Section I.
The Promise of Reconstruction
A. Overview of Reconstruction in South Carolina

The United States was a deeply transformed nation after the Civil War. The four-year conflict had resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of men and cost millions of dollars in destruction. It left in its wake a ravaged landscape and a weary people.

Yet, from such devastation also came hope. Enslaved African Americans throughout the South were emancipated as Union military forces invaded southern territory and defeated Confederate armies. After the war ended in 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment permanently abolished slavery, guaranteeing freedom to roughly four million African Americans who, just four years earlier, could only dream of it. Even though many of the political and economic gains these newly freed men and women achieved would be systematically revoked during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they succeeded in creating “an autonomous black social and cultural life, which…ranked among the most enduring accomplishments of Reconstruction.” They enjoyed a newfound ability to “pursue their own agenda,” free of white claims to corporal ownership and all the limits those claims had placed upon them. They engaged in activities which unmistakably demonstrated their freedom: forming independent communities and institutions, educating themselves, working towards economic independence, owning land and property, and exercising political rights. Illustrative of African-American perceptions of freedom, their endeavors embodied the hopes and promises of the era.¹

Organizing themselves into structured communities was of the first order for freed men and women throughout the South. The establishment of a stable family life became the basis of these communities, though just bringing together families proved difficult for many African Americans. The process frequently involved searching for family members who had been separated from each other during enslavement, either from slave sales or trades. These searches usually ended in disappointment, but sometimes they were successful. African Americans also focused on “liberating their families from the authority of whites.” The harsh conditions of enslavement along with the constant threat of separation had placed considerable strain on familial ties. Secondary to the authority of white slaveholders was the parental authority of black fathers and mothers, which was undermined and devalued during slavery. With freedom, African Americans hoped to rebuild these values and emphasize the centrality of family life to the black community.²

The development of independent black churches further strengthened black communities. Although many white churches allowed African Americans to worship with white parishioners during Reconstruction, they still relegated black parishioners to a second-class status. Across the board, African Americans therefore withdrew from biracial congregations to establish their own churches, which soon dotted the landscape of the South. Churches became the only institution where African Americans could truly feel free from white control. They not only served as places for African Americans to practice their faith, but they also were social centers for local

communities. The ministers of these churches likewise became post-war black leaders. They mobilized entire communities to offer charitable services to the neediest African Americans. Orphanages, soup kitchens, employment agencies, and relief funds were just a few services that promised self-help from within the black community.³

Freed men and women also considered education imperative to collective self-improvement. They associated the ability to read and write with freedom because white southerners had denied them access to education during slavery. As soon as they received the chance, African Americans established private schools for themselves and their children in any available facility. They packed classrooms full of eager students and placed those adults with the most formal schooling at the front of the class as teachers. Similar to ministers, teachers were considered leaders who often played multiple roles within the black community. For example, a teacher might be asked to mediate the sale of a farmer’s crops or to serve on a county board. Specific reasons why black southerners wanted an education were usually intertwined with the issues they faced in everyday life—they might want to become literate so they could read the Bible or they might feel it was necessary to master basic arithmetic in order not to be cheated out of money when they took their crops to market. In part due to education’s clear implications for collective self-improvement, many white southerners refused to financially support black schools. As a result, many of these schools were forced to run on private funds or seek aid from the federal government; however, white opposition hardly caused African Americans to lose their appetite for education. Just five years into Reconstruction, they spent an astounding one million dollars on education. Efforts to sustain their schools were supported to a large degree by the federal

³ Foner, Reconstruction, 88-96. For more on the separation of black and white churches, see Paul Harvey, Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
government, which spent more than five million dollars on black education within that same timeframe.\textsuperscript{4}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{crowded_classroom.jpg}
\caption{A crowded classroom in South Carolina. African-American families enthusiastically enrolled their children at local schoolhouses during Reconstruction. Educating a child was an economic sacrifice for many parents, who needed the child to take care of younger siblings or work on the family farm. Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.}
\end{figure}

Just as freed men and women established independent churches and schools, so they maintained a separate social sphere from white southerners. Of course, these separate spheres were not impermeable. They often came into contact, requiring blacks and whites to interact in various daily situations. Once freed, however, African Americans tried to remain independent of whites to the best of their ability.\textsuperscript{5}

The creation of separate spheres arose mostly out of black attempts to escape the social and labor relations of the old plantation system. Fundamental to African-American concepts of freedom was the understanding that they would no longer toil under white authority. Black southerners attempted to reject any form of labor that resembled working on plantations. They interpreted their newfound freedom to mean that they could set the conditions of their own labor and avoided entering into labor contracts, such as sharecropping, with whites. Black southerners even shunned cash crops, such as cotton, which still carried memories of enslavement. Although


white southerners often misconstrued their refusal to work under white management as “indolence” or “laziness,” African Americans simply desired to farm their own fields for their own subsistence. And although some black southerners emigrated to the North or moved closer to urban areas for better economic—and often educational—opportunities, the vast majority remained in the rural South, farming their own land where possible. In South Carolina, for instance, seventy-seven percent of blacks worked in agriculture by the end of Reconstruction.6

