

Chapter Research Project:

Dramatized Legends of Texas History: The NTCC Webb Chapter Film Series

Query <www.ntcc.edu/honorsfilms> For Past Films and Scripts.

*The work of the NTCC Webb Society on its Texas history
films in 2022. Covering Activity on:*

*Pedal to the Metal: The Life of Carroll Hall Shelby
Trailer and Film on YouTube*

: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRxwHU9JwME&t=4s>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwXU0sbcih8&t=2527s>

Or Query on YouTube: <Pedal to the Metal: Carroll Hall Shelby. Final>

&

*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=L0FWyBOVWco>

Or Query on YouTube: <Texas Suffragette: the Minnie Fisher Cunningham
Story> and <2022 NTCC film in progress, Minnie Fisher Cunningham>

Premiere Date: 24 March 2023

At the Whatley Center for the Performing Arts at Northeast Texas Community College

A) The Scope of the Undertaking:¹

All of the fifty-two weeks of the year, 2022, involved some agenda work on our Texas history film series.² The fall semester ended on 9 December 2022, and on that very day, four students, and Dr. Yox went on K-Lake radio in Mount Pleasant to talk about the coming film about Minnie Fisher Cunningham. Our producer, Sam Pollan, had an extra eight days after that to finish his editing. Then the film had to be spotted.³ During Christmas week our Texas composer, Kenny Goodson, whose music has been played throughout the state, was busily at work with the score of our new Minnie Fisher Cunningham film. In January the film is finished. Last February and March, we were thankful for opportunities to present segments of our film, or film scholarship, at meetings of the state Webb society, and Great Plains Honors Council. We have our premiere in late March. We also make abstracts for submission and acceptance into the National Collegiate Honors Council NCHC. In April and early May, film topics appear on posters for the annual McGraw Hill poster contest held at NTCC and typically judges by fifteen leading patrons and friends of the honors program. In May, we pursue research on the next film. Script development proceeds through June and July. The intense bout with filming the script occurs the second week of August, though that entire month is consumed with reservations, invoices, purchases, and thank-you letters. In September through December, film scholarship continues; we present at the Fall Webb Society, and the national meeting of the National Collegiate Honors Council. This was the rhythm for 2022, and it matches that of previous years. The Cunningham film is now our

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 Carroll Shelby film as well as other Shelby presentations. We plan to have similar materials for our Minnie Fisher Cunningham premiere this 24 March, and subsequent showings, but cannot yet include them here.

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. 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].

³ This refers to sequencing the scene lengths and moods previous to sending the film to the film score composer.

eleventh feature-length film on themes concerning Texas history that we have produced—since 2012.⁴

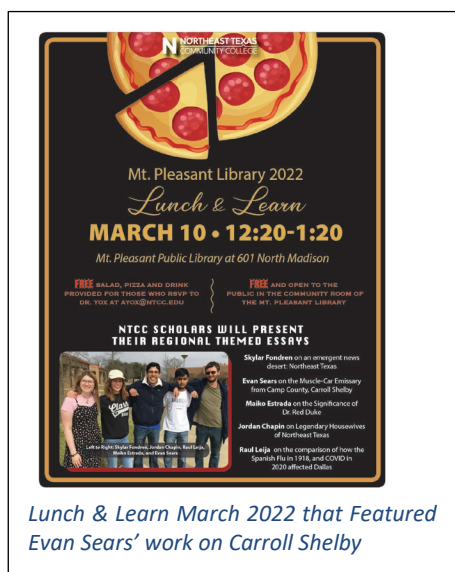
Though the magnitude of the project extends throughout the calendar year, there is a particular intensity to the second week of August when all our student actors are involved, and, in the case of this past year, about \$6,000 was spent. Film week may well involve about



Our Webb Film Cast and Crew, August 2022. 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 Hudson, 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 Otero, Aubrey Watkins.

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. The Shelby film was our tenth, the Cunningham film, our eleventh effort. The scripts and the stories about how each film was made are also available on this site.

700 hours of combined work. The week was especially trying for the director, and script-writer, Skylar Fondren, the Unit Production Director, Monse Rivero, and the lead actress who in this case was Skylar Hodson. Drivers Ann Goodson, Erika Garza, and Dr. Yox each drove the twelve hours involved with the Fredericksburg trip. Goodson, and Yox subsequently stayed busy with the film running errands. But even Garza, who had nothing to do with the film per se, found herself running errands for the student-actors and crew, at one point going late at night at the behest of one student to Walmart.



