

Director's Notes

Born in 1801, Tamsen Eustis was a native of Newburyport, Massachusetts. As a young woman she left for North Carolina to teach at a Seminary in Elizabeth City. She met and married Tully Dozier but was widowed and lost two children by the age of 35. In 1836 she traveled to Springfield, Missouri to care for her brother's children. It was in Springfield that she met her second husband George Donner, a well-to-do landowner. Tamsen continued teaching and also wrote poetry, some of which was published in *The Sangamon Journal*.

Our play begins in 1846, when Tamsen and George decided to travel to California where they could purchase land inexpensively and where Tamsen could start a ladies seminary. They traveled with their three young daughters and two of George's older daughters from a previous marriage. Their wagon train consisted of 91 pioneers, hoping to forge a better life in the distant West.

They had planned their journey as a summer holiday but unfortunately miscalculated the time it would take to cross the salt flats. They made the fatal decision to take a shortcut over the Wasatch Mountains after following the advice of a stranger. Because of the lost time and an early onset of one of the worst winters in western history, the Donner Party ended up snowed in for six months in the Sierra Nevadas, only 100 miles from their final destination.

Due to the plight of these pioneers, the Donner Party became a symbol of America's westward expansion. Only forty-one of the original party survived that horrible winter. Their story has found its way into fiction, film, folklore, children's literature and American popular culture. In **TAMSEN DONNER: A WOMAN'S JOURNEY**, Ruth Whitman transforms historical fact into poetic insight. Her moving portrayal of Tamsen's longings, sufferings, joys and deep sorrows make for a fascinating look into a pioneer woman's life. It has been a little over one hundred and fifty years since the Donner Party's overland migration and it is astonishing to realize how this country developed in such a relatively short amount of time. Our history books show the founding of America as being primarily in the domain of men, but women were an important part of our magnificent journey. There were many heroic women that helped make America what it is today. Tamsen Donner was one of them. ♦



