

M1902

RECORDS OF THE FIELD OFFICES FOR THE DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA, BUREAU OF REFUGEES, FREEDMEN, AND
ABANDONED LANDS, 1865–1870

United States Congress
and
National Archives and Records Administration
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**NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
FREEDMEN'S BUREAU PRESERVATION PROJECT**

This National Archives microfilm publication is part of a multiyear project to microfilm the field office records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau). The project was made possible by the United States Congress through The Freedmen's Bureau Records Preservation Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-444). When completed, all of the field records for the States of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and for the District of Columbia will be available on microfilm. For microfilm availability and description, consult the current edition of the National Archives publication *Microfilm Resources for Research: A Comprehensive Catalog*. You can also view the National Archives microfilm locator on our web site at www.archives.gov.

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Anne Elam	Denise McAdams	Reginald Washington*
Thomas Ferrell	Douglas McRae	Richard Whittington
Jane Fitzgerald	Kathy Miller	Marlon Wise
Benjamin Guterman**	Stephanie Richmon	

Civil War Conservation Corps (CWCC) Volunteers
Directed by Budge Weidman and Russ Weidman

* Reginald Washington wrote the introductory materials.

** Benjamin Guterman edited the introductory materials.

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INTRODUCTION

On the 21 rolls of this microfilm publication, M1902, are reproduced the previously unfiled records of the District of Columbia field offices of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870. Some pre-Bureau records dated 1863 and 1864 are included. These records consist of bound volumes and unbound records, containing materials that include letters and endorsements sent and received, monthly reports, registers of marriages, and employment registers. These records are part of the Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group (RG) 105, at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC.

This film series completes the reproduction of all Bureau records created in the District of Columbia between 1865 and 1872. Many of these records were reproduced in 1978 and 1980 in National Archives Microfilm Publications M1055, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*, and M1056, *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872*.

HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, also known as the Freedmen's Bureau, was established in the War Department by an act of Congress on March 3, 1865 (13 Stat. 507). The life of the Bureau was extended twice by acts of July 16, 1866 (14 Stat. 173), and July 6, 1868 (15 Stat. 83). The Bureau was responsible for the supervision and management of all matters relating to refugees and freedmen, and of lands abandoned or seized during the Civil War. In May 1865, President Andrew Johnson appointed Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard as Commissioner of the Bureau, and Howard served in that position until June 30, 1872, when activities of the Bureau were terminated in accordance with an act of June 10, 1872 (17 Stat. 366). While a major part of the Bureau's early activities involved the supervision of abandoned and confiscated property, its mission was to provide relief and help freedmen become self-sufficient. Bureau officials issued rations and clothing, operated hospitals and refugee camps, and supervised labor contracts. In addition, the Bureau managed apprenticeship disputes and complaints, assisted benevolent societies in the establishment of schools, helped freedmen in legalizing marriages entered into during slavery, and provided transportation to refugees and freedmen who were attempting to reunite with their family or relocate to other parts of the country. The Bureau also helped black soldiers, sailors, and their heirs collect bounty claims, pensions, and back pay.

The act of March 3, 1865, authorized the appointment of Assistant Commissioners to aid the Commissioner in supervising the work of the Bureau in the former Confederate states, the border states, and the District of Columbia. In the District of

Columbia, field office operations began in June 1865, when Col. John Eaton, Jr., was appointed Assistant Commissioner with headquarters in the city of Washington. Brig. Gen. J. C. Fullerton succeeded Eaton in December 1865 and served until February 7, 1866. Brig. Gen. Charles H. Howard, brother of Commissioner Howard, then served as the Assistant Commissioner until the position was discontinued in December 1868. Bvt. Maj. David G. Swaim then supervised operations until October 1869, when virtually all Bureau functions, except education, were terminated.

The Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia was responsible for Bureau affairs in the District, the Freedmen's Village in Virginia and the farms south of the Potomac, and the Government farms in St. Marys County, Maryland. In September 1865, Alexandria, Fairfax, and Loudon Counties, Virginia, were added to his jurisdiction. In August 1866, Loudon was transferred to the Assistant Commissioner for Virginia, and Alexandria and Fairfax Counties were transferred similarly in March 1867. In the same month, West Virginia was placed under the jurisdiction of the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia. He was also responsible for Bureau affairs in Montgomery, Prince Georges, Anne Arundel, Charles, Calvert, and St. Marys Counties in Maryland. In January 1868, Washington and Allegheny Counties, Maryland, were added, and in August 1868, the remaining counties of Maryland and the State of Delaware were added to his jurisdiction. Although the officers in the neighboring Maryland and Virginia counties reported to the Assistant Commissioner of the District of Columbia, their records are among those of the subordinate officers for Maryland or Virginia.

While the work performed by Assistant Commissioners in each state and the District of Columbia was similar, the organizational structure of staff officers varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In the District of Columbia, the Assistant Commissioner's staff consisted of a superintendent of education, an assistant inspector general (from time to time he served as the assistant adjutant general), an assistant quartermaster and disbursing officer, a superintendent of marriages, and a surgeon in chief. Subordinate to these officers were the assistant superintendents, or subassistant commissioners as they later became known, who commanded the subdistricts. For administrative purposes, agents were assigned to the various counties of Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. Within the District of Columbia, a subassistant commissioner was appointed to supervise Bureau activities for the communities of Georgetown and Washington. In 1868 Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties were added to his jurisdiction. A subassistant commissioner was also assigned to Alexandria County in January 1866; he reported to the Assistant Commissioner until responsibility for the supervision of the county was transferred to Virginia authorities. In addition to county agents and subassistant commissioners, local superintendents were appointed to supervise such Government projects as Barry Farm, located south of the Anacostia River, and the Sothron Farm in St. Marys County, Maryland. These farms were purchased with Bureau funds to aid freedmen in buying farmland. Other local superintendents were assigned to administer

Freedmen's Village and schools and hospitals. Occasionally, the Bureau retained military officers in a civilian capacity after the termination of their military service. For a list of known District of Columbia subordinate field office personnel and their dates of service, see the Appendix.

