

M1908

RECORDS OF THE FIELD OFFICES FOR THE STATE OF MISSOURI,
BUREAU OF REFUGEES, FREEDMEN, AND ABANDONED LANDS,
1865–1872

United States Congress
and
National Archives and Records Administration
Washington, DC
2004

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORD ADMINISTRATION
FREEDMEN'S BUREAU PRESERVATION PROJECT**

This National Archives microfilm publication is part of a multiyear project to microfilm the field office records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau). The project was made possible by the United States Congress through The Freedmen's Bureau Records Preservation Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-444). When completed, all of the field records for the States of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and for the District of Columbia will be available on microfilm. For microfilm availability and description, view both the microfilm catalog *Black Studies: A Select Catalog of National Archives Microfilm Publications* and the National Archives microfilm locator on our web site at www.archives.gov.

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INTRODUCTION

On the 24 rolls of this microfilm publication, M1908, are reproduced the records of the Office of the Disbursing Officer for Missouri, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872. The records of the disbursing officer are the only field records for Missouri, but they reflect his overall responsibility for freedmen affairs in the state. These records consist of bound volumes and unbound records, containing materials that include letters sent and received, registers of marriages, and other records relating to freedmen's claims and bounty payments. These records are part of the Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group (RG) 105.

HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, also known as the Freedmen's Bureau, was established in the War Department by an act of Congress on March 3, 1865 (13 Stat. 507). The life of the Bureau was extended twice by acts of July 16, 1866 (14 Stat. 173), and July 6, 1868 (15 Stat. 83). The Bureau was responsible for the supervision and management of all matters relating to refugees and freedmen, and of lands abandoned or seized during the Civil War. In May 1865, President Andrew Johnson appointed Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard as Commissioner of the Bureau, and Howard served in that position until June 30, 1872, when activities of the Bureau were terminated in accordance with an act of June 10, 1872 (17 Stat. 366). While a major part of the Bureau's early activities involved the supervision of abandoned and confiscated property, its mission was to provide relief and help freedmen become self-sufficient. Bureau officials issued rations and clothing, operated hospitals and refugee camps, and supervised labor contracts. In addition, the Bureau managed apprenticeship disputes and complaints, assisted benevolent societies in the establishment of schools, helped freedmen in legalizing marriages entered into during slavery, and provided transportation to refugees and freedmen who were attempting to reunite with their family or relocate to other parts of the country. The Bureau also helped black soldiers, sailors, and their heirs collect bounty claims, pensions, and back pay.

The act of March 3, 1865, authorized the appointment of Assistant Commissioners to aid the Commissioner in supervising the work of the Bureau in the former Confederate states, the border states, and the District of Columbia. While the work performed by Assistant Commissioners in each state was similar, the organizational structure of staff officers varied from state to state. At various times, the staff could consist of a superintendent of education, an assistant adjutant general, an assistant inspector general, a disbursing officer, a chief medical officer, a chief quartermaster, and a commissary of subsistence. Subordinate to these officers were the assistant superintendents, or subassistant commissioners as they later became known, who commanded the subdistricts.

The Assistant Commissioner corresponded extensively with both his superior in the Washington Bureau headquarters and his subordinate officers in the subdistricts. Based upon reports submitted to him by the subassistant commissioners and other subordinate staff officers, he prepared reports that he sent to the Commissioner concerning Bureau activities in areas under his jurisdiction. The Assistant Commissioner also received letters from freedmen, local white citizens, state officials, and other non-Bureau personnel. These letters varied in nature from complaints to applications for jobs in the Bureau. Because the assistant adjutant general handled much of the mail for the Assistant Commissioner's office, it was often addressed to him instead of to the Assistant Commissioner.

In a circular issued by Commissioner Howard in July 1865, the Assistant Commissioners were instructed to designate one officer in each state to serve as "general Superintendents of Schools." These officials were to "take cognizance of all that is being done to educate refugees and freedmen, secure proper protection to schools and teachers, promote method and efficiency, correspond with the benevolent agencies which are supplying his field, and aid the Assistant Commissioner in making his required reports." In October 1865, a degree of centralized control was established over Bureau educational activities in the states when Rev. John W. Alvord was appointed Inspector of Finances and Schools. In January 1867, Alvord was divested of his financial responsibilities, and he was appointed General Superintendent of Education.

