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## The Challenges Faced by the Freedmen's Bureau Agents of Deep East Texas



The Challenges Faced by the Freedmen's Bureau Agents of Deep East Texas

By

Jacy Danet King, Bachelor of Arts

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
Stephen F. Austin State University  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements

For the Degree of  
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December 2018

THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE  
FREEDMEN'S BUREAU AGENTS OF DEEP EAST TEXAS

By

Jacy Danet King, Bachelor of Arts

APPROVED:

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Dr. Scott Sosebee, Thesis Director

---

Dr. Perky Beisel, Committee Member

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Dr. Andrew Lannen, Committee Member

---

Dr. Michael Martin, Committee Member

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Pauline M. Sampson, Ph.D.  
Dean of Research and Graduate Studies

## ABSTRACT

The years following the Civil War proved to be tumultuous for the nation and caused great social and economic upheaval in the South. Congress established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in 1865 to provide a smoother transition in former Confederate states and to guard the liberties of the former bondsmen. The agents of the Freedmen's Bureau in Deep East Texas faced the same challenges and hardships as their counterparts in other areas of the state and throughout the South. Numerous historians have written on Reconstruction and the Freedmen's Bureau in Texas, but in a broader sense.

This study primarily focused on the records left by the Freedmen's Bureau agents in the Deep East Texas counties of Nacogdoches, Angelina, Shelby, San Augustine, Sabine, and part of Cherokee. These primary sources uncovered a wealth of understanding into the problems that the agents faced during their tenure in their subdistricts which mirrored the situations faced by subassistant commissioners throughout the South.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is dedicated to all of my family. Without their support and encouragement, I would not have been able to complete this task. My mother and husband listened to my ideas and propelled me forward whenever I needed lifting up. Both of my young sons provided inspiration and understanding which allowed me to continue this endeavor to completion.

Dr. Sosebee guided me to and through this thesis topic with his expert advice, and my committee helped me clarify my thoughts which enabled me to tell this story. Any staff member at Stephen F. Austin that I came in contact with to ask questions or for assistance always provided that help with patience and reassurance. All of the courses I have taken at the university with this experience have been challenging, yet rewarding.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **The Clash of Cotton and the Birth of the Bureau**

One night in April of 1868, amidst the turmoil of Reconstruction, “some ruffians” broke into and vandalized the office of Freedmen’s Bureau Agent Alex Ferguson in Nacogdoches. The gang destroyed the door and windows of the building and scattered important government documents in the streets. Soon after, Ferguson received four threatening letters warning him to leave town. The small community of fewer than five hundred people began to turn increasingly more hostile toward the Bureau, its agents, and former slaves as the year continued. Known for its crops of corn rather than cotton, the town’s sizable population of freed bondsmen contributed to tensions after the Civil War. Klansmen rode the streets at night, former slaves, known as Freedmen, slept in the woods for protection, and Ferguson dared not leave the downtown area for fear of his life. His father-in-law had ventured out of the county weeks before to make business purchases and had not returned. Yet despite the

turmoil, Alex Ferguson, a young man in his mid-twenties and a stranger to East Texas, remained at his post.<sup>1</sup>

The agents of the Freedmen's Bureau in Deep East Texas faced the same challenges and hardships as their counterparts in other areas of the state and throughout the South. Most of them showed steadfast determination to counter injustices that had fallen on newly-freed men, women, and children since the conclusion of the Civil War. Immense changes took place throughout the South during the era of Reconstruction only to eventually fall back to a state of antebellum status quo. Brave men challenged callous acts of violence, and yet those mostly-forgotten deeds rarely surface in today's history books. Numerous historians have researched the Freedmen's Bureau of Texas with broad strokes as they successfully painted an overview of the various trials and tribulations of Bureau subassistant commissioners, called agents, across the entire state of Texas, mentioning those that served deeper East Texas. This work endeavored to focus solely on those selected counties and the actions of their respective agents more fully.

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<sup>1</sup> Ferguson to Lt. J.P. Richardson, April 15, 1868 & May 1, 1868, Roll 11, Letters Received. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-CVPS?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB7%3A1513612102%2C1513624257> : accessed 1 December 2018), Texas > Roll 11, Letters received, D-G, 1867-1869 > image 326 of 677; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

Despite moderate fruitful gains, the agents of the Deep East Texas Freedmen's Bureau faced the demise of their short-lived organization and watched helplessly as the South was "redeemed" and a dark era slowly surfaced for Freedmen and their descendants that lasted a century. Some historians would argue that most of the failure occurred at the hands of the subassistant commissioners within their subdistricts. While the majority of agents in Texas and throughout the South performed their duties to the utmost of their abilities, some lacked their moral compass and failed individually. Ultimately, however, the failure of the Freedmen's Bureau resulted from its militaristic organization, underestimation of needs, and the lack of time and funds provided. All of which affected and hindered each agent as he tried to defend the civil liberties of the Freedmen as best he could under the given circumstances.

The process of emancipating slaves first emerged in other areas that bordered the Atlantic Ocean decades before the United States faced the challenge and directly affected the nation's course. Abolition and emancipation arrived in the Atlantic imperial colonies during the nineteenth century but reached each area at different times and for diverse reasons. Haitian slaves first received liberation from their French oppressors after the island's revolution concluded in 1804. Other colonies (with Brazil being the last in 1888) implemented emancipation in their own way, all of which led to economic and social ramifications. Empires such as the British and Portuguese practiced a gradual

release of their bondsmen into freedom beginning in 1833 due to a dwindling need for their labor force. After full emancipation in 1838, British colonies such as Trinidad and Tobago, converted their economic system from a slave-based economy to wage labor.<sup>2</sup> Three decades later, the United States patterned its emancipation experiment after the British model by introducing ideas such as sharecropping in which Freedmen worked the land of a former master who paid them wages only after selling the crops.

Reconstruction in the United States followed the American Civil War, which ended in April of 1865. Its purpose focused on rebuilding the country by bringing the Confederacy back into the fold, transitioning millions of former bondsmen into their new roles as citizens, and shifting the South's economy to function without slave labor. Republican president Abraham Lincoln wanted the guidelines for readmission to be lenient, but his assassination thwarted the implementation of his ideas. President Andrew Johnson adopted Lincoln's plan but quickly clashed with Congress for pardoning many former Confederates and allowing the South to elect those same Democrats to office. Southern state legislatures soon enacted laws called Black Codes in their attempt to preserve a pre-Civil War society. Those laws placed limits on the rights of Freedmen. Former slaves

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<sup>2</sup> Bridget Brereton, ed., *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Postemancipation Social and Cultural History* (Barbados: University of the West Indies, 1999), 55-56.

could be jailed for not having jobs and denied the ability to travel freely. They could not hold public office or serve on juries. The lack of change in the South under President Johnson outraged Radical Republicans who wanted to punish their former enemy, so in 1867 they asserted their power by passing the Reconstruction Acts. The laws divided the South into five military districts, denied suffrage to former Confederate leaders, and helped African Americans register to vote. The former Confederate states had to acknowledge the Reconstruction Amendments which gave citizenship and suffrage to all males over the age of twenty-one. With the aid of Union troops, African-American citizens saw greater freedoms and for a brief period rejoiced to see the first of their race to be elected to Congress and other state and local offices. The clash between Republicans and Democrats continued in the South until 1877. The Republican nominee for president in 1876, Rutherford B. Hayes, agreed to accept that the Democrats had redeemed the South and promised the removal of troops in exchange for confirmation of his contested victory as President of the United States.

Prior to 1876, emancipation came to the shores of Texas on June 19th, 1865, with an announcement made by General Gordon Granger from the balcony of Ashton Villa located in Galveston. He arrived with a few thousand Union troops. African Americans would later celebrate the anniversary of this event as Juneteenth. Reconstruction formally began in Texas with the arrival of the provisional governor, Alexander J. Hamilton, in the summer of 1865. Governor

Hamilton's primary goals according to Carl Moneyhon in his work, *Republicanism in Reconstruction Texas*, consisted of "abolishing slavery, creating a constitution that would guarantee basic civil rights to Freedmen, and putting local governments into the hands of loyal citizens of the Union." The Governor was astonished at the number of letters he received almost daily informing him of murders and atrocities committed against Freedmen and white Union sympathizers. Hamilton did not seem to have an organized plan for how he was going to accomplish his goals and the fact that men swarmed him for patronage did not help his predicament.<sup>3</sup> Gentlemen that served the Union Party prior to the war dominated his appointments, but he failed to consider their actions during and after the conflict. Many of his hastily-chosen appointees had owned slaves or had served in the Confederate Army.<sup>4</sup> As roars of disapproval came to Hamilton about his appointments, he made adjustments as needed by seating men with more proven loyalty.

After state elections, the Constitutional Convention met in March of 1866. The new document acknowledged the thirteenth amendment but barred other basic civil rights to Freedmen, and denied them access to the education

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<sup>3</sup> Carl H. Moneyhon, *Republicanism in Reconstruction Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Carl H. Moneyhon, *Texas after the Civil War: The Struggle of Reconstruction* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 28.

fund, state offices, and interracial marriages. After that meeting, Texas and other Southern states resolved to return to their antebellum practices and conventions. Unionists and radical-minded Texans bemoaned their state of affairs and worked for changes mirroring the national scene in Washington. Many new Republican Congressmen held seats after the 1866 elections, and soon the federal Reconstruction Act of 1867 spread across the nation. Scores of local government appointees in Texas were swept out of their offices and replaced by men with more devotion to the true spirit of reform. Governor Throckmorton suffered that same fate as radical ideas replaced his conservative views in the state's politics. Test oaths became a prerequisite for those in office, and new elections took place. Thousands of Republican Freedmen registered to vote under the protection of Union Leagues and the military. With their party as a majority at the new Constitutional Convention, a document more favorable to the North was written by the fall of 1869, and Edmund J. Davis, a progressive Republican, was elected governor of Texas. Reform could now take place. According to Moneyhon, Governor Davis had three goals for Texas: "to secure law and order, to usher in economic development and to bring legitimacy to his new government." Davis moved swiftly to pass his proposals for reform but

people questioned if the new laws worked or if they aided the goal of attracting more people into the Republican Party.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most controversial laws that Davis passed was the establishment of a state militia and the Texas State Police force. The latter was formed to help stem the violence that was happening across the state with the militia being used to back up the state police as needed. His opponents felt that the formation of a state police force was an act of tyranny. Most whites felt uncomfortable with the idea that the organization used Freedmen in their ranks. Even though the police force curbed the brutality, the Thirteenth Legislature later abolished it.

Reforms enacted by Radical Republicanism strove to reconfigure Southern society, but resentment of such a goal, as well as opposition to rising taxes, led to considerable backlash among Texas voters. Davis tried to explain to the citizens the cost of progress and stated, "If you live in a hut and sleep under a Mexican blanket, it will cost you less than if you fabricate an elegant building. If you have no government it will cost you nothing. If you have public schools and law and order, you must pay for it."<sup>6</sup> That sentiment, however, mostly fell on deaf ears. The Democrats knew he was in trouble and rallied against their oppressor. The cost of government had gone up 400 percent between 1866 and

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<sup>5</sup> Moneyhon, *Texas after the Civil War*, 135.

<sup>6</sup> Moneyhon, *Republicanism in Reconstruction Texas*, 163.



1870 and so in 1871, citizens held a bipartisan Taxpayers' Convention, which significantly tarnished Davis's reputation.<sup>7</sup>

During the election of 1873, Governor Davis had little hope of holding on to his office. Violence kept blacks away from the polls, and increased white franchisement empowered the growing Democratic Party, so Richard Coke trounced Davis. Coke began a tradition of Democratic governors in Texas that lasted more than one hundred years. Coke and his administration went so far as to have Davis removed from office before his term was over, thus ending Reconstruction in Texas.

Texas, mainly because of its geographic location, exhibited a different reality after the Civil War when compared to other Southern states. Even in 1865, the state still possessed a frontier zone still troubled by Native American hostilities. The state also possessed a unique history of slavery that differed from other Southern states because of its origin and traditions. When Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, the government encouraged white settlers to come to Texas. Even though the Mexican government outlawed slaves, new immigrants brought them into Texas. When white Texans outnumbered Mexican citizens, Texas fought for independence and succeeded in 1836 thus preserving the American practice of slavery.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 161.

Andrew Torget explains in his book, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850*, there existed “three driving forces in early Texas: cotton, slavery, and empire”.<sup>8</sup> The Republic of Texas not only vied against the United States to win favor with England and France to secure a position in the global marketplace for cotton, but the fledgling country also wrestled with threats from Mexico and Native Americans who desired to reclaim their land. Despite these worries, cotton reigned supreme and farmers brought their slaves into the new country thus increasing their population from 1837 to 1840. Soon after the creation of the nation, the Republic of Texas's Congress met and passed laws protecting the institution of slavery. Texas leaders such as President Mirabeau B. Lamar touted his nation as an empire made to shelter slave owners from the biting rhetoric of the abolitionists in the United States. Receiving recognition from other countries proved difficult as many shunned away due to Texas’s unstable relationship with Mexico and its firm grip on slavery, an institution European nations had loosened.<sup>9</sup> President Sam Houston knew well that his weak and economically broken nation needed the protection and guidance of the United States and he steered the Texans toward annexation in 1845.

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 206-210.

In the years between annexation and the Civil War, the population of Texas grew by 325 percent according to Randolph B. Campbell in his work, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*, from 142,000 in 1847 to 604,215 by 1860.<sup>10</sup> The majority had migrated from the Southern parts of the United States and a quarter of those immigrants owned slaves. Campbell continues by explaining that Texans enjoyed small cities instead of urban centers and that the sheer size of Texas hindered industrial growth in the large state. Most occupations, if not directly agricultural, centered on the needs of those in that field, such as cotton ginning and shipping. Although there existed other crops in Texas such as corn and sugar, cotton rose by 643 percent in just ten years from 1849 to 1859, consequently increasing the workload and need for slave labor.<sup>11</sup> By 1850, 30 percent of the population was made up of slaves mostly living on plantations in the eastern sections of the state. Texas's slave population remained low until the war when slave owners from other states began bringing their bondsmen across the borders to keep them away from the frontlines. The state also experienced less battles during the conflict which left the state intact and with a lingering fighting spirit that lamented the "Lost Cause." Citizens realized they had been beaten and their lives were about to change forever, but

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<sup>10</sup> Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 207.

<sup>11</sup> Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 210.

harbored uncertainty of how that would occur. Since much of the white population, whether they owned slaves or not, dealt in some aspect of cotton production, the occupation by the Northern victors brought apprehension when considering their social and economic lives. Poorer white citizens now worried as former slaves entered the workforce and became their competition for employment.

A vital component in understanding Reconstruction in Texas comes from the study conducted by Randolph B. Campbell in *Grass-Roots Reconstruction in Texas, 1865-1880*. He carefully dissected six Texas counties and revealed vital information when studying this era because they “differed from one another extensively.”<sup>12</sup> In Colorado County, for example, the population included twenty to twenty-five percent German immigrants and forty-five percent of African Americans. The switch to Congressional Reconstruction did not affect the county as much as some of the others since, similarly like Jefferson and Nueces Counties, Colorado County originally seated office holders that were loyal and never slave owners. The Republican Party held firm in this county due to its ethnic diversity well into the 1880s, long after Governor Davis had stepped down.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Randolph B. Campbell, *Grass-roots Reconstruction in Texas, 1865-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 4.

Campbell chose Colorado, Dallas, Harrison, Jefferson, McLennan, and Nueces Counties.

<sup>13</sup> Campbell, *Grass-roots Reconstruction in Texas*, 27-62.

Harrison County, on the other hand, possessed the closest resemblance to the Old South during its antebellum days with numerous cotton plantations and the use of slave labor. This county, and others such as Dallas and McLennan, had to replace a good deal of the original local office holders when Congressional Reconstruction began. When suffrage came to Freedmen, their population contained seventy-four percent of registered voters in the county.<sup>14</sup> That majority waned due to violence and intimidation at the polls in addition to shady voting practices that ended in over one thousand Republican votes being thrown out during the election of 1878. Democrats eventually took over the county and its society looked as it had during the antebellum years.<sup>15</sup> Dallas County did not have cotton production because of the lack of railroads and navigable rivers. After voter registration, Freedmen represented thirty-one percent of those registered even though they comprised only sixteen percent of the population. This inflation happened in other counties as well where whites could not pass the test oath or had been a Confederate and thus were excluded from suffrage. However, Dallas County wanted to grow and because of that desire, the citizens took a moderate stance to speed up the process of Reconstruction so that they could look to a future burgeoning economy. Campbell also pointed out that the amount of federal presence and the

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<sup>14</sup> Campbell, *Grass-roots Reconstruction in Texas*, 98-141.

<sup>15</sup> Campbell, *Grass-roots Reconstruction in Texas*, 134.

Freedmen's Bureau differed in each county, which greatly impacted the different areas. His study shows that Texas, with its immense size, ethnic makeup, and diversified geography reacted differently with the era depending on those factors.<sup>16</sup>

Northeast Texas especially felt the brunt of restless, aggressive gangs during those years. The authors of *The Devil's Triangle: Ben Bickerstaff, Northeast Texans, and the War of Reconstruction* chronicle those events. After the Civil War, many disgruntled Confederate veterans made their way back home to Northeast Texas and the surrounding area with plans that did not include reconciliation with the Union. Those men, such as Bickerstaff, Cullen Montgomery Baker, and Bob Lee, set about finding like-minded ruffians to band together in the name of the "Lost Cause." Their targets were any former slaves or Union sympathizers that crossed their paths. The thugs stole belongings, raped women, set buildings on fire, and murdered innocent people all for the sake of personal revenge. They tended to run in small gangs unless they neared the territory of others criminals, at which point they joined like attracting magnets. When they banded together with members of the newly formed Ku Klux Klan, their numbers reached approximately five hundred. Such a reality put fear into residents of towns such as Marshall, Jefferson, and Sulphur Springs,

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<sup>16</sup> Campbell, *Grass-roots Reconstruction in Texas*, 63-97.

especially for the African-American citizens and Union sympathizers. Their force seemed to be unstoppable and their notoriety began to spread around the country. The Union Army attempted to put an end to the violence but often failed, hindered by the gangs' quick escapes through the thickets of the area. Eventually, with the aid of vengeful citizens, the army was able to rid the area of each gang leader thus finally putting an end to the majority of heinous crimes.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau**

The United States took an extra step by initiating the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in an attempt to remedy racial conflicts between former masters and their newly freed labor force. The agency not only dealt with unoccupied lands and refugees, but aided destitute whites, orphans, and the disabled or elderly who sought support in the worn-torn regions of the South. The organization endured from March of 1865 until the summer of 1872 instead of lasting only a year as originally envisioned. The Freedmen's Bureau, as it was most commonly called, existed as part of the United States Army under

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<sup>17</sup>James M. Smallwood, Kenneth W. Howell, and Carol C. Taylor, *The Devil's Triangle: Ben Bickerstaff, Northeast Texans, and the War of Reconstruction* (Lufkin, Texas: Best of East Texas Publishers, 2007).

the Department of War and Union General Oliver O. Howard headed the Bureau during those years.

