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**Records of the Assistant
Commissioner for
the State of Texas.
Bureau of Refugees,
Freedmen, and
Abandoned Lands
1865-1869**



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Records of the Bureau of Refugees,

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Record Group 105

in the National Archives Building

RECORDS OF THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR THE STATE OF TEXAS
BUREAU OF REFUGEES, FREEDMEN, AND ABANDONED LANDS
1865-1869

On the 32 rolls of this microfilm publication are reproduced the records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Texas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-69. The records consist of 10 volumes and some unbound documents. The volumes include letters and endorsements sent, orders issued, registers of letters received, and a "record of criminal offenses." The unbound documents consist primarily of letters and reports received. These records are part of the Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105.

HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION

The Freedmen's Bureau, as the Bureau was commonly known, was established in the War Department by an act of March 3, 1865 (13 Stat. 507), and extended twice by the acts of July 16, 1866 (14 Stat. 173), and July 6, 1868 (15 Stat. 83). Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard, appointed Commissioner by the President in May 1865, served in that position throughout the life of the Bureau. In January 1869, in accordance with an act of July 25, 1868 (15 Stat. 193), its operations in the States were terminated except for educational functions and collection of claims. Remaining activities were terminated June 30, 1872, as required by an act of June 10, 1872 (17 Stat. 366).

Although the Bureau was part of the War Department, its work was primarily social and economic in nature. It cooperated with benevolent societies in issuing supplies to destitute persons and in maintaining freedmen's schools; supervised labor contracts between black employees and white employers; helped black soldiers and sailors to collect bounty claims, pensions, and backpay; and attended to the disposition of confiscated or abandoned lands and other property. In Texas, much of the Bureau's time and effort was expended in protecting freedmen from persecution, intimidation, and physical violence at the hands of whites or other freedmen.

The act of March 3, 1865, authorized the appointment of assistant commissioners to aid the Commissioner in supervising the work of the Bureau in the States. In Texas, operations began in September 1865 when Brig. Gen. Edgar M. Gregory took command as Assistant Commissioner and established headquarters at Galveston. Brig. Gen. Joseph Kiddoo relieved Gregory in May 1866 and was himself succeeded by Maj. Gen. Charles Griffin in January 1867. When Griffin died in office in September 1867, Maj. Gen. Joseph J. Reynolds assumed the duties of Assistant Commissioner but was absent from actual duty until November 1867; in the interim Lt. Charles Garretson, the Acting Assistant Adjutant General, acted as Assistant Commissioner. Upon his arrival, Reynolds

moved the headquarters from Galveston to Houston, where it remained until the Bureau ended its operations in the State. In January 1869 Maj. Gen. Edward R. S. Canby succeeded Reynolds who subsequently resumed office in April and served until the Bureau, except for the Superintendent of Education, withdrew from Texas in May 1869.

Beginning in 1867 the Assistant Commissioners of Texas also served as the military commanders of Texas. The dual function of the Assistant Commissioners resulted in a succession of changes in the official headings used on correspondence and issuances. The title "Headquarters, Bureau R.F. & A.L." was changed in December 1867 to "Headquarters, Dist. Texas, Bureau R.F. & A.L." The heading "Headquarters, 5th Military Dist., Bureau R.F. & A.L." was used from August to December 1868, when the original heading was readopted. Although the Assistant Commissioners created and received records in both aspects of their dual capacities, they appear to have maintained separate sets of records for each. The records that they created and received as military commanders of Texas are among Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Record Group 393, and are not reproduced in this microfilm publication.

The Assistant Commissioner's staff at various times consisted of an Assistant Adjutant General (or Acting Assistant Adjutant General), a Quartermaster and Disbursing Officer (or Assistant Quartermaster and Disbursing Officer, or Acting Assistant Quartermaster and Disbursing Officer), a Surgeon-in-Chief (or Chief Medical Officer), an Acting Assistant Inspector General (or Inspector), an Inspector of Schools, a Superintendent of Schools (or Superintendent of Education), and an Assistant Superintendent of Education. Upon occasion several of the offices were performed simultaneously by a single individual.

