



Written by [Roger D. McGrath](#) on September 16, 2019

Published in the September 16, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 18

## Annie Oakley

Annie Oakley was the most famous American woman of the late 19th century and a legend in her own time. She entertained U.S. presidents, European royalty, and the general public, and was one of the featured acts of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. She was also a proponent of arming women and teaching them to shoot, and she herself gave instruction to thousands of women.

Born Phoebe Ann Mosey (also recorded as Moses) in 1860 to Quaker parents Jacob and Susan, Annie spent her early years on the family farm in Darke County, Ohio. The dark-haired, blue-gray-eyed girl liked hunting with her father and brother in the woods that surrounded the farm rather than staying home with her sisters. She learned to trap game before she learned to shoot, but quickly became an expert at both.

Young Annie was an absolute natural with a rifle. "I was eight years old when I took my first shot," said Annie, "and I still consider it one of the best shots I ever made. I saw a squirrel run down over the grass in front of the house, through the orchard and stop on a fence to get a hickory nut. It was a wonderful shot, going right through the head from side to side."

Although Annie didn't confirm it, there's another story that her brother was upset that she had used the rifle and he thought he'd teach her a lesson. He put a double load of buckshot in the family shotgun and bet her she couldn't hit his hat if thrown in the air. He reckoned the kick of the shotgun would knock her flat. He tossed his hat and Annie fired. Full of holes, the hat fluttered to the ground while Annie remained upright.

Annie wasn't enthralled by school or studying and wanted to spend her days in the woods, gun in hand. "My mother ... was perfectly horrified when I began shooting and tried to keep me in school," recalled Annie, "but I would run away and go quail shooting in the woods or trim my dress with wreaths of wild flowers."

Caught driving a wagon and miles from home when a blizzard suddenly swept down on Darke County, Jacob Mosey arrived home near death from hypothermia. His speech was gone, his hands were frozen, and he couldn't climb down from the wagon under his own power. Pneumonia set in and he was soon dead. This meant an end to childhood for Annie. The family moved to a rented farm and struggled to survive. Annie's oldest sister, Mary Jane, died from tuberculosis, and the mother sold the family milk cow to cover doctor and funeral expenses. Annie's mother went to work nursing maternity cases and sent the youngest child, Hilda, to live with another family.





Written by [Roger D. McGrath](#) on September 16, 2019

Published in the September 16, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 18

---

It wasn't long afterward the mother sent Annie to live at the county poor house, a three-story brick building known as the Infirmary. Annie was still adjusting to life there when a farmer asked the Infirmary for a girl to work in his home, helping his wife and her new baby. Annie essentially became an indentured servant. "I got up at 4 o'clock in the morning," said Annie, "got breakfast, milked the cows, washed dishes, skimmed the milk, fed the calves and pigs, pumped the water for the cattle, fed the chickens, rocked the baby to sleep, weeded the garden, picked wild blackberries and got dinner. Mother wrote for me to come home. But they would not let me go. I was held a prisoner."

When Annie fell short of the farmer's expectations, he beat her with a belt. The wife wasn't any more lenient. One night Annie fell asleep while darning, and the wife forced her outside the house and into the snow. At 11 years old, Annie ran away from the couple she would later identify only as "The Wolves."

Annie returned to the Infirmary voluntarily, but only because Nancy Ann Edington, the wife of the new superintendent, was a friend of Annie's mother. Nancy Ann treated Annie as another daughter, and Annie began attending school with the Edington children. Superintendent Samuel Edington also paid Annie for work at the Infirmary, first as a seamstress and then as the manager of the dairy. Most of the money she earned she saved.

At 15, Annie was finally back living with her mother, who had remarried and was living near Greenville, a growing town at the intersection of rail lines and overland roads. Annie concluded a deal with the Katzenberger brothers to supply their Greenville grocery store with game. Into the north county woods went Annie, trapping and hunting daily. By now she was also taking advantage of the latest generation of rifles and shotguns, which made her father's old muzzle-loading firearms that she had first used seem primitive. Annie was wildly successful, and the Katzenberger brothers were able to ship fresh game meats to hotels and restaurants in Cincinnati, 80 miles to the south. With her profits Annie not only saved money but also paid off the mortgage on her mother's new house.

