

# THE STUMP

*The latest news and updates from the Vance Birthplace Historic Site*



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## Discovering Perseverance

From a historic building that has weathered over two centuries of change, interpretation that has shifted over 60 years, and the Vance staff's patience in dealing with damage from Tropical Storm Fred, this issue of *The Stump* is filled with stories of perseverance. As we continue to find our rhythm in an ongoing pandemic, we will also persevere in sharing the history of the Vance Birthplace with our visitors. Therefore, we are excited about the new projects our staff and interns have created over the last few months. Read on to learn about our latest exhibits, research, and digital programming. And don't forget to check out the last page of this newsletter to discover how you can support the site and help us on our journey of perseverance!

## A Message from Kimberly

KIMBERLY FLOYD, SITE MANAGER

*"So often in life, things that you regard as an impediment turn out to be great, good fortune." Ruth Bader Ginsburg*

As Lauren and I discussed the theme for this newsletter, I thought about what has happened at the site since our last publication in April 2021. I reflected on the summer and our Juneteenth exhibit that examined the historiography of the site itself, delving into how the interpretation has developed and changed over the years. I thought about numerous additional *Quarantined Historians Maybe* or *Maybe Not Drinking Coffee* episodes that I thought would be only one season, but the pandemic continues. I considered our first in person school program and the new challenges with face-to-face programming. I contemplated the impact of our newest wayside on Elizabeth Hemphill or the golf cart we acquired. And then honestly... I felt tired. And I paused. I paused to be present. I realized the absolute dedication of our staff and their ability to persevere no matter what comes their way. Thus, our theme, perseverance.



As people who work in museums every day, we spend a lot of time thinking about the past or the future; planning programs, planning exhibits, the list goes on. But how can our museums pause, and both honor the past and persevere while remaining present? How can we best serve the needs of the community today? I believe we honor our past by continuing to question. Question the resources we have available, question how we interpret them internally, and question how we then share that narrative with the public. Tilden said, "the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation." The best way we can serve the community is by hearing your questions. What stories do you want to know more about? How best do you learn? What museums have you been to, that you enjoyed, and why? Your local historic sites can help create a sense of community and a place not only to educate on the history of the area but create a shared present as well. I encourage you to visit us, in-person or virtually, participate in the many interpretive touchpoints, join the steadfast commitment of the staff, and persevere with us.



# Atonement: Journey to Juneteenth

LAUREN MAY, ASSISTANT SITE MANAGER

*"Who says history doesn't matter?" David Tate, Former Site Manager, Vance Birthplace*



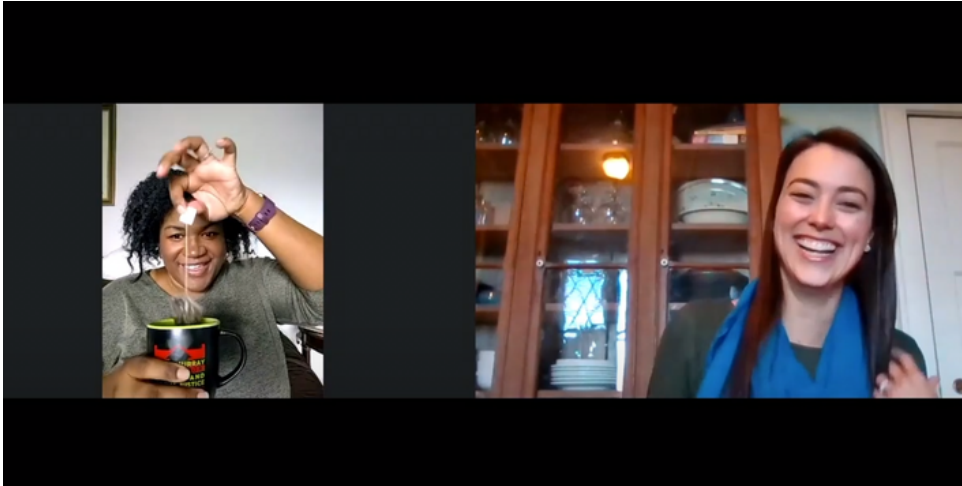
*Left: The new exhibit includes a video component with interviews from former site staff and other public history colleagues. Center: Former site manager David Tate explores the Vance Birthplace scrapbook collection with current site manager Kimberly. Right: The panels of "Atonement: Journey to Juneteenth" are portable and can be reconfigured to fit anywhere on site.*

