

Biographies of West Virginia statehood leaders were prepared by Marshall University Humanities Program graduate students enrolled in Dr. Billy Joe Peyton's Fall 2010 "Historical Studies" class at Marshall's South Charleston campus.

By Carolyn S. Quinlan

JOHN C. VANCE was born on November 28, 1835, in Harrison County, [West] Virginia to Colonel Cyrus and Minerva Vance. His early education was at Northwestern Academy, Clarksburg, Harrison County. Later in his education, he decided to study law. He attended Judge Brockenbrough's famous law school at Lexington, Virginia from 1856-1858. He was admitted to the Bar in 1859 and returned to Clarksburg to set up practice.

His interest in politics led him to become an elector in 1860 when Douglas and Johnson were running for President and Vice-president respectfully. It was during this time that he made a name for himself in politics.

Already established as a strong leader and hard worker, he organized and led the first company of Union soldiers in his home county of Harrison to Wheeling where they were assembled into the Federal army. In June 1861 he was elected as delegate to the Convention to Restore the State Government of Virginia. He served in the first Legislature under the Reorganized Government from 1861 to 1862. He was quick to speak out on any legislation that he believed to be impertinent.

November 28, 1861 he married Amelia Hornor, daughter of James Y. Hornor, of Clarksburg, Virginia.

Soon after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862, Vance resigned his seat in the Legislature because he felt the war was losing site of its sense of resolve; others who held the same belief, followed him in his pursuit to reorganize the Democratic Party. On April 19, 1862 he became a prisoner of war after he was arrested by Federal authorities and placed in a prison at Fort McHenry, near Baltimore, Maryland. After his release, he returned to Clarksburg and continued to work hard to reorganize the political party he loved. It is noted he may have done as much as anyone to strengthen the Democratic Party in the state. Even though he was a strong politician, it is said he preferred the business life to politics.

After his election in January of 1870, he served nineteen years as Cashier of the Bank of West Virginia in Clarksburg. Under his direction the bank continued to grow and remain solvent.

In 1859 he became a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. He represented the Grand Encampment of West Virginia in the Sovereign Grand Body, three times; at Cincinnati, Ohio, 1881; Baltimore, Maryland, 1882; and at Providence, Rhode Island in 1883.

Sources: Atkinson, George Wesley and Alvaro F. Gibbens, *Prominent Men of West Virginia*, Wheeling: W. L. Callin, 1890.
<http://books.google.com/books?id=vLYUAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=prominent+men+of+wv&source=bl&ots=9mO46TGFfl&sig=d3B9o7HLgIMG2tPSb9a87-#v=onepage&q=VANCE&f=false>.