At the same time Annie was trapping and hunting, she was also entering local shooting contests. She won so regularly, taking home prize money and goods, that she was finally banned from entering some of the contests. It must have been galling to the other shooters because not only was she a teenage girl but she stood but five feet tall and weighed only 100 pounds.

Her shooting prowess was coming to the fore at exactly the right moment in America — in the 1870s shooting contests and exhibitions were all the rage. Fancy shooters such as Adam Bogardus, Doc Carver, John Ruth and his wife, Charley Austin, Ira Paine, Frank Howe and Tillie Russell, and Frank Butler awed crowds throughout the United States.

## **A Welcome Hitch in Her Path**

The last named, Frank Butler, was born in Ireland early in 1847 and worked his way to "Amerikay" as a deckhand when only a 13-year-old boy. In New York City he mucked stables, blew glass in a factory, and went to sea as a fisherman. Along the way he got married and had two children, which got him thinking of ways to make more money. With his good looks, gift of gab, and sense of humor, people suggested the stage. He developed a dog act and was doing well until, as he tells it, he played at a theater in Philadelphia. The theater was next door to a fire station and when an alarm sounded, one of his dogs, a retired fire dog, ran for the station, followed by the other dogs in the act.



Written by [Roger D. McGrath](#) on September 16, 2019

Published in the September 16, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 18

---

After that incident he began developing a trick-shooting act. He was a natural and quickly became a deadeye. Assisted by a partner, he appeared not only on stage in theaters but also at outdoor venues. He was on the road throughout the year, which may have been the cause of his divorce. In 1881, he found himself in Cincinnati, Ohio, and checked into the Bevis House hotel. The proprietor of the hotel, J. B. "Jack" Frost, was one of those who bought fresh game meat from the Katzenberger brothers, and he knew all about Annie. Frost asked Butler just how good a shot was he really. "I told him I could beat anything then living save Carver and Bogardus," replied Butler. "He said he had an unknown who would shoot me at Greenville ten days from that time for \$100 a side. It seemed a shame for me to take the money from those country people. I thought there were some country people who thought someone could shoot a little and were ready to lose money, and as I needed it, I went out."

Butler arrived in Greenville by train. He then traveled 18 miles by coach to the shooting site close to the unknown's home. Butler reasoned the time and travel was worth it because he'd soon be richer by \$100 — the equivalent of several thousand dollars today. He said he "almost dropped dead when a little slim girl in short dresses stepped out to the mark with me. I was a beaten man the moment she appeared for I was taken off guard."

The little slim girl was Annie Mosey. If Frank Butler was a beaten man before the shooting match commenced, he didn't show it. Annie would have a pigeon released from a trap and blow the bird out of the sky. Butler would then do the same. Annie didn't miss and neither did Butler. Finally, the 25th and last pigeon was released for Annie. She hit it squarely. Butler's 25th was released and he fired. The pigeon was hit but so late in its flight that it fell beyond a boundary line for the contest. Butler's shot was counted as a miss.

Butler may have lost but so taken was he with the pretty 20-year-old sharpshooter that he gave her and her mother tickets to his show in Cincinnati. They attended and enjoyed the show immensely, but before the spark of romance could be fanned into a flame, Butler was off to tour with the Sells Brothers Circus. While on the road, he began a letter-writing campaign to win Annie's heart. A little more than a year after their fateful shooting match, they were married in June 1882 while the Sells circus was in Windsor, Ontario.

Mrs. Frank Butler didn't immediately begin performing with her husband. His shooting partner at that time was John Graham. The circus advertised them as the "Graham & Butler rifle team and champion all around shots." They had better have been champions because among other feats of marksmanship they shot apples off each other's head.

On a night late in 1882 when Graham was too ill to shoot, Butler had Annie substitute. Annie held various objects and Frank shot them. Annie did no shooting herself. It was part of Frank's act to miss a time or two to build up suspense. One night while Annie was still substituting for Graham and Frank was missing shots, a well-oiled spectator yelled, "Let the girl shoot." Frank thought the drunk might actually be on to something and told Annie to give it a try. She hadn't practiced the particular trick shot and she missed the first time. On her second try she hit the target and the "crowd went into an uproar," said Frank, "and when I attempted to resume my act I was howled down."

Annie adopted the stage name Oakley and suddenly it was the rifle team of Butler & Oakley. Audiences were enthralled by the sight of a pretty and petite female shooter who could perform trick shots with ease and style. Moreover, she looked sweet and innocent and no more than 16 years old. Frank had



Written by [Roger D. McGrath](#) on September 16, 2019

Published in the September 16, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 18

---

been in show business long enough to understand she was the main draw, or as he put it, “She outclassed me.” He taught her all the trick shots he knew and turned to playing a supporting role only.

*Photo credit: AnnieGetYourGun*

*This article appears in the September 16, 2019, issue of The New American.*

## **Little Sure Shot**

In March 1884, Annie and Frank arrived in St. Paul, Minnesota, for a series of performances with the traveling road show, the Arlington and Fields Combination. Coincidentally, Sitting Bull was there to tour the big city with Major James McLaughlin, the Indian agent from the Standing Rock Reservation. Sitting Bull visited various schools and businesses and seemed to enjoy the tour, especially the cigars he sampled at a cigar plant, but was dumbfounded by a telephone, calling it “Waukon” — the Devil.

Then one evening, Sitting Bull was taken to the Olympic Theater to see the Arlington and Fields Combination, advertised as “the greatest aggregation of talent” ever to appear in St. Paul. Sitting Bull watched singers, acrobats, minstrels, comedians — and Annie Oakley. Annie’s trick shots astounded him. He had never seen anything like it. “He was about as much taken by my shooting stunts as anyone ever has been,” declared Annie. “He raved about me, and would not be comforted. His messengers kept coming down to my hotel to enquire if I would come and see him. I had other things to do and could not spare the time.” He finally sent her \$65 — at least a couple thousand dollars today — asking for a photograph.

“That amused me,” said Annie, “so I sent him back his money and a photograph, with my love, and a message to say I would call the following morning. I did so, and the old man was so pleased with me, he insisted upon adopting me, and I was then and there christened ‘Watanya Cicilla,’ or ‘Little Sure Shot.’”

Annie had fun with it all, noting that as the daughter of a Sioux chief she was now entitled to five ponies, a wigwam, and livestock. She and Frank also understood Sitting Bull’s actions were of great promotional value. Frank immediately began writing advertising copy and designing posters with Sitting Bull included. Nonetheless, the Butler and Oakley shooting team rejoined the Sells Brothers Circus when it went back on the road in April and stayed with it until it closed for the winter after a two-week engagement in early December in New Orleans.

Also in New Orleans in December was Buffalo Bill Cody and his Wild West show. The Butlers met with the former Army scout turned showman and discussed working in his show. Cody told them he had several star shooters at the moment, including the legendary Adam Bogardus and his sons. Early in March 1885, though, Bogardus quit Buffalo Bill’s show, and Cody and the Butlers began discussing terms. Cody was worried that the petite Annie couldn’t handle the heavy shotguns needed for firing at glass balls and clay pigeons flung into the air.

Cody’s doubts lighted Annie on fire. On an April morning at a gun club in Cincinnati, she set out to break 5,000 glass balls thrown into the air in one day of shooting. Bogardus had broken 4,844. Annie began firing and the glass balls began shattering. When time was called, she had broken 4,772 balls, falling only 72 short of Bogardus’ mark and proving she had the strength and stamina to wield heavy shotguns.

When the Butlers arrived in Louisville, Kentucky, where Cody was preparing his show for the year’s



Written by [Roger D. McGrath](#) on September 16, 2019

Published in the September 16, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 18

---

tour, Annie immediately began practicing shooting clay pigeons. She noticed a well-dressed man watching her but didn't think much of it. She fired right-handed and left-handed and from different positions and angles and shattered one clay disc after another. When she finished, the well-dressed man came running up to her exclaiming, "Fine! Wonderful!" and asked her if she had photographs of herself with a gun in hand. The man was Nate Salsbury, Cody's business manager. He knew a woman who could shoot like what he had just witnessed would be a smash success. He didn't bother waiting to consult with Cody but signed a contract with the Butlers on the spot.

