

The Freedmen's Bureau Online

Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands

[Murders and Outrages](#)
[Freedmen's Labor Records](#)
[Marriage Records](#)

Navigation

States

[Alabama](#)
[Arkansas](#)
[Florida](#)
[Georgia](#)
[Louisiana](#)
[Mississippi](#)
[New York](#)
[North Carolina](#)
[South Carolina](#)
[Tennessee](#)
[Texas](#)
[Virginia](#)
[Washington DC](#)

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choose a state:

Search

Search this site:

[Home](#)

The Freedmen's Bureau Online

Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee

Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865 - 1869

National Archives Microfilm Publication M999, Roll 34

"Reports of Outrages, Riots and Murders, Jan. 15, 1866 - Aug. 12, 1868"

Freedmens Bureau List of Outrages Perpetrated by the Whites Upon The Freedmen in the State of Tennessee from April 1865 to March 1866

In April 1865 - While **Gilbert McGee** (colored) was plowing in the field, he was assaulted by two white men, named **Thomas Perry** and **James Morton**, taken from his work, tied to a tree, whipped, shot, and finally beheaded-this on the plantation of Rogan and Brannon, eight miles from Gallatin, on the Hartsville Pike.

About the 8th of Jany 1866 - **Samuel McMurray** shot twice, with intent to kill, **George Gammond** (colored) the ball taking effect in his person, said Gammond had to flee for his life-McMurray afterward returned with others and searched for him, so that he had to remain out, exposed to cold, and is now suffering from frosted feet. His life is still threatened by these men. This occurred on the farm and in the presence of **William Wilcox**-two miles from Dixon Springs, Smith County, Tenn.

Mr. **J. M. Ament**, *Columbia, Tenn.*, July 27, '65 states that an old colored woman, 80 years of age, was driven from home in want by her former owner whom she had served for years and who had sold all her children for money.

John Seage, Supt. R. F. & A. L. *Rutherford Co.* reports the following:

I. On the 29th of June 1865 **Beverly Randolph** beat the wife of "**Ben**" (colored) with his fists-caught her by the chin, threw back her head, drew his knife and swore he would cut her throat-was stopped by his brother-in-law, he then went to his house and got a pistol swearing he would kill some d-d nigger.

II. "**Egbert**" (colored) staid with the family of **J. Irvin** while he was absent in the Rebel Army. About the 1st of August 1865 Irvin returned from the Army and found that Egbert had a crop growing of which he was to have one third-when Egbert began to gather the crop he was driven off with his family, by Irvin, who said he didn't care a d-n for the bureau.

III. **Andrew B. Paine** hired **Sam Neal** (col'd) and family, ten in all to work for him for the season, after they had performed the labor Neal was ordered off with his family without pay or any share of the crop, he did not go and was threatened with death by Paine who afterward with the assistance of one **Miles Ferguson** beat him badly.

IV. About the 4th of August 1865 one **Bill Murray** beat the wife and daughters of "**Anthony**" (colored) very severely with a stick because they were singing a union song.

V. About August 30, '65 **Wm. Jones** tied up a colored boy and gave him five hundred lashes.

VI. **Isaac Rucker** hired **Bee Whitney** and wife (colored) to work the season for one third of the crop they raised. In June, Rucker attempted to drive them off without pay, and because they did not go, beat Whitney's wife on the head and side, badly, with a piece of board-knocking her down, and this only six days before the birth of her child.

VII. **Lina** (colored) lives with **Widow Brothers** on Fall Creek 13 miles from Murfreesboro-Lina says that "**Mr. May**" the overseer tied me up because I would not consent to him, tied my clothes around my neck and beat me very badly, then drove me off without pay or a morsel to eat."

Said "Lina" is 19 years old and was welted all over shamefully.

VIII. **Peter Goodwin** hired laborers who worked the year, he then called in the Due Bills he had given them, paid 20 per ct of their wages, promising to meet them at the office of the Bureau and pay the rest, but left the same day for Arkansas, defrauding them of the remainder of their pay.

