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HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
QUARTERLY

Sept. 30, 1969

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FOREST,  
QUEEN OF THE MTS.

CREDO QUIA ABSURDUM,  
AND ALL THAT?

REFLECTIONS OF A  
CLAMPER  
MURDER IN THEM THAR HILLS!

THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 30, 1969 VOL. I, NO. 3

THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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## FOREST CITY REVISITED

(Author's Note: Except for the paragraph of background history, the information in this article resulted from a recent interview with Mrs. Edith Pemberthy McKenzie of Brisbane, California. Mrs. McKenzie lived in Forest, Sierra County, from 1883 until the 1930's, when she had to leave Sierra County because of her health.)



Forest was first called Brownsville—after one of the three sailors who discovered gold there in 1852. The name was later changed to Elizaville and then, after a heated town meeting, to Forest City. This last name was suggested because of the dense foliage in the area created by numerous oaks.

The small city of cloth tents grew rapidly—thriving from diggings on the flat and from drift mining. However, the mining situation alternately prospered and faltered. Fires, particularly ones in 1858 and 1865, discouraged many of the residents. But success in mining under Bald Mountain brought Forest

its days of glory. In the 1870's it had become the most important mining center in Sierra County.\*

Mrs. McKenzie came to Forest City (changed to Forest in 1895) in 1883 at the age of four, having lived previously at her birthplace, Eureka, Nevada. Her father was Isaac Pemberthy (born in 1841). Mary, her mother, had been born in 1857 on a farm in Wisconsin, where she married in 1876. Mrs. McKenzie had one brother, William Clyde Pemberthy, and a sister. While the children were still young, the father of the family died in a cave-in. Mrs. Pemberthy then opened a dress-making shop, which later became a general merchandising store. It was located between the fire house (likely where the bell stands today) and the brewery. Behind the store was the jail. Mrs. McKenzie's mother was truly a remarkable woman—hewn in the pioneer tradition—for besides running a business and raising her own children, she also raised the children of her daughter, Effie Bradbury. Mrs. Bradbury had died of shock three days after she saw her husband's nephew crushed to death in a Forest Quartz mill.

When Mrs. McKenzie came to Forest, hydraulic mining was the popular method. As a girl her favorite occupation was to ride the hose used in this operation. The hose was so powerful that it had to be held by four men. Gravel mining followed the outlaw of the hydraulic method. The mines she remembers best were the Bald Mountain Mine, the Bald Mountain Extension and the North Star (located in town and owned by her husband.)

\*from the Illustrated History of Plumas, Lassen and Sierra Counties, San Francisco, Fariss and Smith, 1882, pp. 473-475.



The tracks for the ore car from the Bald Mountain Mine came right into town. During the snow young Edith and her classmates would walk the tracks to the school house. Students started to school at age six, as it was thought children any smaller wouldn't be able to make it through the snow to school. The house she lived in as a girl had a second story door from which she used to leave for school during the winter months. The school had two rooms--which were always full. The grades were one through nine. If anyone wanted to go further, he had to go to Nevada City to School.

Mrs. McKenzie recalls the town of Forest having a population of 8,000 at one time. Despite its remote setting the town had all the crowded conditions of a city. The houses were so close together that in some places one couldn't leave his house without walking on the porch of a neighbor's house. Often there was no space between the houses.

The Chinese formed a large percentage of the ethnic distribution of the population of Forest. The Chinese part of town was near the Forest Cemetery. In addition to the Chinese, there were quite a few English and some Italians. Four women in town (recalled as being of Dutch or German descent)--Mrs. Malone, Mrs. Higgleman, Mrs. Mack, and one other woman, came to California on a boat which contained women who were "ordered" by the miners. When asked what happened if the women were dissatisfied with their miners, Mrs. McKenzie replied, "They had no choice; they either took the men, or they put them in the dance halls."

Her family grew fruit and vegetables in the summer--even-though the growing season was short--and they canned in the fall. Every fall most families hired a wagon to bring a load of supplies up from Nevada City which was enough to get the people through until the spring. The butcher kept livestock in the back of his shop where he had a slaughter house. During the winter, he slaughtered at various times--at which point the people had to buy their meat.

Mrs. McKenzie recalls two churches: A Methodist and a Roman Catholic Church. The major saloon was on the first floor of a large hall (four stories) for the Masons and the Knights Templar. The town had no bank. People often stored their valuables in wells. One man put gold in carved out niches in the logs which held up his house. After he put the gold in the niches, he plugged the holes with pieces of wood. One winter there was a flood and his was one of the houses washed down the ravine. People spent days trying to find the logs which were the underpinnings of his house, but none met with success.



