

## **Freedmen's Bureau in Gordonsville**

### **From a report commissioned by Historic Gordonsville, Inc.**

Note: The information below is from a 2001 research project conducted and written by a research intern for Historic Gordonsville, Inc. to gain insight into the town's history of the Freedmen's Bureau. The name of the intern and/or the author of the report is unknown. Further, there is no title for the 53 page report. Footnote citations below are a part of the original 2001 report and derive from *End Notes*. The page number in parenthesis references the page in the intern's report where the information is located. The entire report is on file at the Orange County Historical Society.

#### **Introduction (page 1)**

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands established by the United States Congress following the Civil War was commonly referred to as the Freedmen's Bureau. For organizational purposes to administer services, the various Bureaus in the state of Virginia were broken down into ten districts, and the Freedmen's Bureau located in Gordonsville was in the Fourth District. The Fourth also encompassed Middlesex, King and Queen, Essex, Caroline, Spotsylvania, Albemarle, Rappahannock, Madison, Orange, Hanover, Louisa, Goochland, Fluvanna, Greene and Culpeper counties.<sup>1</sup> There was also a Freedmen's Bureau at the Orange County courthouse, but this report concentrated on the district office in Gordonsville.

#### **A Brief Background of Gordonsville, Virginia (page 2)**

Gordonsville is centrally located in the Virginia Piedmont close to the Louisa County border. The first major land purchase in the area was 1,350 acres in 1786 by Nathaniel Gordon, who set up a tavern to feed and rest the growing multitude of road travelers moving north-south from Charlottesville to Fredericksburg-Washington D.C. and east-west from Richmond to the Valley. Gordon's tavern was located near the present day traffic circle in the town. By the mid- to late-1800s, Gordonsville was also a thriving railroad town and by the Civil War, this "crossroads" town had become an obvious choice to transport troops and to locate a receiving hospital for the wounded.<sup>2</sup> In 1864 the hospital (in the building now known as the Exchange Hotel) had been set up and run by the Confederate government. The author of the research report concluded, "The ease in transport and the hospital already in place made Gordonsville a clear choice for the headquarters of the Fourth District of the Freedmen's Bureau."

#### **A Brief Background of the Freedmen's Bureau (pages 2-4)**

The Freedmen's Bureau Act of 1865 was passed on March 3, to establish a Bureau for the Relief of Freedmen and Refugees in order to provide food, shelter, clothing, medical services, and land to displaced Southerners, including newly freed African Americans. It was placed under the direction of the War Department in Washington D.C.

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<sup>1</sup> William T. Alderson, *The Influence of Military Rule and The Freedmen's Bureau on Reconstruction in Virginia, 1865-1870* (Nashville, Vanderbilt University, 1952), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Martin, "The Hospital Complex in Gordonsville, Virginia; Its History, Development, and Participation in the Confederate Medical Department." *Senior Research Project*, December 8, 1999.

The Bureau had four major functions:

- The requisition of abandoned lands;
- The establishment of Freedmen's schools;
- The oversight of labor contracts involving freedmen; and
- The medical treatment of freedmen.<sup>3</sup>

The Freedmen's Bureau of 1865 had the authority to supervise and manage all abandoned lands and also, according to the report, the "control of all ... refugees and freedmen from rebel states," which included "provisions, clothing and fuel for the immediate and temporary shelter of destitute and suffering refugees, their wives and children."<sup>4</sup> This included both black and white Southerners displaced by the war. A Civil Rights bill passed by the U.S. Congress in April 1866 granted the Freedmen's Bureau the right to use the federal court system in cases pertaining to freedmen and in cases of discrimination based on race.<sup>5</sup> On July 16, 1866 Congress passed the Freedmen's Bureau Bill which extended the life of the Bureau two more years.<sup>6</sup> In addition, these two bills allowed for the repair and rental of school buildings and former Confederate property to be used for the benefit of freedmen. Gordonsville's Civil War Receiving Hospital had been Confederate property.

