



By Norman Rainock, Richmond, VA, 2006

Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia

The Virginia Freedmen Extraction and Indexing Project

What is the Virginia Freedmen Extraction and Indexing Project?



This is an effort to organize volunteers from Virginia to extract and index genealogically relevant information from the digitized versions of the Freedmen's Bureau records, specifically those that were generated by Virginia's Bureau branch offices.

Records created by this and subsequent extraction and indexing projects (conducted in other Southern states) will enable historians and descendants of emancipated slaves, freed Blacks, and Black Union soldiers to access historical data, much of which was never before available.

Why was Virginia selected for the pilot project?

Given the complexity of the Freedmen's Bureau records, the National Archives and Records Administration and the Genealogical Society of Utah decided that a pilot project was needed to test software, methods and procedures for extraction and indexing.

Virginia was chosen to take the lead in this important project, in recognition of the Jamestown 2007 Commemoration of Virginia's 400th anniversary, and considering the critical role African-Americans have played in Virginia's early history.



What did the Governor announce about the project?

On October 26, 2006, Governor Timothy M. Kaine announced that Virginia will be the first state in the nation to participate in an historic project to index and digitize Freedmen's Bureau records.

“This is an exciting opportunity for Virginia and really for the world,” said Governor Kaine. *“Just like the archeological work being done at Jamestown Island, this project gives us the unique opportunity to see and learn for the first time about the lives of these early Virginians.”*



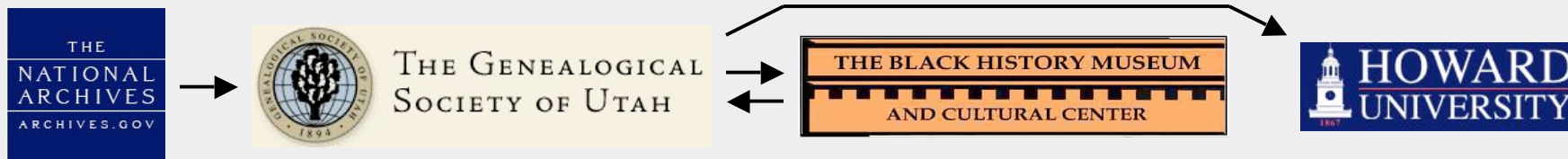
Announcement: October 26, 2006

What steps were taken to prepare the records for extraction?

In 2000, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the nation's preserver and archivist of important US documents and materials, began a major project to microfilm the Freedmen's Bureau records. The project was completed in September of 2006, resulting in the creation of over 1,000 rolls of film.

NARA has entered into an agreement with the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU) to scan (digitize), extract and index genealogical and historical information from the microfilmed records. GSU has invited the Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia to organize a pilot effort to extract and index information from the Virginia branches of the Freedmen's Bureau. Based upon the experience of the Virginia pilot, records from other states will then be digitized and extracted.

Ultimately, Howard University will place the extracted and indexed images on the Internet for access by genealogists, historians, and the general public.

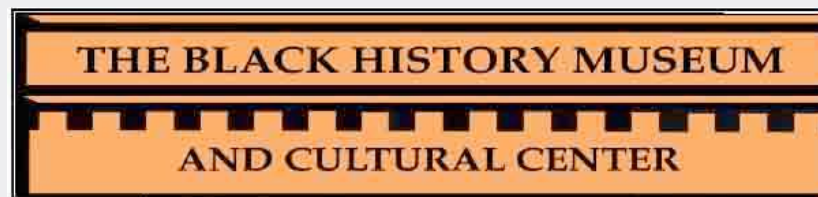


Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia

What is the Black History Museum's role in the project?

The Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia will coordinate volunteer recruitment for the Virginia Freedmen Extraction and Indexing Project. The Museum will inform interested organizations about opportunities for participation.

Volunteers interested in participating in the Project can so indicate by contacting the Black History Museum at (804) 780-9097.



Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia

What is the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia?



The Museum is a repository for visual, oral and written records and artifacts commemorating the lives and accomplishments of Blacks in Virginia.

Carrol Anderson, Sr. founded the Museum in 1981. In 1991, the Museum was opened to the public at its present location, 00 Clay Street, in the historic Jackson Ward district of Richmond. The house built in 1832 by German descendant Adolph Dill, incorporates both the Federal and Greek Revival architectural styles. Under the leadership of Maggie L. Walker, the country's first female and Black bank president, the Council of Colored Women purchased the house in 1922. In 1932 it became the Black branch of the Richmond Public library and was named for Rosa D. Bowser, the first Black female school teacher in Richmond.

When will the project begin?

203 rolls of microfilmed Virginia records have just been scanned, which was necessary to convert them to digitized images. These images are now being evaluated to determine which of them should be included in the Virginia Freedmen Extraction and Indexing Project.