An act of Congress, approved July 25, 1868 (15 Stat. 193), ordered that the Commissioner of the Bureau "shall, on the first day of January next, cause the said bureau to be withdrawn from the several States within which said bureau has acted and its operation shall be discontinued." Consequently, in early 1869, with the exception of the superintendents of education and the claims agents, the Assistant Commissioners and their subordinate officers were withdrawn from the states.

For the next year and a half the Bureau continued to pursue its education work and to process claims. In the summer of 1870, the superintendents of education were withdrawn from the states, and the headquarters staff was greatly reduced. From that time until the Bureau was abolished by an act of Congress approved June 10, 1872 (17 Stat. 366), effective June 30, 1872, the Bureau's functions related almost exclusively to the disposition of claims. The Bureau's records and remaining functions were then transferred to the Freedmen's Branch in the office of the Adjutant General. The records of this branch are among the Bureau's files.

THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU IN MISSOURI

ORGANIZATION

On May 31, 1865, Major Gen. Oliver Otis Howard appointed Brig. Gen. John W. Sprague as the Assistant Commissioner for Missouri and Arkansas. In June Sprague established his headquarters at St. Louis, Missouri. Bvt. Maj. Gen. Edward O. C. Ord

relieved Sprague in October 1866, and was succeeded by Bvt. Maj. Gen. Charles H. Smith in March 1867.

When Sprague arrived in St. Louis, his jurisdiction encompassed areas outside Arkansas, including Missouri, Indian Territory, and parts of Kansas (around Fort Leavenworth and Fort Scott) and Illinois (around Quincy and Cairo). Commissioner Howard felt by September 1865 that the laws of Missouri afforded enough protection to freedmen for the Bureau's activities to cease there. Therefore, on October 16, 1865, Sprague received orders from Commissioner Howard to transfer headquarters from St. Louis to Little Rock, Arkansas, and the operations of the Bureau were withdrawn from Missouri. However, in April 1867, F. A. Seely was assigned as a disbursing officer for Missouri with headquarters at St. Louis, a position he held until February 1872. Although much of Seely's work related to the processing and payment of claims, he was also in charge of freedmen's affairs in Missouri. Much of his correspondence relates to the establishment of schools for freedmen as well as to the settlement of military claims.

ACTIVITIES

Although the political and social environment in Missouri was less hostile and violent than in other border states, and the Freedmen's Bureau received considerable support for its operations from a large segment of the foreign-born German community, activities of the Missouri Bureau generally resembled those conducted in other states. The Bureau provided relief, worked with benevolent societies in the establishment of freedmen schools, administered justice and protection, helped freedmen legalize marriages, and assisted black soldiers and their heirs with military claims.

When General Sprague assumed command as Assistant Commissioner for Missouri and Arkansas, he assigned Chaplin Alpha Wright as superintendent for the Missouri and Kansas. From June 1865 to September 1866, to prevent widespread starvation and destitution, the Bureau in Missouri and Arkansas issued some 1,705,055 rations to both blacks and whites. However, by late October 1865, the Bureau's ration-relief efforts had been discontinued in Missouri. Because civil authorities in the Arkansas district failed to provide medical assistance to the "destitute and starving," the Bureau, with assistance from Northern societies, established asylums, hospitals, and various kinds of relief camps. By the fall of 1866, with two commissioned medical officers, contract physicians, and male and female attendants, the Bureau had treated more than 100 refugees and over 15,000 freedmen. In late October 1866, Assistant Commissioner Sprague reported that Arkansas hospitals alone had given medical aid to 3,260 people, nearly 200 of them freedmen. By the end of June 1868, Bureau hospitals in Arkansas had treated four times as many patients as in previous years, and greatly curtailed the attacks of smallpox and cholera.¹

¹ Thomas S. Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1862-74* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1923), pp. 205-7; House Ex. Doc. 70, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., Serial 1, vol. 1256, p. 73.

Safeguarding rights and securing justice for freedmen were paramount concerns to the Freedmen's Bureau. After the Civil War, several Southern states enacted a series of laws commonly known as "black codes" that restricted freedmen's rights and legal status. Freedmen often received harsh sentences for petty crimes, and in some instances were unable to get their cases heard in state courts. On May 30, 1865, Commissioner Howard directed Assistant Commissioners to "adjudicate, either themselves or through officers of their appointment, all difficulties arising between negroes themselves, or between negroes and whites or Indians." In Missouri, "because good laws [were] passed protecting the rights of freedmen," Bureau officials mostly relied on the civil courts to administer justice in freedmen cases. In Arkansas, however, freedmen's cases were tried in both provost and freedmen courts. A freedmen court consisted of a Bureau official and two citizens of a given county. These courts had jurisdiction over labor disputes and other cases relating to freedmen and refugees that did not exceed \$300, 30 days in prison, or a fine of \$100. In October 1865, Sprague appointed civilian superintendents to administer justice in Arkansas, especially where freedmen were denied the right to testify in courts. Superintendents were told to follow state court procedures and laws as long as the laws made "no distinctions on account of color." By summer 1866, despite continued allegations of mistreatment of freedmen, all cases but those relating to labor contracts were being handled by state courts or military authorities. In 1867, when reconstruction acts placed Arkansas under the fourth military district, both state and Bureau courts were put under military supervision.²

