

Women of The Wild West

Annie Oakley and Calamity Jane: these women of the Wild West shot down the view that life as a female pioneer was about cooking, sewing, cleaning and caring for children.

Born during a time when women stood in the shadows of their rugged men, these trailblazers proved that they were as good - if not better - than their male counterparts.

Calamity Jane

Martha "Calamity Jane" Canary epitomized this tough rebellious character. Travelling to the West at the age of 13 with her parents, she eschewed the traditional female role and spent most of her time with the men and joining hunting parties. She was commended by the others as a remarkably good shot and a fearless rider. Later she worked as a scout, donning the male uniform and fighting the Native Americans.

Earning the reputation of being able to handle a horse better than most men and shoot like a cowboy, she toured with Buffalo Bill Cody and Sitting Bull in the Wild West Show.



Annie Oakley

Both lucky and extremely talented, Annie Oakley used her astonishing marksmanship to escape a poor childhood in Ohio and become the first female superstar in what had been a male-dominated profession.



From the very beginning of her life, Annie Oakley challenged stereotypes about what it means to be a woman.

Born Phoebe Ann Mosey, Oakley was just 15 years old when she won a shooting match against traveling-show marksman Frank E. Butler. She would go on to become one of America's most famous sharpshooters, while championing equal rights.

By the time of her death, in 1926, Americans were celebrating the liberated, urban-focused, modern times of the Jazz Age. Women had won the right to vote, wore less restrictive clothes, and followed a changing ideal that was loosening some of the restrictions on women's roles and behavior that had reigned through the 19th century.

"She wouldn't have said she was a feminist, but there's a difference between being avowed and actually doing it," states Glenda Riley, professor of history at Ball State University in Muncie. Oakley "campaign[ed] for equal pay for women," Riley said. "She also taught women how to shoot and had a partnership marriage with her husband, Frank Butler, who gave up his career in show business to become her manager."