



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

United States Sanitary Commission records. Department of the Gulf archives

1862-1866

MssCol 18590

The conservation, arrangement, and description of the collection was made possible by generous funding from the Robert W. Wilson Charitable Trust.

Compiled by Melissa Haley, 2013

Summary

Creator: United States Sanitary Commission

Title: United States Sanitary Commission records. Department of the Gulf archives

Date: 1862-1866

Size: 4.24 linear feet (10 boxes, 1 volume)

Source: Donated by the United States Sanitary Commission to the Astor Library, 1879

Abstract: The USSC's Department of the Gulf was established in New Orleans in 1862. This city became the Department's base for operations for supply distribution and relief efforts in support of soldiers and sailors in military operations along the Gulf Coast, from Texas to Florida, and into the interior of Louisiana. Its agents accompanied troops during the siege of Port Hudson, 1863, and the Red River campaign in 1864, and sailed with hospital ships carrying sick and wounded soldiers up the Mississippi River. In New Orleans, the USSC established a strong presence by distributing numerous supplies to hospitals, regiments and naval ships. Its Soldiers' Home provided food and shelter to soldiers in transit, becoming the hub of special relief services to soldiers and their families, including assistance in filing pension and other claims. The Department of the Gulf Archives, 1862-1866, comprise the records of its main office, notably the correspondence of George A. Blake and Edward A. Crane, who directed Department activities; its Special Relief Department, as seen in correspondence, record books documenting services at the Soldiers Homes in New Orleans and Brashear City, Louisiana, and back pay and bounty books recording claim assistance. Supply Department records document the extensive distribution of supplies in New Orleans and elsewhere, and to relief agents for use in the field. Other materials include receipts, cancelled checks and miscellaneous documents.

Preferred citation: United States Sanitary Commission records. Department of the Gulf archives, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Processing note: Compiled by Melissa Haley, 2013 Revised December 2013

Related Materials:

..

Creator History

Work in the USSC's Department of the Gulf began in the spring of 1862, when agent Dr. George A. Blake (abt. 1828-1892) accompanied Union General Benjamin Butler's expedition to New Orleans, which reached the city on May 1. Blake also served as a surgeon with a regiment during the advance on New Orleans. During Butler's occupation, the USSC mostly worked with military hospitals for the sick, providing clothing, bedding, and food. After the initial foray into the city, little assistance was needed from the USSC for the rest of the year, as Butler's strict sanitary policies helped diminish sickness in the Army. Blake left town, but returned in November and resumed control of the Department.

General Nathaniel Banks replaced Butler in December 1862, and in 1863 operations to the west of the Mississippi River created new opportunities for the Commission. Relief agents accompanied troops during the siege of Port Hudson (May-July), distributing numerous supplies to Baton Rouge hospitals and regiments. Dr. Edward A. Crane (1832-1906), a USSC Inspector who had arrived with Banks' expedition, was placed in charge of inspecting area troops for the Department. In July, the federal government gave the Commission use of property at 23 Carondelet Street in New Orleans, which became the primary storehouse, as well as a central office for Blake.

The Department was very active in 1864, as supplies were distributed to troops along the Gulf Coast—from the Texas/Mexico border to the Tortugas in Florida—and into the interior of Louisiana. In addition, the Department continued to distribute supplies locally, to New Orleans hospitals, stationed regiments, naval ships, prisons, and Union aid societies. In the spring, agents also outfitted and supplied two hospital steamers in New Orleans, the "N.W. Thomas" and the "Laurel Hill," and accompanied the sick and wounded soldiers onboard as far north as Cairo, Illinois.

An agency was briefly established at Brownsville, Texas in early 1864. The USSC distributed supplies among impoverished refugees at Pensacola, Florida in May. The Red River Campaign—a Union disaster in Louisiana that lasted from March to May—created much work for the Commission, with a depot and temporary soldiers' lodge established at Alexandria, Louisiana. Work was also undertaken in Port Hudson, Baton Rouge, and Morganza in the summer and fall, and supplies were distributed to soldiers on the Florida coast as well. The Department also accompanied prisoner-of-war exchanges with supplies at Red River, Louisiana and Galveston, Texas in the final months of the year.

