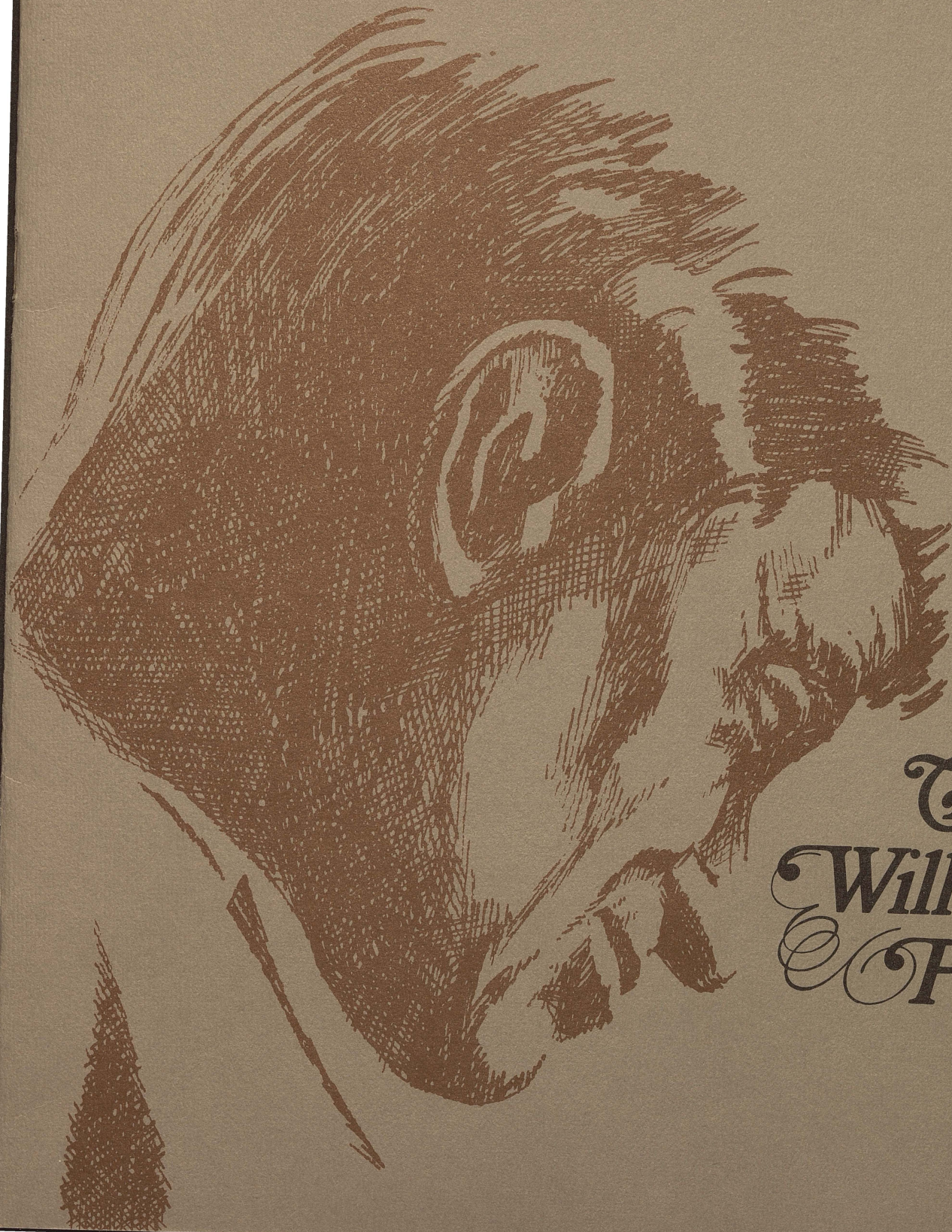


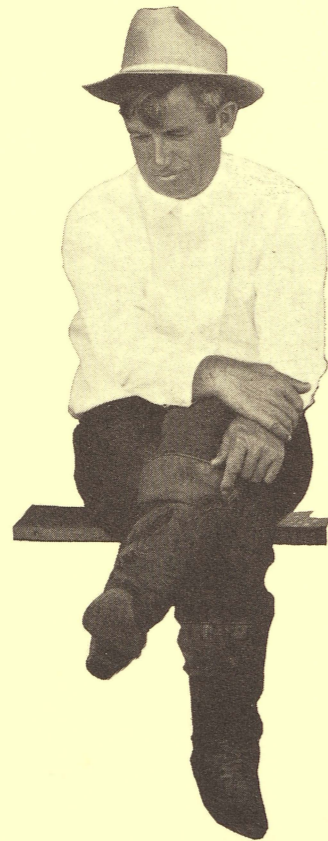
O K L A H O M A S T A T E U N I V E R S I T Y



The
Will Rogers
Papers

*"We will never have true civilization
until we have learned to recognize the rights of others."*

. . . Will Rogers



The crash of a small airplane at Point Barrow, Alaska, on August 15, 1935, claimed the life of Will Rogers, and thus closed an era. As news of the death of America's foremost entertainer-commentator quickly spread across a stunned world, men of all ranks paused to reflect on the loss of a very uncommon man who had won their hearts with his wit and wisdom, a man who had truthfully said, "I never met a man I didn't like."

Rogers died during the depths of the Great Depression, when survival of the American dream was in doubt. During the tumultuous years in which he lived, no one did more than he to help Americans understand themselves, their opportunities, and their responsibilities. Equally at ease with presidents and with paupers, Rogers was truly an American hero. Born in Indian Territory (later part of the state of Oklahoma), he was a product of the western frontier who lived to see America become a giant among nations.

Pioneer, cowboy, actor, author, humorist, critic, business man, traveler, father, patriot, sage — he was a living American legend. And, with the passing of time, his legacy has added to his stature.

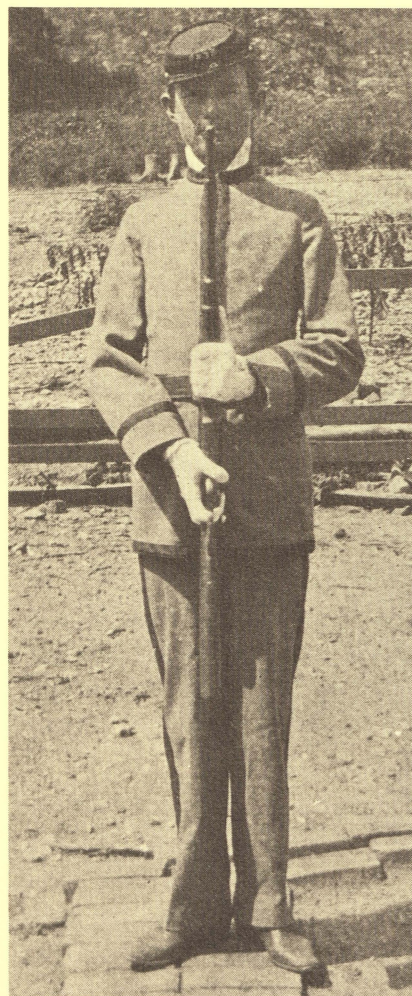
Combining a natural salty wit with an ability to do almost anything with a rope, Rogers early developed a running monologue for the stage. Listeners marveled at his talent as he applied a characteristic "Will Rogers" twist, which cut sharply and cleanly, though never maliciously, to the heart of the major problems and issues of the day. He wielded his humor incisively, frequently cajoling the individual targets of his quips into laughing at themselves; everyone else already was. He seldom left hearers in doubt as to his point.

In his speeches Rogers frequently took verbal pokes at political leaders at home and abroad. His observations during travels to foreign countries produced statements which still have broad application for understanding current international problems. Pundits continue to marvel at Rogers' insight into the political and social changes taking place in Russia, Japan, and Germany, for example, events that would in time lead to growing tension and conflict.

Rogers numbered among his friends not only crowned heads, elected leaders, and members of high society's Four Hundred, but more significantly he was the uncrowned champion of middle-class Americans. They invited him into their homes through the medium of radio. They made him "number one" on the banquet speaking tour. They joyously sought his humor and basked in his wisdom. He entertained them, lectured them, and sometimes chastised them from the stage, through the silent and the talking motion picture screen, and by his written word.



