



Historic Freedmen’s Bureau Database Given to National Museum of African American History and Culture

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Salt Lake City — FamilySearch, the world’s largest genealogy organization, celebrated the opening of the Smithsonian’s African American Museum of History and Culture by giving a newly indexed database of the historic Freedmen’s Bureau Records to the museum on Tuesday morning, Dec. 6. The database contains priceless genealogical information of newly freed African Americans and refugees after the Civil War.

D. Todd Christofferson, an elder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, presented the database to the museum before an audience of congressional leaders, genealogy experts and volunteers who were key to the project’s success.

“I can think of no better way to honor the unprecedented commitment of over 25,000 volunteers who helped uncover the names of 1.8 million newly freed slaves, than to have their work symbolically housed at the National Museum of African American History and Culture,” said Christofferson. “Countless African Americans can now trace their family history and shine the light on their courageous ancestors.”

“Using modern, digital and web-based technology and the power of volunteers, this project is unlocking information from a transformative era in the history of African American families and the American nation,” said Hollis Gentry, a genealogical specialist at the museum. “Making that information available globally via the web will allow all of us to enlarge our understanding of the past.”

The Freedmen’s Bureau, organized under an 1865 Congressional order at the conclusion of the Civil War, offered assistance to freed slaves in many ways. Handwritten records of these transactions include records such as marriage registers, hospital or patient registers,



educational efforts, census lists, labor contracts and indenture or apprenticeship papers and others. The records were compiled in 15 states and the District of Columbia.

African Americans can access all of the Freedmen’s Bureau Records online for free at the touch of the button at discoverfreemen.org. Thom Reed, marketing manager for FamilySearch, said, “We will now focus our efforts on teaching African Americans how to search the new digital records to discover and reunite with their families through this lost generation.”

Using the index and document scans provided by FamilySearch, the National Museum of African American History and Culture has begun a collaboration with the Smithsonian’s Transcription Center. The Transcription Center is an online platform for volunteers to digitally transcribe and review transcriptions of Smithsonian collections. With almost 2 million individual records, the Freedmen’s Bureau Transcription Project will be the largest crowdsourcing project ever sponsored by the Smithsonian. To supplement the indexing work done by FamilySearch volunteers, the Freedmen’s Bureau Transcription Project will transcribe word-for-word every document in the collection. When completed, the papers will be searchable online. This joint effort will help increase access to the Freedmen’s Bureau collection and help the public learn more about the United States during Reconstruction.

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About the Museum

The National Museum of African American History and Culture opened Sept. 24 on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Occupying a prominent location next to the Washington Monument, the museum is the nation’s largest and most comprehensive cultural destination devoted exclusively to telling the African American story and its impact on America and the world.

About Familysearch

FamilySearch is the largest genealogical organization in the world providing billions of ancestral records. FamilySearch is a nonprofit organization sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints..