

Chapter Research Project:
**Texas-History-Centered Niche Cinema: The
NTCC Webb Chapter Film Series**

Query:



For Current Films, Past Films, Scripts and Film Stories.

*The work of the NTCC Webb Society on its Texas history
films in the Year **2023**. Covering Activity on:*

*Texas Suffragette: The Minnie Fisher Cunningham Story
Trailer and Film in Progress Now on YouTube:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quZWhc7xXK4&t=4s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFqoukR71tw&t=1811s>

Or Query on YouTube: <Texas Suffragette: The Minnie Fisher Cunningham Story>

&

*The Traveling Preachers of Early Texas.
Now on YouTube*

<https://www.ntcc.edu/honorsfilms>

The Link to the Complete Film with Placeholder Music is provided in the Email.

Premiere Date: 23 February 2024 At the Whatley Center for the Performing Arts at Northeast Texas Community College

A) The Scope of the Undertaking:¹

We began the winter and early spring of 2023, abiding with the following observations that had the ring of validity about our film work: “Our patrons and Webb/Honors Director are getting older: some are committing acts of bravery to remain as our patrons.” “The NTCC honors program has a declining allure, and that will mean less students in the Webb Society, and Texas History seminar.” “Less high school graduates need Texas history on a collegiate level, as they have already burned through dual-enrollment U.S. History requirements while in high school.” “Why do a film on something religious, with so many unchurched young people?” “Wasn’t our premiere of our women’s suffrage film in March of 2023 not up to the standard of our earlier Carroll Shelby, and Ma and Pa Ferguson showings?” But by May of 2023 we began to feel the momentum of a project that has surpassed all our previous efforts in enthusiasm, expenditure of funds, and, we believe, quality. Our donors alone came up with over \$6,000 to make our “Traveling Preachers of Early Texas” film work, and the students met for a record fifteen times *outside* of our traditional film week in August to make this recent film on the traveling preachers a possibility. At the center of the rejuvenated effort this year was a new form of community input, and student leaders—Michelle Calderon, and Monse Rivero, who avidly encouraged and supported such input. **Allen Herald**, an alumnus of our college, and former resident of Camp County, now living in Austin, discovered our series, and volunteered to help with it, along with his South-African-born fiancée, **Hannah Goldblum**. Herald had before this a somewhat mixed legacy of film-making already in Northeast Texas, and our Webb/Honors Director, Dr. Andrew Yox, was not sure about how to deal with this. It wasn’t that people doubted his artistry, just his wherewithal to keep agreements. But the students thought Yox was something of an old fogy for doubting what the young, aspiring film-maker could do. Yox was more ambivalent than opposed and he gave

¹ Our series creating previously un-filmed stories of Texas, includes a two-year cycle for each film. Thus we are including in this report our film-developing activity for the year 2022, on the two films. These materials include our premiere and publicity outreach for the Texas Suffragette film. We plan to have similar materials for our Traveling Preacher film, and subsequent showings, but cannot yet include them here.

way, and Herald steadily advanced in the nature of his help. Soon there was no question that Herald alone had become the executive director, as the student directors could not keep pace with the day-to-day improvisation that was happening. This caused another change in the leadership structure. Yox and even some students fretted about the way the film was progressing—so much slower than the soap-opera-styled velocity of our tradition. Some student leaders feared that the film had become too large of a project.



Hannah Goldblum and Allen Herald at a Webb Society Film Gathering at Jo's Coffeehouse, Mount Pleasant, 28 July 2023

But Herald, our key donors, the Rev Dan Hoke—our main enthusiast, and Herald's student following, persevered. Our regional composer, Kenny Goodson was happy to continue his role creating the music for the soundtrack, because what he saw coming out of the Herald-led effort was better than anything before.