Five generals served as assistant commissioners in Texas while the Bureau existed. They all served for less than a year for different reasons. The first was Edgar M. Gregory, considered an extremely zealous man who took his duty seriously. He eagerly made two tours of Texas to assess the state. Gregory had a sincere admiration for Freedmen in a paternalistic manner. He considered them docile and patient while acting commendably considering their plight. There was animosity between the assistant commissioner and the planters, however, and after several complaints to President Johnson, he was removed from his office.<sup>18</sup> The next gentlemen to take the reins was Joseph B. Kiddoo. He considered the Bureau to be the "guardian of the Freedman to see that he gets a fair and equitable bargain."<sup>19</sup> Kiddoo placed education as a top priority and made Bureau services available for more people in the state. However, he clashed with conservative Governor Throckmorton and was eventually removed as well. Charles Griffin, who was the replacement, had the advantage of a

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<sup>18</sup> The term *planter* is most commonly used to describe a plantation owner, but can be used to identify a man owning large amounts of real estate either with or without slaves. Alexander Ferguson, the Bureau agent for Nacogdoches, uses the term *planter* to describe former plantation owners which is how the word is used in this thesis.

<sup>19</sup> Barry A. Crouch, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 24.



combined power of both Bureau and military force.<sup>20</sup> As a result of that structure, decisions happened more efficiently, and so the organization quickly expanded. Griffin was an effective leader who had to deal with tough times due to weather conditions that damaged crops which exasperated the current troubled conditions. Although he made good gains, he failed to move inland when a yellow fever epidemic struck Texas, and he died in 1867. The final assistant commissioner for the Freedmen's Bureau before its demise was Joseph J. Reynolds. According to William L. Richter in *Overreached on All Sides: The Freedmen's Bureau Administrators in Texas, 1865-1868*, Reynolds was a nice gentleman but he focused primarily on political issues instead of economic ones that had a more significant impact on Freedmen. He also had the difficult task of taking over at a time when Congress wanted the Freedmen's Bureau to stand back and let local authorities handle most of the cases. In most instances, as Reynolds knew well, those officials still harbored hatred for the former slaves and so most of the trials ended in a farce.<sup>21</sup> Edward Canby concluded the list of assistant commissioners, but served only briefly and as the Bureau exited Texas. In turn, those men appointed numerous subassistant commissioners to manage the day-to-day operations during that tumultuous time. Each agent's subdistrict

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<sup>20</sup> William L. Richter, *Overreached on All Sides the Freedmen's Bureau Administrators in Texas, 1865-1868* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 149.

<sup>21</sup> William L. Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 254.

consisted of two to five counties and thus often covered vast areas of land. Bureau administrators ordered agents to confront an idea that had previously ignored: race relations between the black and white populations. They worked directly with planters and Freedmen and acted as mediators, clerks, lawmen, judges, and protectors. Vehemently hated by the majority of the white population in their district, most agents faced threats to their lives. According to Barry Crouch in his book, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans*, six agents were murdered while performing their duties. He explained that agents were to "implement these [Reconstruction] laws, protect blacks in their newly won freedom, attempt to maintain peaceful relations between the two races, and provide economic direction." The overworked agents also had to act as counselors, judges, and champions for education all while dealing with mounds of paperwork and a never-ending stream of complaints and crimes.<sup>22</sup>

The Freedmen's Bureau benefitted Freedmen in a number of ways. James Smallwood's work, *Time of Hope, Time of Despair: Black Texans during Reconstruction*, explains that shortly after emancipation, the black population felt the need to *test* their new independence. Nearly 75,000 left the state in search of family, jobs, or merely to see if they could. Many remained, however, trapped in a system of sharecropping that closely resembled slavery. Smallwood is quick

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<sup>22</sup> Crouch, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans*, 128-131.

to point out the Freedmen's ability to help themselves. In the several months before the Freedmen's Bureau arrived in Texas, black communities raced to begin educating themselves in small, scattered groups located wherever they were allowed and by whatever teacher they could find. African Americans almost entirely separated from white churches and even pooled their money together to build churches and staff their own preachers. Sometimes, church buildings were funded and filled by several denominations taking turns for services.<sup>23</sup>

With the arrival of the Bureau, many Freedmen sought their local Bureau agent's help in obtaining wages their employers denied to them and asked for aid in finding lost loved ones sold off during slavery. After emancipation, the South had incorporated the British model of apprenticeships which included forcing or deceiving parents of young children to sign their youths over to former masters as workers in exchange for their basic care.<sup>24</sup> Those parents desperately desired their children out of apprenticeships and looked to the agents for guidance. The Bureau offices did what they could to solve economic and social questions such as those and obtain funding and land for building new schools.

Challenges existed with the education of Freedmen. First of all, the buildings themselves became victims of arson or defilement. Richter tells of a situation in

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<sup>23</sup> James M. Smallwood, *Time of Hope, Time of Despair: Black Texans During Reconstruction* (Port Washington N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1981), 100.

<sup>24</sup> Brereton, *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition*, 80-81.

a Paris, Texas Freedmen schoolhouse where a group of white girls entered the building at night and defecated on the desks and in the water buckets.<sup>25</sup> There was also the problem of enrollment. Many children had to help with the crops and so enrollment tended to fluctuate with seasons. Also, there was sometimes a tuition fee for attending. Although it was small, many parents could not pay that price and their children suffered. Anger existed among some Freedmen circles because schools remained segregated. The biggest hurdle to overcome was finding teachers. The preference was for white, male, Union-born teachers because of the extreme violence in the communities. Female teachers had a rough time finding houses in which to board. They found it difficult to escape the extremely damaging lies that abounded in the towns about their morality. The daily taunts from white citizens overwhelmed many of them.<sup>26</sup>

The Bureau's agents attempted to offer the black community protection from white mobs and their extreme violence. The Ku Klux Klan and similar gangs raided communities at night to try and scare Freedmen into submission. At times, Freedmen seeking help from the Bureau caused those Klan outbursts.

The Bureau aided freemen politically by helping them register to vote. The African-American voters sometimes outnumbered white voters in some counties,

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<sup>25</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 234.

<sup>26</sup> Smallwood, *Time of Hope*, 79-80.

especially when laws excluded former Confederates from the polls. With that advantage and along with white Unionists, Republicans won many elected seats. Reconstruction obtained several black politicians with the help of those votes, and many more Freedmen won local county positions.

The Freedmen's Bureau agents had diverse backgrounds. Enlisted officers were the first choice for men to hold the subassistant commissioner position followed by recently mustered-out veterans, and then Southern citizens loyal to the Union. White, Southern civilians that sided with the Republican Party faced scorn and backlash from their Democratic neighbors. Each group contained pros and cons. The Union military men proved better prepared for the rigorous demands that the administration could place on them, but they were unfamiliar with the local people and the culture. A civilian's main disadvantage tended to be the lack of familiarity with the structure of paperwork and other formalities of the military. Scalawags, although severely hated by their community, did have the advantage of knowing the backgrounds of citizens which proved valuable. Most of those gentlemen possessed such a noble character that even when faced with violence and a lack of resources, they pushed on with their goals and attempted to make life bearable for Freedmen in their area. Crouch spends a considerable amount of time honoring a young agent named William G. Kirkman, who, despite

his best enthusiastic efforts, was gunned down by the outlaw Cullen Baker.<sup>27</sup> William Richter negatively viewed agents as incompetent drunks and embezzlers. He adds a quote from the Texas Bureau's chief inspector, William Sinclair, bemoaning about his job which dealt with "swindling, lying, drunken, worthless, and inefficient bureau agents."<sup>28</sup> Despite either view, most served their districts at their own peril and faced angry planters and Ku Klux Klan members threatening violence. The agents that assisted Deep East Texas shared these experiences.

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<sup>27</sup> Crouch, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans*, 70-73.

<sup>28</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 271.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Agent Ferguson and his Nightmare in Nacogdoches

The news of emancipation reached the shores of Texas on June 19, 1865. After the war ended, chaos reigned across the South as soldiers traveled back home to discuss the devastation of lost loved-ones and the destruction of property. When Major General Gordon Granger emerged on the balcony of Galveston's Ashton Villa, he issued General Order #3, which proclaimed the slaves' freedom. He further advised the slaves to stay on their plantations and work for wages as to avoid idleness which encouraged the wage-labor system as a replacement for slavery.

Granger's order spread throughout Texas at various speeds and with different reactions. Former slaves had an important decision to make: to stay or to go. Susan Ross, a former slave south of Jasper, told of how her older brother gave a whoop and bid his mother goodbye. He then scooped her up in a hug, kissed her, and exclaimed, "Brother gone, don't 'spect you ever see me no more."<sup>29</sup> He

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<sup>29</sup> Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 3, Lewis-Ryles. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn163/>.

then jumped a high fence, never to return. Lacking education and possessions, many newly freed people chose to stay despite their feelings of being trapped. Others, hoping emancipation would lead to the return of loved ones sold away years before, decided to remain on the plantations. All told, seventy-five thousand Freedmen left Texas in search of better opportunities, or to reunite with their loved ones, which created a labor shortage for their former masters still in need of rebuilding the economy.

The Bureau would not reach the deeper sections of East Texas until the spring of 1867 because other areas of the state proved a priority due to race hostilities or a larger concentration of former slaves. An office existed in Marshall, Texas and served as the closest location for grievances until more direct help arrived. During those years of transition, the white population became increasingly alarmed due to changing social statuses and a lack of guidance through uncertain times. The citizens of Melrose, Texas gathered to initiate an order that “each member thereof shall do every thing [sic] in their power to dispossess Negroes of fire arms [sic] and ammunition” unless under the “immediate Control of proper white persons.”<sup>30</sup> The leaders of Nacogdoches signed a petition on November 30th of 1865 asking the Freedmen’s Bureau that

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<sup>30</sup> L. T. Barret Collection (A-274), East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library, Stephen F. Austin State University. <http://archives.sfasu.edu/repositories/2/resources/79>.



the “Freedmen of this section of this state be informed of their exact civil status” and stressing the importance of their finding useful employment with the white race. The document continues to state that thus far, “the negroes have been left in doubt and consequently have indulged in extravagant conjectures in neglect to their rights and duties in their new relation.”<sup>31</sup> They requested the Bureau send instructions as soon as practicable. Help did not arrive directly in their area for almost eighteen more months.

The Freedmen’s Bureau agents encountered many of the same struggles their fellow agents did across the South and elsewhere in Texas: conflicts between white citizens and Freedmen, a lack of supplies and support of civil authorities, and the constant threat of violence. Many scholars have not focused entirely on East Texas districts during the first few years after the Civil War because it lacked prominence in the cotton kingdom and did not contain the volume of atrocities that occurred in other areas of Texas such as in Marshall or Sulphur Springs. Nacogdoches housed the headquarters for the Fiftieth Subdistrict, which included Nacogdoches and Angelina Counties and the

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<sup>31</sup> Letter to the Assistant Commissioner from the citizens of Nacogdoches, November 30th 1865. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-89TL-?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XBM%3A1513612102%2C1513614701> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 17, Unregistered letters received, 1865-1866 > image 424 of 1304; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

southern part of Cherokee County. This region faced its share of violence and turmoil, and the Bureau agents assigned to this post witnessed such events. Edwin Onley Gibson, the first post commander of the Nacogdoches district, took control of the post on May 13th of 1867 and soon rented an office from Frederick Voight for twelve dollars a month. Just a few years earlier, Captain Gibson bravely served in the Union army representing his state of New York. He suffered severe wounds, and was later captured and held as a prisoner of war. Despite such experiences, Gibson decided to make a career in the military and earned the rank of second lieutenant. He was assigned to the Seventeenth Infantry in 1866 before arriving in Nacogdoches. Most of the cases that Gibson and other agents of the Freeman's Bureau handled centered on disputes and crimes between Freedmen and the white population or between Freedmen themselves.

E. O. Gibson's first report to Bureau headquarters in July of 1867 spoke of serious matters that had occurred several months prior, but had remained unreported or investigated until the presence of the Bureau<sup>32</sup>. Just before

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<sup>32</sup> Report to Bureau from Gibson, August, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8Q4P-1?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB6%3A1513612102%2C1513766491> : accessed 7 December 2018), Texas > Roll 32, Registered reports of murders and outrages, Sept 1866-July 1867 > image 211 of 290; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

Christmas of the previous year, a young Freedman, John Wolfe, had been murdered in Cherokee County and his body discovered in the Angelina River with his hands and legs bound along with bullet wounds in his head. Julia Ann Wolfe grieved for the loss of her son and told the agents that just before this incident, the white citizens of Linwood, Robert Diamond and George McGhee, approached her seeking the whereabouts of her son who had gone to Shreveport. Because she failed to inform them of his travels, they proceeded to march her to a nearby blacksmith shed, stripped her nearly nude, and took turns whipping her with a saw until they tired and "the blood ran down like water."<sup>33</sup> The motive of her son's murder remained unclear, but the witnesses agreed that Diamond visited the home of William Evans knowing John Wolfe and other Freedmen resided there looking to contract with Evans. Diamond's gang included other local white citizens such as Dane Richardson, Phil Wolfe, and William Land. They called for John Wolfe to appear outside and soon the group led him into the woods in the direction of the river. Shots rang out some time later.<sup>34</sup> The local authorities arrested Diamond, but he then escaped jail.

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<sup>33</sup> Statements given in the Wolfe murder case to Bureau agent, August 23, 1867. "Texas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1870," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9MX-Q9C9-Z?cc=1989155&wc=94K7-SPK%3A266076901%2C266080401> : 22 May 2014), Nacogdoches > Roll 24, Miscellaneous records, Jan 1866-Dec 1868 > image 53 of 99; citing NARA microfilm publication M1912 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Not all of the clashes the subassistant commissioners of the Bureau dealt with included Freedmen. The government empowered them to hear cases between the white citizens of their section when acts of intimidation or assault occurred due to political party tension. Democratic citizens despised their Union-sympathizing neighbors, or scalawags, and tempers sometimes flared. Nacogdoches resident William Burroughs shot another white citizen, James M. Hazlett in the shoulder for “uttering Union sentiments.”<sup>35</sup> Hazlett came from Alabama and had served in the Union army during the war. The military attempted to apprehend Burroughs, but he escaped despite being under gunfire.<sup>36</sup>

An agent’s responsibilities to his subdistrict remained a never-ending job. Subassistant commissioner John B. Whitesides who served near Courtney, Texas lamented that “he could not even leave the house for a moment without someone running down the road after him, begging his advice and assistance.”<sup>37</sup> The administrators of Nacogdoches knew this feeling all too well as Gibson reported numerous incidents that occurred throughout the spring and summer of 1867. A merchant in Melrose, Texas by the name of Mr. Simpson shot and wounded a Freedman named Augustus and his wife for their refusal to buy

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 50.

anything from his store. Simpson received a bond of \$2000. In Linn Flat during June, Mr. Blackwell shot a Freedman named Nathan Hudson in the arm without provocation. Gibson's report also included the murder of a Freedman name Elijah by Hosea (Jose) Montes who also escaped after apprehension.<sup>38</sup> Gibson states that three other homicides within a twenty-mile radius of Nacogdoches occurred during the last eighteen months with no progress made in any of the cases. He continued to state the impossibility to make an arrest with infantry since the implicated parties kept "out of the way" once the troops arrived.<sup>39</sup> On September 2<sup>nd</sup> of 1867, Gibson left for Tyler, Texas due to reassignment and officially handed the reins of the post to Pennsylvanian native, T. (Thomas) M.K. Smith.<sup>40</sup> Smith, like Gibson, served in the military for numerous years as his

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<sup>38</sup> Report to Bureau from E. O. Gibson of murders and assaults in Nacogdoches, August 1, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8Q4P-1?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB6%3A1513612102%2C1513766491> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 32, Registered reports of murders and outrages, Sept 1866-July 1867 > image 211 of 290; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>39</sup> Report to Bureau from E. O. Gibson, July 22, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TD-N78S?cc=2427901&wc=73RQ-S5C%3A1513612102%2C1513629301> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 5, Letters received, D-G, 1866-1867 > image 884 of 923; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Lieut. J. F. Kirkman from E. O. Gibson, September 2, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-CVC9?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB7%3A1513612102%2C1513624257> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 11, Letters received, D-G, 1867-1869 > image 378 of 677; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the

career. During the Civil War, the Confederates captured him and placed Smith in the infamous Andersonville prison.<sup>41</sup> Now in Nacogdoches, Colonel (also referred to as Captain) Smith handled the case of the Freedman Jordan King in his first report to the Bureau. The case represented an example of how agents presided over incidents that occurred between Freedmen. King, a sturdy-built father and husband, stood accused of murdering his half-brother, Isaac, and also assaulting his sister, Vina Jones. According to the reports, during that previous January, the two brothers began quarreling about salted pork. They took the argument outside where witnesses say Isaac armed himself with a shovel because Jordan kept threatening to kill him with a knife. A white neighbor tried to calm them down and talked Isaac into laying down the shovel, but Jordan jumped his brother and stabbed him several times. Isaac managed to retrieve the shovel after being wounded and hit Jordan across the head before they both fell wounded. Isaac survived his wounds for several weeks, but later succumbed to fever and a cough. Doctors determined that the knife had punctured his lung during the struggle and he died because of Jordan's attack. Jordan later attacked his sister in her home surrounded by a group of family and friends because he believed she abused their mother. Jordan kicked, slapped, and hit

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Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>41</sup> Obituary of Lieutenant-Colonel T. M. K. Smith, *The Oregonian*, 4 Mar 1901, page 10.

his sister with a hickory stick in front of witnesses. Jordan King also avoided arrest.<sup>42</sup>

During the rest of that report, Smith mentions that any previous criminal listed still remained at large. Criminals in the Piney Woods of East Texas eluded the Bureau officials often by disappearing into the thick forests or being harbored by like-minded friends or family. Smith, along with many other agents, begged repeatedly to rent a horse which would greatly aid him in apprehending those suspects. Horses and the funds to obtain them remained in short supply during this era and most of the time that request remained unanswered.<sup>43</sup> He explained that the feeling between the races stayed bitter, but were improving every day in his opinion. He worked from 8 am to 5 pm in his office, and seventy-eight troops attempted to guard the freedoms given by the Civil Rights Bill. In comparison, the number of troops in neighboring San Augustine never reached double-digits. A few blocks from his downtown office stood a university building opened less

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<sup>42</sup> Testimony in King murder case, March 1, 1867. "Texas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1870," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9MX-Q9CQ-G?cc=1989155&wc=94K7-SPK%3A266076901%2C266080401> : 22 May 2014), Nacogdoches > Roll 24, Miscellaneous records, Jan 1866-Dec 1868 > image 64 of 99; citing NARA microfilm publication M1912 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>43</sup> Report to Bureau from T. M. K. Smith, October 5, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z917-4?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XY5%3A1513612102%2C1513615901> : accessed Fall of 2018), Texas > Roll 22, Reports, operations and conditions, Sept-Oct 1867 > image 476 of 1084; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

than a decade before. During the Civil War, this structure had served as a hospital for Confederate soldiers. During Reconstruction, however, the structure housed the former Union soldiers and Bureau agents during their service in Nacogdoches.<sup>44</sup>

Historians agree that former slaves' chief desire included the hope of owning their own land and having the freedom to profit from their choice of crops. Barry Crouch explains that approximately eighty percent of Freedmen "worked the land in some form" but they had "little to no money to purchase land and the Freedmen's Bureau had no confiscated property for blacks to buy."<sup>45</sup> Despite their new liberation, many of these people remained tied to a planter's land in a system devised to resemble slavery. Crouch in *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texas* states that part of the job of the administrators of the Freedmen's Bureau included teaching the planters how to manage in a wage-labor economic system. Assistant commissioner Edgar M. Gregory noted that the planters seemed reluctant but willing to cooperate as he "instructed the owners about their new obligations."<sup>46</sup> Crouch explains that planters grew angry at the task-

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<sup>44</sup> Today, it is known as the Old University Building.