It is anticipated that the extraction and indexing will begin in early 2007 and, if all goes well, the project should be completed by midyear 2007.



How do I become a volunteer for the extraction and indexing project?

Volunteers should have basic computer skills, access to the Internet, and an inherent interest in African American history and genealogy.

Pre-approved volunteers (approvals to be coordinated by the Museum) will receive user names and passwords that will enable them to download software and training materials directly from FamilySearch.org. These are highly self-explanatory, enabling volunteers to learn the extraction and indexing processes and do the work at home.

Individuals interested in participating in the Virginia Freedmen Extraction and Indexing Project should contact the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia at (804) 780-9097.



What was the Freedmen's Bureau?

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, also known as the Freedmen's Bureau, was established in the War Department by an act of Congress on March 3, 1865 (13 Stat. 507).

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



"Office of the Freedmen's Bureau, Memphis, Tennessee," Harper's Weekly, June 2, 1866

What role did the Freedmen's Bureau play in the years after the Civil War?

While a major part of the Bureau's early activities involved the supervision of abandoned and confiscated property, its mission was to provide relief and help freedmen become self-sufficient. Bureau officials issued rations and clothing, operated hospitals and refugee camps, and supervised labor contracts.

In addition, the Bureau managed apprenticeship disputes and complaints, assisted benevolent societies in the establishment of schools, helped freedmen in legalizing marriages entered into during slavery, and provided transportation to refugees and freedmen who were attempting to reunite with their families or relocate to other parts of the country. The Bureau also helped black soldiers, sailors, and their heirs collect bounty claims, pensions, and back pay.

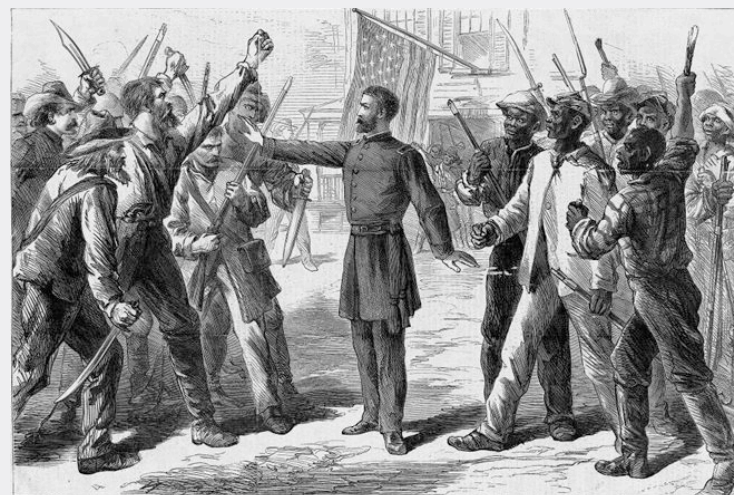


"Glimpses at the Freedmen - The Freedmen's Union Industrial School, Richmond, Va." Frank Leslie's illustrated newspaper, Sept 1866

How long did the Freedmen's Bureau last?

President Lincoln signed the legislation establishing the Bureau on March 3, 1865. The life of the Bureau was extended twice by acts of July 16, 1866 (14 Stat. 173), and July 6, 1868 (15 Stat. 83).

The Bureau ended its activities completely on June 30, 1872, when the work of the Bureau was terminated in accordance with an act of June 10, 1872 (17 Stat. 366).

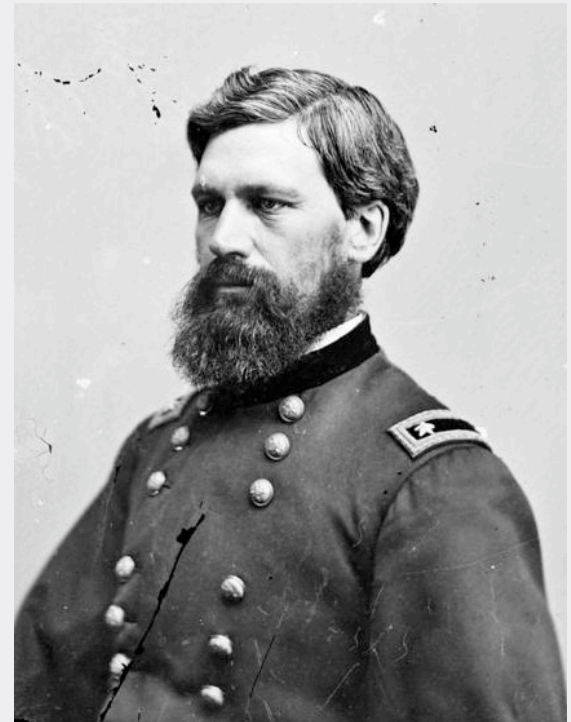


“The Freedmen’s Bureau,”
Harpers' Weekly, July 1868

Who directed the Freedmen's Bureau?

