

**AN ARCHIVAL ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY**  
of the  
**NORTHERN STORES DEPARTMENT, HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY, 1959 - 1987**

by

**GERALDINE ALTON HARRIS**

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**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	. . . . .	i
Introduction	. . . . .	1
Chapter 1	An Overview of Hudson's Bay Company Administration, 1670-1959 . . . . .	10
Chapter 2	Northern Stores Department Administration, 1959-1987 . . . . .	32
Chapter 3	Northern Stores Department Operations, 1959-1987 . . . . .	56
Chapter 4	Northern Stores Department Records-Keeping Systems and Records . . . . .	110
Conclusion	. . . . .	134
Bibliography	. . . . .	137

## Abstract

The provenance method of retrieving information from archival records has rarely been employed fully. The description of the provenance or institutional creator of records is often merely the name of an administrative department. This thesis emphasizes the importance of understanding how records-creating institutions function in order to understand their records and retrieve the information contained within them.

In demonstrating a functional approach to provenance, this thesis provides an archival administrative history of the Northern Stores Department of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1959 - 1987. The Northern Stores Department operated for twenty-eight years during which time it ran over 200 stores in the northern and remote communities of Canada, often as the sole supplier of groceries and other essential goods. It had an important impact on the people of the North and is thus of considerable interest to researchers. The department developed out of the company's Fur Trade Department, which gradually expanded into the area of general merchandising during the 1940s. It was renamed the Northern Stores Department in 1959 to reflect the changing mandate. While maintaining an interest in furs, the Northern Stores Department was primarily engaged in retailing. Its stores were administered separately from those of the rest of the company due to the special conditions of retailing in the North. The department was equipped with its own personnel, accounting, merchandise, transportation, distribution and fur collection operations. It functioned with a certain degree of autonomy from the company's overall business and was eventually sold in 1987 to become a company in itself, The North West Company.

Chapter one provides a broad overview of the history of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1670-1959 with emphasis on the departmentalization of the company's activities

and, specifically, the development of the Fur Trade Department. It was during this time that many of the activities undertaken by the Northern Stores Department became formal administrative areas. Chapter two provides a close examination of the department's mandate and administrative structure between 1959 and 1987.

Emphasis is placed on the upper levels of management and those who played a significant role in shaping the department's administrative structure. Chapter three analyzes the purpose and activities of each of the administrative divisions within the department. This chapter provides a description of the functions of each of the administrative divisions and the department overall as the key to understanding its records. This information sets the records within their proper context and allows the user to interpret the information in the records in relation to this context.

Furthermore, much can be inferred about the type of information in the records, and where this information might be found, based on knowledge of the functions of the department. It is this type of functional access to information that will open archival records to greater usefulness and easier access. A chapter on the records-keeping systems and the records of the department concludes the thesis. It again underlines the importance of functional access to archival records because the records-keeping systems of the department were structured upon a functional basis.

## INTRODUCTION

Archival endeavours of the twentieth century are marked by efforts to adapt to the sheer volume of records being created and to the increasing variety of documentation and information caused by changing recording technologies. These challenges have prompted archivists to reaffirm the importance of the principle of provenance while developing new strategies to implement the principle in changing circumstances. The principle of provenance, first articulated by European archivists in the nineteenth century, maintains that in order to protect the integrity of the records as evidence of the actions of their creators, the creators of the records must be known. It follows that to protect the integrity of the information in the records, the records of a particular creator must neither be confused with those of another creator, nor have their origin effaced or obscured by physically intermixing them with the records of one or more other creators. According to provenance, records created by one institution or individual must be preserved as a distinct unit and the original order of the records must be maintained. The description of archival records therefore is largely a description of the institution or individual that created them, or the provenance. Archival administrative histories provide the totality of relevant provenance information for institutional records.

Provenance information, however, does more than protect the integrity of archival documentation. It also serves as the most powerful means of information retrieval from very large bodies of archival records. Knowing the origins and original purposes of records allows an archivist or researcher to infer much about the likely information content of the records without first having to read widely in them. An administrative history for archival purposes also includes a description of the records-keeping systems an institution creates and the individual types of documents which these systems hold. The goal here is to understand which components of an institution

documented their work on which filing system(s) and how the filing systems actually work. Changes in the system(s) are clearly important to understand as well. Individual types of documents are studied in order to learn their functions and the categories of information they contain. Knowledge of administrative history, the history of records administration, and the history of particular types of documents enables the archivist to direct researchers to relevant information in the records.

