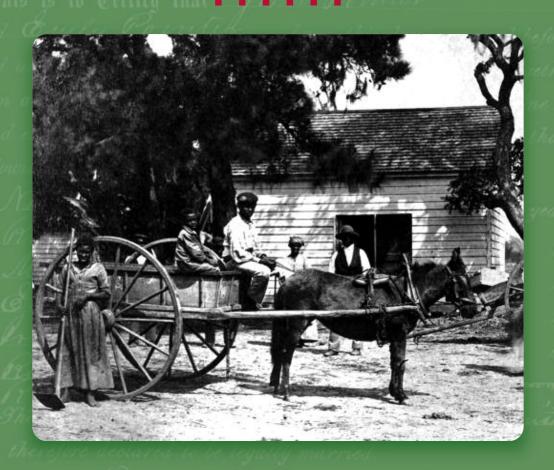
Freedmen &

Black Family Research

Records of Post-Civil War Federal Agencies at the National Archives



Reference Information Paper 108

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION WASHINGTON, DC REVISED 2010

Black Family Research

Records of Post-Civil War Federal Agencies at the National Archives

Compiled by Reginald Washington

Reference Information Paper 108

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, DC
REVISED 2010

United States. National Archives and Records Administration.
Black family research: records of post-Civil War Federal
agencies at the National Archives/compiled by Reginald
Washington—Washington, DC: National Archives and Records
Administration, revised 2010.

___ p.; 23 cm.—(Reference Information Paper 108)

1. United States. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands—History—Sources—Bibliography—Catalogs. 2. United States. Commissioners of Claims—History—Sources—Bibliography—Catalogs. 3. United States. Freedman's Bank and Trust Company—History—Sources—Bibliography—Catalogs. 4. Afro-Americans—United States—Genealogy. 5. Freedmen—History—Archival resources. 6. Registers of births, etc.—United States. I. Washington, Reginald. II. Title.

Front cover: "Gwine to da Field." Freedmen who entered Union lines during the Civil War were often put to work on lands under Federal Government control. Freedmen shown here worked on the James Hopkinson plantation at Edisto Island, South Carolina. (64-CN-8971)

Back cover: The Freedmen's Bureau was responsible for issuing rations and clothing to destitute freedmen and refugees. This policy originated with the U.S. Army, which provided relief to needy slaves who fled into Union lines. (111-BA-2212)

Introduction

he National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is the official repository of the permanently valuable records of the U.S. Government. NARA's vast holdings document the lives and experiences of persons who interacted with the Federal Government. The records created by post–Civil War Federal agencies are perhaps some of the most important records available for the study of black family life and genealogy. Reconstruction-era Federal records document the black family's struggle for freedom and equality and provide insight into the Federal Government's policies toward the nearly 4 million African Americans freed at the close of the American Civil War. The records are an extremely rich source of documentation for the African American family historian seeking to "bridge the gap" for the transitional period from slavery to freedom.

This reference information paper describes three post-Civil War Federal agencies' records housed at NARA in Washington, DC, and College Park, MD: the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands; the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company; and the Commissioners of Claims. Records of these agencies often provide considerable personal data about the African American family and community, including family relations, marriages, births, deaths, occupations, and places of residence. They can contain the names of slave owners and information concerning black military service, plantation conditions, manumissions, property ownership, migration, and a host of family related matters. While these records represent a major source for African American genealogical research at NARA, there are other Federal records available to assist the black family researcher as well. For details of these records, researchers should consult the Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives (National Archives Trust Fund Board, 2000); Black Studies: A Select Catalog of National Archives Microfilm Publications (National Archives Trust Fund Board, 2007); and Black History: A Guide to Civilian Records in the National Archives (General Services Administration, 1981).

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

Group [RG] 105), also known as the Freedmen's Bureau, was established in the War Department by an act of Congress on March 3, 1865. The Bureau was responsible for the supervision and management of all matters relating to the refugees and freedmen and lands abandoned or seized during the Civil War, duties previously shared by military commanders and U.S. Treasury Department officials. In May 1865, President Andrew Johnson appointed Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard as Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau. Howard's headquarters were in Washington, DC, but assistant commissioners, subassistant commissioners, and agents conducted the Bureau's daily operations in the former Confederate states, the border states, and the District of Columbia.

