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Ann Hyman, Ron Masucci. *Jacksonville Greets the Twentieth Century: The Pictorial Legacy of Leah Mary Cox.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. xix + 125 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2548-3.

Reviewed by Philip Smith (Department of History, Texas A&M University)
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Jacksonville in Black and White

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Jacksonville is one of the least studied cities on the east coast. During Florida's colonial eras there was no Jacksonville. Planters established themselves along the St. Johns River, but there was no urban presence until the territorial period, 1821-1845. Even then, Jacksonville was overshadowed politically by St. Augustine, Tallahassee, and Pensacola. The city was named for a governor who never visited. During the Civil War, the port of Jacksonville was effectively blockaded and the city occupied by Union forces, keeping it out of the theater of war for the most part.

Although strategically located near the mouth of the St. Johns River, Jacksonville did not truly flourish as a major ocean port until the late nineteenth century when construction of enormous jetties permitted large ships to cross over what had been a treacherous bar. A fire in 1901 destroyed city and county records along with much of the city's downtown. Into the twentieth century, Jacksonville played little sister to rival regional cities, especially Atlanta. Not until a 1960s experiment with a new form of government did Jacksonville become more than a minor regional city.

These are a few of the reasons why Jacksonville has had a low profile. However, this is changing. Jacksonville contains a wealth of under-tapped research opportunities, as historians James Crooks and Daniel Schafer have shown in their works which range from the early nineteenth century to the twentieth century's experiment with bold governmental changes. Schafer's new book, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Owner*[1] is a significant contribution that explores themes of race, gender, and citizenship in nineteenth-century northeast Florida. Another enormous addition to Jacksonville history was the 1989 publication of *Jacksonville's Architectural Heritage: Landmarks for the Future*,[2] a vast project to document the city's structures that was led by architect and preservationist Wayne Wood. There have also been two recent books about American Beach, a nearby African American resort community that thrived during segregation.[3]

In *Jacksonville Greets the Twentieth Century: The Pictorial Legacy of Leah Mary Cox*, Ann Hyman and photo editor Ron Masucci have turned a serendipitous discovery of photo negatives in an old house into a delightful volume. Although this is not a scholarly text, journalist and author Hyman situates photographer Leah Cox within the urban, labor, racial, and women's issues during the Redeemer, Populist, and Progressive Eras. None of these themes is addressed in depth in the text of this tribute photo album with biographical commentary, but the issues come to life in the story of this independent woman and the city she adopted.

Leah Mary Cox (1867-1953) was born in England and immigrated with her family to Ohio, then Nebraska, and next to the middle Florida cotton belt in 1885. Three years later, at age twenty-one, Cox moved on her own to Jacksonville. When her father died a short time later she brought her family to the city and supported herself and them as a milliner, but Cox's enthusiasm was for photography.

This book contains sixty-one prints selected from over four thousand glass plate negatives that were found in the basement of the old Cox home. The negatives had gathered dust for decades until relatives who live in the Cox home discovered the collection. Cox did not marry and had no children of her own. Historians and casual readers might wish to see hundreds more of her images, but we can thank photo editor Ron Masucci for these well chosen glimpses of the city.

Cox kept no journal, and therefore the interpretation of the photographs is left to the viewer. Not much is known about Cox's life, and much of Hyman's text is taken from oral accounts of descendants or is speculation. For instance, one can only wonder about Cox's pur-

ported courtship with a Spanish American War veteran and her life lived as an independent woman, suggesting that another subject of investigation is Jacksonville's alternative culture in the first half of the twentieth century. However, the excellent foreword by James Crooks provides context for Jacksonville history during Cox's active photo-making years.

By far the most important single event during Cox's photography career was the 1901 fire that consumed most of downtown Jacksonville. She was there to record the immediate aftermath and the rebuilding of the city. Other galvanizing events for the growing city included the troop build-up during the Spanish American War, which brought soldiers to Jacksonville who would later return to settle in the city. Cox survived a yellow fever epidemic, and Hyman's text explains the false assumptions about its cause and how citizens reacted to an urban health crisis.

