

# *National Archives Microfilm Publications*

*Pamphlet Describing M1875*

---

**M**arriage Records of the  
Office of the Commissioner,  
Washington Headquarters  
of the Bureau of Refugees,  
Freedmen, and Abandoned  
Lands, 1861-1869

Records of the Bureau of Refugees,  
Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands

Record Group 105

UNITED STATES CONGRESS AND THE  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES TRUST FUND BOARD  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION  
WASHINGTON, DC

M1875

MARRIAGE RECORDS OF THE OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER,  
WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS OF THE BUREAU OF REFUGEES,  
FREEDMEN, AND ABANDONED LANDS, 1861-1869

Records prepared for microfilming by members of the Civil War Conservation Corps,  
under the direction of Russ and Budge Weidman.  
Introduction by Reginald Washington.

United States Congress  
and  
National Archives and Records Administration  
Washington, DC  
2002

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.nara.gov](http://www.nara.gov).

United States. National Archives and Records Administration.

Marriage records of the Office of the Commissioner, Washington Headquarters of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861-1869.— Washington, DC : United States Congress and National Archives and Records Administration, 2002.

13 p. ; 23 cm.— (National Archives microfilm publications. Pamphlet describing ; M 1875)

Cover title.

“Records prepared for microfilming by members of the Civil War Conservation Corps . . . Introduction by Reginald Washington.”

1. United States. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands – Archives – Microform catalogs. 2. Marriage records – United States – Microform catalogs. 3. African Americans – Genealogy – Microform catalogs. 4. Freedmen – United States – Genealogy – Microform catalogs. I. Washington, Reginald, 1949– II. Civil War Conservation Corps (U.S.) III. Title.

## INTRODUCTION

On the five rolls of this microfilm publication, M1875, are reproduced marriage records of the Office of the Commissioner, Washington headquarters of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861-1869. These records consist of unbound marriage certificates, marriage licenses, monthly reports of marriages, and other proofs of marriages. The 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.

## HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, often referred to as the Freedmen's Bureau, was established in the War Department by an act of 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). Congress assigned to the Bureau responsibilities previously shared by military commanders and by agents of the Treasury Department. They included supervision of all affairs relating to refugees (indigent whites) and freedmen and the custody of all abandoned or confiscated lands and property. The Act also provided that a Commissioner head the Bureau, appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.

In May 1865, President Andrew Johnson appointed Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard as Commissioner. Howard, who served until the Bureau was discontinued in 1872, established his headquarters at Washington, DC. The size and organization of the Bureau headquarters varied from over time. Howard's staff consisted primarily of an assistant adjutant general, an assistant inspector general, a chief medical officer, a chief quartermaster, a chief disbursing officer, and officers in charge of the Claims Division, the Education Division, and the Land Division.

The Bureau's operations were confined principally to the former Confederate States, the Border States, and the District of Columbia. The 1865 Act authorized the appointment of Assistant Commissioners to aid the Commissioner in supervising the work of the Bureau in the states. Generally, the organization of the Bureau in the states was similar to that of Bureau headquarters in Washington. Subassistant commissioners, subordinate to the staff officers in each state, were responsible for administering Bureau policies in the subdistricts into which the states were divided. Civilian and military Superintendents, assistant subassistant commissioners, and agents were under the supervision of the subassistant commissioners.

During the years of its greatest activity, the operations of the Freedmen's Bureau resembled, in many ways, the work of later Federal social agencies. In addition to supervising the disposition of abandoned or confiscated lands and property, Bureau officers issued rations, clothing, and medicine to destitute refugees and freedmen. They established hospitals and dispensaries and supervised tenements and camps for the homeless. Bureau officers and members of benevolent organizations cooperated in establishing schools, operating employment offices, and dispensing relief. In

addition, Bureau officers supervised the writing of labor contracts and terms of indenture, issued marriage licenses and certificates and registered marriages, listened to complaints, and generally were concerned with improving almost all aspects of the freedman's life. In March 1866, the Bureau assumed the function of helping black soldiers and sailors and their heirs to file and collect claims for bounties, pensions, and pay arrearages.

