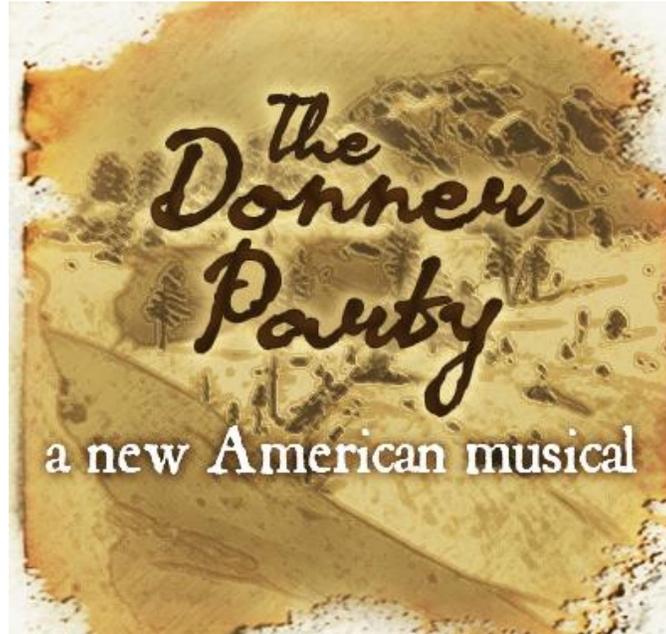


# Sacramento Theatre Company

## Study Guide



By Eric Rockwell and Margaret Rose

In Community Partnership with Sutter's Fort  
[suttersfort.org](http://suttersfort.org)

**Study Guide Materials Compiled by Anna Miles**

# **Sacramento Theatre Company**

## **Mission Statement**

The Sacramento Theatre Company (STC) strives to be the leader in integrating professional theatre with theatre arts education. STC produces engaging professional theatre, provides exceptional theatre training, and uses theatre as a tool for educational engagement.

## **Our History**

The theatre was originally formed as the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre in 1942, an ad hoc troupe formed to entertain locally-stationed troops during World War II. On October 18, 1949, the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre acquired a space of its own with the opening of the Eaglet Theatre, named in honor of the Eagle, a Gold Rush-era theatre built largely of canvas that had stood on the city's riverfront in the 1850s. The Eaglet Theatre eventually became the Main Stage of the not-for-profit Sacramento Theatre Company, which evolved from a community theatre to professional theatre company in the 1980s. Now producing shows in three performance spaces, it is the oldest theatre company in Sacramento.

After five decades of use, the Main Stage was renovated as part of the H Street Theatre Complex Project. Features now include an expanded and modernized lobby and a Cabaret Stage for special performances. The facility also added expanded dressing rooms, laundry capabilities, and other equipment allowing the transformation of these performance spaces, used nine months of the year by STC, into backstage and administration places for three months each summer to be used by California Musical Theatre for Music Circus.

Sacramento Theatre Company can accommodate 292 patrons in the proscenium-style auditorium of its Main Stage, while the Pollock Stage offers a more intimate experience with only 87 seats in a black box-style theatre. Both provide good acoustics and sight-lines. This professional, Equity theatre presents seven professional productions per season with a reputation for excellent stage adaptations of classic literature. Three annual productions in the Cabaret Stage, which seats 100, round out the experience with high-quality Broadway musical revues.

The Young Professionals Conservatory, a training program for young theatre artists, was founded in 2003. The program, as well as the entire STC School of the Arts, is directed by Michele Hillen-Noufer.

**For further information about the Sacramento Theatre Company please visit us online:**

**<http://www.sactheatre.org>**

# **The Donner Party**

## **A New American Musical**

### **Sacramento Theatre Company Production Study Guide**

#### **Contents**

##### **Information on the Play**

Characters	4
Synopsis	6
<i>The Donner Party: A History</i>	7
<i>Sutter's Fort: Sacramento's Role in the Great California Migration</i>	12
Glossary of Terms	13

##### **Interactive Materials**

Study Guide Questions: Engage With the Play	16
Theatre Etiquette	17
Additional Reading/Study Material	18

**Study Guide Materials Written and Compiled by Anna Miles**

## *The Donner Party: Characters*

### **The Reed Family**

**James Reed-** A wealthy businessman, traveling with his wife Margaret, their 3 children, and his mother-in-law. Very strong in his convictions, he is a man who follows his gut impulses.

