

The legacy of the Freedman's Bank serves as a reminder that we must continue striving for greater financial inclusion for all Americans.

- U.S. Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew

Freedman's Savings Bank Fact Recap

37

US Branches

70,000

Depositors

57,000,000

USD In Deposits

FOUNDING

President Abraham Lincoln established the Freedman's Bank on March 3, 1865 as part of the Freedman's Bureau. As the Civil War drew to a close, the United States Congress and President Lincoln recognized the need to aid newly freed black men and women in their transition to freedom. To support the land grants and other elements of the Freedman's Bureau Act, a Freedman's Bank was established to help newly freed Americans navigate their financial lives. Call it the financial literacy program of its day.

During its existence, The Freedman's Bank maintained some 37 offices in 17 states, including the District of Columbia. At its height, the Bank had over \$57 million in deposits (adjusted for inflation) and 70,000 depositors.

Five weeks after the creation of the Freedman's Bank, President Lincoln was assassinated.

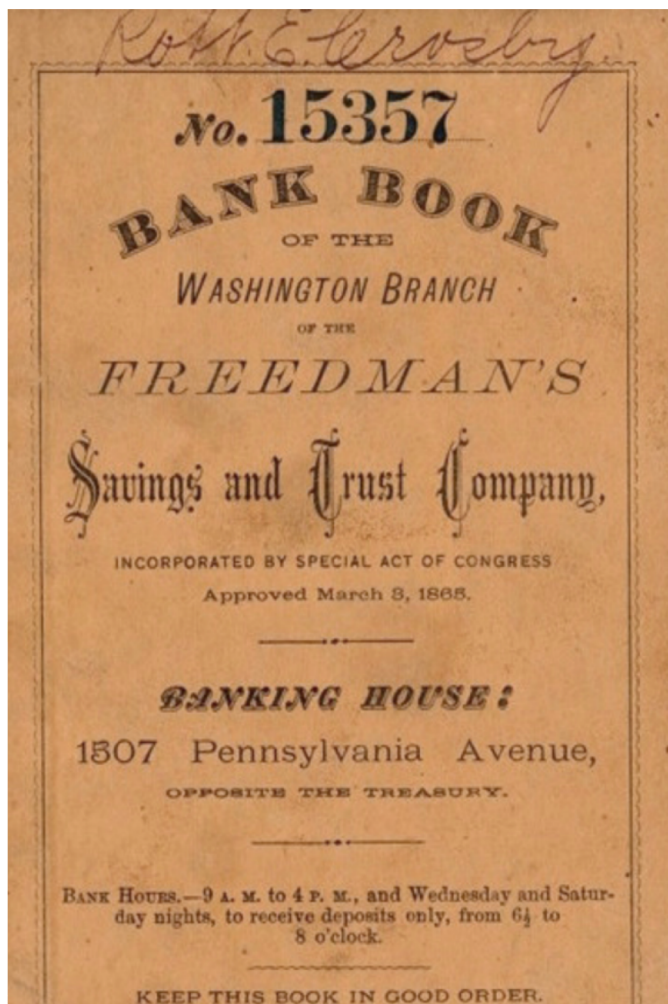
Seven years later, In June of 1872, the U.S. Congress voted to permanently close the Freedman's Bureau. The Bank however remained operational and in 1874 Frederick Douglass was asked to run the Freedman's Bank as its D.C. branch relocated to a new home across from the U.S. Department of Treasury, in a grand building which cost \$260,000 to construct.



THE HALF HAD NOT BEEN TOLD

When Frederick Douglass arrived at the Bank's new location in Washington D.C. he wrote: *"The whole thing was beautiful. I had read of this bank when I lived in Rochester, and had indeed been solicited to become one of its trustees, and had reluctantly consented to do so: but when I came to Washington and saw its magnificent brown stone front, its towering height, its perfect appointments, and the fine display it made in the transaction of its business, I felt like the Queen of Sheba when she saw the riches of Solomon, that 'half had not been told me'."*

When Douglass came on as the Bank's director however, he found rampant corruption within the Bank and risky investments across industries being made with depositor's savings. In a desperate attempt to stabilize the Bank, Douglass invested \$10,000 of his personal funds, but sadly, later that year, in June of 1874 the Bank failed against the backdrop of the political forces that undermined Reconstruction.



LEGACY

Before it failed, the Freedman's Savings Bank had 37 branches operating in 17 states and the District of Columbia and lost a total of 3 million dollars. In the District alone over 3,000 depositors—both individuals and cultural institutions—lost their savings. While the failure of the Freedman's Bank was tragic and left many African Americans with feelings of distrust of the American banking system, the records created by the bank are a rich source of documentation for black family research for the period immediately following the American Civil War. The records of twenty-nine branches of the Freedman's Savings Bank, including those of the Washington D.C. office, still survive today and are searchable at the National Archives.

What make these records so important are the thousands of signature cards that contain personal data about the individual depositors. In addition to the names and ages of depositors, the files can contain their places of birth, residence, and occupations; names of parents, spouses, children, brothers, and sisters; and in some cases, the names of former slave owners. These records of the individuals, who lived through the transition from slavery to freedom, are the keys that allow their descendants to unlock the mysteries of their largely undocumented family histories.

Within these records are stories that reveal struggle, sacrifice, courage and determination; stories that must be told to our children and left for future generations.



RENAMING

On January 7, 2016, at the urging of Operation HOPE's Founder & CEO, Secretary Lew publicly renamed the Treasury Annex Building, The Freedman's Bank Building, in honor of the site where the Freedman's Saving Bank once stood. Former Mayor of Atlanta and Senior Advisor to Martin Luther King Jr, Andrew Young gave opening remarks and positioned the historic ceremony within a broader history. The Secretary of the Department of Treasury, Jack Lew, then gave remarks and honored the historic legacy of the Freedman's Bank as well as the work of those who had helped to bring the history to light.

FULFILLING ITS CHARTER

Operation HOPE is fulfilling the unfinished charter of The Freedman's Bank. Approximately 50 million, or 1 in 6 Americans are not a part of the financial system and are what the FDIC would call "unbanked" or "underbanked." These individuals rely on payday lenders, check cashers, and do not hold traditional checking or savings accounts. Operation HOPE helps bank the "unbanked and underbanked" and also provides financial counseling to those who are banked, so that they can better manage financial decisions. We offer this financial education and counseling to youth and adults nationwide and are excited to shed light on the history of the Freedman's Bank as we continue that legacy.

