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## **The Struggles of the Freedmen Teachers and City Schools of Baton Rouge: The First Years, 1864-1865**

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The Struggles of the Freedmen Teachers and City Schools of Baton Rouge:

The First Years, 1864-1865

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Honors Thesis

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### The Teachers' Challenge: Bringing Academic Education to the Freedmen

At the end of the Civil War, African-Americans in the South found themselves emancipated from the institution of slavery. No longer were they considered property, required to work without wages. Nor were they forced to obey the white men and women who ruled over them for generations. Instead, they sought employers who would treat them more respectfully than their former masters. They attempted to live independently, and many of them found joy in the educational opportunities that were made available to them for the first time. With the aid of education, most African-Americans foresaw an improved lifestyle. They believed that the ability to read and write would prove advantageous as they set out to make new lives for themselves. In their research, previous historians have examined the evolution of African-American education, often beginning with a study of the Freedmen's Bureau, its schools, and curriculums. One particular historian, Robert C. Morris, argues that initially the teaching of academic subjects in freedmen schools was considered secondary to economic and social instruction. In his book *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*, Morris presents this claim that African-Americans were primarily being taught to appreciate the benefits of civilized life and abandon the habits and customs of slavery.<sup>1</sup>

However, Morris' argument that teachers were primarily "encouraged to instruct the freedmen concerning the rights and responsibilities of citizens" is not strongly supported by a careful examination of microfilmed copies of the *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Louisiana, 1864-1869*.<sup>2</sup> While the records do occasionally show references to this sentiment and tendency to support social

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<sup>1</sup> Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

education over academic education, they more abundantly present evidence to the contrary. Social education does not seem to have been the freedmen teachers' priority, especially in the first few years. As most of the teachers were from the South, they were not intent upon instilling their African-American pupils with Northern republican values. Furthermore, teachers and other officials were instructed to keep careful statistical records for each school. These records recorded information such as number of pupils in attendance as well as number of pupils able to read, write, and do arithmetic.

Nevertheless, the evidence contained in the correspondence between school board officials and teachers gives more extensive information about the successes and struggles of the freedmen schools. This paper explores the difficulties that freedmen teachers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, experienced from 1864 through 1865 while attempting to bring academic education to their pupils. For example, due to the lack of funds allocated for the purpose of education, teachers went unpaid several months at a time, and deliveries of orders for books, desks and other supplies were delayed. Other situations also arose that hindered the teachers' mission of academically educating African-Americans, such as conflicts between teachers and education officials. Many teachers questioned the qualifications of other instructors, opposed the hiring of black teachers, and requested higher salaries. Thus, there were many different factors that contributed to the difficulties experienced by the freedmen teachers as they labored in Baton Rouge during the early years of Reconstruction.

#### 1862-1864: Reconstruction in Louisiana During the Civil War

Reconstruction in Louisiana differed from other parts of the South due to the fact that key cities in the state were captured by Union forces during the first few years of the

Civil War. In April 1862, New Orleans was captured and put under the control of Benjamin F. Butler after which Commodore David Farragut sailed up the Mississippi River and took Baton Rouge.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the southern part of Louisiana remained under Union occupation for the duration of the war.

Due to the changing societal circumstances that appeared to foretell the Union victory in the Civil War, there came to prominence several agencies active in aiding the freedmen. Many of these organizations originated in the North, such as the American Missionary Association that did much to assist African-Americans in several areas of their lives including education and religion. Some of these societies even took it upon themselves to set up schools in the South before the war had officially ended. Many individuals also took pride in participating in such philanthropic activities. One such person, Mary D. Brice, a teacher from Ohio, opened a school for black children in Louisiana during its period of Union occupation.<sup>4</sup> Teachers such as Brice, and those employed later during Reconstruction, were unique individuals. They served as a model of reform and a symbol of the importance of education, and their opinions and experiences are recounted in the letters and telegrams they sent to their superiors. Furthermore, several schools were established in Louisiana for many African-Americans, including those for the Free People of Color. These different schools, with the purpose of educating freedmen of all ages, were established by both civilian and military organizations both during and after the war.

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Louisiana: A History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1984), p. 173-176.

<sup>4</sup> Howard A. White, *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), p. 167.

During the Civil War General Nathaniel P. Banks, who replaced Butler as commander of New Orleans, oversaw the implementation of President Abraham Lincoln's Reconstruction plan in Louisiana. Under this plan, set forth for the purpose of restoring the seceded states to the Union, loyal state governments in the South could be established as soon as 10 percent of those who voted in the 1860 election took an oath of allegiance to the United States. Thus, Banks called for the election of a governor, other state officials, and a legislature for the purpose of serving the part of the state occupied by Union troops. He also ordered the election of delegates to a state constitutional convention in 1864.<sup>5</sup>

Education for African-Americans was an important issue at this convention. At that time, many people in Louisiana strongly opposed granting African-Americans any civil or political rights. Thus, it is not surprising that General Banks' order to establish a Board of Education on March 22, 1864, with the purpose of providing basic education for the freedmen, was initially met with opposition. It was only as a result of the intense pressure he placed on the convention that its delegates finally approved a dual system of public schools in their state. It is important to note, however, that this consent did not arise from any altruistic proclivities towards African-Americans on behalf of the white delegates. Rather, the approval of such a system instead signified an appeal for the availability of public schools for white southerners. Louisiana had given little support to public education prior to the Civil War, despite provisions made for it in the 1845 state constitution. While a system of public schools was established on paper, there were few public schools for white Louisianans outside of New Orleans, and the schools that did exist were of quite low quality. As a result, the situation seems to suggest that the white

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<sup>5</sup> Schafer, *Louisiana: A History*, p. 185-186.

delegates' acceptance of a dual system of education in 1864 was a result of feeling threatened by the possibility of African-Americans becoming more educated than white Louisianians. Therefore, white southerners adamantly opposed financing education for African-Americans. A proposal to remedy this objection called for white schools to be paid for by white taxes while black schools would be funded by black taxes.<sup>6</sup> This, however, proved to be extremely difficult in practice, because African-Americans often could not afford the tax required to support their own schools. Furthermore, the notion of integrated schools was not addressed at this time probably because the convention's acceptance of such a suggestion would have been highly unlikely. Due to continued prejudice, white southerners were highly opposed to having African-Americans attend school with their own children, while many African-Americans feared for the safety of their own children if they matriculated with the white children. Thus, segregation in such educational facilities was naturally assumed.

