PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-21

Who brought E Clampus Vitus to Hangtown: George Penn Johnston in the El Dorado reunion of 1888, and a lodge at Young's Hill, Yuba County, in Charles E. De Long's journal, 1856

Michael Urbanski ORCID 0009-0006-8183-5828 (https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8183-5828), Project Scroll · Issued 4 November 2026 · Version 1 · a permanent identifier (DOI) will be added here

SUMMARY

The order's histories say the ritual reached Hangtown (Placerville) about 1849–50, without naming who brought it there. The historical sketches read at the El Dorado County Society's reunion at Placerville in May 1888 do: "It was introduced into Hangtown by the late Hon. George Penn Johnston." By February 1856, they add, the order "exceeded all other orders, societies and institutions in El Dorado county combined," and when Johnston gave its oration on Washington's Birthday the members of the Legislature came up from Sacramento for its ball. Steve Gage, the district's legislator of 1857, credited "Penn Johnson" with the same at the Studebaker dinner of 1912. In the same spring, at Young's Hill in Yuba County, the storekeeper Charles E. De Long, later United States Minister to Japan, wrote in his journal that he "helped organize the E Clampsus Vitus Order on the hill" (27 April 1856), and recorded its first initiates in May. The journal was edited for print in 1930 by Carl I. Wheat, who read from it at the Clift Hotel that November and revived the order there thirteen months later.

THE RECORD

1. ***Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, 26 May 1888, p. 1, "A Popular Society"**

> *"It was introduced into Hangtown by the late Hon. George Penn Johnston. … in point of numbers in February, 1856, it exceeded all other orders, societies and institutions in El Dorado county combined. … All the members of the Legislature, then in session at Sacramento, came up to participate in this gala entertainment."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn82014381/1888-05-26/ed-1/?sp=1&st=text)

2. **Wells Drury, *An Editor on the Comstock Lode* (1936), p. 329: Steve Gage at the Studebaker dinner, Placerville, 1912**

> *"Penn Johnson, that brilliant genius, who introduced to this community the ancient and honorable order known as E Clampsus Vitus."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.153480)

3. **Charles E. De Long, journal, 27 April 1856, ed. Carl I. Wheat, *California Historical Society Quarterly* 9:1 (March 1930), p. 59**

> *"Cool and cloudy weather; helped organize the E Clampsus Vitus Order on the hill; attended the Ugly Club meeting in the afternoon."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/california-history_1930-03_9_1_0)

4. **De Long, journal, 16 and 19 May 1856, ibid., pp. 60–61**

> *"E Clampsus Vitus met and organized initiated brother G McMurray by way of experiment" (16 May); "E Clampsus initiated J P Brown & G W Butler" (19 May).*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/california-history_1930-03_9_1_0)

5. ***California Historical Society Quarterly* 9:4 (December 1930), p. 408**

> *Wheat at the Clift Hotel, 25 November 1930, reading from the diary: De Long "joined the 'E Clampus Vitus Society'."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/california-history_1930-12_9_4_0)

WHAT IT CHANGES

Hangtown moves from a lodge carried there by tradition to one with its introducer named in a record written by men who were there, and a second, independent memory agrees. Young's Hill joins the register from a diary of the time, with its organizer and first initiates named; and the man who revived the order in 1931 is shown to have been reading that diary the year before.

LIMITS

The 1888 sketch is a memory written thirty-two years after the events, signed by no one; the 1912 speech is a memory too, printed in 1936 under a looser spelling of the name. The De Long entries are read in Wheat's printed transcription, not the manuscript.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

Chronicling America and the Internet Archive full text for every spelling of the order's name; the California Digital Newspaper Collection; and the order's own histories: Then and Now of 1966, Credo quia absurdum of 1949 and Seth Slopes's anthology of 2000.

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.

Project Scroll is independent research. It is not affiliated with, sponsored by or endorsed by E Clampus Vitus, Inc. or any of its chapters, and it does not speak for the order. E Clampus Vitus®, ECV® and Clampers® are registered trademarks of E Clampus Vitus, Inc., as are its designs of a kicking jackass, of a miner and a braying jackass with the motto *Per caritate viduaribus orphanibusque sed prime viduaribus*, and of a coat of arms with the banners "Satisfactory" and *Credo quia absurdum*. The order's names, mottoes, emblems, plaques and publications are named or quoted here only to identify the order and report its history; this site sells nothing, all rights in them remain with the order and its chapters, and nothing on this site is a product or publication of the order. Book covers and plaques are shown only to identify the works and places discussed. Help from individual members is credited to them personally and is not an endorsement by the order.

WORKS CITED

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

1. Paolo Sioli, *Historical Souvenir of El Dorado County* (1883), p. 215. https://archive.org/details/historicalsouven00siol
2. E Clampus Vitus, *Then and Now* (1966). https://ecv13.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Then_and_Now_1966.pdf
3. E Clampus Vitus, *Credo quia absurdum* (Placerville, 1949). https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31822035077338
4. Seth Slopes, *E Clampus Vitus: Now & Then: The Replete History of ECV* (Murphys, Calif.: Old Timers Museum, 2000). https://archive.org/details/eclampusvitus0000seth

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:

- `hangtown-johnston-1888` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#hangtown-johnston-1888)
- `youngs-hill-1856` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#youngs-hill-1856)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

Michael Urbanski, "Who brought E Clampus Vitus to Hangtown: George Penn Johnston in the El Dorado reunion of 1888, and a lodge at Young's Hill, Yuba County, in Charles E. De Long's journal, 1856," Project Scroll Research Note 2026-21, version 1 (4 November 2026), https://projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-21/.

BibTeX

```
@techreport{urbanski202621,
  author      = {Urbanski, Michael},
  orcid       = {0009-0006-8183-5828},
  title       = {{Who brought E Clampus Vitus to Hangtown: George Penn
Johnston in the El Dorado reunion of 1888, and a lodge at Young's Hill,
Yuba County, in Charles E. De Long's journal, 1856}},
  institution = {Project Scroll},
  type        = {Project Scroll Research Note},
  number      = {2026-21},
  year        = {2026},
  month       = {nov},
  url         = {https://projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-21/},
  note        = {Version 1}
}
```