Other bills passed by Congress gave authority for the Bureau to the U.S. Secretary of War in 1868 to discontinue or extend the Bureau as he saw fit<sup>7</sup> and another bill in 1869 ended the Bureau in all states EXCEPT for Freedman schools and collection of claims.<sup>8</sup> Further, by 1872 the Freedmen's Bureau had become so impoverished that Congress ended it altogether on June 10th.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Freedmen's Bureau in Virginia** (page 15-18)

On May 31, 1865 **Orlando Brown** became the Assistant Commissioner for the Freedmen's Bureau in Virginia and operated out of his headquarters in Richmond. He sent a circular to the Bureau's officers in Virginia districts outlining their duties and responsibilities:

- "Protect the [freedmen] in their rights as freemen--to see that in their present state of helplessness, they are not oppressed or injured by their former masters by false charges, unjust punishment, or otherwise.
- "You will aid them, by your advice, in making contracts for their services, if such contracts are liable to be injurious to their interests--In all other cases, leave them free to make their own bargains.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction* (New York; Fordham University Press, 1999), 48.

<sup>4</sup> [www.africana.com](http://www.africana.com)

<sup>5</sup> George R. Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1955), 131, 135.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>8</sup> National Archives Microfilm Publication, Roll 1 of the Records of the Freedmen's Bureau.

<sup>9</sup> Bentley, 201.

- “You will let them understand that when their contracts for services are made with the whites, they are under obligations to and must fulfill the same [.] You will annul [sic] all contracts that may have been made with the freedmen, that are injurious and unconscionable.
- “Cultivate, as far as possible, among them, a friendly spirit towards the citizens and their former masters and explain to them the relations that exist between capital and their labor, and how each is dependent on the other.
- “You will not issue rations to any person able to work, for whom employment can be found. Require each Assistant Superintendent to keep a register of all [freed] persons able to work, and without employment, in his sub district, and to aid such persons in finding places to work...
- “Look after vagrants, and, if after being admonished, they do not provide themselves with honest labor, turn them over to work under some military guard, without payment, until they are ready to work for themselves.
- “...You will consider them [the freedmen] under the same common laws that govern free laborers throughout the North.
- “...You will instruct them that, their rights in what they may possess, will now be protected, and that neither laws nor proclamations can make them really free, until by frugality and economy, they place themselves in a position, where their dependence on the Government or charity for support shall cease.
- “The unsettled condition of [the freedmen] will be likely to give you trouble. Beyond the changes necessary for uniting families, you will discourage their wandering propensities, except so far as changes may be necessary for labor to find its best market.
- “...All orphaned children and helpless infirm persons, that have no one to care for them, will be removed at once to a comfortable home, now being provided.”<sup>10</sup>

Based on these goals, Bureau officers were to oversee the fair treatment of the freedmen, but history shows that the Bureau was not a perfect institution. Some researchers claim that the Bureau was “plagued with corruption”, or assistant superintendents were accused of barbarity while others were illegally selling tobacco.<sup>11</sup>

During its four and a half year life, the commissioners and the organization of the Virginia Bureau as well as the structure of Virginia districts changed many times and was ever evolving. For example, in September 1865 courts were set up to try cases involving freedmen but by May 10, 1866 these courts dissolved due to a new state law which allowed freedmen testimony in civil courts.<sup>12</sup>

The Bureau in Virginia had thirty-nine Assistant-Sub-Assistant-Commissioners by January 1868, but by June the number had dropped to twenty-nine. As stated earlier, on January 1, 1869, the Bureau ended in every state in the South except for the persons in charge of freedmen’s schools and the collection of claims. The decline in personnel throughout the state was thought

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<sup>10</sup> Alderson, 4-6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-24.

to be the result of a decline of hospital services and other outreach except for freemen schools and the collection of claims.

