

# ROOM 326: WILL ROGERS

BORN WILLIAM PENN ADAIR ROGERS (1879-1935)

AN INDIAN, A COWBOY, A NATIONAL FIGURE, A LEGEND

## WHAT WAS HE DOING AT THE STRATER HOTEL?

Born on a large ranch in the Cherokee Nation near what later would become Oologah, Oklahoma, Will Rogers was taught by a freed slave how to use a lasso as a tool to work Texas Longhorn cattle on the family ranch.

As he grew older, Will's roping skills were so developed that he was listed in the Guinness Book of World Records for throwing three lassos at once: One rope caught the running horse's neck; the other would hoop around the rider; and the third swooped up under the horse to loop all four legs. Will Rogers's unsurpassed lariat feats were recorded in the classic movie "The Ropin' Fool."

He was the star of Broadway

and 71 movies of the 1920s and 1930s. He was a popular broadcaster, wrote more than 4,000 syndicated newspaper columns, and befriended Presidents, Senators, and Kings.

During his lifetime, he traveled around the globe three times, meeting people, covering wars, talking about peace and learning everything possible. He wrote six books. He was the first big-time radio commentator, and was a guest at the White House. His opinions were sought by the leaders of the world.

While a fast horse thrilled Will, he also loved flying. It was on a flight to Alaska in August, 1935, with a daring one-eyed Oklahoma pilot named Wiley Post, that their plane crashed and both

men lost their lives. Just three weeks before that fateful crash, Will had spent some time in Durango at the Strater. At the time of his visit, Earl Barker Sr. (then owner of the hotel) was Durango's Mayor, and Earl Jr., who was just a six year old boy at the time, was afforded the opportunity to sit on Will's knee and hear a story.

During his stay at the Strater, Will discovered that the Hotel staff were replacing the elevator car with an upgrade, so with the encouragement of the management, he carved his name in the elevator wall. He said that he had always had a hankering to do so, and was happy to oblige. The section with his name was cut out and saved.

—Courtesy of Rod Barker, *The Strater Hotel Story* (available for purchase at the front desk.)



Courtesy of Will Rogers Memorial Museum, Claremore, OK

### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Will's father was one-eighth Cherokee and his mother was one-fourth Cherokee.
- He was the youngest of eight children. Only three of his siblings survived into adulthood.
- He married Betty Blake on November 12, 1908. They had four children, but one passed away at age two.
- Betty wrote a book about Will after he died, called "Will Rogers: His Wife's Story," in 1941

### Famous Quotes:

"Always drink upstream from the herd."

"Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment."

"Don't let yesterday use up too much of today."

"Things will get better—despite our efforts to improve them."

"I never met a man I didn't like."

## POLITICS AND WILL'S "ANTI-BUNK" PARTY

Rogers was a staunch Democrat, but he also supported Republican Calvin Coolidge. Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt was his favorite president. Although he supported Roosevelt's New Deal, he could just as easily joke about it:

*Lord, the money we do spend on Government and it's not one bit better than the government we got for one-third the*

*money twenty years ago.*

Rogers served as a goodwill ambassador to Mexico, and a brief stint as mayor of Beverly Hills. During the depths of the Great Depression, angered by Washington's inability to feed the people, he embarked on a cross country fund raising tour for the Red Cross.

Rogers thought all campaign-

ing was bunk. To prove the point he mounted a mock campaign in 1928 for the presidency. His only vehicle was the pages of *Life*, a weekly humor magazine. Rogers ran as the "bunkless candidate" of the Anti-Bunk Party. His only campaign promise was that, if elected, he would resign. .