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



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE  
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are from

*Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen,*

*and Abandoned Lands*

*Record Group 105*

in the National Archives Building

in March 1869, Gen. Adelbert Ames established his headquarters at Jackson and supervised the closing of the office of the Assistant Commissioner. The appointment of General Ames was revoked April 30, 1869.

When the Freedmen's Bureau was abolished, its records were sent to the Office of the Adjutant General. Clerks in the Adjutant General's Office numbered the volumes or book records and prepared "indexes" or lists of these books. In this microfilm publication the number assigned to the volume by the clerks in the Adjutant General's Office appears in parenthesis. This number is useful only as a more precise method of identifying the volume.

### Series Listings and Remarks

#### Letters Sent

The seven letter books, June 1865-May 1869, consist of press copies of letters, telegrams, and reports sent by the Assistant Commissioner and the Acting Assistant Adjutant General. The communications in the letter books are generally arranged in chronological order. There are name indexes in each of the first six volumes, and there are also subject index books for the first three volumes. Filmed before the seventh letter book is a name index prepared by the National Archives.

Frequently noted in the first three volumes are the entry numbers of letters received relating to the communications in the letter books. Sometimes citations of special orders or endorsements relating to the letters are also given.

#### Endorsements Sent

According to the recordkeeping practices of the day, the Assistant Commissioner kept a series of records known as endorsements sent or endorsement books. Frequently, instead of writing a letter, the Assistant Commissioner or the Acting Assistant Adjutant General wrote the reply or forwarding statement on the incoming letter and either returned the communication to the sender or forwarded it to another officer. These replies or statements were copied into endorsement books with a summary of the contents of the incoming communication and also the previous endorsements that had been written on the communication.

The three volumes of endorsements sent, June 1865-May 1869, are generally arranged chronologically. In the left margin of the pages in the endorsement books are the names of the persons or titles of the officers to whom the endorsements were sent. There are frequently references in the style of a fraction in the left margin also. The numerator is the number of the page in the same volume on which a preceding endorsement to the same addressee

appears, and the denominator is the number of the page on which there is a subsequent endorsement. Usually noted is the entry number of the incoming letter in the register of letters received or the page number of a previous endorsement written by the office of the Assistant Commissioner on the communication. There are name index books for each of the endorsement books and also a subject index book for the first volume. Since the name index books for the first and third endorsement books are incomplete, the National Archives has prepared additions to both indexes.

### Registers of Letters Received

Another recordkeeping practice of the day was the entering of incoming communications into registers of letters received. The registers include such information as the name or office of the correspondent, the date of the letter, the place from which it was written, an abstract of its contents, the date of receipt of the letter, and the entry number assigned to it. Often there are notations in the left margin of the page in the register indicating action taken regarding the communication, such as the page number of an endorsement or a letter subsequently written in response to the letter received.

The entries in the five volumes of registers of letters received, June 1865-May 1869, are arranged alphabetically by initial letter of the surname or office of the sender and thereunder by date of receipt of the communication. Each entry was assigned a number, with a separate numerical sequence for each alphabetical division in the first four registers. The fifth register has a numerical sequence for each year within each alphabetical division.

Communications from staff officers, written at the direction of their commanding officers, are usually entered in the name of the superior officer. Letters from the executive departments of the U.S. Government are entered under the first letter of the department's or bureau's title: "W" for War Department, "P" for the President of the United States, and "R" for the headquarters of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Communications from the Assistant Commissioner's staff or subordinate officers in Mississippi are usually entered in the name of the sender.

There are name and subject indexes in the first register, and name and subject index books for the second register. The remaining registers have name index books.

Because the number of pages allotted to each alphabetical division in the registers often proved insufficient, it was necessary to continue the entries elsewhere in the volume. The National Archives has filmed the registers in corrected order so that the pages are no longer necessarily in numerical sequence.

Blank pages have not been filmed.

The dates given for each register refer to the dates that the first and the last letters entered in that register were received in the office of the Assistant Commissioner. Although the inclusive dates received of the first three registers overlap, the first register contains only those letters written in 1865; the second register, those letters written in 1866; and the third register, those letters written in 1867.

Not all of the letters entered in the registers are still among the records of the Assistant Commissioner. Some letters were forwarded to the Bureau headquarters at Washington; others were referred to staff officers or sent to officers subordinate to the Assistant Commissioner. The National Archives has placed an asterisk in the registers near the entry numbers of the letters that are in the series of registered letters received. Often, related letters were filed together in the series of registered letters received. Notations in the registers, beneath the entry numbers of related letters filed together, indicate the location of the collective file in the series.

#### Letters Received

The letters and telegrams received by the Assistant Commissioner and the Acting Assistant Adjutant General are in two unbound series, registered letters and unregistered letters.

