



# National Archives and Records Administration

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## ***Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) for Texas, 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 Texas, the Bureau launched a small-scale relief project to issue medicine and food. By the fall of 1866, the Bureau had limited rations to hospitals and asylums. The Bureau regulated labor contracts and fined freedmen for breaking their contracts for higher wages.

The Bureau attempted to intervene in court cases involving freedmen. It established three-member courts consisting of a subordinate Bureau staff member and two civilians. These courts could fine violators up to \$100 and imprison them for up to 30 days. Convictions could be appealed to the Assistant Commissioner, Commissioner, Secretary of War, and the President of the United States. In reality, the Bureau was limited to trying whipping and beating cases, turning over most of its cases to civil courts.

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

### **Administrative Records**

\_\_\_M821, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Texas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*. 32 rolls. DP. The records include reports relating to operations and conditions, rations, lands, and Bureau personnel. There are also records pertaining to murders, outrages, and other criminal offenses. Roll 32 contains a February 26, 1867, inspection report of the Texas State penitentiary. The appendix includes the names of 209 incarcerated freedmen as well as their counties of residence, crimes, and sentences.

### **Educational Records**

\_\_\_M822, *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Texas Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870*. 18 rolls. DP. The Bureau offered advice, protection, and financial assistance to local citizens interested in sponsoring schools for freedmen, and also examining and appointing teachers. The records include school reports,

reports of school buildings, reports of persons and articles hired, and lists of teachers and schools.

### **Field Office Records**

\_\_\_M1912, *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Texas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870*. 28 rolls. DP. These records provide information about administering justice, establishing schools, providing relief, and supervising labor contracts. The records include registers of complaints, registers of contracts, reports of persons and articles hired, and affidavits and settlements.

### **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 31 and 35 specifically relate to activities in Texas.

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