The breadth of our film work widens as Webb students make their own presentations based on the film experience. Our Shelby film scholar, Evan Sears, and our producer of the Shelby film, Victor Diaz, two Webb sophomores, also had eventful years developing their ideas that flowed from our common project. Evan Sears presented his work on Shelby at the 2022 February meeting of the Webb Society in Austin, a March Lunch & Learn at the Mount Pleasant Public Library where he was

joined by our Webb essayists, at the October meeting of the East Texas Historical Association in Nacogdoches (ETHA), and at the November meeting of the NCHC. It is notable that Sears and our other two Webb presenters at the ETHA became the first students in the history of our college to win the Portia Gordon Award as the best student panel at the 2022 meeting. In 2019, a group of students from Texas A&M College Station won this same award. Also, Victor Diaz, as our film producer, presented segments of our film at the meeting of the ETHA, and at the NCHC.



Presenting at the NCHC in Dallas in November of 2022. Our five NTCC Webb members formed one of the 50 general panels of the NCHC, and our session was based on our Texas-based film series.

The film work also engages members of our community. Last year's Chapter Research project detailed the musical accomplishments of Texas composer, Kenny Goodson, who again is composing our film score this year as a public service. This past year, his wife, Ann Goodson also performed very valuable services of her own. Ann, an NTCC alumna who wrote about Texas history before NTCC had a Webb Chapter, served initially as an advisor to our top-rated honors sophomore,

Skylar Fondren, as she wrote the script. Ann also accompanied our film trip to Fredericksburg, and also sewed the Suffragette sashes that were employed in our film.

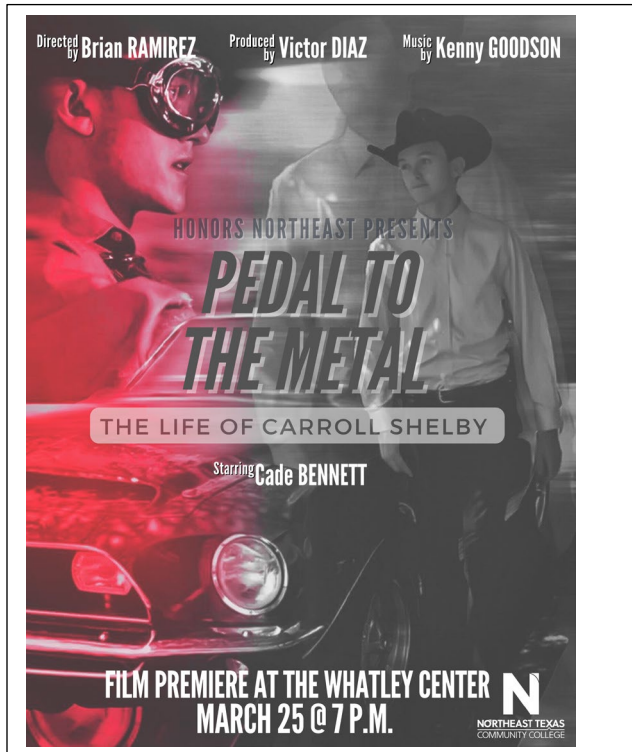


Ann Goodson appeared in our film as the national leader of suffrage, and a friend to Texas' Minnie Fisher Cunningham, Carrie Catt.



Our Texas Suffragettes, filming in Fredericksburg, with their sashes produced by Ann Goodson. In front is Skylar Hodson who played the role of the lead Texas Suffragette, Minnie Fisher Cunningham.

The film projects of the last year were beholden as well to two brilliant women who also donated above-and-beyond time to the project. One was a former NTCC Alumna who



when she was with us as a student did a history of Jefferson, Andrea Reyes. Reyes designed our poster for the Carroll Shelby premiere last March, left. The simplicity of the poster, its fiery red field to the left, signaling speed and tension, the duplication of Shelby as someone who grew to be a towering figure in the automobile industry, are all neatly expressed. Reyes was not only a local valedictorian back in 2007, but a national merit winner. She now has four very bright children, and lives in the same town, Hughes Springs, as the Goodsons.

We have to mention a very special galvanizer as well this year for our female student actors, Dr. Maryna Otero, a Spanish teacher from the largest high school in our service delivery area. Otero assumed the role of Annette Finnigan, the elder Texas suffragette who persuaded Minnie Fisher Cunningham to head the effort. She also was a formative influence



Dr. Maryna Otero

on our prize-winning Carroll Shelby film producer, Victor Diaz. Before he came to us, Diaz did three short Spanish language films for Otero. Otero appeared first for one of our coffee-house rehearsals at Jo's in Mount Pleasant. She was a fountain of energy and inspiration, and very effective is helping our students to see how they could optimize their film work. She is one of the best high school teachers in the area and has impeccable standards.

