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SOUTHERN CLAIMS COMMISSION APPROVED CLAIMS, 1871-1880:  
ALABAMA

Introduction

On the 36 rolls of this microfilm publication, M2062, are reproduced the 828 approved case files of claims submitted to the Commissioners of Claims (known as the Southern Claims Commission) from the State of Alabama, 1871-1880. These records are part of Record Group 217, Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury.

Background

Even before the close of the Civil War, in an act of July 4, 1864 (13 Stat. 381-82), which applied only to citizens in states not in rebellion, Congress recognized the debt the Federal Government owed loyal citizens for property losses suffered during the war. Throughout the last half of the 1860s, the Government was besieged with claims from southern states, many from people who had been unquestionably loyal to the Union cause during the war.

It was not until the power of northern radicals in Congress diminished and northern ill will toward the South began to subside that sufficient support could be mustered to provide for the losses suffered by southern Unionists. An act of March 3, 1871 (16 Stat. 424-25), authorized a special board of three commissioners to be appointed by the President, with the advise and consent of the United States Senate. These Commissioners of Claims were to "receive, examine, and consider the claims of those citizens who remained loyal adherents to the cause and the government of the United States during the war, for stores or supplies taken or furnished during the rebellion."

The commissioners were to satisfy themselves about the loyalty of each claimant; certify the amount, nature, and value of the property taken or furnished; and report their judgment on each claim in writing to the U.S. House of Representatives. The House would then vote to approve or disallow the claim and appropriate money for payment; it usually followed the recommendation of the commissioners. The act provided further that of the claims within its provision only those presented to the commissioners could be acted on; all others were to be barred.

The Commissioners of Claims first met on March 16, 1871, in Washington, DC, with Asa Owen Aldis of Vermont as its president. The other two members were James B. Howell of Iowa, and Orange Ferriss of New York. Charles F. Benjamin served as the chief clerk. The volume of their work soon proved to be so great that they were authorized by an act of May 11, 1872 (17 Stat. 97), to appoint special commissioners to administer oaths and affirmations and take depositions of witnesses. These special commissioners were local appointees confined to hearing "small claims." The Commissioners of Claims were also authorized to appoint special agents to investigate pending claims, procure evidence, and examine witnesses. The special agents were traveling investigators of both "large and small claims". All papers

collected by special commissioners and agents were sent to the Commissioners of Claims in Washington, who were responsible for making recommendations on all claims.

In 1872 the deadline for filing claims was set at March 3, 1873 (17 Stat. 577). By that date a total of 22,298 claims had been filed, all of which were considered by the commissioners. The final date for submitting evidence pertaining to a claim was fixed at March 10, 1879 (17 Stat. 97-98).

The Commissioners of Claims were occupied with investigation and settlement of the southern claims until March 1880, when the last of the claims was reported to Congress. Of the 22,298 claims filed, only 7,092 satisfied the rigid tests of sworn statements and cross examination required to prove both the sustained unionism of the claimant throughout the war and the validity of the claim. The total amount of the claims submitted amounted to \$60,258,150.44, of which \$4,636,920.69 was approved and paid.

An act of June 16, 1880 (21 Stat. 253), terminated the Commission and gave the Treasury Department the responsibility for liquidating the business of the Commission.

The absence of any regularly established tribunal for the adjudication of claims by Southern Unionists, the dissatisfaction of many claimants with the outcome of their cases, and objections to the act of March 3, 1873, which declared that all claims not presented by that date "shall be deemed barred forever thereafter," led to the Bowman Act of 1883 and the Tucker Act of 1887. Under the provisions of these acts, Congress could reconsider any of the claims previously disallowed by the Southern Claims Commission and transmit them to the U.S. Court of Claims for review and recommendation. The result is that some of the case files are in Record Group 123, Records of the U.S. Court of Claims.

#### Records Description

The approved case files for the State of Alabama, 1871-1880, are arranged alphabetically by county, thereunder by name of claimant. In some cases, individuals filed more than one claim. A case file may contain any or all of the following types of documents: summary reports; petitions; inventories for supplies and property for which compensation was desired; applications to have testimony taken by a special commissioner; testimony of the claimant and others, both favorable and adverse, relating to the claim; vouchers; powers of attorney; correspondence; a copy of the Commissioners of Claims report; and the certificate of settlement issued by the Third Auditor of the Treasury.

#### Related Records

Southern Claims case files have found their way into records of all three branches of the Government, executive, legislative, and judicial. The approved claims, which were sent to the Treasury Department for payment, were inherited by the General Accounting Office, as the agency which succeeded the Comptrollers and Auditors of the Treasury. Most disallowed claims and barred claims were retained by Congress and are now part of Record Group 233, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives. Claims that were sent to the Court of Claims for a finding of fact are part of Record Group 123.

The disallowed and barred case files in Record Group 233 have been reproduced as National Archives Microfilm Publication M1407, *Barred and Disallowed Case Files of the Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880*. Allowed claims for the State of Georgia have been reproduced on M1658, *Southern Claims Commission Approved Claims, 1871-1880: Georgia*.

An index of claims acted upon by the Commissioner of Claims was published under the title *Consolidated Index of Claims by the Commissioners of Claims to the House of Representatives from 1871-1880*

(Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1892). This index was compiled under the supervision of J.B. Holloway, clerk to prepare digest of claims, and Walter H. French, file clerk, U.S. House of Representatives. This volume is the only document in which the names of all the claimants appear in a single alphabetical list. This index has been reproduced on the first four microfiche of M1407, above.

Additional records documenting the activities of the Southern Claims Commission are part of Record Group 56, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, and have been reproduced as M87, *Records of the Commissioners of Claims (Southern Claims Commission), 1871-1880*.

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McNutt, Henry  
McNutt, Winston  
Miller, Lucius C.  
Morgan, David  
Myers, Thornton  
Myres, Abraham  
Nations, Joseph  
Nelson, Isaac S.  
Phillips, George W.  
Pike, Mary  
Pike, Philip P.  
Pike, P.P.  
Prince, Ishom (Administrator, James H. Prince)

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Reed, William  
Reid, Lucynthia  
Richardson, Job  
Richardson, Joseph  
Roberts, Elizabeth M.  
Roberts, Julia A.  
Robinson, George H.  
Romine, James  
Rushm, William A.  
Sandlin, Daniel  
Self, John Clayton  
Sides, James  
Sides, Susan  
Sims, Elijah H. (Administrator, John W. Sims)  
Smith, Patsey A.  
Southerland, James  
Sparks, Eli A.  
Sparks, Samuel (Administrator, Thomas F. Sparks)  
Sparks, Thomas  
Stachs, Matthew  
Stachs, William  
Stagg, John, Sr.  
Steward, John  
Stokes, William  
Taylor, John  
Townley, Richmond (Administrator, Andrew A. Sides)  
Tucker, Charles  
Tuggle, James B.

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Underwood, William N.  
Vest, William Anderson  
Ward, Reuben R.  
Watt, William  
Webb, Nancy M.  
White, Zachariah (Administrator, Eurastus W. Miller)  
Wilson, Washington  
Wilson, W.W.  
Wood, Elias  
Woodard, Sarah A.  
Wright, Elias  
Winston  
Barns, Ephraim  
Barton, Jonathan  
Cagle, Ephraim  
Carroll, Thomas  
Ellis, Richard  
Givens, Samuel H.  
Jackson, William M.  
Manasen, Wiley B.  
McAllister, Joseph T.  
McCullars, Andrew

Montgomery, Nathan  
Walker, Buckner, Sr.  
Williams, Sally