



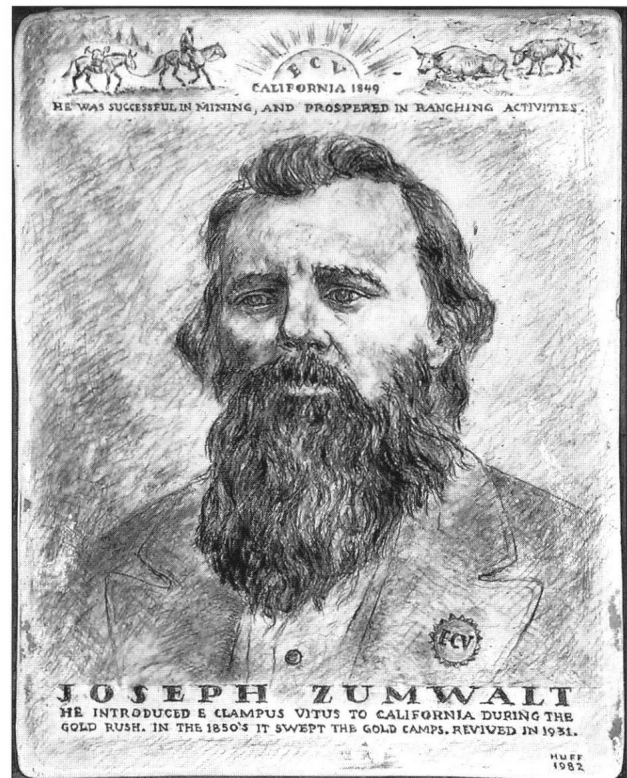
THE ANCIENT AND HONORABLE ORDER OF E CLAMPUS VITUS

by *Bonnie Miller*

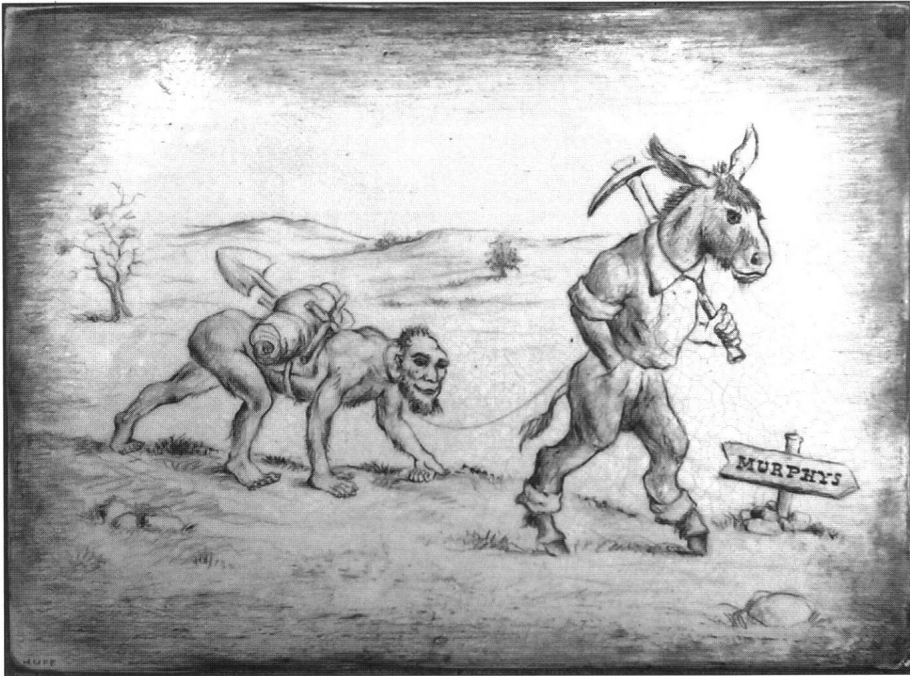
Joseph H. Zumwalt left his home in Kentucky and brought his family to California by wagon in 1849. In his trunk was a pamphlet he had purchased while provisioning for the trip. The pamphlet, printed in Pike County, Missouri, described the ritual of the Ancient and Honorable Order of E Clampus Vitus.