Goals of self-employment were ideological and not economically feasible in the long term for most African Americans. Many had to enter into some sort of contractual agreement with white southerners, sometimes their former owners, in order to find land and work. Throughout South Carolina’s coastal lowcountry, for instance, “a labor renting system” emerged, “whereby freedpeople agreed to work two or three days a week for a landlord in exchange for ‘the right to reside on and cultivate particular tracts of plantation lands’.” They then farmed for self-subsistence on the side or worked in some other type of vocation. Although not ideal, blacks could at least manipulate the terms of such agreements to maintain a degree of autonomy which was unattainable during slavery.7

Ideally, African Americans could avoid labor contracts by raising the capital to purchase their own plot of land. If freed men and women possessed property, they could farm it without fearing that white southerners would exploit their labor. Ownership of land thus became a goal for nearly all black southerners—it enabled their self-sufficiency, symbolizing their autonomy and a departure from the old plantation system. By the end of the Civil War, rumors had circulated throughout freed populations that the federal government was planning to subdivide large plantations into smaller plots to be distributed among freed men and women. These rumors, including the oft-quoted "forty acres and a mule," probably arose due to General William T. Sherman’s Field Order 15, which temporarily settled freed blacks on confiscated rebel property in the lowcountry. The federal government, however, rescinded Sherman’s orders in 1865 and many African Americans were told they could not own the land on which they had previously settled.  

Despite the revocation of Sherman's orders, freed men and women argued that the federal government should somehow be involved in the realization of black land ownership. The enforced redistribution of southern land to former slaves “seemed a logical consequence of emancipation” in the opinions of many African Americans for they had worked the land while enslaved, but they did not reap its benefits.

It was understandable that freed men and women believed the federal government should make land available to them, for many of them were heavily dependent on its services after emancipation. In 1865, the creation of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, commonly referred to as the Freedmen's Bureau, strove to aid former slaves through education, health care, and employment agencies. Failing black schools and hospitals often turned to the bureau for financial aid, and black laborers often relied on it for protection from the exploitation of white planters. Besides the bureau, the passage and enforcement of new federal laws sought to establish African Americans as equal citizens. Enactment of the Fourteenth Amendment granted them citizenship and the Fifteenth Amendment extended voting rights to the men. The military occupation of former Confederate states, along with the installment of military governors, ensured that white southerners could not overturn these new amendments, or return African Americans to slavery.

The threat of re-enslavement seemed very real for many newly freed men and women. Resentment among white planters over the loss of their work force ran deep, partially explaining why the federal government was reluctant to assist with black land ownership. Many white South Carolinians adamantly refused to treat African Americans as equal citizens and lashed out at their ambitions to own and farm land. The state's Black Codes, passed by whites in late 1865, imposed a "strict set of regulations" on African-American labor and social life which plainly resembled a return to enslavement. Although the codes recognized abolition, African Americans were expected to work as field hands or domestic servants, unless they had a license from a judge for a different occupation. They were required to work from sunrise to sunset and could be charged with vagrancy if caught unemployed by white officials. Fortunately for African Americans, South Carolina's military governor invalidated the laws by 1866, but the codes

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8 Foner, *Reconstruction*, 104-106.
clearly demonstrated white attempts to control black labor.  

The federal government did equip African Americans with the means to protect themselves from such hostility by giving them full political rights. The Reconstruction Acts of 1867, later backed by the Fifteenth Amendment, ensured that African-American men could vote and hold office, regardless of race or ancestry. These new black voters overwhelmingly tended to vote for the Republican Party, which was not unusual considering the fact that Abraham Lincoln, the party’s first president, was seen by many former slaves as the “Great Emancipator.” Representative of this tendency, at least ninety percent of 100,000 black voters were members of the Republican Party in 1869.

In South Carolina more than any other southern state, freed men took advantage of their newfound political rights. Constituting sixty percent of the state’s voting population, they elected 73 African Americans out of 124 total delegates to the 1868 Constitutional Convention.

