory forest. It features a centralized dining hall, local shower facilities and program areas, with a large area to walk and to explore. It is available during the whole year for use by packs, troops, teams, crews and ships for day events, overnight camps, and weekend camping.

The reservation includes a boating area with a lake where visitors learn to canoe, row, and sail. It has a climbing area available. Here, people can practice shooting sports since the reservation has shooting ranges for archery, rifle and skeet. It has a swimming pool with cold water to relax in.

4.1.1.9. Will Rogers Bowl

The Will Rogers Bowl was a postseason college football bowl game held in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on January 1, 1947. It was intended to be an annual event, but was discontinued after the first match. The game was played on January 1, 1947 in Oklahoma City, and it was named in honor of Will Rogers.

4.2. MEMORIALS

4.2.1. California Memorials

Will Rogers' former home in Pacific Palisades, Santa Monica, became the Will Rogers State Historic Park in 1944, and it has been preserved for the public's enjoyment. A small park on Sunset Boulevard and Beverly Drive in Beverly Hills was named Will Rogers Memorial Park, and a beach in Malibu was named Will Rogers Beach.

There are some schools in California that have been named for Rogers such as Will Rogers Elementary School in Santa Monica, and Will Rogers Elementary School in Ventura. Also, there are two Middle Schools named Will Rogers, one is in Long Beach and the other in Fair Oaks.



U.S. Route 66 is known as the Will Rogers Highway on which a plaque, dedicating the highway to the performer, is located opposite the western end of the route in Santa Monica.

The California Theatre in San Bernardino is the place of Rogers' final show. The theatre named one of its reception spaces the Will Rogers Room.

4.2.1.1. Will Rogers State Historic Park

Picture # 37

Will Rogers's House at the State Historic Park



(flickrriver.com)

Will Rogers State Historic Park is the former ranch of Will Rogers. It lies at the tip of the Santa Monica Mountains in Los Angeles, in the Pacific Palisades area. It is located on 14253 Sunset Boulevard. The ranch became a State Park in 1944 after the death of Betty Rogers who had willed the property to the state of California upon her death, under the condition that it must be a public area for the citizens to play polo and practice horseback riding. In 1971, the property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The park has been



completely renovated, and it is still a working ranch. It still retains many of the western equestrian activities that were part of the Rogers' family life.

The historic park consists of the 31-room ranch house, polo field, stables, riding arenas, picnic areas, and hiking trails.

4.2.1.2. Will Rogers Memorial Park

Picture # 38



(S, Martin)

This is a small park located across from the legendary Beverly Hills Hotel. In fact, in 1912, the land of this five-acre park was part of the front lawn of the Hotel, surrounded by bright floral displays which stood as a welcome sight. In 1915, the Hotel gave the land as a gift to the city of Beverly Hills and named it "Sunset Park," that became the city's very first municipal park.

Over the years, many celebrity events took place in this park. Most notably, it was here that Will Rogers was named Honorary Mayor of Beverly Hills in 1926.

