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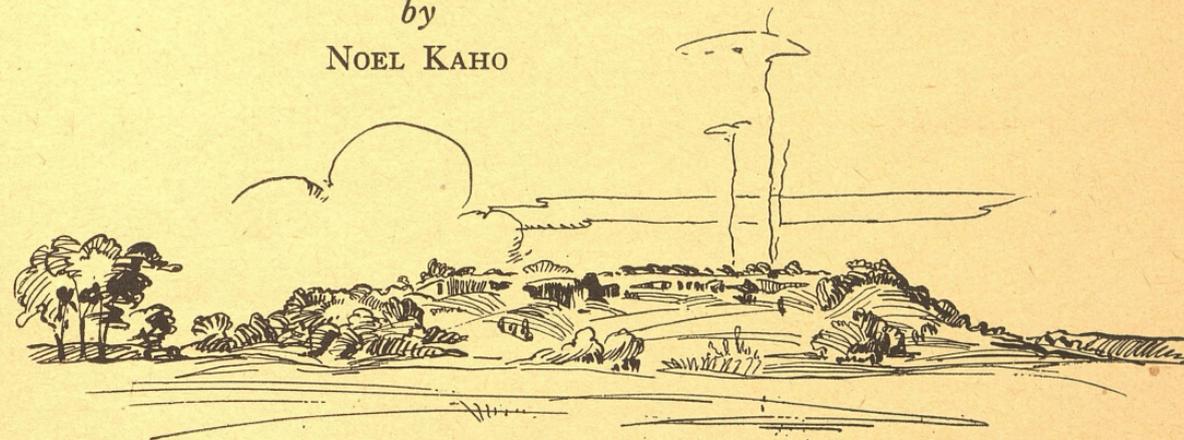
WILL ROGER'S COUNTRY

BY
NOEL KAHO

For
Amos G Carter
with great pleasure
Noel Kaho

The WILL ROGERS COUNTRY

by
NOEL KAHO



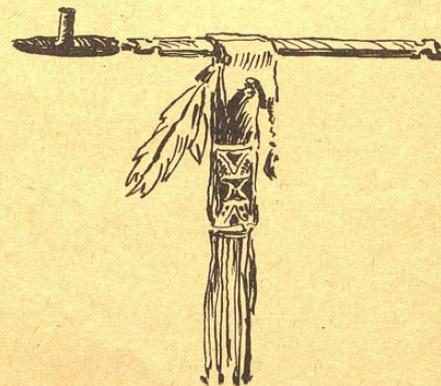
With Illustrations by
BETTINA STEINKE

CLAREMORE, IN THE WILL ROGERS COUNTRY, OKLAHOMA

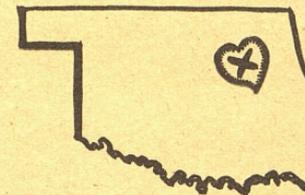
Second Edition
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This Book . . .

Across its pages gallop the Indians and buffalo; pioneers labor to build a new home and a new country; the black gold of oil flows; and politics and war, romance and adventure blend into a sweeping background for the life of a world-famous man once called Willie.



Where The Roads Cross



A certain X marks the spot in the heart of America made by a new road crossing an old. The new road, fast and wide, made of concrete, is called the Will Rogers Highway, U. S. 66; the old one, nearly obliterated and lost in the erosion of time, scarcely heard of Willie Rogers. But it knew his dad, Clem, quite well.

The crossing X of these two roads does not come in Claremore, or Oologah, or Chelsea. It simply marks the heart of the three points, as the triangle marks a land and place made famous over the whole world by one man, who slowly lifted it up, as he himself took stature, held it before the world's delighted gaze, and then let it float to earth after his passing.

As he grew to this great stature, truly a man of the world, he carried a remembrance of the tall grasses, the oak-covered hills, the gay people—his boyhood country in the valley

of the Verdigris—with him, gave it stature, too. And now today, without him, it seeks its own level; for the grains have gone through the hourglass.

It is a fragment of earth unlike any other in the whole world. Not because it became British out of grandiose ignorance, or Spanish through French indebtedness, or French through Spanish pride, or American through Napoleonic fears and sagacity. No, not because of these things, nor because the town of Claremore was first an Osage village, then a Delaware enterprise, then a Cherokee town drawn to the white man's railway line, and finally a white man's town.

Not even because it contains a few surviving settlers in the face of today's impression that pioneers are all well dead.

But, because it somehow gave realization to a spirit.

Some people say that this patch of land we call the Will Rogers Country, and the Oklahoma it became a part of, held the last flare of the Anglo-Saxon spirit, that here was its last frontier. Perhaps that is so. But that spirit, under the spacious clouds and along the landscape and the flowing Verdigris, seems too indigenous, too well blended with Osage and Delaware and Cherokee, to carry an alien tag.

Rather than this, it was a spirit of gaiety and laughter at work, of a way of life that was good and somehow got distilled and poured into the great heart of a little boy.

But before he came racing his pony over the range, there were the Indians who knew the game-filled valleys long before the Greeks knew Troy. They had known it thousands of years, but not enough thousands of years to remember when the bottom of an inland sea rose into the sunlight and its fossil-crowded limestone became the flat caps of scattered hills to which Claremore brought his people.

Coronado may have come within a stone's throw of Claremore Mound and the others of these



scattered hills in 1541, looking for gold. But he did not know what it looked like. To him it was a yellow metal. But to the Chouteau boys it was a piece of fur. Coronado saw poor savages; the Chouteaus saw rich friends. One looked for metal and people to be conquered; others looked for soft pelts and a free people left free.

The Indian wanted the freedom of great spaces. The hills and valleys, the herds of buffalo and deer, the game and fish and fruits were his from a time beyond the reach of memory. They suited his way of life. But something stronger came along and took all of these things from him. And it was he who became the stranger in his own land.

But before he became so, before the valley of the Verdigris, which rolls upward to the east, became a part of the United States (1803), Claremore went there with many of his people. Under the guidance of the Chouteau family that established St. Louis and Kansas City, he built a new home on the banks of the Verdigris. And the first village of Claremore became a reality.

The Osage Story

THE OSAGES have fared poorly in the history of the Will Rogers Country, and of Oklahoma. For that history is concerned mainly with the taming of the wilderness. And though the Osages built towns in the grassy, river-bottom land Clem Rogers found so good fifty-four years later, they were still not the right kind of pioneers. They were too much a part of the brown and emerald wilderness to escape the subjugating forces.

In face of the irresistible westward flowing of the white man's way of life and in the squeeze-play of economic factors that grew, like Jack's bean stalk, out of the decreasing buffalo herds and the increasing dependence of the Osages on their conquering intruders, and because arrows were no match for bullets, and faith and trust no guard against the subtle robberies by stronger peoples, the Osages fell from their princely arrogance into humiliation, from wealth, as Indians see it, into poverty and destitution.



Chief Claremore

When they came to the Verdigris country they were its owners. They had been for many years. They had owned and been lords over a vast domain that extended from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and from the Missouri River on the north to the Arkansas River on the south. They were the undisputed rulers of it all. And they were the undisputed scourge and terror of all the surrounding Indians, even though today they live as a gentle people on an acreage that in comparison with their ancient lands would seem no bigger than a buffalo skin spread out upon a limitless prairie.



First Claremore

Known historically as early as 1673, the Osages came southwest a hundred and twenty-nine years later over a path now marked U. S. Highway 66, the Will Rogers Highway. And in that year (1802) Claremore built the first recognized and official village of Oklahoma.

It was here, and at the less important Osage Villages to the east, that the Osages struggled against the inevitables, here that they lived for about thirty-five years, desperately resisting the rising tide of their dependence, clutching childishly to their old ways.

