

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Oklahoma	
COUNTY: Rogers	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER 70.10.35.0010	DATE 9/29/70

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Will Rogers Birthplace

AND/OR HISTORIC:

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
SE/4 Sec. 13, T 23 N, R 15 E

CITY OR TOWN:  
Oologah (c. 4 m. NE)

STATE: Oklahoma      CODE: 35      COUNTY: Rogers      CODE: 131

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
State of Oklahoma (Parks Division)

STREET AND NUMBER:  
500 Will Rogers Building

CITY OR TOWN: Oklahoma City      STATE: Oklahoma      CODE: 35

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:  
Office of the County Clerk

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Rogers County Courthouse

CITY OR TOWN: Claremore      STATE: Oklahoma      CODE: 35

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Will Rogers Birthplace

DATE OF SURVEY: 1960       Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Parks Division, Industrial Development and Park Department

STREET AND NUMBER:  
500 Will Rogers Building

CITY OR TOWN: Oklahoma City      STATE: Oklahoma      CODE: 35

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Will Rogers described the home in which he was born this way when he invited Calvin Coolidge to spend his next vacation in Oklahoma:

I will stake you to my place right where I was born, just 12 miles out of Claremore. It's just rundown and old enough that it will remind you of Vermont. I will get special dispensation from the authorities of Rogers County, so they won't bother you, because you will be the first Republican that ever slept in the House, and I will have to fix the Game Laws for protection.

Now I am not located on a bootlegging route from Canada. The best you can get there is home-talent stuff. But the boys have had a lot of practice making it, for Oklahoma has always been dry . . . and on account of our years of experience I don't want it to be considered in the nature of egotism, but they do say we build it better than anybody. I can show you stills there 100 years old. It's a tradition with us; it's not a get-rich-quick industry.

Will was, as usual, exaggerating a bit to make his point. The house was hardly "old" by New England standards. His father started building it in 1873. Nor was it really "rundown." Even after Will left in 1902 the two-story, seven-room frame house stayed in the family, lived in much of the time by relatives who kept it largely intact. No rooms were changed over the years except in their use. Running water was installed; but electricity was not, though Will himself offered many times to put it in. "It's more like the old place, without electric lights," explained Mrs. Herb McSpadden, whose husband was Will's nephew. She insisted, too, on using wood for heating.

But the big white house was one of the finest in Indian Territory at the time of its erection. And it was comfortable. From an upstairs screened porch, where Will slept as a boy, he could catch a glimpse of the Verdigris River to the east. (Largely unbroken rangeland spread out in all directions from the house.) A small upstairs hallway served the two bedrooms, gave access to the balcony. There were (are) five rooms downstairs.

Construction of Oologah dam and reservoir made flooding of the original home site inevitable. In 1960 the State of Oklahoma bought the house from the Rogers family, moved it the following year somewhat less than a mile west to an open hilltop overlooking the new lake. Here it has been replaced on its original native stone foundation. Stones from the two big chimneys at either side of

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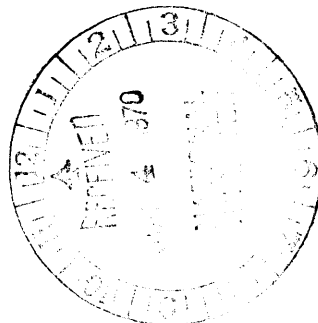
(Number all entries)  
No. 7. Description

Will Rogers Birthplace

the white, clapboarded house were carefully dismantled, numbered, and just as carefully replaced, along with stone slabs that served as steps to the high front porch. The four fireplaces, their mantels of walnut, have also been restored.

Interior restoration has aimed at recreating the appearance at the time of Will's boyhood. Clem Rogers had furnished his home mostly with pre-Civil War furniture from the East. "He had nice things for the time," says Robert M. Black, who heads the restoration committee. "The ranch was mid-way between Claremore and Coffeyville, Kansas. It was thus a favorite stop-over point for friends. And the Rogers were well known. They had lots of friends. There was a piano in the parlor. In the evening there was singing and story-telling. That's the kind of congenial, gracious atmosphere we want to recreate." Unfortunately, none of the original furnishings remain; many were stored in a barn that was destroyed in 1931 by fire. But furniture similar to that used in the 1880s has been sought.

X Despite the care with which the house itself has been restored, emphasis of the over-all, still developing project is not on Will Rogers himself, according to Black, but on ranch life in Indian Territory at the time he was growing up. The excellent museum and shrine at nearby Claremore, also state owned, "is a first-rate presentation of Will Rogers. There's no need in duplicating that," he says. Instead it is hoped that eventually visitors will be able to watch an old-time blacksmith at work, inspect early-day farm equipment, and perhaps learn how to lasso a calf with something of the finesse of the humorist who was born here and parlayed his own skills with a rope -- and words -- into world-wide fame.



**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1879 to 1902

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education             | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering           | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy            | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry              | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                        | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention             | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                      | _____                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture          | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                        | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                 | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Military              |   | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                 |   | _____                                    |

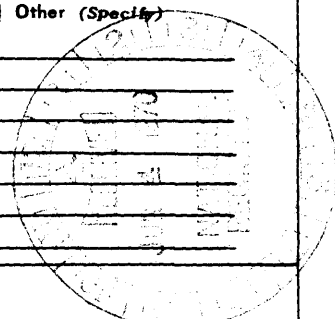
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

It would seem almost presumptuous to hold that any building associated with Will Rogers -- especially the house in which he was born and reared -- would need a detailed brief to earn its National Register status. Will was known and loved, not only in Oklahoma and the United States, but around the world. Here in this modestly comfortable, two-story frame house he was born Nov. 4, 1879. Though wanderlust first, then fame, took him away from Oklahoma much of the time -- from 1902, when he left for South America to Aug. 15, 1935, when, with Wiley Post, he was killed in a plane crash near Point Barrow, Alaska -- he always considered Oklahoma his home. He is buried in nearby Claremore. This house, meanwhile, remained in the Rogers family until 1960, when it was sold to the state to become the feature of Will Rogers Birthplace State Park.

Will had become something of a legend - admired, respected, even revered -- long before he died. Hundreds of tourists a year in the early 1930s were hunting up the big white house (some five miles northeast of Oologah), just to see where the famed humorist was born. "It's really curious how most people react to the house," said Mrs. Herb McSpadden (her husband was a nephew of Will ) the day after his death. "You would think Uncle Will had been gone for years, a martyr perhaps to some great cause. Visitors seem to think they are on hallowed ground. They stand at the threshold of the room where Uncle Will was born, too awed to step inside the door."

That east front room where he was born is now a parlor. It has a big native stone fireplace, walls of hand-hewn oak logs. Clem V. Rogers, Will's father, established a ranch here on the Verdigris River in 1869, gradually expanded it to include some 2,000 acres. He wintered 2,000 head of cattle in 1890, had about 3,500 head on the range that summer. In 1900 he moved to Claremore as president of a bank. Will operated the ranch a few more years before leaving to seek his fortune elsewhere.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Collins, Reba, "Will Took Pride in Oklahoma," Oklahoma's Orbit,  
 Nov. 5, 1967  
 Crow, Pat, "Redecoration of Will Rogers' Father's Home . . ."  
Tulsa World, Oct. 31, 1969  
 Thetford, Francis, "Will Rogers Home . . ." The Daily Oklahoman,  
 April 8, 1967

JOHN O'NEAL

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES				
CORNER	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE		LATITUDE		LONGITUDE		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	36°	28'	10"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"	95°	39'	26"
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"			
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **c. 5 acres**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Kent Ruth**

ORGANIZATION: **Oklahoma Historical Society**      DATE: **April 1970**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Historical Building**

CITY OR TOWN: **Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**      STATE: **Oklahoma**      CODE: **35**

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National     State     Local

Name *Georg N. Rubin*

Title *Liaison officer Okla*

Date *NOV 1 1970*

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

*August Allen Connally*  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

SEP 29 1970

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

*William J. Montague*  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date *1970*

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No. 8. Significance

Will Rogers Birthplace

One story, perhaps apochryphal, remains to be told. Though the original house was a simple log affair begun in 1873, Clem Rogers had ordered "genteel" siding sent down by wagon from Coffeyville, Kansas. The two-story, seven-room house that evolved became a local showplace, one of the finest in the area at the time. But shortly before Will was born, or so it's told, Mrs. Rogers - an admirer of Abe Lincoln - moved her bed from a recently added lean - to a room into the older section . . . so her child might be "born in a log cabin." With a mother so keenly conscious of dramatic fitness, Will's success would seem to have been virtually assured.