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.

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.

### **THE FREEMEN'S BUREAU AND MARRIAGE RECORDS\***

While the primary focus of the Freedmen's Bureau was to provide relief and assist freedmen in becoming self-sufficient, the Bureau was also interested solemnizing marriages that freedmen had entered into during slavery. Slave marriages had no legal foundation or protection. Slave husbands and wives, without legal recourse, could be separated or sold as their owners saw fit. Couples who resided on different plantations were only allowed to visit with the consent of their masters. Oftentimes without the benefit of clergy, "the marriage ceremony in most cases consisted of the slaves' simply getting the master's permission and moving into a cabin together."<sup>1</sup> When freedom came, many sought to "remarry" and solidify long-standing relations, while others attempted to marry for the first time.<sup>2</sup> They all sought help from Union Army clergy, Northern missionaries, and the Freedmen's Bureau.

On May 30, 1865, Commissioner Howard issued Circular Number 5, which told his subordinates that "in places where the local statutes make no provisions for the

---

\* When field office records are described in this section, unless a National Archives microfilm publication number is provided, the records are not yet available on microfilm.

<sup>1</sup> John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1979), p. 165. See pages 149-91 for discussion of the slave family.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of slave marriages and freedom, see Ira Berlin and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African-American Kinship in the Civil War Era* (1997), especially pages 155-92.

marriage of persons of color, the Assistant Commissioners are authorized to designate officers who shall keep a record of marriages, which may be solemnized by any ordained minister of the gospel." Howard's order was less a policy of the Bureau than a continuation of a practice begun by military officers and civilians who supervised "contraband camps" that freedmen flocked to during the Civil War. For instance, in the Department of Tennessee and Arkansas, John Eaton, the superintendent of contrabands, issued Special Order 15 (March 28, 1864) ordering Union Army clergy to "solemnize the rite of marriage among Freedmen." Special Order 176, issued by the Department of the Gulf (July 4, 1864), ordered clergy in that Department "to unite in marriage, free of charge, such colored soldiers as may be recommended to them . . . with the women whom such soldiers may select to be their wives." The earliest record of "contraband" marriages that appear in Freedmen's Bureau files, and reproduced in this microfilm publication, is an October 11, 1861, report of marriages of Rev. Lewis C. Lockwood at Camp Hamilton, Virginia. Lockwood, who represented the American Missionary Society at Fortress Monroe, listed in his report the names of 32 couples whom he married during the month of September 1861.<sup>3</sup>

While Howard's order was explicit in regards to freedmen's marriages, Assistant Commissioners and lower-level Bureau officials did not by any means execute his order in a consistent manner. This is quite evident in the kind of information collected and the considerable variation in the number of marriage records that exist for each state. In Alabama, for instance, Assistant Commissioner Wager Swayne, who favored remarriage of individuals who lived together without licenses, ordered his officers "to solemnize no marriage unless the probate judge of the county where the female lived had denied application." After the Alabama state convention adopted a measure validating the unions of former slaves who had lived as man and wife, Swayne advised freedmen of the new rules and offered no additional instructions about freedmen marriages.<sup>4</sup> With the exception of one marriage license/certificate found among the files of the Office of the Commissioner, there is no evidence in Bureau records that indicates officers in Alabama registered or issued licenses and certificates in the state.

On June 24, 1865, John W. Sprague, Assistant Commissioner for Arkansas, whose jurisdiction covered both the States of Arkansas and Missouri (June 1865 until January 1866), issued Circular Number 3 instructing his subordinates "to keep and preserve a record of marriages of freed people, and by whom the ceremony was performed." Less than a month after his order, Sprague and his subordinates began forwarding monthly reports of marriages for both Arkansas and Missouri to the Office of the Commissioner in Washington, DC. Reports for Missouri, however, contain less information than those for Arkansas. The Missouri reports generally

---

<sup>3</sup> See microfilm roll 5 in this series, Office of the Commissioner, Virginia, Reports of Marriages.

