Robert Vance was one of five sons born to Samuel Vance and Sarah Colville living in Frederick County, Commonwealth of Virginia. Both of his parents emigrated from Ireland and are thought to have arrived separately and married in America. Robert served as a sergeant in Lord Dunmore’s War and as a lieutenant and captain in the Revolutionary War. He is associated with an early western frontier fort in the borough of Coraopolis, Washington County, Pennsylvania. Robert is said to have been one of the earliest permanent pioneer settlers in the area that became Coraopolis, a few miles from Pittsburgh. He was an Indian fighter before, during, and after the Revolutionary War. His story has been told in many history books, magazines, and church records. Some of the stories that can be documented are discussed in this review of one of our country’s brave American patriots. There are six Sons of the American Revolution who list Robert as their ancestor and there are no fewer than fifty Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) who list Capt. Robert Vance as their ancestor. About twenty descendants of Robert have been or are current members of the Vance Family Association.

The year of Robert Vance’s birth has been variously reported as 1728 [1], 1736 [2], and 1747. The latter date is favored, because it is supported by a death notice published in at least three different newspapers [3]. The one shown to the left was published in the Vermont Gazette on 13 Oct 1818. These notices indicate that Robert died “in his 71st year.” The DAR lists Robert Vance as Ancestor No. A117359, with a date of death of 18 Aug 1818 [4] which is also the date of death shown for Robert’s grandson Robert Vance McCabe [51] in the McCabe family Bible. Determining the correct date for Robert’s birth is relevant because it affects some of the family lore and stories that surround his military career and where he lived. We elected to use a birth year of 1747 since it is about the mid-point of the birth years of his siblings, Samuel Vance and Sarah Colville’s eight known children.

Robert may have been in Westmoreland County as early as the late 1760s and certainly by the early 1770s. In a 20 Dec 1786 deed of sale for 300 acres of land, he states that “I Robert Vance of Huntingdon Township and Westmoreland County by virtue of an improvement [in] the month called December in the year called one thousand seven hundred and sixty-eight [1768] have bargained sold and by these presents make over my whole right and title to said improvements . . . [5].” Huntingdon Township is on the east border of Allegheny County and southeast of present day Pittsburgh. A few interesting anecdotes to this transaction are that David Vance and James Tucker signed as sureties in the amount of 900 pounds Pennsylvania currency to guarantee William Latta’s grantee title to this land. George Vance was witness to the signing of the deed. A George Vance also
delivered a letter to Robert Vance at Vance’s Fort dated 29 Aug 1786 wherein Robert’s brother John discusses what was very likely the land Robert sold to William Latta in this deed [6,7]. The David Vance who was a resident of Westmoreland County was the son of Major William Vance of Washington County. Robert and David were related through the Colville side of their families [7].

Based on a record from the probate of Maj. William Vance’s estate, Robert Vance was in Washington County as early as January 1772. In the probate, Robert attested to the loan value of a horse. Robert Vance was listed as a freeman (over 21, unmarried) on the tax rolls of Hempfield Township in Bedford County, PA for the year 1773 [8a, 8b]. Sgt. Robert Vance served under Capt. John Stephenson [10] who was also listed as a resident of Hempfield Township as was Robert’s cousin David Vance [8a]. Within a few months, this part of Bedford County became part of Westmoreland County, PA. Hempfield Township is adjacent to the eastern boundary of Huntington Township where Robert sold land in 1786 (see above). Robert was identified as a jury member in Westmoreland County for the Oct 1773-Jan 1774 Term and for a Grand Inquest in Jan 1774 [9]. For Robert Vance and John Stephenson (AKA Stevenson), the distance from Hempfield Township to Fort Pitt would have been a reasonable commute on horseback. In October of 1774, Stephenson’s company participated in the decisive battle of Lord Dunmore’s War at Point Pleasant against the Shawnee Indians led by Chief Cornstalk. Point Pleasant is along the Ohio River and about 140 miles southwest of Fort Pitt (then called Fort Dunmore). This battle resulted in the Treaty of Camp Charlotte wherein the Shawnee ceded their lands south of the Ohio River to Virginia.

