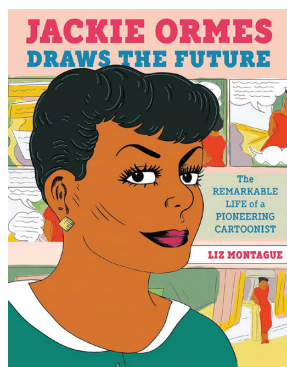
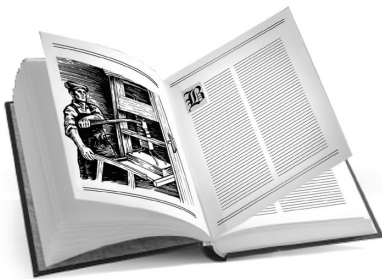


BOOK REVIEWS



Jackie Ormes Draws the Future: The Remarkable Life of a Pioneering Cartoonist

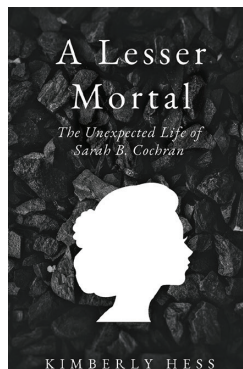
By Liz Montague
Random House Studio, 2023
40 pages, illustrations, notes, sources
Hardcover, \$18.99; e-book, \$11.99

Reviewed by Samuel W Black, Director, African American Program

Illustrator Liz Montague tells the story of Zelda Jackson, known professionally as Jackie Ormes, the first African American female newspaper cartoonist and illustrator. Though enjoyable for any age, the book was written and illustrated for children between the ages of 4 and 8.

Montague, an admirer of Ormes, shares the life story of a mid-20th-century pioneer from the small mill town of Monongahela in Washington County. Ormes began her career at the *Pittsburgh Courier* with only a high school education. She would later move to Chicago, join the staff of the *Defender*, and attend the Art Institute of Chicago in the late 1930s. Her pioneering strips include “Torchy Brown in Dixie to Harlem,” which was introduced in the *Courier* in May 1937. Later strips would be “Patty-Jo ‘n’ Ginger,” a serial of adventures and stories of current events from the view of the six-year-old Patty-Jo. Her adult sister, Ginger, was the sounding board for Patty-Jo’s curiosity about life as a Black child.

Montague’s recount of Ormes’ life and rise as a pioneer illustrator is accompanied by her illustrations of Ormes’ life in a style reminiscent of Ormes’ newspaper strips. Montague herself has made history as the first African American female cartoonist for the *New Yorker*. ☀



A Lesser Mortal: The Unexpected Life of Sarah B. Cochran

By Kimberly Hess
Books Fluent, 2021
167 pages
Paperback, \$15.99

Reviewed by Leslie Przybylek, Senior Curator

This book may never have existed if not for the family ties it represents between the author, Kimberly Hess—a writer and corporate executive from New Jersey with a broad academic background in business, international relations, economics, and a Certificate in Historic Preservation—and her subject, Sarah B. Cochran, a distant relative through her great-grandmother. Hess was part of a branch of the family from southwestern Pennsylvania that brought the author back to the region nearly every month as a child, trips that made an indelible impact on her.

A Lesser Mortal: The Unexpected Life of Sarah B. Cochran is really two narratives in one, and all the better for it. On the surface, the book recounts the almost cinematic story of Sarah Boyd Moore Cochran, the daughter of a modest Fayette County farming family who found employment in the home of prominent Connellsville coke baron James Cochran. A relationship blossomed between Sarah and the family’s oldest son, Phillip, and a wedding followed. Sarah became part of one of the most prominent families in the industrial hierarchy of

southwestern Pennsylvania. But when Phillip died at an unexpectedly young age, he left Mrs. Sarah B. Cochran, as she was always known, essentially in charge of the family business and fortune.

The book traces Sarah’s experience as she navigated her place in the realms of business and philanthropy, leaving a legacy still remembered in Fayette County, but as is often the case with women figures who were well-known in their day, forgotten on a larger national stage. (In a personal example related to this, Sarah funded buildings on multiple college campuses, including Allegheny College’s Cochran Hall in Meadville, PA. This reviewer grew up in Crawford County and knew of that building yet had no idea it was named after a woman.) The “coal and coke queen” of Connellsville had a story worth retelling that also raises larger questions about how and why such a legacy did not become part of the more familiar, and essentially masculine, narrative that dominates images of the region.

At the same time, the book also serves as a personal account of author Hess’s research and how she reconstructed this story of her ancestor’s life. Her thoughtful questions and insightful discussion about the larger chronological context in which Sarah Cochran operated serve as a wonderful model for using family histories to illuminate broader historical themes about a place such as Fayette County. Hess dove deep, tapping into a wide range of primary sources to track down and recover the story of Sarah’s many contributions—a story that the author herself observes is one that would have been difficult to reclaim if she had not already known that Sarah existed. In communities and regions across the country, how many other women like Mrs. Sarah B. Cochran have stories that remain to be recovered?

One of Sarah Cochran’s many philanthropic gestures was to underwrite the college education of Kimberly Hess’s great-grandmother, Henrietta Sproat Stillwagon, instilling a value for education that carried through multiple generations. *A Lesser Mortal* is a first-rate example of family and local history that reminds us why these stories matter. Engaging for general readers with a well-paced narrative, the book nonetheless uses footnotes and an extensive bibliography to assist those interested in exploring more. ☀