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RECORDS OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF CLAIMS
(SOUTHERN CLAIMS COMMISSION)
1871-1880

On the 14 rolls of this microfilm publication are reproduced records of the Commissioners of Claims (otherwise known as the Southern Claims Commission) dated between March 10, 1871, and June 29, 1880 and also a few papers dated as early as March 29 1864, and as late as April 17, 1900. An act of Congress approved March 3, 1871, provided that the President nominate three commissioners of claims (to be confirmed by the Senate) to receive, examine, and consider the claims of "those citizens who remained loyal adherents to the cause and the government of the United States during the war, for stores or supplies taken or furnished during the rebellion for the use of the army of the United States in States proclaimed as in insurrection against the United States " By an act approved May 11, 1872, this clause was extended to include property used by the Navy The commissioners were to satisfy themselves of the loyalty of each claimant; certify the amount, nature, and value of the property taken or furnished; report their judgement on each claim in writing to the House of Representatives at the beginning of each session of Congress; hold their sessions in Washington; and keep a journal of their proceedings and a register of all claims brought before them. The act provided further that of the claims within its provisions only presented to the commissioners could be prosecuted, and that all others were to be barred.

The Commissioners of Claims –Asa Owen Aldis, of Vermont, President; James B. Howell, of Iowa; and Orange Ferriss, of New York—met in Washington on March 16, 1871, with Charles F. Benjamin as Chief Clerk. The volume of their work soon proved to be so great that they were authorized by an act of May 11, 1872, to appoint special commissioners to administer oaths and affirmations and take depositions of witnesses, and special agents to investigate pending claims, procure evidence, and examine witnesses. The special commissioners were local appointees, confined to hearing small claims. The special agents were traveling investigators of both large and small claims. All papers collected by commissioners and agents were sent to the Commissioners at Washington, who were responsible for making recommendations on all claims. They had received 22,298 claims by March 3, 1873, which had been set by an act of Congress approved on that date as the last day on which new claims could be presented to the Commissioners. They were occupied with the investigation and settlement of these claims until March 1880 when the last of the claims were reported to Congress. The whole amount of the claims was \$60,258,150. Of which only \$4,636,920.69 was approved and paid. Of the 22,298 claims, only 7,092 satisfied the rigid tests of sworn statement and cross-examination in proving both the sustained Unionism of the claimant throughout the war and the validity of his claim.

An act of June 16, 1880, terminated the Commission and gave the Treasury Department responsibility for liquidating the business of the Commission.

On this microfilm publication are reproduced the following records:

(1) The journal of the Commissioners, March 16, 1871 March 9, 1880, consisting of two volumes, in addition to one volume of an earlier draft through October 8, 1872. The journal is a daily record of the proceedings of the Commissioners, with summaries of letters received and sent and also with printed copies of several annual reports of the Commissioners, samples of blank forms, and other printed matter. Only the first volume, which ends December 31, 1877, is indexed.

- (2) Miscellaneous letters received by the Commissioners from all classes of correspondents except special agents, March 10, 1871-June 29, 1880. Among the correspondents are Claimants, attorneys for claimants, Federal officials and other persons giving evidence on specific claims, special commissioners, and writers of letters in favor of or in opposition to applicants for appointment as special commissioners. They are not indexed.
- (3) Miscellaneous papers, consisting chiefly of memorandum copies of bills for goods, March 29-June 13, 1864; a letter from the Deputy Quartermaster to the Quartermaster General of the Army, May 14, 1869, relating to a claim of A. M. White; updated notes and letters addressed by claimants and others to the Department of the Treasury, September 4, 1882-May 10, 1895, with one letter written not earlier than April 17, 1900, relating to business left unfinished by the Commissioners. The papers previous to 1882 may have been enclosures separated by accident from the letters received by the Commissioners. Those of later date are not records of the Commissioners of Claims but are filed with and related to the records and are therefore included in this microfilm publication.
- (4) Fifty-seven summary reports, one on each of 57 claims, submitted by the Commissioners to the House of Representatives and arranged by serial numbers from 586 through 21148. These are printed forms giving serial number of claim, name of claimant, county and State in which claimant resided, itemized statements of claim, amount allowed and/or disallowed for each claim, and remarks. It is not clear why these few reports are separated from the others, which are among the Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233, in the National Archives.
- (5) Letters received by the Commissioners from and about special agents, August 8, 1871-February 7, 1880. The special agents consist chiefly of letters of acceptance and weekly reports; those about the agents are chiefly recommendations and complaints. That agents were not officially authorized to act before May 11, 1872, when Congress provided for the appointment of special agents. The letters are arranged alphabetically by the names of the 14 special agents.
- (6) A printed but unpublished geographical list of claimants, arranged alphabetically by names of States, thereunder by names of counties, and thereunder by names of claimants, with the serial number and amount of each claim.
- (7) *Consolidated Index of Claims Reported by the Commissioners of Claims to the House of Representatives from 1871 to 1880, Compiled under the Supervision of J B. Holloway, Clerk to Prepare Digest of Claims, and Walter H. French File Clerk, House of Representatives* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1892). This printed volume is filed with the records of the Commissioners and is filmed as an index to the action taken on the 22,298 claims. The entries are arranged alphabetically names of claimants. For each claim the following information was given: name of claimant, State, Commission number (serial number of claim), office number, report number (number of the report in which the claim was reported by the Commissioners to the House of Representatives); year (in which claim as reported); amount claimed, amount allowed; amounts disallowed, barred, withdrawn, or dismissed; and nature of claim (commodities or other item or which compensation was claimed).

These records are part of General Records of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 56, in the National Archives. In the same record group are additional records of the Commission that have not been reproduced in this microfilm publication. These consist of a few fragmentary records and various manuscript registers and indexes of claims that contain essentially the same information as the printed alphabetical and geographical indexes.

Also in the same record group is correspondence of the Division of Captured and Abandoned Property and successor divisions, 1864-1906, that were responsible for handling inquiries regarding individual claims after the Commission was abolished.

Closely related records in other record groups include case files relating to individual claims. The Records of the United States House of Representatives, Record Group 233, include the case files for claims that were disallowed or barred by the Commission and on which no further action was taken by the claimants. Most of the case files for claims allowed, either whole or in part, before 1894 are among the settled accounts and claims of the Third Auditor in the Records of the United States General Accounting Office, Record Group 217. Case files of claims subsequently brought before the United States Court of Claims, as provided by later legislation, are part of the Records of the United States Court of Claims, Record Group 123.

The annual reports of the Commissioners of Claims, 1871-81, have been published as House Miscellaneous Documents in the Congressional Serial Set as follows:

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These introductory remarks were prepared by Kathryn M. Murphy.

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2	Miscellaneous Letters Received; Mar. 10 1871-Dec. 30, 1872
3	Miscellaneous Letters Received; Jan. 2-Dec. 29, 1873
4	Miscellaneous Letters Received; Jan. 1-June 29, 1874
5	Miscellaneous Letters Received; July 1-Dec. 31, 1874
6	Miscellaneous Letters Received; Jan. 5-Dec. 23 1875
7	Miscellaneous Letters Received; Jan. 7-Dec. 28 1876
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9	Miscellaneous Letters Received; Jan. 2, 1878-June 29, 1880 Miscellaneous Papers; Mar. 29, 1864-ca. Apr. 17, 1900 Summary Reports on Claims
10	Letters From and About Special Agents: Avery-Brownlow R. B. Avery, Mar. 21, 1877-Nov. 8 1879 Liberty Bartlett, Aug. 2, 1872-Jan. 17, 1877 John B. Brownlow, June 7, 1872-Feb. 21, 1877
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