Sometime during 1775 or 1776, it is thought that Robert Vance may have met with land speculators who had purchased some land from George Croghan who in turn had acquired John Montour’s 335 acre tract known as “Oughsarago”[11, 12]. George Croghan was identified as an Indian trader in the vicinity of Logstown in 1747 and was “well acquainted with the Indian country [13].” This tract of land lies on Moutour’s Run, a small river that drains northeasterly into the Ohio River and includes Montour’s Bottom, the flat drainage land adjacent to the river. John inherited Oughsarago after his father Capt. Henry Montour died in 1772 [11]. Henry (AKA Andrew) Montour was a half-breed Indian interpreter and scout for the British and acquired his tract through a warrant from the Proprietors of Pennsylvania (not from Virginia). The land was surveyed on 28 Jun 1769 along with two other adjacent tracts bordering the south bank of the Ohio River. These latter two tracts were for Thomas McKee (335 acres) to the northwest (down river) and Thomas Masden (331 acres) to the southeast (up river). These three adjoining tracts were the earliest surveys that later became the borough of Coraopolis in Moon Township. Neither Henry Montour nor his son John were thought to have lived on Oughsaragoh. Of interest, the Indians who controlled the land north of the Ohio River had given Henry Montour the use of Neville Island (known then as Montour’s Island or Long Island) opposite his tract located on the south side of the river, but they did not sell it to him. No transfer of title of Oughsaragoh from the land speculators to Robert Vance has been found [11]. “It is assumed that Vance’s settlement on Oughsargoh was one made on the basis of pre-emptive or “squatters rights [11].”
The timing for Robert Vance’s settlement on Oughsaragoh comes from his deposition made on 6 Dec 1807 to Judge May, a Justice of the Peace for Allegheny County, wherein he states “He (Vance) hath for the past fifty years been well acquainted with the tract of land in question (Col. John Gibson’s tract near Logstown lying down river and west of Oughsaragoh) having lived upwards of thirty-two years of the latter part of that time in the same neighborhood [14a].” Assuming the “same neighborhood” included Oughsaragoh, then Robert would have taken up residence about 1775, the year he married Jean White. Appreciate that Capt. Robert Vance was a friend of Col. Gibson and wanted to assure the judge that Gibson did indeed occupy the tract of land he (Gibson) was selling. Robert’s claim of knowledge of the area for “fifty years” would be a stretch considering he was born about 1747.

Vance Fort

The origin of Vance’s Fort is shrouded in family lore and colorful stories with little or no documentation. One story by a member of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania [15] published in the Sewickley Weekly Herald in 1911 proclaimed “Old Fort Vance, built in 1759, called Vance Fort, Middletown, Pennsylvania, one of the most historic Forts stationed along the Ohio river, 11 miles from Fort Duquesne . . .” If we accept Robert’s birth year as 1747, one can appreciate he did not build a fort at age 12. The author of this Sewickley newspaper article, and several other writers [2], interpreted Robert’s 6 Dec 1807 affidavit literally and assumed he built the fort soon after (i.e., 1807 – 50 = 1757) he came to the area on the Ohio River between Logstown and Fort Pitt. The author was also not quite correct in saying “Fort Duquesne” because it had been burned and abandoned by the French on 24 Nov 1758, then taken possession by the British the next day and construction began on Fort Pitt in August of 1759 [16].
The origin of Vance’s Fort is complicated because it was known by another name in the mid- to late 1770s. The earliest records we could find for a fort or stockade on the tract of land called Oughsaragoh is 3 Jun 1777 in a report to General Edward Hand who had assumed command of Fort Pitt on 1 Jun 1777. In Maj. Henry Taylor’s report to Gen. Hand on his “return of the militia for the county of Youghiogane (sic) on the Ohio River” he recorded “one lieutenant, one sergeant, and 9 privates [were] posted at Montours Bottom [15].” Montours Bottom lies at the termination of Montours Run, a stream or small river running through Oughsaragoh to the Ohio River. The bottom is flat sandy soil, well suited to farming. The military “post” was identified by its geographical location within Montour’s 1769 land grant. This was confirmed in a footnote to the transcribed tables of Maj. Henry which reads “Montours Bottom: Near present Coraopolis, Allegheny County PA [17].” There were six additional “returns” (muster rolls) between 30 Jun 1777 and 15 Jul 1778 for the post at Montours Bottom. The largest number of troops present was recorded on 15 Dec 1777: 1 Capt; 2 Lts.; 1 Ensign; 4 Sergs; 32 Pvt. This particular return included an inventory of implements of war: “50 lbs of powder; 25 public armes (sic); 70 lbs of lead; 75 flints; 2 axes; 20 tomahawks; 3 kettles; and 2 spades [15].” From this information, we might deduce that the fort consisted of a blockhouse and a stockade.

A blockhouse can be built of stone or wood, or combination of both, and is used to store implements of war and as a defense against attacks. By contrast, a stockade is typically constructed of large logs set upright into the soil that would provide a 10 foot high barrier against attacks and to protect horses and livestock. No records were found describing the size of the fort at Montours Bottom, but it was large enough to accommodate the soldiers and supplies enumerated above [15]. It is presumed there may have been at least a few horses used by the officers and a few pack animals to carry the supplies. For the most part, nearby Fort Pitt was garrisoned by militia forces with a small contingent of regular Virginia forces [18a]. It is not known how long Vance’s Fort was occupied at any given time, but one report on 12 Jan 1778 showed that 16 men had served one month and were planning to return home [15], indicating they were militia forces. It is not known if Lt. Robert Vance was ever stationed at Montours Bottom Fort at any time during his service in the 13th and 9th Virginia Regiments. From a 1937 historical tablet (marker) for Fort Vance in Coraopolis, we
learned that the fort was used by the Washington County Militia during the Indian uprising of 1782 [19] and that the fort at Montours Bottom was indeed Vance Fort.

