

THE STUMP

The latest news and updates from the Vance Birthplace Historic Site



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Primary Sources

On March 2, we hosted our first in person field trip for middle grades since 2020. This program explores primary sources: the documents, stories, artifacts, and structures from the past that provide insight into a particular time and place. We encourage students to ask questions rather than answer them, an exercise our staff regularly practices as public historians. We constantly wonder about the people who lived in the Reems Creek Valley, and as we discover answers about the past, we often uncover even more questions.

In this issue of *The Stump*, we are sharing some of our primary sources and historical questions with you, and we challenge you to ask your own questions about the past.

A Message from Kimberly

KIMBERLY FLOYD, SITE MANAGER

"One way we explore our sources is by asking questions." Kimberly Floyd

I can't tell you how many times over the years a school child has asked me whether I was an artifact after I explained what they were. Touché fourth graders across North Carolina...touché. While our visitors take tours, read our exhibits, and come to our special programs to learn history, we find it increasingly important that our guests understand the resources we have used, primary or secondary. Primary sources are first-hand accounts. They typically include materials like legal documents (marriage certificates, wills, estate sales), eyewitness accounts, census records, pieces of creative writing, audio and video recordings, photographs, or artifacts. Secondary sources, such as journal articles and books, interpret and analyze primary sources.



As public historians, we use these sources to interpret history for the public and encourage reflection, thought, and discussion. Much of our discussion centers around connecting to these materials through the tangibles, intangibles, and universals that we attach to our resources. Tangibles are the physical elements of a site or object. The cradle in the sitting room is made of wood, it is hard, it is brown. Intangibles are the meanings or abstract concepts including ideas, feelings, relationships, values, or beliefs. The cradle may make you think about the relationship between a mother and her child on the plantation. Universals are ideas or emotions that can appeal or have meaning to almost everyone, i.e. family, death, prejudice, love, hunger. The cradle provides an opportunity for discussion around the family dynamic and love on an early 1800s plantation in western North Carolina.

One way we explore our sources is by asking questions. My question for you is, what kind of feelings might Venus, a woman enslaved by the Vances, have while rocking a baby in the cradle in the sitting room who would one day grow up to own her?



A 19th century cradle on display at the Vance Birthplace. Venus rocked the Vance children in a cradle like this one.

Join us for Juneteenth at the Vance Birthplace

"History has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own." Michelle Obama



Leah & the Rabbit

A Juneteenth Play at the Vance Birthplace

Presented by the American Myth Center and the
Mountain History & Culture Group

Saturday, June 18 @ 1:00 pm

Leah & the Rabbit: A Conversation on Resiliency & Reclaiming Narratives

SATURDAY, JUNE 18: 1-3 PM

We are partnering with the American Myth Center to present an afternoon of historical drama and discussion on the appropriation of African American stories, resiliency among enslaved people, and the romanticized view of the plantation past. This performance will utilize moving panoramas and puppetry to tell the story of Leah Erwin, who experienced slavery and emancipation, interspersed with traditional Brer Rabbit tales.

The three-act piece begins with a tour of the 1790s slave dwelling, which includes the contextualization of the stories of Brer Rabbit. Following the play, *Leah & the Rabbit*, the program will conclude with a reflection about the play, the perpetuation of the Lost Cause mentality, and the reclaiming of our collective histories.

We are excited to work with writer and director Mikayla Wilson--who directed last year's production of *An Appalachian Christmas Carol*--and to welcome Dr. Oralene Simmons, internationally recognized civil rights leader, to the site for the post-play discussion. Although this is a free program, registration is encouraged as space is limited. You can register for the program on Eventbrite [here](#).

This is an outdoor program. Some chairs are available but participants are encouraged to bring their own chairs and blankets.

LAUREN MAY, ASSISTANT SITE MANAGER

REPUBLICAN MEETING IN BUNCOMBE CO.

According to previous notice the colored citizens of Buncombe County met at the Sulphur Springs Academy, Saturday, the 18th May, 1867.

When, on motion of Lewis Young, Sandy Erwin was called to the Chair, and James Hudson requested to act as Secretary.

The Chairman then appointed the following gentlemen as a committee on resolutions: Lewis Young, Charles Johnston, Jas. Moore, Frederick Hawkins, Samuel Henry and B. Jenkins.

The meeting was then addressed by Messrs. Virgil S. Lusk, James J. Osborne and Thos. J. Candler. The committee then reported the following preamble and resolutions which were unanimously adopted:

WHEREAS, We, the colored citizens of the County of Buncombe, North Carolina, do hereby

[illegible]

Left: Republican Meeting in Buncombe Co. Raleigh Standard: June 1, 1867. Sandy Erwin is named in this article.
Center: West Asheville, looking toward the west. Wilbur G. Zeigler & Ben S. Grosscup, The Heart of the Alleghanies: Or, Western North Carolina (1883).
Right: Census record from 1870 listing Sandy Erwin's household in Sulphur Springs Township (in present-day West Asheville).

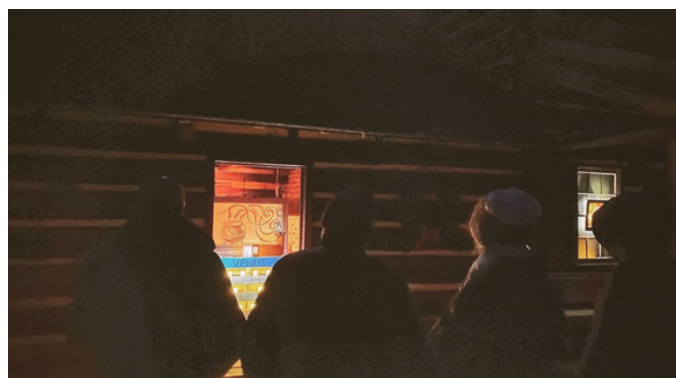
While researching another topic last year, our Mountain History and Culture Group board president discovered Sandy Erwin's name in a newspaper article published in the Raleigh Standard on June 1, 1867. We were excited to learn that Sandy was elected chairman at a May 18 meeting of African American men in support of the Republican Party in Buncombe County. The group drew up a list of resolves, including this statement:

"That with hearts full to overflowing do we hail with joy and delight the passing of a bill by the 39th Congress, which gives us the political rights of citizens. Though we have been rescued from bondage, yet without this dearest right of an American citizen, we would be unable to defend ourselves or reward our benefactors, the Republicans."

