

CIVIL WAR CONFEDERATE SLAVE PAYROLL RECORDS

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National Archives and Records Administration

Website: www.archives.gov

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The National Archives Building, 700 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20408, <https://www.archives.gov/dc>, contains many records captured from the government of the Confederate States of America during the American Civil War. Please note! Records that are available online and/or on microfilm must be viewed in those formats.

Record Group 109, War Department Collection of Confederate Records, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/438>, contains two types of records:

1. Records captured during the war. As the Union Army retook control of the southern states, it seized records of the
 - Confederate Central Government
 - Confederate Military
2. Records that the War Department compiled after the war from captured records
 - Indexes and Compilations (none of which are the subject of this lecture).

Confederate Slave Payrolls, 1861-1865 (National Archives Identifier 719477) are digitized and available online in the National Archives Catalog at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/719477>. Some are searchable by name or geographic location.

What States are included in the Confederate Slave Payroll Records?

- Alabama
- Florida
- Georgia
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Mississippi
- North Carolina (2nd most)
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Virginia (most)

Why did the Confederate States use slave labor?

- Had an inadequate supply of free white males
- Needed to fortify and defend strategic points and the City of Richmond
- Needed to produce military supplies, such as harnesses, gunpowder, other ordnance

Logistical and legal issues: the CSA needed to ---

- Develop procedures for getting adequate quantities of labor to places it was needed.
 - Ad Hoc (1861-62) – requests by military commanders to local officials
 - State-law procedures (1862-64) – required slave owners to supply slaves; for example, Virginia’s quota system was based on each county’s slave population, and provided exemptions to certain slave owners.
 - CSA national law procedures (1864-65)
- Balance conflicting needs of different military commands
- Balance conflicting needs –
 - Military needs, both ongoing and time-sensitive
 - Agricultural needs for labor to produce food for troops and civilians
 - Political support – taking too many slaves, or for too long a time, would cause a loss of support for CSA goals

Where did the slaves work?

The CSA Engineer Bureau and CSA Quartermaster Generals had enslaved persons—

- Dig entrenchments
- Strengthen fortifications at forts
- Dig potassium nitrate (saltpeter) for gunpowder at “nitre works”
- Work at ordinance factories and arsenals
- Work at harness-making shops
- Create obstructions on major rivers (James River, Neuse River)

Important Details

- **Arrangement.** During ca. 1874-1899, the War Records Office of the Adjutant General’s Office of the U.S. War Department arranged and numbered the payrolls.
 - Payrolls were numbered from 1 to 5889.
 - Roughly grouped by state, but not by date or specific location.
 - There was no rhyme or reason to the numbering. Kind of random!
 - Sometimes a complete payroll was assigned one number.
 - Sometimes pages from the same payroll were scattered and assigned different numbers.
 - In addition, 101 payroll records were not assigned a number.
 - Some of the numbered and unnumbered “payrolls” are not “payrolls” as such but powers of attorney or other related records.
- **Information Content**
 - Name and (usually) place of residence of slave owner
 - Name of slave
 - Month(s), year(s) during which the slave was employed
 - Location at which the slave was employed
 - Confederate officer under whom the work was performed
 - Number of days worked
 - Daily rate of pay
 - Total amount of pay
 - Acknowledgement that payment was received by slave owner or his agent.

- May include powers of attorney signed by slave owners authorizing their agent(s) (“attorney”) to receive payment on their behalf.
- More than 99.9% of the slaves listed are men, but there are a **few** women slaves.
- Probably 90% of slave owners were men, but perhaps 5 to 10% were women, likely either widows or young women who inherited a slave(s) from a parent.
- Date span is primarily 1861 – 1864.
- Some enslaved persons “runaway” and are so indicated on the payroll.
- Some lists include free blacks (free person of color) who were likely impressed (forced) who received payment.
- Some lists contain white employees, who acknowledged receipt of payment for themselves.
- Some lists contain both white employees and slaves.
- CANNOT always assume that the slave belonged to the person from whom they were hired. For example, payment for work done by Alex, James, and John, slaves at the Arsenal at Knoxville, Tennessee, went to *different men each month*, who must have hired these slaves from the “real” owner, perhaps as a means to avoid having to provide their own slaves to Confederate authorities.
- **The slaves were not paid for their work**
- **To get paid, the slave owner had to –**
 - Personally go to the appropriate Confederate officer to receive payment and sign the payroll.
 - If the owner could not personally make the trip to the Confederate officer, he or she could sign a power of attorney to authorize someone else to collect the money on their behalf. The “power of attorney” did not mean that person was a lawyer, it was simply an authorization of someone to be the person’s **agent** for the transaction.
- **“Not paid” does not mean “never paid”**
 - Many payrolls indicate a slave owner was “unpaid” or show no payment.
 - This means the payment was not recorded on *that* particular payroll, most likely because neither the owner or his or her agent went to the Confederate officer in time before the payroll had to be submitted to a higher level authority.
 - Thus, the *same* transaction should be found on a *second* payroll created at a later date when the owner or agent finally went to the Confederate officer for payment.
- **Physical Dimensions**
 - Most are “normal” sized sheets of paper
 - Many are 24 by 18 inches or more
 - Longest payroll is 13 feet long, 2nd longest is 10 feet long
 - Paper varies between thick high quality “kraft” paper to very thin and delicate paper
 - Color: blue, tan, brown, orange, yellow, green, pink, off-white (formerly white?)
- **Uses for these Records**
 - African American genealogy researchers
 - Study of use of slavery in the war effort

- Enhance understanding of local history
 - Effects of war on specific counties
 - Slave ownership
- Slave naming patterns (for example, there may have been a different mix of first names in North Carolina than in Virginia).

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OTHER CONFEDERATE SLAVE PAYROLL RECORDS may be found in the state archives of southern states.

Virginia is one example. The Library of Virginia (which includes the state archives) has the Virginia (state) Records of the Engineer Department, 1861-1865 (bulk 1861-1862), information at https://lva.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma990004982950205756&context=L&vid=01LVA_INST:01LVA&search_scope=MyInstitution&tab=LibraryCatalog&lang=en

- Virginia Civil War records list at <https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/civil-war.htm>
- "Confederate Impressment During the Civil War," *Encyclopedia Virginia*, article online at https://www.encyclopediaofvirginia.org/confederate_impressment_during_the_civil_war