

During his tenure as head of the BYU Motion Picture Studio, Wetzel O. "Judge" Whitaker directed and produced scores of institutional films, including Church classics such as *Windows of Heaven* (1963), *Man's Search for Happiness* (1964), and *Johnny Lingo* (1969). He is arguably the most important figure in the history of Mormon film. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

THE THIRD WAVE: JUDGE WHITAKER AND THE CLASSICAL ERA (1953–1974)

The Third Wave of Mormon cinema is unquestionably the age of Judge Whitaker. He represents the development of Mormon film from its pioneer infancy into classical maturity. The similarities to Hollywood's classical era are numerous (with important exceptions). Most obviously, Mormon film finally left behind the multitasking artisanal mode of prior decades in favor of a studio-based industrial infrastructure featuring specialized workers. Equally important, the BYU studio produced films of an identifiable, consistent, and aesthetically and culturally conservative style deeply rooted in Hollywood norms. It supplied a steady stream of products to a vertically integrated distribution and exhibition network. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Church films compare to Hollywood films—and other classical artworks—in their permeating influence upon their host culture. During Whitaker's tenure, Church films became central to Mormon culture and created a universal doctrinal, cultural, and aesthetic touchstone for Latter-day Saints, to the point that today it is difficult to conceive of the Church without its films and videos. And Judge Whitaker, for his part, has had more influence on Mormon filmmaking than any other person.

It is important to note that institutional LDS film was once again behind the times. Just as the Clawsons had maintained an 1890s style into the 1920s, and the Second Wave practitioners used antiquated forms like slideshows, silent movies, and one- to two-person crews into the 1940s, so too were Church films just launching into their classical period as American filmmakers moved into a postclassical period of sex, violence, and narrative and stylistic disjunction. As a consequence, mainstream films depicting Latter-day Saints (with the general exception of television) returned to postclassical depictions of Mormonism slightly akin to the sensationalist representations of the First Wave. Topics such as polygamy returned and were treated in comical, satirical, or even tragic takes on Mormonism that would pave the way for the “new anti-Mormon film era” of the Fourth and Fifth Waves.

Key Films of the Third Wave

- *Come Back, My Son* (1954, USA, director Judge Whitaker, 25 minutes). This early BYU film was shown in general conference and sealed official Church support for the fledgling studio.
- *How Near to the Angels* (1956, USA, director Judge Whitaker, 42 minutes). The longest BYU film to that date; considered a turning point for the studio.
- *Advise and Consent* (1962, USA, director Otto Preminger, 139 minutes). Key Hollywood film in the switch back to cynicism and prurience in depicting Mormon subjects.
- *Windows of Heaven* (1963, USA, director Judge Whitaker, 50 minutes). Landmark BYU production on the payment of tithing; one of the studio's most popular films.
- *Man's Search for Happiness* (1964, USA, director Judge Whitaker, 13 minutes). This was the defining film for the Church's institutional use of film for propagandizing purposes.
- *Mahlzeiten* (1967, West Germany, director Edgar Reitz, 90 minutes). This Mormon-themed existential drama was on the cusp of the German New Cinema and reflected the changing cinematic view of Mormonism.
- *Johnny Lingo* (1969, USA, director Judge Whitaker, 26 minutes). A routine film for the Sunday School that arguably has become the most popular institutional film in the history of the Church.
- *Pioneers in Petticoats* (1969, USA, director Judge Whitaker, over 44 minutes). This prestige production for 1969 was a milestone and the closest BYU had yet come to a feature film.
- *Paint Your Wagon* (1969, USA, director Joshua Logan, 164 minutes). Polyandry puts a comic twist on the Mormon element of this well-known musical western.
- *Ice Cream and Elevators* (1971, USA, directors Robert Starling and Dean Stubbs, 30 minutes). This romantic comedy inaugurated student filmmaking at BYU.
- *The Church in Action* (1970–1982, USA, directors Judge Whitaker, David Jacobs, various lengths). Judge Whitaker saw these annual documentary records of Church activity as his magnum opus and greatest legacy.