This article shares more of Sandy's life after emancipation and tells us that he quickly joined in the political discussions taking place during Reconstruction. We also see that Sandy commanded the respect of his community, as he was selected to chair the meeting. This new (to us) source also leaves us with questions. Since the new laws mentioned in the article only applied to African American men, we cannot help but wonder how Sandy's wife, Leah Erwin, felt about the politics at this time. Did she, too, wish for suffrage? Was she proud of her husband's political role in their community? Did she discuss politics with her husband? Did her thoughts, and the thoughts of the other men's wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, make it into their resolves? And finally, how did Sandy and Leah react in the coming decades as they saw the promises of Reconstruction and the 14th Amendment crushed by men like Zebulon Vance?

What questions does this source inspire for you? What would you like to learn more about?

Gloamings, Ghosts, & Guided Tours: Fall & Winter at Vance Birthplace



TOP LEFT:

We had a wonderful turnout at October's Storytelling event, our first in person event since March of 2020. Dr. Delanna Reed thrilled visitors with ghost stories of Appalachia and beyond.

TOP RIGHT:

The staff carved turnips for Halloween and learned about the Celtic roots of the holiday. These turnip lanterns decorated the front desk and made visitors smile!

BOTTOM RIGHT:

In December, *An Appalachian Christmas Carol* returned as an in person program with a few updates and modifications because of the pandemic. However, visitors were still enchanted!

ABOVE:

3rd graders learn about the history of the Vance Birthplace as Lauren leads a field trip tour of the slave dwelling. We loved having students visit again after a year of virtual programs!

Black Bears: Using Nature & Artifacts as Primary Sources

LAYTON ATKINS, HISTORIC INTERPRETER

"Bears not only make the habitat rich, they enrich us just by being."
Linda Jo Hunter

The North American Black Bear is often seen as a symbol of the Appalachian Mountains, and for good reason, as I have discovered while researching this animal. The species is the only kind found in the wilds of both North Carolina and the eastern United States at large. Weighing anywhere between 130-660 pounds for males and 90-175 pounds for females, black bears can be seen as large and lumbering creatures but are quite adept at climbing, swimming and running. Indeed, black bears have been clocked at running over 35 miles per hour while traveling short distances.



Bear fat candle on display at the Vance Birthplace.



Bear trap on display at the Vance Birthplace.

When European settlers made their way into the mountains, they began hunting the black bear with flintlock and percussion rifles as well as using traps like the one in our collection. The fat gained from the bear proved useful as a cheap source of fuel for the candles of poor Appalachian families; one such candle can be seen here at the Vance Birthplace. Bear hunting would, at times, occur during the animals' hibernation season, which lasted between November and early April. At this time, black bears enter a state called torpor and sleep on what resembled giant bird nests made of leaves sticks and grass.

Due to both hunting and the destruction of the black bears' natural habitat since the nineteenth century, their population dwindled to very low levels in the mid-1900s. However, the black bear has made a very successful comeback with their species even ranging from northern Mexico all the way to Canada. It is one of only two American bear populations not considered an endangered or near extinction species. The American Black Bear has proven to be a resilient species with deep natural and cultural connections to the North Carolina mountains.

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](#)!

Visit & Attend programs! Join us for our virtual and in-person events, from our Facebook Live videos to our Appalachian Christmas Carol. Or pop by for a guided tour, picnic lunch, or stroll through the historic structures. The site is open Tuesday-Saturday 9AM-5PM except for state holidays. Please call the site to determine what activities are available on the day of your visit. We look forward to seeing you soon!

Volunteer! You can donate your time and offer support with collections care, guided tours, special events, and visitor services. Call (828) 645-6706 or send an email to vance@ncdcr.gov to learn more about our volunteer opportunities.

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](mailto:vance@ncdcr.gov)

828.645.6706

Spring 2022 Event Schedule

"Nothing ever seems impossible in spring, you know." L. M. Montgomery



Open Hearth Cooking

SATURDAY, MARCH 12: 10 AM-2 PM

See the original 1790s fireplace in action with food historian Clarissa Lynch. Clarissa will prepare a meal in the original hearth of the Vance house. This same hearth witnessed the life and resilience of Leah, a woman enslaved by the Vances. Leah prepared meals every day for her entire adult life. Learn about the skill, craftsmanship, and traditions of cooking throughout the 19th century.

MHCG Lecture

SATURDAY, APRIL 2: 10 AM-12 PM

This annual lecture sponsored by Root & Root LLC explores various topics throughout the history of the site from the Cherokee to the 1960s when the site opened to the public. This year's guest speaker, James Owen, Assistant Professor of US History and Native American Studies at the University of Georgia will center around Cherokee history.

Patchapalooza

SATURDAY, APRIL 23: 9:30 AM-12 PM

On this day we will combine all of our school lessons and activities into this one hands-on program. Step inside our early 19th century home and learn about how life has changed through time. Stop at one of our many stations including weaving, weapons, wood working, and candles. When you are all done return to the visitor center to receive your unique Vance patch! Registration required.