**Margaret Reed-** Wife of James Reed. Kind and quietly strong, Margaret is ambivalent about traveling to California but trusts her husband's judgment.

**Virginia Reed-** James and Margaret's teenage daughter (age 13). She loves and admires her parents, but struggles to find her own identity on their journey to California.

**Patty Reed-** James and Margaret's young daughter (age 9). A lover of dolls and her grandmother.

**Tommy Reed-** James and Margaret's son, age 8.

**Sarah Keyes-** Margaret Reed's elderly mother.

### **The Donner Family**

**George Donner-** A friend of James Reed, traveling with his wife and daughter. Donner is a kind, honest man, but his true strength comes from his wife Tamsen, to whom he is devoted.

**Tamsen Donner-** George Donner's wife, a strong and opinionated woman who loves flowers and logic. She is the voice of reason in the story and often has the best ideas, but she is very rarely listened to.

**Frances Donner-** George and Tamsen's daughter (age 6).

**Charlie Stanton-** A young single man, a friend of George Donner's. He is a writer and a romantic.

### **Others**

**Lewis Keseberg-** a German immigrant traveling with the party

**Peggy Breen-** Irish, very pregnant, traveling with the party

**Patrick Dolan**- an Irish immigrant, happy-go-lucky, traveling with Peggy Breen. A good friend to Charlie Stanton and Mary Ann Graves, he is convinced he carries luck with him wherever he goes.

**Mary Ann Graves**- A young woman traveling with the party. Mary Ann does not want to travel to California, but must follow her family.

**John Snyder Strong**- A hard working Teamster (driver of animals) for the Graves family.

**Luke Halloran**- A seriously ill young shopkeeper, traveling alone.

# *The Donner Party: A New American Musical*

## Synopsis

In the spring of 1846, the Reed and Donner families depart from Independence, Missouri on their journey to California. Traveling with the families are Charlie Stanton, Mary Ann Graves, Lewis Keseberg, Peggy Breen, Patrick Dolan and John Snyder.

Margaret Reed's mother Sarah dies on the road, joining the ghostly "chorus" of the play, while Mary Ann sneaks up on Charlie while he is writing in his journal. She reads his writing and realizes that he has been watching and writing about her. She is charmed by his words and the two begin to fall in love.

The travelers reach Independence Rock in Wyoming, where Reed, despite warnings to the contrary, convinces the group that they should take Hastings Shortcut, promising that Hastings himself will guide them through. The group agrees with Reed about the shortcut but vote Donner leader of the newly christened "Donner Party."

The travelers are soon lost in the shortcut, and have a difficult time getting their large wagons through because Hastings never showed up to help them along the trail. They meet Luke Holloway, a sick young man traveling to California to improve his health, whom Tamsen Donner takes in. Keseberg suggests they dump Reed's large wagons, while Tamsen believes the best option would be to turn back and take the normal trail. Reed convinces the party to keep going through the shortcut, even though they will have to cut their own trail. Peggy gives birth to a baby girl, but Luke succumbs to his illness. He joins Sarah in the chorus and urges the party not to waste time building him a casket, which they do anyway. They finally reach the Humboldt River, marking the end of the shortcut, but not before leaving many of their wagons and supplies behind. The lack of food leads Charlie to go ahead for more supplies from Captain Sutter in California.

After an argument, Reed kills John Snyder in self-defense, is banished from the company and continues on alone, while the rest of the company falls apart: food and water are scarce, Indians have been spotted watching them, and they are fighting amongst themselves. Charlie returns with supplies, but more time is wasted when Donner insists on rebuilding a wagon after breaking it apart to save his daughter Frances, who had been trapped underneath. He cuts his hand badly during the rebuilding and abandons the effort.

