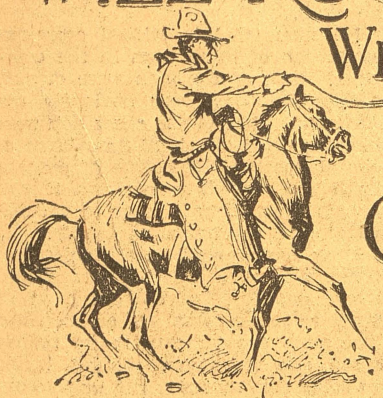


WILL ROGERS MEETS OLD FRIENDS WHO KNEW HIM AS "RABBIT" IN THEIR COWBOY DAYS



(By The Star's Own Service.)

VINITA, OK., Nov. 24.—One day back in 1887, when he was only 8 years old, Will Rogers scratched his head and solemnly told his parents:

"If it wasn't for my pony and my rope I might grow up to be famous."

"Why is that?" asked the amused older folks.

"Well," he remarked thoughtfully, "my pony is so good I have to spend all my time riding and roping and I never seem to find any time for studying."

His parents felt that way about it, too, and often tried to discourage his outdoor activities in favor of a higher education. But the coming years were to prove his love for a horse and a rope far more valuable to him than any of the years Will Rogers ever spent in school. It was to lead him away from the ranch life of Oklahoma to wealth and tremendous popularity.

His ability to wisecrack, his hatred of school discipline, his yearning for adventure and his skill with a rope all played a prominent part in his transformation from an Oklahoma cowboy to a famous movie actor and humorist with international renown.

A Cowboy's Homecoming.

Fresh from the latest of his many trips to Europe, Will Rogers, native son, returned here recently to visit old friends who knew him before he left Oklahoma on the road to fame and fortune, when he was a freckle-faced, gum-chewing, wisecracking farm lad from Oologah, Ok., who could run like a scared jack rabbit and was handy with a cow rope.

The occasion of his return was Vinita's annual homecoming celebration, an event honoring the pioneer settlers of Oklahoma, and it was homecoming for Will Rogers in reality, because this little midwestern town admittedly is dearer to his heart than any other.

But the event that actually brought him back to Vinita was a reunion of

In the town of Rogers, Ark., twenty-six years ago this afternoon, Miss Betty Blake became the bride of Will Rogers. There was no significance in the fact that the name of the town and the name of the bridegroom were the same. It was merely coincidence. And there was at the time no special significance in Miss Blake being married to "Mr. Will P. Rogers"—no more than the unusual attention of a small town to a school teacher's marrying an actor who had achieved some success in his profession in New York.

Yet the young man who became Betty Blake's husband that day has become America's foremost humorist. He is internationally known, a friend of kings and Presidents, a philosopher, in some

he could run so fast and partly because his ears stuck out so far.

The homecoming celebration was well under way when Rogers arrived. It was noon and the business section was crowded with thousands of visitors. At the county courthouse park, two blocks off Main street, an elaborate parade, with its highly-decorated floats, richly-uniformed bands, whooping cowboys and bannered motor cars, awaited his arrival.

The famous comedian was surrounded by a delegation of his old friends as he climbed from his car. He had flown from Hollywood to St. Louis by plane and taken a night train to Chelsea for a visit with his sister, Mrs. Tom McSpadden. The distance of twenty miles to Vinita was covered by motor car. After a short session of handshaking, he was mounted on a horse to lead the parade through the business section. He was reluctant at first to take part in the festivities.

"No, wait a minute," he said, grab-

respects a statesman, the most popular of newspaper columnists, and famous as a motion picture actor, lecturer and after dinner speaker. As such he is a distinguished guest in any company of notables—and still quite at home with his old cowboy pals in his native Oklahoma.

