FALL 2019 VOL. 2, ISSUE 2

# THE STUMP

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

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## She Changed the World: NC Women Breaking Barriers

In September, the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources will kick off a year-long initiative that "celebrates the achievements of North Carolina women and explores the diversity of their experiences and impact on our history." While marking the anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment, this celebration also recognizes that not all women were granted suffrage in 1920 and that the struggle for equal rights continues today.

In this issue of the *Stump*, we will examine the steps we are taking at the Vance Birthplace to tell an inclusive story. Read on to learn how we are utilizing programs, community partnerships, special events, and more to re-frame the narrative.

# You Have to Start a Thing: North Carolina Women Breaking Barriers Symposium

KIMBERLY FLOYD, SITE MANAGER

*The Vance Birthplace, the Thomas Wolfe Memorial, the North Carolina Room at Pack Library, and the University of North Carolina at Asheville are hosting a symposium honoring the achievements of women in western North Carolina on September 12 & 13, 2019.* *Details on page 5.*

The idea for a symposium celebrating western North Carolina women came about as part of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources campaign to commemorate the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in 2020. The "She Changed the World: NC Women Breaking Barriers" campaign is running from March 2019 through November 2020.

Our goal for this symposium is to create a space where everyone can come together and examine the many ways women have impacted our state and nation. While we are commemorating the ratification of the 19th Amendment, it is important to recognize that this legislation did not grant suffrage for all women. Therefore, from the beginning of the planning stages it was important that this symposium offered presentations and discussions about women from different time periods, different races, and different backgrounds.

Learning and examining our history is as relevant today as it has always been. Our history is what makes us who we are, our communities what they are, and lays the path for our future. We can feel the impact of the past every day, be it socially, economically, or politically. This event is particularly relevant because women's history is North Carolina history and women's historical narrative often continues to be an afterthought or a side story in historical interpretations. We look forward to sharing the stories of western North Carolina women at the "You Have to Start a Thing: North Carolina Women Breaking Barriers" Symposium.

*Photograph of Lillian Exum Clement, the first female representative of Buncombe county--and the first woman to ever be elected to a state legislature in the South--with the Asheville Draft Board staff, ca. 1917. Courtesy of the State Archives of North Carolina.*

*"I know that years from now there will be many other women in politics, but you have to start a thing." Lillian Exum Clement*

# Expanding the Narrative: The Slave Dwelling Project Visits the Vance Birthplace

LAUREN MAY, ASSISTANT SITE MANAGER

*"As the Slave Dwelling Project continues to honor people who were enslaved at antebellum sites, we come across allies with similar missions." Joseph McGill, Founder of The Slave Dwelling Project*

*Left: Students pose after setting up their tent to spend the night near the 1790s slave dwelling.*
*Center: The evening concluded with a campfire discussion about slavery, racism, and the impact upon us today.*
*Right: Kimberly leads a tour of the Vance Birthplace, beginning with the 1790s slave dwelling.*

The Slave Dwelling Project works to change the historic narrative and raise awareness about the history of slavery. In order to accomplish this mission, the non-profit organization visits and stays overnight in extant slave dwellings around the country. During their visits, members of the Slave Dwelling Project focus on themes of preservation, compassion, and diversity.

On April 11, 2019 the Slave Dwelling Project traveled to the Vance Birthplace for an overnight stay. President Joseph McGill and board member Prinny Anderson were joined by members of Mars Hill University's Teaching with Primary Sources program. We also welcomed eight local high school students, who received an in-depth look at slavery in western North Carolina.

The group of students and educators spent the day evaluating primary sources and the built environment of the Vance Birthplace. Together, we took a guided tour of the property, led by site manager Kimberly; listened to a talk about Zebulon Vance's connection to slavery by Dr. Steve Nash, ETSU professor and president of the Mountain History & Culture Group; and learned how to evaluate primary sources. The evening concluded with dessert and a discussion around the campfire, which allowed students to share their own experiences--joining their stories to the larger narrative we had explored throughout the day.

We are honored that the Slave Dwelling Project, alongside Mars Hill University and Buncombe County Schools, arranged to visit our site, and we are incredibly grateful to have been a part of the larger conversation around expanding the narrative.

# Patches, Preservation, and Parables: Spring & Summer at Vance Birthplace

ABOVE:
Michael Logan, of Logan Restoration and Contracting, teaches visitors about window restoration at our This Old Cabin: Working with Windows Workshop on July 20.

