

Photo of the Month

Will Rogers: The Ropin' Fool



Will Rogers, ca. 1913
(Accession # 87.12.54, Gift of Vera Key)

When visitors to the Rogers Historical Museum see photographs of famed western humorist Will Rogers, they often ask if the town was named after him. However, while Rogers did have strong ties to the town, he was not responsible for its name.

Will Rogers was born in 1879 on a large ranch in the Cherokee Nation near present-day Oologah, Oklahoma. Rogers was taught how to use a lasso as a tool to work Texas Longhorn cattle on the family ranch by a former slave. He was even listed in the Guinness Book of Records for throwing three lassos at

once: one rope caught the running horse's neck, the other would hoop around the rider, and the third swooped up under the horse to loop all four legs.

His unparalleled roping skills were later recorded in the classic movie, *The Ropin' Fool*, which is currently featured in the museum's new exhibit "That's Entertainment."

Rogers, Arkansas, native Betty Blake first met Will Rogers while she was recuperating from an illness at her sister's home in Oklahoma. After Betty returned to Rogers, she and Will corresponded for nearly eight years. But because she had qualms about a life in show business, Betty initially resisted Will's proposals of marriage. They were finally married in 1908. Will, Betty, and their children kept close ties to Rogers even after Will became famous, often staying at the Blake family home.

Will Rogers was also very good friends with Rogers citizen and nationally known newspaper columnist Tom Morgan, who specialized in stories written in authentic Ozark dialect, featuring such characters as Gap Johnson of Rumpus Ridge and J. Fuller Gloom.

This photograph, taken around 1913, was autographed by Will Rogers to Tom Morgan. It shows Will with his ever-present lasso and wearing the leather chaps of a working cowboy.