<sup>45</sup> Barry A. Crouch, "Unmanacled" Texas Reconstruction: A Twenty-Year Perspective. Texas State Historical Association. *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Volume 93, July 1989 - April, 1990, periodical, 1990; Austin, Texas. (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph101213/: accessed December 7, 2018), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting Texas State Historical Association.

<sup>46</sup> Barry A. Crouch, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1992) 16.



oriented way the former bondsmen worked the fields. Black laborers worked relentlessly when the crops demanded, but rested when the demand was not needed during the growth cycle. Many planters fumed and wrongly cited laziness on the part of their contracted hands which differed greatly to their Puritan work ethic which consisted of the appearance of constant toiling.<sup>47</sup> Most cases Smith dealt with involved the settling of accounts from services rendered by the Freedmen on those former plantation lands. Like most former slaves working the land as sharecroppers in the South, if Freedmen (or poor white sharecroppers) provided their own supplies and food, they received half of the profits once the crops sold. If their employer furnished the supplies and food, they received one-third of the earnings. The corn crops of the Nacogdoches district flourished in 1867, but the cotton crop failed due to an infestation of worms. Throughout the South, crop failures brought added turmoil between the races as land owners sought to cheat the Freedmen out of any profits they earned.

The Bureau agents certainly did not work in isolation from each other and corresponded with other officials in the surrounding subdistricts if the need arose. Colonel Smith received a letter around that same time from his counterpart, Agent Johnson in Sumpter, Texas. The letter detailed a break-in incident of

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<sup>47</sup> Crouch, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans*, 115.

Johnson's office that occurred while the agent recovered from illness at home and the absence of the guard who left to have dinner. Edward L. Robb, a young husband and father of Angelina County, broke in through the back door of the office and stole the guard's gun. Mr. Robb served as a Captain for the Confederacy during the Civil War and deemed it appropriate to return to the empty office several times on that evening to escort others in to "see the show--- a torn and trampled United States flag."<sup>48</sup> Johnson tried to apprehend the suspect, but he fled on horseback and stayed with friends who the agent thought as "rebels" of the same sort. Johnson contacted Smith because he now believed Robb to be hiding out in Smith's subdistrict at his father-in-law's house. Johnson also mentioned in his letter that he visited with Freedwoman Emily Mapy who returned from Homer, Texas in Angelina County. She relayed dissatisfaction with the Bureau's award given out. Johnson told her that he "had no right or authority to interfere in that matter" and that she should consult Colonel Smith directly.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Letter from Agent Johnson to T. M. K. Smith, November 6, 1867. "Texas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1870," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-L9MX-Q9HL-Q?cc=1989155&wc=94K7-SPK%3A266076901%2C266080401>: 22 May 2014), Nacogdoches > Roll 24, Miscellaneous records, Jan 1866-Dec 1868 > image 14 of 99; citing NARA microfilm publication M1912 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

By November of 1867, Smith observed the attitudes toward the Freedmen getting progressively worse every day. Despite still having seventy-seven troops in Nacogdoches, in the remote parts of the county, Freedmen remained too frightened to report to the Bureau due to violent retaliation.<sup>50</sup> A few months before, Gibson had reported a case which involved a Mr. Crawford shooting a Freedman, Squire Pettis, for reporting him to the Bureau. In January of 1868, Colonel Smith turned over the paperwork to Colonel James F. Grimes as he prepared to depart for his new post assignment in the more volatile city of Marshall.<sup>51</sup>

Agent Grimes, not unlike other subassistant commissioners throughout the South, met a variety of citizens with daily complaints as part of his duties as an agent. One such gentleman, Blackstone Hardeman, seemed a repeat customer in January as he showed up in the Bureau's records in Nacogdoches four separate times. He had served the Confederacy during the war and was a member of a prominent family of Nacogdoches. He lived in a small town in Nacogdoches County called Melrose and had served as postmaster there in

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<sup>50</sup> Report to Bureau from T. M. K. Smith, November 30, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-84ST-4?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYB%3A1513612102%2C1513617301> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 23, Reports, operations and conditions, Nov-Dec 1867 > image 508 of 1085; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>51</sup> National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; Returns from U.S. Military Posts, 1800-1916; Microfilm Serial: M617; Microfilm Roll: 828

1848. His issues seemed to focus on a black farmer named Nathan Blackwell and his wife, Amanda. Hardeman, on several occasions, threatened the life of both of those individuals and shot at them and Berry Houston, another Freedman. The agent fined Hardeman a total of \$45 that month for those events.

Colonel Grimes knew well the injustices that could occur in the Fiftieth Subdistrict. He handled an assault case which involved a Mr. Wright and Benjamin Scogins beat a black citizen, Ed Edwards, while he attempted to stop other Freedmen from fighting. The white crowd present at the scene held pistols, knives, and clubs to threaten Freedmen "who dared venture."<sup>52</sup> Grimes noted that Mr. Edwards, though severely beaten and bruised, stood to face a grand jury for assault with intent to kill while his two attackers remained in the clear and at large. Several cases dealt with threats to take lives and most resulted in fines. Agent Grimes reported feeling worried that if the troops departed, the Freedmen's rights would risk violation due to the prejudices of the people.<sup>53</sup> Grimes served only two months as the post commander and relinquished his

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<sup>52</sup> Report to Bureau from James M. Grimes, March 3rd, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-DXSS?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB5%3A1513612102%2C1513618501> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 24, Reports, operations and conditions, Jan-Feb 1868 > image 600 of 947; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

position on March 4<sup>th</sup> of 1868 to Alexander Ferguson, a Bureau clerk who had served Nacogdoches for the past nine months under the other agents. William L Richter's book, *Overreached on All Sides: The Freedmen's Bureau Administrators in Texas, 1865-1868*, details the vast amounts of paperwork agents had to endure as administrators of their districts and how it was common for agents to request the aid of clerks to keep up with this never-ending problem.<sup>54</sup> Grimes remained with Ferguson for at least another month and together, they faced the aftermath of their office being vandalized that April. Grimes assisted Ferguson the next morning after the crime by picking up the scattered government documents in the streets. He believed that Ferguson would experience a difficult time once he left. His premonition proved correct.<sup>55</sup>

Alexander Ferguson had arrived as a stranger to the Piney Woods of eastern Texas and proved unaccustomed to its culture.<sup>56</sup> In his early twenties, the young Scottish-born man claimed Florida as his home state but records show he

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<sup>54</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 297.

<sup>55</sup> Letter to Bureau from Alexander Ferguson, April 15, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-CKM4?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB7%3A1513612102%2C1513624257> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 11, Letters received, D-G, 1867-1869 > image 323 of 677; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>56</sup> Alexander Ferguson may not have served in the military during the Civil War. Although letters from Nacogdoches citizens to Ferguson addressed him as "Captain Ferguson," correspondence with the Bureau never mentions a rank and only addresses him as Mr. Alexander Ferguson and states that he is clerk. Because his name is so common, definite proof to his life before and after his time as an agent is vague.

worked as a clerk for several months in Galveston's Freedmen's Bureau headquarters under the Disbursing Officer in early 1867.<sup>57</sup> Ferguson applied for the open clerk position in Nacogdoches on May 20th of 1867 as he awaited orders in Galveston.<sup>58</sup> He arrived less than a month later on June 15th under the direction of post commander, E. O. Gibson. He served for almost eighteen months at that location. His first eight months he worked as a clerk under the other agents and aided them with the hostilities that they encountered. He served as an agent for the subdistrict for ten months, which proved unusual. Many agents faced dismissal from their posts after a few months due to character flaws such as incompetence or drunkenness, or relocated to more hostile areas in the state, as in the case of the three post commanders before him in that subdistrict.

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<sup>57</sup> Report of persons and articles hired, February, 1867. "Texas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1870," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-L9MX-QKV5?cc=1989155&wc=94KQ-YWL%3A266079301%2C266106001> : 22 May 2014), Quartermaster and disbursing officer > Roll 8, Reports of persons and articles hired, Oct 1866-Dec 1867 > image 270 of 1312; citing NARA microfilm publication M1912 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>58</sup> Report of persons and articles hired, August, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TD-JKLM?cc=2427901&wc=73RQ-S5D%3A1513612102%2C1513633101> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 3, Registers of letters received, vol 1-2, Feb 1866-June 1869 > image 154 of 676; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

Agents all over the South dealt with the struggles of day-to-day burdens as best they could while realizing that the necessities that would ensure success seemed in short supply or absent. The government did not furnish subassistant commissioners with horses, and in many cases, the agents supplied their own. Ferguson was no exception. During his tenure, he relied on locals for forage in addition to his corn and wood. He requested items such as stationery to complete the amount of paperwork demanded by his superiors, including frequent reports about the crop conditions and the “disposition and feelings” of those in his district.<sup>59</sup>

In the article, “What Shall We Do With the Negro?,” the authors Diane Neal and Thomas W. Kremm explain the complicated and overlapping relationship with the Freedmen’s Bureau and the court system. “Civil courts asserted the right to try all criminal cases, the United States Army of occupation insisted in trying cases involving soldiers or other federal officials, and the Bureau claimed jurisdiction in cases involving blacks.”<sup>60</sup> The Bureau courts resembled that of a justice-of-the-peace court, but because of the agents lacked

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<sup>59</sup> From the Field Office records of Alexander Ferguson of Nacogdoches, May to December, 1868. "Texas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1870," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-89MX-Q9HV-8?cc=1989155&wc=94K7-SPB%3A266076901%2C266076902> : 22 May 2014), Nacogdoches > Roll 24, Letters sent, vol (139), May-Dec 1868 > image 3 of 20; citing NARA microfilm publication M1912 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>60</sup> Diane Neal and Thomas W. Kremm, "What Shall We Do With the Negro?" The Freedmen's Bureau in Texas," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 27: Issue 2 , Article 7, 1989. Page 25. Available at: <https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol27/iss2/7>.

a “working knowledge of the technical points of law” they sometimes clashed with civil authorities.<sup>61</sup> During 1867, assistant commissioners Griffin and Reynolds relayed the order from Fifth District Military Commander, Winfield Scott Hancock, to scale back and eventually halt the Bureau’s court proceedings and to hand cases over to the civil authorities.<sup>62</sup>

Much of Ferguson’s time during his tenure involved resolving non-violent disputes within the Freedmen communities or between Freedmen and planters. A majority of cases centered on contract violations, non-payments of goods and services, and damages to crops. Ferguson dealt with fraud and seizure of property numerous times. Horse and cow killings, along with hog theft, frequently occurred in the subdistrict. He replied to letters such as the one sent from local planters asking what they should do about Freedmen that will not chop wood as they have been told to do.<sup>63</sup> The agent also heard cases of family disputes such as wife desertion. Any subassistant commissioner could consider a case resolved when both parties did not return to the Bureau, if the parties reached a compromise, or by handing the issue to the civil authorities. Agents

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Mr. Garrett to Alexander Ferguson, October 5, 1868. "Texas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1870," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q57-89MX-Q9H9-R?cc=1989155&wc=94K7-SPK%3A266076901%2C266080401>: 22 May 2014), Nacogdoches > Roll 24, Miscellaneous records, Jan 1866-Dec 1868 > image 27 of 99; citing NARA microfilm publication M1912 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).



had the authority from the Bureau to settle disagreements with fines or with the guilty party paying the victim in bushels of corn if the need arose.

A typical conflict that arose between planters and Freedmen throughout the South concerned the legalities of apprenticeships. After slaves officially received their freedom in Texas on June 19, 1865, black children and their families suffered. Many plantation owners panicked at the thought of losing their workforce. To curtail their losses, many began seeking the help of civil courts to indenture, or apprentice, orphaned black children. Those arrangements benefited both parties in some cases. Many freed children under the age of fourteen lived without parents and means of support. Therefore, indenturing children to families who would see to their upbringing until adulthood seemed a practical solution. However, numerous former plantation owners took advantage of that system and used children as free labor while providing few benefits to the minors. The Texas Legislature made apprenticeships part of the Black Codes in 1866 that resulted in abuses that kept Freedmen in a state close to slavery.<sup>64</sup>

With the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, panicked parents in Ferguson's subdistrict fought back. They sought the subassistant commissioner's help in retrieving their children, claiming that their sons and daughters had been kidnapped or wrongfully bound. In May of 1868, Ferguson

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<sup>64</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 42-43.

noted that a Freedman named Willis requested the return of his children who resided with S. M. McGaughy. Although McGaughy, a former slave owner in Alto, seemed willing to comply with the request and return the children to Willis, the agent wrote McGaughy, explaining the Bureau's position and insisted that the children remain with the planter until the court ruled otherwise. He informed Mr. McGaughy that subassistant commissioners, "have no right to interfere with" the civil courts in relation to apprenticeships. The agent finished by stating that McGaughy would have to direct his appeal to the civil court that bound the minors and that he had "nothing at all to do with them."<sup>65</sup> The Bureau assisted in many of those cases during its existence, but agents in the latter years obtained word by assistant commissioner Joseph J. Reynolds that they needed to grant more authority to state civil courts, thus decreasing the Bureau's power.<sup>66</sup>

Agent Ferguson's report for the month of March of 1868 began with assaults. Neil Kirk, who worked for a Mr. Mosley near Nacogdoches, received a bullet wound in his right arm above the elbow while bringing firewood into the house after dark. The next day, William Walker hid behind a tree and shot Smith Pettis

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<sup>65</sup> Letter to S. M. McGaughy from Alexander Ferguson, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1868. "Texas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1870," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-L9MX-Q9HP-N?cc=1989155&wc=94K7-SPB%3A266076901%2C266076902> : 22 May 2014), Nacogdoches > Roll 24, Letters sent, vol (139), May-Dec 1868 > image 5 of 20; citing NARA microfilm publication M1912 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>66</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 219-220.

just below the collarbone as he rode home. Pettis recovered, but the Nacogdoches Sheriff, Richard D. Orton failed, "as usual" (Ferguson underlined those words) to apprehend the suspect. The agent stated that those Freedmen that reported to the Bureau made a "cross upon their own back" and would undoubtedly receive punishment as soon as the troops left.<sup>67</sup>

The rest of the March report explained that Ferguson mostly dealt with assigning contracts for the year. Corn remained the primary crop due to the planters' fear of growing cotton since the failure of the last season. He noted that Angelina and Cherokee Counties contained no contracts despite his visits to those areas of his subdistrict just days before his report. The citizens of those counties believed that the Bureau would end in July and so they intended on ignoring contracts to later defraud the Freedmen out of their share of the profits.<sup>68</sup> The month of April in 1868 proved particularly stressful for Agent Ferguson as he witnessed increasing violence in Nacogdoches County. Citizens knew that troops stationed in town would soon be departing, leaving Ferguson vulnerable to the parties that detested his presence. All of the criminals that had "skedaddled"

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<sup>67</sup> Report to Bureau from Alexander Ferguson, March 31, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-DZ43?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB4%3A1513612102%2C1513617601> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 25, Reports, operations and conditions, Mar-Apr 1868 > image 120 of 783; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

while the troops protected their post could now be seen “lurking in the vicinity” due to rumors of their departure and made sure Ferguson knew that they did not fear him.<sup>69</sup> Ferguson observed that the culprits did not fear the civil authorities either. He could not arrest them, and while Sheriff Richard Orton endeavored with all in his power to aid the agent, he too seemed powerless against violent lawbreakers. Someone “cowardly” slipped four threats under Ferguson’s office door warning him to leave town. The agent addressed the townspeople in a letter. Ferguson told them that if they believed that he had not done his duty as an agent of the Bureau that they should “inform me of the fact to my face.” With his office destroyed and government papers scattered by the “ruffians,” he relocated to a building on the square owned by John S. Roberts, a local merchant and signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence. Ferguson described the office as a “stone building built in the year 1779 and called by the Mexicans as a fort.”<sup>70</sup> The agent requested that his office be moved to Douglas

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<sup>69</sup> Letter to Bureau from Alexander Ferguson, April 15, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-CKM4?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB7%3A1513612102%2C1513624257> : accessed 7 December 2018), Texas > Roll 11, Letters received, D-G, 1867-1869 > image 323 of 677; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>70</sup> Originally built by Antonio Gil Y'Barbo and called La Casa Piedra. Today, it is known as the “Old” Stone Fort Museum and was relocated to the Stephen F. Austin State University campus where it stands today.

fifteen miles from Nacogdoches because he thought he could “get along better and more quietly.” The Bureau never granted his petition.<sup>71</sup>

Agent Ferguson had to investigate cases of terrorism, fraud, and murder during that spring. In the case of the Muckleroy family of Nacogdoches, he dealt with all three. Jesse Muckleroy, a white merchant, received warnings from local citizens that his wife would become a widow if he did not “quit Nacogdoches forever.” The accusers claimed that Muckleroy dealt with the “Yankees” and that “no such villain can live in this town.” The merchant had been terrorized by that group of men before as they stated they would not “fail the next time we try to burn you out.” The terrorist signed the threat, “one of the few.” Ferguson also investigated the merchant’s father, Captain David Muckleroy, in a separate issue for buying the Freedmen’s votes when he ran for local office. After examining the issue, Ferguson could not find fault with Muckleroy calling the accusations “malitious [sic] falsehood.” The former slaves that had accused Muckleroy retracted their stories and claimed that a Freedman preacher, who hoped to beat Muckleroy and given a chance at attending the state convention, instigated the

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<sup>71</sup> Ferguson to Col. Extrach, April 21, 1868, Roll 11, Letters Received. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-CVPS?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB7%3A1513612102%2C1513624257> : accessed 1 December 2018), Texas > Roll 11, Letters received, D-G, 1867-1869 > image 326 of 677; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

idea to contest the election. The agent also reported that Alexander Muckleroy, David's son and Jesse's younger brother, murdered Freedman W.H. Casper "in cold blood" that April yet there existed no action taken against him except the placement of a bond.<sup>72</sup> In those cases, one brother faced persecution from his neighbors for associating with the Bureau while the other brother murdered a Freedman and received little punishment.

