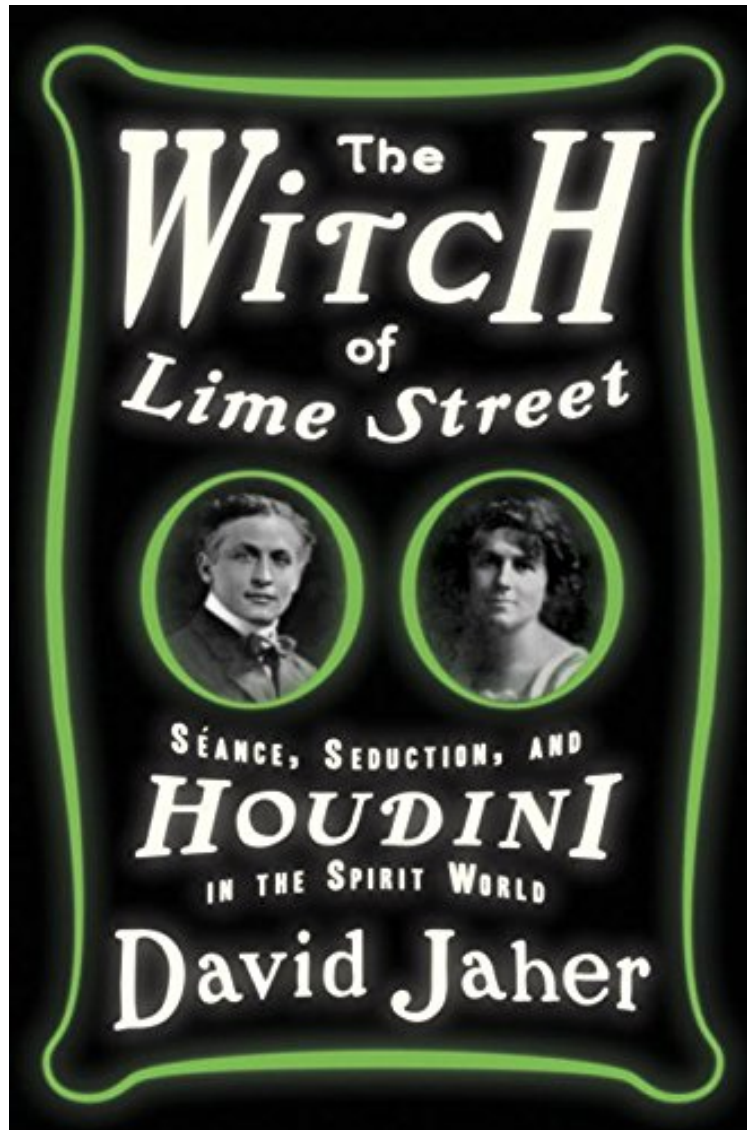


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## The Witch of Lime Street: Sance, Seduction, and Houdini in the Spirit World

David Jaher

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#586066 in Books David Jaher 2015-10-06 2015-10-06Format: Deckle EdgeOriginal language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.54 x 1.44 x 6.571, 1.25 #File Name: 0307451062448 pagesThe Witch of Lime Street Séance Seduction and Houdini in the Spirit World | File size: 33.Mb

**David Jaher : The Witch of Lime Street: Sance, Seduction, and Houdini in the Spirit World** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Witch of Lime Street: Sance, Seduction, and Houdini in the Spirit World:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. scientists vs. spiritualists in the 1920sBy lisaleo (Lisa Yount)This

