

# THE CHRISTMAS FOUNDLING

By Norman Allen  
Inspired by the stories of Bret Harte



Directed by Karen Lund

  
**TAPROOT  
THEATRE**  
COMPANY

**Study Guide**

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[www.taproottheatre.org](http://www.taproottheatre.org)

# The Christmas Foundling

By Norman Allen

Inspired by the stories of Bret Harte

Directed by Karen Lund

### Play Synopsis

The California gold rush is on and rough-and-tumble miners fill their days chasing fortunes and their nights with story and song. When an infant appears on their doorstep on Christmas Eve, their carefree existence is turned topsy-turvy and they discover that the greatest wealth sometimes comes in surprising packages. A play rich with the spirit of Christmas and filled with traditional folk music and carols.

### Cast

Jason Adkins	<b>Hoke</b>
Justin Emerick	<b>Boston</b>
Grant Goodeve	<b>Old Jake</b>
Danny Helms	<b>Tom</b>
Jake Lund	<b>Tom</b>
David Anthony Lewis	<b>Moscow</b>
Eric Riedmann	<b>Georgia</b>
Casi Wilkerson	<b>Aunt Sarah</b>

### The Setting

The Sierra Foothills,  
California, 1850-1862

## Norman Allen

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From [www.capitalcommunitynews.com](http://www.capitalcommunitynews.com)



Born December 24, 1939 in London England.

Born and raised on the north shore of the San Francisco Bay, Allen followed his love of theater to Richmond College in London and then back into the US to

Boston University where he studied under Nobel Prize laureate Derek Walcott. After college, he settled for a while on Cape Cod where his first play was produced by the Provincetown Theatre Company. While there, he wrote the first draft of *Melville Slept Here* combining his fascination with history and his interest in literature.

Plays weren't the only things he wrote. He freelanced for magazines and newspapers as well. One assignment for the Boston Globe had him interviewing Betti Brown, a prime mover in the development of the Washington theater community. She opened doors for him here, and he landed a job as a publicist with the Shakespeare Theatre Company. Later, he worked for WETA.

Brown also sent some of his works to Arlington's Signature Theatre which went on to produce six of his plays over the next ten years, including *Nijinsky's Last Dance* which won the Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play.

Playwriting eventually earned him enough to drop his day job. He wrote the "script" for a Cirque du Soleil-type mixture of mime, acrobatics, music and specialty acts called *Cirque Ingenieux*. It toured the country for three years, was filmed for public television and released on DVD.

The Broadway world called when Signature's Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer was asked to direct a concert version of Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's 1929 musical *Sweet Adeline*. Allen was hired to adapt the lengthy

script for a short structure appropriate for a concert presentation.

Work with Schaeffer led to a gig with the Walt Disney organization, developing a stage version of *Snow White* for Disneyland in California. Later, he wrote the script for another Disney theme park show, *The Golden Mickey*, for Disneyland Hong Kong. The songs are sung in English, but the dialogue was translated into Mandarin Chinese.

Work on *The Golden Mickeys* coincided with Allen's return to academia. He enrolled in the graduate curriculum of St. John's College in Annapolis and found himself deep in study of Homer's *Iliad* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* by day, and then hoping on a plane to a script conference in California drafting dialogue for Mickey and Minnie Mouse in flight.

During the years that Signature Theatre was producing his plays as part of their regular seasons, Allen started up a youth outreach program for the theater in partnership with Arlington's Wakefield High. Working with the school's students, Allen would research an historical event or issue and create a play which would be produced for performances with the students as cast members.

After establishing his credentials as a successful playwright, he realized that the happiest times he spent were those in the student playwriting project, so he decided to teach. He is a Junior English teacher at César Chávez Charter High School.

He seems to have found the satisfaction he sought at Chávez, but he is still in demand as a playwright. The Shakespeare Theatre Company, where he had once been a publicist, commissioned its first play for families. His *On the Eve of Friday Morning* dealt with the culture clash of east and west, modern and ancient through the device of an old Persian folk tale and current events in Iran.

His latest project is the script for a musical based on the same novella on which the famous opera *Carmen* was based. He has also won 2 Emmy awards for his documentary writing as well as a Helen Hayes Award.

