

**Will Rogers Memorial Grows in
Favor; Half Million Visit It Yearly**

Humorist Still Lives in Hearts of Countrymen

CLAREMORE, Okla., Nov. 11 (Spl).—The Will Rogers Memorial here is attracting visitors at a prodigious rate — more than half a million annually—as the memory of the great philosopher-humorist grows in stature.

It was on Aug. 15, 1935, that Rogers and Wiley Post fell to their deaths in Alaska. The Memorial was dedicated Nov. 4, 1938, and each year sees a larger attendance.

Seldom a Sunday passes when there aren't at least 3,000 visitors.

They come in cars, on horseback and afoot. The average visitor stays a little over an hour.

Many of them read the original manuscript of a feature story and comment:

"Why I remember that. I chuckled at the time."

Or, "Will sure hit it on the head with that one."

EQUESTRIAN STATUE.

The first thing the visitor sees as he enters the Memorial Grounds is the imposing equestrian statue of Rogers astride his favorite horse, Soapsuds.

The statue, a gift of Amon Carter, was unveiled Nov. 4 at the anniversary observance by Mrs. James B. Rogers, wife of the youngest son of the beloved Rogers.

The evening sun glints from the statue and it is appropriately named "Riding Into the Sunset."

The statue stands on a landscaped island in the driveway in front of the Memorial Building—a low, rambling building of Catoosa limestone which looks for all the world like a ranch house.

Presentation of the statue—a replica of the original by Sculptress Electra Waggoner Biggs of Vernon which now stands on the Will Rogers Memorial grounds in Fort Worth—was made in Carter's behalf by C. R. Smith, president of American Airlines.

NEIGHBOR TO ALL.

Smith expressed pleasure at being in Claremore, "among the neighbors and friends of Will Rogers. The personality of Will Rogers was such that every man called him neighbor, but Oklahoma and Texas occupied the place of his greatest affection."

"Will once said, 'A man with a message is a lot harder to listen to than any other species of speaker.'

"Even without that sound admonition, it would not occur to me to bring you a message about Will Rogers. He was born 12 miles north of Claremore, in the county named for his father. You knew and loved him, long before the stage, motion picture and radio made Will Rogers the friend of every member of the household in every rich and humble home in the land.

"I spent an evening, many years ago, in Will's home in California. I was there for the reason that Amon Carter had invited me to go along. It was a pleasant and enjoyable evening, with only Will, Amon, Fred Stone and myself present.

"After dinner, Will said, 'Would you like me to read the finest thing I have ever written?' And with that he read through the introduction he had written for 'Trails Plowed Under.' The message was addressed directly to Charley Russell, who had long since gone to the place where good cowhands go.

LASTING AFFECTION.

"Will spoke of his affection for Charley, and of how much he missed him. He then asked Charley if he would go down one of the trails there and look up a little white house, where he would find two people, also from Claremore—the mother and father of Will Rogers.

"Will believed that it was not far from heaven to earth and that those up there could look down on us here. I hope that is so, and that Will is aware of the strong and lasting affection we have for him, and of our purpose here—to express our respect for a great American, by the dedication of this splendid bronze statue.

"The companion piece to this statue is in front of the Will Rogers Memorial buildings in Fort Worth—a lasting testimonial of the friendship of the people of Fort Worth and of Texas. Will had a home in Oklahoma and one in California, but in Texas he was an adopted son.

"A second bronze is at Texas Technological College at Lubbock, on the campus of a great school near the ranch country in which Will lived during his younger days.

WORK OF TEXAN.

"These statues are the work of a talented Texan, Electra Waggoner Biggs. Electra is herself a member of a pioneer Texas family. It is especially fitting that she could devote her keen interest and outstanding artistic talent to the creation of this striking bronze. We are grateful to her, as we are grateful to Mr. Amon Carter, for together they have made it possible to cast this outstanding work of art. The generosity of Mr. Carter has permitted its dedication here.

"Amon, like Will, is a man of the small town. He is a man with many of the characteristics of

Will. He was his close friend, the man from Shady Oak Farm, so often described by Will in his daily column.

"Amon, like many of you, represents the strong, courageous character which has permitted the development of the West; men who have made this land into the happy, friendly, colorful, vigorous section which has found and held the affections of all who have known it.

"I am glad that it is Amon who has been responsible for this presentation, for Will would have liked that. I have seen in many books at the Fort Worth Club the simple salutation and inscription, 'To Amon Carter, my friend, Will Rogers.' What could be more direct, or more satisfying?