nonfiction book describes the investigation of scientists from Scientific American magazine and several eastern universities not to mention famous magician and anti-spiritualist crusader Harry Houdini of probably the most famous medium of the early to mid-1920s, a woman generally known as Margery. Margery, whose real name was Mina Crandon, supposedly channeled her older brother, Walter, who had been killed in a train accident. She and Walter specialized in physical manifestations moving furniture, ringing bells, and the like, along with production of filmy ectoplasm rather than messages from sitters deceased loved ones, as some other mediums did. Margery was different from most other mediums of the era in other ways, too. First, she clearly was not putting on an act for profit: she was the wife of a prominent and wealthy Boston surgeon, and she did not charge for her performances. She also possessed intelligence, wit, refinement, and seductive beauty (according to the men who knew her; I didn't feel that that came across in the book's photographs), features notably lacking in most others of her ilk. Those features made the investigators all the more keen to determine whether her effects were truly supernatural or carried out by trickery: doing so became an attempt, not merely to expose a garden-variety fraud, but to answer the fundamental human question of whether life after death existed. The book is quite interesting in presenting not only the story of Margery versus the scientists, including numerous accounts of her individual performances, but in providing background on this iteration of the spiritualist craze in America and Britain, which involved such notables as Sherlock Holmes creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. (Doyle was originally a friend of Houdini's, but they fell out because of their opposing views of spiritualism; Doyle was not directly involved in the Margery investigations, but he cheered her on from across the Atlantic.) It also shows a difference in scientific attitude between Margery's time and ours; although the experts who investigated her and other mediums were not surprised to find most of them fraudulent, they were apparently much more willing to consider the possibility that spiritualistic phenomena might be genuine than most scientists would admit to being today. Finally, it emphasizes that scientists are human beings too; the investigators' individual personalities and reactions to Margery, who repeatedly entertained them in her home, played a large part in their findings. The book does have frustrating aspects, however. One is repetitiveness; the seemingly endless accounts of various seances eventually blurred into each other. (Whatever her faults may have been, I had to admire Margery's patience and stamina; she and Walter repeated their schtick night after night under physical conditions that were often as torturous as anything Houdini faced in his acts.) It also left key questions unanswered. Houdini insisted that Margery was a fake, and there seems no reason to disagree with him but if so, how did she do it? For the most part, the book doesn't tell us. I would also have liked to know why she did it, since it wasn't for money. Fame? Power over men? Perhaps no one knows. In spite of these flaws, I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to know about this period in history, the spiritualist movement, or the people involved in the story provided that the readers have a fair amount of patience.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Unreserved recommendation to read *The Witch of Lime Street* By Lisette Coly Author David Jaher helps us individually wrestle with the essential question asking what happens when we die? Against the historical backdrop of the Jazz Era with meticulous scholarly investigation we are left to draw our own conclusion. As the head of the non profit Parapsychology Foundation in existence for close to sixty-five years founded by my maternal grandmother, Eileen J. Garrett, herself a world famous medium looking into the complexities of ostensible psychic functioning I had difficulty putting the book down as it is a fascinating read. Apart from Garrett's own conclusions interacting with Margery and working with many of the book's cast of characters, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Hereward Carrington, Eric Dingwall et al. the author presents both sides of not only the magician's coin as utilized so well by Houdini but manages to also represent the actions and motivations of the various researchers and sitters in an even handed and completely reasonable manner. Several cases exist in the literature of similar personages as the Witch of Lime Street who deserve examination and similar treatment hopefully in future by David Jaher as he continues to shed light on a fascinating subject.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. "Catch her if you can." By Elspeth G. Perkin Do you believe? Throughout this supernormal themed work the author poses that tricky question while at the same time inviting the reader back to the 1920s to investigate and witness feats of the: unexplained, miraculous, various bright show lights of amusement and the crimson rooms of possible hyperactive imaginations. In this bewitching book a little of everything is tossed in and Mr. Jaher juggles and conjures certain events from history to rise and overall this title became a rare treat for this excited reader of history. I honestly couldn't have asked for a better escape for this month and in the end I eventually fell under the completed spell of this colorful narrative and impressive dedication of subject and history but first some patience was required on my part. Being a paced read, I was somewhat disappointed in the beginning as I was hoping for more razzle-dazzle but in a clever way this book used and perfected the slow reveal- building the suspense and inner storyline, touching on different topics to reach the grand finale that this work advertised but at the same time the jumping back and forth in years and names in chapters did create some annoyance and confusion for this reader. I was also disappointed in the lack of photographs and it became a little frustrating to try to correctly visualize the spirit snapshots or key portions of the storyline particularly the fascinating Houdini Box or the baffling early ectoplasm photographs. The final chapters were also a little uncomfortably odd and they repeated details that seemed there only for shock and disgust. On the other side of the coin and (thankfully) overbalancing the negatives, I loved how the author presented the lingering mysteries of the little known tale of Harry Houdini and the Blonde Witch of Lime Street. The excellently depicted cat-

and-mouse games that play throughout these pages and the striking narrative paired with different final messages and questions along with good old-fashioned entertainment, made this a great escape and I think those who enjoy forgotten portions of history and mysteries of the past, present and future will eventually agree.

