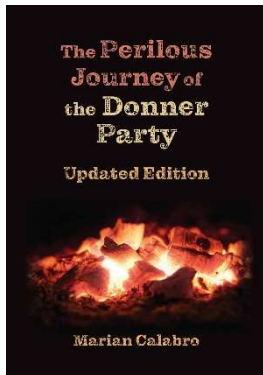


Donner Party Resource List

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: Updated Edition* (2026) and presenter of “The Real Story of the Donner Party,” a [Zoom program](#) for ages 12 to adult. Marian’s book is [available on Amazon](#) in all formats.

“Eerie and mesmerizing.”—*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Comments, questions, new resources or info to add to this list?
<https://mariancalabro.com/contact>

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SELECTED BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (with crossover appeal to adults*)

Brown, Skila. *To Stay Alive: Mary Ann Graves and the Tragic Journey of the Donner Party*. Candlewick Press, 2018. A novel told in verse for grades 5 to 9, based on the facts of Mary Ann Graves’s life.

*Calabro, Marian. *The Perilous Journey of the Donner Party: Updated Edition*. Honors for the first edition include: American Library Association Notable Book, Scholastic Book Club selection, and multiple awards and starred reviews (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; accurate but too lighthearted in spots.

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

*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.

*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.

SELECTED NONFICTION BOOKS FOR ADULTS

Brown, Daniel James. *The Indifferent Stars Above*. Mariner Books, 2015.

Hardesty, Donald L. *The Archaeology of the Donner Party*. University of Nevada Press, 1997.

Johnson, Kristin, editor. *“Unfortunate Emigrants”: Narratives of the Donner Party*. Utah State University Press, 1996.

Mullen, Frank. *Donner Party Chronicles: A Day-by-Day Account of a Doomed Wagon Train 1846-47*. Nevada Humanities, 1997. New edition to be published in 2026.

Rarick, Ethan. *Desperate Passage*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Stewart, George R. *Ordeal by Hunger*. Harper Voyager, 1992. Written in the 1930s by a professor of English literature; still the best overview in some ways.

Wallis, Michael. *The Best Land Under Heaven: The Donner Party and Manifest Destiny*. Liveright, 2017. The most thorough of the contemporary histories; researched and written with the cooperation of Donner family descendants who shared their archives.

NOTE: The two main repositories of Donner Party archival material are the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Sutter's Fort Historical Monument Collection, part of the California State Parks system. Both repositories offer online access to some materials.

<https://lib.Berkeley.edu>

https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=485

TIMELINES

In addition to the Chronology in books by Marian Calabro and Frank Mullen, these timelines are available online. Be aware that a lack of records make it impossible to reconstruct a 100% accurate timeline.

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).

<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.)

Instagram

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

@DonnerPartyHistory

Pinterest

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

MOVIES AND DOCUMENTARIES

Dead of Winter: The Donner Party (2015) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4863622/>

Not to be confused with a fictional movie of the same name, this documentary is a Weather Channel production. Not comprehensive, but generally accurate. Streamable only as short clips on YouTube.

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

A PBS documentary by Ric Burns, brother of Ken Burns. Accurate but based on the incomplete notion that the group's troubles centered almost totally on their decision to follow the Hastings Cutoff.

The Donner Party (1994) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7898464/>

Part of the series *The Real West*, initially broadcast on the Arts & Entertainment Network. As of 2025, it is streamable at The History Channel's Vault series.

Expedition Unknown (2022) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt21879630/>

Donner Party Horror and Heroes (Season 10, Episode 13)

Part of the long-running Discovery Channel series hosted by Josh Gates, this episode provides a real-time look at discoveries made in the 175th anniversary year. The retracing of travels by the Forlorn Hope by local athletes and historians is especially compelling. As of 2025, the series can be rented or purchased on Amazon Prime.

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

A TV dramatization, thoughtfully done but incomplete and somewhat inaccurate.

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

Hollywood film dramatization, historically inaccurate.