



History 101

Annie Oakley

Annie Oakley (born Phoebe Ann Mosey; August 13, 1860 – November 3, 1926) was an American sharpshooter who starred in Buffalo Bill's Wild West show.

Annie began trapping before the age of seven, and shooting and hunting by age eight, to support her siblings and her widowed mother. She also sold the game to restaurants and hotels in northern Ohio. Her skill paid off the mortgage on her mother's farm when Annie was 15.

Annie soon became well known throughout the region. On Thanksgiving Day 1875, the Baughman & Butler shooting act was being performed in Cincinnati. Traveling show marksman and former dog trainer Frank E. Butler (1847–1926), an Irish immigrant, placed a \$100 bet per side (equivalent to \$2,328 in 2019) that Butler could beat any local fancy shooter. A match between Butler and the 15-year-old Annie, was arranged. "The last opponent Butler expected was a five-foot-tall 15-year-old girl named Annie." After missing on his 25th shot, Butler lost the match and the bet. He soon began courting Annie and they married. They did not have children.

Annie and Butler lived in Cincinnati for a time. Oakley, the stage name she adopted when she and Frank began performing together, is believed to have been taken from the city's neighborhood of Oakley, where they resided. They joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West in 1885. At five feet tall, Oakley was given the nickname of "Watanya Cicilla" by fellow performer Sitting Bull, rendered "Little Sure Shot" in the public advertisements.

In Europe, she performed for Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom, King Umberto I of Italy, President Marie François Sadi Carnot of France and other crowned heads of state. Oakley supposedly shot the ashes off a cigarette held by the newly crowned German Kaiser Wilhelm II at his request.

In 1901, Oakley was badly injured in a train accident but recovered after temporary paralysis and five spinal operations. She left the Buffalo Bill show and in 1902 began a less taxing acting career in a stage play written especially for her.

It is believed that Oakley taught more than 15,000 women how to use a gun. Oakley believed strongly that it was crucial for women to learn how to use a gun, as not only a form of physical and mental exercise, but also to defend themselves. She said: "I would like to see every woman know how to handle guns as naturally as they know how to handle babies."

In late 1922, the couple was in a car accident that forced her to wear a steel brace on her right leg. She eventually performed again after more than a year of recovery, and she set records in 1924. Her health declined in 1925 and she died of pernicious anemia in Greenville, Ohio, at the age of 66 on November 3, 1926. Her body was cremated in Cincinnati two days later, and the ashes buried at Brock Cemetery, near Greenville. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annie_Oakley]

