

VERMONT

*The
Proceedings of the
Vermont Historical Society*

HISTORY



SUMMER/FALL 1999

VOL. 67, Nos. 3&4

IN THEIR WORDS

MANUSCRIPTS IN THE VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



This occasional section draws attention to the outstanding manuscript holdings of the Vermont Historical Society by presenting transcribed letters, diary entries, memoirs, and other documents. Editing has been kept to a minimum, but punctuation, capital letters, and paragraphing have been added for clarity. Following the manuscript material is information about its physical dimension, location in the library, and provenance.

Reading, Writing, and War: A Vermonters' Experience in the Port Royal Experiment, 1863-1871

EDITED BY ALICE McSHANE

Among the many collections of family papers at the Vermont Historical Society are those of the Leonard Johnson family of Peacham, Vermont, 1854-1904. Leonard Johnson was known for his strong abolitionist sympathies. Local tradition has it that his home on Danville Road was used as a way station on the Underground Railroad. Two of his daughters, Martha and Caroline, taught at freedmen schools during the Civil War and Reconstruction. His brother, Oliver Johnson, was a national publicist, abolitionist leader, and close confidant of Horace Greeley.

This small collection includes several fascinating letters written by Martha Johnson, the eldest of the nine Johnson children. Martha's letters recount her

experiences as a teacher at a freedmen's school on the Sea Islands of South Carolina from her arrival in 1863 to her death in 1871. These letters are of particular importance because Martha arrived in South Carolina in the middle of the war. Although Northern forces occupied the Sea Islands, they were not secure from Southern guerilla action. In addition, Martha arrived during a time of social transition: the Emancipation Proclamation had been in effect for only three months; the first black regiments were being formed; and freedmen policy was being shaped by three independent forces—the Union Army, the War Department, and private freedmen organizations. The activities in South Carolina during this period became known as the “Port Royal Experiment,” the prototype for Union occupation and reconstruction throughout the South. Martha's letters reflect the transitory nature of this period when our nation underwent a social revolution in the midst of civil war.

Four million slaves lived in the South at the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1860. When the war began, the institution of slavery was still protected under the Constitution and the Fugitive Slave Act was still federal law. In the first two years of the war, Lincoln walked a precarious tight-rope between abolitionists and radical Republicans, who advocated the abolition of slavery as a primary war aim, and supporters in the border states, whose loyalty to the Union rested on the continued federal protection of their property. During the conflict, slaves crossing over to Union lines exacerbated the situation. The Unionists in the border states were not the only ones to oppose emancipation. Farmers in the northwest feared emancipation would bring an influx of freedmen into the territories, increasing competition over land. Laborers in the northeast, in particular German and Irish immigrants, feared emancipation would bring freedmen to Northern cities, increasing competition over jobs. Northern Democrats, who opposed emancipation and its implied restructuring of the social order, played on Northern racial fears to keep restoration of the Union - *as it had been* - the primary war aim.

The resulting ambiguity of Union policy toward slavery and the lack of any specific legislative guidelines concerning refugee slaves until 1862 complicated the Union army's situation in both the states under rebellion and the border states loyal to the Union. In the first year of the war, Union General Benjamin Butler, in Fortress Monroe, Virginia, ignored federal law and kept slaves within his lines. Calling them “contrabands of war,” he put them to work building breastworks, roads, and other military essentials. Other Union officers followed Butler's example. Nevertheless, Union soldiers reflected the prejudices of their society. They often inflicted terrible cruelties upon slaves caught within their lines, including rape and torture.¹ Even if slaves were offered sanctuary, what was to become of them? Who would be responsible for them? The Union army, argues historian James McPherson, “was ill-equipped to function as a welfare agency.”

Its main task was to fight the rebels; few soldiers wanted to have anything to do with contrabands except perhaps to exploit them or vent their dislike of them. Thousands of blacks huddled in fetid "contraband camps" where disease, exposure, malnutrition, and poor sanitation took an appalling toll that accounted for a large share of the civilian casualties suffered by the South.²

On November 7, 1861, the two forts guarding the South Carolina coastal Sea Islands in Port Royal Bay fell to Union warships under the command of Samuel du Pont. Southern whites fled the area leaving behind 195 plantations and farms, 8,000 to 12,000 slaves, and the most highly prized cotton in the Confederacy.³ Faced with numbers of ex-slaves far greater than anything to that date, the Union began unofficially to shape a contraband policy.