Over the entire span of Reconstruction, at least 315 African Americans—men such as Richard H. Cain, Francis L. Cardozo, Robert Carlos DeLarge, Robert Brown Elliott, Richard H. Gleaves, Joseph H. Rainey, Alonzo J. Ransier, and Robert Smalls—held public office in South Carolina. Of those whose antebellum status is known, 88 were freedmen and 131 were slaves, indicating that the majority of black government officials had been enslaved beforehand. It can be assumed that their experiences as slaves shaped their ambitions and policies once in office. They, more than any other politicians, knew what freed men and women needed to fulfill the hopes of Reconstruction. They funneled money into government programs and organizations which provided services for former slaves—a stronger militia for security on the home front, monetary compensation for Ku Klux Klan attacks, an orphanage for parentless children, and land for those who could not afford to purchase from private owners. In the judgment of one historian, their efforts succeeded in "the passage of more legislation to improve the condition of the freedmen than was accomplished in any other state.”

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14 South Carolina General Assembly, Report of the Joint Investigating Committee on Public Frauds and Election of Hon. J.J. Patterson to the United States Senate, Made to the General Assembly of South Carolina at the Regular Session 1877-1878 (Columbia: Calvo & Patton, State Printers, 1878). This primary source was written from the perspective of white Democrats who opposed these programs and helped to terminate many of them. Although the text is filled with racial biases, it gives modern readers an idea of what black legislators aimed to accomplish and how their efforts were perceived by many white South Carolinians.
15 Rubin, "Reconstruction," 780.
Furthermore, most of the black legislators in South Carolina owned land, suggesting a significant relationship between land ownership and political activism. In fact, African Americans who held onto land were more likely to register, vote, and run for office than those who did not.\textsuperscript{16} Black legislators in South Carolina therefore appreciated the powerful symbolism of land ownership and its potential for racial uplift. At the 1868 convention, delegate Richard Cain argued that, without owning land, freed men and women could not elevate themselves much higher than their status as former slaves. Despite having established strong black communities, they could “know nothing of what is good and best for mankind until they get homesteads and enjoy them.”\textsuperscript{17} His political comrades agreed with him. Through the authority of the state government, they tried to extend the means for land ownership to their fellow freed men and women, creating what became known as the South Carolina Land Commission.

B. Overview of the South Carolina Land Commission

Congressional Reconstruction began with the passing of the Military Reconstruction Acts in March 1867, which called for African-American males to vote for or against a convention to reorganize the state government. Despite attempts by southern white Democrats to block African Americans from voting, 66,418 African Americans voted unanimously for a convention and an embrace of Republicanism, on November 19 and 20, 1867.\(^{18}\) The South’s traditional leaders—planters, merchants, and Democratic politicians—bitterly opposed the Reconstruction legislature and “black supremacy.” They could not accept the idea of former slaves voting, holding office, and enjoying equality before the law.\(^{19}\)

Nevertheless, the Constitutional Convention met in Charleston on January 14, 1868, to discuss among other pressing issues a land distribution program in the state of South Carolina. Seventy-six of the one hundred and twenty-four delegates were African American and they initially hoped to petition the United States Congress for a loan to purchase plantation lands for redistribution to landless people. Little attention was paid to South Carolina’s request in Washington and no money was granted, but on March 27, 1869, the South Carolina legislature established the Land Commission on its own. The original appropriation from the legislature was $200,000, and in March of 1870, another $500,000 was appropriated for lands to be purchased by the Land Commission. This was made possible by the overwhelming presence and voice of African Americans in the legislature, and South Carolina would become the only southern state to promote the redistribution of land for the benefit of freed men and women, as well as landless whites.\(^{20}\)

The Land Commission consisted of an Advisory Board made up of the governor, secretary of state, state treasurer, attorney general, and state controller, who chose the Land Commissioner. The job of the Land Commission was to purchase plantation land and subdivide it into plots no more than 100 acres and no less than 25 acres. The program was financed by the public sale of state bonds, and the capital generated was used to purchase the privately owned lands. The purchasers, which included both African Americans and whites, were expected to pay the land taxes and six percent interest annually on the principal of the loan during the first three years. After three years and compliance with all rules, the purchaser would receive a certificate of purchase and begin payments on the full purchase price. To stop speculation, it was required that at least half of the land be cultivated within five years. The title was received only after the entire amount, plus six percent interest, was paid in full. Purchasers were required to make final payments within eight years of receiving the certificate of purchase or forfeit the land.\(^{21}\)

White feelings were mixed about the Land Commission program. Many Democrats called for a repeal of the bill, while poor whites, who were intended to be included as purchasers along with

\(^{20}\) Bleser, *The Promised Land,* xiii.
African Americans, refused to participate. Though many plantation owners vocally protested the sale of land to African Americans, they continued to sell their land to the Land Commission. Many had abandoned their land for the duration of the war. The sheer depression, devastation, and debt many ex-Confederates found themselves in made selling to the Land Commission very appealing as a form of economic relief.

