PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-03

Ephraim Bee in the newspapers, 1855–1860: the remembered founder of E Clampus Vitus in records of his own day

Michael Urbanski ORCID 0009-0006-8183-5828 (https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8183-5828), Project Scroll · Issued 25 October 2026 · Version 1 · doi:10.5281/zenodo.23631262 (https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23631262)

SUMMARY

Ephraim Bee of Doddridge County, Virginia, is remembered as the founder of E Clampus Vitus, but everything told of his part comes from accounts written in 1863 or later, and from a notice of 1853 that survives only as a quotation of 1931. Newspapers of his own day, read on the page, show him in the order from 1855, and show the joke growing as it went. In April 1855 a Clarksburg paper reported "Ephraim Bee, the Gwand Iwiseutis of the Eclampus Vitus," declaring Know-Nothingism "a branch of his 'ancient and honorable order.'" In August 1856 he was "the Grand Hote Tote," with "despatches from the Emperor of China." In February 1858 a Parkersburg paper had him lecturing on the order at Richmond, where initiations were "nightly performed." And in March 1860 a Richmond report called him "Grand Lama" of an order "introduced into the United States on the return of the Hon. Caleb Cushing." These are the earliest records of Bee in the order we have found that can be read on the page, and they put Caleb Cushing into the story years before the earliest telling we had found, in the Wheeling *Daily Intelligencer* of 1 February 1867.

THE RECORD

1. ***Cooper's Clarksburg Register*** **(Clarksburg, Va.), 25 April 1855, p. 3, "Know-Nothingism in Gilmer"**

> *"We are informed that since Ephraim Bee, the Gwand Iwiseutis of the Eclampus Vitus, has declared that Know-Nothingism is a branch of his 'ancient and honorable order,' that the society has been quite flourishing in Glennville. A large number of gentlemen have been initiated into the secret order, according to the most approved forms of the Eclampus." (The w's of "Gwand Iwiseutis" are set in italic in the original: the joke is a lisp.)*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn85059716/1855-04-25/ed-1/?sp=3)

2. ***Cooper's Clarksburg Register*****, 15 August 1856, p. 2, a letter from Glenville dated 9 August 1856**

> *"... the renowned Ephraim Bee, the Grand Hote Tote of Eclampus, Vitus, on the part of Know-Nothingism. The Grand Syrus Cutus, said that he had recently received despatches from the Emperor of China, ordering him to make the 'grand rounds' of the State of Virginia, and excommunicate all members from the Eclampus, who had not given in their adherence to Know-Nothingism." The letter goes on that Bee passed sentence "upon the venerable Colonel, who had formerly been a disciple of Ephraim's": that is, "Col. Joel Yancey, of 'Upper Egypt,'" named earlier in the letter, and very likely the "Colonel Yancey" the Weston Herald of 1853 is quoted as calling Bee's deputy.*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn85059716/1856-08-15/ed-1/?sp=2)

3. ***Winchester Republican*** **(Winchester, Va.), 26 February 1858, p. 2, "Great Excitement," from the *Parkersburg Gazette***

> *"Ephraim Bee, 'Grand Ariscutis of the E Clampus Vitus,' is delivering a course of lectures, in Richmond, on the rise and progress of this noble institution. The solemn and impressive ceremony of initiation is nightly performed, and, so great is the rush for admission into the order, that many of the applicants are 'put through by daylight.' It is a subject of rejoicing, that the 'Celestial Order' has so distinguished a representative at the Capital of Virginia, as the gentleman from Doddridge."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn86071898/1858-02-26/ed-1/?sp=2)

4. ***Richmond Enquirer*****, 19 February 1858, p. 2, "Legislature of Virginia," House of Delegates, 18 February**

> *Among "Senate bills passed": "Authorizing Jonathan M. Bennett to convey by deed to Ephraim Bee of the county of Doddridge, certain forfeited and delinquent lands, sold in the county of Jackson, but now in the county of Roane, upon the payment of a balance of purchase money."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn84024735/1858-02-19/ed-1/?sp=2)

