

Some Semi-Official Return Envelopes from the Gubernatorial Election of 1864



by Maurice Bursey

The North Carolina gubernatorial election of 1864 was a choice between the very popular Conservative Party¹ incumbent, Zebulon Baird Vance (1830 – 1894, Figure 1), and his opponent from the Confederate Party,² William Woods Holden (1818 – 1892, Figure 2), the reformist publisher of the Raleigh Standard, who had reluctantly accepted the nomination only after he could not persuade any other prominent politician to enter the race. The race was bitter, and the pivotal issue was peace.

After election twice to the United States Congress and refusing requests to stand for the Confederate Congress, Vance



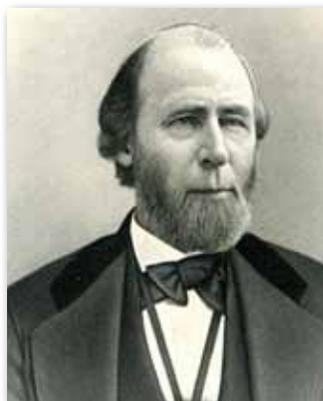
Figure 1. ▶ Zebulon B. Vance, the incumbent governor of North Carolina in 1864 and later U.S. senator.

organized the “Rough and Ready Guards,” which became part of the Fourteenth North Carolina Regiment. In August 1861, Vance was elected colonel of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Regiment, which he led ably at New Bern in March 1862 and the Seven Days’ battles before Richmond a short time later. He was elected Governor in 1862, ousting the incumbent in an election whose outcome expressed voters’ dissatisfaction with state and Confederate leaders. (Recall that by then the Union Army was occupying a large part of coastal North Carolina.) For the next two years Vance took up opposition to policies made in Richmond: Confederate conscription and impressment of property, the suspension of *habeas corpus*, discrimination against North Carolinians in the appointment and promotion of commissioned officers, the use of Virginia officers in North Carolina, state ownership of blockade runners, and North Carolina’s efforts to clothe its troops in the Confederate Army – all were issues where Vance was seen as protecting the rights of North Carolinians against the overreaching central government in Richmond.

¹ During the Civil War, members of the former Whig Party and then the Know-Nothing Party called themselves the Conservative Party in North Carolina.

² The Democratic Party assumed the name Confederate Party during the Civil War in North Carolina.

Holden, on the other hand, was the leader of the state’s “peace movement,” which had been gathering strength in 1863 and early 1864. Holden had been the publisher and editor of the Raleigh *North Carolina Standard* for more than twenty years, and built the paper into the dominant voice of the Democratic Party in the state. He saw the futility of the war and declared that it was far better to make an honorable peace while that was still possible, rather than being forced to accept unconditional surrender. He thought that the time had come to overthrow agrarian aristocratic rule and to create a progressive state for the welfare of the common citizen. This position was, of



◀ **Figure 2.** William W. Holden, the challenger in the North Carolina gubernatorial election in 1864, later governor, and still later postmaster of Raleigh.

course, anathema to powerful political forces in the state.

After the Civil War, Holden sensed the impending disaster of control by forces in the United States Congress and chose to ally himself with new political forces. President Andrew Johnson appointed him governor of North Carolina in late April 1865, although he was defeated in an election later that year by Jonathan Worth, a much respected Democrat. In turn he defeated Worth in 1868 and resumed his role as governor. His term in office was overloaded with problems. In March 1870, after the assassination of a state senator, lynching of an African-American police officer, and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan to fearsome proportions, he declared Caswell and Alamance Counties to be in a state of insurrection and sent in troops to restore order. The first troops were under the command of William J. Clarke. Soon thereafter he sent more troops under the command of George W. Kirk, a Unionist who was widely despised for his terrorist raids in the western part of the state during the war. Thus began the “Kirk–Holden War.” Because of the troops’ behavior during occupation in the two counties and because of his call for the arrest of the editor of the Raleigh *Sentinel*, Holden’s political enemies called for his impeachment. His trial began in January 1871; he was convicted by the Senate in a party-line vote and removed from office on March 22, 1871, the first American governor to be impeached, tried, and removed; his major crime having been

to anger political forces allied with the Ku Klux Klan. Holden was in Washington, D.C., at the time of his removal from office. He was offered diplomatic positions in Peru and Argentina, but declined them, hoping to return to journalism. Later that year he assumed the editorship of the *Washington Daily Chronicle*. He let it be known that he wanted to return to North Carolina, and in March 1873 he was named postmaster of Raleigh, where he served until 1881. From that period, he avoided politics and became known as one of North Carolina's finest historians and lecturers, using his time to write for newspapers in Raleigh and Charlotte, compose poetry, and engage in church activities. For what good it did, the North Carolina State Senate unanimously pardoned him in 2011.