INSTITUTIONAL FILMS

Finding a Foothold at BYU

Although Judge Whitaker would eventually make BYU the heart of classical Mormon cinema, when he first arrived on campus Mormon filmmaking was once again starting from scratch. An inventory of all film-making equipment on campus found just three old 16mm cameras, so the first task was to return to Hollywood, this time for equipment. After this, Whitaker also needed personnel. Whitaker's first employee was a student named John Green, but for expert help he contacted Frank Wise. Wise, though shocked that a new Church film unit had been formed more or less behind his back, joined the department on a part-time basis until his time-consuming work on the temple endowment film was completed, at which point he came on full time.

That February Bishop Wirthlin requested a number of films, but Judge Whitaker deemed it prudent to start with smaller projects like recordings of university functions, the laying of the Los Angeles Temple cornerstone, and a short promotional film for the university called *B. Y. and You*. The results were encouraging, and soon the department's budget and personnel were increased, bringing to campus Judge's brother, writer and animator Scott Whitaker, and cinematographer Robert Stum, whose arrival caused Wise to switch permanently to editing. Soon the group could undertake major projects for the Presiding Bishop's office, beginning with *Come Back, My Son*, in which Scott Whitaker played "a smoking and card-playing deacon" brought back to full Church activity. This film began a long series of narrative films intended to train and inspire Church members in their duties. A similar film followed, *The Bishop, President of the Aaronic Priesthood Quorum*, dramatizing a bishop's relationship with the young men of his ward. President McKay was so pleased that he determined *Come Back, My Son* would be shown at the April 1954 general conference. Its impact finally secured full support for the department, and film requests began streaming in. Many Church organizations now joined the Presiding Bishopric in requesting and funding films. Foremost among these was the Sunday School, which desired pictures for its yearly conventions. The first film for that Church auxiliary, begun by Wise at Deseret Film, was *What Is a Sunday School Class Worth?*—a documentary on the methods of Sunday School teacher Ella Stratford, which showed at the Sunday School convention in October 1954.

Subsequent major productions included *The Happy City* about a boy in the Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake, *Pupil Centered Teaching* about a Sunday School teacher who develops a true interest in her

students, *A Teacher Is Born* about the training of a Sunday School teacher, and *It's the Ward Teachers* about the effects of the ward teaching program. The department also began creating secular educational and training films with no doctrinal or Mormon content, beginning in 1955 with *The Story of Chamber Music*, which was followed by titles ranging from *Dance with Us*, about the Virginia Tanner dance group in Salt Lake City, to the rather self-explanatory *Teaching with Chalk*. By late 1955, Whitaker and his team had hit their stride, with one film completed roughly every two to three months; their dramatic productions generally ranged from twenty to thirty minutes. In September 1956 they completed *How Near to the Angels*, a fifty-minute film on the importance of temple marriage that proved a major milestone in the department's development over just three and a half years.⁸⁶ It also showed the inadequacy of their working conditions, and in December 1958 the crew moved into a new facility built in the Carterville river bottoms area of Provo, thus allowing the BYU Motion Picture Department to finally claim the status of a Motion Picture Studio (MPS). At the end of the 1962 fiscal year, the studio showed a profit for the



The exterior of the BYU Motion Picture Studio soon after its 1958 construction. Though the studio has been enlarged and remodeled, the façade remains recognizably similar today. Courtesy Brigham Young University.



A late-night shoot on location in the St. George Tabernacle for *Windows of Heaven* (1963). Radio actor Francis Urry's portrayal of Lorenzo Snow brought tears to the eyes of President McKay, who remembered well President Snow and the events depicted in the film. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

first time, and in 1963 Ernest Wilkinson boasted that not only were BYU and USC the only American universities with motion picture production studios, but BYU's was "much the larger of the two programs."⁸⁷

High Tide in the 1960s

Given this momentum, the 1960s provided many opportunities for bigger and higher-quality productions. The first of these came in late 1961 when the Presiding Bishopric requested a film on tithing in response to a crisis in the Church's finances. Scott Whitaker's script for *Windows of Heaven* was appropriately based on a similar situation from the past: Lorenzo Snow's 1899 tithing reformation, with the bulk of the dramatic emphasis placed on the promise of rain in the parched city of St. George. Though budgeted for a thirty-minute piece, it grew to fifty, and Judge Whitaker was determined to make it their finest production yet. The effort paid off. Not only did the film, which premiered in March 1963, deeply impress President McKay, who had known President Snow personally, but it became one of BYU's most popular pictures for years to come and, perhaps more