Since the 1980s some leading Canadian and American archivists have rediscovered the possibilities of provenance information as a means of indirect access to subject information. Tom Nesmith, Richard Berner, Richard Lytle, David Bearman and Terry Cook, for example, have discovered that access to the information in archival materials is best provided through a clear understanding of their origins and characteristics. According to Tom Nesmith, Canadian archivists have until recently neglected the contextual, provenance approach to understanding records.<sup>1</sup> Berner too argues that American archivists have overlooked the possibilities of provenance methods of information retrieval while relying on subject-based content analysis and subject indexing. Berner suggests that the provenance method of information retrieval is novel "because it has so rarely been fully employed to extract the information that is inherent in provenancially given data".<sup>2</sup> Both Richard Lytle and David Bearman have developed this insight. They argue convincingly that knowledge of the functions performed by records creators and the types of records they create eliminates much of

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<sup>1</sup>Tom Nesmith, "Archival Studies in English-speaking Canada and the North American Rediscovery of Provenance" in Tom Nesmith, ed., Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance (Metuchen, N.J. and London: Society of American Archivists and Association of Canadian Archivists in association with The Scarecrow Press, 1993): 1-23.

<sup>2</sup>Richard C. Berner, Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1983): 116.

the need for subject indexing. To improve information content retrieval Lytle and Bearman recommend that archivists and archival researchers should focus more on studying the records' creators, their actions, or in the case of institutions, their functions, and the forms of their records. Provenance information once indexed and automated would provide access, inferentially, to subject matter.<sup>3</sup> In an article entitled "From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives", Terry Cook argues that the contemporary archival challenge requires a shift in the intellectual orientation of the archival profession away from a concern about direct provision of subject information in the records to a contextual, provenance understanding of the records. Cook maintains that only provenance knowledge can provide means of access to subject information of interest to a particular researcher within the overwhelming amount of information and documentation facing archivists and researchers today.<sup>4</sup> Cook's "Paper Trails: A Study in Northern Records and Northern Administration, 1898-1958" is an excellent example of one of the few detailed studies of the origins of archival records. In this study of the Canadian government's records of northern administration Cook describes the reason for the creation of the documents through an examination of the creators of the records, the administration of the records, and the form and function of various types of documentation.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the importance of detailed studies of the origins and characteristics of archival

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<sup>3</sup>Richard H. Lytle and David Bearman, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance", Archivaria 21 (Winter 1985-86): 25-26.

<sup>4</sup>Terry Cook, "From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives", Archivaria 19 (Winter 1984-85): 28-49.

<sup>5</sup>Terry Cook, "Paper Trails: A Study in Northern Records and Administration, 1898-1958", in W. R. Morrison and Ken Coates, eds., 'For Purposes of Dominion': Essays in Honour of Morris Zaslow (North York, Ontario: Captus Press, 1989): 13-35.

records, this type of research has rarely been done thoroughly by archivists.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, although administrative histories written by historians are useful to archivists, these histories, when they exist at all, seldom provide the full range of information required for archival purposes because they usually leave out discussion of the institution's records. Archival administrative histories provide descriptions of the functions that resulted in the creation of records, the organizational structure of the creating agency, and the records themselves. Through the study of an institution's administration, the functions or activities that resulted in the creation of records are better understood. Following from this, a clear understanding of the reasons why records were created, or the function they served in the daily operations of the institution, will undoubtedly lead to a better understanding of the information in the records themselves. An archival administrative history which throws the most light on the records of an institution includes the following five elements: i) the overall administrative structure and the specific formal mandate, actual functions performed to carry out the mandate, and other, unofficial, activities of the entity; ii) officials in the institution who played a significant role in shaping its history and records; iii) significant events in the history of the institution in the period under study which shaped its structure and mandate, and thus its records; iv) records creation processes, or how and by whom the records were created; and v) the records-keeping systems (formal and informal) which were used to document the work of the institution.

The Northern Stores Department (NSD) of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) is the subject of this archival administrative history. The Northern Stores Department provided an important function in the company's overall operation. It also had an

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<sup>6</sup>Rodney Ross, "Thoughts on Administrative Histories: A Preliminary Report", The Indian Archives part I, January - June 1988 (vol. 37, no. 1): 25-35; and part II, July - December 1988 (vol. 37 no. 2): 35-46.

important impact on the people of the North and is of interest to researchers. The Northern Stores Department operated for twenty-eight years before it became a company in itself, The North West Company, in 1987. During these years it ran over 200 stores in the northern and remote communities of Canada, often as the sole supplier of groceries and other essential goods. The department developed out of the HBC's Fur Trade Department, which by the late 1940s, while maintaining an interest in furs, was expanding into broader areas of general merchandising. These expansionist policies eventually gave rise to a change in the department's mandate. The old fur trade image was no longer appropriate to the new merchandising focus. To better reflect the function of the department a new name was adopted in 1959, the Northern Stores Department.