5. ***Kanawha Valley Star*** **(Charleston, Va.), 9 February 1858, p. 2, Senate proceedings of about 1 February 1858**

> *"JOINT RESOLUTION. Of appointing a select committee of three, for reporting a bill to release Ephraim Bee from the payment of a part of the purchase money of certain lands purchased by him at a sale of forfeited and delinquent lands in the county of Jackson, and authorizing the appointment of a commissioner to make him a deed and receive a balance due the Commonwealth. (Committee: Messrs. Neal, Brannon and Taliaferro.)"*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn85059862/1858-02-09/ed-1/?sp=2)

6. ***Alexandria Gazette*, 8 March 1860, p. 2, a report of the House of Delegates at Richmond**

> *The contested election of the sitting member "from Tyler and Doddridge, whose seat is contested by Ephraim Bee, who is said to be the Grand Lama of the celestial order of 'E. Clampus Vitis;' an order of the Celestial Empire, that dates back 7000 years, and which was introduced into the United States on the return of the Hon. Caleb Cushing, Minister to China." The House confirmed the sitting member.*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn85025007/1860-03-08/ed-1/?sp=2)

7. ***Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling), 18 July 1863, p. 1, "The First West Va. Legislature," sketch of Ephraim Bee**

> *Bee "spent the winter of '57–8 at Richmond, and while there initiated the greater part of the Legislature ..."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America; transcribed by West Virginia Archives and History · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn84026845/1863-07-18/ed-1/?sp=1)

8. ***Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, 1 February 1867, p. 2**

> *Bee "has set up his tabernacle at the McLure House, and is now initiating candidates"; he is "the recognized American head" of the order, and "The Hon. Caleb Cushing, of Massachusetts, is said to be the man who brought the secrets of the order to this country, and communicated them to Mr. Bee." Until these papers were found, this was the earliest telling of Cushing we knew.*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn84026844/1867-02-01/ed-1/?sp=2)

9. **Earl G. Swem, "A Register of the General Assembly of Virginia, 1776–1918," *Report of the Virginia State Library*, 1917 (Richmond, 1918), p. 179, session of 7 December 1857 to 8 April 1858**

> *Doddridge and Tyler. John McKay. Bee is not in the register's indexes of members, which run from 1776 to 1918.*

Library of Virginia; complete scan at the Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/registerofgenera00virg)

10. **Alvaro F. Gibbens, *Wood County Formation: A Century of Progress* (Morgantown: Acme Press, 1899), p. 48**

> *Of the jury hall of the first Wood County court house at Parkersburg: "it is asserted that Ephraim Bee, the humorist politician and legislator, in the midnight hour oft gathered the dignified and sedate novitiates of local prominence and the legal lights of other counties there to enjoy the mysteries and deep secrets veiled in the order of E. Clampus Vitis … "A later memory, not a record of the time.*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/woodcountyformat00gibb/page/48/)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The order's histories tell Bee's part from accounts written after the fact: the Wheeling sketch of 1863, an 1896 account in the *Parkersburg State Journal*, Boyd Stutler's article of 1931 and the anthology *E Clampus Vitus* (2000). These newspapers of 1855–1860, none of them cited in any history of the order we have found, catch the order while it was news. They show Bee styled its head, in the papers' joke-titles, in his own country by April 1855, and tie the order there to the politics of the Know-Nothing years. They name the Emperor of China by 1856 (the *Weston Herald* of 1853, as Stutler quotes it, already has Bee "first commissioned Grand Gyascutis for the United States of America by the Grand Hotetote of China") and Caleb Cushing by 1860, where the earliest telling of Cushing we had found was in the Wheeling *Daily Intelligencer* of 1 February 1867. They date his winter of initiations at Richmond by a squib of February 1858, and show a reason for his being there: a private bill in his favour, for lands in Roane County, passed the House of Delegates on 18 February 1858, having begun in the Senate as a joint resolution about 1 February. And they show the titles given him changing with every telling: Gwand Iwiseutis (1855), Grand Hote Tote and Grand Syrus Cutus (1856), Grand Ariscutis (1858), Grand Lama (1860). The *Weston Herald* of 1853, as Stutler quotes it, gives two: Bee was "first commissioned Grand Gyascutis," and Colonel Yancey was "legally deputized and commissioned by the Grand Lama, Ephraim Bee."

