
Texas Movies is a sweeping look at the relationship between Texas and motion pictures. The exhibit focuses on films made in Texas and secondarily on those made by Texans, either behind or in front of the camera. The brainchild of Texas screenwriter and film aficionado Frank Thompson, it draws considerably on materials from his collection for the earlier days of the film industry and on a wide variety of sources for more recent developments.

Using mostly paper memorabilia, the exhibit also includes a number of simple interactive and media stations. In fact, the entrance to the exhibit, appropriately under a theater marquee sporting its title, is decorated with clapboards with biographies of Texans working in all aspects of the movie industry in the state. An interactive video screen encourages visitors to submit their own reminiscences of a memorable movie-going experience, with those selected by museum staff being viewable on the screen accompanied by images of theaters in the hometowns where the stories took place. This is an excellent device for getting visitors to start thinking about movies before they start their tour.

From a historical perspective, that tour begins just a few years after the birth of the film industry itself. Filmmaking was originally an East Coast business, but an increasing number of filmmakers were drawn to the West and Southwest for the climate, which made shooting possible year round. The introductory panel for this first section stresses the productivity of the early Texas film industry: over 300 movies were shot in the Lone Star State between 1910 and 1920. Of course, these were almost all one-reel quickies, over 90 percent of which are now lost. One important exception is Wings, winner in 1926 of the first Best Picture Oscar. Postcards, movie posters, and lobby cards of this and other silent pictures—some in color—highlight this section. A stand-alone video monitor in this section shows clips from the more than one hundred films included in the exhibit.

The next section of the exhibit, “Mythic Texas,” is perhaps the closest to the guest curator’s heart. The introductory panel tells us that the Texas story has produced three major movie themes, the “western, oil dramas, and military stories.” Thompson had a hand in the John Lee Hancock Alamo of 2004, and is a long-time Alamo enthusiast. Consequently, much of this section is devoted to artifacts of Hancock’s and John Wayne’s versions and considerable attention to Alamo Village, the huge ranch outside Brackettville, Texas, where Wayne had stone and mortar versions of San Antonio and the Alamo constructed. The video media in this section highlights clips from these two and other Alamo-related movies, and mentions the more than one dozen movies on the subject that have been made in Texas. Conceptual art, lobby cards, and press kits for other movies shot at Alamo Village supplement the “military stories” theme. This section also includes a display case with costumes and il-
Illustrations from the 1956 Rock Hudson–Liz Taylor–James Dean epic *Giant*, which represents the oil drama category, and stills, lobby cards, and a press kit from *HUD*, representing the western.

The second half of the exhibit has three main themes, “Texas on Location” “Real Life Texas” (pun intended?), and “Mavericks.” These are much less focused than what comes before. “Texas on Location” stresses that the state’s uniqueness has made Texas part of the story. A couple of movies are mentioned, but the important element in this section is the TV show *Dallas*. “Real Life Texas” is the exhibit’s nod to nonfiction filmmaking, but it can only point to a snippet of footage from the 1900 Galveston hurricane and the oldest surviving natural disaster film, and three films from the 1970s through the 1990s. Of course, the video display in this part of the exhibit includes that Galveston hurricane footage and a newsreel on the 1947 Texas City disaster. “Mavericks” focuses on Texas filmmakers who have done it their way and gained success, particularly Robert Rodriguez (*El Mariachi* and *Space Kids*), Richard Linklater (*Dazed and Confused* and *The School of Rock*), and Tobe Hooper (the original *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Poltergeist*), and a couple who have not.

Aside from these well defined if unevenly developed sections, other artifacts stress the variety of Texas’s contribution to the art of the motion picture. Cloris Leachman’s Oscar from *The Last Picture Show* is only one of a number of items related to the translation of Larry McMurtry’s literary output to film, the oddest of which is the “mummy” of the character Gus McCrae from the miniseries *Lonesome Dove*. Other unusual items include Sandra Bullock’s garter holster from *Miss Congeniality*; a singed and tattered sailor’s uniform from *Pearl Harbor* (scenes were shot onboard the Houston-based battleship *Texas* and Corpus Christi-based aircraft carrier *Lexington*); the prop “space suits” and helicopter from *Spy Kids 3D*; and the grandma “skeleton” prop from *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

Aficionados may be disappointed in a number of ways. Aside from the introductory panels, the captions are spartan, to say the least, often little more than an identification of the artifact displayed and the date of its creation. A bigger concern is the general lack of broader context in the exhibit. For instance, important films about Texas subjects not actually made in Texas are almost entirely ignored. *Martyrs of the Alamo*, the oldest extant feature on the subject, released in 1915 and made by a protégé of D. W. Griffith, goes unaddressed, as do John Ford’s *The Searchers* and Howard Hawk’s *Red River*, among many other Texas western classics. Among the curious omissions of Texas-made films are Sam Peckinpah’s vision of a morally bankrupt Texas in *The Getaway*, Louis Malle’s underrated rumination on the evolution of American racism in *Alamo Bay*, and Joe Dante’s camp classic spoof of *Jaws*, *Piranha*, which was shot in San Marcos, Texas, with John Sayles contributing to the story. Although the exhibit rightly points out that the varied Texas landscape has stood in for a worldwide range of locations, it would have been useful to point out how other places have stood in for Texas, for instance Alberta’s wheat
fields standing in for the Texas Panhandle in Terrance Malik’s *Days of Heaven*. In other words, the history of “Texas” in film is not as fully explored as it might have been.

As a tight-budget introduction to the Texas film story, *Texas Movies* does a good job, and the general public will appreciate the broad scope and accessibility of the exhibit. In fact, given the nature of the vast majority of the artifacts on display—posters, photographs, sketches, pages from scripts—there is no reason that this exhibit could not easily be transformed into a traveling show. Here’s hoping it is, perhaps in one or two of those old-time movie halls that have been turned into community centers.

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Jessica Hayes, conference coordinator at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, described the irate phone call protesting the exhibition and conference scheduled in September 2004 titled *Life Interrupted: The Japanese American Experience in World War II Arkansas*. The caller felt that highlighting this experience was an insult to the veterans who fought in World War II. Over sixty years later, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Public History Program and the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, California have collaborated in an effort to eradicate just such notions. That all Japanese, citizens or not, were the enemy, is exactly the sort of public opinion that made it possible to eliminate due process and to incarcerate over 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry during World War II.

The www.Lifeinterrupted.org Web site provides an overview of the entire Life Interrupted project, which includes the 2004 opening of eight exhibitions in the Little Rock area, the development of elementary- and secondary-level educational curriculum, the release of a new documentary, and the organizing of a one-day conference.

The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, whose mission is to improve the lives of Arkansans by funding programs and projects that address such issues as economic, racial, and social justice, provided major funding. The primary purpose of the Life Interrupted project is to educate the citizens of Arkansas and the nation about Japanese Americans in World War II Arkansas, with particular emphasis on the Jerome and Rohwer camps in Arkansas, where Japanese Americans from California were held during the war.

The Web site showcases the various aspects of the Life Interrupted project, beginning with detailed information regarding the 2004 Life Interrupted con-