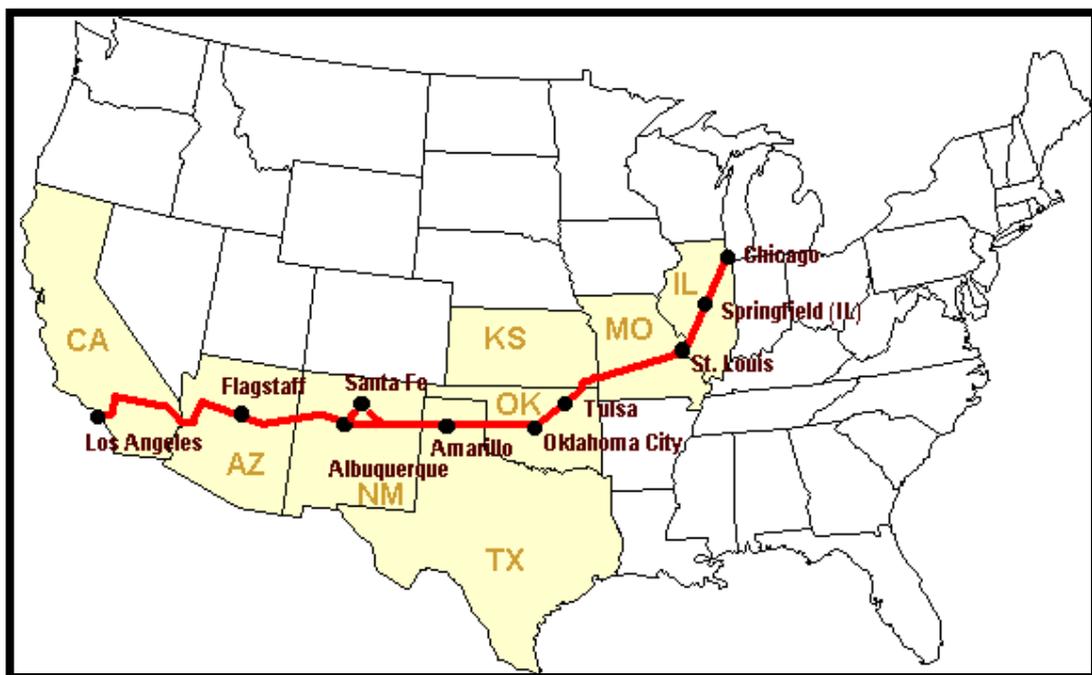


In 1952, 17 years after his death, the City renamed the Park “Will Rogers Memorial Park” as recognition of his generous spirit, unstinting community support, and highly acclaimed writings that gave him such a popularity throughout the country.

This beautiful little park that is in the center of Beverly Hills, boasts a lush landscape, bubbling fountains, and a pool with colorful fish. Besides, there is a bronze commemorative plaque featuring a portrait of Will Rogers with a dedication to him.

4.2.1.3. U.S. Route 66

Picture # 39



(Henion, Ron)

Historic route 66 identified as the Main Street of America or the Mother Road to come west, has been honored by festivals, songs, and movies since its inception on November 11, 1926. By 1940, it was renamed as the Will Rogers Highway as a tribute for him. The highway linked Chicago to Los Angeles over 2,448 miles. The route crossed through Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma,



Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, finally ending in Santa Monica. The construction of the road was meant to connect main streets of the cities and rural areas because until then, most small towns had no access to major national thoroughfares. The highway became a major route to travel from east to west and the other way around. Consequently, the highway became so popular that businesses such as restaurants, gas stations, and motels sprang up along the route.

From the 1930s to the 1960s, the road was well-traveled by millions of people. In 1956, the Interstate Highway System was instituted by the Federal Highway Act or National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956. Finally, in 1984, Route 66 was officially deactivated.

4.2.2. Texas Memorials

Picture # 40

Riding Into the Sunset



(Krogt, René & Peter)



The Will Rogers Memorial Center was built in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1936 with a mural, a bust and a life-size statue of Will Rogers on Soapsuds (his horse) titled *Into the Sunset*¹⁰ and sculpted by Electra Waggoner Biggs.

A casting of *Into de Sunset* stands in the entrance of the main campus quad at Texas Tech University, in Lubbock, Texas. This memorial was initially commissioned in 1937 by Amon G. Carter, a friend of Will Rogers. Finally, it was finished by Biggs in 1947 and it was dedicated to Rogers on February 1950.

4.2.2.1. Will Rogers Memorial Center

Picture # 41



(Mr. Pat)

The Will Rogers Memorial Center is a multi-purpose entertainment complex spread over 85 acres in Fort Worth District, Texas. The Will Rogers Coliseum was built along with the auditorium and Landmark Pioneer Tower in 1936. It is mainly a sports and livestock complex. It is the home of the annual Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo. Also, its location is used for the hosting of livestock

¹⁰ Riding into the Sunset is a bronze sculpture by Electra Waggoner Biggs, depicting Will Rogers on his horse. There are four castings, located in Fort Worth, Texas; Claremore, Oklahoma; Lubbock, Texas; and Dallas, Texas.



shows, the annual World Exposition of the Texas Longhorn Breeders Association of America, and other major events of the National Horse Association every year. The complex contains the following facilities:

- Will Rogers Coliseum
- Will Rogers Auditorium
- Will Rogers Equestrian Center
- Exhibits Hall
- Arena

The tower and the auditorium of the Will Rogers Memorial Center were built with an *Art Deco* style.

4.2.3. Colorado Memorial

The Will Rogers Shrine of the Sun is an 80-foot observation tower on Cheyenne Mountain west of Colorado Springs, at the base of Pikes Peak near the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo.