<sup>4</sup> Elaine C. Everly, "Marriage Registers of Freedmen," *Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives* (Fall 1973): 150, 152; Headquarters, Assistant Commissioner for Alabama, Circular 1, September 7, 1865, vol. 16 (Alabama), Record Group (RG) 105, NARA.

provide the names and ages of the couple, dates of marriage, where married and by whom, and the number of male and female children. On the other hand, Arkansas reports included such additional information as the couple's color and place of residence, the color of the couple's parents, the number of years the couple lived with another person, how separated, number of children by previous marriage, and names of witnesses and minister or official who performed the marriage. While Arkansas officers registered marriages for both Arkansas and Missouri, there is only one register of marriages in the records of the Missouri office of the disbursing officer (Cape Girardeau). For the Arkansas subdistrict field offices, however, there are marriage registers and certificates for the subdistricts at Arkadelphia, Dardanelle, Fort Smith, Hamburg, Jacksonport, Little Rock, Madison, Osceola, Pine Bluff, and Washington. There is no evidence in Bureau files that the Assistant Commissioner for Arkansas or his subordinate field officers issued marriage certificates to freedmen in Missouri.

Reverend 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), which 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 through the District of Columbia Office of the Assistant Commissioner to the Office of the Commissioner. Kimball also registered couples and forwarded ministers' reports of marriages that remained with the Assistant Commissioner. In addition to the reports received from Kimball, the Assistant Commissioner also received reports from other officers regarding marriage laws in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. In the records of the District of Columbia subassistant commissioner is a register of freedmen at Camp Barker—a "contraband" camp operated by the Military District of Washington during the Civil War—that includes a register of arrivals, deaths, and marriages for the camp. Like other "pre-Bureau" records, the register was probably given to the Bureau by the War Department when it took over duties formerly assigned to wartime superintendents of freedmen.

As in Alabama, Bureau officials in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and Texas informed freedmen about the laws relating to marriage for each respective state.<sup>5</sup> However, with the exception of an undated report of marriages and marriage licenses and certificates found in the records of the Office of the Commissioner for Florida, there is no evidence among Bureau files that indicate officials in Florida registered freedmen marriages. Neither is there evidence in the Bureau's records indicating officers in Georgia and Texas registered marriages or issued licenses and certificates. The records of the North Carolina Office of the Assistant Commissioner however, contain reports of marriages (National Archives Microfilm Publication M843, Roll 38), and in the files of the Subdistrict Field Office at Fayetteville there are two lists of births, marriages, and deaths. (These records have not been filmed

---

<sup>5</sup> See "Laws of Southern States, In relation to freedmen, 1865-66," Entry 49, Miscellaneous Records, 1865-71, Records of the Commissioners, RG 105, NARA.

yet.) There is no evidence of other North Carolina marriage records among Bureau files.

Bureau officials in Kentucky, Louisiana, and Tennessee were ordered to follow the laws for each state in regard to freedmen marriages. They were also told to issue licenses if local officials refused to do so. In Kentucky, Bureau officers were instructed to license black preachers to solemnize marriages. Freedmen couples were encouraged to submit their cases to the Bureau for examination, and a decision concerning the issuing of a marriage certificate would be decided upon on a case-by-case basis.<sup>6</sup> Bureau officers in each state, however, issued marriage licenses and certificates and registered freedmen marriages. For Kentucky, there is a single marriage license and a marriage certificate in the records of the Office of the Commissioner. However, in the records of the Kentucky Subdistrict Field Office there are marriage licenses and certificates and registers for the subdistricts of Augusta, Bowling Green, Columbus, Cynthiana, Saint Sterling, Owensboro, Paduchah, and Winchester. There is a relatively large quantity of marriage certificates containing similar information for both Louisiana and Tennessee in the records of the Office of the Commissioner. The records include the names and ages of couples, their color and the color of their parents, the number of years both the husband and wife lived with another person, the reason for separation, the number of children together and from previous marriages, and other marriage-related data. In the Louisiana Subdistrict Field Office there are registers of marriages for the subdistricts at the Gragg Home Colony, Donaldsonville, Mansfield, and Shreveport. At the Tennessee Office of the Assistant Commissioner are marriage licenses, and for the Tennessee Subdistrict Field Office there are marriage registers for the subdistricts at Lebanon, Memphis, and Trenton.

