

Will Rogers to be inducted into Museum of Polo and Hall of Fame

By PAT REEDER

Will Rogers was at home on range, stage, movie set, behind a radio mike, at his typewriter, in the passenger seat of an airplane, in the roping arena — and on the polo field.

Because of him, they are household words. He earned accolades for involvement in each. Now he will be honored with induction into the Museum of Polo and Hall of Fame.

The posthumous induction will be Feb. 18. Grandson, Chuck, who played on the professional polo circuit more than 30 years, will be at the Museum in Lake Worth, Fla., for the ceremony. He will be joined by his brother, Kem, who represents the family on the Will Rogers Memorial Commission, and sister, Bette Brandin.

Although Will wrote to IRS he was “no polo player, I am not even fond of the game. I would ride a bit and I took it up solely for what there was in it from a publicity angle,” the fact was he enjoyed playing.

In 1926 he built a polo field on land he bought two years earlier in Pacific Palisades (now a California state park) — even before a house was built.

A Pacific Palisades newspaper account said he wanted a house with a bird’s eye view of the polo field, corral and paddock as a “tonic for weary and homesick eyes.”

Before they moved to the Santa Monica ranch, he and his family and friends spent weekends and summers on the property playing with horses — playing polo and roping. His favorite polo mount was “Bootlegger.”

His was the first field in the Rustic Canyon area. According to Rogers’ biographers, weekly contests at the Rogers Ranch were primary reasons polo became a Hollywood fad.

News accounts tell of him going to a polo match in Mexico City, using his movie producer Hal Roach’s plane. He played at Oklahoma Military Academy on a visit to Claremore.

Players such as Roach, Darryl Zanuck, Walt Disney, Spencer Tracy, Leslie Howard, James Gleason, Big Boy Williams and a “local youngster Robert Stack” gathered regularly at the ranch home field.

A Los Angeles columnist, who covered polo, wrote “he misses the easy shots and returns all the impossible ones. He rides so well he gets away with murder.”

He was known to hit a golf ball from horseback and caddied on horseback for golf champion Bobby Jones.

Will Rogers taught his children to play polo. Son Jim built a polo club on his Bear Mountain (California) ranch and in 1967, Chuck traded car racing for polo. It was a satisfying career that took him around the world. Kem, a career cattleman, lives in Tennessee, where he keeps a few polo ponies. Bette has a love of horses and retired to a place where she can keep a few head.

Will Rogers' love and respect for good horses may have taken him to the game of polo, where the mark of a performer's success is determined by his athletic partners — his ponies.

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The Museum of Polo and Hall of Fame is dedicated to fostering an appreciation of development of the 2,600 year-old game — one of the fastest, roughest and most dangerous sports played today.

Tulsa polo player John T. Oxley was inducted into the museum in 1994.