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Records of the
Superintendent of Education
for the State of Georgia
Bureau of Refugees,
Freedmen, and
Abandoned Lands
1865-1870



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Record Group 105

Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands

in the National Archives

RECORDS OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION
FOR THE STATE OF GEORGIA
BUREAU OF REFUGEES, FREEDMEN, AND ABANDONED LANDS
1865-1870

On the 28 rolls of this microfilm publication are reproduced the records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Georgia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-70. The records consist of 14 volumes of letters sent, registers, and accounting records, and unbound letters and reports received. They are a part of Record Group 105, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands.

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, often referred to as the Freedmen's Bureau, was established in the War Department by an act of Congress approved March 3, 1865 (13 Stat. 507). Congress assigned to the Bureau responsibilities that had been previously shared by the military commanders and by the agents of the Treasury Department. The duties included supervision of all affairs relating to refugees, to freedmen, and to the custody of abandoned lands and property.

In May 1865 Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard was appointed as Commissioner of the Bureau and established his headquarters in Washington, D.C. Assistant Commissioners were appointed to supervise the work of the Bureau in the States, but because the number of Assistant Commissioners was limited to 10 by the act of Congress, some officers were assigned to duty in more than one State.

The Assistant Commissioner assigned to both Georgia and South Carolina was Maj. Gen. Rufus Saxton, who established his headquarters in Beaufort, S.C., in June 1865. He assigned to Brig. Gen. Edward A. Wild the responsibility for the Bureau affairs in part of Georgia. In September 1865, after General Wild was relieved from duty, the Office of Assistant Commissioner for Georgia was established, and Brig. Gen. Davis Tillson was appointed as Acting Assistant Commissioner, with exclusive control of all matters concerning the Bureau in Georgia. General Tillson reported to General Saxton in South Carolina until December 1865, when he was ordered to report thereafter directly to Commissioner Howard in Washington.

The organization of the Bureau in Georgia was similar to that of the Bureau headquarters in Washington. The staff of the Assistant Commissioner included an Assistant Adjutant General, an Assistant Inspector General, a Chief Quartermaster and Disbursing Officer, a Superintendent of Education, and a Surgeon in Chief. Officers subordinate to the Assistant Commissioner carried out the policies of the Bureau in the subdistricts into which the State was divided.

In the summer of 1865 Commissioner Howard ordered the Assistant Commissioners to designate a superintendent of schools for each State. Consequently, in October 1865 General Saxton appointed G. L. Eberhart as Superintendent of Schools for Georgia and ordered him to report to General Tillson.

The Superintendent of Schools (later called Education) was responsible for executing Bureau policies relating to the education of freedmen. The Bureau promoted the establishment of schools for freedmen by offering advice, protection, and financial assistance to local citizens interested in starting schools. The Superintendent frequently acted as an intermediary between freedmen and members of the benevolent societies that offered to provide teachers and aid for the schools. The Superintendent corresponded with State and local authorities, with teachers, and with Bureau officers stationed in the subdistricts. He collected information about the schools and about the attitudes of the white populace toward the education of the freedman and reported his findings to the Bureau headquarters in Washington.

Changes occurred in both the personnel and the administrative organization of the Office of the Superintendent of Education. Superintendent Eberhart and Edward A. Ware, who succeeded him in August 1867, were members of the staff of the Assistant Commissioner. In January 1869 Commissioner Howard ordered the Assistant Commissioner, Maj. John R. Lewis, to also assume the duties of Superintendent of Education. Although Major Lewis served in both capacities until May 1869, when the Office of the Assistant Commissioner was discontinued, he did not combine the records of the two offices. He was relieved of his duties as Superintendent of Education in May 1870. Ware, who had been acting as Assistant Superintendent, remained in Georgia as Acting Superintendent until August 1870, when all Bureau officers except the claims agents were withdrawn from the State.

The volumes reproduced in this microcopy were originally arranged by type of record and thereunder in numerical sequence. Originally no numbers were assigned to series consisting of single volumes, but later all the volumes were arbitrarily assigned numbers. In this microfilm publication the last set of numbers assigned are in parentheses and are useful as an aid in identifying the volumes.

Series Listings and Remarks

Letters Sent

The 6 volumes of letters sent, August 1, 1867-August 8, 1870, are arranged in chronological order. They consist of press copies of letters sent by the Superintendent of Education, although the volumes also include copies of a few letters sent by the Assistant Superintendent of Education and by the Inspector

of Schools. The legibility of some of the letters is poor and a few are not readable. A name index is at the beginning of each volume.

