

Will Rogers in South Africa, 1902–03



*By Joseph H. Carter Sr. and
Michelle Lefebvre-Carter**

The powerful, historic contributions of Will Rogers have repeatedly been documented in multiple newspapers, magazines, academic papers, and scores of books, both academic and popular.

This paper focuses on the critical period of Will Rogers's life at the ages of twenty-three and twenty-four in South Africa, where he made a career change that became the starting point of a dramatic and new direction in his storied life. The year 1902, in the authors' view, was the seminal year of Will Rogers's public career.

This paper is prepared as a guide and source of information for persons who may be researching or hold a deeper interest in the background of Will Rogers. It was not prepared as an academic or scholarly presentation. Rather, the report is submitted as a slim resource to researchers and as enrichment.

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The findings are based on interviews; research in newspapers, archives, and libraries; and exploration of sites Will Rogers visited. Based also on the long interest and study of Will Rogers by the authors, the paper draws some conclusions about the origins of Rogers's career as an entertainer and humorist and the influence of his time in South Africa on that development.

While a natural wit and an effortlessly entertaining individual with a rare gift of communications, Will Rogers first became a paid professional actor in December 1902 in the "arena version" of show business at Ladysmith, South Africa, in Texas Jack's Wild West Show and Dramatic Company.

In a letter to his family dated December 28, 1902, Will Rogers wrote prophetically about working for Texas Jack, "I am going to learn things while I am with him that will enable me to make a living in the world without making it by day labor."

In an indication that he had expected a lifetime as a working cowboy, just six months earlier in a letter dated July 21, 1902, from Buenos Aires, Argentina, Will Rogers advised his father that he had taken the job delivering cattle to South Africa and wrote, "I may come back to the U. S. from there [no punctuation] I think I will go to work for Halsell and stay there when I get back."

Clem Rogers and W. E. (Bill) Halsell were major Indian Territory cattle ranchers of the Cherokee Nation and also were involved in creating the First National Bank of Claremore, where Will Rogers's father was a director and vice president. Will Rogers had attended a school in Vinita, Indian Territory, that Halsell sponsored.

Beyond proclaiming a new career, the December letter is an obviously understated measurement of what Will Rogers would learn from Jack Omohundro, the show's owner/manager/performer. Texas Jack seemed to quickly grasp the young cowboy's potential as a popular performer. This initial employment launched Will Rogers's rise as a public persona that would grow in many dimensions and with historic results. The transformation occurred at a time when he lacked steady employment and probably was suffering a degree of loneliness and lack of purpose. With his high level of inherent intelligence, Will Rogers accepted his new career with determination and purpose. His natural-born talents were routed into a professional path on a steady payroll for nine months as the show played numerous venues across South Africa.

Beyond the value of entering show business, at Ladysmith Will Rogers was exposed to the dramatic evidence left by four wars that recently had devastated the community and countryside with death and massive material losses. Memories of terror and the daunting task of

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Will Rogers birthplace near Oologah, Oklahoma (1981, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).

rebuilding both a beleaguered town and hundreds of shattered families and lives faced the people he met daily. Ladysmith gave Will Rogers a rare and close view of fresh and brutal history. Undoubtedly, social, political, and cultural attitudes were absorbed and were critical in forming his ability to make contributions that would enrich human understanding through his use of the media of show business. The South African experience enriched his perspective that appeared in his career as a journalist or news pundit. From the South African roots grew Will Rogers's tools for the broad venue of communications that he would spread beyond the circus tent on the wild west show in Madison Square Gardens, vaudeville, the Ziegfeld Follies, Broadway, newspaper and radio commentary, and stardom in cinema.

Amid the rich diamond fields and gold mines of South Africa, Will Rogers seemed to have found a communicator's richness that was equally bedazzling.