4.2.3.1. Will Rogers Shrine of the Sun

The Will Rogers Shrine of the Sun is the tomb which holds the ashes of Spencer Penrose (1865 – 1939), a philanthropist who contributed many of the most prominent landmarks in Colorado Springs, including the neighboring Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and the Broadmoor Hotel. This 80-foot observation tower located on the side of Cheyenne Mountain was finished by Penrose in 1937, and it overlooks the Broadmoor Hotel, and the entire Colorado Springs metropolitan area can be seen from the tower.

The shrine is open every day of the year except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. In 1994, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Picture # 42



(Hinckley, Steve)

4.3. NATIONAL TRIBUTES

In 1936, the NVA Hospital located in Saranac Lake, New York was renamed to the Will Rogers Memorial Hospital by the National Vaudeville Artists association to honor him. Bill Rogers, Will's eldest son, starred as his father in the film *The Story of Will Rogers* in 1952. During the 1990s, *The Will Rogers Follies* was a Tony Award¹¹-winning play on Broadway and brought Rogers into life for modern audiences.

¹¹ The Antoinette Perry (Tony) Awards, presented each June by the American Theatre Wing and the League of American Theatres and Producers, honor distinguished achievement in Broadway theatre.



On November 4, 1948, the United States Post Office commemorated Rogers with a first day cover of a 3-cent stamp with his image and with an inscription that read, "In honor of Will Rogers, Humorist; Claremore, Oklahoma." Later on, he was also honored on the centennial of his birth, in 1979, with the issue of a United States Postal Service 15-cent stamp as part of the "Performing Arts" series.

The Borrow, Alaska airport, located about 16 miles from the place of their fatal airplane crash, is now known as the Wiley Post – Will Rogers Memorial Airport.

The last boat of the Benjamin Franklin class ballistic, missile submarines USS Will Rogers has his named to honor him.

The Will Rogers Theatre, a movie house, opened in Chicago's Belmont-Central shopping district 1936 and operated until 1986 and was demolished in 1987.

The Will Rogers Theater in Charleston, Illinois, a movie house was opened in 1938. It has a single auditorium with a capacity of 1,000 seats. The theatre was placed on the Register of Historic Places in 1984. Then in 2010, it was definitely closed.

4.3.1. USS Will Rogers Submarine

USS Will Rogers (SSBN-659) was a Benjamin Franklin class ballistic missile submarine. It was the last one of the "41 for Freedom" Polaris submarines. It was the only ship of the United States Navy to be named after Will Rogers. It was launched on July, 1966, after three years of working on its construction.

The Benjamin Franklin-class submarines were built with the Polaris A-3 ballistic missile. On August, 1994, it was finally decommissioned and deactivated.



Picture # 43



(Delk, Whiting)

Picture # 44

Will Rogers with crewmen on board USS Pennsylvania, March 28, 1928



(Naval Historical Center)



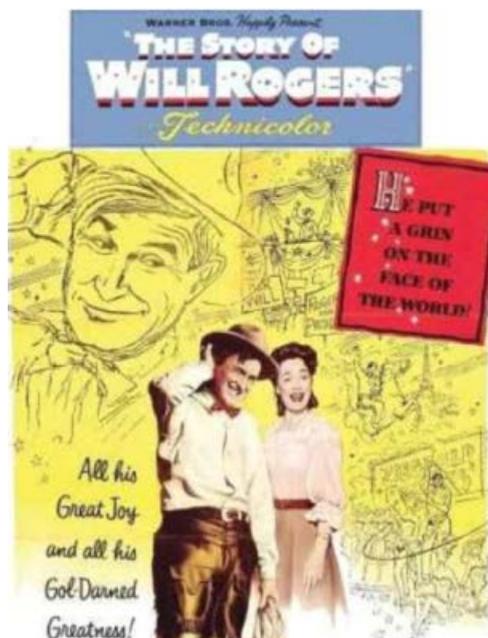
4.3.2. Will Rogers Memorial Hospital

The former Will Rogers Memorial Hospital previously known as the National Vaudeville Artists Lodge was built in 1928 by the National Vaudeville Artists association. The three-story building, located at Saranac Lake in Essex County, New York, was constructed specifically for the treatment of poor and elderly performers of the vaudeville stage, particularly those with tuberculosis. From 1930 to 1974, the Saranac Lake provided unconventional tubercular treatment until it was replaced by tuberculosis drug treatment in the 1950. In 1936, it was named after Will Rogers and in 1974 it closed. Currently, it houses an *independent living*¹² facility known as Saranac Village at Will Rogers.