#### Efforts of the Board of Education

After its creation, the Board of Education assumed control of the schools that had been created by private philanthropic groups such as the American Missionary Association. This proved beneficial since the numerous schools developed during the war for the purpose of educating the freedmen were in need of more centralized administration. The board assumed a number of other duties, including the creation of schools in all school districts defined by the parish Provost Marshals, the formation of schoolhouses on tracts of land obtained for educational purposes, and the employment of

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<sup>6</sup> Taylor, Joe Gray, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), p. 48.

teachers. The board also possessed the right to levy a school tax on real and personal property in order to fund the schools.<sup>7</sup>

In April 1864, the Department of the Gulf sent letters instructing its employees to go to certain parishes with the purpose of supplying specific information that would aid the Board of Education in the establishment of schools. The agents were instructed to divide the parishes into districts and report the number of children between the ages of five and twelve living therein. They were also to seek out buildings that could possibly be used as schoolhouses as well as places where teachers could be boarded if necessary. The employees' purpose was obvious. They were to prepare an informational report to the board that would assist it in locating the existence or need of schoolhouses in the various parishes. Thus, the Department of the Gulf made substantial efforts and aided the Board of Education in preparing for the establishment of schools in the various parishes of Louisiana.

However, the lack of funds to begin the much-desired school system was a problem in which the Department of the Gulf was not able to resolve. Many different organizations, such as the American Missionary Association, had varying opinions as to how the money to finance the schools should be obtained. In April 1864, the Board of Education had "no funds—absolutely none," and therefore proposed the implementation of a poll tax to support its educational efforts.<sup>8</sup> The board felt that this was an ideal solution, as it would be imposed on black adult males only. This would give the African-American population pride in contributing to their own education and that of their

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<sup>7</sup> Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Board of Education to Banks, April 1864. Letters and Telegrams Sent, vol. 1. *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Louisiana, 1864-1869* (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1977). (hereafter referred to as *Records of the Superintendent*)



families, as well as silencing the complaint that many white southerners had about being forced to pay taxes to fund black schools. Despite the seeming ingenuity of this proposal, it was fatally flawed. The constitutional convention had no intention of giving African-Americans the right to vote; therefore, the implementation of such a poll tax was impossible. As financial support for freedmen schools continued to be an important issue to the board, many people considered funding the schools with the resources obtained from selling confiscated Confederate property. This solution, of course, was opposed by many white southerners.

Before the end of the war, Louisiana received minimal financial assistance from Northern aid associations, in part due to the fact that they were under the false impression that General Banks' plan to use taxes was successfully paying for school expenses.<sup>9</sup> This is not to be considered an excuse made by the Northern organizations for it was General Banks himself who informed them that he had created "a self-supporting program" in Louisiana.<sup>10</sup> Even so, it is clear that the school system struggled immensely as a result of its lack of funds, and it was these financial difficulties that had damaging effects on the teachers' mission of academically educating the freedmen.

#### A Request for Teachers

In spite of the board's good intentions in getting plans underway, correspondence between its members suggest the existence of important administrative problems in these early stages that would later severely cripple the goal of academic education for the freedmen. The secretary of the board's request for three teachers of "requisite energy or intelligence" for employment purposes implied the difficulty in finding adequate

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<sup>9</sup> White, *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana*, p. 173.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

teachers.<sup>11</sup> Undoubtedly, there was much opposition to this new practice of establishing schools for the freedmen, especially in Louisiana. A substantial portion of the overall population was vastly uneducated due to the inferior, almost non-existent school system in the state, therefore accounting for the lack of qualified instructors, a difficulty the schools would continue to experience throughout its existence. Furthermore, most qualified, local, white teachers were naturally opposed to assuming such a position. Some, of course, cringed at the thought of educating African-Americans, while others' feared for their own safety, thus discouraging them from seeking such employment. Nevertheless, a small, but important population did put their fears aside and submitted applications in active pursuance of teaching jobs in the city schools.

In spite of the difficulties the teachers were sure to encounter, many chose to endure these hardships in their agreement to teach freedmen. Some tolerated these difficulties for several years while others gave up after only a few months of employment. A few came from the northern states while others were native southern residents of Louisiana. In spite of their different backgrounds, teachers often experienced many of the same situations that proved challenging to educating the freedmen.

Upon assuming their positions, teachers found themselves responsible for academically educating a population that lacked social training as well. But the mission of scholastic education was not hindered by social ineptitude alone. Other factors contributed much more to the problems experienced by the teachers. First, most of those employed in the city schools taught in opposition to negative sentiment on the part of their fellow white citizens, and due to the financial difficulties, at times they even taught without pay. Even so, there was a fulfillment from teaching that those who prevailed

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<sup>11</sup> Wheelock to Birge, April 26, 1864. Letters and Telegrams Sent, vol. 1. *Records of the Superintendent*.

through the adversities experienced, and many instructors had strong beliefs as to their role in the process of Reconstruction.

Interestingly enough, in 1864 it was the Board of Education's rule in Louisiana "to employ only female teachers."<sup>12</sup> Many believed that women were more suited to such a profession. They were considered to be more compassionate and patient, and it was assumed that their maternal instincts would benefit their pupils. Nonetheless, this policy of "female only" teachers apparently was not strictly enforced, as a school report dated September 16, 1864, showed four of the five schools in Baton Rouge headed by male principal teachers. Although every subordinate teacher was female at this time, it is evident that males did serve important roles in the city schools and were responsible for teaching the children even as early as 1864. Furthermore, the rule of exclusive employment of female teachers did not become the official policy of the Freedmen's Bureau.

#### Struggles of the Teachers and Schools in Union Occupied Louisiana

Throughout the rest of 1864 and the beginning months of 1865, preceding the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, agents and members of the Board of Education in Louisiana continued to work diligently in order to develop a decently functioning educational system in the various parishes. They planned on purchasing or renting land to build schoolhouses. They meticulously counted the number of school-age children in each parish in an attempt to provide adequate educational facilities for all of those eligible. They created budgets, by estimating the cost per month of educating the freedmen, taking into account the cost of the classroom, teacher's salary, and supplies.

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<sup>12</sup> Wheelock to Coney, May 20, 1864. Letters and Telegrams Sent, vol. 1. *Records of the Superintendent*.

In spite of their planning, the teachers arriving at their posts in Baton Rouge encountered a number of problems. The Board of Education had had immense difficulty in obtaining room and board for the teachers. Due to the strong opposition of the public, many citizens refused to open their homes to these women. This refusal was so common that General Banks issued a circular threatening to take away black laborers from plantation owners if they continued to refuse to board the teachers.<sup>13</sup> Most teachers were forced to find board for themselves, however, but keeping a room would prove increasingly difficult in later months when they were rarely paid in a timely manner. Furthermore, upon their arrival and settlement in some residences, it became apparent that few of them had any means of transportation. Due to the "many miles of almost impassable roads," teachers were often unable to get to provision stores. To make matters worse, if the teachers were able to make it to the store, they often found that once there, they were unable to get credit as a result of the "unpopular nature of their work." In several instances, the teachers arrived with absolutely no money, and Josiah Beardsley, the Superintendent of Government Schools and also principal teacher of school number one, found it necessary to advance them forty dollars so that they could obtain provisions.<sup>14</sup>

While the Board of Education was naturally disheartened by the community's less than welcoming response to its teachers, it finally came to a solution that not only resolved this difficulty for the teachers, but also eventually proved beneficial to its own organization as well. By allowing the teachers to buy provisions from the commissaries

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<sup>13</sup> Morris, *Reading, Writing, and Reconstruction*, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Wheelock to Boyce, June 10, 1864. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent*.

at government rates or issuing them rations as a portion of their monthly salary, the board was able to reduce its cash payments to the teachers by approximately \$2000 per month.<sup>15</sup> This, however, did create the necessity for additional paperwork, as a letter, including a list of the teachers entitled to rations, had to be sent to the commissary in Baton Rouge.