TOP LEFT:
Helped by former interpreter Sam Beale, children make corn husk dolls to earn a Vance Birthplace patch at our first annual Patch-a-Palooza event on April 27.

TOP RIGHT:
Jennifer Cathey, Restoration Specialist with the State Historic Preservation Office, discusses the history of log buildings at This Old Cabin: The Story of Log Buildings on May 4.

BOTTOM RIGHT:
Dr. Delanna Reed recounts the tale of "Old Dry Frye" at our second annual Appalachian Folk Tales event on Augsut 15.

# Upcoming Events: Fall 2019

*"Every leaf speaks bliss to me, fluttering from the autumn tree." Emily Brontë*

## You Have to Start a Thing: NC Women Breaking Barriers Symposium

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12: 6-7 PM
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13: 10 AM-6:30 PM

UNC Asheville's Department of History, the Vance Birthplace State Historic Site, the Thomas Wolfe Memorial State Historic Site, and the North Carolina Room at Pack Memorial Library will present a two-day symposium celebrating the achievements of women in western North Carolina. The symposium will be held at Lord Auditorium at Pack Memorial Library and will begin with a keynote address by Dr. Valerie Ann Johnson on September 12. Sessions will begin at 10:30 on September 13 and conclude with a reception at Cultivated Cocktails. Register for free: https://bit.ly/2NBklvS

## Militia Living History Day

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21: 10 AM-4 PM

Experience 18th century camp life with the militia company at the Vance Birthplace! This living history event will feature firing demonstrations and drills, historic crafts, games, and more. This free event is perfect for the whole family and will take place rain or shine.

## Appalachian Folk Festival

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19: 10 AM-3 PM

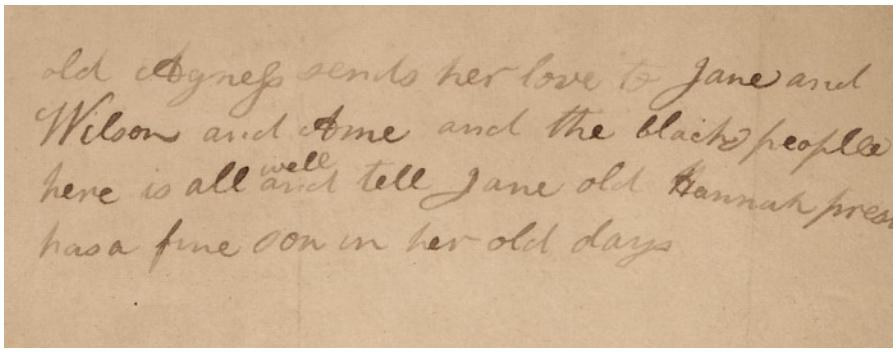
Experience the rich folk culture of the Blue Ridge Mountains! Programs and demonstrations will feature old-time music, local craftsmen, and artists. Observe cooking demonstrations in the historic Vance hearth or a local blacksmith as he uses his anvil to shape metal. You can spend the day in the Reems Creek Valley with delicious barbecue for purchase from Mountain View BBQ & Deli and free crafts for kids!

# "Old Agness Sends Her Love": Discovering Enslaved Women's Resistance through Primary Sources

LAUREN MAY, ASSISTANT SITE MANAGER

*"Slave women's resistance within the plantation household is the least acknowledged component of the larger struggle of slaves for survival and dignity." Thavolia Glymph*

Thavolia Glymph, author of *Out of the House of Bondage*, argues that enslaved women "carved out small spaces of autonomy" as a way to resist a system that tried to erase their power. Through primary source documents we can trace how Aggie, Leah, and Venus--three women enslaved by the Vances--found subtle but significant ways to defy enslavement. Three documents in particular show us how these women maintained relationships of love and friendship in the face of slavery.


old Agness sends her love to Jane and
Wilson and Anne and the black people
here is all well and tell Jane old Hannah pres
has a fine son in her old days

*Postscript from Mira Vance's 1830 Letter to Margaret Davidson, relaying a message from Aggie to Jane*

*1790s slave dwelling at the Vance Birthplace, photographed by Brenda Scott, 2017*

An 1830 letter written by Mira Vance to her niece in Tennessee includes a postscript, transcribed by Mira, with a message from "Old Agness." Agnes, or Aggie, was brought to the Reems Creek Valley by Mira's in-laws in 1795, and by 1830 had spent a long life laboring for the Vances. Though Aggie remained at the Reems Creek plantation, her friends and family had traveled with new owners to neighboring counties and states. However, Aggie used Mira's letter to send her love and share news of the community of enslaved men and women on the Vances' 900-acre plantation.

