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### **The Dorer Family Five-Stamp Mill Humbug Canyon**

The five-stamp mill was erected by A. W. Poole in 1879 near where Humbug Creek enters the North Fork of the American River. It was used to process ore brought by a tramway from the nearby Poole Mine and was powered by water.

After it's use was discontinued ( sometime in the late 1800's or early 1900's), the mill languished in a small niche in the steep bank above the North Fork of the American River. The wooden frame had disappeared; probably the large timbers were used in other mining operations.

In about 1970, the Dorer Family decided that the mill should be removed so that it could be put on view in Foresthill. A few years before, a road had been hacked out of the canyon and the area could be reached by vehicles down this twisty and dusty three mile road.

Family members gathered at the site and began the difficult task of dragging each heavy piece of the mill about 100 feet up a nearly vertical bank to a primitive road. Gathered there were Lutie and Andy Dorer, sons of Leopold Dorer and grandsons of Richard Dorer who was one of the first settlers of Humbug Canyon; Joe Merz, husband of Theresa Dorer Merz and the daughter of Leopold Dorer; and, Richard Merz, son of Joe and Theresa, and grandson of Leopold Dorer.

Lutie had a Dodge Power Wagon with a winch. A cable was lowered and attached to a piece of the mill; the pieces were the five stems, cam shaft and battery. Each stem weighed about 500 hundred pounds, the cam shaft about 1,000 pounds and the battery over 1,000 pounds. The cable could not be lowered in a direct line from the winch to the mill and so had to be run at various angles by the use of snatch blocks fastened to trees growing from the steep bank. Andy Dorer and Joe Merz descended the bank and attached the cable to a piece of the mill.

Each piece was pulled up the bank until it was near one of the snatch blocks. The piece was then held in place by separate cables that Andy, Joe and Richard attached to the nearest tree. Richard would then clamber up and down the bank relocating the cable and snatch blocks so that the piece of the mill could be pulled a few more feet up

the bank to the next snatch block. Four or five changes for each piece had to be made in the direction of the cable before they reached the road. Lutie would then drag the piece about 100 feet up the road to a large oak tree. All this took a long three day weekend to accomplish.

Several weeks later, they returned to Humbug Canyon to complete the rest of the task. Lutie fastened a stout block to the limb of the oak tree. A cable was run through the block with one end attached to a piece of the mill and the other end fastened to the rear of Richard's Jeep. On the first attempt, the weight of the mill was too much and the Jeep could not lift it. Andy's Jeep was then chained to the front of Richard's Jeep and the two vehicles together could then lift each piece high enough to drive Lutie's truck under it and then be lowered onto the bed of the truck.

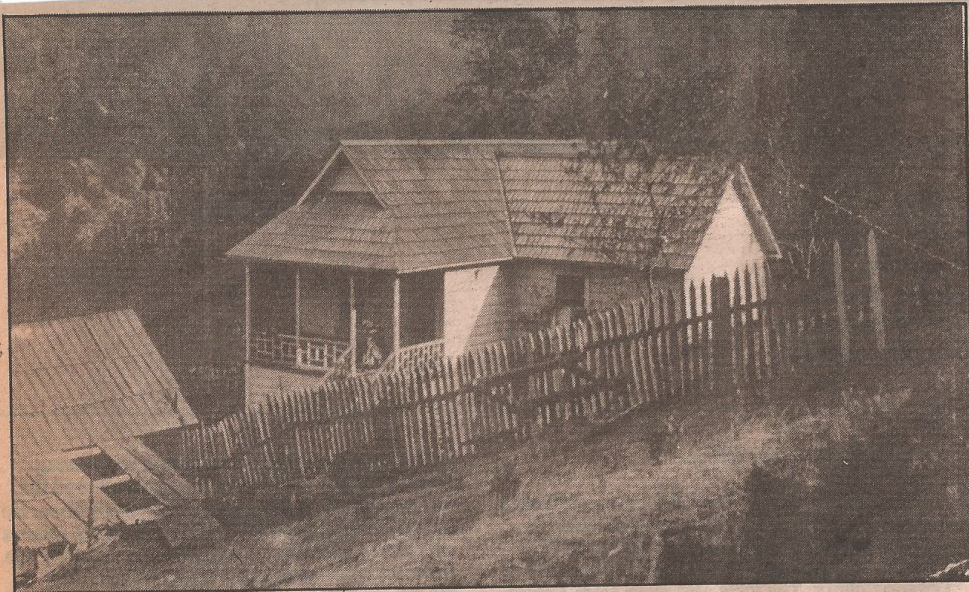
During the lifting of the battery, Richard felt his Jeep lurch and knew that the cable had snapped. Ducking his head, he heard the cable whistle through the air and then strike nearby trees. He glanced over his shoulder to see if anyone had been in the path of the whipping cable but they had cautiously stood behind trees and thick brush while the lifting was being done. But, several trees and bushes were badly bruised, and a swath of ground was swept clean of grass, leaves and rocks!

Several trips had to be made by Lutie to haul the mill up the steep road and to his home near Baker Ranch. At his home, Lutie used a hand operated winch to lift the mill pieces from the truck.

The mill was kept on Lutie's farm for several years when he arranged with Wendel Robie and the Native Sons of the Golden West to have it brought to Auburn.



**A Dorer family portrait taken on the parents 25th wedding anniversary. The year was 1922, the same year the family moved from Humbug Canyon to Auburn. From left in the back row are Andy, Theresa, Lutie, Ray and Wilhelmina. In the front row are Anna, Richard, Fred, Mrs. Wilhelmina Dorer, Blend, Arnold and Leopold Dorer. The Dorer's were married in 1897 in Deadwood.**



**Home in Humbug Canyon east of Auburn.  
While it is larger in this photo  
than when originally built, the  
structure still stands today.**

climb in the direction from which they entered. Half way up the canyon they rested and one of them, Kirkpatrick by name, was heard to say, "Pshaw, this place hasn't any gold, it's a regular humbug. Instead of Mississippi let's re-name her Humbug Canyon."

