

Knox College

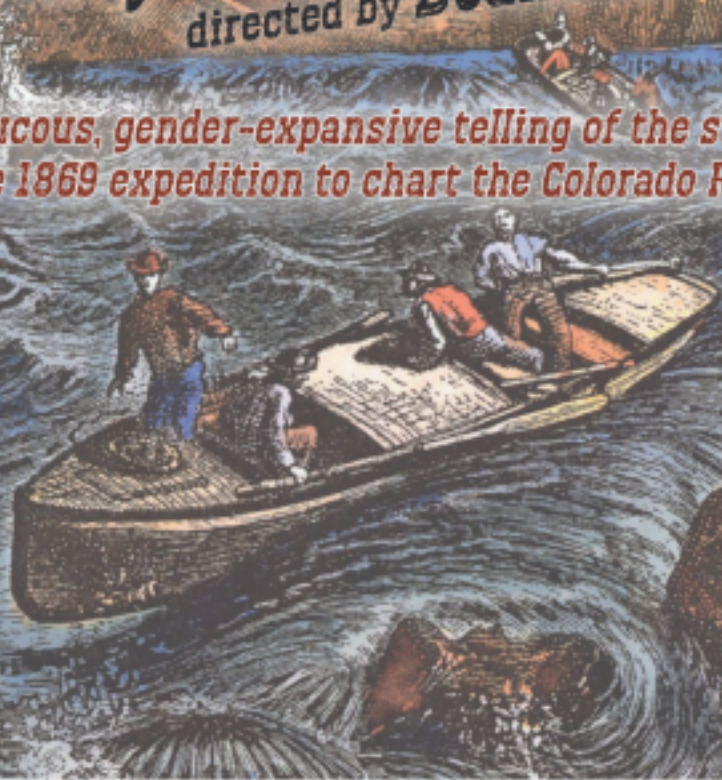
theatre
presents

MEN ON BOATS

by Jaclyn Backhaus

directed by Deana Nichols

*A raucous, gender-expansive telling of the story
of the 1869 expedition to chart the Colorado River.*



Director's Note

I first read Jaclyn Backhaus's *Men on Boats* several years ago, and became immediately excited about the possibilities for production. For, as the playwright indicates in her Note on Casting, "The characters in *Men on Boats* were historically cisgender white males. The cast should be made up entirely of people who are not." Suddenly this already fun, funny play about a moment in American history about which I knew nothing at all became even more fascinating. How, in a play that tells the story of ten explorers attempting to chart the Colorado River and "discover" the Grand Canyon in 1869, might the assumptions we make about these characters be upended through this casting? What questions might we ask about gender performance? What assumptions could we challenge about who can be considered an explorer, a hero? How might a story that rests squarely within the realm of Manifest Destiny be told in a way that didn't replicate the masculinist, settler-colonial ethos of the period and the vast majority of its depictions? Suddenly the jokes were funnier, the adventures more adventurous, the commentary more damning. I was a fan.

I'm now even more of a fan. Having worked with these ten actors who are just as intrepid as the characters they portray, I've had the opportunity to see, in real time, the answers to the above questions. I've witnessed the bond shared by the characters reflected in the hard work and community created by the actors telling their story. And I'm excited for you, the audience, to witness this as well. Working on this production in 2026 has been a joy and a balm, and I hope that you experience the same. Enjoy the show!

THEATRE DEPARTMENT FACULTY

Smith V. Brand Distinguished Professor.....Liz Carlin Metz
Chancie Ferris Booth Distinguished Service Professor.....Craig Choma
Associate Professor of Theatre.....Jeff Grace
Associate Professor of English & Theatre.....Sherwood Kiraly
Assistant Professor of Theatre.....Deana Nichols
Director of Costume & Makeup.....Allison Smith Hahn

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Men on Boats

by Jaclyn Backhaus

Directed by Deana Nichols

Scenic & Lighting Design by Craig Choma

Costume Design by Allison Smith Hahn

Sound Design by Keyera Williams Props

Design by Siena Adwere-Boamah

Content Information:



Playwrights Horizons, Inc. and Clubbed Thumb produced MEN ON BOATS in New York City, 2016. Initially developed and produced by Clubbed Thumb in 2015.