The first Land Commissioner was Charles P. Leslie. Under Leslie, land was often left unsurveyed prior to its sale. The surveyor himself, Benjamin Jackson, complained that not a single plat was ever found to be accurate, and boundary lines were extremely difficult to locate because many plats had not been surveyed in some fifty to one hundred years. African-American Secretary of State, Francis L. Cardozo, brought charges of corruption against Leslie, but he was never indicted. Robert DeLarge, an African American, became the second Land Commissioner once Leslie was forced out of office in 1870. Records from the DeLarge era seem to have disappeared, making subsequent research in the records of the Land Commissioner in this period challenging.

*Francis L. Cardozo.* As secretary of state, Cardozo effected changes within the Land Commission that enabled it to sell land to far more families than had previous commissioners. *Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.*
Robert Carlos DeLarge. DeLarge replaced C.P. Leslie as the second Land Commissioner in 1870. He later served in the House of Representatives.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

When accusations of corruption began circling around DeLarge himself, the duties of Land Commissioner were passed to the Secretary of State, Francis Cardozo, in February 1872. Cardozo rescinded the previous act of 1869 which required a purchaser to live on the land for three years before receiving a certificate of purchase; now any person who could begin the payments was given a certificate. Cardozo also removed corrupt officials and began the lengthy task of going through the Land Commission records, which had been plagued by falsification and were in dire need of reorganization. With the capable Cardozo at the helm, 5,008 families—approximately 3,000 more families than in 1871—had settled on Land Commission tracts by 1872.22

By 1876, Democrats had regained control of many former Confederate states including South Carolina. These Democrats called themselves Redeemers, since they claimed to have “redeemed” the South from corruption, misgovernment, and “black rule.”23 The Redeemers launched an investigation that condemned the Land Commission and by 1878 relegated all Land

22 Bleser, The Promised Land, 93-94.
23 Foner, Give Me Liberty, 552.
Commission sales to the Sinking Fund Commission, which would use future land sales to pay down state debt. Under the Sinking Fund Commission, blacks who defaulted on their payments were to be evicted. Fewer African Americans took up certificates of purchase and many who had already settled on lands were evicted or had to forfeit their lands because of a strict collection schedule implemented by the Sinking Fund. By 1890, as many as 14,000 African-American families had settled on Land Commission lands in South Carolina as a whole, but only 960 had received titles to 44,579 acres of the 118,436 acres available. The rest of land, now being sold in large parcels, was sold to whites, and by 1890 the sale of lands had ceased and the program was bankrupt.

Those black South Carolinians who were able to retain their land most likely employed one of three land management strategies explained in Elizabeth Bethel’s *Promiseland*, a case study of African-American lands received from the South Carolina Land Commission in Abbeville and Greenwood counties. Each strategy was dependent on age and domestic situation, but the three strategies included: family farming, a cultivation style limited to operator-owned land; owner-renter farming, in which portions of the land were rented out to others for farming; and landlord farming, which was based on tenancy and/or the employment of wage laborers. Employing similar strategies enabled multiple families in Lower Richland County to retain their land holdings and receive deeds from either the Land Commission or the Sinking Fund.

Although corruption marred the South Carolina Land Commission from the start and the only previous study done has emphasized such corruption, the dedicated and courageous leadership of Francis Cardozo highlighted the determination of African Americans to see such a promise through. This report highlights ten parcels originally granted by the South Carolina Land Commission which remain essentially unbroken in Lower Richland County today.

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C. The South Carolina Land Commission in Lower Richland County: The Case Study

1. Planter Sales: Origins of Land Commission Lands in Lower Richland County

The responsibility for purchasing plantations and other large tracts of land fell to the Land Commissioner. Once tracts were obtained, surveyors subdivided the land into marketable parcels. Though the Land Commissioner’s responsibility was to locate appropriate land to purchase, the final decision to procure particular tracts lay with the Advisory Board. A majority vote to purchase a tract moved the process forward once the Land Commissioner submitted the title of land to the attorney general. The attorney general then inspected the title to determine its validity, and once that was established, the state treasurer purchased the plantation or tract of land.

To identify land suitable for the program, the Land Commission sent out formal requests. Many planters throughout South Carolina sent letters to the Land Commission requesting the purchase of their tracts. (Land owning families, once wealthy, were often drowning in debt following the Civil War and looked to the sale of their land to the state agency as a form of economic relief.) Mortgaged land was not considered acceptable for purchase, which disqualified many planters. In addition, the agency called for only purchasing large landholdings and thus many applications received by the Land Commission for small farms were denied. The Land Commission received a number of requests from African Americans who asked to purchase lands from specific plantations in and near their own communities.

