

# THE STUMP

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



## IN THIS ISSUE

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**What's in a Name?**

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**Sunflowers & Suffrage**

---

**Fall & Winter at Vance**

---

**Virtual Resources**

---

**The Art of Weaving in  
Appalachia**

---

**The Strange Odyssey of  
Benjamin Hemphill**

---

**An Invitation from  
Michelle Lanier**

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## Stories of Appalachia

At the Vance Birthplace, site staff interpret the landscape, individuals, broader culture, and historical trends that shaped Buncombe County and western North Carolina into a uniquely Appalachian community. Since we published the last edition of the *Stump*, we have explored new (to us) narratives; shared Appalachian crafts, music, and food with our visitors; and celebrated aspects of history that we do not regularly interpret. We have also adjusted to a new normal as we continue to practice social distancing in the face of COVID-19. Read on to learn about our latest Appalachian adventures and discoveries, and to engage with our new virtual resources!

# A Message from the Site Manager: What's in a Name?

KIMBERLY FLOYD, SITE MANAGER



**Left:** Using the coals from the fire, Kimberly bakes butter cookies at our March 7 "Open Hearth Cooking" event.

**Center:** Late winter snowfall created a lovely scene at the Vance Birthplace in February.

**Right:** Actress Sonia D'Andrea portrayed Elizabeth Hemphill at our 2019 production of *An Appalachian Christmas Carol*. Elizabeth and her family occupied the former Vance house for over 60 years after the Vances sold their Reems Creek property.

At the Governor Zebulon B. Vance Birthplace State Historic Site, we interpret life on an early mountain plantation. We focus on the time period 1790 to the mid-1840s, but the scope and breadth of our narrative encompasses a great deal more. From the Cherokee people that first inhabited the Reems Creek Valley to the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on western North Carolina, we utilize the entire site to tell the stories of Appalachia. The permanent exhibit in our visitor center interprets the life of Governor and US Senator, Zebulon Vance. Our daily tours begin at the 1790s slave dwelling and explore early Appalachian mountain life and culture, including the narratives of David Vance Sr. and Priscilla Brank, Vance's grandparents, and the experiences of the eighteen enslaved people--from Venus, who cared for the children, to Jim, the blacksmith.

The name of the site is an ongoing conversation with current and former staff. Visitors make their way off the Blue Ridge Parkway daily and arrive confused by what the site actually presents. The name is both factual and misleading. Zebulon Vance was, in fact, born on the property in 1830—but that is not an interpretation, a narrative, or a story. Every year we work to expand our interpretation and to ensure we have a broad and inclusive narrative. This means telling not just the story of the Vances, but the stories of enslaved people and other families that lived in the Reems Creek Valley. It means examining the environment, including the interpretation of the land, trees, streams, and animals. It means we look at not just politics and war, but music and art.

*Did you know that the NC mountains have one of the most diverse salamander populations in the world? If you look closely, you can spot one at our natural spring.*

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We kicked off this year with two programs. At Handwriting of the Heart in February, visitors read love letters exchanged between Vance and his first wife, Harriet Espy, for inspiration as they crafted their own valentine. Participants could try writing with a quill pen and finish their letter with a wax seal. We celebrated Women's History Month in March with Clarissa Clifton Lynch, a food historian from Atlanta. Lynch explored African American foodways as she taught staff how to prepare meals in the original 1790s fireplace in the Vance house--the same fireplace where Leah, an enslaved woman, cooked food for the Vances. Visitors learned about the realities of cooking over an open hearth, as well as the cultural roots of popular southern cuisine. This event celebrated the legacy of women like Leah, who created spaces of freedom within a system of bondage.

So as our site continues to grow, I can't help but question, what is in a name? And could we better prepare the visitor for the experience they are going to have at the Vance Birthplace?



*Layton Atkins, Historic Interpreter at the Vance Birthplace, begins a guided tour at the 1790s slave dwelling. This building, which was relocated to the site from Swannanoa, gives visitors a glimpse of the lives of the enslaved men, women, and children who lived in the Reems Creek Valley.*

# Sunflowers & Suffrage: Thinking about Equality

LAUREN MAY, ASSISTANT SITE MANAGER

*“I would like to be known as a person who is concerned about freedom and equality and justice and prosperity for all people.” Rosa Parks*

The NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources’ “She Changed the World” initiative has provided many opportunities for staff at the Vance Birthplace to look at aspects of history that we do not regularly cover at our site. In November, we joined staff from the State Archives at a Mars Hill University program that explored the women’s suffrage movement in North Carolina. Students from local schools moved through different stations and learned about the ideology and symbolism of the movement.