CAST

JOHN WESLEY POWELL.....	Cassie Wefel
DUNN.....	Delaney Edsall
COLTON SUMNER.....	Danny Schiffer
	JOHN OLD

SHADY.....Eleanor Decker
 BRADLEY.....Daria
 Klinck O.G. HOWLAND.....Sophia
 Merchant SENECA
 HOWLAND.....Ursula Burrows FRANK
 GOODMAN.....Max Russell
 HALL.....Trinity
 Anderson
 HAWKINS.....Zan
 Peterson

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director.....Deana Nichols
 Technical Director.....Craig Choma
 Stage Manager.....Eli
 Ladd Assistant Stage Manager.....Em
 Risner Movement Choreographer.....Madelyn
 Pellegrino Scenic
 Designer.....Craig Choma Scenic
 Artists.....Beckett Andersen, Grace Dinges Scene
 Shop T.A.s.....Beckett Andersen, Nida Baig,
 Leah Binzel, Viola Bocker, Grace Dinges
 Martin Herrera, Eli Ladd, Sid McCasland,
 Alan Plascencia, Chase Pollard, Daisy Santos,
 Abhishek Sharma, Cassie Wefel
 Scene Shop Volunteers.....Yusra Ali, Mohsin Asad,
 Cilia Conley, January Ha,
 Connor Jenkins, Abdullah Kamal,
 Sama Khan, Kamlesh Kumar,
 Carlos Leigh, Nati Mulcachy,
 Kin Nguyen, Henry Vo
 Costume Designer.....Allison Smith Hahn
 Assistant Costume Designer.....Mack van Lier
 Cutter/Draper.....Soran Rubio
 Costume Studio T.A.s.....Wynn Khuri, Emily Kunkel,
 Carissa Medlock, Malia Mei Nells,
 Katie (Tam) Nguyen, Soran Rubio,
 Aspen Sorenson, Mack van Lier

Costume Studio Volunteers.....Tracy (Yaxuan)Huang,
 Sy Quoc Uy Vo (Herry), Jay Kronbach,
 Onyx Nowak, Bee Allen
 Lighting Designer.....Craig Choma
 Lead Electrician.....Nida Baig
 Lighting Board Operator.....Eli Ladd
 Sound Designer.....Keyera Williams
 Sound Board Operator.....Em Risner
 Props Designer.....Siena Adwere-Boamah
 Dramaturg.....Dareann
 Weber

This production is supported in part by the
ELIZABETH JAHNKE METZ THEATRE FUND
 Contribute to Knox Theatre by donating to this fund at:
knoxtheatre.org

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Chairperson.....Liz Carlin
 Metz House Management.....Student
 Volunteers Box Office.....Student
 Volunteers Tickets.....Jeff Grace,
 Deana Nichols
 Ushers.....Student Volunteers
 Contract Licensing.....Jennifer Lazarz
 Publicity.....Cast &
 Crew Poster Design.....Craig
 Choma
 Programs.....Deana
 Nichols

WHO’S WHO IN THE CAST

TRINITY ANDERSON (Hall) is a freshman from Beavercreek Ohio, planning to major in Music and minor in dance. This is her first play ever! She would like to thank her family and friends for their support,

and the cast and crew for such a wonderful experience.

URSULA BURROWS (Seneca Howland) is a sophomore from Chicago, Illinois who is majoring in History. Previously at Knox, they have been in *Cowboys and Lesbians* (Nina) and *Savage in Limbo* (Savage). They would like to thank their friends, family, and the Knox Theatre Department!

ELEANOR DECKER (Old Shady) is a first-year student from Iowa City, and plans to double major in History and Theatre. She has recently appeared in *Our Town* (Emily Webb) and *Metamorphosis* (Greta Samsa) with the Knox Theatre Department. Eleanor would like to thank her loved ones for their support, and the cast and crew for being so fun to work with.

DELANEY EDSALL (William Dunn) is from Bangkok, Thailand, and is double-majoring in Theatre and History. At Knox, they have appeared in *She Kills Monsters* (Tilly) and *The Coast Starlight* (Anna); other production credits include *Cowboys and Lesbians* (Director), *Our Town* (Assistant Director/Dramaturg), and *Rat Play* (Director). They have studied theatre in London and Edinburgh, and taught at Des Moines Performing Arts for the past two summers. Delaney currently serves as a Production Manager for the Theatre Advisory Board, Head of Art and Design for Quiver Magazine, and as an Oral History Assistant in the Knox Archives.