History comes alive in this textured account of the rivalry between Harry Houdini and the so-called Witch of Lime Street, whose iconic lives intersected at a time when science was on the verge of embracing the paranormal. The 1920s are famous as the golden age of jazz and glamour, but it was also an era of fevered yearning for communion with the spirit world, after the loss of tens of millions in the First World War and the Spanish-flu epidemic. A desperate search for reunion with dead loved ones precipitated a tidal wave of self-proclaimed psychics and, as reputable media sought stories on occult phenomena, mediums became celebrities. Against this backdrop, in 1924, the pretty wife of a distinguished Boston surgeon came to embody the raging national debate over Spiritualism, a movement devoted to communication with the dead. Reporters dubbed her the blonde Witch of Lime Street, but she was known to her followers simply as Margery. Her most vocal advocate was none other than Sherlock Holmes' creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who believed so thoroughly in Margery's powers that he urged her to enter a controversial contest, sponsored by Scientific American and offering a large cash prize to the first medium declared authentic by its impressive five-man investigative committee. Admired for both her exceptional charm and her dazzling effects, Margery was the best hope for the psychic practice to be empirically verified. Her supernatural gifts beguiled four of the judges. There was only one left to convince...the acclaimed escape artist, Harry Houdini. David Jaher's extraordinary debut culminates in the showdown between Houdini, a relentless unmasker of charlatans, and Margery, the nation's most credible spirit medium. *The Witch of Lime Street*, the first book to capture their electric public rivalry and the competition that brought them into each others orbit, returns us to an oft-mythologized era to deepen our understanding of its history, all while igniting our imagination and engaging with the timeless question: Is there life after death?

Praise for David Jaher's *The Witch of Lime Street* An NPR Best Book of 2015 Riveting reading...flamboyant, enigmatic, and complex characters. [Jaher] is also a diligent researcher, and his storytelling skills are impressive. Wall Street Journal Occasionally, you run across a book so good it feels like a secret and spend months recommending it to anyone who will listen. That's *The Witch of Lime Street*. Genevieve Valentine, NPR's Best Books of 2015 David Jaher's stunning and brilliantly written account of the battle between the Great Houdini and the blond Witch of Lime Street illuminates a lost period in American history...One of Jaher's great achievements is to build real suspense in a tale whose conclusion is foreordained captivating and unforgettable. Cass Sunstein, *The New York Times* David Jaher's utterly spellbinding *The Witch of Lime Street* painstakingly sets its scene, which spans more than a decade and involves so many interrelated figures that you almost expect a list of dramatis personae. Jaher writes with a novelist's panache about the intricacies of the egos in play (Houdini's and Doyle's more than most, though several contest judges give them a run for their money). With the result something of a foregone conclusion you'll notice "psychical research" is not currently a household industry it's all the more impressive that Jaher builds the sense of mystery effortlessly, without seeming as though he's actually withholding any of the key information about the society medium who would rock *Scientific American*. He chronicles Mrs. Crandon's social circle with a mixture of poetic sympathy and journalistic distance. (And he backstories her husband Dr. Crandon with a beat of the what-the-hell candor that makes this book such a page-turner.) But like any good magician, Jaher has other tricks up his sleeve. As the plot thickens, we begin to see macabre glimpses of things falling apart: examples of Houdini's short temper, power struggles between journalism and academia, hints of Mina's personal and family demons. It was a raucous age, and *The Witch of Lime Street* makes sure its spooky showdown happens smack in the middle of the action. It's a delightful history, a captivating mystery, and thanks to Jaher's stylish flourishes, even the big reveals maintain an air of high-wire theatricality like any good magician. *The Witch of Lime Street* knew what we wanted all along. NPR So carefully paced that readers will still need to pinch themselves to remember the book is nonfiction...The supernatural moments of *The Witch of Lime Street* are balanced by the author's deft contextualization and inclusion of correspondence and other archival materials. Lurid and almost unbelievable, Jaher's debut is a fascinating and sensational chapter of U.S. history. *Minneapolis Star Tribune* Through deep sourcing of newspaper articles and personal correspondence, Jaher himself has succeeded in reviving ghosts. *Washington Post* David Jaher's colorful account of the career of the woman reporters dubbed *The Witch of Lime Street* sets her in the context of a wider war over the validity of the spirit world. Jaher calls forth a vivid cast of characters in a world no less interesting for being thoroughly physical. *Columbus Dispatch* In his book *The Witch of Lime Street*, first-time author David Jaher does a bit of his own sleight of hand, pulling a solid piece of historical reporting out of the ethereal and often tawdry world of spiritualism... Jaher's research of spiritualism and its early 20th-century cast of characters is meticulous. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* Tightly paced and furiously entertaining...*The Witch of Lime Street* is a well-researched history of the links between vaudeville, magic and mediumship told with verve and humor. Fans of Glen David Gold's novel *Carter Beats the Devil* will find much to enjoy here. *Bookpage* The story of how the *Scientific American* investigation unfolds grows richer the longer it