That was how Humbug Canyon got its name.

Even today those who are lucky enough to visit Humbug Canyon describe it as "idyllic." Consider then its impact on Richard and Leopold Dorer who first saw it in 1853, in its almost pristine state. The two brothers — from Baden, Germany — were not there to bask in nature's beauty but to find gold. They were placer miners and they found the gravel along Humbug Creek to be rich in it, and the mineral bearing gravel seldom more than from three to ten feet deep.

In their prospecting the two brothers must have stumbled on the Rock House, situated at the junction of Humbug Canyon and the North Fork, as much a mystery then as it is today.

Only its foundation, built of flat rock, was left, but to the brothers it may have told the story of someone's earlier dream — most likely a Spaniard or Mexican — perhaps the first white man to locate the canyon, long before the discovery of gold. How the man's dream ended no one knows, but he left behind eight feet of rock foundation that today is still a curiosity for the few who explore the area.

Leopold Dorer remained a bachelor but Richard, answering the stirrings within him, journeyed all the way back to New York City to

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# Christmas in Humbug Canyon

by Bill Wilson

**C**hristmas in Humbug Canyon was not necessarily all "humbug." It may not have been one of the largest and most joyous celebrations, but it was not "humbug" to the Dorer family, or to the few other families living in an isolated and misplaced home site.

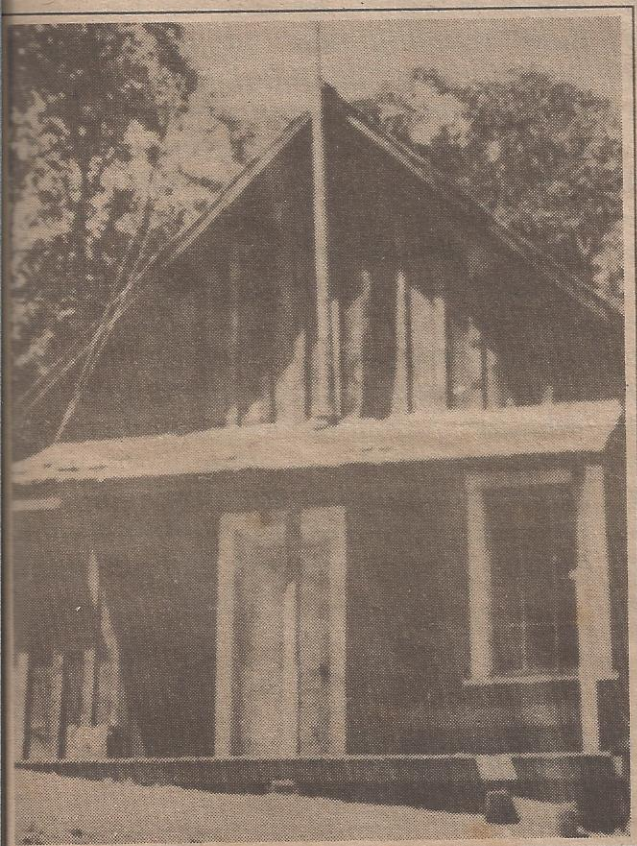
"Christmas and family were what it was all about," said Theresa Merz of Auburn, who was born in the canyon and recalls when her father took her to harvest a Christmas tree. The Dorer family became the community, and a school was organized just for the youngsters.

Humbug Canyon was not named for a depressed and dissolutioned settlement. In fact, it was built on the love and care of one family who to this day will not allow Humbug Canyon to die.

"There was a lot of love there," says Mrs. Merz, one of the four survivors of 11 children whose pioneer predecessors went to the remote site along the North Fork of the American River and left a legacy of the old-time spirit of doing what has to be done.

Humbug Canyon, especially at Christmas time, was out of any flow of activity, but the families there celebrated the holidays in a style of their own. It was in the canyon where only pack trains brought supplies, but it was there that a special life evolved for the Dorers.

"Our Christmases were enjoyed as we would go with my dad into the woods to cut a Christmas tree and my mother would string popcorn to decorate the tree," recalls Wilhelmina Dorer Tobin of Au-



*The one-room school in Humbug Canyon was where the Dorer family attended during the early days of the old gold mining town.*



*The Dorer family gathered for a family photograph during the early 1900s. They are (front row, left to right): Fred, Andrew, Arnold; (second row), Anna, Blend, Mr. and Mrs. Leopold Dorer; (back row), Theresa, Wilhelmina, Richard, Lutie and Raymond.*

burn. "My mother very carefully kept some tree ornaments from year to year. My father made some home-made taffy and my mother roasted a chicken. Those were the good old days," she said in remembering what happened in the canyon.

It was not easy living in the small mining settlement where Leopold and his brother, Richard, settled in 1853, after following the magnetic lure of gold. They had heard that the gravel in the North Fork and its tributaries were extremely rich and, like many who were addicted to finding gold, they found their way to the canyon.

Leopold, with his strong German influence, raised a family whose name is synonymous with the canyon. There was Fredolina, who died at five days; Wilhelmina, Richard, Leopold Lutie, Theresa, Raymond Roosevelt, Andrew Noble, Arnold William, Fred Harold, Anna Louise and Blend Edward. Wilhelmina, Theresa, Anna, and Andrew still survive.

How the canyon got its name is still in question. The story handed down is that it either came from a disgruntled resident of Mississippi who named the canyon Mississippi Canyon only to toil for gold there and found nothing and

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