Then they were driven out, forced to recede further into a temporary oblivion. In Kansas they lived for another thirty-five years, and then bought back, at a price ridiculously high in comparison with what they had been paid for them, some of the blackjack hills further west.

They have been gone now from our Will Rogers Country for nearly a hundred years. In that time they have known irony in its most exquisite form. For the Cherokees who resettled their land were later to know, as the Osages had known, the feel of poverty. And the Osages, purchasers of their own ancient lands, were to know what wealth, in the white man's view of it, really was. They became the richest single group of people on earth after oil was discovered on their reservation.

But the Osages still come back to Claremore and the Will Rogers Country. Some of them do, coming back for the mineral baths, or as tourists, riding in their rich motor cars. Many of the old men still braid their hair, wear blankets, paint their faces. But there is something intangible that was left in the land from their fathers, from the years contemporary with Jefferson and Adams and Madison.



The ghost of old Chief Claremore is still supposed to haunt the mound that stood beside his village (the mound that one can see from the tower of the Memorial off to the north). And there has clung to the place a

feeling of self-sufficiency and freedom and a dash of insolence very much like that the old Osages used to have. The town has the old chief's name. And on its eastern edge is a stream called Dog Creek, named for Black Dog, who with Claremore and Pawhuska were the three main chiefs of the Osages when they dominated the country.

It is poetic justice that the modern town of Claremore should be named for the old Chief. He was called "The Builder of Towns." And once, when he was in Washington, D. C., the Great White Father told him:

"If you wish to build a town, build on a good stream. There you will have a good fire—many children—many braves."

And Claremore said:

"I have built my town. I have done all I could."

BY 1808 the Cherokees had begun to arrive west of the Mississippi. Not the educated Cherokees who were trying desperately to practice the theory of the white man's way of life, but the ones who did not like such experimentation, the ones who preferred the old way, and liked the war whoop and the rattle of terrapin shells.

The conflict between these two tribes, the Osages and the Western Cherokees, increased

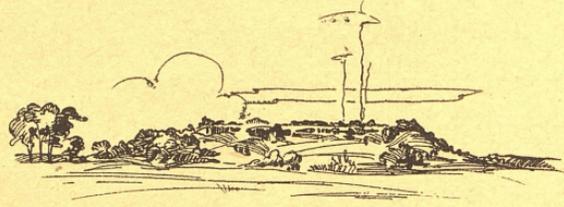
with the fury of a spreading prairie fire. There were constant clashes.

Claremore tried bravely to restrain his young warriors, but no sooner would he get them to agree to peaceful ways than the Cherokees would incite them to retaliations.

The Cherokees wanted the Osage land and made no bones about it. The white people of Arkansas sent a memorial to the United States Congress in which they charged: "The Cherokees are a restless dissatisfied, insolent and ambitious tribe engaged in constant intrigues with neighboring tribes to foment difficulties, produce discord, and defeat the great objective of the Government in promoting the civilization of the Indians and preserving peace among them."

Finally, the Cherokees got the Quapaws, Delawares, Shawnees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws within the circle of their influence to join in a war to exterminate the Osages. But they did not fool Major William Bradford, who had brought one company of soldiers up to Belle Point on the Arkansas (now Fort Smith, Arkansas) on order of General Jackson. Bradford wrote Jackson that the Cherokees were using any excuse for the hostilities employed in effectuating their deliberate purpose of driving the Osages out of their home and dividing the country among themselves and their allies.

Battle of Claremore Mound



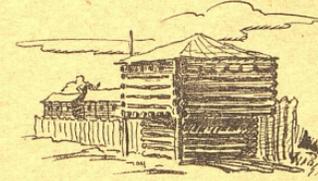
REINFORCED from the Koasati, Tonkawa, and Comanche tribes, by eleven white men, and a company of Cherokees from the eastern nation, the main body of the Cherokees set out. The Osage warriors were away on a hunting trip when the Cherokees attacked. The village was filled with women, children, and old men. The Osage losses were "fourteen men killed, 69 boys, women and children killed, several wounded in the retreat, and 103 or 104 made prisoners by the Cherokees, who also took a great deal of plunder. The town was burned and crops destroyed." This was reported by Auguste Chouteau.

The great Cherokee "victory" over the defenseless Osages occurred in October, 1817. By November, messengers had ridden to the eastern nation to tell of the bravery of the Cherokee warriors. There were many war dances among the civilized Indians in celebration.

Then Claremore's son, Mad Buffalo, or Skitook as some called him, discovered a camp on Blue Water River where once before he had fought some Choctaws and Caddoes. In taking 21 horses, the Osages killed five men. Their great misfortune was that one of the men slain was Major Curtis Welborn.

Because of this raid General Winfield Scott, in command of the Western Department with headquarters at New Orleans, ordered Colonel Arbuckle to move from Fort Smith up to the mouth of the Verdigris River with five companies. Colonel Arbuckle demanded the murderer of Major Welborn, and Claremore was flatly told that if he did not surrender the murderer the army would march against him. Some of the employees of Union Mission became so upset and panicky about the situation that they fled the country.

When Colonel Arbuckle brought his men up the Arkansas, some by land and some by



river, and established Fort Gibson (which has been rebuilt to exact specifications for today's tourists to see), April 21, 1824, the Osages were fairly well convinced that

the army meant to march against them.

Captain Nathan Pryor, for whom modern Pryor, Oklahoma, east of Claremore by sixteen miles, is named, and David Barbour, Osage sub-agent, said that Chief Claremore should go to the new fort. Thus in June, five hundred of the Osages went there with the six warriors who were leaders in the Blue Water raid. They were Mad Buffalo, Little Eagle, Little Rattlesnake, Little Bear, Caddo Killer, and another who escaped.

"To see six brave men come forward and voluntarily submit to become prisoners; to be put in irons; and sent away to be tried for their lives; to see this done with firmness and decision, by the unanimous consent of the Nation, and without a single sign from their wives—to see the sense of honor manifested on the part of the criminals, and the desire to do justice in the Nation, was indeed affecting to every spectator," wrote one man from Union Mission who was there that day.

In the long, drawn-out trials at Little Rock, Mad Buffalo and Little Eagle were sentenced

to be hanged. Justice took no notice of tribal custom or Indian land. A white man had been killed. The others were set free.

In order to pay attorneys' fees to defend the prisoners the Osages did everything they could to raise money. Governor Alexander McNair, the Osage agent, came to Claremore's town and found that the Indians had actually impoverished themselves for this thing of honor.

Shortly afterwards, President Adams pardoned Mad Buffalo and Little Eagle as one of his first official acts. The pardoned Indians told ludicrous stories of the trials at Little Rock. But when they came back to live among their people they lived in disgrace. About Mad Buffalo, his "life had been forfeited, but (as they say) not worth taking."



The government gave Lovely's Purchase to the Cherokees in 1828. And the Osages felt that they were being treated very poorly, that the government was not keeping its promises to them any better than the Cherokees.

Captain Pryor, Colonel Arbuckle, and Colonel A. P. Chouteau came to Claremore's town to talk with the Chief. Claremore told them that "their tears could not be dried for



less than \$800 and that it would require 136 yards of blue stroud, 80 pairs of mackinaw blankets, 397 yards of domestic plaid, 12 butcher knives, 4 pounds of vermilion, and a

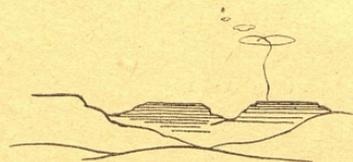
few other items to appease them."

But before all this could be settled Claremore died (1828), and his son, Claremore, became chief after him. The plight of the Osages was not good and some of the old men were glad that the venerable Chief had gone

from them and could not see the full extent of their unhappiness.