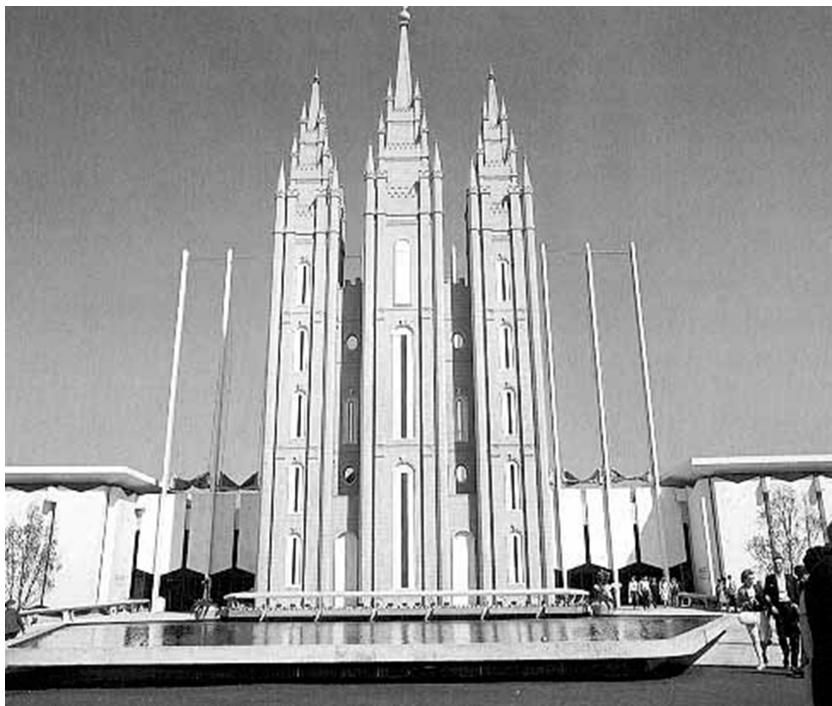
importantly, it appears to have been crucial in raising tithing revenue and relieving the crisis that gave it birth.⁸⁸

Other crew members besides Judge Whitaker began directing starting in 1963, an important step in the establishment of a film studio. As soon as *Windows of Heaven* was complete they undertook an equally ambitious project, *Man's Search for Happiness*, for the Church's exhibit at the 1964 New York World's Fair in Queens. Though only thirteen minutes long, it became their most expensive and difficult project yet, and the crew firmly believed their multiple setbacks were Satan's attempts to thwart their efforts. The finished film was seen at the fair by an estimated five to six million people, then was shown for years throughout the Church, and was even remade twice. It is very possible that in terms of missionary work, *Man's Search for Happiness* is the most important film the studio has made.⁸⁹

A new soundstage was also completed in 1964. On September 15, however, a fire—caused by a truck's leaky gasoline tank and a malfunctioning ice cream dispenser—caused extensive damage but miraculously spared all of the film stock and camera equipment. By now Church support of the studio was strong, and the facilities were immediately rebuilt and improved at an estimated cost of \$389,000. Despite being homeless, the crew completed twelve films in the 1964–65 fiscal year. In 1969 *Pioneers*



A domestic scene from *Man's Search for Happiness* (1964) in which an Everyman family seeks for the answers to life's greatest questions. Norma Hall plays the mother, Bryce Chamberlain the father, and Francis Urry the grandfather. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.



The Mormon Pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair, Flushing Meadows Park, Queens, was the second most popular religious pavilion (behind the Vatican's and ahead of Billy Graham's). The central attraction for its 5.8 million visitors was *Man's Search for Happiness*. Missionary work throughout the Church was positively influenced by the fair and film. Locally, New York City baptisms tripled from 1963 to 1964. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

in Petticoats, created for the centennial of the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association, was the year's prestige production, but the small Sunday School–sponsored film *Johnny Lingo* proved a sleeper hit. Set in the Pacific Islands and shot in Hawaii, the filming proceeded through several small miracles, primarily concerning weather, volcanic activity, and cow wrangling. It premiered at a Sunday School conference in February 1969. Though a success at the time, no one could have predicted this film's almost cult popularity for generations to come.