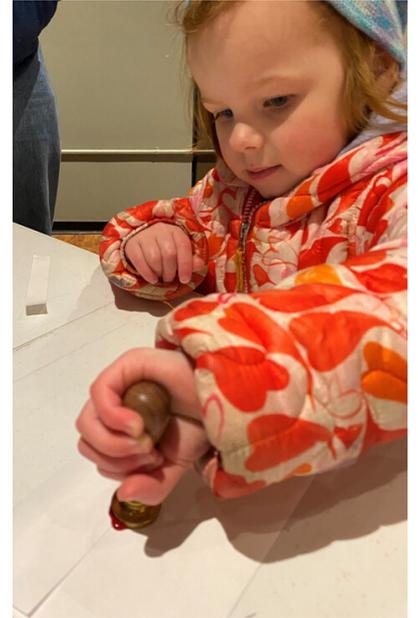
At our station, we chose to use the sunflower symbol to explore the theme of equality. The sunflower became a popular symbol of the suffrage movement in 1867, when lawmakers in Kansas deliberated on statewide women’s suffrage. Though the referendum did not succeed, the sunflower and its golden hue stuck as suffrage symbols. As a 1913 article stated, “...gold, the color of light and life, is as the torch that guides our purpose, pure and unswerving.”



Students considered the “pure and unswerving” search for equality by making paper sunflower brooches. We challenged both fourth grade and high school students to ask themselves, “what does equality mean to you?” After writing their answers on the petals of their sunflowers they discussed their ideas as a group. This activity encouraged students to think about the successes and failures of a century-long search for equality.

Site staff were so impressed by students’ ideas and perspectives—and thrilled that both the fourth graders and the high school students were eager to wear their brooches for the rest of the day. We are also excited to see our sunflower activity in the official She Changed the World Educational Activity Guide! To download a copy, you can visit <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/featured-programs/she-changed-world-north-carolina-women-breaking-barriers>.

# Holidays, Hauntings, & Hearth Fires: Fall & Winter at Vance Birthplace



ABOVE:  
Clarissa Clifton Lynch demonstrates open-hearth cooking techniques at our Appalachian Folk Festival on October 19, 2019.

TOP LEFT:  
Puppeteers from the American Myth Center rehearse for *An Appalachian Christmas Carol*, held December 12-14, 2019. During the program, visitors encountered the ghosts of Christmas while learning the story of Venus.

TOP RIGHT:  
At Handwriting of the Heart (February 8, 2020), visitors created Valentines using quill pens, then finished their letters with a wax seal.

BOTTOM RIGHT:  
Dennis, Kim, and Lauren pose in front of Vance Knob on Halloween.

## Going the Social Distance: Vance Virtual Resources

As we all get used to a new normal of virtual connection during this pandemic, site staff at the Vance Birthplace have been working to create fun, historical content to remotely engage with our visitors. We are excited to share our new digital programs, history lessons, hands-on activities, and demonstrations with you through YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. We hope you will join us on these platforms to stay connected with the past while social distancing.

### Solve a History Mystery with Lauren each Thursday at 2:00 PM!

During these Facebook Live events, Lauren will feature a historic artifact and share clues about its purpose. Can you guess the artifact before Lauren reveals what it is? Tune in weekly to find out!

### Tune in to our YouTube Channel to Continue #LearningAtHome

We are posting weekly videos so you can keep up with activities at the Vance Birthplace. Look for the following programs and [Click Here to Subscribe](#)

#### Details with Dennis



Tune in as Dennis highlights a different detail about the Vance Birthplace! These videos often include demonstrations, so look for them on YouTube!

#### Crafts with Kimberly



Look for a new craft from Kimberly each week that you can make at home! These videos often pair with a Learning with Lauren video.

#### Learning with Lauren



Learn something new about the landscape, buildings, and artifacts that make up the Vance Birthplace with Lauren each week!

## Quarantined Historians Maybe or Maybe Not Drinking Coffee

The Mountain History and Culture Group, along with staff from the Vance Birthplace, are bringing you a YouTube series we are calling "Quarantined Historians Maybe or Maybe Not Drinking Coffee." You can expect topics from the Revolutionary War and slavery, to museum interpretation and what it is like working at the Vance Birthplace. We hope you enjoy!

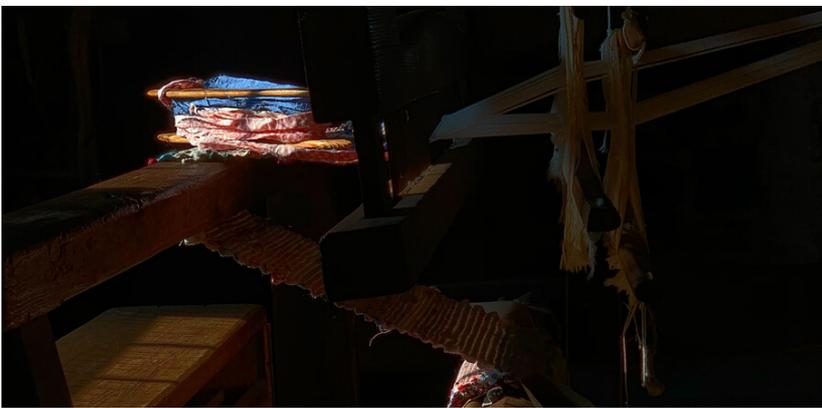
***Look for more fun content on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter! Just follow @VanceBirthplace on all platforms to stay connected.***

# The Art of Weaving in Appalachia

JESSICA GRIFFIN, FALL 2019 INTERN

*"Weaving continues to be deeply connected to Southern Appalachia's art and craft making traditions." Cathryn Washell*

Textiles in the early 19th century played a large role in daily life. Textile mills had not been industrialized yet so buying fabric that was already made was expensive. Trading posts in Southern Appalachia were often far apart and difficult to get to. Not everyone had the luxury of traveling. Most had to weave and create their own textile products. Wealthier families like the Vances would have left the weaving to enslaved women.