The winters were severe. Because of slides in the wet season, no one built on one side of town. There were many hardships but the business of the town continued as usual. Outside contact was always maintained. In



good weather the mail came by a daily stage. Mail during the heavier part of the winter came by sled or a skiing mailman—unless it was actually storming.

Like most towns of the Gold Rush, Forest was plagued by fires. One bad one Mrs. McKenzie recalls occurred around the Bald Mountain Extension. At the time of the fire there were quite a few men in the mine. The whole town worried that the men would be smothered to death, but during the fire they went into a lower shaft and found enough air to last until the fire burned over. Another fire occurred when she was ten or eleven. During



FOREST CITY, SIERRA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA.

Forest, California, just before the fire of 1858. The woodcut is from Hutchings' California Magazine. Reproduced courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.



the night-time conflagration, the children had to put on all the clothes they owned, leave their homes, and watch to see if their home was one of those destroyed. An unusual night time fire observance occurred when Mrs. McKenzie saw, from a hill near Forest, the eruption of Mt. Lassen.

The people of the town are still fresh in Mrs. McKenzie's memory: Watson Bales, the stable man; Mr. Heinson, the most important storekeeper; Mr. Whalen, the candy store owner; Charles Miller and Owen Owens, butchers; and the most looked up to man around town, Mr. Johnson of the 16 to 1 Mine. And it is the people which make the difference between the Forest of Edith McKenzie's memory and the Forest of today, a mute and deteriorating witness to the heyday of California's Gold Rush.

Notes on the Author: Moreland L. Stevens was born November 7, 1938, in San Francisco, the town to which his great-grandfather came to settle in 1847. He grew up in San Rafael, after which time he attended and graduated from San Jose State College. In 1967 Mr. Stevens received a Master's in art history from the University of Maryland. After that time--until a recent move to Auburn--he lived in Loyalton. Presently he is teaching in Roseville, and continuing work on a biography of Charles C. Nahl, the pioneer California painter.





CREDO QUIA ABSURDUM!



Among the many lodges, secret orders, and similar organizations which flourished in the California gold mine country during the early days of the Gold Rush, there was one which must be among the most unusual to have ever been conceived. This was the Ancient and Honorable Order of E Clampus Vitus. The main object of this VERY secret order seems to have been one of spoofing other secret orders. It became one of the most powerful of all societies in the mines, in spite of, or, perhaps because of, the fact that its members refused to take themselves, or any one else, seriously.

No one can pinpoint the place of the first meeting held. Many of the "authorities" state that it was a society imported from the East. Others, equally firm in their conviction, pump for the mining camps. The mining camps seem, to this writer, to be the most logical, since the broad and ribald humor of this society fits so well the type of humor prevalent in the camps.

There is very good evidence which points to Sierra City, Sierra Co., as the birth place of the E Clampus Vitus; however, other areas also claim this distinction, and they base their claim on "very good evidence."

Many of those folks "beyond the pale", or otherwise ineligible to join the other societies, took to the Clampers in droves. This may have been because each member became a chairman of The Most Important Committee, and each member was an officer of equal indignity. The list of titles given to the members as they were "taken in" (and were they ever taken in) starts with the leader's title of Noble Grand Humbug. Then in swift order, follows

Clampus Petrix,  
Clampus Vetrix,  
Clamps Matrix,  
Royal Platrix,  
Great Mountageon,

High and Mighty Hangman,

Grand Qyascutis, not necessarily in order of importance. Other titles were made up as needed. The meetings of this society of enlightenment were held in the Hall of Comparative Ovations. The meetings were called by the sounding of the Hewgag, a rather frightening instrument, shaped something like a bugle, flaring widely at the end and being approximately four plus feet long. The sound was said to be horrendous. It lifted the spirits of the miners, however, for upon the blast they knew they were ready to take in a new spirit and that he would furnish the spirit for the rest of the boys. It is said that none of the members were capable of keeping minutes of the meeting after the uplifting of spirits brought about by the induction of a new "brother". This may be one explanation for the dearth of material on the early days of the organization. After a poor



Blind Candidate had sat in the Expungent's Chair, passed through the Cave of Silence, ridden the Rocky Road (a wheel-barrow with a large wet sponge in the bottom pushed rapidly over a long ladder on the floor), experienced the Elevation of Man (being tossed in a blanket wielded lustily by as many members as could get a hand on it), taken the fearful oaths, endured the Obliterating Obfuscation, received the Staff of Relief, and seen his initiation fee converted into liquid assets to be consumed by all assembled Clampers, he had no remaining doubts about his being "taken in". He was understandably eager to find another sucker in order to get even.