DARIA KLINCK (Bradley) is a sophomore from Chicago, Illinois, majoring in Political Science and Creative Writing.

SOPHIA MERCHANT (O.G. Howland) is a first-year student planning to major in Music Education. They are excited for their future here in the theatre department and to make some new friends here at Knox!

ZAN PETERSON (Hawkins) is a first-year student who intends to major in Creative Writing. She previously operated the follow spot for Knox's production of *Our Town* and played Joan/Alex/Beth in *Birthday Candles*. She would like to thank her parents, sister, and friends for their continued support throughout the years. Zan is from Commerce City, Colorado.

MAX RUSSELL (Frank Goodman) is quite thrilled to be here! They are a sophomore from Appleton, Wisconsin and are majoring in English Literature and Theatre. Their recent performances at Knox include *Cowboys and Lesbians* (Noa), *Our Town* (Rebecca), *Savage in Limbo* (Linda), and *Twilight Bowl* (Sharlene). They have also written, directed,

and performed in New Plays Workshop and Festival. Max would like to thank every director who used he/him when they were cast as a male character and she/her when they were cast as a female character. All gender is performance; Max's just happens to be on stage.

DANNY SCHIFFER (John Colton Sumner) is a first-year student from Faribault, Minnesota. He plans to major in Religious Studies or Creative Writing. Previously he has participated in the New Plays Workshop with the Knox Theatre Department. He would like to thank the State of Minnesota for keeping gender affirming care legal for minors, without which he would not have the confidence to perform on stage.

CASSIE WEFEL (John Wesley Powell) is a sophomore from Urbana, Illinois. She has participated in the New Plays Workshop every possible term and was most recently April in *Savage in Limbo*. She is excited to act with such a wonderful group of people! She would like to thank her parents and siblings for their endless love and support.

WHO'S WHO IN THE CREATIVE TEAM

SIENA ADWERE-BOAMAH (Props Designer) is a senior majoring in psychology and minoring in philosophy. Her background in prop design comes from making LARP equipment. She also worked on props for *Clyde's* (Winter 2024) and *Our Town* (Fall 2025). Recently, she was a stage manager for *The Coast Starlight* (Spring 2024) and *Metamorphosis* (Winter 2026). Siena is from Palo Alto, California.

CRAIG CHOMA (Scenic Designer, Lighting Designer, Technical Director) is the Chancie Ferris Booth Distinguished Service Professor of Theatre, and Knox Theatre's resident designer and technical director. Favorite Knox designs include *Birthday Candles*, *Twilight Bowl*, *Clyde's*, *The Wolves*, *The Thanksgiving Play*, *The Laramie Project*, *The Drowning Girls*, *The Secret in the Wings*, Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, *The Caffè Cino Project*, *In the Next Room or the vibrator play*, *The Green Bird*, *Under Construction*, *A Lie of the Mind*, Euripides' *Medea*, *Intimate Apparel*, *The Skriker*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *War and Peace*, and *Macbeth*. Craig has designed both sets and/or lights professionally in Chicago, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Minneapolis, Ohio, Toronto, Canada, and Avignon, France. Craig designs for both theatre and dance, and he enjoys each equally. He has designed in proscenium, thrust, and arena spaces, small storefront theaters, converted churches and libraries, and site specific locations. He has been the production designer for various fundraising events, and he has collaborated on court cases, creating forensic models to be used in the presentation of evidence. Craig holds a B.A. in Theatre and Philosophy from Knox

College (1993), and M.F.A.'s in both Scenic and Lighting Design from Carnegie Mellon University (1996). Craig is originally from Chicago, Illinois.

ALLISON SMITH HAHN (Costume Designer) is an instructor, resident costume designer, and Costume Studio manager. She received her B.A. from Knox, studying under the mentorship of Margo Shively and serving as a Post-Baccalaureate Fellow in the Costume Studio. Chicagoland costume designs include *Multitudes* and *pool (no water)* (Vitalist Theatre), *Good People*,

The American Clock, *Red, I and You*, *Another Bone* (Redtwist), *Rhinoceros* (Theatre Heist), *Miles Away*, *Mike and Seth*, *Hello Failure*, *Through the Leaves*, *Request Concert* (Side Project Theatre), *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* (Wilmette Center for the Arts), and *Next Fall* (AstonRep). Allison holds an MLIS from the University of Illinois, and is most recently from Chicago, Illinois.