A few years after I began to collect covers illustrating the Civil War in North Carolina, I became aware that envelopes, printed so that sheriffs of North Carolina counties could return gubernatorial election results to Raleigh for the 1864 election, were on the market, usually in auctions. To my mind, they met the

definition of semi-official envelopes, and I began to try to collect as many as came onto the market. After nearly fifty years of watching for them, however, I accumulated only seven.

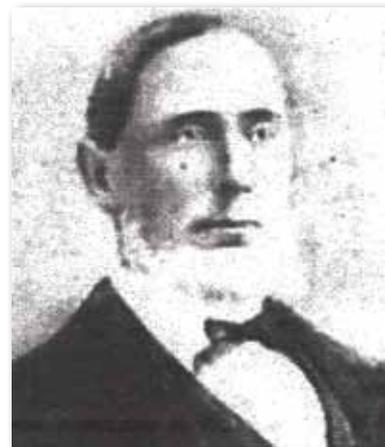
An envelope from Alleghany County appears in Figure 3. The form envelope is signed by the sheriff of Alleghany County, Jesse Ransom Bledsoe (Figure 4), and bears a manuscript postmark of Elk Creek of August 27, 1864. Elk Creek is in neighboring Ashe County. The stamp, a five-cent Richmond printing CSA number 7, appears to have been added to the cover. For one thing, the postage rate had changed to ten cents on July 1, 1863; for another, the stamp is not tied to the cover by the manuscript double line cancellation. Jesse Bledsoe (1827 – 1895) was indeed recorded in Alleghany County as sheriff in the 1860 federal census. He did have close relatives in Ashe County in the 1860s, and he had lived there at other periods in his life.

Figure 5 on the next page shows the envelope from Chatham County. It bears the signature of R. B. Paschal. Richard Bray Paschal (1820 – 1870, Figure 6), spent his life in Chatham



◀ **Figure 3.** 1864 election return envelope from Alleghany County, signed by Sheriff J. R. Bledsoe. It was posted at the Elk Creek post office, in neighboring Ashe County, on August 27, 1864.

Figure 4. ▶ Sheriff Jesse Ransom Bledsoe (1827-1895), who signed the Figure 3 election returns envelope. He was recorded in the 1860 federal census as sheriff of Alleghany County. He had close relatives in Ashe County in the 1860s and lived there at other periods in his life.



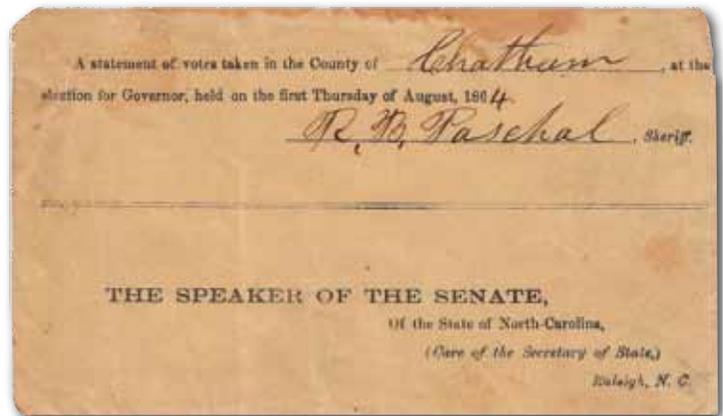
County. He was listed in the 1860 federal census as sheriff of Chatham County, living in Goldston. A black Type 3 Pittsboro circular datestamp with no readable date is on the reverse.

The envelope from Franklin County is shown in Figure 7. On the reverse is an unexceptional CSA number 11 stamp, canceled by a black Type 1 Louisburg circular datestamp. The envelope was signed by Elijah Albert Gupton (1823 – 1904), listed as the sheriff of Franklin County in both the 1860 and 1870 censuses, and his signature appears on correspondence in 1868 with the Freedman's Bureau in New York City.

Guilford County returns were made in the envelope shown in Figure 8, on which a CSA number 11 stamp is canceled by a red Type 5 circular datestamp of Greensboro, with the hyphen between N and C. Caleb Augustus Boone (1820-1897, Figure 9) signed the transmittal envelope as C. A. Boon. He was born in Gibsonville and is listed in the 1860 census as sheriff. By 1870 he was a prosperous farmer in Rock Creek Township of Guilford County.