'GREAT AMERICAN.'

"I say now, as so many have said before, that this son of Claremore, Will Rogers, was one of the great men of our time. We knew and loved him. We shall continue to miss him. Today in spiritual presence he is with us again.

"I have the great honor, acting on behalf of my fellow Texan and good friend, Amon Carter, to present this statue to an outstanding son of a great state, a great American, Will Rogers," Smith concluded.

Immediately after Smith spoke, Raymond E. Buck, Fort Worth attorney and counsel for American Airlines and Convair, was introduced by the master of ceremonies, Glenn Condon of Tulsa. Buck presented a "surprise" gift from Carter to the Memorial—a bust of Rogers, also by Mrs. Biggs.

Buck recounted the airplane flight to Claremore of Carter and his party, saying "Today I felt that Will Rogers rode right along beside us—and now he looks down with pride and satisfaction on this Memorial."

Both gifts were accepted for the people of Oklahoma by Gov. Roy J. Turner, who termed the Memorial "a wonderful symbol of our everlasting affection for this great man.

STATE HOLIDAY.

"Today, Will Rogers' birthday, is a day of reverence for Oklahoma and a state holiday. Our Legislature in 1947 passed a law making Nov. 4 a holiday in recognition of the great humanitarian service he rendered his state and nation.

"The memory of Will Rogers and his great philosophy will live on, and we are grateful to the friends of Will Rogers from other states who help us perpetuate the memory of his great service to mankind.

"I wish to express our deep appreciation to Mr. Amon Carter of Fort Worth for providing this magnificent statue of Will and his favorite horse, and the impressive bust, for Oklahoma's Memorial. We also thank Mr. Carter for honoring our friend and his friend, Will Rogers, elsewhere. Similar statues have been provided in Fort Worth and Lubbock, Texas. The thousands of people who visit this memorial each year will join us in gratitude to Mr. Carter and to Electra Waggoner Biggs, the sculptress, whose genius has inspired this bust and statue.

"In the name of the Will Rogers Memorial Commission and in the name of the State of Oklahoma, I accept this bust and statue of Will Rogers. May they serve always to remind us that no man gave more of himself to all people than this great Oklahoman," he declared.

SENATOR ATTENDS.

Among the platform guests at the presentation was Oklahoma's U. S. Senator Robert S. Kerr.

The jovial senator remarked on how appropriate was the weather on "this glorious Oklahoma sunshine-filled afternoon to receive the presentation of this wonderful monument to Oklahoma's greatest citizen from one who is certainly one of, if not the, greatest citizen of this wonder state south of the Red River.

"I want to say this about Texas, and if Will Rogers was here I believe that he would concur: that if there is another state in the union that is anywhere near as great as Oklahoma, it probably would be Texas.

"Do you suppose, Amon, that the university down there will ever get a team that can beat these Sooners?

"You know, we were sitting over here at the dining table a little while ago and we were complimenting our guests, certainly. Hospitality and courtesy and our great love for them indicated that we would make them welcome, and Amon got to where he was serious about it and he said, 'Why certainly Texas is the greatest state in the union . . . This late war was won by Texas and the outlying states!' And somebody spoke up and said, 'As if any state could outlie Texas.'

8,000 IN AUDIENCE.

"Well, it is events of this kind that keep fresh in our memory the great and wonderful men and women who have built our state and we welcome these friends from out of Oklahoma and this

gesture of their affection for our great son, Will Rogers, and their great affection for Oklahoma.

"Amon, I want to say right now," Senator Kerr concluded, "that if you were an Oklahoman, I would agree that there is no greater man in America. As it is, I will say, no greater man outside of Oklahoma."

The presentation and dedication ceremonies took place before a crowd estimated at 8,000 persons who flocked to the Memorial Grounds located atop a windswept hill a half mile from U. S. Highway 66 linking Chicago and Los Angeles.

The 20-acre site, purchased by Will Rogers before his death as the location on which he planned to build a home after retirement, offers an unsurpassed view of the Oklahoma plains where Rogers rode and roped as a young man.

The winding Verdigris River, where he went fishing, lies like a giant snake across northeastern Oklahoma. To the southwest can be seen the spires of Tulsa, 27 miles away.

STATUE BY DAVIDSON.

Central attraction inside the Memorial Building's rotunda is a 10-foot statue by Sculptor Jo Davidson, depicting Rogers standing in his usual slouched position. On the base is engraved "I never met a man I didn't like."

