

BOOK REVIEW

Antarctic pioneer: the trailblazing life of Jackie Ronne, by Joanna Kafarowski, Dundrun Press, Canada, 2022, 304 pp., \$25CAD, (paperback), 312 pp., (eBook) ISBN 1459749537 (ISBN13: 9781459749535)

Joanna Kafarowski's new book *Antarctic Pioneer: The Trailblazing Life of Jackie Ronne* traces the story of Edith 'Jackie' Ronne. As an introduction, four quotes illustrate where women's place was regarding the Antarctic: 'There are some things women don't do. They don't become Pope or President or go down to the Antarctic' (Harry Darlington, 1947). Ronne overwintered with her husband, his team and another woman, Jenny Darlington, at Stonington Island, on the Antarctic Peninsula, from 1946 to 1947. Together, they were the first women to overwinter in the Antarctic. However, Jackie Ronne, as she was called by her friends, also undertook significant work in the background related to Antarctic matters.

This biography, arranged in three parts and subdivided in chapters, draws attention to how Jackie Ronne got involved in the Antarctic through her husband, Finn Ronne and how that influenced the rest of her life. She was a woman of her time, integrated and aligned with the US female role in the 1940 to the 1970: 'Perhaps most important, the suburban wife was expected to make the home an oasis of comfort and serenity for her harried husband . . . [represented] a model of efficiency, patience and charm' (p144). Slowly, she evolved from this 'background' position until in the 1980s she recognised her own contributions to Antarctic matters.

The first part of the book describes Jackie Ronne's troublesome childhood and the way her aunt gave her the head start she needed to develop her full potential. She lived most of her young age with her aunt and uncle. Both were scientists and lived an unconventional life, travelling and hosting interesting people. After finishing with an AB degree in history at the George Washington University in 1940, she worked as a general clerk at the National Geographic Society. She moved on as a secretary in the Civil Service Commission and was transferred later to the Department of State. Jackie Ronne's career started well and she established connections that would help her later in life when she promoted her husband's career. She met Finn Ronne, an experienced Antarctic explorer, and married him despite the twenty-year age difference. At this point, Kafarowski portrays Finn Ronne's background, which was the foundation of Jackie Ronne's fascination for him.

The 'Ronne Antarctic Research Expedition' dominates part two. In 1946, the expedition planning was well underway. Jackie Ronne was heavily involved in the preparations and it turned out that her writing skills were of essential importance to the expedition efforts. Not all went smoothly for the expedition and Kafarowski explains the circumstances in a brief but comprehensive manner. One challenge was Finn Ronne's decision, as the expedition leader, that Jackie Ronne was to take an active part of the expedition. To ensure she was not alone as the sole woman on the expedition he decided that the chief pilot's wife, Jennie Darlington, would join as well. The tensions between Harry Darlington and Finn Ronne became almost unbearable and the two women lived separated lives most of the time, each protecting their husband's reputation. When the expeditioners arrived at their destination, the hut was almost completely destroyed and many resources such as fuel were stolen. These were crucial parts Finn Ronne took into account at the planning of the expedition. This factor brought significant delays for the scientific operations. To compensate some of the misfortunes,

Finn Ronne applied a strict and almost authoritarian leadership that brought more strain to the crew. Jackie Ronne worked hard to justify her role within the expedition. She was not only involved in the article and report writing for the newspapers but also got actively involved in science and took over readings and recordings. Jackie Ronne assisted the ‘geophysicist Andy Thompson with his seismic and tidal analyses and found it enormously satisfying’ (p111). She describes in an article what she actually had to do when working with the seismograph:

[...] Every twelve hours I crawled into a dungeon-like room, pulled up the trap door, beneath which the instruments were concealed, and changed the photographic sheets on the revolving drum. The machines were then checked for correct operation and the necessary adjustments made. (p. 111–112)

The expedition was the last of its kind as privately funded event. The world was moving towards international collaboration only ten years later. Jackie Ronne was a great writer and she put her husband in the spotlight and wrote herself gradually out of the expedition. She blends in into the perfect housewife and mother for her daughter Karen, but still wrote reports, and articles, hosted many parties with important and influential people. Her connections with outstanding women did not urge her to bring her own achievements to light. Finn Ronne gave many talks worldwide and served in different high-level positions but the focus was on him. Jackie Ronne felt often pain when he was travelling the world without her, but she ‘worked harder than ever on his behalf [...]’ (p158).

Over the next few years, Jackie Ronne would vanish from the expedition’s narrative. Finn Ronne feared that this would overshadow the achievements of scientific results. He tried to downplay Jackie Ronne’s role and she was ‘a willing partner’ (p132). Jackie Ronne said in an interview: ‘I just went along the ride, and the ride lasted 15 months and 15,000 miles’ (p132). However, she was influential and was consulted as an expert in Antarctic matters and promoted the Antarctic Treaty in the 1950s and 1960s. She did not really encourage female scientists at this point.

The book also provides an overview of modern human history in the Antarctic, charting the shift from the Mechanical Era to the modern time when Antarctica is accessible to far more people – both men and women. Antarctic tourism evolved quickly during this period, and Jackie and Finn Ronne were invited as honoured guests on the Argentinian vessel *M/V Yaperyú*, the first tourist vessel to the Antarctic in 1959. That became an important part in her later life when she was invited as guest lecturer on Antarctic tourist ships in the 1980s and 1990s. The book details this later period of Jackie Ronne’s life, focussing on her presentations, voyages to the Antarctic and supporting women in science.

After Finn Ronne’s death in January 1980, Jackie Ronne slowly came out of her shell, and started to recognise publicly her achievements. Part three of this book covers her work for the Antarctic. By following the arc of Jackie Ronne’s Antarctic involvement, Kafarowski shows how the narrative of women in the Antarctic changed and how active Jackie Ronne was in this regard. With her active volunteer work in the Society of Women Geographers, she brings herself back into the picture and appreciates the well-deserved attention.

Jackie Ronne died in 2009 at 90 years old. In her lifetime, she saw the changes for women in the Antarctic that she inspired indirectly and directly. Her active involvement in the Society of Women Geographers and the Washington branch of the Explorers Club left positive footprints for women where they are now.

The book is also a valuable source with two appendices with the scientific achievements of the Ronne Antarctic Research Expedition and a timeline of women in the Antarctic. The ‘Notes’ give additional information and an extensive bibliography shows the depth of Kafarowski’s research. Within the text are black and white images in a great number

visualising different stages of Jackie Ronne's life. Images of her in the Antarctic present, however, still the stereotypical role of women as carer for a nice home, and washing the laundry, nevertheless still look great with polished nails and the hair well done.

This biography of Jackie Ronne is a great addition to the history of women in the Antarctic. The book traces her journey from humble beginnings, changed by the circumstances she could not influence, to a confident woman, with a clear understanding of her achievements and influence, framing Jackie Ronne as both a polar pioneer and an inspiration. Kafarowski's biography is a great read and delivers precise context to Jackie Ronne's life as loving wife and hard-working companion and her transformation to an advocate for the Antarctic and women's involvement at this special place.

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