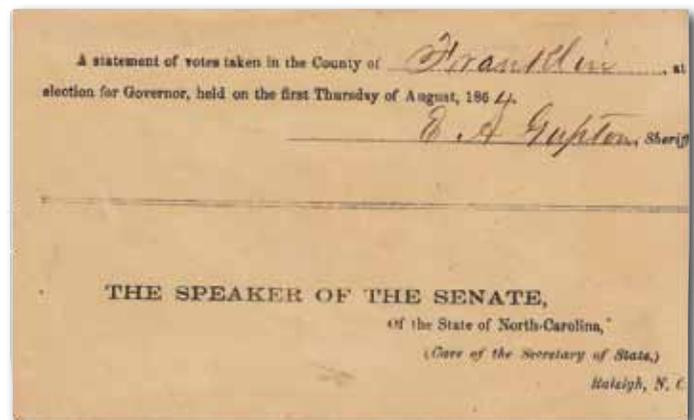
The returns from Hertford County (Figure 10) presumably were sent from the county seat, Winton. While manuscript post-

Figure 5. ▶ 1864 election return envelope from Chatham County, signed by Sheriff R. B. Paschal. A black Type 3 Pittsboro circular datestamp with no readable date is on the reverse.



◀ **Figure 6.** Sheriff Richard Bray Paschal (1820-1870), who signed the Figure 5 election returns envelope. He was listed in the 1860 and 1870 federal census as sheriff of Franklin County, and his signature appears on correspondence in 1868 with the Freedman's Bureau in New York City.

Figure 7. ▶ 1864 election return envelope from Franklin County, signed by Sheriff Elijah Albert Gupton. On the reverse is an unexceptional CSA number 11 stamp, canceled by a black Type 1 Louisburg circular datestamp.



marks from Winton during the Civil War period are known, this cover bears only a cork smudge to cancel the postage stamp, a CSA number 11. The signature is that of Jackson Boone Hare (1819 – 1899, Figure 10), a well-to-do 1860 planter in Hertford County. In 1865, he also owned a grist mill in Winton Township. The 1870 census still gives the same occupation for him, but with considerably less wealth.

No such problem exists in the identification of the sheriff of Orange County in 1864. On the next page H. B. Guthrie signed the return envelope in Figure 11 as sheriff. The envelope bears a CSA number 12 stamp canceled with a blue Type 5 Hillsborough circular datestamp. Hugh Blair Guthrie (1814 – 1881) was born in Chatham County and died in Chapel Hill. In 1853 he bought the Eagle Hotel, a famous 19th century hostelry in



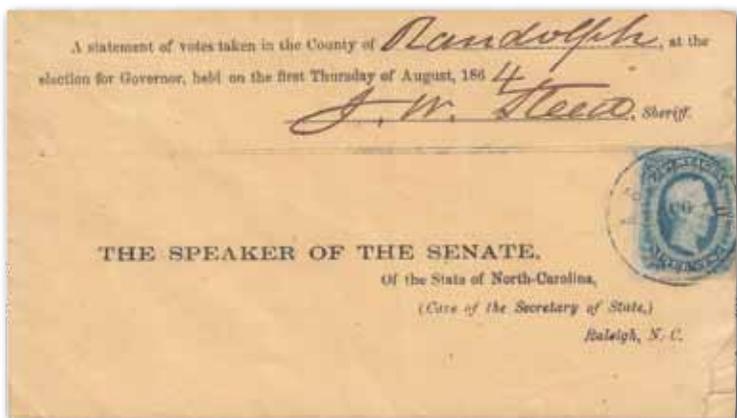
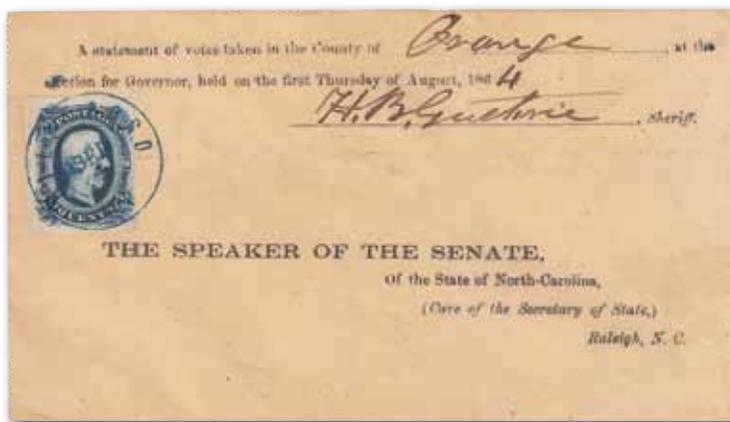
◀ **Figure 8.** 1864 election return envelope from Guilford County, signed by Sheriff C. A. Boone, who signed his name “C.A. Boon” on the printed envelope. A CSA number 11 stamp is canceled by a red Type 5 circular datestamp of Greensboro, with the hyphen between N and C.

