



National Archives and Records Administration

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20408-0001

Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) for Arkansas, 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.

In Arkansas, nine million acres of public land was available for settlement. The Bureau in Arkansas hired an agent to locate land for the freedmen, although much of the land was unsuitable for settlement. Only 25 percent of the approximately 250 freedmen (many from Georgia) who applied for land entries received land. The majority of Arkansas land entries were made by whites. The Bureau in Arkansas was also concerned about fair labor contracts between freedmen and planters. Subordinate Bureau officers kept records of the labor contracts that they approved and witnessed. Bureau officials advised freedmen to consider employment from individuals who offered educational opportunities to children.

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

Administrative Records

___M979 *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*. 52 rolls. DP. The records include reports on operations and the education of freedmen. There are records relating to abandoned and confiscated lands, distribution of rations (including petitions of destitute citizens for rations), labor contracts, and personnel. A few miscellaneous records include a report on the relationship between freedmen and Indians in the Indian Territory, a report of contracts for 1866, and a list of murders and assaults committed in Arkansas (March 1867–March 1868).

Educational Records

___M980 *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1871*. 5 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 correspondence and school reports.

Field Office Records

___M1901 *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872*. 23 rolls. DP. The records provide information about administering justice, assisting freedmen in locating land, issuing rations, supervising labor contracts, establishing schools, and providing medical relief. The records include amnesty oaths, registers of bounty claimants, and monthly reports. There are also records relating to rations, claims, court trials, property restoration, and homesteads.

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 Arkansas.

___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 the unbound monthly reports of marriages (July 1865–September 1866) for the following subdistricts of Arkansas: Arkadelphia, Ashley, Devalls Bluff, and Helena.

Rev. January 2011