Although the Bureau was not abolished until 1872, the bulk of its work was conducted from June 1865 to December 1868. While a major part of the Bureau's early activities included the supervision of aban-



Most Freedmen came in contact with the Freedmen's Bureau at the local level such as at this office in Beaufort, South Carolina. (165-C-394)

doned and confiscated property, its mission was to provide relief and help freedmen become self-sufficient. Bureau functions included issuing rations and clothing, operating hospitals and refugee camps, and supervising labor contracts between planters and freedmen. The Bureau also managed apprenticeship disputes and complaints, assisted benevolent societies in the establishment of schools, helped freedmen in legalizing marriages entered into during slavery, and provided transportation to refugees and freedmen who were attempting to reunite with their family or relocate to other parts of the country.

As Congress extended the life of the Bureau, it added other duties, such as assisting black soldiers and sailors in obtaining back pay, bounty payments, and pensions. When the Bureau was discontinued, its remaining functions were transferred to the Freedmen's Branch of the Adjutant General's Office. The records of this office are among the Bureau's files. *Records of the Field Offices of the Freedmen's Branch, Office of the Adjutant General, 1872–1878* (NARA Microfilm M2029, 58 rolls) contains extensive genealogical information concerning black soldiers' and sailors' claims for bounty, pension, arrears of pay, commutation of rations, and prize money. The records can be valuable when used in conjunction with military service and pension records.

Because the Bureau's records contain a wide range of data about the African American experience during slavery and freedom, they are an invaluable source for the black family historian. Among the records are registers that give the names, ages, and former occupations of freedmen and names and residences of former owners. In addition, there are marriage registers that provide the names, addresses, ages, and complexions of husbands and wives and their children. For some states there are census lists, details of labor and apprenticeship agreements, complaint registers, personal data about black soldiers (including company and regiment), and a variety of documentation relating to the social and economic conditions of the black family.

Headquarters Records

Records of the Freedmen's Bureau, Washington, DC, headquarters consist of records of Commissioner Oliver Otis Howard and his staff. They have been described in *Records of the Bureau of Refugees Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Washington Headquarters* (**Preliminary Inventory 174**). The inventory descriptions of the Washington office are arranged by offices or divisions. Generally, researchers are less likely to find family related information among headquarter's files; however, because assistant commissioners and their subordinates forwarded a variety of reports and other documents to the Washington headquarters, the records can contain genealogical information.

For example, a series of marriage records among the headquarters' files includes freedmen's marriage certificates, licenses, reports, and other documents relating to marriages, covering the period 1861–69, with most dated between 1865 and 1868. It appears that this series was compiled or brought together by the Adjutant General's Office after the Freedmen's Bureau was abolished. These records for Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, South Carolina, Virginia, and the District of Columbia have been reproduced on microfilm (NARA Microfilm M1875, 5 rolls). However, the number and the type of records found vary for each state. The files for Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee contain the greatest number of marriage certificates. These various marriage records can provide dates and places of marriages, and the names of couples, parents, former spouses, children, and the individual who performed the marriage ceremony.

In a letter to the Washington headquarters, Robert K. Scott, assistant commissioner for the State of South Carolina, included lists of destitute people in South Carolina. The lists are arranged alphabetically by county or city. They provide the name, sex, age, race, number of family members, the amount of land the person had to seed, and general remarks about the physical and economic condition of each destitute person.

Field Office Records

Records of the Bureau's field offices consist of records received and created by the assistant commissioners of the states and their subordinate officers. While the organizational structure under each assistant commissioner varied from state to state, subordinate officials in each state performed similar work. Field offices were inconsistent however, in the kinds of records they created. Thus, certain kinds of series available for some states may not exist for others. It is important to note that most people came in contact with the Bureau at the local level. Therefore, the vast majority of series that contain genealogical data can be found among these files.

