



National Archives and Records Administration

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Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) for Maryland and Delaware, 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 June 1865, Commissioner Howard appointed Col. John Eaton as the Assistant Commissioner of the District of Columbia, whose jurisdiction included Maryland, the District of Columbia, the city of Alexandria, and the Virginia counties of Fairfax and Loudon. On September 27, 1865, Howard appointed Lt. Col. William P. Wilson as the acting Assistant Superintendent for Maryland. In March 1866, Bvt. Maj. Gen. George J. Stannard became the first Assistant Commissioner for Maryland (with the exception of the counties of Calvert, Charles, Montgomery, Prince George's, and St. Mary's, which fell under the control of the Assistant Commissioner of the District of Columbia). In the summer of 1866, six counties in Virginia and two in West Virginia, referred to as the Shenandoah Division, were added to the Maryland Command (transferred to the Virginia Command the following September). On January 16, 1867, Maryland's jurisdiction was expanded to include Delaware.

In Maryland, the Bureau took legal action to free black school-aged children from the apprenticeship system. The Bureau also established school buildings and worked with benevolent societies to maintain schools in Maryland and Delaware.

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

Field Office Records

M1906, Records of the Field Offices for the States of Maryland and Delaware, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872. 42 rolls. DP. The records document the major activities of the field offices in Maryland and Delaware, focusing largely on freedmen education, the administration of justice, and veterans' claims. On Rolls 1–41, the records of

Delaware are interspersed among Maryland records. Roll 42 relates specifically to Wilmington, Delaware.

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 16–18 and 34 specifically relate to activities in the District of Columbia including Maryland and Delaware.

—M1902, *Records of the Field Offices of the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870.* 21 rolls. DP. Records for Maryland are interspersed throughout this microfilm publication; there are no records for Delaware. The records document the major duties of the field offices in the District of Columbia such as providing relief, resettlement transportation, employment, establishing schools, legalizing marriages, and obtaining veterans benefits for black soldiers and sailors. The records include correspondence, endorsements, reports, employment registers and rosters, marriage registers, registers of contraband camps, labor contracts, transportation orders, and ministers' reports relating to marriages. The records are generally arranged alphabetically by administrative office, then chronologically by type of record.

—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 two affidavits certifying marriages in Delaware. There are no separate listings for marriages in Maryland, but information may be filed among the records of the District of Columbia (also contained on roll 1).

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