

# ANNIE OAKLEY

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## BASIC BIOGRAPHY

Annie Oakley (1860–1926) was born Phoebe Ann Moses in Ohio. After her father died, Annie was sent to work for a family as their servant but was treated cruelly and ran away. She reunited with her mother and soon became the breadwinner of the family by shooting game and selling it to the grocery store. Annie paid off her mother's mortgage and began entering shooting contests. At age 15, she defeated marksman Frank Butler in a contest. Butler made a living performing in a circus and convinced Oakley to join him. The two married one year later and Annie gained fame on the vaudeville circuit. In 1885, she joined "Buffalo Bill" Cody's Wild West Show and performed with them for the next 17 years. In her act, she shot playing cards from thirty paces, corks off bottles, dimes thrown into the air, and she even shot cigarettes out of her husband's mouth. On a European tour, she performed for Queen Victoria and Crown Prince Wilhelm. A train accident in 1901 left Oakley partially paralyzed but she returned to the show circuit after she recovered. Annie retired in 1913 and died on November 3, 1926. Her husband of 50 years died 18 days later.

## KEY EVENTS

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show (1883–1913), American Exhibition (1887), Spanish-American War (1898)

## KEY PEOPLE

Frank Butler, William Frederick "Buffalo Bill" Cody, Sitting Bull

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

William "Buffalo Bill" Cody opened his show in 1883 in Nebraska. Cody and his partner traveled around the country presenting a circus-like show helping to define the popular image of the West. Annie Oakley became a famous act on the tour. The show also featured Native Americans such as Sitting Bull. To celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, a world's fair was held in London in 1887. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show was one of the main attractions at the American Exhibition.

## FUN FACT

In 1903, William Randolph Hearst's newspaper in Chicago ran a story claiming Annie Oakley had been arrested for stealing in order to pay for her drug addiction. It turns out it was a woman impersonating Oakley but the story had already been published by over 50 newspapers across the country. Oakley spent six years bringing libel suits against the papers who ran the story, winning or settling 54, including one against Hearst. Learn more at <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn92053934/1904-02-13/ed-1/seq-6/>.



c. 1899, Library of Congress (2009631997), <https://www.loc.gov/item/2009631997/>

## DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

- Make one copy of the Court Circular for each pair of students.
- Divide students into pairs.
- Distribute one copy of the Court Circular to each pair of students.
- Ask students to read the document and answer the questions.

## LEARNING ACTIVITY

- Ask each pair of students to share their responses with the class.
- Brainstorm as a class, "If there were an American Exhibition today, what would they include to best demonstrate the United States?"
- Create an advertisement poster for a modern day American Exhibition.

*Teacher Tip: Student pairs may each create a poster for a specific part/act of the Exhibition from the ideas or you could have students create a poster depicting multiple elements they would include in an Exhibition.*



*Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World, c. 1899, Library of Congress (LC-USZ62-1161)*  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97503242/>

## LOCAL CONNECTION

You can visit the Annie Oakley Center at the Garst Museum located in Greenville, Ohio. A part of the Darke County Historical Society, the museum contains an exhibit on Oakley as well as the Crossroads of Destiny, which explores The Treaty of Greenville, Tecumseh, Lewis & Clark, and more. For more information visit <https://www.garstmuseum.org/>.

## LEARN MORE

### PRIMARY SOURCES

Annie Oakley: Topic Guide for Chronicling America  
 Ohio History Connection  
<http://www.ohiohistoryhost.org/ohiomemory/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/AnnieOakley.pdf>

Topics in Chronicling America –  
 William F. Cody "Buffalo Bill" (1846–1917)  
 Library of Congress  
<https://www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/bill.html>