First passenger to fly in U.S. Mail plane



In Kemper uniform, 1898



With family at their Los Angeles home



With Vice-president John Nance Garner

It was through his writings that Rogers had his greatest influence. Perhaps his best known effort was a "daily telegram" carried by metropolitan and small town newspapers. He also wrote a weekly column and other occasional articles that appeared in the daily press and in magazines. His widely appreciated books were based on the best of these pieces.

Though Rogers was not pleased with all that he saw in America, he was convinced that it was the finest place in the world. "So you think we are doing bad in the U.S., do you?" he wrote in 1930. "Well, let's look around and see what our companions are doing. China is in a mess, not only again, but yet. Russia is starving her own people in order to feed propaganda to the rest of the world; a guy named Hitler has Germany like Capone has Chicago; France has plenty of gold, but is short on friendship; England has her fine diplomats, but no work or markets . . . So before you think of giving up your citizenship here, you better think it over."

When he returned from a European voyage in 1932, Rogers wrote, "Oh boy, I was glad to set my old big feet on American soil even if it has got a second mortgage on it. Had the greatest trip I ever had in my life and I believe if everybody made it (they) might come back a little poorer, but better off in the feeling toward our country. I know business is off, they say 60 percent, well, that still leaves us 30 percent ahead of anywhere I have seen."

Will Rogers' commentaries were almost always contemporary. According to Will Rogers, Jr., "Will Rogers was of the '20's in the '20's and of the '30's in the '30's." While visiting the campus of Oklahoma State University in late 1967 to discuss plans for a major study of his father's life and works, the son remarked, "I've always thought Will Rogers was much more than a humorist. Perhaps his lasting effect will be in history. He was a commentator, an analyzer, a capsulizer — he could take a thing and say it very pithy."

Because this view is shared by many others, a scholarly study designed to organize the materials Will Rogers created was inevitable. Oklahoma State University has accepted the responsibility of conducting such a study, one which will give back to the world, as completely as possible, the words, the wisdom, and the humility of Will Rogers. The project will present the works of the century's greatest entertainer-commentator so that his ideas and goals for America and its people will persist, as does his image in the minds of those who lived through his era.

Will Rogers has an assured place in history because of who he was, what he accomplished, and how he did it, and above all because of the spirit of hope

"The memory of Will Rogers is important to America. In troubled and anxious times such as these perhaps the best medicine that can be prescribed for our flagging American spirit is a hearty dose of that most bracing of all tonics, laughter. This was the precious gift of Will Rogers, and we need it today perhaps more than ever before."

— Everett McKinley Dirksen



With Film Director Frank Lloyd



With President Calvin Coolidge



With the 1932 Olympic wrestling team



With President Franklin Roosevelt

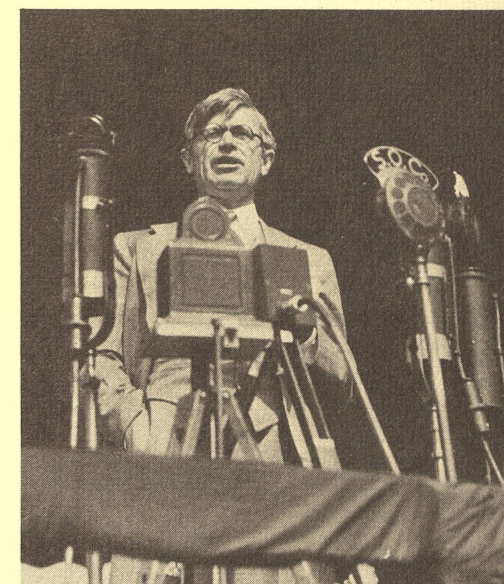
which he gave to his fellow Americans in a time of despair and turmoil. These aspects of his life provide not only the reason for a major study but also the basic structure upon which the study can be shaped.