Ten years later, the year when the younger Claremore died, the Osages were ordered from our Will Rogers Country. They were told that if they did not remove to their reservation in Kansas within a certain time limit, the soldiers would drive them out.

So the Osages were driven from their ancient lands the same year the eastern Cherokees were driven from theirs. The land passed from the hands of one race into the hands of another. The country where the flat-topped mounds mark a famous spot moved into a new era and a new way of life.



Empire of the Chouteaus



THE Will Rogers Country, in spite of the prior claims of the Indians, became Spanish in historic times. Coronado rode up from Mexico looking for the Seven Cities of Cibola to conquer (1541) and came through north-eastern Oklahoma and Kansas. De Vaca had been shipwrecked in the Texas region twelve years before and stayed there nearly eight years. And De Soto, coming up from Florida, tramped across Missouri and Arkansas, later recounting the adventure in "The Narrative of a Gentleman of Elvas." Enough, indeed, for any country to claim it for its own.

Then, by the royal patent of 1606, King James of England, in grand gesture and geographic ignorance, and completely oblivious of the Spanish claims to the continent,

granted the Virginia Company a great belt of land which included a large part of the present United States, making our Will Rogers Country English, in spite of what the Spaniards said.

While Jamestown was struggling to keep alive, however, and the Pilgrims were toughing it out in New England, the French were settling along the St. Lawrence and southwest of it, building new France. Then they discovered the Mississippi valley for themselves. Joliet and Marquette came down to the mouth of the Arkansas; La Salle floated all the way down. And in 1718 Bienville founded the gay, brash city of New Orleans. And Louisiana became French, in spite of what the English said.

"The attempt of France to extend a line of military posts down the Ohio River in order to join Canada with the settlements of Louisiana brought on the French and Indian war." Spain came to France's assistance and out of French defeat (1763) gained New Orleans and regained all the territory west of the Mississippi.

Living among the polyglot population of Franco-Spanish New Orleans were Rene Auguste and Marie Therese Chouteau, whose son, Auguste (1749-1829), together with his half-brother, Jean Pierre (1758-1849), was to become one of the real pioneers of Missouri and Oklahoma.

Auguste, at the mature age of fourteen, accompanied his stepfather, Pierre Laclède, when in 1763 he moved his family up the Mississippi to the Illinois country. It was Auguste who assisted Laclède in finding a site for St. Louis. And it was he who began the building of that fur metropolis. By the time the English colonists had thrown off George III's yoke, read Washington's Farewell Address, and got accustomed to the second president's living in the Presidential Palace (the White House), Auguste had built a brisk trade in furs with the Osages.

He was so enterprising that he secured from the Spanish Governor a monopoly franchise for this trade with the Indians. And brother Jean Pierre whose sons founded

Kansas City, established Oklahoma's first commercial enterprises, outside of salt works, got the monopoly franchise for trading in Arkansas Territory.

Charles IV of Spain let vanity get the best of him. His son would be king some day, but his daughter would be only the Duchess of Parma unless he did something about it. So he traded Louisiana to Napoleon for the Kingdom of Etruria for his son-in-law. This made the Will Rogers Country French again. But Napoleon kept the matter secret for a few years and let the Spanish Governor continue his rule.

One of the Governor's arbitrary acts was to rescind Auguste's monopoly franchise and give it to Manuel Lisa.

This affected the history of our patch of land because the Osages liked the French people very much. Some of the women had even married Frenchmen. So it was no great feat for the Chouteaus to induce the Osages to move to another part of their land, to the Verdigris River valley where the flat-topped mounds marked a bountiful spot.

"This location, with which they had long been familiar on their hunting expeditions, had many advantages. It was in the midst of a fine hunting region, at the head of navigation on the Arkansas River, whence furs could be shipped to New Orleans, and provided a location for the receipt of supplies by return voyages; it was a beautiful country, and included a celebrated saline spring that supplied Indians and whites with salt for many years."

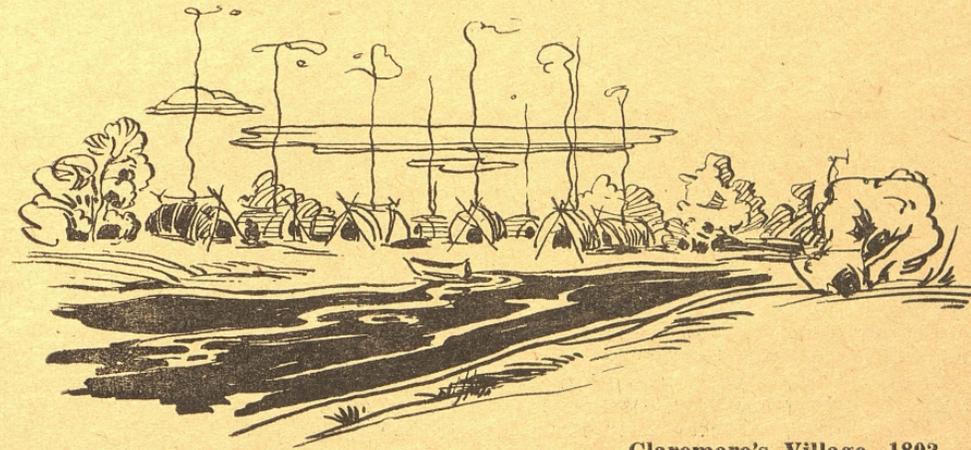
The Chouteaus selected for their chief an influential Osage named Cashesege, or Big Track. But the "most influential warrior and leader was Claremore, the lawful sovereign of the Osage tribe."

CLAREMORE built his village on the banks of the Verdigris a short distance from the large mound that one passes today on the county road from Claremore to Oologah. The village was well placed and large, having more than a hundred and fifty dwellings, each one housing many people according to the number of wives and relatives a man had.

Dr. Marcus Palmer, coming over from Union Mission for the first time, wrote: "In

passing that distance, about twenty-five miles, we found the land a continued level, and rich prairie. When we came in sight of the town, we had one of the grandest prospects I ever beheld.

"As we approached the town, the head chief (Claremore) came out to meet us, and bid us welcome. In a short time we were surrounded by hundreds, apparently happy to see us. The chief took us to his lodge. . . . Having entered the lodge, and had our horses turned out, we took a humble seat around the fire. Presently there was brought to us a wooden bowl, filled with food made of corn. In a short time we were invited to eat



Claremore's Village, 1802

at another lodge, and before we had finished, at another and another. In the same manner were we treated during all the time we remained in the village.

"The dress of the Indians consists of buckskins dressed, made into leggins, reaching to the hips; on their feet, moccasins, and a buffalo robe or blanket about their shoulders. The females had short skirts and covering for the



breasts. They shave off their hair close to their heads, except a line, about half an inch wide, running around the head. The hair thus left is cut about an inch long; within this line of hair they fasten an ornament. Their ears are slit in several places, and filled with strings of beads. In addition to these, they have many other kinds of ornaments about their arms and legs.

"Their houses are made of poles, arched from fifteen to twenty feet, covered with matting made of flags. At the sides they set up rived planks, lining the inside with neatly made flag matting. They build several fires in the lodge, according to the size, or the number of wives the owner has."

The same year of the "Battle of Claremore Mound" Auguste Pierre Chouteau, Pierre's son, got a license from the government for himself and a French-Osage by the name of Revoir to set up a trading post. Revoir was killed and finally, five years after the license was issued (1822), Auguste Pierre came down to La Saline to make his home.

The Chouteau place was called "baronial." It was on a well-known road, or trace, that later became the route of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad, and U. S. Highway 69. Traffic was heavy over this road, even in those days. And it grew heavier with every year. Hundreds of wagons, immigrants going south, west, north, east, passed each month. Even tourists came by.

