



Smithsonian

National Museum of African American History and Culture

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

National Museum of African American History and Culture
Washington, D.C. 20004
NMAAHC-Archives@si.edu
<https://nmaahc.si.edu>

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Museum of African American History and Culture
Title:	Records of the Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872
Identifier:	NMAAHC.FB.M1056
Date:	1865–1872
Extent:	26,827 Digital files
Language:	English .
Summary:	The collection is comprised of digital surrogates previously available on the 24 rolls of microfilm described in the NARA publication M1056. These digital surrogates reproduced the records of the Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–72. The records consist of 11 bound volumes and 15 feet of unbound documents. Bound records include letters sent, endorsements, and registers of letters received. Unbound documents consist primarily of letters received and school reports.
Digital Content:	Image(s): M1056-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 M1056.]

HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, commonly known as the Freedmen's Bureau, was created by an act approved March 3, 1865 (13 Stat. 507). The Congress assigned to the Bureau duties and responsibilities that previously had been assigned to military commanders and special agents of the Treasury Department. The duties of the Bureau included the supervision of all affairs relating to refugees and freedmen and of all abandoned lands. Under the initial act, the Bureau was to have been terminated 1 year after the Civil War. The act creating the Bureau was extended twice, however, by acts of July 16, 1866 (14 Stat. 173), and July 6, 1868 (15 Stat. 83). An act of July 25, 1868 (15 Stat. 193), limited the functions of the Bureau to education and assistance in the collection of claims. Bureau 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 economic in nature. The Bureau cooperated with aid 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 in the collection of claims, pensions, and backpay; and handled the disposition of confiscated or abandoned lands and other property.

In May 1865, Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard was appointed Commissioner of the Bureau and established his headquarters in Washington, D. C. Assistant commissioners were appointed to supervise the work of the Bureau in the States in accordance with the act of March 3, 1865. In July 1865, Commissioner Howard instructed the assistant commissioners to appoint an officer in each State to serve as Superintendent of Schools. Superintendents were instructed to supervise the education of refugees and freedmen, secure protection for schools and teachers, aid in maintaining schools, and correspond with benevolent societies in securing teacher to staff schools. The Superintendent also was required to help the Assistant Commissioner in making reports.

In October 1865, 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 was redesignated General Superintendent of Education. Rev. John Kimball was appointed Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia in August 1865 and served until he was replaced by Maj. D. G. Swaim in October 1869. Swaim was replaced in December 1869 by Maj. W. L. Van Derlip, who retained the position through August 1870, as indicated by his signature on letters forwarded from the Superintendent's office. Because the volume ends in 1870, there is no indication who held the position after that date.

The Bureau promoted the establishment of schools for freedmen in the District of Columbia by offering advice, protection, and financial assistance to local citizens interested in establishing them. The Superintendent acted as an intermediary between freedmen and benevolent societies who provided teachers and money for schools. In addition, he corresponded with local citizens, teachers, aid societies, and Bureau agents in the field to obtain information about Bureau-supported schools and the attitudes of local citizens toward them. 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. Schools maintained in these areas and the District of Columbia included day schools, night schools for adults, and Sabbath schools. Instruction included rudimentary courses in reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and industrial education. Teachers were recruited from among local white citizens and freedmen and from the North by benevolent societies. The Bureau's responsibility for education in the District of Columbia and surrounding areas included establishing and maintaining schools, appointing teachers, and providing supplies for schools. Bureau funds were primarily for constructing and repairing schools, renting property for educational purposes, and transporting teachers.

Records Description

The volumes reproduced in this microfilm publication originally were arranged by type of record and thereunder by volume number; no numbers were assigned to series consisting of a single volume. Later, all volumes were arbitrarily assigned numbers by the Adjutant General's Office (AGO) of the War Department after the records passed into its custody. In the table of contents, which follows these introductory remarks, and also in the title and target sheets filmed with the records, the AGO numbers are shown in parentheses as an aid in identifying the volumes. In some volume, there are numbered blank pages; those papers 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
- Education
- Freedmen's Bureau
- Reconstruction, U.S. history, 1865-1877
- Slaves -- Emancipation

Container Listing

Series 1: Fair Copies of Letters Sent

Scope and Contents: The two volumes of fair copies of letters sent, January 1, 1868–April 4, 1870, generally are arranged and numbered in chronological order. The National Archives and Records Service (NARS) staff prepared name indexes to both volumes of fair copies of letters sent. The numerical sequence of letter numbers 461 – 549 in Volume 1 is duplicated within the volume, but the letters are not. Because the numbering of letters in Volume 2 was incomplete, the NARS staff completed the numbering beginning with letter 462.