After the capture of Port Royal and the Sea Islands, Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase ordered the military to seize all plantations and ship the confiscated cotton to New York for sale. The army supported Chase's policy as a means of lessening its burden. Within two months of occupation, the army joined forces with U.S. Treasury officials and private freedmen aid organizations to revive the Sea Islands' economy using contraband labor.

Most freedmen became paid workers on the very same plantations where they had been slaves.⁴ Therefore, Secretary Chase and the radical Republicans saw the endeavor, not only as a means to provide badly needed monies for the war effort, but also as an experiment in the value of free labor over slave labor. Coinciding with the government's economic activities, freedmen aid organizations in the North commenced a program to educate the newly freed slaves in the skills and knowledge they believed were required for the exercise of liberty. The first group of teachers arrived in Port Royal on March 6, 1862. At the same time, the army was organizing the first black regiments for the protection of the Sea Islands' activities, its employees, and its students. Combined, these military, economic, theoretical, and educational endeavors became known as the "Port Royal Experiment."

When Martha Johnson arrived in Port Royal in March 1863, approximately thirty schools had been established throughout the islands with forty to forty-five teachers and 2,000 students.⁵ Control of the Port Royal experiment had been transferred from the Treasury Department to the War Department the previous summer. The commander of the experiment was General Rufus Saxton, who went on to become a ranking official in the National Freedmen's Bureau at the end of the war. In her letters, Martha often directs her family to send letters to her in care of the general.

The Port Royal educational efforts were plagued by two chronic problems. From the start, conflict existed between the evangelical societies, who wanted their teachers to double as missionaries, and the secular societies, who emphasized citizenship over "sectarian bias."⁶ Martha's first appointment

came from the Freedmen's Bureau Association of New York. During the post-war years, her appointment appears to have been from the American Missionary Association. Both organizations were evangelical and Martha's personal faith is evident throughout her letters.

In addition to being plagued by factional infighting among the freedmen organizations, the educational effort remained secondary to the government's emphasis on cotton production throughout the Civil War and Reconstruction. This emphasis influenced both the school hours and teacher availability. Most often teachers scheduled two to three hours of classroom instruction in the afternoon so children could work in the fields in the morning.⁷

Teachers were paid \$25 to \$50 a month by their sponsor organizations. The government housed them in confiscated plantation houses. The aid organizations also sent superintendents who coordinated educational activities with the teachers and army officials. Four types of schools were established: day schools for young children and unemployed older children; night schools for adults; industrial schools (sewing classes for females); and evangelical Sunday schools.⁸ Martha taught at a day school and a Sunday school. Though the army established its own schools for black regiments, Martha also taught a group of black soldiers for a brief period.

The basic curriculum began with instruction of the alphabet and advanced to more standard subjects including reading, writing, and arithmetic. Historian Martin Abbott states that the program also included "courses in the geography of Europe, Asia, and South America, history, physiology, natural philosophy, Latin, and classical literature." He condemns the curriculum for introducing the freedman "to the world of learning without realistically introducing him to the world in which he had to live."⁹ However, curricula varied from school to school. Martha Johnson does not appear to have advanced beyond the use of reading primers in her classroom.

Some teachers felt instruction in "cleanliness, industry, and patriotism" were more important than the standard subjects and developed oral lessons on the war and politics.¹⁰ These attitudes contributed to Southern white opposition in the post-war years. Martha's letters suggest a deep personal faith, and, though she came from an influential abolitionist family, it is likely her oral lessons focused more on evangelism than republicanism.

The typical teacher was a Northern Anglo-Saxon Protestant female in her forties, a profile that fits Martha Johnson. Nativism ran rampant amongst Protestants and abolitionists, and therefore the freedmen organizations tended not to hire Catholics, Jews, or the Irish. Elderly applicants and those under twenty-eight were automatically excluded. Most of those accepted had been teachers in Northern white private or public schools and few had taught in Northern freedmen schools. Few, if any, had experience teaching Southern blacks.¹¹ Martha Johnson taught at an industrial school in New York before her acceptance to teach at a freedmen's school in Port Royal.