Washington Irving was there and as a result of his visit the world got to read his "Tour of the Prairies." Latrobe was there. And Catlin, the famous painter, who painted Claremore and his wife, and Black Dog, the one-eyed chief, about whom he wrote, "This dignitary . . . is one of the most conspicuous characters in all this country, rendered so by his huge size, standing in height and in girth above all his tribe." These pictures now hang in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C.



Sam Houston, living at the Wigwam, on the Verdigris, was a frequent visitor both at the Chouteaus' wilderness estate and at Claremore's village. And Jefferson Davis, the later Confederate President, was stationed at Fort Gibson for a while and was a friend of Clare-

more . . . and Nathan Pryor . . . and visitors of European title. But the Chouteaus were used to the famous of two continents and took it all in stride.

Old Colonel A. P. was a good business man. One boatload of furs shipped to New Orleans weighed nineteen tons! But this kind of business was bound to be extinguished. And there had to be a latent period while changes in a way of life were made. With game constantly decreasing, furs became scarce. And even the buffalo began to disappear from the prairie where he had grazed for so long, and the Indians began wearing the woven blankets of the white man. The petty agriculture of a pioneering people encroached upon the vastness, immigrants crossing the country daily erased the feeling of isolation, surrounding states joined the Union, the cattle industry developed, and a thousand other significant changes, great and small, took place.

The Osages were unable to resist these many complex factors. They could not go the white man's way any more than he could go theirs. Most people have a tendency to think that the change, being slow, should

have been an easy one for them, that they should have made the effort willingly. But old Chief Smohalla, of the Far West, explained the deeply emotional and tragically naive reason for the Indian's resistance. He said:

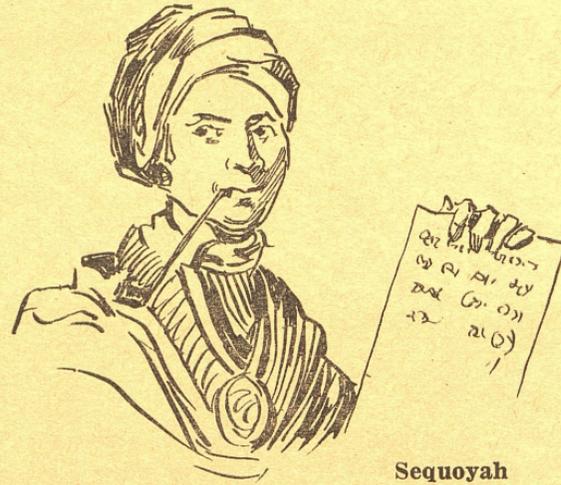
"You ask me to plow the ground! Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest.

"You ask me to dig for stones! Shall I dig under her skin for bones?

"You ask me to cut grasses and make hay and sell it and be rich like white man! But how dare I cut off my mother's hair?"

The Chouteaus did not really accomplish much in the civilization of the Osages, although many of the younger boys married women of the tribe. Their interests were too strongly commercial. So, as the Osages waned in almost every respect, the Chouteaus' influence went too. A little town south of Pryor on Highway 69 is named for them. There is a marker at Salina, straight east of Claremore by about twenty miles. Little else is left. And it seems a long time since those days.

The Cherokee Story



Sequoyah

THE Cherokees dismiss the Osages with a wave of the hand. When a question of barbarity comes up, they are quick to mention Hitchcock's Journal and read that the Osages were "thieves to a man, wild, ignorant and barbarous, hate work and are half the time in a starving condition." Then they point out that as early as 1721 six Cherokee chiefs were presented at the English Court to George III and "exhibited a dignity and bearing in keep-

ing with their rank and influence as representatives of a great Nation."

They are quick also to mention the great and marvelous achievement of Sequoyah—the Cherokee alphabet; and the printing press which was set up in Oklahoma in 1835; and the large number of their college-trained citizens; their agriculture and their high social level. They were, indeed, a civilized tribe of Indians.

When they came to the new country from the East, the more adventurous youngsters came into the Verdigris valley where Claremore's Town had been. The old fullbloods had settled in the hills east of Grand River because it was so similar to their old home in the east.

So these youngsters came to the westward-sloping valley, insistent upon gaining new freedoms for themselves. They believed in themselves. And they rode forward into the new land in pursuit of happiness. They shared their land among themselves taking only what they could use according to the laws of their Indian republic. They made much out of little.

Charles Coody came out the first year after the tragic Trail of Tears. In his wagon was a plow for soil that had never been plowed before. In his boxes were supplies for a kind of home that had never been built before in the Will Rogers Country. Ahead of him he drove his cattle, having no concern for the wild buffalo still left in the West.

The Osages — the Chouteaus. Here again was a pioneer, taking the land for himself.

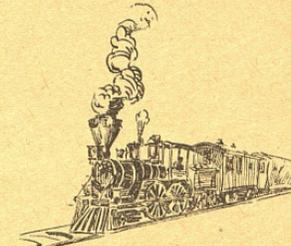


Yet, there was a slight difference between

The only condition his nation put upon him was that he turn the fallow crust, that he join the trees of the thick woods into a house for his family. That done, it was his to hold as long as the grass grew green and the rivers flowed with water.

Coody's pioneering and that of the usually romantic American pattern. For he carried in his pocket a book that had been printed only thirty-five miles away, and in his boxes were newspapers, used for wrapping, that had come from the surrounding states of Missouri, Arkansas, and robust Texas.

Steamboats visited his neighbors, even though they were distant, and their arguments were hot over the Missouri Compromise, the



Monroe Doctrine, canals like the Erie, the rapid sprawling of the railroads across the country, the twenty-one millionaires in New York City, the financial panic of '37. And there was

always the exciting news and contact with the folk on the Texas Road about twenty miles west of him.

In the nation itself there was politics. But there was always politics among the Cherokees, and it was always at white heat. And it was seldom localized at the capital, Tahlequah, but reached out like capillaries to the remotest cells of its being.

Coody never felt himself isolated even though he was a pioneer. He was always a part of his nation and of the world. He came back to Tahlequah in '43 as a senator and was president of that Senate until he died

the next year. It is seldom that pioneers are politicians concurrently.

Major Dewitt Clinton Lipe, one of the prominent post-Civil War leaders of the later Will Rogers Country, kept a reminiscent journal. In it he jotted down these notes of those first days:

"Among the first settlers to this Verdigris country about the year 1839 was Charles Coody, grandfather of John H. Coody of Nowata. He settled at the place now called Coker Spring and set out those locust trees, bringing the sprouts from Grand River, as no locust was found growing wild in these parts. He brought with him quite a bunch of cattle and he trained them to come up for their salt by blowing a horn.

"He lived there a few years then moved up on the river and located at what is now called Coody's bluff taking its name from him. He had quite a large family; all of them lived around him. . . .

"After Coody moved away from Coker Spring, there was a man named Davison lived there a short time, and one evening a cyclone came along and blew his house all away. He and his wife heard the storm approaching and jumped into a little cellar they had dug under the floor, and saved themselves. They moved away shortly afterwards and no one lived there until the war closed, when Dempsey Coker, a Baptist preacher, father of John and Dave, moved near the spring and settled. That's how it got the name.

"In the year 1840 John Chambers, a prom-

inent Cherokee, moved out to this country with his wife, rifle, dog, a bundle of bedding and a cow, coming right across the prairie from Saline and settled not far from Big Lake. And during the great flood of 1844 while he was absent from home on business the back water from the Verdigris surrounded his house. And there happened to be a bunch of Osages camped near the place and they took in the situation and made a bark canoe and went in and brought Mrs. Chambers and children out to dry land. John Chambers, as long as he lived, never forgot the Osages for this kind act.