The question of who actually built Vance’s Fort is interesting because no one person alone can build a fort with a stockade. In the “Annals of Southwestern Pennsylvania,” there is a statement “Robert Vance was one of the early permanent settlers locating at the present site of Coraopolis, in Allegheny. He built a blockhouse on his plantation, which became known as Vance’s Fort [18b].” But, there is more to a fort than a blockhouse. Dr. Robert Jockers in his analysis of Vance’s Fort [11] found a 3 Jun 1777 memorandum to General Edward Hand describing the fortified posts in the vicinity of Fort Pitt where one was a “small guard of men Consisting of nine at a Stockaid (sic) Built at Munters (Montours) Bottom by the Adjacent [adjacent] inhabitants [20].” The words “adjacent inhabitants” certainly imply that Robert’s neighbors helped to build the stockade. These words also imply that Robert’s log home was not part of the fort, i.e, the stockade did not encircle his home. The fort was a separate structure, making it more convenient for use by the state and local militias. That the fort did not include Robert’s home is supported by a 22 October 1911 letter from Robert Atchison Vance to his cousin Dallas McCabe, Esq. wherein RAV describes the location thusly: “I suppose you [McCabe] know where the old grandfather Vance and McCabe residence[s] stood or stand if not removed. Well, between that place and where Coraopolis now stands is the place where grandfather Robert built a blockhouse and fort and from which place Grandfather Vance and Lewis Whetsel, Adam Poe and other Indian fighters used as headquarters and equipped parties to cross the river and go out into the wilderness as they called the country of Ohio at this time and punish and kill the Indians who had made raids and killed many of the old pioneer settlers of Pa. [21].”

![Ebey Blockhouse (1855-1858) on Whidbey Island, Island County, Washington, photo by National Park Service [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons](image)

A simple blockhouse was a square, roofed log structure with loopholes to allow rifles to be fired at an approaching enemy [14b]. A blockhouse was also used as an armory and
was often encircled by a stockade. A blockhouse would more likely have been built by the militia or army, but Robert had some military experience in Lord Dunmore’s War and could have seen and later built a blockhouse. Based on status reports of frontier fortifications submitted to General Hand [17] in 1777 and 1778, it is possible that Robert may have relinquished control of the blockhouse and stockade to the militia in the late 1770s [17] and early 1780s [19]. It should be kept in mind that Robert also owned land in Hempfield [22] and Huntingdon Townships [23] in Westmoreland County during the time when the stockade and blockhouse were built. Exactly when the fort at Montours Bottom became more widely identified as Vance Fort is not known, but most likely after the Revolution (ca 1782-83). Certainly Vance Fort enhanced the stature and legacy of Capt. Robert Vance, but it is curious that Vance Fort at Coraopolis was not included in the register of frontier forts prepared by Albert [24] or in Bomberger’s History of Westmoreland County [25]. An interesting analogy to the fort at Montours Bottom in Allegheny County is the fort at Reardon’s Bottom in Beaver County [26], the latter having been forgotten in the sands of time.

Family

According to family tradition, Robert Vance married Jean White on 20 Mar 1775 [2]. Jean was thought to be born in 1746 [2], a date used in four SAR applications. Their home was reported as being about one-fourth of a mile from Fort Vance [2], which is consistent with the 1937 historical marker [19]. No information could be found on where or when Robert met Jean, but they were married about three months after Robert served in Lord Dunmore’s War (see below). Robert and Jean had ten children; the first was David, born 1777 [2] while Lt. Robert was serving in the 13th VA Regiment at Fort Pitt. It should be noted that Indian hostilities had increased dramatically in 1777 and continued through 1782 [12]. Westmoreland County was a very dangerous place to live; many early settlers fled to safer locations in the east. Their second child, Sarah was born 1779 [2], probably while Capt. Robert was on leave of absence from the 9th Virginia Regiment. Their third child, Samuel was born 1781 [2]. The family of Robert Vance and Jean White is outlined to two generations in the family tree that follows this report. Jean died in May 1834 and is buried in Three Springs Cemetery in Holiday’s Cove, Hancock County, WV [29].

Capt. Robert Vance – Military Service

Lord Dunmore’s War

As summarized by the Library of Virginia, Dunmore's War was a conflict between the Colony of Virginia and the Native Americans of the Ohio Valley. Following increased raids and attacks by native Indians on frontiersmen in this region, the Royal Governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, organized a large force of militia and marched to Fort Pitt arriving at the end of August 1774. Dunmore also ordered Col. Andrew Lewis, commander of the southwestern Virginia militia, to raise an army in the south and meet Dunmore's force along the Ohio River. Lewis formed militia companies from Augusta, Botetourt, Fincastle, Bedford, Culpeper, Dunmore, and Kentucky counties. In August the militia of Frederick County under Maj. Angus McDonald raided the Indian towns on the
Muskingum River. Before his forces could join those of Gen. Lewis, the Indians attacked Maj. McDonald’s forces at Point Pleasant, but were soundly defeated. After the victory at the Battle of Point Pleasant, Dunmore successfully negotiated a peace treaty with the Delaware, Mingo, and Shawnee chiefs, which prevented them from settling or hunting south of the Ohio River. The Indians remained in control of lands on the north side of the Ohio River, which were then claimed by both Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Robert Vance is listed on the pay rolls for Capt. John Stevenson’s Company of the Virginia Militia, which was called into service by Governor Lord Dumore in 1774. Robert is listed as one of three sergeants assigned to this company [10, 28]. When the pay list was prepared, Robert was credited with 197 days (6-1/2 months) and was paid 24 £ 12 Sch and 6 Pnc with a balance due of 17 £ and 17 Sch [30]. A descendant of Capt. John Stevenson was able to find the following information regarding his ancestor: “Led Militia company of 101 men, 3 officers, and 3 sergeants in a campaign against Shawnee Indians led by Chief Cornstalk. The Shawnees surprised the Militia camp at Point Pleasant but the Shawnees were defeated after a day long battle with a heavy loss of militia men killed or wounded (no citation available).”