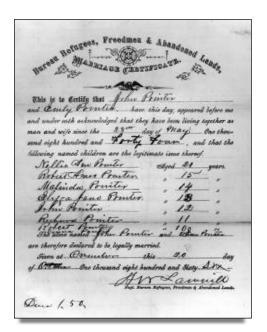
For instance, there is an estimated 60 linear feet or more of labor contracts between blacks and planters among the field office records. Most contracts are from the Deep South and some include agreements with entire families. In the records of the assistant commissioner for Mississippi there are four marriage registers and nine such registers in various field offices in Arkansas. There are also marriage records for the assistant commissioners for the District of Columbia and marriage registers, lists, certificates, and licenses for several field offices in Kentucky. At least six field offices for Virginia contain census returns and lists. The records of the assistant commissioner for the District of Columbia, whose jurisdiction included parts of Maryland and Virginia, have cen-

sus returns for the District, and in Virginia for Alexandria, Freedmen's Village, and Loudoun and Fairfax counties.

Other field office records of genealogical value are claims relating to the back pay, bounty payments, and pensions of black soldiers and sailors. There are claims registers and related records for every state, except Texas. These records can be used to supplement information found in the tens of

thousands of military service and pension records of African
American soldiers and sailors who served during the Civil War, particularly those who died in combat.
Researchers should also examine files of letters sent and received by field officers. While these records often relate to Bureau operations, they do contain letters from and about African Americans and their families.

Intermixed with field office files are "pre-bureau" records that document the interactions of military commanders and U.S. Treasury agents with blacks during the Civil War. These records consist largely of files created by wartime superintendents of freedmen appointed by the War Department to manage "contraband" camps that provided food, clothing, and shelter to blacks entering Union lines. The most voluminous records are for Louisiana and Mississippi (NARA Microfilm



In 1866, Freedmen's Bureau officials at Owensboro, Kentucky, issued a marriage certificate to John and Emily Pointer that included the names and ages of their eight children. They had lived together as man and wife since 1844.

M1914, 5 rolls, and M1907, 65 rolls) and fewer for Alabama, Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, Virginia, and the

District of Columbia. Many of the records contain registers that include the names and ages of blacks employed at the camps, addresses of former owners, lists of persons receiving rations, and information relating to the administration of abandoned and confiscated property. Other records relating to the activities of military commanders in areas where the Freedmen's Bureau operated can be found in the Records of the U.S. Army Continental Commands, 1821–1920 (RG 393). Records concerning the activities of

special agents of the Treasury Department are in the Records of Civil War Agencies of the Treasury Department (RG 366).

The surviving records of the Freedmen's Bureau field offices have been described in a three-part unpublished inventory entitled *Preliminary Inventory* of the Records of the Field Offices of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (NM 95). The inventory descriptions of the records are arranged alphabetically by state and thereunder by offices, and thereunder alphabetically by county, town, or village. Part One describes the records of the bureau offices in Alabama, Arkansas (including the Indian Territory), the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, and Louisiana. Part Two includes descriptions for offices in Maryland and Delaware, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Part Three covers offices in Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and the records of the Freedmen's branch of the Adjutant General's Office. In addition to providing the locations of the headquarters of state assistant commissioners and subordinate offices, the inventory gives the names and dates of service of individual officers. This information can be helpful in identifying Bureau officials who might have sent and received correspondence on behalf of or about blacks and their families.

Access and Use of the Records

The original Freedmen's Bureau records are available at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC. For access and inquiries about the use of the records, researchers should visit or write the Archives I Reference Section (NWCT1R). Selected records of the Bureau's Washington headquarters and all field offices have been reproduced on microfilm. Most of the field records that were microfilmed prior to 2002 relate to the administrative files of the state assistant commissioners and superintendents of education. The exception is the series of field office records for New Orleans (NARA Microfilm M1483, 10 rolls), which contains such records as labor contracts, hospital registers, complaint books, and indentures of apprentices. The records of the field offices for Florida (NARA Microfilm M1869, 15 rolls) have been microfilmed through a cooperative arrangement between NARA and the University of Florida at Gainesville. With the support of Congress, the National Archives completed a multiyear project to preserve and increase the accessibility of field office records, especially those of the subordinate field offices, where researchers are more likely to find records of genealogical value. NARA has microfilmed the field office records for Alabama (NARA Microfilm M1900, 34 rolls), Arkansas (NARA Microfilm M1901, 23 rolls), the District of Columbia (NARA Microfilm M1902, 21 rolls), Georgia (NARA Microfilm M1903, 90 rolls), Kentucky (NARA Microfilm M1904, 133 rolls), Louisiana