This report will attest to how the story with Herald turned out, but in addressing the first question about scope, our 2023 work was basically like previous years, an all-around-the-calendar exercise, only this year it was more extensive.² In January of 2023, future student director, Monse Rivero began working on the poster for our 2023 premiere in March, Michelle Calderon finished her essay on the Suffragette film research, and Kenny Goodson put his final touches on the Texas Suffragette soundtrack, based on a spotting document of the 47 scenes compiled on 21 December. In February, we made and submitted abstracts for Calderon's poster and our film panel to the meeting of the National Collegiate Honors Council in November. As it turned out, Calderon's proposal was accepted; our Texas-History Niche Cinema film panel, which had enjoyed a three-year run at the NCHC, was rejected. In El Paso on 4 March at the Walter Prescott Webb Society, writer and director Skylar Fondren, and producer, Sam Pollen provided an overview of our film. We were thrilled there to learn of our Caldwell Chapter Award for film work in 2022! Also, in Wichita Falls on 11 March at the Great Plains Honors Council, Sam Pollen provided a film overview. On March 22, Collins Knighton and K-Lake radio allowed us to take to the airways a second time to boost our film premiere on the Suffragettes the following Friday. This was the first

² Money is always an issue. We are so thankful for the donors of the NTCC honors program that makes this Webb initiative possible, mainly Jerald and Mary Lou Mowery, of Mount Vernon. The institutional resources of the NTCC honors program, *Honors Northeast*, also come into play as an important factor explaining what we are able to do. See: Annie Mueller, "Why Movies Cost So Much to Make," *Investopedia* 25 June 2019. <<https://www.investopedia.com/financial-edge/0611/why-movies-cost-so-much-to-make.aspx>> [Accessed 8 January 2019]; Stephen Follows, "Blog," <<http://stephenfollows.com/how-many-people-work-on-a-hollywood-film/>> [Accessed 17 January 2015].



Disc-Jockey Collins Knighton in center with red cap; Students from left: Sam Pollen--producer of the Suffragette film, Neida Perez--actress, Victoria Matiz—cinematographer, Michelle Calderon, film scholar, Victor Diaz, researcher, actor and consultant, and Skylar Hodson who starred as Minnie Fisher Cunningham.

time in our history that the students were able to talk exclusively about a film in a K-Lake segment. We premiered the Suffragette film at the Whatley Center for the Performing Arts on 25 March at 7 pm, with our donors providing free baked goods, and drinks. On 20 April, Skylar and Sam presented our film to donors in a local dinner. On 5 May, Sam Pollen presented a poster about our Suffragette film at the McGraw Hill Poster Contest.

We were not entirely finished with the Suffragette film. Michelle Calderon would present her film research on Minnie Fisher Cunningham twice in November, the latter time at the National Collegiate Honors Council in Chicago. But in May we pivoted, bringing in members of the newest group of the *NTCC Webb Society*, and *Honors Northeast*, and initiating our traveling preachers' film. On 25 May, our student directors of the new film on the Traveling Preachers, Monse Rivero, and Michelle Calderon, and key film scholar, Luke McCraw, met for the first time with Allen Herald, and Hannah Goldblum, as well as the Rev. Dan Hoke who first initiated the research on the traveling preachers. The latter three had nothing to do with honors, but we thought it right to adopt them as community members of our Walter Prescott Webb Society. It was a fateful meeting. Rev. Hoke showed us all how



Monse Rivero, Rev. Dan Hoke, Hannah Goldblum, Allen Herald, Raul Leija, and Michelle Calderon at our Initial Encounter in May



Students met 15 Times outside of Film Week to accommodate the more patient Schedule of Herald and Goldblum. Our honors patrons always provided lunch. Here the students are by the Thruston House of Mount Vernon, Texas an old dogtrot home. Rev. Dan Hoke is again on hand on the left to cheer the students on.

energized he was by the film topic. He role-played a traveling preacher for us. He would go on not only to act in the film, but to show up on many occasions just to cheer the group on. Allen Herald and Hannah Goldblum, however, stole most of the attention. They seemed super-cool, and affirmative. The students were hooked. Reverend Dan was hooked.

Emboldened by this initial meeting on the newest film, on 31 May to 2 June, six scholars and Dr. Yox traveled to Dallas for research on the traveling ministers of early Texas. We performed this research before our gracious hosts at the DeGolyer Library at Southern

Methodist University. We say “gracious,” because they at the end of our research sojourn donated \$1,000 worth of brand new if sometimes dated books on Texas history to our NTCC library!³



Students on our Film Research Trip, 1 June 2023, at Southern Methodist University. Michelle Calderon, Perla Guzman, Vanessajane Bayna, Luke McCraw, Raul Leija, and Neida Perez

³ “SMU donates books to NTCC” *Northeast Texas Community College Press Releases* < [7](https://www.ntcc.edu/news/2023/smus-degolyer-library-donates-books-ntcc#:~:text=Once%20back%20at%20NTCC%2C%20the.at%20the%20best%20Texas%20artist.> [Accessed 5 January 2024.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