The Assistant Commissioner corresponded extensively with both his superior in the Washington Bureau headquarters and his subordinate officers in the subdistricts. Based upon reports submitted to him by the subassistant commissioners and other subordinate staff officers, he prepared reports that he sent to the Commissioner concerning Bureau activities in areas under his jurisdiction. The Assistant Commissioner also received letters from freedmen, local white citizens, state officials, and other non-Bureau personnel. These letters varied in nature from complaints to applications for jobs in the Bureau. Because the assistant adjutant general handled much of the mail for the Assistant Commissioner's office, it was often addressed to him instead of to the Assistant Commissioner.

In a circular issued by Commissioner Howard in July 1865, the Assistant Commissioners were instructed to designate one officer in each state to serve as "general Superintendents of Schools." These officials were to "take cognizance of all that is being done to educate refugees and freedmen, secure proper protection to schools and teachers, promote method and efficiency, correspond with the benevolent agencies which are supplying his field, and aid the Assistant Commissioner in making his required reports." In October 1865, a degree of centralized control was established over Bureau educational activities in the states when Rev. John W. Alvord was appointed Inspector of Finances and Schools. In January 1867, Alvord was divested of his financial responsibilities, and he was appointed General Superintendent of Education. In August 1865, Rev. John Kimball was appointed superintendent of education for the District of Columbia and served until replaced by Maj. D. G. Swaim in October 1869. Maj. W. L. VanDerlip succeeded Swaim in December 1869 and remained in the position until August 1870, when educational activities in the District of Columbia were discontinued.

Because the jurisdiction of the superintendent of education for the District of Columbia included areas other than the District itself, his records include reports and correspondence relating to schools in Maryland, West Virginia, Delaware, and parts of Virginia.

An act of Congress, approved July 25, 1868 (15 Stat. 193), ordered that the Commissioner of the Bureau "shall, on the first day of January next, cause the said bureau to be withdrawn from the several States within which said bureau has acted and its operation shall be discontinued." Consequently, in early 1869, with the exception of the superintendents of education and the claims agents, the Assistant Commissioners and their subordinate officers were withdrawn from the states and the District of Columbia.

For the next year and a half the Bureau continued to pursue its education work and to process claims. In the summer of 1870, the superintendents of education were withdrawn from the states, and the headquarters staff was greatly reduced. From that time until the Bureau was abolished by an act of Congress approved June 10, 1872 (17 Stat. 366), effective June 30, 1872, the Bureau's functions related almost exclusively to the disposition of claims. The Bureau's records and remaining functions were then transferred to the Freedmen's Branch in the office of the Adjutant General. The records of this branch are among the Bureau's files.

Constrained by limited resources, Southern opposition, and the politics of Reconstruction, the Bureau faced an enormous challenge in its efforts to assist the freedmen and refugees. Its relief efforts, without question, saved thousands of southerners from starvation. Its attempts to assist freedmen to become self-sufficient, to provide public education, administer justice, and, to a lesser degree, to provide land, all worked with varying degrees of success to lessen the difficulties during the transition from slavery to freedom. One of the Bureau's greatest legacies is the body of records it created and received during the course of its operations. These records are arguably some of the most important documents available for the study of the Federal Government's policies, efforts to reconstruct the South, and Southern social history and genealogy.

THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The major activities of the Freedmen's Bureau field office in the District of Columbia generally resembled those conducted in other states. The Bureau provided relief from poverty and destitution, provided transportation and employment for needy freedmen, worked with benevolent societies in the establishment of schools, provided assistance in legalizing slave marriages and various legal matters, and worked with black soldiers and sailors in obtaining back pay, bounty payments, and pensions.

To relieve problems of destitution and poverty and to aid the aged, orphans, and infirm in the District of Columbia and Virginia, the Bureau offered various forms of assistance. The Bureau established an asylum at the Freedmen's Village in Arlington, Virginia, for destitute men, women, and children. It was located across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, on the estate formerly owned by Robert E. Lee. It originated with the War Department in 1863 as a "model community" for the freedmen in the Washington area and was continued by the Freedmen's Bureau for destitute freedmen. Also, under the auspices of a women's campaign, "National Appreciation of the relief of destitute colored women and children," the Bureau constructed a building for the Colored Orphans Home of Washington, DC. In addition, the Brooklyn Home for Children of Freedmen, under the direction of the African Civilization Society, received aid from the Bureau to allow temporary relief for freedwomen to look for employment. When "The Farm School for colored boys"

in the District of Columbia ceased its operations on June 14, 1867, the Bureau provided homes for inmates, and assisted others who returned to their parents.¹

As a part of its ongoing relief efforts, the Bureau also issued rations to both the Freedmen's Hospital in the District of Columbia and Abbott Hospital at Freedmen's Village. Up to a 3-day supply of rations was given to freedmen who sought employment outside the city, and rations were given to those destitute refugees and freedmen who weren't considered permanent residents of Washington. In 1866 Congress authorized a special relief appropriation of \$25,000 for the poor in the District of Columbia, and an additional expenditure of \$15,000 in 1867. A Special Relief Commission headed by Robert Reyburn, surgeon in chief of the District of Columbia, was established by Assistant Commissioner Howard to administer the appropriations. The Commission provided food, clothing, and other essentials to both blacks and whites in the city. The Commission maintained registers of applicants who applied for relief and forwarded weekly reports of its operations to the Assistant Commissioner. The Assistant Commissioner also received additional reports relating to rations, clothing, and medicine issued by other Bureau officials.²

One of the major challenges facing Freedmen's Bureau officials in the Washington, DC, field office was to reduce the number of freedmen in the city who depended on the Bureau for assistance. When the Civil War began, thousands of freedmen flocked to the capital city from the surrounding areas of Maryland and Virginia. After Congress abolished slavery in the District of Columbia in 1862, thousands more migrated to the city, causing overcrowding, destitution, and significant increases in unemployment. A census taken by the Bureau in the winter and spring of 1866 revealed a black population of more than 31,000 in Washington and Georgetown, many of whom were unable to find work. To relieve the Government of the burden of providing support for these individuals and to encourage independence, Assistant Commissioner Charles Howard solicited the help of Northern aid societies in Philadelphia, PA; Boston, MA; New York; and Providence, RI. Howard believed that if large numbers of freedmen in the District of Columbia could secure employment in other parts of country, conditions would improve for those who remained. To carry out his plan, Howard established employment offices in both the District of Columbia and Northern cities and provided rations and free transportation for interested freedmen to prospective employers. Employment offices (a.k.a., "intelligence offices") were established in various parts of the capital, and the

¹ These Bureau relief projects are explained in Annual Reports of the Assistant Commissioners, District of Columbia, October 10, 1867, [pp. 27–30], Records of the Commissioner, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group (RG) 105, National Archives Building (NAB).