Ferguson later examined the death of a Freedman named Ben Wood who met a tragic end in April of 1868. Wood stood accused of hog stealing around Homer, Texas, in Angelina County and sent to jail. He escaped, but was soon recaptured and held captive in a store with a guard at the door. When the guard succumbed to whiskey and fell asleep (as Ferguson speculated), the prisoner escaped with \$75 in gold and \$100 in currency. Wood later tried to purchase a revolver, but some locals noticed he had money. They murdered and robbed him. According to Ferguson, when they recovered his body, it lay "partially eaten by wolves."<sup>73</sup> Those responsible for the murder stood trial a few months later,

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<sup>72</sup> Ferguson to Lt. J.P. Richardson, April 15, 1868 & May 1, 1868, Roll 11, Letters Received. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-CVPS?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB7%3A1513612102%2C1513624257> : accessed 1 December 2018), Texas > Roll 11, Letters received, D-G, 1867-1869 > image 326 of 677; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>73</sup> Letter to J. P. Richardson from Alexander Ferguson, May 6, 1868. "Texas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1870," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-89MX-Q9HX-W?cc=1989155&wc=94K7->

but with no evidence, the case dissolved. Ferguson did note that he found it suspicious that the parties paid their lawyer the sum of \$100 for their defense.<sup>74</sup>

By May, Ferguson manned his subdistrict alone as he reported that the troops had departed. He managed to leave Nacogdoches for a few days traveling to Angelina and Cherokee Counties. There, he made sure black laborers got paid for their labor in 1867. Most of those cases ended with rewards for back pay to the Freedmen in amounts varying from \$5 to \$100. The corn and cotton crops looked beautiful all over the district that summer and he reported no criminal offenses except for hog theft. Ferguson left his post for more than a week to make an official inspection of his district with Inspector William Sinclair, whose job entailed investigating and reporting on the status of all Bureau posts and the competency of their agents. The relatively uneventful summer proved only a brief respite for Agent Ferguson. The fall and winter months brought more murders and tragedy for his section of East Texas but also to the young man personally.

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SPB%3A266076901%2C266076902 : 22 May 2014), Nacogdoches > Roll 24, Letters sent, vol (139), May-Dec 1868 > image 6 of 20; citing NARA microfilm publication M1912 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>74</sup> Report to Bureau from Alexander Ferguson, June 30, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-DPXQ?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XBH%3A1513612102%2C1513620501> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 26, Reports, operations and conditions, May-July 1868 > image 457 of 1035; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

No new criminal activity appeared in subassistant commissioner's district as the days grew nearer to voting. Ferguson admitted he believed that Ulysses S. Grant and Schuyler Colfax would win the 1868 election. He further felt that the white attitudes toward Freedmen had again changed for the worse. The agent angrily declared the planter class, "raskels [sic]" and that they cheated the black citizens every chance they got as proven by the many cases of abuse he received. Despite the fact that he hoped Grant would win the election, he feared that his office would have trouble staying open if the Republican Party won and requested troops be sent over for this reason.<sup>75</sup> Other agents in Texas repeatedly begged for more troops but their requests also remained unanswered by the assistant commissioners. Historian William L. Richter said that this "spoke loudly about the inadequacy of policies and paucity of results of the bureau's operations."<sup>76</sup> In October, Ferguson expressed concern that the black community would not be allowed to vote without the presence of troops. He

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<sup>75</sup> Report to Bureau from Alexander Ferguson, September 30, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-ZSW9-K?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XBC%3A1513612102%2C1513617401> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 27, Reports, operations and conditions, Aug-Oct 1868 > image 502 of 1046; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>76</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 157.



reflected that, "only a statesman can really answer the question of race relations."<sup>77</sup>

The last months of 1868 brought more challenges for Alex Ferguson. On the night of November 30, Barney Hayter, a gray-haired Freedman preacher seventy years of age, and his wife awoke in the middle of the night to encounter a group of outlaws at their home in Douglas. "Knocked senseless" with the stroke of a revolver, Mrs. Hayter tried to protect her husband as the group took Mr. Hayter outside. They traveled a short distance from his home, shot him ten to twelve times, and stole his horse. Someone assassinated Henry Thomas, another Freedman from Douglas, in the same fashion. In addition, three other men from Alto disappeared around that same night with only their saddlebags being recovered. The murdered preacher shocked Ferguson as he could not "imagine what the old man was murdered for."<sup>78</sup> Later that evening, six Freedmen

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<sup>77</sup> Report to Bureau from Alexander Ferguson, October 31, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-ZSZM-Z?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XBC%3A1513612102%2C1513617401> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 27, Reports, operations and conditions, Aug-Oct 1868 > image 829 of 1046; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>78</sup> Report to Bureau from Alexander Ferguson, November 30, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8VMR?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XBZ%3A1513612102%2C1513618101> : accessed 7 December 2018), Texas > Roll 28, Reports, operations and conditions, Nov-Dec 1868 > image 483 of 692; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

suffered by being whipped by the lash. Around that same time, a sergeant of the 26th Infantry who had passed through Alto reported to Ferguson he and his men found the body of another Freedman preacher “cut to peices [sic] in church.” A doctor in Douglas briefed Ferguson on this event and urged the agent’s presence there because the “Ku Klux is at work every night.” Ferguson remained unwilling to go because he felt “alone and unaided.”<sup>79</sup> The civil authorities took no action after Ferguson reported those events to them.

Mr. Hayter and Mr. Thomas were targeted because of their association with the Union League. Any that dared join a Union League faced harassment from their hostile Democratic neighbors. Republicans in the South set up those societies, sometimes called Loyalty Leagues, after the Civil War with the purpose of registering former slaves to vote and carrying out Republican agendas. At times, Union League members met at the black schools or churches. Ferguson observed that the violence had become more aggressive after the election of General Grant as president. The whites in his district made it clear that they felt in “no way favorable” toward the Freedmen. The criminals made it known that they targeted several more “Loyal Leaguers.” Three of those men came to Ferguson for protection, but he had none to provide despite pleas to the military

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

post in nearby San Augustine requesting support.<sup>80</sup> After Grant's victory, Ferguson's predictions about worsening tension proved correct, and the angry white citizens swore that they would dispose of the Loyal Leaguers and control the Freedmen.<sup>81</sup>

December brought that subdistrict five more murders and missing Freedmen along with "further outrages" as the population became emboldened after they realized the Freedmen's Bureau faced closure. By late 1868, six subassistant commissioners had been killed while serving their districts.<sup>82</sup> Agent Ferguson's own father-in-law and local businessman, Thaddius Clark, went missing as he traveled to Angelina County for business.<sup>83</sup> That event must have terrified

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<sup>80</sup>Letters to Charles Vernon from Alexander Ferguson, December 1 and 5, 1868. "Texas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1870," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9MX-Q9CJ-J?cc=1989155&wc=94K7-SPB%3A266076901%2C266076902> : 22 May 2014), Nacogdoches > Roll 24, Letters sent, vol (139), May-Dec 1868 > image 17 of 20; citing NARA microfilm publication M1912 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>81</sup> Report to Bureau from Alexander Ferguson, November 30, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8VWP?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XBZ%3A1513612102%2C1513618101> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 28, Reports, operations and conditions, Nov-Dec 1868 > image 482 of 692; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>82</sup> Crouch, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans*, 39.

<sup>83</sup> Reports to Bureau from Alexander Ferguson, December 1, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-CVFS?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB7%3A1513612102%2C1513624257> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 11, Letters received, D-G, 1867-1869 > image 356 of 677; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980); Ancestry.com. *1860 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Images reproduced by FamilySearch.

Ferguson and Eunice, his young wife, but despite their growing anxiety, the agent continued to perform his duties. He tried a case between a Freedwoman and a white man and Ferguson decided in favor of the Freedwoman. After the trial, the lady returned to her home a mile from town when the son of the defendant gunned her down. Ferguson experienced further upset when a "fine young man" lay executed by someone who shot a musket ball into the back of his head. Ferguson showed outrage that the civil authorities declared it "suicide" as he underlined the word in his notes. In another incident, a gentleman by the name of Mr. Bell, a planter from Cherokee County, sought protection for the Freedmen that worked for him. They had been driven from their homes by fear and "compelled to sleep in the woods" and therefore could not pick the planter's cotton. Bell explained that other planters in the district suffered from this situation. The planter wanted Ferguson to come to his plantation to see those offenses first-hand. He warned the agent not to take public roads for his safety. However, Ferguson dared not take any road, public or otherwise, a mile past town. He knew that a group of men headed by the outlaw Robert Diamond had returned to the area. Mr. Bell spoke to the gang and then advised Ferguson not to leave his home after nightfall. Diamond knew the agent had fired upon him during his previous stay in the county jail. Alone and defeated, Ferguson knew

his time in East Texas would soon conclude.<sup>84</sup> As he reported yet another murder on December 20th, he helplessly pleaded that “something out to be done” within his subdistrict.<sup>85</sup>

Reconstruction proposed radical social ideas that never fully came to fruition in the South. Although small achievements in the social, political, and economic standings of former slaves did occur during that era, the brief mood of optimism soon dimmed with the “redemption” of the entire region. Alexander Ferguson’s life mirrored those events. When he arrived in Nacogdoches to assume his new career, he seemed confident and energetic. Ferguson had married the teenaged daughter of a local businessman and seemed eager to please citizens of his subdistrict.<sup>86</sup> As 1868 continued, however, his tone grew more panicked, and he endured personal threats and attacks on his new family. He grew fearful and soon realized that the situation could not be won. His frustration with his lack of

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<sup>84</sup> Letter to Charles Vernon from Alexander Ferguson, December 7, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-CVRQ?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB7%3A1513612102%2C1513624257> : accessed 5 December 2018), Texas > Roll 11, Letters received, D-G, 1867-1869 > image 363 of 677; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>85</sup> Letter to Charles Vernon from Alexander Ferguson, December 20, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-C241?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB7%3A1513612102%2C1513624257> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 11, Letters received, D-G, 1867-1869 > image 366 of 677; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>86</sup> Cherokee County, Texas. Marriage certificate, February 2, 1868, Clark-Ferguson: Online database. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com.

control appeared palpable. He continued to report violence taking place around him even as he received word that the Freedmen's Bureau would dismantle. The agent applied for transportation out of the county, but remained willing to stay by stating that if the Bureau continued, "no orders need be sent should you think me capable of holding the office I now occupy." His superiors granted his request to leave by stagecoach for Galveston during the last days of the year. The agent organized his records for shipment and proceeded to depart his post.<sup>87</sup>

Once the agent left town, the white Democrats of Nacogdoches settled back into what they considered their safe lull of antebellum society. No one remained to hear the grievances of Freedmen or to aid in their protection. After the Bureau's departure, African Americans faced literacy tests or poll taxes that diminished their suffrage in addition to fearing resurgences of terrorism by the Ku Klux Klan. Although skirmishes surfaced between Republicans and Democrats in Nacogdoches County in the years that followed, none compared to the violence that erupted while Ferguson represented the Bureau in that subdistrict.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Letter to Charles Vernon from Alexander Ferguson, December 20, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-C241?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB7%3A1513612102%2C1513624257> : accessed Fall 2018), Texas > Roll 11, Letters received, D-G, 1867-1869 > image 366 of 677; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>88</sup> James M. Hazlett and Jordan King, mentioned in this chapter, participate in the "Linn Flat Affair" For more information on the Linn Flat Affair, see:

Barry A. Crouch and Donaly E. Brice. "Dastardly Scoundrels: The State Police and the Linn Flat Affair." *The East Texas Historical Journal*, Vol. 37: Iss.1, Article 9 (1999).

Despite their overall goal, the Bureau had set Alexander Ferguson and the Freedmen of his subdistrict up for failure. With proper support, troops, and supplies, Ferguson and the previous agents could have implemented the policies of their administration more successfully. Without these necessities being provided from the organization, the agents faced violence, confusion, and disappointment.

Ferguson served as a Constable for Fort Bend County in 1870-1871. He used his law enforcement skills later to earn a brief position as a member of the Texas State Police based in Galveston in 1872. The controversial and short-lived institution first organized under the direction of the radical Republican governor, Edmund J. Davis. The force's purpose sounded similar to the Bureau's in that he fought against the wrongful treatment of Freedmen and aided in their protection. After his stint as a state policeman, Alexander Ferguson faded from record books much like the heroic deeds he and his fellow agents performed during the turbulent times of Reconstruction.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Barry A. Crouch, and Donaly E. Brice, *The Governor's Hounds: The Texas State Police, 1870-1873* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011)265.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Agent Metzner's Mayhem in San Augustine, Shelby, and Sabine Counties**

Thirty miles east of Nacogdoches existed another one of the oldest towns in Texas: San Augustine. The town, barely ever exceeding 3,000 people, boasts an impressive history steeped in important events that shaped the Lone Star State. The Hasinai Indians first occupied this region before being disturbed by the French and Spanish explorers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Soon, Spanish missionaries and land-hungry American colonists moved to the area using the San Antonio Road (El Camino Real) which opened up a major thoroughfare thus increasing San Augustine's importance by providing a path for Anglos to populate the city. Sam Houston gathered troops there before heading off to defeat General Santa Anna during the Texas Revolution. The town became an incorporated city and the county seat of San Augustine County during the Republic of Texas era and achieved a fair degree of sophistication with hotels, mercantile shops, newspapers, and colleges. San Augustine grew strong in cotton production resulting in several sprawling plantations which looked similar to the Old South many of the settlers had left behind. The town sent



troops to fight for the Confederate cause during the Civil War, and by the time of Reconstruction, the white townspeople stood ready to recapture the gentility of their antebellum years and get back to their lucrative cotton business, however, emancipation and the Freedmen's Bureau interfered with their goals.<sup>90</sup>

Just fifteen miles north of San Augustine, however, Shelby County exhibited a less cultured region of Texas. Although this county shared the same beginnings as San Augustine, The El Camino Real did not run through this area, which left it more isolated than its neighbor to the south. Settlers avoided this county in the early 1800s due to its status as "no man's land" as a result of a border dispute between the United States and the Spanish governments. This conflict provided an opportunity for squatters and outlaws to hide from the law. The Regulator-Moderator War which occurred from 1839 to 1844, included bloodshed over land titles. Family factions murdered several individuals living in Shelby County and added to the chaos of the region. The violence hurt the economy and the *San Augustine Red-Lander* newspaper announced, "The tide of emigration has completely turned from that country which is shunned by emigrants as another Sodom."<sup>91</sup> The citizens supported the Confederate cause during the Civil War, and after its conclusion, the area desired to go back to the pre-war days of

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<sup>90</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, Vista K. McCroskey, "SAN AUGUSTINE, TX (SAN AUGUSTINE COUNTY)," accessed September 29, 2018, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hgs01>.

<sup>91</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, Cecil Harper, Jr., "SHELBY COUNTY," accessed September 29, 2018, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hcs09>.

growing corn, cotton, and hogs. The Freedmen's Bureau coming to San Augustine did not bother the residents of Shelby County, and they aimed to keep the Union presence away from their county line by their usual pattern of violence.<sup>92</sup>

The Seventeenth Subdistrict of the Texas Freedmen's Bureau consisted of San Augustine, Shelby, and Sabine counties.<sup>93</sup> Albert A Metzner reported for duty as the subassistant commissioner for this section in the spring of 1867. Just like Alexander Ferguson in neighboring Nacogdoches county and several other agents throughout the state, Metzner began his life in Europe in 1833 before immigrating to the United States. Coming from Germany, he declared his hometown as Louisville, Kentucky where records show he was a distiller. During the Civil War, Metzner served as a Lieutenant in Company F of the 46<sup>th</sup> Regiment from New York. During the Battle of James Island, he fell from his horse and landed on a cannon wheel, fracturing his right thigh close to his hip which disabled him for life. After this injury, he served as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant for the Volunteer Reserve Corps (Invalid Corps) which provided light-duty assignments for partially disabled soldiers. Christopher B. Bean explains in his book, *Too Great a Burden to Bear: The Struggle and Failure of the Freedmen's*

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Sabine county shared a similar historical and economic background with San Augustine County.

*Bureau in Texas*, that the “Freedmen’s Bureau drew from the VRC to make up for those lost to mustering out.”<sup>94</sup> He continues by stating that fifteen men from the VRC served Texas as subassistant commissioners. “Motivated to some extent by patriotism, pride, and a desire to help the emancipated slaves these gentlemen most certainly wanted to prove their continued worth to the country and society in general.”<sup>95</sup> The VRC members served as agents in 1866 and 1867 and found out that having an injury would not shield them from the criticism from the citizens of their districts.<sup>96</sup> After the War, Metzner served as a subassistant commissioner for Clinton, Texas before being assigned to the Seventeenth Subdistrict. However, his European background seemed the only common trait that he shared with his younger counterpart from Nacogdoches. Where Ferguson strove to perform his duties to the utmost of his abilities, Metzner fell victim to his demons and vices.