Little that has not been told can be written about the Will Rogers of today. But what of his early days? What kind of boy was he? When did he begin his "wisecracking" that was to bring him fame and fortune? What do his former teachers and old companions say about his youth? Will Rogers himself has been too modest to tell. But those "who knew him when" have provided answers in the following article.

cession, and was immediately hustled off to the home of Sam Cobb, where an old-fashioned dinner was being prepared. Entering the house, Will yelled with delight as he was confronted by a room full of his school-day chums and rushed forward to clasp the outstretched hands. These were men of the same caliber as Will Rogers himself, products of the old West, the same plain-spoken, big-hearted fellows that rode side by side with Rogers in Indian Territory days, when their chief recreation was roping and sometimes riding the horses and steers that ran wild over the Oklahoma range.

Except in outward appearance—the

of the situation with a sigh of relief, throwing off his hat and coat, loosening his tie and sprawling across a comfortable chair. The rest of the men found places around the room and exchanged stories of the old days, when they were wild and woolly boys whose parents were trying vainly to educate them at Willie Halsell college.

The Boy Who Had Lots of Rope.

The college was established at Vinita in 1894 by the missionary branch of the Methodist church in an effort to push education among the Cherokee Indians. The school building, an imposing structure at the time, rested in the middle of 160 acres of pasture running north from the edge of town, and close by was a dormitory for out of town students like Will Rogers who had enrolled from Oologah. There was plenty of room for the boys who rode horses to race across the campus, and the road from the front steps of the school building to town became a favorite race track down which they spurred and whooped.

One of the men recalled the time a group of schoolboys, led by the energetic Will, rustled an entire herd of cattle from a nearby ranch and drove them onto the campus, where they had built a corral to hold them. Then the boys took turns riding the untamed animals, and when one threw his rider, which was almost every time, and tore out across the pasture, another youth on horseback would spur after him and bring him up with a well-placed lasso. The ranchman was furious when he discovered the "theft" and the boys were severely reprimanded by school authorities, but these rowdy kids couldn't be bothered. It was just all in the day's play.

On another occasion, this same group raided the school kitchen and carried away a stack of freshly-baked pies. Will Rogers had the mumps at the time and, when he spied a tall bottle of vinegar in the raid, he mistook it for whisky and took a big drink to help the mumps. His yell of surprise brought the cook to the scene and the boys fled.

But Will was never a drinking man. Sam Cobb, who had gone into the kitchen to mix some appetizers for the boys, remembered this and asked Will if he would like a soft drink.

"No, sir," he answered. "I want to drink what the rest of the boys do. I just got back from 'Roosia' and I can drink anything now."

When the call came for dinner, Will was the first in the kitchen, where the food was set out in cafeteria

Will Rogers as the "most popular man in the world today."

"During my recent travels," he said, "I found people in every country who asked me about Will Rogers. The man we all knew as 'Rabbit' Rogers, of school days, has become more popular than any king, emperor or potentate."

"Yes," chimed in someone from the audience, "and better loved."

A Comedian in Tears.

The applause that followed the remark was too much for Will. As he stepped to the platform there were tears in his eyes.

"Folks," he said, "what you say about me ain't so, but I like to hear you say it." He talked seriously for a time and then fell into his old custom of wisecracking.

"We are celebrating the passing out of Willie Halsell institute. Well, there was guys went there that would have put Harvard or Yale out of business. I believe John Oskison was the only one we really got educated, but they taught a lot of them to get out and lead fine, useful lives in their communities."

John Oskison, a member of the first Willie Halsell graduating class, went on to graduate from Leland Stanford university, spend a year in postgraduate study at Harvard, and then became an author. One of his books, "A Texas Titan" appeared serially in The Star a few years ago.

"But the world doesn't have to learn of you to make you worthwhile," Rogers continued. "I still believe those fine Indian Territory boys and girls who went to old Willie Halsell college are as great a contribution to American life as 'Pretty Boy' Floyd. "I studied art at Willie Halsell once. I also took elocution. I stopped just in time or I would have been a senator."

He congratulated the former students who had remained in Vinita all their lives. "Travel ain't so hot," he said. "I've hummed around a lot, but that's because my work demands a lot of travel. The happiest people in the world should be those who have lived on year after year right at home and enjoyed life. Don't get the notion to travel a lot. There ain't much to see."

