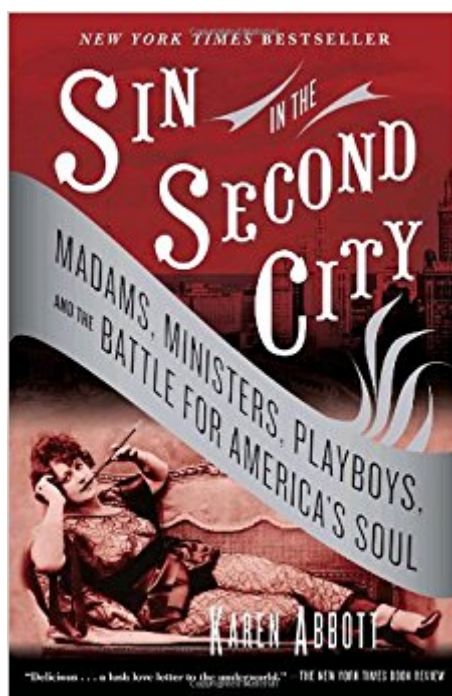


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# Sin In The Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys, And The Battle For America's Soul



## Synopsis

Step into the perfumed parlors of the Everleigh Club, the most famous brothel in American history and the catalyst for a culture war that rocked the nation. Operating in Chicago's notorious Levee district at the dawn of the last century, the Club's proprietors, two aristocratic sisters named Minna and Ada Everleigh, welcomed moguls and actors, senators and athletes, foreign dignitaries and literary icons, into their stately double mansion, where thirty stunning Everleigh "butterflies" awaited their arrival. Courtesans named Doll, Suzy Poon Tang, and Brick Top devoured raw meat to the delight of Prince Henry of Prussia and recited poetry for Theodore Dreiser. Whereas lesser madams pocketed most of a harlot's earnings and kept a "whipper" on staff to mete out discipline, the Everleighs made sure their girls dined on gourmet food, were examined by an honest physician, and even tutored in the literature of Balzac. Not everyone appreciated the sisters' attempts to elevate the industry. Rival Levee madams hatched numerous schemes to ruin the Everleighs, including an attempt to frame them for the death of department store heir Marshall Field, Jr. But the sisters' most daunting foes were the Progressive Era reformers, who sent the entire country into a frenzy with lurid tales of "white slavery" — the allegedly rampant practice of kidnapping young girls and forcing them into brothels. This furor shaped America's sexual culture and had repercussions all the way to the White House, including the formation of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. With a cast of characters that includes Jack Johnson, John Barrymore, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., William Howard Taft, "Hinky Dink" Kenna, and Al Capone, *Sin in the Second City* is Karen Abbott's colorful, nuanced portrait of the iconic Everleigh sisters, their world-famous Club, and the perennial clash between our nation's hedonistic impulses and Puritanical roots. Culminating in a dramatic last stand between brothel keepers and crusading reformers, *Sin in the Second City* offers a vivid snapshot of America's journey from Victorian-era propriety to twentieth-century modernity. Visit [www.sininthesecondcity.com](http://www.sininthesecondcity.com) to learn more!

"Delicious" | Abbott describes the Levee's characters in such detail that it's easy to mistake this meticulously researched history for literary fiction. — New York Times Book Review

"Described with scrupulous concern for historical accuracy | an immensely readable book." — Joseph Epstein, *The Wall Street Journal*

"Assiduously researched | even this book's minutiae makes for good storytelling." — Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*

"Karen Abbott has pioneered sizzle history in this satisfyingly lurid tale. Change the hemlines, add 100 years, and

