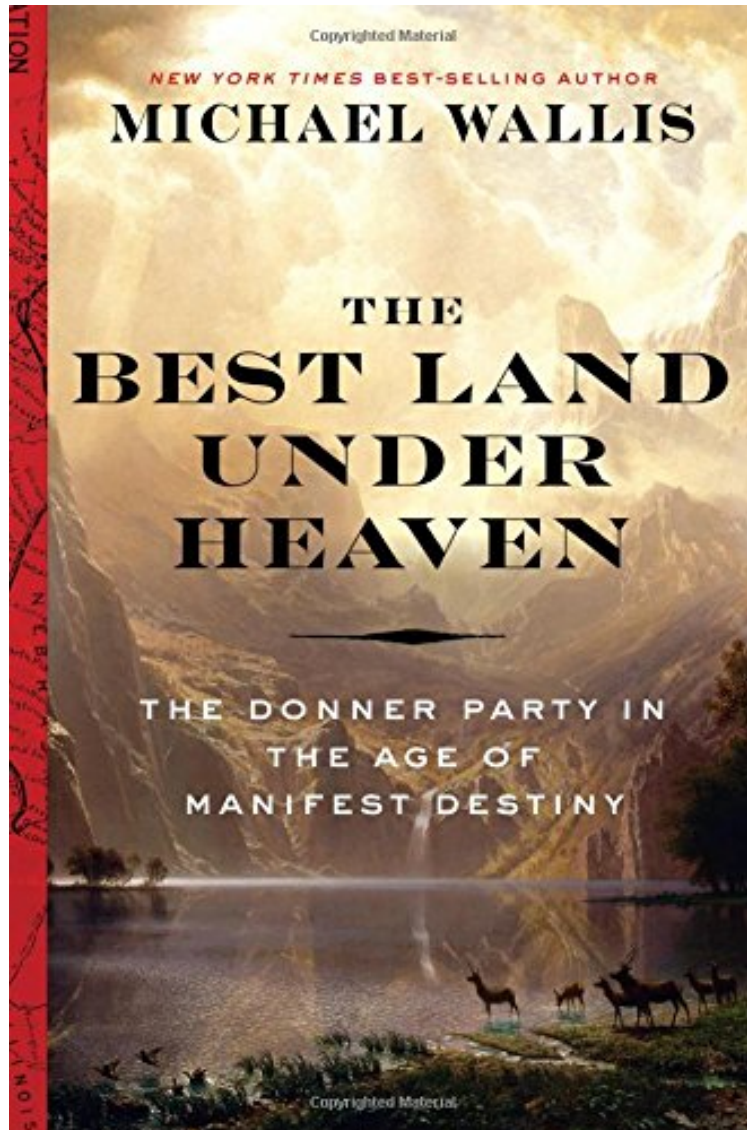


(Online library) The Best Land Under Heaven: The Donner Party in the Age of Manifest Destiny

The Best Land Under Heaven: The Donner Party in the Age of Manifest Destiny

Michael Wallis

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Michael Wallis : The Best Land Under Heaven: The Donner Party in the Age of Manifest Destiny before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Best Land Under Heaven: The Donner Party in the Age of Manifest Destiny:

50 of 50 people found the following review helpful. Harrowing Tale of ConsequencesBy Rhys A MartinMy review in

a single sentence: The Best Land Under Heaven is a detailed, humanizing portrait of a doomed American migration that underlines the fragility of the human condition. I, like most people, learned about the Donner Party from a textbook. The gruesome details of their fate are a byline in the narrative of westward expansion and Manifest Destiny. In this book, Michael Wallis pulls back the layers of myth and exaggeration and tells the story of the Donner and Reed families. Once I spent some time with them and got to know their dreams and aspirations, each poor decision or stroke of bad luck filled me with dread rather than the derision I felt all those years ago in the classroom. When their fate in the Sierra Nevada mountains became clear, I was not filled with macabre fascination but with great sorrow. The details of their survival that terrible winter are present in detail, made all the more powerful by the knowledge of who these people were. Their story is framed within the larger context of Manifest Destiny and the arrogant righteousness that blossomed in many westward pioneers. The narrative that leads the reader on a journey from Illinois to California flows easily thanks to Mr. Wallis' writing style; I read the entire book in two sittings. One might expect such a historical accounting to be dry, but if you've read any of Michael's other books you know he weaves a wonderful tale. The research undertaken was extensive and it shows through the detail present across the pages. It's a piece of American history, a showcase of frontier survival, and a powerful cautionary tale. Highly recommended. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Michael Wallis is a historian first. His account of ... By Barbara Branning Michael Wallis is a historian first. His account of facts and history of the westward expansion have been fascinating. Well written account! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very informative By Molly OMalley Blair Family members many, many years ago, crossed through the Donner pass. Wanted to read as much as I could about the facts.