While most of those in Cody's Wild West show performed as part of an ensemble cast, Annie's act was hers alone. Dressed in a blouse, skirt, and leggings, Annie would gracefully glide down a gangway into the arena, all the while waving and blowing kisses. Waiting for her in the center of the arena was Frank and next to him a table with revolvers, rifles, and shotguns. He loaded the traps with either glass balls or clay pigeons. At first only a single target was flung into the air, then two, and then three or four. No matter. Annie unerringly hit them.

Annie didn't give the awe-struck spectators a chance to move back off the edge of their seats. She repeated the process firing left-handed instead of right. She then took a revolver in each hand and shattered glass balls that were hurled skyward — two, three, then four at a time. She held a rifle upside down over her head and destroyed glass balls or clay pigeons in flight. She shot lying on her back. Frank whirled a rope with glass balls on its end over his head and Annie blew the balls to pieces. A writer for the *New York Evening News* declared, "Miss Annie Oakley ruined more glass balls within a given time than I would like to pay for in a week. She slammed a rifle through the air in almost any old direction, and when she snapped the trigger there was a broken ball falling ground ward.... As fast as the target flew upward, so fast did Miss Oakley bring about their [**sic**] destruction. She shot from almost every conceivable position."

Although most of her trick shots with stationary targets didn't translate well to the outdoor arena, Annie still shot at targets while standing backwards with a rifle resting on her shoulder and sighting through a mirror.

One of her stunts, which makes me wonder what kind of athlete she'd be today, demonstrated extraordinary quickness, coordination, and spring. Frank placed a shotgun on the ground about ten feet from the gun table in the center of the arena. Annie stood about an equal distance on the other side of the table. When Frank sprung a trap and a clay pigeon flew into the air, Annie sprinted forward, hurdled the table, sprinted to the gun, grabbed it, aimed, and fired. Invariably, she shattered the disc before it hit the ground.

If all this weren't enough, Annie had a grand finale. It was announced she'd shoot 11 glass balls in 10 seconds using six different guns. She stood at the ready holding a rifle upside down. Five loaded shotguns were on the table. When Frank threw the first ball into the air, Annie blew it to pieces with the rifle. As quick as he could Frank next threw two balls into the air. As quick as she could Annie grabbed the first shotgun and fired, shattering both glass balls. In lickity-split fashion she repeated the feat four more times. A newspaper called the feat "her cleverest number" and noted it was done "in the wonderful short time of 10 seconds."

With spectators applauding, stomping, and cheering, Annie blew them a kiss and ran across the arena, kicking up her heels before disappearing through a canvas curtain.



Written by [Roger D. McGrath](#) on September 16, 2019

Published in the September 16, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 18

---

Newspaper reporters wrote glowing reviews of Annie's performances whenever Buffalo Bill's Wild West show was in town. Even her run across the arena was praised and described as "like a deer" or "like an antelope." From the very beginning, it was clear Annie not only wowed spectators with her extraordinary marksmanship but also with her charm, humor, and style. She inserted skits into her shooting exhibition that had her repeatedly missing glass balls thrown into the air by Frank, becoming exasperated, and stomping about. She then dashed for Frank, pulled the hat off his head, threw it in the air, and shot it full of holes. The crowd roared. When Frank again began throwing glass balls into the air, Annie didn't miss a one. Actress, opera singer, and drama critic Amy Leslie said Annie was "an actress of no mean pretensions" and her comedic skits were "half the performance."

After only one season of touring with Cody's show, Annie was becoming famous. Contributing to that fame in her initial season was Sitting Bull, who joined the tour in June in Buffalo, New York. It was only a little more than a year earlier he had given her the name Little Sure Shot. Sitting Bull had been recruited by the show's promoter, John Burke. The chief didn't come cheap — a \$125 signing bonus and \$50 a week, about five times what the average American working man earned. But then, Sitting Bull had two wives and 11 children to support back home on the Standing Rock Reservation.

When Annie and Sitting Bull were reunited, she asked him if he had received a red silk handkerchief and coins she had sent him. Through an interpreter he replied, "I got them but left them at home for safety. I am very glad to see you. I have not forgotten you feel pleased that you want to remember me."

