



Courtesy of the Garst Museum

Annie OAKLEY

1860–1926

DARKE COUNTY

ANNIE OAKLEY was born Phoebe Ann Mosey in Woodland, Ohio (now known as Willowdell), on August 13, 1860. Growing up in a very poor family, Mosey learned to trap and shoot small game, which she would sell to hotels and restaurants to help support her family. By age fifteen, she had earned a reputation across Ohio for accuracy and skill as a marksman. Her business was so successful that she was able to pay off the mortgage of her family's farm.

At age twenty-one, Oakley, a name she chose as a stage name, was invited by one of her customers to compete as a woman sharpshooter against well-known marksman Frank E. Butler. Oakley defeated Butler, but the relationship that began in that competition resulted in their marriage on June 22, 1882. They toured together with the Sells Brothers Circus, headquartered in Dublin, Ohio. On March 19, 1884, in St. Paul, Minnesota, Oakley met Sioux Chief Sitting Bull, who was so impressed by her skills that he adopted her as his daughter and gave her a Sioux name that translates as “Little Sure Shot.”

In 1885, Oakley and Butler joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West, with Oakley receiving top billing and Butler serving as her manager and assistant. On European tours, Oakley was presented in the press as a lady of the Wild Wild West, rather than a person who had honed her skills in the woods of Darke County. Capitalizing on this image, Oakley remained with the Wild West until 1901. In that year, a train accident left her severely injured, but she continued to perform almost until the end of her life.

Oakley, immortalized in books, television shows, movies, stage plays, and commercial memorabilia, is now an American icon. A lesser-known fact about her pioneering spirit, however, is that she made two offers during times of war (the Spanish American War and World War I) to assemble a regiment of women sharpshooters to defend the country. Her offers were declined, but in World War I she traveled along the Eastern Seaboard, demonstrating gun safety to servicemen and raising funds for the American Red Cross. Oakley died in 1926 in Greenville, Ohio. In 2000, a stretch of State Route 127 in Darke County was renamed “Annie Oakley Memorial Pike” in her honor.