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Honors Northeast District

*Texas Suffragette: Minnie Fisher
Cunningham Story*



FILM PREMIERE AT THE WHATLEY CENTER
MARCH 24TH AT 7:00 PM

Texas Suffragette: The Minnie Fisher Cunningham Story

Few know the story of the Texas suffragettes. At a crucial juncture in 1919 when national suffrage was a possibility, the Solid South offered vociferous resistance to the idea of women voting. But Texas suffragettes scored a surprise upset. Texas endorsed the Nineteenth Amendment. It became the tenth state in the union, and the first of only three Southern states to back what became a victorious proposal. In discrediting the narrative that suffrage was an attack on Southern culture, the Texas struggle became a saga.

At the center of the story was an unassuming Victorian matron who lacked both professional accolades, and upper-class standing, Minnie Fisher Cunningham. Her biographer, Judith MacArthur, emphasizes Cunningham's extreme work ethic, but fails to conceptualize the actual dynamic that led to success. Our Film Scholar, Michelle Calderon, though agreeing that Cunningham was ardent, argues that the lead Texas Suffragette pursued a "periphrastic strategy," a discursive and deferential path to success. Rather than campaign directly, or even forthrightly for suffrage, Cunningham did everything she could to encourage and help the all-male liberal wing of the state's Democratic party. The women helped drive the corrupt, conservative Democrat, Governor Jim Ferguson, from office. The Texas suffragettes directed considerable assets toward the nation's efforts in World War I. Radicals in the East, tried, through pickets, parades and hunger strikes, to define the war as a crusade for a pure democracy and immediate suffrage. But the Texas women organized to fight prostitution and alcoholism in the ranks of the American army. Though Cunningham disliked Governor William Hobby, the liberal Democrat who betrayed the women from time to time, her best friend, Lavinia Engle, eagerly embraced Hobby's friendship as noted in our film. Patience and a *quid pro quo* with the liberals paid off. The Texas suffragettes reaped the victory when the progressive legislature, led by Hobby, adopted the suffrage amendment. They did this in the face of Texas' male voters who as a group opposed female suffrage in 1919.



Suffragette Film cast and crew, photo Courtesy of Hudson Old, and the [East Texas Journal](#): From Left to Right: Odalys Adame, Chandler Wascom, Evan Sears, Dr. Maryna Otero, Samuel Pollen, Victoria Matiz, Monserrat Rivero, Skylar Hodson, Dr. Andrew Yox, Skylar Fondren, Luiz Olvera, Raul Leija, Michelle Calderon, Neida Perez, Danielle Ison, Mrs. Ann Goodson, Hope Kelly. Other film actors not seen above: Victor Diaz, Mr. Kenny Goodson, Paisley McGee, Sabrina and Sebastian Otero, Aubrey Watkins.

Casting and Roles

Suffragettes: **Skylar Hodson** as Minnie Fisher Cunningham. **Skylar Fondren** as Lavinia Engle, Cunningham’s best friend. **Dr. Maryna Svirska Otero** as Annette Finnigan, wealthy Houston business woman who drafted Cunningham. **Ann Finch Goodson** as Carrie Chapman Catt, the national suffrage leader. **Michelle Calderon** as Eleanor Brackenridge, San Antonio banker. **Aubrey Watkins** as Helen Moore. **Neida Perez** as Perle Penfield, **Monse Rivero** as Jesse Ames. **Victoria Matiz** as Marie Ames.

Anti-Suffragettes: **Odalys Adame** as Amarantha Parkington. **Neida Perez** as Grace Winchester. **Aubrey Watkins** as Pauline Wells. **Grace Kelly** as Ida Darden. **Dr. Andrew Yox** as Texas Governor Jim Ferguson.

Ambivalent Males: Sam Pollen as B. J. Cunningham, Minnie’s husband. **Victor Diaz** as Texas Governor William Hobby. **Raul Leija** as pharmacist/Willard A. Johnson. **Luiz Olvera** as Charles Metcalf.

Others: **Kenny Goodson** as the minister. **Sabrina and Sebastian Otero** as youth at church.

Our Thanks To:

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Whatley Enhancement Grants and Nita May, NTCC Development
Friends of Honors Northeast along with Ann Goodson, and Christine Yox for premiere refreshments
Kenny Goodson, whose music and verve in composition are an inspiration to us all
Carolyn Franks Whatley Performing Arts Director
Steven Nelms, Whatley Tech Director, and Consultant
Jodi Pack, NTCC Director of Marketing and Public Relations
Hudson Old, Publisher of *East Texas Journal*

NTCC Administration: President: Dr. Ron Clinton; Vice President: Dr. Kevin Rose; Associate Vice President: Anna Ingram. NTCC Business Office, Humanities Secretary: Delbra Anthony

Establishments where we filmed in August of 2022: Northeast Texas Community College, Whatley Center for the Performing Arts. Mount Pleasant Churches: Good Shepherd Lutheran and Tennison Methodist. Caldwell Park of Mount Pleasant, Historic St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, and Pioneer Museum of Fredericksburg, Texas. Historic homes in Fredericksburg: Abigail's Cottage, Little Acorn, and Metzger's Sunday House.

Costume Support: Ann Goodson, Hope Kelly, Dr. Page Petrucka, NTCC Theatre Director

Graphic Arts Support: Cindy Hammonds, Monse Rivero

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State Leader of the Webb Society: Lisa Berg, Director of Education, Texas State Historical Association

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Our previous feature-length films, watchable from the film page of the above honors site, have concerned: the Morris County father of prohibition--Morris Sheppard, the great Texas populist from Hughes Springs--Wright Patman, Harriet Potter Ames—perhaps the only woman in Northeast Texas with a monument (by Lake Caddo), Sam Houston, and the Fall of the Texas Cherokee (For a generation in the early 19th century, Cherokee lived to the south of us), the story of the great cosmetics CEO, Mary Kay, the story of Barbara Conrad and the University of Texas, 1956-57, Adina De Zavala and the Making of the Alamo, the story of Bo Pilgrim, and the Carroll Shelby Story. The scripts and the stories about how each film was made are also available on this site.