While the Fur Trade Department had managed a profitable business in the trade of furs, the Northern Stores Department managed a profitable retail business in those fur trading communities. The retail business was imposed upon the structure of the old Fur Trade Department and the focus of business remained in the northern communities. Although the stores, previously referred to as fur trade posts, continued to receive furs from trappers, their profitability increasingly lay in the sale of general merchandise. Very few basic functions changed as a result of this shift in mandate. This is largely due to the fact that the department was still involved in the movement of goods. In the days of the fur trade the primary objective was to move furs out of the northern communities to central depots and, ultimately, to auction houses. The structure of the department was designed to perform this function. Although this function gradually changed to the movement of merchandise into the fur trading communities, the activities which formed the basis of the department's role remained intact. Transport, for example, was central to the department's role in the case of both the fur trade and general merchandising. Similarly the management of store buildings

and staff dwellings continued to be an essential activity regardless of the type of goods bought or sold. Personnel management and accounting continued very much as before. The merchandising function, which had occupied a much smaller part of the company's overall activity, was greatly expanded and this was reflected in the development of the department's own Merchandise Division. Finally, the activity surrounding the collection of furs, which had originally formed the basis of the company's operation, and had been inherited by the Northern Stores Department, became the specialized concern of the department's Raw Fur Division formed in 1930. It managed the acquisition of furs through the stores and their preparation and distribution to the auction houses.

The administration of the Northern Stores Department remained similar to that of its predecessor as it continued to administer stores and the distribution of goods. In fact its activity in northern and remote communities gave the department its unique character in the company. The stores were located in small communities relatively free from other retail interests and required different marketing strategies from those of the department stores in larger centres. The stores were generally located in isolated regions requiring special transportation arrangements for the distribution of goods. The location and extreme climate of many of the northern communities required the construction of staff dwellings and the continual expansion and upkeep of store and warehouse buildings. Special training was required for the staff because it was often relied upon to perform functions beyond the sale of merchandise. The accounts were handled manually and therefore separately from those of the company's department stores. As a result of the isolation of the stores the department administered a quite different retail operation from that of the rest of the company.

The records of the Northern Stores Department document more than the development

of a retail business in the North. In much the same way as it inherited the structure of the Fur Trade Department, it also inherited many of its records and records-keeping systems. Records describing the cooperation of the company with the Government of the Northwest Territories, the federal Department of Transport, and the Department of National Defence are among these records. National Defence, for example, while concerned about the problem of defending the sparsely populated North, secured the cooperation of the company in 1947 in organizing a reserve militia corps, the Canadian Rangers. Its members were drawn from trappers, woodsmen, miners and fishermen in the various northern localities. Leaders of the corps were drawn from HBC employees. The corps provided guides to organized troops in the area, coast watching, rescue work and assistance to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the discovery and apprehension of enemy agents or saboteurs.

As the Transport Division of the Northern Stores Department provided the only means of transportation to many of the northernmost communities, the division often assisted government departments and scientific expeditions by transporting individuals and supplies to and from remote areas. The records include evidence of scientific expeditions, government inspections and of photographers and wildlife experts who traveled on board the department's supply ship. Competition in the collection and sale of furs is documented in the records along with the department's involvement with HBC subsidiary companies such as Rupert's Land Trading Co., Fur Sales Inc., New York, Fur Sales Inc., Canada and Hudson's Bay and Annings Ltd.

The records also provide an excellent source of information on the people of the North. Correspondence between the company and the federal government on the subject of Aboriginal game resources, living conditions and relief payments form a substantial part of the records. The records also describe to some extent trade in Inuit art as it

was bought and sold through the HBC Arts and Crafts Centres created in Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg.

The records of the Northern Stores Department describe the history of one of the most important, distinctive and successful retail businesses in Canada. Its records describe the main functions (accounting, personnel, merchandising, transportation and distribution) of a modern retail operation spread over a huge geographical area. The records range in date from 1940 - 1985 and occupy approximately 300 linear feet of shelf space. They vary in form including photographs, maps, ships logs, architectural blueprints of buildings, accounting ledgers, fur statistics and comparative analyses, correspondence, reports and minutes of meetings. Some of the records are restricted under the Hudson's Bay Company Archives access rules. Access to records that fall under these restrictions must be approved by the Keeper of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives.