"During the year 1842 Elijah Hicks, another prominent Cherokee and brother-in-law of Chief John Ross, moved out to this country and settled where Woodlawn Cemetery is now located, and previously occupied by Osage Chief Black Dog. When the Osages moved away they left quite a large peach orchard extending up as far as where Fred Parsley's house now stands. Dog Creek is named for that Chief. (Dog Creek now supplies Lake Claremore.)

"Elijah Hicks was the first person buried in what is now Woodlawn Cemetery, year 1856. My first wife was his youngest daughter. She is also buried there. Some people claim Black Dog is buried there, but I doubt it."

In the year Elijah died the Cherokee Council at Tahlequah decided that the new country had a sufficient population to become a district rather than a vast and indefinite western part of Saline District. In creating

the new district, the Council named it for John Ross, taking his Cherokee name, Cooweescowee.

As a part of Saline District the new country had supplied many of the political officers to the nation's government. While Senator Coody was presiding over the Senate, Elijah Hicks, since '39, had been a delegate for the nation in Washington. John Chambers was a senator and clerk of the Senate. And John Lucien Brown had been sheriff for three terms, a senator for one, and later a judge.

Clem Rogers came out the year the new district was formed. He was still in his teens and in his manly dreams of the future he had, mixed in, remembrances of the father and grandfather he had never known, but heard much about. His mother had married again, to William Alexander Musgrove, but of pure fatherly things he had inherited an admonition that stood him, and his son, Willie, well through their lives. It was: "See that Clem always rides his own horse." He did. And Willie rode his own horse, too; not his father's.

He also inherited two slaves, Rabb and Houston, whom he called Huse. He brought them with him when he came out to the new country that was to bear his name and his son's name. He had supplies for a trading post, as his grandfather had. And when he came he rode the old and familiar road that ran northwest from Fort Gibson and joined up with the Santa Fe Trail a couple of days north of Coody's.

He passed Coker Spring and the Rogers place—no relatives of his but prominent in Cherokee Politics—and he stopped at Elijah's son, Daniel Ross, was sheriff of the new district.

Dan rode with Clem and his wagons on up the road, partly to talk more with Clem and partly to go by the log schoolhouse, where the road forked, and say "hello" to Miss Nancy Jane Rider, who happened to be the schoolmarm. (They married in '59.)

The schoolhouse was not far from Claremore Mound, where the Cherokees had fought the Osages, and just a short distance from it was the log courthouse for the district. Here the road forked. One way led up to the Trail and the other, which Clem took, followed the Caney, a branch of the Verdigris. Later, after the war, Clem took the other road and settled at the now famous Will Rogers Ranch, four miles east of Oologah.

There are no more than three or four places today where one can be sure that old road ran, for the earth has absorbed it. Yet, it was an active road. In '49, hundreds of men in caravans of wagons headed for the West and gold. And it was one of the two roads out of Arkansas for the West.

After Clem got settled at his place on a branch of the Caney, and Rabb and Huse could handle things, he used to make social calls further up Caney, at his Uncle Joe Vann's. But more often than that he went down the river. Because down there, about ten miles, was John Gunter Scrimsher's place,

and one of John's frequent visitors was his sister, Mary.

Clem was in love with Mary. But before he dared to ask her to marry him he had to feel the reality of his abiding sense of independence. He wanted more slaves, a great house, and money. He wanted to be a big man among his people. When he finally became sure of this he asked her; when he knew for sure he sat his own horse, he asked her.

They were married at Grandma Scrimsher's in Fort Gibson in '59. And the gaiety of the occasion was heightened rather than lessened by the rumblings of the approaching Civil War, for the Cherokees always took sides on every issue and the strength of their decisions was exhilarating.

Civil War

Scarcely more than a year had passed when South Carolina seceded. Sixteen days later, before any other southern states acted, the Chickasaws sought to influence the Five Civilized Tribes into a mutual compact "in the event of a change in the United States." Then the secession movement encompassed the South, and Texas and Arkansas brought every pressure on the Cherokees and the other Indians to join the Confederacy. The Union troops withdrew from the Indian country. The battle of Bull Run back East, started the actual war, but it was the battle of Wilson's Creek in southwestern Missouri, that integrated West with East. And the southern

victories seemed to foretell a triumph for the South.

Stand Watie, the Cherokee leader, was seeking recruits for his Mounted Rifles Regiment. Families divided among themselves. Hatred flared. Dissensions tore into remaining sanity. Then Opothle-yohola tried to take six thousand of his Creek and Seminole Federal sympathizers into Kansas through the Cherokee country.

War struck the Indian country at the mouth of the Cimarron River, near present Tulsa. It struck next within a stone's throw of John Scrimsher's place. He and his family, Clem and Mary with their two slaves, Joe Vann and his people fled to Fort Gibson with all they could carry away.

Clem joined up with Stand Watie and for a while was first lieutenant under Captain James Leon Butler. His brother-in-law, John, was a private. Then, there were promotions, as new companies were formed, and Clem became a captain. John did too, later, and one of his officers was Sergeant Clark Charlesworth Lipe, brother of Dewitt Clinton Lipe. Clark always called his roll slightly out of order so he could end it with the three choice names: "Kickup, Turnover, and Roundabout."

After the battle of Pea Ridge, the fighting became pretty much a local project, separate from the major activities east of the Missis-



sippi. There were constant skirmishes and guerrilla fighting between the Indian and Southern troops and the Kansan and Missourian Federal troops. Violence and destruction rolled back and forth over the land,



like unceasing tidal waves. Stones and ashes marked the places of homes, bones the flesh of cattle.

There was nothing left to steal or eat. And still control of the land washed back and forth, from North to South.

Lee surrendered on April 9, 1865, but Stand Watie did not lay down arms until June 23, the last of the fighting in the Civil War; the last of the Confederacy; the last of the pure Indian governments in the United States.

The Cherokees had lost, and their land was second to Virginia in destruction from the war. The Federal government insisted on a new treaty in 1866. It demanded the abolition of slavery and the admission of slaves to full citizenship. It demanded that a "portion of the land hitherto owned and occupied by you must be set apart for the friendly tribes now in Kansas . . .," that the government become territorial, that the Indians henceforth be more nearly under the jurisdiction of the United States. It was a treaty of unconditional surrender.

The Delawares moved into the new country

before the treaty ink was dry. They chose the rich valley of the Verdigris for their homes, for it was a magnetic country that drew people irresistibly to it. Old Chief Journey-cake, with his family of eight girls and about two hundred others, settled around the present site of Nowata and Bartlesville and Alluwe. To the south of these larger settlements came the James Conners and the George Collinses within sight of Claremore Mound.

In the meantime Clem had gone down to Texas after Mary and the baby—little Sallie had been born in '63. When they came back to the nation Clem had to begin in business again. All of his things were destroyed, his slaves freed, and his money sunk with the Confederacy. He went to work on salary in Fort Gibson.

But working for a salary, dependent upon another man's whims, was not for Clem. It went against the grain of his nature; it was not riding his own horse. Finally he set out for the Verdigris country again. And this time he took the north fork of the road. On up the Verdigris he went until he found a spot that suited him. Here he and Mary and the two children, Sallie and Maud, would settle. In the spring of '71 he brought out some cattle and built a nice log house with cedar posts for the front porch. The big house he built two years later, the house that now stands on the ranch, looking down toward the gentle Verdigris.

Clem's sister and her husband, Richard Timberlake, had gone up the Caney to Joe

Vann's old place. And Frank Musgrove, Clem's half-brother, had taken a place close by. John Scrimsher, back at his old place on Bird Creek, found it unsatisfactory and so moved up within the triangle of the rapidly filling Will Rogers Country.