² Ibid., [pp. 30–31]. See also Register of Ration Requests and Weekly Reports of Operations of the Special Relief Commission, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1055, roll 16).

Bureau hired several employment agents and paid the rent of employment offices in New Jersey; Providence, RI; Hartford, CT; and Boston, MA. In many instances, employment agents traveled with freedmen to the North and took them to the employment office or the employer. Officials in charge of employment offices in Washington; Alexandria, VA; and northern employment offices forwarded trimonthly and monthly reports of their operations to the Assistant Commissioner. The Assistant Commissioner also received reports from local agents regarding destitute freedmen.³

By October 1867, the Bureau had provided resettlement transportation for more than 9,000 freedmen from the District of Columbia. Many others received help finding homes in Maryland and Virginia, to where transportation was not required. However, in spite of the Bureau's claims of reducing the dependency of the black population in the District of Columbia, poverty and unemployment remained an issue. In a circular issued October 5, 1867 (Circular Number 6), Howard, probably realizing the shortcomings of the employment program, limited transportation to orphans and women with small children, thus gradually closing employment offices in and around the city.⁴

To further deal with the continued problem of poverty and unemployment, and to remove freedmen from some of the most deplorable living conditions in the District of Columbia and Alexandria, Virginia, the Bureau set aside certain buildings under its control as tenements. Several barracks in and around Washington were provided for some 350 families, and in Alexandria accommodations were made for more than 100 families. Families were charged a moderate rent, amounting to nearly a third of what they had paid to their former landlords for filthy shanties and huts. For those who could not find work at an adequate wage to support their families, Assistant Commissioner Howard ordered Bvt. Col. S. P. Lee, superintendent of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Loudon Counties, to rent some 550 acres of land at Camp Distribution (near Alexandria) for tenements. Land was sub-rented to heads of families in lots from 5 to 40 acres, at a cost to the Government of \$800 per year. Small lots were also rented to freedmen in Arlington and St. Marys County, Maryland.

Superintendents of the barracks forwarded monthly reports of occupying tenants to the Assistant Commissioner. The reports provided the name and occupation of the head of the family, the number in the family, the number of rooms occupied, the rate of rent per month, the amount(s) of rent paid, and the amount of rent in arrears.⁵

³ Senate Ex. Doc. No. 6, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., Serial vol. 1276, p. 39; Annual Reports of the Assistant Commissioners, District of Columbia, October 10, 1867, [pp. 23–26]; William H. Williams, *The Negro in the District of Columbia during Reconstruction*, Howard University Studies in History, No. 5 (Washington, DC: 1924), pp. 33–37.

⁴ Annual Reports of the Assistant Commissioners, District of Columbia, October 10, 1867, [pp. 25–26].

⁵ Senate Ex. Doc. No. 6, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., Serial vol. 1276, pp. 36, 37. See also Monthly Reports of Bureau Tenants, M1055, rolls 20 and 21.

In an effort to assist freedmen in securing land, the Bureau provided funds for the purchase of 375 acres of property south of the Anacostia River known as the “Barry Farm.” Portions of the land were sold to freedmen in 1-acre lots. Freedmen were required to make monthly payments for 2 years before they received full ownership of the property. The Bureau cleared the roads leading to the lots and provided lumber and assistance in the construction of houses. By the fall of 1867, the Bureau reported that at least 180 lots had been sold and some 90 houses were either complete or under construction. With the help of the Bureau, freedmen at the “Barry Farm” project built a school on one of the lots.⁶

The educational efforts of the District of Columbia field office were similar to Bureau operations in other states. The Bureau, by and large, assisted with construction, rental, and repair of school buildings, while benevolent societies provided teachers and paid their salaries. The Bureau also provided free transportation for teachers and assisted them in getting government rations at cost. The superintendent of education, Rev. John Kimball, forwarded monthly school reports to Bureau headquarters and received monthly school reports from subordinate officers and from superintendents of schools sponsored by benevolent societies. In the District of Columbia, the Bureau worked closely with the board of trustees appointed by an act of Congress on May 21, 1862 (12 Stat. 407), to “aid in the support of the colored race.” The Trustees provided lots upon which the Bureau erected several school buildings. In 1866 the Assistant Commissioner reported that in his district there were more than 70 schools and over 6,000 students being taught by 132 teachers. There were 15 night schools and 20 Sabbath schools with slightly more than 3,000 students. There were 45 day schools (including industrial schools) conducted in buildings provided and furnished by the Bureau.⁷

The educational efforts of the Bureau’s field office in its Maryland areas of jurisdiction were hampered by a system of illegal apprenticeship of school-age children. In direct conflict with the Civil Rights Act of 1866 (14 Stat. 27), black children were being bound to their former owners for indefinite periods of time with the help of Maryland government officials. An estimated 10,000 black children were bound out as apprentices between 1864 and 1867. The Bureau, however, through writs of *habeas corpus* and other court actions, fought vigorously to have these children released. By 1868, the intense efforts of the Bureau had largely ended the

⁶ Annual Reports of the Assistant Commissioners, District of Columbia, October 10, 1867, [pp. 19–21].

