

WILL ROGERS

Childhood adventures with an Oklahoma legend

BY CAROLYN ESTES

CHAPTER 7: *Dark cloud on the prairie*

The new town of Oologah was one of many towns created as the Missouri Pacific railroad system stretched from Kansas all the way to Texas. Big changes were coming to Indian Territory, especially in the Cooweescoowee District where the Rogers ranch was located.

For years the land had been open range with no fences as far as the eye could see. With the coming of the railroad, fences were about to scar the land.

Mr. Rogers was the first to build a barbwire fence in the area. He didn't like fences, but he had to protect his cattle.

He didn't like the changes, but reluctantly accepted them. The open cattle range was a thing of the past and farmers would move in.

Ed Sunday lived about four miles south of what was to be the new town. He had been a line rider for Mr. Rogers for several years.

Sunday's friend, Bill Hewitt, lived in Claremore about 13 miles from the new town site. Hewitt visited the site the day it was announced and spent the night with his friend.

The very next morning Hewitt and Sunday rode over to the new town and staked out the first business location. Hewitt planned to build a general merchandise store.

More businesses were sure to come. The little

town of Oologah was coming to life on his range just six miles southwest of his ranch headquarters.

Mr. Rogers knew that 1889 was a year of change. His cattle ranch would become a diversified farm. He hated the settlers because he knew they would fence off small farms. It would destroy the Cherokee Nation as he knew it.

Will knew that his dad was unhappy. Will, too, was worried.

"Pa, can I ride over to see Frank?" Will asked.

"Sure can, just be back before dark," Mr. Rogers answered.

Will rode across the prairie with the bluestem waving in the wind. He wondered how much longer he would be able to race his horse across the open fields. His sadness grew as he came close to Frank's home. He reined in his horse as he spotted Frank near the barn.

"Those railroad men sure are moving fast," Will exclaimed. "They named that spot 'Oologah' where they're going to put the town"

"That's a strange name for a town," Frank said. "I wonder how they came up with that."

"Pa said it was the name of some Cherokee Chief. In English it means Dark Cloud," said Will.

"Hope they call it by its Cherokee name and not the English one," laughed Frank.



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Photo courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial Commission

CHAPTER 7 - 6.4375x10.5

NEWSPAPER ACTIVITY

1. Pretend you are a reporter assigned to cover the announcement of the new town. Write a story. Don't forget to include who, what, when, where, why, and how in your story.

NEXT WEEK: CHAPTER EIGHT, THE CONCLUSION

Racing the flames

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