Registers of Letters Received

According to the recordkeeping practices of the day, incoming communications were entered in registers of letters received. The entries in the 5 volumes of registers of letters received, September 1865-July 1870, are generally arranged in chronological order and numbered in a separate numerical sequence for each volume. The entries in the registers usually give the date of receipt of the letter, the name of the author, the date of the letter, the place of origin, an abstract of the contents, and the number of the register entry. Some of the endorsements, which were written either by the Superintendent of Education or by officers forwarding the communications to him, have been copied into the registers. A name index is at the beginning of each register. The number in the index refers to the page number in the register on which the letter is entered and not to the number of the register entry.

Not all letters entered in the registers are among the series of letters received by the Superintendent of Education. Some letters were forwarded to the Assistant Commissioner or to the Bureau headquarters in Washington, and others were returned to the sender. The National Archives has placed an asterisk (*) near the register entry number of the letters that are still among the letters received.

On pages 330 and 358 of register 1 are miscellaneous memoranda relating to books and to financial aid for freedmen's schools.

Letters Received

The letters received by the Superintendent of Education, September 1865-July 1870, are arranged in the order in which they are entered in the registers. The file citation on the letters gives the volume number of the register, the page number, and the entry number. A few unregistered letters and telegrams, 1865-70, are filed at the end of the series of letters received.

School Reports

There are two series of monthly school reports: reports from Bureau officers (agents and subassistant commissioners stationed in the subdistricts) and reports from the teachers of freedmen's schools. Generally both reports were submitted on printed forms and both give statistical information about the schools.

The reports from the agents and the subassistant commissioners, January 1867-December 1868, are arranged by month and thereunder alphabetically by initial letter of name of county. They usually list the names and locations of the schools and the societies that sponsored them. The reports show whether the schools were maintained by the freedmen or by societies, whether the building was supplied by the Bureau or owned by the freedmen, the amount of tuition paid by the freedmen, and the Bureau's expenses for the school. The reports also give information concerning the pupils at each school, as follows: sex; color; number of pupils over 16 years of age; degree of literacy; number of pupils in geography, arithmetic, writing, needlework, and the "higher branches"; and the number who were free before the war. Letters of transmittal are occasionally interfiled with the reports.

Beginning in 1868 and interfiled with the reports described above are forms submitted by the agent or subassistant commissioner concerning education in the subdistrict. The 19 questions on the form relate to the number of schools, the location of each school, the number of visits by the officer to the school, the establishment of new schools in the area, and the public sentiment toward education for the freedmen.

The monthly school reports from teachers, October 1865-July 1870, are arranged by month. The reports usually give statistics about the number of pupils, attendance habits, and degree of literacy. They also give information about the financial assistance received by the school.

Accounting Records

Reproduced on the last roll of this microfilm publication are two registers of expenditures and one volume of miscellaneous lists and memoranda. Many of the numbered pages in the three volumes are blank, and they have not been filmed.

The first register contains a list of monthly expenditures from the Congressional appropriation, May 1869-June 1870, and a list of monthly expenditures from the school fund, June 1869-May 1870. Each list is arranged chronologically. The second register contains entries of expenditures for freedmen's schools, 1867-70. The entries are arranged alphabetically by initial letter of name of town or city in which the school was located and thereunder chronologically.

The volume of miscellaneous lists and memoranda, 1865-70, contains abstracts of school reports, lists of delegates to the educational convention held in Macon in May 1867, lists of teachers, and an annual report on operations written by the Superintendent of Education in October 1866.

Related Records

Also in Record Group 105 are records created by other Bureau officers stationed in Georgia. Among them are the records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Georgia, 1865-69 (Microcopy 798). There are also records of the Surgeon in Chief, the Chief Quartermaster and Disbursing Officer, and the subordinate officers stationed in the subdistricts. Records relating to Bureau activities in Georgia before September 1865 are also among the records of the Assistant Commissioner and the Superintendent of Education for the State of South Carolina.

In the same record group are records of the Bureau headquarters in Washington, some of which have been reproduced as microfilm publications. Among them are two series of records of Commissioner Howard's office: Selected Series of Records Issued by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-72 (Microcopy 742), and Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-72 (Microcopy 752).

Many records relating to the Freedmen's Bureau are in other record groups in the National Archives. Among them are records of military districts and departments in Record Group 393, Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920; and records of abandoned property in Record Group 366, Records of Civil War Special Agencies of the Treasury Department.

Records of the Education Division of the Bureau will be reproduced in a forthcoming microfilm publication.

The editorial material for this publication was prepared by Elaine Everly. Willna Pacheli arranged the records.

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