Figure 9. ▶ Sheriff Caleb Augustus Boone (1820-1897), who signed the Figure 8 election returns envelope. He was born in Gibsonville (Guilford County) and was listed in the 1860 census as sheriff. By 1870 he was a prosperous farmer in Rock Creek Township, Guilford County.



◀ **Figure 10.** 1864 election return envelope from Hertford County, signed by Sheriff J. B. Hare, presumably sent from Winton, the county seat. While manuscript postmarks from Winton during the Civil War period are known, this cover bears only a cork smudge to kill the postage stamp, CSA number 11.

Figure 11. ▶
1864 election return envelope from Orange County, signed by Sheriff Hugh Blair Guthrie. The envelope bears a CSA number 12 stamp canceled with a blue Type 5 Hillsboro circular datestamp. Guthrie was mayor of Chapel Hill from 1869 to 1872, town commissioner, magistrate of police, postmaster, and member of the General Assembly. He also served two short terms as sheriff of Orange County.



◀ **Figure 12.** 1864 election return envelope from Randolph County, signed by Sheriff J. W. Steed. It bears a CSA number 12 stamp, canceled by a blue Type 3 circular date stamp of Asheboro. Sheriff Steed was a lifetime resident of Randolph County listing his occupation as a farmer.

Chapel Hill, from its original owner, Nancy Hilliard, and was a prosperous businessman by the 1860 census. In the 1870 census, he was a farmer near Chapel Hill in much reduced circumstances. Since the University of North Carolina was shuttered from 1868 until 1875, there was no reason for large numbers of guests to visit Chapel Hill. So there was time for him to be mayor of Chapel Hill from 1869 to 1872, town commissioner, magistrate of police, postmaster, and member of the General Assembly, and to serve two short terms as sheriff of Orange County. He made no secret of being a Union man during the Civil War, and even changed the name of the Eagle Hotel to the Union Hotel. His tombstone in Old Chapel Hill Cemetery bears the inscription, "Born a Whig, Died a Republican."

The envelope from Randolph County is illustrated in Figure 12 bearing a CSA number 12 stamp, canceled by a blue Type 3 circular date stamp of Ashboro. This transmittal was signed by J. W. Steed, sheriff. Joseph Warren Steed (1815 – 1873) spent all his life in Randolph County. He was listed in the 1860 census as the sheriff of Randolph County, but the 1870 census lists his occupation as farmer and his means much reduced.

The election was a runaway for the popular Governor Vance. On August 24, the Raleigh *Confederate* reported that only eleven counties had not reported to the Speaker of the Senate of

North Carolina. Of these, no Confederate elections had been held in the Union-controlled counties of Carteret, Tyrrell, and Washington; Mitchell, Transylvania, and York had voted with the counties from which they had been formed. That left gaps in official returns from Cherokee, Chowan, Gates, Haywood, and Macon Counties, although the *Confederate* published unofficial returns from Cherokee, Haywood, and Macon. The story, as usual, was copied by out-of-state newspapers. The story in the Richmond *Examiner* was copied by *The New-York Times*, which printed the official vote as 52,833 for Vance and 20,174 for Holden. Vance therefore received 72.4% of the vote, by this reckoning. The *Confederate* remarked that Vance had received the largest vote for governor ever cast in the state until then.

After I had accumulated most of these covers, I learned that they had been stolen from the North Carolina State Archives during the time the North Carolina Postal History Society was preparing *Post Offices and Postmasters of North Carolina* in the 1990s. When I disposed of the great bulk of my Civil War collection of North Carolina covers in the winter of 2017, I did not allow these covers to be listed for auction. Instead, I returned them to the State Archives; it was the only ethical thing to do. They are once again available to anyone who wishes to examine them.

Acknowledgments:

I have made heavy use of the biographies of Zebulon B. Vance and William W. Holden in William S. Powell's *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Chapel Hill: 1979-1996.

There are numerous archivists and librarians in Wilson Library in Chapel Hill; the State Archives in Raleigh; and municipal and county libraries and museums in Asheboro, Chapel Hill, Greensboro, Hillsboro, Louisburg, and Winton, who searched mightily for images of their sheriffs in 1864 but who came up empty-handed; I must thank them for the time, effort, and courtesy. My own hunt through online genealogical and other websites to identify these sheriffs' descendants, whom I then contacted about the existence of photographic images, was useless. I thank Robert B. Anthony, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, for identifying the sheriff of Hertford

County in 1864; I had not been able to read the signature on the envelope. ■

References:

- Kaufmann, Patricia A., Crown, Francis J. Jr. and Palazolo, Jerry S. *Confederate States of America, Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*. (n.l.: Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012).
"North Carolina Postmark Catalog Update." www.ncpostalhistory.com/project_postmark_catalog.aspx (Accessed May 14, 2018).
Powell, William S. Editor. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*. 6 Vols. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979-96).