

The Will Rogers Dedication

It was a magnificent tribute that was paid to Will Rogers at Fort Worth Tuesday, when both a life-size equestrian statue and a life-size portrait of the unique humorist-philosopher were unveiled at the Will Rogers Memorial Auditorium and Coliseum.

For thousands of people to turn out for such an event, 12 years after the death of the man honored, is a remarkable demonstration of the affection that was held for him. Will Rogers is not forgotten; nor will he be, as long as millions live who read and heard his kindly, human witticisms and his homely but profound observations on the life of his era.

It is fitting that one of the outstanding figures of our day was chosen to dedicate the statue and portrait—General of the Army and Chief of Staff Dwight D. Eisenhower. The general revealed a deep insight into the cowboy humorist's character. He showed that he understood the place Will Rogers occupied in the American scene, a place which no one since has been able to fill.

"He possessed a keen insight into the things that concerned, amused or distressed his fellows," General Eisenhower said, "and was gifted with an uncanny ability to relate these things to the fundamental business of making a living, of maintaining freedom, of pursuing happiness . . . He climbed to fame on the lazy twirls of a cowpuncher's rope—and he used his fame to teach while he entertained; to goad each of us to think about the heritage we possess—of our opportunities, our rights, our responsibilities."

It is most interesting, as the general said, "to speculate on what he would have had to say about things that trouble us today.

"What wisecrack would he have shot at us on a dozen differences in the United Nations; what kind of needling would he have used to awaken us to the relationships between maintenance of our liberties and a decent life for others that desire also to remain free; what quip would he have employed to shame us into greater saving of food for the needy; what shaft would he have launched to inspire us to greater co-operation at home?

"Could his wit, his insight, his homely phraseology make us better see that democracy has entered its decade of greatest crisis? . . .

"Could he have made us more vigilant in the preservation of freedom, defending it from all enemies, foreign or domestic?

"Could he have helped strip from our eyes the scales of misunderstanding, prejudice, ignorance, fear—and so help us each to see clearly our duties to our country and ourselves, and tirelessly to struggle toward their performance?"

The answer is, of course, that if Will Rogers were alive today he could do these things, and he still would be doing them as he did for almost two decades before that tragic airplane crash in the wilds of Alaska.

It is fitting that Will Rogers has been honored so highly by the citizens of a state he loved so well, in a city which, like Houston, he loved. An Oklahoman, he was a Texan too. So American as to be virtually a native son of every state, he was a Texan in just a little greater degree than a son of other states except his native Oklahoma.

For this occasion, and for the splendid tribute in bronze and canvas, Texans and all admirers of Will Rogers are indebted to Amon Carter, publisher of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

The statue, which is the work of a well known Texas sculptor, Electra Waggoner Biggs, was completed in 1939. Its unveiling and dedication had been delayed awaiting an appropriate occasion, the war being primarily responsible for the delay. The program Tuesday took place on the sixty-eighth anniversary of Will Rogers' birth.

A long-time friend of the cowboy humorist, Mr. Carter is also responsible for naming the coliseum, auditorium and the memorial tower between the two Fort Worth Fat Stock Show structures for Will Rogers.

Mr. Carter cannot be commended too highly for his fidelity to his friend, whom General Eisenhower, in addition to other words of praise, called so appropriately "a smiling wanderer."