The party is stuck on the summit until spring and decide to stay in two cabins they happen upon, while Charlie, Mary Ann and Patrick volunteer to cross the summit on jury-rigged snowshoes to get help. Donner's wound becomes infected but he delays amputating his hand. The party spends a dismal Christmas at the camp.

The snowshoe group is forced to draw straws to see which of them will give up their life so the others can have food. Patrick draws the short straw, but Mary Ann and Charlie cannot bring themselves to kill him. The camp occupants also begin to debate cannibalism and decide to dig up the dead for food. Patrick dies of natural causes, and Charlie and Mary Ann force themselves to eat his flesh. Charlie, however, soon dies as well, leaving his journal to Mary Ann.

Reed, having reached California, struggles to get back to his family. He finally reaches the camp, with food for the rest of the party, and says goodbye to Donner, who is dying. The Reeds head to California, and Tamsen sends Frances with them, choosing herself to stay with her husband until the end. When the rescue party finally comes, they find only Keseberg alive.

The survivors flourish in California, surrounded by the spirits of their loved ones.

# ***The Donner Party:*** **A History**

By Jonathan Fisher

*The Donner Party: A New American Musical* tells the true story of the Donner party's fateful winter trapped in the mountains of the Sierra Nevada, but as in any good historical adaptation, facts and historical figures are elided, combined, eliminated and otherwise changed in order to effectively translate the story into the medium of a musical. The following is an account of the historical facts of the ill-fated journey, so that the presentation of the story in the musical can be compared to the historical record.

## **Background**

The Donner Party was but one group of a dramatic surge in Westward movement by pioneers seeking religious freedom, job opportunities, and fulfillment of the idea of "Manifest Destiny," which stated that Americans deserved to settle the entirety of the North American continent. These pioneers would generally depart from Independence, Missouri and make their way along the established Oregon and California Trails in a journey that typically lasted between four and six months. The most difficult leg of the trip was the final one-hundred miles across the Sierra Nevada mountain range, and journeys were timed so that wagon trains could cross the range after spring rains created mud that would make travel difficult, and before winter brought snow drifts that made the mountains impassable. One early immigrant named Lanford Hastings proposed a new trail in his book *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California* that led through the Wasatch Mountains and across the Great Salt Lake Desert, though he himself had not traveled this route until 1846 and even then did not have any wagons with him.

## **Personnel**

The group that eventually became the Donner party comprised nine wagons containing thirty-two people that left Independence, MO at the tail end of a larger group of almost five-hundred wagons on May 12, 1846. **George and Tamsen Donner** traveled with their daughter **Frances** (age 6). **James and Margaret Reed** traveled with her mother **Sarah**, who died on the trail on May 28th, and their children **Virginia** (13), **Patty** (8) and **Thomas** (3), as well as three hired ox team drivers, a handyman and a cook. Several additional families joined the Reed/Donner group on the trail, among them **Peggy Breen**, and her neighbor **Patrick Dolan**; German immigrant **Lewis Keseberg**; and finally the tubercular **Luke Halloran**, the care of whom was passed from family to family, none of whom could properly care for him or his rapidly worsening illness.

## **The Cutoff**

A week into their journey, the Reed/Donner group joined a larger group of fifty wagons and by all accounts the first part of the trip went very well. On July 12th, the group received a

letter sent from Lanford Hastings to traveling emigrants warning them of the opposition of Mexican authorities and California and claiming a new trail to the territory and that he would be waiting at Fort Bridger, Wyoming to personally guide interested group along his new cutoff. The group was warned to be wary of Hastings and Tamsen Donner expressed reservations about turning off the established trail, and on July 20th, most of the larger wagon train decided to follow the established trail. The smaller group that decided to make for Fort Bridger and follow Hastings Cutoff needed a leader, and while James Reed was seasoned with military experience, his haughty and aristocratic attitude turned off many of his traveling companions. George Donner's more genial nature made him more well-liked by the party and he was chosen as the group's leader.

