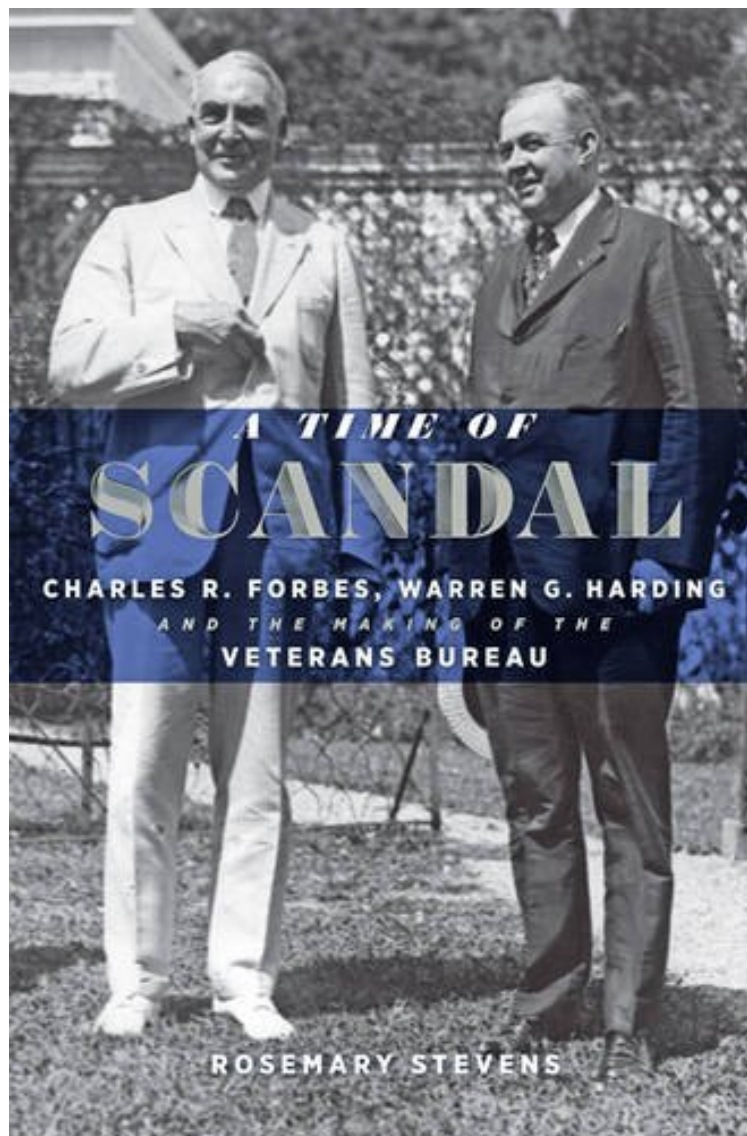


(Download free pdf) A Time of Scandal: Charles R. Forbes, Warren G. Harding, and the Making of the Veterans Bureau

A Time of Scandal: Charles R. Forbes, Warren G. Harding, and the Making of the Veterans Bureau

Rosemary Stevens

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Rosemary Stevens : A Time of Scandal: Charles R. Forbes, Warren G. Harding, and the Making of the Veterans Bureau before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Time of Scandal: Charles R. Forbes, Warren G. Harding, and the Making of the Veterans Bureau:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Needed More TimeBy WittgensteinThe story is interesting, if a bit complicated, and the author deserves credit for extensive research beyond what has been done before in understanding the scandals of the Harding Administration. But my oh my, where are the editors who are supposed to help turn well researched histories into readable histories? This book badly needed one or more.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. History as an enjoyable read!By TintalBrazEngagingly written, enjoyable read. Timely.4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Scholarly Re-examination of the Charles Forbes-Veterans Bureau Scandal of 1920s.By mirasreviewsA Time of Scandal was written by Rosemary Stevens, professor emeritus of the history of sociology and science at the University of Pennsylvania, who specializes in the history of American health care, as a revision of the history of the Department of Veterans Affairs. In 1925, Col. Charles R. Forbes was found guilty, along with Midwestern construction contractor John W. Thompson, of conspiracy to defraud the federal government by rigging government contracts to build hospitals for military veterans of World War I. Stevens believes that Forbes almost certainly did not commit this crime but was caught in the anti-corruption furor and personal ambitions that swept the nation, the Justice Department, and Capitol Hill following the death of Pres. Warren Harding in 1923. The Veterans Bureau scandal, Teapot Dome (Department of Interior) and the prosecution of former Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty informed the reputation of the Harding administration as corrupt and of Pres. Harding as ineffectual and nave. These scandals have been the subject of reanalysis in recent years, and Stevens is perfectly positioned to take another look at Charles R. Forbes 18 months at the Veterans Bureau and his fall from grace. Senator Warren Harding met Forbes in Hawaii, where Forbes was superintendent of public works. The men became friends, and Harding offered Forbes two positions in his presidential administration, before he accepted the directorship of the Bureau of War Risk Insurance, consolidated into the Veterans Bureau in August 1921. Forbes task was to integrate the fiscal, medical, and educational cultures of disparate government agencies into a consolidated system that would serve as a department of public welfare for veterans. Forbes may not have possessed the ideal temperament for the job, though he was enthusiastic, tireless, and overworked. The scale of the undertaking was daunting, and Forbes regularly clashed with White House physician and Harding confidant Gen. Charles E. Sawyer over the role of the Veterans Bureau. Then Forbes foolishly became friendly with Washington bootlegger, swindler, and extortionist Elias Harvey Mortimer and his ill-treated wife Katherine, when Mortimer tried to set himself up as a middle man in some hospital construction contracts. That sealed Forbes fate, as Mortimer became an informant and witness-for-hire for the Justice Department in order to save himself from prosecution for bootlegging. As prosecuting corruption, real or imagined, in government became the fashion, Mortimer, a brazen sociopath and inveterate liar, was a convenient weapon to wield against Forbes and in the promotion of certain politicians and public prosecutors. Senate hearings were convened, steered by Committee Counsel John F. O'Ryan. Then Forbes was prosecuted by Assistant Attorney General John W.H. Crim for allegedly taking a bribe from Mortimer in Chicago. Against all sense, the testimony of other witnesses, and without any other evidence of fraud, judge and jury believed Mortimer's accusations. Stevens presents Charles Forbes as perhaps ill-suited to the job and foolish in his friends but a competent and dedicated man who was sacrificed for the betterment of the Veterans Bureau and victimized by the politics and personal ambitions of the day. She bases her analysis on official records, including contemporary investigations into Veterans Bureau affairs under Forbes, and on some personal papers preserved by Forbes family and that of his third wife. Unfortunately, most of Pres. Warren Harding's personal papers, which might have exonerated both the president and Forbes of charges of incompetence, were destroyed after the president's death. But it is clear that the prosecution did not have evidence of fraud apart from Mortimer's discredited testimony.