In December of 1865, **W.R. Morse** began his career with the Bureau in Gordonsville as the Assistant Superintendent of the Fourth District.<sup>13</sup>

### **Background of the Bureau Officers in Gordonsville** (page 30-32)

Personnel for the Freedmen's Bureau in Gordonsville as evidenced below was through excerpts from personnel records found in the National Archives Microfilm Publications.

July 1865: The first officer of the Freedmen's Bureau in Gordonsville was **Captain T. Frank P. Crandon** who began his work as a Superintendent.<sup>14</sup> By August he had eight men working for him: Assistant Superintendent--**N. Wardner**; Orderlies--Charles Smith and John E. Vernon (assumption was they worked at the Freedmen's Hospital); Guards--Moses Bolton, Charles Huff, Bruno Colborn, Joseph Sparks and John L. Phillips. It is unknown which men were union employees, soldiers or civilians.<sup>15</sup>

October 1865: personnel began to change and by November 1865 only **Captain Frank Crandon** (Gordonsville superintendent) and his assistant superintendent **N. Wardner** were the only two men left in the Bureau in Gordonsville as everyone else was relieved and mustered out.<sup>16</sup>

December 1865: John L. Phillips became another Assistant Superintendent (former guard).<sup>17</sup> He served for only one year.

January 1866: Phillips was out and **William R. (W.R.) Morse** and Samuel H. Carpenter were listed as additional Assistant Superintendents. Garrick Mallery was the Inspector of the Fourth (included Gordonsville) and the Sixth Districts.<sup>18</sup>

June 1866: **W.R. Morse replaced Crandon as Superintendent of the Fourth District** with his Headquarters to remain in Gordonsville.<sup>19</sup> William Brock was employed as a Guard but by September is relieved of his duties.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 and 36.

<sup>14</sup> National Archives Microfilm Publications, Records of the Assistant Commissioner of the State of Virginia, Reel 63 frame no. 177.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 409.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 736.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 906.

December 1866: names of surgeons began to appear in the records and **U.W. Gray** is the first African American surgeon recorded in the personnel roster but he is not the first surgeon at the Freedmen's hospital.<sup>21</sup>

February 1867-July 1867: **E. Nason** became the Chief Medical Officer in Gordonsville while **G.M. Baker** was Surgeon in Chief.<sup>22</sup> Baker's contract was canceled on October 31, 1867 as his services were no longer required.<sup>23</sup>

The author of this report concluded that the Gordonsville Receiving Hospital was not only home to a Civil War hospital but also to a **Freedmen's hospital**. "The Gordonsville Receiving Hospital, under the authority of the Confederate government, was the same building that now houses the Exchange Hotel Civil War Museum, owned and operated by the Historic Gordonsville, Inc."<sup>24</sup>

The ending date of this hospital and transfer of property is unclear. When the Freedmen's Bureau ran a freedmen's hospital in Gordonsville, a letter from **Gordonsville Superintendent Crandon** to his supervisor, State Assistant Commissioner **O. [Orlando] Brown**, stated that "no buildings have been occupied in this [Fourth] District by the Bureau except those that had been formerly used as public buildings by the Rebel Authorities. The list on the 1st day of September 1865 was as follows: 11 hospital buildings..."<sup>25</sup> This indicates that the hospital run by the Bureau was a building owned in some capacity by the Confederate government. Although the exact address is unknown, the author believes that it appears relatively clear that the Exchange Hotel was home not only to a Civil War hospital, but to a freedmen's hospital as well."<sup>26</sup>

May 1867: **Frederick W. Poor** was employed as a clerk in the Superintendent's office in Gordonsville.<sup>27</sup>

January 1868: **M.S. Hopkins** was named Assistant-Sub-Assistant-Commissioner for the First Division of the Fourth Sub District with headquarters in Gordonsville. In addition, in February he was also assigned to the Third Division.<sup>28</sup>

December 1868: **Hopkins'** appointment was revoked due to massive cutbacks to the Bureau by the Secretary of War. It was at this time that the only officers left in Virginia were to give

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>24</sup> Alison Martin, "The Hospital Complex in Gordonsville, Virginia: Its History, Development, and Participation in the Confederate Medical Department." *Senior Research Project*, December 8, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> National Archives Microfilm Publications, Records of the Assistant Commissioner of the State of Virginia, Reel 12, frame no. 695.