Into the '70s: Growth and Diversification

In his final years before retirement, Judge Whitaker continued to direct prolifically but also increasingly moved into a supervisory role while others directed. In December 1970, the Church pursued its first Church-wide



Johnny Lingo star Naomi Kahoilua has her hair adjusted while costar Blaizdell Ma Kee looks on. Kahoilua, a Church College of Hawaii student, was cast locally, while Ma Kee and Francis Urry as Mr. Harris were the only professional actors brought from the continent. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.



The snowy set of *The Lost Manuscript* (1974). LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

correlation effort to reduce redundancy in curricula and bring the Church's rather autonomous auxiliary organizations under tighter priesthood control. This resulted in increased bureaucracy and official oversight of Church films and also eliminated the auxiliary conferences that had long kept the BYU studio in the black.

Frank Wise retired on May 28, 1971, at an honorary end-of-year banquet at which Judge Whitaker himself received a surprise honorary doctorate. With momentum generated from this recognition, Whitaker was able to make his last years at the studio productive ones, producing all of its films and directing several more himself, including the forty-five minute *The Lost Manuscript*, which was released November 1974, two months after his retirement. What he saw as his most important work and potential legacy, however, bore mixed fruit. This was the longitudinal series *The Church in Action*, begun in 1970. Based on David Jacobs's research on the Clawson brothers and his own personal vision for the unifying and motivational power of film, Whitaker conceived of a series of annual films that would chronicle the growth and activities of the Church throughout the world, thus encouraging and catalyzing otherwise isolated Latter-day Saints to greater communal effort. The films from the 1970s arguably represent some of the finest work done at BYU, but costs were high, distribution was disappointing, and soon installments were being completed only every few years before the program was disbanded completely in the 1980s. The modern equivalent, Bonneville Communication's *The World Report*, though useful, lacks the original's vitality, and attempts by Jacobs to revive the series have proven fruitless.

Judge Whitaker retired on September 4, 1974, after which he continued his interest in Church films and wrote his memoirs *Pioneering with Film*. He passed away on November 1, 1985.

Expanding Exhibition Venues and Production Entities

Distribution of films to LDS meetinghouses kept pace with the BYU studio's production output, and more than ever before film exhibition became an organized and standard part of Church life. In November 1962, Frank Wise wrote of all Church buildings that "facilities for the use of motion picture films are now a regular requirement by the General Authorities."⁹⁰ Non-English-speaking audiences began to be accommodated as the Church started translating films as a major activity, particularly after *Man's Search for Happiness*. At the local level, film screenings were arguably the Church's most common fundraiser at this time, hitting an all-time high in January 1970 when the Hayward Stake in southern California raised \$70,000 by hosting the world premiere of *Hello, Dolly!*

Obviously, the many official productions coming through Church distribution did not preclude ongoing screenings of Hollywood fare. A renamed Film Screening Committee continued to post movie reviews, encouraging an active and informed engagement with the medium generally.

An additional venue for Church film emerged in this period within the Church Educational System through its efforts to introduce audio-visual material into its curriculum (just as the Sunday School had done years before). In the 1960s, CES personnel began experimenting with still filmstrips for use in seminary and institute classes, hitting their stride by the time the popular *Tom Trails* series was released Church-wide in 1968. Later, CES would collaborate with the BYU studio to make its own films, and Church seminaries would eventually become one of the largest venues for Mormon films and videos.⁹¹

The Church's developing interests in broadcasting (primarily through KSL-TV) broadened the reach of institutional films and led to production of film outside of the BYU studio. KSL was suffering in the early 1950s and received a major overhaul under President McKay, beginning with the installation of Arch Madsen as president. KSL's productions were primarily event-related, such as general conference and concert films made of the Tabernacle Choir, but as it grew the station delved into documentary and fiction programming. It even released material on film, such as a



Members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir being filmed while singing on the Salt Flats near the Great Salt Lake. Beginning in the 1960s with *Choir for All the World*, *the Salt Lake Mormon Tabernacle Choir*, the famed LDS singers would be the subject of many performance films and documentaries, including Lee Groberg's *America's Choir: The Story of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir* (2003). LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.