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 ninety-four-page Minnie Fisher Cunningham film script, written mainly by student-scholar-director Skylar Fondren in the summer of 2022.⁵
- ✓ The Voucher and Itinerary for the Fredericksburg Trip. This does not include spending for the earlier part of the week. Our donors through our college foundation provided 100 percent of the costs for film week, a first.
- ✓ A 22 June 2022 Letter to our Key Film Donors, Jerald and Mary Lou Mowery of Mount Vernon, Texas.
- ✓ The Shelby Premiere Program, 25 March 2022
- ✓ The itinerary for the research trip to the University of Houston 31 May-2 June 2022
- ✓ A letter from the head librarian of the Special Collections at the University of Houston
- ✓ Our Spotting Document for the Minnie Fisher Cunningham Score

B) Its Purpose:

The overall purpose of our film work is to encourage regional uplift. This involves an effort to 1) educate members of our community and indeed ourselves about significant Texas

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

history themes, 2) highlight various regional legends that can bring us together, and encourage discussion and patriotism, 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.

Though both the Shelby and Cunningham films relived controversies, the themes of this work resonated into our lives in very intimate ways. As they touched us, they connected us. The Shelby film had an enthusiastic following. Shelby was a speed cowboy who wore a Cowboy hat at *Le Mans*, and also became the key emissary of the muscle car in the corporate worlds of Ford, and Dodge. For the last ten years before his death in 2012, he resettled in the land of his birth—Northeast Texas. He gave our college complete funding for an automotive program bearing his name. His foundation has donated over a million dollars to our college. At the same time, Shelby was an inveterate philanderer, and that film set off some controversy among the women in honors. Jordan Chapin, and Skylar Fondren, two of our leading scholars, loved the film concept, but hated the depiction of women in the Shelby film. They wanted something totally different and got it with the suffragette film that consumed our efforts after the Shelby premiere in March. This film also encouraged discussion. Our research at the University of Houston showed how our own counties of Northeast Texas had joined the rest of the deep South in resisting suffrage. Jordan Chapin had just finished a Webb project essay on current-day Legendary Housewives of Northeast Texas, those who were leading the homeschool effort and putting a significant amount of effort into the success of their offspring. On the other hand, the Cunningham project engaged a more progressive segment who took inspiration from the fact that Texas as a state broke from the solid South, and became the first state of the old Confederacy to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment which gave women the right to vote.

Our films have traditionally served as stepping stones for our students in terms of winning other awards and honors. We have seen this again this year. In the spring of 2022,

one of the actors in our Pilgrim film, Aaliyah Avellaneda, won our college's eleventh \$150,000 Jack Kent Cooke scholarship. She also won a Coca Cola Bronze Award—nationally.



No student in the history of our film series wrote such a large fraction of the final script as Skylar Fondren. She optimized this attainment and others to become the highest ranking student in the Great Plains Honors Council. She also directed our film.

Last summer two of our actors and film activists, Raul Leija, and Jordan Chapin, won Star awards of Phi Theta Kappa. Chapin also won a Dr. Mary Hood Scholarship, a first-place in Phi Theta Kappa of Texas, and became its state president! Skylar Fondren, our most remarkable film activist who directed and wrote this year's film on Minnie Fisher Cunningham leveraged these attainments to become student representative of the Great Plains Honors Council this past November.

This was the most remarkable designation of all, as it was a true intervarsity accomplishment, coming out ahead of university honors students from Nebraska to Texas.



The Student Group Which Filmed in Fredericksburg

Finally, our film serves to pull us together. We not only end up eating a lot of meals together, and staying in the same Jefferson (Shelby) or Fredericksburg (Cunningham) Bed and Breakfasts, and Airbnbs, but we gained a group spirit by spending hours together filming, and helping each other reciting lines.

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 composition.

In each of these areas, there were notable developments in 2022:

Research: For the first time in our eleven-year history of film research, we journeyed to Houston, and the University of Houston, in particular, for the research. We left NTCC at 4:30 AM on 31 May in order to get a good six hours in with the archive the first day. We departed 2 June, and got back to Northeast Texas late at night. Christian Kelleher, the endowed Library Professor at the University of Houston showed exceptional kindness. We knew this was the place to go to study the Texas suffrage movement, and Minnie Fisher Cunningham, but we were shocked by the sheer number of boxes on this topic the library had. They allowed our team of researchers to occupy two rooms, and provided a continual stream of attendants. We were the biggest group they had had since COVID.