4.3.3. The Story of Will Rogers

Picture # 45

Cover Art for the Story of Will Rogers



Main Characters

Will Rogers Jr. ... Will Rogers
Jane Wyman ... Betty Rogers
Carl Benton ... Clem Rogers
Noah Beery, Jr. ... Wiley Post
Margaret Field ... Sally Rogers

(Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.)

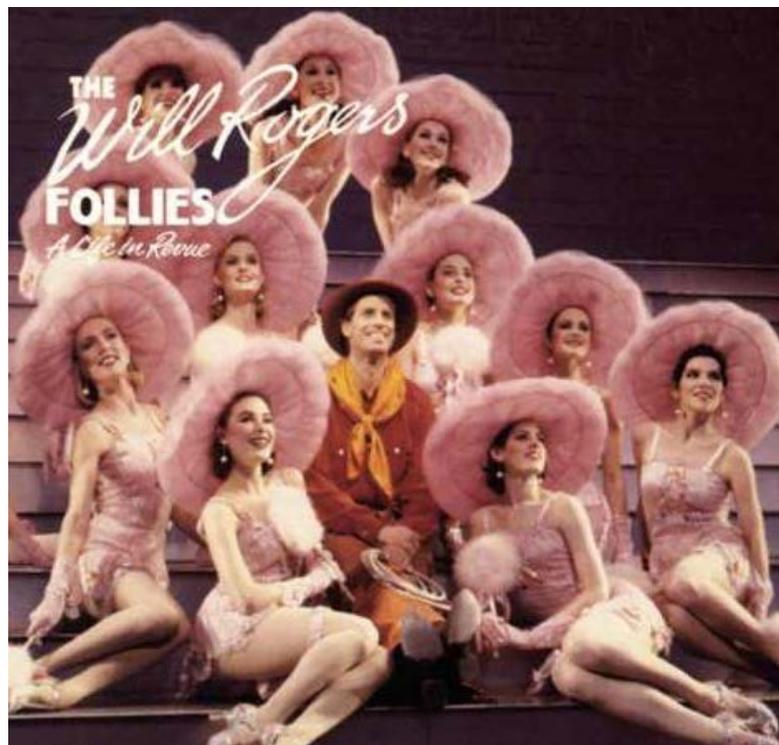
¹² Independent living is a philosophy that sponsors disability treatments and was formed by a group of people with disabilities who worked for self-determination, self-respect, and equal opportunities for people with incapacities.



The Story of Will Rogers is a biography movie of Will Rogers distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures, and released in 1952. It was a film produced by Robert Arthur and directed by Michael Curtiz in which Will Rogers Jr. stars as his father. The supporting cast features Jane Wyman, Slim Pickens, Noah Beery Jr., Steve Brodie, and Eddie Cantor. The story was edited by Folmar Blangstead with music by Victor Young and cinematography by Wilfred M. Cline.

4.3.4. The Will Rogers Follies

Picture # 46



(Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.)

The Will Rogers Follies is a musical based on the life and career of Will Rogers, using as a backdrop the Ziegfeld Follies, which describes every episode of Rogers' life as a big production number. The Rogers' character also performs rope tricks in between scenes and tries to personify the performer. The revue contains extracts of Rogers' simple style of wisdom and common sense and tries to convey Rogers' personality.



The Broadway production with a book by Peter Stone, lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, and music by Cy Coleman was opened on May 1st, 1991 at the Palace Theatre, and closed on September 5, 1993, after 981 performances and 33 previous.

Directed and choreographed by Tommy Tune, the original cast won a Tony Award and a *Drama Desk*¹³; it featured Keith Carradine as Rogers, Dee Hoty as Betty Blake, Dick Latessa as Clem Rogers, and Cady Huffman as Ziegfeld's favorite chorus girl.

Graph # 3

The Will Rogers Follies Original Broadway Production Awards

Year	Award	Category
1991	Tony Award	Best Musical
		Best Original Score
		Best Direction of a Musical
		Best Choreography
		Best Costume Design
		Best Lighting Design
	Drama Desk Award	Outstanding Musical
		Outstanding Choreography
		Outstanding Music

(Archerd, Army)

¹³ The Drama Desk Awards are the only major New York theater honors for which productions on Broadway, Off-Broadway (smaller than Broadway with a seating capacity between 100 and 499), Off-Off-Broadway compete against each other in the same category. Beginning in 1955, they are considered one of the important American theater awards.