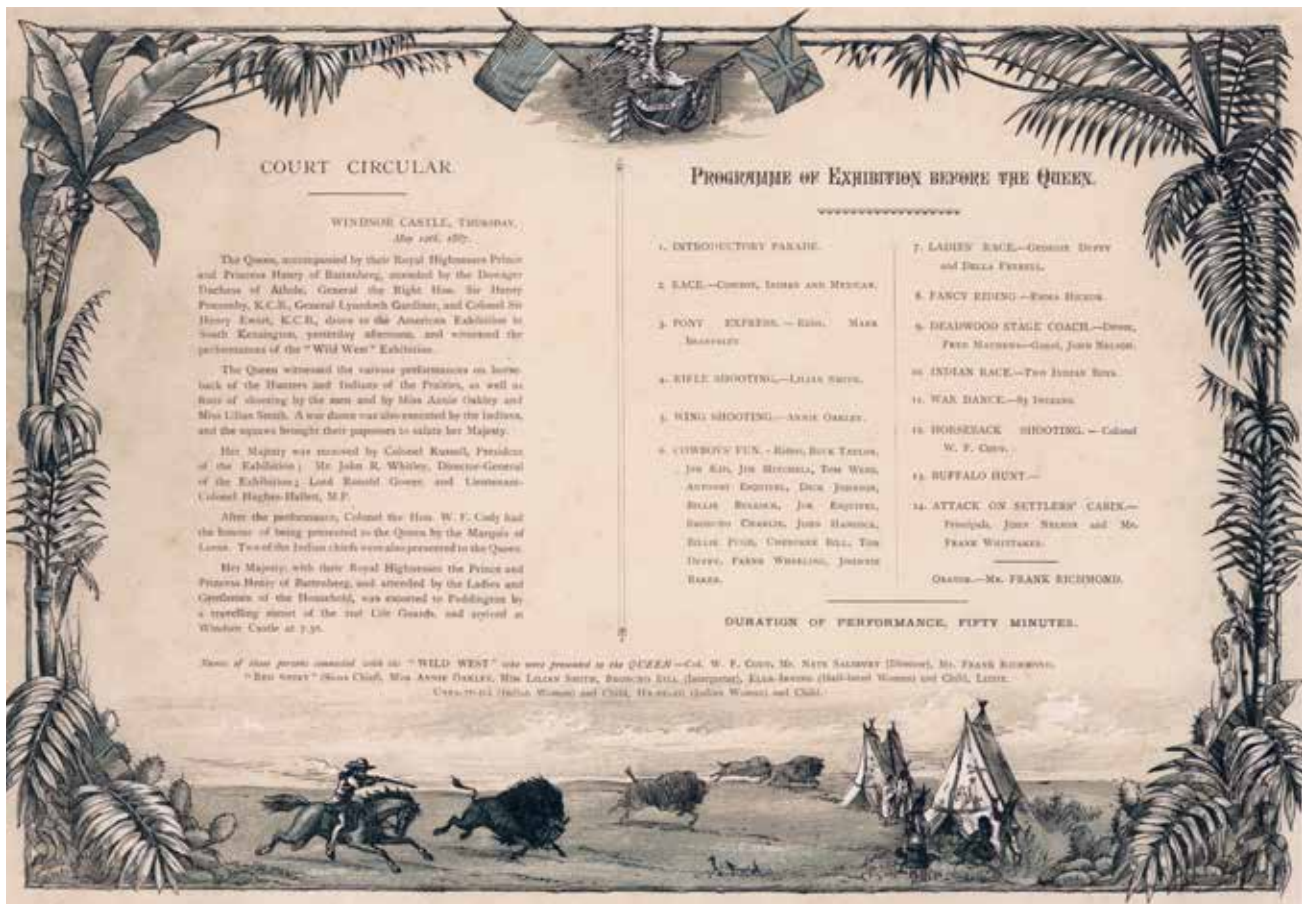
William F. Cody Scrapbooks  
 Buffalo Bill Center of the West  
<http://library.centerofthewest.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p17097coll39>

### SECONDARY SOURCES

The Annie Oakley Center Foundation, Inc.  
<https://www.annieoakleycenterfoundation.com/index.html>

Biography: Annie Oakley  
 PBS American Experience  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/oakley-annie/>

Caroline Kim-Brown, " 'Little Sure Shot':  
 The Saga of Annie Oakley," May / June 2006  
*Humanities: The Magazine of the National Endowment  
 for the Humanities*  
<https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2006/mayjune/feature/%E2%80%9Clittle-sure-shot%E2%80%9D-the-saga-annie-oakley>



Courtesy of the McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, WY; MS6.3829.035.

- What do the images on the Court Circular depict? What do they tell you about the show?

- Who attended the show with the queen? Why do you think this show was popular at the American Exhibition in 1887?
- Look at the Program of Exhibition that lists the acts of the show. What do you think they would have conveyed about America to Queen Victoria and the other guests?
- If there was going to be an American Exhibition today, what acts do you think would represent or exemplify our country?