Most of the letters among the fair copies were sent to teachers, Bureau agents, and aid societies and relate to routine problems, such as school expenditures, monthly reports, teachers' salaries, lack of school supplies, and building maintenance. Other letters were sent to school trustees and Bureau agents in the field, requesting lists of Bureau property and deeds to property. Among the correspondence are letters sent to Commissioner Howard, informing him that the Superintendent of Education was performing the functions of his office.

Also included among the fair copies of letters sent are copies of monthly reports to the Assistant Commissioner and other periodic reports to the Assistant Commissioner and other periodic reports to General Superintendent Alvord. Volume 1 (41) contains monthly reports covering the period December 1867–September 1868; a quarterly report dated January 1, 1869, to the General Superintendent, covering operations for the last 3 months of 1868; an annual report dated October 10, 1868; and a special report dated November 4, 1868, which gives information about school systems in the District of Columbia, Maryland, West Virginia, Delaware. Volume 2 (42) includes an annual report dated January 1, 1870. Many of the reports were not copied into the volumes in precise chronological order. Most reports contain information about progress in industrial, normal, theological, and high schools supported by the Bureau. Reports also provide statistical data about teachers, pupils, and expenditures and, in some instances, information about white attitudes and other aspects of the local situation.

The fair copy volumes contain occasional cross–references to other correspondence series. In Volume 1, the symbol "EB" refers to endorsements sent (Endorsement Books), and in Volume 2, "PLB" refers to the press copies of letters (Press Letter Books).

1.1: Volume 1 (41), Jan. 1, 1868–Aug. 2, 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

1.2: Volume 2 (42), Aug. 2, 1869–Apr. 4, 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 2: Press Copies of Letters Sent

Scope and Contents: Press copies of letters were obtained by wetting a piece of thin paper and pressing it on the original through the use of press copying machine, which caused the ink to be transferred to the moistened paper. Because of the relative crudeness of this method, many copies are difficult to read and some are virtually illegible.

The records of the Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia include seven volumes of press copies of letters sent. Volume 1 (43), 6 (48), and 7 (49) of the press copies, which cover the periods January 1867–March 1868 and February–August 1870, have been reproduced in this microfilm publication, although the contents of Volumes 1 and 6 are partially duplicated in the fair copy volumes. The remaining four volumes in the series have not been reproduced because they are duplicated in the fair copies of letters sent. The volumes reproduced are arranged chronologically.

2.1: Volume 1 (43), Jan. 4, 1867–Mar. 30, 1868

[Image\(s\)](#)

2.2: Volume 6 (48), Feb. 4–June 8, 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

2.3: Volume 7 (49), June 11–Aug. 27, 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 3: Endorsements

Scope and Contents: According to the recordkeeping practices of the 19th-century, replies to incoming letters were frequently written on the letter itself or on a specially prepared wrapper. The reply, termed an endorsement, was then copied into an endorsement book or memorandum book, and the endorsed letter was returned to the sender or forwarded to another office. Endorsement books usually included a summary of the incoming letter and sometimes previous endorsements that were recorded on it. The volume of endorsements, January 3, 1868–August 13, 1870, is arranged and numbered in rough chronological order. It has not summaries of the contents of incoming letters, but it does include copies of endorsements on letters received. Names and title of persons to whom endorsements were sent, or from whom received, appear in the upper left part of each entry. Endorsements are cross-referenced to the registers of letters received by citations that include the file number of the correspondence and the volume and year of the register; e. g., "H. 86. Vol. 1. 1869." The citations marked "L. B." in the volume refer to the fair copies of letters sent (Letter Books) and include the volume and letter numbers. Entries within the volume are cross-referenced to each other by use of the symbol "EB." Generally, this internal cross-referencing was used to indicate the location endorsements on the same letter elsewhere in the volume.

3.1: Volume (50), Jan. 3, 1868–Aug. 13, 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 4: Registers of Letters Received

Scope and Contents: In accordance with 19th-century recordkeeping practices, incoming communications were entered in registers of letters received. Entries in the registers include such information as the name of office of the correspondent, where the letter was written and when received, an abstract of the letter, and the entry number assigned to the letter. Entries in the two volumes of registers of letters received, January 1868–September 1870, are arranged by time period, thereunder alphabetically by the initial letter of the correspondent's surname or office, and thereunder chronologically by date of receipt. The NARS staff prepared name indexes to both registers. Within the alphabetical headings, entries frequently are not in strict chronological order. Often the space allocated for a particular alphabetical heading was insufficient, and entries were continued elsewhere in the volume. NARS, however, has filmed the entries in the proper order. Within alphabetical headings, some numbers were duplicated in the registers. In such instances, the NARS staff added the annotations "[No. 1]" and "[No. 2]" adjacent to the entry number for purposes of distinction. In a few instances, a single letter was entered twice in the register. These duplicate entries are cross-referenced to each other with "See" notations.