No. 59. 1864 of 5.

CERTIFICATE OF COMMISSION.

ROOMS OF THE

National Freedman's Relief Association,

Nos. 1 & 3 MERCER STREET, near Canal.

New York, 11 Octo 1864.

This Certifies that THE NATIONAL FREEDMAN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION have appointed Miss Martha Johnson to be a Teacher to the Freed people in the Dept of the South and hereby commend her to the favor and confidence of the officers of Government, and of all persons who take an interest in relieving the condition of the Freedmen, or in promoting their intellectual, moral and religious instruction.

On behalf of the N. F. R. Association,

Wm Geo Shaw
President.

Chas. K. Lynch
Chairman of Home Committee.

Martha Johnson's Certificate of Commission, issued 11 October, 1864, by the National Freedman's Relief Associations. Vermont Historical Society, Leonard Johnson family papers (MS. 185).

Many were well educated graduates of Harvard, Yale, and Oberlin College in Ohio. A center of liberalism then as it is now, Oberlin sent the greatest number. Still others, like Martha, possessed simple teaching certificates from local normal schools. For the aid organizations, the most difficult problem was finding applicants that fit their ideal. The application process involved a highly subjective review of the applicant's health, energy, morality, commitment, religious conviction, and experience.¹² Despite her chronic poor health, Martha Johnson passed the test.

Teachers included abolitionists, feminists, civil rights workers, temperance advocates, penal reformers, and proponents of Negro emigration, and it was not uncommon to find many of these ideological sympathies in a single individual. Many bordered on "naivete and fanaticism," while others were simply looking for employment.¹³ While Martha's faith and commitment are evident in her letters, she also makes occasional references regarding salary and other employment matters. Whether motivated by principle, money, or both, Martha and her fellow teachers were extremely self-sufficient individuals who persevered in time of war with minimal governmental support.

One of the more curious aspects of Martha's letters is her seeming isolation. Indeed, the freedmen teachers were isolated physically and socially. Most Southern whites fled the Sea Islands in 1861. In 1865, 40,000 slaves fled their abandoned plantations and followed in the wake of William T. Sherman's march through Georgia to the sea. In response, Sherman issued special field order number fifteen. It set aside 300,000 acres, including the Sea Islands and a portion of the South Carolina coastline, for exclusive black settlement. The 40,000 blacks were relocated there. All remaining Southern whites were given thirty days to vacate.¹⁴

Southern whites made no systematic effort to stop the freedmen schools, though opposition became more prevalent after 1867. Southern poverty in the wake of the war's devastation was the primary cause of opposition and many felt economic and political restoration to be more important than education of freedmen. Fear of social leveling also contributed to opposition among poor whites.¹⁵ Overall, Southern whites supported freedmen education and no social stigma was attached to white Southerners who taught freedmen. They opposed, however, instruction at the schools by Northern teachers as they feared these teachers were not teaching but indoctrinating freedmen in social equality and republicanism. Such fears were not unfounded. Republican victories during Reconstruction were strongest in areas with effective black school systems. To placate Southern fears, government and freedmen organization officials advocated an accommodationist position with the white population. They instructed teachers to conduct themselves within "the limits of prudence and propriety" and to avoid any behavior that would foster "ill feelings and disrespect among the white people."¹⁶ Many teachers

objected and ignored the official policy. Indeed, Martha's stay overnight in a black couple's home suggests behavior beyond the accepted norm. Perhaps this was a reflection of the growing admiration for her black scholars and acquaintances that her letters suggest.

Martha Johnson died on December 24, 1871 after a protracted, undiagnosed illness, though yellow fever, which Martha mentions in her letters, was prevalent in the area at the time of her death. Northern involvement in freedmen education ended shortly thereafter. By the time of Martha's death, instruction of blacks had been turned over to Southern black teachers.¹⁷ The rise of black teachers was due primarily to the National Freedmen Bureau's establishment of black high schools and colleges, including, among the now famous and well regarded, Howard and Fisk universities.

