

Donner Party Resource List

A starting point for readers, researchers, and the just plain curious

Curated and annotated by Marian Calabro, author of *The Perilous Journey of the Donner Party* and presenter of “The Real Story of the Donner Party.”

Comments, questions, new resources or info to add? Please email me via my websites:

<https://mariancalabro.com> and <https://donnerpartyhistory.com>

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Selected books for young people (with crossover appeal to adults*)

*Calabro, Marian. *The Perilous Journey of the Donner Party*. American Library Association Notable Book, Scholastic Book Club selection, and multiple award winner (California Library Association, Virginia Library Association, New York Public Library). “In Calabro’s hands, truth is indeed as spellbinding as fiction.”—*Boston Globe*

Hale, Nathan. *Donner Dinner Party*. A graphic-novel-style retelling; for me, a bit too lighthearted.

Laurgaard, Rachel. *Patty Reed’s Doll*. Intended for 4th graders, this fictionalized account avoids cannibalism.

Lavender, David. *Snowbound*. While this short factual account is well-written, it contains few first-person voices.

Steffoff, Rebecca. *Women Pioneers*. The Donner Party’s Virginia Reed is among the nine female pioneers profiled.

Werner, Emmy E. *Pioneer Children on the Journey West*. Includes diaries, letters, and memories of 120 young pioneers, with a single chapter devoted just to the young people of the Donner Party.

Werther, Scott P. *The Donner Party*. A 48-page book for middle graders.

*Wolf, Allan. *The Snow Fell Three Graves Deep: Voices from the Donner Party*. Hunger is the narrator in this massive (416-page) and impressively organized chronicle.

*Zeinert, Karen, editor. *Across the Plains in the Donner Party*. Primary sources such as Virginia Reed’s writings and Patrick Breen’s diary form the basis of this overview.

Nonfiction books for adults

Bryant, Edwin. *What I Saw in California*. An 1848 account by one of the rescue party leaders.

Hardesty, Donald L. *Archaeology of the Donner Party*

Johnson, Kristin, editor. “*Unfortunate Emigrants*”: *Narratives of the Donner Party*

Mullen, Frank. *Donner Party Chronicles: A Day-by-Day Account of a Doomed Wagon Train 1846-47*

Rarick, Ethan. *Desperate Passage*

Stewart, George R. *Ordeal by Hunger*. Written in the 1930s, yet still the best overview in some ways.

Wallis, Michael. *The Best Land Under Heaven: The Donner Party and Manifest Destiny*. The most relevant of the contemporary histories, in my opinion.

The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, is the premier repository of Donner Party archival material. It has a near-complete list of Donner Party books and publications: <https://bit.ly/2Od8DdO>

Timelines

Lack of records make it impossible to reconstruct a 100% accurate timeline. As author Frank Mullen has noted: "Simple matters, like when or where things happened or who they happened to, become debates. Mileages don't tally. Timetables do not compute." But these efforts are pretty good:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donner_Party_timeline

https://www.softschools.com/timelines/donner_party_timeline/444/

Websites, Blogs, Social Media

<http://www.donnerpartydiary.com/>

Omnibus site created by Daniel M. Rosen in 1996 and kept up to date. A detailed portal with commentary and links to other sites (some of which seem to be defunct as of 2021).

<https://www.forlornhope.org/>

Fascinating chronicle of individuals who reenacted some of the Forlorn Hope's journey in 2020. This snowshoe party was a spinoff group that left the main Donner Party early to search for help. (The name Forlorn Hope was applied to them much later.)

<http://donnerblog.blogspot.com/>

Kristin Johnson edited the book "*Unfortunate Emigrants*" and has had a longstanding interest in Donner Party history. Her blog is excellent but (as of March 2021) its last entry was made in 2014.

Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/donnerpartyhistory/>

@DonnerPartyHistory

Pinterest

<https://www.pinterest.com/sherrilann/the-donner-party/>

Media

The Donner Party (1992) <https://www.pbs.org/wqbh/americanexperience/films/donner/>

A PBS documentary by Ric Burns, brother of Ken Burns. Accurate but predicated on the incomplete notion that the group's troubles centered almost totally on their decision to follow the Hastings Cutoff. Available on Amazon Prime as of Spring 2021.

One More Mountain (1994) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110734/>

A TV dramatization, thoughtfully done but also historically inaccurate.

The Donner Party (2009) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1219336/>

Hollywood film dramatization, historically inaccurate.