4.4. Other Recognitions

4.4.1. Hollywood Star Walk

Picture # 47

Radio



(Los Angeles Times)

Film



(Sterling, Bryan)

Will Rogers has been honored by Hollywood with two stars in the Hollywood Star Walk. One is a Radio Star on the south side of the 6600 block of Hollywood Boulevard. The other is a Film Star on the north side of the 6400 block of Hollywood Boulevard. Star 6608 has a symbol displaying a microphone which pays tribute to Will Rogers as a broadcaster. Star 6401 displays a camera in it which recognizes Will as a film star.

4.4.2. Poems

The writer T. W. Hurst wrote a couple of poems to honor Will Rogers' memory. They are: "Will Rogers," and "The Big Boss."

"Will Rogers"

Out of the plains he came.
A homely man with lariat twirled.
A hitch on our hearts he gained.
This kingly man as he rounded up the world.

T. W. Hurst.



“The Big Boss”

The “Big Boss” called Will Rogers
To the ranch beyond the divide,
So we are lonesome rangers
For we miss him on this side.

It happened Will was a riding,
Up on the Alaskan range,
When the big alarm clock sounded,
And Joe Crosson took the reins.

The “pictures” don’t seem natural,
The newspapers all seem dull,
Without Will’s quips in the corner,
And him grinnin, just above.

T. W. Hurst.

4.4.3. Books About Will Rogers

There are many writers, authors, people, and relatives that have written about Will Rogers’ life, adventures, jobs, travels, work, and philosophy. Among the most well-known and widely read there are the following:

4.4.3.1. Published Books

Graph # 4

1. *Will Rogers Says*, by Reba Collins.
2. *The Will Rogers Book*, by Paula McSpadden Love.
3. *Will Rogers: Cowboy, Comedian, and Commentator*, by Sandy Donovan.
4. *The Quotable Will Rogers*, by Joseph H. Carter.



5. *The Best of Will Rogers*, by Bryan Sterling.
6. *The Autobiography of Will Rogers*, by Donald Day.
7. *Never Met A Man I Didn't Like: The Life and Writings of Will Rogers*, by Joseph H. Carter.
8. *Will Rogers: An American Legend*, by Frank Keating.
9. *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way*, by Lary May.
10. *Will Rogers, Performer*, by Mary Buckingham Maturi and Richard J. Maturi.
11. *Will Rogers: A Biography*, by Ben Yogoda.
12. *Will Rogers*, by Betty Rogers.
13. *The Old Home Ranch: Birthplace of Will Rogers*, by Ellsworth Collings.
14. *Will Rogers Official Genealogy and Bibliography*, by Pat Lowe.
15. *Will Rogers in Hollywood*, by Brian B. Sterling and Frances N. Sterling.
16. *On the Road With Will Rogers*, by Lance Brown.
17. *Will Rogers: Larger than Life*, by Debbie Dadey.
18. *Will Rogers at the Ziegfeld Follies*, Edited by Arthur Frank Wertheim.
19. *Will Rogers' Tomfoolery Spiced with Wit*, by Patty Wineyard MacDonald.
20. *Will Rogers: Courtship and Correspondence 1900 – 1915*, by Reba Collins.
21. *The Papers of Will Rogers: The Early Years: Volume 1 – November 1879 – April 1904*; by Arthur Frank Wertheim and Barbara Bair.
22. *The Papers of Will Rogers: Wild West and Vaudeville: Volume 2 –April 1904 – September 1908*; by Arthur Frank Wertheim and Barbara Bair.
23. *The Papers of Will Rogers: From Vaudeville to Broadway: Volume 3 – September 1908 – August 1915*; by Arthur Frank Wertheim and Barbara Bair.
24. *The Papers of Will Rogers: From the Broadway Stage to the National Stage: Volume 4 – September 1915 – July 1928*; by Steven K. Gragert and M. Jane Johansson.



25. *The Papers of Will Rogers: The Final Years: Volume 5 – August 1928 – August 1935*; by Steven K. Gragert and M. Jane Johansson.
26. *Convention Articles of Will Rogers*, edited by Joseph A. Stout Jr. and Peter C. Rollins.
27. *Radio Broadcasts of Will Rogers*, Edited by the Will Rogers Memorial Commission and Oklahoma State University.
28. *Will Rogers' Daily Telegrams, Volume 2 – The Hoover Years: 1929 – 1931*.
29. *Will Rogers' Daily Telegrams, Volume 3 – The Hoover Years: 1931 – 1933*.
30. *Will Rogers' Daily Telegrams, Volume 4 – The Roosevelt Years: 1933 – 1935*.
31. *Will Rogers' Weekly Articles, Volume 2 – The Coolidge Years: 1925 – 1927*.
32. *Will Rogers' Weekly Articles, Volume 3 – The Coolidge Years: 1927 – 1929*.
33. *Will Rogers' Weekly Articles, Volume 4 – The Hoover Years: 1929 – 1931*.
34. *Will Rogers' Weekly Articles, Volume 5 – The Hoover Years: 1931 – 1933*.
35. *Will Rogers' Weekly Articles, Volume 6 – The Roosevelt Years: 1933 – 1935*.