IX. On the night of December 17th 1865 **T. Mahoney** went to the house of **Lewis Drennon** (colored) after all were in bed, broke in the door and presented a pistol to Drennon's head and demanded his arms. Drennon assured him that he had none, when Mahoney struck him with his pistol, cutting his head badly and stunning him, he then demanded their money. Drennon's wife got up and went to the chest & got their pocketbook containing only a few cents and give him-Mahoney then searched the premises & took everything of value & left. Drennon fearing they might return went to a neighbors for help-while gone Mahoney & his accomplice returned and beat an old man - father-in-law of Drennon, so that he died two days after.

X. On December 20th **Rolla Miller** in the presence of eleven witnesses, ten of them white, shot at a colored man, named **Bill Stover**, with intent to kill, wounding him twice in his right arm-because Stover took away his sister aged ten years formerly owned by Miller.

Jno. R. Henry, Special Agent at *Knoxville* reports as follows:

I. An old colored man named **Lewis Rose**, 60 years of age, was assaulted by five white men, and badly beaten with a hickory stick-his arm was fractured and his head lacerated and without any cause.

II. A colored man by the name of **Nathan Yarwood** of Monroe Co., Tenn. while working in his shop was shot with a pistol by a white man named **Saml. Wilson**, without provocation: the ball entering his right side and lodging in the left side near the heart, whence it was extracted by **Dr. Bogard** of Sweet Water.

III. **Wm. Ballard** (colored) was robbed of his gun powder lead & by six white men who forcibly entered his house.

W. G. Bond Supt. *Montgomery County* reports the following:

I. About Dec 15, 1865 one **Peter Farthing** beat **Chas. Trigg** (colored) severely with a club.

II. **Lew Johnson**, beat **Dinah Johnson** (col'd) with a club and swore he would kill her.

III. About Dec 9, 1865 Mr. Bond gave **Catherine Riley** (colored) an order to **James Riley**, Loggan Co., Ky, for her child. She got the child and was returning when she was followed by said Riley, overtaken and beaten with a club until she was senseless on the ground. Riley carried the child off and, as he said, "put it out of the reach of the d-d Yankees."

IV. A Negro Soldier was shot not long before this by the same man "**Riley**." Similar cases occur daily.

V. **Jack Ranney**, about 4 miles from Clarksville, beat **Gus Laughlin** (col'd) with a club and threatened to kill him.

S. B. F. C. Barr, Agt. *Wilson Co., Tenn.*, Nov 23, '65 states that a man named **Clint Holt** living 15 miles from Louisville on the line of L & N RR stole a colored boy named **Dick** 8 years old and carried him to Kentucky.

Rev. John W. Jones, Supt. *Gibson Co.* on Jan'y 24, 1866 reports the following case: About the 1st of Jan'y **Donall Wood** a freed man aged sixty years of a quiet peaceable character, while staying with his wife 5 miles from Trenton was taken from his bed by some white men and carried some distance, was shot several times & severely wounded, and left by them as dead, has but partially recovered.

Also an old colored man most inoffensive and harmless was shot & mortally wounded, without any provocation-while driving his team quietly along the public road. He lived but 3 days.

Also some freedmen who had rented houses for the year had them burned.

Mr. **Geo. M. Stewart** of *Dover, Tenn.* 18th Jan'y 1866 reports a number of Freedmen at the *Rough and Ready Furnace* in *Montgomery Co.* were attacked & robbed of their arms and one of them of \$15.00 in money.

Thomas Hendricks (colored) worked for **William Cole**, Bedford Co. Tenn., five or six months in 1865. During the year Cole murdered a white man named **Simmons**. Hendricks then left him and rec'd but five dollars for his work.