TAMSEN DONNER

A Woman's Journey

*Adapted from Ruth Whitman's
book of the same title*

Directed by Nina Schuessler

Sound Design J Hagenbuckle

Light Design Tim Healy

Costume Design Robin McLaughlin

Choreographer Joanne Callum

Sponsored by



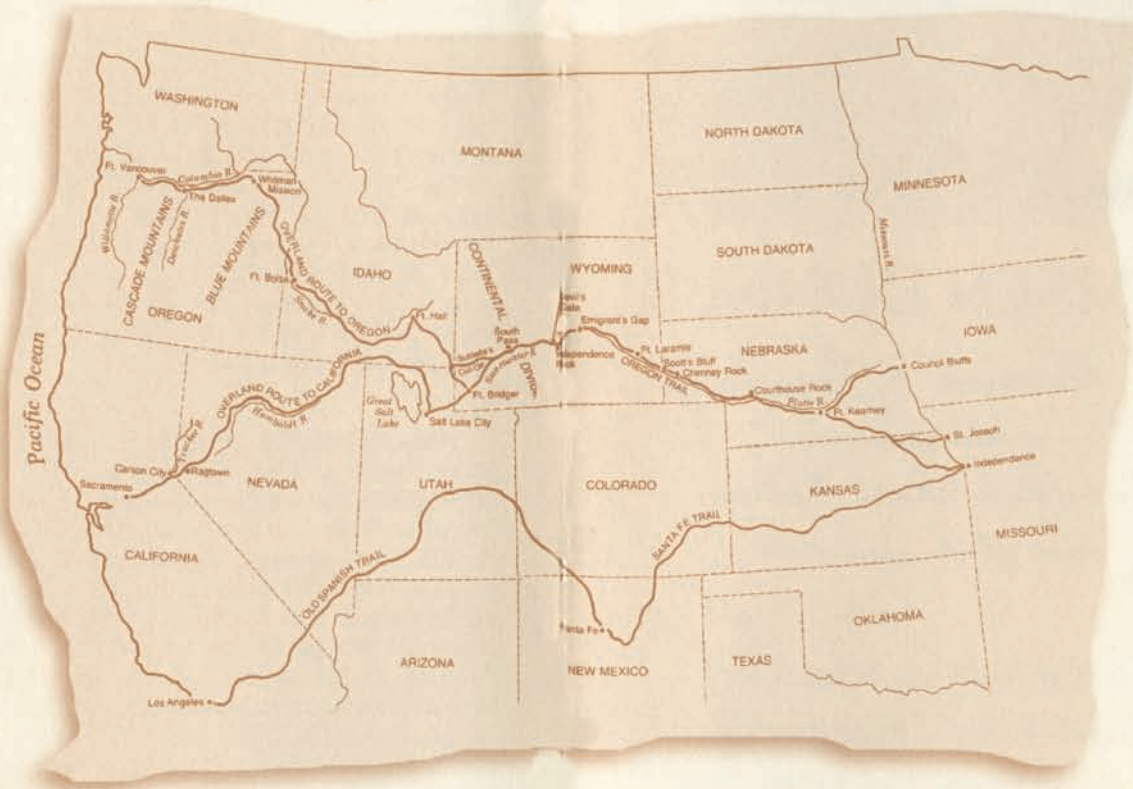
Who's Who

Tamara Harper (Tamsen Donner) is a teacher, director, and actress at HJT. She also teaches at Wheelock Family Theatre and studied at Boston University School for the Arts. As an actress with The Winter Company, (the resident adult company at HJT) she played the Stepmother in *The Juniper Tree*, A Tragic Household Tale the Witch in *Becca*, Celia in *As You Like It*, Roxanne in *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Regan in *King Lear*. Her directing credits include *The Little Princess*, *Really Rosie*, *Pippi Longstocking*, and *Willy Wonka and The Chocolate Factory*. Tamara also leads HJT's extensive outreach program, utilizing drama to teach Bullying and Teasing Prevention and integrating drama in the classroom.

Nina Schuessler (Director) became Harwich Junior Theatre's Artistic Director in 1996. She has acted, directed and taught theatre for the past twenty-five years. Under her artistic direction, HJT received the 1997 Regional Award for Excellence from the New England Theatre Conference and was nominated for the Presidential "Coming Up Taller" Award. Nina has supervised the production of over 100 plays. Her directing credits include *Gypsy*, *Oliver!*, *The Me Nobody Knows*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Lettice and Lovage*, *French Gray*, *Gertrude Stein*, *Gertrude Stein...*, *The Bridge to Terebithia*, *Hamlet*, the premier of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* by Mary and Andrew Arnault, *Honk* and *The Normal Heart*, a benefit starring Julie Harris. Nina has worked extensively with playwright Wendy Kesselman. She directed *Becca*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Executioner's Daughter*, several early readings of her new play *The Notebook*, which will soon premier at Second Stage in New York and a revision of *The Juniper Tree*, a Tragic Household Tale.

J Hagenbuckle (Sound Design) is a freelance sound designer and composer. His work on Tamsen Donner is part of an ongoing project made possible by an NEA/TCG Design Grant. J is the first sound designer to receive an Elliott Norton Award. He has designed productions on- and off- Broadway, in London, Boston and on Cape Cod at WHAT and, for HJT. ♦

Western Expansion Overland Trail



"Powerfully and movingly conveys the experience of the U.S. Westward movement through a woman's eyes"

... Pat Mahoney,
Language Art Teacher,
Mattachese Middle School,
Yarmouth, Mass

"Tamsen Donner, A Woman's Journey, is a rich, evocative and imaginative dramatization of the Donner Party's last days in the Rockies, told from the perspective of the wife of George Donner. It is a woman's gentle and resonant record of the heroic effort and sad tragedy, and it reverberates outward to all of us; it speaks to the human condition."

...Tom Kaplan-Maxfield, Professor of English, Boston College

"Tamsen Donner, A Woman's Journey, was compelling and cathartic. Tammy Harper's portrayal of this brave pioneer was outstanding. She brought the imagery of Ruth Whitman's beautiful poetry to life. It is surely "true art" and "theatre at its best", when an audience experiences emotions of elation, pain, sorrow and hope all in one show. Congratulations to the Harwich Junior Theatre for bringing this gripping story to the stage."

...Karen Kelly,
English Teacher,
Harwich High School
Harwich, Mass



THE WINTER COMPANY at
HJT Presents

TAMSEN DONNER

A Woman's Journey



Starring
**TAMARA HARPER as
TAMSEN DONNER**

For Booking information contact
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