4.4.3.2. Books by Will Rogers

Graph # 5

1. *Autobiography of Will Rogers*.
2. *Ether and Me, or 'Just Relax.'*
3. *The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibition*.
4. *There's Not a Bathing Suit in Russia, by Will Rogers*.
5. *The Cowboy Philosopher on the Peace of Conference*.
6. *Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President, by Will Rogers*.



4.5. FILMOGRAPHY

Will Rogers was also named the 1920s and 1930s generation's King of All Media. He made 48 silent movies and 21 talkies from 1919 until 1935, the year he died at the peak of his career.

4.5.1. Silent Movies

4.5.1.1. Goldwyn Pictures Corporation

Goldwyn Pictures Corporation was the first Film Industry William Rogers worked for. During the three years he work with the Goldwyn Corporation, he made 13 films. They are the following:

Graph # 6

1. *Laughing Bill Hyde* (1918)
2. *Almost a Husband* (1919)
3. *Jubilo* (1919)
4. *Water, Water Everywhere* (1919)
5. *The Strange Boarder* (1920)
6. *Jes' Call Me Jim* (1920)
7. *Cupid, the Cowpuncher* (1920)
8. *Honest Hutch* (1920)
9. *Guile of Women* (1920)
10. *Boys will be Boys* (1921)
11. *An Unwilling Hero* (1921)
12. *Doubling for Romeo* (1921)
13. *A Poor Relation* (1921)



4.5.1.2. Will Rogers Corporation

Will Rogers produced only three movies of which two were released and the other was never released.

Graph # 7

1. *The Ropin' Fool* (1922)
2. *Fruits of Faith* (1922)
3. *One day in 365* (1922) (unreleased)

4.5.1.3. Hal E. Roach Productions

Graph # 8

1. *Hustling Hank* (1923)
2. *Two Wagons, Both Covered* (1923)
3. *Jus' Passin' through* (1923)
4. *Uncensored Movies* (1923)
5. *The Cake Eater* (1924)
6. *The Cowboy Sheik* (1924)
7. *Big Moments from Little Pictures* (1924)
8. *High Brow Stuff* (1924)
9. *Going to Congress* (1924)
10. *Don't Park There* (1924)
11. *Jubilo, Jr.* (1924)
12. *Our Congressman* (1924)
13. *A Truthful Liar* (1924)
14. *Gee Whiz, Genevieve* (1924)



4.5.1.4. Paramount Pictures

Graph # 9

1. *One Glorious Day* (1922)
2. *The Headless Horseman* (1922)
3. *Hollywood* (1923)
4. *Tip Toes* (1927)
5. *A Texas Steer* (1927)

4.5.1.5. Travelog Series

Travelog series refer to Will Rogers' shorts or short series. In all of them, Will Rogers casted as himself. They are the following:

Graph # 10

1. *With Will Rogers in Dublin* (1927)
2. *With Will Rogers in Paris* (1927)
3. *Hiking Through Holland with Will Rogers* (1927)
4. *Roaming the Emerald Isle with Will Rogers* (1927)
5. *Through Switzerland and Bavaria with Will Rogers* (1927)
6. *With Will Rogers in London* (1927)
7. *Hunting for Germans in Berlin with Will Rogers* (1927)
8. *Prowling Around France with Will Rogers* (1927)
9. *Winging 'Round Europe with Will Rogers* (1927)
10. *Exploring England with Will Rogers* (1927)
11. *Reeling Down the Rhine with Will Rogers* (1928)
12. *Over the Bounding Blue with Will Rogers* (1928)



4.5.2. Sound Pictures

Rogers' popularity increased with the coming of sound pictures; and by 1935, he was the nation's top box-office attraction in Hollywood. Rogers filmed 21 sound movies with the Fox Film Corporation.