In the early 1920s, with the nation still recovering from World War I, President Warren G. Harding founded a huge new organization to treat disabled veterans: the US Veterans Bureau, now known as the Department of Veterans Affairs. He appointed his friend, decorated veteran Colonel Charles R. Forbes, as founding director. Forbes lasted in the position for only eighteen months before stepping down under a cloud of criticism and suspicion. In 1926 after being convicted of conspiracy to defraud the federal government by rigging government contracts she was sent to Leavenworth Penitentiary. Although he was known in his day as a drunken womanizer, and as a corrupt, betraying toady of a weak, blind-sided president, the question persists: was Forbes a criminal or a scapegoat? Historian Rosemary Stevens tells Forbes's story anew, drawing on previously untapped records to reveal his role in America's initial and ongoing commitment to veterans. She explores how Forbes's rise and fall in Washington illuminates President Harding's efforts to bring business efficiency to government. She also examines the Veterans Bureau scandal in the context of class, professionalism, ethics, and etiquette in a rapidly changing world. Most significantly, Stevens proposes a fascinating revisionist view of both Forbes and Harding and raises questions about not only the validity but the source of their respective reputations. They did not defraud the government of billions of dollars, Stevens convincingly documents, and do not deserve the reputation they have carried for a hundred years. Packed with vibrant characters—conniving friends, FBI agents, and rival politicians split by sectional and ideological interests as well as gamblers, revelers, and wronged wives *A Time of Scandal* will appeal to anyone interested in political gossip, presidential politics, the "Ohio Gang," and the 1920s.

"[A] nuanced and well-documented exploration of the controversies around the early Veterans Bureau. A Time of Scandal is a multifaceted and strong account of an interesting time." (Foreword s)"Her colorful narrative makes a convincing case for Forbes' rehabilitation and, in light of other recent revisionist histories, a full reconsideration of an allegedly corrupt president and administration. An engaging argument for justice for a flawed but perhaps wrongfully disgraced civil servant." (Kirkus s)"Stevens offers a richly detailed account that portrays Forbes and Harding more favorably than most previous historians. Although aimed at scholars, general readers will be fascinated by the courtroom scenes and Forbes's rehabilitation during his two- year sentence in Leavenworth Penitentiary." (Library Journal)"A splendid (and highly revisionist) book. A Time of Scandal, written with verve and intelligence by a major player in the history of American medicine and public health, is a fresh, convincing look at Warren Harding's presidency and Charles Forbes's tenure at the Veterans Bureau." (Ronald L. Numbers, University of Wisconsin-Madison, coeditor of *Newton's Apple and Other Myths about Science*)"Soundly researched and superbly written, this intriguing and important book will appeal to a broad audience. Weaving together the biography of Charles R. Forbes with the tumultuous early years of the Veterans Bureau and its place in the 'Harding scandals,' the author presents a rich historical account that features hubris, deception, vindictiveness, and an interconnected series of cascading events." (Carl F. Ameringer, University of Nebraska Omaha, author of *The Health Care Revolution: From Medical Monopoly to Market Competition*)"Sometimes the best story is the back storywhat really happened behind the scenes. Rosemary Stevens reveals the truth behind one of the most colorful scandals in American political history in this incisive and gracefully written work. A tour de force of historical research and insight." (Evan Thomas, author of *Being Nixon: A Man Divided*)"Equal parts detective, biographer, and keen historical analyst, Rosemary Stevens delves into one of America's most infamous political scandals with stunning results. Cutting through the mist of intrigue and rumor, she offers a compelling portrait of President Warren Harding and his Veterans Bureau chief, Charles Forbes, and in the process forever alters our narrative of high politics in the Roaring Twenties." (Thomas J. Sugrue, New York University)"This is a wonderfully researched and beautifully written examination of a key playerheretofore largely overlookedwho was deeply involved when things went amiss during the Harding presidency, and the book shines fresh light into a few dark corners of history that are worth reexamining." (John W. Dean, author of *Warren G. Harding (The American Presidents Series)*)"Professor Rosemary Stevens has produced what is certainly the definitive work on Forbes in *A Time of Scandal*." (NY Journal of Books)"Recommended." (Choice)About the AuthorRosemary Stevens is professor emerita of the history and sociology and science at the University of Pennsylvania and the De Witt Wallace Distinguished Scholar in Social Medicine and Public Policy at Weill Cornell Medical College. She is the author of *In Sickness and in Wealth: American Hospitals in the Twentieth Century* and *The Public-Private Health Care State: Essays on the History of American Health Care Policy*.