Whenever former site manager David Tate stops by for a visit, staff know to settle in for a nice long chat. With nearly 30 years of reminiscences to share, David always brings the best stories. His memory came in handy this year as staff worked on a new exhibit--*Atonement: Journey to Juneteenth*--that explores the evolution of the site's interpretation. David dropped in to go through boxes of photographs taken at the site and to fill in the stories behind the images. These stories provided the backbone of the new exhibit, which chronicles the site's 60+ year history as a journey leading to our 2020 *Juneteenth in the Reems Creek Valley* installation.

Dedicated on May 13, 1961, the Vance Birthplace opened to the public as a shrine to North Carolina governor and senator Zebulon B. Vance, who was born on the property in 1830. Throughout the last six decades, interpreters at this site have moved beyond that original purpose to build a more diverse and inclusive narrative. In addition to sharing that evolution, our *Atonement* exhibit fits into this continuing process of inclusivity and transparency by taking an honest look at this ongoing process.

Working with our support group, the Mountain History & Culture Group, we developed an exhibit that examines the site's past through a historiographical lens. We examined how local and national events, from the Civil Rights Movement to the protests in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, impacted the interpretation at Vance. This study encouraged us to take a step back from our work and view where we fit into the continuing narrative of this property, and it helped us create an exhibit that forms a dialogue between past and present, visitor and staff, history and interpretation. To prompt this dialogue, we laid footprints on the floor of the exhibit to encourage visitors to literally view the past as a journey, a step-by-step progression that leads into the present. We hope you will visit the site soon to explore our *Journey to Juneteenth*.

# Visitors, Vehicles, & Virtual Programs: Spring & Summer at Vance Birthplace



ABOVE:  
In partnership with Civil War Trials, Inc., we unveiled a new wayside marker in July that features Elizabeth Hemphill's experience of the Civil War in the Reems Creek Valley.

TOP LEFT:  
Kimberly interviewed friends and colleagues for Season 2 of *Quarantined Historians (Maybe or Maybe Not) Drinking Coffee*. Frachele Scott shared tea and tidbits about history in Episode 3.

TOP RIGHT:  
In June, Dennis and Lauren led our first in person field trip program since March 2020. Kindergarten students learned about 19th century artifacts like this boot jack.

BOTTOM RIGHT:  
This summer we acquired a golf cart, which will make our site more accessible. We were thrilled the day it was delivered and made sure to take a selfie and a few rides around the grounds.

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## Fall 2021 Event Schedule

*"Fall has always been my favorite season. The time when everything bursts with its last beauty, as if nature had been saving up all year for the grand finale." Lauren DeStephano*



### Storytelling by the Fire

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23: 7-8 PM

Join us for an evening of storytelling to get into the spooky spirit of Halloween! Dr. Delanna Reed, professor & member of the Jonesborough Storytellers Guild, will share ghost stories from Appalachia and further afield during this twilight event. Bring your own chairs & blankets and gather around the fire to enjoy Dr. Reed's stories. Suitable for ages 12 and up.

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### An Appalachian Christmas Carol

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2: VIRTUAL

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4: ON SITE

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9: VIRTUAL

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11: ON SITE

We are excited to partner with the American Myth Center for a fifth year of this magical program! As in years past, the AMC will utilize toy and shadow theater to share the life of Venus, a woman enslaved by the Vances, during live theatrical tours at the Vance Birthplace. However, this year the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future will also be haunting the internet, taking visitors on a virtual journey through the past to illuminate Venus's story. Stay tuned to learn more about tickets and tour times!

