

**LILLIAN
FRANCES
SMITH**
1871-1930



**EXPERT
SHARPSHOOTER
PRINCESS
WENONA**

Lillian Smith was equal to Annie Oakley in her sharpshooting ability as part of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in the late 1800s but their rivalry became so personal that it nearly destroyed both women's careers. Later, Lillian would achieve fame as Sioux Princess Wenona, but her story would be filled with heartache along the way.

Lillian Frances Smith was born in August 1871 in Coleville, California. At age nine, she asked her father Levi for a 'little rifle' to play with. Soon Levi began offering \$5,000 to anyone who could beat her, including Doc Carver, one of the era's best-known marksmen, who ironically didn't show up in St. Louis for the competition.

Buffalo Bill discovered the 15-year-old while touring in California, and invited her to join his Wild West show in 1886, much to the chagrin of Annie Oakley, Cody's star attraction. From the start, Oakley and Smith were opposites. Oakley favored the shotgun, while Smith the rifle. Known for her conservative Victorian dress and professionalism, Oakley loathed cursing, smoking and drinking. Known for her brass personality, Smith wore flashy costumes and was a shameless flirt. She liked to brag "Annie Oakley was done for" now she had arrived.

Oakley was jealous of the decade-younger Smith so she chopped six years off her real age. Smith's parents objected but soon the firebrand began a relationship with James "Jim Kid" Willoughby, nearly fourteen years her senior. He has won the 1884 Montana riding and roping championship. In September, they were secretly married.

The feud continued when the show went to London in 1887. There were conflicting accounts of whom got the lion's share of praise during a performance for Queen Victoria. Oakley had the last laugh at a shooting competition at Wimbledon, after Smith embarrassed herself with a poor showing, Oakley shot so well that Prince Edward personally congratulated her. But the damage was done. Oakley quit and joined Pawnee Bill's show.

Smith didn't draw crowds for Cody like Oakley could so Oakley returned in 1889 on the condition that Smith not be there. Cody agreed. The Willoughby marriage soon failed when he went on a second Buffalo Bill tour with Oakley – and Smith wasn't welcome. Under Levi's guidance, Smith began performing up and down the West Coast. In 1899, after a brief marriage to saloonkeeper Theodore Powell, Smith married Frank Hafley, a lawman who recently made headlines after capturing Southern Pacific train robbers in Fresno.

With her career declining, Smith recreated herself as a Sioux princess named Wenona. Her face darkened by makeup and her now-black hair in braids, she wore a fringed suede tunic with intricate beadwork and a feathered headdress. In Pawnee Bill's show, she soon added "Princess" to her name. She claimed to be the 18-year-old daughter of Sioux Chief Crazy Horse, born in a tepee on the south bank of the Big Cheyenne, near Fort Bennett, Dakota. In reality she was actually 29, and never used the name Lillian Smith again.

In 1907 Wenona joined the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch in Ponca City. The Hafleys' contract allowed them to pursue side ventures, so in 1908 Frank became the amusement manager at Dreamland Park, on New York's Coney Island, where he showcased Mamie Francis, who dove from a 50-foot-high platform into a tank of water on the back of her horse. After Frank and Mamie fell in love, Wenona only performed if she needed the money.

Wenona married cowboy Wayne Beasley and fellow 101 Ranch performer Eagle Shirt before settling on the 101 Ranch in 1920 with German master painter Emil Lenders, who had come to the ranch to paint buffalo. In 1922, Joe Miller generously gave them acreage which they called Thunderbird Ranch, with chickens and dogs, an orchard of 500 peach trees and a vineyard. Wenona finally retired from show business in 1925.

In 1926, Lenders left her and returned to his studio in Ponca City. Wenona's lifelong beloved horse Rabbit died in 1928, which sent the destitute Wenona into a decline. She was found dead in her cabin in February 1930 at age 59. By her wishes, she was buried in her Sioux costume. The death of the onetime champion rifle shot of the world garnered just a few lines in the newspapers. Her grave was unmarked until a monumental headstone – complete with photographs and shooting records – was purchased in 1999 by the 101 Old Timers Association.