LIMITS

These are jokes in partisan newspapers, not minute books. The 1855 item reports Know-Nothings at Glenville initiated "according to the most approved forms of the Eclampus"; it shows no lodge of the order there, and does not say who did the initiating. The 1858 squib is known from the *Winchester Republican*'s copy. The *Parkersburg Gazette* original has not been found: the paper (then the *Parkersburg Gazette and Virginia Courier*) is not in Chronicling America, and the West Virginia State Archives' loose issues skip 1858. A microfilm run is reported at the Parkersburg and Wood County Public Library, which we have not checked. The *Enquirer* heads its report "Friday, February 18," though 18 February 1858 was a Thursday. Bee did not sit in the 1857–58 session, or in any other session of the Virginia General Assembly: Swem's register gives John McKay for Doddridge and Tyler, and Bee is in neither of its indexes of members, 1776–1918 (read in machine-read text of a complete scan). In 1860 he contested the Tyler and Doddridge seat, without success. So his winter at Richmond was not spent as a member. (He did sit in the first legislature of West Virginia, in 1863, which Swem does not cover.) That "Grand Hote Tote" and "Grand Syrus Cutus" of 1856 both mean Bee is our reading of the letter. The 1896 *Parkersburg State Journal* account is known to us at second hand, and without its day; the paper is not online. Boyd Stutler's collection at the West Virginia State Archives (Ms78-1), whose E Clampus Vitus files run from 1936, has not been checked and may hold these or other early clippings.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The Library of Congress's Chronicling America newspapers for "Ephraim Bee," "Eclampus," "Clampus," "Ariscutis," "Gyascutis," "Iwiseutis," "Hote Tote," "Syrus Cutus" and "Grand Lama," 1845–1870; the Internet Archive's full text, including the anthology *E Clampus Vitus* (2000), for the same words and for Glenville, Clarksburg, Richmond and Parkersburg; Wikipedia's articles on Ephraim Bee and E Clampus Vitus; the Doddridge County Heritage Guild; West Virginia Archives and History; Albert Shumate's history; *Then and Now* (1966); web searches; the Internet Archive's full text for "Old-Time Secret Order"; Chronicling America, 1895–1898; the West Virginia State

Archives' lists of loose newspapers; Gibbens, *Wood County Formation* (1899); Myers, *History of West Virginia* (1915); the West Virginia University *Guide to Manuscripts* (1974); the research repositories Zenodo, OpenAlex and Crossref, with Google Scholar, JSTOR, Academia.edu and ResearchGate through web searches (OSF, Semantic Scholar, CORE, SSRN and arXiv could not be searched from our tools).

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/).

"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. *Weston Herald* (Weston, Va.), 28 November 1853 (vol. 1, no. 13), as quoted by Boyd B. Stutler, "Ephraim Bee, Grand Gyascutis," *West Virginia Review*, August 1931; reprinted in *Credo quia absurdum* (Placerville: E Clampus Vitus, 1949). A typescript index and transcription of the *Weston Herald* from this issue to 3 June 1861 is held by the West Virginia & Regional History Center, West Virginia University (Box 22, Notebook 10, pp. 6–78). https://archives.lib.wvu.edu/repositories/2/archival_objects/51858
2. Boyd B. Stutler, "Ephraim Bee, Grand Gyascutis," *West Virginia Review*, August 1931; reprinted in E Clampus Vitus, *Credo quia absurdum* (Placerville: ECV 5954, 1949). https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31822035077338
3. *Parkersburg Gazette and Virginia Courier* (Parkersburg, Va.; weekly, 1854–1860), February 1858, "Great Excitement," known only as reprinted in the *Winchester Republican*, 26 February 1858, p. 2.
4. "Story of an Old-Time Secret Order and Its Founder," *State Journal* (Parkersburg, W. Va.), 1896; known at second hand from Jennifer Wilt, "Ephraim Bee and E Clampus Vitus," Doddridge County Heritage Guild (first printed in *The Doddridge Independent*, column "Our Heritage"), accessed October 2026. https://www.doddridgecountyheritageguild.com/ephraim-bee-e-clampus-vitus