(NARA Microfilm M1905, 111 rolls), Maryland/ Delaware (NARA Microfilm M1906, 42 rolls), Mississippi (NARA Microfilm M1907, 65 rolls), Missouri (NARA Microfilm M1908, 24 rolls), North Carolina (NARA Microfilm M1909, 78 rolls), South Carolina (NARA Microfilm M1910, 106 rolls), Tennessee (NARA Microfilm M1911, 89 rolls), Texas (NARA Microfilm M1912, 28 rolls), and Virginia (NARA Microfilm M1913, 203 rolls). All of the field office records are available on microfilm at the National Archives Building, Washington, DC, and at each of NARA's regional facilities. For a list of some of NARA's Freedmen's Bureau microfilm publications and their content, researchers should consult the current edition of the Black Studies microfilm catalog. This guide is available for sale at www.estore.archives.gov or at the Customer Service Center in Washington, DC, or can be ordered from the Research Support Branch (NWCC2). Most Freedmen's Bureau microfilm publications have accompanying descriptive pamphlets (DPs) that include a brief history of the Bureau, a description of the records, and an explanation of the arrangement of the records. DPs can be viewed online or obtained free of cost through the Research Support Branch (NWCC1). Copies of some of the previously filmed publications may be available at NARA's regional records services centers. For information on availability, researchers should contact the nearest regional center or visit NARA's Order Online web page at www.archives.gov.

Copies of inventories for both the Washington headquarters of the Bureau and field office records are available at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC, and at NARA's regional records services facilities. While the inventories for the Washington headquarters and the Black Studies guide should be examined for record series of potential genealogical value, researchers should first consult the preliminary inventories of field office records for the geographic location in which an ancestor resided. If there are no records available for the state, city, or county in which an ancestor lived, family historians will need to examine the inventories and records for neighboring states, counties, and cities. Researchers should identify and search series in field office records that are likely to contain genealogical information (e.g., labor contracts, ration lists and applications, census lists, contracts of indentures, complaint records, marriage records, military claims, etc.) Because of their potential for containing information from and about African Americans, researchers should also search letters sent and received by Bureau officials.

Researchers interested in using Freedmen's Bureau records should bear in mind that they are voluminous and, at times, difficult to use. The headquarter's records and those for the field offices of the state assistant and subordinate offices consist of more than 1,000 cubic feet of records and contain nearly 5,000 separate series. While the records are a treasure trove of information for the study of the black family experience before and after the Civil War, they lack useful name indexes, and, in some instances, the arrangement of the records prevents easy access. Thus, research in the records can be time consuming when looking for individuals. Below are general descriptions of some of the most common record series and those that are apt to include genealogical data:

- **Labor contracts:** Contracts between freedmen and employers (usually farmers or plantation owners) witnessed by Bureau officers. Most of the contracts provide the names of the contracting parties, the period of service, the rate of wages, and type of work to be performed.
- **Registers of labor contracts:** Registers kept by officers subordinate to assistant commissioners. The registers usually give the date of the contract, the names of the contracting parties, and the rate of wages.
- **Registers and applications of persons receiving rations:** The registers and applications can include the name of the head of family, names of the wife and children, ages of children, location of land, number of cultivated acres, owner of land, and the date that rations were issued.
- **Indentures:** Indentures of apprenticeship are preprinted or handwritten forms giving pertinent data concerning the contracted parties and dates of apprenticeship, and include a statement of the obligations and responsibilities of each party. Registers of indentures provide the date, name of the person indentured, name of the officer who officiated, and name of the custodian to whom the person was indentured.
- **Registers of complaints:** Registers kept by officers subordinate to the assistant commissioners. The "complaints" relate to problems that freedmen brought to the officer's attention. Many of the registers simply list the name or names of the freedmen and the nature of the complaint, but others also give a synopsis or summary of the case.
- **Registers of marriages:** Registers kept by officers subordinate to the assistant commissioners. Most registers give the names of the couple, the date the marriage was registered, and the minister who performed the ceremony. Many registers also provide information about previous marriages and the number of children from these marriages.
- **Census lists:** Census lists can include the individual's name, age, sex, and residence; the name of former owner, if applicable, and the person's occupation and current employment.