Subordinate to the Assistant Commissioner and his staff were the assistant superintendents, or subassistant commissioners as they later became known, who commanded the local field offices into which the State was divided for administrative purposes. Before 1867 one or more subassistant commissioners were assigned to particular county offices as was deemed appropriate by the Assistant Commissioner. On February 12, 1867, however, a circular letter issued by the Bureau headquarters in Washington directed that the States be divided into subdistricts consisting of counties designated by the Assistant Commissioner. Accordingly, on April 1, 1867, Assistant Commissioner Griffin issued a circular dividing Texas into 50 numbered districts (later called subdistricts); the number of these field offices was expanded to the maximum of 59 by August 1867.

Before this time the activities of the Bureau had centered in the southeastern part of the State, but the numbered subdistricts represented an effort to distribute personnel and resources

systematically throughout Texas. Each subdistrict was headed by a subassistant commissioner, some of whom had assistant subassistant commissioners as subordinates. The subassistant commissioners and their assistants were generally military officers or former military officers. At the outset of Bureau operations in Texas a number of Civil War Volunteer officers were utilized to fill the subordinate positions and were continued in office after they were mustered out of service. Other civilians, including citizens of Texas, also served in the subdistricts.

GENERAL RECORDKEEPING PRACTICES

The Assistant Commissioner corresponded extensively with his superior, Commissioner Howard, in the Washington Bureau headquarters, and with his subordinate officers in the field. Reports submitted to him by the subassistant commissioners and other subordinate staff officers provided the basis for reports to the Commissioner concerning Bureau activities in Texas. The Assistant Commissioner also corresponded with Bureau officials in other States, Army officers attached to the military commands in Texas, State officials and white citizens, and freedmen and other non-Bureau personnel. The letters varied in nature from complaints and reports of conditions to applications for jobs in the Bureau. Because the Assistant Adjutant General (or Acting Assistant Adjutant General) handled much of the mail for the Assistant Commissioner's office, outgoing letters often bore his signature and incoming communications were frequently addressed to him instead of the Assistant Commissioner.

The correspondence of the Assistant Commissioner was handled in accordance with typical 19th-century recordkeeping practices. Fair copies of outgoing letters were transcribed in letter books. Replies to incoming letters were frequently written on the letters themselves or on specially prepared wrappers. The replies, known as endorsements, were then copied into endorsement books, and the endorsed letter was returned to the sender or forwarded to another office. Endorsement books usually included a summary of the incoming letter and sometimes previous endorsements that were recorded on it. Incoming correspondence was frequently entered in registers of letters received. In addition to a summary of the contents of the incoming letters, the registers usually included such identifying information as the name and sometimes the office of the writer, the date of receipt, the date of the communication, the place of origin, and the entry number assigned at the time of receipt. The registered letters were folded for filing, generally in three segments, and the information recorded in the registers was transcribed on the outside flap of the letters.

The letters and endorsements sent, registers of letters received, and registered letters received, which are reproduced

in this microfilm publication, are cross-referenced to each other by the use of various symbols. Letters sent are designated L.S. or L.B. followed by the page and sometimes the volume number. Endorsement books are variously designated E.B., E.M.B., E. & M., and E. & M.B. Registers of letters received are referenced as L.R. or R.L.R. followed by the appropriate file number and sometimes the volume number, or simply by the file number. Frequently the letter itself can be located among the series of registered letters received. Letters sent and endorsements are also cross-referenced to the previous and subsequent entries in their respective series by the use of a fractional symbol. The numerator denotes the previous letter to or endorsement by a particular individual and the denominator refers to the subsequent one. The symbols generally appear in the left margins of the pages, but sometimes within the space allotted for the entry.

The Assistant Commissioner utilized various types of issuances to convey information to staff and subordinate officers. General orders and circulars or circular letters related matters of general interest, including the implementation of Bureau policies throughout the State, duties of subordinate personnel, administrative procedures to be followed, relevant acts of Congress or issuances from Bureau headquarters in Washington, and the appointment or relief of staff officers. Special orders were used to communicate information of less general interest, such as duty assignments of individual field officers.

The letters sent, endorsements, registers of letters received, and issuances all have name indexes in the front of the volumes. These finding aids provide references mainly to personal names but also include a few other citations to places, groups, and titles of organizations.

The volumes reproduced in this microfilm publication were originally arranged by type of record and thereunder by volume number. Originally no numbers were assigned to series consisting of single volumes; later all volumes were arbitrarily assigned numbers by the Adjutant General's Office of the War Department after the records passed into its custody. In this microfilm publication the set of numbers last assigned are in parentheses and are useful as an aid in identifying the volumes. In some volumes, particularly in indexes and alphabetical headings of registers, there are a number of blank numbered pages that have not been filmed.