5. Seth Slopes, *E Clampus Vitus: Now & Then: The Replete History of ECV* (Murphys, Calif.: Old Timers Museum, 2000). Internet Archive (borrow). https://archive.org/details/eclampusvitus0000seth
6. Boyd Blynn Stutler Collection, Ms78-1, West Virginia State Archives (West Virginia Archives and History), Charleston; Series 8, Box 5 holds "E Clampus Vitus" correspondence, newspaper articles and photographs, 1936–1959, accessed October 2026. https://archive.wvculture.org/history/collections/manuscripts/ms78-1.html
7. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, accessed October 2026. https://www.loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america/
8. Internet Archive, full-text search. https://archive.org/
9. Wikipedia, "Ephraim Bee," and its references, accessed October 2026. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephraim_Bee
10. Wikipedia, "E Clampus Vitus," and its references, accessed October 2026. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E_Clampus_Vitus
11. Jennifer Wilt, "Ephraim Bee and E Clampus Vitus," Doddridge County Heritage Guild (West Union, W. Va.), accessed October 2026. https://www.doddridgecountyheritageguild.com/ephraim-bee-e-clampus-vitus
12. West Virginia Archives and History, "Ephraim Bee" (profile of 1863, transcribed for the West Virginia sesquicentennial), accessed October 2026. https://archive.wvculture.org/History/sesquicentennial/biobeeephraim.html
13. Albert Shumate, "The Mysterious History of E Clampus Vitus," talk to the San Francisco Corral of Westerners, 25 June 1991, as published by the Julia C. Bulette Chapter No. 1864, E Clampus Vitus, "ECV History," accessed October 2026. https://juliacbulette.com/ecv-history/
14. Dave Dunlap, R. Coke Wood and others, *Then and Now: The Story of E Clampus Vitus* (Stockton: E Clampus Vitus, 1966). PDF published by the Joaquin Murrieta Chapter No. 13. https://ecv13.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Then_and_Now_1966.pdf
15. Sylvester Myers, *Myers' History of West Virginia*, vol. 2 (Wheeling: Wheeling News Lithograph Co., 1915), p. 178. Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/myershistoryofwe02myer
16. *Guide to Manuscripts and Archives in the West Virginia Collection* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1974), entry 261, "E Clampus Vitus. Papers, 1850–1966" (A&M 2012). Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/guidetomanuscrip0000west_b1o2

17. West Virginia Archives and History, lists of miscellaneous newspapers held, accessed October 2026. https://archive.wvculture.org/history/newspapers/

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:

- `bee-clarksburg-1855` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#bee-clarksburg-1855)
- `bee-richmond-1858` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#bee-richmond-1858)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

Michael Urbanski, “Ephraim Bee in the newspapers, 1855–1860: the remembered founder of E Clampus Vitus in records of his own day,” Project Scroll Research Note 2026-03, version 1 (25 October 2026), https://projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-03/. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23631262.

BibTeX

```
@techreport{urbanski202603,
  author      = {Urbanski, Michael},
  orcid       = {0009-0006-8183-5828},
  title       = {{Ephraim Bee in the newspapers, 1855--1860: the
remembered founder of E Clampus Vitus in records of his own day}},
  institution = {Project Scroll},
  type        = {Project Scroll Research Note},
  number      = {2026-03},
  year        = {2026},
  month       = {oct},
  url         = {https://projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-03/},
  doi         = {10.5281/zenodo.23631262},
  note        = {Version 1}
}
```