The museum contains a saddle room where Rogers' saddle collection is displayed. In other rooms are manuscripts, pictures, mementoes, 13 doramas depicting the stages of his life, various plaques, tablets and memorials given by organizations ranging from the Pocohontas Club to the Daughters of the Confederacy.

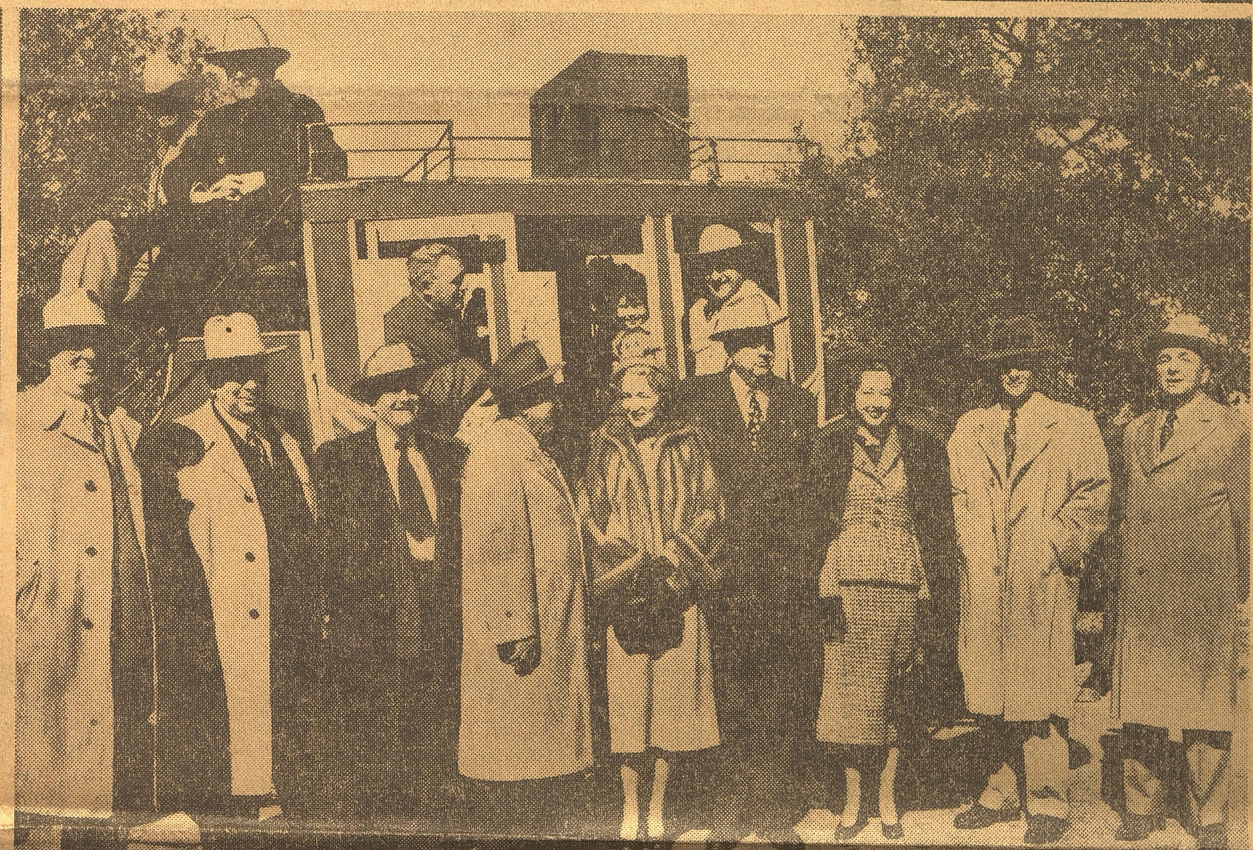
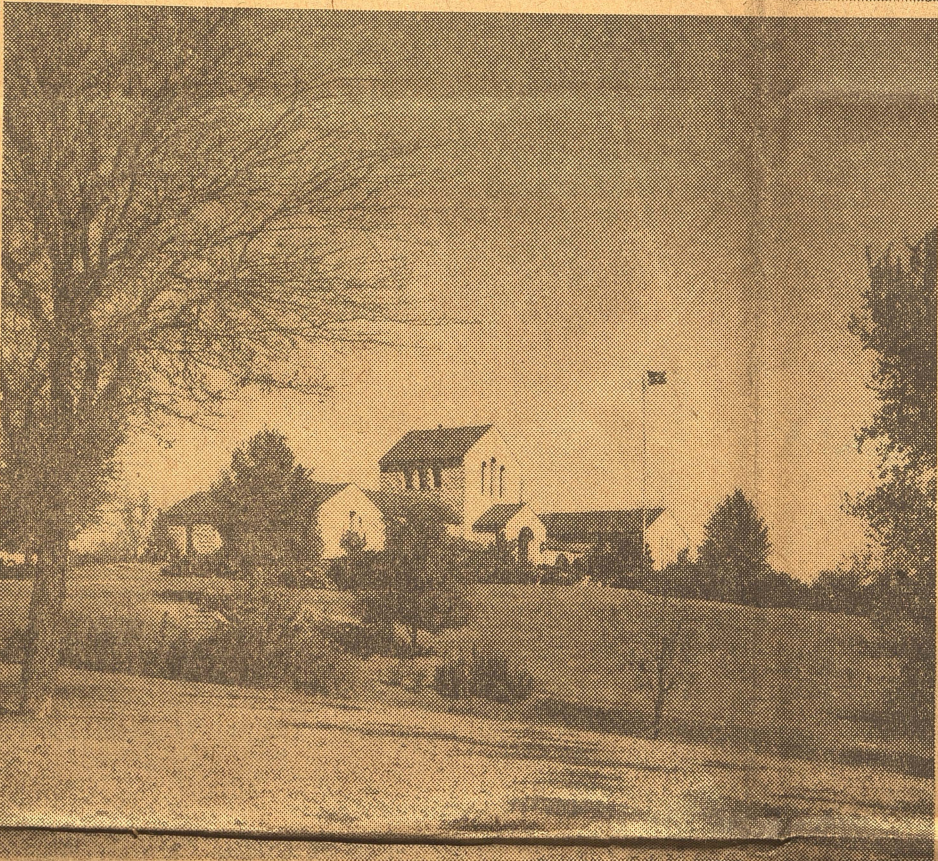
The Pocohontas Club, incidentally, is made up of a score of ladies of Indian descent who formed the group 51 years ago to promote cultural and social activities. It wasn't long before some of the young men wanted into the club. A number of them, including Rogers, were taken into membership.