On August 25, 1866 Leah and Sandy Erwin stood before a Freedmen's Bureau agent and registered their marriage, a union that began a quarter-century earlier but was not legally recognized until after the Civil War. Because the Vances did not own Sandy until the 1850s or 60s, the couple likely dealt with periods of separation during their marriage. Leah and her four children were also put up for auction in 1844, and though Mira Vance purchased the family back from her husband's estate, Leah likely experienced the fear of being torn away from Sandy and her children. Though we have no first-person accounts from Leah or Sandy, the 1866 record of their relationship, which "acknowledged the relation of marriage for the last twenty five years," speaks for itself.

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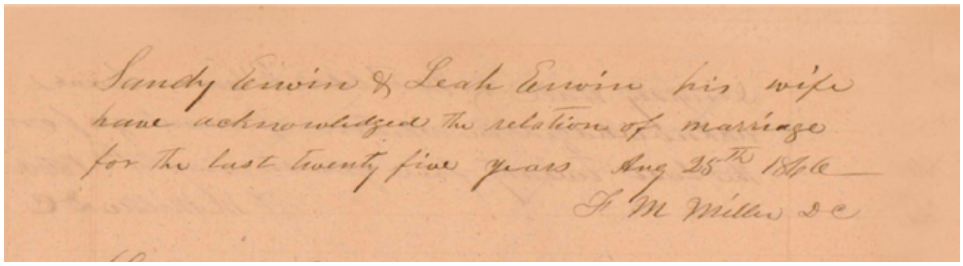
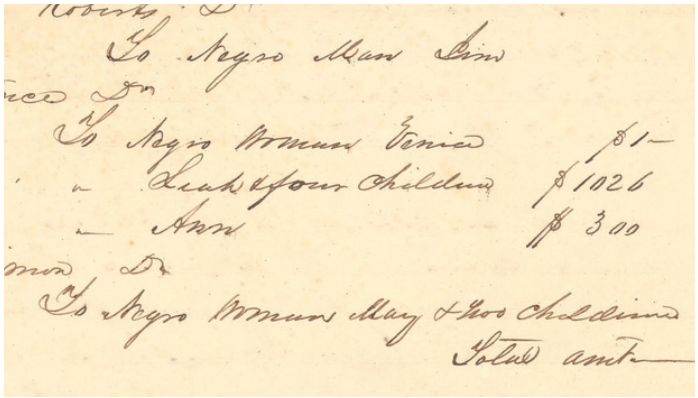



*Left: Utensils hanging above the 1790s hearth in the reconstructed Vance house, photograph by Brenda Scott, 2017*
*Right: Freedmen's Bureau record of Leah and Sandy Erwin's marriage, 1866*

Venus, the caretaker for the Vance children, was also put up for auction after David Vance Jr.'s death in 1844. Venus had raised both Robert and Zebulon Vance, and was currently caring for their youngest sister, baby Hannah. According to Robert Vance, when Venus stood on the block, she held Hannah in her arms and calmly told the crowd that "whoever takes Venus takes my child." Apparently no one dared to take Venus away from the children, offering no contest to Mira Vance's bid of $1. Venus used her role as caretaker to keep her place with the Vances, though it must have been challenging to spend her life raising and caring for children who would grow up to own her.

These acts of defiance--sending a message to a friend, maintaining a marriage, and loving a child--might seem small when compared with more active forms of resistance. But through these acts, Aggy, Leah, and Venus did the unthinkable: they created spaces of freedom within a system of bondage.




*Record from the David Vance Jr. estate sale in 1844, listing Mira's purchase of Venus for $1*

*Ca. 1800s cradle on display in the reconstructed Vance house, photograph by Dennis Owenby, 2019*

*Learn more about these women's stories by taking a tour of the Vance Birthplace, offered Tuesday-Saturday at 11:00 am, 1:00 pm, and 3:00 pm. Our tours explore the historic structures on site, including a 1790s slave dwelling and the reconstructed Vance house, which retains the original 1795 hearth where Leah would have prepared meals for the Vances.*

# A Most Useful Vegetable

TIMOTHY HARDEN, HISTORIC INTERPRETER

There are several gourds on display at the Vance Birthplace, and visitors—especially school children—have many questions about them. How and why do people turn vegetables into tools and vessels? Who made these gourd objects? Where did these plants come from?