Although a March 22, 1867, act of the Maryland General Assembly validated freedmen marriages, there is no evidence in Bureau files that the Assistant Commissioner for Maryland advised freedmen of the law. Neither is there evidence that the Assistant Commissioner acted upon Commissioner Howard's May 1865 order regarding freedmen marriages. There were no subordinate officers responsible to the Assistant Commissioner except those officers in the Shenandoah Division. This division consisted of six counties in Virginia and two in West Virginia (May–September 1866). At various times, Maryland was under the jurisdiction of the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia. Most of the registrants that appear in the marriage registers for the superintendent of marriages for the District of Columbia (November 1866–July 1867) had moved to the District of Columbia from Maryland and Virginia. In January 1867, Maryland's jurisdiction was expanded to include Delaware. The marriage records found in the files of the Office of the Commissioner for Delaware, all appear to relate to proof of marriage in claims filed with the claims division of the Freedmen's Bureau. One affidavit among the Delaware files concerns a marriage that was performed in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. There is no evidence in Maryland Bureau files that indicated officials there issued marriage license and certificates or reported marriages for Delaware.

---

<sup>6</sup> Everly, "Marriage Registers of Freedmen," p. 153.



In Mississippi, Bureau officials were very active in documenting and solemnizing the marriages of freedmen. In a circular issued July 3, 1865 (Circular Number 1), Assistant Commissioner for Mississippi Samuel Thomas authorized his officers to keep a record of marriages of persons of color and gave instructions on how to maintain marriage registers. Like those for Louisiana and Tennessee, the marriage certificates for Mississippi forwarded to the Office of the Commissioner provide such information as the color of persons marrying and the complexion of parents. Also included is data about the number of years the couple lived with another person, how they were separated, and the number of children by a previous connection. There are four marriage registers for the Mississippi Office of the Assistant Commissioner that provide similar information. The registers for Davis Bend, Vicksburg, and Natchez, Mississippi, document the registration of more than 4,600 freedmen from Mississippi and northern Louisiana. Over half of the soldiers registering marriages for Natchez were members of the 6th Mississippi Heavy Artillery of the U.S. Colored Troops. Nearly all of the soldiers registering marriages for Davis Bend served with the 64th Colored Infantry.<sup>7</sup> The Mississippi subdistrict field office also registered freedmen marriages and issued licenses and certificates in the subdistricts of Brookhaven, Columbus, Davis Bend, Goodman, Grenada, Jackson, and Pass Christian.

In South Carolina, Assistant Commissioner Rufus Saxton issued "marriage rules" under General Order Number 8 (August 11, 1865). Declaring that "the sacred institution of Marriage lies at the very foundation of all civil society," Saxton outlined the duties of married couples and who was eligible to marry and to perform the ceremonies. These marriage rules also applied to Florida and Georgia, which were under the jurisdiction of the Assistant Commissioner for South Carolina at the time they were issued. Bvt. Gen. Robert K. Scott, who, in January 1866, succeeded Saxton as Assistant Commissioner, appointed a superintendent to provide guidance to freedmen on the responsibilities of marriage.<sup>8</sup> However, with the exception of a single marriage certificate found in the records of the Office of the Commissioner, and the marriage rules in the files of the South Carolina Office of the Assistant Commissioner, there is no evidence that South Carolina Bureau officials actively registered or issued marriage licenses or certificates to freedmen.

In a circular dated March 19, 1866 (Circular Number 11), Assistant Commissioner for Virginia, Col. Orlando Brown, ordered his subordinates to register the names of freedmen who were "cohabiting together as man and wife" and to "take pains to explain to colored persons . . . that they are firmly married by the operation of the law." As the basis for his order, Brown cited two February 27, 1866, acts of the

---

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of Mississippi marriage registers, see Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1790-1925* (1976), pp. 18-24. The Mississippi marriage registers are reproduced on NARA Microfilm Publication M826, Roll 42. Compiled service records for the 6th Mississippi Heavy Artillery, USCT, have been reproduced on M1818, rolls 109-133.