Supplies received by the Department of the Gulf came primarily from the Woman's Central Association of Relief (WCAR) in New York and the Western Department in Louisville. The WCAR furnished mostly bedding, clothing, stationary, and less-perishable food, while the Western Department was able to deliver fresh vegetables via the Mississippi River. These vegetables, along with sauerkraut and pickles, from the Western Department were key in combating scurvy, which was prevalent in the Gulf area. Some supplies were also received from Boston, Maine, and the Cincinnati Branch.

One of the primary areas of activity for the Department of the Gulf was that of special relief, under the direction of O.C. (Oliver Crosby) Bullard (1822-1890). A Soldiers' Home in New Orleans was established in October, 1863 by special order of the US Army and was initially run by the independent Western Sanitary Commission, based in St. Louis. The USSC dispatched agents to New Orleans around the same time to set up special relief services in the city, but finding a soldiers' home already established there deemed it inadvisable to open another. However, the Reverend Ephraim Nute, head of the Western Sanitary Commission's home, found it difficult to procure supplies, and unofficially transferred management of the home to the USSC in November. Top officials of the Western Sanitary Commission had not been informed of the transfer, but eventually agreed to it. The home still operated under military order at this point, with the USSC having little actual authority. In February 1864, the

Army transferred full control of the Soldiers' Home to the Commission. The New Orleans home had a number of superintendents, including H. Clay Weaver, Major C.F. Howes, and W.S. (William Sumner) Bullard, son of O.C. Bullard.

The Soldiers' Home in New Orleans—located in the former Planters Hotel on the corner of Julia and Magazine Streets—served many functions. Its original object was to feed and house soldiers passing through town on their way to rejoin their regiments, or who were temporarily stationed there. However, a great need soon arose to also assist soldiers on furlough, or those who had been recently discharged and were awaiting transportation to the north. In addition, soldiers who were detailed at headquarters in the city, or who were detained in New Orleans, were provided with lodging through official orders.

In addition to the Home at New Orleans, the Commission also operated a Soldiers' Rest or Lodge in Brashear City, Louisiana (now Morgan City), west of New Orleans, which opened in January, 1864. The Rest provided temporary shelter and meals for soldiers moving through the area, with stays generally limited to two nights.

Besides providing soldiers with lodging, food, and clothing, the Department eventually expanded its special relief services to include assistance with back pay, bounty and pension claims. O.C. Bullard worked with soldiers in the New Orleans Home who required assistance in filing claims, or who needed corrections made to their official papers. Pension Agent Charles W. Seaton assumed responsibility for filing pension and certain types of claims, mainly for next of kin of deceased Louisiana soldiers, from February, 1864 to October, 1865. The bulk of Seaton's work was conducted through the USSC's Army and Navy Claim Agency (ANCA). George A. Blake served as an Examining Surgeon for Pensions, in addition to his managerial duties in the Department.

The expansion of special relief services led to the occupation of two additional buildings and a lot that were adjacent to the Home, serving as offices, storage, and lodging for employees. Staff included a superintendent, a matron, nurses, a night watchman, and a number of workers who performed cooking, washing, and cleaning duties. The Soldiers' Home also contained a hospital ward, with Dr. Owen Long as Surgeon in Charge.

Spring of 1865 was an especially active time for special relief in New Orleans as numerous discharged soldiers passed through the city. The Soldiers' Home continued to be busy in May and June, with former soldiers resorting to sleeping on the sidewalks due to the overflow. The Home closed in July of 1865, with the USSC transferring its equipment to the military.