From the moment this group of seven came back to the present, someone has been devoting time, on a daily basis to the film and the rest is a blur. In June we had meetings at the Mount Pleasant Starbucks. In July we had a film dinner at Nardello's in downtown Mount Pleasant, and met at Jo's Coffeehouse with its more spacious interior, and escape from the heat. Script development proceeded through June and July. The intense bout with filming the script occurred from 7 to 12 August. We spent the last four days of that week in Nacogdoches, filming, our most expensive trip ever. We stayed at log cabin Vrbos and Airbnbs. Somehow, they were even more expensive than the more accommodating Bed-and-Breakfast places in Jefferson, Texas where we have most often filmed. But we needed actual cabins, something that the old Southern-Victorian town of Jefferson lacked. The entire month of August was consumed with reservations, invoices, purchases, finding the right receipts, filling out more POs, and writing thank-you letters. The overworked staff at NTCC had a few meltdown moments because of all of this end-of-the-year activity. At least one secretary had to endure the anger of an administrator who had been illicitly cut out of the action.

From September through December, film scholarship continued. Luke McCraw will be submitting his essay on this subject for the Caldwell essay contest; we presented an early draft of our *Traveling Preacher* film trailer at the Fall Webb Society at San Felipe de Austin on 20 October. One notable new activity stemmed from the constant work and editing of *Allen Herald*. He made two major revisions of the script during the fall. Most of the weekends in August and September involved filming at various sites in Camp and Franklin Counties.

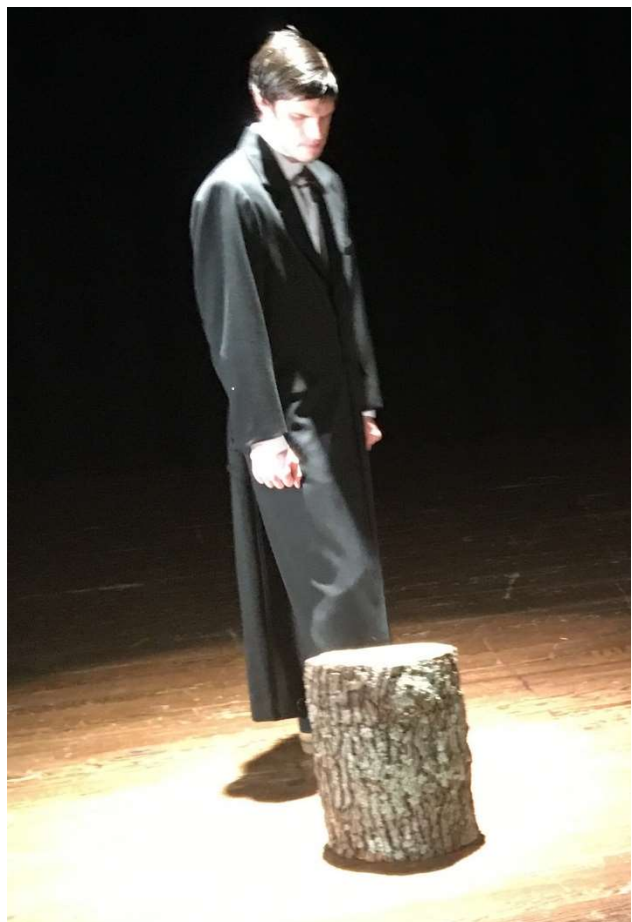
The year 2023 became our most involved year of niche-Texas History cinema history as it was also the year when elements outside the college, and outside honors had the most to

do with the shaping of the film. The *Traveling Preacher* film is now our twelfth feature-length film on themes concerning Texas history that we have produced—since 2012.⁴

There is both a minor and major novelty that could be added for the year, 2023: First for some carryover news. Evan Sears, the film scholar of our 2021 film, began working this past fall on a possible *Texas Handbook* article on Carroll Shelby much as Israel Perez earlier supplied the Handbook article on Bo Pilgrim. He has shared his proposed article with Yox, and seems serious in his resolve.

