

University of Michigan Law School  
University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository

---

Articles

Faculty Scholarship

---

1901

## Joseph Hardcastle Vance

Jerome C. Knowlton

*University of Michigan Law School*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://repository.law.umich.edu/articles>

 Part of the [Legal Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Knowlton, Jerome C. "Joseph Hardcastle Vance." *Mich. Alumnus* 7 (1901): 199-201.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [mlaw.repository@umich.edu](mailto:mlaw.repository@umich.edu).

---

JOSEPH HARDCASTLE VANCE.

On December 20, 1900, after a quarter of a century's services in the University of Michigan, Joseph H. Vance died at his rooms on Monroe street in the city of Ann Arbor. He had been confined to the house for only a few days and the announcement of his death shocked many of his friends, who had not learned of his illness. He was seventy-three years of age and to those most intimately associated with him his death was not a surprise. During the past two years marked indications of senility had appeared with painful frequency.

In October, 1859, the Law Department of the University of Michigan opened its doors for the first time, and upon the register of that year—still preserved—we find entered in his own hand, the name of Joseph H. Vance, as a freshman law. It may be of interest to notice that our Professor B. M. Thompson entered at the same time. They studied law together.

Mr. Vance graduated with the law class of 1861, and in this class were many men who thereafter became prominent in the history of the state and nation. He had the advantage that comes from being associated with earnest students, full of intellectual vigor and stimulated by laudable ambition, and more than that, he sat at the feet of the "Great Faculty," Cooley, Campbell and Walker.

After graduation Mr. Vance entered a law office in the city of Ann Arbor as an office clerk. Between the years of 1861–1883 he continued this line of work with unimportant variations. For many years he had a desk in the office of Robert E. Frazer, now a circuit judge in the city of Detroit. At that time the office of Judge Frazer was in an old rectangular building, called the "Court House." This court house was then precisely where the present one is now. To the older alumni this spot is dear because of the fact that in front of this old court house President Tappan in 1861 spoke vigorously and urged students to go to war in defence of the Union. Vance was there and has frequently told us younger men of those exciting times.

During this period of over twenty years in Mr. Vance's life, he was frequently called upon by the University authorities to do work in connection with our libraries. This work he did exceedingly well. Once he was placed in charge of the general library of the University—and at one time he was private secretary of the President and at another acted as steward of the University. This was in the sixties.

At one time Mr. Vance thought he was fitted for the bar as a trial lawyer, but he was not, and after some years of disappointment, he returned to his early occupation of handling books. In 1883 the Regents of the University of Michigan made him "Assistant Librarian, in charge of the Law Library." His salary was fixed at \$250. This position he filled faithfully to his death.

The Board of Regents raised his salary from time to time, but he died a poverty-stricken man. He left no estate, except the memory of those who had learned to love him for his acts of kindness.

Mr. Vance was of a literary turn of mind. He wrote continuously and intelligently, but he was of such an extremely modest disposition that few of his writings have been published. His work on Jurisdiction and a few magazine articles are all that have been given to the public. He must have left many manuscripts of value, worthy of thoughtful consideration.

In personality, Mr. Vance has been a unique figure on the Campus for over twenty years. At the age of seventy-three he died a bachelor with no home environments. During the greater part of the time he served the Uni-

versity he walked from his country home, some three miles distant, daily, summer and winter, with dinner pail in hand. The exacting conditions of such a life give the details. As assistant librarian he must have suffered much.

In habits and dress he was exceedingly plain. He had no bad habits and was in every sense a Christian gentleman. His personal wants were few and simple. He had no social obligations and no particular friends. He was courteous to every one he met and treated all alike.

The marked characteristic of the man was his secretiveness. Upon public topics or of University policy he seldom spoke, unless some one asked him a question and then he never gave a definite answer. He was no gossip monger. No one ever heard him say an unkind word about any man. He died a friend to every man and every man his friend.

During his long service as Law Librarian at the University he gave to the students valuable assistance which every alumnus now appreciates, and in my judgement he answered more questions in law and regarding books of law than any other man ever connected with our department. Day and night of every day, he was appealed to. At all times he was exceedingly willing to serve any man in need of help. Members of the Faculty recognize his insistent determination to give them every possible assistance. In this respect he was, of his own volition, almost servile. His chief ambition seemed to be to do his duty as Law Librarian. In this he was courteous and kind to excess. This unselfish interest in others may have been his chief mistake in life, but it is not a mistake that many men make.

The alumni of the Law Department of the University of Michigan will long remember, with a feeling of love and respect, the old man who sat at the table in their library and gave them their first knowledge of where the books were and what there was in them.

*J. C. Knowlton, '75.*