



# National Archives and Records Administration

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## ***Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) for Virginia, 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.

In Virginia, the Bureau's operations began in June 1865 when Assistant Commissioner Orlando Brown established his headquarters in Richmond. Beginning in September 1865, however, the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia became responsible for Bureau operations in the Virginia counties of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Loudoun, and the Freedmen's Village near Arlington, Virginia. By August 1866, supervision of Loudoun was transferred back to the Assistant Commissioner for Virginia, and Alexandria and Fairfax Counties were similarly transferred in March 1867. Because officers in the above counties reported to the Assistant Commissioner of the District of Columbia, some records for Virginia are among his files.

The Bureau in Virginia provided relief for both blacks and whites, and from the late summer to early fall of 1865, it issued more than 350,000 rations. After that, the number of rations issued declined significantly as the Bureau focused on reducing expenditures and providing limited relief for those in dire need. The Bureau worked to make freedmen self-sufficient and to incorporate them into the new free-labor system in Virginia. This effort included providing transportation for persons who were unable to find work in areas where they resided to locations where work was readily available. In addition, the Bureau also established educational facilities and worked to safeguard rights and secure justice for the freedmen.

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

### **Administrative Records**

\_\_ M1048, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*. 67 rolls. DP. The records document the general operations of the field offices. The activities include administering justice, supporting schools, providing labor contracts, and issuing rations. Also included are reports on the conditions of freedmen and refugees, confiscated and abandoned lands, murders and outrages, and personnel records.

## **Educational Records**

\_\_ M1053, *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870*. 20 rolls. DP. These records document the general administration of the Bureau's schools in Virginia. The records include correspondence related to the schools and documentation of statistical information, inspections of facilities, monthly reports by teachers, and reports on schools, teachers, and buildings.

## **Field Office Records**

\_\_ M1913, *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872*. 203 rolls. DP. These records document the daily operations of each local field office. They consist primarily of correspondence, general and special orders, reports, and registers of proceedings of Freedmen's Bureau courts, which include complaints and claims made by freedmen. The records are arranged by field office and then by type of record.

## **Other Records**

\_\_ M1055, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*. 21 rolls. DP. This microfilm contains administrative records relating to Bureau activities within the District Columbia, but includes information on Loudon, Fairfax, and Alexandria Counties in Virginia. In addition to correspondence, this publication consists of reports of operations, and records relating to relief, rations issued, transportation, and personnel.

\_\_ M1902, *Records of the Field Offices for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870*. 21 rolls. Records relating to Virginia may be included in this publication. The records document the major duties of the field offices in the District of Columbia such as providing relief, resettlement transportation, employment, establishing schools, legalizing marriages, and obtaining veterans benefits for black soldiers and sailors.

\_\_ M1875, *Marriage Records of the Office of the Commissioner, Washington Headquarters of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861–1869*. 5 rolls. 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. Records of marriages in Virginia may be filed among District of Columbia records.

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