Salvaged largely from his own letters home, only a half-dozen pages about the period of 1902–03 are cited in each of two of the most comprehensive and commendable biographies of Will Rogers: *Will Rogers: A Biography* by Ben Yagoda (1993) and *Will Rogers: His Life and Times* by Richard Ketchum (1973). Likewise, in published writings by Joseph H. Carter, the letters were the only source of material. Most outstanding in its research and effort to explain the circumstances of the South African period is *The Papers of Will Rogers: Volume One, November 1879–April 1904*, edited by Arthur Wertheim and Barbara

- Texas Jack's -

. . . GREAT . . .

WILD WEST SHOW & CIRCUS,

PROGRAMME.

OVERTURE

- 1.—Manœuvre by Ladies and Gentlemen on Horseback
- 2.—Feats of Weight Lifting Mr. HARRY WARD
- 3.—Trapeze Mr. D. AVARRE
- 4.—Musical Ride by THE COWBOYS
- 5.—AZODI, the Flexible Marvel
- 6.—Entree—Clowns TONY & ALVAREZ
- 7.—Rough-riding Act Mr. ERIC WARD
- 8.—Contest—Prize, a Mexican Saddle.
- 9.—Clown VICTOR
- 10.—Wonderful Shooting Display by **TEXAS JACK**
- 11.—THE CHEROKEE KID, World's Premier Lasso Thrower
- 12.—American Bronchos and Australian Buckjumpers, ridden by
MISSOURI BILL HAMPTON and G. J. BROWN

🎪 🎪 INTERVAL 🎪 🎪

- 13.—Risley Act CARLO RICARDO
- 14.—Mr. HARRY WARD on the Japanese Perch
- 15.—Realistic Western Sketch, entitled

“TEXAS JACK'S TRIUMPH.”

GOD SAVE THE KING.

“Texas Jack's Triumph.”

. . . CAST OF CHARACTERS. . . .

TEXAS JACK	IN HIS ORIGINAL CHARACTER
J. Jones (Ranch Owner) G. HENDERSON.
Silkstone (his Manager) J. WALTER COLLIER,
Patsy Hooligan } on	{ CHARLIE CONUS.
Coaley } tramp.	{ W. P. ROGERS.
Rattlesnake George, } Border	{ R. J. FOX.
Saltpetre Bill } Ruffians,	{ H. WARD.
Blackheart (Indian Chief) G. T. ANDREWS.
Eaglehawk } Indian friend of	{ D. ALVAREZ.
Wun-Lung, (Chinese Servant)... S. VICTOR.
Cissie Jones (Jones' daughter)... Miss LYLE MARR.

Texas Jack's Wild West Show program from the East London, South Africa, performance March 16, 1903 (Will Rogers Memorial Museums Collections, OHS).

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Will Rogers on a horse with Texas Jack on the right in South Africa, 1903 (Will Rogers Memorial Museums Collections, OHS).

Bair, a 611-page academic study published in 1996 by the University of Oklahoma Press. Commendably, these two scholars devoted 113 pages of the text to the South Africa year. The conclusions of these respected scholars are based on outstanding research.

The bootstrap efforts of the authors of this paper were to solidify or challenge facts in Will Rogers's letters written at the time. We discern that his reports in his letters were accurate. We were able to verify that suitable railroad resources were in place during the late nineteenth century for movement of livestock, among other freight, to and from the docks at the Port of Natal in Durban. Special rates were provided to entertainment units, allowing them to move economically and efficiently by passenger trains across the sprawling nation. With limits in our time and budget and travel allowances, we failed to find any evidence of specific venues where Texas Jack's Wild West Show performed.

Considerable insight into conditions and historic events of the time in South Africa also can be gleaned from an insightful 2014 book by Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi Before India*. The book focuses on the two decades when Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) honed his celebrated nonviolent resistance credo largely in the Durban area but sometimes around Ladysmith during the Boer War. Gandhi temporarily returned

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Texas Jack's Wild West Show cast (Will Rogers Memorial Museums Collections, OHS).

to India during the third week of October 1901, and Will Rogers arrived in August 1902.

