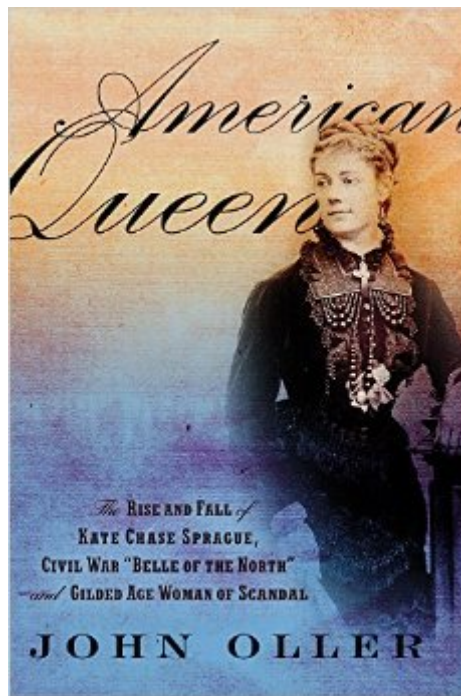


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American Queen: The Rise And Fall Of Kate Chase Sprague--Civil War "Belle Of The North" And Gilded Age Woman Of Scandal



Synopsis

Had People magazine been around during the Civil War and after, Kate Chase would have made its “Most Beautiful“ and “Most Intriguing“ lists every year. The charismatic daughter of Salmon P. Chase, Lincoln's treasury secretary, Kate Chase enjoyed unprecedented political power for a woman. As her widowed father's hostess, she set up a rival “court“ against Mary Lincoln in hopes of making her father president and herself his First Lady. To facilitate that goal, she married one of the richest men in the country, the handsome “boy governor“ of Rhode Island, in the social event of the Civil War. She moved easily between the worlds of high fashion, adorning herself in the most regal Parisian gowns, and politics, managing her father's presidential campaigns. "No Queen has ever reigned under the Stars and Stripes," one newspaper would write, "but this remarkable woman came closer to being a Queen than any American woman has." But when William Sprague turned out to be less of a prince as a husband, Kate found comfort in the arms of a powerful married senator. The ensuing sex scandal ended her virtual royalty; after the marriage crumbled and the money disappeared, she was left only with her children and her ever-proud bearing. She became a social outcast and died in poverty, yet in her final years she would find both greater authenticity and the inner peace that had always eluded her. Kate Chase's dramatic story is one of ambition and tragedy, set against the seductive allure of the Civil War and Gilded Age, involving some of the most famous personalities in American history. In this beautifully written and meticulously researched biography, drawing on much unpublished material, John Oller captures the extraordinary life of a woman who was a century ahead of her time.

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Customer Reviews

John Oller has handled the character, as well as the memory of Kate Chase Sprague with kindness, sensitivity and extreme attention to detail. No doubt she was a queen, albeit a self styled one, as we had an entrenched aristocracy by the mid nineteenth century. And if not an actual queen, a woman of her time, indeed ahead of her time, in that she combined both male and female precepts, moving easily between both worlds. I recently read a biography of Catherine the Great, and Kate's personality and mental machinations do not appear to be that far from Catherine's...just a matter of degree. Beautiful, educated and charming, however, she appears to me as a social parasite, who knew little or nothing of the plights of the common people, and thus at the end of her life, this was her fated task...to go among them and finally become one of them. This does not mean I am not sympathetic to her plight, but given the rcumstances and the social times in which she moved, power and money are the greatest aphrodisiacs. perhaps in her early years she was reflective and compassionate, her marriage to Sprague killed off whatever altruism was left. So that by the time she met Conkling, she was full bore into socially deviant behaviors. Mr. Oller's hypothesis states that they were " made for each other". I agree with this premise, and also that they were both narcissistic and self aggrandizing beyond what was socially acceptable, even in Washington DC. To Conkling, who had always been on the edge of social respectabilty, Kate was a low hanging fruit..and she was ready to be picked. A question remains which is yet to be fully explored by any author, but Oller has come in very close: what exactly was the true nature of her relationship with Conkling and did they love each other...

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