Records show that Agent Metzner formed a close relationship with San Augustine’s patriarch, S. W. (Stephen William) Blount during his tenure. Accounts prove that the Bureau paid \$15 per month to Mr. Blount for Metzner to rent an office.<sup>97</sup> According to the *Handbook of Texas Online*, S. W. Blount was

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<sup>94</sup> Christopher B. Bean, *Too Great a Burden to Bear: The Struggle and Failure of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Texas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 25.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

<sup>97</sup> Record of persons and articles hired, August, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau Records of Persons and Articles Hired, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch

born in Georgia in 1808 and later signed the Texas Declaration of Independence shortly after his arrival. Once Texas received annexation in 1845, he held various civic roles such as postmaster and as a delegate to state and national conventions. Mr. Blount owned 60,000 acres in San Augustine for his cotton plantation. During the Civil War, he aided the Confederacy by serving as a fiscal agent, and later became vice president of the United Confederate Veterans Association.<sup>98</sup>

Mr. Blount seemed to keep Agent Metzner in close proximity. While Metzner headed the local Bureau, Blount served as a Justice of the Peace. However uneasy the agent may have felt about aligning himself with a former Confederate supporter, he knew that the relationship would prove essential to his survival while he resided amongst rebel sympathizers.

During the summer months of 1867, Metzner set about the duties of his position and reported to the Bureau many of the same challenges faced by his comrades through Texas and the South. He busied himself settling accounts from the previous year and attempting to set up a school for the local Freedmen.

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(<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-Q237> : accessed 29 September 2018), Albert A Metzner, Aug 1867; citing Residence, San Augustine, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publication M1912, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861-1880, RG 105, (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2003), roll 8; FHL microfilm 2,427,286.

<sup>98</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, L. W. Kemp, "BLOUNT, STEPHEN WILLIAM," accessed September 29, 2018, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbl31>.

Metzner explained his great need for a horse as there existed no stagecoach lines nearby to enable him to check on the rest of his district. He reported that this area contained numerous children that served as apprentices, a number that diminished as his tenure progressed.

The Freedmen worked for shares just as the assistant commissioners and other administrators instructed them to do throughout the South. If the laborers received a wage, the payment varied from five to ten dollars depending on the economic conditions and with females always receiving less. During the years of 1867-68, the Bureau listed 667 Freedmen contracted for labor in the Seventeenth Subdistrict. Men dominated the roster by far, but a few females and children served as hired hands as well. Some of the Freedmen shared the same surname as the landowner they contracted with possibly showing a prior slave-master relationship.<sup>99</sup> For example, Lucius Benjamin Polk, who came to San Augustine during the Republic years, brought his slave, Moses Polk, with him. Moses contracted with him during Reconstruction, but by 1880 the census recorded the former slave owned his land and remained next door to L. B. Polk.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Year: 1880; Census Place: *San Augustine, Texas*; Roll: 1325; Page: 283B; Enumeration District: 081.

However, tension began to surface as that summer's cotton crops failed due to an infestation of worms. Metzner told the Freedmen not to leave their obligations for other work, but instead, busy themselves with tasks such as mending fences as to not violate their contract with the planters. In this way, the agent protected the interests of the Freedmen, but he also secured the needs of the landowners to harvest a successful crop which would ensure a stable local economy.

Bureau agents not only dealt with economic issues, but matters of local government demanded their attention as well. Because of the lack of stability in the federal, state, and local governments, civil administration jobs frequently remained vacant when a qualified candidate proved nonexistent. Once Presidential Reconstruction ended and Congressional Reconstruction began, men that once showed allegiance to the Confederacy could no longer hold elected seats. In September of 1867, Metzner reported that no courts convened in any of the counties and that Shelby County lacked a sheriff.<sup>101</sup> Two months later, he admitted that the lack of civil offices remained his greatest difficulty in

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<sup>101</sup> Report to Bureau from Albert Metzner, September 30, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-84S9-B?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYB%3A1513612102%2C1513617301> : accessed 29 September 2018), Texas > Roll 23, Reports, operations and conditions, Nov-Dec 1867 > image 1 of 1085; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

performing his duties. During that winter, San Augustine lost all of its commissioner seats in addition to its tax collector and assessor.<sup>102</sup> As 1868 began, Agent Metzner wrote a letter to Austin to explain that he had accepted the position of presiding officer of the Board of Registrars for San Augustine County. The previous gentleman, William Phillips, resigned to become a candidate for the state convention. He felt it his duty to carry this responsibility since the other members of the Board “could not find any other person qualified.”<sup>103</sup> It seems that the agent did not hesitate to become embedded into the local politics. Economic and civic tensions did not prove to be the most paramount concerns for Texans, however.

The dominant worry for Texans during Reconstruction remained violence. Northeast Texas experienced the most turmoil due to a larger concentration of Union sympathizers clashing with former Rebels with both sides convinced they

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<sup>102</sup> Report to Bureau from Albert Metzner, January 30, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-D6CM?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB5%3A1513612102%2C1513618501> : accessed 29 September 2018), Texas > Roll 24, Reports, operations and conditions, Jan-Feb 1868 > image 1 of 947; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>103</sup> Letter to Bureau from Albert Metzner, January 30, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z9LN-L?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB9%3A1513612102%2C1513614301> : accessed 2 October 2018), Texas > Roll 13, Letters received, I-M, 1867-1869 > image 899 of 1056; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

would defeat the other. Although Deep East Texas did not encounter the same ferocity of bloodshed as northern towns terrorized by gangs headed by Ben Bickerstaff and Cullen Baker (mentioned earlier), the Seventeenth Subdistrict handled its share of assault cases and violent crimes during the tenure of the Freedmen's Bureau. Just as in other parts of the state and throughout the South, the conflicts that the agents encountered either involved at least one black person or clashes within the white community that existed between Confederate sympathizers and their Union-minded neighbors.

Agent Metzner, in a letter to Austin written in June of 1868, declared eleven homicides in the county of San Augustine during 1867. Four of those murders happened within the white community while the total for the black community members taken by white citizens numbered five. The remaining cases occurred within the Freedmen community, and usually proved the result of personal conflict rather than being politically or socially motivated.

During the administration of the Texas assistant commissioner Major General Charles Griffin in the summer of 1867, every agent had the protection of at least five men at their post.<sup>104</sup> Metzner realized that the nine troops stationed with him at San Augustine were essential for any success. He felt the white citizens

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<sup>104</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 158.



treated the Freedmen with kindness only due to the need for labor and the presence of the Bureau.<sup>105</sup>

Even with the support of nine troops, Shelby and parts of Sabine County still proved perilous as Metzner feared any journey across their county lines. Soon after his arrival, Shelby citizens issued a warning to the agent that if he stepped across the border, they would hang him. Metzner joked in his report that he planned on testing their threat out the next day by making the journey.<sup>106</sup> He soon realized not to take the situation so lightly. The agent continued to discuss Shelby County by explaining that the people, "generally settle their difficulties with firearms."<sup>107</sup> He stressed how hazardous the situation stood without the use

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<sup>105</sup> Report to Bureau from Albert Metzner, August 31, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-831G-7?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYP%3A1513612102%2C1513613801> : accessed 7 December 2018), Texas > Roll 21, Reports, operations and conditions, June-Aug 1867 > image 971 of 1108; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>106</sup> Letter to Bureau from Albert Metzner, July 31, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-83YY-Q?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYP%3A1513612102%2C1513613801> : accessed 29 September 2018), Texas > Roll 21, Reports, operations and conditions, June-Aug 1867 > image 1 of 1108; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>107</sup> Report to Bureau from Albert Metzner, October 31, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z9RL-K?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XY5%3A1513612102%2C1513615901> : accessed 13 October 2018), Texas > Roll 22, Reports, operations and conditions, Sept-Oct 1867 > image 837 of 1084; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

of more troops or cavalry when he reported, "My life, or those of my men, are far from being safe, when we are compelled to visit Shelby County."<sup>108</sup> Metzner continued to describe those regions as "almost living on Indian principles, and it would be certain death to me, if I attempted to travel through these parts."<sup>109</sup>

Agent Metzner reported fewer homicides for the first half of 1868 consisting of two murdered San Augustine men by white men from Shelby County. One of the two murdered black men had begged for protection from the civil authorities, but his request remain ignored. A few days after the homicide, Agent Metzner spotted the murderer talking with the sheriff of the county in town, but he remained free. He reported no arrests for the lynching of two black men from the district hung by a mob in Louisiana, and one black female stabbed to death in Shelby County.<sup>110</sup> For the most part, Shelby County accomplished its mission, and remained untouched by the Bureau's control.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Report to Bureau from Albert Metzner, December 31, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-84QQ-4?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYB%3A1513612102%2C1513617301> : accessed 13 October 2018), Texas > Roll 23, Reports, operations and conditions, Nov-Dec 1867 > image 829 of 1085; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>110</sup> Testimony of Albert Metzner, June 19, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z9VM-V?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYB%3A1513612102%2C1513614301> : accessed 3 October 2018), Texas > Roll 13, Letters received, I-M, 1867-1869 > image 979 of 1056; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

One of the more egregious crimes that Agent Metzner investigated involved a prominent planter from San Augustine by the name of William Garrett and his former slave, Kit Myrick. Garrett migrated from Tennessee before the Texas Revolution and saw action serving in the militia against Mexico. By 1860, at the age of around fifty years old, he owned over a thousand acres and 132 slaves. He grew corn, cotton, wheat, and barley using his large labor force in the fields and to build his plantation home that faced the historic El Camino Real highway.<sup>111</sup> His punishment for any slave that left his plantation without permission involved cutting off his testicles. He performed the task himself, and Kit Myrick may not have been his only victim. Born in Georgia and around twenty-eight years old at the time of the maiming, Myrick claimed the crime happened during March or April of 1865 and confessed his story two years later to Judge Goodrich of Sabine County, where Myrick resided.<sup>112</sup> The judge directed to Metzner to investigate. The agent examined Myrick and found the story to be true. Metzner reported that he desired to arrest Garrett at once but his small force of only nine troops “is too small to arrest a rich man in this part of Texas.” The criminal could not be apprehended as he left town for “parts unknown” perhaps either to Mexico or New Orleans. His family remained on his

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<sup>111</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, Laurie E. Jasinski, "GARRETT, WILLIAM," accessed October 04, 2018, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fga57>.

<sup>112</sup> Year: 1870; Census Place: Beat 4, Sabine, Texas; Roll: M593\_1604; Page: 31A; Family History Library Film: 553103.

large estate, however, and soon he returned home.<sup>113</sup> When Garrett arrived back in town, he surrendered to civil authorities. Agent Metzner noted that despite this good news, he was unable to hold Garrett because there existed no jails in his county or the neighboring areas. Metzner set the criminal's bond at \$1000 as he awaited his appearance at the next District Court session.<sup>114</sup>

### **The First Signs of Trouble**

On October 16<sup>th</sup> of 1867, a scathing letter reached Bureau headquarters in Austin with the purpose of removing Albert A. Metzner from his subassistant commissioner position. The paper came from the "Loyal Citizens of San Augustine County," headed by the President of their Board of Registrars, Mr.

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<sup>113</sup> Letter to Bureau from Albert Metzner, July 16, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-84WY-B?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYJ%3A1513612102%2C1513612101> : accessed 5 October 2018), Texas > Roll 7, Letters received, M-N, 1866-1867 > image 709 of 916; citing Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and -1980).

<sup>114</sup> Letter to Bureau from Albert Metzner, January 21, 1868, "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z9LL-J?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB9%3A1513612102%2C1513614301> : accessed 5 October 2018), Texas > Roll 13, Letters received, I-M, 1867-1869 > image 891 of 1056; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

William Phillips.<sup>115</sup> A local merchant of the town and around fifty years of age,<sup>116</sup> Phillips succinctly listed five reasons why his group deemed Lieutenant Metzner unsuitable for his office. The first accusation called Metzner a “drunkard” and brought “discredit upon the service to which he belongs.” The next charge stated agent Metzner did not protect the interests of the Freedmen and instead used “his influence and authority in behalf of the rebel employers [sic] to the detriment of the Freedmen.” Phillips continued by alleging that the agent “aided and abetted in gathering up an excitement here against one Plato Thompson.” Thompson, the merchant claimed, was a Freedmen of good moral character, a preacher of the gospel, and a member of the Board of Registrars. Phillips had asked Thompson to pass around a circular imploring Freedmen to vote in favor of the Republican Party, but the Bureau agent stopped his efforts. Phillips also claimed that Metzner and his soldiers stationed in the town threatened to restrain Plato Thompson from preaching or holding prayer meetings at his home. His last charge asserted the agent came “under the influence and control of the rebel eliment [sic] in this community” and inspired more Union hatred in the area “than

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<sup>115</sup> Letters to Bureau from Phillips, Metzner, Blount, and other citizens, November 23, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z9ZD-D?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYT%3A1513612102%2C1513615301> : accessed 6 October 2018), Texas > Roll 14, Letters received, N-R, 1867-1869 > image 150 of 744; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>116</sup> Year: 1870; Census Place: San Augustine, Texas; Roll: M593\_1604; Page: 44A; Family History Library Film: 553103.

all the rebels together.” Phillips ended by calling for the agent’s removal and his position be filled with someone that would “do justice to the Freedmen and not give them just cause to say that the Freedmen’s Bureau is their worst enemy, and the rebels their best friends.” Signers of the document included Charles Epps, a like-minded friend of Phillips since their names are listed together in the 1867 List of Registered Voters, and eight Freedmen including Plato Thompson.<sup>117</sup>

Naturally, Agent Metzner perceived the action as a direct threat to his moral character, and perhaps an attempt at Phillips to procure his office. He quickly sought to refute the charges before Governor Pease and assistant commissioner, Joseph J. Reynolds. He did not comment on the accusations of being a drunkard, but enclosed a letter written by Blount who knew the Governor personally. He admitted that there may have been instances where he “refused to support a complaint made by a Freedman, but it was because the fraud attempted to be practiced against the white man, was palpable and apparent.” He reiterated that he also belonged to the Loyal League and participated in passing out those same circulars mentioned by Phillips to Freedmen in order to drum up support for the Republicans. Metzner admitted that he spoke plainly to

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<sup>117</sup> Ancestry.com. Texas, Voter Registration Lists, 1867-1869 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

Plato Thompson because he believed that Thompson “was attempting an interference in my duties, by counsel and advise [sic] to another Freedman, that was wholly unwarranted and unauthorized.”<sup>118</sup> He and his soldiers at no time, according to the agent, threatened to keep Thompson from preaching. To dispute the claim that he inspired excitement against the Union cause, he found the charge “certainly very flattering to myself that I, almost a stranger, should in so short a time be enabled to exercise such an influence as therein stated.” Metzner called the claim “simply ridiculous” and a “matter of astonishment.” The Lieutenant insisted that there existed not one instance where he “made a sacrifice of principle or duty” and that he had accomplished executing the orders from the Department and “had held myself aloof from all friendly and social intercourse with the community.”<sup>119</sup> In reality, Metzner rarely practiced isolation during his stay in San Augustine.

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<sup>118</sup> Letters to Bureau from Phillips, Metzner, Blount, and other citizens, November 23, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z9ZD-D?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYT%3A1513612102%2C1513615301> : accessed 6 October 2018), Texas > Roll 14, Letters received, N-R, 1867-1869 > image 150 of 744; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>119</sup> Letters to Bureau from Phillips, Metzner, Blount, and other citizens, November 23, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z9ZD-D?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYT%3A1513612102%2C1513615301> : accessed 6 October 2018), Texas > Roll 14, Letters received, N-R, 1867-1869 > image 150 of 744; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

That same day, S. W. Blount came to the rescue of the subassistant commissioner. Blount said the charges against the agent “are false and malicious being entirely without foundation.” The sixty-year-old citizen admitted that Metzner has once or twice partaken in too much to drink when he gathered with his fellow “brother officers of the army,” but at no instance while he performed his duties. Mr. Blount explained that he was not a politician and in favor of Reconstruction. He closed his letter by giving the names of prominent men who could back his claim up, such as a judge, and called Metzner a “loyal Union man of great intelligence and integrity.”<sup>120</sup>

A further enclosure sent with the subassistant’s packet to Austin included a document, written and signed by S. W. Blount which, explained how the position of three of the Freedmen who had previously signed Phillips’s accusation letter had now changed their minds about Metzner. These gentlemen, Wilson King, Jesse Crain, and Spencer Brooks, all stated that they did not comprehend the meaning of Mr. Phillips letter and that for the past year they had not heard any complaints by either race against Lieutenant Metzner. Further, they “looked to

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<sup>120</sup> Letters to Bureau from Phillips, Metzner, Blount, and other citizens, November 23, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z9ZD-D?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYT%3A1513612102%2C1513615301> : accessed 6 October 2018), Texas > Roll 14, Letters received, N-R, 1867-1869 > image 150 of 744; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).



Lieut. A. A. Metzner as an [sic] friend and protector” and that they admit this “without any mental reservation or the influence of any person.”<sup>121</sup> The appeals worked, and Agent Metzner kept his position.

At the end of 1867, the veteran received a letter informing him of an order by General Grant to muster him out of service by January 1<sup>st</sup> of that year and to continue as a civilian agent at the highest salary paid. Many VRC members received this letter which served as a cost-cutting measure by Congress.<sup>122</sup> Metzner now joined the ranks of civilian administrators which roughly made up half of the agents in Texas.<sup>123</sup> His salary stood at \$150 per month which served as the standard for veteran agents.<sup>124</sup> He faced new challenges in the months to come as the troops departed by February and the pressures toward him increased.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Agent Metzner had sent numerous reports during the same time as this letter's creation about how the two Freedmen's Bureau school teachers, one being Spencer Brooks, had displayed incompetence as educators.

<sup>122</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 105.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 172.

