



National Archives and Records Administration

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

On May 31, 1865, Howard appointed Brig. Gen. John W. Sprague Assistant Commissioner for Missouri and Arkansas with headquarters located in St. Louis. Sprague's jurisdiction also included Indian Territory as well as parts of Kansas and Illinois. By September 1865, Howard felt that Missouri's laws offered adequate protection to freedmen. On October 16, 1865, he transferred Sprague to Little Rock, Arkansas and withdrew the Bureau from Missouri. From April 1867 to February 1872, F.A. Seely served as the disbursing officer for Missouri. Although the majority of Seely's work involved the processing and payment of claims, he also oversaw freedmen's affairs in Missouri.

In Missouri, Bureau disbursing officers assisted black soldiers and their heirs in the preparation and settlement of claims for back pay, bounty payments, and pensions. Benevolent societies previously established freedmen schools in Missouri. The Bureau supported the construction of additional schools in St. Louis, Warrensburg, Kansas City, Westport, and Carondolet.

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

Field Office Records

___M1908, *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Missouri, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872*. 24 rolls. DP. The records document such activities as administering justice, establishing and supporting schools, and legalizing marriages. The majority relate to providing assistance with military claims. Roll 24 contains a register of marriages at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, during the months of July and August 1865, as well as the proceedings of the Missouri Commission, which sought to compensate former slaveholders for slaves who served in the military during the Civil War.

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 25 and 34 specifically relate to activities in Missouri.

___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 3 contains the monthly reports of Missouri marriages from July to August 1865. A single marriage report also appears for George Washington and Lizzie Arthur dated August 17, 1865.

___M1894, *Descriptive Recruitment Lists of Volunteers for the United States Colored Troops for the State of Missouri, 1863–1865*. 6 rolls. DP. General Orders Number 135 authorized assistant provost marshals throughout Missouri to recruit slaves, contrabands, or free blacks into military service. Slave owners were compensated up to \$300 per slave. More than 8,000 African Americans enlisted in the United States Colored Troops from Missouri.

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