A second contemporary, twenty-five-year-old future British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was a war correspondent during the Anglo-Boer War. He was taken prisoner in November 1899 by Boers but escaped prison twenty-seven days later. Churchill's three-hundred-mile "wanted dead or alive" flight to safety with a twenty-five pound price on his head was harrowing but enlightening. The South African adventure shaped his life—like Rogers's and Gandhi's—and news reports about his feat published in England have been credited with his 1900 election to Parliament. We are hopeful that this paper lends a concurring and "on-location" view of what molded Will Rogers's contributions to humanity.

Unfortunately, at the time Drs. Wertheim and Bair were compiling their manuscript, budget limitations precluded travels to South Africa. Joseph Carter, at that time Will Rogers Memorial Commission director, was responsible for securing funds for the project, which was a most challenging task. Commendably, in the two decades following publication of the five-volume *The Papers of Will Rogers* by the University of Oklahoma Press, our field work, research, and findings at archives, libraries, and in newspapers provided nothing to discredit or

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contradict the superb work of these two academic scholars who labored under extremely limited financial conditions.

Nothing that the Carters observed reflected any previous “boots on the ground” attempt to trace Will Rogers’s life and career in South Africa. Some 112 years following Rogers’s twelve-month sojourn, the authors spent a week scouring the region where Will Rogers began his South African saga. Durban, Mooi River, and Ladysmith were visited for deeper understanding and clues that may have survived the century-plus lapse. While much of the Natal Province was traversed and documentary sites were visited, there remained great areas that could tempt future researchers. Some clues to sources and resources are included in this article.

The spectacular, extravagant, and costly Greenfields farm of Rogers’s initial employer, James Piccione, remains least changed among the venues. Located eighty-eight miles north of Durban in Mooi River, the nineteenth-century edifices still gleam amid the lush green pastures serving as headquarters for a twenty-first-century agricultural enterprise.

Greenfields through time had evolved into a manor for special events such as weddings and included a restaurant and overnight facilities. The current owner said using Greenfields as such a facility failed to meet economic expectations and the tourism concept was terminated, although Greenfields Farm Butchery and Deli remained in operation selling meat and poultry products from the farm.

Adam Kethro lists himself as director but said he and his wife fully own Greenfields Agricultural Holdings and had purchased the farm during the twenty-first century.¹

The directional signs to Greenfields remain standing and the current owner said the farm in 2014 included about one thousand acres. Beyond livestock, Kethro operates a farm implements dealership from the barn where Will Rogers once stabled horses. The stalls remain identifiable as luxurious housing for horses, but have been slightly altered to serve as offices, storage space, and room for tractor parts. Kethro manages and maintains both the land and buildings with excellence. We detected great pride in maintaining the historic significance of the farm.

Adorning the walls of the offices are photographs and storyboards that outline the history of Greenfields. Kethro said that he recalled having read a detailed history of Greenfields but could not recall where it might be found.

During our Greenfields visit, Kethro was cordial and deeply interested in the history. He was only vaguely aware of Will Rogers. At the

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The stables at Greenfields (photograph courtesy of the authors).

time of our unannounced visit, Kethro was preparing to leave shortly to deliver two horses to a track for a race and was pressed for time. However, he shared from his sack of Biltong, a dried beef manufactured on the site from grass-fed cattle that he butchered for meat.

Our research sheds new but limited light on both James Piccione and his activities. We were unable to discern how Piccione could afford the great expense of constructing this luxurious, sprawling complex that has “1893” chiseled on an outside edifice. Advertisements from *The Natal Witness* concerned Piccione’s business of importing from South America. Other ads reflect the value of livestock and the high-dollar stakes in horse racing.

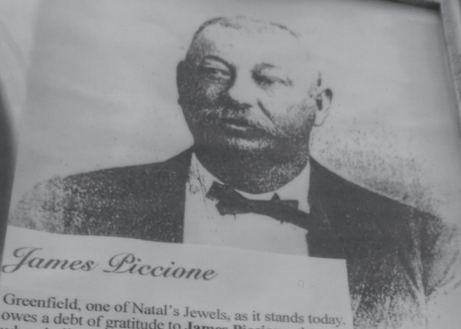
“Was it diamonds?” was Adam Kethro’s question in reply to our question about where Piccione may have gotten the finances to build such an elaborate barn and residence on such a large and rich spread of land.

