

Will Rogers wows audience at 1927 auditorium appearance

"Will Rogers, self-acknowledged diplomat, lariatier, and otherwise humorist, Follies 'contrast,' and entertainer kept 4,000 laughing for three hours Saturday night at the Memorial gym."

— *Bloomington Evening World*, Jan. 10, 1927.

Will Rogers found his way to Bloomington in January of 1927. His appearance here followed by only a few days his one-night stand at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

Poking gentle fun at the Carnegie Hall audience, Rogers told them between chaws on his gum, "I'll bet I'm the only guy that ever came out on this here platform with a name you could pronounce, and I'll bet I'm the only guy that had hair as short as mine."

Fortunately, he had saved some of his homespun humor for the Bloomington audience. And the audience loved it. "At least he stuck on the job longer than usual, and the crowd was loathe to depart," explained the *Evening World*.

Rogers told the audience about some of his world travels, ending up in a spare bed room of the White House in Washington, D.C. There he encountered the president's "fleabitten" hounds.

It was apparent that during his visit to Bloomington Rogers had a mind of his own. Apparently, a dinner had been scheduled for him, but instead he dropped by Memorial



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

Hall (the castle-like front of Wells Quadrangle). The newspaper said the entertainer "got all of the local scenery and settings for his performance from the dormitory coeds."

No Will Rogers program would be complete without some of his roping tricks, and he did not disappoint the crowd. Added the *Evening World*, "He sat down on the edge of the stage Raymond Hitchcock-like and just talked to the crowd."

A genuine crowd-pleaser, Rogers announced Big Ten basketball scores and seemed to enjoy Indiana University's victory over Wisconsin as much as anyone. Taking his cue from the coeds, the performer put lots of local flavor into his informal monologue.

Explained the newspaper, "Doc Hetherington, Bloomington water, the spelling match and the *Evening World* came in for their local jokes, along with many jibes at the University profs and the athletic teams, and all was good-naturedly enjoyed by the audience."

There was an unscheduled part of the program. As the *Evening World* put it, "Rogers spied Harry Howard and wife, local folks who

have traveled much in vaudeville and were great personal friends, and down into the crowd Rogers went to shake hands with the Howards. Then Rogers made Dr. Bryan stand up amid the applaudits of the crowd."

The Bryans (IU President William Lowe and his wife, Charlotte, were Rogers' hosts while in Bloomington. The *Evening World* of Jan. 6 announced the advance plans for the performer, including the dinner he skipped. A reception was also on the schedule.

Chirped the newspaper, "One can imagine Mr. Rogers being glad to get away from New York for awhile. He has said that he is homesick for the rest of the United States."

Advance sales for Rogers' visit were brisk, according to the *Evening World*. The newspaper did not mention which organization sponsored the appearance here.

Apart from an amusing evening, there were other benefits. The *Evening World* reported that Rogers received \$2,200 for his appearance. Added the newspaper, "...Dean (Herman B) Wells' fund after the headliner was paid was still \$1,000 to the right side of the ledger."

In 1935, when the news of Rogers' death in a plane crash appeared in the newspaper, there were those in Bloomington who remembered with a smile his visit here.

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