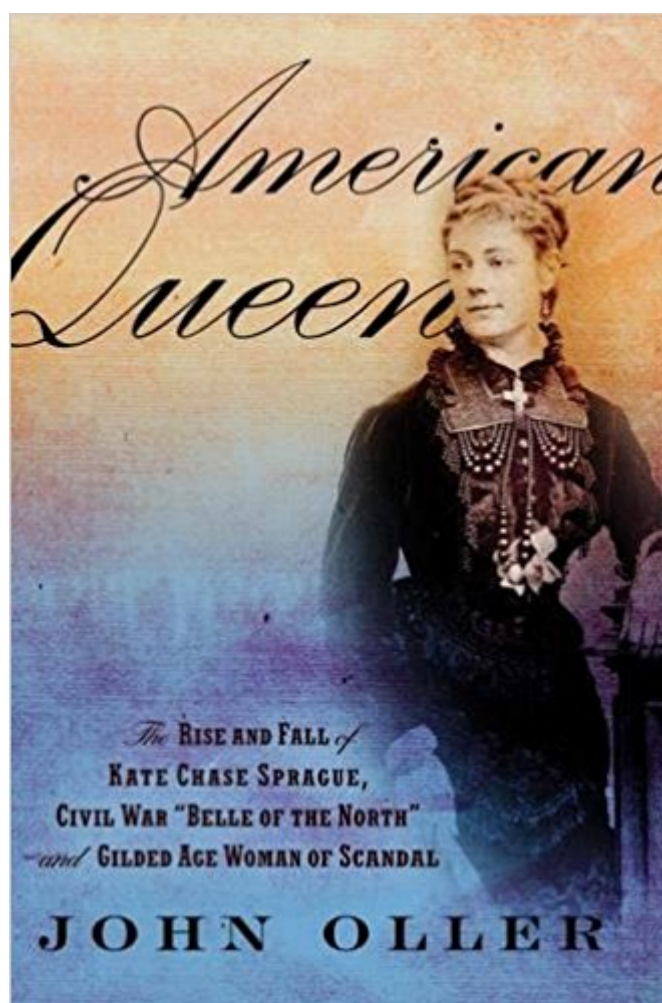


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# American Queen: The Rise And Fall Of Kate Chase Sprague--Civil War "Belle Of The North" And Gilded Age Woman Of Scandal



## Synopsis

Had People magazine been around during the Civil War and after, Kate Chase would have made its &#147;Most Beautiful&#147; and &#147;Most Intriguing&#147; lists every year. The charismatic daughter of Salmon P. Chase, Lincoln&#39;s treasury secretary, Kate Chase enjoyed unprecedented political power for a woman. As her widowed father&#39;s hostess, she set up a rival &#147;court&#147; 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 &#147;boy governor&#147; 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&#39;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&#39;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 In this beautifully written and meticulously researched biography, drawing on much unpublished material, John Oller captures the extraordinary life of a woman who was a century ahead of her time.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Minneapolis Star Tribune, 12/28/14; [Kate Chase Sprague] is a fit subject for a biography because of her commanding presence in an era when women were not expected to have any say in public affairs; Oller commands his sources in a riveting narrative that is all the more persuasive because he does not make large claims for his subject. It is enough, he realizes, for a biography to portray and assess a remarkable human being; one who struggled with and overcame many of the confining conventions of her age; in her own terms. [Adventures with Words](#), 10/28/14; A surprising biography; American Queen should be required reading for anyone taking a class in American history, anyone interested in this period of American history, and any woman who wants to know what ignoring societal limitations looks like. [Fangirl Nation](#), 10/27/14; Kate Chase is probably the most tragic story you've never heard from American History; Oller's book is sympathetic and kind to a woman that men wanted and women wanted to be for most of her days in Washington DC; If you've never heard of Kate Chase or her contributions to American politics, now is the time to hear her story. [Portland Book Review](#), 1/16/15; Oller, who has worked closely with Sprague's granddaughter, attempts to dispel the typical opinions that her life was tragic by instead focusing on her strength of spirit and accomplishments for a woman of that era. [Civil War Book Review](#), Winter 2015; Kate Chase was an interesting woman in an age when women were not supposed to be interesting; Oller has created an immensely readable book. [San Francisco Book Review](#), 2/25; A ripped-from-the-headlines romp through the 1800s; A fascinating look at Kate Chase Sprague; A careful and vivid biography worthy of a read. [Civil War Monitor](#), 4/21/15; Full of engaging detail and captivating characters; Yet this vivid portrait of a vivacious and complex woman who defied the dictates of her day is no mere biography. Oller weaves in fascinating details of rivalries and alliances launched in Civil War Washington which influenced political agendas during Reconstruction and what followed, the so-called Gilded Age; He also powerfully invokes the way in which the press reflected and stimulated political intrigue and downfall. [2015 Ohioana Book Award](#), finalist Advance praise for *American Queen*; Beautiful, brilliant, and wildly ambitious, Kate Chase was a master of political intrigue and behind-the-scenes power in an era when women were told to be seen and not heard. A terrific work of historical research and