Zumwalt mined in Hangtown (Placerville) and the Yuba River before finally settling in Mokelumne Hill. This man is credited with the creation of the order in the west. E Clampus Vitus, the rowdy and possibly inebriated historical society had its western roots in the Gold Rush, and many believe that it found its true birthplace here in Calaveras County.

The exact origin of the ECV remains unclear. We know that Zumwalt brought the ritual with him from the east and indeed several states in the east claim a history with the ECV with active chapters prior to the Gold Rush. When Zumwalt traveled to California he hung a banner on his wagon that read, "*Per Cartate Viduaribus y Orphanibusque, Sed Prime Viduaribus*" which roughly translates as 'for the protection of widows and orphans, but espe-



Joseph Zumwalt of Kentucky is credited with bringing the E Clampus Vitus ritual to California during the Gold Rush. Plaque from the Wall of Comparative Ovations, Murphys.



A miner of the ECV, possibly inebriated, claims to have witnessed this scene on his way to the gold country. This tile is on the Wall of Comparative Ovations, and representative of the absurdities of the organization.

cially the widows.' It is clear that Zumwalt had a sense of humor and had adopted the absurd outlook of the ECV early in his California career.

Mining camps could be boisterous communities as young men expelled their frustrations through drink. When mining proved unprofitable, the men became restless. Zumwalt repeatedly witnessed dispirited young men unable to extract a profit from their mining labors, and he thought a diversion was in order. The more serious members of the communities found refuge in fraternal organizations. Organizations such as the Masons, the Odd Fellows and the Knights of Columbus thrived in the gold camps. But what about the rest of the folks, especially those who could not afford dues? Zumwalt felt the situation was ripe for ridicule. Creating an organization based on nonsense provided the distraction the young men needed.

Zumwalt's idea for a satirical fraternal organization finally took root on his second attempt in Moke Hill in 1853. He used the E Clampus Vitus ritual outlined in his pamphlet. He established his new lodge as No. 1001 of the organization. In the spirit of absurdity, there was and still is no logic to the numbering.

The Moke Hill lodge met in the Van Pelt building that was later used as a jail. It is believed

that this was the building where the Hotel Leger is today, although there was another jail in the town. Early members included prominent Calaveras citizens such as District Attorney Charles Spires, editor of the Calaveras Chronicle George Schuler, Judge Brockway, Judge Porter, Dr. Hoerchner, Judge Grant and Deacon Peek. These fine gentlemen were often members of the other serious fraternal orders but sought some fun with the ECV as well.

Membership into the order required a poke of gold and a humiliating but humorous initiation ceremony. How much was

required to be in the poke was unclear, but if a candidate couldn't afford it, he was allowed to join anyway. Until he was enlightened, he was considered blinded from the truth of the order. The 'poor blind candidate' was blindfolded and subjected to a humiliating task, called 'going down the slippery gulch,' clearly a reference to difficult placer mining. Everyone enjoyed watching the new member perform some ridiculous task to gain admission. Alcohol was always present and heartily enjoyed at these times. Indeed, playing a hoax on the candidate seemed to be high sport among the miners. The tradition continues today. It was said that if a candidate could survive the initiation process, he could take anything the order required of him. When successful, the new initiate became a brother for life.

Credo Quia Absurdum

The name E Clampus Vitus and their motto "*Credo Quia Absurdum*" sound vaguely Latin, and translate even more vaguely as 'I believe because it is absurd.' The motto is still used today and clearly represents the attitude of the members of the E Clampus Vitus, or "Clamper," as they are called.

Absurdity abounds in all of their activities. One example is the hewgag. The hewgag, historically

a trumpet, was also a gag. The music that went in sweet came out sour. When the hewgag sounded it was the call to meet. Many late shifts in the mines were interrupted with the braying trumpet of the hewgag, calling miners to meet that evening, although meetings could be held any time before or after a full moon.

“The organization was, by nature, a spoof on the more dignified, straight-laced and deeply ritualistic fraternal orders of the day”, explains ECV Historian Skip Skyrud.

