

**The Ancient and Honorable Order of
E Clampus Vitus™**

AL PACKER CHAPTER #100, COLORADO

Al Packer Chapter #100, Colorado, is the Colorado Chapter of The Ancient and Honorable Order of E Clampus Vitus (ECV). ECV is a non-profit fraternal organization dedicated to the study and preservation of Western heritage. We research sites of historical interest (though perhaps not of interest to mainstream historians) and erect plaques to mark them. We partner with other Historical societies and/or will go it alone to plaque sites. ECV has erected many hundred historical markers and plaques to commemorate sites, people and events that played a role in our western heritage but might otherwise be lost or forgotten. The work is, of course, voluntary and we seek absolutely no monetary reward for our work and we generally fund the plaques to be erected.

We have plaqued the gold mines at Victor; the City Hall, Elks Lodge and cemetery in Victor; Navajo Hogan's, the Rock Island Interurban Roundhouse in Colorado Springs; the Steam Plant, Victoria Tavern, Jackson Hotel in Salida; Crown Point cemetery in grand Junction, and the Rocky Flats Nuclear Plant near Boulder to just name a few.

ECV is also involved in community projects and raise money for educational scholarships.

The Ancient and Honorable Order of E Clampus Vitus (ECV) is a fraternal organization dedicated to the study and preservation of Western heritage, especially the history of the Mother Lode and gold mining regions of the area. The fraternity is not sure if it is a "historical drinking society" or a "drinking historical society." There are chapters in California, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington. Members call themselves "Clampers." The organization's name is in Dog Latin, and has no known meaning; even the spelling is disputed, sometimes appearing as "Clampus", "Clampusus", or "Clampusis". The motto of the Order, *Credo Quia Absurdum*, is generally understood as meaning "I believe it because it is absurd."; the proper Latin quotation *Credo quia absurdum est*, is from the Christian apologist Tertullian (140-230), who rejected rationalism and accepted a Gospel which addressed itself to the "non-rational levels of perception."

History

The history of the organization is steeped in mythology. History shows that the organization was brought to the United States in 1845 in Lewisport, Virginia, now West Union, West Virginia,

when tavern and stable owner Ephraim Bee was given a commission from the Emperor of China to "extend the work and influence of the Ancient and Honorable Order of E Clampus Vitus."

Bee claimed to have received his commission from Caleb Cushing, the American minister to China. West Union has a monument to Ephraim Bee on the site of the old "Beehive" Tavern, where the RailTrail comes through. The original tavern, the "Bee Hive", was destroyed in the late 1800s during a flood.

At the age of 60, he was a Captain of the Doddridge County Militia, which protected the area from roving Confederate forces, horse thieves & outlaws. The Militia also had a part in the Underground Railroad in Doddridge County. They were hidden in hidden cellars of homes and also in Jaco Cave. Ephraim Bee played his greatest joke on his local West Virginian neighbors. Occasionally, the entire town was invited to a great party. After the Civil War, it was discovered that Jaco Cave was a holding area for the runaway slaves. When the cave was full, E. Bee gave a party to keep all busy while that group of people were moved further north to the next stop.



Colorado Clamper of Al Packer Chapter #100, Colorado exhibits a prime example of ECV regalia.

Bee felt that an organization was needed which was less exclusive than the other organizations of the day, such as the Masons, Elks and Odd Fellows. In addition, nativism was rising in the United States, as evidenced by such political organizations as the Know-Nothing Party. Bee opened membership in ECV to any "upstanding" man who had come of age. It is known that there were E Clampus Vitus chapters in Bedford, Pennsylvania; Metropolis, Illinois; Bowling Green, Missouri; and Dahlonega, Georgia. (It has been rumored that ECV brethren within the U.S. Army even attempted to bring the order as far south as Mexico City following the Mexican-American War as a gesture of brotherhood and reconciliation, but all record has vanished of the well-intentioned Chapultepec chapter.)



An Ex-Noble Grand Humbug current ECV Proctor at a Doin's somewhere in Colorado.