The first school after the war was at John's Dog Creek place, about a mile below Elijah Hicks'. They called it West Point. And the teacher, John Vann, and five pupils, Sallie and Bob Rogers, Bob and Kate Timberlake, and Dick Mayes, all boarded with the Scrimshers.

Gruff Clem, quick and positive in action, was again making a success. He was creating a fortune. He was a leader and an intimate of the other big men of the country, especially J. O. Hall and Bill Halsell, of Vinita. He was Coowescoowee judge in '77. In '79, the year Willie was born, he was elected senator, serving six years.

Besides politics, Clem's ranching kept him busy. He and Major Lipe were partners several times in cattle deals, though one of Clem's biggest deals came when he and Fox Dannenberg bought some Texas yearlings and later sold them to John Dirickson for \$30,000. Fox was a big rancher like Clem, and so was John. Major Lipe had cattle too, but like Clem was in politics.

He had been clerk of the district since '74, and while Clem was judge he was a senator. After that he was treasurer for four years. Other politicians and public officials were Dan Ross Hicks, who by this time had been

a judge, an executive councilor and a sheriff; Charles Coody Rogers, John Chambers, Walter Adair Starr, Emmett Starr, Joe Thompson, Bill Sunday, and many others.

The Second Claremore

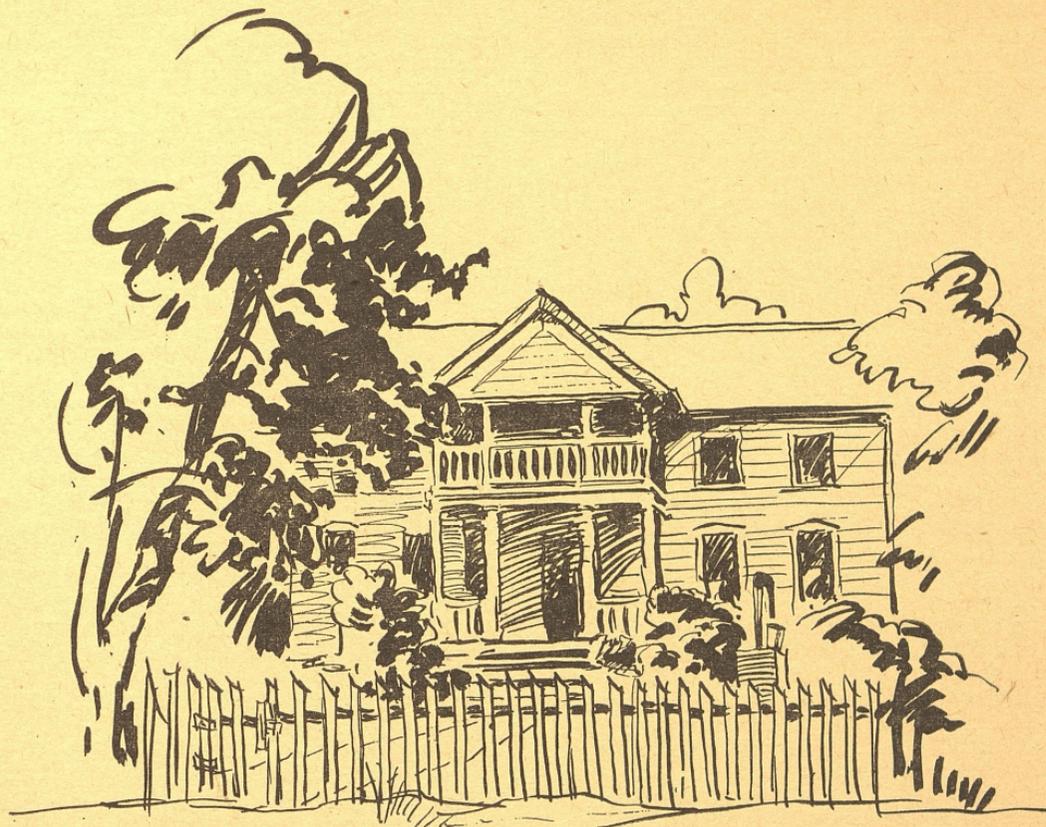
High up Caney, above Clem's old pre-war place lived Jake Bartles, cattleman, store-keeper, farmer, and town-builder. To him, at his Turkey Creek place, in '75 came a young Delaware youth from Kansas, John Bullette, dark, small, and dynamic.

John got his start working for Jake. He learned how to conduct a business, learned cattle-raising, how to use the market to advantage, how to manage people. Jake helped him to set himself up in business at a place close to Claremore Mound. There was to be a store, like Jake's, and a house.

It was this store that marked the beginning of the second Claremore.

When all the arrangements were made, John went up to Kansas after his bride, "though he wasn't sure whether she was going to take him or Mr. Cook." She took John, and they were married in Peru, Kansas, in 1880, and came back to the Verdigris country, staying at Clem's big house while their own was being built.

After forty-two years Claremore had come to life again. First among Osages . . . now among Delawares on Cherokee land. The first had been built because of a young man's search for peace and security, but set in motion by economic forces. Here again was the same force, the same dream, a new people.



The Ranch House Where Will Was Born

As John dreamed of a glowing future out of his store and his land and his home, it did not occur to him that the Frisco Railway might some day move beyond its end at Vinita, forty miles away, into this land of his. But it did ('82). Scarcely giving him time to finish his home and get settled, the steel ribs crawled across the hills into his valley. And they beckoned to their side every straggling settlement that called itself a town.

The Third Claremore



John moved his store and house as quickly as he could to the closest allowable stop (there was one every six miles). But he was not quick enough, for the allowable stop closest was practically at the Chambers' doorstep.

The Chambers set up in business immediately. Old John and Joe Chambers had sons, the first families of Claremore Number Three. It was a Cherokee town this time on Cherokee land.

This third Claremore was destined for bigger things than any of the others. It was to

be the home town of a famous man, Will Rogers, and it was the only town his father was to live in after Will grew up. It produced other, lesser celebrities of its own and was used to seeing full-fledged ones in and out all the time. It grew up to be different from any other little town in the world. And sadly last, it was destined to become the place of the Will Rogers Memorial and the final home of his body. His spirit lives on in the world.

This third Claremore began in '82. It felt the pulse of new life as though blood were being pumped into it from the artery of the railroad. Then the first child in this third Claremore was born—Zoe, child of John Bullette.

Ranching was accelerated. And Clem made greater successes. His home, facing the lazy slope of the fields down to the verdant banks of the Verdigris, had become so popular that it must, at times, have seemed like an inn. Everyone was welcome, although Kansas people were not looked upon with any great affection.

However, Clem did most of his big shopping in Kansas. He would go up in the hack, usually taking Sallie with him when she was at home, and he would have one of the farm helpers drive a wagon to carry the provisions back.

Sallie was not around very much except during the summers. She had gone to a private school in Fort Gibson, taught by Miss Florence Nash, and after that she had gone with her younger brother and sister, Bob and

Maud, to West Point, the little school at the Scrimshers'. Then she stayed with the Gulars in Tahlequah while she attended the Eureka School. At twelve she entered the Cherokee Female Seminary at Park Hill. The year after Willie was born she graduated and that fall taught at the second little town of Claremore.

In those golden summers when she was at home she would go with her father to Coffeyville on the old road that was the upper fork her father had once taken when searching for a home. As they rode over the rambling, uncertain roads of the new country, Sallie would tell Clem about the books that Cousin Tuxie Brown at Fort Gibson had sent her: Dickens, Cooper, Thackeray, Jane Austen.

