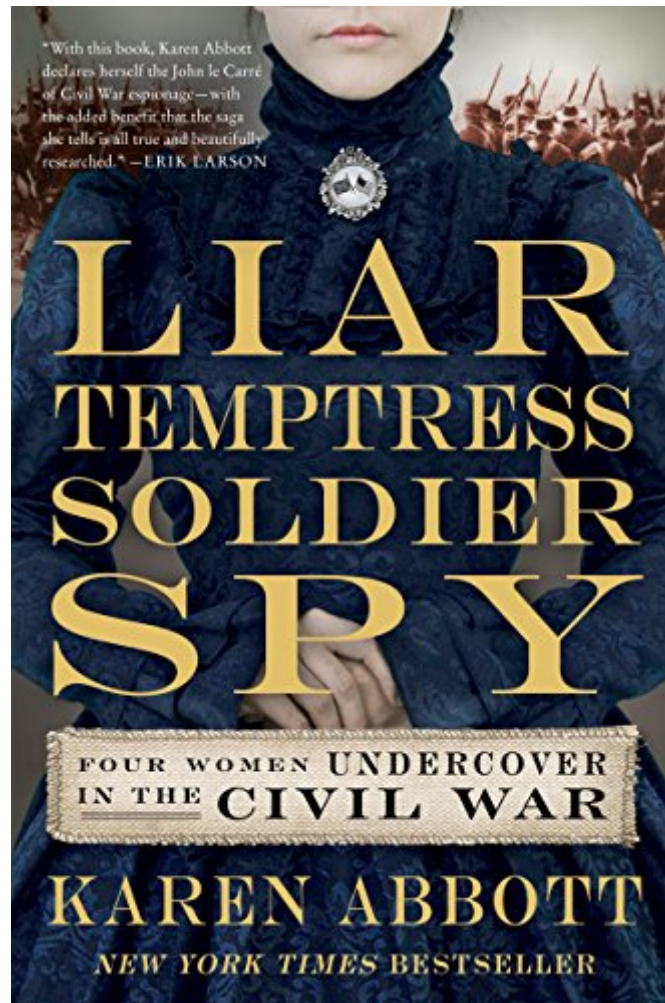


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# Liar, Temptress, Soldier, Spy: Four Women Undercover In The Civil War



## Synopsis

Karen Abbott, the New York Times bestselling author of *Sin in the Second City* and a pioneer of sizzle history (USA Today), tells the spellbinding true story of four women who risked everything to become spies during the Civil War. Karen Abbott illuminates one of the most fascinating yet little known aspects of the Civil War: the stories of four courageous women—a socialite, a farmgirl, an abolitionist, and a widow—who were spies. After shooting a Union soldier in her front hall with a pocket pistol, Belle Boyd became a courier and spy for the Confederate army, using her charms to seduce men on both sides. Emma Edmonds cut off her hair and assumed the identity of a man to enlist as a Union private, witnessing the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. The beautiful widow, Rose O'Neale Greenhow, engaged in affairs with powerful Northern politicians to gather intelligence for the Confederacy, and used her young daughter to send information to Southern generals. Elizabeth Van Lew, a wealthy Richmond abolitionist, hid behind her proper Southern manners as she orchestrated a far-reaching espionage ring, right under the noses of suspicious rebel detectives. Using a wealth of primary source material and interviews with the spies' descendants, Abbott seamlessly weaves the adventures of these four heroines throughout the tumultuous years of the war. With a cast of real-life characters including Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, General Stonewall Jackson, detective Allan Pinkerton, Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, and Emperor Napoleon III, *Liar, Temptress, Soldier, Spy* draws you into the war as these daring women lived it. *Liar, Temptress, Soldier, Spy* contains 39 black & white photos and 3 maps.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a thorough and well researched book about four passionate women, each committed to winning the war. The book spans the years of the Civil War from 1861-65, with an epilogue explaining the fates of the women after the war. The book takes place predominately in Virginia. I grew up there, so I especially enjoyed reading about places I had visited many times as part of Virginia History, taught in schools. Guess what was not taught in school in the 1970's? The role of women in our state's early history! Four very different women are profiled. Belle Boyd is 17 years old when the war starts. She is a force of nature and has no fear. She also has quite an ego and has big aspirations to be the most valued and famous spy. Rose O'Neal Greenhow was head of a spy ring and a notorious flirt who had "relations" with many men. She was about 36 years old when the war started. Rose and Belle were fighting for the Confederacy. Fighting for the Union were Emma Edmondson and Elizabeth Van Lew. Elizabeth was a 43 year old spinster who passed important messages through the Richmond Underground and gained permission from a Confederate general to visit Union prisoners. Emma is my favorite. She joined the Union army as Frank Thompson. She worked in the hospital, fought, and also passed messages. She left the war on her own terms and became Emma again. I was blown away by the bravery and conviction of these women. I learned so much about spy tactics and the dangers involved. Sadly, all of these women came to an unhappy end. One died in service to her country, a couple lost children or married unhappily. All of them ended up nearly destitute. The book is well written, detailed, and contains some nice photos. I also read one of Ms. Abbott's other books, *Sin in the Second City*. I enjoyed this one more. My only negative comments are that I had some difficulty keeping track of the characters and I thought the book bogged down and moved slowly at times. I would still recommend it.