<sup>26</sup> Unknown author of research report on the Freedmen's Bureau in Gordonsville found in the offices of the Orange County Historical Society.

<sup>27</sup> National Archives Microfilm Publications, Records of the Assistant Commissioner of the State of Virginia. Reel 63, frame no. 63.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

oversight to freedmen's schools established by the Bureau.<sup>29</sup> The freedmen's hospital in Gordonsville ceased to function after 1868 since the emphasis was on freedmen's schools.

January 1869: **Morse's** appointment had been changed from Superintendent of the Fourth District to Assistant Superintendent of Schools in charge of the Fourth Educational District with headquarters in Gordonsville.<sup>30</sup> He requested that Freedman Bureau headquarters be moved to Culpeper.<sup>31</sup> The move was made by the end of January 1869.

April 1869: Mr. Morse's appointment was revoked because his services were no longer required as the **Bureau had been permanently terminated.**

### **Typical Activities of the Bureau Officers in Gordonsville:** (pages 32-37)

The services of the Freedmen's Bureau in Gordonsville were broken down into three categories:

- the Hospital and medical treatment of the freedmen,
- Outrages (violent acts) and court proceedings involving the freedmen, and
- general monthly reports and requests.

Many freedmen were brought from other counties and towns to Gordonsville for medical treatment at the Bureau because the Gordonsville hospital, unlike many other places in the state, would treat freedmen. The term "Outrages" was used by the Bureau to define acts committed by or against freedmen.

The first mention of medical treatment was in a letter dated February 5, 1966 from **Superintendent Crandon in Gordonsville to O. [Orlando] Brown in Richmond** when Crandon requested transportation from Charlottesville to Gordonsville for "Laura who is an old [African American] woman...ill and without friends and requires hospital treatment."<sup>32</sup> This was a typical request as a vast majority of the records were transportation requests for destitute or sick freedmen or women.

The first mention of a doctor was in a letter dated February 21, 1866<sup>33</sup> when **Superintendent Crandon** requested transportation for Dr. William H. Palmer to and from Louisa Court, Orange Court House and Charlottesville 'to enable him to attend to the sick Freedmen at those places who need his services.'<sup>34</sup> Dr. Palmer also helped settle disputes or outrages. For example, on August 20, 1866 he wrote that Jane Gwyman had been admitted to the hospital on June 25 due to a gunshot wound which led to her death. In December 1866, Palmer was requested to report the cause and condition of the wound of John Moore, a freedman, who was in the hospital. His

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> National Archives Microfilm Publications, Records of the Assistant Commissioner of the State of Virginia. Reel 35, frame no. 322.

<sup>32</sup> National Archives Microfilm Publications, Records of the Assistant Commissioner of the State of Virginia. Reel 12, frame no. 120.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

work as a doctor was not only to treat patients but also to assist in settling disputes, some of which could be vicious. There are four reels of microfilm at the National Archives (Virginia) relating to outrages, murders and criminal cases involving freedmen from June 1865-January 1869. On January 6, 1866 **Crandon sent a report to Brown** telling about the conditions of his district:

*...I forwarded herewith a report of the outrages committed by the citizens on the [freedmen] in this District, so far as the facts have come to my knowledge...In this report I only allude to cases of the most cruel and vindictive character...If cases of personal outrages by the [freedmen] towards white persons have occurred, I do not know them. In many instances I find the Freedmen doing wrong, but I have not heard a case of personal violence being committed by them. While I would not consider the cases reported as an index of the general feeling in the District, I can not but regard the common sentiment as antagonistic to the recognition of the complete and absolute freedom of men who have been slaves....<sup>35</sup>*