13th Virginia Regiment of foot

Robert Vance entered military service in the Revolutionary War at Fort Pitt as a lieutenant assigned to the 13th Virginia Regiment (AKA the West Augusta Regiment). The 13th VA was composed of ten companies, the tenth company was commanded by Captain James Sullivan [31]. A roster of the 10th Company, as constituted on 16 Dec 1776, can be found on a muster roll taken on 6 Sep 1777 [32]. This roster shows Robert Vance and Walter Graham as the original lieutenants. Robert Vance in a deposition stated that he and David Steele entered service from Allegheny County the latter part of September or in the month of October 1776, “about the time the officers began to recruit the regiment [Ancestry.com].” (David Steel was commissioned as Captain and commanded the 4th Company of the 13th Regiment [31] and was apparently a friend of Robert.) Lt. Robert Vance appears on the Morning Report for Capt. Sullivan’s Company, 13th Virginia Battalion “now stationed at Fort Pitt on 17 Mar 1778 (file card)[32].” It is relevant to point out here that Gen. Washington was encamped with his army at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania from 19 Dec 1777 to 19 Jun 1778. Lt. Robert Vance does not appear on the muster rolls of those who were at Valley Forge during the winter of ’77-’78 [33]. This might be explained by the fact that only “five of the ten companies of the 13th VA Regiment served with Muhlenburg’s brigade in the northern campaigns, while the remaining companies were stationed at Fort Pitt and Fort Randolph (Point Pleasant)[31].” Contrary to family lore [34] and interesting stories [35], we could not find any evidence that Robert Vance went to Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-78. But, absence of evidence is not evidence for absence. We can only document that Lt. Robert Vance was at Fort Pitt on Mar 1778 [36], which coincided with the encampment at Valley Forge. Based on a limited number of muster roll cards, Lt. Vance served all of 1777 and the first nine months of 1778 in the 10th Company of the 13th VA Regiment.
On 9 Sep 1778, at White Plains New York, the Continental Army was reorganized. Because there were so few men left in the five companies of the 13th VA that were assigned to the eastern campaigns, particularly after the Siege of Charleston South Carolina, the 13th VA Regiment was renumbered the 9th [31], after which the 13th VA Regiment ceased to exist. Because the 9th VA Regiment was “captured almost to a man” at Germantown, what remained was consolidated with the 1st VA Regiment [31]. The “new” 9th VA basically consisted of the two remaining companies of the 13th that had been stationed at Fort Pitt (and probably the two companies stationed at Fort Randolph). This lends support to the idea that these two (four) companies were never called to participate in the military engagements in the Eastern or Southern Departments of the Continental Army. Instead, these companies were part of the Western Department charged with defending the western frontier from Indian attacks. The companies of the 13th VA Regiment that had remained at Fort Pitt were essentially “Indian fighters” and fort-builders.

That Capt. Robert Vance and his men were Indian fighters comes from reviewing the pension depositions of veterans who had served in the 13th VA under Capt. Sullivan and then Lt. Vance. For example, private (Pvt.) James White [38] related that “myself with eleven others were sent up the Monongahela to build storehouses where Elizabeth-town now stands [as of 1832] . . . About the first of November, the 8th Pennsylvania Regiment with Colonel Brodhead and of[ur] Regiment all under the command of Captain Uriah Springer of the infantry (a light infantry unit trained for rapid movement through rough country [31]) with General McIntosh went out upon a campaign to Tuscarora and the infantry immediately returned to Beaver where we had previously built Fort McIntosh . . . We went to Fort Laurens . . . where we arrived on the 10th of December. Our garrison now consisted only of the 13th VA Regiment [actually renumbered to the 9th] . . . on the 22nd of January a guard of 8 men . . . were attacked by Indians and two of their number were killed four wounded one taken whose name was Jones. On the 24th of February a party of 18 men were sent out for horses to bring in firewood and the Indians attacked them [with]in site of the Fort (Laurens) and killed them all, a strong party who were ordered out to assist him [them] were obliged to return, the Indians attempting to get between them and the Fort. On the 28th of March the 8th Pennsylvania Regiment came and relieved us.” This is a first-hand account of the siege of Fort Laurens. The deposition given by James Watson [39] on 14 Apr 1814 is succinct, he “served for three years in the company commanded by Captain George McCormick [3rd Company] in the 13th VA Regiment commanded by Colonel John Gibson . . . serving under different captains until the winter of 1780 . . . when he was discharged at Pittsburgh by Colonel John Gibson, that
he was continued [the] whole time of his Servitude on the Western frontiers and building forts and on expeditions against the Indians etc.” A close examination of the 17 Mar 1778 Morning Report for Capt. Sullivan’s Company [36] shows 11 artificers, out of 73 men total, were assigned to his company. Artificers helped to build forts and roads, wheel-rights, repair machinery and wagons, and shoe horses, and were probably non-combatants. The term “forts” as used here includes blockhouses and stockades.

