

# Annie Oakley Biography

## Annie Oakley

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# Biography

Annie Oakley (1860-1926), originally Phoebe Anne Oakley Mozee, was known as "The Peerless Lady Wing-Shot," for her marksmanship. She led one of the fabled lives of America's Wild West.

Annie Oakley was born in a Drake Country, Ohio, log cabin on Aug. 13, 1860, the sixth of eight children. After her father died in a blizzard, she began shooting rabbits and quail to provide the family income. Then she went to town, won a shooting match against a vaudeville star named Frank E. Butler, and earned more by shooting glass balls and playing cards at 30 paces.

A few years later she married Butler, and he became her manager. Buffalo Bill hired them for his Wild West Show in 1885. Helped by publicists like Nate Salsbury and her own incredible shooting eye, Oakley remained a star for 17 years, surmounting even a train wreck in 1901 that partially paralyzed her for a time.

Let no one doubt that Oakley could do what she claimed. Thousands of people saw Annie slice a playing card with the thin edge toward her by shooting at 30 paces. Kaiser Wilhelm II had her shoot a cigarette out of his lips. She was death to moving glass balls; one day, by official count, she shot 4,772 out of 5,000.

Oakley charmed everyone with her simplicity and modesty, including Queen Victoria. Dressed in western costume and beating many a man in what was traditionally a masculine world, she intrigued young and old alike. (No wonder that Irving Berlin made her the subject of his Broadway musical *Annie Get Your Gun*, which played throughout the 1950s.)

A fundamentalist in religion, Oakley read the Bible throughout her life. She was never involved in the kind of scandal that plagued Buffalo Bill, and at least 18 orphan girls were educated through her generosity.

When Annie Oakley died on Nov. 3, 1926, there was wide mourning and many tributes. By then, any punched complimentary ticket--which looked as if it had holes shot through it--was called an "Annie Oakley." Born at the beginning of the Civil War, she lived through the "classic period" of transition from frontier to 20th-century statehood in the West. Whether or not she was the best lady shot in that epoch, she certainly was thought to be best; fact, fiction, and musical comedy have combined to make "Sharpshooter" an indelible adjunct to her name.