By the time the Freedmen's Bureau arrived in Missouri, several benevolent societies had established schools for freedmen. In 1864, the American Missionary Society established a freedmen school at Warrensburg, and the Western Freedmen Aid Society (WFAS) assisted military officials in the education of freedmen at Benton Barracks. The WFAS also helped open an orphan home for black children in St. Louis. When Frederick Seely opened his office in Missouri in 1867, there were more than 1,000 students attending some 30 schools in St. Louis alone. Seely, however, provided support and assistance to local groups in the construction of additional schools in St. Louis, Warrensburg, Kansas City, Westport, and Carondolet. In south St. Louis, for example, the Bureau granted \$800 to a group of blacks to erect a school at Jefferson and Cinde streets. A group of black Methodists in Carondolet received \$1,500 dollars from the Bureau to construct a building for religious and educational purposes.³

² House Ex. Doc. No. 11, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., Serial vol. 1255, p. 45; Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas*, pp. 211–15; For a discussion of Freedmen's Bureau courts (including Missouri), see George R. Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), pp. 152–68.

³ W. A. Low, "The Freedmen's Bureau in the Border States," in *Radicalism, Racism, and Party Realignment: The Border States During Reconstruction*, ed. Richard O. Curry, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1969), pp. 258–62.

In response to Assistant Commissioner Sprague's orders of June 24, 1865, "to keep and preserve a record of marriages of freed people, and by whom the ceremony was performed," Freedmen's Bureau officials in parts of Missouri registered freedmen marriages. Reproduced in this microfilm publication is a register documenting the marriage of some 66 freedmen couples performed during the months of July and August 1865 at Cape Girardeau, Missouri. The register includes such information as the date of marriage, names and ages of the bride and bridegroom, where married, by whom, and the number of male and female children. Reports of these marriages and of others performed during the month of August 1865 at Pilot-Knob, Missouri, were forwarded to the Office of the Commissioner in Washington, DC.⁴

On November 14, 1863, Maj. Gen. J. M. Schofield, commander of the Department of Missouri, issued General Orders Number 135, authorizing the widespread recruitment of African American volunteers for service during the Civil War in the United States Colored Troops (USCT). Schofield's order called for the recruitment of slaves, contrabands, and free blacks, with compensation of as much as \$300 for loyal slaveowners who lost slaves to military service. More than 8,000 African Americans, most from Missouri, enlisted in the Missouri regiments of the 18th, 60th, 62nd, 65th, and 68th USCT. The Colored Troops Division of the Adjutant General's Office maintained descriptive lists of black volunteers recruited for the army from Missouri. In accordance with a law passed by Congress on May 29, 1865, making the Freedmen's Bureau the sole agent for payment of claims of black veterans, Bureau disbursing officers assisted tens of thousands of black soldiers and their heirs in the preparation and settlement of claims for back pay, bounty payments, and pensions. Reproduced in this microfilm publication are registers relating to military claims of black soldiers from Missouri and proceedings of a Missouri commission established by the War Department to award compensation to loyal persons "whom a black volunteer or drafted man may have owed service at the time of his enlistment."⁵

RECORDS DESCRIPTION

⁴ See the series Register of Marriages at Cape Girardeau on roll 24 of this microfilm publication. The monthly reports of marriages for Cape Girardeau and Pilot-Knob, Missouri, sent to headquarters, are reproduced on National Archives Microfilm Publication M1875, *Marriage Records of the Office of the Commissioner, Washington Headquarters, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861-1869*.

⁵ See Microfilm Publication M1894, *Descriptive Recruitment Lists of Volunteers for the United States Colored Troops for the State of Missouri, 1863-1865*. Compiled service records for the 18th Missouri Infantry Regiment, USCT, have been reproduced on M1822, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: Infantry Organizations, 14th through 19th*, rolls 65-83. See the series Proceedings of a Missouri Commission to Award Compensation to Each Loyal Person to Whom a Black Volunteer or Drafted Man May Have Owed Service at the Time of His Enlistment or Draft into the Military Service of the United States on roll 24 of this microfilm publication.

