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



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Record Group 105

Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen,

and Abandoned Lands

in the National Archives

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

On the 36 rolls of this microfilm publication are reproduced the records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Georgia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-69. A few papers are dated as early as 1862. The records consist of 34 volumes of communications sent, registers, and orders issued; and of unbound letters and reports received and miscellaneous papers. The documents were created or received by the Assistant Commissioner and two staff officers, the Assistant Adjutant General and the Assistant Inspector General. The records are 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.

The operations of the Freedmen's Bureau resembled, in many ways, the work of later Federal social agencies. In addition to supervising the disposition of abandoned or confiscated lands and property, Bureau officers issued rations, clothing, and medicine to destitute refugees and freedmen; established hospitals and dispensaries; cooperated with benevolent societies in establishing schools; listened to complaints of the freedmen; witnessed the writing of labor contracts; and helped colored soldiers and sailors to file and collect claims for bounties, pensions, and pay arrearages.

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.

During the relatively brief period of its existence the Office of the Assistant Commissioner for Georgia was located in four different cities and headed by three different officers. General Tillson first established his headquarters at Augusta in September 1865 but moved it to Savannah in October 1866. Col. Caleb C. Sibley succeeded General Tillson as Assistant Commissioner in January 1867, and 2 months later he moved the headquarters from Savannah to Macon. It remained there until July 1867, when the office was transferred to Atlanta. In October 1868 Colonel Sibley relinquished charge of Bureau affairs to Maj. John R. Lewis, who served as Assistant Commissioner until the office was discontinued in May 1869.

From January to May 1869 Major Lewis combined the duties of Assistant Commissioner with those of Superintendent of Education, and he continued to serve until May 1870 as Superintendent of Education after the Office of the Assistant Commissioner was discontinued. Although Major Lewis served in both capacities, the records of the two offices were not combined.

The volumes reproduced in this microcopy were originally arranged by type of record and thereunder in numerical sequence. Originally no numbers were assigned to index books or, generally, to series consisting of single volumes; 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 Listing and Remarks

Letters Sent

The 9 volumes of letters sent, October 1865-May 1869, are generally arranged in chronological order. They consist mainly of press copies of letters and telegrams sent by the Assistant Commissioner and the Assistant Adjutant General. Also included are copies of letters sent by the Assistant Inspector General

and the Assistant Commissary of Subsistence. A name index is at the beginning of each volume.

The legibility of some of the letters is poor, and a few are not readable. The last part of volume 2 of letters sent is missing, which is the reason for the gap in dates from February 21 to March 6, 1866. Letters sent by Assistant Commissioner Tillson from Savannah in March 1866 were copied into the volume of special field orders issued and are reproduced on Roll 34 of this microcopy.

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, the Assistant Adjutant General, or the Assistant Inspector 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 with all the previous endorsements that had been written on the communication.

The 6 volumes of endorsements sent, October 1865-May 1869, are generally arranged in chronological order. In the left margin is the name of the person or title of the officer to whom the endorsement was sent. Fractions are entered in the left margin throughout volume 1 and in part of volume 2. The numerator is the number of the page in a volume on which there is a preceding endorsement to the same officer, and the denominator is the number of the page on which there is a subsequent endorsement. Frequently noted is the page number on which the incoming letter was entered in the register of letters received. A name index to volumes 1 and 2 has been filmed before volume 1.

Registers of Letters Received

Another recordkeeping practice of the day, as indicated above, was that of entering incoming communications into registers of letters received. The entries in 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, abstracts of the contents of the enclosures, the date of receipt of the letter, and the register entry number assigned to it.

The 5 volumes of registers of letters received, October 1865-May 1869, are arranged in two ways. The entries in registers 1-3 are arranged alphabetically by initial letter of surname or office of correspondent and thereunder generally in chronological

order by date of receipt of communication. In addition, in registers 2 and 3 the letters were assigned entry numbers with a separate numerical sequence for each alphabetical division. The entries in registers 4 and 5 are arranged in chronological order by date of receipt and numbered, with a separate numerical sequence for each register. A name index book to register 5 has been filmed before the register.

Because the number of pages allotted to each alphabetical division in the registers often proved insufficient, it became necessary to continue the entries in other parts of the volume. The National Archives has filmed the registers in correct order, therefore some of the pages are not in the original numerical sequence. Blank numbered pages have not been filmed.

The registers contain several abbreviations. "E&M" refers to the series of endorsement books and "LRB" to the registers of letters received. In each case the numeral after the abbreviation in the register is the page number in the endorsement book or in the register of letters received.

Not all letters entered in the registers are among the records of the Assistant Commissioner. Some letters were forwarded to the Bureau headquarters in 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 number of each letter that is still in the series of registered letters received.

Letters Received

The letters and telegrams received by the Assistant Commissioner, the Assistant Adjutant General, and the Assistant Inspector General are in four unbound series--one series of registered letters and three series of unregistered letters, telegrams, and letters relating to appointments.

The letters entered in the registers of letters received, September 1865-April 1869, are arranged in the order in which they are entered in the registers. The file citation on a letter entered in registers 2-5 includes the volume number of the register, the page on which it is entered, and the entry number assigned to the letter. The letters entered in register 1 usually have no file citations.

The unregistered letters received, September 1865-January 1869, are arranged by year and thereunder alphabetically by initial letter of surname of correspondent. Letters received from the Bureau headquarters in Washington are at the beginning of the file for each year. The letters have no file citations, and no entries will be found for them in the registers of letters received. Some of the letters dated September 1865 are addressed to General Wild.