**Crandon** continues to list nine outrages against freedmen from August-December 1865 that include shootings, beatings, whippings, threats, stabbings, injustice in the courts. The last outrage occurred about December 1, 1866 when “John Allen of Caroline Co., Va. shot John Moose [sic] with a pistol inflicting a severe wound in the left hand and this without provocation.”<sup>36</sup>

Other Gordonsville men reported on outrages as well. In February 1867 the whipping of a freedman named Thomas Jefferson was reported to **W.R. Morse**. The case was settled in May with a settlement of \$1,000 given to Jefferson.<sup>37</sup>

**Crandon** sent monthly reports to Richmond involving the freedmen. Most of them pertained to the pay due the freedmen from their white bosses. He also requested money to repair freeman housing and sent various reports--of rations required for the destitute; of deaf, dumb and blind freedmen; of white persons requiring food to prevent starvation; of indigent freedmen in Orange and Louisa; and requests for teacher supplies.

#### **Analysis of the Bureau Officers in Gordonsville:** (pages 38-40)

Superintendents: during the three and half years in Gordonsville, the Freedmen’s Bureau had only two Superintendents oversee the Fourth District (**Crandon and Morse**).

Clerk: Frederick W. Poor, was the only clerk and had a tenure of one and one half years.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 718-725.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-175.

Assistant-Sub-Assistant Commissioner, M.S. Hopkins arrived in Gordonsville in January 1868 and stayed through December when the Secretary of War revoked the position. He was the only person to serve in that role.

Surgeons: Four surgeons operated in the Gordonsville Freedmen's Hospital during its two year and three month lifespan.

Orderlies and Guards: From August 1865-November 1865 there were five guards and two orderlies. After November 1865, these positions remained unfilled. The author of the research report speculated that action demonstrated the rapid decline of a military presence in Gordonsville. However, it is not known whether there was a lack of need to fill the positions or a lack of funds to fill the positions.

**Analysis of Typical Bureau Activities:** (pages 40)

For the Hospital: Records pertaining to the hospital at Gordonsville indicate that of the fifty-six records sent by **Crandon** to his bosses in Richmond demonstrate that 44.6% (or 25 records) pertained to transportation or treatment of ill freedmen. The frequency of requests for transportation demonstrates the Bureau's commitment to support the health of the freedmen in the area. Further, the Gordonsville hospital had a large volume of patients, many from surrounding areas. Those two statistics may indicate that the freedmen most likely had few means of medical care other than that provided by the Bureau, especially since other districts saw the same need to establish freedmen's hospitals as well.

There was no further analysis of other Bureau activities.

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**Summary from the Exchange Hotel Civil War Medical Museum website:**

*"The Freedmen's Bureau*

After the Emancipation Proclamation, newly freed slaves had basic care needs such as reading, writing, healthcare, and justice. To protect these newly freed slaves, the Federal Government stepped in and created The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, usually referred to as the Freedmen's Bureau. Using confiscated Confederate property, the government established schools, hospitals, and courtrooms.

The Exchange Hotel was used as all of the above from 1865 to December 1868. In 1867 there were 250 students registered to learn to read and write in our building. Court

sessions were held for cases no higher than \$100 or 30 days in jail and were adjudicated on the first floor.”<sup>38</sup>

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**From historian Frank Walker in his book, *Remembering: A History of Orange County*:**

“A less than casual observer of the Orange County scene during Reconstruction was Marcus Sterling Hopkins. An Ohio native, Hopkins’ first visit to our area was as a sergeant in the 7th Ohio Infantry Regiment, but disabling wounds to his face and shoulder during the Battle of Cedar Mountain in adjacent Culpeper County relegated him to the Veteran Reserve Corps for the remainder of the war. As soon as the Federal government created the ‘Bureau of Freedmen, Refugees, and Abandoned Lands,’ he sought and received appointment as one of its field officers, or ‘agents’ as they were often called. The official short name for the Virginia division of the Bureau was ‘BRFAL-VA,’ however everyone soon began calling it the ‘Freedmen’s Bureau,’ since such work as it did with refugees and abandoned lands was overshadowed by its involvement in freemen’s activities.