Capt. Sullivan’s Morning Report dated 17 March 1778: Artificers are listed in columns four and five. Gen. Washington’s encampment at Valley Forge included March 1778 when Robert was at Fort Pitt.

A tabulation of the forces garrisoned at Fort Pitt and on the western frontiers as of 25 Jul 1778 is indicative of the importance of the Western Department of the Revolutionary Army. Militia forces from Yohiogany, Monongahalia, Ohio, and Westmoreland Counties at Fort Pitt totaled 699 [18b]. Regular Army forces included the “residue of ye 13th Virg’a regt about 100 [18a]” and Brodhead’s 8th VA Regiment of 250 [18b]. Fort Randolph (at Point Pleasant) was garrisoned by 84 men [18b], probably part of the 8th VA Regiment [31]. This July 1778 status report documents the statement in Sanchez-Saavedra that “five of the [ten] companies [of the 13th VA] served with Muhlenberg’s brigade in the northern campaigns, while the remaining five were stationed at Fort Pitt and Fort Randolph [at Point Pleasant][31].” Two of the five companies of the 13th VA Regiment remaining at Fort Pitt were the 3rd Company commanded by Capt. George McCormick and the 5th Company commanded by Capt. James Sullivan. Since Lt. Robert Vance served under Capt. Sullivan, it is unlikely he was in the northern campaigns.
9th Virginia Regiment of foot

Lt. Robert Vance was promoted to captain on 19 Aug 1778 (replacing Capt. David Scott of the 10th Company) one month before the formal reorganization of the Continental Army at White Plains NY on 14 Sep 1778. This reorganization resulted in renumbering the 13th VA to the 9th VA Regiment, thus Robert Vance found himself in the 9th VA Regiment by decree, he did not resign from the 13th or transfer to the 9th, nor was there any indication it was a cavalry unit. Robert Vance served as captain of the 10th Company of the 9th VA under Col. John Gibson [39a]. Because the 9th and 8th VA Regiments were stationed at Fort Pitt, they were spared from the surrender at Charleston South Carolina in May 1780 [31].” Capt. Vance served in the 9th VA up until 31 Dec 1780, on which date he resigned [39a].

7th Virginia Regiment of foot

At the Chesterfield Court House arrangement (i.e., reorganization) of 12 Feb 1781, the 9th VA Regiment was redesignated (renumbered) the 7th VA Regiment [31].” While military cards show Capt. Robert Vance in the 7th Regiment [40], he may have only been there “on paper.” The 7th VA was renumbered for the last time on 1 Jan 1783 and it remained active until June 1783, when most of the companies were disbanded.

Based on a limited number of muster roll cards, Capt. Vance served the last three months of 1777 and all of 1778, 1779 and 1780 in the 10th Company of the 9th Virginia Regiment, which was under the command of Col. John Gibson. Capt. Vance was on an approved leave of absence for the last six months of 1778 (including August when he was promoted to captain). Capt. Vance’s service in the 13th and 9th VA Regiments totaled four years.

Family lore relates that Robert Vance served eight years in the Revolutionary War. We have only been able to account for about five years, which includes Dunmore’s War. Nothing was found indicating Robert had served in Braddock’s Campaign [41] or the French and Indian War [10]. Evidence for Robert Vance having served in the Westmoreland Militia of the state of Pennsylvania could not be found. However, there is at least one entry for 1 Jul 1791 in the Pennsylvania Archives that mentions the names of four men who were considered for the position of Lt. Col. as the Commandant of the 3rd Battalion of the Allegheny County (Pennsylvania) Militia [42]. One of those was Robert Vance who placed second in the poll. At that time, it was common practice for the local militia to elect their own officers. This entry indicates Robert may have been active in some way with the Westmoreland Militia (Washington County was derived from Westmoreland County) after his retirement from the 9th VA Regiment in Dec 1780. Unfortunately, the Archives only account for the Pennsylvania Militia for the years 1790 – 1800 and not from 1780 – 1790 when county militias were prevalent.