From 1861 to 1872, some 20,000 to 30,000 freedmen children received education in South Carolina. Despite these numbers, nearly three quarters of school-age freedmen did not go to school.¹⁸ Was the Port Royal experiment a success? Historians' opinions are mixed. Eric Foner believes government efforts to revive the Southern economy ultimately undermined the freedmen's rights. Indeed, during Reconstruction the great abolitionist leaders, including Wendell Phillips and Frederick Douglass, refused to support the educational efforts in the South, arguing that civil rights and justice under the law were needed before education could be truly effective. Walter Abbott believes that the emotional fanaticism of Northern teachers and aid organizations was so insubstantial that it burned out quickly and helped kill the momentum. Despite his negative views, Abbott admits that "the freedmen seemed to know that in this strange world of words and letters lay a power capable of moving them along the road to freedom." It is to the experiment's transitory role that most historians nod approvingly. George Bentley writes, "The idea of Negro schools had become established in southern thinking, white and black. School organization had been developed, and buildings for Negro education had been scattered over the country." It was a good beginning.¹⁹

Ultimately, the success of the Port Royal experiment was due, in part, to teachers like Martha Johnson, of Peacham, Vermont. In Abbott's words:

They brought to the movement dignity and nobility through their willingness to forswear a life of security and comfort for one of sacrifices and physical hardship...It was persons such as these who gave strength, purpose, and high resolve to the movement to lift the pall of ignorance from the former slaves.²⁰

Martha Johnson in Beaufort, South Carolina, to Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Johnson
in Peacham, Vermont, Mar. 11th 1863

Dear Parents

...I am at the residence of Mr. French, called the Mission House where all the Teachers stay until they receive their appointments for the different places around here. Where mine will be is as yet unknown to me...

Mr. French has just come in and says he has good news. One of the largest Plantations, on Port Royal Island, belonging to one of the worst of rebels was bought this morning by the Slaves, belonging on that place and a neighboring one, with money saved from their own earnings...[The] government is trying to secure all the land she can for the benefit of the Colored Race.²¹ I am in one of the most ancient looking houses, large square rooms, immense fireplaces that will hold big logs, beautifully carved Mantel pieces and cornice, elegant pieces of furniture, but all having the marks of War, defaced and broken...It seems as though I have lived a month in the last six days. I begin to realize something of War where I am now in a sense I never did before...

Martha Johnson at Perryclear Plantation, South Carolina, to family in
Peacham, Vermont, Apr. 11 1863

Dear Sisters

...On Thursday morning I was awakened about five o'clock by the sound of Cannon [that] seemed very near. I was up and to the window very soon—the atmosphere was full of smoke and the sound of the cannon continued for some minutes. Then we saw a blaze and the colored people said the boat was burning for they could see it from their houses. It proved to be a wooden Gun boat lying at the Ferry—the rebels fired into her and the second shell struck the powder magazine and she was burned. We could hear the rebels' shouts of triumph as the boat was burning for it was not more than four miles from here. It is reported that the Captain was asleep when the rebels first fired and not a gun on the boat was loaded. Smart Gun boat it was not. The Pickets on this shore said they heard the rebels at work all night getting their Artillery down to the shore—heard the car whistle which brought them down within a few miles of the shore and the Gun boat lying near the rebel shore. Knew nothing of it until they were fired upon and they could not return the fire for they had no loaded guns. One man was killed (scalded) and four or five wounded. I can see from the window where I am writing into "Secesh" country not more than two miles from here, across the Broad river...

Mr. Root has three Plantations under his charge, twelve Negro cabins on this place, and as many more on the other two places. The men and women work in the field, and both receive the same pay, except a few

who are too old and infirm to labor—they are supported on the Plantation. They have nearly done planting corn and sweet potatoes and are preparing the ground for planting cotton which is to be planted this month. There is a certain number of acres of cotton which is to [be] cultivated for the Government, that is for the use of the Superintendent and the horses, mules, and cattle on the Plantations for which the colored people are paid twenty five cents per day for their work and each man, woman, and child has a certain number of tasks, 4 of which make an acre to cultivate for their own use and so many tasks of cotton ground and the government pays them for every pound of cotton they raise. So you can see they are induced to take the best care of their cotton ground...