Cutting through 160 years of mythmaking, best-selling historian Michael Wallis presents the ultimate cautionary tale of America's westward expansion. "WESTWARD HO! FOR OREGON AND CALIFORNIA!" In the eerily warm spring of 1846, George Donner placed this advertisement in a local newspaper as he and a restless caravan prepared for what they hoped would be the most rewarding journey of a lifetime. But in eagerly pursuing what would a century later become known as the "American dream," this optimistic-yet-motley crew of emigrants was met with a chilling nightmare; in the following months, their jingoistic excitement would be replaced by desperate cries for help that would fall silent in the deadly snow-covered mountains of the Sierra Nevada. We know these early pioneers as the Donner Party, a name that has elicited horror since the late 1840s. Now, celebrated historian Michael Wallis beloved for his myth-busting portraits of legendary American figures continues his life's work of parsing fact from fiction to tell the true story of one of the most embroidered sagas in Western history. Wallis begins the story in 1846, a momentous "year of decision" for the nation, when incredible territorial strides were being made in Texas, New Mexico, and California. Against this dramatic backdrop, an unlikely band of travelers appeared, stratified in age, wealth, education and ethnicity. At the forefront were the Donners: brothers George and Jacob, true sons of the soil determined to tame the wild land of California; and the Reeds, headed by adventurous, business-savvy patriarch James. In total, the Donner-Reed group would reach eighty-seven men, women, and children, and though personal motives varied bachelors thirsting for adventure, parents wanting greater futures for their children everyone was linked by the same unwavering belief that California was theirs for the taking. Skeptical of previous accounts of how the group ended up in peril, Wallis has spent years retracing its ill-fated journey, uncovering hundreds of new documents that illuminate how a combination of greed, backbiting, and recklessness led the group to become hopelessly snowbound at the infamous Donner Pass in present-day California. Climaxing with the grim stories of how the party's paltry rations soon gave way to unimaginable hunger, Wallis not only details the cannibalism that has in perpetuity haunted their legacy but also the heroic rescue parties that managed to reach the stranded, only to discover that just forty-eight had survived the ordeal. An unflinching and historically invaluable account of the darkest side of Manifest Destiny, *The Best Land Under Heaven* offers a brilliant, revisionist examination of one of America's most calamitous and sensationalized catastrophes. 50 illustrations

Wallis has delved into an extraordinary mass of original material, documents, diaries, accounts and letters, as well as new sources apparently not available to previous authors, and produced not only a definitive account of the Donner tragedy, but also a book so gripping it can scarcely be put down. . . . Wallis has done a superb job sifting through lurid tabloid moralizing and unreliable accounts to explore the complex truths of human beings pushed to the absolute limits of existence. - Douglas Preston, *New York Times Book Review* The saga of the Donner Party is one of the most horrific and fascinating events in the history of the American West. A cautionary tale at the time, it becomes in Michael Wallis's thorough and persuasive new telling, *The Best Land Under Heaven*, emblematic of the more shadowy aspects of Manifest Destiny. . . . [A] welcome update of a nightmarish tale. - Buzzy Jackson, *Boston Globe* [An] engaging account of the doomed journey . . . Mr. Wallis tells the story well and paints interesting portraits of the characters. - David A. Price, *Wall Street Journal* An even-handed, briskly written history of the party, destined to become the standard account of this horrid chapter of American history. - Timothy R. Smith, *Washington Post* If you want the full, unvarnished, exceptionally researched and documented, day-by-day description of what happened, look no further . . . [Wallis] provides a study of the times and circumstances and pioneer mindset that it took for farmers and businessmen

to decide to sell off their property, pack up their families and set off in search of something better beyond the next hill, over the horizon, past where the sun was last seen setting. . . . Fascinating, and horrifying, and inspiring. - Glen Seeber, *The Oklahoman* Michael Wallis takes readers on an adventure full of excitement, intrigue and harrowing results. . . . Referencing myriad documents and histories, Wallis presents a well-written and interesting account of this terrible tragedy. - Mike Whitmer, *Deseret News* Adopting an empathetic approach bolstered by studious research and geographical contextualization, biographer Wallis reclaims the horrific story of the infamously ill-fated wagon train from the annals of sensationalism The Donner Partys struggles and determination continues to fascinate, and Walliss comprehensive account of bravery, luck, and failure illuminates the realities of westward expansion. - Publishers Weekly, starred review Wallis offers a vivid new look at the ill-fated Donner Party Walliss use of primary sources, together with his dynamic writing style, turns a familiar retelling into a real page-turner. A welcome addition to all history collections. - Patricia Ann Owens, *Library Journal*, starred review Best-selling Wallis (David Crockett, 2011) account of their tragic and thoroughly avoidable trek is well-researched, detailed, and well-written. . . . Wallis recounts their bad decisions and sufferings as well as the heroic efforts to rescue them with sympathy and eloquence while placing them within the broader context of the pursuit of the Manifest Destiny to expand across the continent. This is an excellent reexamination of an infamous saga. - Jay Freeman, *Booklist* Nobody tells the stories of American history better than Michael Wallis. Hes done it again with this superbly researched and written account of the Donner Party trip west toward glory and riches that ended in bizarre catastrophe. The *Best Land Under Heaven* will clarify the facts of that infamous event as well as captivate and entertain. There are few better reads than this. - Jim Lehrer Michael Wallis has outdone himself in *The Best Land Under Heaven* by revisiting the sad wanderings of the doomed Donner Party. In elegant prose, Wallis reveals how the death song of Manifest Destiny had lured so many to irretrievably, and often tragically, alter not only the course of their own lives but that of America, too. - Larry McMurtry, author of *Lonesome Dove* Mr. Wallis has succeeded for the first time in compiling all available pertinent historical facts into this book. It is a must-have for everyone wanting the true story of the most epic saga of survival during the westward movement. - William A. "Bill" Springer, Great grandson of Captain George Donner and the Curator of the Donner-Springer Family Collection You cannot understand the settlement of the American West without understanding the facts and tellingly the myths of the tragic Donner Party of 1846. Michael Wallis has done a superb job sifting through the grumblings, resentments, and fatal delays of the wagon train that came to symbolize both the folly and grit of our westward expansion. Once I started, I could not put this account down. - Rinker Buck, best-selling author of *The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey and Flight of Passage* About the Author Michael Wallis, the best-selling author of *Route 66* and *Billy the Kid*, has published eighteen books and won numerous honors and awards. He is a popular public speaker and a highly acclaimed voice actor. He lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma.