

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 17, 1952

### **'I Never Met a Man I Didn't Like'**

Today's highlight was a visit to Claremore, Okla. And the Will Rogers memorial. This tribute to the beloved Oklahoman, the world's "ambassador of good will" was built and is maintained by the state of Oklahoma and the dime of school children.

High on the hills overlooking Claremore, one mile off Highway 66 it stands where the famous humorist once planned to build a home.

The Rogers' tomb, which daily attracts a great number of visitors, is located in a beautiful garden in front of the memorial. In it are interred Will, Mrs. Rogers and one of their children.

It is simply marked with a pink granite slab engraved with the family name.

The stone constructed memorial building contains four principal galleries and a library. When the visitor enters he sees first the life-size statue of Will Rogers which was executed in bronze by Jo Davidson, the world-renowned sculptor who often visited the Monterey Peninsula as a guest of his friend Lincoln Steffens.

The statue's pedestal is engraved with Rogers' name, the dates of his birth and death (1879-1935) and with his famous words: "I never met a man I didn't like."

Many pictures of the actor-humorist hang in the library, along with photographs of movie personalities and stills from the films in which he starred. Glass cases hold mementoes which he saved and cared for during his lifetime.

In another large room is displayed a collection of both American and foreign saddles, all of them works of art in leather, and other equipment used by cowboys and cattlemen. Many of these valuable articles had been presented to Will by friends and admirers who knew of his love for good horses, his fancy roping and his riding ability. They knew that the place he loved best at western rodeos was a seat on the fence with his fellow cowboys.

Probably the room that attracted us most was the gallery in which the dioramas of Will Rogers life from boyhood to his final end on the ice fields of Alaska were displayed. These miniatures were created by the late Jo

Mora of Pebble Beach, who also supervised their installation.

This fascinating picture history begins with a small scene, dated 1888, in which Will and his father ride away from the family ranch near Oalagah while his mother and sister wave goodbye. In the second scene Will shows off his roping talent to a girl friend in the school yard. In a miniature reproduction of old Claremore in 1895, Will stands talking with his neighbors in front of the general store; a lively scene thronging with children, dogs, horses and wagons.

A large and impressive diorama shows the moonlit range and Will, mounted on his resting horse, singing to a herd of cattle. The modeling of the cattle vividly demonstrates the artistry of Jo Mora – there seemed to be hundreds of them, and they actually appeared to be listening to Will's ballad of the range,

Inevitably, there was a scene of Will on the New York stage, all set to begin his fancy roping act; the lock of hair hanging on his forehead, the quizzical expression – and a row of Ziegfeld girls lined up behind him. This was dated 1915.

Rogers is also shown giving his first broadcast at Pittsburgh, Pa., and as the "Humanitarian at Nicaragua." He went to that country after Managua was destroyed by earthquake and fire in 1931.

To illustrate Rogers' later years is a scene of the den in his Santa Monica ranch (now a California state monument) with Rogers writing his daily telegram to the newspapers, one of the Rogers family at breakfast at their ranch house, and one of the filming of the "Connecticut Yankee." In the latter, Will is shown sitting on the running board of a car, writing his daily column while he waits for the scene to start.

The final diorama is the sad one. We see the vast, snow-covered waste of Point Barrows, Alaska, a short stretch of fence posts – and a fur-clad figure looking vainly through glasses into space for the plane that bore Will Rogers and Wiley Post to their deaths on August 15, 1935.