

A HISTORY OF ANNIE OAKLEY

Phoebe Anne Mosey (sometimes called Mozee) was born on a run-down farm in Darke County, Ohio in 1866. She fired her first shot at the age of seven and by the age of 12 was the chief provider for her large and hungry family. Thanks to her mastery of the rifle, she was paying off the mortgage on the Mosey shack through the sale of surplus quail, grouse and mallards to Cincinnati hotel owners.

The fame of this juvenile sure-shot exploded overnight when she defeated Frank Butler, vaudeville's champion marksman and trick shot, in a live-bird contest rigged to promote his act - although its outcome had the opposite effect of making his skill the star. One year later, Frank Butler and Anne Oakley (she having dropped her first and last names) joined forces as a headlining double-act. They also joined forces at the altar - shortly after their marriage Butler gave up his performance career to manage hers. The team prospered on the variety circuits and in small circuses until 1885 when Annie joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.

Touring Europe in the Buffalo Bill Show of 1887, Annie twice gave private demonstrations for Queen Victoria, defeated Grand Duke Michael of Russia in a match arranged by the Prince of Wales, and in Berlin shot a cigarette from the lips of Kaiser Wilhelm. She announced her retirement in 1901, but made intermittent appearances until 1916.

Annie Oakley's feats as a sharpshooter are legendary. At 30 paces she shot a dime from between her husband's thumb and forefinger with a .22 rifle and with this weapon could hit two-inch flying balls by sighting them in the shiny surface of a bowie knife. Once she hit 943 out of 1000 flying balls in a rapid-fire demonstration and, at the age of 56, using three double-barreled guns, punctured in mid-air six balls sprung from as many traps.

Her prowess was immortalized in the lingo of Broadway when, in the pre-computerized days of hard tickets, complimentary tickets identified by the holes punched in them were called "Annie

Oaklies" since they duplicated the holes Annie shot in flying playing cards.

Annie Oakley died in Dayton, Ohio in 1926. Frank Butler died 18 days after her.