Approval of purchases in each county had to be obtained from members of the Advisory Board and often by recommendations of members who lived in the specific county in question. The majority of board members were not originally from South Carolina and were unfamiliar with much of the land and therefore could often be misinformed regarding the quality of land under discussion. If no board member resided in a county where new land was being examined, respected Republicans in the area would serve as land appraisers, making recommendations to the Advisory Board. Almost half of the land purchased by the Land Commission was located in the counties of Charleston, Colleton, Georgetown, and Beaufort. While it may appear that the Advisory Board favored the lowcountry, in fact the board focused on the area because it contained the largest percentage of African Americans, the highest number of available plantations, and the lowest land costs per acre.

Despite the focus on the lowcountry, Richland County was well represented in purchases.

made by the Land Commission: 9,402 acres were acquired for a total sum of $61,081. This amount placed Richland County third behind Colleton County with 14,160 acres for $69,276, and Charleston County, with 25,180 acres for $106,892.50.

Seven tracts were purchased in Richland County by the South Carolina Land Commission between 1869 and 1870: Adams, Back Swamp, Diseker, Hickory Hill, Hopkins, Hunt, and O’Hanlon. Many of these lands were originally held by Lower Richland planter families, but the tracts were deeded to the Land Commissioner by third parties.

Richland County planter James Pickett Adams sold 482 acres of his 500-acre tract in 1870 for a sum of $2,892 to South Carolina Governor Robert K. Scott. This land was originally deeded to Adams by his father Robert on July 14, 1848. The 1850 Census listed Adams as a planter residing in Richland County, owning five slaves. By the 1870 Census his real estate was valued at $15,000 and his personal estate at $2,000. The land sold to Governor Scott in 1870 was to

35 “Lands Purchased by the Late Land Commission,” Land Commission Exhibit, 1882, ST.0782, Roll AD, page 672. South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, SC.
37 Deed Book F, page 39, Richland County Register of Deeds.
extend only as far as Dry Branch, thus allowing James Adams to maintain ownership of 18 acres. Adams likely experienced financial hardships following the Civil War and sought economic relief through the sale of his land. However, unlike many planters in South Carolina, Adams held onto a portion of his original land. Governor Scott, a member of the Advisory Board, then sold the entire tract to Land Commissioner Robert DeLarge for the same cost he acquired the property. The land is referred to as the J.P. Adams tract in Land Commission Records.

A record from the Land Commission does not exist for the original seller of the Back Swamp tract to the Commission. Reports from the Land Commission detailing the specific selling price and acreage for each original tract do not include Back Swamp. The tract is mentioned in a report from the commission to the General Assembly in 1872 with a description of the tract as containing seven lots. A second record from the same report details the total acreage of lands purchased and the accompanying costs for each county in the state. However, if one were to compare the total cost and acreage for Richland County according to the Land Commission and calculate the sum of individual prices of acres, those figures would be almost identical. This leaves Back Swamp a tract acknowledged briefly by the commission, but unaccountable regarding original cost and acreage.

Sheriff Phineas F. Frazee sold the Diseker tract to Land Commissioner Robert C. DeLarge in 1870. The 440-acre tract was put up for public auction on January 3, 1870, due to a dispute by members of the Hopkins family in the Court of Common Pleas. According to the deed, William Hopkins submitted a Bill of Complaint against English Hopkins, Amy Hopkins, Sarah Hopkins, Simeon Rawls, and Ed Gillmore on November 19, 1869, regarding the sale of real estate consisting of seven tracts of land. The source of the dispute is not known, but William Hopkins was once a prominent planter in the Lower Richland community. Those he filed a complaint against over the Diseker tract included his daughter, Amy Hopkins, and his former overseer, Simeon Rawls. In December of that year a judge decreed the tract of land known as the Diseker tract be sold by the county’s sheriff. At a public auction the following January, Land Commissioner DeLarge produced the highest bid for the property, paying $1,760 for the acreage.

The Hickory Hill tract was sold to Commissioner C.P. Leslie by Sheriff Phineas Frazee in 1869. According to the deed granted to Leslie, the tract known originally as the Hickory Hill plantation and measuring 712 acres was owned by James R. Pringle. Thomas B. Clarkson filed a court complaint against Pringle due to an unpaid mortgage and demanded his land be foreclosed. The Hickory Hill tract was indeed foreclosed and the lands sold at public auction by Frazee on December 16, 1869. Charles P. Leslie was the highest bidder, acquiring the land at a cost of $5,874.

