PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-13

E Clampus Vitus before the California Legislature: the Senate debate at Benicia struck from its journal (March 1853), and the Assembly's dollar-a-member resolution (April 1855)

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SUMMARY

Seth Slopes's history of the order (2000) lists Benicia under "March 1853" without a source, and the published register of early lodges had Benicia first on record in October 1857. Three newspapers of 19 March 1853 report that on Thursday, 17 March 1853, at Benicia, then the state capital, a resolution came before the California Senate "praying that body to grant the use of their chamber for the meetings of the 'E. Clampsus Vitus' Society." The *San Joaquin Republican* names the mover, Senator De la Guerra. The *Sacramento Daily Union* reports the debate: Senator Wambaugh (M. M. Wombough of Yolo and Colusa in the Senate Journal) called the order "nothing more than a burlesque upon secret societies"; Senator Coffroth answered that among its members was "one Senator, who was the head and front of the association in the State"; that senator replied that the opposition of "the member from Colusa" was owed to his having been "black-balled" by the society; and "the member from Mariposa" was named as "a member of the renowned 'E Clampsus Vitus.'" The *Republican*'s own Benicia letter names him: "Mr. Wade, although a member of the order, was opposed to the resolution," and adds that "the N. G. H. of the State was present and gave the Grand Sign." The resolution was set aside: "laid on the table" in the *Union*, "indefinitely postponed —ayes 9, nays 7" in the *Republican*. The *Daily Alta California* adds that the Senate afterwards voted, probably on 18 March, 10 to 7, "to strike from the journal all proceedings had in relation to the 'E Clampsus Vitus' Association." The printed *Journal of the Senate* for the session has no entry on the matter. The episode dates

the order's presence at the capital to March 1853, within a year of its first California notice, shows sitting senators among its members and names one of them, and explains why the official record is silent. Two years later, with the capital moved to Sacramento, the order came before the Assembly. The *Sacramento Daily Union* of 1 May 1855 reports that on Monday, 30 April 1855, "while the house was enjoying an interregnum 'under a call,'" a resolution was introduced "to the effect that a tax of one dollar be levied on each member for the benefit of the renowned order of E Clampsus Vitus; that association being compelled to rely upon its own resources at present, and its charitable acts having exhausted its exchequer," and that the Speaker *pro tem.* "reluctantly declared the resolution out of order." Together the two episodes put the order on the floor of both houses of the Legislature within three years of its first California notice.

THE RECORD

1. **"Our Benicia Correspondence," dated Benicia, 17 March 1853, *Sacramento Daily Union*, 19 March 1853, p. 2**

   > *"Unprecedented proceedings were had in the Senate this morning, on the presentation of a resolution, praying that body to grant the use of their chamber for the meetings of the 'E. Clampsus Vitus' Society. ... Mr. Wambaugh considered this 'E Clampsus Vitus' nothing more than a burlesque upon secret societies ... and he would rather cut his right arm off than vote for the resolution. Mr. Coffroth ... begged to remind him that among its members were numbered one Senator, who was the head and front of the association in the State ... The Senator referred to then arose, and said that the opposition of the member from Colusa was attributable to the fact ef his having been 'black-balled' by the society. The member from Mariposa, although a member of the renowned 'E Clampsus Vitus,' was opposed to granting the use of the hall to any societies, of any description. The resolution was, very properly, laid on the table."*

   California Digital Newspaper Collection · See the record (https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SDU18530319.2.6)

2. **"Tabic Talk," a letter dated Benicia, 17 March 1853, *San Joaquin Republican* (Stockton), 19 March 1853**

> *"Mr. De la Guerra introduced a resolution granting to the ancient and honorable order of 'E Clampsus Vitus' the use of the Senate chamber, when not otherwise occupied. Mr. Colgrove urged the passage of the resolution. ... Looking around the Senate chamber he discovered a number of honorable senators who were ornaments of the order, and outside the bar were also several members of the press, belonging to the society ... Mr. Lind moved to lay the resolution on the table. Lost. ... A Senator remarked that the last Senator must have been black-balled, judging from his inveterate opposition. Mr. Wade, although a member of the order, was opposed to the resolution. On motion of Mr. Wombough, the resolution was indefinitely postponed—ayes 9, nays 7." And: "I should tell you that the N. G. H. of the State was present and gave the Grand Sign." (No senator named Colgrove sat in 1853; the Union gives the speech to Coffroth.)*

California Digital Newspaper Collection · See the record (https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SRP18530319.2.8)

3. **"Matters at the Capital," *San Joaquin Republican* (Stockton), 19 March 1853**

> *"Mr. De la Guerra introduced into the Senate to-day a resolution giving the Senate chamber to the order of 'E Clampsus Vitus,' which elicited a long debate. Mr. Wambaugh opposed ..." The resolution was "finally indefinitely postponed." (Read in the machine-read text.)*