# A Frankenstein House: Reconstructing the Vance Birthplace

COLLIN JEWELL, SUMMER 2021 INTERN

*"We are fashioned creatures, but half made up." Mary Shelley*

Lauren May cannot remember exactly when staff started calling the reconstructed Vance house their "Frankenstein house," but the nickname stuck. The term refers to the structure's makeup: some parts original, some parts new, some parts sourced from other historic homes. The Vance house is a product of a series of choices which reflect two priorities: authenticity and durability. The site planners wanted the new structure to look like a cabin built in the 1790s, but it needed to accommodate visitors far into the future. These decisions impacted the site plan at the basic level: design, labor, materials, and technique. I have become familiar with just how frankenstein-y the structure is while researching its reconstruction for an upcoming virtual exhibit, which has given me a new perspective on the Vance house.



Some aspects of the Vance house seem to blend old and new elements. The fireplace, for example, possibly crafted by men enslaved by David Vance Sr., survived many of the remodelings during the former structure's 160 year existence, but not without changes. In the image to the left, the hole probably created in the chimney for a stove flue is visible, as well as the edges of the hearth worn from the leaning of women and heavy pots. The two local brick masons in the image worked to restore the fireplace by removing the first inch of mortar and replacing it with cement (which was thought to be more durable), and by adding new brick to the hole and the height of the chimney (which was thought to create a more authentic look). The "original" fireplace, therefore, is more a blended structure than uniform.

*Two men work to restore the original 1790s fireplace before reconstruction begins in 1960.*

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The wood of the Vance house represents a joining of original, new, and sourced, rather than blending. The log siding, as well as portions of the interior paneling and flooring, required new logs and local skilled professionals who could hand-hew the wood using old tools (as seen in the right image), therefore creating an authentic looking cabin. The new wood also needed to match the older wood incorporated into the reconstructed house. Sections of flooring and paneling came from the former Vance house, and others that were relocated from historic homes in the area: Rhea house (Beech Community), Garrison house (Barnardsville), and McLean house (Weaverville). The staircase came from the Hemphill house. The Vance house wood thus appears like a collage of old and new materials, labor, techniques, and design to achieve authenticity and durability.



*Workmen lift the shaped pine logs into place on the second story of the reconstructed Vance House. Ca. 1960*



*Workmen use traditional tools to shape the logs for the outer walls of the reconstructed Vance House. Ca. 1960.*

The Vance house did not simply become the “Frankenstein house,” rather, it was intentional, a product of design for a site that would look like an old cabin but could better withstand years of the elements and visitors. The Vance house is still changing and is not quite “new” anymore, ringing in its sixtieth anniversary since reconstruction this year. Since 1961, the shingles have been replaced, the logs have worn from their bright yellow pine color, and each visitor and demonstration continues to add wear to the house. Such activities and changes contribute to the Vance house’s blend and collage of old and new.

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While completing her internship at the Vance Birthplace, Collin Jewell designed a virtual exhibit that explores the construction and reconstruction of the Vance House. You can visit Collin's exhibit online at [vbcabinconstruction.omeka.net](http://vbcabinconstruction.omeka.net).

## What about Bob? Researching Robert Brank Vance

NILS SKUDRA, SUMMER 2021 INTERN

*"Robert B. Vance is a very different man from Z. B. Vance. He is honest, has no political ambition, and is poor." Governor William W. Holden, 1865*

Over the course of my internship with the Vance Birthplace State Historic Site, I have focused on Robert Brank Vance, the older brother of North Carolina's Civil War- and post-Reconstruction-era governor Zebulon Baird Vance, as the topic for my research. While Zebulon Vance has held a prominent and controversial role in North Carolina's history, Robert Vance has not received as much attention due to his having kept a lower profile, and therefore I endeavored to explore his life and career, with particular emphasis on Robert's views regarding race and civil rights and whether they differed from those of his brother. In the process of conducting my research, I uncovered a wide variety of intriguing facts which shed light on Robert B. Vance and his stances on these issues.



