**Annie Oakley biography, 1860 – 1926**

Annie Oakley was born Phoebe Ann Moses—Annie to her family—on August 13, 1860, in Darke County, Ohio. After the death of her father and stepfather, the 9-year-old Oakley lived with the superintendent’s family at the Darke County Infirmary, which housed the elderly, the orphaned, and the mentally ill. In exchange for helping with the children, Oakley received an education and learned the skill of sewing, which she would later use to make her own costumes.

As a young teen, she returned to her family after her mother had married a third time. To help with family finances, Oakley used her father’s old Kentucky rifle to hunt small game for the local grocery store for resale to hotels and restaurants. Her hunting enterprise was so successful that she was able to pay the $200 mortgage on her mother’s house with the money she’d earned…and she was just 15 years old!

One of her “customers”—who was impressed with her shooting—invited her to participate in a contest against well-known marksman, Frank E. Butler. Oakley won the match with 25 shots from 25 attempts; Butler missed one, but that didn’t stop him from being totally enamored of his opponent. Eventually, the two shooters were married on August 23, 1876.

The Butlers traveled with their shooting performances, signed up with the Sells Brothers Circus for one season in 1884 as “champion rifle shots,” and then joined [Buffalo Bill’s Wild West](http://www.bbhc.org/explore/buffalo-bill/research/buffalo-bill/) in 1885. Oakley became a star attraction, and Butler was content to be her manager and assistant. The two prospered with the Wild West and remained with the show for 16 years—including two trips to Europe that secured her position as a seasoned performer and star of the Wild West. In truth, Annie Oakley may have been the first woman celebrity.

Because of a desire for less travel, the Butlers left Buffalo Bill in1901. They did continue to perform, however, finally retiring from shooting exhibitions in 1913. Eventually they moved to [Pinehurst, North Carolina](http://www.annieoakleyboomdays.com/), where Oakley wrote a touching eulogy for Cody in 1917, noting “the passing of a golden era.”

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Oakley unsuccessfully offered to raise a regiment of woman volunteers to fight in the war and went so far as volunteering to teach marksmanship to the troops. She gave her time to the National War Council of the Young Men's Christian Association, War Camp Community Service, and the Red Cross. She had, by all accounts, a very philanthropic soul.

In 1926, after 50 happy years of marriage, the Butlers passed away within three weeks of each other: Annie Oakley died on November 3, and Frank Butler died November 21. Both died of natural causes after a long and adventuresome life.