President Lincoln picked Union Major General Oliver O. Howard to head the Freedmen's Bureau. On May 12, 1865, after Lincoln's death, President Andrew Johnson appointed Howard to head the Bureau. Howard was the Bureau's only director in its seven-year existence.

Among many accomplishments, General Howard succeeded in getting Congress to establish the Freedmen's Hospital and a college in Washington, both of which now bear his name -- Howard University Hospital and Howard University.



Major Gen. Oliver Otis Howard

Where was the Freedmen's Bureau located in Virginia?

The Bureau's operations began in Virginia in June 1865, when Assistant Commissioner Orlando Brown established his headquarters in Richmond. Sub districts with assistant superintendents and sub assistant commissioners were established at other locations in Virginia.

The Virginia Headquarters was originally located on 10th Street, between Broad and Capital Streets. Historical research is currently underway to confirm the locations and timing of the Richmond headquarters.



“The Freedmen's Bureau at Richmond, Virginia,” *Harpers Weekly*, Dec 23, 1865

How is the State of Virginia planning to recognize the Virginia Freedmen's Bureau?

In the same ceremony in which the Virginia project was announced, Governor Kaine also announced plans to place a historic marker identifying the location of the Virginia Freedmen's Bureau headquarters.



Announcement: October 26, 2006

How was the Freedman's Bank related to the Freedmen's Bureau?

On the same day that President Lincoln signed legislation establishing the Freedmen's Bureau – March 3, 1865 – he also signed a bill chartering the Freedman's Savings & Trust Company.

It is estimated that more than 12 million African Americans today descend from the over 480,000 individuals whose names appear in the Freedman's Bank records.

Information from the Bank's deposit records, which have already been digitized and indexed, are now available on genealogical research sites, such as FamilySearch.org and Ancestry.com.

An application record for James H. Scott, handwritten in cursive. The text includes: 'An application record for James H. Scott', 'Date of Application, June 24/71', 'Where born, City of Richmond', 'Where brought up, do', 'Residence, N. Petersburg', 'Age, 27', 'Complexion, Dk W', 'Occupation, Plaster', 'Works for', 'Wife, Ann Rebecca', 'Children, James, Caroline, Poolontas', 'Father, Joe', 'Mother, dead', 'Brothers, None', 'Sisters, Josephine', and 'Signature, James H. Scott'.

Freedman's Bank application record for James H. Scott, a Virginia resident (and progenitor of current Richmond residents).

What kinds of documents are included in the Bureau records?

The National Archives and Records Administration maintains the original Freedmen's Bureau records. It has been said that there are nearly 1,100 linear feet of records in NARA's possession.

A great diversity of documents are included in the collection of Bureau records, including food rations applications, marriage certificates and registries, labor contracts, hospital registries, school and land reports, legal records, correspondence, claims for back pay and pensions, bureaucratic reports and transmittals, and many other documents.



Freedmen's Bureau records in the stacks of the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. (NARA, photo)

Why are the Freedmen's Bureau records important?

The Freedmen's Bureau records are effectively the "**genesis records**" of African American identity post Civil War. They provide the earliest major compilation of information on many freedmen, documenting for the period 1865-1872 their names, legalized marriages, educational pursuits, work contracts, and receipt of rations, health care, legal, and other support.

In his 1901 history of the Freedmen's Bureau, WEB DuBois asked: "*What shall be done with the slaves?*" In answer, he said:

" . . . No approximately correct history of civilization can ever be written which does not throw out in bold relief, as one of the great landmarks of political and social progress, the organization and administration of the Freedmen's Bureau."
Atlantic Monthly, 1901

May 11th, 1868
Chas. of the Freedmen's Bureau at Richmond
Dear Sir,
I am anxious to learn about my sisters, from whom I have been separated many years - I have never heard from them since I left Virginia twenty four years ago - I am in hopes that they are still living and I am anxious to hear how they are getting on - I have no other one to apply to but you and am persuaded that you will help one who stands in need of your services as this I shall be very grateful to you, if you oblige me in this matter - One belongs to Peter Coleman in Caroline County and her name was Jane - Her husband's name was Charles and he belongs to Buck Haskin and lives near John Wright's store in the same county - He has three children, Robert, Charles and Julia, when I left - Sister Martha belonged to Dr. Jefferson, who lives two miles above Wright's store - Sister Matilda belonged to Mrs. Boths in the same county - My dear uncle Jim had a wife at Sack Langley's and his wife was named Julia and his name oldest son was named Buck and they all belonged to Sack Langley's - There are all my own nearest relatives and I wish to correspond with them with a view to visit them as soon as I can - Dear from them - My name is Hawkins Wilson and I am their brother, who was sold at Sheriff's sale and

Hawkins Wilson Letter: A Freedmen's letter sent to the Richmond Bureau headquarters requesting help in finding his family