"I just came in from New York," the humorist continued, "where they have plenty of rich fellows. It's funny, but the richer they are the more they howl. I asked them why they were howling, since they hadn't been hit yet, and they said it was because Roosevelt was in a position to do something to them."

Will concluded by referring to the Willie Halsell college reunion. "I wish I could take some of you people back to California with me," he said, "to prove that I attended Willie Halsell. Out there, they don't believe I ever went to school."

Why Will Neglected His Books.

Contrary to popular belief, Will Rogers was not born amid the poverty that has characterized the early lives of so many American celebrities. His father, Clem Vann Rogers, was a judge of the Cooveescoowee district, Cherokee nation, and helped to draft the Oklahoma state constitution. There were eight children in the family, only two of whom are alive today, Will and one sister, Sallie.

Will was born November 4, 1879, in

tion for Will. His favorite pastime was rope throwing and he took it up when he was just a little fellow, barely big enough to hoist a lasso. Something about the rhythmic accuracy of roping captured his imagination and he induced cowboys to teach him all they knew. With his rope he would stand for hours at a time persistently lassoing a big elm stump in a clearing on the ranch near Oologah. Tom Mix, who was a friend of Will Rogers back in cowboy days, often remarks that the stump was three feet high and that "before Will learned to rope good the stump was worn plumb to the ground."

Early Became an Entertainer.

After he had mastered the stump, Will turned his attention to calves, horses, dogs and chickens, anything that could run to escape him, until they became his easy prey. Finally he grew expert and today there is nothing he enjoys more than skillful roping, either doing it himself or watching others.

At Willie Halsell college, the youthful Will Rogers and the other out-of-town students were under the care of "Aunt Laura" Cooper, the school matron, a kindly woman with a big heart who mothered the homesick children until they all learned to love her. She became especially dear to Will Rogers because she filled an emptiness in his bosom created by the death of his mother.

"Aunt Laura," who now lives in Afton, Ok., recalled recently that Will, next to roping, excelled in dancing, and that he never shirked amateur theatricals. He loved to amuse people and, on one occasion, when he was selected to dance the minuet with a little Willie Halsell girl, he was in raptures over his costume of velvet coat, knee trousers and silken hose.

Will was best at extemporaneous entertainment. His mind always worked like lightning (as it still does) and wisecracks rolled off his tongue as smoothly as though he had memorized them in advance. His sister, Mrs. McSpadden, recently recalled this characteristic.

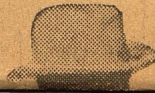
"Will thinks faster than anyone else I ever knew. He is a widely read student and always attended the best schools in this part of the country but he burlesques his education by saying it was bounded by McGuffey's Readers."

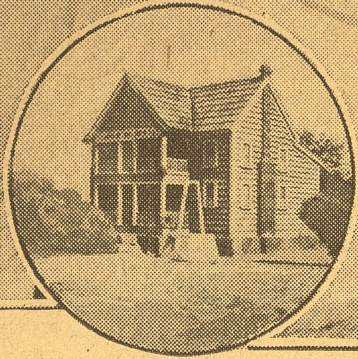
After leaving Vinita, Will was sent to Scarritt college in Neosho, Mo., and later, when he was 16, to Kemper Military academy at Boonville, Mo. In a year and a half, he made good records at Kemper and did not complain, although he did not enjoy the drills. He felt he was wasting

MR. AND MRS. ROGERS—STILL SWEETHEARTS THIS PHOTOGRAPH WAS MADE LAST SUMMER IN HOLLYWOOD. THE PICTURE WILL HOLDS IS A COPY OF THE ONE SHOWN AT THE RIGHT.