Furthermore, significant financial problems had arisen before the bureau had even formally assumed control of the schools. In October 1864, Lieutenant Edwin M. Wheelock, supervisor of schools under the board's jurisdiction, received a letter from New York inquiring after a \$2,098.98 balance remaining on an order of school books. Copy books, arithmetic charts, reading charts, and slates constituted the supplies most often requested by the teachers in Baton Rouge, and most of these were ordered from a company called Barnes and Burr.<sup>16</sup>

#### January-March 1865: The Last Months Under the Board of Education

During the last few months the schools remained under the jurisdiction of the Board of Education, conditions for the teachers and schools fluctuated. At times school officials reported progress, although in most instances they experienced difficulties in fulfilling their mission. In January 1865 Josiah Beardsley informed Wheelock of a number of problems that proved hindering in bringing academic education to the African-Americans. First of all, the board was experiencing difficulty obtaining a school building it had spent \$225 repairing. Miss Murphy, the owner, had previously agreed to rent the property to the board for fifty dollars a month. Upon the completion of the building's

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<sup>15</sup> Board of Education to Commanding Department of the Gulf, February 1865. Letters and Telegrams Sent, vol. 1. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>16</sup> Barnes and Burr to Wheelock, October 6, 1864. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent.*

repairs, however, Murphy insisted that the board pay a higher price, one that Beardsley thought to be unreasonable considering how much the board had already monetarily contributed to its improvement.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Beardsley gave the impression that Murphy's manner and dealings with officials had not exactly made her highly esteemed among them. He referred to her as a "shrewd, cunning, ...scheming woman, and probably none too loyal, although she has taken the oath." These testaments given by a freedmen teacher, illustrated the more covert conflicts between those civilians and freedmen school officials and employees in Baton Rouge. Even so, despite these difficulties with fellow citizens, Beardsley also reported that the "schools are fast regaining their prosperity and I trust our numbers will soon be as great or even higher than at any former time in their history."<sup>18</sup> Thus, it is clear that the teachers were intent on making a difference in their communities. Academic education was certainly on their list of priorities. They strove to establish an educational system unprecedented in Louisiana, and they took immense satisfaction in seeing evidence of success in that endeavor.

As superintendent, Beardsley also had the responsibility of evaluating teachers. After Wheelock's request that he visit the class of Susan Harris, hired in October 1864 as assistant to principal teacher A. Rogers in the third school, and "ascertain her success in teaching," Beardsley sent a letter to his superior reporting his findings. Although he did not consider her a particularly outstanding teacher, he did not see any specific reasons why she should be dismissed. In fact, he seemed to reprimand Rogers who "boasts considerably of the excellence of his school." While his complaint seemed to have been based more on Roger's arrogant attitude, Beardsley did express some disapproval at

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<sup>17</sup> Beardsley to Wheelock, January 18, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Beardsley to Wheelock, January 18, 1865.

seeing "a woman teacher employed who has a husband who holds an important position in the rebel army."<sup>19</sup> Thus, the suspicious feelings between bureau employees and southern civilians were mutual. Just as Murphy seemed reluctant to have her property used for the benefit of freedmen, Beardsley was uncomfortable with having an ex-Confederate woman of dubious loyalty teaching in his schools.

The schools' struggle with keeping teachers employed began early. In this same month of January, Beardsley informed Wheelock that his second assistant, Fannie Hendricks would be leaving. He then asked that the board approve the employment of Emily Austin as her replacement, "a teacher of experience, excellent character, and an earnest worker...a lady and teacher with whom we would be greatly pleased."<sup>20</sup> The loss of teachers and the subsequent hiring of replacements was a process that plagued the bureau for its entire existence. Instead of Austin, however, the bureau hired Emily Graff, who Wheelock later described in a recommendation letter as "a faithful and successful teacher" experienced in working with the schools.<sup>21</sup>

Nonetheless, considering the struggles and social ostracism these teachers endured in an occupation that was less than respected by the citizens of the community in which they taught, their departure was not exactly surprising. Despite the heroism of their profession, many freedmen teachers suffered socially. Not only were they looked down upon and disliked for their chosen vocation, some experienced both mild and severe intimidation. Many teachers encountered problems that threatened both their property and their person. Schoolhouses had been threatened with the possibility of

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<sup>19</sup> Beardsley to Wheelock, January 24, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Beardsley to Wheelock, January 31, 1865.

<sup>21</sup> From Wheelock, September 25, 1865. Correspondence Received Relating to Employment. *Records of the Superintendent.*

burning, and the teachers themselves were at times accosted and called names. Although the bureau was authorized to participate in the protection of teachers, pupils, and school property, if necessary, this often proved difficult. Beardsley reported that in the Baton Rouge schools, “a glass is frequently smashed from our windows.”<sup>22</sup> While he did not specify this as a particularly aggressive act of violence, there is no mistaking the less than enthusiastic response the community had toward the teachers’ efforts. Later that month, Beardsley sought Wheelock’s advice after broken glass forced the closure of the schoolhouse for a day. Whether or not Wheelock’s instructions, to “Repair the damage and punish the offenders,” was fulfilled in its entirety is unclear.<sup>23</sup> Presumably, it was difficult to find the culprits. Nevertheless, Beardsley appeared to have downplayed the seriousness of this act by presuming the culprits to be “reckless soldiers or boys,” vandals without a necessarily malicious intent, thus choosing to endure the hardship and focus his concern on preparing the freedmen academically.

After making clear in his description of Emily Austin what qualities he deemed most important in a teacher, Beardsley informed Wheelock of his unwillingness to continue to employ principal teacher Frank Greene’s African-American assistant, Harriet Hoffman. Described as having “never been a very earnest or successful teacher” and possessing “very little life in the schoolroom,” Hoffman seemed only to have remained employed out of sympathy for her situation. Even so, the fact that “she is far from home and friends” could not serve as an excuse for retaining her as a teacher after her outrageous actions. According to Beardsley, her problematic behavior began after the arrival of an African-American minister named Hearston Beedy, who avidly promoted

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<sup>22</sup> Beardsley to Wheelock, January 24, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent*.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Wheelock to Beardsley, January 30, 1865.



segregation between white and black people in the community. In his first sermon, Beedy advised his fellow African-Americans to “separate from the white preachers and white teachers.”<sup>24</sup> As expected, both the church and the freedmen teachers were less than pleased with this man who seemed intent on foiling their noble plans of scholastic instruction.

