

WILL ROGERS

Childhood adventures with an Oklahoma legend

BY CAROLYN ESTES

CHAPTER 6: *Unwelcome strangers*

The winds of change were about to come sweeping down the plains.

Will knew his dad was not going to be happy with the news.

As he got closer to the ranch, Will wasn't sure how to tell his dad about his talk with the railroad men. He just knew he had to tell him right away.

Will pulled up his horse at the barn, dismounted, and walked it into its stall. Once that was done, he walked quickly into the house.

Mr. Rogers was sitting in his chair near a window, working on papers with lots of numbers on them. Will knew it was the count of cattle that were being driven to market.

"Pa, I need to tell you something," Will said.

"Well, sit down and tell me what is on your mind," Mr. Rogers said.

"When Frank and I were out riding today, we came across a bunch of men doing some markings for the railroad. One man asked us if we thought this would be a good place for a town," Will said. "I told him I didn't know much about towns."

Mr. Rogers got a stern look on his face.

"Well, Will, I guess they've made up their mind to bring that blasted railroad across our land," he said. "How far out were you?"

"I figure about six miles or so," Will said.

"I think it's close to Bill Baker's place."

"I'll have to find out more about this town," Mr. Rogers said.

The next day several railroad men came to the ranch to talk to Mr. Rogers. Will was invited to listen.



The men told him they were building the railroad from Coffeyville, Kansas, to Van Buren, Arkansas. They said the law allowed for a town every six miles.

"This is going to cut my land in half," said Mr. Rogers.

"Things are going to

change and try as I might, I can't stop it."

"What's the town's name gonna be?" Will asked.

"Well, William P. Ross picked the name 'Oolagah' for this new station on the Iron Mountain Railroad Switch," one of the railroad men said.

"We think it was the name of a Cherokee Chief. We'll announce it tomorrow."

The next day the town site was announced.

Note: According to historians, the town's name, Oolagah, was misspelled by the painter as he painted the new railroad station. The spelling of the town was then changed to Oologah to match the railroad sign.

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Photo courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial Commission

CHAPTER 6 - 6.4375x10.5

NEWSPAPER ACTIVITY

1. Search your newspaper for the names of towns.
2. How many different names did you find?
3. Ask your teacher to help you find out how far the next town is from your town.

NEXT WEEK: CHAPTER SEVEN

Dark cloud on the prairie

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