



Smithsonian

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Records of the Superintendent of Education
for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees,
Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Museum of African American History and Culture
Title:	Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870
Date:	1865–1870
Identifier:	NMAAHC.FB.M1053
Extent:	20,203 Digital files
Language:	English .
Summary:	The collection is comprised of digital surrogates previously available on the 20 rolls of microfilm described in the NARA publication M1053. These digital surrogates reproduced the records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–70. The records consist of 11 volumes and of unbound documents. The volumes include letters and endorsements sent and registers of letters received and endorsements sent. The unbound records consist primarily of letters received and reports.
Digital Content:	Image(s): M1053-Representative-Image

Administrative Information

Acquisition Note

Acquired from FamilySearch International in 2015.

Related Archival Materials

See also [Freedmen's Bureau Digital Collection](#)

Citation Note

Courtesy of the U. S. National Archives and Records Administration, FamilySearch International, and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Access Note

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Historical Note

[The following is reproduced from the original NARA descriptive pamphlet for M1053.]

HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION

The Freedmen's Bureau, as the Bureau was commonly known, was established in the War Department by an act of March 3, 1865 (13 Stat. 507), and extended twice by acts of July 16, 1866 (14 Stat. 173), and July 6, 1868 (15 Stat. 83). Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard, appointed Commissioner by the President in May 1865, served in that position throughout the existence of the Bureau. In January 1869, in accordance with an act of July 25, 1868 (15 Stat. 193), Bureau operations in the States were terminated except for educational functions and the collection of claims. These activities were terminated June 30, 1872, as required by an act of June 10, 1872 (17 Stat. 366).

Although the Bureau was part of the War Department, its work was primarily social and economic in nature. It cooperated with benevolent societies in issuing supplies to destitute persons and in maintaining freedmen's schools; supervised labor contracts between black employees and white employers; helped black soldiers and sailors collect bounty claims, pensions, and backpay; and attended to the disposition of confiscated or abandoned lands and other property.

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 States. Operations in Virginia began in June 1865, when Assistant Commissioner Orlando Brown established his headquarters in Richmond. In a circular issued by Commissioner Howard in July 1865, the assistant commissioners were instructed to designate an 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 benevolent agencies which are supplying his field, and aid the Assistant Commissioner in making his required reports." In October 1865 some 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 relieved of his financial responsibilities and was redesignated General Superintendent of Education.

Assistant Commissioner Brown appointed Prof. W. H. Woodbury as Virginia's Superintendent of Schools for Freedmen on June 20, 1865. Woodbury served for only a short period, until he was replaced by Ralza Morse Manly, the Assistant Superintendent of Schools. Manly, an Army chaplain, remained as Superintendent of Schools (later Education) until January 1869, when Assistant Commissioner Brown briefly assumed those duties through April. On May 1, 1869, Manly again became Superintendent and held the position until August 15, 1870, when all Bureau educational activities in the States ceased.

The Superintendent of Education served under the Assistant Commissioner as a staff officer. Subordinate to both the Assistant Commissioner and the Superintendent of Education were officials who commanded the local field offices into which Virginia was divided for administrative purposes. From July 4, 1865, to April 14, 1867, the State was divided into 10 districts, with an agent or superintendent in charge of each. Districts were further divided into subdistricts, each headed by an assistant superintendent. On April 15, 1867, the State was reorganized into 10 subdistricts, with a subassistant commissioner in charge of each. The subdistricts were divided into divisions headed by assistant subassistant commissioners. Subdistrict headquarters were established at Alexandria, Fort Monroe, Fredericksburg, Gordonsville, Lynchburg, Norfolk, Petersburg, Richmond, Winchester, and Wytheville. On January 1, 1869, the 10 subdistricts were reorganized into 8 educational subdistricts, with an assistant superintendent of schools in charge of each. The heads of the various subdivisions supervised all Bureau activities, including education, in their respective areas and reported on educational matters to both the Superintendent of Education and the Assistant Commissioner.