The Department continued to distribute supplies in the spring of 1865, especially in Florida, and in the Mobile, Alabama area at the end of the war. Supplies were also provided for a prisoner exchange at Red River in March. Although Blake was originally directed to close up the Department in July, he was later instructed by General Secretary John S. Blatchford to remain in the city. The Department continued to distribute supplies in August, especially to troops stationed in Texas. Blake wound up operations in early October, leaving New Orleans.

Within the USSC, the Department of the Gulf primarily corresponded with the New York Office, and reported to the General Secretary.

There were occasional gaps in service for major departmental personnel. In March, 1864, Blake traveled north for personal reasons and Crane took over control of the Department until Blake returned in July. O.C. Bullard was away from New Orleans from August to October, 1864 for health reasons; his son, W.S. Bullard was in charge of special relief during this time.

Scope and Content Note

The Department of the Gulf Archives, 1862-1866, documents the Department's supply distribution and relief efforts for soldiers and sailors along the Gulf Coast, and the interior of Louisiana, from its base in New Orleans. The Department of the Gulf material is arranged primarily by office or department, and consists of records for the Main Office, Special Relief Department, and Supply Department, as well as receipts and canceled checks, and miscellaneous documents.

Main Office records are primarily correspondence, and include copies of letters sent and received by department heads George A. Blake or Edward A. Crane, mostly regarding supplies needed and distributed throughout the Department's area of operations—in Brownsville and nearby outposts on the Texas coast, in Pensacola and to forts in Southern Florida, and to troops involved in the Port Hudson and Red River campaigns in Louisiana. Main Office records also document departmental procedures, personnel assignments, finances, and some Special Relief activities.

Special Relief Department records detail the Department of the Gulf's extensive relief work, centered around the Soldiers' Home in New Orleans, which provided lodging, food, medical care, and claims services, mainly for discharged or furloughed soldiers. The USSC also assisted Union families, providing information about soldiers' whereabouts and deaths, and returning personal effects. Special Relief activities are reflected in letters and reports received, as well as copies of letters sent. Soldiers' Home records include reports, registers, hospital record books, a provision account book, and a cash book. The providing of claims services for soldiers is documented in the Special Relief Department's back pay and bounty journals. Also included is a register for the Gulf's Soldiers' Rest at Brashear City, Louisiana, and a cash book for the Department.

Supply Department records are primarily volumes documenting supplies issued from the main warehouse in New Orleans, for distribution in the city and elsewhere. New Orleans issues include to hospitals, stationed regiments, naval ship, and prisons. Supplies were also issued to relief agents for use throughout the Gulf Coast and the interior of Louisiana, and to hospital ships carrying sick and wounded soldiers up the Mississippi River.

Department of the Gulf material also includes receipts (for items purchased and utilities, soldiers' pay, soldiers' effects, labor, shipping), supply receipts for items distributed, and canceled checks. Miscellaneous documents include various items that were randomly grouped together by the USSC, and loose documents removed from volumes.

Most documents in this record group were numbered by the USSC's Archive Department; items range from 1-2110. See Archive Department register, New York volume 12 for the original inventory of numbered documents in one consecutive order.

Container List

I. Main Office 1863-1866

Records consist mostly of correspondence to or from Department of the Gulf heads George A. Blake and Edward A. Crane, who served in Blake's absence from March to July, 1864. Also included is a departmental cash book. The main office was located at 23 Carondelet Street, along with the Department's primary storehouse.

Letters received 1863-1865

Items 1-585 are from a disbound letterbook; includes letters mostly to George Blake and Edward Crane from army personnel and surgeons, USSC offices and branches, and relief agents in the field regarding supplies distributed and needed (especially for the Red River campaign 1864), and departmental procedures, instructions, and personnel assignments. Items are roughly chronological.

b. 1 f. 1-16 #1-320 1863 Oct-1865 Jan, 1864

b. 2 f. 1-13 #321-585 1864 Dec-1865 Aug, 1865

b. 2 f. 14 Index

Copies of incoming letters and reports (Letterbooks)

Most appear to be copies of originals that were forwarded to the Washington Office or New York Office.