Given the importance most school officials placed on the moral character of the teachers, Greene and Beardsley were even less pleased upon learning that only two weeks after his arrival, “he and Miss Hoffman were making love and giving pledges of marriage.” Even more socially reprehensible in Beardsley’s eyes was the fact that upon his arrival, Beedy had only been a widow for three weeks. Thus, under these circumstances, Beardsley expressed his reluctance to continue to employ Hoffman and warned Wheelock of her imminent dismissal if her behavior persisted.<sup>25</sup> It is impossible to tell whether or not Beardsley dismissed her or she chose to leave of her own accord. Whatever the case, school reports show that later in the year, Honora Hanrahan was hired as her replacement.<sup>26</sup>

During the first few months of 1865, Baton Rouge would lose several more teachers. Sickness plagued many who found it necessary to request a temporary leave of absence or complete resignation. In January, Sarah Corbin, Greene’s other assistant, had put in a request to “go home immediately” due to her very poor health.<sup>27</sup> A northerner from Wisconsin, she informed Wheelock of her regret that her “strength will not permit

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<sup>24</sup> Beardsley to Wheelock, January 24, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent*.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Beardsley to Wheelock, January 24, 1865.

<sup>26</sup> Baton Rouge, week ending April 21, 1865. Registers of Weekly and Monthly Statistical Reports. *Records of the Superintendent*.

<sup>27</sup> Beardsley to Wheelock, January 31, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent*.

[her] to remain in the South. [She had] labored under the Board of Education since its organization and have been very much interested in the work of instructing the colored children.”<sup>28</sup> Clearly, Corbin was greatly disappointed that her poor health required her to leave because she truly believed in her mission as a freedmen teacher. Educating the freedmen was clearly important to her. Wheelock was thus required to find an immediate replacement in Martha QuaiFFE. In a telegram, Beardsley also regretfully informed his superior that Greene would be leaving as of March first and asked that he “send a good man to take his place.”<sup>29</sup> Interestingly enough, it was not a man, but a woman, Annie Peabody, who took his place as principal teacher.<sup>30</sup>

#### March 1865: Under the Jurisdiction of the Freedmen’s Bureau

Unfortunately, the problems and difficulties that hindered the academic teaching of African-Americans would not disappear under the March 1865 creation of the Freedmen’s Bureau, probably the most well-known national Reconstruction Era organization. The bureau exercised certain important responsibilities in Louisianan education as well as in other areas, despite the fact that it probably had less than one hundred employees in the state.<sup>31</sup> Its responsibilities at the state level were similar to those it had on the national level.

Several different officers managed the educational system established by the Freedmen’s Bureau. Thomas Conway was named Assistant Commissioner, who, as directed by the national bureau itself, was responsible for taking charge of the Louisiana

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<sup>28</sup> Corbin to Wheelock, January 16, 1865. Correspondence Received Relating to Employment. *Records of the Superintendent*.

<sup>29</sup> Beardsley to Wheelock, February 22, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent*.

<sup>30</sup> Baton Rouge, week ending March 3, 1865. Registers of Weekly and Monthly Statistical Reports of the Schools. *Records of the Superintendent*.

<sup>31</sup> Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863-1877*, p. 330.

schools. Even so, Louisiana would have eight assistant commissioners between the years 1865-1868. This continual change in leadership may have contributed to the bureau's struggles throughout its existence. Captain H. R. Pease was appointed Superintendent of Education, while a number of school directors were also assigned to individual parishes. City superintendents were hired as well. The state of Louisiana was divided into seven sections in order to provide a more systematic, centralized administration of the schools: Alexandria, Amite City, Bragg Home Colony, Greenville Colony, New Orleans, Shreveport, and Thibodaux. The bureau created a variety of schools including day schools for children, night schools for adults, and Sabbath schools for both.

In 1865 the Freedmen's Bureau assumed control of the schools that had been initiated by the efforts of the Board of Education. Most of the principals and teachers continued to serve in the schools they had labored in while under the jurisdiction of the board. Principal Josiah Beardsley, first assistant Emily Beardsley, and second assistant Emily Graff continued to serve in school number one, while Annie Hawkins, Mary Hendricks, and Harriet Hoffman remained assistants in school number two under Principal Peabody. School number three was run by Principal Rogers and Susan Harris as assistant.

Almost immediately, the bureau made a series of efforts to curb problems previously experienced by the board. It began reviewing applications for additional teachers and attempted to ensure the timely payment of salaries. In addition, trouble still remained in finding adequate schoolhouses for the teachers and their pupils. The administrators of the Freedmen's Bureau were not opposed to renting property and were willing to pay approximately eight dollars per month for each establishment. The

purchase of lumber and other supplies was approved for the partitioning of rooms in certain schoolhouses.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the bureau set out in improving the schools and helping the teachers in hopes that this would lead to success in academically educating the freedmen.

Naturally the bureau was intent on proving that its educational endeavors were successful or at least becoming so. For this reason, it required the teachers to fill out reports regularly, although many of the teachers failed to turn theirs in on time, if at all. In at least one instance, Beardsley received a scolding from his superior who complained that "There have been repeated instances of neglect in this Matter, from the schools at Baton Rouge, and it now must cease."<sup>33</sup> Again showing intent on confirming progress in the schools, Beardsley also received a telegram during that same month of May inquiring as to whether his "successes [had] gone up."<sup>34</sup> To the bureau's satisfaction, records show that by the end of that month, average attendance had increased to 703 in the Baton Rouge schools, a significant increase since the bureau had assumed control in March.<sup>35</sup>

### A Summer of Struggles

Despite the achievement in raising the average attendance of pupils, financial struggles in the schools became even more apparent in hindering the bureau's educational endeavors. Towards the end of May 1865, the Chief Quartermaster in New Orleans, aware of such difficulties, asked that agents from New Orleans be sent to Baton Rouge to pay the bureau's teachers in person. In doing so, the teachers would not be forced to

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<sup>32</sup> Milden to Wheelock, March 13, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>33</sup> Wheelock to Beardsley, May 15, 1865. Letters and Telegrams Sent, vol. 2. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>34</sup> Wheelock to Beardsley, May 20, 1865. Letters and Telegrams Sent, vol. 1. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>35</sup> Baton Rouge, April 1865. Financial Reports of the Board of Education and the Superintendent. *Records of the Superintendent.*

spend fifteen dollars of their sixty dollar a month salary to make the trek south to retrieve their much deserved pay.<sup>36</sup>

By June, the roster of teachers in the Baton Rouge schools had changed a bit. While there is no evidence to explain their departure, school reports show the replacement of Josiah and Emily Beardsley in school number one by Nathaniel Whiting and Medora Cox. Emily Austin was serving in school number one, having finally come to teach in Baton Rouge, and in school number two, Annie Peabody continued in her position with her three assistants, Ellen Watson replacing Honora Hanrahan. Lastly, while principal teacher Rogers and assistant Harris remained in charge of school number three, Fannie Campbell served as principal teacher with Armada Yena as her assistant in the fourth school.

