

## **The Pathmaker/Frémont/John Frémont: the Pathfinder** **by Tom Smith**

**Characters/Audience:**     *The Pathmaker* (general audiences): 2 men, 1 woman (if doubled)  
                                  *Frémont* (high school/middle school): 1 man, 1 woman (if doubled)  
                                  *John Frémont: the Pathfinder* (elementary school): 1 man

**Time/Place:**               1829-1890, The United States

**Running time:**            *The Pathmaker* (general audiences): 75 minutes  
                                  *Frémont* (high school/middle school): 50 minutes  
                                  *John Frémont: the Pathfinder* (elementary school): 30 minutes

All three versions of the play explore the life of John C. Frémont, famed explorer who discovered major paths west to California. Starting with a group of Senators agreeing that the country must expand westward from St. Louis, early scenes reveal Frémont's sense of not belonging, forging his desire to travel and discover.

Soon Frémont becomes a topographer, mapping out uncharted territory. He meets Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, and falls in love with Benton's daughter, Jessie. Exiled for over a year by Jessie's protective father, Frémont and Jessie continue their relationship via letters, and finally elope. Begrudgingly, Thomas Hart Benton accepts Frémont into his family.

Joined by Kit Carson, Frémont is assigned to map out possible railroad paths west. After a brief excursion, he returns home and Jessie begins to help him write books based on his experiences.

Following a brief second expedition, Frémont and his men are forced to take arms against Native Americans during their third expedition to the west. Frémont, a pacifist, is torn by his desire to discover and his need to protect his men.

After a charge of mutiny and a court martial, Frémont quits the military and continues to trek out on his own. During a famed and fatal fourth expedition, Frémont and his men are trapped in the LaGarita Mountains. Freezing and starving, his men resort to cannibalism to survive.

Soon, personal tragedy strikes again and again: Frémont's son dies; the gold rush nearly bankrupts his family; Frémont's anti-slavery stance loses him an election to the Senate; a fire destroys his home; and his newborn daughter dies. Not knowing what to do, Frémont forges on his fifth and final expedition. It is here that Frémont discovers an easier and more efficient path west.

Wanting to dedicate himself to his family, Frémont decides to run for President and becomes the first Republican nominee. He is defeated by Buchanan, and tries a life outside of the public eye. Soon, the Civil War begins and Abraham Lincoln appoints Frémont to become a Union General. But Lincoln thinks Frémont's anti-slavery stance is too strong, and removes him from his post. Jessie confronts Lincoln, but Lincoln's mind is set.

Having lost his pride, having little income, and too old to continue exploring, Frémont and Jessie settle in to enjoy their remaining days, writing books about Frémont's expeditions. They invest their money in the railroad, but strikes and delays bankrupt them. Frémont dies from bronchitis shortly afterwards.

At his funeral, Frémont's son gives an elegy reminding us that "from the ashes of his campfires have sprung cities."