The 1,830 acres that comprised the Hopkins tract passed through many hands before they

41 Deed Book E, page 555, Richland County Register of Deeds.
42 Census, 1850. The deed research for this report indicates that 449.25 acres were actually sold in the 440-acre Diseker tract. The discrepancy of 9.25 acres might be the result of the resale of Lot 3 and of Lot 2 consisting of 20 acres. Or, it might be the result of inaccurate surveying or careless record-keeping.
43 Deed Book F, page 27, Richland County Register of Deeds. The deed research indicates that 750.6 acres were actually sold in the 712-acre Hickory Hill tract, but resale of parcels accounts for the difference.
were sold to the Land Commission in 1870. According to deed records, Fanny H. Adams received the property from her father James Uriah Adams under the condition that if she married she would give the estate to a male relative. In 1867 Adams, addressed as a spinster in the deed, married John Shoolbred, a planter from Charleston County. With their union came the understanding that Fanny would sell her real and personal estate to her brother Joel R. Adams, a Richland County planter. Joel Adams then became the trustee of Fanny’s estate and saw the sale of the “Hopkins Turn Out” tract to Julius G. Huguenin, his brother-in-law, for a sum of $7,000. Huguenin came from a wealthy family in Beaufort County and married Mary Hopkins Adams in 1860. The couple moved from Huguenin’s family estate in the lowcountry to Columbia following the outbreak of the Civil War. They eventually settled at Whitehall Plantation in Gadsden. Huguenin sold the land to the Land Commission for a cost of $12,810 in 1870. According to deed records, Huguenin purchased and sold numerous properties in Richland County throughout the 1860s and 1870s. Following his death, Mary Huguenin continued to acquire and sell properties well into the 1910s.

Thomas J. LaMotte sold the Hunt tract to C.P. Leslie in 1870. LaMotte was a magistrate and notary in Richland County. Alfred M. Hunt previously owned the tract of land, but he declared bankruptcy on December 31, 1868. The following May, LaMotte was appointed assignee of Hunt’s estate. The land was sold at public auction on December 6, 1869, and Commissioner Leslie purchased the property for a total cost of $1,635. The deed granted to Leslie described the land as on the nature of the Congaree River, known as the “Weston tract,” measuring 774 acres in Richland County. In other Land Commission records it is referred to as the Hunt tract and shall be referred to as such in this report.

The O’Hanlon tract was the largest property acquired by the Land Commission in Richland County. The plantation originally belonged to James O’Hanlon, but upon his death, his property was sold. Samuel L. Jones and Jesse Reese served as executors of O’Hanlon’s will, selling the tract to C.P. Leslie in 1870 for $36,125. The deed described the property as bordering the Congaree River, Radford’s Creek, and Cabin Branch, with a total acreage of 5,160. The tract actually contained 5,164.5 acres, but in computing the price to be paid, four and a half acres were excluded to compensate for the ground occupied by the Adams’ dam erected between 1840 and 1845.

Although many of the tracts sold to the Land Commission were originally owned by planter families, it is evident that the Civil War took its toll in Richland County. Third parties

44 The 1860 Census listed James U. Adams as a farmer residing in Gadsden, South Carolina, with a real estate worth of $125,000 and a personal estate totaling $340,000.
45 Deed Book E, page 534, Richland County Register of Deeds.
48 Deed Book E, page 494, Richland County Register of Deeds.
49 Grantee and Grantor Indexes, Richland County Register of Deeds.
51 Census 1860; Census, 1870.
52 Deed Book F, page 28, Richland County Register of Deeds.
53 Deed Book K, page 150, Richland County Register of Deeds.
Survey map of Alfred M. Hunt’s land. A map of the Hunt tract was included in the 1869 deed to Commissioner C.P. Leslie. Courtesy of Richland County Register of Deeds.

orchestrated the majority of the sales. The purchase of James P. Adams’ land by the state’s governor illustrated the remaining influence of the planter class in Richland County, as well as the desperation of many southerners to relieve their financial stress following the Civil War. Julius G. Huguenin, though from a planter family in the lowcountry, acquired the Hopkins tract as a means of personal investment and sold the land to the state. Thomas LaMotte was a civil servant, who according to deed records acquired and sold numerous properties throughout the county, many of which had been seized by the county due to bankruptcy. Phineas F. Frazee served as the county’s sheriff whose duties included disposing of land that had been foreclosed upon due to failure to pay taxes or whose ownership was under dispute by family members in the Court of Common Pleas.⁵⁴

2. African-American Purchases: Overview of Land Sales in Lower Richland County

Freed men and women in Lower Richland County purchased some 6,310 acres of land from the

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⁵⁴ Middleton interview.
South Carolina Land Commission, mostly between 1870 and 1872. The lots they purchased ranged in size from 6 to 108 acres. Most individuals or families purchased a single lot, but there are several records of a single lot being purchased jointly and many records of a single purchaser acquiring more than one lot. Commission lands in Lower Richland County were priced between two and ten dollars per acre, around seven dollars per acre being the most common price. Nearly 180 freed men and women purchased commission lands in Lower Richland County, buying an average of 55.67 acres at an average price of $333.71, not including interest. Of the nearly 180 purchasers, 39 of these succeeded in making full payment and received clear title to their land. Their holdings, some 1,399 acres in all, represented just over twenty-two percent of the total freed men and women’s purchases in the county. Although most of the remaining buyers managed to pay at least the first year's interest, they were unable to pay off the principle and subsequently forfeited their purchases.  