The length of Capt. Robert Vance’s service in the Virginia Regiments entitled him to half-pay [39b], which is what military retirees receive today for 20 years of active duty service. Robert was entitled to five years’ full pay, as the commutation of half-pay for his
service in the Virginia Line of the Continental Army. A payment for Capt. Robert Vance in the amount of £429 and 14 Sch was picked up by J. Tarnhill (sp?) on 30 Apr 1785 [43]. There is no indication of the purpose of the payment. Interestingly, Robert’s heirs filed a petition with Congress (House of Representatives) in 1839 for his commutation pay, but it was not granted (i.e., “laid on table” with an “adverse” report) on 23 Jun 1840 [55]. We cannot tell if £429 would have been equivalent to five years of full pay. Capt. Vance was also entitled to 4,000 acres after serving 3 continuous years of service [44] in the Virginia Regiments (not applicable to service in the militia). Captains were allotted 3,000 to 4,666 acres [44] and Capt. Vance was granted 4,666 acres [45]. The additional 666 acres is interesting in that it implies Robert may have served seven years. The applicable law read “... for every year which every officer or soldier may have continued, or shall hereafter continue, in service, beyond the term of six years, to be computed from the time he last went into service, he shall be entitled to one-sixth part in addition to the quantity of the land apportioned to his rank respectively [46].” To have served an additional three years, Robert would have served from 1 Jan 1781 to the end of the war in 1783. No records of such additional service were found.

Bounty Warrants

I do hereby Certify that Capt Robert Vance was en-listed officer in the Virginia Line on Contl Establishment in the year 1776, and continued in actual service until the year 1781, when he became Supernumerary.

Jno Gibson, Colo Vig Contl Line Richmond June 17th 1783.

Col. John Gibson’s Certification of Capt. Vance’s Military Service

To apply for his bounty land warrant, Robert had to prove he served in the Virginia Regiments of the Continental Line. Robert’s proof was in the form of an affidavit from his former commander Col. John Gibson (see below). The affidavit was signed on 17 Jun 1783 [47] (see below). Robert filed his request, along with Gibson’s affidavit, with the Governor of Virginia who issued a certificate to the Virginia Land Office authorizing the Register to issue a warrant for bounty lands. Robert was issued bounty warrant No. 850 in the amount of 4,000 acres [44]. The earliest survey under this warrant was No. 422 completed on 28 Oct 1796 for 1,000 acres. This land was situated between the Little Miami and Scioto Rivers northwest of the River Ohio in the 4.2 million acre Virginia Military District in Ohio. The land was granted by President John Adams on 20 Mar 1800 to Lucas Sullivant (not Sullivan) [48], the assignee of Robert Vance. The amount paid by Sullivant to Vance was not recorded in the title document. It is curious that 19 years had lapsed from the time Robert resigned from the 9th VA Regiment (31 Dec 1780) to the date of the formal transfer of the first parcel of land. Of interest, Capt. Vance also signed an affidavit on 20 Nov 1806 for 47 enlisted men whom he could recall as having served with him [18b].
A second parcel of land for 740 acres was surveyed on 27 Nov 1797 in the same area under bounty warrant No. 850. President James Madison gave title (patent) of this land to Robert Vance on 20 Dec 1810. An adjoining parcel of land was patented by his former commander, Col. John Gibson, under Survey No. 28341. An annotation on Robert’s land grant clearly states that this land was “part of a bounty warrant No. 850” recognizing the warrant was for a larger amount of land.

A third parcel of land in the same district was granted under Military Warrant No. 850 for 700 acres described in survey No. 9953. Robert died before the patent was issued. On 12 Jan 1831, the patent was issued by President Andrew Jackson to Andrew Vance as the administrator of Robert’s estate. The survey recognized the 700 acres were part of 4,000 acres on the waters of the Big Miami (Virginia Military District in Ohio). For whatever reason, this patent was not accessible through the Bureau of Land Management’s General Land Office website, but rather was found by a descendant in 1921 in the Logan County (Ohio) Chancery Records [54].

Military Warrants

A fourth parcel of land for 540 acres was surveyed on 30 Jul 1807 as part of military warrant No. 5140 issued to Robert Vance who was identified as “a captain for the seventh year.” The original military warrant was for 666-2/3 acres total. The survey was patented by Daniel Cale (or Cole), a devisee of Robert Vance, who received the land from President James Madison on 9 Mar 1810.

A fifth parcel of land containing 255 acres was surveyed on 9 Nov 1809 based on a combination of three military warrants, one of which was Robert Vance’s warrant No. 5140. Robert’s contribution was 49-1/3 acres. The survey was patented by Daniel Cale (or Cole) on 6 May 1811 as a devisee of Robert Means who was assigned the land by Robert Vance and two other men. Cale received the land from President James Madison on 6 May 1811. This grant also identifies Robert Vance as “a captain for the seventh year.”

A sixth parcel of land containing 428 acres was surveyed on 30 Jul 1807 based on four warrants, one of which was Robert’s military warrant No. 5140. Robert’s contribution was 77-1/3 acres. The survey was patented by John Stokely and Daniel Cale (or Cole) on 8 Aug 1822 who received the land from President James Monroe. This grant also identifies Robert Vance as “a captain for 7 years.”
Why Robert Vance appears as a captain “in service for seven years in the Virginia Line on Continental Establishment” for land granted under military warrant No. 5140 is unknown. He is clearly identified as a Captain for three years (not four years) in service to the United States in the Virginia Line on Continental Establishment for land surveyed and patented under bounty warrant No. 850. Three years of continuous service was the threshold for receiving bounty land warrants for service in the Revolutionary War. No records were found for such additional service, i.e., for up to seven years. It may be that the land grants issued under military warrant No. 5140 became the basis for family history that says Robert served eight years in the Revolutionary War (1776-1783); however, this has not been verified.