Spoofing the orthodox fraternities, the Clampers concocted marvelous and hilarious paraphernalia--the Blunderbasket, the Sword of Justice Tempered with Mercy and the aforementioned Hewgag.

From the History of Plumas, Lassen and Sierra Counties--Fariss and Smith, 1882, we get the following:

"In 1871, a grand Fourth-of-July celebration was held at Sierra City, on which occasion J.J. Tinney read the Declaration of Independence to a vast audience, and Frank Anderson of Downieville delivered an eloquent and thrilling oration. A prominent feature of the day was the laying of the corner-stone of the Bush Building on Main Street, by the E Clampus Vitus society, with appropriate and impressive ceremonies. The brazen serpent, and other insignia of this ancient and honorable order, were displayed to the public gaze; while Harry Warner, in an able peroration, dilated at some length on the benefits accruing to its members and their families by their connection with a secret order possessing such broad and liberal principles. Many an old Clamper was fired with enthusiasm at the recital, the public mind stirred, and the effect of the address was an immediate numerous batch of applications for admission within the pale of the favored order. The E Clampus Vitus was first organized in Sierra City in 1857, with Samuel Hartly as the pioneer NGH."

To return to that corner-stone laying mentioned in the above paragraph, the present resident in the old building informed me that Mr. A.C. Busch told her that in the corner-stone is a copy of a paper of that time, whether locally printed or not she didn't know, one each of all the coins minted at that time and a quart of whisky. But she added in an aside, "I don't know whether to believe him or not. He was the biggest fibber in town."



Despite their reputation for tom-



foolery the Clampers became a powerful force in the mining communities. After enjoying their belly-laughs at the expense of the FBC and the elevation of their spirits, also at his expense, they would sit down to decide whether the family of some injured miner needed help or to plan a benefit for a family of some poor preacher or out-of-work miner. It made no difference whether those aided were Clampers or not; those in distress or needing help in any way would be the recipient of what was needed and many times this was done anonymously.

The atmosphere of the mines was perfect breeding ground for the well balanced projections of horse-play, nonsense and good works. They sponsored grand, and sometimes costumed, balls, lively picnics and ben-



efits of all kinds. Branches sprung up in almost all the mining towns of the time. Many of them made up their ritual as they went along. There was always some one, usually a recent FBC, who would present novel ways for the enlightenment of the prospective new member. However, the Noble Grand Humbug always explained to the new brother the reason for the motto, "Credo Quia Absurdum", (I believe because it is absurd) the importance of the Clampatron, St. Vitus, the significance of the emblem, the Staff of Relief, and then the ritual question, "What Say the Brethern?"—always to receive the thunderous answer, "Satisfactory!"

Most people knew the whole thing to be nonsense, but couldn't help being impressed against their own better judgement. After all usually the



banker, the lawyers of the best repute, the doctors, the leaders of the town were members. Probably few truly believed the Clamper's Claim of memberships held proudly by Solomon, George Washington, Henry Ward Beecher, and John Sutter.

In 1930, after a long, dark decline in popularity, the order was revived. The members of present day hold meetings once a year usually, but they may be called anytime there is a need for it. The present day Clampers visit places of historic interest, often to dedicate plaques to commemorate important events from the past. To quote from the "Introduction to the Curious Book of Clampus": "In the Words of St. Vitus, Credo Quia Absurdum: take nothing seriously unless it is absurd! That which seems most serious is sure to reveal its absurdity when an inquisitive finger is poked into it. The most absurd spectacle in all the foolish farce of humanity is that of a man who takes himself seriously. It is the solemn duty of Clampers to expose the absurdity of all such pretensions and by Clamathematical demonstration reduce them to the common denominator of dampfoolishness. Our Ancient and Honorable Order has ever been the defender of the People against all false pretenders, demagogues, stuffed shirts, windbags, quacks, thimble-riggers, sinister ambidexters, fanatics, braggarts, prigs, hypocrites, imposters, wolves in sheeps clothing and asses in lions skins. It is time for the Hewgag to sound its terrible warning blast! TAAROOOMPHT! See, the smug faces fall! TOOOORAAAAFST! Watch, the overswelled chests deflate! RAATOOMK! They are on the run with their tales between their legs. There is here a great responsibility that our Ancient and Honorable Order has assumed and is nobly bringing to fruition."

WHAT SAY THE BRETHERN?

SATISFACTORY!!

My thanks for the help in this research to Myrtle Lamb, Frances Emerson, Inez Winstead, and the unwritten works of Clampatron St. Vitus.