b. 2 f. 15 1863 Nov 28-1864 Oct 31 (1 volume)

b. 2 f. 16 1864 Nov 16-1865 May 31 (1 volume)

Letters sent 1863-1865 (Letterpress copybooks)

b. 3 1863 Nov 23-1864 Jun 24

v. 1 Letters from Edward Mitchell, Blake, and Crane to USSC personnel, relief agents regarding departmental activities, distribution of supplies, transfer of Soldiers' Home from the Western Sanitary Commission, and the Red River campaign. Index incomplete.

b. 3 1864 Jun 24-1865 May 12

v. 2 Letters from Crane and Blake to USSC personnel, relief agents, soldiers' families. Contains mostly weekly correspondence from Blake to J. Foster Jenkins. Letters concern departmental activities including relief agents, supplies received and distributed, relief work for Union prisoners, financial matters, the whereabouts of individual soldiers, and the death of relief agent George Edgerly (July 1864)

b. 3 1865 May 15-Oct 4

v. 3 Letters from Blake to USSC personnel, relief agents regarding departmental activities, the whereabouts of individual soldiers and grave locations, finances, Union troops in Texas, the transfer of the Soldiers' Home to the Army, and plans for the closing of the department.

Cash book 1864 Jul-1866 Feb (1 volume)

Departmental receipts and disbursements (mostly salaries).

II. Special Relief Department 1862-1865

Records of the Gulf's Special Relief Department, with O.C. Bullard in charge. Special relief activities centered around the Soldiers' Home in New Orleans, located in the former Planters Hotel on the corner of Julia and Magazine Streets. Adjacent buildings served as offices, housing for employees, and storage.

The Special Relief Department, and especially O.C. Bullard, assisted soldiers in the Home with back pay and bounty claims, and papers corrections. Charles W. Seaton, in a nearby office, processed claims for pension and arrears of pay and bounty as a local agent for the USSC's Army and Navy Claim Agency. His reports and records are found in the Army and Navy Claim Agency Archives; early records document some claims initially processed by the Special Relief Department.

II. Special Relief Department (cont.)

Letters and reports received 1862-1865

Items 586-675, 757-879 include letters and reports from USSC offices, General Secretary J. Foster Jenkins, army personnel, soldiers' families, and soldiers. Most are to O.C. Bullard and W.S. Bullard, regarding special relief including the Soldiers' Home and hospital at New Orleans and the Soldiers' Rest at Brashear City; soldiers' whereabouts, deaths, and personal effects; soldiers' travels, discharge papers, and circumstances; burials in New Orleans; receipts of personal effects by family members; and thank you letters from soldiers assisted by the USSC. Some items pertain to supplies and USSC procedures. Also present are orders (property and soldier assignments; admission into Soldiers' Home), and a few outgoing and copies of outgoing letters. Items are roughly chronological.

- b. 4 f. 1-11 **#586-675** 1862 Sep-1865 Feb
- b. 4 f. 12-16 **#757-815** 1865 Jan-Mar
- b. 5 f. 1-6 **#816-879** 1865 Mar-Jul
- Orders** 1865 Jan-1865 Jun
- Orders are primarily for admission of soldiers to the Soldiers' Home at New Orleans, requested by the Army.
- b. 5 f. 7-8 **#676-737** 1864 Apr-Jul
- b. 5 f. 9-10 **#931-1054** 1865 Mar-Apr
- b. 5 f. 11-16 **#1055-1289** 1864 Jan-1865 Jun

Letters sent 1864 Jan-1865 Aug (Letterpress copybooks)

Letters are mostly to USSC and Army personnel regarding individual soldiers' cases (pay, discharge, transport, papers) and to next of kin of soldiers who died in the Soldiers' Home.

- b. 6 **1864 Jan 19-1865 Aug 17**
- v. 1
- b. 6 **1864 Mar 7-1865 Jul 6**
- v. 2

Soldiers' Home, New Orleans

Reports

Department of the Gulf reports 1864-1865

Includes morning, tri-monthly, and monthly reports; forms were printed by the Department of the Gulf. Information includes totals of soldiers and civil employees remaining, admitted, and departed, by status (furloughed, discharged, etc.)