⁷ Monthly Reports of the superintendent of education, superintendents of aid society-sponsored schools, and subassistant commissioners or agents in Maryland and West Virginia, *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1056, rolls 12 and 13), RG 105; Senate Ex. Doc. No. 6, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., Serial vol. 1276, p. 38. See also William H. Williams, *The Negro in the District of Columbia during Reconstruction*, especially pp. 25–30.

apprenticeship system in Maryland.⁸

Although the illegal apprenticeship system hindered the Bureau's educational activities in Maryland, the agency still managed to provide assistance with the construction and repair of school buildings and protection of and transportation for teachers. To increase the Bureau's visibility and to gauge the interest of freedmen in the establishment of schools, Superintendent Kimball traveled to various counties in Maryland, holding meetings on the benefits of education and the Bureau's intention to provide aid for schools. In addition, the Bureau worked hand in hand with private benevolent societies, such as the Baltimore Association, the American Missionary Association, and the Freedmen's Union Association, to sustain freedmen schools during a period when white opposition to black schools in Maryland was intense and support for such schools was nonexistent. From October 1867 to October 1868, the Bureau provided aid and assistance to 80 schools in Maryland.⁹

West Virginia maintained a system of free education, but whites controlled funds for schools and the employment of teachers, and schools for blacks and whites were required by law to be separate. Bureau officials worked closely with the West Virginia superintendent of free schools in the establishment of schools for freedmen. As in Maryland, Bureau officials traveled throughout West Virginia counties, advising freedmen of its support and plans for building freedmen schools. Similar to other areas under its jurisdiction, the Bureau supplied funds for buildings, and teachers were generally paid from public funds, contributions from blacks, and aid from benevolent societies. By 1868, with cooperation mostly from freedmen themselves, the Bureau was able to establish 9 schools in West Virginia. Although there were no laws in Delaware by October 1868 for the support of black schools, the Delaware Association, with assistance from Northern societies, sustained some 23 schools in various parts of the state. The Freedmen's Bureau provided assistance in the construction of 12 of the school buildings.¹⁰

Safeguarding rights and securing justice for freedmen was of paramount concern to the Freedmen's Bureau. Following the Civil War, several Southern states enacted a series of laws commonly known as "black codes," which restricted the rights and legal status of freedmen. Freedmen were often given harsh sentences for petty crimes and in some instances were unable to get their cases heard in state courts. In a circular issued by Commissioner Oliver Otis Howard on May 30, 1865, Assistant

⁸ Annual Reports of the Assistant Commissioners, District of Columbia, October 10, 1867, [pp. 3–9]; W. A. Low, "The Freedmen's Bureau in the Border States," in *Radicalism, Racism, and Party Realignment: The Border States during Reconstruction*, ed. Richard O. Curry, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 247.

⁹ W. A. Low, "The Freedmen's Bureau in the Border States," pp. 247–49. Annual Reports of the Assistant Commissioners, District of Columbia, October 10, 1868, [pp. 11–13, 15–24].

¹⁰ Annual Reports of the Assistant Commissioners, District of Columbia, October 10, 1868, [pp. 26–30]. See also W. A. Low, "The Freedmen's Bureau in the Border States," p. 257.

Commissioners were authorized, in places where civil law had been interrupted and blacks' rights to justice were being denied, to adjudicate cases between blacks themselves and between blacks and whites. In the District of Columbia and Maryland, the civil process of law had not been interrupted, and unlike many areas of the South under the Bureau's jurisdiction, no freedmen's or provost courts were in operation. The Bureau did however, provide legal assistance to freedmen in civil and criminal cases in the both the District of Columbia and Maryland. This was done especially in instances where freedmen lacked counsel and in cases where Bureau officials felt that freedmen were wrongly convicted or imprisoned. Court cases involving freedmen in Alexandria, VA, were handled by provost courts until June 10, 1866, when the Virginia legislature abolished laws that did not allow blacks to sue or be a party to a suit, or testify in cases in which they were involved. In 1868, the Assistant Commissioner reported that nearly 900 cases had been attended to by the Bureau. A large percentage of the cases involved incidents in Maryland.¹¹

The Freedmen Bureau's field office in the District of Columbia made a special effort to assist freed men and women in legalizing marriages that they had entered into during their enslavement. Continuing a practice that had been started by Northern missionaries and Army clergy, Rev. John Kimball, who served as the superintendent of marriages for the District of Columbia, advised freedmen of the act of Congress of July 25, 1866 (14 Stat. 236), relating to slave marriages. The act stipulated that all persons who recognized each other as man and wife prior to the act were now legally married. Superintendent Kimball and his assistants issued marriage licenses and certificates and forwarded them along with marriage reports to the Office of the Commissioner. During the year, Kimball issued more than 1,000 marriage certificates. Nearly half of the couples who received certificates had lived in slavery without any form of marriage ceremony. Kimball also registered couples and forwarded ministers' reports of marriages that were retained by the Assistant Commissioner. In addition to the reports received from Kimball, the Assistant Commissioner also received reports from other officers regarding laws relating to marriage in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. A March 22, 1867, act of the Maryland General Assembly validated freedmen marriages in Maryland. In Virginia, two February 27, 1866, acts of the Virginia General Assembly made provisions for issuing marriage licenses and the registration and legalization of marriage relations entered into by former slave couples.¹²

¹¹ Senate Ex. Doc. No. 6, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., Serial vol. 1276, p. 34; Annual Reports, Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia, October 10, 1867, [p. 3], and October 10, 1868, [pp. 5–11].

¹² Annual Reports of the Assistant Commissioners, District of Columbia, October 10, 1867, [pp. 11–13]; *Marriage Records of the Office of the Commissioner, Washington Headquarters of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861–1869* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1875, roll 1), RG 105. See also Miscellaneous Reports and Lists, M1055, roll 21.

