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Exploring the "Confederate Slave Payrolls"

During the U.S. Civil War, the Confederate Army required enslavers to loan their enslaved people to the military. Throughout the Confederacy from Florida to Virginia, these enslaved people served as cooks and laundresses, labored in deadly conditions to mine potassium nitrate to create gunpowder, worked in ordnance factories, and dug the extensive defensive trench networks that defended cities such as Petersburg, Virginia.



Confederate breastworks in front of Petersburg, Virginia, 1865. [National Archives Identifier 524565](#)

To track this extensive network of thousands of enslaved people and the pay their enslavers received for their lease, the Confederate Quartermaster Department created the

record series now called the "Confederate Slave Payrolls." This series is fully digitized and available to view in the [National Archives Catalog](#).

Sheet No. 1

FORM No. 2.

Report of Persons and Articles employed and hired at *Raleigh*, during the month of *February* 186*4*, by *Wm. W. Pierce*

Ranking Numbers	No. of each class	NAMES OF PERSONS AND ARTICLES.	DESIGNATION AND OCCUPATION.	SERVICE DURING THE MONTH.			RATE OF HIRE OR COMPENSATION.			DATE OF CONTRACT AGREEMENT, OR ENTRY INTO SERVICE.	BY WHOM OWNED.	AMOUNT OF RENT OR PAY IN THE MONTH.		REMARKS : Showing by whom the buildings were occupied, and for what purpose; and how the vessels and men were employed during the month. Transfers and discharges will be noted under this head.	TIME
				From	To	Days	Dollars	Cents	Days, month or voyage.			Dollars	Cts.		
1	1	V. Ballard	Paymaster	1	29	125	00	00	July 1862		125	00			
2	2	M. L. Quarles	Pay Clerk	1	29	125	00	00	Aug 1 1862		125	00			
3	3	H. T. Shenck	Pay Clerk	15	29	125	00	00	Feb 15 1864		62	50			
4	1	C. L. Chamult	Bookkeeper	1	15	125	00	00	July 1 1862		62	50	Promoted to Quartermaster		
5	2	O. W. Carr	Bookkeeper	1	29	125	00	00	Feb 1 1864		125	00			
6	1	W. R. D. Detton	Bookkeeper	1	29	125	00	00	Jan 20 1863		125	00			
7	2	M. J. Dean	Asst. Dr.	24	29	100	00	00	Feb 24 1864		24	00			
8	1	D. A. Stephenson	Troop Clerk	1	29	125	00	00	July 1 1862		125	00			
9	1	L. D. Thumble	Courier	1	29	100	00	00	Sept 1 1863		100	00			
10	1	J. M. White	Transport	1	29	100	00	00	Jan 11 1864		100	00			

"Confederate Slave Payroll 2269." [National Archives Identifier 79425315](#)

This series, [comprising nearly 6,000 payrolls for enslaved labor](#), sheds light on the lives of enslaved people loaned to the Confederate Army during the Civil War, and may provide a wealth of genealogical information relating to the names and home counties of African Americans.

The payrolls show the time period covered, the Confederate officer under whom the enslaved people were employed, the place of service, names of the enslaver, names and occupations of the hired enslaved person, number of days employed, daily rate of wages, amount paid, and the signature of the person receiving the payment.

For example, this payroll record shows that for each day of March 1862, a man named Ben cooked for the Confederate military stationed at Pinners Point, VA, [earning 60 cents a day](#) that would go to his enslaver.

March

Samstead Wm W	Moses	"	"	26 Days	50¢ per day	15.60	
Elliot Elizabeth	Abiah	"	"	26	"	15.60	
Emmerson Arthur	Samuel	"	"	5	"	3.00	
Wadges J. G.	Charles	"	"	19 1/2	"	11.70	
James John	Ben	Cook	"	26	"	15.60	27.80 James G.
"	Samuel	Laborer	"	26	"	15.60	34.20
Killy John P.	Mills	"	"	26	"	15.60	
Watts M. S. Jr.	Robert	"	"	26	"	15.60	
Young C. M.	Company	"	"	7	"	21.20	
						Total	153.60
						Unpaid	153.60
						Paid	427.30

"Confederate Slave Payroll 18." [National Archives Identifier 24486055](#)

Prior to the Civil War, Moses Hunt was a field laborer at a plantation called White Hill, which is now partially protected in the modern boundary of Petersburg National Battlefield. "[Confederate Slave Payroll 1099](#)" shows that Charles Friend hired Moses and another man named Henry to construct earthworks at Williamsburg in the spring of 1862.

Non-payroll rolls

We, the subscribers, acknowledge to have received of Captain John J. Clarke the sums set opposite our names respectively, being in full for the services of our Slaves at Williamsburg during the month April and May 1862, having signed duplicate receipts.

FROM WHOM HIRED	NAME AND OCCUPATION	TIME EMPLOYED	RATE OF WAGES	AMOUNT FOR EACH SLAVE	AMOUNT RECEIVED		SIGNATURE
					Dollars	Cents	
<i>R. R. Beasley</i>	<i>Willie</i>	<i>Laborer</i>	<i>15 days</i>	<i>\$1.00 per Mt</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>00</i>	
	<i>Sam</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>15 "</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>00</i>	
	<i>James</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>9 "</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>00</i>	<i>13 04 William Turnbull atts</i>
<i>Chas. Friend</i>	<i>Henry</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>9 "</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>00</i>	<i>0 04 William Turnbull atts</i>
	<i>Edmond</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>1 Mnth. 6 days</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>00</i>	
<i>H. Spura</i>	<i>Edmond</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>ditto</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>00</i>	<i>24 00</i>
	<i>Ruffin</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>1 Mnth. 12 days</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>00</i>	
<i>M. King</i>	<i>Edmond</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>ditto</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>00</i>	
	<i>Ruffin</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>ditto</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>00</i>	<i>28 00</i>
					<i>74</i>	<i>00</i>	
					<i>19</i>	<i>00</i>	
					<i>52</i>	<i>00</i>	

Aut. disbursed

Aut. to be disbursed

I certify the above pay roll is correct and just.

