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Unfortunate Emigrants

Kristin Johnson

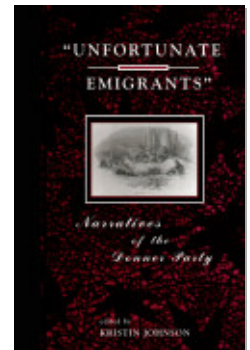
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EDNA MAYBELLE SHERWOOD (1885–1951)

Edna Maybelle Sherwood was born in 1885 in Elk Grove, California, the daughter of Seth P. Sherwood and Mary Anna Cyrus, a daughter of Lovina Graves Cyrus of the Donner party. Edna Sherwood married Theodore Tracey Fairchild in 1911, living for a time in Nevada but moving back to Calistoga by 1919. They had three children. Edna Sherwood Fairchild married Arthur Wing in 1948; she died May 10, 1951, in Larkspur, California.

Edna's grandmother, Lovina Graves Cyrus, was born in Marshall County, Illinois, on July 3, 1834. After her rescue from Donner Lake, Lovina was cared for by her older sisters. She and her younger sister Nancy lived for a time with Mary Graves Pyle in San Jose, where they attended school. Lovina also stayed with Sarah Fosdick Ritchie and Eleanor Graves McDonnell, who lived in the Napa Valley (Eleanor moved to nearby Knights Valley, Sonoma County, in 1850). On June 5, 1855, Lovina married John Cyrus, also a veteran of Hastings Cutoff, with whom she had six children. She died in Oakland on July 27, 1906.

The Text

Like her sister Nancy, Lovina was reluctant to talk about the Donner party and did not correspond with C. F. McGlashan, though her brother William and sister Mary did. W. C. Graves consulted her on some of the questions McGlashan posed, but wrote the historian that Lovina was "a little childish" about discussing the tragedy. She later relented and gave her granddaughter a brief account of the Donner party. This story is not a major contribution to the Donner literature, being late and secondhand, but it contains several interesting details.

Edna Sherwood wrote down her grandmother's memoir and sent it to the San Francisco *Chronicle*. The memoir is said to have appeared on the children's page of that newspaper about 1900 but this version has not been located. The memoir was incorporated into a *Daughters of the American Revolution* publication in 1929, taken from an equally elusive version

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which appeared in a Calistoga newspaper about 1910. The present account is from the *Weekly Calistogan* of June 14, 1940, and published with the kind permission of editor Pat Hampton. I thank Maxine Durney for bringing the memoir to my attention.



**Edna Maybelle Sherwood (1885–1951); date of photo, circa 1900.
Courtesy, Marilyn Kramer**



**Lovina Graves Cyrus (1834–1906); date of photo, circa 1850.
Courtesy, Marilyn Kramer**