



National Archives and Records Administration

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

By summer 1865, the Bureau in South Carolina combined efforts with the offices of the Commissary General of the Army, the Quartermaster General, and the Surgeon General to provide clothing, medical supplies, and 300,000 rations to approximately 9,000 destitute individuals. In 1866, the Bureau began encouraging self-sufficiency by providing relief only to individuals in need. From 1866 to 1867, crop shortages and failures made it necessary for the Bureau to provide large-scale relief. The Bureau also regulated labor contracts between planters and freedmen. Approximately 130,000 freedmen worked under labor agreements between 1865 and 1866.

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

Administrative Records

__M869, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of South Carolina, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870*. 44 rolls. DP. A few of the records are dated as early as 1863. The records include applications for the restoration of property and reports about murders, outrages, conditions, and operations in South Carolina. Other records contain information about the issuance of rations, contracts, legal actions, transportation, and personnel.

Field Office Records

__M1910, *Records of the Field Offices for the State of South Carolina, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872*. 106 rolls. DP. Some records were created from 1862 to 1864, prior to formation of the Bureau, by Union military commanders and U.S. Treasury agents. The records provide information about issuing rations, providing medical relief, supervising labor contracts, administering justice, providing resettlement transportation, and

establishing schools. They include registers of claimants for bounties and pay arrearages as well as registers of indentures.

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 29 and 35 specifically relate to activities in South Carolina.

__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 Marriage Certificate for Benjamin Low and Hayer Jenkins dated September 30, 1865.

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