Meetings were rowdy affairs often including joke telling, song singing, and of course much drink. When a community required a parade, such as for the Fourth of July, all local organizations turned out in their finery to strut their uniforms. Fraternal organizations such as the Masons and Odd Fellows proudly paraded down the street wearing their sashes and waving their banners. Bringing up the rear was often the miners of the E Clampus Vitus sporting the classic miner’s red shirt. They waved a woman’s hoop skirt over their heads like a flag, with a banner declaring “This is the flag we fight under.” Adorning their shirts, in jest to the finery worn by the higher class organizations, the Clampers wore medals cut from tin cans.

All members of the organization were equal although some were more equal than others. All members were officers, and all officers were of equal indignity and were bestowed with grandiose titles. The president of a lodge or chapter is called the Iscutis, although today many just refer to the

head guy as the Noble Grand Humbug. What is an Iscutis? It is rumored to be a hill wolf, whose legs are shorter on one side of his body. And then there is the Gyiscutis, a beetle. The Gyiscutis was also one of the early placer mining machines.

Clamper membership peaked around 1870. Their activities in mining camps became so boisterous that towns often shut down for business when the Clampers were in town. Many stories have been told of hilarious activities or about prominent members of the clan, all the way back to Hannibal (yet another example of their absurd claims). One account asserts that even Sam Clemens was an ECV member, which seems plausible considering his propensity for absurdity. The ridiculousness of the organization likely appealed to Clemens’ wry sense of humor. The ECV story goes that he even first heard the frog jump story while attending an ECV meeting. This too is plausible as it is well known that Clemens heard the story in a saloon, and it is quite likely that the ECV also used the saloon for meeting.



The ECV constructed this monument to Mark Twain at Frogtown, the Calaveras County Fairgrounds. Dedicated May 21, 1966.

The other Side of Clamperdom

All of the practical jokes and absurdities were more than just a spoof aimed at the serious orders and an outlet for stress. The ECV also had a serious side. Like all fraternal orders it provided a social service. Although they joked about serving the widows, they did indeed help out distressed children and widows as well as fellow ECV members. Food and other provisions were often anonymously left at the doors of destitute widows, or delivered to fellow miners down on their luck. When a fellow miner fell sick or was injured, his Clamper friends were sure to see that he received help. Clampers were known to be some of the first to respond to mine disasters. They often worked long hours after their own day of mining to assist fellow citizens displaced by fire or flood waters.



This stone monument, adorned with a miner's pick, shovel and pan was constructed and dedicated by the ECV in 1964. It is located in front of the Pioneer Hotel and acknowledges the Sheep Ranch Mine.

One famous story about the Clampers tells of the time a travelling entertainer came to a mining camp. He was distraught over his pending performance. Apparently a low turnout was expected, spelling financial doom for the theater man. A dutiful Clamper took the man aside and explained that if he joined one of the local fraternal organizations in the town then he was sure to draw a crowd. The entertainer promptly bought all the Clampers present a round of drinks. In turn, they filled his theater full that evening, ensuring his financial success.

Booming and Busting

Populations in the gold camps were fluid, growing or shrinking according to the boom or bust cycle of the gold strikes. Memberships in the fraternal organizations were no less immune to those changes. As the economy moved from placer to hard rock mining or other means of employment, the need for the ECV waned. Socially the west was settling down and no longer needed entertaining diversions. By the late 1800s interest in the ECV was almost non-existent. In 1915 only one lodge remained.

Fortunately the organization was revitalized in the early 1930s. California historians decided to revive the brotherhood before all historic recollection of its rituals and purpose were lost to time. It is believed that the launch of the modern movement took place again here in the Mother Lode, on Parrotts Ferry Road. The needs of miners' widows and children no longer existed. Rather, the purpose of the organization evolved to recognize and commemorate the west's lively historic past. The ECV reemerged as an organization dedicated to preserving the memory of the Gold Rush and the settlement of the west.

