PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-22

The first known appearance of E Clampus Vitus in print read in full: the Connersville letter of February 1846, its two editors, and what the oldest spelling of the name suggests

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SUMMARY

The earliest dated mention of the order yet found, a letter from Connersville, Indiana, printed in the *Indiana American* of Brookville on 27 February 1846, has been quoted only for its last sentence. Read in full, it is a defence of the travelling mesmerist I. I. Keely, whose lectures had restored a deaf man's hearing by sworn affidavit, and its jibe is aimed at his two skeptical critics, the editors William Stewart of Connersville and James H. Hunt of the *Cambridge City Reveille*: both, the writer says, are "naturally qualified members of the 'Eclampsus Vitus' society, an order of which, we have in our town." By February 1846 the name was already a byword at Connersville for a society of solemn fools. The note also sets out a reading of the name from its oldest spelling. The Indiana papers of 1846–47 write the first word as one ("Eclampsus," "Eclampses," "Eclampees"); *eclampsis* was a medical word of the day for a convulsive fit, and an English handbook of 1838 lists "convulsions; St. Vitus's dance; eclampsis" together. "Eclampsus Vitus" may run two names for fits together in dog Latin; no member of the old order said so.

THE RECORD

1. ***Indiana American*** **(Brookville), 27 February 1846, p. 2: letter from Connersville, 20 February 1846, signed "W."**

   > *"'Stewart,' our editor, who has just returned from the State Legislature … has boldly brayed 'humbug.'… The long eared editor of the 'Cambridge Reveille' came out in a long and labored article … To both of these learned expositors of news our citizens are universally of the opinion that they are naturally qualified members of the 'Eclampsus Vitus' society, an order of which, we have in our town."*

   Hoosier State Chronicles · See the record (https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=IA18460227.1.2)

2. ***History of Fayette County, Indiana*** **(1885), pp. 94–95**

   > *William Stewart (1815–1865), printer, publisher of the Indiana Telegraph at Connersville from about 1843–45.*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/historyoffayette00warn/page/n98/mode/1up)

3. ***History of Wayne County, Indiana*** **(1884), vol. 1, p. 537**

   > *"The first paper printed in Cambridge City was the Cambridge City Reveille, started in the summer of 1845 by James H. Hunt."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/historyofwayneco01inte/page/n562/mode/1up)

4. **H. F. Dunsford,** ***The Pathogenetic Effects of Some of the Principal Homoeopathic Remedies*** **(London, 1838), p. 257**

   > *"convulsions; St. Vitus's dance; eclampsis."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/pathogeneticeff00dunsgoog/page/n268/mode/1up)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The order's first appearance in print gains its context, its date of writing (20 February 1846) and the names of the two men it mocked, who were not members. The search for anything earlier in Indiana's digitized newspapers, 1836–1851, came up empty, which fixes the letter as the earliest record yet found.

LIMITS

The 1846 page was read in the archive's machine-read text; the page image is locked on the site. The letter-writer "W." is not identified. The reading of the name is an interpretation, not a record.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

Hoosier State Chronicles for every spelling and wildcard form of the order's name, 1836–1851, each page read; Chronicling America, every page returned for "vitus" or "vitis" in eight states, 1840–1846, and every Indiana page of 1843–1847; the Fayette and Wayne County histories.

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.

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WORKS CITED

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

1. Howard S. Rogers, *History of Cass County, from 1825 to 1875* (1875), pp. 253–254. https://archive.org/details/historyofcasscou00roge

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in A lodge of E Clampus Vitus, in Cassopolis, in 1846 (projectscroll.com/news/e-clampus-vitus-in-cassopolis-1846/). In the discoveries register:

- `connersville-letter-1846` (`projectscroll.com/discoveries/#connersville-letter-1846`)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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