In addition to assisting freedmen in solemnizing slave marriages, the Bureau helped discharged soldiers and their heirs in claims for back pay, bounty payments, and pensions. In accordance with a law passed by Congress on March 29, 1867 (15 Stat. 26), making the Freedmen's Bureau the sole agent for payment of claims of black veterans, Bureau disbursing officers assisted veterans in the preparation and settlement of claims. While many of the subdistricts under the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia field office were involved in veterans claims, most of the activities of the Bureau were centered in Baltimore, MD, where two full-time disbursing officers were assigned to settle and pay veterans claims. In 1868 Bureau agents disbursed more than \$100,000 for military claims.¹³

RECORDS DESCRIPTION

The records reproduced in this microfilm publication consist of volumes and inbound records. The volumes were originally arranged by type of record and thereunder by volume number. No numbers were assigned to series consisting of single volumes. Years later, all volumes were arbitrarily assigned numbers by the Adjutant General's Office (AGO) of the War Department after the records came into its custody. In this microfilm publication, AGO numbers are shown in parentheses to aid in identifying the volumes. The National Archives assigned the volume numbers that do not appear in parentheses. In some volumes, particularly in indexes and alphabetical headings of registers, there are a number of blank numbered pages that have not been filmed.

The volumes consist of letters and endorsements sent and received, press copies of letters sent, registers of letters received, letters and orders received, employment registers, registers of contraband camps, marriage records, special orders and circulars issued, and monthly reports forwarded to the Assistant Commissioner. The unbound documents consist of letters and orders received, unregistered letters received, special orders and circulars received, labor contracts, monthly reports, transportation orders, employment rosters, and ministers' reports relating to marriages.

LIST OF BOOK RECORDS

The single-volume list of book records of officers in the District of Columbia (no date) is arranged by office, with records of the Assistant Commissioner first. Included in the list of book records are the type of record in each book or volume, the dates of the volume, and the volume number. Throughout this introductory material and in the Table of Contents, the volume number appears in parentheses in the series descriptions of the records.

¹³ Annual Reports of the Assistant Commissioners, District of Columbia, October 10, 1867, [pp. 10–11], and October 10, 1868, [pp. 13–15].

OFFICES OF STAFF OFFICERS

Assistant Inspector General

The single-volume name index (53½) to the single-volume of letters sent (53), mentioned below, is undated. The numbers in the index refer to the number of the letter.

The single-volume of letters sent, March 1866–September 1868 (53), is arranged and numbered in chronological order, although there are sections of the volume in which the communications were not copied in chronological order. Some of the communications in this volume are also copied in the five volumes of letters sent by the Assistant Commissioner that have been reproduced on Rolls 1 and 2 of Microfilm Publication M1055.

The single-volume name and subject index (52½) to the register of letters received and endorsements sent (52), mentioned below, is undated. The numbers in the index refer to the number of the letter.

The single-volume register of letters received and endorsements sent, March 1866–December 1868 (52), is arranged alphabetically by initial letter of the surname of the correspondent and thereunder arranged in chronological order and numbered.

Unbound letters received, April 1866–August 1868, are arranged according to their entry in the single-volume register of letters received.

Unbound unregistered letters received, March 1866–August 1868, are arranged chronologically.

Unbound inventory and inspection reports of quartermaster stores and medical property, November 1866–October 1868, are arranged chronologically. The reports were submitted on a printed form on which the reporting officer listed the articles; from whom they were received; condition of the articles; and whether the articles should be dropped from returns, repaired, or destroyed.

Assistant Quartermaster and Disbursing Officer

The two volumes of registers of letters sent, June 1865–August 1869, 1 (58) and 2 (59), are arranged by time period. The entries are arranged alphabetically by initial letter of surname of addressee, thereunder by press book (five volumes of press copies of letters sent mentioned below), and thereunder chronologically.

The five volumes of press copies of letters sent, 1 (60), 2 (61), 3 (62), 4 (63), and 5 (64), cover the period June 1864–August 1869. Volume 1 (60) is dated June 1864–December 1866; Volume 2 (61), May 1866–October 1867; Volume 3 (62), May 1866–April 1868; Volume 4 (63), January–July 1867; and Volume 5 (64), April 1868–August 1869. There are name indexes for volumes 1 (60), 2 (61), and 3 (62).

For a register of these letters, see the two volumes of registers of letters sent mentioned above. Some of the letters in Volume 1 (60) were signed by E. A. Holman, superintendent of Government Farms South of the Potomac and by John A. Elison, chief quartermaster for the Department of Washington.

The four volumes of press copies of letters sent, requisitions, and receipts, September 1864–August 1869, 1 (66), 2 (67), 3 (68), and 4 (69), are arranged chronologically, and there are name indexes for volumes 1 (66) and 2 (67). This series is composed mainly of receipts and requisitions and letters relating to supplies.

The two volumes of registers of letters received, June 1865–August 1869, 1 (55) and 2 (56), are arranged by time period. The entries are arranged alphabetically by initial letter of the surname or office of correspondent and thereunder chronologically. The actual letters received are mentioned below.

Unbound letters received, May 1865–August 1869, are in two numerical sequences. Although these letters are entered in the two volumes of registers of letters received, 1 (55) and 2 (56), it appears as if the letters were first arranged and numbered in chronological order, and then the entry number of the letter was written next to the entry in the register.

Unbound unregistered letters received, September 1866–August 1869, are arranged chronologically.

The single volume of letters received, August 1865–August 1866 (57), is arranged in four subseries and thereunder chronologically. The subseries include letters from the Third Auditor, the Quartermaster, Commissioner O. O. Howard, and from “miscellaneous” sources. The “miscellaneous” include letters from depot quartermasters, private individuals, and other War Department offices.

Unbound contracts for labor and services, March 1865–June 1869, are arranged chronologically. Most of the contracts are for the repair and construction of buildings.

Unbound transportation orders received from Bureau headquarters, June 1867–March 1869, are arranged chronologically. The orders give the name and destination of the person or article.

The single-volume register of disbursements, September 1865–December 1868 (73), is arranged chronologically. The register gives the name of the person to whom the disbursement was made, the date, the voucher number, and the amount and nature of the account.

Superintendent of Marriages

The single-volume register of marriages, November 1866–July 1867 (30), is arranged by month and thereunder by name of minister issuing the certificate. The register gives the date the certificate was issued, the name of the minister who issued the certificate, the names of the couple, former residences, the date of their marriage, who performed the ceremony, the number of children from previous marriages, and remarks of the minister.