The organization is said to have been taken to California by an ECV member named Joe Zumwalt, who first heard of it in Missouri. Zumwalt opened an ECV lodge in Mokelumne Hill in 1851, when Mokelumne Hill Lodge No. 1001 was established. There are arguments that previous lodges had been founded in Hangtown, Downieville and Sierra City, but none of those became permanent.

ECV flourished, in part, as the result of the miners' reaction to the "established" organizations such as the Masons and Odd Fellows. Those groups had come to the mining country prior to ECV, and when ECV appeared, the older, more established groups looked down upon the more rowdy nature of E Clampus Vitus. ECV, on the other hand, made fun of the stuffed shirts of the Masons: they made great fun of the sashes and ceremonial attire of the "upscale" fraternities, and began dressing in red shirts and pinning on badges made of cut-out tin can lids. This practice, called "wearing the tin," continues to this day, although the badges are frequently professionally made. Members commonly dress in a red shirt, black hat and Levi's jeans. ECV titles reflected the tongue-in-cheek nature of the organization. Officials were called "Noble Grand Humbug," "Roisterous Iscutis," "Grand Imperturbable Hangman," "Clamps Vitrix," and "Royal Gyascutis." All members are officers and all officers, the organization professes, are of equal indignity.

Clamper meetings were held in the Hall of Comparative Ovariations, generally the back room of a saloon. Some chapters even built their own Halls of Comparative Ovariations. One still stands in Murphys. The Clamper flag was a hoop skirt, with the words "This is the flag we fight under." Meetings were held "at any time before or after a full moon." New members were called "Poor Blind Candidates." They were required to present a poke of gold dust, although the value of the poke was left to the discretion of the brotherhood, and was frequently waived entirely if the prospective member could not afford it.

Despite the humor and rowdiness of E Clampus Vitus, the members do take their brotherhood seriously. When a member became sick or injured, the group would collect food or money to help him. They frequently trekked through the vastness of the Sierra Nevada to reach lonely miners who otherwise would have had no Christmas celebration. The society was also careful to assist the widows and orphans of fallen members.



Al Packer Chapter #100, Colorado Clampers at a Plaquing in Ridgway, Colorado, showing their colors, tin and camaraderie. It is not uncommon for clampers to share the good news of ECV while traveling which has led to growth throughout its history.

At the ECV's peak, around 1870, so many miners were members that many mining camps shut down during ECV celebrations (some mining towns had two chapters). At one point, Lord Sholto Douglas, a British peer leading a troupe of actors in Marysville, was so down heartened by the lack of ticket sales that he had determined to leave town. When a local Clamper found out that the troupe was having trouble, Lord Douglas was immediately initiated into ECV, and the brothers bought enough tickets to fill the local theater. A 20th century chapter of the ECV was named for Lord Douglas LSD in honor of this event. Mark Twain was a member, and it was while attending an ECV meeting that he heard the story which he wrote as *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*.

Members of note included Adam, the first "Clampatriarch"; Philip D. Armour, the meat packer; John Mohler Studebaker, the automobile manufacturer; Gene Autry "The Singing Cowboy" and owner of the California Angels baseball team; and John Hume, a California state assemblyman. ECV also claims Ulysses S. Grant, J. Pierpont Morgan, Horace Greeley, and Horatio Alger as members, but claims have also been made to Solomon, Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar, Henry VIII of England, Sir Francis Drake, George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Ronald Reagan, and of course, His Imperial Majesty Joshua A. Norton, "Emperor of these United States and Protector of Mexico". These fanciful claims show ECV's propensity for not taking much of anything particularly seriously, least of all itself.

There is evidence to support the ECV claim to Ulysses S. Grant. One of the early capitals of California was Benicia. At the close of the War with Mexico, Lt. William Tecumseh Sherman was Adjutant to Col. Richard Barnes Mason at the time of the gold discovery at Sutter's Mill. Upon Sherman's retirement in 1853, his replacement at the Benicia Arsenal was Lt. Ulysses S. Grant, who spent 30 days in the Arsenal Guardhouse for being drunk on duty and firing his cannons at the Martinez shoreline. Considering Benicia's position as the major inland Army post and transport hub to the valley, both Grant's and the Brotherhood's affinity for strong drink and the early spread of the Brotherhood through Northern California, it is entirely possible that Grant was inducted into the Organization.