4.5.2.1. Fox Film Corporation

Graph # 11

1. *They had to See Paris* (1929)
2. *Happy Days* (1930)
3. *So this is London* (1930)
4. *Lighntin'* (1930)
5. *A Connecticut Yankee* (1931)
6. *Young as you Feel* (1931)
7. *Ambassador Bill* (1931)
8. *Business and Pleasure* (1931)
9. *Down to Earth* (1932)
10. *Too Busy to Work* (1932)
11. *State Fair* (1933)
12. *Doctor Bull* (1933)
13. *Mr. Skitch* (1933)
14. *David Harum* (1934)
15. *Handy Andy* (1934)
16. *Judge Priest* (1934)
17. *The County Chairman* (1935)
18. *Life Begins at Forty* (1935)
19. *Doubting Thomas* (1935)
20. *Steamboat Round the Bend* (1935)
21. *In Old Kentucky* (1935)



CONCLUSION

William Penn Adair “Will” Rogers,” called the Cherokee-American cowboy, the Cowboy Humorist, the Cowboy Philosopher, and Oklahoma’s favorite son traveled around the world three times, made 71 movies (50 silent films and 21 "talkies"), wrote more than 4,000 nationally-syndicated newspaper columns, and became a world-famous figure. By the mid-1930s, Rogers was adored by the American people, and was the top-paid movie star in Hollywood at the time.

Will Rogers started out as a cowhand in Oklahoma, and later became known for his work in satirical writing, political criticism, and charity activism. His popularity helped him to travel throughout the world, almost always by air, and talk man-to-man with presidents, dictators, premiers, emperors, and even kings. From his experiences abroad, he provided Americans with accounts of his travels. Will’s success in the mediums of newspaper, radio, and film allowed him to build a fortune that made him one of the richest men in the country during those hard days of the 1920’s and 1930’s.

At the time of his death, Will Rogers was the country’s most widely read newspaper columnist between his daily “Will Rogers Says” and his weekly column. His Sunday night half-hour radio show was the nation’s most listened weekly coast to coast broadcast. Also, by 1933, he was the country’s number-two movie box-office attraction behind Marie Dressler; number one in 1934, and second in 1935 behind Shirley Temple.

Will was greatly loved by a huge majority of Americans who were captivated with his endless mirth and joy. Even before he died, a small book titled:

“The Story of Will Rogers” was written and published by Jerome Beatty. Its introduction said: “The true story of the rise of Will Rogers, the Cherokee Indian cowhand from Oologah, Indian Territory, is perhaps the most amazing tale that could be written about any living American... lacking the ability to turn out a paragraph that would pass the English teachers, he is one of America’s highest-paid authors. (Carter, 2005: 35)



Likewise, in his bestseller, *Will Rogers: A Biography*, the writer Ben Yogoda wrote:

For there to be another Will Rogers today, he (or she) would have to combine the separate attributes of Johnny Carson, Roy Rogers, Clark Clifford, Walter Cronkite, Bill Cosby, Bob Hope, Russell Baker, H. Ross Perot and James Reston. If just can't happen. (Yogoda)

Lynn Taylor wrote:

No one has ever been able to equal the position that Will Rogers held in American hearts---he was our first national "personality." He struck chords that predated the cowboy and went all the way back to Brother Jonathan, Artemus Ward, and the wise rube who outsmarts the city slicker. At the same time, he was an authentic cowboy, raised on a ranch in the Cherokee Nation, and a master of the lasso. His own experiences recapitulated the history of the cowboy hero: he had been a horse wrangler, a working cowboy, a Wild West performer (in South Africa), and a movie star. Unlike Theodore Roosevelt, he had access to the radio and to motion pictures, and he took advantage of both. He also wrote a syndicated political column and several books of political commentary. In those heady times, he provided just the right anchor to the American past....Will Rogers' represents a transition between the world of the real cowboy and the world of the make-believe cowboy, and he is a pivotal figure in the growth of the cowboy myth. (Taylor, 78)

Nevertheless, as well as he captured the hearts of so many Americans along the way, he also had some detractors that disagreed with him. For instance, Henry L. Mencken, an expert writer and columnist of the *Baltimore Sun*¹⁴, once fumed about Will Rogers and declared:

¹⁴ The Baltimore Sun was the U.S. state of Maryland's largest general circulation daily newspaper and provided coverage of local and regional news events, issues, people, and industries.



Look at the man. He alters foreign policies. He makes and unmakes candidates. He destroys public figures. By deriding Congress and undermining its prestige he has virtually reduced us to a monarchy. Millions of Americans read his words daily and those who are unable to read listen to him over the radio. I consider him the most dangerous writer alive today.