reconstruction, American Queen follows her fascinating but forgotten life to tell the story of the Civil War and its scandalous aftermath; its assassinations, impeachments, and sexual hijinks; from an entirely fresh perspective. — Debby Applegate, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher*; No woman of her time walked as close to the power of the land as Kate Chase Sprague. None of the men in her life exceeded her in ambition and drive, or in intriguing for success. John Oller's *American Queen* eloquently traces her rise and fall, bringing out new material that gives context to an already rich life. Proud at her heights, unbroken by tragedy, this almost *American Queen*'s story is as fascinating as it is improbable. In many respects this thoroughly nineteenth century woman sounds very modern, indeed. — William C. Davis, prize-winning author; A fascinating portrait of a strong, accomplished, and resilient woman, who was ahead of her time; and happens to be my great-great grandmother! — Kris Carr, New York Times bestselling author and motivational speaker; The story of Kate Chase literally jumps off the page in John Oller's brilliant evocation of her tumultuous life. She is the Northern *Scarlett O'Hara*, whose political and social ambitions; and machinations worthy of Machiavelli; ultimately consume her. Oller's skilled and even-handed treatment of his subject allows the reader to empathize with this fascinating and complex woman despite her flaws. — Heath Hardage Lee, author of *Winnie Davis: Daughter of the Lost Cause*; John Oller's book adds many new dimensions to one of the most famous women in the United States in the nineteenth century. — Richard Vangermeersch, Professor Emeritus, University of Rhode Island; Kirkus, 10/15/14; A well-researched, thoughtful biography of a woman who became entirely her own person, a rare feat for women of her day. — Library Journal starred review, 10/15/14; Well written, fast paced, and with a compelling attention to detail, this work should be a fascinating read for Civil War buffs, fans of Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals* (in which Salmon Chase is a main character), and Jennifer Chiaverini's *Mrs. Lincoln's Rival*. — Publishers Weekly, 10/1/14; Oller details Sprague's fascinating life, introducing readers to an inspiring woman in spite of her faults: haughtiness; personal, rather than ideological, politics; financial profligacy; Oller offers an accessible, attention-grabbing work. — Chicago Tribune, 11/6/14; Nuanced and finely balanced. — WhatWouldTheFoundersThink.com, 11/1/14; John Oller has written an absorbing book; [he] brings into focus a master of political intrigue and a beautiful, ambitious, resourceful woman who was determined to live life on her own terms. Oller's book evokes an

era and the American Queen who, for a time, ruled it. — Providence Journal, 12/14/14; [An] immensely readable and grippingly sumptuous biography; Fascinating. — Hudson Valley News, 11/26/14; [A] lively book; it's a joy to say that a biography, even of someone you hadn't heard of before, can be good fun all the way through. —

John Oller, a lawyer and former journalist, is the author of *Jean Arthur: The Actress Nobody Knew*, which film critic Leonard Maltin called "an exceptional piece of work," and the *Los Angeles Daily News* praised, saying it "neither blinks nor blurs in its examination of a very colorful and eventful life." He lives in New York City.