"I had to read them all, Papa, because when Cousin Tuxie came to see me at the Seminary he would always ask me about them. I had to know what I was talking about," she would tell him. And Clem would pat her knee and tell her to be sure she always did know what she was talking about. He told her about riding one's own horses. And Sallie did, all her life.

Whenever they got to Coffeyville it was always gay times. Old Bill Ellis used to say she was the belle of the town, gay, dancing, charming, accomplished. In the daytime they would shop, she and Clem. At night she would play, and Clem would strengthen his business and political ties.

Sallie could play the piano. Her mother, Mary, had taught her and she had studied at

school. She could play at home because the Rogers had the first piano in the country (and the first sewing machine). And Sallie always played when anyone asked her to. Clem and Mary had taught her to do that. There was even an article in the Christian Advocate, in the seventies, about Sallie's and Mary's playing and the filial devotion in the family.

When they shopped they bought vast quantities of things. There were boxes of thread, yards and yards of materials, hundreds of pounds of flour and green coffee and sugar, gallons of preserves. And at Christmas time perhaps an orange.

Across the Verdigris from the Rogers a family of boys lived, the McSpaddens. And in '85 Sallie married one of them, Tom. They lived on Tom's farm further east until '91, then moved to Chelsea where Sam and Roxie McSpadden already were, and the Pete Couches, the Stranges, and the Charley Pooles.

Early during their farm days Sallie and Tom decided that there was need for spiritual benefit. They were both deeply religious. So they decided to build a church. All the neighbors got together and built the schoolhouse-church. Tom furnished the materials, the neighbors the labor.

Once a month the Methodist circuit rider came by to preach for them. But Sunday School was held weekly, and singing. Tom was superintendent and Sallie was teacher-organist.

"They wanted an organ so Sallie wrote to Carl Hoffman Music Company in K. C. and

told him of the project and he sent them a second-hand organ for the sum of \$40.00. They took up a contribution for the organ and Tom paid the express, \$3.46. Many full bloods came to the services and as long as Sallie could wheeze out a tune they would stay there to sing. The Indians were very musical. They sang by note and carried four-part harmony. An Indian woman took care of Sallie's baby—there was always a baby.

"Willie stayed with Sallie and Tom on the farm and attended his first school—Droom-gule. He rode his pony the two miles to school and he used his shop-made saddle that Clem had given him. During the noon hour the boys ran races on their ponies. Sallie packed his lunch in a bucket and started him off each morning. Each week end he went to his father's."

After that, and through friendship, Willie went to a girls' school in Muskogee, then to Vinita, and finally to a military academy in Missouri. While Sallie had been a model pupil, brother Willie was the very opposite. Later when Clem was talking to intimates he referred to Willie as "that damned kid," but he meant in only as a doting father can mean such a phrase, and he would have lost his tongue rather than have a stranger misinterpret his exact meaning.

Mary Rogers died when Willie was ten. Maud kept house for a while. But before long Clem married again, to another Mary, Mary Bibles, his housekeeper. Shortly after this he moved to Claremore and made his home. The

ranch was rented, although there was always a place there for Willie. And at one time Clem gave Willie—unsuccessfully—some cattle to manage. But Willie was too much interested in parties, oyster suppers, dances, and seeing the world.



Willie never lived in Claremore, the way people usually say a man lives in a place. He began his wanderings over the earth when he was quite young and when he came back he usually stayed out at the ranch, which he loved, or visited his dad in town for a few days. That was all the living he did in any Oklahoma town.

Some people say that Willie was born at Oologah. But when Willie was born in '79 there wasn't any Oologah. And when the town was founded by the Sundays early in the nineties, Willie was long since away at school. He just called Claremore his home town because it was the only town his dad ever lived in. He called it that because he had a room that was called "Willie's room" waiting for him. And then there was the piece of ground out west of town (where the Memorial is now) that he bought for his home when he would settle down.

Out a little way from Sallie's farm was a spring that had undrinkable water because crude oil oozed out of the ground and spoiled it. But farmers used what crude they could get to grease their wagons, and the Indians,

as long as they could remember, had used it to soften their buffalo and deer skins. And they used it on their mangy dogs, too.

Edward Byrd imagined the future and after a trip to Washington, and many to Tahlequah, he got a lease. He organized the Cherokee Oil and Gas Company. The well drillers stayed with Sallie and Tom at their farmhouse. The company drilled three small wells on their lease near Chelsea three-quarters of a mile from the house, in '89. The depths were from thirty-six to a hundred and twenty feet and the initial production was five to ten barrels of oil a day. In 1900 other wells were developed and the oil piped to Chelsea. This was the first drilling for oil in Oklahoma. And a stone marks the spot.

Bartley Milam's father put in the first oil well supply store in Oklahoma at Chelsea. Bartley, with his brother-in-law, Woodley Phillips, later drilled on his allotment and the well was a producer, the beginning of an accumulation of nearly a thousand wells, in an area that even today has remained the largest shallow oil field in the world.

In '94 the Cherokee payment was made from the sale of the Outlet, that vast territory to the west which the Cherokees had previously been leasing as grazing lands to cattlemen. All the citizens got \$365.70 apiece. Previously their communal payments scarcely went over fifteen dollars.

In Vinita, where the bank was, "main street was a regular midway. Every available space had stands selling things. Such a graft! The

bank kept two watchmen with guns inside the door of the bank. And Charl (Godbey, the cashier) handled so much money it made him sick at his stomach.

"Collectors came from everywhere. It was a wild and wooly time. One woman came from Oregon with a carload of horses to sell to the Indians. People even slept on the ground—anywhere they could find."

Short, blond-mustached Jim Hall and his rancher friend, tall, black-mustached Bill Halsell, were leading men in the town—with interests in the bank. They got together with Clem and decided to put in a branch bank at Claremore. They looked Wagoner and Tulsa and Chelsea over first, but picked Claremore.

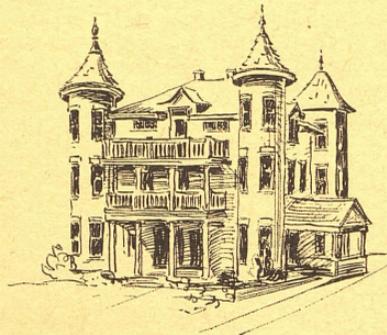
It was the largest town of the lot and seemed to hold the greatest future. So that is where they put in the new bank. It was this that brought Clem definitely into town. He was executive vice-president and Charl Godbey came down from Vinita to be the cashier.

They built a big brick building on Main Street, across from the Frisco tracks. And Clem used to sit in the back room, the board room, with his feet on the table, looking out the big window at the people who passed. He often watched the sunset on the hill a mile away to the west, where his son today is buried.

Clem bought a good deal of property in Claremore. And he ran a livery stable, where the post office with its mural to his son is today. His home, on Fifth Street, was a two-

story frame one and quite big for him and his second Mary.

Then the Bayless family came to Claremore. J. M. was a builder. That's the term people used to describe him. And he liked it. He came from Missouri with plenty of money, for he had just sold his railroad, though he left his son Guy to stay on for a while and run it as engineer and conductor for the new people.



J. M. built the three-story Sequoyah Hotel. And in the front corner he set up a bank which he and Earle ran. Guy and Fanny's husband, George D. Davis, ran the Opera House, which J. M. built too. The other Bayless children were too young to be in any of the businesses. They all lived in the turreted mansion "papa" built on Fourth Street.

The old stone opera house that had once

been the center of the town's social life (where the laundry is now) was not good enough for J. M. He built the Windsor Opera House—the name suggests his thinking—facing the Sequoyah Hotel. On its boards the troupes that came to Miami and Vinita and Muskogee began to act. There were The Lion and the Mouse, The Sculptor's Dream, Dora Thorn, She Stoops to Conquer, East Lynne, Hans and Nix, West's White Minstrels, Si Plunkard, The Clansman, Down East, Poor Relations, Fabio Romani, The Devil's Auction, Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Wizzard of Wall Street, The Count of Monte Cristo, Ole Olsen, and a hundred more. Besides this the townspeople used the big auditorium for their politics and their religion and their society. They made a great deal out of a very little.