SERIES LISTINGS AND REMARKS

Letters Sent

The two volumes of letters sent, September 8, 1865-May 8, 1869, are arranged chronologically, and each volume contains a name index. In addition to outgoing letters, these volumes

include copies of telegrams and reports sent by the Assistant Commissioner to Commissioner Howard. Among the latter are annual reports dated November 20, 1867, and October 20, 1868. Upon occasion, circulars and circular letters were also transcribed. Some letters, generally relating to appointments, bear the marginal notation "Filed in T." This means that the original letter had been endorsed back to the Assistant Commissioner from the Commissioner's office and was then registered and filed under "T" for Texas among the registered letters received.

Of the four unbound letters sent, one is undated and the others are dated May 9, June 28, and July 28, 1868, respectively. They are arranged in that order and are not duplicated in the letters sent volumes described above.

Endorsements Sent

The two volumes of endorsements sent, April 3, 1866-May 7, 1869, are arranged chronologically, and each volume contains a name index.

Registers of Letters Received

The entries in the two volumes of registers of letters received, February 1866-June 1869, are generally arranged by time period, thereunder alphabetically by the initial letter of the correspondent's surname or office, and thereunder chronologically by date of receipt. Each volume contains a name index. Certain irregularities in arrangement and deviations from standard recordkeeping practices have rendered the registry system difficult to use. Under alphabetical headings the entries are frequently not in strict chronological sequence. Often the space allotted for a particular alphabetical division proved insufficient, and the entries were continued elsewhere in the register. The National Archives and Records Service (NARS) has, insofar as possible, tried to film the entries in both registers in a proper numerical sequence.

Under alphabetical divisions in the first register, some numbers and number sequences were repeated as many as three times, thus resulting in duplicate numbering for different entries. NARS has, therefore, added [No.1], [No.2], and [No.3] to the file designations to distinguish between the repeated numbers. In the second register a new numbering sequence was begun on January 1, 1869, but was used only a few weeks. Numbering was then resumed under the old system, skipping those numbers that would have been used for the letters entered under the new registry. NARS has added the omitted old numbers in brackets beside the new numbers in order to achieve a continuous sequence. Both types of bracketed citations have also been added to the corresponding documents in the series of registered letters and reports.

Documents in these registered series have been arranged in strict file number sequence irrespective of their dates or the dates they were received.

A number of the documents entered in the registers are no longer to be found among the series of registered letters received. Often, communications were forwarded to Bureau headquarters, referred to staff or subordinate officers, or returned with endorsements to the sender. NARS has placed an asterisk (*) near the writer's name in the register for each letter that is still in the series of registered letters received. Reports from subassistant commissioners relating to operations and conditions or murders and outrages were entered in the registers as other correspondence; they are filed in separate series. The register entries for the former reports have been annotated with a double asterisk (**) and for the latter with a triple asterisk (***) .

Some letters, although still among the registered letters received, are no longer to be found filed under their original registry designation. Some were subsequently placed in consolidated files with related documents, and others were filed under new designations. NARS has added the marginal note [F/W] (filed with) in the first instance and [F/A] (filed as) in the second, together with the file designation under which the document can currently be found.

Letters Received

The letters received consist primarily of the registered series, but there is also a smaller series of unregistered correspondence.

The registered letters received, February 1866-June 1869, are generally arranged in accordance with the order of entries in the register. However, some deviations from this arrangement have been necessitated by certain irregularities in registry and by the presence of consolidated files that have been left intact. As a result, letters filed under alphabetical divisions, particularly those entered in the first register, are often not in strict chronological sequence. A number of the letters were not originally received by the Assistant Commissioner but were referred to his office, frequently from the military commands in Texas and from Bureau headquarters in Washington. These letters contain the registry numbers and other identifying information recorded by the original office of receipt. In addition to letters, the registered series also includes telegrams and reports received from staff and field officers. The reports generally differ from those filed as separate series in that they pertain more to specific incidents than to situations over a given time period.