Very few of them [freedmen] could read when Mr. and Mrs. Root came here, but now there are eight or ten women that have learned their letters and can read a few verses in the Bible. To be able to read the Bible is their great desire. They come in after a hard days work to read a few verses and then go home and read it over again by their pitch [illegible] fires until they can read it quite well. They seem so grateful for a little instruction. It is a pleasure to teach them. The children are quick to learn as white children and as full of fun and mischief. I never think of their black skins when I am with them and have become as much attached to them as to any white children...

I suffer that you will see the account of the burning of the Gun Boat in the papers before you get this but do not get alarmed about me. I feel as safe as I did in Vermont...The Pickets are stationed almost under our windows. They have been white soldiers but on Monday they were relieved by the 1st S.C. Colored regiment...A company of the 4th N.Y. was here when I first came and we formed some very pleasant acquaintances among them. One of the Corporals was a Vermonter...he had a Montpelier paper which he lent me...Mr. Root invited him and another young man here to dinner. They said it was the first time they sat down to a table with a cloth on and laid in order with dishes since they left home...

Martha Johnson at Perryclear Plantation, South Carolina, to family members in Peacham, Vermont, Apr. 25th 1863

Dear Brother and Sister

...The nearest white family is three miles from here so we have to depend upon our work and ourselves to make time pass pleasantly. I have not had time as yet to feel lonely for I find employment and amusement also among these people until I am tired and then it seems so good to rest...

The Teachers in Beaufort do not have but one lesson of three hours in a day and sewing school two days in a week in the afternoon, and are required to visit among the families in each one's district as often they can consistently. I have not had school here more than three

hours in a day as that is as much as is profitable for the children until they are more advanced for they cannot study themselves much and everything has to be talked into them. Three hours is as much as is good for Teacher or pupils at one time... You would smile to see them come into school in the morning. The boys touch their caps, if they have any or not, make the motion. The girls curtsy in the manner peculiar to the race with a "Good morning maam" and when school is closed in the same manner as they go out. I could hardly maintain the school marm dignity the first day I was in school. Some of the men will touch their hats when I meet them as gracefully as any gentleman. The women are more uncouth than the men. I think perhaps it is owing in part to their dress for they wear cotton bag dresses, very narrow skirts not reaching their knees, while the men dress like white men. On Sunday the women dress more like white women...

Martha Johnson at Perryclear Plantation, South Carolina, to [Clarissa Johnson in Peacham, Vermont?] May 23 1863

Dear Cassie

...I have a nice school of thirty children and twenty five men, soldiers of the 1st Colored S.C. Regt.. They do picket duty on this Island. The Headquarters are very near my school and the Capt. of the company asked permission for the boys to come to my school. I very gladly gave them permission to come. It is uncertain how long I may have them but I shall endeavor to do them all the good I can. They are some of them very fine looking men. Very few can read anything more than the letters but are improving fast. I have two or three only that can read the testament. I wish you could look in upon me surrounded by the dark faces, but bright and pleasant. My school room [is] in the Piazza of the old Plantation house. When I have all the children and a good many soldiers I have to send a part of them out of doors...

Martha Johnson at Perryclear Plantation, South Carolina, to family in Peacham, Vermont, [part of a letter, 1863]

...I realize more and more every day the awful wickedness of Slavery and wonder they are as good as they are. I have visited them in their homes as much as I could find time or strength. They seemed a little suspicious at first but now they give me a pleasant greeting and seem pleased to see me and have me talk with them. They all seem to have a strong religious element in their natures. Cut off from all earthly comfort, they have gone to God for consolation. Their childlike faith and entire confidence in their Heavenly Father is often a reproof to me for I have so much more given to me than these poor degraded children of our common Father. I have not yet heard one man or woman speak

unfriendly of their old Massa or Missus, say they worked them hard and did not give them enough to eat and don't care to see them but never seem [to] cherish a revengeful feeling towards them...

Martha Johnson at Perryclear Plantation, South Carolina, to [family in Peacham, Vermont, [part of a letter, 1863]

...The Secesh took the house servants with them so it is very difficult to find a woman on the Plantations that knows how to do work in a house properly.