The schools maintained by the Bureau in Virginia included day schools for children, night schools for adults, and Sabbath schools. Rudimentary education, including reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography, received primary emphasis in the schools. Many teachers were recruited from the North by freedmen's aid societies, such as the American Missionary Association, the New York National Freedmen's Relief Association, the New England Freedmen's Aid Society, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the Friends Freedmen's Relief Association, and the American Freedmen's Union Commission. Other teachers were eventually recruited from among the local white population and from among freedmen.

The Bureau's responsibility for education in Virginia included the establishment and maintenance of schools and the examination and appointment of teachers. Bureau funds were used to pay for construction and

repair of school buildings, for rental of properties used for educational purposes, and for providing teachers with transportation. Freedmen's aid societies provided some of the pay for the teachers they recruited, and the salaries were partially subsidized by contributions from freedmen. Bureau policy dictated that, whenever possible, subscriptions be solicited from freedmen for the establishment of schools and that tuition be charged. A number of schools were established as the result of the initiative of local whites and freedmen, although subsequently they were given direction and support by the Bureau.

The volumes reproduced in this microfilm publication were originally arranged by type of record and thereunder by volume number. No numbers were assigned to series consisting of single volumes; 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. Volume numbers without parentheses were assigned by the National Archives and Records Service (NARS) staff. Numbered blank pages have not been filmed.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- American South
- Freedmen's Bureau
- Reconstruction, U.S. history, 1865-1877
- Slaves -- Emancipation

Container Listing

Series 1: Letters Sent

Scope and Contents: The five volume of letters sent, March 2, 1866–August 31, 1870, are arranged chronologically; each volume contains a name index. All letters are press copies, which were made by pressing a written letter onto a very thin piece of moistened paper in a press–copying machine. Because the amount of ink transferred to the moistened paper varied considerably, some copies are difficult to read, while others are virtually illegible.

Most letters were sent to Bureau officials and teachers or representatives of benevolent societies assisting the educational program. Those addressed to subordinate officials and teachers deal with funds, buildings, and supplies. Letters to teachers also relay procedural instructions and occasional reprimands. Correspondence with organizations aiding the Bureau generally request additional teachers or discuss the program's successes or shortcomings. A number of letters also were sent to Commissioner Howard, Rev. Alvord, and the Assistant Commissioner for Virginia. Although many of these letters deal with routine matters, a few are lengthy commentaries about educational activities in the State. Vouchers for rent and other payments were copied in the last three volumes.

1.1: Volume 1 (51), Mar. 2, 1866–Oct. 8, 1868

[Image\(s\)](#)
[Image\(s\)](#)

1.2: Volume 2 (52), Oct. 8, 1868–June 12, 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

1.3: Volume 3 (53), June 12–Nov.10, 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)
[Image\(s\)](#)
[Image\(s\)](#)

1.4: Volume 4 (54), Nov. 10, 1869–Mar. 28, 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)
[Image\(s\)](#)
[Image\(s\)](#)

1.5: Volume 5 (55), Mar. 28–Aug. 31, 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)
[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 2: Registers of Letters Received and Endorsements Sent

Scope and Contents: According to 19th-century recordkeeping practices, incoming communications were entered in registers of letters received. In addition to a summary of the contents of incoming letters, the registers usually include such identifying information as the name and occasionally the office of the writer, the date of receipt, the date of the communication, the place from which it was written, and the entry number assigned. Replies to incoming letters were frequently written on the letters themselves or on specially prepared wrappers. The replies, called endorsements, were then copied into endorsement book or registers of letters received; endorsed letters were returned to the senders or forwarded to another office.

The entries in the three volumes of registers of letters received and endorsements sent, April 1869–August 1870, are arranged alphabetically by the initial letter of the correspondent's surname or office and thereunder chronologically by date of receipt. Each volume contains a name index. In each alphabetical section of a register, entries are numbered consecutively with one exception. Entries for April–December 1869, in the first and second registers, are numbered continuously in a single sequence for each letter, while the third volume, for January–August 1870, begins a new sequence in each section. Correspondence from Commissioner Howard and other officials in the Bureau's Washington headquarters is usually entered under "W" for War Department, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Since the number of pages allotted to each alphabetical section in the registers sometimes proved insufficient, it became necessary to continue the entries elsewhere in the volumes. All entries for each letter designation in the registers have been filmed as one entity; therefore, some pages in this publication are not in their original numerical order.

