



# **Soldier Princess: The Life and Legend of Agnes Salm-Salm in North America, 1861-1867**

*David Coffey*

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Beautiful and brave, outlandish and unconventional, Princess Agnes SalmSalm played a sometimes controversial, often conspicuous, and always colorful role in three of the nineteenth century's major events: the American Civil War, the fall of Maximilian's empire in Mexico, and the FrancoPrussian War.

During the Civil War this mysterious American woman married a German soldier of fortune who served in the Union Army and happened also to be a minor prince. Over the course of the war she combined beauty and assertiveness to advance her husband's career and in the meantime lived a most unlikely adventure.

The impetuous couple rallied to Maximilian's cause in Mexico, where Agnes's extravagant efforts to save the doomed emperor made her a leading figure in the tragedy. The princess went on to earn praise for her work in the field hospitals of France.

But by the time of her death in 1912 this enigmatic woman's life had become the stuff of myth, which she only encouraged. Stories featured her fighting beside her husband in battle while treating the wounded. She claimed to have received a captain's commission for her services and to have been a close friend of President Lincoln, which apparently she was not. One story even placed her in command of a company of troops during Sherman's March to the Sea.

David Coffey weaves the story of Princess SalmSalm's years in the United States and Mexico with the deft art of a detective storyteller, separating fact from fiction in highlighting this truly remarkable woman. As with the modern cases of Princess Grace of Monaco and Princess Diana of Great Britain, the contemporary fascination with this minor princess reveals something of the American desire for a paradoxical mix of aristocratic royalty with republican boldness.

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