<sup>8</sup> Everly, "Marriage Registers of Freedmen," pp. 152-53; Headquarters, Assistant Commissioner for South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, General Orders Number 8, August 11, 1865, RG 105, NARA. The "marriage rules," filed with Unbound Miscellaneous Records, 1865-68, have been reproduced in M869, roll 44.

Virginia General Assembly that made provisions for issuing marriage licenses and the registration and legalization of marriage relations entered into by freedmen during slavery. Brown forwarded reports of marriages to Office of the Commissioner that contained the names and ages of couples, place of residence and birth, names of parents, and occupation. Most of the couples named in the reports were either born or resided in Gloucester County, Virginia. In response to Brown's order, officers in the Virginia Subdistrict Field Office registered marriages for the subdistricts of Goochland, Lexington, Louisa Courthouse, and Lovington. The information found in the files for these five subdistricts, for the most part, reveals that a significant number of the registrants were farm laborers and field hands and many had lived in long-standing marriages.

While the issuing of marriage licenses and certificates and registering freedmen marriages represented a small fraction of the Freedmen's Bureau's efforts to assist former slaves, the surviving marriage records of the Bureau—although fragmented—document freedmen's desire to legalize monogamous relations that for some spanned several decades. They reveal the Federal Government's efforts to help freedmen validate the bonds of matrimony, a process denied to them as slaves. The Freedmen's Bureau marriage records, despite their shortcomings, are some of the most important records for the study of black family marital relations before and after the Civil War.

### RECORDS DESCRIPTION

The records reproduced in this microfilm publication are arranged, for the most part, alphabetically by the state in which the marriage was performed. The number of marriage certificates for each state varies and they are arranged generally alphabetically by initial letter of surname of the bridegroom. There are several hundred certificates for Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee and smaller amounts for Alabama (one marriage license), Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Missouri, South Carolina, and the District of Columbia. In addition to marriage certificates, the records include marriage licenses and other proofs of marriage. The records contain monthly reports of marriages for the States of Arkansas, Florida, Missouri, Virginia, and for the District of Columbia.

Most of the records are dated 1865–66, however some of the marriage certificates and reports of marriages have earlier dates that reflect the efforts of Union Army clergy and others to solemnize freedmen marriages during the Civil War. One marriage certificate that was submitted to the Claims Division of the Freedmen's Bureau as proof of marriage in a claim for additional bounty payments is dated February 7, 1850. It appears that the series of records reproduced in this microfilm publication were created or brought together by the Adjutant General's office after the Freedmen's Bureau was abolished.

## Office of the Commissioner

### ALABAMA

The single unbound marriage license of Abslum Susk and Martha Culbert is dated June 20, 1865.

### ARKANSAS

Unbound monthly reports of marriages for the subdistricts of Arkadelphia, Ashley, Devalls Bluff, Helena, dated July 1865–September 1866, are arranged chronologically. The reports generally provide the name of the bride and bridegroom, their ages, dates of marriage, officiating minister, and remarks. A report from the subdistrict of Arkadelphia provides additional information, such as the place of residence, complexion of mother and father, number of years living with another woman, reason for separation, number of children by previous marriage, and number of children together.

### DELAWARE

Unbound copy of an affidavit certifying the marriage of James Blake and Catherine White is dated October 9, 1867. The marriage was performed in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, at the First Presbyterian Church on February 23, 1865. It appears that the document was submitted to the claims division of the Freedmen's Bureau as proof of marriage.

Unbound copy of an affidavit certifying the marriage of William Dunnsmore and Julia Mc Dewitt on October 9, 1859, is dated February 29, 1867. The information was copied from a marriage register of the Saint Peters Church in New Castle, Delaware.

Unbound marriage certificate of John Martin and Sarah Jane Booth is dated February 7, 1850. There is also a copy of a record relating to the marriage dated April 11, 1870, and a related U.S. Treasury Department letter dated April 5, 1870. The documents appear to relate to a claim of Sarah J. Martin filed with the claims division of the Freedmen's Bureau for additional bounty.

