

Annie Oakley

Annie Oakley's motto was, "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 keep on shooting for only practice will make you perfect. Finally, you'll hit the Bull's Eye of Success."

She was born in Darke County, Ohio, just a few miles north of Greenville. Her date of birth was August 13, 1860. Her mother named her Phoebe Ann Moses. Annie's younger years were marked by the loss of her father and the dire poverty the family endured after his death.

To gain a perspective, imagine what Ohio was like in 1860. Visualize a forested land with small areas cleared for farming, towns and villages. There were only a few good dirt roads and travel for most people was by horseback, wagon, or on foot. People grew their own food or went into the woodlands to hunt for game to supply their needs. In order to get staples, Annie's father had to drive the wagon into Greenville. To market his crop of corn and wheat, he had to deliver it to the local grist mill, fourteen miles away. It would take a full day before he returned.

In 1866, Annie's father, Jacob, was caught in a blizzard as he was returning home from the mill. It was very late and the family was worried. When they heard the wagon pull up, they saw their father, seated upright in the wagon. His hands and feet were frozen and he could not speak. They took him inside and tried to comfort him. Unfortunately, there was little that could be done. He did not recover. Annie often recalled the horror of that night. It was a defining event for the family. Shirl Kasper describes the family's plight in the following excerpt from her book, *Annie Oakley*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Publishing Division of the University, 1992.

"The destitute family moved to a rented farm, but life did not improve. Annie's oldest sister, Mary Jane, came down with tuberculosis and died and Susan Moses sold Pink, the family cow, to pay doctor and funeral bills." Unable to provide for her children Susan was forced to send them to live with others. Annie had to live at the county infirmary. Later, she was sent to work in the home of an abusive family. Annie described this time as slavery and the family as the wolves."

Annie learned to shoot at the age of eight. She had a natural athletic talent that enabled her to hit small game, usually quail and rabbit, with a clean shot through the head. This made her the favorite game provider at the Katzenberger brothers general store in Greenville who traded and purchased from Annie. They, in turn, supplied hotels in Cincinnati.

Annie was an excellent markswoman and she eventually began to take part in shooting contests. It was at one of these events that she met another competitor, Frank Butler, whom she would later marry.

The Annie Oakley Center at Garst Museum is a wonderful place to learn more about this remarkable woman. See guns, medals, personal clothing, and gifts given to her by kings, queens and Indian chiefs. Read about her career and see that this hero was not a wild west girl as many have portrayed her, but an inspirational role model who overcame childhood adversity with a rare talent that set her apart and enabled her to become a legend. Annie died in Greenville, Ohio on November 21, 1926. Her husband, Frank Butler, followed her just eighteen days later.

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This information was generated by The Garst Museum

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