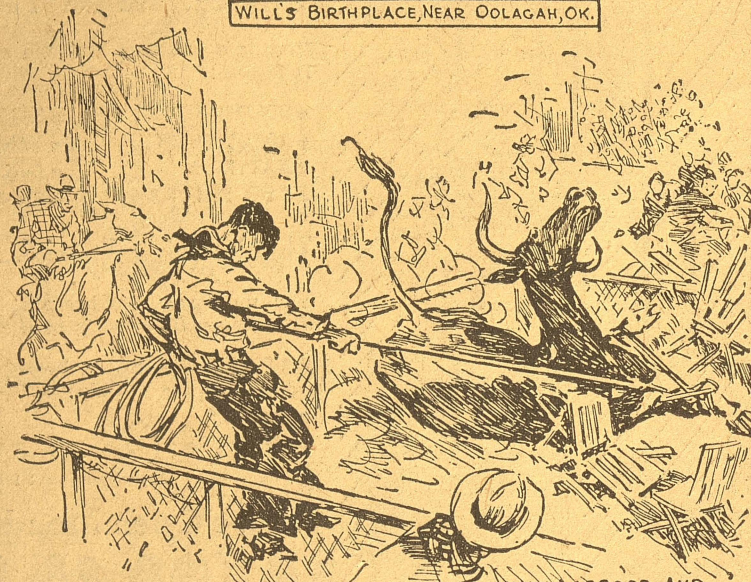


WILL P. ROGERS IN AUSTRALIA—THE DATE, 1903.

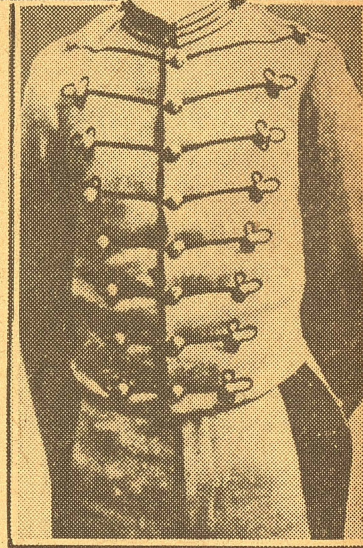




WILL'S BIRTHPLACE, NEAR OOLAGAH, OK.



TO PREVENT A PANIC IN MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, WILL LASOED AND TIED A STEER THAT HAD LEAPED OUT OF THE ARENA.



AS A CADET IN BOONVILLE, MO.

AS A ROPE THROWER AND WISecRAKER ON THE STAGE.

former students of Willie Halsell college, a territorial mission school that flourished during the latter part of the nineteenth century and passed into oblivion before statehood. In that little institution, Will Rogers obtained most of his early education, and here he spent the most enjoyable years of his enviable life. Approximately 250 students of the little college, which belied its name because it had only high school rating, attended the reunion from cities and towns scattered over the United States from coast to coast. The majority of these old-timers saw Will Rogers again for the first time since school days back in 1895, when he was called "Rabbit," partly because

being the arm of Sam Cobb, an Oklahoma cattleman and a close friend of the old days. "I don't want to ride in the parade. I'll just fool around with you fellows." But his friends pressed him and there were thousands lining the streets and roaring for a glance at him. Then someone thrust a coiled rope into his hand and Will Rogers weakened. "All right," he said, "but wait till I get this rope ready." Mounted on a well-trained horse and with the feel of the rope in his hand, Will soon got into the spirit of the occasion, and as he rode through the streets he entertained the crowd with fancy rope twirling tricks, occasionally lassoing one of the bystanders or a horseman riding near him. After the parade, Will was officially presented with a blue ribbon, the prize for the best cowboy in the pro-

graying hair at the temples, the slight bulges at the waistline and the more serious faces—there had been little change in these men, least of all in Will Rogers. Fame and riches had not turned his head. To his old friends he was the same "Rabbit" Rogers who left home many years ago with a few dollars in his pocket to become a soldier of fortune, and returned with an income that is probably more than half a million dollars a year. Among the guests at the dinner were Earl Walker, Henry "Sunny" Knight, Jim Highland, George Franklin, Ewing Halsell, Harry Williams, Jim Rider, Billy Friend, Frank Sesso, Sam Cobb and Louis Thomason. The atmosphere was strictly informal and Will Rogers took advantage

style. There was no caviar such as the comedian had eaten in Russia, but there were great bowls of victuals more to his liking. The menu included navy beans, cooked with ham; salad made with oysters, tomatoes and onions, fried scrapple, barbecued beef, radishes, corn bread and black coffee. A large crowd already had gathered for the college reunion that afternoon when Will arrived and the comedian attempted to sneak in and find a seat unnoticed but was unsuccessful and in a moment was surrounded by his old schoolmates. The principal address was made by W. E. Rowsey, second president of Willie Halsell college, who had just returned to America after a tour of twenty foreign countries. After an eloquent dissertation, he introduced

