Real Women in Historical Fiction

American Women

The 19th Wife
by Ebershoff, David

The story of Ann Eliza Young, the nineteenth and final wife of Brigham Young, who in 1875 leaves her husband and embarks on crusade to end polygamy, is intertwined with a modern-day murder mystery in which a polygamous man has been found dead and one of his wives is accused of the crime. (Ann Eliza Young)

The Black Rose
by Due, Tananarive

A fictional biography chronicles the story of Madame C. J. Walker, who rose from the poverty of her former slave parents to found a marketing empire that made her America's first black female millionaire. (C.J. Walker)

Blonde : a novel
by Oates, Joyce Carol

A fictional recreation of the life of Marilyn Monroe recounts the tale of her rise to stardom, as seen from Marilyn's perspective. (Marilyn Monroe)

Buffalo Girls
by McMurtry, Larry

Living quietly in her friend Dora's Miles City whorehouse, Calamity Jane is plunged back into one final, bittersweet adventure by the arrival of her old friend and rival, Buffalo Bill Cody. (Calamity Jane)

Dolley: A Novel of Dolley Madison in Love and War
by Brown, Rita Mae

A fictional diary captures the life of Dolley Madison, wife of America's fourth president, in 1814, as she copes with war with Great Britain and her husband's unpopularity with the American people. (Dolley Madison)

The Emancipator's Wife: A Novel of Mary Todd Lincoln
by Hambly, Barbara

In 1865, in the wake of her husband's assassination, Mary Todd Lincoln struggles to cope amid the animosity and confusion that surrounds her, in a historical novel that captures the saga of one of the most misunderstood women in American history. (Mary Todd Lincoln)

Etta: A Novel
by Kolpan, Gerald

Imagines the life of Etta Place, once a Philadelphia debutante whose father's death left her orphaned and bankrupt, as she joins Butch Cassidy's notorious gang and begins a romance with the Sundance Kid. (Etta Place)

Flying Blind: A Novel of Amelia Earhart
by Collins, Max Allan

Nathan Heller is hired to protect Amelia Earhart after she begins receiving threatening letters, but is unable to travel with her during her flights, thus after her mysterious disappearance, Nathan sets out to find out what happened to her. (Amelia Earhart)

Henry and Clara
by Mallon, Thomas

A recreation of the tragic story of Henry and Clara Rathbone, the young couple who sat in the President's box on the night of Lincoln's assassination, describes how the event changed their lives forever, leading to guilt, madness, and ultimately, murder. (Clara Rathbone)

I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem
by Conde, Maryse

A fictionalized account of the West Indian slave Tituba, who was accused of witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692, and was arrested and jailed for two years. (Tituba)

Immortal Wife: The Biographical Novel of Jesse Benton Fremont
by Stone, Irving

Chronicles the indestructible marriage of John C. Fremont and his strong willed wife, who helped aid him in his great accomplishments. (Jessie Benton Fremont)

Impressionist: A Novel of Mary Cassatt
by King, Joan

A novel which dramatizes the life of Mary Cassatt, an American painter who became friends with Manet, Renoir, Gauguin, and Degas, and a part of the impressionist movement. (Mary Cassatt)

Jack's Widow
by Pollard, Eve

A tale based on the life of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis finds the widow of an assassinated president remembering her childhood, struggling privately with her late husband's philandering, and embarking on a controversial new marriage. (Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis)

Lucy: A Novel
by Feldman, Ellen

A fictional account of FDR's romance with Eleanor's social secretary, Lucy Mercer, follows their pre-World War I affair, its impact on his marriage, and FDR and Mercer's reacquaintance years later as he prepared for an unprecedented third term. (Lucy Mercer)

An Ordinary Woman: A Dramatized Biography of Nancy Kelsey
by Holland, Cecelia

Nancy Kelsey, her husband, and a small group of Americans make the perilous overland trek to California, where she works at Sutter's Fort and rides in the Rebellion that wrests California from Mexico, in a novel based on the real-life exploits of one courageous American pioneer woman. (Nancy Kelsey)

Those Who Love: A Biographical Novel of Abigail and John Adams
by Stone, Irving

The love story of John and Abigail Adams from courtship to the White House. (Abigail Adams)

Thousand Pieces of Gold
by McCunn, Ruthanne Lum

Chronicles the life of Lalu Nathoy, a young Chinese girl--sold as a slave and brought to America--where, later, as Polly Bemis she struggles and survives as a pioneer in the West.