## **Summary**

From [www.curtainup.com](http://www.curtainup.com)

Starting out on Christmas Eve 1850, just after the outbreak of gold rush fever, the story culminates on a Christmas Eve in the midst of the American Civil War. Rather than involve itself in either of those cultural revolutions, Allen's play is more a gentle love story which he works on a variety of levels. His message in the play is to highlight the miracles that love can bring into our lives -- if we allow it.

Thus, high in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range, he's set two gold miners, the cantankerous Old Jake and the younger anti-social Hoke, who find themselves suddenly becoming the guardians of an infant on Christmas Eve. The child, whom they name Tom, has been orphaned after his mother dies from starvation, exposure and childbirth. With no information about the boy's relatives, the two men choose to raise the "wee bear" instead of giving him up. To assist them, they enlist their fellow miners and together the men of Piney Gulch (Population: 5) raise the boy in the beautiful, pristine and isolated countryside. As the years pass, the presence of the child changes each of the men and as they teach the boy to maneuver through the wilderness, he in turn softens their rough and gruff exteriors.

Thus neighbors Boston, Georgia and Moscow give up wine, women and song on Christmas Eve and begin to spend the holiday awaiting "The Telling" (which is the story of how Tom the child came into their lives). This annual event is followed up by the humorous "Passing of the Goat" (a story which explains how Tom was able to survive his first years on earth). The storytelling becomes key to the men's simple lives, since none read or write English, and thus a faithful retelling of the child's history is the only way to ensure he has any knowledge of his origins or roots.

It's during the annual Christmas Eve festivities that another woman -- only the second to pass through the small town in ten years -- emerges at Jake and Hoke's doorway. Sarah it turns out is Tom's aunt, who after receiving an inheritance which gave her wealth and freedom, has been searching for her sister for the past two years. When she discovers Tom, she is determined to return him to his relatives in Boston. It's at this point that an unlikely romance develops and the story comes full circle on another Christmas Eve with everyone gathered around Old Jake waiting for "The Telling." This is a feel good play, to warm your heart and make you delight in the magic of the season.

## **The Stories of Bret Harte**

From [www.uncp.edu](http://www.uncp.edu); [www.online-literature.com](http://www.online-literature.com)

Bret Harte (1836-1902), American author, essayist, humorist, and critic wrote *The Luck of Roaring Camp* (1870), one of his first and most successful works. Francis Brett Harte was born on 25 August 1836 in Albany, New York, the son of a teacher, Henry Harte and his wife Elizabeth Ostrander. Young Frank was frail as a child due to ill health, so he turned to books as his favorite indoor pursuit, studying the Bible and reading Byron, Dickens, and Poe among others. Harte worked in many places – teaching, mining, publishing, even at the US Mint and as a US Consul in Germany. Experience in so many occupations helped Bret relate to the many characters who made up the new culture of people in the West, and added to the characters in many of his short stories. His colorful stories about the West made California famous. Harte had mastered the genre of gold rush fiction, capturing the corruption and greed in nostalgic prose, with vivid descriptions of the myriad characters he had known and the wild new frontier lands he had traversed. He had a keen sense of his audience and their expectations and interests. After the transcontinental railroad was connected, the Easterners flocked out West to see this land of gold

Harte described so vividly. His background as a journalist gave him a brisk style and a special skill for describing people, their mannerisms, and dialogue. Harte won national acclaim through his writings and publications from the West.

## **The Gold Rush**

From PBS Documentary *The Gold Rush*

### **An Accidental Discovery**

Sandwiched between the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the Civil War in 1861, the California Gold Rush is considered by many historians to be the most significant event of the first half of the nineteenth century. Gold was first discovered in California by James Marshall, hired by rancher John Sutter to build a sawmill for Sutter's expanding agricultural empire. While chopping lumber for the sawmill, Marshall noticed several gold nuggets in the American River and told Sutter. Surprisingly, neither Marshall nor Sutter had any interest in capitalizing on the find and feared that competition from gold-seekers would interrupt their own operations, so they made a pact to keep the discovery a secret.