Hastings' shortcut was investigated by a journalist, who was concerned by the roughness of the trail, especially for the number of wagons and children in the party, and he left word for the Donner group telling them of his concerns. By the time they reached Bridger, Hastings had already left to guide another group, and the head of the Fort told the Donner group that the cutoff was a smooth trip, in order to improve the business of the trading post he ran out of the fort. On his advice, and not having received any of the journalist's warnings, the group set out for the cutoff on July 31st after four days of rest and repairs.

As the group followed the cutoff, they found the terrain very difficult to traverse, and many had to lock the wheels of their wagons to prevent them from sliding down steep hills and making them much harder to maneuver. Hastings left directions on trees along the trail and on August 6th, the party found one such letter instructing them to wait until he could come back and guide them personally along an alternative route that he and the group he was guiding had discovered. Reed and **Charles Stanton** left to catch up to Hastings, but found only difficult terrain, including canyons with narrow walls and precipitous drops to a river below, which would be dangerous for wagons. They could not catch up with Hastings, who only doubled back part of the way and left a general direction for the group to follow. While Stanton stopped to rest, Reed returned to the group and urged them not to turn back to the established trail, but rather forge ahead along the Hastings shortcut. The group's progress slowed to half a mile a day, due to the labor of clearing brush, breaking rocks and cutting down trees involved in forging the trail.

## **Mountains and Desert**

The party entered the Wasatch Mountains in central Utah, the last group of the 1846 expedition West. The Donner Party now numbered 87 in between 60 and 80 wagons. The mountain crossing took upwards of three weeks, and Luke Halloran finally succumbed to tuberculosis on August 25th. Soon after, they found a tattered letter from Hastings, which indicated several days of rough travel with limited grass and water ahead. By the time the party left the mountains and reached the Great Salt Lake Desert, the decisions to listen to James Reed and to follow the cutoff began to be questioned, and some of the poorer families began to run out of food and supplies. The party also caught up with Stanton, who had gotten lost on his way back to the group and was a day away from eating his horse.

The party continued into the Salt Desert on August 30th and after three days, their water was gone. Many oxen were so weak that they had to be abandoned, and nine of Reed's ten oxen

broke free and ran off. Many members of the party suffered hallucinations and many of the wagons were irreparably damaged by the harsh environs. Although no one died on the eighty mile journey across the desert, it took a full six days rather than the expected two. Once at the springs on the far side of the desert, another several days were spent attempting to recover cattle, retrieve broken wagons and transfer food and supplies between wagons. Reed was hit the hardest by the desert trek and demanded an inventory of the group's provisions, while also suggesting that two men should ride ahead to Sutter's Fort and seek assistance from John Sutter. Charles Stanton volunteered for the trip, while the remaining wagons were pulled by combined teams of animals from multiple families. Another forty mile stretch of desert was crossed with little difficulty, and on September 26th, after a two month journey on Hastings Cutoff, the Donner Party rejoined the original trail. Rather than being a shortcut, the cutoff had delayed them by nearly a month.

## **Back on the Trail**

Now traveling along the Humboldt River, the group was joined by some Paiute Native Americans, who eventually stole and shot several oxen and horses. After the Donner family split off from the main party to make better time, two wagons in the group became tangled, and John Snyder beat one of Reed's oxen. When Reed stepped in, Snyder turned on Reed, and Reed fatally stabbed him under the collarbone. Without their nominal leader Donner, the party debated what should be done with Reed. Despite having seen Snyder hit Reed and possibly Reed's wife Margaret, the group liked Snyder far more than they liked Reed, and Keseberg thought Reed should be hanged for murder. The group reached the compromise that Reed be allowed to leave the camp without his family and unarmed, but his daughter Virginia rode ahead secretly to give him a gun and food.

The party had now broken up into smaller groups, each fending for themselves and being forced to walk due to the weakness of the animals. Keseberg forcibly ejected an elderly man from his wagon, telling him to walk or die. He complied for a few days, until he sat down next to a stream to rest his split-open feet. The group refused to waste resources looking for a seventy-year-old man, and he was not seen again. Reed caught up with the Donners and then proceeded with one of his teamsters; the two made good time sharing one horse. By the time the rest of the group caught up with the Donners, Native Americans had stolen and killed another thirty seven cattle and forcing Margaret Reed and her children to walk. As the company pressed on to try and cross the mountains before winter, Charlie Stanton returned alone with mules, food and two Native American guides, along with news that Reed and his teamster had reached Sutter's Fort in California.