These records consist of volumes and unbound records. The volumes reproduced in this microfilm publication were originally arranged by the Freedmen's Bureau by type of record and thereunder by volume number. No numbers were assigned to series consisting of single volumes. Years later, all volumes were assigned numbers by the Adjutant General's Office (AGO) of the War Department after the records came into its custody. In this microfilm publication, AGO numbers are shown in parentheses to aid in identifying the volumes. The National Archives assigned the volume numbers that are not in parentheses. In some volumes, particularly in indexes and alphabetical headings of registers, there are blank numbered pages that have not been filmed.

The volumes consist of letters and endorsements sent and received, press copies of letters sent, registers of letters received, registers of bounty claimants, and a marriage register. The unbound documents consist of registered letters, registered letters received by endorsement, and unregistered letters received.

RELATED RECORDS

In the same record group, RG 105, and related to records of the Bureau in Missouri, are those of the Bureau headquarters in Washington, DC, and previously microfilmed records of the Assistant Commissioner and the superintendent of education for Arkansas. These record series are available in the following National Archives microfilm publications:

M742, Selected Series of Records Issued by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872

M752, Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872

M803, Records of the Education Division of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1871

M979, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869

M980, Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1871

M1901, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872

M1875, Marriage Records of the Office of the Commissioner, Washington Headquarters of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861–1869

M1894, Descriptive Recruitment Lists of Volunteers for the United States Colored Troops for the State of Missouri, 1863–1865

Records in other record groups supplement those of the Disbursing Officer. In Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821–1920, RG 393, are records of the military district that included Missouri. Records relating to employment and welfare of freedmen and abandoned property before the establishment of the Bureau are among Records of Civil War Special Agencies of the Treasury Department, RG 366. The records of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, 1865–1874, in Records of the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, RG 101, contain information relating to former slaves who maintained accounts with the bank branches at Missouri.

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ROLL	DESCRIPTION	DATES
1	<p>LIST OF BOOK RECORDS OF OFFICERS</p> <p><i>State of Missouri</i></p> <p>The single-volume list of book records for the office of the disbursing officer for Missouri is undated. Included in the list of book records are the type of record in each book or volume, the dates of the volume, and the volume number. Throughout this introductory material and in the table of contents, the AGO volume number appears in parentheses in the series descriptions of the records.</p> <p>1 Volume</p>	
	<p>OFFICE OF THE DISBURSING OFFICER</p> <p>CORRESPONDENCE</p> <p><i>Press Copies of Letters Sent</i></p> <p>The ten volumes of press copies of letters sent, April 1867–February 1872, 1 (7), 2 (8), 3 (9), 4 (10), 5 (11), 6 (12), 7 (13), 8 (14), 9 (15), and 10 (16), are arranged chronologically, and each volume has a name index.</p>	
	<p>Volume 1 (7)</p> <p>Volume 2 (8)</p>	<p>Apr. 9–Oct. 16, 1867</p> <p>Oct. 17, 1867–Feb. 18, 1868</p>
2	Volume 3 (9)	Feb. 18–May 11, 1868
3	Volume 4 (10)	May 11–Oct. 6, 1868
4	Volume 5 (11)	Oct. 6, 1868–Apr. 3, 1869
5	Volume 6 (12)	Apr. 3–Dec. 21, 1869
6	Volume 7 (13)	Dec. 21, 1869–June 9, 1870
7	Volume 8 (14)	June 9–Nov. 5, 1870
8	Volume 9 (15)	Nov. 7, 1870–Aug. 19, 1871
9	Volume 10 (16)	Aug. 19, 1871–Feb. 19, 1872
	<p><i>Register of Endorsements Sent and Received</i></p> <p>The single-volume register of endorsements sent and received, December 1867–December 1869 (17), is arranged chronologically. The volume contains an abstract of letters received. For an explanation, see the descriptive narrative for the six-volume series of registers of letters received (April 1867–April 1872) described below. Letters received by endorsement and indexed in this volume are in the unbound registered letters received by endorsement (December 1867–December 1869) described below.</p>	
	Volume (17)	Dec. 1867–Dec. 1869

ROLL DESCRIPTION

DATES

9 *Registered Letters Received by Endorsement*

(cont.) Unbound registered letters received by endorsement, December 1867–December 1869, are arranged chronologically. These letters are registered in the single-volume register of endorsements sent and received described above. For an explanation, see the descriptive narrative for the six-volume series of registers of letters received (April 1867–April 1872) described below.

