

Southern Claims Commission case files

Descriptive Summary

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| Repository: | Georgia Historical Society |
| Creator: | United States. Commissioners of Claims. |
| Title: | Southern Claims Commission case files |
| Dates: | 1871-1880 |
| Extent: | 0.12 cubic feet (6 microfilm rolls) |
| Identification: | MS 1500 |

Biographical/Historical Note

Before the close of the Civil War, in an act of July 4, 1864, Congress recognized the debt the Federal Government owed loyal citizens for property losses suffered during the war. This act only applied to citizens in states not in rebellion. Throughout the last half of the 1860s, the government was besieged with claims from Southern states, many from people who had been unquestionably loyal to the Union cause during the war.

On March 3, 1871, an act was authorized to address the losses of southern Unionists. The act authorized a special board of three commissioners to be appointed by the President, with the advice and consent of the United States Senate. The Commissioners of claims were to "receive, examine, and consider the claims of those citizens who remained loyal adherents to the cause and the government of the United States during the war, for stores or supplies taken or furnished during the rebellion."

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

The Commissioners of Claims met first on March 16, 1871, in Washington, with Asa Owen Aldis of Vermont as its President. The other two members were James B. Howell of Iowa, and Orage Ferriss of New York. Charles F. Benjamin served as the Chief Clerk. The volume of their work soon proved to be so great that they were authorized by an act of May 11, 1872, to appoint special commissioners to administer oaths and affirmations and take depositions of witnesses, and special agents to investigate pending claims, procure evidence, and examine witnesses. The special commissioners were local appointees confined to hearing "small claims." The special agents were traveling investigators of both "large and small claims." All papers collected by special commissioners and agents were sent to the Commissioners of Claims in Washington, who were responsible for making recommendations on all claims.

In 1872, the deadline for filing claims was set for March 3, 1873. By this date a total of 22,298 claims were filed, all of which were considered by the commissioners. The final date for filing evidence pertaining to a claim was fixed as March 10, 1879.

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

An act of June 16, 1880, terminated the Commission and gave the Treasury Department the responsibility for liquidating the business of the Commission.

The absence of any regularly established tribunal for the adjudication of claims by Southern Unionists, the dissatisfaction of many claimants with the outcome of their cases, and objections to the act of March 3, 1873, which declared that all

claims not presented by the date "shall be deemed barred forever thereafter," led to the Bowman Act of 1883 and the Tucker Act of 1887. Under the provisions of these acts, Congress could reconsider any of the claims previously disallowed by the Southern Claims Commission and transmit them to the United States Court of Claims for review and recommendation. The result is that some case files are in Records of the United States Court of Claims, Record Group 123.

Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of microfiche of the case files of claims submitted to the Commissioners of Claims, known as the Southern Claims Commission, from the state of Georgia, 1871-1880. The records themselves are actually part of the Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury.

The approved case files of the Southern Claims Commission for the State of Georgia, 1871-1880, are arranged alphabetically by county, then by name of claimant. Appendix A, consisting of a small National Archives pamphlet with the microfiche, lists the approved claimants case files in the order, and also provides the case file number, as well as the number of fiche containing the case file. Appendix B, consisting of a small National Archives pamphlet with the microfiche, lists the approved claimants alphabetically by surname, then by claim number and county.

A case file may contain any or all of the following types of documents: summary reports; petitions; inventories for supplies and property for which compensation was desired; application to have testimony taken by a special commissioner; testimony of the claimant and others, both favorable and adverse, relating to the claim; vouchers; power of attorney; correspondence, a copy of the Commissioners of Claims report, and the certificate of settlement issued by the Third Auditory of the Treasury.

Index Terms

Case files.
Georgia--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
Microfiche.
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Finance.
United States. Commissioners of Claims.

Location of Originals

Original case files located in the National Archives.

Physical and Technical Access Restrictions

A microfiche reader is required to access this collection.

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Material was acquired from the National Archives through a project with the R.J. Taylor Jr. Foundation to publish on microfiche the Southern Claim Commission Settled Claims for the State of Georgia.

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Acquisition Information

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Restrictions

Access Restrictions

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