The letters and telegrams entered in the registers of letters received, June 1865-May 1869, are arranged in the order in which they are entered in the registers. The series also includes those reports received by the Assistant Commissioner that were entered in the registers of letters received. The reports are primarily monthly narrative reports from subassistant commissioners and civilian agents, and most are dated 1865 and 1866. The file citation includes the entry number of the letter, telegram, or report, and the year.

The unregistered letters and telegrams, August 1865-April 1869, are arranged by year and thereunder alphabetically by initial letter of the surname of the correspondent. Some of the letters have file citations, but none of the citations are from the registers of the Assistant Commissioner for Mississippi. A name index prepared by the National Archives is filmed before the unregistered letters.

#### Orders and Circulars

Among the records of the Assistant Commissioner are three volumes of issuances, a register of orders received, a printed manual for Bureau officials in Mississippi, and a register of property restored. There is also an unbound series of orders

and circulars received.

The volume of general orders and circulars issued by the Assistant Commissioner, June 1865-December 1868, is arranged by type of issuance, thereunder by year, and thereunder numerically. The general orders consist primarily of issuances outlining the general policies of the Bureau. Several of the general orders are reprints of letters of instructions from the Commissioner of the Bureau, the Secretary of War, and the President of the United States. The circulars are mostly policy directives published for the general information and guidance of the Bureau officials in Mississippi. There is a name index book for the general orders.

The volume of special orders and property orders issued by the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-68, is arranged by type of issuance, thereunder by year, and thereunder numerically. The special orders, June 1865-December 1868, consist of issuances concerning specific individuals on matters such as transportation, appointments, special assignments, and purchases. The property orders, August 1865-August 1866, consist of directives restoring abandoned lands and buildings to their former owners. Name index books for both the special orders and the property orders have been filmed before the issuances to which they refer.

The "scrapbook" of orders and circulars issued and received, 1967-68, consists of printed orders and circulars that have been pasted in the volume. The "scrapbook" includes the following: orders issued by Gen. Edward Otho Cresap Ord, Commander of the 4th Military District; general orders and circulars issued by Assistant Commissioner Gillem; and general orders and a circular issued by Gillem in his capacity as Military Commander of the Sub-district of Mississippi. The volume is arranged by origin of order, thereunder by type of order, and thereunder chronologically.

The register of orders and circulars received by the Assistant Commissioner, 1866, provides such information as the origin of the issuance, the date and number of the issuance, and an abstract of its contents. Most of the orders are from Bureau headquarters at Washington, military commanders, or subordinate officials of the Bureau in Mississippi. The entries in the register are arranged and numbered chronologically.

The digest of orders and instructions to subassistant commissioners was compiled in the office of the Assistant Commissioner and printed in 1866. The manual includes copies of several orders and circulars and summaries of instructions on bookkeeping methods and on such subjects relating to freedmen as contracts, the administration of justice, orphans, vagrancy, and marriage.

The entries in the register of property restored by the Assistant Commissioner, July-October 1865, usually provide such information as the date of the application for the restoration of

property, the name of the applicant, a description of the property, and the date and number of the order that returned the property. The register is generally arranged chronologically according to the date the property was restored. There is a name index in the volume.

The unbound series of orders and circulars received by the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-68, is arranged by type of order, and thereunder chronologically. The series includes general orders, special orders, and circulars.

### Reports

Among the records of the Assistant Commissioner are six unbound series of reports and one volume of reports, vouchers, and requisitions received. None of the reports in the series of unbound or bound reports were entered in the registers of letters received.

The narrative reports received by the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-68, consist of monthly reports from subassistant commissioners and civilian agents, and concern destitution, complaints of freedmen, freedmen's labor contracts and marital problems, administration of State laws, and general operations of the subdistricts. The reports are generally arranged chronologically, and most of them are dated 1867 and 1868.

The series of land reports, 1865-66, consists of monthly tabular reports compiled by special agents of the Treasury Department, acting assistant commissioners, and subassistant commissioners. Arranged chronologically, the reports describe abandoned property and its use by the Bureau. Also included is a list compiled in the office of the Assistant Commissioner of property transferred to the Assistant Commissioner for Louisiana in January 1866.

The series of ration reports, August 1865-March 1869, consists of monthly tabular reports received from subassistant commissioners, hospitals, and orphanages. Arranged chronologically, the reports list the numbers of refugees and freedmen issued rations, clothing, or medical supplies.

The series of miscellaneous reports from subordinate officers, 1865-67, includes tabular reports from subassistant commissioners, hospitals, and orphanages. The series includes statistical reports on the rations, contracts, indentures, and marriages of freedmen, and also reports on persons and articles hired. The series is arranged by type of report and thereunder chronologically.

There is also a small series of miscellaneous reports from staff officers, July 1865-October 1867. The series includes

tabular and narrative reports from the Receiving and Disbursing Officer, Assistant Inspector General, Acting Assistant Adjutant General, Superintendent of Schools, Surgeon in Chief, and Commissary of Subsistence. The reports are arranged chronologically.

