



Hezekiah Vandorn (1823-1903)

Missoula's first blacksmith located in Grass Valley at Hellgate village. Hezekiah sought his fortune as a placer miner in California and Washington. He was gold partners with Mark Twain and noted in Twain's book "Roughin it." He served as County Commissioner in 1861.

- **1823-Birth.** Hezekiah was born in 1823 in Covington, Fountain County, Indiana.
- **Marriage:** Spouse and six children.
- **1849.** One of the many fortune hunters who crossed the continent and built his cabin in the placer fields of California. He worked north along the Columbia River into Washington and came into Montana in 1859.
- **1849.** Mark Twain noted in his book 'Roughin it' that Hezekiah Van Dorn was a partner of his in the Gold Rush of '49. The story notes that three young

German brothers found 'cement full of dull yellow metal' in a mountain gorge in California. The brothers each took some of the 'cement' and headed back to town. Only one brother arrived with only a small amount gold. The man wanted nothing to do with the land again and gave his map and information to another miner. Hezekiah was one of a party that headed out to find this vein of 'cement' in the mountains. However, by the time they reached the general area, miners from all over the region had heard enough whispers of the vein that the area was well staked and too troublesome for the party. They instead traveled down to a lake known as the 'Dead Sea of California' and set up such a comfortable camp that they stayed and explored the area for quite some time.

- **1859.** Hezekiah began farming in Grass Valley. He later located up Miller Creek.
- **Blacksmith.** Hezekiah was the first known blacksmith operating his shop at Hellgate by the store owned by Higgins and Worden. He later re-located his shop into town when Higgins and Worden moved their store.
- **1861.** Elected County Commissioner in 1861 along with Captain C. P. Higgins and Granville Stuart.
- **Legend.** In The West magazine dated 1966, family members recall stories of Hezekiah:
 - **Plummer gang.** It was on his Grass Valley ranch that members of the Plummer gang were captured in the Missoula area, tried in the store at Hellgate village, and hung nearby, allegedly on the ranch operated by Hezekiah Van Dorn. The Plummer gang was a band of horse thieves and highwaymen whom the vigilantes of Virginia City chased across the mountains into Missoula County, finally exterminating the band. The members that night consisted of George Shears, Cyrus Skinner, Whisky Bill Graves, and men named Cooper, Zachery, and Carter.
 - **Fort Fizzle.** In 1877 Hezekiah was one of 100 volunteers to help stop Chief Joseph and his Nez Perce. Chief Joseph was leading his people on an escape from the required reservation. Captain Rawn was in charge of stopping these Indians from going any further. All the settlers were frightened that the Indians would conduct a major massacre here in Missoula so joined forces with the army to defend this area. When Chief Joseph sent word ahead that he had no quarrel with the volunteers, only with the army, the volunteers quickly deserted Captain Rawn. Chief Joseph left his campfires burning on the hillsides as a decoy and slipped through the pass and Captain Rawn's army. The fort was then known as Fort Fizzle for its failure.