A weary assistant keeps the script at hand for Wetzel O. Whitaker as he directs *Windows of Heaven* (1963) in the southern Utah desert. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

documentary on the Los Angeles Temple and another film for the Nauvoo visitors' center. Other Church departments, like the Genealogical Society of Utah and the Church Building Department, occasionally made films without BYU's aid, and other entities, principally BYU's student television department, forayed into televised broadcasting, leading to the creation of a KBYU television station, a PBS affiliate, in November 1965. In 1964 the Church created the Bonneville International Corporation as a holding company for all the Church's broadcasting interests, including KSL, again with Madsen at its head. By the Fourth Wave, Bonneville would become another distinct production entity within the Church, working parallel to the Motion Picture Studio.

If Church-affiliated broadcasting in Salt Lake City and Provo pushed forward additional filmmaking outside of the BYU Motion Picture Studio, so did students on the BYU campus itself. Extracurricular student films began to appear in 1962 with *The Great Grass Cutter*, and by 1971 student film became part of the curriculum with the romantic comedy *Ice Cream and Elevators*. That film, produced by Robert Starling, received administrative sanction through a cameo from university president Ernest Wilkinson, who played a janitor witnessing a romantic elevator scene. This first official student film screened to an enthusiastic crowd of 6,000 in the Smith Fieldhouse. In 1972 a student crew produced a university-sponsored 16mm documentary film on the Mormon Festival of the Arts entitled

Shades of Difference. Today BYU film graduates constitute a disproportionately large number of those working on Mormon films, including the directors of nearly every theatrically released Fifth Wave film thus far. The Church-sponsored university has thus generated institutional films at its Motion Picture Studio and independent films from its students.

INDEPENDENT MORMON FILMS

Students were not the only Mormons of the Third Wave to make movies independent of the Church, particularly after the BYU studio's success seemed to open the door for such productions. Perhaps the most serious effort came from the indefatigable Nathan and Ruth Hale in Glendale, California. This couple began a dynasty of community theaters and dramatic productions, usually Mormon-based, and had also been involved in filmmaking since the welfare films of the 1940s. After this initial exposure, they created Seagull Productions and completed at least three 16mm projects, the largest of which was a forty-five-minute color biopic called *Oliver Cowdery, Witness to the Book of Mormon* (1954). Films on the two other witnesses of the gold plates were planned but never materialized.

This, indeed, was the fate of virtually every other attempt at independent Mormon filmmaking throughout the Third Wave—a trend unbroken from the Second Wave. Among the most prominent failures were DeVon Stanfield's attempt to adapt John D. Fitzgerald's book *Papa Married a Mormon*, Verland Whipple's \$3 million pioneer epic *Hole-in-the-Rock*, Fred Gebhart's *Echo Canyon* about the 1857 Utah War, Bill Greenburg's untitled feature on the pioneer vessel *Brooklyn*, Raymond Goldrup's television film *Winters of Glory* about pioneers, and even an unspecified project by Scott Whitaker and newcomer Kieth Merrill. Various other efforts were envisioned but never even reached the preproduction stage.

Despite these setbacks, the tenacity of one individual, DeVere Baker, resulted in his producing not just one but several films. Baker decided that he could prove the Book of Mormon true and stop the growth of global communism by sailing a raft west across the Pacific. His multiple failures throughout the 1960s and 1970s eventually moved him out of favor with the general Church populace, but he did succeed in creating and personally exhibiting several films of his voyages, all for fundraising purposes. Though his supporters loved the pictures, his films were generally disregarded by more objective film critics.⁹²

MORMONS AND THE MAINSTREAM INDUSTRY

A Global Reach

Mormons involved in the film industry gained acclaim internationally and domestically during the Third Wave and contributed importantly to film and television. By 1970 several converts to the Church were gaining significance across the globe, a sign of the international growth of the Church itself. Geza de Rosner from Hungary; Ragnar Lasse Henriksen from Norway; and José María Oliveira Aldamiz, Spain's first stake president, were examples of this growth; Aldamiz even made a horror film that included Mormon missionaries. A convert with a longer and more prominent career was Lino Brocka of the Philippines, who in 1961 was reportedly the second convert baptized in that country but whose Church affiliation ended before his career took off. Directing forty-seven features, he became internationally recognized as one of the Philippines' greatest talents and received Golden Palm nominations at Cannes for *Jaguar* in 1979 and *Bayan Ko: My Own Country* in 1984. He died tragically in a car crash in 1991.