The major novelty for the year 2023, however, in terms of scope, has to do with our film scholar, Luke McCraw. The scholarly facet behind our film this year, our findings and conclusion appear exciting as they encompass not only an interesting theory about traveling preachers, but the discovery of a whole new story—the Second Great Awakening vs. the “Pine-Tree Curtain” of Secular Texas. Our film scholar, Luke McCraw, currently booked to speak 26 January for a men’s prayer breakfast in Mount Pleasant, and also, 22 February, at the Mount Pleasant Library, has been our best film researcher of all time. A winner of the \$200 Dr. Charles B. Florio award for his academic leadership this past fall, he has been a whirlwind of scholarship. In fifteen weeks, this fall, McCraw submitted twenty-six research exercises on the traveling preachers, numbering 17,336 words of highly original, dense, fact-

⁴ For our film series see www.ntcc.edu/honorsfilms or query NTCC films on the web. Our previous feature-length films, watchable from the film page of the above honors site, have concerned: 1) the Morris County father of prohibition--Morris Sheppard, 2) the great Texas populist from Hughes Springs--Wright Patman, 3) Harriet Potter Ames—perhaps the only woman in Northeast Texas with a monument (by Lake Caddo), 4) The Story of Ma and Pa Ferguson, Texas Governors, 5) Sam Houston, and the Fall of the Texas Cherokee (For a generation in the early 19th century, Cherokee lived to the south of us), 6) the story of the great cosmetics CEO, Mary Kay, 7) the story of Barbara Conrad and the University of Texas, 1956-57, 8) Adina De Zavala and the Making of the Alamo. 9) the story of poultry magnate, Bo Pilgrim. 10. The life of Carroll Shelby, Emissary of the Muscle Car. 11. Texas Suffragette: Minnie Fisher Cunningham, and the story on how the 19th amendment was passed in Texas.



Luke McCraw acting as Stephen F. Austin, about to take the "stump" in our film, in Missouri, battling his future Texas nemesis, traveling preacher William Stevenson

studded prose. The great bulk of his research concerned documents that remain offline. This means that for fifteen straight weeks, McCraw was submitting an essay as long as the final essay submitted by a typical NTCC student after one semester in history.

Much of the narrative below will continue to suggest the final dimensions of the "scope" issue, but attachments in the same email in which this report is sent will also attest to this. The email inserts will include:

- ✓ Our eighty-one-page Traveling Preacher film script, substantially edited and rewritten by Allen Herald, and Hannah Goldblum.⁵
- ✓ The Voucher and Itinerary for the Nacogdoches Trip. This does not include spending for the earlier part of the week.
- ✓ A March Letter, 2023 letter to our Key Film Donors, Jerald and Mary Lou Mowery of Mount Vernon, Texas.
- ✓ The Texas Suffragette Premiere Program, 25 March 2023
- ✓ The itinerary for the research trip to SMU for the Traveling-Preachers research 31 May-2 June 2022
- ✓ A press release over the main week of August 2023 filming

⁵ Our other scripts, including the Shelby film script sent last January, are all online at www.ntcc.edu/honorsfilms.

B) Its Purpose:

The overall purpose of our film work is to unify and uplift. We hope to: 1) educate members of our community and indeed ourselves about significant Texas history themes, 2) highlight various regional legends that can bring us together, and encourage discussion and regional/patriotic spirit, 3) enable students to enhance their résumé of citations, and talents, and 4) to build our Webb-Honors group into an ongoing team with a common, year-long reference point.

The Cunningham, and Traveling Preacher films both taught stories that few people knew. The victory of the Texas Suffragettes relative to the suffrage movements in other Southern states and the victory of the traveling preachers in opposing the more secular order envisioned by Stephen F. Austin were victories that most of our students empathized with. They were stories that also drew enthusiastic community support, particularly Ann Goodson, and Dr. Maryna Otero, with the case of the suffragettes, and the Rev. Dan Hoke and the generous ladies of the McMahan's Chapel near St. Augustine with the case of the traveling preachers.⁶ With the students, Skylar Fondren reached a state of high ardor with the Cunningham story, though her enthusiasm was not as contagious as we would have surmised. On the other hand, we have never had such an assortment of male actors showing such unabashed, above-and-beyond vitality for a film as with the traveling preacher story. Webb Society students, Luke McCraw, Michael Rodriguez, Kaden Groda, Morgan Thrapp, and Garrett Phillips provided the greatest assortment of male actors we have ever fielded. They were also the most enthusiastic.

⁶ The women of the McMahan's Chapel near St. Augustine, Texas, led by Sharron Mills, fixed our entire film group a free, wonderful lunch of chicken-spaghetti. They were very supportive and encouraging about our film effort.