Diamonds, gold, political connections, or plain shrewd dealings were possibilities for Piccione’s mysterious wealth as theorized in our interview with Rod Skinner, the astute editor of the *Ladysmith Gazette*. The *Gazette*, the 2014 leading newspaper in Ladysmith, commenced publication in 1902. The earliest preserved copy of the newspaper, volume two, number 102, dated July 25, 1904, was framed and exhibited in the

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Above right: Snapshot photograph of storyboard exhibited in the office at Greenfields (photograph courtesy of the authors).

Below: Advertisement about Piccione horse sale (photograph courtesy of the authors).




James Piccione

Greenfield, one of Natal's Jewels, as it stands today, owes a debt of gratitude to James Piccione, the man who dedicated his tremendous energy and vast fortune to making it an historic homestead.

Born in Belfast, Ireland to Italian Parents (it is of interest to note that his grandfather was personal physician to the king of Naples) he, with his brother Francis, came to Durban in 1879.

Being of a roving disposition, he went all over the country, looking for possible openings, during which time he took contract work in Pietermaritzburg, among a hundred other occupations.

James Piccione purchased Greenfield from the Natal Colonisation Company in 1892. The farm at that time was approximately 3074 acres in extent.



The stables were lofty and commodious, the timber coming from the Klark Forest, near Howick and no expense spared in the construction. Special attention was given to ventilation and it was said that Picciones' horses were housed than thousands of human beings.

THE NATAL WITNESS, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1898

Howick Stock Fair.

THE FOLLOWING ENTRIES have been received for the Fair, to be held on **FRIDAY, MARCH 5th.**

7 Head of Salted Cattle; 300 Merino Rams, bred by Wm. Adams; The Double Line of Fenecing erected round the Howick Hills Station.

Entries will be received up to time of Sale, 11 a.m.

J. RAW & CO., Auctioneers,
W. H. SUTTON, Sec., H.F.A.

Cheap Advertisements.
Cash with Order.

15 Words for 6d.
20 Words for 9d.
25 Words for 11-
Each additional in Words, 6d.

WANTED.

VACANCY for four Readers, friends. Home complete. 212, Long Street.

SITUATION for an Indian Cook. Apply—Z.

ROOMS. Two or three good rooms unfurnished, centrally situated. Would be taken for a term from April—Box 62, Maritzburg.

SHEEP, 200 or 400 young Ewes. Box 62, Maritzburg.

YOUNG Man desires situation as Teacher—Up-country preferred.—Do, 410, Mr. F. SMITH, Van Rensselaer.

GOOD Plain Painter and paper-hanger, young man preferred. Apply—FRANK CROCKETT, Dundee.

A GOVERNESS to teach five children, English and Music, standards 2 to 6, youngest 7. Address—May Levin, Edmont.

VACANCY for six boys as boarders, who wish to attend School. Good Table. Washing included; for 23 per month. Address—A.F., P.O., Greytown.

A GROOMER Assistant. Apply, in writing, to—W. H. SMITH & Co.

A N Auctioneer and Conveyancer, 5 years' experience in the Colony, seeks engagement. Apply by letter—Box 49, Maritzburg.

YOUNG Gentlemen to reside in private family; superior board; home comforts; moderate terms.—M.P., "Witness" Office.

ONE or Two Good Milch Cows, must be in full milk, and accustomed to Town Lands.

AGRICULTURAL JOURNAL
AND
MINING RECORD
OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AND
COLONY OF NATAL.

Will appear on **FRIDAY, 18th MARCH.**

The Journal, which will be every alternate Friday, District News, Official Intelligence, and Agricultural matters of interest to Farmers.

Advertisements portable, Farming, and Miscellaneous, and may be inserted.