Entries in the registers frequently contain cross-references to related letters sent and to other incoming communications. Letters sent are designated by the abbreviation "L.S." accompanied by letter and volume numbers keyed to pages in the volumes of press copies. Letters received are referred to by register number. In addition, notations indicate the disposition of the letters: filed, forwarded to other offices, or returned with endorsements to the sender. An asterisk (*) has been placed near the correspondent's name in the register for each letter that was retained among the Superintendent of Education's records.

Endorsements for April–December 1869 were entered in the first two registers of letters received opposite the related letter entry. Endorsements for January–June 1870 were recorded in a separate volume and arranged chronologically. This volume contains a name index. Every entry in the endorsement volume includes a cross-reference to the related entry in the register of letters received. In the register a comparable cross-reference for each letter having an endorsement is indicated by the abbreviation "E & M" (endorsement and memorandum) followed by the number of the page (noted as "Fol:" with a number) on which the entry appears in the endorsement book.

2.1: Volume 1 (48), Apr. 22–Oct. 16, 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

2.2: Volume 2 (49), Oct. 19–Dec. 31, 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

2.3: Volume 3 (50), Jan. 1–Aug. 24, 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

2.4: Endorsements Sent (56), Jan. 12–Aug. 1, 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 3: Letters Received

Scope and Contents: The letters received by the Superintendent of Education consist of a registered and unregistered series. The registered letters, April 1869–August 1870, are arranged in the order in which they were entered in the registers. The unregistered letters, June 1865–August 1870, are arranged chronologically by year and month and thereunder alphabetically according to the correspondent's surname. A name index to the letter series has been prepared and is on rolls 6 – 10 immediately preceding the letters.

Both series contain correspondence addressed to individuals other than the Superintendent, since some communications addressed to other correspondents were forwarded to and retained by his office. Some letters written by and subsequently returned to him also have been filmed. Most letters from high-level Bureau officials and the War Department are found in the registered series; otherwise, both series include letters from Bureau officials, representatives of benevolent societies, and teachers. Most letters from teachers, which deal with topics similar to those found in the letters sent, were not registered. Many letters, particularly those written by teachers, consider routine matters related to the operation of Bureau schools.

3.1: Entered in Volumes 1 and 2

3.1.1: A – V, Apr. 22–Dec. 31, 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

3.1.2: W – Y, Apr. 22–Dec. 31, 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

3.2: Entered in Volume 3

3.2.1: A – Y, Jan. 1–Aug. 24, 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

3.3: Unregistered Letters Received

3.3.1: Unregistered Letters Received, June 1865–Mar. 1867

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

3.3.2: Unregistered Letters Received, Apr. 1867–July 1868

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

3.3.3: Unregistered Letters Received, Aug. 1868–Apr. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

3.3.4: Unregistered Letters Received, May–Nov. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

3.3.5: Unregistered Letters Received, Dec. 1869–Aug. 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 4: School Reports

Scope and Contents: The records of the Superintendent of Education include eight unbound series and one volume of school reports. Among the records are retained copies of outgoing reports of the Superintendent and originals of reports received from district superintendents, assistant subassistant commissioners, and teachers.

The unbound monthly statistical school reports of the Superintendent, July 1865–June 1870, are arranged chronologically by month. Most of these reports were prepared on printed forms, and all include such data as the names and locations of schools, the dates of their opening and closing, the names of sponsoring benevolent societies or other patrons, and the amount of tuition paid by freedmen. The reports also give information concerning the sex, race, age, and attendance of the pupils as well as the number studying each subject. Related to the unbound reports and providing almost identical information is a volume of the State Superintendent's monthly school reports, April 1869–June 1870, also arranged chronologically.

The monthly reports on school buildings, August–December 1869 and April 1870, are arranged chronologically and contain information on Bureau and non–Bureau buildings. Information about each structure includes its locations; its physical composition, condition, and value; and the owner and value of the land upon which it was situated.