...The great fear that has prevailed in the north of the colored people all working north if they were free—nothing but Slavery will drive them from their homes. They are so strongly attached to their old homes, they do not like to go to another Plantation to live and almost without exception reply when asked if they would like to go north "I had rather stay in my old home. I am use to this place and don't know anything about the North."

Martha Johnson at Perryclear Plantation, South Carolina, to family in Peacham, Vermont, Jan. 12th 1865

Dear Brother & Sister

...There was an Emancipation celebration in Beaufort on New Years. We did not know of it until it was past so of course were not present—had we known it, should have tried to have gone. Sherman has sent a great many contrabands to Beaufort so the town is full and the country around covered with tents. The Hospitals are full of sick and wounded. We have not heard the sound of war very much for a few weeks...

Martha Johnson at Perryclear Plantation to family in Peacham, Vermont, Mar. 28th 1865

My dear Brother & Sister

...Last Sunday Mr. K, Miss Clary, and I went to Church (colored) on Ladies Island. Crossed the river and walked two miles. Heard a Colored preacher, Kit Green. His text was in Acts—Paul's defense before Agrippa. Said Paul must have been of low origin or he would not have been so mean as to persecute the Christians—"he did not even know his daddy" brethren. He read all of the chapter where Paul heard a voice saying "it is hard to kick against the bricks." Asked if they knew what kicking against the bricks meant—it was kicking against God. It is the only sermon I have heard since I left N.Y. and I enjoyed it very much. The preacher possessed a good deal of native talent. If he had had the benefit of an education, would be equal to the average of white preachers.

The Church was built in Sesech times for the Colored people—a

frame, boarded on the outside, no windows, a few wooden shutters, and a floor, rough made movable benches, will seat about two hundred. Every seat was occupied. We were the only white faces in the house.

My new scholars [here], a large part of them are quite light colored but few of them have ever been slaves but are as ignorant, and not as good looking as the real Negro—were the most forlorn looking set of people I ever saw, were ragged and dirty. Had been following Sherman's army and fared hard on the journey. The children are bright and eager to learn. It is a pleasure to teach them. I enjoy this work more and more...

Martha Johnson at Brickyard Plantation, South Carolina, to family in Peacham, Vermont, April 12th, 1871.

Dear Sister

...You need not worry about the Klu Klux. They are not near us. There are too many northern people about here for them to care to come here. Uncle Kit is still in jail, will stay his time probably there, not be sent any further. Heard the others concerned are having a new trial this month. Have not heard anything from it. Do not think anyone believes Uncle Kit guilty of any intentional wrong only ignorance...²²

Martha Johnson at Brickyard Plantation, South Carolina, to family in Peacham, Vermont, Oct. 20th 1871.

Dear Brother & Sister

...Uncle Sancho & Aunt Minna have a good size cabin and no one but themselves occupy it. They were very glad to see us but so overcome with surprise & pleasure as to be hardly able to give us a welcome for a few minutes. Did not last long however. I asked Aunt Minna to give us some supper for we had eaten nothing but an apple since our supper on the Steamer the night before...They gave us their bed with clean sheets...they slept on the floor on a pile of Cotton...

Martha Johnson in Beaufort, South Carolina, to family in Peacham, Vermont, Dec. 5th. 1871.

Dear Brother & Sister

...School is larger than a year ago—have over eighty names. For two weeks have not had more than fifty per day as the people have been digging "tater." Yesterday had a room full. Today it had been so cold, did not have but forty two...

...I want very much forty copies of the Child at Home which will cost \$5.00. If you think it proper will you ask the Sunday School to send them to me...I want them to begin the new year. My Sunday School I hope to make better this year than ever before, if with the help of our great Father above.

The sickness in B. has abated—two of our friends died with Yellow fever beside several others. A few had it and recovered. Our friends there advised us to stay away so we did...

MANUSCRIPT

The Leonard Johnson family Papers (MS 185) consist of correspondence and related documents from 1854 to 1904. The collection primarily pertains to the experiences of Martha Johnson who served as a teacher for the freedmen schools in the Beaufort/Port Royal area of South Carolina from 1863 to 1871. The collection was donated to the Vermont Historical Society by Leonard Johnson's great great granddaughter, Betty Wilkinson of Barre, Vermont, in 1997. The collection occupies one box (.25 linear feet).