*AMERICAN QUEEN* is an excellent biography of Kate Chase Sprague, who was the belle of U.S. society during the 1860's and 1870's. The book is well written, intelligent, intuitive, and it provides a window into the life of a very remarkable woman. Remarkable does not mean likable, however. Kate Chase Sprague was beautiful, intelligent, cultured, and charismatic, and I really wanted to like her. But she was also cold, conniving, and calculating, traits she inherited from her famous but disagreeable father, Salmon P. Chase. Indeed, it is impossible to warm up to any of the principle characters in this tale. Kate's husband, William Sprague, was a mentally unstable alcoholic who cheated on Kate. Later, Kate took her own lover, one Roscoe Conkling, the leader of the Republican Party in New York. Conkling was an egotist of the first order. One does not find oneself rooting for any of the main characters. Despite the personal failings of Kate and her supporting cast, this is a fine biography and well worth the time invested.

Anyone with an interest in the American Civil War, and especially the Lincoln Administration, will sooner or later come across Kate Chase. My own introduction to her came as a child when I read a book about White House history. Matthew Brady's photograph of Kate was illustrated with a caption that read along the lines of "Ambitious and arrogant Kate Chase, who longed to live in the White House". Well, that got me intrigued. Superficial as that book caption was, it contains more than a shred of truth about Kate and her life. Although there are a number of biographies of Kate available on the used book market, she has long been in need of a more modern biography. Kate Lampier's excellent "*Kate Chase and William Sprague: Politics and Gender in a Civil War Marriage*" partially filled this need, but John Oller offers more details and further insight into Kate's life, one of the most fascinating American women of the 19th Century. Oller had access to some of Kate's descendants

and far from repeating the same old stories, he goes to considerable lengths to try to track down sources and verify oft-told tales, especially those related to Kate's social rivalry with Mary Lincoln. In addition, a number of rarely seen photographs are included. Many biographers dismiss or ignore previous biographies on their subject, but Oller goes out of his way to commend Kate's previous biographers, particularly Mary Merwin Phelps, whose 1935 biography rescued Kate from oblivion as an historical figure. Kate's story is not a particularly happy one, although it contains moments of joy and triumph along with more than a fair share of tragedy. Oller does a fine job of telling her life's story and I thoroughly enjoyed this book.

"American Queen" is an interesting and detailed look at the life of a very influential woman during an era when a woman's involvement in politics was frowned upon. Kate Chase, love her or hate her, was highly intelligent and determined, and proved, at a young age, to be formidable competition for Mary Lincoln. I have always been curious about Kate and am glad to have found this book which shed ample light on her life. I found it quite an enjoyable read.

I simply could not put it down. Excellent book!

I live about half a mile from Kate Chase's Edgewood mansion, and have always been interested in her. This book is well-written, well-researched, and well-annotated. An excellent history.

I have always been fascinated with Kate Chase and was thrilled to find this well written biography of her life. The author has gone the distance in researching his fascinating subject and presents a portrait of a woman who experienced both tremendous highs and devastating lows while skillfully using her charm and brilliance to further the careers and fortunes of the men she loved.

Unfortunately, these men were unable or unwilling to acknowledge her vast talents and give her the rich credit she deserved for working quietly behind the scenes for their benefit. Her father was especially clueless and was described by a colleague as a man of light but no heat. She and her husband were hopelessly mismatched and her dream of him becoming a powerful and respected political leader was shattered within just a few years of their marriage. This book is a great read for all those who are interested in the northern political scene during the civil war and would like to learn more about the movers and shakers of that day that peopled the world of Kate Chase and who were more than willing to make her the "queen" of their time and place in history. She was unique and her story held me spellbound.

I was excited to read because I love American History; however, I was disappointed because I felt more like I was reading a history text book. I thought it would be focused more on Kate and it brought in every family member and elected official of the time. Some may love it but I just thought it was fair.

I was introduced to Kate Chase and William Sprague in Gore Vidal's novel, Lincoln. I wanted to read American Queen to learn more about them and their place in history. I found American Queen a fascinating read. From the time Kate and Sprague met they seemed destined to marry, yet their marriage seemed destined to fail.

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