<sup>124</sup> Letter to O. O. Howard from J. J. Reynolds, January 3, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TD-N9XC-G?cc=2427901&wc=73RQ-SP2%3A1513612102%2C1513630701> : accessed 12 October 2018), Texas > Roll 1, Letters sent, vol 1-2, Sept 1865-May 1869 > image 439 of 590; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>125</sup> Report to Bureau from Albert Metzner, February 29, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-D6JP?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB5%3A1513612102%2C1513618501> : accessed 11 October 2018), Texas > Roll 24, Reports, operations and conditions, Jan-Feb 1868 > image 701 of 947; citing multiple NARA microfilm

## **Drunken Misconduct at the Hail Hotel**

Around May of 1868, a group of local citizens, Albert Metzner included, gathered at the piazza of the Hail Hotel in San Augustine on Sunday before church to socialize when violent words broke the congenial mood. According to the testimony of the County Clerk F. B. Dixon, a local wagon maker from Ohio and veteran Captain of the Confederacy, the group of five or six men inquired as to whether any Ku Klux Klan members had entered the town.<sup>126</sup> S. W. Blount claimed none existed but that there could be a group organizing in Shreveport. Agent Metzner replied that if that statement proved true that he would organize the Freedmen in the area against them. Blount immediately became enraged and “sprung up and shook his fist in Metzner’s face and with abrupt oaths informed Metzner that if he did...he would hang him or have him hung.” Blount, according to Dixon, quickly reminded Metzner that he had been his friend and saved the agent from being mobbed by a party from other counties mainly through his influence.” Dixon admitted that Metzner seemed “somewhat intoxicated at the time” and the administrator asked Blount if he could speak with

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publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>126</sup> Year: 1870; Census Place: San Augustine, Texas; Roll: M593\_1604; Page: 46B; Family History Library Film: 553103. Ancestry.com. Texas, Muster Roll Index Cards, 1838-1900 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011

him privately the next day to which Blount agreed. Dixon then described Blount as a “perfectly harmless but a regular blowhard.” After the group dispersed, Dixon scolded Metzner and told him not to mention again “that he would head the niggers as I did not believe the Government sent him here for that purpose.” Metzner apologized and said that he had been joking only to taunt Blount.<sup>127</sup>

J. C. Pritchett, a blacksmith in his late thirties, corroborated Dixon’s story with his testimony but added that he also spoke to Metzner after Blount’s party left for church. Pritchett told Metzner, “Damn you, what have you to say about it?” He made it clear to Metzner that if he interfered with him that he would cut the agent’s throat.<sup>128</sup>

Mr. Blount’s testimony began by stating that the small group had been “lively and joking” and that he had only mentioned that the KKK might organize in Shreveport in order to carry on with the joke even though he admitted it was not true. He became angry at Metzner’s remarks and told him the white citizens

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<sup>127</sup> Testimony of F. B. Dixon, July 13, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8SLM-8?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYR%3A1513612102%2C1513615701> : accessed 6 October 2018), Texas > Roll 15, Letters received, S, 1867-1869 > image 667 of 1084; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>128</sup> Statement of J. C. Pritchett, summer of 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8SNF-1?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYR%3A1513612102%2C1513615701> : accessed 6 October 2018), Texas > Roll 15, Letters received, S, 1867-1869 > image 665 of 1084; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

would hang him for leading a group of “Negroes”. He reminded Metzner that the agent belonged to the Loyal League and that “we [white Southerners] had the same right to league together for self protection as the Northern people had.” The testimony continued that they met the next day and after the agent apologized, Metzner admitted that Blount had been his “best friend.” Blount accepted Metzner’s apology and they “parted as friends.” Blount ended his affidavit by inserting his opinion that at least two persons in that place wished to frighten Metzner off in order to be his successor.<sup>129</sup> Once again, Albert Metzner’s drinking served as a source for tensions between the agent and the townspeople, and Blount ended the misunderstanding on his terms.

### **The Final Straw—Metzner Retreats to Austin**

In June of 1868, subassistant commissioner Albert A. Metzner fled to Austin in fear for his life. A letter written from within the city by the agent attempted to explain to headquarters the reasons for his departure after serving San

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<sup>129</sup> Statement of S. W. Blount, July 13, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8SNB-M?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYR%3A1513612102%2C1513615701> : accessed 6 October 2018), Texas > Roll 15, Letters received, S, 1867-1869 > image 660 of 1084; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

Augustine for sixteen months. He described the Freedmen of that county as terrified and not willing to report outrages committed against them to the Bureau. "One colored man was fired upon in my own yard by a party of white men—no arrest."<sup>130</sup> He continued to state that he has no power to protect the Freedmen, especially since the departure of the troops from his post, and he noted that the residents "manifest great hostility against the U.S. government."<sup>131</sup> The colored community cannot hold meetings of any kind including religious services. Metzner then tells the trouble of Freedman Plato Thompson, mentioned earlier in this chapter, who feared living in his home due to repeated threats to his life because of his position on the Board of Registration, and because he "dabbled in politics."<sup>132</sup> Metzner also served on the Board as chairman, and during the election of 1868, the white people of the county "broke into the room where I was holding election—fired one shot and threatened the lives of all the Board, so that

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<sup>130</sup> Testimony of Albert Metzner, June 19, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z9VM-V?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB9%3A1513612102%2C1513614301> : accessed 3 October 2018), Texas > Roll 13, Letters received, I-M, 1867-1869 > image 979 of 1056; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Report of William Sinclair, August 18, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8SDG-6?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYR%3A1513612102%2C1513615701> : accessed 13 October 2018), Texas > Roll 15, Letters received, S, 1867-1869 > image 488 of 1084; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

all the members fled except myself.” The sheriff of the town did not come around at all that day, but a Justice of the Peace did: S. W. Blount. Agent Metzner stated that Blount pretended to arrest one of the rioters, but said to the crowd, “Go ahead, boys. Drive those damned Yankees out.”<sup>133</sup> It seemed the wolf had removed his sheep’s clothing to Metzner and that the agent may have worn out his welcome.

Metzner’s letter explained that the civil authorities failed to enforce the laws, “They are all rebels—except one or two.” William L Richter, an expert on the Freedmen’s Bureau in Texas, found that “ineffective local authorities plagued many bureau agents” throughout the state.<sup>134</sup> Historian Barry Crouch also cites cases “in which officials refused to arrest or serve papers upon a white man who had been accused of assaulting a black man.”<sup>135</sup> Civil authorities in East Texas either pretended to perform their duties or completely ignore them, much to the frustration of the Bureau agents.

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<sup>133</sup> Testimony of Albert Metzner, June 19, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z9VM-V?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB9%3A1513612102%2C1513614301> : accessed 3 October 2018), Texas > Roll 13, Letters received, I-M, 1867-1869 > image 979 of 1056; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>134</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 242.

<sup>135</sup> Barry A. Crouch, *The Freedmen’s Bureau and Black Texans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 52-53.

The agent then described an intense episode that he encountered with the townspeople of San Augustine during May of that year. He claims that he expressed his “political sentiments very politely to several men whereupon they drew their revolvers upon me and threatened to shoot.” They told the agent that they would soon hang him and he included S. W. Blount in that audience. A couple of weeks before Metzner fled to Austin, a Freedman and F.B. Dixon both warned him of a brewing conspiracy to kill him. Without the protection of his benefactor, Metzner felt the need to flee stating, “So I have come away—driven by fear of being murdered.” He clarified by stressing that he had received threats in the past, but had “paid no attention to them” and only escaped his post when he felt certain the threats proved valid. Later that month, Metzner acknowledged the denial he received asking to resign from his post.<sup>136</sup> He also received an order from assistant commissioner General Reynolds that he had reported to headquarters without authority and that he should return to his station and resume the duties of his office as a Bureau agent.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Letter to Charles Vernon from Albert Metzner, June 23, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-Z9JB-S?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XB9%3A1513612102%2C1513614301> : accessed 7 October 2018), Texas > Roll 13, Letters received, I-M, 1867-1869 > image 984 of 1056; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>137</sup> Letter to Albert Metzner from Charles Vernon, June 23, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TD-N96Z-6?cc=2427901&wc=73RQ-SP2%3A1513612102%2C1513630701> : accessed 7 October 2018), Texas > Roll 1, Letters sent,

## **Inspector Sinclair Reveals Metzner's Vices**

Inspector William Sinclair could make or break an agent's career, and the subassistant commissioners knew all of their actions would be under scrutiny with the arrival of this special agent into their district. Sinclair hailed from Ohio and had served as a Union officer making the rank of colonel before being mustered out. He remained as a "special agent" for the military as a civilian, and one of his main jobs for the Freedmen's Bureau entailed inspection tours of the districts. "Between 1866 and 1868, he made fourteen tours as acting inspector general and visited nearly every county in southeastern and northern Texas."<sup>138</sup> Sinclair, a man of thirty years when he visited San Augustine, reported on each agent with clarity and conciseness thus earning the trust of the administration of the Bureau in Austin.

The records are not clear if Albert Metzner ever returned to San Augustine after he fled to Austin, but the lack of reports give signs that he probably did not. A few weeks after he received orders to return to San Augustine, Inspector

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vol 1-2, Sept 1865-May 1869 > image 503 of 590; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>138</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, Aragorn Storm Miller, "SINCLAIR, WILLIAM HENRY," accessed October 07, 2018, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fsi57>.



Sinclair made the journey to determine the condition of this post and to close the chapter on Metzner's time there. William L. Richter in his book, *Overreached on All Sides: The Freedmen's Bureau in Texas: 1865-1868*, explains that Inspector Sinclair liked to travel incognito for his safety. Such a method also allowed him to speak to the local citizens, and learn how their Bureau agent ran the district.<sup>139</sup> However, his arrival into San Augustine leaked out and he was "saluted by the people about the streets yelling to each other, "The Grand Cyclops has come" and others replying, "Oh, hell no. He is only one of the Grand Cyclop [sic]—Reynold's Cyclops." He later left the home of Judge Wallace, a Union man, for his hotel when he heard from the bushes three "clucks of the tongue" to indicate the Ku Klux Klan. He excused these actions as no great matter to him by stating that he can excuse "ignorance and ill-breeding."<sup>140</sup>

The inspector began his report of subassistant commissioner Albert A. Metzner with admiration. Sinclair noted that Metzner came to San Augustine without money and almost without clothes and "was well received by the majority

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<sup>139</sup> Richter, *Overreached on all Sides*, 262.

<sup>140</sup>Report of William Sinclair, August 18, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8SDG-6?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYR%3A1513612102%2C1513615701> : accessed 8 October 2018), Texas > Roll 15, Letters received, S, 1867-1869 > image 488 of 1084; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

of the people” considering his situation.<sup>141</sup> He continued to say that the agent has suffered difficulties which “grew out of his bad habits” in the inspector’s estimation. In fact, Sinclair believed that if Metzner had done his job soberly, he would have been somewhat successful with his duties. Despite his “disgraceful conduct,” he still seemed respected by the white citizens even with the town’s demeanor of “swagger, braggadococia [sic] and indolence equal if not superior to any I have seen in the state.” Sinclair admits that Metzner “was a just and brave man” and the agent convinced the townspeople of this in spite of their hateful view of “Yankee Goats.”<sup>142</sup> However, the agent began to drink, and only stopped for a brief intermission when he got word that Mr. Phillips complained about him to his superiors which only lasted about a month.

The subassistant commissioner left debts all over town totaling \$512 (close to \$9,200 in today’s money) from businesses and friends. Sinclair continued, explaining that the bars received “all of his pay,” his horse worth \$165 in gold, and any money he borrowed from his trusted associates. Amy Houston, an old, “colored servant” complained to the inspector that the agent had borrowed

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<sup>141</sup> Letter to Charles Vernon from William Sinclair, July 13, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8SL9-8?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYR%3A1513612102%2C1513615701> : accessed 8 October 2018), Texas > Roll 15, Letters received, S, 1867-1869 > image 638 of 1084; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

money from her and also owed her for her services in addition to two other Freedmen he employed, a young boy named Amos and a gentleman named Jefferson.<sup>143</sup> W. C. Roberts opened his home to Bureau administrator for several months and appeared to Sinclair to have “been Metzner’s friend thoroughly” even though his boarder owed him rent and money that he had borrowed which ended up at the whiskey shops in the amount of \$198 (approximately \$3500 today). Robert’s wife cared for Metzner “through many sicknesses that followed his sprees.”<sup>144</sup> Inspector Sinclair included sixteen pages of bar tab purchases with a multitude of whiskey purchases for the agent as well as what looked to be rounds for his friends. The investigation also included a three-page tab from the local billiards hall and another collection of papers that documented the daily needs the agent procured from Mr. Roberts such as linens and candles as well as the numerous loans his friend gave him. Sinclair declared, “Such ingratitude and

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<sup>143</sup> Letter from Charles Vernon to Michael Butler, August 8, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TD-N9JS-V?cc=2427901&wc=73RQ-SP2%3A1513612102%2C1513630701> : accessed 8 October 2018), Texas > Roll 1, Letters sent, vol 1-2, Sept 1865-May 1869 > image 521 of 590; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>144</sup> Letter to Charles Vernon from William Sinclair, July 13, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8S2Z-W?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYR%3A1513612102%2C1513615701> : accessed 9 October 2018), Texas > Roll 15, Letters received, S, 1867-1869 > image 641 of 1084; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

misconduct as he has displayed while here is perfectly disgraceful and astounding.”<sup>145</sup> Sinclair attributed many of Metzner’s town quarrels to his heavy drinking and that his quick admission of guilt and apologies to the citizens backs up his theory.

As to Metzner’s claim that he fled to Austin due to the grave threats on his life, Sinclair harbored doubts. He admits that Metzner “was liked better than the majority of agents are throughout the county by the white people.”<sup>146</sup> He asserts that any agent that spends his time in bars as much as this man did in this “wild and lawless country” surrounded by heated political debates while being intoxicated would feel the same danger as Metzner. “He paid little attention to his duties—drank often and treated every body [sic] –why should he not be liked?”<sup>147</sup>

An explanation of Metzner’s removal came from the assistant commissioner of Texas, Brevet Major General J.J. Reynolds in a letter to Washington D.C. on July 31, 1868 to Major General O. O. Howard who headed the Freedmen’s Bureau. Reynolds cited the agent’s “excessive intemperance and neglect of

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Letter to Charles Vernon from William Sinclair, July 13, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8S2Z-W?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYR%3A1513612102%2C1513615701> : accessed 9 October 2018), Texas > Roll 15, Letters received, S, 1867-1869 > image 641 of 1084; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

official duties."<sup>148</sup> Sinclair's experience with an agent like Metzner proved familiar to him as he had investigated numerous other cases of administrators with drinking habits or embezzled government funds.<sup>149</sup> The San Augustine agent joined the ranks of a handful of other VRC officers that left "under a cloud" due to incompetence or illegal activities<sup>150</sup> A few days later, Reynolds sent another letter to Howard to inform him that Mr. Michael Butler would replace Albert Metzner effective on August 1<sup>st</sup> with his pay being \$100 per month.<sup>151</sup> Subassistant Commissioner Butler served out the remaining months in San Augustine as the Freedmen's Bureau came to an end in Texas by the first of 1869. He faced the same hardships as his predecessor: lack of troops, assaults, murder, and the lack of ability to enter the dangerous counties of

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<sup>148</sup> Letter from J. J. Reynolds to O. O. Howard, July 31, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TD-N9J9-M?cc=2427901&wc=73RQ-SP2%3A1513612102%2C1513630701> : accessed 9 October 2018), Texas > Roll 1, Letters sent, vol 1-2, Sept 1865-May 1869 > image 515 of 590; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>149</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 264-265.

<sup>150</sup> Bean, *Too Great a Burden to Bear*, 66.

<sup>151</sup> Charles A. Vernon to Michael Bulter, August 3, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TD-N9JS-G?cc=2427901&wc=73RQ-SP2%3A1513612102%2C1513630701> : accessed 9 October 2018), Texas > Roll 1, Letters sent, vol 1-2, Sept 1865-May 1869 > image 518 of 590; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

Shelby and Sabine stating that the area remained unsafe and “thronged with outlaws and horse thieves.”<sup>152</sup>

Even though Metzner’s actions caused his own downfall, the wounded veteran could have performed his duties more effectively if he had been emboldened with the backing of a stronger Bureau. He must have felt the helplessness of his situation as the troops left and the hostilities increased, which possibly encouraged his poor judgement. The Bureau failed to provide for the needs of their agent and the citizens in those counties he attempted to protect.

Lieutenant Albert A. Metzner died March 5, 1880 at forty-seven years of age from hypertrophy of the liver which probably resulted in his continued drinking habit.<sup>153</sup> Just three years after he left San Augustine, he wandered in and out of homes for disabled volunteer soldiers until his demise. His last residence registered his burial in Dayton, Ohio at the Central Branch home’s cemetery and the record lists no next of kin.<sup>154</sup> Historian William L. Richter believed that firing the disabled veteran “was a bit rough on a man who probably drank to forget the

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<sup>152</sup> Michael Butler to Charles A. Vernon, August 31, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-ZSQG-2?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XBC%3A1513612102%2C1513617401> : accessed 13 October 2018), Texas > Roll 27, Reports, operations and conditions, Aug-Oct 1868 > image 41 of 1046; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>153</sup> Ancestry.com. U.S. National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1866-1938 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2007.

<sup>154</sup> Ancestry.com. Ohio, Soldier Grave Registrations, 1804-1958 [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2017.

constant pain in his damaged thigh.”<sup>155</sup> Although dying fifteen years after the Civil War, Metzner became another casualty stemming from both his personal battle wounds and disgrace, and the nation’s chaos that ensued after the great conflict.

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<sup>155</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 263.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Challenges and Successes of Deep East Texas Freedmen's Bureau Schools

Once the Civil War ended, the Freedmen exhibited a deep desire for education and self-improvement. According to James M. Smallwood in his book, *Time of Hope. Time of Despair: Black Texans During Reconstruction*, ninety-five percent of former slaves could not read or write. Of the five percent that could, they exhibited only basic skills.<sup>156</sup> To many researchers today, the education of former slaves remains the Freedmen's Bureau's most prominent and lasting accomplishment.

In July of 1866, Congress passed a legislative act for Freedmen schools that proclaimed that "the commissioner shall have power to seize, hold, use, lease, or sell" all buildings and lands "formerly held by the late so-called Confederate states" and to use these properties or "appropriate the proceeds derived therefrom to the education of the freed people."<sup>157</sup> Congress allocated five million dollars in funds devoted to Freedmen education, but Texas saw little of

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<sup>156</sup> James M. Smallwood, *Time of Hope, Time of Despair: Black Texans During Reconstruction* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1981), 68.

<sup>157</sup> Alton Hornsby. "The Freedmen's Bureau Schools in Texas, 1865-1870." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (1973): 397-417. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30238207>.



that due to its distant location from Washington D.C. Priority tended to go to other Southern states. Also, larger towns and cities opened Bureau schools before rural areas.

Galveston opened Texas's first Freedmen's Bureau school with modest success in September of 1865 under the direction of Texas Superintendent of Education, E. M. Wheelock. "Nothing can be more cheering than the extraordinary thirst for information which the pupils, both old and young, exhibit," Wheelock observed upon seeing early school successes.<sup>158</sup> The Superintendent received help from the Assistant Commissioner, E. M. Gregory, a man many historians view as the father of black education in Texas.<sup>159</sup> The next year, 1866, the Galveston area showed improved enrollment with January boasting 1,200 students. May's records indicated there existed 99 schools with 53 teachers and 4,796 students in the state.<sup>160</sup> When compared to other states in the South, Georgia enrolled more students than Texas. However, the Lone Star state boasted more students than Florida, Arkansas, or Alabama.<sup>161</sup>

Wheelock ordered the Freedmen's Bureau schools to reflect a New England style. Classes began at 9 o'clock in the morning with a hymn or prayer, a lunch break of thirty minutes, and dismissal at 2:30 in the afternoon. Daily exercises

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<sup>158</sup> William L. Richter, *Overreached on All Sides: The Freedmen's Bureau Administrators in Texas, 1865-1868* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1991), 59.