Who was Will Rogers? He was a successful American in a dynamic period of national life. Born of a leading family in the Cherokee Nation, he shared as well the pioneer heritage of Americans of European descent. His Indian Territory background, his off-and-on-again schooling, his well-developed ranching skills, his gift for entertaining, all helped him enter the adult world soon after the age of sixteen. Texas Jack's Wild West Circus and the Wirth Brothers Circus in Australia were his stepping-stones to the public stage, to the theater and to the motion picture, through all of which he amused, delighted, and instructed.

Will Rogers' chief accomplishment was to play the role which took him from "cowboy philosopher" to American sage. For three decades his words proved him to be a wise commentator on public life, its leaders, and their foibles. His friendships were legion: leaders in politics, journalism, business, entertainment, and aviation, and ordinary citizens from every walk of life sought and were warmed by his friendship.

Will Rogers is important because of the style and manner in which he addressed himself to his subject and his audience. Always friendly, always open, he kept a wary eye out for sham and pretense. "You can always kid a big man," he once said. "I generally hit the fellow on top because it's not fair to hit a man when he's down." Although he could be — and often was — blunt, he was never intentionally unkind. In the time of war or depression, or when the nation mourned a fallen President, he found a sympathetic phrase to speak on behalf of the whole people. Often his humor was turned on himself. Few pieces of his work closed without a positive ending. His words, written and spoken, deserve to be kept alive for future generations, for Rogers represented the best traditions of 20th century American society — its energy, its ability to organize, its willingness to share its bounty, its concern for individuals and for humanity at large.

His death shocked and brought sorrow to millions throughout the world. Rogers' friends and admirers have sought fitting ways to recognize his many accomplishments and to perpetuate his memory. The names of public schools, such as Tulsa's Will Rogers High School, symbolize his interest in young people. A state office building, a major segment of Oklahoma's turnpike system, the world airport at Oklahoma City, and streets in cities large and small, both in his home state and elsewhere, bear his name. So do vessels of the United States Navy: a liberty





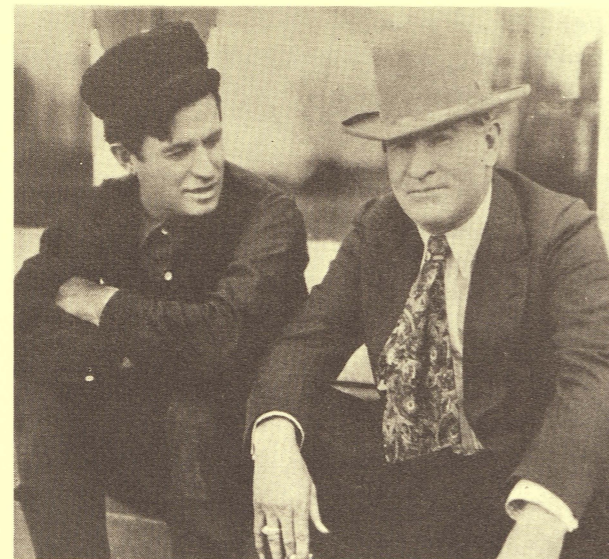
Aboard the battleship Pennsylvania



With Comics Joe E. Brown and Eddie Cantor



With the ambassador to Argentina

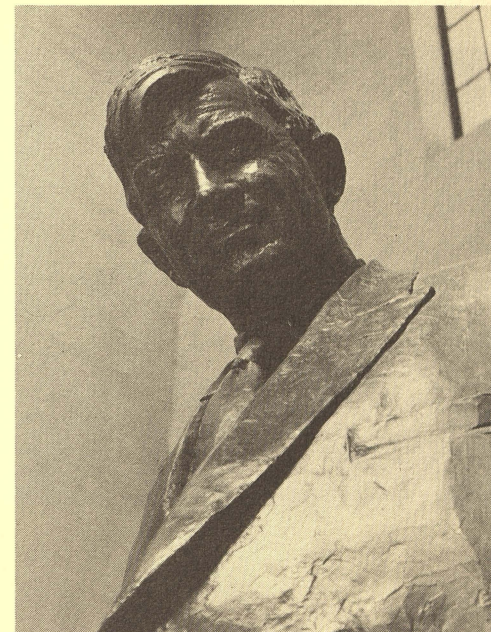


With Charles Russell

ship of World War II vintage and a nuclear submarine of the 1960's. His former family estate at Santa Monica, acquired by the state of California, is a much-visited park.