Our films have traditionally served to provide an honorary momentum for our students in terms of winning other awards and honors. Their group Caldwell Chapter Award, and various individual roles in a victorious enterprise enhance their stories immensely. We have seen this again during the year 2023. Jordan Chapin who starred in our Shelby film as Carroll Shelby's movie-star wife, Jan, won an All-USA Award from Phi Theta Kappa. This put her in a top group of twenty, nation-wide. Skylar Fondren, who served as assistant director for the Shelby film, but then became a glistering flame of energy with the suffragette film, writing the script, acting, and directing, won a Coca Cola Gold Award of Phi Theta Kappa also in May. This put her up with a group of about 250 top students nationally.

In terms of team building, every trip, every filming experience locally, and every meeting at Starbucks (thanks to our donors) seemed to help in some way in building team spirit. One festive party we probably should not have had, occurred in the deep woods to the west of Nacogdoches. It was night. It was 100 degrees. The students didn't care. We were in the middle of nowhere, without GPS. The students stretched the Airbnb rules a little bit, but it was a wild time, with dancing and tacos. Below one sees the chefs of our wild night. On the left in orange, Melody Mott, our Assistant Honor Director, became a huge factor in providing lunches and occasions like this.



Chefs on "party night" that also included some 2 a.m. filmings. Melody Mott, Victoria Matiz, Halea Ledezma, Aubrey Watkins, Michael Rodriguez, Raul Leija, and Michael Rodriguez again, 10 August, 2023 in Nacogdoches.

C) Procedures Followed:

Our basic film procedure is research, script formation, the organization of an executive committee, the reach-out to fill the needs of casting, rehearsals, filming, production, and the non-diagetic musical overlay.

In each of these areas, there were notable developments in 2023:

Research: This was the first film where a member of the community not only suggested the topic, but bequeathed some research as a starting point. The Reverend **Dan Hoke**, a friend of our key film patrons, Jerald and Mary Lou Mowery, had developed an essay on the traveling preachers. When we departed for the DeGolyer library at the end of May, therefore, we knew something of the size of Methodist saddlebag books, the hardships endured by the preachers and the funny stories about Biblical ignorance, and ignorance in general, on the frontier. (in one story, a settler protests that he is thankful that he knows so little of scripture. The traveling preacher replies: “well you must have a lot to be thankful for!”). The DeGolyer Library personnel as noted above were exceptional in providing us autobiographical material on the traveling preachers, as well as other primary documents. We did not have the quantity of the material that we had with the Suffragette film, but what we had was page-by-page more revealing. Much of the suffragette work was perfunctory, dealing with letters about meetings, and speaking engagements. Traveling preachers like Henry Stephenson, and Joseph Bays, on the other hand, risked their lives on several occasions. The tension with the opposition was more dramatic.

Script: On our way back from Dallas, we talked about what our research meant. Luke McCraw, our film scholar discussed it more with Dr. Andrew Yox. We had a general consensus that we had a story that went beyond the Peter-Cartwright-variety-difficulties-with-frontier-preaching narrative. Stephen F. Austin, and his agents, as well as the Mexican government had clearly opposed the preachers in Texas, and thus the Second Great Awakening had a drama in Texas that it did not have in other states. Luke was going to write some scenes, as Skylar Fondren before him had written the entire suffragette script. But he got involved with a great deal of work with the grocery-store Brookshires, a position he later quit to concentrate on his schoolwork. Dr. Yox then began the draft in June. After one week, Allen Herald, Hannah Goldblum, Monse Rivero, and Michelle Calderon had an at-first tense meeting with Yox. They did not like the way the script was proceeding. They thought it lacked drama, and that a narrator should not be relied on to explain the film. Rather there should be a “narrative anchor,” a later-day spokesman, who perhaps could tell the story as a character in the film itself. Yox again gave way. He did, however, finish a draft alive to some of the historical realities. Then Allen Herald, Hannah Goldblum, Monse Rivero, Michelle Calderon, and Raul Leija all edited the result.

Various realities of the film-making and the unique film vision of Allen Herald necessitated a second and final draft of the script. Allen Herald dominated these revisions.

