

PRESERVING THE PAST:

**A LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF THE
FREEDMEN'S BUREAU RECORDS PRESERVATION ACT
OF 2000**

Compiled by

William Sleeman

*Assistant Director for Technical Services
Thurgood Marshall Law Library
The University of Maryland School of Law*

William S. Hein & Co., Inc.
Buffalo, New York
2006

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Preserving the past : a legislative history of the Freedmen's Bureau Records Preservation Act of 2000 / compiled by William Sleeman.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8377-3709-5 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. United States. Freedmen's Bureau Records Preservation Act of 2000. 2. United States. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands—Records and Correspondence. 3. Public Records—Law and legislation—United States—Legislative history. 4. Freedmen—United States—Registers—History. I. Sleeman, William.

KF485.P74 2005

342.73'0662—dc22

2005050320

Arrangement and original material
© 2006 William S. Hein & Co., Inc.
All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

The quality of this reprint is equivalent to the
quality of the original work.



This volume is printed on acid-free paper
by William S. Hein & Co., Inc.

Table of Contents

Introduction	v
Congressional Sponsors	vii
Summary of Congressional Action	viii
Documents	
Part 1: Public Law	
Part 2: Bill Versions	
• Initial version introduced in the House	
• Version passed by the House	
• Version enrolled in the Senate, passed by both chambers	
• Version sent to the president	
Part 3: Congressional Record	
Part 4: Hearing	
Bibliography	
Appendices	
• An Act to establish a Bureau for the Relief of Freedmen and Refugees. 13 Stat. 507 (March 3, 1865).	
• Horn, Stephen. "Restoring a vital link to America's past." March 7, 2001.	
• Millender-McDonald, Juanita. "Rep. Millender-McDonald teams with Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints for Black History Month." February 26, 2001.	
• Millender-McDonald, Juanita. "Rep. Millender-McDonald addresses Howard University faculty and Washington, D.C. officials in celebration of the Freedmen's Bureau Records Preservation Act." February 27, 2001.	
• Millender-McDonald, Juanita. "Rep. Millender-McDonald secures continued funding for Freeman's Bureau Preservation Act." July 24, 2002.	
• Washington, Reginald. "Spotlight on NARA: The Freedmen's Bureau Preservation Project." Prologue, vol. 34, no. 2 (Summer 2002).	

Introduction

The Freedmen's Bureau Preservation Act of 2000, passed and signed in the waning days of the Clinton administration, would hardly qualify, at first glance, as a piece of landmark legislation. However, its passage in a period of intense partisanship represents a rare example of both sides of the political divide coming together to protect an important but long neglected piece of our nation's heritage.

The Freedmen's Bureau Preservation Act required the National Archives and Records Administration to turn its attention to these resources and to give them the same level of attention and care that had been provided other federal records.

What accounted for this success? Certainly the incredible growth and interest in African American genealogy was one key factor in the bill's passage. Genealogical research has become extremely important in the African American community particularly as the descendants of slaves and freed people have sought to better understand their history.¹ The records of the bureau for the Relief of Freedmen and Refugees—the Freedmen's Bureau—are an important piece of the genealogical puzzle. However, these resources, because of their physical condition and lack of intellectual access tools, have long been difficult if not impossible for many genealogists and historians to use.

Another important factor in the passage of this legislation was the role played by its initial sponsor, California Democratic Congresswoman Juanita Millender-McDonald. An educator and genealogist herself, Ms. Millender-McDonald recognized early the importance of these materials and was able to reach across the aisle and across chambers to partner with Republicans J.C. Watts of Oklahoma and Stephen Horn of California to organize support for the legislation's passage.²

This work documents the successful legislative effort to protect the records of what one historian has called our nation's first social service

¹Walton-Raji, Angela, "The Roots Revolution." *The Baltimore Sun*, Baltimore, Md.: Jan. 27, 2002, p. 3F.

²Millender-McDonald, Juanita. "Statement of Hon. Juanita Millender-McDonald . . ." *Freedmen's Bureau Preservation Act: Are these Reconstruction era records being protected?* Hearing before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2001, p. 6.

agency.³ It includes the key components of the legislative process that led to the bill's passage along with select background material and a brief bibliography.

Bill Sleeman

³Reidy, Joseph. "Interview: NPR Weekend Edition." National Public Radio, Saturday, March 10, 2001.

Summary of Legislative Action

September 12, 2000	Introduced in the House.
September 2, 2000	Referred to the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology of the House Committee on Government Reform
October 18, 2000	Hearing before the Subcommittee.
October 19, 2000	Discharged by the Committee on Government Reform.
October 19, 2000	Considered in the House.
October 19, 2000	Amendment in the nature of a substitute offered by Mr. Horn.
October 19, 2000	Amendment agreed to, bill passed in the House.
October 23, 2000	Received and read in the Senate.
October 26, 2000	Considered in the Senate.
October 26, 2000	Passed in the Senate by unanimous consent. Forwarded to the Executive Office of the President.
October 27, 2000	Communication about the Senate Action sent to the House.
November 6, 2000	Signed into law (P.L. 106-444).