The photographs fall into three categories. Cox's photographs of the aftermath of the 1901 fire are of great interest. To this day, the 1901 fire is still the most significant urban fire in a Southern city, and Cox's photos reveal the extent and ferocity of the devastation. Native Jacksonvillian James Weldon Johnson recorded a first-hand account of the fire in his autobiography, *Along This Way*,[3] and the photography bears out his stirring description. In a second category are photos of downtown streets and port activities that depict the waterfront and store names still patronized by shoppers in modern Jacksonville. Third are photos of celebrations, entertainment, and recreation, including Gala Week, Dixieland Park, the Ostrich Park, and entertainer Mable Page. Cox worked hard to position her camera atop buildings and along shorelines to capture interesting angles for her photographs. The only posed pictures in this sample are those of Leah Cox herself and one of Mable Page wearing a hat designed by Cox. The candid nature of the photos shows the everyday life of people on bicycles and carts, and on foot. Even images of blurred passers-by convey vitality better than shots posed for the occasion of photo taking.

Hyman supplements her text with visitors' accounts of the city and the major events of the times. Some of those quoted are famous visitors, but Hyman avoids the impression of name-dropping that may sound like a small city's desire for notoriety by claiming an association with celebrities who are just passing by.

Crooks notes in his foreword that black Jacksonville is missing from the photographs, and this is a very important point. In a city that was almost half African American, there are no photos of the vitally active life of blacks in Jacksonville. Then again, we wouldn't have expected Leah Cox to photograph black citizens, and this emphasizes the point that the two communities were becoming invisible to one another as segregation was taking a firm hold in the South.

There are in fact blacks in the background here and there, performing jobs on docks or standing on parade routes just out of focus behind the main events or sitting by the fountain in the city square under the shadow of the Confederate monument that still stands at the center of the city. The most striking evidence of black Jacksonville in this book is a 1907 photo of the entrance to Phoenix Park that contains the prominent notice "Private Park. For Whites Only." It is this kind of white southern reaction to African Americans that defined the South in Leah Cox's mature years, and its legacy today continues in the reaction of Jacksonville's black community to the 2000 election process. However, Dan Schafer's new book illustrates that early and mid-nineteenth-century Jacksonville was perhaps uncharacteristically diverse in its regard for racial and gender rights.

The absence of black Jacksonville in Cox's work serves to remind the reader that at the very time she was making photographs, Jacksonville was the stage for an event of national and century-long significance, an event outside the focal distance of any lens available to whites. This of course was the first performance in 1900 of Rosamond Johnson and his older brother James Weldon Johnson's anthem, "Lift Every Voice." Only indirectly does this have anything to do with the photos and life story of Cox, but one can imagine that on that monumental day she may have been making hats or photographing boats or taking pictures of picnickers at the beach while five hundred school children lined up on stage for Lincoln's birthday celebration and first sang the song that would become a hallmark of the civil rights movement of the twentieth century and one of the greatest of all American songs. A photo of that occasion would have a place of honor in millions of homes.

Students of Florida history will appreciate Hyman's book principally for its photographic reproductions. The text and life story of Cox leave more to the imagination than can be explained by what little is known about her. If it is always best to leave them wanting more, in this case "more" would be more photographs but also more comparative information about single women in Jacksonville and other Southern cities, including labor, supportive structures, and alternative or underground social networks. And what about black women in the same sit-

uation? Praise Cox as we might for her achievements and devotion to family, what do we or can we know about black women of the same era? This, too, is addressed by Crooks in his introduction when he refers to the lives of African American Clara White and her daughter who became great benefactors to the city's poor at the same time that Cox was making photographs.

Jacksonville's significance will never be satisfactorily found by celebrating only examples of white courage, innovation, and celebrity. Nevertheless, it is a joy to welcome a new contribution to the historical account of this Florida city, and everyone who values images from this era will celebrate Cox's passion for photography and thank those who brought her story to life.

Notes

[1]. Daniel L. Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Owner* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

[2]. Wayne W. Wood, *Jacksonville's Architectural Heritage: Landmarks for the Future* (Jacksonville: University of North Florida Press, 1989).

[3]. Marcia Dean Phelts, *An American Beach for African Americans* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997); and Russ Rymer, *American Beach: A Saga of Race, Wealth, and Memory* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998).

[4]. James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way* (New York: Viking, 1933), pp. 162-165.

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