But within months, word spread eastward, and by 1849, thousands of young men left their homes and families and traveled to California for their share of the fortune. Some traveled on foot on the already established Oregon-California Trail. Others traveled by ship around the tip of South America, while still others took shortcuts across Panama and Mexico. Regardless of the route, it was an intensely difficult journey, with the adventurers often plagued by seasickness, malaria, cholera and other diseases.

It's important to note that the gold-seekers, or 49ers as they were called since most left their homes in 1849, were not only American. The California gold rush was a world event, attracting gold-seekers from Mexico, China, Germany, France, Turkey and around the world.

### **High-risk Entrepreneurialism**

Some of the most successful entrepreneurs never panned for gold, but supplied the gold miners with much-needed supplies and services. For example, Levi Strauss started a successful dry goods business, Philip Armour opened a meat market and Henry Wells and William Fargo offered miners secure, honest banking services in their company, Wells, Fargo & Co.

Women played an important, yet often underestimated role during the gold rush. At the time, women were scarce, but those who lived in California realized the entrepreneurial opportunities that existed and put their much-needed domestic skills to work and profit. Some authorities regard this period in history as the beginning of the women's movement.

The legacy of the gold rush is significant for a number of reasons. First, gold brought people from around the world to the West--people who stayed to form the multi-cultural nucleus that exists today in that region of the country. Secondly, the gold rush pulled the country itself westward, ensuring that California and the other western regions would become a part of the United States. Lastly, the gold rush awakened America to the idea of high-risk entrepreneurialism, a concept that America's capitalistic society continues to nurture.

On January 24, 1998, the United States celebrated the 150th anniversary of the gold rush.

## Possible Travel Routes to Gold Territory

From PBS Documentary *The Gold Rush*

### **The Oregon-California Trail**

Distance: about 3,000 miles

Estimated travel time: 3 to 7 months



### **The Panama Shortcut**

Distance: 7,000 miles

Estimated travel time: 2 to 3 months



### **Around Cape Horn**

Distance: 15,000 miles

Estimated travel time: 4 to 8 months



## **Timeline: 1847-1861**

From PBS Documentary *The Gold Rush*

**1847** August 19: John Sutter and construction foreman James Marshall make plans to build a sawmill on the American River at a place known to the Native Americans as "Culloomah."

**1848** January 24: James Marshall and Peter L. Wimmer discover gold at Sutter's new sawmill.

May 12: Sam Brannan set off gold fever in San Francisco when he waves a bottle of gold dust and shouts "Gold! Gold! Gold from the American River!" Brannan will see huge profits at his merchandise store at Sutter's Fort.

June: News of the gold rush reached the Hawaiian Islands.

August 18: News of the gold reached Chile. An estimated 5,000 Chileans arrive in San Francisco during the first six months of 1849.

October: Mexican migrants begin to arrive in California for the gold rush.

By the end of the year, an estimated 5,000 people were mining in California. The entire non-native population of California is estimated at 20,000.

Australians hear about the gold rush in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

**1849** February 28: First regular steamboat service to California is inaugurated by the arrival of the Pacific Mail's steamer *California*.

September 1: The California Constitutional Convention began in Monterey. Forty-eight delegates draft the first state constitution. Under the constitution, California will enter the Union as a free state. In Washington, D.C., there was heated debate over slavery.

November 13: California voters approved the State Constitution.

December 31: The population of California is estimated at 100,000 including 35,000 people who came by sea, 3000 sailors who deserted ships and 42,000 who came overland.

**1850** January 29: U.S. Senator Henry Clay presented a compromise to prevent the Union from dissolving over the issue of slavery. Congress debated Clay's proposal for eight months before passing the Compromise of 1850, which included allowing California to enter the union as a free state.

April 13: The state legislature levied a \$20 per month tax on non-American born miners. The tax primarily targeted Latin Americans. Resistance to the Foreign Miners Tax came from French, Mexican, Chilean and German miners as well as from merchants who faced tremendous business loss as a direct result of the tax. The passage of the tax bill led to a rise in banditry in the mines; the tax was repealed in March 1851.