The unregistered letters received, April 1865-March 1869, are arranged by year, thereunder by the initial letter of the correspondent's surname or office, and thereunder chronologically. A small number of undated letters follow those for 1869. The accompanying finding aid to the unregistered letters, consisting of an alphabetical list of correspondents for each year, was prepared by NARS. Most of the file citations appearing on these letters were assigned by previous offices of receipt. A few appear to have been assigned by the Assistant Commissioner's office, but the corresponding entries have not been located in the registers of letters received.

Issuances and Monthly Rosters of Bureau Personnel

The single volume of issuances and rosters is arranged by type of record and thereunder chronologically. The name index in front of the volume covers all the series within, and the table of contents that follows gives page numbers for each part. The issuances consist of general orders, special orders, and circulars, but they do not appear in that sequence in the volume (see note to roll 19). A small series of unbound special orders received by the Assistant Commissioner is arranged chronologically and has been filmed directly following the bound issuances.

The general orders issued, January 1, 1867-April 15, 1869, are numbered in sequence for each year. The special orders issued, October 6, 1865-March 17, 1869, and circulars and circular letters issued, October 12, 1865-December 8, 1868, are similarly numbered, except for the years 1865-66 when a single numbering system was used. The unnumbered circular letters are interfiled with the numbered circulars according to date. The last circular is dated September 3, 1867, and the remaining three issuances are circular letters. Because they are similar in nature to the general orders, circulars and circular letters may have been used in lieu of the former during 1865-66.

The monthly rosters of Bureau personnel, April 1866-December 1868, are arranged chronologically and are indicative of the administrative structure of the Bureau in Texas. Prior to April 1867 the rosters list the staff and subordinate officers, specifying the headquarters for each of the latter and the counties for which they were responsible. Beginning in April 1867 the subdistricts are listed in numerical order followed generally by the name of the subassistant commissioner in charge, the location of the headquarters station, the number of troops stationed there, and the counties comprising the subdistrict. The assistant subassistant commissioners are listed as a group at the end of each roster. Similar but printed rosters, some not available in this series, are reproduced on rolls 29-31 of this microfilm publication.

The special orders received, July 1866-May 1868, were issued by the military commands in Texas and relate to duty assignments of military officers in the Bureau.

Reports

The two unbound series of reports consist of registered reports of operations and conditions and received and retained reports relating to rations, lands, and Bureau personnel. A small series of oaths of office taken by Bureau personnel has been filmed directly following the reports.

The registered reports of operations and conditions, December 1866-December 1868, are arranged chronologically by month and thereunder as entered in the registers of letters received. Within this series the few unregistered reports are filed last under the particular month to which they pertain. All but one of the reports filed under December 1866 are annual and cover the previous year's events. The reports are exclusively narrative until July 1867 when a printed form first came into use. Within a few months the form reports superseded the narrative reports, although the informational content remained similar. The content of the reports was specified in a circular letter issued by the Assistant Commissioner on December 31, 1866. Information was requested from subassistant commissioners relative to matters in their particular areas, including civil and criminal cases involving freedmen; local white attitudes toward freedmen and their education; the progress of education generally; a statement of monthly business transacted, including office hours and days absent from office; the number of troops present and the need for them; operations of State laws as applied to freedmen; the status of freedmen as agricultural workers; and the difficulties encountered in carrying out Bureau functions.

The received and retained reports relating to rations, lands, and Bureau personnel, October 1865-April 1869, are arranged chronologically by month and thereunder by type of report. The received reports came from subassistant commissioners in the field offices and consist primarily of monthly reports of rations, clothing, and medicines issued to freedmen and refugees, and monthly reports of abandoned and confiscated lands. Both types of reports were usually statistical and were submitted on Bureau forms. The reports of rations, clothing, and medicines required information by type and sex of recipient and also data on the value of rations, medicines, and quartermaster stores issued. The land reports required such information as the name of the former owner, location boundaries and acreage of land, whether the property was abandoned or confiscated, and types of buildings, if any, on the property.

For most months there are relatively few field office reports on file because there was presumably no information to relate. Negative reports, however, were also submitted on blank forms or in simple narrative statements. The few reports for 1865 are narrative and varied in nature, including a report dated December 1, 1865, concerning an inspection of part of the Eastern District of Texas by Surgeon-in-Chief S. J. W. Mintzer.