The Journal may be published, Messrs. Longmarket Street, in advance, of 3/-, postage free Colony; post free

W. A. DRAPER, preferred.
HARVEY W.

HORSES!

HORSES!

MR. JAMES PICCIONE,

Having spent over Six Months in the Argentine Republic selecting Horses suited to South Africa, is now about to Return in the S.S. "LANGDON GRANGE," with

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lobby of the newspaper office. The local newspaper editor said he had no recollection about items in the files about Will Rogers, Texas Jack, or the Wild West Show.

Keenly aware of the historic siege of Ladysmith, Skinner and *Gazette* reporter Mandy Killian both vouched for the historic accuracy of the midtown Ladysmith museum that commemorates the battle. While amply dramatizing the siege, the museum lacks the backing of an archives or library. At the Ladysmith Siege Museum, Jongukuthula (Jongu) Shabalala, the liaison officer, suggested seeking information by visiting the state archives at Pietermaritzburg, a large city located south toward Durban. The museum in Ladysmith lacks archives, although exhibits are dramatic and the storyboards are explicit. Jongu searched his meager files without results on the question of Texas Jack's Wild West Show.

The authors reached Pietermaritzburg a short while before the official state archive was scheduled to close on a Friday and would not reopen until Monday. We were able to physically review early editions of *The Natal Witness* newspapers dated both before and following the war year. Editions of the newspaper from 1902 were not found during the limited time. Available newspapers seemed well preserved but there was no catalog.

During the time-limited, page-by-page search, a February 28, 1898, advertisement was found about the forthcoming sale of one thousand horses that James Piccione had purchased in Argentina and was delivering to South Africa by steamship. Described as "prices very reasonable," Piccione offered "1,000 FIRST-CLASS HORSES." The ad claimed they included "Heavy Draught, Trolly, Trammers, Hacks, Carriage Horses, and those suited to every class of work." Piccione spent "over six months in the Argentine Republic selecting horses suited to South Africa."

To the authors, this justly supported Will Rogers's account of transporting the shipment of Argentine livestock in 1902 that he colorfully related in a letter mailed home. His November 26, 1902, letter to his father noted that "a good young all around horse will bring three or four hundred dollars." Obviously, the business was lucrative.

An archivist who identified herself only as Ms. Gumeda found two items of interest in the official Natal archives. First, a Minute Paper dated "31.1.01" wherein charges and name calling were leveled at James Piccione. It includes a handwritten letter of transmittal asking the minister of agriculture at Mooi River for an inquiry. With it is a typed letter from "Mooi River, Natal," with a name typed thereon of "Mombra, born on St James Street, Piccadilly" but "I am afraid to sign

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Will Rogers in Bloemfontein, South Africa (Will Rogers Memorial Museums Collections, OHS).

my name.” Addressed to “Sir,” the letter said, “Piccione is a bastard, half Italian, half Scot; a rogue and a thief. You should put your police here to watch the low thief. He is bail for Dutch farmers and which the Colony of Natal accepts.”

During our research at the Killie Campbell Library in Durban, we reviewed a typed manuscript titled “History of Mooi River and District” that was dated August 16, 1939. E. J. Shorten of the Weston Farm Training School at Mooi River was listed as the author. The manuscript made casual reference to James Piccione’s farm and reported that Piccione’s son had been thrown from a horse and fatally injured. The manuscript noted that William Hodgson had become owner of Greenfields following Piccione. Killie Campbell, 1881–1965, was a collector and historian whose home, Muckleneuk, and personal library now are a museum. The reference library is part of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

These documents serve as a clue about Will Rogers’s short tenure as Piccione’s employee and amplify his description of the demanding boss that he described in letters he mailed home and that are included in *The Papers of Will Rogers*.

Second, a Minute Paper with a September 8, 1902, letter from Piccione to the surveyor general that offered to sell “my farm at Mooi

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Left to right: Texas Jack, Mrs. Texas Jack, unidentified, Will Rogers (Will Rogers Memorial Museums Collections, OHS).