<sup>159</sup> Smallwood, *Time of Hope, Time of Despair*, 69.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 68-70.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

occurred and teachers did not inflict severe punishments. Students began with the alphabet and learning the basics of writing and reading. As the student progressed, however, the curriculum became tailored to each student's needs as they advanced at their own pace and with the possibility of being introduced to geography and arithmetic.<sup>162</sup> Assistant commissioner General Kiddoo also believed the former slaves should learn proper Victorian behavior and about societal expectations.<sup>163</sup>

According to historian Barry A. Crouch, all agents "became mini-superintendents of education and, at least once a month, were required to visit every school located in their area." The subassistant commissioners would "use every means" to acquire land for schools, contract with laborers to complete the buildings, and assist in placing the desks and other physical requirements.<sup>164</sup> The Bureau offered three time slots for Freedmen to attend school in order to work around their labor schedules. Besides the day school, night school occurred from 7 o'clock to 9:30 in the evening for adults, and a Sabbath school on Sundays for both adults and children designed to aid the former slaves with religious morals and biblical education in addition to literacy training.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 69-70.

<sup>163</sup> Christopher B. Bean, *Too Great a Burden to Bear: The Struggles and Failure of the Freedmen's Bureau in Texas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 89.

<sup>164</sup> Barry A. Couch, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 31.

Many challenges plagued the Freedmen Bureau schools throughout their existence. Freedmen were often unable to pay tuition, which hindered the schools' effectiveness. Tuition varied and could range from fifty cents to one dollar and fifty cents per pupil with the price adjusted for additional siblings, although children of widows and orphans that attended did not pay tuition. The Bureau experimented with tuition-free schooling for a brief period, but with mixed results. Free schools either saw soaring enrollment or a decrease in student population due to a number of factors. Some parents removed their children because they did not wish to accept charity. Others withdrew their children in the tuition-based schools in order to enroll them in tuition-free institutions. Tuition-free schools, thus, did not last long for such reasons. Clearly, revenue needed to be generated due to the lack of funds for supplies and teachers' salaries.<sup>165</sup>

Natural disasters and the environment also wreaked havoc on the Freedmen's Bureau schools. Epidemics of yellow fever or cholera swept through, especially from the coastal areas, and devastated school enrollment as teachers, students, and parents struggled to survive. Crop failure also caused enrollment to plummet because parents could not continue to send their children to school when they did not have the means to pay tuition. When the crops succeeded, labor intensified, and children old enough to work in the fields could

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<sup>165</sup> Couch, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans*, 70-71.

not attend school during the fall and spring months in order to supplement their family's income.<sup>166</sup>

A lack of qualified teachers, buildings, and supplies plagued the school system as well. Several benevolent societies as the American Missionary Association, the American Bible Society and African Methodist Church, served the Bureau in attempting to send teachers and materials to the desperate Freedmen.<sup>167</sup> Some societies in New England considered Texas too remote for their aid. The Peabody Foundation<sup>168</sup> toured Texas and decided not to spend money on helping such a "lawless" region and calling it "the darkest field educationally in the United States."<sup>169</sup> The demand for textbooks and bibles

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>167</sup> "The American Missionary Association (AMA) was an abolitionist group founded on Protestant beliefs. It focused on the abolition of slavery, education for African Americans, gaining racial equality, and promoting Christian values and was most prominent in the United States before and during the Civil War and during Reconstruction." "With this idea at the core of the AMA beliefs, they founded more than five hundred schools and colleges in the South and spent more money doing so than the U.S. government-sponsored Freedmen's Bureau. Those colleges included Fisk University, Hampton Institute, Tougaloo College, Atlanta University, Dillard University, Talladega College, and Howard University. The American Missionary Association also created the Freedmen's Aid Society to recruit Northern teachers to teach in the South and help find those teachers housing." American Missionary Association (1846-1999), accessed November 12, 2018, <https://blackpast.org/aah/american-missionary-association-1846-1999>

<sup>168</sup> "Shocked by reports and letters about the South's Civil War devastation, George Peabody (1795-1869) founded the \$2 million Peabody Education Fund (PEF, 1867-69) to aid public education in eleven former Confederate states and West Virginia. Born in Massachusetts but a merchant in the South, he became an international banker in London (1837-69) and a philanthropist." "In its first thirty years (1868 through 1897) the PEF gave the eleven former Confederate states and West Virginia a total of \$2,478,000 to advance public schools, teacher institutes, and normal schools." Franklin Parker and Betty J. Parker, "Peabody Education Fund in Tennessee," *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, October 8, 2017, accessed November 11, 2018, <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/peabody-education-fund-in-tennessee/>.

<sup>169</sup> Couch, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans*, 94.

soon overshadowed the supply, however. Citizens struggled to find suitable locations for children to learn.

The Bureau encouraged the Freedmen communities to raise as much money as they could, with the government providing a supplement for the remainder. If the black community could raise funds, they did and with surprising ferocity. Poverty hindered many, however, and many buildings resembled sheds or classes convened outdoors. Sometimes teachers could teach within a home, or the Bureau rented buildings in the community. At times, white churches shared part of their building for classes, but as enrollment grew so did the tensions between the races. Sometimes former plantation owners asked to erect a school on their grounds to attract a labor force and make the workers into more productive citizens.<sup>170</sup> Luring educators proved just as demanding as many did not wish to go into the dangerous conditions and face such harsh opposition for little or no pay despite the noble cause.

Educators often faced dangerous working conditions while performing their duties. Many Southerners disliked having Northern teachers and feared that they would train their charges into being sympathetic to Union values and beliefs. Whites believed the black students might “become too independent, too

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 73-78.

politically and socially aware,” thus upsetting the Southern way of life.<sup>171</sup> One Houston woman explained that she would “sooner put a bullet in their heads” than educate the Freedmen.<sup>172</sup> Clearly, many Freedmen’s Bureau schools stood in hostile territories as symbols of a changing Southern society and caused numerous white citizens to invoke deeply rooted aggression against anyone that supported such educational goals.

Black communities seemed indifferent in their desire for a male or female teacher, but the Bureau preferred male educators to endure the pressures stemming from the resistant white populations. The Bureau faced difficulties housing teachers as no one wanted to associate with these individuals or to take on the risks that came with sheltering an unwelcomed guest. Many missionary teachers faced ostracization from townspeople and some received daily threats. The Ku Klux Klan did not hesitate to burn down school buildings or to tar and feather teachers.<sup>173</sup> In East Texas, five black schools burned in 1871 alone.<sup>174</sup> Eric Foner describes in his work, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, how William Luke, an Irish-born teacher of Freedmen, “suffered verbal abuse, saw shots fired into his home, and finally, in 1870, was lynched at Cross Plains, Alabama, along with four black men” by the Klan. He continued by telling the story of Washington

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>172</sup> Richter, *Overreached on All Sides*, 59.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 75-85.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 92.

Eager who met his end when the Georgia Klan murdered him because, according to his brother, “he was too big a man...he can write and read and put it down himself.”<sup>175</sup>

Due to the dangerous working conditions of educators, the Bureau hired numerous local teachers of both races whenever possible. White educators risked ridicule from their neighbors if they chose the profession. Black teachers seemed to be the best fit to calm the tensions from the white communities. E. M. Wheelock insisted that these men and women performed a valuable service because “they subsisted on scanty support and penetrated areas where whites could not go” and “understood Negro problems better than their white counterparts.”<sup>176</sup> When General Kiddoo served as assistant commissioner, he reported, “the people of Texas have violent prejudices against the North being imported to teach the Negroes; they do not consider it compatible with the dignity of the Southern character to teach them themselves, but are willing and anxious to have them taught by their own race.”<sup>177</sup>

Even after the Bureau posts closed at the end of 1868, the Freedmen Bureau schools remained open for a few more years. The Democrats began taking back

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<sup>175</sup> Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), 185.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

<sup>177</sup> LaVonne Jackson Leslie, *Freedom after Slavery: The Black Experience and The Freedmen's Bureau in Reconstruction Texas* (Bloomington, IN: Tafford Publishing, 2013), 91-92.

over government seats in 1872 and soon the “redemption” of the South concluded. If they escaped closure, the schools transitioned into public schools funded by state taxes.<sup>178</sup>

### **The Teachers of Deep East Texas**

The Freedmen’s Bureau schools in San Augustine only lasted about four months and typified the same issues as numerous other endeavors throughout Texas and the South. Subassistant commissioner Albert A. Metzner reported that substantial progress toward having schools in his district began in the summer of 1867. In June, he stated that the white citizens seemed indifferent to having schools for the former slaves and donated neither land nor money toward this cause. Metzner indicated that “the freed people are anxious to establish schools, and have lately established a Sunday School in this county.”<sup>179</sup> He continued by explaining that he has not established a school in each county because of the lack of teachers. The following month, the agent reported that the freed people continued to make efforts to build school houses, but he knew they

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<sup>178</sup> Hornsby, "The Freedmen's Bureau Schools in Texas, 1865-1870.", 397-417.

<sup>179</sup> Letter to J. P. Kirkman from Albert Metzner, June 30, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-83GL-D?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYP%3A1513612102%2C1513613801> : accessed 24 October 2018), Texas > Roll 21, Reports, operations and conditions, June-Aug 1867 > image 169 of 1108; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).



would not succeed unless aided by the federal government.<sup>180</sup> Poor cotton crops that summer also hindered their efforts erect any buildings.

In August, Metzner seemed delighted to report the opening of two schools in San Augustine, and stated they “are progressing nicely” and he sent in requests for religious school books. He identified the two teachers as “colored men, but not competent. I have engaged them to break the ice, hoping to be furnished with some teachers.”<sup>181</sup> He stresses his frustration with having these two men as “incompetent” educators twice more in future reports but to no avail.

Harry Garrett served as one of those teachers and possessed an intriguing militant background. According to East Texas historian George L. Crocket, Garrett served as a leader in the Freedmen community and had acquired some education before becoming a school teacher.<sup>182</sup> Many former slaves sought refuge in the northwestern parts of the county just outside of town

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<sup>180</sup> Letter to J. P. Kirkman from Albert Metzner, July 31, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-83RS-J?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYP%3A1513612102%2C1513613801> : accessed 24 October 2018), Texas > Roll 21, Reports, operations and conditions, June-Aug 1867 > image 473 of 1108; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>181</sup> Letter to J. P. Kirkman from Albert Metzner, September 1, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-8318-B?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYP%3A1513612102%2C1513613801> : accessed 24 October 2018), Texas > Roll 21, Reports, operations and conditions, June-Aug 1867 > image 972 of 1108; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>182</sup> George L. Crocket, *Two Centuries in East Texas: A History of San Augustine County and Surrounding Territory From 1685 to the Present Time* (Dallas: The Southwest Press, 1932), 347-348.

in an area known as “Pre-emption.” The region received that name because the land could be claimed or “squatted” on before being bought at a cheaper rate due to the sandy soil and less-developed land. Crocket explained that Garrett organized a military company among the Freedmen and would “assemble them at night to the sound of a horn which could be heard for a long distance” and then practiced their drills for several hours. He described a fortified log house that “included notches cut in the top for gun rests.” Crocket said the tension reached a climax with a threatening letter sent to “I.L. Matthews and Reese Matthews, two prosperous planters, demanding certain things under penalty of death.”<sup>183</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan mobilized and visited the fortified log house one evening. According to Crocket’s account, the black residents fled their gun posts behind the notched logs when they observed the Klan’s approach. They pursued Garrett to the river bottom where he ditched his horse and escaped never to return.<sup>184</sup> The 1870 census shows Harry Garrett living in San Augustine as a farmer while in his early thirties with a young family. Garrett shows up on subsequent census records living in Natchitoches, Louisiana, the state of his birth. Perhaps his militant disposition stems from the fact that the 1900 census

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

record lists his father's birthplace as Haiti, not long after the slave rebellion and successful independence movement from the French.<sup>185</sup>

Harry Garret ran the Union School house in San Augustine which opened its doors on August 19, 1867. He ran only a day school, and his early reports cited the students made good progress. The tuition cost between \$1.25 and \$1.50 a month and he recorded that all of his students remained punctual and present in class. In August, the Union School enrolled twenty-one boys and eleven girls, and for the next two months, both numbers climbed to twenty-eight and twenty respectively. For the first month, twenty-three of the students could afford to pay the tuition. Once October came around, however, only four students are shown to have paid, which corresponds to the failed cotton crop that the region suffered that summer. The number of students being present and punctual dropped significantly likely for the same reason as children were needed in the fields. Fifteen people over the age of sixteen enrolled in August, but those numbers dropped as well when their labor shifted to the fields until only three remained. Garrett recorded that the families appeared "very poor" and hardly able to pay the tuition. The number of students that began working with the alphabet basics slowly diminished as progress allowed them to move in the primer readers, but

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<sup>185</sup> Year: 1900; Census Place: Police Jury Ward 1, Natchitoches, Louisiana; Page: 15; Enumeration District: 0068; FHL microfilm: 1240569.

any higher academics remained absent on the school record.<sup>186</sup> Sadly, the Union School house burned to the ground on December 1, 1867.<sup>187</sup>

Spencer Brooks served as the educator for the other school in San Augustine. Brooks, another local Freedman around the same age as Garrett, showed similar results when his school opened on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August in 1867. He reported sixteen boys and fifteen girls as enrolled in both August and September with

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<sup>186</sup> Reports of Freedmen's Bureau school from Harry Garrett, August, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-X1KR> : accessed 6 December 2018), Harry Garrett, Aug 1867; citing Residence, San Augustine Land District, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 12; FHL microfilm 1,695,179.

Report of Freedmen's Bureau school from Harry Garrett, October, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-XYVN> : accessed 6 December 2018), Harry Garrett, 31 Oct 1867; citing Residence, San Augustine Land District, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 12; FHL microfilm 1,695,179.

Report of Freedmen's Bureau school from Harry Garrett, November, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-FMX6> : accessed 6 December 2018), Harry Garrett, 30 Nov 1867; citing Residence, San Augustine, San Augustine, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 12; FHL microfilm 1,695,179.

<sup>187</sup> Report to Bureau from Albert Metzner, November 30, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TZ-843W-R?cc=2427901&wc=73QQ-XYB%3A1513612102%2C1513617301> : accessed 26 October 2018), Texas > Roll 23, Reports, operations and conditions, Nov-Dec 1867 > image 308 of 1085; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

“promises still to increase in numbers.” However, where all but one student paid the \$1.00 tuition fee the first month, only four paid the next. Enrollment decreased as the fall approached, but the number of pupils over the age of sixteen, four females, remained the same. Brooks proudly reported that his students made good progress and the number of students advancing from the alphabet to primer readers almost doubled in just one month. Brooks expressed hope that his school would eventually have a permanent school building and asked for the assistance of the U.S. government for such a project. He knew Freedmen could not afford to finish the construction alone. But, his school, too, closed before the end of the year. Both teachers never received any pay from the government for their services.<sup>188</sup>

Alexander Ferguson, the subassistant commissioner of the Nacogdoches district, reported that a new school building existed one mile east of town on the

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<sup>188</sup> Report of Freedmen’s Bureau school in San Augustine from Spencer Brooks, August, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-X26T> : accessed 6 December 2018), Spencer Brooks, Aug 1867; citing Residence, San Augustine, San Augustine, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 18; FHL microfilm 1,695,185.

Report of Freedmen’s Bureau school in San Augustine from Spencer Brooks, September, 1867. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-XB4P> : accessed 7 December 2018), Spencer Brooks, 30 Sep 1867; citing Residence, San Augustine, San Augustine, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 12; FHL microfilm 1,695,179.

property of Emsly Borrows. The census records show a mulatto clergyman and land owner in his late fifties by that name was the likely donor.<sup>189</sup> Ferguson visited the school three times that month and cited that twenty-six students enrolled under the tutelage of Stacy Mayfield.<sup>190</sup> Mrs. Mayfield, a Southern-born woman, turned to teaching due to her desperate need for money. Ronald E. Butchart in his book, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876*, explains how many women in Mrs. Mayfield's position turned to education when faced with poverty. Such circumstances caused them to "cross the double Southern boundaries of race and gender roles [by] teaching the freed people, in the first instance, and taking up paid labor, in the second." Mayfield once stated, "I have been trying to make my living for the past fourteen months teaching Freedmen."<sup>191</sup> In a letter written in March of 1869 to Bureau headquarters by Charles Haughn, the assistant superintendent of education, described the teacher's situation. "Mrs. Mayfield appears, at first sight, to be a very deserving lady. She is very poor." He

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<sup>189</sup> (Burrough, or Burrows) Year: 1870; Census Place: District 1, Nacogdoches, Texas; Roll: M593\_1599; Page: 439B; Family History Library Film: 553098.

<sup>190</sup> Report to Joseph Welch from Alexander Ferguson, August, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TH-K91V-C?cc=2427894&wc=31S1-T3X%3A1556264002%2C1556267401> : 1 August 2016), Texas > Roll 13, Monthly reports from teachers and subassistant commissioners, Apr-Sept 1868 > image 792 of 1013; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978).

<sup>191</sup> Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 68.

continued to state that if she received \$15 per month, she could take on up to thirty-five students (she taught thirteen at that time).

Further in his letter, Haughn mentioned, "Mrs. Mayfield has never received a cent from the Bureau" and that "she is very needy." Mayfield was likely a widow as there is no mention of a husband's support, and teachers could not be married while working. The letter states Mayfield once owned several slaves, but now he asked the Bureau to "judge of her situation now" as he came to her defense.<sup>192</sup> Miss Mary Orndorf, another teacher mentioned in the letter, suffered similar conditions. She, like a few other teachers that came through Nacogdoches to aid Mayfield, only taught about a month in the district. Haughn describes her reason for going into education as "only hunger compels her to teach."<sup>193</sup>

Agent Ferguson reported to the Bureau that there existed numerous educational needs for his district. He stated that five more schools would expand educational opportunities and that the towns of Homer, Alto, Linn Flat, Douglass, and Chireno would benefit significantly. Ferguson repeated the desire for outside help in his endeavors. He claimed that help would not be needed, if the "cotton

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<sup>192</sup> Report of Charles Haughn, March 24, 1869. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TH-FS9P-M?cc=2427894&wc=31SB-DP8%3A1556264002%2C1556271301 : 9 March 2015>), Texas > Roll 6, Letters received, H-M, 1868-1870 > image 98 of 1132; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978).