Unbound ministers reports of marriage certificates issued to freedmen, November 1866–January 1867, are arranged chronologically. In their reports, the ministers usually listed the couples who were issued certificates. Included in this series are copies of Superintendent Kimball's reports to the Assistant Commissioner. The last item is a marriage license dated October 1869.

Surgeon in Chief

The single volume of letters sent, February 1867–September 1870 (no number), is arranged alphabetically by initial letter of surname of addressee and thereunder chronologically. There are only a few letters dated 1870.

The single volume of endorsements sent and received, February 1867–March 1870 (no number), is arranged chronologically.

The single-volume register of letters received, February 1867–May 1870 (no number), is arranged alphabetically by initial letter of the surname of correspondent and thereunder arranged and numbered in chronological order. The letters in this series have not been located. Most appear to have been forwarded to other officers, and the volume contains many cross-references to endorsements in the single volume of endorsements sent and received mentioned above.

SUBORDINATE FIELD OFFICES**Local Superintendent for Washington and Georgetown***Correspondence*

The single-volume name index (78½) is an index to the two volumes of letters sent, July 1865–September 1868, 1 (77) and 2 (78), mentioned below. The numbers in the index volume refer to the page numbers in the volumes of letters sent.

The two volumes of letters sent, July 1865–September 1868, 1 (77) and 2 (78), are arranged chronologically. See name index above.

The two volumes of endorsements sent and received, July 1865–September 1868, 1 (80) and 2 (81), are arranged chronologically.

The single-volume name index is an index to only Volume 3 (76) of the three volumes of registers of letters received that cover the period July 1865–September 1868, mentioned below. The numbers in the volume refer to page numbers.

The three volumes of registers of letters received, July–August 1865 and October 1866–September 1868, 1 (74), 2 (75), and 3 (76), are arranged by time period. The actual letters received are described below. The entries in the volumes are arranged chronologically and numbered in three sequences: July–August 1865; October 1866–April 1868, volumes 1 (74) and 2 (75); and April–September 1868, volume 3 (76).

Unbound letters received, October 1866–August 1868, are arranged according to their entry in the registers of letters received mentioned above. Letters received July–Aug. 1865 and registered in volume 1 (74) appear to be missing from these unbound letters received. The September letters, entered in register volume 3 (76), are also missing.

Unbound unregistered letters received, August 1865 and February 1866–October 1868, are arranged chronologically.

Reports

The two volumes of reports forwarded to the Assistant Commissioner, July 1865–October 1868, 1 (95) and 2 (97), are arranged chronologically. Volume 1 (95) consists of reports of tenements occupied by freedmen, reports of funds, rosters of employees of the local superintendent, as well as reports of employment offices. Volume 1 (95) also contains a register of employees, July 1865–June 1867 (pages 266–69), and a register of accounts, December 1866–June 1867 (page 336). Volume 2 (97) consists of reports of the business of the employment office. It also contains circulars issued by the local superintendent, December 1866–August 1867; a list of employees under the direction of the local superintendent who are entitled to rations, June–October 1868; and miscellaneous receipts and memorandums, February–June 1868.

Unbound monthly rosters, reports of persons and articles hired, and time reports, June 1866–August 1868, are arranged chronologically.

Unbound monthly reports from superintendents of industrial schools of materials and clothing received, expended, and on hand, April 1867–April 1868, are arranged chronologically.

Records Relating to Employment of Freedmen

Unbound letters received by employment agents, January 1866–November 1867, arranged by agent and thereunder chronologically. These letters were received by the following agents: J. L. Roberts, Miss W. F. Harris, O.S.B. Wall, and D. R. Disbrow.

The single-volume “employment” register, July 1867–October 1868 (88), is arranged chronologically. The register gives the names and addresses of applicants for servants, the kind of help desired, and the wages offered. The register usually gives the names, ages, and addresses of servants sent to the applicant. The volume also contains names of men sent to work on an arsenal and to work for General Michler repairing the streets.

The two volumes of “employment” registers from the Wisewell Barracks cover the period August 1866–August 1868 1 (91) and 2 (96). Volume 1 (91) is a register of employers provided servants, and Volume 2 (96) is a register of servants. Both are arranged chronologically. In addition to giving the name of the employer, Volume 1 (91) gives the address of the employer, the number and class of servants sent, and the pay per month. Volume 2 (96) gives the names and ages of servants.

The two volumes of “employment” registers from East Capitol Street Barracks cover the period December 1866–February 1868, 1 (90) and 2 (94). Volume 1 (90) is a register of employers, and Volume 2 (94) is a register of servants. Both volumes are arranged chronologically. Volume 1 (90) gives the name and address of employer, the number and class of servants sent, and the rate of pay per month. Volume 2 (94) gives the name and age of the servant.

Unbound labor contracts, August 1865–March 1867, are arranged numerically, with unnumbered contracts at the end of the series. Contracts between freedmen and employers were witnessed by the local superintendent. Most are printed forms, and they usually indicate the period of service, the rate of wages, and the type of work to be performed.

Unbound monthly rosters from employment agents and superintendents of barracks, November 1866–August 1868, are arranged chronologically.

The single volume of cash accounts of the employment office, July 1865–February 1867 (93), is arranged chronologically. The volume appears to be the accounts of the employment office operated by the local superintendent J.V.W. Vandenburg.

Other Records

Unbound consolidated weekly reports of sick and wounded freedmen, February 1867–July 1868, are arranged chronologically. The reports are printed forms on which the surgeons showed the number of men, women, and children under their care; the number at the last weekly report; the number admitted since last report; the number discharged, transferred, or died; and the number of medical attendants on duty.

The single-volume register of freedmen departing from Mason’s Island, VA, May 1864–July 1865 (92) is arranged chronologically. The register gives the names, sex, and ages of freedmen and the places where they were sent. The volume also contains

a register of applicants for employment dated June 1865, which was probably compiled by an employment agent in the District of Columbia. For other records relating to Mason's Island, see the single volume of accounts of materials used in industrial schools and miscellaneous lists (98) mentioned below.

