

Abbott, Karen. *Sin in the Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys, and the Battle for America's Soul*. New York: Random House, 2007. Print.

Once upon a time, when Chicago's Levee District was its fount of vice, there was a house on Dearborn Street called the Everleigh Club, and they said it was the best damn brothel in the country.

Now, the Levee District was a rough place, but that wasn't Ada and Minna Everleigh's style. Instead, as Karen Abbott recounts in her novelistic *Sin in the Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys, and the Battle for America's Soul*, the Everleigh sisters were determined to build and run the most luxurious bordello in America. For a time in the early 1900s, they did.

The Everleigh Club didn't employ common ladies of the night. No, Ada and Minna called them "butterflies," and they were trained in deportment and in literature. The butterflies' pay and working conditions were quite different from those experienced by other working girls, for Ada and Minna believed in taking care of their employees. No wonder there was always a waiting list of women ready to become Everleigh butterflies! The Club was selective in its clientele, and its discretion was absolute. The Club and its butterflies were so famous that it became the destination of choice for men such as the Crown Prince of Prussia and the scions of Chicago's wealthiest families.

But Abbott's *Sin in the Second City* isn't just the story of two creative and successful madams. Nor is it only the account of their grand brothel or their refined courtesans. It's the story of men like the aldermen Bathhouse John Coughlin and Hinky Dink Kenna, and the Mafia boss Big Jim Colosimo, who together controlled the Levee District. It's the story of white slavers who kidnapped girls and forced them into prostitution. It whispers of segregation in the post-Civil War North, for not all men were equally free to enjoy the Levee's best brothel. It tells the tale of corruption in the ranks, of vice flowing like blood through the city's veins. After all, vice pays.

*Sin in the Second City* is also the tale of reformers: it tells the stories of the crusading state's attorney Clifford Griffith Roe and of the police captain Edward McCann, whom Jane Addams considered one of the few honest men on the Force. It unfolds the history of the McCann Act, inspired by tales of white slavers in the Levee, and the little bureau that grew from it to become what we now know as the FBI. And it tells Chicago's story: cheerfully amoral, with excellent business acumen and reformers ranting on the sidelines. For a time, the Everleigh Club sat on top of fortune's wheel, wealthy playboys swarmed to the Levee, and business was booming.

But wealthy young playboys sometimes *died* in the Levee District, and wealthy men's lives are never forgotten. Scandal was the Levee's life's blood, but those deaths were its bêtes noires. The Everleigh Club had risen high indeed, but as everyone knows, that which fortune's wheel raises must eventually be brought low. And *that* turning is the tale of Karen Abbott's *Sin in the Second City*.