The 1885 season was hugely successful for Cody's Wild West show and the profits allowed old debt to be retired. Cody was wildly optimistic when the tour began for the 1886 season, although it would be without Sitting Bull. The chief said he had enjoyed himself, especially meeting the Big Chief — President Cleveland — in the Big Teepee in Washington, D.C., but missed his family and was tired of traveling. It couldn't have been the work — all he had been required to do was ride in the parade upon the show's arrival in each new town and in the opening processional for each show.

When the Wild West show arrived in New York City in late June, a new arena had recently opened on Staten Island. It could seat nearly 25,000 in comfort. On weekends it was packed to overflowing and on weekdays two-thirds full. The retired grand showman P.T. Barnum himself came down from Connecticut to see what all the fuss was about. He left saying it was the show of the future.

Annie almost didn't survive the first week. Despite running a high fever — evidently an allergic reaction to a bug bite — she rode in the parade through New York City before the first show. By the conclusion of the parade, she was so weak she could barely stay upright in the saddle. Frank had to lift her out of the saddle and lower her to the ground. For the next four days she remained in bed in her tent dangerously ill. After missing four shows she could stand it no longer and struggled out of bed and performed.

Part of her motivation may have come from a new addition to Cody's troupe, Lillian Smith, a 15-year-old girl from California. Lillian was California's answer to Ohio's Annie Oakley. Cody signed her thinking of the spectacular success of Annie. Why not another girl shootist? Annie responded with her typical competitiveness. She not only introduced new trick shots but she also became six years younger. Annie was 25 and would turn 26 in August, but now said she had been born in 1866, making her only 19. Lillian was a mere teenage girl. Well, now Annie was a mere teenage girl. Annie got away with the deception for the rest of her life. It wasn't difficult. She always looked far younger than her years — she



Written by [Roger D. McGrath](#) on September 16, 2019

Published in the September 16, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 18

---

was petite and slim and was careful to protect her face from the sun. Moreover, she didn't drink or smoke and remained Mrs. Frank Butler until she died.

Although Lillian proved to be a crack shot with a rifle, she was not nearly as proficient as Annie with shotguns or revolvers. Moreover, Lillian tended to brag about her accomplishments, flirt shamelessly, and dress flashily. Annie had no need to worry Lillian would have greater appeal as a sweet, innocent, and demure girl wielding guns in a man's world. Lillian never enjoyed the popularity of Annie and left the show after three seasons.

### **The World in Wonder**

In 1887, Cody took his Wild West show to England. The timing was propitious — this was Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, the 50th anniversary of her coronation. The show was a smash success, Annie especially so. In the stands on opening day was a who's who of London society, including Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde, Lady Randolph Churchill, the playwright and composing team of William Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, actors Henry Irving and Charles Wyndham, and Cardinal Henry Manning, the Archbishop of Westminster.

The royals also attended one of the performances. Edward, the Prince of Wales, who would become King Edward VII in 1901, was an avid shooter and hunter. He sat in the royal box with his wife, Alexandra, and their three daughters. Joining them were a dozen other English royal figures and several royals from continental Europe as well.

Edward was so taken by Annie's performance that he invited her to the royal box to congratulate her. When he extended his hand, Annie ignored it and turned to Alexandra and grasped her hand. "You'll have to excuse me, please," said Annie to Edward, "because I am an American and in America, ladies come first."

Thousands noticed the breach of English etiquette, but no one seemed upset. As the London Daily Chronicle said the next day, Annie's breach was merely a consequence of her "charming naivete." Nonetheless, Annie had intentionally snubbed Edward, who had a reputation for affairs outside of marriage, including one with actress Lillie Langtry. "All I had heard of women trying to flirt with the prince while the gentle princess held her peace raced through my mind as I approached the royal box," said Annie.

Queen Victoria, herself, attended another performance. It was one of the few times she had ventured out of Buckingham Palace since the death of her husband, Prince Albert, in 1861. Annie's meeting with the queen went smoothly, unlike her earlier introduction to the Prince of Wales. The queen looked down from the royal box and told Annie, "You are a very clever little girl." Annie later said, "I was not so very little, and I was a married woman, but I suppose the costume gave the impression that I was shooting from the high school."

