



A Pair of Shootists: The Wild West Story of S.F. Cody and Maud Lee

Jerry Kuntz

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In 1888, Samuel F. Cody, a twenty-one-year-old horse wrangler, met Maud Lee, a sixteen-year-old aspiring circus performer, while touring with the Wild West show cast of Adam Forepaugh's Circus. A quick rapport developed between the girl from Norristown, Pennsylvania, and the cowboy who dazzled audiences with his good looks and fancy pistol shooting.

A Pair of Shootists is the exuberant and sometimes heartbreaking story of the elusive S. F. Cody and his first wife, Maud Lee. Recounting their many dramatic exploits, this biography also overturns the frequently romanticized view of Wild West shows.

Living the erratic lives of touring performers, S. F. Cody — who changed his name to capitalize on his resemblance to William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody — and Maud Lee first appeared together in vaudeville halls and dime museums. Setbacks in the United States made Cody and Lee eager to try their luck abroad, so they traveled to Great Britain, where they played music halls and acted in burlesques on roller-skates and in extravagant arena exhibitions. When the two performers eventually parted ways, author Jerry Kuntz masterfully splits their stories into two. From there, he follows their individual ups and downs, including Cody's soaring career in pioneer aeronautics and Lee's decline into mental illness and addiction. In an ironic twist, Maud's professional life ended amidst a vast misunderstanding that brought her into conflict with the woman she had been emulating her entire career: Annie Oakley.

While other biographies focus mainly on Cody's contribution to aviation, Kuntz uses sources previously unavailable to scholars to paint a more complete picture of Cody's early years and to recover the forgotten — and ultimately tragic — story of Maud Lee.

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