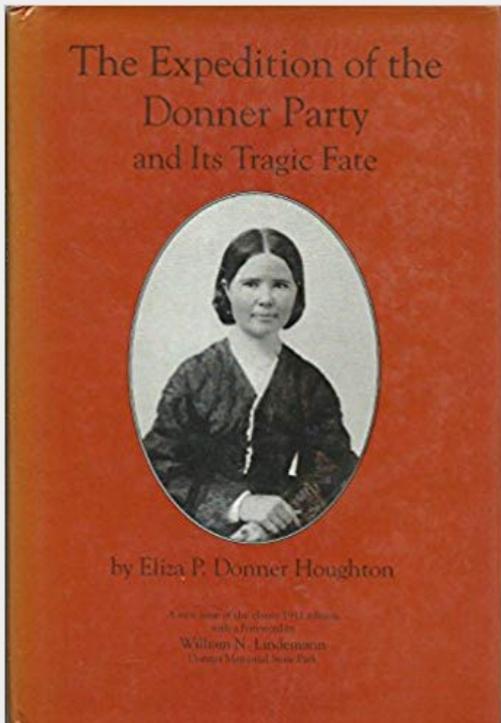


The Expedition Of The Donner Party And Its Tragic Fate by Eliza P. Donner Houghton, William N. Lindemann



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ISBN: 0870622501

ISBN13: 978-0870622502

Author: Eliza P. Donner Houghton, William N. Lindemann

Book title: The Expedition Of The Donner Party And Its Tragic Fate

Pages: 375

Publisher: Sierra District of California State Parks; Facsimile Edition edition (January 1, 1996)

Language: English

Category: Americas

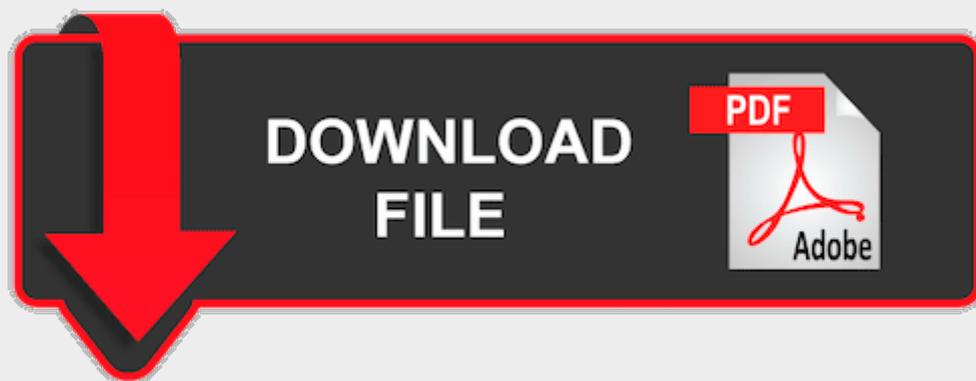
Size PDF version: 1669 kb

Size ePUB version: 1173 kb

Size FB2 version: 1733 kb

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Reviews of the The Expedition Of The Donner Party And Its Tragic Fate by Eliza P. Donner Houghton, William N. Lindemann

1. DABY

I have read three books, including this one, about the Donner Party this year. I liked Houghton's book because she provided aftermath to this horrendous story. She gave details of what happened to the people after they managed to escape the snowy mountains. Some were in very poor shape but did survive. She speaks so lovingly of her own mother who did not make it out but did sacrifice herself for her children in the most basic and gripping way. When you think of it, these people really had no idea about life in California and were forced to figure it out after surviving their ghastly ordeal. To me, it's astounding they were able to build lives of such substance and somehow even have children of their own. Some even lived into much older age. These people had true fiber!

2. Risinal

I'll admit that I am not a Pioneer scholar and living in California for my whole life, I have heard the Donner Party mentioned in numerous ways over the years without fully understanding their actual story. Although others will contest that Eliza Donner and her sisters were too young to fully comprehend what was happening along their journey, I think this book is still a fair overview and gives plenty of insight into the failed expedition.

Essentially, the "Donner Party" has come to represent cannibalism. Basically, a group of pioneers was trapped in the mountains for months with no choice but to eat their dead. However, that isn't exactly true and their circumstances speak to the rugged determination of the pioneer spirit. What I had always assumed was that the Donner Party was made up of a single family, but in actuality it was much larger - I believe around 75 people at the time they were trapped in the mountain pass. They were able to survive for months by eating the livestock they had with them and by eating the laces of their boots, etc. Many of the people who were part of that group, including the children, survived and were rescued some months later by some unsavory characters -- men who were motivated not just by the money they were being paid (a handsome sum) but by the potential loot that was in the mountains. Settlers moving "from the States" to the unsettled West would carry all they had with them. The Donner family itself had over \$10,000 cash sewn into quilts and thousands of dollars more in gold and silver hidden in their belongings. The other families had similar earnings, so the rescuers often went in with less than altruistic ideas - which was evident in the fact that they did not carry supplies for the survivors, they only brought the food and water that they

themselves would consume. So it really isn't surprising that these are the same people who began the ugly rumors that the Donner Party had resorted to cannibalism -- an act which would make it easier for everyone to care less about their fate; they were now unclean in the eyes of God.