A number of documents entered in the registers are no longer to be found among the registered letter received. Letters were often referred to staff personnel or to other individuals or returned to the sender. An asterisk following an entry number indicates that the corresponding letters is among the letters received. The registers contain frequent cross-references to related correspondence series, using the same symbols as found in the fair copy letter books. There are several cross-references in the second register to a press copy book "F," but this volume does not appear to be among the extant records of the Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia.

4.1: Volume 1 (39), Jan. 1868–Dec. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

4.2: Volume 2 (40), Jan.–Sept. 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 5: Registered Letters Received

Scope and Contents: Registered letters received, January 1868–September 1870, are arranged in order of entry in the register. The file citation on the letter includes the alphabetical heading under which it is entered, the entry number, volume, and year. In the few instances where the entry number on a letter does not correspond to the entry number in the register, the NARS staff annotated the correct number in brackets.

Both series of letters received cover various subjects. Most letters received were concerned with the organization and operation of Bureau schools, including freedmen's schools in Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, and Delaware. Most of the letters were written by teachers, representatives of benevolent societies, and Bureau agents. Teachers sought compensation for expenses and transportation, payment of salaries, and school supplies and complained about inadequate support. Aid societies sought positions for unassigned teachers and information relating to teachers in the field. Bureau agents wrote reports concerning periodic inspections of schools, problems encountered with local citizens, schools attendance, teacher competency, and the physical condition of schools. Other correspondents include freedmen seeking Bureau support in the construction of new schools and persons seeking employment as teachers.

5.1: (Entered in Register 1)

5.1.1: A – B, Jan. 1868–Dec. 1869

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

5.1.2: C – F, Jan. 1868–Dec. 1869

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

5.1.3: G – O, Jan. 1868–Dec. 1869

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

5.1.4: P – Y, Jan. 1868–Dec. 1869

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

[Image\(s\)](#)

5.2: (Entered in Register 2)

5.2.1: A – Y, Jan.–Sept. 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 6: Unregistered Letters Received

Scope and Contents: Unregistered letters received, August 1865–September 1868 and August 1870, are arranged by year, thereunder alphabetically by the initial letter of the correspondent's surname or office, and thereunder chronologically. Most of these letters are for 1865–67. The NARS staff prepared a name index for the unregistered letters received.

Most letters received were concerned with the organization and operation of Bureau schools, including freedmen's schools in Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, and Delaware. Most of the letters were written by teachers, representatives of benevolent societies, and Bureau agents. Teachers sought compensation for expenses and transportation, payment of salaries, and school supplies and complained about inadequate support. Aid societies sought positions for unassigned teachers and information relating to teachers in the field. Bureau agents wrote reports concerning periodic inspections of schools, problems encountered with local citizens, schools attendance, teacher competency, and the physical condition of schools. Other correspondents include freedmen seeking Bureau support in the construction of new schools and persons seeking employment as teachers.

6.1: A – Z, 1865

[Image\(s\)](#)

6.2: A – Z, 1866

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

6.3: A – E, 1867

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

6.4: F – W, 1867

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

6.5: H – W, 1868

[Image\(s\)](#)

6.6: A – T, 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 7: School Reports

Scope and Contents: Among the records of the Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia are four unbound series of reports pertaining to the organization and operation of Bureau-supported schools. Most of these reports were prepared on printed forms and contain statistical data, but a few are narrative reports.

The series of retained copies of monthly school reports from the Superintendent of Education, October 1865–June 1870, is arranged chronologically. School reports usually give the name of the teacher, name and location of the school, number of students, and name of the sponsoring aid society. Interfiled among the school reports are a few narrative and building reports. Among the narrative reports is one dated January 19, 1867, from Superintendent of Education John Kimball to Assistant Commissioner C. H. Howard explaining that trustees of black schools in the District of Columbia had been denied a proportional share of moneys expended for schools.

The reports from superintendents of aid society–sponsored schools, June–December, are arranged chronologically. Most of the reports contain information about each school sponsored by the particular society, including names of teachers and number, age, and sex of pupils. A few of the earlier reports in this series are narrative in nature. A third series, monthly reports from subassistant commissioners or agents in Maryland and West Virginia, January–July 1868, is arranged chronologically. The reports give the location and number of schools within various districts, the number and race of the teachers, the value and physical condition of the schools, and public sentiment toward freedmen's schools.

The last series of school reports, monthly teachers' reports, October 1865–June 1872, is arranged chronologically by month. The reports usually contain such information as name and location of the school, the number of students attending, names of teachers, subject taught, name of the sponsoring society, and public attitude toward black schools. Some of the reports are undated and have been filmed following the 1865 reports because they appear to be reports prepared during that year.