The single-volume register of patients in the female ward of Lincoln Hospital, July 1866–March 1867 (no number), is arranged chronologically. Another list or register of patients, July–October 1866, appears at the end of the book. The register gives the name, age, and type of illness of the patient, and the dates of admission and discharge from the hospital.

Unbound agents' and superintendents' monthly lists of articles received, expended, or on hand, March 1867–August 1868, are arranged chronologically.

The single volume of accounts of materials used in industrial schools and miscellaneous lists, 1863–68 (98), is arranged by type of record. The volume includes the following: lists of contrabands and articles debted or credited, June 1863; list of articles received by D. B. Nichols, superintendent of contrabands for the Department of Washington, June–April 1863; register of deaths at Mason's Island, VA, February–June 1865; register of freedmen seeking employment, August 1866–August 1867; and accounts of materials used in industrial schools, February–March 1868.

The single volume of accounts, August 1865–July 1867 (82), is arranged chronologically. For a register of accounts for December 1866–July 1867, see volume 2 (95) of reports forwarded to the Assistant Commissioner mentioned above.

The single volume of miscellaneous records of the East Capitol Street Barracks, 1866–68 (79), is arranged by type of record. The volume includes a register of payments received from tenants of the East Capitol Street Barracks, May 1866–August 1867; letters and circulars received and a few copies of letters sent, November 1866–January 1868; and miscellaneous contracts, 1866–67.

The single-volume name index to tenement book is not dated (38). The volume that this book indexes has not been found.

Subassistant Commissioner (Subdistrict 1)

This subdistrict consisted of Washington and Georgetown, and in 1868 it also included the surrounding Maryland counties of Montgomery and Prince Georges.

The single volume of letters sent, October 1867–June 1868 (86), is arranged chronologically.

The single volume of endorsements sent, October 1867–September 1868 (87), is arranged chronologically.

The single-volume register of letters received, October 1867–September 1868 (85), is arranged alphabetically by initial letter of the surname of the correspondent and thereunder arranged in chronological order and numbered.

Unbound letters received, October 1867, consists of four letters.

Barry Farm

The Barry Farm project was an attempt by the Bureau to enable freedmen to purchase land. The farm was located south of the Anacostia River and was purchased by trustees from funds supplied by the Bureau. The trustees were to sell the land in 1-acre lots to freedmen, who were to pay for it within 2 years.

The single volume of press copies of letters sent and received by the superintendent of Barry Farm, September 1867–March 1869 (100), is arranged chronologically and has a name index.

Freedmen's Village

Freedmen's Village was located across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, on the estate formerly owned by Robert E. Lee. It originated in 1863 as a "model community" for the freedmen in the Washington area and was continued by the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands largely as a place for destitute freedmen.

The single volume of letters sent by the superintendent, July 1867–November 1868 (111), is arranged chronologically. Most of the letters are addressed to the Assistant Commissioner and his staff, and they relate to the general operations of the Freedmen's Village. The volume was originally listed as a Virginia record.

Unbound letters received, December 1864–December 1868, are arranged chronologically. Most of the letters were either sent or returned by the Assistant Commissioner and his staff, but a few are reports from teachers and letters from freedmen.

The single volume of letters and orders received, October 1865–February 1868 (99), is arranged chronologically. From October 1865 to July 1867 the letters and orders copied in the volume were addressed to the assistant surgeon at Abbott Hospital, which was located within Freedmen's Village. Also included for the period are some letters sent by the surgeon. After July 1867, the letters are addressed to the superintendent of Freedmen's Village. Almost all of the letters and orders are from the Assistant Commissioner and his staff.

Unbound special orders and circular letters received, February 1866–October 1868, are arranged by type of order and thereunder chronologically. The orders are primarily issuances from the Assistant Commissioner.

Unbound reports, 1865–68, are arranged by type of report. The series includes reports of persons and articles hired, operations reports, rosters, quarterly statements of quartermaster property, estimates of rations, returns of animals, and reports of forage drawn.

Unbound labor contracts, 1864, consist of three items. They are labor contracts witnessed by the chief quartermaster for the Department of Washington.

The single-volume register of people arriving at Freedmen's Village, January 1867–June 1868 (84), is arranged chronologically. The register gives the name and age of the person, the date of arrival, condition or state of health, and name of agent who recommended him for Freedmen's Village. The volume also contains registers of freedmen arriving at Camps Springdale, Wadsworth, Rucker, and Beckwith, 1863–65, and also a register of departures from Camp Springdale. These registers give the name, age, marital status, and former residence of the freedman.

Unbound reports of sick and wounded, returns of medical and hospital property, and statements of receipts and expenditures at Abbott Hospital, 1866–68, are arranged by type of record. For other records relating to Abbott Hospital, see the single volume of letters received (99) mentioned above.

Unbound receipts for materials received by superintendents of workshops and receipts for rent received from the superintendent of Freedmen's Village, December 1864–April 1867, are arranged chronologically. The receipts for materials are also arranged numerically.

RELATED RECORDS

In the same record group, RG 105, and related to records of the field offices for the District of Columbia, are those of the Bureau headquarters in Washington, DC, and previously microfilmed records of the Assistant Commissioner and the superintendent of education for Washington, DC. These record series are available in the following National Archives microfilm publications:

M742, Selected Series of Records Issued by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872

M752, Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872

M803, Records of the Education Division of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1871

M1055, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*

M1056, *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872*

M1875, *Marriage Records of the Office of the Commissioner, Washington Headquarters of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*

Records in other record groups supplement those of the Assistant Commissioner and subordinate field offices. In Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821–1920, RG 393, are records of the military district that included the District of Columbia. Records relating to employment and welfare of freedmen and abandoned property before the establishment of the Bureau are among Records of Civil War Special Agencies of the Treasury Department, RG 366. The records of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, 1865–1874, in Records of the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, RG 101, contain information relating to former slaves who maintained accounts with the bank branches at the District of Columbia.