Patterns of land purchase varied between the seven Land Commission tracts in Lower Richland County. Only a single freedman bought land in the Back Swamp tract and only two in the Hunt tract. The O'Hanlon tract showed the strongest sales in terms of both total acres sold (2,978) and number of purchasers (84). Lot sizes were largest in the Hunt and Adams tracts, averaging 61.5 acres and 55.25 acres, respectively, and smallest in the Hickory Hill tract, where

55 Bleser, The Promised Land, 84.
56 These numbers are slightly inflated because in several instances the same lot is recorded as being sold to multiple buyers. For purposes of comparison to the other tracts in the county, however, the difference is insignificant.
the average settler purchased 27.8 acres. Land was least expensive in the Hopkins tract at an average of $4.34 per acre and most expensive in the Hickory Hill tract at an average of $8.20 per acre. Total purchase prices averaged highest in the Adams tract at $337.54 and in the O’Hanlon tract at $253.22. The average total purchase price was lowest in the Diseker tract at $142.02.

Rates of land retention also varied by tract. Retention was worst in the O’Hanlon tract, where less than five percent of purchasers received clear title and just over three percent of purchased acres were paid off. Settlers in the Hickory Hill tract, in a striking contrast, succeeded in retaining nearly fifty-three percent of their purchased acres and forty-six percent of the purchasers received deeds. Nearly thirty-eight percent of the acres purchased by settlers in the Hopkins tract were retained, with thirty-five percent of purchasers receiving deeds. Thirty-three percent of the purchased acres in the Diseker tract were retained, and thirty-eight percent of settlers received deeds. Thirty-eight percent of the acres purchased in the Adams tract were retained, and forty-three percent of settlers received deeds.

Sample deed application. As land ownership passed from former planter families to African-American families, records like this one kept by the Land Commission detailed the transfers of property. Courtesy of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

The findings of this report indicate that the settlers of the Hickory Hill and Hopkins tracts were most successful in retaining all or part of their land to the present day. Such a result might well be expected as these two tracts were the only ones to combine a relatively high retention rate with a large number of purchasers. The success of the individual settlers, however, was clearly dependent on any number of other factors.
D. A Snapshot of Lower Richland County, 1865-1890

As national and statewide events after the Civil War did much to determine possibilities for freed men and women, the local community daily affected the experience of the residents of Lower Richland County. Though historical accounts of life in Lower Richland County after the Civil War are sparse, it is possible to gain a small sense of the life that surrounded these newly freed African-American families as they pursued the purchase of land.57

Following the Civil War, most of Lower Richland County’s plantations were split up into small individual farms, including those sold by the Land Commission. Between 1860 and 1870, both the amounts of livestock and crop production in Richland County had decreased by half, likely because of the Civil War.58 By 1870, most of the farms listed in census records had improved only a small portion of acreage, had a horse or mule, a few cattle, and swine, and most were growing Indian corn with maybe one other crop in small quantities.59 The visual nature of those small farms was certainly highlighted by the building of fences after the 1877 “stock law,” which required livestock to be penned on their land instead of wandering across lands in a communal way.60 As black farmers worked hard and established independent families, Richland County’s population increased faster than Columbia’s alone, and most of the population outside of Columbia resided in the more fertile Lower Richland County.61 The rural portion of the county was very active and growing during the post-war period in trying to make up for war losses; freed men and women sought to make up for lost time.

With the fall of the institution of the slave plantation, many villages and towns grew around the already established railroad depots. By the mid-1870s, Kingville, Acton, Eastover, Gadsden, Hopkins Turnout and Clarkson’s (or Wateree) were all depot stations, had post offices and emerging village life.62 The second official “urban center” in Richland County after Columbia, Eastover was incorporated by the state legislature in 1880; its boundaries extended one half mile around the depot.63 This depot-centered village life around depots focused on agricultural commerce and trade, but in the surrounding rural areas appeared schools, churches, and small industries.