## **Winter**

The party arrived at the foot of the Sierras on October 20th and decided to press ahead, with the information that the pass would not be snowed in until the middle of November. The Donners brought up the rear, until one of their wagon axles broke and George Donner sliced his hand open attempting to repair it. The Breen family climbed nearly 1,000 feet to Truckee Lake, three miles from the mountain summit and camped near an earlier pioneer cabin. The Kesebergs joined them, but they were unable to find the trail over the mountain after finding five-ten foot

snow drifts blocking their way and returned to the Truckee Lake camp, where the rest of the families also set up camp. Subsequent efforts to breach the pass over the next few days all failed, and the party set up for the winter.

Three existing cabins were occupied by the party, in addition to a lean-to built by Keseberg against one of the cabins. The cabins had no doors or windows and were patched with canvas and ox hide to keep snow out. Sixty people set up camp at Truckee Lake, and another twenty-one people settled farther down the trail in tents built by the Donners. Little of the food brought back by Charlie Stanton remained and the oxen began to die from the cold. Margaret Reed promised to pay double when they arrived in California for the use of three oxen from the Graves and Breen families, and Graves charged Eddy twice the cost of a healthy oxen for the carcass of one starved ox. As desperation grew in the camp, several attempts were made by small parties without wagons, and on November 21st, a party of twenty-one people successfully reached the peak, but were forced to return to the lake after traveling a mile and a half west of the summit.

Patrick Breen kept a diary of life in the camp and the conditions the party lived in: the cabins were cramped and dirty, and people were often snowed-in for days at a time; diets consisted of glue-like jelly made from boiled oxhide, ox and horse bones that were boiled so many times for soup that they would crumble upon chewing, and stray mice that the pioneers caught and cooked. News soon came from the lower camp that Jacob Donner and three workhands, one of whom confessed to the murder of another, had died, and George Donner's hand injury had become infected. Margaret Reed saved enough food for a Christmas pot of soup for her children, but by January they were facing starvation.

Eventually a party of seventeen set out on makeshift snowshoes to attempt the summit, and while the snowshoes were effective, most were malnourished and un-accustomed to camping in snow up to twelve feet deep. Charlie Stanton straggled behind and told the group to move on without him, and his body was found in that location the next year. After another two days without food, Patrick Dolan suggested that someone should volunteer to die to provide food to the group, but Eddy suggested they wait until someone died from the elements. Dolan eventually began to rant and rave, stripped off his clothes and dies shortly afterwards. The group then ate his flesh, as well as that of others who had died. On January 12th, the group stumbled on a Native American camp and eventually to a small farming community on the edge of the Sacramento Valley. Their journey from Truckee Lake took 33 days.

## **Rescue**

James Reed had been recovering at Sutter's Fort since late October, and became more concerned for his family's safety as time passed. He eventually mustered a rescue party, expecting to find the Donner Party on the western side of the mountains, but found no sign of them, and returned to Sutter's Fort. Reed organized a second rescue party, joined by people who had heard of cannibalism by the rescued snowshoe party, and set out for Truckee Lake on February 4th, 1847.

The party reached the cabins on February 18th, finding thirteen people dead and all survivors emotionally unstable. Donner was unable to move due to his infected arm, and twenty-three people were chosen to go back with the rescue party, leaving twenty-one in the cabins and another twelve at the eastern camp. Margaret Reed was forced to leave her two youngest children at the lake, and made one of the rescuers swear to return for them. They encountered the next rescue party on their way down the mountain, and Margaret was re-united with James who was with that second party. That party reached Truckee Lake on March 1st, and Reed was reunited with his youngest children, and found that no one at the lake had died since the first rescue party, though there was evidence that many of the deceased had been eaten by the survivors. Seventeen more people were rescued by the second party, most of whom were children. Five people remained at the lake, including Keseberg, and Tamsen Donner chose to stay with her husband and three daughters until a third rescue party could come

