



The Last Madam: A Life in the New Orleans Underworld

Chris Wiltz

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Norma Wallace grew up fast in the rough neighborhoods of New Orleans. In 1916, as an ambitious fifteen-year-old, she went to work as a street-walker in the French Quarter, but by 1920 was madam of what became one of the city's most lavish brothels, an establishment frequented by politicians, movie stars, gangsters, and even the notoriously corrupt police force. For decades, Norma flourished, a smart, glamorous, powerful woman whose scandalous life made front-page headlines.

Her lovers ran the gamut from a bootlegger who shot her during a fight, to a famed bandleader, to the boy next door, thirty-nine years her junior, who became her fifth husband.

She knew all of the Crescent City's dirty little secrets and used them to protect her own interests—she never got so much as a traffic ticket—until the early 1960s, when District Attorney Jim Garrison decided to clean up vice and corruption. After a jail stay, she went legitimate as successfully as she had gone criminal, with a lucrative restaurant business. To the end Norma maintained her independence, and surrendered only to an irrational, obsessive love, which ultimately led to her violent death.

In *The Last Madam*, author Christine Wiltz combines original research with Wallace's personal memoirs to bring to life an era in New Orleans history rife with charm and decadence, and to reveal the colorful woman who reigned as its underworld queen.



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