During the summer, the bureau continued to accept teachers for the parish schools. In response to applicant Henry W. Stanton, Wheelock invited him to “come at once! Our salaries for teachers range from sixty to ninety per month. The Superintendents and Agents. We pay one hundred dollars a month. The precise amount of your salary will depend of course upon the value of your services.”<sup>37</sup> During this same month, Rogers’ salary was increased to sixty-five dollars a month,<sup>38</sup> and a fifth school was opened under newly hired principal teacher, P. A. Hinchy.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of this expansion of the Baton Rouge city schools on behalf of the bureau, however, many of the teachers, like Cox, suffered from sickness in June 1865. This

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<sup>36</sup> Plumbly to Chief Quartermaster of the Department of the Gulf, May 30, 1865. Letters and Telegrams Sent, vol. 2. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Wheelock to Stanton, June 10, 1865.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Wheelock to Rogers, June 13, 1865.

<sup>39</sup> Baton Rouge, week ending June 16, 1865. Registers of Weekly and Monthly Statistical Reports of Schools. *Records of the Superintendent.*

required a juggling of teachers to ensure that none of the classes would go untaught. Thus, Harris was responsible for filling in at school number one until the end of the month.<sup>40</sup> Illnesses such as this would continue to plague the teachers, even causing the inopportune resignation of some.

After becoming established in their jobs, the teachers began feeling the intense lack of adequate educational supplies in their schoolhouses. This lack of materials severely handicapped their ability to provide the best quality academic education to the freedmen. They made numerous requests for supplies to the bureau's administrators, some of which were met while many others went unfulfilled. Nonetheless, the lack of fulfillment was certainly not simple negligence on the part of the bureau. Undoubtedly, its officials sincerely wanted to send the teachers all of the supplies requested, however, their budgets could not endorse such actions. Thus, when Rogers received a message in June 1865 informing him that "The Furniture shall be sent as soon as possible," he was also asked if he "Can not obtain some benches or desks" from somewhere else in the city. Obviously, the bureau's funds were scarce, and often the administrators had no choice but to deny necessities to a teachers despite reports of "prosperity" in the schools.<sup>41</sup>

By mid-July, the bureau had employed an adequate number of teachers in Louisiana, allowing Wheelock to refer to the state as "by far, the most inviting field in the south." Nevertheless, while Wheelock reported the vast amount of work that had been completed in developing these schools, he also requested much needed assistance. At this time, the federal government was having immense trouble in providing transportation, school buildings, and protection to the teachers. Because of this,

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<sup>40</sup> Wheelock to Rogers, June 14, 1865. Letters and Telegrams Sent, vol. 2. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>41</sup> Beardsley to Wheelock, January 18, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent.*

Commissioner Oliver Otis Howard was reliant on various freedmen's organizations to pay the teachers and purchase books for the schools.<sup>42</sup> Thus, all the struggles that the teachers continued to experience stemmed from lack of money. Earlier that month, principal Whiting had even put in a request for his salary for the last month and a half which was needed desperately due to "the very high prices of everything in Baton Rouge and the necessity for cash payments."<sup>43</sup> Wheelock's assurance to Whiting, that "payments for June will be made in a few weeks (and) No delay ever occurs that can be avoided by any support of ourn," did not change the fact that teachers could not afford to live if they were not being paid.<sup>44</sup> Even more importantly, they were unable to effectively teach the freedmen without adequately furnished schoolhouses or books.

In August, the Freedmen's Bureau was notified of the need to send yet another teacher to Baton Rouge to take the place of Mary Hendrick, who had recently taken ill.<sup>45</sup> Upon returning to her post after recovery, she brought with her news that she had been ordered to leave school number two and commence teaching at the Ashland Plantation school. Principal teacher Stuart, who had recently replaced Peabody after her resignation,<sup>46</sup> expressed his displeasure with this reassignment, stating that "Mrs. Hendrick has become well acquainted with the dispositions and habits of her pupils and they have become much attached to her."<sup>47</sup> Such reports were deemed very important in judging the quality of certain teachers. They signified a genuine care for the pupils on

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<sup>42</sup> Wheelock to Webster, July 10, 1865. Letters and Telegrams Sent, vol. 2. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>43</sup> Whiting to Wheelock, July 7, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Wheelock to Whiting, July 7, 1865.

<sup>45</sup> Stuart to Wheelock, August 11, 1865. Correspondence Received Relating to Employment. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>46</sup> Baton Rouge, week ending July 21, 1865. Registers of Weekly and Monthly Statistical Reports of Schools. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>47</sup> Stuart to Wheelock, August 11, 1865. Correspondence Received Relating to Employment. *Records of the Superintendent.*

behalf of the teacher, and the fact that the students responded well to her could not be underestimated.

In order to improve conditions in his school and facilitate the education of the freedmen, Whiting made several requests to Captain Pease, General Superintendent of Education, later during that month of August. First, Whiting requested the employment of another teacher because the "primary departments in schools no. 1 and 2 are quite too large." Secondly, he asked that the Sunday school be remodeled or abandoned altogether, as he questioned "whether our Sunday teaching is production of much good." He also argued that the teachers were so exhausted from their duties during the week that they "do not and cannot enter into this work with much heart." Finally, Whiting made complaints about his salary. Upon being denied his request of at least one hundred dollars a month for taking charge of school number one, he had finally agreed to come if paid the same amount as his predecessor. After learning that his predecessor was not being paid the eighty dollars he was currently receiving, but ninety dollars instead, he asked for a raise, justifying his request not only by the fact that he would have received a much greater salary in New England, but also by pointing out the undeniably "high rates of living South."<sup>48</sup> Regardless of whether or not Whiting's grumbles about his salary were valid, the bureau had reason not to grant him his initial minimum request of one hundred dollars a month. Due to the bureau's tremendous difficulty paying its teachers, it naturally tried to cut back when and where possible.

Despite this desire to save money, however, the bureau was not reluctant to employ teachers if vacancies necessitated it, and many times the principals of the schools

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<sup>48</sup> Whiting to Pease, August 23, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent.*



submitted requests as to whom they wished to be hired as replacements. When Henry W. Stuart, principal teacher of school number two, informed Pease of the desired resignation of his assistant, Annie Hawkins, who wished “to change to the City,” he also asked that a qualified relation of Hendrick’s be sent to work at his school.<sup>49</sup> Clearly then, the school officials understood that competent teachers were absolutely necessary in bringing academic education to the freedmen, and they did their best to ensure that those employed were proficient.