ELI LADD (Stage Manager) is a sophomore who is studying Theatre and Computer Science and works in the Knox College Scene Shop. He was recently the stage manager for *Birthday Candles* and the assistant stage manager for *Our Town*. He wants to thank everyone in the theatre department for letting him have all of these amazing opportunities, and his roommate for being his BROAT! He cannot wait to keep learning and working on what he loves! Eli is from Mountain View, California.

DEANA NICHOLS (Director) is an Assistant Professor of Theatre. She received both an M.A. and Ph.D. in Theatre History, Theory, and Literature from Indiana University. At Knox she has directed Jean Anouilh's adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, Lynn Nottage's *Clyde's*, Julia Cho's *The Language Archive*, Larissa FastHorse's *The Thanksgiving Play*, and Sarah Treem's *The How and the Why*. Previous to Knox, her work has included *Theatre Uncut*, *Knives in Hens*, *Independence*, and new work *Catalina*. Deana is a proud citizen of the Chickasaw Nation.

MADELYN PELLEGRINO (Movement Choreographer) is from Chicago and is majoring in Anthropology and Sociology with minors in Psychology and Biology. She has been on and off the stage in numerous New Plays Workshops, directed *Dorothy and Alice*, assisted in directing *Our Town*, and choreographed for *She Kills Monsters*. She would like to thank her family and friends for their support and encouragement through her many artistic endeavors.

EM RISNER (Assistant Stage Manager) is a sophomore from Kansas City who is studying English Literature and Creative Writing. Em would like to thank the Theatre Department who is making this happen.

MACK VAN LIER (Assistant Costume Designer) is a sophomore majoring in English Lit and minoring in Film Studies. Back home in Cleveland, Ohio, Mack was both on and offstage at Near West Theatre, where their love for the stage started in 2014 with *Once on This Island Jr.* They are incredibly grateful to be able to pursue their love for costuming and theatre at Knox by working in the costume studio and being a part of this production.

DAREANN WEBER (Dramaturg) is a recently transferred junior, majoring in Theatre and minoring in Film Studies. Her previous credits include dramaturgy in *The Little Mermaid*, *Peter Pan*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, and ASL Sign Shadower in *The Little Mermaid* and *The Theory of Relativity*, all at Monmouth College. She would like to thank her dysfunctional family of two women and three dogs, her best friend, Madison, and the director and production team for sharing her kindness and acceptance. Dareann is from Moline, Illinois, and currently resides in Monmouth.

KEYERA WILLIAMS (Sound Designer) is a junior majoring in Music and minoring in Theatre Playwriting. Her previous credits include the sound design for *Birthday Candles* and *Twilight Bowl*, and acting in *The Coast Starlight* (Liz), *Clyde's* (Letitia), and more. Outside of theatre, she enjoys composing and producing music. She would like to thank her friends, family, and director for always giving her support and opportunities. Keyera is from Peoria, Illinois.

JACLYN BACKHAUS is a playwright and co-founder of Fresh Ground Pepper. Her play *MEN ON BOATS* was a NYT Critics' Pick (Off-Broadway, Clubbed Thumb and Playwrights Horizons) after starting in Clubbed Thumb's Summerworks, and was a Kilroys play in 2015. Other works include *PEOPLE DOING MATH LIVE!* (Under The Radar Festival's *INCOMING!* Series at The Public Theater), *THE INCREDIBLE FOX SISTERS* (Live Source), *YOU ON THE MOORS NOW* (Theater Reconstruction Ensemble, The Hypocrites Theater Chicago), *BULL'S HOLLOW* (Ars Nova), and the musical *FOLK WANDERING*. She has received commissions from Playwrights Horizons and Ars Nova and is the 2016 Tow Foundation Playwright-in-Residence at Clubbed Thumb. Her work has been developed and showcased with the Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival, Playwrights Horizons, The Public and Joe's Pub, The Ice Factory Festival, (not just) 3 New Plays, The Civilians R&D Group, SPACE on

Ryder Farm, Ars Nova's ANT Fest, and The Falcons. BFA: NYU. She hails from Phoenix, Arizona.



THANKS

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Pat Pendergast

Joseph Taylor

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