

The Plaques of E Clampus Vitus: Wolf Creek Tavern

by Grand Sublime Bill Wensrich

The Plaques of E Clampus Vitus—Umpqua Joe Chapter No. 1859. The 39th in a continuing series of articles prepared by Bill Wensrich

“If you ain’t plaque’n, then you ain’t Clampin’”

Oregon’s Umpqua Joe Outpost received their Charter at Grand Council in May 2010. This meant they were no longer an Outpost; they had become an E Clampus Vitus Chapter. They had proved they could stand on their own two beers. When an ECV Outpost gets their Charter it is always followed by a big party, what we call a Charter Doin’s. Umpqua Joe No. 1859 held their Charter Doin’s the following year. Almost 325 redshirts attended the Clampout held at Gray’s Ranch near the mouth of Grave Creek which flows into the Rogue River. During the long weekend celebration, officers receiving the signed Charter document from the Board of Proctors representing the Grand Council.

On Friday, June 10, 2011 the Wolf Creek Tavern was plaqueed and dedicated. Dr. “Molar” Mike Johnson from the Billy Holcomb Chapter did the speechifying before 60 redshirts and several dozen civilians. Oregon State Parks and Recreation was represented as well as the Wolf Creek Inn owners. Each attendee received an event history keepsake article Mike had prepared. The following history excerpts are from Mike’s article.

“There have been two legendary hotels in Wolf Creek. The first was called the Six-Bit House, presumably because rooms went for 75 cents. It may have been built as early as 1857, and is believed to have stood about a mile northeast of the center of town. In about 1883, Henry Smith, successful entrepreneur that he was, built the building now known as the Wolf Creek Tavern (or Inn). It was intended to appeal to a

more genteel clientele, as Smith was teetotaler and allowed no alcoholic beverages on the premises. It has the distinct of being the oldest continually operated hotel in the Pacific Northwest, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

It catered to local traffic and stage travelers prior to the 1887 completion of the Oregon and California Railroad through the Siskiyou Mountains. Wolf Creek was an important stop on the 16-day stagecoach journey from Portland to San Francisco. When the Pacific Highway reached Wolf Creek in 1922, the number of travelers increased and business picked up. Among the luminaries who stayed here was author Jack London, who completed his novel “Valley of the Moon” while a guest at the Inn.

The construction of Interstate 5 decreased the Inn’s visibility, and as business diminished the survival of the historical building became uncertain. The situation improved in 1972, when the Wolf Creek Tavern was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It was then conveyed to the State of Oregon, and between 1975 and 1979 was carefully restored by local artisans. It reopened in its present configuration in 1979 by Oregon State Parks, and continues to operate today as a nine-room hotel, complete with a dining room for its guests.”

Because the historic building had been conveyed to the State of Oregon, ECV first needed permission from the State Parks Department to commemorate the building and its history. Receiving the go ahead, the new ECV Chapter had to find a place to hold their Charter Doin’s.

Nearby Gray’s Ranch was an ideal choice because of its size and remoteness. The weekend function was quite an affair. Indignataries from most E Clampus Vitus Chapters representing eight western states attended. It turned out to be one of the best Charter Doin’s ECV has witnessed over the last 15 years. A short video of the Charter Doin’s Clampsite can be viewed on YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sr-zzRzkkuEve>.

It was Glenn Hearrell’s idea to plaque the Wolf Creek

Tavern. The new Chapter’s first Humbug (club president), Keith “Longhorn” Long, developed the plaque wording, obtained the granite sheet and had Recognition Specialties chisel the agreed upon language. Adhering to Park requirements not to alter the look of the historic building, Glenn constructed a suitable wooden frame painted white to match the exterior of the historic Inn. With help from “Molar” Mike and his Southern California redshirted brothers Dave Dutcher and Mike “Smitty” Smith, the plaque was securely affixed to the old tavern building. Mounting the historical monument under the covered porch on the exterior wall just to the left of the front door met all park requirements.

To see this plaque take Interstate 5 north 20 miles past Grants Pass, Oregon to Exit 76. Go to the west side of the freeway and bear right toward the Wolf Creek Inn. On the National Register of Historic Places, you will find the hotel and tavern. Plan on spending much of day touring the area. For a scenic drive home proceed under the railroad overpass and turn left onto Lower Wolf Creek Road heading toward Galice. At the intersection of Lower Wolf Creek and Lower Grave Creek roads continue in a straight line staying of Lower Grave Creek Road. This 25-mile loop takes you back toward Grants Pass. Near the end of this drive, Indian Mary Park will be on your left. At the entrance is another Umpqua Joe plaque commemorating Umpqua Joe, Chapter namesake, and his daughter, Indian Mary.

Bill Wensrich serves on the E Clampus Vitus Board of Directors. His recently published guide book for the ECV Transierra Roisterous Alliance of Senior Humbugs titled “The Trail to Sailors’ Diggin’s from Paragon Bay” is available for purchase from the nonprofit Del Norte County Historical Society Museum located at 577 H Street in Crescent City, California.

Diary of Alonzo P. Turner:

by Greg Walter

Part 6 of 7
August 7, 1853

I will be able to send it about the last of September as we have now about 50 tons of hay already up and grass enough to make 25 Tons more which we are selling every day at 80\$ by the ton and 5\$ a hundred at retail. We have all the hay there is in this valley or within 30 miles of the mines. We are situated at the foot of the mountain where all the pack teams have to pass us in going to Crescent City, situated on the Ocean where all the stuff that we consume in the mines is packed from. There are hundreds

of animals for packing pass every day. Most every man that has a train of animals gets more or less hay.

You spoke of my telling how I liked the country & climate. I must say that as yet I am not in love with this country altho I intend to remain in this country until I make enough to satisfy me to come home and live like a white man. If you do not come to this country you will see me home about a year from next winter. I would like to get off 2 crops after this year and then I will leave an opening for someone else to make a pile. I cannot think

of settling here for life, there being no possible chance for any society to ever be established. The people are all transient coming and going. The climate is subject to two extremes in the Summer very dry hot days and cold nights (Splendid for married folks) winter Season either rains or snows all the while although it never freezes of any account. The hardest frost we had last winter you could just perceive a thin scale of ice on the water bucket. The grass is green the winter through. We intend to let our cabbage stand all winter that is our small plants. Onions

we calculate to sow this fall. We intend to plant some Potatoes this fall, sow Oats also in the fall and plant our garden in February.

In the seventh letter, Alonzo goes into detail for Clarissa to sell their farm in Wisconsin and come out to Oregon with details in the journey and what to bring.

Turner Ranch, January 17, 1854

There is a number of young men here that requested me to have some young woman come with you as soon as they found I

was about to send for you. They say if they had a wife here they never would leave this country without a bushel of money. If a man would be contented to settle down here he could make a fortune in five years that would place him and his family in independent circumstances forever. I have made up my mind to stay here until I do make it.

The eighth and last letter written at the Turner Ranch is a lament where Alonzo is really missing his wife and also details the ups and downs of the farming he is doing.

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