Our students at the University of Houston M.D. Anderson Special Collections. From left to right: Keren Valencia, Victor Diaz, Raul Leija, Jordan Chapin, Michelle Calderon, and Sam Pollan.

Script: Never before has a student so dominated one of our film scripts as Skylar Fondren did in the summer of 2022 (see image above). She was indisputably by the time we needed to put our research into words, our best scholar. She had just won the 2022 McGraw Hill Poster Contest, and a Britt Award from the Great Plains Honors Council for her work on news deserts in Northeast Texas. She had the verve of a high-end journalist, and a passion for the issue. She received help and extensive comments from Ann Goodson, and Dr. Andrew Yox, our Webb sponsor. It was Fondren's vision that the film should be Cunningham's own story, rather than that of some supposedly omniscient historical overseer.

Executive Committee: Having written the film in June and July, Fondren was the best qualified scholar to direct it. She had already won awards for photography and poetry, and had some experience one-year earlier, directing some of our Carroll Shelby scenes in the summer of 2021. She was joined by our first-year Dr. Jerry Wesson Scholar, Monse Rivero who was more of an understudy or associate working with Fondren than a true Unit Production Director on her own. Fondren and Rivero worked together as one. Freshman Sam Pollan who had come on the Houston research trip was our producer, and Victor Diaz, our producer last year, was an all-around consultant and motivating force.

Our **Casting Effort** this year was not as successful last summer as other years. We were so thankful for community talents like Dr. Maryna Otero, Kenny and Ann Goodson stepping into roles, but our NTCC scholar group had some problems with verve. Unlike Cade Bennett who played both Bo Pilgrim, and Carroll Shelby, and had a great personality, and a track record with theatre, we could not find experienced actors this year. Skylar Hodson became Minnie Fisher Cunningham because she was as generous as she was willing, and because she showed up to our Friday get-togethers at Jo's for coffee. The role of Lavinia Engle, who as an early Flapper Suffragette provoked some of the more Victorian Suffragettes

of Texas, was even more demanding, and in desperation, Fondren herself took that role. We fortunately had enough actors to make it work.

With **Costumes**, we were at the top of our game this past summer with Ann Goodson generously driving to Fredericksburg and other sites with a pickup truck with a coat rack filled with costumes. We also had Hope Kelly, a very talented sophomore, and daughter of a missionary who is a theatre design major. To complete the equation, Page Petrucka, Director of the NTCC theatre department allowed us free reign with the costumes of the Whatley Center. This might be visually, our best historical portrayal yet.



Ann Goodson on her pickup truck, declaiming with Hope Kelly in Fredericksburg.

Practices and Filming: This year we again practiced on the second-floor of Jo's Coffee Shop in downtown Mount Pleasant. We filmed initially on Monday, 8 August at the Whatley Center of Northeast Texas Community College, and the Director, Carolyn Franks was especially nice to give us the run of the whole place with full Air Conditioning.

We got our bearings. Fondren brought some wonderful light sets she was able to get, and sophomores like Evan Sears were able to diagnose some of the challenges, like a boom mic that was not working. On Tuesday we filmed in Mount Pleasant: at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church thanks to president Rick Strudthoff, Caldwell Park, thanks to City Manager, Ed Thatcher, and Tennison Methodist Church, thanks to Melissa Pearson, administrative manager. Wednesday through Friday we filmed at Fredericksburg, Texas. Dr. Yox was the one who had to secure these permissions.

We decided to go to Fredericksburg this year initially because we had never been there and knew they had many old homes. Ann Goodson also knew a married couple there who in

a pinch could have taken as many as seven to ten boarders. It seemed an excellent prospect until Goodson's friends got COVID. Meanwhile, McKenzie Moellering of the Fredericksburg Visitor's Bureau, and others in Fredericksburg again showed us that kindness pops up all over the state. We were a little leery of Fredericksburg initially. But two residents of Fredericksburg who went above-and-beyond in their help, and encouragement were Rev. Jeff Hammond of St. Barnabus Episcopal Church, who had some experience with film, and David Shields of the Pioneer Museum. They were incredibly genteel, and accommodating. We also enjoyed touring St. Barnabus where LBJ and Lady Bird Johnson used to worship, and the Pioneer Museum that had many excellent period rooms that fit our 1915-20 Suffragette era.

Production and Composition: Somehow, we lost a \$200 terabyte drive in Fredericksburg, and film editing got off to a slow start. But Sam Pollan, our freshman producer persevered to bring the scenes together during the fall semester in a lengthy process in which he learned how to utilize Adobe Premiere-Pro. We still have a few more filming glitches than usual, and the lack of camera toggling between speakers in the film is disappointing. Kenny Goodson again was an amazing help with all this. He is not only a composer, but the former Director of Computer Services at our college.