Amazingly, many people DID survive this ordeal. This book is the story of Eliza Donner and her sisters. Eliza was about 3 years old when she was rescued along with her sister who was about a year or two older. Once rescued from the mountains where their parents had died, the young girls were put into the care of their teenage half-sisters (13 and 15, I believe). The government, the Spanish royalty, and some others had dedicated a small stipend to their care but they were otherwise lost in the world and all alone. Over the course of the next few months, the sisters were separated and the youngest two were taken into the care of a local German couple who were the butcher and dairy for the area. The girls spent the next 10 years or so in their care, which was extremely difficult although better off than most of the era. They were cared for but not loved and they were deliberately kept away from their older sisters who had been married and started families of their own. They also still had to deal with being Donner children and the unavoidable stares and snickers from townspeople for their entire lives. The newspapers of the times were thrilled with the sensational stories of cannibalism and debauchery by the Donner Party and the poor children were the unwitting victims of slander for the whole of their lives.

When Eliza was a teenager herself she was finally able to meet a man who had been part of the party and gone for help. He had been the one that the reporters had gotten the initial reports of cannibalism from; essentially this man admitted that he had no other choice and had to eat the flesh of one of his party. He is the only one "on record" as having admitted this and he is the single source for the rumors that persist hundreds of years later! When Eliza meets him, he denies ever eating human flesh and he assures her that her father died as a result of his injuries (sustained along the trail) and that her mother stayed by his side to care for him before succumbing to delirium and freezing to death. Eliza and her sisters accept his account as the truth and are satisfied, as I think all readers should be.

What was more remarkable that their journey to the west and subsequent peril in the mountains is that the survivors basically just went on with life. In the modern era, these girls would have lived off the money from talk show appearances and tell-all books for the rest of their lives. Instead, they were adopted as farm girls and lived the difficult, rugged life of farm children everywhere. In a time of great political upheaval (the war with Mexico, the Spanish ruling California) they just went back to life like everyone else - working hard, dealing with hardships, hoping for escape in marriage.

This is a free Kindle book and although I thank the people who have made it available in this format, it should be noted that there are many issues with the digitized version. Words are misspelled and typos abound (yes, I understand that this was written hundreds of years ago - but there are still blatant typos like "tne" instead of "the") and quotations and indentations are everywhere. I think a lot of this has to do with OCR being used to translate the text. Overall, it is readable but it should be noted that there are errors.

3. Kabei

The book was very interesting but because of all the people that were in the Donner party it was kind of hard to keep them all complete in my reading of the book. I also didn't understand how the book was layed out in the chapter headings. I have visited the Donner memorial, and would like to go back and revisit it because I truly feel now that I understand some of the hardships the poor people went through.

4. DEAD-SHOT

I found this story captivating and especially appreciated this version for its insight and depth. As a Virginia resident currently coping with record-breaking snow and pretty much snowbound myself, I was drawn to this story after seeing a PBS program. Reading this book sure minimized my whining about any personal hardships in the light of what this party experienced.

Here's where a Kindle is worth its weight in gold--I can't get to a bookstore and the UPS man can't get to me, so being able to download the book was more than just a casual convenience.

I gravitated toward this particular version of the story because the author had actually been there. She did a great job of presenting how things appeared from the eyes of a child who had no preconceived notion of how things ought to be. It focused on what is important to a child without

judgment and how she personally experienced the trip from preparation to the harsh winter of confinement and then her life in California after rescue where she grew up without her parents who didn't survive. The story of California as it evolved from its earliest days of settlement by pioneers turned out to be as fascinating as the trip to get there.

Mrs. Houghton's research to add appropriate information and a framework to her remembrances built a highly readable story in context to the times. I particularly enjoyed reading of the events in the language of the period, which made it come alive to me. The free Kindle version does not include the pictures as I've found with other free downloads and I want to see those so intend to head to the library when I'm able to look at them. It didn't stop me from really enjoying the story, however. It is a story that is completely true and well documented, but reads with all the drama of well-conceived and well-written fiction. Truth is sometimes more interesting than fiction and this is a great example. While the story was greatly sensationalized at the time and since, this version has a depth of honesty without pretense that made it a winner for me. Highly recommended.

5. Jia

The book is written by one of the survivors; a daughter of George Donner himself, the party's Captain. The book starts with the preparation for journey with excited anticipation then follows the trials and tribulations of getting across first the plains and then the desert. Following bad advice and broken promises the immigrant train tries a new route across the Sierras with tragic consequences. The book shows the incredible determination and fortitude of the early immigrants. As well as the inner strength and will to survive bestowed the Donner girls by their parents. It is a slap in the face to today's society. We get nuts if we can't find our remote or iPhones.

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