



National Archives and Records Administration

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Federal Court and Commission Records Relating to Slavery in the District of Columbia, 1820–1863

Slavery existed in the District of Columbia when Congress created the Federal territory in 1790 from lands held by the slave states of Virginia and Maryland. Slavery remained legal in the District until April 16, 1862, when President Abraham Lincoln signed into law an act abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia (12 Stat. 376). The law provided for immediate emancipation, compensation to loyal Union masters of up to \$300 for each slave, and voluntary colonization of former slaves to colonies outside the United States.

Records of the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Columbia

M433, *Records of the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Columbia Relating to Slaves, 1851–1863*. 3 rolls. This microfilm reproduces records relating to slavery kept by the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Columbia, including emancipation papers, 1862; manumission papers and affidavits of freedom, 1857–63; and fugitive slave case papers, 1851–63. **The National Archives has a searchable database of the names of individuals in these records.**

Emancipation Papers, 1862

Section 2 of the act of April 16, 1862, required that owners claiming compensation for their slaves freed as a result of this act file schedules of their slaves by July 15, 1862. A supplementary act of July 12, 1862 (12 Stat. 538) permitted submission of schedules by slaves whose owners had neglected to file and it granted freedom to slaves whose owners lived outside of the District of Columbia if the slave had been employed with the owner's consent in the District any time after April 16, 1862. The emancipation records consist of the schedules and supporting documentation submitted as a result of these two acts. The records are organized by act of Congress and then generally by last name of slave owner (act of April 16, 1862) or slave (act of July 12, 1862).

Manumission Papers & Affidavits of Freedom, 1857–62

The manumission papers record the voluntary freeing of slaves by their owners and generally contain schedules similar to the emancipation schedules as well as accompanying documentation, such as will extracts and letters. The affidavits of freedom consist of an affidavit sworn by a free individual testifying to the freedom of a black resident of the District. The manumissions and affidavits are organized by date.

Fugitive Slave Case Papers, 1851–63

As part of the Compromise of 1850, the act of September 18, 1850 (9 Stat. 462), provided that claimants to fugitive slaves could recover the slaves either by applying to Federal judges and commissioners for warrants for the arrest of the fugitives or by arresting the slaves and taking them before the judges or commissioners to establish ownership. The fugitive slave case records are organized by date and can contain warrants for arrest and documentation of proof of ownership.

___M434, *Habeas Corpus Case Records of the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Columbia*, 1820–1863. 2 rolls. A writ of habeas corpus is a court order instructing a person who is detaining another to bring the detainee before the court, usually to explain the reason for the detention. Article I, Section 9, of the U.S. Constitution ensures the writ of habeas corpus. Section 14 of an act of September 24, 1789 (1 Stat. 81), gave all U.S. courts the power to issue writs of habeas corpus.

Many of the habeas corpus records concern individuals who were alleged runaway slaves. Documents include petitions for writs of habeas corpus, writs of habeas corpus, manumission papers, statements of freedom, and other papers filed in habeas corpus proceedings, arranged by year. **The National Archives has a searchable database of the names of individuals in these records.**

These records are part of **Record Group 21, Records of District Courts of the United States.**

The Board of Commissioners for the Emancipation of Slaves

___M520, *Records of the Board of Commissioners for the Emancipation of Slaves in the District of Columbia*, 1862–63. 6 rolls. DP. Section 3 of the act of April 16, 1862, authorized the President to appoint a board of three commissioners to examine petitions for compensation from owners of slaves freed under this act. This microfilm reproduces the records of the Board of Commissioners relating to compensation paid to former owners of freed slaves in the District of Columbia, including:

- a bound volume comprising the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Commissioners with a name and subject index at the beginning of the volume
- a bound volume containing a record of petitions filed under the act of April 16, 1862, arranged chronologically with an index by name of petitioner at the front of the volume
- a bound docket book kept by the board relating to petitions filed under the act of April 16, 1862, arranged by petition number with an index at the front of the volume
- an unbound summary list of amounts awarded to claimants who filed petitions under the act of April 16, 1862, arranged by petition number
- an unbound final report by the Board to the Secretary of the Treasury, with three tabular statements, including a chronologically arranged list of petitions presented to the Board under the act of April 16, 1862, with an alphabetical index; a chronologically arranged list of petitions received under the act of July 12, 1862; and an alphabetical list of claimants who would have been eligible for awards if their petitions had been filed before the deadline
- unbound petitions filed with the Board of Commissioners pursuant to the acts of April 16 and July 12, 1862. Petitions filed under the first act were numbered consecutively and arranged numerically; those filed under the second act are arranged chronologically.

These records are part of **Record Group 217, Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury.**

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