April 22: The California legislature passed an Act for the Government and Protection of Indians that essentially forced Native Americans into servitude. The law provided for the forced labor of loitering or orphaned Native Americans, regulated their employment, and defined a special class of Indian crimes with punishments.

September 9: California was admitted to the Union as the 31st state.

October 18: The news of California's admission to the Union reached San Francisco. The entire city burst into spontaneous celebration.

**1851** Summer: Miners invented new ways to reach the gold that lay underground, including a method called quartz mining. Investors from Boston and New York get in on the action by purchasing stakes in quartz mining operations. Mining companies offered wages of \$100 per month and find plenty of takers.

June 22: The last of six "Great Fires" in San Francisco in a year and a half. The total damage from all 6 were estimated at \$26 Million and 3,300 buildings lost.

**1852** May 4: A second Foreign Miners Tax was imposed, this one aimed at the Chinese. The tax lasted through the 1860s and became a key source of revenue for the new American state of California.

Gold exports in 1852 amount to \$45,587,803.

**1853** In 1853 a new technique called hydraulic mining spreads through the gold camps. Miners shoot water through hoses at hillsides and turn them to gravel heaps. They then separate the gold. This continued industrializing of the mining process forces more men into wage labor. Hydraulic mining also devastates the landscape.

Gold exports in 1853 amount to \$56,390,812.

**1857** The search for gold continued unabated throughout the 1850s. Gold production stabilized in 1857 at about 45 million dollars a year.

Rapid technological advances in the 1850s, required far greater capital resources. Large-scale corporations became the dominant form of economic organization, and speculation in mining securities became a regional obsession.

**1860** An influx of women brings their numbers up to nearly 19% of the population -- 9,000 women in an enumerated immigrant population of almost 50,000.

November 6: Abraham Lincoln was elected president.

**1861** Civil War begins.

## **Other Works by Norman Allen**

From [www.doollee.com](http://www.doollee.com), [www.culturevulture.net](http://www.culturevulture.net), [www.playscripts.com](http://www.playscripts.com)

*Waiting in Tobolsk, On the Eve of Friday Morning, Nijinsky's Last Dance, The Morning of Eighth Day, Melville Slept Here, Jenny Saint Joan, In the Garden, House Halfway, Here to Stay, Coffee with Richelieu, The Christmas Foundling, The Christmas Carol Rag, Fallen From Praust, Sweet Adeline, Cirque Ingenieux (Cirque de Soliel), The Children of the Last Tsar, Journey Home, PBS documentaries: Vincent Van Gogh & John Singer Sargent, Disney's staged version of Snow White and The Golden Mickeys, The Besting of Humphrey Mercer, Mary Cassatt/A Brush with Independence and From Renoir to Rothko/The Eye of Duncan Phillips*



## THE CHRISTMAS FOUNDLING

Set design by Mark Lund



Casi Wilkerson, Jake Lund, Jason Adkins, and Grant Goodeve.

Production Team	
Director	Karen Lund
Sound & Scenic Designer	Mark Lund
Costume Designer & Costume Shop Manager	Sarah Burch Gordon
Stage Manager	Sarah Dale Rice
Lighting Designer	Monty Taylor
Props Master	Dustin Morache
Dramaturg	Megan Smithling
Assistant Stage Manager	David Purdy
Dresser	Clare Hungate-Hawk
Light Board Operator	Dustin Morache
Sound Board Operator	Nathan Gemmet
Dialect Coach	Nikki Visel
Production Stage Manager	Anne Hitt

## Taproot Theatre Company

Taproot Theatre Company is a professional, nonprofit theatre company with a multi-faceted production program. Founded in 1976, Taproot Theatre serves the Pacific Northwest with Mainstage Productions, Touring Productions and Acting Studio. Taproot exists to create theatre that explores the beauty and questions of life while bringing hope to our search for meaning.