At the beginning of the year he made a contract at the office of the Freedmens Bureau to work a year for **Mr. Whit Ransom**-Marshall Co., Tenn. The latter part of Feby, the said Cole came to the plantation where he (Hendricks) was at work, and took him forcibly away to his house six miles distantly & forced him to work four days, when he escaped and returned to his employer. Said Cole then returned with Mr. **Henry Pope**, entered the cookhouse on Ransom's farm, flourishing their pistols, and dragged him (Hendricks) out; after taking him some miles, they made him get down on his knees and then threatened to shoot him. He was taken to Cole's house and put under guard & his life threatened if he attempted to escape. He was rescued by a company of his fellows & taken back to Ransom's. Cole threatened repeatedly, to shoot Ransom and every nigger on his place. Said Hendricks and others have been driven from their homes, and flee to this city for protection. (See affidavit of Whitney, Ransom & others)

Capt. **Chas. A. Beckert**, 110th USCI, Sept 8, 1865 states that **Martha Hargrove**, the wife of a faithful soldier of his Co. was severely beaten and driven from home with her child-by **Abner L. Hargrove**, four miles from Elk River Bridge.

Capt. **James C. Babbitt**, Agent *Benton Co.*, reports that on the 19th of October, two col'd men named **Robert Johnson** and **Donaldson Whitesides** were attacked on the public highway by three or four horsemen armed with revolvers. Robert Johnson was shot by **Thomas Thornton** & mortally wounded, and beaten on the head with a revolver, so that he lived but a few moments.

Also reports that **Albert Allgee**-a freedman in Huntington, Carroll Co., was shot dead in a barroom by (illegible) **T. Freeman**, the Barkeeper.

Also that freedmen are daily driven from their homes without a cent after having been induced to work the year with a promise of a share of the crop. Husbands are not permitted to claim their wives or parents their children, women have been struck to the ground and choked.

Mr. **S. Stevens McMinnville, Tenn.** Dec 11, 1865 states that during divine service a colored woman entered the church. A Mr. **Pennibarker** asked the preacher to stop-and ordered all colored folks to leave-no one left-at close of the service said Mr. Pennibarker stopped the colored woman at the door and chastised her severely.

S. H. Melcher, Supt. *Lagrange, Tenn.* Dec 18, 1865 states as follows:

I. Complaints come in daily from the adjoining counties of Miss. of robbery, assaults &c, on the persons of Freedmen. Not less than one hundred & fifty have let Tippah and Marshall Co.'s, Miss. within the past week and came into Tenn. And all with their story.

A Freedmen living twelve miles south came in last night, covered with blood, with severe cuts on his head-his former master had beaten him with a heavy stick while his son-in-law stood by with a pistol, because the Freedman had said that he intended to go and hunt up his children, whom he had not seen in four years.

Also, Feby 3rd, 1866 reports that an attempt was made to force **Chas. Moore**, colored assistant in his office, into a fight with an ex-rebel soldier, some forty or fifty persons were present, principally rebel officers & soldiers. Mr. Melcher interfered and Moore was finally rescued. An ex-rebel Capt. Drew a knife on Mr. Melcher & threatened his life-

At the same time an old Freedman was attacked in his own yard & badly beaten by two of the same crowd.

Disloyal, lawless men from the border of Miss. commit many outrages & with impunity-as there is no protection.

II. Dec 11 - **Stephen Lane** was robbed of his gun & ammunition by Capt. **Bonner**, Marshall Co., Miss. Militia, about the same time there were similar cases.

III. **Edmund McNeil**, a freedman was arrested and put in jail in Bolivar, and hired to a man in Miss. because he went to Supt. at Bolivar to learn about his contract. He escaped.

IV. **India Wilson** (a freedwoman) was assaulted by two white men-**Steve & Jerry Ball** & cut with a knife.

V. Jan 6 - **Jane Simmons**, freedwoman, was assaulted by one **Pickney Stafford** and badly beaten on the hand.

VI. The outrage most frequently occurring is the refusal of the employer to settle with the Freedmen for their last years work, or taking advantage of them and securing a settlement before witnesses for a mere trifle.