The third party got to the lake on March 14th, and found only Keseberg alive, who confessed to eating the remains of a child that had died. George and Tamsen Donner remained at the eastern camp, despite being told that no more relief was likely to come. They returned with the rest of the children left at the lake. On April 10th, a salvage party returned to the lake to recover any belongings that might be left, to be sold to support the Donner orphans. They found the eastern tents empty except for the body of George Donner, and on their way back to the lake, found Lewis Keseberg alive. Keseberg claimed that Tamsen Donner had arrived at his cabin after the death of her husband, but died during the night. The salvage party were suspicious of Keseberg's story. They threatened to lynch Keseberg, who confessed that he had cached \$273 of the Donners' money at Tamsen's suggestion, so that it could one day benefit her children. On April 29, 1847, Keseberg was the last member of the Donner Party to arrive at Sutter's Fort.

Of the 87 people who entered the Wasatch Mountains, 48 survived. Only the Reed and Breen families remained intact. The children of George Donner were orphaned. Only three mules reached California; the remaining animals perished.

## **Sutter's Fort: Sacramento's Role in the Great California Migration**

By Anna Miles

In *The Donner Party: A New American Musical*, the company sends one of their younger members ahead to reach Captain Sutter in Sacramento for supplies and aid. That younger member was successful, as was James Reed when he made it to California before the rest of his family; because of this, Captain Sutter was instrumental in the eventual rescue of the Donner Party survivors. Sacramento meant safety for the party survivors, and was likely the first sign of civilization in California that they came across. It seems appropriate, then, that the musical version of the Donner Party story should premiere right here in Sacramento, in partnership with Sutter's Fort, the settlement which welcomed the party with open arms and restored hope to the tragedy-ridden travelers.

Captain John Sutter built Sutter's Fort in 1869, and originally called the structure "New Helvetia," which means "New Switzerland." At that time, Sacramento was an agricultural and trade colony in the Mexican Alta California province. New Helvetia was the first non-Indigenous settlement in the California Central Valley, which means that it was the first organized community that did not belong to the Native Americans of the area.

Sutter's Fort was close to the ends of two key trails, the California Trail and the Siskiyou Trail. These trails, first mapped out by fur traders in the early 1800s and, in the case of the Siskiyou Trail, originally based on existing Native American trails, soon became used by migrant travelers like the Donner Party, who were hoping to find new opportunity in the West.

Most famously, of course, Sutter's Fort and Sacramento were a large part of the California Gold Rush, which began on January 28, 1848 when James W. Marshall found gold at Sutter's Mill. The Rush continued until 1855, and by its end, some 300,000 people had made the journey to California.

The history of the United States has always been the history of Westward expansion, as settlers pushed further and further westward in search of opportunity, space, and riches, until they reached the Pacific Ocean. Sutter's Fort, Sacramento, and the Donner Party have become iconic symbols of this migratory history- we are lucky to have such strong connections to our nation's seminal past right in our own backyard.

Although Sutter's Fort fell into disrepair after it was abandoned during the Gold Rush years, the Native Sons of the Gold West purchased and restored the fort in 1891. It is now owned and administered by the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1961. You can visit Sutter's Fort every day between 10 am and 5 pm. For more information, visit [suttersfort.org](http://suttersfort.org).

For this production of *The Donner Party*, STC is pleased to partner with Sutter's Fort to educate the community about important topics related to the production, as well as host special events throughout the season. For more information about this and other community partnerships, go to <http://www.sactheatre.org/support/>.

## Glossary of Terms

**Admonition-** A gentle caution or piece of advice

**Alamande-** A variation on "allemande," a type of dance

**Book of Job-** A biblical book that tells the story of Job, a devout believer with the protection of God. Satan challenges Job's piety, claiming that he only believes and follows God because of His protection. God allows Satan to take away everything Job holds dear, including his family, his health and his wealth, but Job never claims that God has treated him unjustly, proving that his devotion to God did not depend on God's protection. God rewarded Job for his devotion by restoring his former life to him, even better than it was before.