Notes on the Author: This is the second article submitted by our very talented secretary, Jeanne McMahan. She wrote of the mines in the Sierra City area in our first edition. Jeanne resides in Sierra City with her husband, Forrest. She is presently the secretary of the Sierra County Historical Society and devotes much work towards the success of the organization. She is postmistress of the postoffice at Sierra City, California.



CLAMPER ACTIVITIES RELATED  
By Ross F. Taylor  
From Mountain Messenger  
May 28, 1953

It is astonishing how much misinformation can be cooked up and serenely served by the uninformed. And when this fraud is perpetrated upon a noble congregation like the Ancient and Honorable Order of E Clampus Vitus, it is little short of criminal.

Last week in the "Mountain Messenger", a Downieville journal, appeared a news story about Adam Lee Moore and the Clampers. The story was well written and it was interesting, but it was as phony as a campaign promise.

Any gray-beard who lived in Downieville in the 1890's knows that next to charity, the Clampers revered unalterable truth and veracity. Therefore, it devolves upon me in memory of that noble band that colored our history with the pastel hues of fire-engine red and garbage-wagon blue, to clear up some of the errors in last week's story.

It was said that the favorite drink of the old-time Clamper was pisco punch. This is pure libel, Pisco is a Peruvian brandy of such venomous properties that it would eat a hole in a bar rail if spilled. It was brought to San Francisco in the gold rush days by an organized group of humanity haters. It was mixed with other ingredients in a Montgomery Street bar and called a punch. It was never dispensed in Peter Kelly's bar in Downieville. (Alas, even the building is gone. Pete Lavezzola now raises lettuce on the spot where, 60 years ago, Pete Kelly delved among his bottles.)

The Clampers' native drink was a beneficial, mild tippie locally known as "booze". It was a light amber-colored beverage, lovingly distilled from rye or corn. It seldom contained more than 50 % (100 proof) alcohol. It was obtained by tilting a quart bottle of nectar over a two-ounce glass, to measure out the desired amount--- usually two ounces. The old-time Clamper was a strong man. He did not require the help of the bartender to fill his glass, as his puny descendent does. It was sufficient that the bartender removed the cork before placing the bottle on the bar.

Doc Stewart sold this "booze." So did Nat Meany, Jimmy Wiggins, Frank Gardiner, Pete Kelly, Louis Buzint, Monsieur Crignon (I forget his first name), A. J. Blohm, and Fritz Kaiser. There were others, but by this time you won't be interested. It is said that the Clampers' favorite drink is still dispensed in Downieville. I would not know as to that. Pisco punch, my eye! And this Duncan Nicoli; where did he tend bar?



Now, with this dietary item explained away, it might be well to delve further into the mysteries of the A.H.O.E.C.V. It is believed by many that the Clampers originated in Downieville. The Sierra County Chamber of Commerce would like to think so. So would the editor of the Mountain Messenger. So would I, but it is not so. The ritual states that the order is the oldest secret society on earth. I would hate to think that there is anyone so mean that he would doubt the ritual. King Solomon was a Clamper; So was King Arthur. So were Robin Hood, Noah and sitting Bull. So was Santa Claus. How then, it might well be asked, could an order whose charter members inscribed their names upon tablets of papyrus be founded in Downieville, which will be but 104 years old next September?

Downieville was the home of Le Broke Lodge No. 107, 303. If we assume that an average of 10 lodges a year were instituted since No. 1 was founded on the north slope of Mount Ararat, simple arithmetic will show that the lodge was at least 10,703 years old in 1860. Nor is this unreasonable. The ritual states that "the memory of man runneth not back to the time of its non-existence."

But to scratch the back of the chamber of commerce, it is certain that the order was first planted upon the Pacific slope in Downieville, about 1857. History has not recorded the name of the Clamper who seeded the lodge on the Yuba River. It might have been Adam Moore. It might have been A.J. McGuire. It definitely was not Eric Falconer or Bill Maxfield. It could have been, and probably was, Robert H. Taylor, one of Downieville's first attorneys who later made quite a name for himself in Nevada as a judge. Taylor was a genius, and it is recorded that he added much to the ritual. I certainly hope that he was a relative of mine.

Anyway, Le Broke Lodge No. 107,303 was formed in the roaring town of Downieville, then some 5000 population, of which about 1000 were Chinese. Immediately, when the civilizing and spiritual influence of the order was recognized, other lodges followed in rapid succession. Sierra City formed Balaam Lodge No. 107,304. Camptonville received the charter from the Grand Lodge at Mokelumne Hill for King Solomon Lodge No. 107,305, but unhappily I forgot the name. Maybe Bill Copren will recall it. Nor can I remember the town where No. 107,306 was located. Such are the frailties of the ageing human mind.