the book could be filed under current affairs. *USA Today* "A rousing racy yarn. *Chicago Tribune* "A colorful history of old Chicago that reads like a novel | a compelling and eloquent story. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* "Gorgeously detailed. *New York Daily News* "At last, a history book you can bring to the beach. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* "Once upon a time, Chicago had a world class bordello called The Everleigh Club. Author Karen Abbott brings the opulent place and its raunchy era alive in a book that just might become this year's *The Devil In the White City*. *Chicago Tribune Sunday Magazine* (cover story) "As Abbott's delicious and exhaustively researched book makes vividly clear, the Everleigh Club was the Taj Mahal of bordellos. *Chicago Sun Times* "The book is rich with details about a fast-and-loose Chicago of the early 20th century | Sin explores this world with gusto, throwing light on a booming city and exposing its shadows. *Time Out Chicago* "[Abbott's] research enables the kind of vivid description a fellow journalist Erik Larson's *The Devil in the White City* that make what could be a dry historic account an intriguing read." *Seattle Times* "Abbott tells her story with just the right mix of relish and restraint, providing a piquant guide to a world of sexuality. *The Atlantic* "A rollicking tale from a more vibrant time: history to a ragtime beat. *Kirkus Reviews* "With gleaming prose and authoritative knowledge Abbott elucidates one of the most colorful periods in American history, and the result reads like the very best fiction. Sex, opulence, murder • What's not to love? *Sara Gruen*, author of *Water for Elephants* "A detailed and intimate portrait of the Ritz of brothels, the famed Everleigh Club of turn-of-the-century Chicago. Sisters Minna and Ada attracted the elites of the world to such glamorous chambers as the Room of 1,000 Mirrors, complete with a reflective floor. And isn't Minna's advice to her resident prostitutes worthy advice for us all: "Give, but give interestingly and with mystery." *Erik Larson*, author of *The Devil in the White City* "Karen Abbott has combined bodice-ripping salaciousness with top-notch scholarship to produce a work more vivid than a Hollywood movie. *Melissa Fay Greene*, author of *There is No Me Without You* "Sin in the Second City is a masterful history lesson, a harrowing biography, and - best of all - a superfun read. The Everleigh story closely follows the turns of American history like a little sister. I can't recommend this book loudly enough. *Darin Strauss*, author of *Chang and Eng* "This is a story of debauchery and corruption, but it is

also a story of sisterhood, and unerring devotion. Meticulously researched, and beautifully crafted, *Sin in the Second City* is an utterly captivating piece of history. —Julian Rubinstein, author of *Ballad of the Whiskey Robber*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

At the dawn of the 20th century, there was no more famous-or notorious-brothel in America than the Everleigh Club in Chicago. Run by two sisters with an all-American talent for self-invention, the club set new standards for opulence as well as harlots' rights. Abbott's scintillating tale of prostitution and scandal, however, is not well-served by this plodding audio rendition. Bean emerges as a narrator with a curious double standard: for the madams, aldermen and other colorful characters who populated the Levee red light district a century ago, she creates unique voices full of dialect, humor and pathos. For the reformers who sought to shut down the whorehouses, though, her vocal creativity falls flat; the same schoolmarmish voice is used for every religious or legal reformer in Chicago. It's a shame that the audio book couldn't utilize the more than three dozen sumptuous photographs and illustrations that grace the print edition, showing the club in all its gaudy Victorian splendor and providing mugs of the Levee's many legendary figures. Simultaneous release with the Random House hardcover (Reviews, Apr. 16). Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Chicago, the saying goes, ain't ready for reform. It certainly wasn't in 1899, when sisters Ada and

Minna "Everleigh" (real name: Simms) opened their brothel. As Abbott's jaunty history relates, their whorehouse was not a tawdry bang barn for johns with a nickel but a glitzy palace of paid pleasure for plutocrats. Ada and Minna's Everleigh Club prospered, protected by payoffs to Chicago's legendary political crooks "Bathhouse" Coughlin and "Hinky Dink" Kenna, but the bordello's brazenness mobilized moralists alarmed by vice, so-called white slavery in particular. An entertaining read, by turns bawdy and sad, as when a courtesan ends up dead, Abbott's account extends beyond local history because the campaign against Ada and Minna had lasting national effects: the closure of urban red-light districts and the passage of the federal Mann Act concerning prostitution. Abbott adroitly evokes the cathouse atmosphere, but it is the rapier-sharp character sketches of the cast that best show off her authorial skills and will keep readers continually bemused as they learn about the lives and times of two madams. Taylor, Gilbert --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book is a rather scattered examination of Chicago's red-light district, the Levee, in the first decade of the 20th century involving brothels, madams, harlots, clients, politicians, reformers, zealots, etc. The author focuses on the most well-known brothel of the era, the Everleigh Club, which opened in 1900 and was owned by the sister-madams, Minna and Ada Everleigh. But the Levee, despite being relatively segregated from other districts in Chicago, could not withstand the determined assault by reformers, do-gooders, religious groups, and opportunistic bureaucrats and politicians. The district was essentially defunct by the start of WWI. As the author details, the Everleigh sisters insisted on high standards in their club, including their well-cared-for girls, the ornate décor, their enlightened practices, their clients, etc. For example, their girls underwent frequent medical examination. Practices, such as robbing clients, were strictly prohibited. The girls were even encouraged to read good literature. Ironically, their attempts to raise standards won them few friends. Resentful madams were not above trying to undermine them with various officials. But more importantly, as their club gained notoriety, they became the focus of religious-based groups who found prostitution unmitigatingly sinful. The angle that the zealots finally hit upon that resulted in the shutdown of red-light districts across the country was the issue of white slave-trading. No doubt, girls were forced or tricked into prostitution, especially naïve rural girls or those straight off the boat from Europe. However, although not for a lack of trying, few girls working in the Levee could be found who had been coerced. Nonetheless, the constant agitation resulted in the passage of the Mann Act in 1910 that made it illegal for the interstate transport of females for immoral purposes. If interpreted loosely, its provisions could apply to most any madam. The book is definitely