As the days went by, it quickly became evident Annie had won the hearts of the English. "Miss Oakley is a great favorite here," said an American vacationing in England. "She is invited out nearly every day to some reception or other." Newspapers said such things as, "the loudest applause of the night is reserved for Miss Annie Oakley," she "is winning gold and fame in England," she's "a young lady possessed of a decidedly pretty and winsome face, of sweet and gentle manners, and a soft, girlish voice," and she's "a Western girl with quiet, expressive eyes, and a voice as soft and silvery as the rustling of a summer's breeze among the trees."



Written by [Roger D. McGrath](#) on September 16, 2019

Published in the September 16, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 18

---

Flowers, gifts, and invitations poured in to Annie daily. On her birthday in August, she received nearly 70 presents, including a horse, a carriage, and a St. Bernard puppy. During the show's run in London, she also received four marriage proposals — it seemed no one knew she was Mrs. Frank Butler. One of the proposals came from a purported French count. He became so persistent and insistent that Annie finally took a photo he had sent of himself and shot a hole through the head in the photo. She then wrote "Respectfully declined" on the photo and mailed it back. Through all the adulation and rave reviews, Annie didn't get an inflated opinion of herself. Reporters always found her courteous and sweet, and willing to patiently answer their questions.

Annie was invited to London's two elite gun clubs, the London Gun Club at Notting Hill and the Hurlington Club on the banks of the Thames. Before she shot at the clubs, though, she visited gunmaker Charles Lancaster at his own shooting range. She had a dismal first outing because her shotgun and loads were all wrong for the English pigeons — Blue Rock — which were smaller than their American counterparts and much swifter in flight. Hitting two-thirds of the birds was considered outstanding. Annie managed to hit only five of 20. She was embarrassed.

With Lancaster's help, she got all corrected and appeared at the London Gun Club for an invitation-only event. She put on her regular show and then tackled the Blue Rocks. This time she hit 18 of 25, which put her among the best shooters of the club. The club presented her with a gold medal, the first awarded by the elite organization. Thereafter, Annie wore it proudly in her publicity photos.

In England, shooting was a man's sport, but Annie's performances and her ladylike demeanor inspired women to give it a try. A group of five upper-crust ladies thought they'd start at the top and came straight to Annie, asking for instruction. They said she could name her price. Since Annie thought women should be proficient in the use of firearms and since she was never averse to extra income, she gave them a lesson. Although she could have charged them much more, her price was five pounds — some \$700 in today's money.

Annie toured with Cody's Wild West show until tragedy struck en route to the last show of the 1901 season, when the train carrying all the performers and animals collided head-on with a freight train. Riding in cars near the front of the train, the show's animals suffered the severest injuries. Annie injured her back and hip but, always the trouper, participated in a shooting match two months later.

The accident and 17 seasons of living on the road were enough for Annie, and she retired from Cody's show. By then had she performed with the show not only throughout the United States, but also throughout Europe. On many occasions she had entertained royalty. One time she shot the ashes off a cigarette held between the fingers of Crown Prince (later Kaiser) Wilhelm of Germany. He had actually volunteered to clench the cigarette between his teeth as did Frank Butler, but Annie evidently feared the prince might move. The overseas tours had made her a household name not only in the United States but also in Europe.

Unscrupulous women used her name to get appearance money at different events. There was a burlesque dancer in Chicago who went by Any Oakley. When she was arrested for theft, evidently to support her cocaine habit, newspapers ran stories about the terrible demise of the once renowned Annie Oakley. The papers knew better, but it was the period of yellow journalism and anything to boost sales. Annie had attorneys sue 55 newspapers for libel, and she prevailed in 54 of the cases. Attorneys' fees and court costs consumed most of the awards. It was fortunate that Frank, upon leaving the show





Written by [Roger D. McGrath](#) on September 16, 2019

Published in the September 16, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 18

---

with Annie, had accepted the offer of a well-paid job with the Union Metallic Cartridge Company.