Of all the names, Sierra City chose the most appropriate. Balaam, it will be recalled by the devout, was the patriarch who used to debate with his jackass. He was certainly a Clamper, probably Grand Vitrix of Jerusalem Lodge No. 7646.

By the time I arrived in Sierra City, in 1890, the Clampers had passed their peak in membership and were declining, due to the diminishing crop of poor, blind candidates in the form of commercial travelers, then known as "drummers." But meetings were still being held when an occasional poor, blind candidate could be found, and while I was too young to attend the initiations, I could certainly hear them.



The Clampers hall, or temple, in Downieville was on the site of Tony Pezzola's house that adjoins the Riverside Motel. It had been a Congregational Church. I lived with my parents directly across the street in the lower portion of the Masonic Hall building. In fact, the press of the Mountain



Messenger now stands in our former living room. The room didn't seem so cluttered up in my childhood. Though it has been 57 years at least, I can still recall being lulled to slumber by the mellifluous tones of the hewgag. When properly blown, it could be heard half way up the Mountain House grade; I can assure you that it was quite audible across the street in my trundle bed.

And as the tones of the Hewgag died away, and the echoes were reverberation in Gold Valley and LaPorte, the brothers would begin to gather, and we knew that Le Broke Lodge No. 107, 303 had found a P.B.C., and that some hapless "drummer" was going to take a ride over the Marshy Road. Later in the evening, the dulcet tones from David's Noisless Cavern further confirmed the fact.

Now these meeting nights, while apparently irregular, were all definitely set. And they were not, as a recent Mountain Messenger story would have you believe, "the first Saturday before or after the full moon." I will admit that this is the general impression, and that the several lodges in this county so advertised their meetings in the local papers, but that was only to add mystery to the order. Every Clamper meeting was held on the first Saturday before the next rain. And as Providence provided the sheep for sacrifice in the place of Isaac, the same beneficent Providence would always provide a sheep for sacrifice in the shape of a P.B.C. on these meeting nights.

The drummer, wandering in outer darkness, was always identified by his inability to answer the recognition sign, made to him by some local merchant, who, invariably, would later sponsor his application for the Elevation of Mankind.



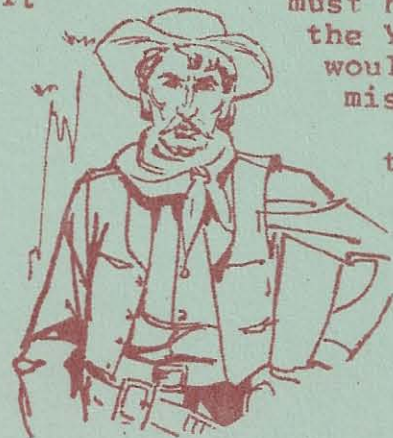
The sign was made as follows: the right arm was extended, bent back at the elbow, like the label on a package of baking soda; then the palm of the left hand was brought down upon the biceps of the flexed right arm with a resounding slap. The answering sign, which an uninitiate could not give, was made like this: the thumbs of both hands were placed against the temples, and the extended fingers wriggled forward and back, like the ears of an aroused burro.



These were distinctive signs. They resembled in no way the furtive signs of contemporary lodges. It is said that never on Main Street, Downieville, Spencer Street, Camptonville; Butte Street, Sierra City, or Lincoln Street, Sierraville, were the Clampters' recognition signs mistaken for the signs of the Rebekahs or Native Daughters.

When the stranger was unable to answer the first sign, as of course, he would be, he found no buyer among the merchants on Main street, or Lincoln Street, or wherever he was. In desperation he would seek the reason, and would find that the Clampers always confined their business transactions to fellow Clampers. However, the disappointed drummer was invariably informed, this particular day happened to be the first Saturday before the next rain, and there would be a lodge meeting that evening. The generous merchant would be glad to try to get the poor blind candidate accepted. The initiation fee would be whatever the local merchant thought could be extracted from the eager applicant for admission to the lodge. The drummer was always accepted. Later, the newgag sounded.

So well did the mountain storekeeper do his part in selling the Clampers to the drummers from below, that one dull-witted knight of the grip joined the lodge three times---first in Downieville, next at Sierra City and finally at Sierraville. Each initiation, he was solemnly informed, constituted a separate degree. He lived to tell the tale. How the credulous salesman escaped Camptonville was never explained. It



must have been because he failed to light in the Yuba County town that trip. They would have got him, otherwise; they never missed a candidate.