- **Registers of claimants:** The registers were compiled by the disbursing officers and usually give the name of the claimant, his company and regiment, and the date he received money from the chief disbursing officer. Registers often contain the amount due the claimant, the date and place the claim was paid, and the person who identified the claimant.
- **List of claimants:** Each "List" was received from a disbursing officer. It is usually a printed form giving the name of the soldier or his heirs, and his rank, company, and regiment. Also provided is the name and residence of the agent, the number and amount of the Treasury certificate, the fees due the agent, and the amount paid to the claimant.
- **Letters sent:** Volumes containing copies of outgoing communications that usually include letters, telegrams, and reports made to superior officers.
- **Registers of letters received:** Volumes in which incoming communications were entered. Registers usually include the date received, the date written, the name and office of the writer, the place from which the letter was written, a summary of the contents, and the entry number assigned to the letter.
- **Letters received:** Incoming communications, usually consisting only of letters, but sometimes including reports and orders.

Internet Sources

Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau)

Archives.gov

For additional information about Freedmen's Bureau records and links to other resources, visit the National Archives Freedmen's Bureau web page at http://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/freedmens-bureau/

Ancestry.com

Ancestry has an online database (http://search.ancestryinstitution.com/search/db.aspx?dbid+1105&enc+1) of selected Freedmen's Bureau Assistant
Commissioner and Field Office records. The database provides digital images of records reproduced on National Archives microfilm publications for the District of Columbia (M1902, 21 rolls), Georgia (M1903, 90 rolls), North Carolina (M1909, 78 rolls), New Orleans, Louisiana (M1483, 10 rolls), Florida (M1869, Assistant Commissioner and Subordinated Field Offices, 15 rolls), Virginia (M1913, 203 rolls), and Tennessee (T142, 73 rolls). The database is searchable by state, start and end year, type of record, and keyword(s).

Records of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company

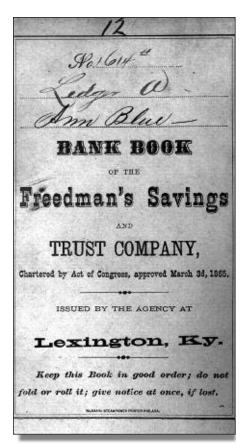
ncorporated by Congress by an act of March 3, 1865, the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company (also known as Freedman's Bank) was established as a banking institution primarily for the benefit of former slaves. Shortly after its creation, two military savings banks at Norfolk, VA, and Beaufort, SC, established during the Civil War for savings deposits of African American soldiers, were transferred to the company. Between 1865 and 1870 the Freedman's Bank opened some 37 branches in 17 states and the District of Columbia. Over its 9-year history, the bank had more than 70,000 depositors and deposits totaling more than \$57 million.

In mid-1874, overwhelmed by the effects of the Panic of 1873, mismanagement, abuse, and fraud, the Freedman's Bank closed. By an act of June 20, 1874, the trustees, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury, appointed a three-member board to take charge of the assets of the company and report its financial condition to the Secretary of the Treasury. A later act of February 21, 1881, abolished the board and directed the Secretary of the Treasury to appoint the Comptroller of the Currency to oversee the affairs of the Bank. The Comptroller was made Commissioner *ex officio* and was required to submit annual reports to Congress. The Commissioner's final report on the Freedman's Bank was made in 1920.

Contrary to what many of its depositors were led to believe, the Bank's assets were not protected by the Federal Government. While half of the depositors eventually received about three-fifths of the value of their accounts, others received nothing. Well into the 20th century, some depositors and their heirs were still seeking reimbursement for the remaining portions of their accounts.

Registers of Signatures of Depositors

Required by law to protect the interests of the heirs of the depositors, the Bank branches collected an enormous amount of personal information about each depositor and his or her family. While the amount of information collected varied from branch to branch, the surviving records of registers of signatures of depositors are probably one of the few bodies of Federal records that provide so much detailed information about black family relations immediately following the Civil War.



Former slaves who opened accounts with the Freedman's Bank were issued passbooks as evidence of their deposits. Ann Blue opened her account in the Lexington, Kentucky, branch office in August 1873.