In America, Hal Ashby began directing in 1970, launching a prolific and acclaimed career that included titles like *Shampoo* (1975) and *Being There* (1979). In television, Glen Larson became a prominent producer, virtually inventing the hour-long action-drama in the 1980s by creating the shows *The Hardy Boys Mysteries*, *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, *Magnum P.I.*, *The Fall Guy*, *Knight Rider*, and *Battlestar Galactica*. The last of these is of particular interest to LDS sci-fi buffs for its reworking of distinctly Mormon elements, such as a twelve-person Council of Elders or the planet Kobol, a metaplasm of the planet Kolob from the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price.⁹³

In Utah two smaller-scale filmmakers, Kieth Merrill and Lyman Dayton, caught the most attention. Fresh from BYU, Merrill won the 1973 Oscar for best feature-length documentary with *The Great American Cowboy*. Though to Church members today Merrill is best known for his institutional films, his career has always included other work, primarily regional documentaries for destination IMAX theaters. Dayton began as a producer, finding success with the mainstream features *Where the Red Fern Grows* (1974), *Seven Alone* (1974), and other titles.⁹⁴ As a producer and director he attempted to infuse his secular films with Mormon beliefs and philosophies, evidently looking forward to an opportunity to insert overtly LDS characters into his work. He apparently came close to this only once, with the 1984 *Solo*, a survival melodrama based on a real



Cast members pausing on the set of *The Great American Cowboy*, for which director Kieth Merrill, *second from right*, won the 1973 Documentary Feature Academy Award. Courtesy Kieth Merrill.

Latter-day Saint and including an unidentified LDS church service and the LDS hymn “I Am a Child of God.”⁹⁵

The World Comes Calling: The Sundance Film Festival

While Latter-day Saints like Aldamiz and Dayton were injecting Mormonism into their mainstream films, others were about to cause the mainstream to focus on Utah en masse. In October 1970 the Utah Travel Council began officially working with film productions, eventually leading to the creation of the Utah Film Commission under John Earle. In 1978 the commission established the Utah/United States Film Festival in Salt Lake City. In 1981 the festival moved east to Park City and, coincidentally, LDS filmmaker Sterling Van Wagenen cofounded the Sundance Institute with actor Robert Redford. The festival came under the Sundance umbrella in 1985, but its roots were deep in the local community; for the first few years, for example, all submissions were screened at the BYU Motion Picture Studio.

The Sundance Film Festival today is known for premiering quirky and original independent films, and many projects the Institute has helped develop, such as Quentin Tarantino's hard-edged *Reservoir Dogs*, are not typical Mormon fare. Nevertheless, as one of the premiere film festivals in the world, Sundance has permanently made Park City—and northern Utah—a global presence in independent film, just as attractive locations made southern Utah a popular filming location in the First Wave.

MAINSTREAM DEPICTIONS OF MORMONS

The New Mormons: Television

The rising ubiquity of television in this period offered opportunities for new representations of Mormons. Newsreels were gradually replaced by news and informational programming, and Latter-day Saints began to appear on these and within television documentaries. For instance, Ed Murrow's popular *Person to Person* show once featured a family home evening in the home of Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson.⁹⁶ In early 1972, Comco Productions included Brigham Young's Lion House in *American Lifestyles*, a documentary series on famous houses and their occupants; a year later ABC aired a documentary that featured the Ray Lindquist family of Salt Lake City; and so on. Entertainment programs such as *Your All American College Show* also proved a welcome venue for Church and BYU performing groups.

Depictions of Mormons were also relatively prominent in fictional programming, including serialized material. After films like *Brigham Young* and *Wagon Master*—and its unauthorized television spin-off *Wagon Train*—Mormon characters could expect to generally be treated well on television where censorship still held a heavier hand than in the theaters. Mormons accordingly popped up in sympathetic roles in western shows such as *Bonanza* and *Here Come the Brides*. *Death Valley Days* proved particularly fruitful, providing a continuing source of interesting, historically-based stories about Mormons, such as hauling the Tabernacle organ pipes across Death Valley. Several episodes were written by Latter-day Saints like Scott Whitaker. One remarkable production was the January 17, 1965, episode of NBC's *Profiles in Courage* in which Peter Lawford portrayed General Alexander Doniphan and his wrenching 1838 decision to disobey an order and not execute Joseph Smith and his associates.