D) Findings:

1. Our Shelby producer, Victor Diaz, came through with the biggest scoop of our University of Houston research trip on Cunningham, a trip he almost missed. He found and researched a story about the suffrage leader of Titus County where our college sits. Mrs. R. F. Lindsey typified the lackluster effort for suffrage made in Northeast Texas, an area that made Cunningham very anxious. And the story was kind of funny. Lindsey only feigned to be in women's suffrage, perhaps to obtain from Minnie Fisher Cunningham some reference letters for her so she could direct the census. When those recommendations failed, Lindsey's motivation for suffrage vanished. She largely bluffed her way into receiving bundles of suffrage literature, only to sit on it. Letters from a Mrs. Russell in Mount Pleasant, and

Cunningham's own suspicions corroborated this event.

2) We discovered a stronger and more complex relationship between the Flapper Suffragette, Lavinia Engle, and Minnie Fisher Cunningham than is alluded to in the most noted biography of Cunningham by Judith MacArthur.⁶ After Cunningham left her husband, she often roomed with the younger, Engle. Unlike Cunningham, Engle was a dynamo speaker, and a key link to Governor Hobby's Campaign who hired her to speak. In Cunningham's collection is a flattering picture of Engle, and the two bandied about with words like "beloved" and "my dear" when addressing one another. However, we do not believe that Cunningham followed national leader Carrie Catt into lesbianism because Engle also seemed fiercely individualistic, and highly desirous of men. At one point she dreamed of becoming a "social vampire."

E) Conclusions:

We are grateful to our film scholar, Michelle Calderon for persevering with this topic this fall in her research paper for Texas history. Karen Valencia initially had the key scholarly role, but she developed a severe and life-threatening case of diabetes, and will have to sit out the spring semester. Calderon then came back to the Cunningham project after abandoning it, and wrote a winsome Webb essay.

The success of Cunningham's TESA organization was impressive. Later only Arkansas and Tennessee followed Texas as former Confederate states to support the Nineteenth Amendment. According to Calderon, it was not through power or logic but through *indirection, service, and patriotic initiatives*, that the Texas suffragettes won the support of male legislators in Texas. Cunningham very smartly used the outbreak of World War I and state pride in the case of debunking corrupt Governor Jim Ferguson, to raise the estate of women as a bloc. Women became necessary in the life and death effort to win the war, and in its corollary, to keep a corrupt Governor who seemed to demean the war effort out of office.

⁶ McArthur, Judith N. and Smith, Harold L. *Minnie Fisher Cunningham: A Suffragist's Life in Politics* (New York: Oxford, 2003)

Round-about politics worked! However, with the case of Cunningham, it was not a recipe for later success. Without the attributes of being a particularly strong speaker or writer, without a resume that signaled an important professional success, Cunningham slipped into the background. She remained separated from her husband, won lower-level political appointments, and remained a minor, though not uninfluential player in Texas politics. She was a symbol of an amazing outcome. Through deference and service, she won the grudging support of males to accept women as co-equal citizens in Texas.

F) Significance:

Minnie Fisher Cunningham had less than stellar talents and abilities. Unlike the lawyer, Hortence Ward, the banker, Eleanor Brackenridge, the traveler, Annette Finnigan, and the educator Annie Webb Blanton, she lacked connections, wealth, or a record of professional attainments. She was not a particularly good speaker or writer, and was not the most personable contact with the men she needed on her side to attain female suffrage in Texas. However, Cunningham made a first-rate application of what abilities she did have. She was a warm cheerleader and motivator of the work of out-of-state suffragette speakers such as Edna Beveridge, Frances Brewer, and Marie Ames. She was a round-the-clock letter writer. She had a positive connection with the national movement and Carrie Catt. This brought suffragette money and outside support to Texas. She also understood that to win the vote in Texas one had to first serve. Her strategy to back the patriotism of the war movement, the political campaign to oust Ferguson, and the political career of the ungrateful Governor Hobby was as highly discursive as it was successful. She projected a spirit of Victorian service, and that is what seemed to have won the hearts of the male legislators who enacted the Nineteen Amendment in Texas.

Thank you for considering our project. Again, if you have not yet done this, we encourage you to query YouTube, and our now completed trailers and films: <Pedal to the Metal. The Life of Carroll Shelby, Final> and our film in progress, <NTCC 2022 Film on Minnie Fisher Cunningham>.