*Left: 1790s hearth featuring a gourd utensil in the Vance house*

*Above: A gourd used as a salt cellar, on display in the Vance house kitchen*

Archaeologists believe that gourds originated in Africa where they migrated with people to Asia and from there were introduced to North and South America. In Africa, gourds were most commonly used as food, water vessels, and musical instruments. For example, the green speckled kiffy pumpkin is used in many West African dishes. The large hard-shelled bottle gourd was hollowed out and used to effectively carry large amounts of water, while smaller bottle gourds were used to make the *shekere* and *axatse* musical instruments.

There are many myths and stories from Asia that feature gourds, such as the folktale about Won Hyo. While stranded in a dark cave at night, Won Hyo finds what he believes to be a gourd filled with water and drinks from it to keep from dying of dehydration. In the morning, the light illuminates the cave and Won Hyo learns that he is in a tomb and what he thought was a gourd was a human skull. His experience teaches him how human perceptions can easily warp reality. This story shows that while gourds were functional tools, they also had cultural significance.

As in Africa, many Asian cultures used gourds as vessels. In China gourds were used as high quality snuff boxes and flower vases, as well as vessels for brewing alcohol. As individuals traveled from Asia to the Americas, people continued to use them as musical instruments, tools, and food. For example, gourds have an important role in Peruvian culture as burilados mates, decorative gourds used for instruments, vessels, and religious pieces.

Europeans adopted many of these practices when colonizing the Americas, while enslaved Africans brought their own knowledge of gourds to the New World. Settlers in the South grew different breeds of gourds to both eat and use as tools. Enslaved women on plantations dried out the gourds and turned them into usable objects. This process takes weeks, sometimes months. The gourd would be cut from the vine and placed in a dry area where the water could seep out of the cut stem. After drying, the desired hole was cut, and seeds removed, making a simple lightweight vessel. These vessels were commonly used as containers to hold water, oil, or salt. Enslaved people and poor whites could have used vessels such as these rather than those made of earthenware or glass as gourd vessels would be much cheaper. Like many of the cultures mentioned above, these enslaved people and other Americans would have relied upon gourds, making them a crucial part of American culture.

# Meet the New Recruits

*"I wanted to share ideas, to be around people who are passionate about learning." Emma Watson*

### Layton Atkins

A senior at Western Carolina University, Layton Atkins joined the Vance Birthplace team in July as a part-time Historic Interpreter. Layton hopes to enter the Public History field after graduation and would love to eventually work at the National WWII Museum in New Orleans. In his spare time, Layton enjoys reading Fantasy novels and spending time with his dog, Kiki. Layton is looking forward to researching the artifacts at our site to further our knowledge of the collection.

### Jordan Allan

Jordan Allan, a senior history major at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, began interning at the Vance Birthplace this August. After graduation, Jordan hopes to gain a master's degree in public history and to eventually work at a historic site. Originally from Raleigh, Jordan enjoys spending time in the mountains; camping, hiking, and getting lost in the woods are some of his favorite pastimes.

### Jessica Griffin

Jessica Griffin, also a student at University of North Carolina at Asheville, is interning at the Vance Birthplace this fall. Jessica is a junior and is currently working on a history major and a minor in cultural anthropology. She hopes to pursue a master's in museum studies and her goal is to work as a museum curator. Jessica grew up in the Asheville area and enjoys reading in her spare time. She also loves to travel and explore new places.

*Are you interested in becoming an intern at Vance Birthplace?*
*Contact Lauren May at (828) 645-6706 or Lauren.May@ncdcr.gov to apply.*

# Call for Volunteers

Are you interested in learning about and sharing the history of western North Carolina in the early 1800s? Consider volunteering at the Vance Birthplace!

We are seeking friendly and energetic people who can assist for two or more hours at a time. You may volunteer a few times a year or multiple times per month. Volunteers will serve as front line representatives of the historic site and work side-by-side with staff to greet visitors, answer questions, provide information, and make visitors feel welcome.

Contact us (see below) for more information about our Volunteer Program!

VANCE BIRTHPLACE STATE HISTORIC SITE

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