California Digital Newspaper Collection · See the record (https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SRP18530319.2.7)

4. **"Legislative Report," *Daily Alta California*, 19 March 1853**

> *"Mr. Wambough moved to strike from the journal all proceedings had in relation to the 'E Clampsus Vitus' Association. Carried, 10 to 7." (The report is headed "Wednesday, March 18," a day that was a Friday.)*

California Digital Newspaper Collection · See the record (https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=DAC18530319.2.7)

5. ***Journal of the Fourth Session of the Legislature of the State of California*, Senate (San Francisco, 1853), pp. 5, 8 and 37 (the senators and their districts), 224–231 (Thursday, 17 March) and 231 (Friday, 18 March)**

> *No entry for the resolution or the debate on 17 March; the entry for Friday, 18 March, opens "The Journal of Thursday was read, corrected, and approved." The Journal names the senators and their districts: M. M. Wombough, "Senator from Yolo and Colusi"; James H. Wade, 10th District, "Mariposa and Tulare"; James W. Coffroth, 9th District, Tuolumne.*

California State Library; scan at the Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/jouron00cali)

6. **"E Clampsus Vitus," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 1 May 1855, p. 2**

> *"... while the house was enjoying an interregnum 'under a call,' a resolution was introduced to the effect that a tax of one dollar be levied on each member for the benefit of the renowned order of E Clampsus Vitus; that association being compelled to rely upon its own resources at present, and its charitable acts having exhausted its exchequer. The Speaker pro tem. reluctantly declared the resolution out of order."*

California Digital Newspaper Collection · See the record (https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SDU18550501.2.7)

WHAT IT CHANGES

Benicia's first record moves from October 1857 to March 1853. The order's own histories give the date without a source; the episode itself, the vote to expunge it, and the naming of a sitting senator, James H. Wade, as a member are not in any history of the order we have read. It shows the order, within a year of its first notice in California, with enough members in the Senate to bring a resolution to the floor and a recognised head for the whole state, and it accounts for the silence of the official record. The Assembly resolution of 30 April 1855 is likewise absent from the order's histories; it shows the joke still alive among legislators at Sacramento in 1855. The *Daily Alta*

California's report of the vote to strike the 1853 proceedings from the journal was found by Jim Cirner, who sent it to the author.

LIMITS

The Senate debate is known only from newspaper correspondents; the official Journal was corrected to leave it out. The *Union* says the resolution was laid on the table and the *Republican* that it was indefinitely postponed. The senator who was "the head and front of the association in the State" is not named in any report read so far. "The member from Colusa" is identified with Wombough from the Journal's list of senators and districts. The *Republican*'s letter gives the order's champion as "Mr. Colgrove," a name not in the Senate; the *Union* names Coffroth. The *Republican*'s report has been read only in machine-read text. The 1855 resolution is known only from the *Union*'s paragraph; it was ruled out of order and, as far as the machine-read text of the 1855 Assembly Journal shows, left no entry there. Who introduced it is not named.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The California Digital Newspaper Collection for "Clampsus," "Clampus," "Clampsus Vitus" and "Vitus" in 1853, and every report of the Senate's proceedings for 17 and 18 March 1853 in the *Union*, the *Alta* and the *Republican*; the 1853 Senate Journal at the Internet Archive, for 17–18 March and its roll of senators; Slopes's chronology (2000); the order's histories of 1949 and 1966. For 1855: the California Digital Newspaper Collection for "Clampsus" and "Clampus" in 1855; the *Journal of the Sixth Session of the Assembly* (1855) at the Internet Archive (journalof00cali), machine-read text, for "Clampsus," "Vitus," "one dollar" and "exchequer."

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

"New" means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note's version.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. Seth Slopes, *E Clampus Vitus: Now & Then: The Replete History of ECV* (Murphys, Calif.: Old Timers Museum, 2000), chronology: "Benicia, March 1853."
2. E Clampus Vitus, *Then and Now* (Stockton, 1966). Joaquin Murrieta Chapter No. 13. https://ecv13.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Then_and_Now_1966.pdf
3. California State Senate, *Record of State Senators, 1849–2024*: Antonio M. De la Guerra, San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara, fourth session (1853). https://secretary.senate.ca.gov/sites/secretary.senate.ca.gov/files/Senators_%20and_%20Officers_%201849_2024.pdf
4. *Journal of the Sixth Session of the Assembly of the State of California* (Sacramento, 1855). Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/journalof00cali

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in E Clampus Vitus: the complete record (projectscroll.com/news/e-clampus-vitus-the-complete-record/). In the discoveries register:

- `benicia-senate-1853` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#benicia-senate-1853)
- `assembly-1855` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#assembly-1855)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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