- b. 6 f. 1 **1864 Aug-Dec (#738-756)**
- b. 6 f. 2 **1865 Jan-Jun (#886-909)**

Special Relief Department monthly reports 1863-1865

Forms of the USSC's Special Relief Department. Information includes monthly totals of soldiers and others, classified by state or other service (Navy etc.); totals of lodgings, meals, and medical treatments. Also added for most is "money received on deposit," indicating totals of soldiers' money held in the Home's safe. Numbered and unnumbered reports contain a mix of originals and copies.

- b. 6 f. 3-4 **1863 Nov-1865 Jul (unnumbered)**
- b. 6 f. 5 **1865 Jan-May and undated (#880-885)**
- b. 6 f. 6 **Ration returns (#910-930)** 1865 Apr-Jul
- Army forms for totals of rations distributed.

- v. 1 **Register of admissions** 1863 Oct-1865 Jul

Entries are chronological and include admittance date, name, regiment and company, circumstances, date of departure, and destination.

- b. 6 f. 7 **Register of detailed soldiers** 1865 Jan-Jun (1 volume)

Register of detailed soldiers who stayed at the Home. Entries, in alphabetical order by first initial of surname, include name, regiment, company, date of admission, where detailed, and length of stay.

II. Special Relief Department (cont.)
Soldiers' Home, New Orleans (cont.)

Hospital record books 1864 Aug-1865 Jul

Records of patients in Soldiers' Home hospital ward were kept by Dr. Owen M. Long, surgeon in charge. Entries include date, name, and treatment; also present is a report of patient totals for July. Records for deaths include name; regiment and company; hospital entry and death dates; illness; age (for some); notes on effects, communication with next of kin, and other actions taken by the USSC. Most entries also include burial location.

b. 6 f. 8-9 **Patients** 1864 Aug 14-1865 Jul 26 (2 volumes)

b. 6 f. 10 **Deaths** 1864 Oct-1865 Jul (1 volume)

b. 7 f. 1 **Provision account book** 1864 Mar-Jul (1 volume)

b. 7 f. 2 **Cash book** 1863 Oct-1865 Jul (1 volume)
Account of expenses and cash received for the Home.

b. 7 f. 3 **Soldiers' Rest, Brashear City, Register** 1864 Jan-May (1 volume)
Admission entries include name, regiment and company, arrival date, number of meals; may also include departure date, number of nights, and destination (usually "R" for regiment).

b. 10 f. 4 **Loose document removed to Miscellaneous Documents**

Back pay and bounty services

Records of soldiers assisted, most likely by O.C. Bullard, in receiving back pay and bounty owed. Journal entries are chronological and include soldiers' names, regiments and companies, amounts received, and enlistment and pay histories. Soldiers pay and bounty book is a record of payments to individual soldiers; entries include page numbers correlating to journals.

b. 7 f. 4-5 **Journal** 1863 Nov 26-1865 Jan 25 (2 volumes)

b. 7 f. 6 **Soldiers pay and bounty book** 1863 Nov 27-1865 Jan 25 (1 volume)

b. 10 f. 4 **Loose letter removed to Miscellaneous Documents**

b. 7 f. 7 **Cash book** 1863 Nov-1864 Jul (1 volume)
Cash accounts of O.C. Bullard for the Special Relief Department

III. Supply Department 1863-1864

Most volumes are records of supplies issued from the main storehouse in New Orleans at 23 Carondelet Street; some volumes also contain entries for supplies received, on hand, or cash accounts. There is also one volume of supplies received and issued in the field by a departmental relief agent.

Recipients include New Orleans hospitals, stationed regiments, naval ships, prisons, hospital transport ships, convalescent camps, Union aid societies, and individuals. Supplies were also issued to relief agents for distribution elsewhere in the Department's field of operation.

