

Annie Oakley, 1860-1926: One of the Most Famous Sharpshooters in American History

A Broadway musical,
23 February 2008

VOICE ONE:

I'm Steve Ember.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Barbara Klein with PEOPLE IN AMERICA in VOA Special English program. Today we report about Annie Oakley, a woman who became famous for her ability to shoot a gun and hit very small objects.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

There are hundreds of stories about Annie Oakley. Many of the stories involve her adventures in the American Wild West. Others tell about her travels with Native American tribes. However, most of the stories are not true. She did not grow up in the Wild West, nor did she fight in any battles. Annie Oakley was a performer in a traveling Wild West show. She used her skill at shooting a gun to become one of the most famous sharpshooters in American history.



Annie Oakley

VOICE TWO:

Annie Oakley was born in eighteen sixty in Darke County, Ohio. Her real name was Phoebe Ann Mosey. When she was six years old, her father died of pneumonia. Her family was very poor. She did not attend school. When she was nine years old, Annie went to live with another family on a farm. Then she became a servant for still another family. She later said that this new family abused her.

When Annie returned to live with her own family, she decided to help them earn money. She taught herself how to shoot her grandfather's gun and began hunting animals for food. She could shoot the animals without ruining the important parts of the meat.

She sold the animals to the people in her town. When she was fifteen years old, she had made enough money to pay for her family's farm.

VOICE ONE:



Soon her ability to shoot a gun became well known in her town. When she was sixteen years old, she was invited to a shooting contest with a famous marksman named Frank Butler. Frank Butler claimed that he could shoot better than anyone else. Annie surprised everyone when she won the competition. She shot all twenty-five targets, while Frank Butler was only able to shoot twenty-four of them. Perhaps their shooting abilities attracted them to one another, because Annie and Frank married in eighteen seventy-six.

VOICE TWO:

In eighteen eighty-two, Annie took the name Oakley. She and Frank Butler started putting on shows together, demonstrating their abilities to shoot a gun. Frank Butler was the star of the show and Annie Oakley was his assistant. However, sometimes she did her own shooting. Two years later, Annie Oakley met the famous Native American chief, Sitting Bull, at a performance. The chief liked her skill in shooting and also her personality. They became friends. He gave her the name "Little Sure Shot" because of her shooting ability and because she was only one and one-half meters tall.

(MUSIC: "Colonel Buffalo Bill")

VOICE ONE:



Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill

In eighteen eighty-five, Annie Oakley and Frank Butler joined another traveling show. It was called "Buffalo Bill's Wild West." William Cody, better known as Buffalo Bill, ran the show. For sixteen years, Annie Oakley was the star of the show while Frank Butler was her assistant. Posters for the show called her a "Champion Markswoman."

The Wild West show became very famous all over the United States. All of the performers demonstrated their skills. Many of the performers had fought in real gun battles while settling the western part of the United States. They wanted to bring the excitement and mystery of the Wild West to a show that people

would like to watch.

VOICE TWO:

Annie Oakley did tricks that showed off how good she was at aiming and shooting a gun. She could shoot a small metal coin thrown in the air from twenty-seven meters away. She could shoot the thin edge of a playing card and then shoot it six more times as it fell to the ground. She could shoot the ashes off of a cigarette her husband Frank Butler held in his mouth.

In eighteen eighty-seven, Buffalo Bill took the whole Wild West show to Europe. They traveled to many countries and gave many performances. They performed in England for Queen Victoria. Annie Oakley received a lot of attention. The newspapers wrote stories about her and she took part in many shooting contests.

VOICE ONE:

The Wild West show returned to Europe two years later. By this time, Annie Oakley had become even more famous. The Wild West show performed in Paris, France, for six months. Then the performers traveled to Germany, Italy and Spain. In Germany, the Crown Prince asked Oakley to shoot the ashes off of a cigarette that he held in his mouth, as she famously had done with her husband. She asked the Prince to hold the cigarette in his hand instead and did the trick easily.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

When the Wild West show returned to the United States, Buffalo Bill decided to change it to include scenes from the life and culture of the Wild West. These scenes included train robberies, gunfights and conflicts with Native American Indians.

In nineteen-oh-one, Annie Oakley was in a train crash that badly injured her back. She had five operations. Annie and Frank wanted to stop traveling so much and have their own home. So they left the Wild West show. They built a home in Cambridge, Maryland. They liked this area because it had a nice community and there were many places they could go hunting. Annie Oakley and Frank Butler took part in community activities. Oakley gave shooting lessons and demonstrations at the local county fair.

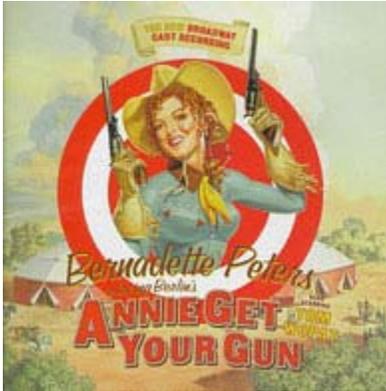
VOICE ONE:

Annie Oakley wrote a book about her life that was published in nineteen fourteen. It was called "Powders I Have Used." She also wrote many stories about hunting and fishing. Some of these articles tried to get other women to begin hunting. She also tried to get women to learn how to shoot a gun so that they could defend themselves.

During World War One, Annie Oakley offered to help the military. She proposed to train a group of women volunteers who would become soldiers in the war. However, the United States did not accept this offer. She also offered to give the American troops shooting lessons. She traveled across the country and visited many training camps. She gave shooting demonstrations and raised money for medicine and supplies.

VOICE TWO:

In nineteen twenty-five, Annie Oakley and Frank Butler moved back to Ohio to be near her family. They continued to give performances. But Annie Oakley was sick. She died on November third, nineteen twenty-six. Her husband Frank Butler died eighteen days later.



Annie Oakley has been remembered in many ways. People have written movies, songs, plays, books and television shows about her. One of the most famous examples is the Broadway musical play called "Annie Get Your Gun." Irving Berlin wrote it in nineteen forty-six. In one of the famous songs from the musical, Annie Oakley and Frank Butler sing "Anything You Can Do." The singers are Ethel Merman and Bruce Yarnell.

(MUSIC: "Anything You Can Do")

VOICE ONE:

The musical is still being performed today to remember a woman with an unusual skill. She showed that women could be just as good, if not better, than men. We leave you with "There's No Business Like Show Business" from "Annie Get Your Gun."

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

This program was written by Erin Braswell and produced by Lawan Davis. I'm Barbara Klein.

VOICE ONE:

And I'm Steve Ember. You can learn more about famous Americans on our Web site, voaspecialenglish.com. Join us again next week for PEOPLE IN AMERICA in VOA Special English.