Today the ECV operates as a fraternal brotherhood, dedicated to historic preservation. But not without some fun. Clampers are still inclined to play practical jokes, create wild initiation processes, and generally have a good time while working toward their modern goal of historic preservation. Whether booming into town for

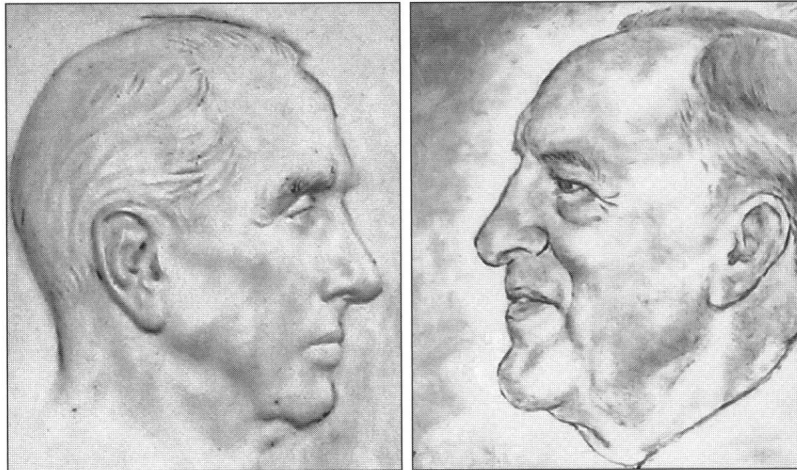
a Clampout gathering, or busting up over their follies, Clampers are sure to have a good time at their events.

The ECV began to place monuments throughout California and eventually across the west at locations of historic note. They often partnered with local historical organizations or the State of California's Office of Historic Preservation. Today visitors can see numerous historic monuments that have been created and placed by the dedicated members of the E Clampus Vitus. Calaveras County has been the recipient and has especially benefited from the attentions and efforts of the Clampers.

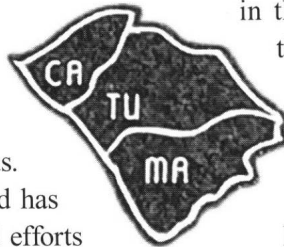
Plaques, Monuments and Matuca

E Clampus Vitus Redivivus, the revived organization as we know it today, has a prolific chapter in our area. On September 24, 1948, one hundred years after the discovery of gold in California, the Matuca Chapter No. 1849 was chartered. This unique chapter encompasses Mariposa, Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties. The name Matuca is derived from the first two letters of the involved counties. For a short time, Amador was a part of the chapter and it was called Amatuca.

The Matuca Chapter is particularly unique as it involves much of the area of the southern mines which is steeped in Gold Rush History. The chapter also encompasses the area of the



Two prominent leaders in the modern era of the ECV were Coke Wood on the left and Archie Stevenot on the right. Both were from Calaveras County and are memorialized on the ECV Wall of Comparative Ovations in Murphys.



in the 1960s. Throughout the decade, across the Mother Lode, the Clampers, armed with their antics, were active and fruitful. Numerous monuments and commemorative plaques were established. "Plaquing," as they like to call it.

Funds for expensive monuments were and are still raised through Clamper events and donations.

Travelers passing through or even residents of Calaveras County pass by these prominent monuments daily. Of note is a beautiful marble plaque on the front of the Hotel Leger in Mokelumne Hill, honoring Joe Zumwalt and the origin of the movement, placed on 26 March 1966. Later that same year, on 21 May 1966 the ECV dedicated a plaque honoring Mark Twain, located at Frogtown. This monument was designed by world famous sculptor and official Clampartist William Gordon Huff.

In 1964 the ECV teamed up with the Historical Society on a joint project. They constructed the stone monument with the wagon wheel commemorating the location of the attempted stage hold up on Mountain Ranch Road.