**Alkaline sand-** Sand that has a high ability to neutralize an acidic substance

**Amputation-** The act of removing a limb through surgery, for the purposes of preventing disease in the limb from spreading to the rest of the body

**Animal hides-** The skins and furs of animals after they have been removed

**Bootstraps-** Leather straps on the sides of boots used to help pull them on

**Bounty-** A generous gift

**Brandy-** A liquor made from distilled wine

**Broth-** A thin soup made of water boiled with meat or vegetables

**Bull-headed-** Stubborn

**Caching-** The act of burying or otherwise hiding goods with the intention of returning for them later

**Captain Sutter-** John Sutter, the founder of Sutter's Fort in the area that eventually became Sacramento

**Casket-** A coffin

**Chisel-** A tool used to cut and shape wood or stone

**Delirious-** Affected by hallucinations, restlessness, excitement, delusions and other disturbances of a normal mental state, brought on by physical or emotional trauma

**"The Die is Cast"-** A metaphorical saying, meaning "there's no going back," or "past the point of no return"

**Foliage-** Leaves

**Freight-** Goods or cargo being transported

**Frontiersman-** Someone who lives in a sparsely-populated region on the frontier

**Frostbite-** A medical condition in which skin and other tissues freeze

**Gargantuan-** Enormous

**Gingham-** A woven fabric known for its distinctive checkerboard design

**The Great Salt Lake Desert-** A large dry lake desert between the Great Salt Lake and the Utah/Nevada border, known for its white salt deposits. The Donner Party crosses this desert as part of Hastings Cutoff.

**Hanging-** The act of execution by hanging the condemned by noose until their neck is broken

**Hastings Cutoff-** A shortcut proposed by Lanford Hastings connecting the Oregon and California trails that the Donner Party famously took on their journey West. At the time it was relatively little-used and the roughness of the trail caused the Donner Party innumerable delays.

**Hue-** A color

**The Humboldt River-** A river that runs through northern Nevada

**"In the Family Way"-** A euphemism for being pregnant

**Independence Rock-** A large rock in Wyoming used as a landmark along the various Westward pioneer trails. Settlers would carve their names in the rock to represent their journey West, and named it Independence Rock because they hoped to reach it by July 4th, Independence Day, to ensure they could cross the mountains before the first snowfall.

**Kindred-** A group of people related to one another; a family or clan

**Lupine-** A type of long, thin flower

**Mercantile-** A general store

**Mountain pass-** A travelable path over a mountain or between two mountains of the same range

**Orion-** A constellation named after a hunter from Greek mythology

**Ox-bow-** A u-shaped metal pole placed around an ox's neck and used in conjunction with a wooden yoke to attach the oxen to a plough or wagon

**Oxhide Stew-** A soup whose flavor comes from water being boiled with the hide of an ox

**Pack mules-** Mules used to carry heavy loads of supplies rather than passengers

**Parlor-** A room in a house used for entertaining guests

**Penny candy-** Any bulk candy sold by the piece. In 1846, the cost was typically a penny.

**Promenade-** A dance move in which partners walk forward arm in arm

**Rations-** Food or provisions, particularly if a set amount has been allotted due to low supplies

**The Russell Party-** Another group of settlers travelling West led by William H. Russell

**Scalawag-** A scoundrel or rascal, from the derogatory term for a white Southerner who collaborated with Reconstruction for personal gain

**Scale (as in, "scale a mountain")-** To climb

**Settlements-** Areas of human population, having been "settled" by the people living there

**Shrewd-** Crafty or sharp in practical matters

**Sierra-** The Sierra Nevada, a mountain range that runs along the Eastern border of California

**Snow-blindness-** A painful eye condition caused by ultraviolet light reflected by snow

**Snowdrifts-** Large mounds of snow built up by high winds in a snowstorm

**Snow line-** A point of elevation on a mountain where snow and ice exist year-round

**Square Dance Caller-** A person who calls the steps at a group square dance

**St. Christopher-** The patron saint of travelers

**Summit-** The peak of a mountain

**Teamster-** A person who drives a team of pack animals, in this case the wagons drawn by horses and oxen

**The Territory-** The California Territory, where the settlers are headed, after the United States gained control of the area from Mexico in 1847, but before it was granted statehood in 1850

**Tripe-** Edible stomach lining of cattle or oxen

**Wasatch Canyon-** A canyon in the Wasatch mountain range in south-central Utah

**Wild Sage-** A type of plant found in the American West

# Study Guide Questions: Engage With the Play

By Anna Miles

Take charge of your theatre-going experience and make it your own by asking yourself questions before, during, and after watching a play.