Dec. 1867–Apr. 1869

10 *Registered Letters Received by Endorsement* (cont.)

May–Dec. 1869

Registers of Letters Received

The six volumes of registers of letters received, 1–6, cover the period April 1867–April 1872. The entries in volumes 1–3 are arranged by initial letter of surname of writer and thereunder chronologically. The entries in volumes 4–6 are arranged chronologically. Volumes 4 and 5 contain name indexes. Volumes 1 and 4–6 include endorsements. Endorsements to volumes 2 and 3 are found in the single-volume register of endorsements sent and received described above. Any letter received during this period, directly from an office or individual, was entered in the register of letters received; if it was then forwarded to another office or individual it was also entered in the register of endorsements sent and received. Because of this procedure, some letters appear in both series. If the letter was received by endorsement (i.e., referral from another office), it was only entered into the endorsements volume. Letters received and indexed in this volume are in the unbound registered letters received (April 1867–April 1872) described below.

Volume (1)	Apr. 1–Dec. 15, 1867
Volume (2)	Dec. 15, 1867–Mar. 1869
Volume (3)	Mar.–Dec. 31, 1869
Volume (4)	Jan.–Aug. 8, 1870
Volume (5)	Aug. 8, 1870–Dec. 12, 1871
Volume (6)	Dec. 13, 1871–Apr. 4, 1872

11 *Registered Letters Received*

Unbound registered letters received, April 1867–April 1872, are arranged as they are entered in the six volumes of registers of letters received (April 1867–April 1872) described above. For the alphabetical ranges below (rolls 11–23), there may not be letters received for each initial surname for each year. For example, in volume 2, there are no “B”s for 1869.

Entered in Volume 1

A–Y 1867

Entered in Volume 2

A 1867–69

B 1867–68

ROLL	DESCRIPTION	DATES
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15	Entered in Volume 3	
	B-M	1869
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	S-Z	1870
	Entered in Volume 5	
	A-C	1870
20	Entered in Volume 5	
	D-S	1870
21	Entered in Volume 5	
	T-Z	1870

ROLL	DESCRIPTION	DATES
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(cont.)	Entered in Volume 5	
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22	Entered in Volume 5	
	F–S	1871
23	Entered in Volume 5	
	T–Z	1871
	Volume 6	Dec. 1871–Apr. 1872
	<i>Unregistered Letters Received</i>	
	Unbound unregistered letters received, April 1867–April 1872, are arranged by month.	
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	<i>Proceedings of a Missouri Commission to Award Compensation to Each Loyal Person to Whom a Black Volunteer or Drafted Man May Have Owed Service at the Time of His Enlistment or Draft into the Military Service of the United States</i>	
	The single volume of proceedings of this Missouri commission, dated October 1866–April 1867 (34), is arranged chronologically.	
	Volume (34)	Oct. 1866–Apr. 1867
	<i>Register of Marriages at Cape Girardeau</i>	
	The single-volume register of marriages at Cape Girardeau, July–August 1865 (24), is arranged chronologically.	
	Volume (24)	July–Aug. 1865
	<i>Name Indexes</i>	
	The two volumes of undated name indexes are indexes to the four volumes of registers of adjusted claims (ca. 1868–April 1872) described below.	
	Volume 1 (20)	Undated
	Volume 2 (23)	Undated

ROLL	DESCRIPTION	DATES
24	<i>Registers of Adjusted Claims</i>	
(cont.)	The four volumes of registers of adjusted claims are dated ca. 1868–1872. Volumes 1 (18) and 2 (19) are unarranged. Volume 3 (21) is dated ca. 1868–70 and is arranged numerically. Volume 4 (22), dated April 1871–April 1872, is arranged in chronological order and numbered. Volume 1 (18) is dated ca. 1868–69 and has a name index. For name indexes to the entire series, see the two volumes of undated name indexes 1 (20) and 2 (23) described above.	
	Volume 1 (18)	ca. 1868–69
	Volume 2 (19)	ca. 1868–69
	Volume 3 (21)	ca. 1868–70
	Volume 4 (22)	Apr. 1871–Apr. 1872
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	The single-volume register of bounty claims, September 1867–October 1871 (23½), is arranged chronologically.	
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