**Treasury Warrants**

It is possible to find additional land grants in the Virginia State Library issued to a Robert Vance in 1807, 1826 and 1835. However, these warrants do not show this Robert was a captain, which means this might not be our Capt. Robert Vance. The land was in Randolph County, where we have not seen any previous connections to Capt. Robert Vance. These parcels are only discussed here for the sake of completeness of the research into Capt. Robert Vance’s land holdings, but have not been proven to be Capt. Vance’s warrants. The first was granted by Alexander McRae Esq., Lt. Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, for 496 acres in Randolph County, WV under Virginia Land Office Treasury Warrant No. 21,187 issued 1 Dec 1783. This was an “old” Treasury Warrant as it was issued between 1779 and 1783. Such warrants could be purchased for a fee of £40 paid to the state treasurer for each 100 acres [50]. This raises the issue of where Robert might have raised £200 in 1783 to pay for the land. Ultimately, the register of the Land Office issued a treasury warrant authorizing any surveyor to lay off the quantity of land specified on the warrant. The first parcel of land was surveyed in Randolph County, WV on 27 Nov 1805, a delay of 22 years from the date of issuance and payment for the warrant. The actual deed to this land was not conveyed until 8 May 1808, a delay of 25 years. This would have tied up Robert’s money for a very long time. We did find that there was another Robert Vance in W. VA who served in the War of 1812, but based on information in his widow’s pension
application, he died before 1814. Absent any better identification of who this latter Robert Vance was, we are not certain who bought any of this land.

**Religious Activities**

Like many Scotch-Irish living in Westmoreland County, Robert Vance affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. He was a signatory to the “First Call to the Raccoon and Montours Churches” presented to the congregations on 21 Apr 1789. He was one of 159 men who pledged to be “responsible to Mr. Joseph Patterson, Preacher of the Gospel.” Before this date, services were held in the woods, where the minister would stand behind a speaker’s stand called a “tent” and the congregations would sit on logs hewn on one side. The first outdoor sermons were likely delivered in July of 1785 by John McMillan. The first church was built in 1789 [52], the first year of George Washington’s presidency and the year Joseph Patterson took charge of the congregation. Robert is said to have help cut and haul some of the logs used in the construction of the first church. We know from one of Robert’s letters to his brother Samuel [53] that Robert was a religious person. The tribute paid to Robert Vance and the acquisition and placement of a headstone in 1935 by the Montours Presbyterian Church shows the respect and pride the church took in Capt. Robert Vance [2].

**Summary**

Robert Vance is a well-documented Revolutionary War Patriot and was an ardent defender of the western frontier during the mid- to late 1700s. He can’t be credited with all the stories written and told about him, but he was unquestionably a very brave man. Think about raising your family in an environment where the militia, the military, and settlers were at war with the Indians and where terror rained down on both sides. How long would it take you to reload a flintlock musket if you were by yourself in the field and your adversary was only fifty yards away? You might only get one shot and then it is one-on-one (or more) combat with knives and sabers. No wonder these pioneers built forts. Robert was a very tough fellow, and with his wife Jean, they managed to raise a family of eight children in a log cabin with a dirt floor in the middle of a wilderness. One hundred years later, their farm became the small city of Coraopolis.
Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Susan Grabek for sharing her information on Robert’s military service in Lord Dunmore’s War and the Virginia Regiments stationed at Fort Pitt. Susan’s research included where Robert Vance owned land, where he lived and paid taxes. Thanks to Will Grave of the ‘Southern Campaign Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters’ website for transcribing the veteran’s pension depositions. Thanks to VFA member Donald DeJaynes for sharing Robert Atchison Vance’s letter to Dallas McCabe. Thanks to Mary Vance Norfleet for sharing her knowledge of Robert Vance’s family tree.

Bibliography

2. Gaupp, F.A., “Montours Presbyterian Church, One Hundred and Fifty-Seventh Anniversary, September 1 and 2, 1935,” p. 4 “1736 is undoubtedly the year Robert Vance was born in Culpeper, Va.” published by the church in 1935.
3. ______, death notice/obituary in the Vermont Gazette (Bennington, VT), Vol. X, Issue 5, p. 3 published Tuesday, October 13, 1818. Also, Salem Gazette (Salem, MA) Vol. XXXII, Issue 82, p. 3 published Friday, October 9, 1818. Also, the Commercial Advertiser (New York, NY) Vol. XXI, Issue 60, p. 2 published Tuesday October 6, 1818.
4. ______, DAR records are now available on-line http://services.dar.org/public/dar_research/search_adb/?p_id=A117359&action=full.
5. Vance, Robert, grantor in Westmoreland County, PA Deed Book B, p. 252, deed recorded 31 May 1787, grantee William Latta. Robert could legally claim this land under “pre-emptive” (squatter’s) rights because the land was improved prior to 1769.
9. ______, “Old Westmoreland,” p. 19, Vol. I, No. 3 (no author, publisher or year of publication cited, please see VFA NL Vol. XVI No. 3, p. 100 (July 2000)).
16. ______, “Fort Duquesne and Fort Pitt,” pp. 3-4 contain a chronology of events from the construction of Fort Duquesne in 1753 to its “ruinous condition” in 1791, published by the
17. Harris, Leon C., Southern Campaign American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters, transcriptions of rosters of militia and regular armies stationed at various forts. See http://revwarapps.org/ bottom of page “Southern Campaign Revolutionary War Rosters” numbered B149, B167, and B147.