In the 30 years I have spent as curator of the Will Rogers Memorial, I find that interest in Will Rogers is a continuing one. More than 15 million people have visited this popular shrine and though the number who knew him personally is diminishing, the attendance increases each year. At present 75 percent of the people who visit the memorial were not born at the time of Will Rogers' death in 1935, but he is known in each succeeding generation as evidenced by the references to him in papers, magazines and books, as well as comments by comedians and entertainers. I cannot emphasize adequately the importance of making the Will Rogers material available to the public. This is evidenced by the hundreds of requests that come to us from all parts of the country from every possible source. The very young are charmed with this delightful cowboy who used a rope instead of a gun; his life presents a challenge to the youth because he was successful in every undertaking; the scholar working for an advanced degree is inspired with the material found in the research library and eagerly sets out to explore the different facets in which Will Rogers made himself known. We have calls and written requests from writers, politicians, news-commentators, radio and TV producers, business men, advertising agencies and the average American who finds in Will Rogers that common sense philosophy and faith in our country that is needed today. I contend that nothing could be written about America during the 1918-1935 period without including Will Rogers because he spoke on the events as they happened day by day. Reading Will Rogers gives one the best history of America during this crucial period in America, told in that inimitable Rogers' manner, sparked with spontaneous wit and wisdom and set down in a style that all can understand and enjoy.

*Paula McSpadden Love, Curator
The Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore*





With Actor Irwin S. Cobb



With Secretary of War Patrick J. Hurley



With Eleanor Roosevelt and Amon G. Carter



With Charles Lindbergh

Oklahomans have constructed at Claremore the Memorial which carries Will Rogers' name and which is, both in site and design, the retirement home he was destined never to build. Here for three decades Mrs. Paula McSpadden Love, Rogers' niece, and her husband, Robert W. Love, have carefully nurtured Rogers' memory. An average of 1,200 visitors, school children, college groups, families from abroad, vacationing Americans, come each day. They stand and admire the Will Rogers statue by Jo Davidson, view the family photographs, possessions, and mementoes, read the posted excerpts from Rogers' writings, and listen to taped extracts from his speeches.

The Loves have gathered a comprehensive collection of Will Rogers materials, organizing and arranging it with a minimum of funds, though not of dedication and effort. From time to time they have granted access to the data, so that several books and more than half a dozen master's theses and doctoral dissertations have been written from their Rogers material. Each year they answer requests for information from scores of school children. The Loves have definitively opened their archives to scholars at Oklahoma State University, entrusting to them the task of editing and publishing Rogers' writings. Thus curators and scholars alike share in perpetuating the Will Rogers story as a living memory. His words, an enduring source of wisdom, have a humor understood and appreciated by people of all ranks. Rogers' writings themselves are a priceless American heritage.

Headed by Dr. Theodore L. Agnew, professor of history, the editors of *The Will Rogers Papers* propose to prepare a comprehensive edition that will embody the terms of a contract between the Will Rogers Memorial Commission* and Oklahoma State University. The contract calls for the University "to edit all of the published and unpublished works, letters, documents, and other memorabilia pertaining to the late Will Rogers."

These volumes will provide a ready and useful source of information for scholars and students of American and world history, especially covering the first third of the 20th century. In addition, because of this work, a previously uncollected and unedited mass of information dealing with Will Rogers will be available in compact and yet comprehensive form to all Americans and to the world at large.

Of all Will Rogers' writings, one publication was so widely syndicated that it came to be associated most directly with him in the eyes of the American people. This was the series of daily telegrams which he wrote during the period from 1926

"... Will Rogers was one of the most penetrating observers and commentators on American Officialdom in the entire span of life of this nation."

— Harry S. Truman

* The Will Rogers Memorial Commission is the state agency responsible for operating and maintaining the Will Rogers Memorial at Claremore, Oklahoma.