*Robert B. Vance, ca. 1870s.*

Based on my research thus far, I have learned that Robert B. Vance did indeed share his brother's views on a variety of issues, including race and civil rights, which were made poignantly clear in his January 10, 1874 speech to the U.S. House of Representatives. In this speech, Vance declared his opposition to a proposed civil rights bill on the grounds that it mandated "social rights," which he distinguished from "civil rights" in the sense that "social rights" entailed the imposition of social equality between the races, including the right to sit at the same tables with whites without distinction. While Vance affirmed that his opposition was not based on hatred or prejudice - he even noted that he had taught "a colored Sunday school of one hundred and fifty scholars" - his argument nonetheless expressed the paternalistic racism that

had been a common argument for slavery during the antebellum period, and at certain points the speech employed white supremacist rhetoric, stating that "if the question is ever presented in the South, shall this country be ruled by white men or ruled by colored men? the colored man is not able to stand any such an antagonism as that; he will necessarily, sir, go down." While he concluded the speech by expressing support for giving "the colored man the opportunity of improvement" through education, Vance also added the requirement that schools be segregated and that the issue of social equality "be left to the States," noting that "the rights of the colored man are coming on, and if he will place himself in a proper attitude he will secure them."

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While he may not have kept as high a profile as Zebulon Vance, Robert clearly adhered to the prevalent white supremacist views of the period, which he articulated in the language of paternalism, and was staunchly opposed to federal civil rights legislation on the grounds of states' rights and the assertion that mandated social equality would harm race relations in the South. Furthermore, in studying his subsequent remarks on the date of this speech, I found that Robert Vance was unrepentant about his wartime allegiance to the Confederacy and the legacy of Confederate soldiers, as he maintained that they fought for what they believed was right. At the same time, however, he advocated sectional reconciliation and supported education for African Americans, although he urged that it take place in segregated schools. I found this particularly striking as his argument for maintaining segregated schools was highly reminiscent of the language that subsequent southern leaders would use in their opposition to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Furthermore, it is highly significant that Robert Vance warned of the closing of southern schools as a consequence of federally imposed social equality, given that southern leaders would actually follow through with this threat in response to the *Brown v. Board* decision.

As we study the lives of Robert B. Vance and his more famous brother, they serve as important examples of the ideology that was widely accepted across the South and much of the U.S., the complexities of their stances on issues of race and civil rights, and how our society has progressed in its outlook over the subsequent 150 years.



*Learn more about Robert Vance by visiting the Vance Birthplace and exploring our exhibit, The Other Brother, on display in our visitor center.*

## How You Can Support the Vance Birthplace

*Donate!* Your financial contributions help us care for the historic buildings and artifacts; create educational programs, online content, and special events; and bring the history of western North Carolina to an ever-expanding audience. You can send a check made out to the Vance Birthplace to the address below or call (828) 645-6706 to donate over the phone. You can also visit Amazon.com to purchase much needed items from our [wishlist!](#)

*Attend programs!* Join us for our virtual and in-person events, from our Facebook Live videos to our Appalachian Christmas Carol. We love seeing familiar faces and new visitors at our programs.

*Visit!* The Vance Birthplace Site Visitor Center and historic structures are open, weather and staffing permitting. Please call the site to determine what activities are available on the day of your visit. We look forward to seeing you soon!

*Share the love!* Drop us a line sharing why you love the Vance Birthplace! Whether through email, snail mail, or social media messaging, your supportive words inspire us!



VANCE BIRTHPLACE STATE HISTORIC SITE

911 REEMS CREEK RD, WEAVERVILLE, NC

VANCE@NCDCCR.GOV

828.645.6706