goes on... The Witch of Lime Street is sure to be an important addition to Houdini studies. Dallas Morning News Some of the 20th century's most colorful and larger-than-life figures come together in a story that is almost too bizarre to believe... Jaher is a very gifted storyteller. Historical Novels Jaher brings Harry Houdini's crusade against Spiritualism back into popular knowledge in his gripping first book a fascinating look at the Spiritualist movement in 1920s America. Publishers Weekly [Starred] Jaher's narrative style is as engaging as his character portraits are colorful. Together, they bring a bygone age and its defining spiritual obsessions roaring to life. Fascinating, sometimes thrilling, reading. Kirkus s In this excellent first book, it is the cat-and-mouse game between Houdini and Margery that will keep readers turning pages. Jaher's narrative gifts keep the story moving while imbuing a real sense of the personality and humanity of the protagonists. This book will be enjoyed by fans of Houdini and the occult and by those fascinated with American social history and Jazz Age culture. Library Journal A colorful, fascinating depiction of a response to a time of great losses and the human need to reconnect, however dubiously, with departed loved ones. Booklist A beautifully written, deeply researched, and delightfully mysterious tale of grifters and ghosts in the Jazz Age. David Jaher writes about the battle between science and spiritualism with a charming combination of sympathy, skepticism, and suspense. Jaher has made a great debut as a historian and a story-teller. Debby Applegate, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of The Most Famous Man in America A perfectly told mystery story involving a famed early 20th century medium, who thrilled her followers and puzzled even celebrity skeptics such as Harry Houdini. This compelling book by David Jaher is a genuinely lovely exploration of our belief systems, both magical and rational. I can promise you that once you finish it, you'll want to sit down and read it again. That's exactly what I did. Deborah Blum, Pulitzer Prize winner and author of Ghost Hunters and The Poisoner's Handbook A spectacular debut that is both a thrilling page-turner and an unforgettable tale of a high-stakes rivalry. David King, bestselling author of Death in the City of Light and Vienna, 1814 Reads like a collection of mysterious tarot cards, Ouija boards, bizarre madame mediums, and yes our friend the Great Houdini. Read it if you dare. Lily Koppel, New York Times Bestselling Author of The Astronaut Wives Club Jaher's meticulously researched account of Scientific American's infamous contest to find an authentic medium had me racing through the pages to find out how it all turns out. To keep this spoiler-free I'll just say that the paranormal showdown of the early 20th century doesn't wrap up how you may think. Stacy Horn, author of Unbelievable: Investigations into Ghosts, Poltergeists, Telepathy, and Other Unseen Phenomena, from the Duke Parapsychology Laboratory David Jaher's tale of the bizarre 1920s fever fad for spiritualism and sances is as gripping as a mystery thriller, as evocative of that post-Great War decade as a documentary, and as haunting as a ghost story. A fascinating piece of time travel to a forgotten era. Kate Buford, author of Native American Son: The Life and Sporting Legend of Jim Thorpe In this meticulously researched and entertaining work, David Jaher explores a largely forgotten chapter in Anglo-American history: the post-World War I rise of spiritualism, born of a deep desire to commune with the spirits of slain soldiers. The cast of fascinating, masterfully drawn characters ranges from Harry Houdini, a supreme rationalist, to Margery Crandon, a self-proclaimed Boston medium with a huge following. This is, on a deep level, a cautionary tale of the bizarre, painful deception and self-deception associated with human unwillingness to accept the finality of death, especially youthful death. Susan Jacoby, author of Freethinkers and The Age of American Unreason About the Author DAVID JAHER received a BA from Brandeis University and an MFA in film production from New York University. At NYU, he was the recipient of the WTC Johnson Fellowship for directing. A New York native and resident, he is a screenwriter and is writing his next work of American history.