

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **E. Clampus Vitus**

While wandering the streets of Columbia during a recent visit to this "Gem of the Southern Mines," we came upon a bronze tablet securely fastened to the wall outside the iron doors of "The Stage Drivers' Retreat." The tablet had been placed there by E. Clampus Vitus in memory of G. Ezra Dane, one of their members and a teller of stories.

The face pictured on the tablet and the story it told intrigued us to seek further information. Why did this organization which came into being during the Gold Rush, place a tablet upon the wall of one of Columbia's oldest buildings and why did they so honor G. Ezra Dane. Searching the library files – appealing of friends and doing some research on our own, we have pieced together an interesting story.

We will come to the story of Dane first. George Ezra Dane was a San Francisco lawyer, born in Pasadena December 21, 1904, a graduate of the schools in the city and of Pomona College. He later studied International Law in Geneva, Switzerland, at The Hague and Harvard Law School, but through all those years of study he had as his foremost hobby the interest in California history and folklore. As a result of this interest he had published "Once There Was and Was Not"; "Penknife Sketches" (Grabhorn); "The Inside Story of the Gold Rush" (California Historical Society); "Life of James A. Marshall" and "Ghost Town," a delightful folktale of happenings in Columbia as told by an oldtimer. (Knopf-1941.)

In addition to these tales he also published "Mark Twain's Letters from the Sandwich Islands" (Grabhorn, 1927 and Stanford Press, 1938), with "Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown" in 1940. Those who wish for entertainment mixed with humor and history, should read any or all of these writings of G. Ezra Dane.

Dane was a director of E. Clampus Vitus, the group which honored him at Columbia during initiation ceremonies which took place in the old Fallon Theater in that community a number of years ago. He was a devoted member of the California Historical Society, the Roxburgh and Comstock Club.

Claude T. Faw of Carmel also became interested in our study of this California historian and writer and during a

recent visit to Columbia he photographed the bronze tablet of "The Stage Drivers' Retreat" and "dug out" from old times the following information: "Ezra Dane was a visitor in Columbia and he became so interested in the stories of the past and spent many hours in the company of the old-timers, listening to their tall tales of the past. Later he wrote the book, "Ghost Town" and the early release was not particularly successful. Mr. Dane becoming discouraged, took his own life in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. To him is due the credit of more or less reviving E. Clampus Vitus, or possibly he enthused over the organization and his efforts led to the revival of their activities."

"Ghost Town" is a book wherein is told much that is wonderful, laughable, and tragic; and some that is hard to believe, about life during the Gold Rush and later in the town of Columbia on California's Mother Lode, which is now a State Monument administered by the State Division of Beaches and Parks. Dane took note of these tales as remembered by the oldest inhabitants and set them down for the first time. As often happens popularity and appreciation did not come to Ezra Dane until after his death.

The story of "Ghost Town" begins: "No Sir, nobody has a better right than me to sit on this stump. I planted the old poplar myself on the corner here, near sixty years ago. It got to be three foot through at the ground, as you can see, and it must have been eighty feet high. But the roots begun to upheave the sidewalk bricks, and when the limbs would blow they'd brush the shakes off the awning of Mike Rehm's Pioneer Saloon, so the old tree had to come down.

"Well they must come an end to all things, no matter how great or how good. With men, and trees, and towns, it's all the same. And so it is with me. I grew up with this old town and I've come down with it." So philosophizes the old-timer as he sits on the stump and spins his tales of Columbia when "a fellow did not have to travel to see the world. The whole world came here then with all samples of humanity."

(To be continued)