Will was born November 4, 1879, in a ranch house halfway between Claremore and Oologah, in Indian Territory. The house was roomy and strongly built, one of those pioneer residences designed both for permanence and comfort. There were numerous barns, corrals and outbuildings to the rear and near the main dwelling stood a row of log cabins that were occupied by Negro slaves before the Civil War and afterward by hired farmers.

Because the ranch was equally distant from Claremore and Oologah, both towns claim the distinction of having been Will Rogers's birthplace, but, in reality, neither place had yet come into existence at the time of his birth. After he became famous, the humorist usually said he was a native of Claremore because, he remarked, Easterners can pronounce "Claremore" but can never hope to master "Oologah."

The Rogers family had a reputation to uphold in the community, and higher education came as a matter of course to boys and girls alike, but no member of the household ever dreamed that Will would escape the common destiny of a college degree. Although he was far above the average in mentality and mastered his studies with ease, he thoroughly disliked the disciplinary aspects of school life, especially because they took him away from his rope and his pony.

When Sallie Rogers was married, she moved with her husband to a new home near Drumgoole school, seven miles from the present town of Chelsea. Will was sent to live with her and start to school. With him went his inseparable companion, his pony. The parting gift from his father was a brand new saddle.

Will was still very young when his mother died and Mr. Rogers placed the boy in Harrell Institute in Muskogee, under the care of the president, T. F. Brewer, an old friend of the family. Will roomed with Bob Brewer, son of the president, and the two were close friends. Bob later grew up to become a New York banker.

Willie Halsell college was Will's third school. Here, in two years, he acquired most of his early education. But as a youngster, before school age, he earned a reputation as a wisecracker and often entertained his brothers and sisters with his bright flow of witticisms. When he came to Willie Halsell college, he was just developing those humorous traits that were to make him famous. He was an unusually bright boy but neglected his studies. The outdoors called to him constantly and the last chime of the bell that dismissed school for the noon hour or recess had no sooner died away than he was out of the building like a shot and mounted on his horse for a wild race over the campus or a tussle with one of the cows that were turned into the pasture.

He Goes Forth to See the World.

Will worked several months and came back home with money in his pocket. By this time, his father had remarried and moved to Claremore, and he made Will a present of the Oologah ranch and a big drove of Hereford cattle. Will operated the ranch with success for a while and became very popular with the people of this section, being especially in demand at picnics and dances, to which he went in jaunty attire, including Stetson hat and flowing necktie. Stockmen of this region who were in the business on a big scale usually sold their droves of cattle in St. Louis, 800 miles away, but Will decided to try the New York market. Taking his cousin, Dick Trent, he headed for New York with a shipment.

The enchantment of New York life made Will discontented with the commonplace existence of the ranch and he invited Dick Paris, another Cherokee boy, to accompany him, and set out for a tour of the world. They went to New Orleans, intending to take a boat for Buenos Aires, but could not find suitable accommodations. So they proceeded to New York, where they bought passage to

Fishing, hunting and trapping, three of the favorite sports among the boys of Indian Territory, held no fascina-

precious hours which might better be spent on horseback. Or as he recently said:

"If all my footsteps while marching in the bull pen at Kemper could be laid end to end, they would make another bunion derby."

A year and a half was all Will could stand of the military school. Without informing his father, who sent him a generous allowance every month, he suddenly pulled up stakes and went to Texas, where he was employed on a ranch owned by the father of a Kemper classmate. Will's father was angry when he learned Will had run away from school, but he felt better when he found out the rancher for whom Will was working was an old friend and was told that Will was a good boy and a hard worker. So he did not reproach the boy, but merely stopped his allowance.

(Continued on Page 3C.)