

## **Annie Oakley** **“Little Miss Sure Shot”**

*“Aim at a high mark and you will hit it. No, not the first time, nor the second, and maybe not the third. But keep on aiming and shooting. For only practice will make you perfect. Finally you’ll hit the bull’s eye of success.”* Annie Oakley

Born Phoebe Ann Mosey on August 13, 1860, Annie Oakley lived her early life in poverty. Her father died from exposure to winter weather in northern Darke County, and her mother struggled to support a family of seven children. She and her children hired out to work for various families while Annie stayed on the farm, trapping and shooting game for food. When Annie was ten years old, she went to care for a newborn with a family who treated her as a slave; she called them “The Wolves.” After two years, Annie escaped and returned home.

Her shooting skills augmented the family’s income and gained her an excellent reputation as a marksman. In 1875, she entered a competition against Frank Butler, a traveling champion. The love affair between Annie and Frank developed; they married and started show business together traveling in the vaudeville circuit and later joining the Sells Brothers Circus as “Butler & Oakley.” Buffalo Bill Cody heard of this 5-foot-tall shooting sensation and persuaded Annie and Frank to join his Wild West show that traveled extensively to major cities in the eastern United States and later to Europe where Annie received medals and accolades from heads of state. When the Wild West show performed in Greenville, Annie received a loving cup that would become the center of her future show posters.

Unfortunately, Annie’s stellar career was tarnished when a lady assumed her identity upon arrest for illegal activities. Without validating the woman’s identity, William Randolph Hearst’s empire published this untrue story that defamed Annie’s reputation. Annie spent most of her wealth suing the Hearst Corporation and winning 54 of 55 of the lawsuits to restore her good name and reputation, but not her wealth spent fighting for them. Frank worked as a sales representative for the United Metallic Cartridge Company and shot in competition during this time.

Upon retirement in 1913, Annie and Frank continued to give shooting exhibitions and make charity appearances. Annie taught interested women to shoot. It was during this time that Annie melted down and sold most of her medals and trophies, but a few survived and are on exhibit at Garst Museum.

Annie donated most of the proceeds to young women’s education and tuberculosis sanitariums.

Although Annie and Frank had lived in several places including Nutley, New Jersey, and Cambridge, Maryland, towards the end of Annie’s life, she and Frank moved back to Greenville. Annie died of pernicious anemia on November 3, 1926; Frank died 18 days later.

Annie's worldwide fame has been immortalized by books, stage plays, movies, TV shows, and collectible items. Broadway and Hollywood have often fictionalized her story under artistic license. Notwithstanding the commercialization of her life, the Garst Museum Store has publications available that portray a more historically accurate account of the life of Annie Oakley Butler.

This information was generated by The Garst Museum

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