Finally, the series of unbound reports includes a short series of tabular reports compiled by the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-69. The series consists of monthly reports of Assistant Commissioners Thomas and Gillem concerning rations, transportation, and rents. The reports are arranged chronologically.

The entries in the register of reports, vouchers, and requisitions received by the Assistant Commissioner, January 1866-August 1867, are generally arranged and numbered chronologically. Most of the reports, vouchers, and requisitions registered are from Bureau officials in Mississippi, and concern financial matters that were subsequently referred to the Receiving and Disbursing Officer. There is a name index in the register. Also contained within the volume is a register of letters received by the Freedmen's Department, January-March 1865.

A small series of miscellaneous records, 1865-68, is filmed immediately after the reports. The series includes several letters and affidavits relating to the transportation of freedmen, receipts, indentures, and a deed to school property. The records are arranged in chronological order.

#### Station Book, Oaths of Office, and Rosters

The station book, 1865-66, lists the name of an officer or civilian on duty in the Bureau, his station, the positions held, the date and order assigning him to duty, and the date and order relieving him from duty. The volume is arranged alphabetically by initial letter of the surname of the officer or civilian. The number of pages allotted to each alphabetical division in the station book sometimes proved insufficient, and the entries for a particular alphabetical division were continued elsewhere in the volume. The National Archives has filmed the station book in corrected order so that the pages are no longer necessarily in numerical sequence.

A small series of oaths of office, 1865-68, contains oaths signed by employees of the Bureau in Mississippi. According to an act of July 2, 1862 (12 Stat. 502), every person elected or appointed to any office of honor or profit under the Government of the United States was required to take an oath of loyalty to the United States. The oaths are arranged alphabetically by initial letter of the surname of the signee.

The unbound rosters of officers and civilians on duty in the Freedmen's Bureau in Mississippi, March 1865-April 1869, are primarily monthly reports on printed forms compiled by the



Assistant Commissioner, staff officers, and subassistant commissioners. Arranged in chronological order, the rosters list officers on duty, citizen employees, enlisted men on duty, and changes in commissioned officers. Some of the rosters are entered in the registers of letters received by the Assistant Commissioner.

#### Registers of Indentures and Marriages of Freedmen

The Register of Indentures of Colored Orphans, August 1865-May 1866, includes such information as the date of the indenture, name and age of the orphan, term of the agreement, and the name and residence of the employer. There are only four pages in the register, in addition to two pages of duplicate indentures pasted in the volume. The entries in the register are arranged chronologically.

There are four registers of the marriages of freedmen, 1863-66. Each entry provides such information as the name, residence, and age of the couple married; date of their marriage; their color and the color of their parents; and the names of the minister and witnesses to the ceremony. The second register contains a list of ministers in Mississippi accredited by the War Department to conduct marriage services. The entries within the first, second, and fourth registers are generally arranged alphabetically by initial letter of the surname of the husband, and thereunder chronologically. The third register is arranged chronologically. The entries dated before July 1865 in the registers were compiled by the Freedmen's Department.

#### Labor Contracts of Freedmen

The unbound freedmen's labor contracts, January 1865-November 1868, consist of agreements between planters and freedmen that were approved or disapproved by Bureau officials. In return for the labor of the freedmen, planters usually promised to pay them a specified wage in addition to providing them with food, clothing, living quarters, and medical attention. The contracts are arranged chronologically by the month approved or disapproved by the Bureau. Contracts dated before July 1865 were approved by the Provost Marshal of Freedmen.

#### Related Records

Also in Record Group 105 are records of the Bureau headquarters in Washington, some of which have been reproduced as microfilm publications. The letters and endorsements sent and the orders and circulars issued by Commissioner Howard are available as Selected Series of Records Issued by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872 (M742). The registers and letters received are available as Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner of the Bureau

of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872 (M752).  
The records of the Education Division have been reproduced as  
Records of the Education Division, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen,  
and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1871 (M803).

Other microfilm publications of records in Record Group 105 are Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Georgia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869 (M798), Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Georgia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1870 (M799), Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Alabama, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869 (M809), and Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Alabama, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1870 (M810).

Record Group 105 also contains records created by the staff officers of the Assistant Commissioner for Mississippi, subordinate officers in Mississippi, and the Freedmen's Department.

Many records relating to the Freedmen's Bureau are in other record groups in the National Archives. There are records of military districts and departments in Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Record Group 393; records of abandoned property in Records of Civil War Special Agencies of the Treasury Department, Record Group 366; and records of the Freedmen's Savings Bank in Records of the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, Record Group 101. Record Group 393 also includes records relating to the Freedmen's Department and the Provost Marshal of Freedmen.

The records reproduced in this microfilm publication were prepared for filming by L. Marie Bouknight, who also wrote these introductory remarks and provided the other editorial material.

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