CREDO QUIA ABSURDUM

THE CLAMPER

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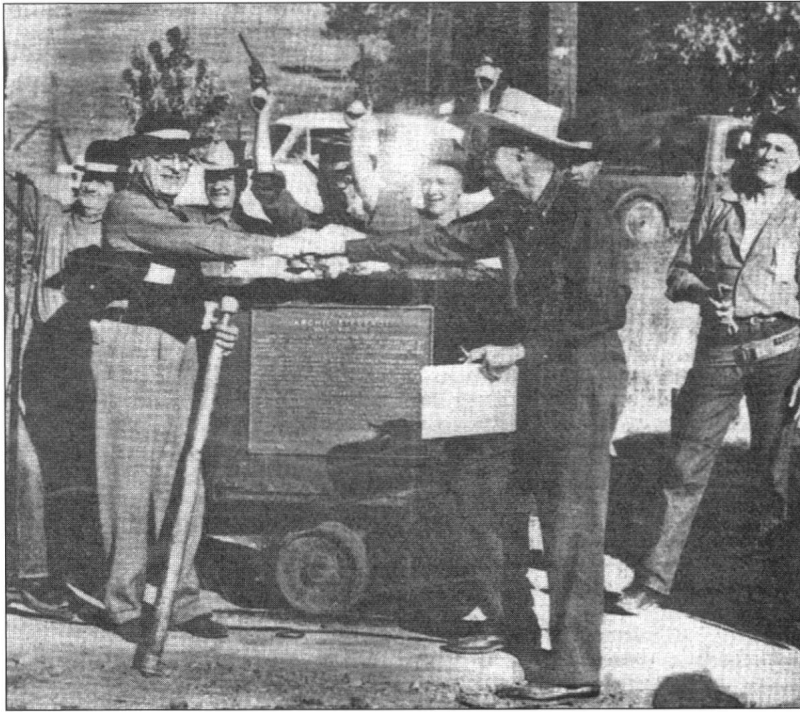
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ECV Directors as listed in April 1962 in *The Clamper*, the official publication of the ancient and honorable order of E Clampus Vitus, the publication created by Coke Wood.



With pistols blazing behind him, Archie Stevenot, left, accepts the plaque at Carson Hill on October 14, 1961. The ore cart was donated by Dick Holman of the Tuolumne County Foundry. Stevenot is holding his Staff of Relief which was a gift of admiration from his fellow Clampers. The staff resides today in the Old Timer's Museum.

Photo by Earle Edmiston, used by permission of the ECV, Matuca Chapter.

Just as Calaveras County has benefited from the attentions of the Clampers, the ECV has benefited from Calaveras County as well. Two of the organization's most prominent members were Archie Stevenot and Coke Wood.

Historical Society members will recall that Coke Wood was a founding member of our Calaveras County Historical Society. He later went on to help establish the Conference of California Historical Societies. Here in Calaveras County he created the Old Timer's Museum in Murphys. He also created The Clamper, the newsletter of the ECV. In 1969 he was named "Mr. California" by the California State Legislature.

In 1970 Wood allowed the creation of the E Clampus Vitus Wall of Comparative Ovations on the side of his Old Timer's Museum. Today this grandly decorated rock wall stands as a shrine to the ECV movement. Likenesses of prominent ECV members, or other amusing things, adorn the wall. Visitors to Murphys are often seen amusing themselves reading the various plaques on the wall. Clampers often conduct events near this wall, supporting the observation that the community of Murphys has become an unofficial capital of the ECV.

We know Archie Stevenot as "Mr. Mother Lode." Archie was founder of the Mother Lode Highway Association, the organization responsible for creating Highway 49 linking the golden communities of the Mother Lode. The Clampers were proud to call him a member of their organization. In fact, Stevenot was a member of the installation team that formed the original Amatuca chapter in 1948. He went on to serve in many of the chapter's positions including as on the Venerable Grand Council of Venerable Clampatriarchs. Not to be outdone by the state's having named him Mr. Mother Lode the ECV ultimately bestowed him with the title of Mr. Clamper of All Clamperdom. In 1961 the ECV honored Stevenot by placing a plaque, attached to an ore cart, along Highway 49 by the Carson Hill Mine. On it the plaque stated:

"TO OUR SUPREME NOBLE GRAND
HUMBUG OF THE GRAND COUNCIL OF
E. CLAMPUS VITUS, INC., THIS MARKER
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED THIS
14TH DAY OF OCTOBER, 1961."