Each year on the anniversary of Rogers' birth, the ladies hold a memorial meeting at the tomb, placing a wreath at the spot east of the building where both Mr. and Mrs. Rogers rest.

PARKING SPACE NEEDED.

The tomb was paid for by close friends of the Rogers family—Waite and Frank Phillips, John Mabee, Ewing Halsell and Lew Wentz. The Memorial Building proper was built with state funds.

The Memorial's most pressing need is an enlarged parking lot,



—Star-Telegram Staff Photos.

THOUSANDS VISIT MEMORIAL GROUNDS—Crowds numbering in the thousands visit the Will Rogers Memorial building and grounds near Claremore, Okla., each week-end to pay tribute to the late humorist-philosopher. These photos, taken recently on what would have been Rogers' 71st birthday, show part of the dignitaries assembled for the dedication of an equestrian statue of Will Rogers. In the upper left picture, C. R. Smith (at microphones) dedicates the statue which was

given by Amon Carter. Platform guests on the front row are, left to right, Mrs. James B. Rogers, Carter, Senator Robert S. Kerr, Mrs. Carter, Ewing Halsell of Vinita, Okla., Mrs. Electra Waggoner Biggs, Gov. Roy J. Turner, Radio Announcer Keith Bretz of Tulsa, Jimmie Rogers and Dr. Hodges McKnight. Upper right: Governor Turner, left, and Senator Kerr, right, chat with Smith in front of the new statue. Lower left: the Memorial building nestles among rolling hills dotted with oaks, elms and evergreens. Winding paths

crisscross the 20-acre landscaped grounds. Lower right: gathered in and around old stagecoach are, (standing, left to right) Norris G. Henthorne, editor of the Tulsa World and chairman of the Will Rogers Memorial Commission; Raymond E. Buck and Dr. McKnight of Fort Worth; Halsell, treasurer of the Memorial Commission; Mrs. Carter, Senator Kerr, Mrs. Biggs and her husband, John Biggs; and C. T. McLaughlin of Snyder. Governor Turner and Carter are seated face to face in the coach, and Smith sits above in the driver's seat.