“Hopkins first served as an officer in the Bureau’s Prince William County office, but in February 1867 he was transferred to the District Four offices in Gordonsville and placed in charge of Orange and Louisa counties. By then he had bought a small farm near Manassas and had moved his wife and family there. Hopkins, however, had been attracted by the land and the climate...

“Initially, Bureau agents conducted Freedmen’s Court and tried cases involving freedmen, who had no standing in Virginia courts until the Civil Rights Act of 1866 was passed. After that, agents still had to attend local courts and monitor all cases involving freedmen. If a decision appeared improper, the agent could conduct an investigation and report to his superiors for possible orders to overturn the local court’s decision. Bureau agents were also charged with providing food and medical care for the freedmen, and a Freedmen’s Hospital was operated for a time at Gordonsville. There is no specific reference to the use of the Exchange Hotel and the old receiving hospital facilities, but there are references to using property of the former Confederate government, which the hotel and hospital most certainly were. The Bureau ceased operating a hospital at Gordonsville the same year Hopkins arrived.

“Bureau agents also assisted the various private organizations involved in the education of the former slaves. At the time Hopkins was here, there was a school in Gordonsville staffed by several members of the Freedmen’s Aid Union Commission, one of the

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<sup>38</sup> Author unknown. “Who We Are.” *The Exchange Hotel Civil War Museum*, Google, Accessed June 16, 2021, <https://www.theexchangehotelmuseum.org/our-history>

several organizations engaged in educating Virginia freedmen. Jane Hosmer of Concord, Massachusetts, and William P. Lucas were the only Gordonsville teachers named in Hopkin's diary. Various other sources report that Harriet F. Stone, Mary A. Fowler, and Marie Perkins, all of Massachusetts, also taught at Gordonsville at one time or another. John W. and A.S. Pratt, husband and wife, taught at Orange for a time. Lucas was a black man. It is not known if any of the women were black, but that would not have been unusual in a freedmen's school.

"Bureau agents were also supposed to draw up and help enforce labor contracts for the freedmen. Hopkins does not specifically note doing so at Gordonsville, and probably by then, he, like most agents, had given up trying to deal in the employment relations of the former slaves with their former masters, as long as everything was relatively peaceful. Both sides routinely ignored such contracts until their enforcement could benefit the complaining party. Agents did what they could to resolve minor claims between whites and blacks and even attempted on occasion to resolve domestic disputes. Hopkins noted that both whites and blacks habitually carried concealed weapons, which definitely added to the excitement and urgency of his work..."

"As the Bureau is about to be partially discontinued, and this is the last report I shall be called upon to make as one of its officers, I deem it proper to note briefly some of the results of its establishment that appear within the limited extent of my jurisdiction, at this, the end of three years of my employment in its service. I desire to do this especially, as in looking at the present condition of the freedmen and their relations with the whites, so much of imperfection and evil is seen, so much to improve and reform is presented, so great the work yet to be done and so long the time yet to wait is felt to be, that one is apt to lose sight of the beginning, and thus fail to appreciate what has already been accomplished in the great and arduous undertaking of converting slaves into citizens, and slaveholders in the respecters of the rights of their fellow men."<sup>39</sup>

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**A summary and statistics from the National Archives in Washington, DC (which helps bring understanding of the Gordonsville office and others throughout the state) :**

### **THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU IN VIRGINIA**

"In Virginia, the Bureau's operations began in June 1865 when Assistant Commissioner Orlando Brown established his headquarters in Richmond. Brown served until May 1866, when he was succeeded by Maj. Gen. Alfred H. Terry, who remained in office until August 1866. Maj. Gen. John M. Schofield served from August 1866 to March 1867, when Orlando Brown again

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<sup>39</sup> Frank S. Walker, Jr., *Remembering: A History of Orange County, Virginia* (Orange: Orange County Historical Society, 2004), 200-203.

assumed office and served as both Assistant Commissioner and superintendent of education until May 1869.