In 1976 another monument was created honoring Archie Stevenot. Working with the Golden Chain Council, the Matuca ECV constructed a stone monument overlooking the beautiful bridge on Highway 49 linking Calaveras and Tuolumne Counties. In 1968 the state had named it the Archie Stevenot Bridge and the ECV felt it warranted a monument. Buried inside the stone monument is a 100-year time capsule.

The Clampers Today

Judge Ross A Carkeet spoke as the Master of Ceremonies at a Clamper dinner in Sonora on 29 January 1966. He summarized the nature of the ECV as mysterious, humorous and benevolent.

*"It is an organization of fun and was
founded on satire and the deepest needs
for entertainment and fellowship in a world
then filled with separation, loneliness and*

hardships. Its strength was built by poking fun at the artificial, the unreal, and the phoniness of certain parts of society that had placed themselves above and apart from the less fortunate. And so, its names and honorary titles emphasized its exposure of all things artificial or phony or of a nature to hoodwink the public.”

“The Clampers Creed tells us that as we go through life we should be humble, never take ourselves seriously, appreciate a little of the ridiculous, always be a two-fisted Clamper when the bottle passes our way, and that we must never forget the men and women of the western wilderness and never fail to appreciate a bit of western lore.”

Today ECV functions include many amusing activities such as Clamperades, Clampouts, or Clampilgrimages to other chapters. When

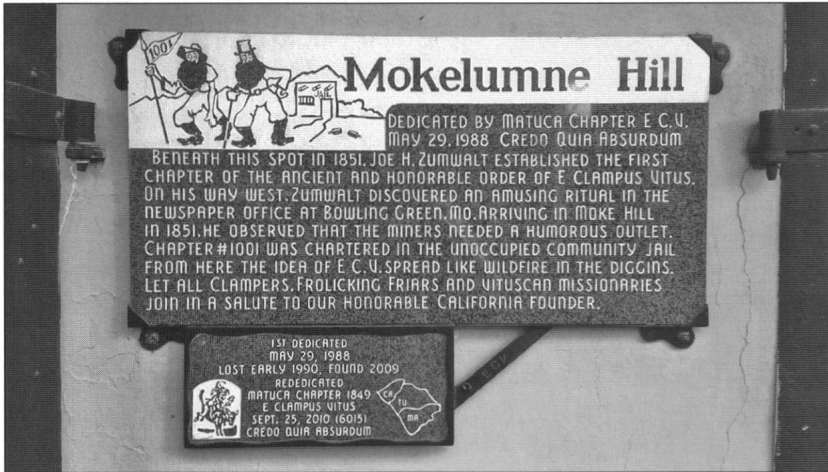
necessary, the Grand Noble Humbug might issue a Camproclamation. With a nod to modernization, today the hewgag is written and mailed rather than blown. Meetings still include singing, accompanied by copious liquid refreshment. And they are still plaquing the Mother Lode so that we won't forget our interesting and historic past.

Drink has always been a part of their rituals and still plays a large role in their gatherings. They do not know if they are a historical drinking society, or a drinking historical society. Crowds continue to be entertained by rowdy groups of red-shirted men, some being carried in wheel barrows signifying the poor blind candidate going down the slippery gulch toward enlightenment, bringing up the rear of a Mother Lode parade.

By 1990 membership in the organization had grown to over 50,000. There are currently more than forty chapters in the west. More than 2000 monuments



Coke Wood, creator of the Old Timer's Museum in Murphys allowed the ECV to establish a Wall of Comparative Ovations on the building, memorializing prominent aspects of the ECV. The wall has become somewhat of a shrine to the ECV, and a point of historic interest in itself.



The ECV placed, and replaced, this plaque noting the origin of the ECV order during the Gold Rush. This plaque adorns the exterior of the Hotel Leger in Mokelumne Hill.

or plaques have been established across California's gold country. The Matuca Chapter alone has placed more than 130 monuments or plaques throughout their tri-county territory, almost fifty of which are in Calaveras County. The Matuca Chapter also boasts one of the largest chapter memberships within the ECV.

