



National Archives and Records Administration

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20408-0001

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

To improve the quality of education for black students and to increase the number of qualified teachers, the Bureau in Tennessee established teacher training schools. On January 9, 1866, the Bureau helped establish Fisk University to train black teachers. The American Missionary Association of New York City and the Western Freedmen's Aid Commission of Cincinnati, Ohio, funded Fisk. In spite of the Bureau's efforts to provide freedmen education, hostile whites constantly threatened teachers and students. The Bureau spent many of its resources on repairing and constructing new school buildings.

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

Administrative Records

____M999, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*. 34 rolls. DP. The publication includes reports relating to abandoned property, activities and the general status of freedmen institutions (such as hospitals and orphan asylums), bounty claims and disbursements, rations distribution, and buildings constructed by the Bureau. The records include inspection reports, indenture and apprenticeship contracts, labor contracts, and registers of outrages and of abandoned property.

____M1000, *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870*. 9 rolls. DP. The Bureau offered advice, protection, and financial assistance to local citizens interested in sponsoring schools for freedmen, and also examining and appointing teachers. The records include monthly school reports from district superintendents, teachers' monthly reports, and some names and addresses of teachers, as well as teachers' affidavits.

Field Office Records

___M1911, *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Land, 1865–1872*. 89 rolls. DP. The records document such activities as administering justice, establishing and supporting schools, providing medical relief, rations distribution, and supervising labor contracts. The records include registers of claimants for bounties and pay arrearages, registers of indentures of apprenticeship, and labor contracts. Roll 47 contains reports and affidavits relating to the Memphis riots of May 1866. Roll 53 contains two volumes of registers of marriages that cover the period from 1863 to 1866. Volume 1 is arranged alphabetically by the initial letter of the bridegroom's last name. Volume 2 is arranged chronologically.

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 30 and 35 specifically relate to activities in Tennessee.

___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 3–5 contain marriage certificates for Tennessee.

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