River” for seven pounds an acre for 4,580 acres, thus solidifying Will Rogers’s estimate. His October 2, 1902, letter home portrayed Piccione’s demands on his employees and placed a \$35 million value on Greenfields.

The storyboard on the office wall at Greenfields described the farm as being 3,074 acres and states that Piccione acquired the farm in 1892, a decade before Will Rogers’s time there.

Persons interested in the prospects for Piccione’s acquisition of wealth in South Africa could well reference the wealth of Cecil John Rhodes (1853–1902), founder of the world famous De Beers diamond cartel and creator of the coveted Rhodes Scholarships at Oxford. Rhodes was a leading entrepreneur of the era that Piccione’s career was in play. In our conversations with Adam Kethro, he mentioned that he understood that Piccione’s father was a painter, which would seem to nullify any prospect of great amounts of inherited wealth. But, with the strike of gold and the discovery of diamonds in South Africa, many clever and lucky individuals became wealthy quickly.

Beyond Piccione’s tough work demands and gruffness that Will Rogers reported in his letters, there is little doubt the cowboy also was discouraged by the cost of board and the dim prospects for increasing



Mooi River, South Africa (photograph courtesy of the authors).

Drakensberg Mountains. While the port is at sea level, Mooi River is eighty-eight miles north and nearly a mile high.

Ladysmith, sixty miles north of the Mooi River site of Greenfields, is where Will Rogers first entered professional show business and initially performed as a paid actor. Ladysmith is a town with a tortured history. The gravity of war and the pain of many lives being lost had recently been endured by the citizens of that colonial city when Rogers arrived. Four wars had blitzed around Ladysmith, including its own 118-day siege and bombardment that had riddled the town. Human corpses and slain animals had floated in the river that served, and still serves, as its water supply. Residents and British troops who escaped blasts, shells, and shrapnel faced starvation and were reduced to eating their horses.

The Second Anglo-Boer War had ended short weeks before Will Rogers arrived. Ladysmith was faced with rebuilding while grieving human lives and property losses. No doubt, the people hungered for entertainment as a distraction from their despair. That entertainment arrived in the form of Texas Jack's Wild West Show in December 1902 seems highly likely, but the authors found no direct evidence to support Will Rogers's letters.

The performances were not unlike the Wild West events that Rogers witnessed in his early travels to Chicago and the amateur roping

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Will Rogers on far left, Texas Jack far right, others unidentified (Will Rogers Memorial Museums Collections, OHS).

events he had won back in Indian Territory. Necessarily, he would have been intent on meeting the owner, Texas Jack. Recognizing raw talent, Texas Jack quickly recruited the skilled cowboy as a performer at \$20 a week. Their relationship is richly documented from letters in the museum at Claremore, Oklahoma, and recorded in *The Papers of Will Rogers*.

Between performances in Ladysmith, the gregarious twenty-three-year-old undoubtedly was assailed with tragic stories of death, terror, hunger, thirst, and deprivation that more than a century later still hang heavily over the Ladysmith explored by the authors. The town's museum is a vivid memorial to the catastrophe.

The Second Anglo-Boer War was declared on October 11, 1899, and by October 28, 1899, the Boers had the town boxed in with 26,000 British soldiers and 8,000 civilians under siege. The *Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith*, self-published in 1999 by Brian Kaighin, reflects the continued interest in the event. Kaighin wrote a day-by-day account of events stating, "The Siege of Ladysmith was arguably the most famous event of the Second Anglo War of 1899–1902 where the British in Ladysmith held out against disease and starvation on an unprecedented scale." The Dutch, or Afrikaners, siege ended February 19, 1900. The greater war raged until May 31, 1902—four months prior to Will

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Will Rogers with Texas Jack's Wild West Show in Kroonstad, South Africa (Will Rogers Memorial Museums Collections, OHS).

Rogers's arrival at Durban and surely was the current topic of conversation in December 1902 at the most grisly battlefield: Ladysmith.