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

crop is made,” which did not happen in many cases.<sup>194</sup> He suggested that paying half of the students’ tuition costs could help. When asked by a questionnaire if his subdistrict had used any Northern charitable aid, he replied that “none have ever been received though they need it very much.”<sup>195</sup> The questionnaire also asked what else the Bureau could do for education in his district. Agent Ferguson remarked, “The Bureau has never done anything to encourage education in this district, though repeatedly called upon by former agents.”<sup>196</sup>

Stacy Mayfield’s school began in the summer of 1868 and continued for more than a year. Her enrollment fluctuated over the months from seven Freedmen students during the fall harvest, to forty-four pupils in the summer off-season. Some months she received tuition from most of her students, but at other times the money for education became nonexistent. Once, she told that her tuition consisted of “a few bushels of corn.” Mayfield enumerated one white student

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<sup>194</sup> Report from Alexander Ferguson, July 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TH-KS9W-5?cc=2427894&wc=31S1-T3X%3A1556264002%2C1556267401> : 1 August 2016), Texas > Roll 13, Monthly reports from teachers and subassistant commissioners, Apr-Sept 1868 > image 566 of 1013; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978).

<sup>195</sup> Report from Alexander Ferguson, November, 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TH-KSKY-6?cc=2427894&wc=313M-W38%3A1556264002%2C1556268101> : 1 August 2016), Texas > Roll 14, Monthly reports from teachers and subassistant commissioners, Oct 1868-May 1869 > image 296 of 1210; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978).

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.



over the months and a small group of adults in her classroom. Her charges became literate by practicing the alphabet, reading primers, and continued with more advanced readers. Arithmetic, grammar, history, and writing made up the curriculum for a small number of more advanced students. Mrs. Mayfield bragged one month that her pupils “improved very fast” despite her numbers dwindling from a bout of whooping cough. Her wooden school house consisted of a sixteen by thirty foot building which the Bureau rented.<sup>197</sup> No

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<sup>197</sup> The above paragraph about Stacy Mayfield’s school compared reports from the following months:

Report of the Freedmen’s Bureau school in Nacogdoches from Stacy Mayfield, October 1868. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-XMWT> : accessed 7 December 2018), Stacia Mayfield, 06 Oct 1868; citing Residence, Nacogdoches, Nacogdoches, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M803. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 31; FHL microfilm 1,695,216.

Report of the Freedmen’s Bureau school in Nacogdoches from Stacy Mayfield, April, 1869. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-XGT5> : accessed 7 December 2018), Stacy Mayfield, Apr 1869; citing Residence, Nacogdoches, Nacogdoches, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 16; FHL microfilm 1,695,183.

Report of the Freedmen’s Bureau school in Nacogdoches from Stacy Mayfield, June, 1869. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-XPHB> : accessed 7 December 2018), Stacy Mayfield, Jun 1869; citing Residence, Nacogdoches Land District, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 15; FHL microfilm 1,695,182.

Report of the Freedmen’s Bureau school in Nacogdoches from Stacy Mayfield, August, 1869. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-XG8R> : accessed 7 December 2018), Stacy

doubt Mrs. Mayfield made a difference in numerous children's lives as she struggled to keep her finances and future secure.<sup>198</sup>

Thomas Hart also educated Freedmen in Nacogdoches for several years. Hart, an Irish-born teacher in his mid-seventies, had been a resident of Nacogdoches County for over twenty years.<sup>199</sup> Many immigrants may have exhibited "less aversion to teaching African-American students than their white, Southern neighbors."<sup>200</sup> Hart lost a son in the Civil War who fought on the Union side which also could explain his actions.<sup>201</sup> Unlike Mayfield, he not only ran a day school but at times he operated a night and Sunday or Sabbath school for the benefit of the former slaves in his area. Hart also taught for over a year with his day school enrollments averaging twenty pupils with only a few white or adult students mentioned. His Sabbath school classes numbered between eighteen and twenty people and his night school enrolled between five and eighteen children. His curriculum mostly remained in the early stages of reading with only a few transitioning to a more advanced level of literacy. Mr. Hart introduced no other advanced subjects, such as geography or arithmetic. The old instructor ran

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Mayfield, Aug 1869; citing Residence, Nacogdoches Land District, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 15; FHL microfilm 1,695,182.

<sup>198</sup> A few years after teaching, she married a local businessman in the logging industry, Samuel Knisley, according to marriage records, thus securing herself financially.

<sup>199</sup> Year: 1870; Census Place: District 1, Nacogdoches, Texas; Roll: M593\_1599; Page: 459B; Family History Library Film: 553098.

<sup>200</sup> Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People*, 59.

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

an efficient school; his students were marked as punctual and present every month he reported. Hart mentioned that once cotton-picking season closed, the children returned to school to continue their learning. He taught in a wooden school building measuring sixteen by eighteen feet and reported that the sentiment toward teaching Freedmen had become “more favorable” by the summer of 1870. Never in any of his reports did he mark any tuition paid by his students. Before he closed the school house doors, he lamented in August of 1870, “I am much in need of money for rent of room and tuition and of \$15.00 per month as promised me by Charles Haughn...when he engaged me in May of 1869.”<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> The above paragraph about Thomas Hart’s school compared reports from the following months:

Report of Freedmen’s Bureau school of Nacogdoches from Thomas Hart, June, 1869. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-XP2M> : accessed 7 December 2018), Thomas Hart, 30 Jun 1869; citing Residence, Nacogdoches Land District, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 15; FHL microfilm 1,695,182.

Report of Freedmen’s Bureau school of Nacogdoches from Thomas Hart, September, 1869. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-X5M9> : accessed 7 December 2018), Thomas Hart, Sep 1869; citing Residence, Nacogdoches Land District, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 15; FHL microfilm 1,695,182.

Report of Freedmen’s Bureau school of Nacogdoches from Thomas Hart, November, 1869. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-XTH5> : accessed 7 December 2018), Thomas Hart, Nov 1869; citing Residence, Nacogdoches Land District, Texas, United States, NARA

Congress ended the Freedmen's Bureau with legislation passed on January 1, 1869. However, it extended the work of the Bureau schools for another year. Some schools survived with the help of philanthropic or church support, but many closed. Others transitioned into public institutions supported by local taxes.<sup>203</sup> With public schools for black children now being funded by the state, many benevolent societies turned their attention to establishing black colleges.

The Freedmen's Bureau teachers of Deep East Texas shared many of the same challenges that their counterparts around the state and throughout the

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microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 15; FHL microfilm 1,695,182.

Report of Freedmen's Bureau school of Nacogdoches from Thomas Hart, December, 1869. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-X26R> : accessed 7 December 2018), Thomas Hart, Dec 1869; citing Residence, Nacogdoches, Nacogdoches, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 18; FHL microfilm 1,695,185.

Report of Freedmen's Bureau school of Nacogdoches from Thomas Hart, June, 1870. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-X531> : accessed 7 December 2018), Thomas Hart, Jun 1870; citing Residence, Nacogdoches Land District, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 16; FHL microfilm 1,695,183.

Report of the Freedmen's Bureau school of Nacogdoches from Thomas Hart, August, 1870. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, 1865-1872," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2QP-XGM5> : accessed 7 December 2018), Thomas Hart, 29 Aug 1870; citing Residence, Nacogdoches, Nacogdoches, Texas, United States, NARA microfilm publications M822. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1978); roll 16; FHL microfilm 1,695,183.

<sup>203</sup> Hornsby, "The Freedmen's Bureau Schools in Texas, 1865-1870.", 397-417.

South did. Despite the small achievements of the schools, the institutions could have enjoyed more successes if the Bureau had provided adequate funding toward the teachers' salaries and the building of school structures. Because of the withdrawal of the agents and troops in each subdistrict by 1869, teachers and students remained without adequate protection from the prejudices they faced for the last few years of their existence. With a heavy heart, they endured much only to see their school doors close or buildings burned to the ground. L. W. Stevenson, the Superintendent of Schools for Texas, wrote a report to Washington in July of 1870 and stated that the Bureau "had allayed prejudice, confronted and combatted all difficulties, and paved the way for the quiet and peaceful establishment of a free school system of the state."<sup>204</sup> Although forty thousands more former slaves remained illiterate in Texas when the program ended, thousands of children benefitted from their services provided by the Freedmen's Bureau schools.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Smallwood, *A Time of Hope*, 94.

## CONCLUSION

The Freedman's Bureau began as a one-year experiment by the War Department on March 3, 1865, but extended twice due to the obvious need of the program. Despite some successes, the Freedmen's Bureau failed to reach its goals and closed in January of 1869 after an act passed on July 25, 1868 terminated all but its educational functions. The schools existed for four more years until an act in the summer of 1872 ended the Bureau schools as well.<sup>206</sup>

Historians have given their insight as to why the agency ended in this way. William L. Richter gives several reasons for the Bureau's lack of accomplishments. He feels that the "story of the Bureau activities in Texas, then, reveals a problem common to the whole Reconstruction effort, a lack of commitment to a potentially imaginative program."<sup>207</sup> He claims that the agents were restricted by their superiors and "unable to move about the countryside freely, powerless to enforce their edicts, and inundated by a sea of red tape."<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>History of the Freedmen's Bureau. "United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Assistant Commissioner, 1865-1872," images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TD-N9N6-G?cc=2427901&wc=73RQ-S5B%3A1513612102%2C1513419177> : accessed 10 December 2018), Texas > A descriptive pamphlet > image 6 of 18; citing multiple NARA microfilm publications; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880, RG 105; (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1969-1980).

<sup>207</sup> William L. Richter, *Overreached on All Sides the Freedmen's Bureau Administrators in Texas, 1865-1868* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 255-301.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

Paperwork demands swamped the agents at every turn as many faced “frustration and fatigue.” He blames the rigidity of the military as the reason they did not bring about more social change. Richter also explains that many agents were unfamiliar to the South, did not fully grasp the “code of the West” or a personal code of behavior based on violence. The subassistant commissioners stood unprepared for the “availability of a wide variety of weapons, an overindulgence in liquor, and the racial hatred compounded by the loss of the war and the social changes that followed.”<sup>209</sup> Barry Crouch adds that “the problems that Texas and Texans posed for the Freedmen’s Bureau in terms of space, time, and control were beyond what the agency could do in so short a period.”<sup>210</sup> He continues to explain that all of the assistant commissioners “tried to give the Freedpeople as much protection as possible,” but “pursued and emphasized different policies” as they took office which added to the confusion faced by the agents trying to follow their orders.<sup>211</sup> James A. Smallwood compares Texas’s Bureau with that of other Southern states by saying that “the Bureau was not as effective in Texas as it was in other Southern states—in South Carolina and Florida, for example—because at the height of its expansion in 1867 it had only sixty-nine local agents in the state, a force too small to be fully

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Barry A. Crouch, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 37.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 38.

effective.<sup>212</sup> Historian Eric Foner sums up the inadequacies of the organization by explaining that “Perhaps the greatest failing of the Freedmen’s Bureau was that it never quite comprehended the depths of racial antagonism and class conflict in the postwar South.”<sup>213</sup> These reasons led to the challenges and failures of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Texas and the entire South.

Much of the work of agents in these East Texas counties remains practically forgotten by present citizens. Men such as Alexander Ferguson and Albert Metzner remain left out of accounts of Reconstruction in the local libraries as the era gets only a small mention, usually void of any atrocities committed against the Freedmen. Several of the men mentioned in their Bureau records committed murder or other hate crimes yet continued with their lives after Reconstruction unmolested by punishment and lauded as pillars of their communities.

Ferguson and Metzner faced the same challenges and hardships as their counterparts in other areas of the state and throughout the South. Both faced shortages of necessities and troops, mounds of paperwork, and death threats. They witnessed the helplessness of the Freedmen, and yet felt powerless to aid them. The agents felt satisfaction in the apprehension of a criminal only to see him escape into the piney woods or experienced a sense of accomplishment

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<sup>212</sup> James M. Smallwood, *Time of Hope, Time of Despair: Black Texans During Reconstruction* (Port Washington N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1981), 161.

<sup>213</sup> Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), 77.



when they established a school only to watch it burn to the ground. Both gentlemen blurred professional lines as they became part of the local citizenry: Ferguson marrying a Nacogdoches girl and Metzner participating in local politics. Much like many subassistant commissioners in the South, these agents transformed from optimistic, brave leaders to paranoid men who feared every shadow for lurking danger. The administrators learned to question the loyalty of their allies all while dealing with public attacks on their character. By the end of their terms, Ferguson and Metzner faced isolation as they attempted to defend the rights of the former slaves.

Alexander Ferguson and Albert Metzner performed the duties of their posts in vastly different ways. Ferguson, in the face of personal threats, isolation, and the sudden disappearance of his father-in-law, stayed vigilant to his duties and continued to remain in Nacogdoches until the Bureau shut down completely. Metzner, on the other hand, quickly succumbed to alcoholism and the hopelessness of his situation until his flight to Austin to escape danger.

The Freedmen's Bureau schools established in Deep East Texas also exemplified the same limited achievements and immense struggles as other institutions throughout the state as the agents strove to improve the lives of the African Americans in their subdistricts. Despite public scrutiny and animosity from the white community surrounding them, the teachers achieved measurable progress with their students. The educators faced poverty and the threat of

being socially ousted or harmed while employed by the Bureau. The black school children of East Texas, similar to Freedmen students throughout the South, encountered the challenges of paying tuition or missing school due to illnesses or fieldwork. The demand for education persisted even as the agents' posts began closing and some Bureau schools, such as in Nacogdoches, remained open for a few more years.

Future research could shed light on any connection between the Freedmen's Bureau schools of Deep East Texas and the Rosenwald Schools established in the early part of the twentieth century. Julius Rosenwald was the president of Sears, Roebuck, and Co. in Chicago and realized the need to build schools in the South for African-American students. With the help of Booker T. Washington, he funded around five hundred schools in Texas alone with over a dozen in Deep East Texas.<sup>214</sup> There has been substantial digitization of the Freedmen's Bureau documents, vital records, and period newspapers which benefits researchers more than in the past decades. Historians and volunteers see the value in continuing to add to these collections, and future scholars may more easily discover new stories that bring to life this relatively untold era in our history.

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<sup>214</sup> "Rosenwald Schools in Texas," Texas Historical Commission, accessed December 09, 2018, <http://www.thc.texas.gov/rosenwald>.

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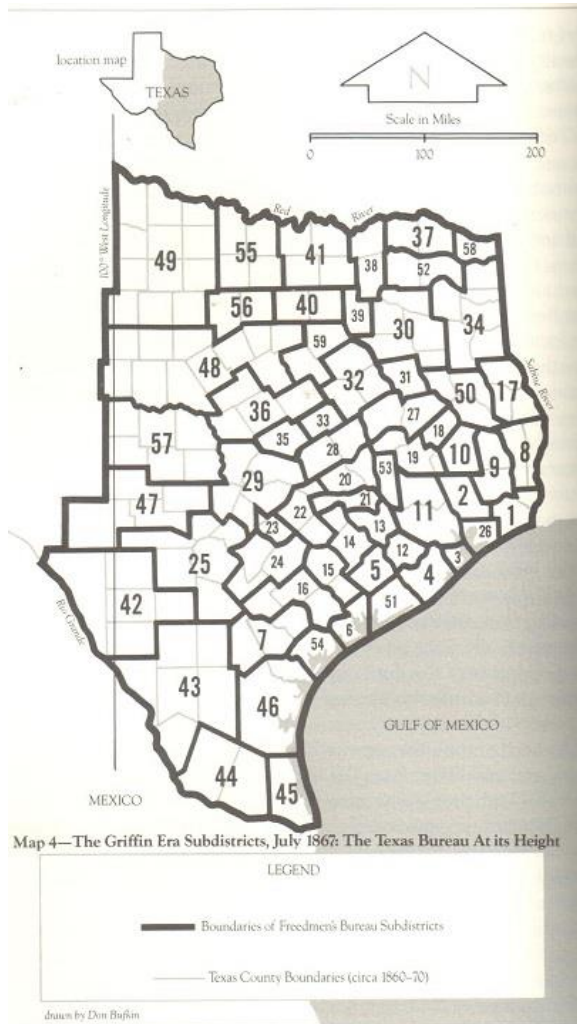
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# APPENDIX



William L. Richter, *Overreached on All Sides the Freedmen's Bureau Administrators in Texas 1865-1868* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 156.



**List of Freedmen's Bureau Administrators in Deep East Texas**

Commissioner:

Oliver Otis Howard

Assistant Commissioners:

Edgar M. Gregory ..... September 1865 to May 1866  
Joseph Kiddoo..... May 1866 to January 1867  
Charles Griffin ..... January 1867 to September 1867  
Joseph J. Reynolds ..... September 1867 to January 1869  
Edward Canby..... (held office only briefly)

Subassistant Commissioners:

Fiftieth Subdistrict  
(Nacogdoches, Angelina, and southern Cherokee Counties):

Edwin Onley Gibson ..... May 1867 to September 1867  
T. M. K. Smith..... September 1867 to January 1868  
James F. Grimes ..... January 1868 to March/April 1868  
Alexander Ferguson ..... March/April 1868 to January 1869  
(Ferguson had been a Bureau clerk in Nacogdoches since June of 1867)

Seventeenth Subdistrict  
(San Augustine, Sabine, and Shelby Counties):

Albert A Metzner..... spring of 1867 to August 1868  
Michael Butler..... August 1868 to January 1869

## VITA

Jacy King was raised in Shelby County where her family roots date back to the 1830s. She graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University in 1998 with a Bachelors of Arts in Composite Social Studies. Mrs. King has been an educator for twenty-one years and has taught every grade from 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> in the subjects of United States History, World History, Geography, Local History, Government, Economics, Psychology, Sociology, and Genealogy. For the last twenty years, she has been employed at Chireno ISD where she has taken groups of students to tour historic cities on the East Coast as well as in Europe. In 2015, Mrs. King received the Texas Humanities Teacher of the Year Award and in 2018, she received the Joe Atkins Public School Teacher of the Year Award from the East Texas Historical Association. Also in 2018, she earned her Master of Arts degree in History from Stephen F. Austin State University. She met her husband, Brian King, at Chireno and now they have two handsome boys, Trevin and Samuel, and have been living in Nacogdoches for fifteen years.

Permanent Address:       3504 Stones Throw  
                                      Nacogdoches, TX 75965

Chicago Style

This thesis was typed by Jacy King.