Among the reports received by the Superintendent are monthly statistical school reports of district superintendents (redesignated subassistant commissioner after April 1867), July 1865–April 1869 and January 1870. These are arranged chronologically by month and thereunder numerically by district (or subdistrict after April 1867). Because the reports, which were prepared on forms, give essentially the same kind of information as the monthly reports prepared by the Superintendent of Education, they were evidently used by him in compiling his reports.

The monthly school reports from assistant subassistant commissioners and agents, January 1868–January 1869, are arranged chronologically by month and thereunder by subdistrict and, until August 1868, by division within the subdistrict. They generally contain information on schools within a division. Most of the reports were prepared on forms containing 19 questions relating to the number of schools in operation and teachers employed, the need for additional schools and teachers, the efforts and ability of freedmen and the aid societies to meet the educational needs of the division, and the public sentiment toward the education of freedmen and impoverished whites.

Three miscellaneous series of reports also are among the Superintendent's records. The first of these consists of five inspection reports for March–April 1866, prepared by Chaplain Charles H. Raymond, Inspector of Schools for Virginia, which include tabulated data and remarks about schools visited, teachers and pupils, discipline, and types of studies. A second series consists of a few descriptive school reports forwarded by assistant superintendents and subassistant commissioners, March 1867–July 1868, which are arranged chronologically by month. The reports briefly discuss locations of schools, attendance, financial support, and teachers. In some cases, educational problems and the competency of individual teachers are considered. The remaining series of miscellaneous reports was the result of responses to six different circulars and circular letters issued by the Assistant Commissioner and Superintendent of Education in Virginia and in Bureau headquarters. The issuances, dated between July 18, 1866, and October 6, 1868, requested various types of data concerning schools, teachers, and buildings. The reports are arranged either chronologically according to the circular to which they pertain and thereunder by district or chronologically by date of the response. A copy of each issuance has been reproduced immediately preceding the documents pertaining to it.

Monthly school reports of teachers, November 1865 and January 1866–June 1871, are arranged chronologically and were prepared on forms devised in the Office of the Superintendent of Education. The forms contain statistical data furnished by individual teachers concerning the number of pupils enrolled; attendance; subjects taught in day, night, and Sabbath schools; and the amount of tuition paid by students. Some forms also contain more lengthy narrative remarks by teachers. Some of the reports apparently pertain to non-Bureau schools. Filmed directly after the school reports is a bound register containing the names of teachers to whom forms and envelopes were sent, May 1869–June 1870; the names are arranged alphabetically by name of county.

4.1: State Superintendent's Monthly Statistical School Reports, July 1865–June 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.2: State Superintendent's Monthly School Reports (58), Apr. 1869–June 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.3: Monthly Reports on School Buildings

4.3.1: [Monthly Reports on School Buildings, Aug.–Dec. 1869](#)

4.3.2: [Monthly Reports on School Buildings, Apr. 1870](#)

4.4: Monthly Statistical School Reports of District Superintendents

4.4.1: Monthly Statistical School Reports of District Superintendents, July 1865–Apr. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.4.2: [Monthly Statistical School Reports of District Superintendents, Jan. 1870](#)

4.5: Monthly School Reports of Assistant Subassistant Commissioners and Agents, Jan. 1868–Jan. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.6: Inspection Reports of Inspector of Schools, Mar.–Apr. 1866

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.7: School Reports of Assistant Superintendents and Subassistant Commissioners, Mar. 1867–July 1868

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.8: Reports on Schools, Teachers, and Buildings Submitted in Response to Circulars and Circulars Letters, July 18, 1866–Oct. 6, 1868

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.9: Teachers Monthly School Reports

4.9.1: Teachers Monthly School Reports, Nov. 1865–Apr. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.9.2: Teachers Monthly School Reports, May–Aug. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.9.3: Teachers Monthly School Reports, Sept.–Nov. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.9.4: Teachers Monthly School Reports, Dec. 1869–Jan. 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.9.5: Teachers Monthly School Reports, Feb.–Mar. 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.9.6: Teachers Monthly School Reports, Apr. 1870–June 1871

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.10: Register of Teachers to Whom Blank Forms and Envelopes Were Sent (57), May
1869–June 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

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