

★ **The Pinks: The First Women Detectives, Operatives, and Spies with the Pinkerton National Detective Agency**

Chris Enss

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Chris Enss's *The Pinks* offers an engrossing look at the women's flank of the famed Pinkerton group, which provided services of security, protection, investigation, and, in many cases, infiltration by its initially all-male staff of "private eyes."

Allan Pinkerton had an innovative and invasive approach to dealing with crime and criminals. After immigrating to the United States from Scotland, he eventually established the Pinkerton offices in Chicago. Six years after the agency opened, Kate Warne had the audacious foresight to apply for a job as a Pinkerton detective, despite the fact that Pinkerton himself had never considered hiring women. Warne argued that women could assume undercover roles as ably as men, and that feminine intuition and charm could help them excel as undercover agents.

Though Pinkerton knew the work would be dangerous, he hired Warne and assigned her to numerous cases. Enss depicts Warne as an excellent actress, able to alter her appearance, accent, and mood quickly and convincingly. Pinkerton's investigations were often complex and went on for extended periods of time as the agents gained the confidence of key individuals—or the guilty parties themselves. Warne rose to every challenge, including escorting a disguised Abraham Lincoln to Washington via train in 1861. The then president-elect was in danger of assassination by a Baltimore cadre of secessionists who wanted Lincoln dead before he even had a chance to take office.

The Pinks notes how Warne's success encouraged Pinkerton to employ other women, placing them in roles of general investigation or even espionage during the Civil War. They pursued murderers, carried classified documents, decoded messages, and maintained their cover in highly charged situations. Ultimately, the Pinkerton logo became that of a watchful female eye, accompanied by the apt motto of "We Never Sleep." However, despite Pinkerton's equal-opportunity mind-set, official American police forces did not hire female detectives until the late nineteenth century.

The Pinks details Warne's career as a Pinkerton detective, along with various other cases assigned to female agents like Hattie Lawton, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, and the artistically gifted Lavinia "Vinnie" Ream. Filled with intrigue, suspense, bravery, and women's accomplishment, *The Pinks* reads like a historical thriller with one fascinating plot twist: it is based wholly on truth.

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