Reestablishment



Poor Blind Candidates receiving a history lesson from an Ex-Sublime Noble Grand Humbug

As the mining industry faded towards the end of the 19th century, ECV started to fade as well. It was revitalized in 1931 by San Francisco historian Carl Wheat and his friends G. Ezra Dane and Leon O. Whitsell. They were contacted by one of the last surviving members of the original ECV, who passed on all that he could remember of the organization's rites and legends. The three founded a new chapter, Yerba Buena Number 1, or the "Capitulus Redivivus." Wheat described E Clampus Vitus as "the comic strip on the page of California history."

New chapters sprang up in Los Angeles (Platrix Chapter #2) and other major cities in California, and were numbered sequentially. However, once Lodge 10 was established in 1936, members pointed out that it was illogical for such a rowdy organization to be so neat in its numbering scheme, and so some creativity was developed in the numbering. The "Pair-o-Dice" chapter in Paradise, for example, is Lodge No. 7-11. The de la Guerra y Pacheco chapter, halfway between Lodge Number 1 in San Francisco and Lodge Number 2 in Los Angeles, is Lodge Number 1.5. There were chapters in British Columbia and Hawaii, but they no longer exist.

In 1937 a plaque appeared in Northern California purporting to have been made by Sir Francis Drake during his voyage of discovery in which it was stated that he had claimed all of California for England, and that he had the authority of the claim by having been ceded the land by the local Miwok Indians. The man who was chief of the Miwoks in 1937, William Fuller, was a member of E Clampus Vitus. During an ECV meeting, he revoked the cession of land to England, and ceded it all to the United States government. The so-called Drake's Plate of Brass was accepted as authentic for forty years, yet was in actuality a hoax initiated by Dane that got out of control. It is now thought that the Fuller ceremony was part of an effort for the perpetrators to tip off the plate's finders as to its true origins.

The current ECV



Al Packer Plaquing Committee with the Director of the Cold War Museum after a successful Plaquing

There are currently 41 ECV chapters in California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Oregon, Idaho and Washington, as well as an offshore chapter (the Floating Whang chapter), an online chapter (the Cyber Whang chapter), and 2 more proposed chapters.

Al Packer Chapter 100, Colorado, was chartered in 2000 — the year 6005 on ECV's idiosyncratic calendar. This chapter has four encampments statewide for members to get together and socialize, research historical venues and erect plaques.

Doc Maynard Chapter #54-40 in Washington State was chartered in 2006, the year 6011 in Clamper years, signifying the first Chapter in the Pacific Northwest.

Snake River Chapter #1811 (Idaho) and Umpqua Joe Chapter #1859 (Oregon) are the most recently chartered, changing their status from "Outpost" to "Chapter" in May 2010, the year 6015 in Clamper years.

The organization has raised historical plaques in many places throughout the West, (often those sites such as bordellos and saloons are overlooked by more traditional historical societies), with a traditional "Doin's," or party, after each plaque dedication.

Initiation

By tradition, a man can only become a Clamper by invitation. However, one can express his desire to join. Initiation rites are sometimes spur-of-the-moment, such as forcing a blindfolded candidate to be lifted into the air by a block and tackle. Other times, the blindfolded initiate is seated upon a wet sponge in a wheelbarrow, and taken upon the "Rocky Road to Dublin" (a ladder lying on the ground). The initiations are secret and vary greatly in execution and severity. Once he has been asked to answer several questions, the Scales of Darkness (the blindfold) are removed, the new member "sees the light", is handed the Staff of Relief, is presented the Stone of Enigma, and appointed Chairman of the Most Important Committee. Afterward everyone toasts the new member with drink. Once enlightened, a brother is a brother for life.



Artistic efforts to advertise and promote one's chapter are quite common at most Clampouts and other ECV Doin's.