Zumwalt's contribution to the success of the ECV is undeniable. Besides being a prankster, he was also a successful rancher and businessman. His contributions to Mokelumne Hill are recognized in the plaque placed in his honor. A street in the community still bears his name today.

Perhaps the ancient and honorable order E Clampus Vitus had roots in the east prior to the Gold Rush, but they came to fruition in the west. Several communities that Zumwalt passed through lay claim to the origin of the order. Downieville, Placerville and Stockton all assert that they are the western birthplace of the ECV, yet the organization never gained a foothold like it did in Calaveras County. It was in Mokelumne Hill that the organization thrived.

Editor's Note:

Las Calaveras is grateful to Clamper JT Bauder for enlightening us about this fascinating organization, and for the assistance of Larry Wesson, Noble Grand Humbug, Matuca Chapter. Our thanks to Skip Skyrud, Matuca Historian for the list of monuments and plaques. For a more

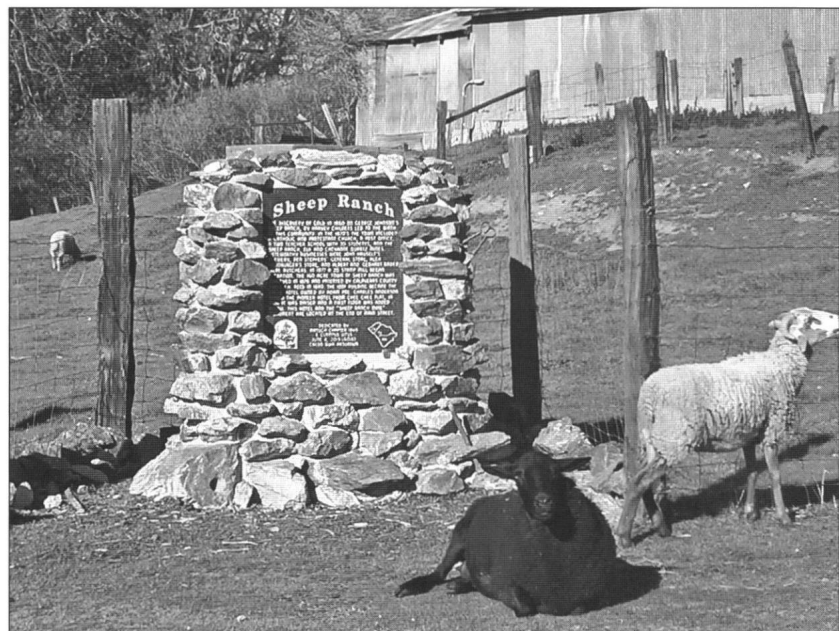
detailed description of Zumwalt's path to California and Calaveras County, and the history of the ECV ritual and its revival, readers are encouraged to see *Las Calaveras*, January 1995.

In 1985 the ECV repaired the Archie Stevenot monument and replaced the plaque that had been stolen from Highway 49 by vandals.

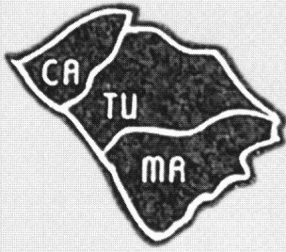
All photos, unless otherwise noted, by Bonnie Miller, Feb-March 2015.

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In 2013 the ECV constructed this monument in the community of Sheep Ranch, apparently to the pleasure of the resident sheep.