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Unbound reports of marriages, 1866–68, are arranged in rough chronological order. Unbound marriage licenses and certificates arranged alphabetically by the initial letter of the surname of the bridegroom cover the period 1865 and 1866–69.

### FLORIDA

The single unbound report of marriages is undated and unarranged. Unbound marriage licenses and certificates arranged generally alphabetically by initial letter of the surname of the bridegroom cover the period 1864–68.

### KENTUCKY

The single unbound marriage certificate of Charles Anderson and Sarah Walker is dated January 23, 1865.

The single unbound marriage license of Ben Laughlin and Alice Veeney is dated January 8, 1867.

#### LOUISIANA

Unbound marriage certificates arranged alphabetically by initial letter of the surname of the bridegroom cover the period 1864–65. Most of the certificates contain the name and ages of the bride (in some cases the maiden name) and bridegroom. The records also include their color, and place of residence and color of the bride and bridegroom's mother and father. In addition there is information concerning the number of years the bridegroom and bride lived with another man or woman, how they were separated, the number of children they have together, the number of children by previous connection, and names of witnesses and minister or official who performed the marriage.

#### MISSISSIPPI

Unbound marriage certificates arranged alphabetically by initial letter of the surname of the bridegroom cover the period 1864–66. The Mississippi marriage certificates can contain information similar to that found in the records for Louisiana. Included are the names and ages of the bride and bridegroom and their color and place of residence. Also included is information about the color of the bride and bridegroom's mother and father, the number of years that the couple lived with another man or woman, and how they were separated. The records also document the number of children the couple have together, the number of children by previous connection, and names of witnesses and minister or official who performed the marriage.

#### MISSOURI

Unbound monthly reports of marriages, July 1865–August 1865, are arranged chronologically. The reports provide the names and ages of the couple, dates of marriage, where married and by whom, and the number of male and female children.

The single unbound report of the marriage of George Washington and Lizzie Arthur is dated August 17, 1865.

#### SOUTH CAROLINA

The single unbound marriage certificate of Benjamin Low and Hayer Jenkins is dated September 30, 1865.

#### TENNESSEE

Unbound marriage certificates arranged by the initial letter of the surname of the bridegroom cover the period 1863–66. The certificates can contain the same kinds of information found in the marriage certificates for Louisiana and Mississippi. The records provide the names and ages of the bride and bridegroom, their color and place of residence, and the color of the couple's mother and father. Also recorded are the number of years the bridegroom and bride lived with another man or woman and how they were separated. The number of children, the number of children by previous connection, and names of witnesses and minister or official who performed

the marriage is documented as well. Some Tennessee marriage certificates also include the names and ages of children and their dates of birth.

#### VIRGINIA

Unbound reports of marriages arranged by the initial letter of the surname of the bridegroom are undated. The reports, in most cases, contain the names and ages of the couples, place of residence, names of parents, and occupation. Among the records is a list of marriages performed by Rev. L. C. Lockwood at Camp Hamilton, Virginia (near Hampton, VA), during the month of September 1861.

### RELATED RECORDS

In the same record group, RG 105, and related to the marriage records of the Office of the Commissioner, are **marriage records of various Offices of Assistant Commissioners and subordinate field offices of the Freedmen's Bureau**. Most of these records have not been microfilmed as of this date and are only available for research at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC. They will be microfilmed in forthcoming publications, however, as part of the overall effort to film previously unfiled records of the Freedmen's Bureau. Consult future editions of the National Archives' guide, *Microfilm Resources for Research: A Comprehensive Catalog*, for those additional microfilm publications.

The marriage records for these field offices have been described in a three-part unpublished inventory entitled *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Field Offices of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands*. The inventory descriptions of the records are arranged alphabetically by state and thereunder by offices, and thereunder alphabetically by county, town, or village. Part One describes the records of the Bureau offices in Alabama, Arkansas, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, and Louisiana. Part Two includes descriptions for offices in Maryland and Delaware, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Part Three covers offices in Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

However, marriage records from the Office of the Assistant Commissioner for both Mississippi and North Carolina are on the following National Archives microfilm publications:

**M826, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Mississippi, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869***  
(Roll 42 contains four volumes of registers of marriages.)