But William did not get mad at the comment and he replied: "Come on now Henry; you know that nobody with any sense ever took any of my gags seriously." Henry Mencken shot back: "They are taken seriously by nobody except half-wits, in other words by approximately 85 percent of the voting population." Then as a reply in his column, William wrote: "I have written on nothing but politics for years. You never hear me on a mother-in-law joke. It is always, about national or international affairs."

Will Rogers was an American original. He was a man of his times, a man for all times. And today, decades after his death, he is still loved by many people who had heard about him from their grandparents or relatives, and those who had read about him. Nowadays Rogers' wit and wisdom is part of the American national heritage.

It is difficult to comprehend the extraordinary work of this great personality because he had such a powerful influence on the minds and hearts of the U.S. people at the time of his death that his death is remembered as one of the most relevant events in the history of the United States. The "out-pouring national grief" over Rogers' passing is generally regarded to be the greatest such show of national mourning since the death of Lincoln many decades earlier.

His name is so remembered that many places around the United States bear his name in his honor. Also, there are many tributes and honors in Oklahoma, California, New York, Arkansas, Texas, and other states in the United States. Even in the schools, children are taught the story of Will Rogers as a national



heritage for being a celebrity and a legend of all times. Will was primarily a speaker and a showman who knew how to manage the stage and his audience.



ANNEXES

Annex # 1: PHOTOS

Picture # 48



Clem Rogers (standing far left) was part of the Cherokee Committee that met with representatives from the U.S. government to discuss the allotment of land to Indians.

(Donovan, Sandy)

Picture # 49

Will Rogers and Lucille Mulhall. Lucille was an early love of Rogers, but her father never approved a relationship between them.



(Wertheim, Bair)



Picture # 50



Will Rogers dressed for the stage of the Ziegfeld Follies (1915 – 1918)

(Wertheim, Bair)

Picture # 51



Will Rogers in a rope dance act in the 1924-1925 Follies.

(Wertheim, Bair)



Picture # 52



Will Rogers practicing his daily rope tricks.

(Whimpey, Jim)

Picture # 53



Will Roger, Bill, Mary, and Jim riding their horses in the field of their ranch.

(Lehman, Keith)

Picture # 54



Portrait of Will Rogers being welcomed as the Mayor of Beverly Hills, 1926.

(Pierce, Charles)

Picture # 55



Will Rogers during a polo match in his house in Santa Monica.

(Wax, Wane)



Annex # 2: MOVIES

Picture # 56



Will Rogers and
Nick Cogley in
Honest Hutch,
1920.

(Wertheim, Bair)

Picture # 57



Will Rogers and
Joel McCrea in
Lighnin', 1930.

(Mubi.com)

Picture # 58



Will Rogers and Myrna Loy in the film *A Connecticut Yankee*.

(Floyd)

Picture # 59



Will Rogers talking with a cow in the film *Doctor Bull*.

(Glenn, Kenny)



Picture # 60



Will Rogers and Evelyn Venable in the film *David Harum*.

(A Certain Cinema)

Picture # 61



Rogers in Rogers' Judge Priest. He helps unite Snow White (Anita Louise) with nephew Jerome (Tom Brown), over the objections of Jerome's mother Caroline (Brenda Fowler)

(Glenn, Kenny)



Picture # 62



Anne Shirley
and Will Rogers,
as Captain Ride,
in the film
*Steamboat
Round the
Bend.*

(Glenn, Kenny)

Picture # 63



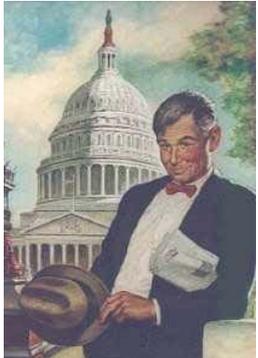
Franklin Hansen, Will Rogers, and Frank Lloyd at the 6th Academy Awards Ceremony at the Fiesta Room of the Ambassador Hotel, 1934.

The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Scenes



Annex # 3

Facets of Will Rogers' Life

Graph # 12		
<p>Performer</p> 	<p>Writer and Philosopher</p> 	<p>Husband and Father</p> 
<p>Actor</p> 	<p>Aviation</p> 	<p>Ambassador</p> 
<p>Radio Commentator and Humorist</p> 	<p>Rancher</p> 	<p>Cowboy</p> 

(Memorial Museum)



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