All in all this was an excellent collection of history/biography covering a rarely told element of the Civil War - or any conflict for that matter. The book shares the stories of four women from both sides of the war, and their efforts to aid their cause. As I read this book, my thought was, "well, yeah, of course women who were away from the front lines did things that were courageous and compassionate." Thing is, there's not much depth in terms of reading material on that aspect of

things. I was very impressed with two of the women, Emma Edmonds and Elizabeth Van Lew. Don't want to put a spoiler in here, so I'll just say that these two had some steel in them. The others did as well, for other reasons, but Edmonds and Van Lew struck me more than the others. This should be required reading for all young people, regardless of gender, as it tells an important aspect of the Civil War that just isn't covered in many places. Excellent read!

I enjoyed this book very much. This book was a book club selection and that is why I read it. I had never heard of Karen Abbott. I am a bit of a history buff and worked in Gettysburg for approximately fifteen years. I still found this book very informative and I learned a great deal. I have seen other reviews talking about a lack of foot notes. I purchased the Kindle edition. Maybe other editions are not footnoted or maybe reviewers are seeking different types of footnotes. I feel my Kindle edition is heavily footnoted. I also did some of my own research and everything I looked at myself corresponded with Miss Abbott's writing. I realize I may be misunderstanding some of the other reviewers' concerns. This book filled in a lot of gaps of my personal knowledge about the Civil War, especially the early parts. Pretty much everything I read about General McClellan had been negative and that he really dilly dallied in the early part of the Civil War. Miss Abbott does not appear to me to be an apologist for General McClellan. However, the more I studied this work, I felt that much of General McClellan's apparent thinking became clearer to me and the more sense it made to me. I can at least say now that there are two sides to the subject of General McClellan. I do take this book to be non fiction. However, there is a description of a drowning that is apparently unwitnessed, and resulted in an unwitnessed death. The drowning is described in painful detail. Absent corroboration, I feel that description is dramatized. I am not sure how that fits into the concept of non fiction history writing. On the other hand, I also had never really understood the so called "peninsula campaign". It is now much more clear to me. I feel indebted to Miss Abbott for this illumination. I am once again grateful to my book club for selecting a book I probably would never have read if left to my own devices. I intend to study Miss Abbott further and seek another of her works to read. Thank You....

Interesting but not one I would read again. It was a bit hard to follow as the book chapters kept going between the women through time. The book did not leave a big impression on me. The time periods of the women's lives were basically the same so there was some overlap in their experiences. The author did a good job of showing how different war loyalties separated families and friends and how local society treated those who did not follow the crowd in supporting "their"

side.

I can honestly say that this was one of the best books I've read. I appreciated Ms. Abbott's meticulous woman-focused research, particularly her use of primary sources, and how masterfully she weaved it all together into an intense blend of narratives. The four women were incredibly complex and rich characters. For example, the author could have easily portrayed Rose as a cartoonish Scarlett O'Hara-like figure, but Rose's intelligence and resolve really shone through [without necessarily compelling you to like or agree with her]. I might be echoing some of the reviewers but I can't really say it much better. As one of four daughters and as a proud feminist, thank you Ms. Abbott so much for writing this book and for contributing to women's history education.

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