## **Research and Reading List**

### **NON-FICTION:**

- Johnson, Susan Lee. *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2000.
- Levy, JoAnn. *They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1990.
- Pierce, Hiram. *A Forty-Niner Speaks*. Oakland: Keystone-Inglett Printing Co., 1930.
- Rawls, James. *Indians of California*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984.
- Rohrbough, Malcolm. *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation*. Berkeley: University of CA Press, 1997.
- White, Richard. *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

### **FICTION:**

- Levy, JoAnn. *Daughter of Joy*. St Martin's Press, 1999.
- . *For California's Gold*. University Press of Colorado
- Allende, Isabel. *Daughter of Fortune*. HarperTorch, 2001.

### **FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:**

- Gregory, Kristiana. *Seeds of Hope: The Gold Rush Diary of Susanna Fairchild, California Territory 1849* (Dear America Series). Scholastic Inc. 2001.
- Yep, Laurence. *The Journal of Wong Ming-Chung: A Chinese Miner, California, 1852* (My Name is America). Scholastic Inc, 2000.

### **Wayback: Gold Fever**

<http://pbskids.org/wayback/goldrush/index.html> - Especially for kids, this site provides an accessible overview of important gold rush people and events.

We are so glad you are joining Taproot Theatre for a student matinee performance. Audience Etiquette is important so that everyone has an enriching and educational experience. See you at the performance!

### **Audience Etiquette**

- It is appropriate to talk quietly until the performance begins.
- If you need to use the restroom, please do so before the performance begins.  
Restrooms are located in the upper and lower lobbies.
- Be sure to be seated before the performance begins
- No food, gum, candy or beverages are to be brought into the theatre.
- Please don't wear headphones during the performance.
- Please turn off watch alarms, cellular phones and other electronic devices.
- Students who disturb other members of the audience may be asked to leave the theatre and wait in the lobby.
- Remember: You will get an opportunity to talk with the actors and director at the end of the performance. Be prepared with questions about the production!
- Please stay out of the aisles (also called "voms") during the performance.
- Enjoy the show!

# Pre-show Activities

- 1) Have students think about their expectations for seeing a live performance. Ask them to write down three of their expectations and share it with two or three other people. Ask the groups to talk about why they have those expectations and why it is important to them.
- 2) Give students time in the library to research The Gold Rush and the 1840-1860s. Ask them to find some of the aspects and elements of that time period that are different from today, i.e. social class rules, manners, social expectations etc. and discuss the impact of each one.
- 3) If you have time, walk through the characters and plot line of *The Christmas Foundling* so they can follow the story a bit better when they see it.

# Post-show Activities

- 1) Class Discussion Topics
  - a. What impressions were created by your first view of the set? What expectations did you form about the play's tone as you listened to the music before the performance started?
  - b. What about the production surprised or impressed you?
  - c. How was music an important part of this production?
  - d. Were the actors believable in their roles?
  - e. What do you think would happen next if the play were to continue?
  - f. What was the purpose of doing a production like this? Did you learn anything from the production?
- 2) Have the students think back to the expectations they wrote down before they came to see the production. With the same groups ask them to share those again and then talk about whether or not their expectations were met when they saw the production. Ask them to think about why they were or were not met and if that influenced whether or not they liked the production.
- 3) Have students write a critique of the production. Encourage them to be specific about their likes and dislikes, and their reasons for each. Help them to understand the differences between critiquing the play (text, storyline, character development) and the production (acting, lighting, directing, sound, set, costumes).
- 4) Have students read a newspaper review of the production. Ask them to write two paragraphs explaining why they agree or disagree with the newspaper review. Encourage them to use specific examples from the play and quotes from the newspaper article to support their argument.
- 5) Frames are frozen pictures that students make with their bodies. Divide students into groups of four or five and give them 15 minutes to come up with five frames from the play and a title for each one. There should be no talking or movement.
  - a. They should pick the five most important points of the story so if someone who had not seen the play saw their frames, they would be able to understand what happens.
  - b. Ask students to assign one person in their group to say the title of each frame as they work on their interpretation.
  - c. When time is up have students show their frames to the whole class.
  - d. Allow the students that are watching to ask questions of the performing group at the end of their frames. Encourage them to ask a question about something that wasn't clear.
  - e. Groups can then redo a frame to clarify the picture.



