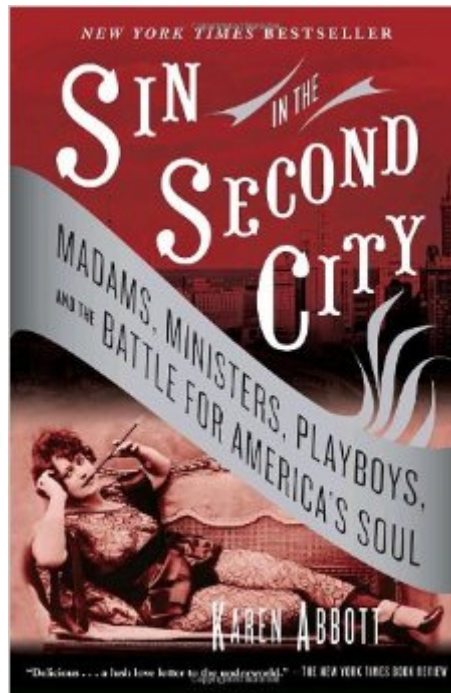


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# Sin In The Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys, And The Battle For America's Soul



## 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 years "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 " la 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

I've been completely side-swiped for days by Karen Abbott's riveting true story of the infamous Everleigh Club brothel that operated in Chicago from 1900 to 1911. *Sin in the Second City* reads like a novel. I had to keep reminding myself it's absolutely true. It's just so absorbing, it's easy to forget you're not reading fiction. Sisters Ada and Minna "Everleigh" (a name they assumed) were raised in privilege in a wealthy southern family. They were very highly educated women, intellectuals in an age that wasn't prized in the female sex. The story of how they went from high society to becoming madams is incredible, reflecting on their innate intelligence and economic and marketing savvy. But equally remarkable is the difference between their establishment and others that existed around the same time. Rather than demeaning their girls, Ada and Minna lavished money and benefits such as expensive clothing on their whores. These were girls who were tutored in the arts, making them more like geishas than common prostitutes. The Everleigh Club was an elite bordello, drawing the likes of literary great Theodore Dreiser, the actor John Barrymore, and even a Prussian prince. This was no common whorehouse. Though the girls did provide sexual services, the Everleigh was a much more refined establishment featuring string orchestras, lavish decor, and a class of girls that were a cut above those in lesser houses. The history presented here illustrates the high level of research Abbott conducted. To say it's thorough is a vast understatement. Not only do we get all the known history on the Everleigh, but the rest of Chicago history is likewise splayed out before us, including all that was going on politically, socially and in the literary world.

When I picked up a copy of *"Sin in the Second City"* during a recent visit to Chicago, my initial thought was "Finally! Someone has seen the Everleigh Sisters for the roguish and riveting characters that they were and given their lives a book-length treatment." After finishing the book in

less than two days, I have to conclude that no one could have done a better job than Karen Abbott did. Minna and Ada Simms were two Virginia-born debutantes who took their beauty, business smarts, love of refinement, and lack of subservience to men, and realized a fortune. Their palatial brothel in Chicago's raucous Levee district made them a cause celebre for the eleven years they remained in business. They catered to the millionaire element, becoming the Nordstrom's of the flesh trade, and injected class and humor into a profession that easily destroyed the bodies and souls of the unwary. Competitors like Madam Vic Shaw and the Weiss brothers hated them for setting gilded standards that the \$2 dives like the Bucket of Blood and the Sappho could never hope to match. Religious crusaders and purity leagues blasted them as flagships for the dreaded white slave trade, conveniently forgetting that the Everleigh Club was so renowned for its generous treatment of the inmates that there was a waiting list to join the ranks of Everleigh 'butterflies', as Minna called them. But as the saying goes, "A narrow mind and a wide mouth usually go together." Although the Everleigh Club's irreverent opulence caused its downfall and ultimately the closure of the old Levee, Minna and Ada had the last laugh. They took their millions, toured Europe, and lived out the last of their days in New York. Through free use of anecdotes that make this nonfiction book read like the best-crafted fiction, Ms.

"Sin in the Second City" is a detailed journey into a part of Chicago history that some people would prefer to forget about. No, this isn't another book about a serial killer at the World's Fair: it's the story of Chicago's Levee district, the brothel-infested underworld based on the city's South side in the 1900's. Specifically, this book tells the story of the Everleigh Club, which was possibly the most famous house of ill repute in all of history. Located on Dearborn Street, the high-class club was run by two madams, Minna and Ada Everleigh, a pair of sisters that claimed to be "the only madams in history who had started out as debutantes." The Everleigh Club was very different from the other brothels in the Levee. Minna and Ada put a great deal of effort into bringing some "dignity" to the prostitution business. Harlots (yes, that's how prostitutes are referred to in the book) needed to be put on a waiting list to get into the Everleigh Club because the place was unlike any other brothel in the country: hundreds of women wanted to work there. The club was grandly decorated in expensive gold fineries and only admitted wealthy and well-behaved male clientele. While other brothels would obtain harlots through methods of white slavery, the Everleigh sisters only hired courtesans who sincerely wanted to work for them. Everleigh "butterflies" were the most beautiful and sought-after girls in the business, and within days of its grand opening, the club became the most prestigious brothel in the country and retained its status for many years. Unfortunately for

Minna and Ada, their success didn't last forever. Chicago became known primarily for two things: the Union Stock Yards and the Everleigh Club.

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