**Organizational Structure** "...From July 4, 1865, to April 14, 1867, the Virginia Bureau 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 sub-assistant commissioner in charge of each. The sub-districts were divided further into divisions headed by assistant sub-assistant commissioners. Subdistrict headquarters were established at Alexandria, Fort Monroe, Fredericksburg, **Gordonsville**, Lynchburg, Norfolk, Petersburg, Richmond, Winchester, and Wytheville. On January 1, 1869, the 10 sub-districts were reorganized into 8 educational sub-districts, 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.

**Activities:** "The major activities of the Freedmen's Bureau in Virginia generally resembled those conducted in other states. The Bureau issued rations and provided medical relief to both freedmen and white refugees, supervised labor contracts between planters and freedmen, administered justice, and worked with benevolent societies in the establishment of schools.

"The Freedmen's Bureau's efforts to provide **relief to both blacks and whites** in Virginia began almost as soon as Orlando Brown assumed office as Assistant Commissioner for the state in June 1865. From late summer to early fall 1865, the Bureau issued more than 350,000 rations at a cost of nearly \$33,000. By mid October 1865, however, the number of rations issued had declined from a previous 275,000 to less than 236,000. During the same period, the number of people receiving rations decreased from 16,298 to 11,622. In September 1866, with Commissioner Howard's limitation of government assistance to those persons in orphanages and hospitals, and the plan to relinquish relief efforts for the destitute to state and local government officials, the Bureau in Virginia issued rations to 4 fewer than 5,000 individuals statewide. Because the Virginia Bureau in 1866 and 1867 was committed to reducing expenditures and providing limited relief for those in dire need, by late September 1868 a large number of freedmen in the state still remained impoverished.

"The Virginia Bureau also opened several **hospitals** for the sick and infirm. At various times, hospitals were established at Eastville, Drummondtown, Norfolk, Hampton, Yorktown, Petersburg, Farmville, Lynchburg, Danville, Richmond, and City Point. [**Note:** these are not the only hospitals as there was a hospital in Gordonsville.] Under the direction of surgeon J. J. De Lamaster, 13 contract and 2 noncontract physicians provided treatment for more than 650 patients during 1865 and 1866. Two dispensaries administered more than 18,000 prescriptions for medicine. At Howard Grove Hospital near Richmond, Virginia, the Bureau opened a ward for the insane and a home for the aged and infirm. In the northern part of the state, homes were located for 139 inmates housed at an orphan asylum. By late October 1866, over 30,000 freedmen received medical aid from the Bureau in Virginia. By October 1867, that number increased to 50,000.

"The Bureau worked to **make freedmen self-sufficient and to incorporate them into the new free-labor system in Virginia**. Thousands of freedmen who crossed Union lines during the Civil

War continued to seek support from the Freedmen's Bureau at war's end. With great demand for labor in some areas (especially in large cities) and not in others, and the Federal Government's determination to reduce dependency on government aid, the Virginia Bureau provided transportation for persons who were unable to find work in areas where they resided to locations where work was readily available. Those able-bodied freedmen who refused or did not apply for transportation would no longer receive rations. Under labor agreements approved by the Virginia Bureau, freedmen received rations (but no clothing) and wages that averaged about \$9 per month. In some districts freedmen worked for a share of the crop. Often, however, with limited employment (especially during the winter months), low wages, inadequate shares of crops, and the failure of local officials to provide for the destitute, freedmen were constantly dependent upon the Bureau for subsistence.