VII. In many cases the children of colored persons which are able to work have been taken and bound out, leaving the younger and more helpless to be cared for by their parents.

J. N. Puckett, Supt. *Hickman Co.*, Jan 15th, '66 reports many outrages committed against Freedmen-up to June last they were kept in bondage through fear of death-if one escaped he was shot down, wherever found-many are kept from getting pay for work performed through fear of maltreatment. Knows of five or six freedmen who have been killed for above reasons.

A freedman had done work for a barkeeper in Dinon, said Co., and applied for a settlement. He was attacked by three of the desperadoes who still infest the county, who first abused him, he started to get away, when they attempted to shoot him, but the pistol missed fire, he was assaulted again with a knife & an axe-but escaped-again he was attacked-the 3rd time with bricks &c & severely bruised.

James M. Shoemake, Supt. *Smith Co., Tenn.* Jan 13th, 1866 reports a case where the former master refuses to give two children to their parents when claimed by them .

Mr. R. Caldwell, Supt. *Pulaski, Tenn.* reports Jan 19, that in several instances he has secured considerable amounts to colored laborers-which they would have lost but for his efforts.

Andrew Neeley, Supt *Carroll Co., Tenn.* Feby 13, 1866 says:

I. A freedwoman was taken from her house, cruelly beaten, and afterward shot.

II. About Christmas, two freedmen were killed in the Northern part of the county, by two white man named **Brant** and **Smith**.

III. Another some time previous was badly beaten & shot at but escaped.

Many other cases of minor importance have occurred.

Thomas C. Trimble, Supt. *Sumner County, Tenn.* Reports a band of lawless men in his Co. who have taken upon themselves the high prerogative of settling all questions in their locality regardless of civil or military authority.

From the best information, nine to fifteen freedmen have been shot and killed in that part of the County.

Their numbers are so formidable that they overawe the peaceable, quiet citizens, and they have things their own way.

Henry Bugg, an old colored man, honest, industrious and peaceable was shot and killed and robbed of his money by these outlaws.

Joel B. Smith, Supt. *Coffee Co.* reports a freedman by the name of **Pinkney Brannon**, who was driven from home, his life being threatened.

On the night of Dec. 11 the Freedmen's school house was burned by incendiaries. Numerous instances occur in which unprincipled with men have taken advantage of the ignorance & confidence of the freedmen & swindled them out of all their hard earned wages.

W. G. Bond, Supt. *Clarksville*, reports Jan'y 23, 1866 the following which occurred in Stewart Co., Tenn.: on the night of the 17th inst. The colored workers of Johnson & Co.'s Iron Works were attacked by six armed white men and robbed of all monies and valuables.

I. **Spencer Swathe** - Co. "M" 1st U. S. C. H. A., while on his way from Greenville, Tenn. where he had been left sick, to rejoin his Regt. At Chattanooga, went to see his wife who lives with **Mr. Bridges**, Union County, Tenn. and while there was attacked by two white men **Bill McFarlin** and **Preston Swathe**: who knocked him down with an axe, and robbed him of a U.S. Colts Revolver, a rifle, overcoat, boots and fifty dollars in money and robbed his wife of six dollars. On Oct 7th said soldier went with a detail of soldiers of the 12th O. V. C. to arrest the perpetrators of the deed-they were overpowered by friends of the white men, and the Negro soldier taken from them and shot. (See affidavit in possession of Jno. R. Henry, Knoxville)

II. A white man named **James Copeland** entered the house of **York Turner** (col'd) near McMillen's Station, Knox Co., Tenn. and made an assault upon his wife, also threatened his life with such indications of violence that said Turner dare not go home.

Also gave two instances where colored men were robbed of their arms by irresponsible parties. (See same affidavit)