

LABOR CONTRACTS

James G. Tait (1833-1911) landowner in this Labor Contract dated July 31, 1865, just three months after the Surrender (end of the Civil War), evidently adhered to this rule too as this labor contract insured that his crops would be harvested.

Ala.

Registered Sept 4, 1865"

State of Ala }
Wilcox Co } a contract entered into, this the 31st day
of July, between James G. Tait as employer and the following
named Freedmen, or Laborers as employees of the County &
State
aforesaid. The said Freedmen or Laborers, on their part, for
& in consideration of the terms hereinafter state, bind
themselves, to:--
faithfully & diligently labor for said Jas G. Tait, during
the rema-
-inder of the year 1865, (according to the (torn) regulation,
conditions
& penalties prescribed & contained in a (torn) rules &
regulations
for the State of Ala. & c.--) and said labor is to (torn)
formed under the
direction of the said J.G. Tait, or any agent by him
appointed.
The said Freedmen, or Laborers bind themselves to visit, or
receive
visitors on such conditions as may be agreed upon, by said
J.G. Tait
or his agent. The Freedmen, or Laborers further bind
themselves to
account to the said J.G. Tait, for the value of any property
of whatever
kind or description that may be wasted, lost, or destroyed by
reason
of the negligence, or careless conduct of said Freedmen or
laborers,
& the part of the crop allotted to said Freedmen or Laborers,
is
hereby made liable for the value of any property, so wasted,
lost or
destroyed. It is further agreed & stipulated, that if any of
the said
Freedmen or Laborers shall refuse, or fail to work faithfully
& diligently,
the said James G. Tait or his agent shall have power & is
hereby
authorised to discharge him or them. The said Jas G. Tait

binds himself
to pay over & deliver on the premises to said Freedmen or
laborers
one-eighth part of the present growing crop ^of corn, fodder,
cowpeas
& ground peas, and also one half of the potatoes & sorghum
syrup
of sickness & rice, & also to furnish food, clothing, houses,
fuel,
& medicines--& in bad cases a physician

James G. Tait.

Witness	Isham his X mark
A. L. Whisenhart	Washington his X mark
W. P. Barnes	Isaac his X mark
A.W. Bethea	Brian his X mark
	Glaster his X mark
	John his X mark
	Dempsy his X mark
	Jeff his X mark
	Jack his X mark
	Bill Smart his X mark
	Widow (torn) her X mark
	Widow-Milly her X mark
	Dick his X mark
	Frank his X mark
	Malinda her X mark
	Jim his X mark

Transcript (LPR 35, Box 1, Folder 2)

State of Alabama} This contract made this the
Wilcox County }day of 1868 between James
A. Tait & Thomas Hill (Freedman) with respect(?)
That the said Tait agrees to let Thom Hill have a certain
piece of land known as the "Morriss Ridge," for the year 1868
upon which (Ridge) he ^Hill is permitted to clear land &
build
houses, without expense to said Tait excepting nails &
flooring
The said Tait agrees to let him work the lands east
of his residence known as "Dry Fork," & to give said Tait for
rent thereof one fourth of all produce raised on said lands.
The aforesaid Tait is to be at no expense in feeding his
(Hill's)
family or any stock required in making said crop-
Witness

Transcript

Swamp Plantation
Lowndes County, Ala
Jan'y 5th 1866

I, Cooper, do agree to hire the time of my wife Angeline and my two sons, Liberty and Mack, to Wm. B. Hall & Thos Douglass for the year of 1866 Term of service commencing Jan'y 5th 1866, and ending Dec. 31st 1866.

I further agree to see that they labor faithfully, and yield obedience to their orders, for which service, I am to receive Two hundred and fifty dollars, \$250.00 medical bills & rations.

Deductions to be made for all time lost from labor, and for support of my children.

his

Witness: Cooper
Eli Cook

X

mark

BACKGROUND

On March 3, 1865, the United States Congress established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. This federal agency helped ex-slaves with food, medical aid, education, and legal advice. [General Wager Swayne](#) was appointed assistant commissioner in Alabama and, after 1866, district military commander over the federal troops who occupied the state. Under his direction, the Freedmen's Bureau distributed rations to thousands of blacks and whites in the "starving time" of 1865-66.

Thousands of African Americans who had left the plantations for the cities when freedom came soon found themselves homeless and hungry. Early in 1866, the freedmen began to return to the land for spring planting. At first they worked for the promise of wages at rates agreed upon at the start of the year. The Freedmen's Bureau required labor contracts to be entered into by blacks and their employers, but did not set wage levels. In a near-cashless society, money wages were soon discontinued, to be replaced by sharecropping arrangements. The standard contract gave the black laborer a share of the crop according to how much of the expenses of production he paid. Only for a brief period did the Freedmen's Bureau offer some economic shelter for the ex-slaves. The sharecropping system that evolved during Reconstruction soon bound most African Americans into debt so ruinous that they were practically re-enslaved. (William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt, *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*, 234-39.)

Updated: July 12, 2001

<http://www.archives.state.al.us/teacher/recon/recon1.html>

Questions to answer using the given documents.

1. What is a labor contract?

2. What is sharecropping?

3. Who drafted these contracts?

4. What are the tones of these contracts?

5. What information is contained in the documents?

6. What problems do you notice in these contracts?

7. Are both parties protected?



Work Contracts Assignment

In the top box....

After reading and discussing the transcripts shared write a short essay answering the following questions. Were freed slaves truly free? Was life better for the Freedmen before the Civil War? Include your opinion and evidences that support your statement.

In the bottom box.... BONUS

Create your own work contract that you feel would be fair for both parties during this era of reconstruction.