Retained copies of monthly reports that the Assistant Commissioner forwarded to Bureau headquarters in Washington are on file beginning with January 1866; they include reports of rations, clothing, and medicines, and also reports of abandoned and confiscated lands. These reports were identical in nature to the field office reports from which they were evidently compiled. In addition, the reports generally include printed rosters of Bureau personnel (similar to those transcribed in the volume reproduced on roll 19), reports of changes of officers and agents (January 1866-July 1868), and reports of civilian agents and clerks on duty with the Bureau in Texas (July 1867-July 1868).

The oaths of office of Bureau personnel, September 1866-November 1867, are arranged chronologically according to the date the individual took the oath of loyalty to the United States. These oaths were required by an act of July 2, 1862 (12 Stat. 502), for all officeholders whether elected or appointed.

Records Relating to Murders and Outrages and Other Criminal Offenses

The records include a three-volume "record of criminal offenses committed in the State of Texas," an unbound series of registered reports of murders and outrages, and miscellaneous records relating to murders and other criminal offenses.

The entries in the "record of criminal offenses," September 1865-December 1868, are numbered consecutively. The entries in the first volume for the period 1865-68 are not in chronological sequence up to page 43; however, beginning with entry 491 on page 43, and continuing throughout volumes 2 and 3, the entries that span February 1867-December 1868 are arranged chronologically according to the date a particular offense was reported. The information recorded for each entry includes the town from which the offense was reported, the county in which the offense was committed, the name and race of the criminal, the nature of the offense, the name and race of the injured party, a statement of the circumstances, the name of the reporting individual, the date the offense was reported, the action taken by the Bureau, and the action taken by the civil authorities. Most of the entries pertain to crimes committed by whites against freedmen, but crimes of whites against whites, freedmen against freedmen, and freedmen against whites were also recorded. The "record" may have been at least partially compiled from the registered reports described below.

The registered reports of murders and outrages, September and October 1866, March and April 1867, and July 1867, are arranged by time period and thereunder in the order they were entered in volume 1 of the registers of letters received. These reports were submitted in accordance with directives of September 11, 1866, March 7, 1867, and July 3, 1867, from the Assistant Commissioner's Office. The first group of reports is narrative and the second and third are tabular; the third was submitted on prepared Bureau forms. Preceding the first group is a report of freedmen murdered in the State of Texas since the close of the rebellion, evidently compiled in the Assistant Commissioner's Office from the registered reports received. In general the registered reports contain the same kind of information available in the "record of criminal offenses." Information about criminal offenses is also available in the reports of operations and conditions reproduced on rolls 20-28.

The miscellaneous records relating to murders and other criminal offenses, 1865-68, include unregistered reports relating to murders and outrages, 1865-66; lists of criminal offenses reported and not reported by the subassistant commissioners, March 1868; fair copies of documents relating to murders and outrages, June-August 1868; copies of testimony taken in 1865 at Brazos Bottom, Burlson County, relating to the murder of the freedman Kit by his master John Eckols; affidavits of March 1868 from citizens of Texas, mostly in Dallas County, who had been arrested by orders of Bureau officials and who appeared before notaries public; and a report dated February 26, 1867, of an inspection of the Texas State penitentiary at Huntsville, Walker County, the appendix of which lists 209 freedmen confined, including their names, counties of residence, crimes allegedly committed, sentences, and miscellaneous remarks.

RELATED RECORDS

In Record Group 105 and related to records of the Assistant Commissioner are those of the Bureau headquarters in Washington. Available as NARS microfilm are M742, *Selected Series of Records Issued by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872*, which includes letters, endorsements, and issuances sent; M752, *Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872*; and M803, *Records of the Education Division of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1871*.

Also in this record group and pertaining to the State of Texas are records of the Superintendent of Education, the Acting Assistant Quartermaster and Disbursing Officer, and the subassistant commissioners who commanded the local field offices. Available as microfilm is M822, *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Texas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen,*

and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1870. In the same record group are records for other State offices and their subordinate field offices. The records of Assistant Commissioners in other States have been reproduced on the following microfilm publications: M809, Alabama; M798, Georgia; M826, Mississippi; M843, North Carolina; and M869, South Carolina.

There are also records in other record groups that supplement those of the Assistant Commissioner. In Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Record Group 393, are records of the military district of Texas and the Fifth Military District. Records of abandoned property before the establishment of the Bureau are among Records of Civil War Special Agencies of the Treasury Department, Record Group 366.

The introduction for this publication was prepared by Joseph Henrich and Robert H. Gruber. Willna Pacheli arranged the records.

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