



National Archives and Records Administration

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Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) for Mississippi, 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 Mississippi Bureau attempted to stave off malnutrition and destitution by making ration distribution a priority. From 1865 to 1866, the Bureau issued more than 350,000 rations. The Southern Homestead Act of 1866 made available approximately five million acres of public land available for settlement in Mississippi. Mississippi, however, did not have a land office, and the Bureau could not get maps and other records relating to Mississippi public lands. By 1867, the Assistant Commissioner concluded that much of the land was unsuitable for settlement. Many freedmen were also under labor contracts that further hampered their ability to claim land.

The Bureau found that many Mississippi schools lacked adequate buildings and funds to pay teachers' salaries, had no uniform teaching standards, and that some teachers were unqualified. The Bureau worked with educational and benevolent societies to improve these conditions.

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

For more information relating to pre-Bureau records for Mississippi, see the following reference report: *Records of the Mississippi Freedmen's Department (Pre-Bureau Records), 1863–1865*.

Administrative Records

___M826, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Mississippi, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*. 50 rolls. DP. The records include registers of indentures and marriages, land reports, ration reports, vouchers, and labor contracts.

Field Office Records

___M1907, *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Mississippi, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872*. 65 rolls. DP. This publication contains the previously unfiled records of the Office of the Assistant Commissioner (roll 65) for the

Mississippi Bureau. The records document such activities as administering justice, establishing and supporting schools, legalizing marriages, providing medical relief, distributing rations, and supervising labor contracts. The records include amnesty oaths, applications of freedmen for rations, and registers of bounty claimants. There are also records relating to 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 24 and 34 specifically relate to activities in Mississippi.

___M1027, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Louisiana, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*. 36 rolls. DP. Mississippi and the Louisiana parishes of Carroll, Concordia, Madison, and Tenas were divided into Western, Southern, and Northern Districts. The Louisiana parishes were incorporated into the Louisiana Freedmen's Bureau in January 1866. The bulk of these records consist of reports on the conditions of freedmen and refugees, confiscated and abandoned lands, murders and outrages, and personnel records. Arranged by type of record, such as issuances and endorsements sent, and reports, such as reports relating to confiscated and abandoned lands, and then chronologically.

___M1026, *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Louisiana, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1864–1869*. 12 rolls. DP. Mississippi and the Louisiana parishes of Carroll, Concordia, Madison, and Tenas were divided into Western, Southern, and Northern Districts. The Louisiana parishes were incorporated into the Louisiana Freedmen's Bureau in January 1866. The Bureau offered advice, protection, and financial assistance to local citizens interested in sponsoring schools for freedmen, and also examined and appointed teachers. Records consist of general correspondence, school reports, personnel records, as well as finance and property records. Arranged by type of record, such as inspection and personnel records, and then chronologically.

___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. Rolls 2–3 contain marriage records for Mississippi from 1864 to 1866.

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