

WILL ROGERS

Childhood adventures with an Oklahoma legend

BY CAROLYN ESTES

CHAPTER 1: *Life along the Verdigris*

Growing up in Indian Territory was a daily adventure for ten-year-old Frank and eight-year-old Anna. In 1889, they lived with their parents on a farm near Four Mile Creek east of the Verdigris River.

Neighbors were few and far between.

Pa worked as a ranch hand and blacksmith for a man named Clem Rogers. The Rogers ranch covered 60,000 acres of rolling prairie. It was carpeted with bluestem grass as far as your eye could see. Sometimes

as many as 10,000 head of Texas Longhorn cattle roamed the Rogers' land.

The Verdigris River flowed through the land. It provided plenty of water for the large cattle herds that roamed the ranch.

The rich land along the river was a perfect place to grow crops like corn, wheat, alfalfa, fruits and vegetables.

Pa and Ma's house wasn't nearly as grand as the Rogers' two-story home.

The Rogers' home was one of the finest in Indian Territory, and some called it the palace on the Verdigris. Others called it the White House on the Verdigris. Barns, corrals, granaries, and bunkhouses rounded out the ranch headquarters.

Frank and Anna loved to ride their ponies across

the fields to visit with the Rogers' son, Will, and his older sister, Mary. Mary would read a story or play dolls with Anna while Will and Frank practiced roping or just kicking up the dust.



On this visit, Will and Frank decided to ride their horses down by the river.

"I think I heard a panther scream last night," Will said. "Let's look for tracks and see if we can find it!"

"Sure," laughed Frank. "But what will we do if it finds us first?"

"Well, I'll throw a rope around its front legs while you loop 'round the back ones," Will said. "That works on them there longhorns. It oughta work on that black cat!"

The two boys inspected the riverbank without finding anything more than a couple of frogs. Their lariats were too big to lasso their find. So, the disappointed boys headed back to the ranch.

"We should try again next time I come over," Frank said. "Keep an eye out for that panther."

"Anna, it's time for us to head home. We have to make it before dark," he said.

The brother and sister mounted up and waved as they turned their horses toward home.

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Photograph courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial Commission

CHAPTER 1 - 6.4375x10.5

NEWSPAPER ACTIVITY

1. William Penn Adair Rogers (Will) was born on Nov. 4, 1879. How old was he in 1889?
2. Search the classified section of your newspaper for an ad that contains land for sale. If you find one, how much per acre is the asking price? If you do not find an ad with land, ask your teacher to estimate the cost of an acre of land in your area.
3. At today's price per acre, how much would the Rogers Ranch be worth in today's market?

NEXT WEEK: CHAPTER TWO

End of a long day

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