## Questions to ask before the play:

What, if anything, do you know about the Donner Party and its history? How are you expecting this to be translated into a play?

When you think about "theatre," what impressions come to mind? What does "theatre" mean to you?

What do you expect your experience to be when you watch a play? Do you expect to be bored? Excited? Engaged? Curious? Angry? Tired?

## Questions to ask after the play:

How did the play live up to your expectations? Did it turn out the way you thought it would? Was your knowledge of the play correct?

Were you able to follow the story?

Which part of the story did you most respond to? What themes and images jumped out at you?

Which character did you most relate to? Why?

How did this production change or confirm your original impressions of "theatre"?

How did your experience watching the play differ from how you expected it would go?

In your own words, how would you summarize the plot of the play? How is the plot different from the story, or the thematic implications, in the play?

Did you feel the story was relevant to your life? How and why?

Did you feel the story said something about our society, or about the world at large? If so, what?

Do you feel this story is an important one to tell and keep telling? How and why?

How would you cope with the conditions the Donner Party faced?

# Theatre Etiquette

- Arrive at the theater on time.
- Visit the restroom before the performance begins.
- Turn off your cell phone. Do not speak on the phone or text during the performance.
- Pay attention to announcements that are made prior to the show about the rules of the theater you are attending and the location of the fire exits.
- Don't speak during the performance unless you are encouraged by the performers to participate.
- Remember that the Overture (introductory music) in musical theater is part of the performance, so be quiet when it begins.
- Do not take pictures during the performance. It can be very distracting to the actors and can cause a mishap. It can also be a violation of an actor's contract.
- Remain in your seat for the entire performance. If you must leave, exit during intermission. In an emergency, wait for an appropriate break in the show. It is rude to get up in the middle of a quiet moment.
- Do not eat or drink in the theater.
- Do not put your feet up on the seats or balcony and do not kick the seat in front of you.
- Don't put or throw anything on the stage.
- Do laugh when the performance is funny.
- Do applaud when it is appropriate during the performance.
- Do applaud when the performance is over... this tells the performers and crew that you appreciate their work.
- Stand and applaud if you really thought the show was great (a standing ovation).
- Do not whistle, stomp your feet, or scream out to the performers except for a Bravo or Brava.

## Additional Study Material

*Ordeal by Hunger: The Story of the Donner Party* by George R. Stewart

The Sacramento Public Library's "*Sutter's Fort Pioneer Guide*"

<http://www.saclibrary.org/Research/Guides/Sutter%E2%80%99s-Fort-Pioneers-Guide/>

*Desperate Passage: The Donner Party's Perilous Journey West* by Ethan Rarick

PBS "*The Donner Party*," an American Experience TV Documentary (and additional books and websites)

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/further-reading/donner-further-reading/>

*Patrick Breen's Diary*

[http://www.books-about-california.com/Pages/Academy Pacific Coast History/Diary of Patrick Breen txt.html](http://www.books-about-california.com/Pages/Academy_Pacific_Coast_History/Diary_of_Patrick_Breen_txt.html)

*The History of the Donner Party: An Online Book* by C.F. McGlashan

[http://www.books-about-california.com/Pages/History\\_of\\_Donner\\_Party/Donner\\_Party\\_main.html](http://www.books-about-california.com/Pages/History_of_Donner_Party/Donner_Party_main.html)

[www.donnerpartydiary.com](http://www.donnerpartydiary.com)

<http://www.historynet.com/westward-expansion>

[suttersfort.org](http://suttersfort.org)