When the password was finally given to the poor blind candidate, a password "associated with the tenderest recollections of childhood," and given in a whisper by the Grand Petrix and the Vitrix, and the final seal of membership



implanted upon his rump, he was declared a member, and entitled to wear the apron, not as a Mason does, but tastily and with Clamperian dignity, across the seat of his pants. It is said that 50 or 60 Clampers solemnly marching around the floor of the lodge room on initiation night was something to write back East about.

The new members you may be assured, lost no time in finding, among his acquaintances in the flat lands, a new poor blind candidate to offer for initiation. For so deeply was the first candidate impressed by the beautiful initiatory ceremony that he could not rest until he had witnessed an initiation, with his guileless friend as the initiatee. And so it went on; each new member finding another.

My father was grand musician both of Le Broke and Balaam lodges. It was from him that I had early instruction in the order, in the hope that I would some day be worthy to receive the sublime degree. Many a first Saturday before the next rain did he fiddle "The Dance That David Danced Before the Knights Assembled." My father told me that about 1888 Balaam Lodge did not have a member who could render appropriate music for this Stately Measure. His local fame as a violinist made my father a natural for the exalted position. But Dad was not a Clamper, nor was his makeup of such artistic qualities that made him yearn for the more spiritual things of life as exemplified by a regular Clamper initiation. But the Clampers needed my father so they made a deal: he would escape (or forego) the usual initiation, and receive full membership if he would accept the honored position of grand musician. He had only to receive the seal of membership; that part of the initiation could not be waived. My father accepted, received the seal, and entered upon a musical career in Balaam Lodge. But he played the fiddle standing up for some time.

About 1895, due to causes I have named above, Le Broke Lodge began to disintegrate. As a Kid, I wandered with other brats born about 1890 through the deserted temple, booting Adam's Apron out of the way of my childish feet, staring with unappreciative eyes at the Chariot, and the Musket, and the Hewgag, and the grisly Coffin that Pete Kelly woke up in, one night after a bout with a Character known as John Barleycorn. Nobody ever had the brains to gather up and preserve these priceless relics of a noble era. If he had, he could exchange them now for Eric Falconer's check book.

Early in this story I named the order as the Ancient and Honorable Order of E Clampus Vitus. And "Clampus" it was, not "Clampus," as modern letterheads and recent literature would have us believe. Any present-day lodge that spells the mystic work without the first "S" cannot trace its origin to Le Broke Lodge, or Balaam Lodge, or



King Solomon Lodge. In fact, the word "Clampus" has a far different meaning than the word "Clampus." But I'll never tell you the difference; that would be divulging a part of the Work, and that I will not do. I may go over Niagara Falls, anyway, for revealing the sign of Recognition.

So while Le Broke and Balaam are no more, their noble activities live on in the memories of the oldtimers of male extraction. Frequently, I can conjure up a belly-laugh at some recollection antic of the Clampers of 60 years ago. For instance the time Balaam Lodge darned near initiated a woman, and, but for the intervention of more serious-minded members, might have done so. That wasn't funny, but it is an awful good story. Then there was the time when a poor blind candidate, suddenly fearful of the initiation to come, escaped from his guard before he could be Elevated. And when it is considered that this guard consisted of five or six husky Clampers armed with spears, the point of each being within six inches of the candidate's wishbone, escape was no mean feat. This hero was known ever afterward as Clamper Jack. And there was a local man who actually refused admission to Le Broke Lodge, even though he applied for membership. This is the only instance of anyone being black-balled.

Then there was the drummer from San Francisco who worked out a terrible revenge (financial in form), for his initiation, which the misguided man did not appreciate. Johnny Mayer and Frank Gardiner long felt the sting of this vengeance. The drummer never returned to Downieville.

Today, the Ancient and Honorable Order of E. Clampus Vitus lives a more or less active life in San Francisco, Marysville, and foothill towns of California. But the Ancient and Honorable Order Of E. Clampus Vitus lives only in the memory of a rapidly diminishing rank of old-timers and, indeed it is a pleasant memory.