#### Fall 1865: Tucker’s Attempts to Improve Conditions in the Baton Rouge Schools

In order to provide better administration for the city schools in Baton Rouge, John Tucker was hired as City Superintendent of Schools in September 1865.<sup>50</sup> Regrettably for him, he entered the job at a time when the teachers were intensely experiencing the struggles that plagued them during their employment by the bureau. Doing his best, however, to meet their needs, Tucker informed Pease that there were “3 new departments without teachers in city schools,” signifying the need for teachers due to sickness, desire for departure, or dismissal.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, even as late as September, the struggle of securing school buildings remained prominent. Chapman politely reminded Pease that both Tucker and he were “anxiously waiting the action of Mr. Conway and yourself upon our application sent you by mail early a week ago for buildings.” Chapman and Tucker continued to note the vacancy of several houses in the area, including one previously occupied by a gentleman

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<sup>49</sup> Stuart to Pease, August 24, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>50</sup> Chapman to Pease, September 13, 1865. Correspondence Received Relating to Employment. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>51</sup> Chapman to Pease, September 17, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent.*

named Mr. Cox.<sup>52</sup> Thus in this way, the bureau was able to mesh its responsibility for assuming control over abandoned lands with the simultaneous activity of educationally providing for the freedmen.

Towards the end of September, a situation arose concerning Stuart that finally resulted in his resignation. According to Tucker, the teachers “are entering complaints against Mr. Stuart.” Because of this and his insistence that he receive one hundred dollars for teaching expenses, Tucker believed it was impossible for him to “get along peaceably in this place,” and he reported his feelings on the situation to Pease. However, Stuart informed Pease of his own complaint about Tucker’s proceedings in examining certain allegations he had made against Lizzie Strehle, a previous employee who had served in the school for only a month. While his letters do not provide any evidence as to what kind of allegations Stuart made, he maintained that Tucker only questioned Whiting, Rogers, and Hawkins, teachers who were able to give little information on the situation. Others, such as Cox and Hall, who could have provided information to support Stuart’s charges, were not present at the meeting. Thus, Stuart was “thoroughly disgusted with Mr. Tucker’s administration of affairs here,” and he informed Pease that “on the 30<sup>th</sup> of this month, it is my intention to come to the city and place my resignation in your hands as I can no longer serve under him.”<sup>53</sup>

Unfortunately, Stuart’s bitter expression of what he considered unfair, unprofessional treatment, did not cease after informing Pease of the situation. In fact, his animosity seemed to have been extended to include Pease, whom he referred to as a “military despot.” Stuart’s scorn caused him to go “around the city trying to poison the

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<sup>52</sup> Conway to Tucker, September 21, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent*.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Stuart to Pease, September 21, 1865.

minds of the teachers against those in authority. And in two cases he has succeeded.” Tucker appeared much distressed at Stuart’s actions and told Pease, “We need a general overturning of this place, but without teachers I can do nothing.”<sup>54</sup> It does not seem to have been too difficult for Stuart to turn some of the teachers against their superiors. Due to the delay or lack of response most teachers experienced in having their requests fulfilled, many men and women had little faith in the bureau itself. The teachers’ often tardily paid salaries and unanswered pleas for books, desks, and other supplies seemed to signify at worst a lack of interest by the bureau, and at best a helpless inability to do anything to assist them. Thus, this spreading disdain between the teachers and administrators contributed to the already steadily decreasing stability of the schools.

By October, the city schools in Baton Rouge experienced a number of administrative changes, as Tucker sought to improve conditions in the schools. Three principals and seven assistant teachers were employed in three schools. As a result of Stuart’s welcome departure, Tucker assumed the position of principal teacher in school number one, thus moving Whiting to school number two. While Rogers as principal and Austin, Hawkins, and Watson as assistant teachers remained with the city schools, four new teachers accompanied them. Tucker also found it necessary in October to move school number two to a nearby church building owned by the freedmen which could be rented for twenty-five dollars a month. Undoubtedly, this move served as another example of the constant flux these schools and teachers experienced. The change of location along with the change of teachers certainly added to this insecure working environment.

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<sup>54</sup> Tucker to Pease, September 23, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent*.

Further discord between teachers arose in Baton Rouge as a result of Emily Graf's reckless financial dealings. Since the teachers' arrival, the struggle with obtaining credit with various merchants, landlords, and landladies had become more relaxed. Many teachers had experienced the luxury and benefit of using credit to obtain board. This was especially relieving to those who had frequently experienced anxiety as to whether they would be paid in a timely manner. Unfortunately, however, due to Graf's debt, amounting to one hundred dollars owed to various people in Baton Rouge, the other teachers ceased to be granted this privilege. In mid-October, Graf's delinquency required Tucker to send Pease five of her bills, requesting that her already tardy salary of August and September not be paid until her bills were settled.<sup>55</sup> Thus, it is quite obvious that Graf's negative reputation, as far as her financial transactions were concerned, added to the community's already largely prejudiced opinion of freedmen teachers.

Despite the teachers' struggles, it is possible that their experiences in Baton Rouge were better in comparison to those endured in other parts of Louisiana. At the end of October, Pease received a letter from a principal named M. Murphy who complained that in his school he "found 5 who could read a little and the remainder of 35 did not know the alphabet. Not one had a slate or pencil, there was no black board, no Order of School exercises, no bell, all proved to me there was no writing or arithmetic taught."<sup>56</sup> After commenting on the disagreeableness of the boarding house, he stated his intention to resign unless he was moved to Baton Rouge. While it is possible Murphy's request for relocation may have resulted from a reason other than knowledge of better-quality education and facilities in Baton Rouge, a June 1865 Statistical Report showed that in

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<sup>55</sup> Tucker to Pease, October 16, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent*.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Murphy to Pease, October 29, 1865.

over half of the classes, the majority of the pupils could read. Thus, teachers in the Baton Rouge schools obviously made the academic education of freedmen their priority. Even so, conditions in Baton Rouge were less than flawless. Along with the receipt of Murphy's letter, Pease was also plagued by requests from Tucker stressing the teachers' need for school furniture.

In an effort to curtail government expenses in funding the freedmen schools, Tucker asked Pease that at least one of the schools in the city that had been established for war refugees be "stopped or turned over to the State Superintendent of White Schools." This seemed to be an odd request indeed, made by someone whose purpose was to ensure the academic education of a formerly oppressed population. However, Tucker had clear reasons behind his appeal. By this time, the white public schools were "in working order" and the attendees of the school or schools in question were "not composed of Refugees, but rather the residents of this city."<sup>57</sup> Tucker hoped that the government would cease giving its financial support to these virtually self-supporting schools, thus allowing funds to be re-appropriated for the purchase of supplies and payment of teachers in the more financially dependent schools.

Hindrances to the academic education of the freedmen is further evident towards the end of 1865 when Annie Hawkins, first teaching assistant of school number two, requested that Pease "not have my salary reduced," thus suggesting that she had been informed that a decrease of payment was likely to occur. But instead of leaving her request at that, Hawkins went even further to point out the difference between her \$59.90 payment for the month of August and that of Austin's \$70.00 per month. True enough,

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<sup>57</sup> Tucker to Pease, October 30, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent.*

she was a third assistant while Austin was a second assistant, but she justified her roundabout appeal for a raise by declaring that the school in which Austin works "is much less than ours." She also pointed out that probably as a result of the previous problems concerning Stuart, she did not resign as a previously written letter showed she would have liked, but instead assumed more responsibility, taking "care of the whole school a great deal of time" by herself. Hawkin's boldness was quite surprising; however, her request showed that like many of the teachers, she felt as if she had been taken advantage of. While the teachers were probably not oblivious to the financial difficulties the bureau experienced, their belief in the moral mission of educating the freedmen could not sustain them economically. Consequently, such issues as lack of adequate funds to meet living expenses for the teachers interfered with their ability to instruct the freedmen.