*Ca. 1800s loom on display at the Vance Birthplace*



*Overshot coverlet on display at the Vance Birthplace*

Looking at this from a 21st century point of view, textile weaving seems like a daunting task. Any coverlets, blankets, clothing, and rugs that a family needed all had to be woven by hand using either a hand loom or a floor loom. People used the larger floor looms to make fabric for clothing, as well as woven coverlets. A coverlet is a type of blanket, almost like a modern comforter, with designs that varied from simple to complex depending on the weaver's skill.

The most common type of coverlet in southern Appalachia was the overshoot coverlet. These coverlets were made on a four-harness loom and had geometric patterns. Depending on the intended usage, overshoot coverlets could be made using wool or linen—or a combination of the two materials for better durability and warmth. The wool or flax fibers used in weaving were often dyed using local plants. For example, dyers boiled the hulls of black walnuts--as well as the bark and heartwood from the trees--to create rich shades of brown.

People handcrafted textiles in southern Appalachia through the early 20th century, when looms became modernized and industrial textile mills cropped up in western North Carolina--keeping the tradition of hand weaving alive much longer than many other places in the United States. Visit the Vance Birthplace to see a working 1800s floor loom and learn more about Appalachian weaving during the 19th century!

# The Strange Odyssey of Benjamin Hemphill

JORDAN ALLAN, FALL 2019 INTERN

In Homer's *The Odyssey*, Odysseus is kept from home for 20 years after angering the ancient Greek god Poseidon. When Odysseus is finally able to return home, he finds his friends and family aged. Like Odysseus, former owner of the Vance property Benjamin Hemphill was separated from his home for decades. Unlike Odysseus, the reasons for Benjamin's "exile" are muddled, unclear, and potentially scandalous.

After David Vance's death in 1844, Mira Vance auctioned the Vance plantation, selling 770 acres to Andrew Hemphill. Andrew divided the land up between two of his sons, Benjamin and John Hemphill. Benjamin, alongside his wife Elizabeth, took ownership of the Vance house in 1849. At first, the Hemphills prospered well enough for Benjamin to hire two enslaved farmhands. Unfortunately, by the 1850s, there were concerns that the family would not have enough money to retain the Vance property.

To remedy the family's financial woes, Benjamin went west to participate in the California Gold Rush. He left Elizabeth, pregnant with their third child, with no warning. The new prospector wrote home about 3 times per week and mailed Elizabeth \$300 dollars in 1855. Over time however, Benjamin grew increasingly remote from his family. Rumors circulated that Benjamin had taken on another wife, which he denied after returning to the Vance property in 1901—half a century after his departure for California.

Why did Benjamin Hemphill stay away so long? According to testimony from Benjamin, a San Francisco doctor, concerned about Benjamin's health, sent him north to British Columbia. While in Canada, Benjamin mostly stopped writing to Elizabeth. When the American Civil War broke out, he claimed that he was unable to return home, because "they (westerners) watched southern men very close." Theoretically, Benjamin finally had the opportunity to return home after the war ended in 1865. He did not take it, choosing to remain in Canada for decades.



*The Hemphills, c. 1880-1900*

After 49 years away from his family, Benjamin Hemphill finally returned home. Over this vast period, Elizabeth had continued to live on the farm, rose to the position of postmistress, and grown old. Her children had grown up, married, and had children of their own. The house once occupied by the Vance family had begun to deteriorate. Through all these changes, Elizabeth held her family together, making her own mark on this property.

## An Invitation from Michelle Lanier



As the Director of the Division of State Historic Sites and Properties, it is my humble honor to share news about a gift for our communities.

As our neighbors, families, educators, first responders, and visitors of all walks of life face this time of upheaval, staff from Historic Sites have worked tirelessly to create a tool for connecting to our sacred and shared histories.

We invite you to invite others to gather at the table of North Carolina memory, until we can meet again on the lands that witnessed more than we can ever imagine.

We invite you to "Tour NC History @ Home."

This resource allows you to explore and experience the rich history of our state wherever you are. Here you will find virtual tours, hands-on activities, and opportunities to travel back in time.

Teachers, students, and all lovers of North Carolina history can virtually visit all of our NC Historic Sites through this [online portal](#).

We invite you to open doors into the past and more fully understand the world we live in today.

Sincerely,  
Michelle



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