Registers of Signatures of Depositors in Branches of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, 1865–1874

(NARA Microfilm M816, **27 rolls**) reproduces 55 volumes containing signatures of and personal identification data about depositors in 29 branches of the Freedman's Bank. In addition to the name and account numbers of individual depositors, the files can contain information such as the age, complexion, place of birth, and place raised. The name of the former owner, mistress, and plantation appears in some of the earlier volumes. The files also include place of residence, occupation, parents, spouse, children, brothers and sisters, remarks, and signature. Some entries include death certificates.

The signatures of depositors are arranged alphabetically by state, thereunder by

city in which the branch was located, then by date when the account was established, and finally by account number.

Indexes to Deposit Ledgers

The registers of signatures are not indexed. However, *Indexes to Deposit Ledgers in Branches of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, 1865–1874* (**NARA Microfilm M817, 5 rolls**) reproduces 46 volumes of indexes to deposit ledgers that provide the names of depositors in 26 branch offices of the Freedman's Bank. The indexes also provide account numbers of the deposit ledgers. Some volumes show

the amount of the deposit. The deposit ledgers themselves are not in the National Archives, and it is not known if they still exist. The indexes are arranged alphabetically by state and thereunder by city in which the branch was located. The names are indexed, for the most part, alphabetically by the first letter of the surname. Because the index entries include account numbers, researchers can use them as a rough finding aid to the registers of signatures.

A note of caution, however, is advised when using the indexes. More than one index exists for some bank offices, and some indexes are not arranged in strict alphabetical order. In such cases, it is necessary to examine every name under the letter of the alphabet that begins the surname. In addition, some indexes do not list all depositors whose surnames appear in the registers of signatures; many account numbers are missing; and in some cases, account numbers assigned to depositors in the index are different from those in the signature cards. In this event, it is necessary to search entire rolls of signature cards for bank offices where an ancestor lived. If there were no bank offices in the state and city where an ancestor resided, researchers should search for information about ancestors in the records of branch offices in neighboring states and cities.

Below is a list of Freedman's Bank branch offices for which there are surviving signatures of depositors and indexes to deposit ledgers. Although there are indexes to deposit ledgers available for the Jacksonville, Florida, branch office, there are no surviving signature records. For a general listing

Bank Branches	Indexes	Bank Branches	Indexes
Huntsville, AL	Yes	Vicksburg, MS	Yes
Mobile, AL	No	St. Louis, MO	Yes
Little Rock, AR	Yes	New York, NY	Yes
Washington, DC	Yes	New Bern, NC	Yes
Tallahassee, FL	Yes	Raleigh, NC	Yes
Atlanta, GA	No	Wilmington, NC	
Augusta, GA	Yes	Philadelphia, PA	Yes
Savannah, GA	Yes	Beaufort, SC	Yes
Lexington, KY	Yes	Charleston, SC	Yes
Louisville, KY	Yes	Memphis, TN	Yes
New Orleans, LA	Yes	Nashville, TN	Yes
Shreveport, LA	Yes	Lynchburg, VA	No
Baltimore, MD	Yes	Norfolk, VA	Yes
Columbus, MS	No	Richmond, VA	Yes
Natchez, MS			

165.
Berord for Paul Potter
Mate and No. of Application, apl 9/66/105 Name of Master, James Potter Name of Mistress,
Name of Master, James Voller
Plantation, Savarmah, 76
Height and Complexion, 5 fr 61/4 Plack
Charles of the Manual of the
Regiment and Company, C"_ 34 to U.S.C. J.
Place of Birth, Savannah, Ga Residence,
Occupation,
mother Chail au in
Protter Josey Savh
Wifes father deach the
A signature, Paul + Potter
Mother Chair au in Brother Jose Savh Wifes father Isaac His Signature, Paul + Potter Privi Isaac. Sider Saval & Pressy Mark

Freedman's Bank officials sought deposits from African American soldiers like Paul Potter during the early years of the Bank expansion. His signature card is shown here.

of series contents for signature cards and indexes, researchers should examine the microfilm roll lists in either the *Black Studies* microfilm catalog or the Order Online locator at *www.archives.gov/order*.

Journal of the Board of Trustees and Minutes of Committees and Inspectors

A board of 50 trustees managed the Freedman's Bank. The Journal of the

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- > Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