Executive Committee: Our de facto executive committees evolved at greater rates than any other year. After having dominated the suffragette film, Fondren was unable to make its premiere. She had conferences, and a death in the family. Calderon, Rivero, Yox, Hoke, and McCraw were at the apex in May, then Herald and Goldblum came along. Rivero and Calderon at first functioned along with Herald and Goldblum during an early phase to secure

an optimal student involvement, and Melody Mott, assistant honors director, also facilitated this. In time, however, Allen Herald, Hannah Goldblum, and two of the male actors, Michael Rodriguez, and Kaden Groda really began to give their heart and soul to it. They enabled the extra filmings, and the tide of enthusiasm that went past film week in August. Our patrons, Yox, and Mott continued to field lunches on their behalf.

Our **Casting Effort** this year for the film on the traveling preachers was as noted successful, in fact, even unprecedented. In 2015, we actually had three aspiring theatre majors—all Webb/honors students--in one set, and other highly talented students. Still, there was something novel about this year's enthusiasm to hold roles. In 2015, one of the theatre majors took over as director. She made allegations and comments that created an oppressive mood for some. The surge in verve this year was a function of our charismatic, executive director, Allen Herald. To be sure, Michelle Calderon, and Monse Rivero, two social minded student directors, added considerably to the original thrust. But Herald motivated students to serve in this film like no one else. He said the film 'would be awesome' and that the talent of this group was 'incredible'. He was always very patient and affirming with people. His associate, South-Africa born Hannah Goldblum said little, but everyone sensed how intelligent she was, and helpful with the finer points of filmmaking. Glamorous, easy to talk to, and an artist at heart, she set an example, and advanced the final product in innumerable ways.

Casting may have been helped along this year too by the binary nature of most scenes. The cast was largely split up into couples that each had a number of one-on-one roles together. Yox's and Herald's scriptwriting paid heed to an early recommendation of Ann Goodson, mentioned above, that women play an integral part in this film. She was right about their importance! Wives made the traveling preachers possible; Stevenson, Stephenson, and Bates did not receive secure funding from their denominations. Someone had to make major sacrifices on the home front to allow the preachers to ride forth. that there were a lot of wife-to-husband conversations, or in the case of Stephen F. Austin, sister-to brother conversations.

Actually, And Stephen F. Austin needed a confidante, thus his sister who he did most like, Emily, got roles. But this organization into pairs motivated more inter-pair competition, and intra-pair rehearsal.



With **Costumes**, we had an optimal year, but a bad ending. Ann Goodson had generously driven to Fredericksburg for the suffragette film, and offered to make the skirts for this year's traveling preacher film. She did make some. However, the student leaders did not care for her zealous pursuit of costuming in the Shelby and Suffragette films. Having the resources

of the *Theatre Northeast* department and other sites, the honors students frankly believed they could do it without Goodson, and she was more or less snubbed. This was unfortunate, at least in the endgame. We made do with decent enough simulacra of nineteenth-century frontier clothing, but in the end, there was just one big ball of discarded clothing, and none of the students had time to deal with it. Promises were canceled by time- famine realities, especially after so many students had already made sacrifices for the film, not realizing the new slow rate at which we would film. This costume disaster led to an abrupt return of costumes to the theatre department, the discovery of folded but not re-entered and laundered costumes, and theatre director Page Petrucka's announcement that henceforth honors students would no longer be able to borrow costumes from the theatre department of Northeast Texas Community College.

Practices and Filming: This year, practicing parts took on a new meaning. Filming took so much time, and the pre-checks of lighting and prop use were so extensively pursued by Herald and Goldblum, that nearly everyone knew their part by the final cut. Herald also

was an amazing improviser. If a student didn't know the part, he would get the lines down to a level the student could say them, and make the scene meaningful. Considering all the time Herald and Goldblum put into the enterprise, it was amazing how patient and understanding they were with the actors. When one coupled this perception with the fact that Herald, as well as the student directors, Calderon, and Rivero, were promising a "new kind of film," or the best film ever," the morale of the troupe was on the whole, excellent.

There were some dissenters. Because of the slow pace, not everyone in the original script got to film their lines. Some memorized parts for nothing. The script changed several times, penalizing at least one student actor, who had obtained initially a fast-forward fidelity over his rather sizable part. Some also thought the filming process was taking too long, and that they could not commit to its continuance. But these dissenters did not go away wishing failure for the project. They recognized the enthusiasm at the core of the enterprise, and believed the end result would overtake procedural problems.