John J. Clarke
Capt. Engineer

"Confederate Slave Payroll 1099." [National Archives Identifier 66392823](#)

Unusual among these "Confederate Slave Payrolls," the Ashley Ferry Nitre Works, Charleston Nitre Works, and Nitre Works District No. 4 all employed enslaved women as laborers. During the Civil War, the manufacture of gunpowder became a serious concern for the Confederacy. One of the ways the Confederacy acquired potassium nitrate, a critical element of gunpowder, was through creating "nitre beds," large rectangular pits filled with rotted manure and straw and covered weekly with urine and liquid from privies and cesspools. The people employed by the Confederacy to do this noxious work were enslaved.

Learn more about the enslaved women of the Confederate Nitre Works on the [Pieces of History blog](#).

Sheet No. 1

We, the subscribers, hereby acknowledge to have received of *Paul S. Adams* full for the services of our Slaves at *Ashley Ferry Nitre Works*

No.	FROM WHOM HIRED	NAMES	OCCUPATION	TIME EMPLOYED Days	RATE OF PAY		AMOUNT FOR EACH SLAVE	Ow
					Per month	Per Day		
1	Gen. R. Quay	Billy	Driver	26	125	32.50		
2	"	Eliza	Labourer	26	100	25.00		
3	"	Sarah	Child		0	00.00		
4	"	Katy	Labourer	22	100	22.00		
5	"	Grace	"	25	100	25.00		
6	"	Eugenia	Child		0	00.00		
7	"	Captain	Labourer	26	100	25.00		
8	"	Bella	"	26	100	25.00		
9	"	Clara	"	22	100	22.00		
10	"	Sam	Child		0	00.00		
11	"	Oliver	"		0	00.00		
12	"	Jacob	Labourer	26	100	25.00		
13	"	George	"	26	100	25.00		
14	"	Ketty	"	26	100	25.00		
15	"	Sampson	Child		0	00.00		
16	"	Adelle	"		0	00.00		
17	"	Joe	Labourer	26	100	25.00		
18	"	Tenah	"	26	100	25.00		
19	"	Cecilia	"	17	100	17.00		
20	"	Judith	"	26	100	25.00		
21	"	Ben	Child		0	00.00		
22	"	Filly	Labourer	26	100	25.00		
23	"	Charles	Teamster	26	125	32.50		
24	"	Primus	"	22	125	27.50		
25	"	Charlotte	Labourer	26	100	25.00		
26	"	Keannah	"	26	100	25.00		
27	"	David	Child		0	00.00		
28	"	Nancy	Labourer	13	100	13.00		

The enslaved men, women, and children named on this payroll were put to work at the Ashley Ferry Nitre Works in South Carolina. "Confederate Slave Payroll 4994" – Ashley Ferry Nitre Works, April 1864. [National Archives Identifier 121637367](https://www.foia.gov/foia/121637367)

You may view the full series of "Confederate Slave Payrolls" in the National Archives Catalog: [National Archives Identifier 719477](https://www.foia.gov/foia/719477)

Many thanks to Rachel Bartgis, conservator technician at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. This feature was adapted from Rachel's posts on the Pieces of History blog:

- [Confederate Slave Payrolls](#)
- [Enslaved Women of the Confederate Nitre Works](#)

Learn more about the "Confederate Slave Payrolls" in the National Archives News article by Victoria Macchi, "[Confederate Slave Payrolls Shed Light on Lives of 19th-Century African American Families.](#)"

You can help make these records more searchable and accessible in the Catalog through transcription. Can you read 19th century cursive writing? Join us and help identify the names, occupations, places and more found within these records. Every contribution helps unlock history. [Get started transcribing!](#)

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Celebrating Constitution Day

September 17 is designated as Constitution Day and Citizenship Day to commemorate the signing of the U.S. Constitution in Philadelphia on September 17, 1787. The National Archives celebrates the 234th anniversary of the signing of the [Constitution](#) with special virtual programs for all ages, including book talks, public programs, and interactive webinars. The National Archives is the permanent home of the original Constitution.

See our [Celebrating Constitution Day](#) page for an array of related online resources.



George Washington is about to receive the draft of the Constitution from James Madison in this mural by Barry Faulkner in the National Archives Building in Washington, DC

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Have a question? [Find your answer on History Hub!](#)

For those looking to conduct research or learn more, we encourage you to browse recent posts and questions on [History Hub's African American Records Community](#).

Related posts include:



Where do I search for references of enslaved people in estate records?



Why are there no records of slave manifests after 1860?



How can I research records of slaves and their owners?

Has Constitution Day inspired you to read up on this founding document? See these related questions:



How many drafts of the Constitution were written before it was finalized?



What was the historical background that helped inspire the Constitution?



Where can I find the actual documents for the Amendments to the Constitution?

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COVID-19 Update

The National Archives is committed to the health and safety of our visitors and staff. We are closely monitoring the situation regarding COVID-19, and we are working with public health officials and our counterpart agencies to monitor and respond to the evolving conditions and following CDC guidelines.

For more information, visit <https://www.archives.gov/coronavirus>

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