There have been numerous books, articles, and dissertations published about the Freedmen's Bureau and its operations. For general background, see Paul S. Pierce, *The Freedmen's Bureau, A Chapter in the History of Reconstruction* (Iowa City, IA: 1904), and George R. Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (Philadelphia, PA: 1955).

Several books written about Commissioner Oliver Otis Howard include *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard* (New York, NY: 1907); John Alcott Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch: Oliver Otis Howard* (Pittsburgh, PA: 1964); and William S. McFeely, *Yankee Stepfather: O. O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New Haven, CT: 1968).

CONTENTS

ROLL	DESCRIPTION	DATES
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	Assistant Inspector General	
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	Letters Sent Volume (53)	Mar. 21, 1866–Sept. 7, 1868
	Name and Subject Index to Volume 52 Volume (52½)	
	Letters Received and Endorsements Sent Volume (52)	Mar. 1866–Dec. 1868
	Letters Received	Apr. 1866–Aug. 1868
	Unregistered Letters Received	Mar. 26, 1866–Aug. 26, 1868
	Inventory and Inspection Reports of Quartermaster Stores and Medical Property	Nov. 1866–Oct. 1868
2	Assistant Quartermaster and Disbursing Officer	
	Registers of Letters Sent Volume 1 (58)	June 1, 1865–Oct. 31, 1867
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	Press Copies of Letters Sent Volume 1 (60)	June 17, 1864–Dec. 15, 1866
	Volume 2 (61)	May 27, 1866–Oct. 31, 1867
3	Volume 3 (62)	May 2, 1866–Apr. 4, 1868
	Volume 4 (63)	Jan. 3, 1867–July 1, 1867
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4	Press Copies of Letters Sent, Requisitions, and Receipts Volume 1 (66)	Sept. 26, 1864–Apr. 28, 1866
	Volume 2 (67)	Apr. 27, 1866–Feb. 19, 1867
5	Volume 3 (68)	Feb. 26, 1867–Aug. 18, 1868
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* Volume numbers assigned by the Adjutant General's Office (AGO) are shown in parentheses to assist in identifying the volumes.

ROLL	DESCRIPTION	DATES
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6	Volume 2 (56) Letters Received Entered in volume 1	Nov. 1, 1867–Aug. 26, 1869 May 16, 1865–Jan. 8, 1866
7	Letters Received Entered in volume 1	Jan. 9, 1866–Nov. 17, 1866
8	Letters Received Entered in volumes 1 and 2	Nov. 20, 1866–Dec. 6, 1867
9	Letters Received Entered in volume 2	Jan. 4, 1868–Sept. 21, 1868
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11	Unregistered Letters Received Letters Received Volume (57) Contracts for Labor and Services	Sept. 4, 1866–Aug. 27, 1869 Aug. 31, 1865–Aug. 18, 1866 Mar. 1865–June 1869
12	Transportation Orders Received from Headquarters Registers of Disbursements Volume (73)	June 18, 1867–Mar. 20, 1869 Sept. 21, 1865–Dec. 3, 1868
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13	Ministers Reports of Marriage Certificates Issued to Freedmen	Nov. 1866–Jan. 1867 and Oct. 7, 1869
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ROLL	DESCRIPTION	DATES
13	SUBORDINATE FIELD OFFICES	
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	<i>Correspondence</i>	
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	Registers of Letters Received	
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	Volume 2 (75)	May 14, 1867–Apr. 6, 1868
	Volume 3 (76)	Apr. 13, 1868–Sept. 11, 1868
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ROLL	DESCRIPTION	DATES
18	Employment Registers from East Capitol Street	
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	Volume 2 (94)	Dec. 4, 1866–Feb. 26, 1868
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19	Monthly Rosters from Employment Agents and Superintendents of Barracks	Nov. 1866–Aug. 1868
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	Register of Freedmen Departing Mason's Island, VA	
	Volume (92)	May 18, 1864–July 18, 1865
	Register of Patients in Female Ward of Lincoln Hospital	
	Volume (no number)	July 1, 1866–Mar. 22, 1867
	Agents' and Superintendents' Monthly Lists of Articles Received, Expended, or On Hand	Mar. 1867–Aug. 1868
	Accounts of Materials Used in Industrial Schools and Miscellaneous Lists	
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ROLL	DESCRIPTION	DATES
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APPENDIX

This list provides the names and dates of service of known Freedmen's Bureau personnel at selected staff offices and subordinate field offices in the District of Columbia. Additional information regarding persons assigned to various field offices might be found among the Bureau's Washington headquarters station books and rosters of military officers and civilians on duty in the states and other appointment-related records.

LOCATION	DATES
OFFICE OF STAFF OFFICERS	
Assistant Quartermaster Disbursing Officer	
Joseph M. Brown	June 1864–Aug. 1869
Superintendent of Marriages	
John Kimball	Nov. 1866–July 1867
J. L. Roberts (Assistant Superintendent)	Nov. 1866–Mar. 1867
M. V. Wright (Assistant Superintendent)	Mar.–July 1867
Surgeon in Chief	
Robert Reyburn	Feb. 1867–Apr. 1869
Patrick Gennan (Freedmen's Hospital)	Apr. 1869–Mar. 1870
Patrick Gennan (Chief Medical Officer)	Mar.–Aug. 1870
SUBORDINATE FIELD OFFICES	
Washington and Georgetown	
Local Superintendents	
W. F. Spurgin	July 1865–Oct. 1866
J.V.W. Vandenburg	Oct.–Nov. 1866
W. B. Beebe	Nov. 1866–July 1867
J.V.W. Vandenburg	July 1867–Sept. 1868
Subdistrict 1 (Washington Georgetown, and Counties of Montgomery and Prince Georges Maryland, 1868)	
William A. Coulter	Sept. 1867–Feb. 1868
J.V.W. Vandenburg	Feb.–Sept. 1868
Freedmen's Village	
George B. Carse	May–Dec. 1865
A. U. Lomas	Dec. 1865–June 1866
A. A. Lawrence	June 1866–Jan. 1867
E. B. Gates	Jan.–July 1867
H. N. Howard	July 1867–Dec. 1868