7.1: Monthly Reports of the Superintendent of Education, Oct. 1865–June 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.2: Monthly Reports of Superintendents of Aid Society–Sponsored Schools, June–Dec. 1865

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.3: Monthly Reports of Subassistant Commissioners or Agents in Maryland and West Virginia, Jan.–July 1868

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.4: Monthly Teachers' Reports, Oct. 1865–Apr. 1866

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.5: Monthly Teachers' Reports, May 1866–Mar. 1867

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.6: Monthly Teachers' Reports, Apr.–Nov. 1867

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.7: Monthly Teachers' Reports, Dec. 1867–Mar. 1868

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.8: Monthly Teachers' Reports, Apr.–Oct. 1868

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.9: Monthly Teachers' Reports, Nov. 1868–Jan. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.10: Monthly Teachers' Reports, Feb.–Apr. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.11: Monthly Teachers' Reports, May–Oct. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.12: Monthly Teachers' Reports, Nov. 1869–Jan. 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.13: Monthly Teachers' Reports, Feb.–Apr. 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

7.14: Monthly Teachers' Reports, May 1870–June 1872

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 8: Records Relating to School Buildings, Grounds, and Supplies

Scope and Contents: Seven unbound and two bound series of records of the Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia contain information about school buildings, grounds, and supplies. Monthly abstracts of school expenses, January 1867–July 1868, are arranged chronologically. These abstracts, made by Assistant Quartermaster J. M. Brown, list expenditures for such items as construction materials, school equipment, repairs, building rent, and labor. The single volume of accounts of materials used for schools in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, 1867–68, is arranged by name of school. It contains an alphabetical index by name or location of school, provides information about materials used in construction of schools, and gives the cost of each item. Deeds and copies of deed of sites for freedmen's schools in Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia, 1866–70, are arranged by State and thereunder chronologically. Deeds indicate the parties involved; the date, conditions, and purpose of the deed; and a description of the dimensions and boundaries of the property. Bills for books and supplies purchased by the Superintendent of Education and by teachers, October 1869–May 1870, are arranged by month. Also among the records are quarterly statements of school property belonging to the Quartermaster Department, September 1866–March 1869, arranged chronologically, and two lists of school articles lost, destroyed, or transferred, October 1869.

There are two unbound series of records relating to supplies purchased for use in Bureau schools. The quartermaster's monthly reports of materials received and issued, October 1865–October 1869, and the monthly lists of teachers authorized to purchase supplies, February–October 1867, are arranged chronologically. The quartermaster's reports, which were submitted on printed forms, list such articles received and issued as desks, tools, curtains, construction materials, and fuel products. The reports also include information on the number and cost of articles received or issued and the condition of articles at delivery. The teachers' lists contain the names of teachers authorized to make purchases from the army commissary. A volume of teachers' accounts, September 1869–June 1870, is arranged by individual teacher and contains a name index. Entries in the volume give the names of teachers, locations of their schools, and status of their accounts.

8.1: Monthly Abstracts of School Expenses, Jan. 1867–July 1868

[Image\(s\)](#)

8.2: Accounts of Materials Used for Schools in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, Volume (37), 1867–68

[Image\(s\)](#)

8.3: Deeds and Copies of Deeds of Sites for Freedmen's Schools in Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia, 1866–70

[Image\(s\)](#)

8.4: Bills for Books and Supplies Purchased by the Superintendent of Education and by Teachers, Oct. 1869–May 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

8.5: Quarterly Statements of School Property Belonging to the Quartermaster Department, Sept. 1866–Mar. 1869

[Image\(s\): Quarterly Statements of School Property Belonging to the Quartermaster Department](#)

8.6: Lists of Schools Articles Lost, Destroyed, or Transferred, Oct. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

8.7: Quartermaster's Monthly Reports of Materials Received and Issued, Oct. 1865–Oct. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

8.8: Monthly Lists of Teachers Authorized to Purchase Supplies, Feb.–Oct. 1869

[Image\(s\)](#)

8.9: Teachers' Accounts, Volume (51), Sept. 1869–June 1870

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 9: Miscellaneous Records, 1865–70

[Image\(s\)](#)

Scope and Contents:

The unbound miscellaneous records, 1865–70, include receipts for teachers' salaries for 1869, arranged alphabetically by initial letter of surname; a list of missionaries and agents of Freedmen's Societies in the District of Columbia, 1865; names and addresses of teachers in the District of Columbia, 1867; a construction contract for a school in Alexandria, VA., 1866; and an undated bond for the use of a school in Nottingham, MD.

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