

Stewart's latest is about feminism, shyster candidates, threat of war

A confession: When "Girl Waits with Gun" came out to enthusiastic reviews in 2014, I poked around in a chapter or two but couldn't get excited, even though the novel had some interesting elements. It was based on the true story of a woman who, a century ago, became one of the first female deputy sheriffs in the nation. It was a tale about incipient feminism and crime. It delved into a tumultuous period of history.

How the author came to write the book was an interesting tale, too.

Amy Stewart had already produced a half-dozen popular nonfiction titles, including "Wicked Plants" (about Ma Nature's bad-boy plants) and "Flower Confidential" (a probe into the flower industry worldwide).

But when she was doing research for what became her 2013 New York Times best-seller "The Drunken Botanist" (about plants that humans have contrived to turn into alcoholic beverages), Stewart stumbled across newspaper articles about Constance Kopp and her sisters. Before she knew it, this writer of a half-dozen successful nonfiction books about plants and gardening was launching an historical fiction series based on the Kopp sisters' unorthodox lives.

In spite of all this, I just couldn't get into that first book. Besides, when "Girl Waits with Gun" was published, Stewart was based in northern California. That let me off the hook — this column focuses on books and authors of the Pacific Northwest and doesn't venture south of the Siskiyou.

But late this summer, when

**"Miss Kopp
Just Won't Quit"
By Amy Stewart
Houghton
Mifflin Harcourt
320 pp
\$26**

I learned that Stewart had moved to Portland, and that her fourth book in the Kopp Sisters series was coming out, I realized I'd better give it another try.

I'm glad I did! "Miss Kopp Just Won't Quit" is a spunky tale that resonates remarkably with events today.

In this outing, Constance Kopp is now a deputy under the enlightened direction of Sheriff Heath in Bergen County, N.J. In addition to collaring criminals, she watches over the women in the county jail, and she's trying out new ideas about rehabilitation.

But her position is still regarded as controversial by some, including a fellow running to replace the Sheriff in the frenzied election year of 1916.

Kopp knows that any mistake she might make will be used against both her and her boss. But when she comes across a case that involves the removal of a woman from her home and commitment in a mental institution at her husband's behest, Kopp smells a rat.

Upon further (unauthorized) investigation, she discovers that this is not an uncommon practice men use against wives they've grown tired of — but in 1916, of course, women can't hashtag their complaints via social

media. Kopp has to seek justice in an entirely different manner — one that will jeopardize her career and her family.

This story is about feminism and shyster candidates and the threat of war. It is a rollicking-good read.

Now I'm thinking I should go back and take another look at the other Kopp Sisters books.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlinc.com.



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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT

ABOVE: Author Amy Stewart. **RIGHT:** The cover of Amy Stewart's novel 'Miss Kopp Just Won't Quit.'



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