With Texas Governor "Ma" Ferguson



With Lois Josephine in "Town Topics"



With Comedian Charles "Chick" Sale



On stage at Keith's Union Square Theatre

to 1935. They began casually, indeed apparently haphazardly — though with Will Rogers little was really haphazard, and even the casual appearance was deceptive. A European voyage, a brief cable to *The New York Times*, an editor's decision to place it in a box on the first page of the second section of that internationally respected newspaper — and, as other cables followed, a column was born. Distributed by the McNaught Syndicate, it was carried at its peak by nearly 400 newspapers. In large measure this column put Rogers at the pinnacle of his renown.

Therefore, it seems wise to present the *Daily Telegrams* as the first portion of *The Will Rogers Papers* to be published. The *Telegrams* number about 3,000 pieces, aggregating nearly half a million words. Chronologically arranged, properly annotated, with individuals and situations appropriately identified, they will constitute the first two volumes of *The Will Rogers Papers*.

During his lifetime — actually in the single decade between 1919 and 1929 — Rogers published six books. All were fairly short, the longest being under 60,000 words. Altogether, Rogers' books and introductions, amounting to approximately 150,000 words, have a unity of their own. *The Will Rogers Papers* will therefore include a single volume, properly annotated, entitled *Books*.

In addition, there are the weekly articles, nearly 700 in number, which Rogers wrote between 1922 and 1935. Their subjects are as varied as Rogers' own curiosity. Also dispensed by the McNaught Syndicate, their more than 800,000 words will be organized into four separate volumes.

McNaught likewise distributed more than 500 of Rogers' short articles entitled "The Worst Story I Have Heard Today." Each of these items was credited by Rogers to a friend, who was often famous, sometimes obscure; typically Rogers added a thought-provoking and timely "moral." A single volume will be devoted to these stories.

More than sixty broadcasts which Rogers made between 1930 and 1935 for two sponsored radio programs also possess a unity of their own. The format was based on Rogers' carefully prepared but extemporaneously delivered comments, about fifteen minutes' worth to each broadcast. These weekly programs, covering his usual wide range of subjects, merit a separate volume.

A rich variety of other materials will be presented in chronological form. This would include many magazine and newspaper articles, advertisements, speeches, interviews, letters, etc. While some of these items were later recast into stage routines or formal articles, and even into Rogers' books, the most meaningful arrangement will be made to assist the reader in understanding the de-



With Actor Fred Stone and Artist Ed Borein

velopment of Rogers' personality and the important role he played during the 1920's and the 1930's. Five volumes will be required for an adequate presentation of these materials.

The series as projected at present will thus embrace fourteen volumes:

Daily Telegrams (2 volumes)

Books (1 volume)

Weekly Articles (4 volumes)

The Worst Story . . . (1 volume)

Radio Broadcasts (1 volume)

General Writings (5 volumes)

These volumes, as Will Rogers' works eminently deserve, will be published in accordance with the rigid editing standards recommended by scholarly organizations in history and literature, especially the National Historical Publications Commission and the Modern Language Association.

Oklahoma State University, at its Research Foundation's annual meeting in March, 1968, announced the signing of the agreement with the Will Rogers Memorial Commission and the launching of *The Will Rogers Papers* project. Will Rogers, Jr., delivering the principal address, gave his most enthusiastic support and good wishes to the enterprise. Closely resembling his late father in appearance, Will Rogers, Jr. dramatically concluded his speech: "My father's future is in good hands."



With Humorist Lou Hershfield



With a Notre Dame University group visiting his California ranch



A project of the magnitude of *The Will Rogers Papers* will be expensive. The cost of supporting eight to ten years of editorial work and the publication expense incurred in producing fourteen or more volumes will require a six-figure budget. Monies to fund this project are being sought from interested individuals and foundations.

If you would like to invest in the preservation of the words and spirit of this great American, or if you know someone who would be pleased to share in supporting *The Will Rogers Papers*, please contact Dr. Robert B. Kamm, President, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74074. Grants and contributions for this purpose should be made to the Oklahoma State University Development Foundation and designated for *The Will Rogers Papers*.