-----Ross F. Taylor

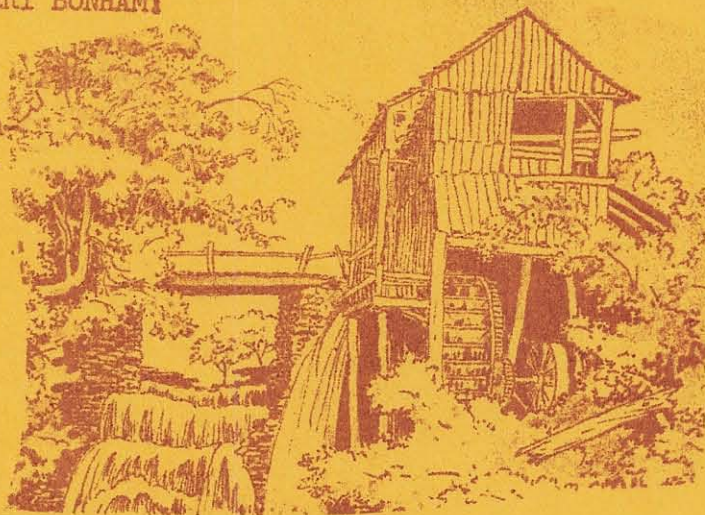
"Mountain Messenger", May 28, 1953

Note: The above article first appeared in the "Mountain Messenger." It was submitted to the Quarterly by contributing author, Ruth Drury of Goodyear Bar, who felt it worthy of further preservation. Mr. Taylor was a resident of Downieville for many years.



## THE MURDER OF PERRY BONHAM

There are few people living in South Sierra today, I am sure, that know of Perry Bonham. Yet in the summer of '94 his name was on every lip, young and old. One of the Argonauts and almost the last survivor of that historic group in Alleghany, he had been basely murdered up on Pliocene Ridge near Shakesville.\*



Any Alleghanian of that day could have told you of Perry Bonham. Leaving his native state of Pennsylvania at the age of thirty, he had joined in the gold rush to California, reaching the isolated Kanaka Creek region just in time to participate in the exciting "tunnel" boom at Smiths' Flat. He had come west by way of the Isthmus from a small town outside Pittsburgh, in the county of Alleghany. There were others at Smiths' Flat from county Allegheny and the surrounding area. Three of these were the McCormick brothers, Jim, Joe, and Lish, from Moon Run. And there was McKee, and Josiah and John Stair, John Kochenour, Horace Gilman, and S.S. Meanor, too.

Fred and Henry Smith had discovered the "breakout" of a very rich placer channel (later called the Great Blue Lead) when prospecting in one of the ravines on the north slope of Kanaka Creek. This set off a furious rush, first at Smiths' Flat, then in Wet Ravine and on the ridge between these, which later became known as Star Hill, and soon after at Cumberland. Perry soon became a member of the Keystone Company, driving a tunnel on what today is known as the Buckeye claim. Some time after, he joined another group, mostly of his fellow Pennsylvanians, on the Alleghany claim, so named after their former home county. For some unknown reason they spelled the name with an "a" instead of the "e". Actually, both spellings were commonly used back East at that time.

They collared a tunnel on Pacific ground, north of the Alleghany claim, because the ridge on their own ground would have required a much longer drive. Commencing in the spring of '53, they drove through the weathered bedrock rim and reached the gravel channel some two years later. The Pennsylvanians laid out a settlement just above their tunnel, where the slope flattened off a bit on the contact between the bedrock and the overlying gravels and volcanics. By 1857 the town had grown to the point where it was the center of activity for Cumberland, Smiths', Chips', Centerville, and even Minnesota. The post office that had been established nine months earlier at Chips' Flat was moved over to Alleghany on November 9th of that year. And now, thirty-seven years later, Perry Bonham and Jim McCormick were the last of the Pennsylvanians still alive and to be seen in the town that they had



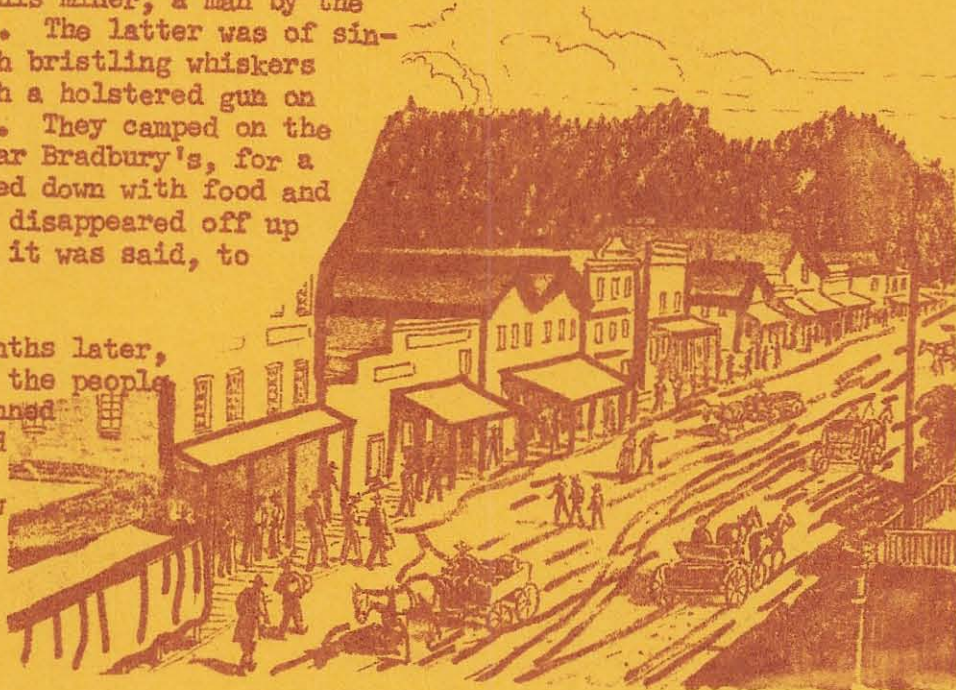
named.