### **Patriot and Female Partisan**

Retiring from Cody's Wild West show didn't mean Annie retired altogether. She continued participating in shooting matches and giving exhibitions, many of the latter for charities. She and Frank also began spending more time at Pinehurst, North Carolina, a resort town designed by Frederick Law Olmstead. They stayed for months on end at the elegant Carolina Hotel, which opened in 1901 and was the largest frame hotel in North Carolina. During the years the Butlers stayed there, the hotel hosted such guests as John D. Rockefeller, Theodore Roosevelt, John Philip Sousa, Alexander Graham Bell, Warren G. Harding, and Will Rogers. The wealthy from the northeast were particularly enamored with the Carolina Hotel, coming down for some or all of "the season," which ran from November to April.

Although Annie had advocated for years that women become proficient with firearms and occasionally gave them lessons, at Pinehurst she made firearm instruction a business — but charged no fee. Her remuneration would be the increased number of women who could protect themselves and their children. "I would like to see every woman," declared Annie, "know how to handle guns as naturally as they know how to handle babies."

Annie began with one student, but within days the number had grown to dozens, causing Annie to devote two hours every morning to instruction. When the season ended at Pinehurst, 700 women had gone through Annie's course. One of them from the wealthy Back Bay section of Boston had started the course, said Annie, "as frightened at the sight of a rifle as a rabbit is of a ferret." The woman thrived under Annie's training, and her husband bought her a revolver. One day back in Boston, she came home to find a burglar "with the silverware packed and ready to depart. She didn't become flustered, but got her revolver out, covered the man, and phoned the police." Annie proudly added that the woman credited her training at Pinehurst for her actions.

Within a few years the number of women Annie had trained was well up in the thousands, and would ultimately reach 15,000. Annie encouraged women to keep a revolver in a handy location when at home and to pack a pistol whenever out alone. "If I were accosted," said Annie, "I could easily fire. A woman cannot always rely on getting help just by calling for it.... It is a common remark that woman's only weapon is her tongue, but though this might have been true half a century ago it is not as true now."

When Congress declared war on Germany in April 1917, Annie wired Secretary of War Newton Baker, "I can guarantee a regiment of women for home protection every one of whom can and will shoot if necessary." Although Annie probably could have delivered on her promise, nothing came of her offer. It was the second time Annie had been turned down for military service. When it became obvious during the early spring of 1898 that war with Spain was imminent, Annie wrote an old acquaintance from Ohio, William McKinley, now President, volunteering her services.

If Annie didn't command a home guard of women during the Great War, she and Frank did visit U.S. Army camps as volunteers with the National War Work Council of the YMCA. They visited upwards of a dozen camps and gave the famous Annie Oakley shooting exhibitions. The troops were thrilled and so, too, was Annie. She had great days with Buffalo Bill and his show, said Annie, "But those days can't compare with the experiences I so recently have had when I was entertaining the boys who will fight for us 'over there.'"

By the early 1920s, even though Annie was in her 60s, there was talk of her going into the movies. She



Written by [Roger D. McGrath](#) on September 16, 2019

Published in the September 16, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 18

---

had a stage presence, was a natural thespian, and was still popular. That idea came to a crashing end in 1922 in Florida when a chauffeur-driven car she was riding in flipped over trying to pass another car. Annie broke a hip and an ankle. She spent six weeks in a Daytona hospital recovering and spent many more weeks with a brace on her leg and using crutches to walk. She eventually walked fairly well but not without the brace, which would be with her for the rest of her life.

Annie recovered enough to still give exhibitions that wowed spectators and shooting lessons to women, but by the spring of 1926 her health was failing. Will Rogers visited her in Ohio, where she and Frank were living, and wrote a column about her that generated thousands of letters of sympathy. Much of the time, Annie was now bed-ridden. A decade older than Annie, Frank's health wasn't much better. Annie continued to weaken through the summer and into the fall. She died on November 3, 1926. Eighteen days later Frank joined her in eternal rest. The death certificate for Annie listed her occupation as "Expert marksman." It could have also said "American heroine."

*Photo credit: AnnieGetYourGun*



Written by [Roger D. McGrath](#) on September 16, 2019

Published in the September 16, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 18

## Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative, non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



[Subscribe](#)

### What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.