But the most interesting and ambitious effort to put the Church on television was sadly a failed one. In 1971 Screen Gems attempted to create

an hour-long dramatic series entitled *Movin' On* for NBC. Pat Wayne (John's son) and Geoffrey Deuel played two itinerant stock racers who set off in search of America. The pilot episode starts them in Salt Lake City—thanks largely to the efforts of Governor Calvin Rampton—where Wayne's character becomes involved with a Mormon travel agent played by Kate Jackson; the climax is a race between him and her rich Mormon boyfriend. Though other episodes were to take the characters to different locales, Jackson's character, an atypically modern and feminist depiction of Mormonism, was to be permanent. The premiere aired in February 1972 but was not picked up for fall distribution, meaning that no subsequent episodes were likely to have been shot. There would be no similar attempt to portray modern Utah or Mormonism until HBO's *Big Love* in 2006.

The Production Code Ends: A Return to the Theaters

After *Wagon Master*, Mormon characters made occasional appearances in Hollywood films, usually in minor roles or minor productions, such as Twentieth Century Fox's 1958 B-western *Blood Arrow*. A Mormon girl played by Phyllis Coates enlists three men to help her cross hostile Blackfoot Indian territory to get a smallpox serum to her town. By the end, not only has she saved her community and won her man, but her upright charms have even converted him to the faith. Mormonism was often most interesting for when it was omitted, such as in *Utah Blaine* (1957) or the cult horror classic *Carnival of Souls* (1962), which is very explicit in placing the story in modern Utah then equally deliberate in emphasizing that none of the characters, except perhaps the zombies at the Salt Air Pavilion, are LDS. A similar decision was made with Otto Preminger's *Advise and Consent* (1962), in which a character identified in Allen Drury's novel as the son of an Apostle became a Latter-day Saint only by inference. Despite this and its apparent lack of concern for the matter, this film remains arguably the best of films critical of Mormonism; where previous films had invented ludicrous accusations, here the homophobia of the implied Mormon community is sobering in its accuracy.

The most important film after *Advise and Consent* was Joshua Logan's 1969 adaptation of the stage musical *Paint Your Wagon*, starring Lee Marvin, Clint Eastwood, and Jean Seburg (as the Mormon Elizabeth Woodling). In an amazing acrobatics of polygamy and polyandry that one reviewer called "a Mormon ménage,"⁹⁷ Elizabeth arrives in the all-male No Name City as a second wife of a Mormon, is auctioned off to Ben Rumson (Marvin) but also falls in love with Pardner (Eastwood), and thus settles down with both, resulting in a threesome for most of the film. After

respectable Protestants arrive, Elizabeth and Pardner choose monogamy as Ben opts for the open road.

The International Perspective

The weakening Production Code was replaced by today's rating system on November 1, 1968, allowing for full-blown sexual explorations of Mormonism that *Advise and Consent* could only imply. The two films that most openly signify this shift both had European ties. In late 1969 two American film producers announced from Rome the release of their film *The Polygamist*, an apparently adult film about a man with two wives in the midst of the 1857 Utah War. Previously unable to get approval under the Code, the duo now hoped to secure distribution under the new rating system; no evidence, however, indicates they were successful.⁹⁸ The second film was not only financially successful but openly pornographic; this was the Danish skin flick *The Bordello* (*Bordellet*), which premiered outside competition at the 1972 Cannes Film Festival and went on to lengthy European and North American runs. Though Mormon characters featured in the film only briefly, the LDS Danish Mission public relations director fruitlessly protested the film; no larger Church action was taken. Though extreme, *The Bordello* was representative of a rising trend in European productions. Never limited by censorship like their American counterparts, European film producers had simply avoided Mormonism because it was not commercial. In the wake of the sexual revolution, however, and with their new conservative image as an attractive foil to changing mores, Mormons again found their way into European films.