The unregistered telegrams received, September 1865-November 1868, are arranged chronologically, and no entries will be found for them in the registers of letters received.

The unregistered letters received relating to appointments, July 1865-October 1869, are arranged by year and thereunder alphabetically by initial letter of surname of applicant. Included are applications, recommendations, and acceptances of positions in the Bureau, and form letters of appointment and revocation received from the Bureau headquarters in Washington. The letters that predate September 1865 seem to have been referred to General Wild, and those that postdate April 1869 relate to positions in the Office of the Superintendent of Education.

Filmed after the letters relating to appointments is a series of test oaths, 1866-69, which are arranged alphabetically by initial letter of surname of individual who signed the oath. According to an act of Congress approved 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.

Reports

Among the records of the Assistant Commissioner are two unbound series of reports: the reports of operations and the reports of murders and outrages.

The reports of operations, 1866-68, are arranged chronologically. They consist mainly of copies of reports sent to the Commissioner about the Bureau's activities in Georgia. The series includes the Assistant Commissioner's annual report for September 1865-November 1866; the Assistant Commissioner's monthly reports, February-August 1867, October-May 1868, and August-November 1868; and also two reports by the Surgeon in Chief to the Assistant Commissioner for October 1866-September 1867 and October-December 1868.

The reports received from subassistant commissioners and agents relating to murders and outrages, 1866-68, are arranged chronologically. Also included is a copy of a report sent to the Commissioner concerning outrages committed upon the freedmen in Georgia during 1868. The reports usually list the names of the person murdered or assaulted and of the person accused of the crime, the race of the people involved, and the action taken in the case.

Filmed after the reports of murders and outrages is a list of freedmen assaulted in the State of Georgia during 1867. The entries in the register are arranged by subdistrict and give the date and place of the assault, the names of the freedman

murdered or assaulted and of the person accused of the crime, the race of the people involved, and the action taken in the case.

There are also three volumes of registers of reports and returns received from subordinate officers and forwarded to the Bureau headquarters in Washington and to the Chief Quartermaster for Georgia, March 1867-February 1869. The entries are arranged alphabetically by initial letter of surname of subordinate officer submitting the report and thereunder generally in chronological order by date of receipt. The entries in the registers give the date of receipt of the report, the name of the person submitting the report, the date of the report, the place of origin, the nature of the report, the name of the officer to whom the report was referred, and a copy of the endorsement written on the report. There are no entries for many letters of the alphabet. An incomplete name index is at the beginning of volume 1.

Orders and Circulars

Among the records of the Assistant Commissioner are a register of orders sent to subordinate officers, a name and subject index, a volume of orders and circulars issued, a volume of special field orders issued, and unbound orders and circulars received and issued.

The entries in the register of orders, circulars, and forms sent to subordinate officers, April 1867-July 1868, are generally arranged in chronological order. The entry usually gives the date the document was sent, the name of the officer, his station, and the number and type of document sent. Blank numbered pages have not been filmed.

A name and subject index to the general and special orders only has been filmed before the volume of orders and circulars. In the volume of general orders, special orders, and circulars and circular letters issued, September 1865-May 1869, the orders are arranged by type of order, thereunder chronologically, and numbered in sequence. The circular letters, which are interfiled with the circulars, are also arranged chronologically but are not numbered. Blank numbered pages have not been filmed.

In the volume of special field orders issued at Savannah during 1866, the orders are arranged chronologically. On pages 101-104 are copies of letters sent from Savannah in March 1866.

The unbound orders and circulars, 1865-69, are arranged by type of order or circular, thereunder separately by received or issued, and thereunder chronologically.

Station Books and Rosters

The entries in the 2 volumes of station books, 1867-69, usually give the name of the officer or the civilian on duty in the Bureau, his station, the position held, the date and order assigning him to duty, and the date and order relieving him from duty. The staff of the Assistant Commissioner is listed first and then the officers and civilians on duty in the subdistricts. A name index is at the beginning of volume 1. Volume 2 contains only 4 pages of information.

There is also a volume listing the civilian agents on duty in Georgia, 1865-67. The volume consists of two registers containing duplicate information; one register is arranged alphabetically by name of county and the other, alphabetically by name of agent. The entries give the name of the county, the county seat, the name of the agent, the date of his appointment, by whom recommended, and the date he was relieved of duty. There are no entries in the registers for some letters of the alphabet.

The unbound rosters of officers and civilian agents on duty in Georgia in December 1866 and from August 1867 to November 1868 are arranged chronologically. The lists are mainly printed rosters.

Miscellaneous Records

On the last roll of this microcopy is a register of land titles issued to freedmen and some unbound miscellaneous papers, 1865-69. The entries in the register, April-September 1865, are arranged alphabetically by initial letter of surname of former owner. Entries do not appear under every letter of the alphabet. The miscellaneous papers are arranged by type of record and consist mainly of documents relating to court cases, reports and papers relating to lands, and a few copies of letters sent. A few of the papers are dated as early as 1862.

Related Records

Also in Record Group 105 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).

In the same record group are records created by officers stationed in the States of Georgia and South Carolina. For the State of Georgia, in addition to the records of the Assistant Commissioner, there are records of the Superintendent of Education, the Chief Quartermaster and Disbursing Officer, the

Surgeon in Chief, and the subordinate officers stationed in the subdistricts of Georgia. The records of the Superintendent of Education for Georgia, 1865-70, will be reproduced in a forthcoming microfilm publication (Microcopy 799). Records pertaining to Bureau affairs in Georgia before the establishment of the Office of the Assistant Commissioner in September 1865 are among the records of the Assistant Commissioner for South Carolina.

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.

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

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