NOTES

¹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 497.

² *Ibid.*, 709.

³ McPherson, 371; George Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (Philadelphia: American Historical Association, 1955), 6; Paul Skeels Peirce, *The Freedmen's Bureau* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1904), 21; and Laura Josephine Webster, *The Operation of the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina* (South Hampton, Mass.: Smith College Press, 1916), 71.

⁴ Freedmen were given food and shelter, and paid 25 to 40 cents a day. Government rations ceased at the end of the first year, when the freedmen were expected to be self-sufficient. While less draconian than slavery, the government nevertheless implemented paternalistic policies designed to elicit output from the freedman, i.e. withholding wages, etc. Foreshadowing the sharecropping system to come, most freedmen rented their homes and land from the government and bought supplies, often on credit, from government stores. In exchange, the freedman either worked on government-owned plantations or sold his cotton to the government. Any advance from or debt to the government was subtracted from the freedman's meager profit. See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 69; Martin Abbott, *Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 5-6; McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 710-711; and Bentley, *History of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 6-8.

⁵ Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 7; Abbott, *Freedmen's Bureau in S.C.*, 6; and Webster, *Operation of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 81.

⁶ Abbott, *Freedmen's Bureau in S.C.*, 86; and Morris, *Reading, 'Riting*, 3-4.

⁷ Morris, *Reading, 'Riting*, 5-6.

⁸ Rupert Sargent Holland, ed. *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne: Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina, 1862-1884* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), xii; Morris, *Reading, 'Riting*, 49; and Peirce, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 75.

⁹ Abbott, *Freedmen's Bureau in S.C.*, 91.

¹⁰ Morris, *Reading, 'Riting*, 7-9; and Webster, *Operation of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 82.

¹¹ Morris, *Reading, 'Riting*, 58-69, 80-83.

¹² *Ibid.*, 59, 84.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 54, 76.

¹⁴ Abbott, *Freedmen's Bureau in S.C.*, 8; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 71, Webster *Operation of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 82-83.

¹⁵ Peirce, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 80-82.

¹⁶ Abbott, *Freedmen's Bureau in S.C.*, 83, 93-95; Bentley, *History of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 180-183; Morris, *Reading, 'Riting*, 41-42; and Peirce, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 80-81.

¹⁷ Abbott, *Freedmen's Bureau in S.C.*, 90, 96; and Peirce, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 78-79, 82.

¹⁸ Abbott, *Freedmen's Bureau in S.C.*, 97.

¹⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 153; Morris, *Reading, 'Riting*, 47; Abbott, *Freedmen's Bureau in S.C.*, 82, 97; Peirce, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 84; and Bentley, *History of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 183- 184.

²⁰ Abbott, *Freedmen's Bureau in S.C.*, 83.

²¹ Despite Martha's enthusiasm, southern freedmen were ultimately cheated out of the promise to own land. Ambiguity surrounding government hold on titles and a chronic racism denied ownership to most freedmen. Of the forty-seven plantations sold in 1863, only six were sold to freedmen. Northern speculators bought up the majority of confiscated land. Eric Foner argues that what speculators didn't get, white Southerners ultimately regained during Reconstruction. See Bentley, *History of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 6-7; Peirce, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 22; Webster, *Operation of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 76-78; and Foner, *Reconstruction*, 158-163, 171, 183-184, 310-311.

²² Martha Johnson adopted the paternalistic custom of referring to and addressing adult blacks as "Aunt" and "Uncle." It is unknown why "Uncle Kit" was jailed or if and when he was released. Uncle Kit and the freedman preacher, Kit Green, referred to in an earlier letter, may be the same person. The letter reflects the growing plight of freedmen as Reconstruction drew to a close and the Southern white ruling class regained hegemony. Incarceration was just one of the many civil and economic measures used to intimidate the freedman and limit his freedom in the new social order. For an in depth analysis of Reconstruction's lost promise to freedmen, see Foner's *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*.