# EALRs

By attending Taproot Theatre's production of *The Christmas Foundling*, using the study guide, and actively engaging in pre- & post-show activities, your students can begin to fulfill the following EALRs.

## Arts

### **1. The student understands and applies arts knowledge and skills.**

- 1.1. Understand arts concepts and vocabulary.
- 1.2. Develop arts skills and techniques.
- 1.3. Understand and apply arts styles from various artist, cultures, and times.
- 1.4. Apply audience skills in a variety of arts settings and performances.

### **2. The student demonstrates thinking skills using artistic processes.**

- 2.1. Apply a creative process in the arts: **Reflect** for the purpose of elaboration and self-evaluation.
- 2.3 Apply a responding process to an arts presentation.  
**Engage** actively and purposefully.  
**Describe** what is seen and/or heard.  
**Analyze** how the elements are arranged and organized.  
**Interpret** based on descriptive properties.  
**Evaluate** using supportive evidence and criteria.

### **4. The student makes connections within and across the arts to other disciplines, life, cultures, and work.**

- 4.1 Demonstrate and analyze the connections among the arts disciplines.
- 4.2 Demonstrate and analyze the connections among the arts and other content areas.
- 4.3 Understand how the arts impact lifelong choices.
- 4.4 Understand that the arts shape and reflect culture and history.
- 4.5. Demonstrate the knowledge of arts careers and the knowledge of arts skills in the world of work.

## Communication

### **1. The student uses listening and observation skills to gain understanding.**

- 1.1 Focus attention.
- 1.2 Listen and observe to gain and interpret information.
- 1.3 Check for understanding by asking questions and paraphrasing.

### **3. The student uses communication strategies and skills to work effectively with others.**

- 3.1. Use language to interact effectively and responsibly with others.
- 3.2. Work cooperatively as a member of a group.
- 3.3. Seek agreement and solutions through discussion

## Social Studies: History

### **1. The student examines and understands major ideas, eras, themes, developments, turning points, chronology, and cause-effect relationships in United States, world, and Washington State history.**

- 1.1 Understand and analyze historical time and chronology
- 1.2 Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping United States and world
- 1.3 Examine the influence of culture on United States, world, and Washington history

# Material for your consideration

## *The Christmas Foundling* Study Guide

This study guide is available on Taproot Theatre's website, <http://www.taproottheatre.org/study-guides/>  
**Taproot encourages making copies and distributing the study guides to your class.**

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### **Preview *The Christmas Foundling* at Taproot Theatre**

If you are interested in previewing the show before the student matinee performance, you are welcome to do so. Please contact Alysha Curry at 206.781.9708 or [alysha@taproottheatre.org](mailto:alysha@taproottheatre.org) for a pair of complimentary preview tickets.

### **Preview Opportunities**

Dec. 2 <sup>nd</sup>	7:30 PM Performance
Dec. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	7:30 PM Performance
Dec. 9 <sup>th</sup>	7:30 PM Performance

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### **Driving Directions to Taproot Theatre Company**

**From I-5:** Take the N. 85<sup>th</sup> St. exit. Go west on N. 85<sup>th</sup> for about 2 miles, crossing Aurora Ave. N. and Greenwood Ave. N. The theatre is a ½ block west of Greenwood Ave. N. at **204 N. 85<sup>th</sup> St.**

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### **Bus Parking**

Heading west on 85<sup>th</sup>, pass Taproot Theatre (**204 N. 85<sup>th</sup> St.**) and pull into the Fred Meyer parking lot, a block and a half west of Taproot. You are allowed to park in their lot along 85<sup>th</sup> St.

### **Language Issues**

Please remember that you're the best judge of what's appropriate for your students. On this page you'll find a thorough account of everything in the script which might be found to be objectionable to students and adults. If you have questions about the content of the script, please read it - don't rely 100% on this page or what you've been told about the show. If you would like a perusal script (copy of the play) or more information about the objectionable material, just call Alicia at 206.529.3668, or e-mail her at [alicia@taproottheatre.org](mailto:alicia@taproottheatre.org).

### **Objectionable Words:**

Hell

Damn

Pissed

### **Objectionable Content:**

References drinking, racial prejudice, and women of "ill repute"

