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Raised in Chicago, she was first bit by the Civil War at age 13, when she devoured the near 1,000-page novel "Gone with the Wind" in just three days.

"I know the book is not viewed very favorably for many important reasons, but I could not put it down," said Monson, who also founded The Writer's Guild, a community literacy group. "That novel launched my interest in exploring the war and that era. It's a tribute to the power of storytelling."

### Women of war

Revisiting a war that is often described in terms of "brother against brother," Monson instead focuses on the often-overlooked contributions of the mothers, daughters, sisters and wives, forming a rich tapestry of diverse viewpoints.

Whether slave, slave owner, immigrant, North-

## IF YOU GO

**Marianne Monson**, author of "Women of the Blue & Gray"

- **Book launch:** 7 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 13, at KALA, 1017 Marine Drive, Astoria (\$8)
- **Book signing:** 11 a.m., Saturday, Sept. 15, at Lucy's Books (free)
- **Lecture, book signing:** 3 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 15, Astoria Library (free)

erner, Southerner, black, white or Native American, Monson's style of short interwoven biographies reveals just how complicated the motivations, sacrifices, wins and losses really were for these women.

"I think it's essential that every person be allowed at the table of discussion, even if we don't agree with their point of view," Monson said.

Within "Women of the Blue & Gray," espionage comes alive. Meet the female battle strategist to President Lincoln, as well as women who were the backbone of

abolitionist movements and the Underground Railroad.

Women, on both sides, took up arms, often in disguise. Even then their motives are singular.

See Frances Louisa Clayton don one of her husband's suits, a false mustache and goatee to enlist in the Union Army under the name Jack Williams and fight alongside her beau on bloody front-lines until he died.

Similarly, a young woman named Melverina Elverina Peppercorn slipped out of the Tennessee hinterlands, unable to watch her 16-year-

old twin brother scurry off to war alone. She followed him into the Confederate Army masquerading as a man, eventually saving his life and nursing him back to health after he was wounded.

### Historical surprises

Then there is the story of Jennie Hodgers, who assumed the male identity of Albert D.J. Cashier five years prior to the start of the war.

As Cashier, Hodgers would survive forty battles with the 95th Illinois infantry. She would live as Cashier for the next 50 years until being discovered when admitted to a state hospital suffering dementia. When staff forced her into a dress, her fellow Union vets decried the humiliation and successfully petitioned to save her military pension. Her brothers-in-arms later made sure her headstone read Albert Cashier and exclaimed her military honors.

Monson was surprised to learn of how many documented cases there were of women fighting in the Civil War.

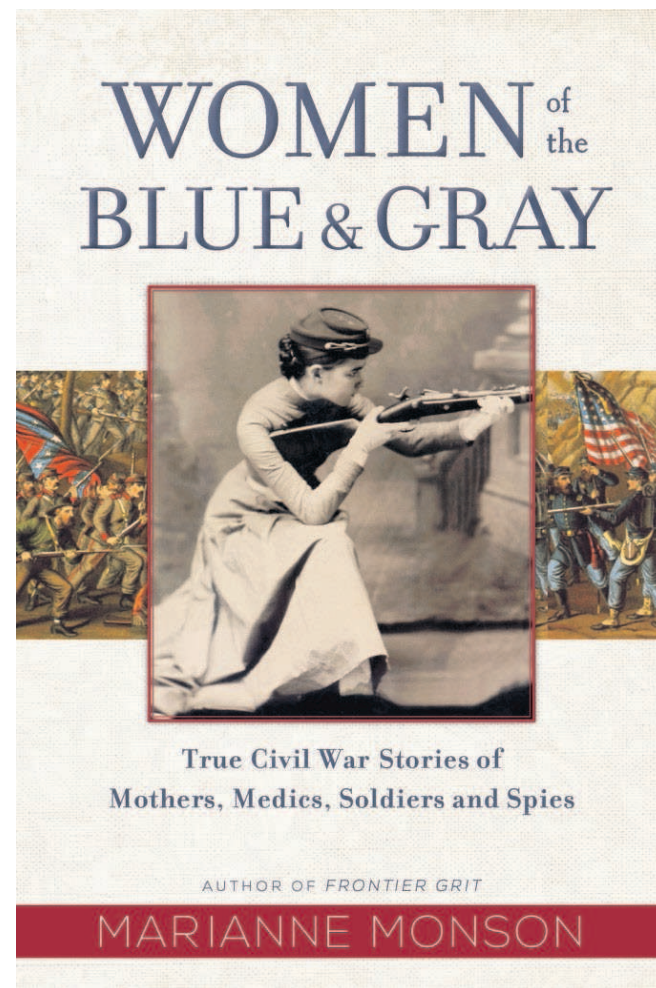
"The number is estimated at being up to 700 women that served in the war in disguise," she said. "Previous to doing the research, I would have thought there were a few anomalous cases, but nothing nearly this extensive."

Of equal surprise is to learn that the Civil War also tore apart the Cherokee Nation.

A longstanding feud within the tribe forced a fissure, driving some to the Union, others to the Confederacy. Eventually, Cherokee Confederate general Stand Watie would earn the distinction of being the last general to surrender the effort.

Monson focuses on his wife, Sallie Watie, who was forced to defend their home from encroaching Yankee soldiers, a home built well after the Cherokee had already been displaced from their land.

"Native women particu-



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The cover of Marianne Monson's 'Women of the Blue & Gray.'

larly were impacted negatively by this conflict," Monson said. "They came out of the war having suffered dramatic losses on every level."

### A divisive time

But the book is not only of interest to hardcore history buffs. By inserting these individual narratives into a larger context, Monson can see parallels between this most infamous period of U.S. history and our fractured national mood of today.

Like Trump, "Lincoln was incredibly divisive," Monson said, adding in an email that the South "basically announced their secession in response to the election results."


The comparison is not completely out of the question. Though it should be taken tongue-in-cheek, a recent Rasmussen poll found

that 31 percent of likely U.S. voters believe a second civil war is possible in the next five years.

In fact, it was after the election of the 45th president that Monson began to envision "Women of the Blue & Gray."

She got to thinking, "What did it look like the first time around? Do we really want to go back there?"

Monson's next book will be a work of historical fiction about Marth Hughes Cannon, the suffragist and frontier doctor, who earned the distinction of being the first female U.S. State Senator, elected in Utah. Controversially, she was also a polygamous Mormon.

The book is slated for a 2020 release, coinciding with the centennial of the Women's Suffrage Movement's victory on voting rights. 

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