A journey into the American promise.

When a promised shortcut strands emigrant families in the Sierra winter of 1846, an exiled father must find a way back while his daughter discovers the courage to keep their family alive.

THE SERIES

A proposed historical musical limited series, with a five-part narrative arc. The Donner-Reed migration is the emotional spine; Mexican California, Indigenous homelands, and American expansion form the larger world. Episode structure and running times remain open to development with a screen partner.

The story moves between the intimate and the immense: a child watching her father, a wagon community making a fatal choice, a winter landscape that refuses to yield. Songs reveal persuasion, longing, conflict, and collective action. The musical language belongs to the drama, carrying what dialogue alone cannot.

THE PEOPLE

James Reed begins with confidence in his own judgment and the promise of California. His ambition helps carry his family west, but his killing of John Snyder breaks the company's fragile order. Exile forces him to become a man whose worth depends on returning for others.

Virginia Reed begins inside her father's dream. Separation and winter ask her to find a courage of her own. Peggy Reed's determination holds the family together, while Mary Ann Graves' love for Snyder makes the consequences of Reed's violence painfully personal.

The Donners, Breens, Murphys, and Kesebergs bring competing needs, loyalties, and losses to the company. Beyond it, Californios and Indigenous characters widen the frame: the emigrants' destination is already someone's home, and the struggle for California is already underway.

THE OPENING MOVEMENT

The current screenplay opens in Yerba Buena in February 1847, with the machinery of communication and rescue moving through a port under the American flag. The journey then opens outward into the world that brought these people together: families seeking a future, promoters selling a route, and California caught in a struggle for power.

The audience encounters the dream before its cost. On the prairie, celebration, courtship, labor, and loss begin to bind strangers into a traveling community. The question is whether that community can withstand the choices made in its name.

The promise. The cost. The way back.

THE JOURNEY AND THE RUPTURE

Hastings' promised shortcut offers Reed and the company a seductive bargain: a shorter road to a better life. Warnings compete with ambition. The passage through difficult country spends the time, strength, and trust that winter will demand.

Affection grows between Mary Ann Graves and John Snyder. When a confrontation ends in Snyder's death at Reed's hand, the road becomes a court. Reed is sent into exile, leaving Virginia and Peggy to continue without him. Father and daughter now move through separate stories, bound by a promise of return.

WINTER AND THE ROAD BACK

Snow closes the mountain passage. The families shelter at the lake and Alder Creek as food dwindles and the company fragments into smaller circles of responsibility. The Forlorn Hope sets out on snowshoes to find help. Hunger, death, and the extremity of survival test every belief the travelers brought west.

In California, Reed confronts military demands and the practical difficulty of organizing a rescue. Help must be persuaded, financed, supplied, and carried back into the snow. The journeys outward and inward begin to answer one another: survival depends on people choosing to return.

WHAT SURVIVES

Successive relief parties bring survivors down from the mountains. Reunions do not erase the people who are missing. The final movement follows the burden of living afterward: grief, accusation, damaged reputations, and the work of beginning again.

The closing question is what one person owes another after the familiar rules have failed. One Warm Line finds its hope in acts of care, in the names people keep, and in the decision to go on.

A treatment of the developing screen adaptation. Scenes, dialogue, and songs are a dramatic interpretation of historical events. Developed through writing, historical research, and AI-assisted creative tools. The recordings and imagery present the creative vision; professional collaboration will shape its realization in performance.

Collin Poseley & Nick Almond / Contact: poseley.collin@gmail.com

Selected films, overview, and illustrated project packet