Supply volumes for New Orleans storehouses are arranged in a rough chronological order reflecting sequence of use where possible.

b. 7 **Supplies issued, received and on hand** 1863 Feb 2-Jun 30
v. 1 Entries are chiefly for supplies issued and accounts of stock in storehouse. Volume also contains a small amount of supplies received, clippings and notes. Ownership note: Gordon Grant (Supply Clerk).

Supplies issued 1863 Jul-1864 Nov

Volume for 1863 Jul 21-Nov 13 and entries for 1863 Nov 12-30 below appear to be first entry/wastebook drafts of volume for 1863 Jul 20-Nov 30.

b. 7 f. 8 **1863 Jul 20-Nov 30** (1 volume)

b. 7 **1863 Jul 21-Nov 13**
v. 2

b. 7 **1863 Nov 12-30, 1864 Aug 8-Nov 14**
v. 3

b. 7 f. 9 **Supplies issued and cash accounts** 1863 Nov-1865 Jul (1 volume)
Supplies issued, 1864 Nov 15-1865 Jul 11. Also includes cash accounts, 1863 Nov 28-1864 Jun 28.

III. Supply Department (cont.)

- b. 7
v. 4 **Supplies issued** 1863 Dec 1-1864 Jan 31
- b. 8 f. 1 **Supplies issued** 1864 Feb 1-Aug 6 (5 volumes)
Includes supplies provided for hospital transport steamers "Laurel Hill" (February 1864) and "N.W. Thomas" (March and April 1864) traveling to Cairo, Illinois.
- b. 8 f. 2 **Supplies issued** 1863 Feb-1865 Jul (1 volume)
Includes tabulated abstracts of supplies issued, 1863 Feb-Nov, and supplies issued, 1865 Jul 11-Sep 29.
- b. 8 f. 3 **Supplies received and issued** 1863 Oct-1864 Apr
Record book of relief agent George G. Edgerly, with entries for Port Hudson, Louisiana; Pensacola, Key West, and Tortugas, Florida; Point Isabel, Brownsville, and Brazos Santiago, Texas; and Alexandria, Louisiana.
- b. 8
v. 1 **Clothing issued** 1864 Jan-Feb
Clothing issued to individual soldiers, most likely at the Soldiers' Home.

IV. Receipts and cancelled checks 1863-1865

- Receipts** 1863 Nov-1865 Jul
Includes receipts and bills for items purchased and utilities, soldiers' receipts for pay collected and items in safe, receipts of soldiers' effects by family members, pay receipts for labor performed, and receipts for express shipping. This material includes items that were typically removed to Accounts and Vouchers or destroyed by the USSC. Receipts and bills can also be found in Accounts and Vouchers.
- b. 8 f. 4-13 **1863 Nov-1865 Jul and undated (#1290-1576)**
- b. 9 f. 1 **Adams Express Company receipts (#1577-1604)** 1864 Feb-Nov
- b. 9 f. 2-3 **Supply receipts (#1605-1649)** 1864 May-Jun
Supplies received from the Department of the Gulf by regiments, hospitals, and hospital ships. Items 1605-1625 are printed "Receipt for Hospital Stores" forms.
- b. 9 f. 4-10 **Cancelled checks (#1756-2110)** 1864 May-1865 Sep
Item 1929 not found

V. Miscellaneous documents 1863-1865

- Items 1650-1755, not in chronological order, include bills of lading, receipts for supplies issued, soldiers' discharge papers, salary reports for Soldiers' Home employees, requisitions, letters, accounts of stock in New Orleans storeroom, and Soldiers' Home hospital reports. Loose documents include items removed from volumes and a list of supply requisitions.
- b. 9 f. 11-15 **#1650-1728** 1863 Jun-1865 Jul
- b. 10 f. 1-3 **#1729-1755** 1864 May-1865 Jul
- b. 10 f. 4 **Loose documents** 1863-1864