We decided to go to Nacogdoches this year because this heavily wooded area seems to have a remarkable number of "cabin-by-a-lake" rentals. The problem with Nacogdoches, however, was that all these cabins, or at least the ones we could secure, were spread out, and some were in areas where the internet was very poor. Travel times to get back and forth from film sites were as abysmal or worse than the summer of 2017, when we filmed the Mary Kay story in Fort Worth with only one van at our disposal. But unlike B&Bs in Fort Worth, two of the outlying cabins of Nacogdoches were not negotiable with GPS, and were often off very poor roads. The Sweet Serenity Cabin some twenty-five miles west of Nacogdoches was a great place to party and film. But to get there our rented minivans had to traverse a long road of dirt and stones, and finally sand. It was up one sand dune, down another and up again. We actually had to unload once and get students to push. Another cabin offered again, a great deal of perfect outdoor space, even if it was 100 degrees in the shade. But the Stag Leap Antlers Cabin despite being expensive and maintained by a proprietor who seemed to think we were lucky to be in heaven, had very poor air conditioning and internet.

Production and the Non-Digetic Musical Overlay: Our students took an unprecedented step. After giving thousands of hours collectively to a project, they trusted Herald and Goldblum to complete all the editing and production this year. No student was involved as in other years where we always had student producers, doing the editing instead of a research essay for History 2301.022, Honors Texas history. Even though they now live most of the time in Austin, and have not received a cent for their labors. Herald and Goldblum have come through on every occasion. They also have worked very well with Kenny Goodson, our regional composer who resides in Hughes Springs, who Herald describes as a musical “machine.” Such unprecedented community-level volunteer work would normally put our students to shame. However, as noted above, many students worked exceedingly hard on this film. Male actors such as Michael Rodriguez, Kaden Groda, and Garrett Phillips served as cinematographers, prop operators, scene makers, and boom mic holders countless times. One actress, enmeshed into the film work, dropped her standing in honors. As they made these sacrifices even after the fall semester began, they even sacrificed their study time—and ultimately, their grades.

Our composer, Kenny Goodson, has become progressively more booked over the years. Yet he has been steadfast in helping our film enterprise. One donor after viewing the *Traveling Preacher* trailer which now lies at the top of our www.ntcc.edu/honorsfilms site noted: “BRAVO & BRAVA to your entire Honors Film Company and Crew.” As for the music, he noted, “Kenny nailed the underscore.”

D) Findings:

Our own regional historian, Rev. Dan Hoke, introduced us to the standard Ross Phares- Peter Cartwright literature of the Southern part of the Second Great Awakening. Phares is an excellent historian of frontier religion, and Peter Cartwright was a contemporary whose colorful stories remain a part of the lore for the period.¹ Hoke also pointed us to an

invaluable source which covers the early life of the traveling preacher who first reached Texas, William Stevenson. Hoke knew there was a way to bring the story of the Second Great Awakening more robustly into Texas historiography.

Our scholars, working during the month of May, and at Southern Methodist University with Dr. Yox at the beginning of June, began to see that the story of the Southern Great Awakening in Texas was different, not only because of the opposition of the Mexican government, but because of the opposition of empresario, Stephen F. Austin and like-minded settlers. We found, for example that Austin forced out of Texas both the Baptist traveling preacher, Joseph Bates, and the Methodist, Henry Stephenson, after they had settled. Then, when Bates tried to enter the country by the Sabine, he was arrested, and would have been jailed, but he escaped. This opposition made the experience of the Second Great Awakening in Texas more dramatic than that of other states, and contributed to the central tension of the film.

Another new theme found in our research was that the opposition between Austin and the Methodist traveling preachers actually began in Missouri. We were surprised that our whole narrative, with the Austins, the Stevensons, Stephenson, and Bates—could begin squarely in Missouri with every character on board, and then shift down to Arkansas and Louisiana before coming to Texas. Thus Stephen F. Austin ran for the territorial election in Missouri against the Methodist, William Stevenson, defeating the latter. Later, however, Stevenson was elected to the territorial legislature of Arkansas, and he was able to help remove Austin from a judgeship. Stevenson was not only acclaimed as the first traveling preacher in Arkansas, but also in Texas. Joseph Bates, meanwhile, who might have befriended the anti-Sauk-Indian Austins in Missouri, visited Moses Austin when he returned from his historic trip to San Antonio in Louisiana. This encounter did not go well—it is possible that Moses Austin resented the attempt of Bates to convert him. Thus, there was a pre-existing animosity that the traveling preachers and their opponents took to Texas.

