



# The Donner Party: A Doomed Journey (Milestones in American History)

*Tim McNeese*

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In the mid-1840s, a group of 33 settlers, their goods, and animals began moving west by wagon train from Springfield, Illinois, to California. After stopping in St. Louis, the Donner Party followed the California Trail until they reached Little Sandy River, in what is now Wyoming, where they camped alongside other groups of travelers. Now numbering 87, the settlers took a shortcut called Hastings Cutoff, but found themselves stranded in the Sierra Nevada Mountains during a snowstorm that blocked the trail through what is now called Donner Pass. What started out as an adventurous trek to a new land turned into a nightmare as the days turned into months, their food and supplies dwindled, and several members of the party died. The rest of the group resorted to cannibalism to survive. Of the original 87 travelers, 39 died, and 48 survived. "The Donner Party" details the trials faced by these settlers as they made the journey west to California.

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