



National Archives and Records Administration

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Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) for Alabama, 1865–1872

Congress established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) on March 3, 1865. Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard served as the only Commissioner of the Bureau. Part of the War Department, the Bureau managed all matters relating to refugees, freedmen, and lands abandoned or seized by Federal authorities during the Civil War. Providing relief and assistance to freedmen, the Bureau issued rations and clothing, operated hospitals and refugee camps, and supervised labor contracts. It also managed apprenticeship disputes, assisted in the establishment of schools, helped former slaves legalize their marriages, and provided transportation to refugees and freedmen. The Freedmen's Bureau was headquartered in Washington, DC, with field offices located in the former Confederate states, the Border States, and the District of Columbia. The Freedmen's Bureau operated until June 30, 1872, although most of its work concluded by December 1868. After 1872, the Bureau's records and activities were transferred to the Freedmen's Branch, Office of the Adjutant General, in Washington, DC.

The Bureau in Alabama set aside land for home colonies, which served as employment and training centers for freedmen living there. Unlike other southern home colonies, those in Alabama were not self-sufficient. The Bureau established hospitals and also used the home colonies as distribution centers for clothes, rations, seeds, and tools. At the home colonies, the Bureau processed claims and organized services for the infirm, orphans, and the elderly. From 1865 to 1867, when massive crop failures and epidemics devastated Alabama, the Bureau made an effort to stave off malnutrition and starvation by making distribution of rations a priority.

These records are part of **Record Group 105, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau)**.

Administrative Records

___M809, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Alabama, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870*. 23 rolls. DP. The records include reports of operations and annual reports from staff officers. The reports relate to destitute freedmen, rations distribution, and abandoned and confiscated lands, as well as rosters of employees. The records also contain a register of claims relating to bounties, back-pay, pensions, and rations, as well as miscellaneous papers relating to property, claims, frauds, and contracts.

Educational Records

___M810, *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Alabama, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870*. 8 rolls. DP. The Bureau offered advice, protection, and financial assistance to local citizens interested in sponsoring schools for freedmen, and also examined and appointed teachers. The records include school reports, accounting records, lists of teachers, and descriptions of Bureau school buildings.

Field Office Records

___M1900, *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Alabama, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872*. 34 rolls. DP. The records provide information about administering justice, issuing rations, supervising labor contracts, establishing schools, and providing medical relief. The records include complaints, contracts, school records, and lists of patients. There are records of several freedmen's hospitals, including those located at Demopolis, Garland, Huntsville, Mobile, Montgomery, Selma, and Talladega.

Other Records

___M803, *Records of the Education Division of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1871*. 35 rolls. DP. This publication contains correspondence and school reports that document efforts to establish and promote schools for freedmen, including day schools, night schools for adults, industrial (vocational) schools, and Sunday schools for religious instruction. Roll 5 contains name and subject indexes. Rolls 15 and 34 specifically relate to activities in Alabama.

___M1875, *Marriage Records of the Office of the Commissioner, Washington Headquarters of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861–1869*. 5 rolls. DP. These records consist of marriage certificates, licenses, monthly reports of marriages, and other proofs of wedlock submitted by freedmen who wanted to legitimize marriages entered into during slavery. The records are arranged alphabetically by state, then alphabetically by the initial letter of the bridegroom's surname. Roll 1 contains one Alabama marriage license issued to Abslum Susk and Martha Culbert on June 20, 1865.

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