#### December 1865: Resignations and the Employment of "Colored Teachers"

In the beginning of December, Tucker reported good news about the schools to Pease. Schools were so full he had been required to appoint "three intelligent colored teachers," one formerly employed in a public school in New York City and two native southerners. Furthermore, their presence actually increased attendance in the schools as "the people who were somewhat prejudiced against the school system on accounts of so many white teachers being engaged in the work are now sending their children to school." Even more exciting to school officials was the fact that these parents expressed support for the issuance of an order "by which the people would be taxed for the support of the schools." Such a proposal would ease the bureau's financial burdens in the area of

education.<sup>58</sup> Tucker's enthusiasm was evident. Seeing almost immediately the advantageous affects of Harriet Reedy, Sarah Gordon, and Alice Provost's employment, Tucker went on to outright challenge the bureau's preference for hiring white southerners by continuing to hire African-American teachers.

The intentional employment and inarguable success of African-American teachers was an important element of the freedmen schools in Baton Rouge. Freedmen who were already uneasy and skeptical about white people were evidently more comfortable with African-American teachers, even if these teachers had not been slaves. An environment that included an African-American teacher was probably considered more conducive to learning than the one that consisted of all white teachers. Furthermore, the freedmen were obviously more willing to contribute what little they had to the purpose of educating their children once they saw that some of the teachers would be black. They believed that these teachers had an even greater invested interest in their profession of educating their race, and therefore the quality of instruction would be better.

Even so, while the African-American community undoubtedly valued the work these teachers were completing in the freedmen schools, it is important to note that they were only paid approximately half the salary given to white teachers. Reedy, Gordon, and Provost received just forty-five dollars a month.<sup>59</sup> Although many years would pass before black people and white people were paid the same for similar services rendered, this was still ironic considering the fact that these three women were laboring for an organization responsible for making sure African-Americans were not taken advantage of by their superiors in their jobs.

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<sup>58</sup> Tucker to Secretary of the Office of General Superintendent of Education, December 6, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent*.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Tucker to Secretary of the Office of General Superintendent of Education, December 6, 1865.

The employment of these three teachers however, led to the resignation of Ellen Watson, who had been a teacher in the freedmen schools since October 1864. According to Tucker, Watson requested leave “because she cannot labor with colored teachers who commenced their duties but yesterday.”<sup>60</sup> Tucker also reported that after “she declared she will not be placed on an equality with them,” he recommended that she resign.<sup>61</sup> Watson’s inability to work with the African-American teachers illustrated a genuine problem experienced by the bureau. While bureau teachers’ purpose was to teach the freedmen, some continued to be prejudiced against African-Americans. They believed that African-Americans were inferior to white southerners. Thus, while they considered it acceptable to teach the African-American children, they found it socially intolerable to work alongside African-American teachers. Although there is no evidence that Watson had any previous problems with African-Americans nor is there any indication that any of her fellow teachers had any complaints about her, one can not help but note her willingness to resign so abruptly after the hiring of these three teachers.

Watson was not the only teacher who failed to return to the Baton Rouge schools the next year. December 1865 proved happy for Annie Hawkins, who finally resigned and returned to her home in Texas. Her employment in the Baton Rouge school was not scandalous in the least, thus leading one to conclude that it was nothing apart from homesickness that drove her away. In fact, in her resignation she asked “to be released

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<sup>60</sup> Tucker to Pease, December 1, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent.*

<sup>61</sup> Tucker to Pease, December 2, 1865. Correspondence Received Relating to Employment. *Records of the Superintendent.*



for a time at least” thus leaving open the possibility for her return.<sup>62</sup> Tucker, who was deeply upset by her leaving and described her as “a good teacher,” would likely not have hesitated in rehiring her due to her good record.<sup>63</sup>

Rebecca Coxe, a third assistant in school number two, also submitted her resignation at the end of the year. According to Tucker, she was unable to “endure the frowns of the rebels,” thus signifying that she was probably not one of the native southern white women employed by the bureau.<sup>64</sup> Employed only three months in the Baton Rouge school, the social distresses seemed to have been too much for her to handle.

Certainly this turnover among teachers proved hindering to the continued academic education of the freedmen. Without an adequate number of teachers, instruction would suffer tremendously. Thus it was imperative that the departing teachers be replaced as soon as possible. However, many potential teachers were reluctant to accept a post in the South due to the social ostracism that was commonly suffered. In his request for three new teachers to replace Watson, Hawkins, and Coxe, Tucker reported that “the teachers and all of us have had to endure abuse and insults from these ‘loyal’ citizens every day. And I am afraid if these things continue much longer we shall lose all our southern Teachers.” He went on to express the seriousness of the situation explaining that he had

not only endured insults, but [had] been assaulted in the streets at night and have had parties of men endeavor to break open my door at midnight to satisfy their fiendish propensities. I can endure all this and even more but some of the young ladies are beginning to yield under their influence...I really hope we may have no

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<sup>62</sup> Hawkins to Pease, January 14, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent*.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Tucker to Pease, December 19, 1865.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Tucker to Pease, December 16, 1865.

more southern teachers...from my experience with them the majority of them have not sufficient moral courage to teach in the colored schools.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, Tucker seemed to have thought it best to recruit teachers from the North. While these recruits were likely to be looked down upon by the local white citizenry, they were assumed to be able to endure its scorn more easily than those native white southern women. Unlike the southerners, they were not seen as traitors to their people. According to Tucker, this break from the bureau's tradition of favoring southern teachers would prove beneficial to the schools in that it would increase their stability and therefore promote the academic education of the freedmen.

By the end of 1865, Baton Rouge teachers and their schools had experienced both ups and downs. The ups signified evidence that they were achieving their goal of educating the freedmen. Teachers saw a rise in attendance and a growing appreciation for their work on the part of the freedmen. Property was acquired for school buildings, and well-qualified teachers, white and black, were hired. Nevertheless, the downs, such as sickness and scandal, plagued the schools and led to the dismissal and resignation of a number of teachers and principals. Supplies and furniture for schoolhouses were scarce, and public sentiment toward the teachers remained exceedingly negative and at times violent in nature. All of these factors, despite the teachers' good intentions, severely limited their ability to provide quality academic education to the freedmen.