**“Safeguarding rights and securing justice for freedmen** were major concerns of the Virginia Bureau. Following the Civil War, several Southern states, including Virginia, enacted a series of laws commonly known as **“black codes”** that restricted the rights and legal status of freedmen. Freedmen were often given harsh sentences for petty crimes and in some instances were unable to get their cases heard or to testify in state courts. In September 1865, Assistant Commissioner Orlando Brown established **Freedmen's Bureau courts** to adjudicate cases involving freedmen where the penalties did not exceed a \$100 fine or three months in prison. The three-member court was composed, for the most part, of a Bureau agent, a planter's representative, and an individual selected by freedmen. In February 1866, the Virginia legislature amended laws that adversely affected the rights of freedmen, and thus by early May 1866, Bureau courts were discontinued, and both civil and criminal cases were turned over to state authorities. However, because of the failure of many local court officials to administer equal justice (especially in areas outside of large cities and towns), the Bureau in Virginia found it necessary to re-establish Bureau courts in certain areas of the state. In late May 1867, Maj. Gen. Schofield, who served as both Commander of the 1st Military District and Assistant Commissioner for Virginia, issued orders appointing military commissioners to oversee the administration of justice in Bureau sub-districts throughout Virginia, giving them exclusive jurisdiction and power to decide whether a case would be tried by a civil court or a military commission. Despite the establishment of military commissioners however, protecting the rights and securing justice for freedpeople still remained an enormous problem for the Bureau as late as the fall of 1868.

“The Freedmen's Bureau's **educational activities** in Virginia began with Assistant Commissioner Brown's appointment of Prof. W. H. Woodbury as Virginia's superintendent of schools for freedmen on June 20, 1865. By November, he had been replaced by Ralza Morse Manly, the assistant superintendent of schools (later education), who served until August 15, 1870, when all Bureau educational activities ceased. Within six months of assuming office, Manly had more than 136 teachers instructing some 8,000 pupils. The number of teachers soon increased to more than 200, with nearly 18,000 students under instruction. During the years 1866 and 1867, freedmen schools continued to improve and expand. By the fall of 1868, there were nearly 270 schools in operation, with more than 350 teachers providing instruction for some 20,000 pupils. Schools assisted or maintained by the Bureau in Virginia included day schools for children, night schools for adults, and Sabbath schools. Students received instruction in such subjects as reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography. Many teachers were recruited from the North by freedmen's aid societies...

“Teachers were also recruited from among the local white and black populations. The Bureau’s educational support for freedmen schools generally involved assistance in 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. Teachers’ salaries were usually paid by freedmen’s aid societies; however, in some situations, salaries were partially subsidized by contributions from freedmen. Whenever possible, the Bureau solicited subscriptions from freedmen for the establishment of schools, and in some cases tuition was charged.”<sup>40</sup>

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From Family Search.com:

**Freedmen’s Bureau Virginia Field Office Personnel Coverage Table<sup>41</sup>**

Gordonsville	Capt. T. Frank Crandon	Superintendent, 4th District	August 1865 - June 1866
Gordonsville	Maj. William R. Morse	Superintendent, 4th District	June 1866 - December 1868

<sup>40</sup> Author unknown. “RECORDS OF THE FIELD OFFICES FOR THE STATE OF VIRGINIA, BUREAU OF REFUGEES, FREEDMEN, AND ABANDONED LANDS, 1865–1872.” *United States Congress and National Archives and Records Administration Washington, DC, 2006*, Google, Accessed June 16, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/microfilm/m1913.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Author unknown. “Freedmen’s Bureau Virginia Field Office Personnel Coverage Table.” *Family Search*, Google, Accessed June 16, 2021, [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Freedmen%E2%80%99s\\_Bureau\\_Virginia\\_Field\\_Office\\_Personnel\\_Coverage\\_Table](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Freedmen%E2%80%99s_Bureau_Virginia_Field_Office_Personnel_Coverage_Table)