**M843, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of North Carolina, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1870***  
(Roll 38 contains a few reports of marriages received by the Assistant Commissioner.)

In addition, the following two microfilm series contain the records of the Bureau headquarters in Washington, DC:

**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***

Records in other record groups supplement those of the Office of the Commissioner and Assistant Commissioners and subordinate field offices. In Records of the United States Army Continental Commands, 1821–1920, RG 393, are records of the military districts that assisted freedmen in a variety of matters prior to the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, including the legalization of marriages. Records relating to employment and welfare of freedmen and abandoned property before the establishment of the Bureau are among the 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, can contain information relating to freedmen couples who maintained accounts with local branches of the bank.

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* (New York: reprint, 1974). For books and articles that discuss the Freedmen's Bureau marriage records, see John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: 1979); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: 1976); Ira Berlin and Leslie S. Rowland, editors, *Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African-American Kinship in the Civil War Era* (New York: 1997), especially pages 155–91; and Elaine C. Everly, "Marriage Registers of Freedmen," *Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives* (Fall 1973): 150–54.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The marriage records in this microfilm publication were prepared for filming by the Civil War Conservation Corps (CWCC) at the National Archives Building, Washington, DC, under the direction of Russ and Budge Weidman. Reginald Washington wrote the introductory remarks, and Elaine Everly's, "Marriage Registers of Freedmen" (*Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives*, Fall 1973), formed the basis for much of the discussion of the Freedmen's Bureau and its marriage records.

This microfilm publication was produced through a cooperative arrangement between the National Archives and Records Administration and the United States Congress, through The Freedmen's Bureau Records Preservation Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-444).

## CONTENTS

ROLL	DESCRIPTION	DATES
1	<b>OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER</b>	
	<b>Alabama</b>	
	Marriage License for Abslum, Susk and Martha Culbert	June 20, 1865
	<b>Arkansas</b>	
	Monthly Reports of Marriages	July 1865– September 1866
	<b>Delaware</b>	
	Affidavit certifying the marriage of James Blake and Catherine White (Married February 23, 1865)	October 12, 1867
	Affidavit certifying the marriage of William Dunnsmore and Julia Mc Dewitt (Married October 9, 1859)	February 29, 1867
	Marriage Certificate for John Martin and Sarah Booth	February 7, 1850
	<b>District of Columbia</b>	
	Reports of Marriages	1866–1868
	Marriage Licenses and Certificates	1865, 1866–1868
	<b>Florida</b>	
	Report of Marriages	Undated
	Marriage Licenses and Certificates	1864–1868
	<b>Kentucky</b>	
	Marriage certificate for Charles Anderson and Sarah Walker	January 23, 1865
	Marriage License for Ben Laughlin and Alice Veenev	January 8, 1867
	<b>Louisiana</b>	
	Marriage Certificates A–Y	1864–1867
2	<b>Mississippi</b>	
	Marriage Certificates A–Q	1864–1866

- |   |   |                       |
|---|---|-----------------------|
| 3 | <p><b>Mississippi</b><br/>         Marriage Certificates<br/>         R-Y</p>   | 1864-1866             |
|   | <p><b>Missouri</b><br/>         Monthly Reports of Marriages</p>  | July 1865-August 1865 |
|   | <p>Report of Marriage of George<br/>         Washington and Lizzie Arthur</p>   | August 17, 1865       |
|   | <p><b>South Carolina</b></p>  |                       |
|   | <p>Marriage Certificate for Benjamin<br/>         Low and Hayer Jenkins</p>   | September 30, 1865    |
|   | <p><b>Tennessee</b></p>   |                       |
|   | <p>Marriage Certificates<br/>         A-E</p>   | 1863-1866             |
| 4 | <p>Marriage Certificates<br/>         F-O</p>   | 1864-1866             |
| 5 | <p>Marriage Certificates<br/>         P-Y</p>   | 1864-1866             |
|   | <p><b>Virginia</b><br/>         Undated reports of Marriages (includes<br/>         an October 10, 1861 report of blacks married<br/>         by Rev. L. C. Lockwood during the month of<br/>         September 1861)</p> |                       |