A PARTIAL LIST OF MONUMENTS AND PLAQUES

Placed by ECV Matuca Chapter 184
throughout Calaveras County

When	What	Where
October 14, 1961	Honoring Archie Stevenot	Hwy 49 at Carson Hill
June 13, 1962	Honoring Judge James Smith	Historic Courthouse, San Andreas
January 12, 1963	Attempted Stage Robbery	Mountain Ranch Road
July 25, 1964	Sheep Ranch Mine	Pioneer Hotel, Sheep Ranch
March 26, 1966	Moke Hill and the ECV origin	Hotel Leger, Moke Hill
May 21, 1966	Honoring Mark Twain	Frogtown
April 7, 1970	Wall of Comparative Ovations	Travers Building, Murphys
April 27, 1974	James Carson	Hwy 49 at Carson Hill
May 31, 1975	Dr Albert A Michelson	Murphys
July 23, 1976	Archie D Stevenot & 100 year time capsule	Hwy 49 at the Stevenot Bridge
1977	The Compere Store	Murphys
October 22, 1977	The Murphy Brothers	Murphys
September 20, 1980	Chinatown of Angels Camp	Angels Camp
May 29, 1983	The Dorrington Hotel	Dorrington
August 22, 1987	Camp Tamarack	Tamarack
April 9, 1988	Black Bart at Funk Hill	Copperopolis
May 29, 1988	Joe Zumwalt	Hotel Leger, Moke Hill
September 14, 1991	Happy Valley	Happy Valley
May 24, 1992	Madame Josephine Felix	Salt Spring Valley
May 30, 1993	Valley Spring	Valley Springs
March 26, 1994	Macaroni Flat	San Domingo Creek
September 9, 1995	Boards Crossing	Boards Crossing
April 1, 1997	Old Corner Saloon	Copperopolis
June 6, 1998	The Avery Hotel	Avery
April 3, 1999	Calaveras Telephone	Copperopolis
June 17, 2000	Copperopolis	Copperopolis
September 14, 2002	Dinkelspiel Store	Vallecito
September 13, 2003	Mountain Ranch	Mountain Ranch
September 18, 2004	Altaville Block 5	Altaville
August 13, 2005	Black Bart at Funk Hill, rededicated	Copperopolis
September 10, 2005	Camp Nine Bell & Vallecito P O	Vallecito
September 9, 2005	Copperopolis Cemetery	Copperopolis
September 15, 2007	Calaveras County Hospital Cemetery	San Andreas
September 12, 2009	Claussen's Corner	Angels Camp
September 25, 2010	Joe H Zumwalt, rededicated	Hotel Leger, Moke Hill
September 17, 2011	Avery One-Room Schoolhouse	Avery
July 28, 2012	Black Bart Inn	San Andreas
June 8, 2013	Sheep Ranch	Sheep Ranch

Calaveras County Historical Society

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The Calaveras County Historical Society is a non-profit corporation. It meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the County. Locations and scheduled programs are announced in advance. Some meetings include a dinner program, and visitors are always welcome.

The Society operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10:00 to 4:00 in the historic County courthouse located at 30 Main Street in San Andreas; and the historic Red Barn Museum at 891 Mountain Ranch Road, also in San Andreas, which is open Thursday to Sunday, 10:00 to 4:00.

The Society's office is located in historic San Andreas, the Calaveras County seat. Visitors are always welcome to stop by the office for assistance with research, and are encouraged to visit the museums while in the area. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:00, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058, or contact us at: CCHS@goldrush.com; Red Barn Museum (209) 754-0800.

January–March, 2015

New Members:

Marlene Weeks—Farmington
Dave Codoni—Lodi
Bill & Gail Stark—Mountain Ranch (gift membership)
John & Lois Land—Mokelumne Hill
Shirley Ryan, C.A.O.—San Andreas (gift membership)
Thomas Pitta—Angels Camp
Ken Johnson—San Andreas (gift membership)
Michelle Bollinger—San Andreas (gift membership)
John Morse—Mountain Ranch (gift membership)
Mary Anne Garamendi—Mokelumne Hill (gift membership)
Bill & Carolyn Edwards—Valley Springs
Jan Schmidiger—Sheep Ranch
Calaveras County Chamber of Commerce
Kris Payne—Diamond Springs

Donations:

Randy Klassen—Painting of historic Zwinge Building, current location of the Calaveras County Archives
Dave Codoni—Cash donation
Sally Tuttle—Trunk of war memorabilia from Judge Richard E. Tuttle
Barbara Berger—Clothing, paperwork and artifacts from Bud and Louise Spence
Bill Wennhold—School pin from the Calaveras Union High School (skull with ruby eyes)