

**HISTORY OF THE
DONNER PARTY: A
TRAGEDY OF THE SIERRA**

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History of the Donner party: a tragedy of the Sierra by C. F. McGlashan

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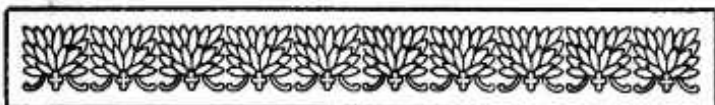
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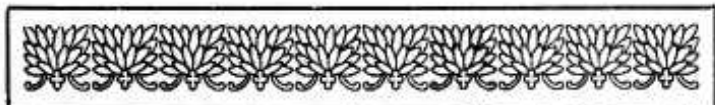


HISTORY
OF THE
DONNER PARTY



A TRAGEDY OF THE SIERRA

TWELFTH EDITION



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DONNER PARTY

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By C. F. McGLASHAN
TRUCKEE, CAL.

TWELFTH EDITION

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TO
MRS. ELIZABETH A. KEISER,

ONE OF THE

PIONEER MOTHERS OF CALIFORNIA,

THIS BOOK

IS

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THE delirium preceding death by starvation, is full of strange phantasies. Visions of plenty, of comfort, of elegance, flit ever before the fast-dimming eyes. The final twilight of death is a brief semi-consciousness in which the dying one frequently repeats his weird dreams. Half rising from his snowy couch, pointing upward, one of the death-stricken at Donner Lake may have said, with tremulous voice: "Look! there, just above us, is a beautiful house. It is of costliest walnut, inlaid with laurel and ebony, and is resplendent with burnished silver. Magnificent in all its apartments, it is furnished like a palace. It is rich with costly cushions, elegant tapestries, dazzling mirrors; its floor is covered with Oriental carpets, its ceiling with artistic frescoings; downy cushions invite the weary to repose. It is filled with people who are chatting, laughing, and singing, joyous and care-free. There is an abundance of warmth, and rare viands, and sparkling wines. Suspended among the storm-clouds, it is flying along the face of the precipice at a marvelous speed. Flying? no! it has wheels and is gliding along on a smooth, steel pathway. It is sheltered from the wind and snow by large beams and huge posts, which are bolted to the cliffs with heavy, iron rods. The avalanches, with their burden of earth and rocks and crushed pines, sweep harmlessly above this beautiful house and its happy inmates. It is drawn by neither oxen nor horses, but by a fiery, hot-breathed monster, with iron limbs and thews of steel. The mountain trembles beneath his tread, and the rocks for miles re-echo his roar."

If such a vision was related, it but indicates, prophetically, the progress of a few years. California's history is replete with tragic, startling events. These events are the landmarks by which its advancement is traced. One of the most mournful of these is recorded in this work—a work intended as a contribution, not to the literature, but to the history of the State. More thrilling than romance, more terrible than fiction, the sufferings of the Donner Party form a bold contrast to the joys of pleasure-seekers who to-day look down upon the lake from the windows of silver palace cars.

The scenes of horror and despair which transpired in the snowy Sierra in the winter of 1846-7, need no exaggeration, no embellishment. From all the works heretofore published, from over one thousand letters received from the survivors, from ample manuscript, and from personal interviews with the most important actors in the tragedy, the facts have been carefully compiled. Neither time, pains, nor expense have been spared in ferreting out the truth. New and fragmentary versions of the sad story have appeared almost every year since the unfortunate occurrence. To forever supplant these distorted and fabulous reports—which have usually been sensational newspaper articles—the survivors have deemed it wise to contribute the truth. The truth is sufficiently terrible.

Where conflicting accounts of particular scenes or occurrences have been contributed, every effort has been made to render them harmonious and reconcilable. With justice, with impartiality, and with strict adherence to what appeared truthful and reliable, the book has been written. It is an honest effort toward the truth, and as such is given to the world.

C. F. McGLASHAN.

TRUCKEE, CAL., June 30, 1879.



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