sympathetic to the Everleigh sisters. The author attempts to clarify their origins, but they were basically self-constructed: creating an elaborate background to explain how they came to open the Everleigh Club. Such fabrication continued when forced to move to NYC after the closing of their club, where they lived in complete anonymity on the wealth from their club. Though they remain mostly a mystery, it is clear that they were quite resourceful as they confounded the opposition for over a decade and escaped unscathed. Numerous colorful characters are in the author's story of raucous, sinful Chicago. But the scope of the story really does not permit more than snippets concerning people and events. It is all rather vague. There was a heyday for the "sporting" business in Chicago and then it was gone - over one thousand brothels out of existence. It almost does not seem real.

Well researched book about the infamous Everleigh Club and the mysterious sisters who made it happen. The scheming and behind the scene plotting of the politicians and the reformers is Chicago at its best and worst all at once. The descriptions of the interior of the club are amazing, more so that the sisters spent the money to make it happen. No wonder their competitors wanted the Everleigh Club to disappear - it made their own businesses look even worse than they really were. Good read for Chicago history buffs and those who like to look at the dark side of the human condition.

Karen Abbott has written a lively rendition about the infamous Levee district of Chicago at the turn of the 20th century. Minna and Ada Everleigh left Omaha, Nebraska, looking for another city in which to set up a den of inequity. After scouting several possibilities they settled on the notorious Levee district in Chicago, Illinois. At the time of their arrival the Lords of the Levee were an odd couple of aldermen named Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna and "Bathhouse" John Coughlin. Kenna was known for his quote, "Chicago ain't no sissy town", and Coughlin for his loud wardrobe of a bright green coat, lavender trousers, and silk pink gloves. Sisters Ada and Minna went by the name of Everly while in Omaha and then changed it to Everleigh which turned into a play on words when men would brag that they "were getting Everleighed tonight." This term was understood by only a few and ultimately the term was shortened. It's interesting that people use the term with no understanding where it originated. The book has numerous photos of the inside of the Club on south Dearborn Street as well as the outside of the building. This was the same area that Big Jim Colosimo had his nightclub which was patronized by Al Jolson, George M. Cohan, and other notables while in Chicago and Al Capone ran The Four Duces. Big Jim, of course, met his demise

on May 11, 1920, most likely by Frankie Yale who was brought from New York to consummate the hit. The Everleigh Club's operation went from 1900 until 1911 when it was forced to close down. The author does a magnificent job in bringing back the flavor of what Chicago was like during this time period in addition to describing the inside of the Club and what the requirements for her girls were in her "classy" establishment. This is infamous history, but there is more to history than wars, treaties, and presidents.

The subtitle: *Madams, Ministers, Playboys, and the Battle for the American Soul* pretty much says it all. This book talks primarily about the Everleigh Club, an upscale brothel in Chicago from 1900 to 1911. It was run by two sisters, Ada and Minna Everleigh, and counted among its clientele most of the rich and famous in the city and elsewhere, including John Barrymore, Theodore Dreiser, and many others. Mobster, such as Big Jim Colosimo, and politicians such as Bathhouse John Coughlin and Hinky Dink Kenna, are colorfully portrayed. Besides the interesting facts about Chicago's red light district, the Levee, the most interesting parts of the book involved early 20th century Chicago. I'm fascinated by Chicago history so I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The sinners in this book were more interesting to read about than the saints, the various people and groups that tried to close down the brothels. During the story, once the Everleigh Club was closed, the book seemed to fizzle out. Overall, very good book though this is one book that was better early.

This is a well researched and well written book about brothels in Chicago around the turn of the century. The book focuses on two sisters with mysterious backgrounds, who become successful madams. The book also show the political and moral climate at that time. If you enjoy Erik Larson books, you will enjoy this. The book was interesting and provides the context for the beginning of prohibition. I wish it had focused more on the sisters, their "butterflies" and life inside the brothel.

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