

Jackie Ormes Papers

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

DuSable Museum of African American History
05/15/2012
Chicago, IL

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Summary Information

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| Repository | DuSable Museum of African American History |
| Title | Jackie Ormes Papers |
| Date [inclusive] | 1938-1985 |
| Extent | 0.5 Linear feet |
| Language | English |
| Abstract | <p>Jackie Zelda Ormes, born Zelda Marvin Jackson (1911-1985), was the first African American female to gain prominence as a cartoonist. She created four cartoon and comic series between 1937-1956, each one featuring African American female protagonists, and addressing social and political issues of the mid-twentieth century. The Jackie Ormes papers span from 1938-1985 and reflect her professional work and her social life in Chicago. The papers are arranged into four series.</p> |

Biographical Note

Jackie Zelda Ormes, born Zelda Marvin Jackson (1911-1985), was the first African American female to gain prominence as a cartoonist. Ormes grew up in Monongahela, Pennsylvania. In 1930, she began working as a proofreader for the Pittsburgh Courier, a weekly African American newspaper. Her first comic strip, Torchy Brown in "Dixie to Harlem," ran in the Pittsburgh Courier from 1937 to 1938. After moving to Chicago in 1942, Ormes wrote articles and a single panel cartoon, Candy, for the Chicago Defender, a prominent weekly African American newspaper. In 1945, Ormes returned to the Pittsburgh Courier and created her longest running cartoon, Patty-Jo 'n' Ginger. The single panel cartoon featured two sisters, Patty-Jo, the younger and precocious sister who was politically and socially astute, and Ginger, the older and beautiful but silent sister. In 1947, Ormes helped produce the Patty-Jo doll, one of the first African American dolls to have an upscale and extensive wardrobe. Production ended on the Patty-Jo doll in 1949. One year later, Ormes created her fourth and final series, Torchy in Heartbeats, a color comic that appeared in the Pittsburgh Courier until 1954. She retired in 1956, ending the eleven year run of Patty-Jo n' Ginger. During her retirement, Ormes remained active in the South Side of Chicago community, presiding over the Urbanaides, a female auxiliary of the Chicago Urban League, and volunteering at the Clarence Darrow Community Center.

Scope and Contents note

The Jackie Ormes papers span from 1938-1985 and reflect Ormes's time as a cartoonist for the Pittsburgh Courier and Chicago Defender and her social life in Chicago. The papers are arranged into four series, "Art and Writings," "Correspondence," "Patty-Jo Doll," and "Personal." "Art and Writings" contains original drawings of her cartoon characters, personal artwork, published cartoons, poems, and copies of "Social Whirl," her column in the Chicago Defender. "Correspondence" is personal and professional in nature. It is primarily made up of incoming mail relating to the Patty-Jo doll production and sales. One personal letter of note is from Paul Robeson, an actor and Civil Rights activist, asking Ormes to purchase a book written by John Howard Lawson. "Correspondence" is arranged chronologically by decade. "Patty-Jo Doll" contains newspaper articles about Ormes and her creation of the Patty-Jo doll, as well as an advertisement for the doll. The series also includes layouts and sketches of the Patty-Jo Doll. "Personal" highlights Ormes's social life, and includes invitations to community events, programs from the Urbanaides fashion productions, documents pertaining to the Joseph Jefferson Awards Committee for Chicago theater productions, and biographical material. Of note in the collection is an original sketch of the Patty-Jo t-shirt, which Ormes designed and sold by mail in the 1970s. Researchers interested in cartoonists, cartoon history, African American history, or doll history will find this collection useful.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

DuSable Museum of African American History 05/15/2012

Controlled Access Headings

Personal Name(s)

- Ormes, Jackie

Subject(s)

- African American cartoonists
 - Patty-Jo doll
 - Patty-Jo 'n' Ginger
 - The Chicago Defender
 - Torchy Brown
-

Cited Sources

Note: This book is available in the DuSable Museum of African American History Library.

Goldstein, Nancy. "Jackie Ormes: The First African American Woman Cartoonist." The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2011.

Series I: Art and Writings,

Collection Inventory

| | | |
|--|------------|---------------|
| Series I: Art and Writings, 1938-1958 | | |
| | Box | Folder |
| Art and Writings | 1 | 1-5 |
| Series II: Correspondence, 1947-1985 | | |
| | Box | Folder |
| Correspondence | 1 | 6-10 |
| Series III: Patty-Jo Doll, circa 1947 | | |
| | Box | Folder |
| Patty-Jo Doll | 1 | 11 |
| Series IV: Personal, 1945-1985 | | |
| | Box | Folder |
| Personal | 1 | 12-20 |