Though statistics on schools at the time were compiled for the whole county, which included Columbia, some observations can be made. Most of the smallest schools in the county had from one to three teachers, and it is likely that the earlier Lower Richland schools were that size. As the following families’ stories show through information from census records, many children of

57 Historically Lower Richland County has been called Lower Township and as Fourth Township.
59 United State Census, Original Agriculture, Industry, Social Statistics, and Mortality Schedules for South Carolina, 1850-1880, Seventh Census, 1870 (South Carolina Archives Mircocopy Number 2).
60 Moore, Columbia and Richland County, 230.
61 Moore, Columbia and Richland County, 210.
63 Moore, Columbia and Richland County, 230.
freed slaves were able to attend school for some months of the year; others spent all their time helping their families on their farms and did not go to school. In 1871, Richland County’s thirty-four free common schools were attended by 1,995 black students and 421 white students. Of those thirty-four schools that belonged in the school district, only four were actually owned by the school district. Of the fifty-nine teachers listed, only eleven of them were black and thirteen of them were northerners. In Lower Richland County, as well as for decades to come, many of its black schools were small, local, and closely affiliated with religious congregations that lent space for classrooms until freestanding schools could be built. Other educational ventures, such as the American Union Literary Club for black residents in Gadsden organized by Aesop Goodson, also appeared.

The first black pastors in Lower Richland County were ordained on November 12, 1865, shortly after the end of the Civil War by the white pastor of Beulah Baptist Church. The first two black churches were led by these newly ordained black leaders, one of whom was Reverend William Weston Adams. Eleven members split off from Beulah to form Shiloh Baptist in 1866 and 565 formed New Light Beulah Baptist in 1867, both at times led by Reverend Adams. In the next two decades, there were eighteen more black congregations formed in communities around Lower Richland County, though often one pastor would serve the churches of two neighboring communities until more ordained ministers could be installed. Most of these new churches were Baptist or African Methodist Episcopal denominations. Several of the earliest churches were directly connected to black families that bought land from the Land Commission. As will be explained later in the report, Hercules Smith in the Hickory Hill tract sold some of his land to establish the St. Phillip A.M.E. Church. The Reverend Samuel Barber also led the foundation of the St. John Baptist Church in the Hopkins tract, which was built on land originally purchased by Ephraim Neal.

Industry in Lower Richland County was limited after the Civil War, as was characteristic of such a rural area. The census for 1880 only lists one lumber company near the Congaree River and Cedar Creek owned by a man named Clarkson which employed three people, and seven flour or grist mills scattered through the area that together only employed sixteen people at most for the year.

The political history of Lower Richland County at this time is also sparsely documented but nevertheless revealing. In rural areas, social spaces often became political spaces during and after slavery. The depots, mills, post offices, and stores were likely gathering places for political involvement of the ordinary farmer. There was a branch of the Grange organized around the Cedar Creek area to educate and advocate agricultural production. Several leaders of the black community in Lower Richland County served in the state legislature, including Aesop Goodson.

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64 Annual Report to the General Assembly, 1871, Records of the State Superintendent of Education, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.
65 Moore, Columbia and Richland County, 262.
67 United State Census, Original Agriculture, Industry, Social Statistics, and Mortality Schedules for South Carolina, 1850-1880, Seventh Census, 1870 (South Carolina Archives Microcopy Number 2).
from Gadsden and James Davis from Hopkins. In 1876, James Davis, an independent Republican who served in the lower house of the General Assembly from 1870 to 1872, appeared at a meeting of the Richland Democratic Club and spoke against the campaign of Wade Hampton for governor. 68 William M. Lowman was also a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives, representing Richland County from 1876 to 1878. 69 Another instance of a political gathering happened earlier in Hopkins Turnout, in September 1867, said to be held in celebration of the passing of civil rights legislation, where three whites and three blacks spoke to the assembled crowd about the future of political representation for the area. In 1882, as the “redeemed” legislature manipulated representative districts, it attempted to include the areas in South Carolina with the highest black populations in one district so that there would be only one black representative; the seventh district extended along much of the coast and inland to include Lower Richland County, populated by new land-owning black farmers thanks in part to the South Carolina Land Commission. 70 When blacks formed a South Carolina branch of the Colored Farmers’ Alliance in June 1889, sub-Alliances were formed in Gadsden and Mill Creek to participate in populist activism, as they were in fifteen black communities across the state. 71 Though it is very difficult to tell how extensive involvement was, the political education of some of the former slaves is evident in the quick ordainment of black church leaders and the formation of a literary club, as well as more direct political organization.

In the transition between enslavement and freedom for residents of Lower Richland County, the seven tracts of the South Carolina Land Commission provided a significant opportunity to establish independent families and communities. Land ownership was a foundation on which the establishment of churches, schools, businesses, political organizations, and other aspects of family and community life could be built.

68 Moore, Columbia and Richland County, 264.
69 Lowman was one of five representatives from Richland County who served in the 52nd General Assembly from November 28, 1876 to March 22, 1878, along with Andrew W. Curtis, Charles S. Minort (later John Cheves Haskell), Robert John Palmer, and James Wells. See: Walter Edgar, et al., eds., Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1974), I, 427.
70 Moore, Columbia and Richland County, 228n.
71 Moore, Columbia and Richland County, 269.