#### 1866-1869: The Freedmen Schools in Later Years

While the *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Louisiana* show activity through 1869, information on freedmen schools after 1865, especially those in Baton Rouge, is minimal. Most of the information takes the form of statistical reports

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<sup>65</sup> Tucker to Pease, December 16, 1865. Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received. *Records of the Superintendent*.

which give little detail as to the genuine condition of the schools. It could be concluded, however, that few, if any, of the original teachers remained in Baton Rouge throughout the existence of the bureau's work there. Furthermore, as the years passed, many schools complained that the teachers being sent to them were unqualified, and in a monthly questionnaire submitted in 1868 a request was made that the bureau increase its efforts to "furnish the means whereby competent teachers can be employed."<sup>66</sup> This complaint about unskilled instructors was common in many parishes of Louisiana. Thus, this turnover among both qualified and unqualified teachers, especially in 1866, led to a diminishing number of pupils and schools, and without teachers and students, high quality academic education for freedmen could not be realized.

Due to past incidents of moderate violence and vandalism, the bureau also continued to be concerned about the community's sentiment towards the freedmen schools. Many southerners outright hated the bureau and its agents for helping the freedmen get ahead in a society that had previously been characterized by white supremacy. Some even took part in violent oppositional acts to freedmen education by doing such things as burning schoolhouses. They believed that the schools were chiefly political vehicles for the Republican party.<sup>67</sup> In Baton Rouge, responses to questionnaires throughout the years stated that public sentiment towards the "education of the freedmen and Poor Whites" was "unfavorable."<sup>68</sup> Thus acceptance on behalf of the white southern population in Louisiana did not seem to have improved significantly during these sensitive years of Reconstruction.

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<sup>66</sup> Questionnaire for Parishes of Iberville and West Baton Rouge, September 30, 1868. Completed Monthly Questionnaires Received From Subordinate Officials. *Records of the Superintendent*.

<sup>67</sup> White, *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana*, p. 183.

<sup>68</sup> Questionnaire for Parishes of Iberville and West Baton Rouge, September 30, 1868. Completed Monthly Questionnaires Received From Subordinate Officials. *Records of the Superintendent*.

### The Introduction of Social Education to the Curriculum

There is no doubt that a vast number of African-American children were educated due to the efforts of the freedmen teachers. Although the teachers' labors were more often than not hindered by lack of funds, academic training, primarily reading and writing, were deemed most important in the schools. Even so, many northerners and southerners alike felt that it was more important that African-Americans learned such things as abiding by contracts and becoming responsible citizens. They believed that these skills would prove most beneficial to African-Americans as they became further integrated into free society. This caused them to favor instruction in social reform over academic education. While it is true that many educators, especially those from the North, believed that there was a right and wrong type of education to teach, those employed in the Baton Rouge schools seemed to have focused the majority of their attention on scholastic instruction. Their primary goal was to improve the intelligence of the freedmen by teaching them the fundamentals of elementary education. Instruction for enhancing their individual characters was secondary.

Nevertheless, this social education is mentioned in the school curriculum, formally drafted in 1866. While "Special attention will be paid by the teachers to the three most important studies for the Freedmen: Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic," the curriculum also required that the teachers "assiduously watch over the morals of their pupils." It stated that

In the moral training and instruction of their pupils, teachers will scrupulously endeavor to impress on their minds by their examples the beauty and excellence of truthfulness, fidelity, good temper, modesty, politeness, moral courage, cheerfulness and all the virtues which grace manhood and womanhood.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Curriculum of Schools Under Supervision, July 31, 1866. Financial Reports of the Board of Education and the Superintendent. *Records of the Superintendent*.

Thus, while the teachers from 1864 and 1865 concentrated almost entirely on teaching these academic skills, the bureau made at least an element of social education policy in later years.

Perhaps most influential in inhibiting the development of the freedmen schools in Baton Rouge was their financial difficulties. In 1866, several agents were found to have practiced corruption, ranging from accepting bribes to charging fees for services. Many of them participated in the embezzlement of thousands of dollars in school taxes, thus leaving the schools in an even more vulnerable state.<sup>70</sup> In addition, supplies remained difficult to procure. The bureau continued to have problems securing permanent buildings of acceptable quality to function as schoolhouses. When satisfactory buildings were obtained, they were often vandalized by those citizens of the community who were less than supportive of the bureau's efforts. Teachers would find the windows of their schoolhouses broken upon reporting to work in the morning. Usually, when winter drew near, the buildings were found to contain leaks and drafts making it impossible for classes to be held. Salaries frequently went unpaid for months despite the assistance of many northern aid societies while taxes levied against the southern populace were met with intense opposition. While some of the freedmen did contribute money when possible, the collected amount was far less than needed to support the schools. Thus many schools failed because teachers did not receive enough funds to meet monthly school and personal expenses. In truth, the bureau did not succeed in establishing a permanent, enduring educational system that would thrive on its own.

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<sup>70</sup> White, *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana*, p. 36.

### A Limited Education

The educational system in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, experienced both disappointments and triumphs from 1864-1869. While many elements of it continued to change throughout the years, there always remained a group of teachers serving as the backbone of the schools. As has already been demonstrated, the teachers often did not stay at one school long, resigning to return home due to sickness or switching locations to schools in other parishes. Nonetheless, the trials and tribulations the teachers endured in the freedmen schools directly hindered their abilities to provide the best academic education possible to the freedmen. Even so, because they believed in educating African-Americans, many teachers tolerated late paychecks and insufficiently supplied classrooms. For these teachers, the hardships they encountered were overshadowed by the internally rewarding nature of their occupation. They strove to educate the freedmen in spite of the numerous challenges that arose. For others however, the ordeals proved more than they could bear. They came to realize that the difficulties they encountered were likely to go unresolved, and therefore only a limited academic education of the freedmen was realized.

Thus instead of giving extensive evidence of social instruction, an examination of the educational efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana uncovered the various struggles freedmen teachers and schools experienced as they tried to bring academic education to African-Americans. As instruction in reading and writing were primary goals of the teachers, books and supplies were invariably needed. But no matter how necessary the materials or how dedicated the teachers to the mission of academic education, lack of sufficient funds proved hindering. Without ample monetary resources,

supplies such as readers for the pupils and furnishings for schoolhouses could not be purchased. Even more devastating to the education of the freedmen was the constant removal and resignation of teachers due to various reasons such as scandal, late payment, or sickness. The absence of a stable body of teachers in Baton Rouge certainly served as yet another hindrance in providing the best academic instruction possible to the freedmen. Nevertheless, while the teachers and the bureau may not have succeeded in providing African-Americans with the highest quality academic education after the Civil War, one can argue that they did the best they could given their extremely challenging circumstances. Although the teachers were constantly plagued by problems within the schools, they almost certainly provided more instruction to the African-Americans than perhaps the freedmen would have received if the schools had not existed. Therefore, despite the struggles the schools encountered in Baton Rouge, the teachers did succeed in introducing the freedmen to the joy of basic academic education, a desire ranked second only to their request that their families not be separated<sup>71</sup> and a right for which they would fight for many years to come.

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<sup>71</sup> Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863-1877*, p. 38.

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