

BRUNSWICK CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

MEETING – November 6, 2012

EXPLOITS OF FEMALE SOLDIERS, SPIES AND FEMME FATALES (HEROES OR HARLOTS????)

Speaker: Charen Fink

Charen Fink and her husband (me) have been living for months with these “ladies – er—gentlemen.” Charen will tell you they have been clamoring to get their truths out. Perhaps 100 hours of research was spent getting their stories straight but once they started pediculating (sporting strange differences) there was no stopping and sometimes it became downright scintillating. Did you have any idea that so many served (400-2000) and for so long (almost half the War)?

Oh, how they broke the mold. Victorian ideas were out. They could spit, cuss and shoot with the best. Being mostly agrarian in background, a soldier's rugged life wasn't much of a stretch. They joined for many good reasons. First – women had no legal or voting privilege – men did. Second – they could patriotically respond to the call for service. Third—Lots of adventure and freedom. Escaping detection wasn't hard. A Civil War physical checked mainly for a trigger finger, four front teeth and two feet. They looked like most of the young recruits and covered their femininity easily. An injury, death, captivity and recognition were some causes of discovery.

The world's second oldest profession – spying—fit well. (It was a sneaky business). Women spies were resourceful and knowledgeable. They needed to be brave, willing and intelligent to avoid capture. This was an invaluable tool for both sides (The South was better at it but thru Pinkerton, the North slowly gained).

Ah Femme Fatales. These women hung out on the fringe of respectability. They were dangerous, mysterious and often seductive. Most had a hidden agenda and used feminine wiles (beauty, charm and sexual allure) to gain their purpose. Being in all the wrong places was no problem – if it gained their purpose. If you were there, you know which one shot her jailer with his own gun and who danced the notorious “Spider Dance.” Wasn't the balance in that seductress Lotta Crabtree's bank account amazing?

Charen leaves us with a mountain of information all designed to help us answer for ourselves that question she posed at the beginning – WERE THEY HEROES OR HARLOT'S??? You must decide for yourselves.

Submitted by Dan Fink