But depictions of Mormons in European films of this period were not uniformly negative or prejudicial. A great many informative and complimentary television documentaries appeared, particularly in West Germany, but the most prolific and even-handed producer of such films was and continues to be the BBC. Given the ample play of anti-Mormon films in the United Kingdom during the First Wave, this signifies a substantial shift that had occurred in Britons' perception of Mormonism since the 1920s.

The Italian film industry took a mixed approach to the Church as Mormons appeared occasionally in the new spaghetti westerns. The first examples are *The Big Gundown* (1966) and *Trippa Joe* (1968), but the concept reached its peak in the 1971 *They Call Me Trinity*. In this film, a land-hungry gangster and some Mexican thugs threaten a group of pacifist Mormons. The lazy but quick-draw Trinity agrees to defend them after bathing (clothed) with two buxom Mormon blondes who offer to marry him. Though victorious, Trinity slinks off during a prayer when he realizes

how much work the Mormons intend for him to undertake. The film was unarguably one of the most influential spaghetti westerns ever made (and even played at BYU's Varsity Theater), but none of the sequels or spin-offs included Mormon elements.

Far more troubling was the West German feature *Mahlzeiten* (*Mealtimes*, 1967). Directed by Edgar Reitz on the cusp of the New German Cinema movement, the film garnered international praise, including a best new director award at the Venice Film Festival. In it, young lovers Rolf and Elisabeth marry and start a family but are troubled by marital difficulties and his failed career. LDS missionaries enter and present a hopeful solution. The couple is baptized, but things continue to slide downhill until Rolf commits suicide and Elisabeth marries another Latter-day Saint to move to America, a bleak and open ending. Starkly realistic, it enjoyed full cooperation from local Church leaders who allowed the use of an LDS stake center and real American missionaries. They quickly reversed their position when they learned that the film included sexual content and the Church was not depicted in a favorable light; the “mock baptism” the filmmakers allegedly promised not to include was reportedly the most embarrassing component, and a local campaign to have the LDS content excised failed. Many Church members in Germany and America did not find it so entirely distasteful, however, and, as with *Advise and Consent*, most non-Mormons did not even think that the Church was at issue.

Negative depictions of Mormons in Europe were opposed by the Church or members only on the local level. The fact that central Church leadership ignored such films measures the great distance the movie industry and the Church had come since *A Victim of the Mormons* had captured international attention and galvanized the Church to respond and enter



Heidi Stroh and Georg Hauke play an unhappy Mormon couple in Edgar Reitz's existentialist drama *Mahlzeiten* (West Germany, 1967), which earned the Best First Feature Film award at the 1967 Venice Film Festival. Richard Alan Nelson Collection, Perry Special Collections, BYU.

filmmaking itself. By 1972 films like *The Bordello* could only hope for fringe status within a vastly expanded film culture. Besides, by this time Mormons had achieved the ability to represent themselves successfully in America and beyond through their own filmmaking, as the proselytizing and public relations success of *Man's Search for Happiness* amply demonstrated.

If after 1968 mainstream depictions of Mormons in America and Europe devolved to the same mode of exploitation and sensationalism characteristic of the First Wave, this time around such depictions came more as an annoyance than as a threat. These films, however, were indicative of the mentality that would give rise to another era of anti-Mormon films in the Fourth Wave that would prove more troublesome.

Third Wave Reprise

The Third Wave of Mormon cinema can be seen as the era in which LDS filmmaking truly came of age. Under the guidance of Judge Whitaker, David O. McKay, and others, institutional Church films transformed from an ad hoc individualized endeavor into an organized and industrialized process. Though mainstream productions were increasingly ambivalent and independent Mormon filmmakers largely failed in their efforts at creating religious feature films, by 1974 the classical corps of institutional LDS pictures had prepared Mormons for the increased growth, changes, and reinterpretations—institutionally and independently—that would occur in the upheavals of the Fourth Wave.



Judge Whitaker and his crew traveled the world during his tenure—shooting across the United States and in Japan, Latin America, and a host of European countries—yet they are seen here, appropriately enough, hard at work in their native Utah Valley. Whitaker's last great effort, the *Church in Action* films, sought to connect Church members across the globe through film. Still, the majority of BYU's productions were shot at their own studio, and Whitaker's work galvanized independent Mormon film productions throughout the state. Filming atop a studio vehicle has long been a common practice to get just the right shot. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.