21. Vance, Robert Atchison, personal letter to [Harvey] Dallas McCabe [Jr.] Esq. (b. Sep 1872), the g-g-grandson of Capt. Robert Vance, dated 22 Oct 1911 consisting of six pages of family history. Robert Atchison Vance (b. 1831) was the son of John Vance and Catherine Kiles Atchison and grandson of Robert Vance and Jean White.

22. _____, tax assessment for Hempfield Twp, Westmoreland (then Bedford) County for 1773.

23. _____, Deed of sale dated 20 Dec 1786 wherein Robert Vance granted William Latta 300 acres for £450 in Huntington Township, Westmoreland County. Robert claimed ownership through an improvement he made in 1768.


29. _____, Find-a-Grave Memorial # 55096275.

30. _____, Pittsburgh Payroll 1775, Misc. Reel 78 (microfilm), p. 15(?) available at the Library of Virginia (citation page is based on payment of Pvt. John Wheeler who was in Capt. Stevenson’s Company).


32. _____, documents can be found at www.vancefamilyassociation.org in the members-only section under Historian’s Files, otherwise available on Fold3.com.

33. _____, Valley Forge Muster Roll Project on-line http://valleyforgemusterroll.org/muster.asp.

34. Curtiss, Chauncey (b. 1857) g-grandson of Robert Vance, application to the Colorado Society of the Sons of the American Revolution National #12185 dated 1 Jun 1899. “Grandfather, Samuel Vance, has stated to my Mother [Elizabeth B. Vance] that his Father, Captain Robert Vance, returned in time to march with the army to Valley Forge, where they went into winter quarters. He also told of the suffering and privations endured while there.”


36. _____, “Morning Report of Cap’ Sullivan’s Company 13th Virga Battallion now Stationed at Fort Pitt,” dated 17 Mar 1778 (both Lt. Vance’s “file card” and a full roster sheet of Sullivan’s company for this date are available on Fold3.com).


40. Vance, Robert Capt., muster card available on Fold3.com and the VFA website under Archives - Historian’s Files.

41. _____, a list of the Virginia officers and soldiers who served with George Washington at the Battle of Great Meadows at Fort Defiance online with the National Park Service at http://www.nps.gov/fone/historyculture/roster.htm. No names began with “V.”


43. _____, ledger entry and pay card are available on-line at 3Fold.com (see also Historian’s Files in the VFA Archives online).

44. Wilson, Samuel, “Catalogue of the Revolutionary Soldiers and Sailors of the Commonwealth of Virginia to Whom Land Bounty Warrants Were Granted by Virginia for Military Service in the War for Independence” (a) p. 77; (b) p. 2, pub. Southern Book Company, Baltimore (1953).


47. Gibson, John, affidavit for Capt. Robert Vance copied by Don Koepp from microfilm available at the Virginia State Archives, Richmond, VA (1994).


49. Maurey, Edward B. “Where the West Began, a Story of Coraopolis and the Ohio Valley,” p. 33-35, pub. Press of Record Publishing Company, Coraopolis, PA (1930). Mr. Maurey was the news editor of the newspaper the Coraopolis Record.


51. Jordan, John W., “Genealogical and Personal History of Western Pennsylvania,” p. 1577, pub. Lewis Historical Publishing Company, New York (1915). Jordan identifies Robert Vance McCabe as the second son of Jane Vance and James Harvey McCabe with a birth year of 17 Sep 1817 and death date of 18 Aug 1818, the same dates shown in the McCabe family Bible. The DAR may be incorrectly using the date of death for Robert Vance McCabe as the date of death for Capt. Robert Vance. An alternative date of death for Capt. Robert Vance of May 20, 1818 was reported by Mary Icephine Vance, who may have had Robert Vance’s Bible [7].

52. _____, “The Story of Old Montour,” pp. prepared by the Montour Presbyterian Church, pub. By the church in Allegheny County, PA (1925).


54. _____, Logan County, OH Chancery Record – Common Pleas – Book G, pp 12-27, October Term 1840, Samuel Vance vs. David Vance, as cited by Norman Thomas Newton in his application to the Sons of the American Revolution on 27 Sep 1921, National No. 36130, State No. 1535.

This photograph of Robert Vance was taken of a painting or drawing that reportedly hung in the Montours Presbyterian Church in Coraopolis near Pittsburgh, PA. The birth year is now thought to be 1747 (see story).