Truth: A Novel
by Sheehan, Jacqueline

A fictional portrait of Sojourner Truth chronicles her life amidst the hardships of slavery, from her separation from her family and sale to one master after another, to her lifelong crusade for abolition and women's rights. (Sojourner Truth)

Warrior Woman: A Novel
by Thom, Dark Rain

Reluctantly entering the battle when Virginia settlers attack her tribe's homeland, Shawnee Women's Peace Chief Nonhelema works to negotiate an armistice with such individuals as Daniel Boone and George Rogers Clark, only to find herself estranged from her people and betrayed by her white adversaries. (Nonhelema)

Women in World History

Abundance: A Novel of Marie Antoinette
by Naslund, Sena Jeter

A fictional tale inspired by the life of Marie Antoinette presents the story of a teenage empress's daughter who is forced to leave her family home to marry the future king of France and who rebels against the formality and rigid protocol of court life. (Marie Antoinette)

An Army of Angels: A Novel of Joan of Arc
by Marcantel, Pamela

The full story of a peasant girl named Jhanette who, at the age of thirteen, is visited by a saint and told she will be the savior of France paints a fascinating, richly detailed portrait of both Joan of Arc and the medieval Europe in which she lives. (Joan of Arc)

Clara
by Galloway, Janice

A fictional portrayal of the musical partnership of the Schumanns follows Clara's childhood experiences that inspired her career, her marriage to Robert, and her struggles with love and creativity. (Clara Schumann)

The Constant Princess
by Gregory, Philippa

A fictional portrait of Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon, follows her through her youthful marriage to Henry's older brother, Arthur, her widowhood, her marriage to Henry, and the divorce that led to Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn. (Catharine of Aragon)

Divine Sarah : a novel
by Braver, Adam

A fictional account of a week in the life of sixty-one-year-old Sarah Bernhardt finds her moving her latest production to a new location and struggling with age and illness, challenges that are explored by news reporter Vince Baker. (Sarah Bernhardt)

Empress Orchid
by Min, Anchee

A fictional portrait of the last empress of China follows Orchid, a beautiful teenager from an aristocratic family, who is chosen to become a low-ranking concubine of the emperor and rises to a position of power in the Chinese court. (Cixi, Empress Dowager of China)

Fanny: A Fiction
by White, Edmund

A fictional account based on the life of Fanny Wright is presented from the perspective of social critic and biographer Frances Trollope, who remembers young Wright's utopian idealism and move to mid-nineteenth century America. (Fanny Wright)

Frida: A Novel
by Mujica, Barbara Louise

A historical novel centered around the life of Frida Kahlo--the colorful, contentious Mexican painter who married Diego Rivera--introduces readers to Mexico in the first half of the twentieth century and the characters that shaped Kahlo's life. (Frida Kahlo)

The Memoirs of Cleopatra
by George, Margaret

A fictional portrait brings life and authenticity to the tale of the Egyptian queen who, after a lifetime of passion and power, chooses to end her existence rather than suffer humiliation at the hands of her Roman conquerors. (Cleopatra)

The Passion of Artemesia
by Vreeland, Susan

A young woman struggles to find reconciliation between her passion for her painting and her role as mother. (Artemisia Gentileschi)

Red Dancer: The Life and Times of Mata Hari
by Skinner, Richard

Combining fiction with official documents, a revealing portrait of Mata Hari--wife, mother, mistress, artist, and mysterious double agent--who has puzzled historians and artists for years, vibrantly recreates the delightful and strange decade of fin-de-siecle Europe as Mata Hari weaves a tangled web of betrayal, sex, and espionage from Indonesia to Europe. (Mata Hari)

The World Before Her
by Weisgall, Deborah

Two parallel stories, set in Venice a century apart, follow two women and their marriages--Marian Evans, better known as famed English author George Eliot, and sculptor Caroline Spingold, coming unwillingly to the city with her older, wealthy husband. (George Eliot)