One final finding came as much from the sources as the prodding of Ann Goodson

above to remember the role of women. The Stevensons, Stephenson, and Bates, as well as slightly later riders like William Allen were not well funded. They were, however, married. In order to go off long distances, they had to have had very prudent wives, and wives who were willing to support the missionary enterprise. One aspect that limited Joseph Bates was the shaky relationship he had with his wife, Rosenia. Henry Stephenson, on the other hand, had in Ruth a true believer as well as a pragmatic negotiator of frontier life.

E) Conclusions:

We are indebted to Luke McCraw for the overarching scholarly discovery underlying the film. His thesis is that the traveling preachers broke through the Pine-Tree Curtain of early secular Texas as men who modeled their lives on the Wesleys, and Francis Asbury. The traveling preachers had neither funding, denominational support, government sanction, or a strong theological education behind them. But as Stephen F. Austin recognized, they were a very tenacious group. The autobiographies of William Stevenson and William Allen, along with scattered sources on the others suggest that the preachers were very straight-laced, very denominational, very conscious of the particular belief system they represented. They were imitators of particular Christians before them who they very much admired, and wanted badly to emulate.



Our Webb Society Film Team, Photo Courtesy of Hudson Old, and the [East Texas Journal](#). From Left to Right: Victoria Matiz, Joel Reyes, Honors Director--Dr. Andrew Yox, Kaden Groda, Allen Herald, Hannah Goldblum, Luke McCraw, Halea Ledezma, Rev. Dan Hoke, Morgan Thrapp, Sam Pollen, Alison Majors, Demi Reyes, Garrett Phillips, Andrea Reyes, Aubrey Watkins, Monse Rivero, Michael Rodriguez, Raul Leija, Assistant Honors Director—Melody Mott, Michelle Calderon, Skylar Hodson.

F) Significance:

With its heartbeat abortion bill, conservative Protestant seminaries in DFW, and Pew Research ranking as the eleventh most religious state in the United States, Texas is still seen today as part of the Bible Belt. But it wasn't always that way. In fact, when Anglo Texas was being formed in the 1820s and early 1830s, the first great empresario, Stephen F. Austin, despised evangelists and did absolutely nothing to invite Catholic priests to Texas. There were very few Catholic priests in Texas before the Revolution, and the missionary efforts of Roman Catholicism in the seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in Texas had largely ceased. We believe we are the first to tell the story of how a group of traveling preachers broke through the “pine-tree curtain” of this secular sphere that was developing at this time in northern Mexico. Amidst imprisonments, forced re-emigration and official harassment, the bearers of the Second Great Awakening persevered, and carried the message to every major Texas settlement. When the shambles of the Revolution were then cleared, the churches

were not only connected to Texas communities, but were able to send in yet another stronger wave of evangelists and religious leaders.²

We suspect too that these historical discoveries are connected to a feature-length film that sets a new standard for a Webb-Society, and Honors-program production. In fact, it could even point to a new way in which regional identity might be strengthened. No one should wait for Hollywood to assist in the cinematic upbuilding of local lore. Nor even are university film programs structured to do this kind of project. Our film series through the years certainly has had to abide with a good deal of amateurism as our students faced an entirely new-kind of group endeavor, with limited time to forge a program. But this year, we have received the freely given work not only of one very talented artist from the larger region—Kenny Goodson, the composer, but Allen Herald and Hannah Goldblum, aspiring film artists on a national scale as well. They have amazing resources: charisma, an incredible work ethic, glamor, artistry, experience, and top-notch equipment. At present we have only “placeholder” music with the scenes, but we believe the final film will attract attention from a larger regional audience, and in time, a larger viewing audience in the years ahead.

The link to the film as it stands now will be attached to the email that carries this report.

¹ Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of a Peter Cartwright, The Backwoods Preacher* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856) <https://www.google.com/books/edition/Autobiography_of_Peter_Cartwright_the_Ba/iOA8AAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Peter+Cartwright&printsec=frontcover> [Accessed 14 January 2024]; Ross Phares, *Bible in Pocket, Gun in Hand: The Story of Frontier Religion.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971).

² “How Religious is your State?” Pew Research Center <<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/02/29/how-religious-is-your-state/?state=alabama>> [Accessed 14 January 2024].