



The Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia

[Home](#)

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[Calendar](#)

[Exhibitions and Collections](#)

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[Gift Shop](#)

[Links](#)

[Search](#)

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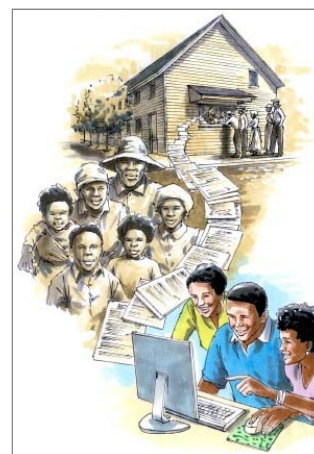
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Virginia Freedmen Extraction and Indexing Project

On October 26, 2006, Governor Tim Kaine announced that Virginia will be the first state in the nation to participate in an historic project to index and digitize Freedmen's Bureau records, allowing historians and descendants of emancipated slaves, freed Blacks, and Black Union soldiers to access historical data, much of which was never before available.

The Freedmen's Bureau records are effectively the "genesis records" of African-American identity post Civil War. They provide the earliest major compilation of information on the African-American community, documenting for the period of 1865-1872 names, legalized marriages, educational pursuits, work contracts, and receipt of rations, health care, legal, and other services. See the entire press release [here](#).



by Norman Rainock
Richmond, VA, 2006

This project is a partnership between the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU), and FamilySearch. GSU will scan into digital images the microfilmed records produced by the National Archives and Records Administration. Volunteers will review the images and document the pertinent information in software templates provided by GSU. The images consist of letters, marriage records, labor contract lists, rations lists, etc. GSU will validate the records and make available to extraction and indexing volunteers information via FamilySearch.org. The Black History Museum will recruit and coordinate the efforts of the volunteers across the state of Virginia.

Based on the experience gained from the Virginia Project, GSU will organize projects for extracting and indexing Freedmen records from other southern states. Ultimately, Howard University will place the broader collection of extracted and indexed records on the Internet for access to genealogists and historians.

The Freedmen's Bureau

The Freedmen's Bureau (officially known as The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands) was established on March 3, 1865. The Bureau was headed by Commissioner General O. O. Howard, who was first selected by President Abraham Lincoln, but then appointed as Commissioner by President Andrew Johnson after Lincoln's death.

The Bureau addressed relief and educational activities relating to refugees and freedmen, including issuing rations, clothing, and medicine. Because it depended on the War Department for funding, the Bureau eventually suffered from a lack of funding and was disbanded



"The Freedmen's Bureau at Richmond, Virginia"
Harpers Weekly, Dec 23, 1865
The Richmond Bureau Headquarters, pictured here, was located on 10th Street between Broad and Capitol.

in 1872. During its tenure, however, the Bureau became a rich repository of information on African Americans in the south.

Volunteers Needed

Volunteers who can work independently, have basic computer skills, good analytical skills, and are detail-oriented are needed for this project. If you enjoy working on computers and love to read about people and events, this is a perfect opportunity for you to impact a nationally and culturally significant undertaking!

The role of the volunteer will be to:

1. Review the digital images (marriage records, letters, bank statements, etc.)
2. Identify the relevant information
3. Document the information in the provided template.

Technology Requirements

- IBM PC or compatible
- Windows® XP, Home or Professional
- Internet Explorer® 6.0.2 SP2 or higher or Mozilla Firefox® 1.5.0.7 or higher
- Computer speed: Pentium® IV or higher
- Internal memory (RAM): 512 MB or higher
- Connection speed: Broadband high-speed (DSL, Cable, or Satellite recommended)

Note: The Black History Museum is unable to provide technology equipment on a temporary or permanent basis. Volunteers will need to obtain access to the appropriate equipment.

Timelines

The project began officially on January 15, 2007, Martin Luther King Day. We expect the extraction and indexing will be completed sometime within 2007.

Ready to Volunteer?

In order for you to become a volunteer, the Project Director will need your name (first and last), address, phone number and email address and the name of the organization that referred you to the Virginia Freedmen Project (if applicable). This information is necessary for volunteers to receive names and passwords.

Register now by sending the above information to the Black History Museum Project Director at: VAFreedmenIndexingProject@comcast.net

Upon receiving the information from you, the Project Director will generate a name and password along with detailed information explaining what you need to know in order to get started.

Frequently Asked Questions

For more information on the Virginia Freedmen Extraction and Indexing Project, please download the informative [Frequently Asked Questions](#) PDF document (about 1.8 megabytes in size).

Freedmen's Bureau Links

- [Freedmen's Bureau Online](#)
- [Valley of the Shadow - Freedmen's Bureau](#)
- [DuBois 1901 Atlantic Monthly Article on the Freedmen's Bureau](#)
- [Wikipedia on the Freedmen's Bureau](#)

National Archives and Records Administration Articles

- [Freedmen's Bureau](#)
- [Freedmen's Bureau Marriage Records](#)
- [Freedmen's Bureau Preservation Project](#)
- [NARA's African-American Research - Introduction and Links to Resources](#)
- [Freedman's Bank](#)