Across the street at the hotel the Hiram Frakes were in charge. Invitations went out for a banquet and a ball to celebrate the formal opening on May 1, 1902. The reception committee, printed on the invitation, included the W. W. Bryans, Frank Churches, W. M. Halls, Joe M. LaHays, H. H. Kahos, F. M. Duckworths (she was Zoe Bullette, first child born in the third Claremore), the A. L. Kateses, C. F. Godbeys, Elmer S. Besseys, and the J. H. Moores. Joe was mayor and was so filled with the spirits of the occasion he had to be helped through his speech.

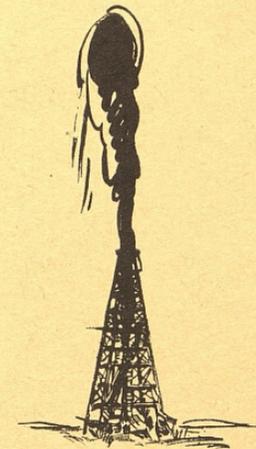
Shortly after this big social event, George Eaton was drilling out east of town for oil or gas. What came up was a rotten-egg-smelling salt water. The townspeople had hoped for gas so that they could light their

houses in the modern way. What they wanted least of all was a gaseous water that peeled the paint off their houses and turned every piece of metal but gold a dirty black. They demanded Eaton's arrest unless he capped the well.

Then a man cured his dog of mange, a wounded finger healed quickly in the water, a woman got over a stomach condition by sipping it. The stories float around with the water's vapors today. So they built a bathhouse at the well site to begin Claremore's biggest industry. And the town grew and Bayless built a three-storied amusement palace in the block back of his hotel.

But gushing oil came to Glen Pool, and Tulsa, once a Creek village known as Tulsey Town, swelled into great being. The high hopes that Claremore would grow into city size faded. So Claremore lost its hopes for bigness, not knowing that it would gain its greater fame for very different reasons.

There was still political turmoil, mostly about coming statehood. And Clem was mixed up in that, a member of the Constitutional Convention. In 1907 the change came and the address of Indian Territory after the names of Claremore and Chelsea and Oologah became historical, as all things must. And they named the county for Clem.



Modern Claremore

CLAREMORE, and the Will Rogers Country, has had a great deal of publicity. Some say too much. But it has stood up well. It has developed a personality that is distinct and unique. And one must admit, after a visit there, that it has an air about it. It is cosmopolitan and sophisticated like no other small town in the world.

When Will Rogers was alive and calling it his home town, the Chamber of Commerce used to thumb its collective suspenders and call the place the "biggest little city in the world," as so many other towns have. But today it does not pretend so rashly. And it got over being self-conscious. And it got to work.

The mineral waters that flow beneath its foundation rocks have brought to its excellent and even to its ramshackle hotels people from the whole wide world. These people move in and out, seasonal and transient. But they have brought a widening of horizons for many

of the home folk, letting them spread a cultural world beyond the confines of the city limits, beyond the surrounding hills and dairy farms.

When oil left Claremore behind in size it left it far more than what the Devil proverbially gets. For Claremore, by the magic of its character, and the ghost of old Chief Claremore who haunts the Mound, and the gaiety of its people who relish life, has had more than its share of everything.

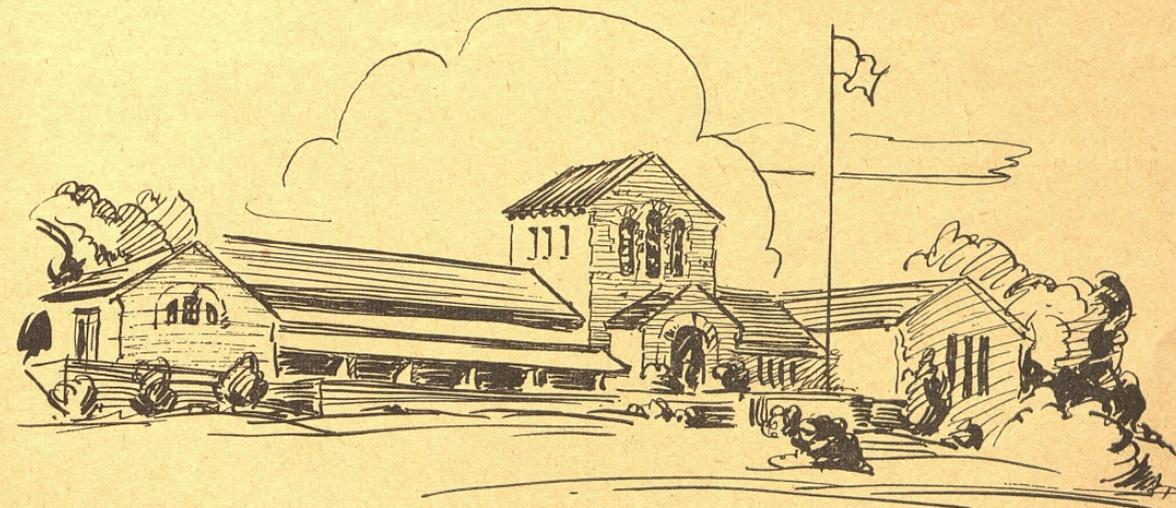
Out of its abundance it has turned some celebrities of lesser gleam than Will, but front-rankers just the same. It has had poets and playwrights such as the famous Lynn Riggs, author of many plays, including "Green Grow the Lilacs" which was the basis of fabulous "Oklahoma." It has had comedians and foot-racers, novelists, politicians, editors, historians, and radio chainers.

It has seen so many expected misfits turn into unexpected personages that it may now

be said to maintain a tolerant expectancy where other towns would openly be shocked and scornful. For example, Will was a bitter disappointment to his family—at first.

Some of the other things that have built

its character are: the airport built in a day so that Will and Post and Gatty could meet each other there after the 'round-the-world trip (the port today is worth more than a half million dollars); a collection of guns, one



The Will Rogers Memorial

of the largest in the world, which the town's perennial mayor, J. M. Davis, has gathered; an honor-rating school, the Oklahoma Military



Academy, that is great and fashionable; the greatest shallow oil field in the world; the Mound where the Cherokees and the Osages fought and where one can find arrowheads today; the Will

Rogers Hotel, the accomplishment of a dream of Claremore's greatest town builder, Morton Harrison. And a lot of other things.

The town has a dozen or so airplanes at the airport all the time. It has a large lake and motor craft that sound in town like distant flying ships. It has an art gallery that's finer than most of them on 57th Street in New York, smart homes, some bona fide intellectuals. It has a country club, night clubs, factories, a society used to orchids and flash bulbs. It has gourmets, world travelers, and the usual run of riff-raff.

It was the center of Oklahoma's first bout with communism. And because the democratic spirit was so pervasive among its people the venture in subversion was tossed into the courts so that justice could be struck the proper way. Its townspeople will laughingly tell of the nationally notorious gangster who used the town's cosmopolitanism as a cloak behind which to hide.

But none of these things are blemishes, unless over-emphasized by careless minds. They are the heights and depths of a group of people who have built and live in a place unlike any other in the whole world. It is filled with richness and true character. It is alive. And it looks upon the days of its international fame as a nobleman might remember his first youthful trip abroad. The accents are not upon the past but upon the future. It is old in name and being, but it is new in spirit. It looks very young to be so old; and quite grown up to be so young.



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