The Ladysmith Siege Museum graphically depicts the horror. It reflects that twenty-eight to thirty persons died some days during the 118-day embattlement. Water and food were perilously low, adding famine and diseases to bombardment casualties. All around the center point town of Ladysmith after the siege was ended, British forces retaliated the brutality with infamous scorched earth and concentration camp policies that devastated both the Dutch farmers and the property in the area.

Since it was owned by a British subject from Ireland and had housed British cavalry during the era, Greenfields seemed to have escaped war damage. In Ladysmith, the fort used during the siege now has been enlarged and is part of the city's police station.

Will Rogers's brief references in letters to family back home said, "A lot of fighting around here," meaning Mooi River battlefields, and, "I was in Ladysmith and passed several English graveyards where there had been a battle." These words seem to be a young man's struggling effort to report a very destructive war that was difficult to comprehend even a century later.

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Precisely the number of venues where Texas Jack's Wild West Show played in South Africa during Will Rogers's tenure is not clear. In visiting the Outeniqua Transport Museum in the city of George, we concluded that railroads during 1902–03 were both efficient and economical. Rails connecting Ladysmith to Durban were completed in 1885. Earlier *Voortrekker* wagons known by early Dutch settlers as *kakebeen wa* because of the jaw-bone shape of its sides were much like wagons used by early pioneers in settling the American West. They were outmoded for overland travel by strong rail networks. The wagons are revered in legendary era books such as *Jock of the Bushveld* written in 1907 by Sir Percy Fitzpatrick and recommended strongly by one old timer, as he said, "if you want to know about the real South Africa." One was on exhibit at the George transport museum and another was a showpiece in a camp at Kruger National Park.

South Africa and Ladysmith were cultural forces and show business locales where Will Rogers's hard-earned experiences, his information, his attitudes, and his expanded wisdom seemed to have molded his base philosophy and inspired his towering successes as a pundit and progressive thinker. Rogers's time in South Africa came on the heels of a protracted war. Ladysmith is the venue where he discovered and started in show business. South Africa became his first platform for communicating both ideas and humor as an inspiring performer.

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Endnotes

* Joseph H. Carter Sr. and Michelle Lefebvre-Carter served seventeen years as successive directors of the Will Rogers Memorial Commission, managing and updating the seven-gallery museum in Claremore and the four-hundred-acre birthplace ranch near Oologah. Joseph authored *The Quotable Will Rogers* (2005), *Never Met a Man I Didn't Like: The Life and Writings of Will Rogers* (1991), and *Will Rogers Memorial and Birthplace Presents a Pictorial Tribute to an American Legend*. He also penned a three-part, award-winning series about Will Rogers that appeared in *American Cowboy* magazine in 2006 and wrote a cover story for *Route 66* magazine. The husband and wife team launched, arranged financing, and were project directors for *The Papers of Will Rogers*, a five-volume series published by the University of Oklahoma Press. Joseph was a speechwriter for President Lyndon Johnson, an economic spokesman for President Jimmy Carter, and an aide to four members of Congress and Oklahoma Governor David Hall. He was director of communications at the Democratic National Committee and press secretary to Chairman Robert S. Strauss. Michelle edited e-book memoirs written by Joseph based on his own experiences as a speechwriter and the experiences of other political operatives.

In retirement, the Carters struck out to retrace Will Rogers's global adventures. Self-financed and visiting more than fifty countries, they searched archives and venues for traces of evidence where Oklahoma's Favorite Son had trekked. Results were meager, but the South African sojourn published here was most enlightening.

The couple works in Norman with Joseph writing and Michelle editing sundry items including book reviews for the *Oklahoman* and articles for *Oklahoma Observer*, plus other books under production. They proudly claim three children, seven grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

¹ The address for Greenfields is R103 District Road, Mooi River KwaZulu-Natal, 3300. Post Office Box 83, Mooi River, KwaZulu-Natal, 3300, is the mailing address. Adam Kethro's email is adamke@bridgeshipping.co.za.