We do not know how successful Perry was in his tunnel ventures. It is probable that he did well in these, but equally probable that he ploughed back most of his earnings into later prospecting operations. That he was captivated, as many others have been, by the Alleghany country is certain, and that he was ever ready to start in on a new prospect we know. It is a good bet that he went on the Meadow Lake rush in '65 and '66. Travelers on the Forest City - Downieville trail in '79 and '80 passed close to his portal just south of City of Six, where he was running a tunnel in on a serpentine contact. He was making Alleghany his headquarters in the '80s, but in the hard winters he retreated to the valley to join his wife and son who had forsaken the rough life in the Sierran mining camp for the easier living down below.

The white-haired old man, with moustache and goatee, carrying a stout manzanita "snake stick," was a popular and well-known figure in Alleghany over those years, and was always pointed out to the newcomers as one of the founders of the town. One former resident well remembers old Perry's last trip into town, early in 1894, with a string of mules, for supplies. Accompanying him was his miner, a man by the name of H.A. Bradshaw. The latter was of sinister appearance, with bristling whiskers and a pegleg, and with a holstered gun on his belt at all times. They camped on the edge of Alleghany, near Bradbury's, for a few days. Then, loaded down with food and mining supplies, they disappeared off up the ridge on the way, it was said, to Poker Flat.

One day a few months later, May 17th to be exact, the people of Alleghany were stunned to hear that Perry had been murdered up at Mt. Vernon, only a few miles from town, by Bradshaw. Bradshaw promptly turned himself in to Sheriff Busch, claiming that he had acted in self-

defense. Old Man Bonham had fired him a while back, Bradshaw said, and things had not gone well between them since. On the morning of the 17th, he had stopped by to see Bonham, near the latter's tunnel at the head of Mt. Vernon Ravine, about some matter which had developed into an argument. Perry, he claimed, raised his stick to assault him, so Bradshaw drew his pistol and fired in defense. It was a well-aimed shot, and Perry was dead





in a few minutes. The affair was witnessed by Jerome York who was prospecting nearby.

The long trial at Downieville was one of the big events of the year in the county seat. Attorney John Gale of Oroville came over to act for Bradshaw, and A.L. Frick, the assistant district attorney of Alameda, joined Sierra's D.A., Frank Wehe, in the prosecution before Judge Sam Davidson. The judge was no stranger to the scene of the crime, for he had been a pioneer miner and storekeeper at Chips' Flat, and later had practiced law at Cumberland before coming to Downieville. Commencing on Monday, July 23rd, the case was not handed to the jury until Friday. The jury was out for fifteen hours, and until the last few minutes it looked as though it was to be a hung jury, six to six. But then the six for conviction were won over to acquittal. Those in the know said that the last minute reasoning was to save the county the expense of another trial. In any event, the peglegged man who had so readily given himself up found sympathy and consideration from his peers.

Although the "Mountain Messenger" reported that the verdict gave general satisfaction, most Alleghenians violently disagreed. How could a 74-year old man seriously menace a vigorous and well-armed miner many years his junior with just a walking stick? Perry wasn't that sort of man anyhow.

The Masons of Forest Lodge gently laid Perry to rest in the little local cemetery. The family was represented at the quiet ceremony by son J.W. Bonham of Oakland. But the shocking death of this pioneer citizen and Bradshaw's acquittal were the subject of discussion at Allegheny for many a year thereafter.

\*\* The group of scattered cabins in the vicinity of upper Mt. Vernon Ravine and on Galloway's Ridge was known as Shakesville or Mt. Vernon.-Ed.

Notes on the Author--Mr. Wm. Pickiepoche. William Pickiepoche is the pen name of a mining engineer, a New Englander and graduate of Harvard College and California Institute of Technology, who practices his profession in the Mother Lode Country. He has been in and out of the Allegheny area for the past 30 years and is well versed in the lore of that region. He is an occasional contributor of historical articles to the "Mountain Messenger", and also edits a local historical quarterly.

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