My thesis will begin with an examination of the establishment of the Northern Stores Department. This will involve a brief historical sketch of the administration of the Fur Trade Department and an examination of the change in the mandate from fur trading to general merchandising. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the external influences and authorities under which the department operated. In the second chapter I provide a closer examination of the Northern Stores Department's mandate and administrative structure between 1959 and 1987. Emphasis will be placed on upper levels of management and officials in the department who played a significant role in shaping its activities. The third chapter analyses the administrative structure of divisions in the department. The activities of these divisions will be discussed individually with respect to their historical development prior to 1959 and their function in the operation of the department. A chapter on the records-keeping systems of the

department and the records themselves will conclude the thesis.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**AN OVERVIEW OF HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY ADMINISTRATION,**  
**1670-1959**

On 2 May 1670 King Charles II of England granted a charter authorizing the "discovery of a new passage into the South Sea and for finding some Trade for Furr, Mineralls and other considerable Commodities and by such their undertaking have already made such Discoveryes as doe encourage them to proceed further in pursuance of their said Designe by means whereof there may probably arise very great advantage to us and our Kingdome."<sup>1</sup> The charter was granted to the king's cousin, Prince Rupert. It gave him and his associates exclusive right to the "Trade and Commerce of all those Seas Streights Bayes Rivers Lakes Creeks and Soundes in whatsoever Latitude they shall bee that lye within the entrance of the Streights commonly called Hudson's Streights together with all the Landes Countryes and Territoryes upon the Coasts and Contynes of the Seas Streights Bayes Lakes Rivers Creekes and Sounds aforesaid which are now actually possessed by any of our Subjects or by the Subjects of any other Christian Prince or State."<sup>2</sup> Rupert's Land, as this territory became known, stretched across the northern part of what is now Quebec and Ontario and included all of present day Manitoba, most of Saskatchewan, the southern part of Alberta, and a large part of the eastern portion of the Northwest Territories. From this starting point the company advanced beyond the original limits of the charter until, when at its peak, the company was the effective ruler of 3 million square miles, or one quarter of the land mass of North America.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Charters, Statutes and Orders in Council Relating to the Hudson's Bay Company (London: Hudson's Bay Company, 1963): 5-6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>For the early history of the company see E. E. Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870, 3 vols. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1960).

Today the Hudson's Bay Company is one of Canada's largest retailers. The company was built, however, on the fur trade. In fact until 1870, the company had dealt almost entirely in the fur trade while gradually moving in the merchandising direction. By the end of the nineteenth century the heyday of the fur trade in Canada was drawing to a close. In 1870 the company surrendered to the Canadian government the whole of Rupert's Land, which was then 38 percent of the land mass of Canada. In return the company was given ownership of 7 million acres of land in western Canada. For the next forty years the company concentrated on selling land, its chief asset, and on developing a merchandising business through its many fur trade posts.

In 1910 the company also reorganized its structure and management to suit the changing mandate. Fur trade activities were assigned to one department, known as the Fur Trade Department, which was under the authority of the Fur Trade Commissioner. The Fur Trade Department was renamed the Northern Stores Department in 1959. By then it operated more than two hundred small retail outlets. It was still involved in the fur trade but the trade had become a peripheral activity. The Northern Stores Department, however, has never been the department primarily responsible for the company's large scale retail business. Its responsibility for retailing lay mainly in small, remote, northern Canadian communities, which the fur trade had served for nearly three hundred years.

The retailing responsibilities of the Northern Stores Department represent the last chapter of the fur trade legacy in the company, but they also represent new commercial interests. In 1987 the Northern Stores Department became an independent company known as The North West Company Inc. This multi-million dollar enterprise hopes to continue the Hudson's Bay Company's tradition of retailing in the North and to build a

circumpolar merchandising conglomerate. Because the new company developed out of the fur trade operations of the Hudson's Bay Company, there remains a link, both real and imagined, between the two companies. The Northern Stores Department represents the end of one era of business history and the beginning of another in the North. This chapter provides the administrative context in which the Northern Stores Department emerged from the Fur Trade Department and the general operations of the Hudson's Bay Company.

The administration of the Hudson's Bay Company was controlled from London through the Governor and Committee as described in the company's original Charter of 1670:

WEE (Charles II) Doe ordeyne that there shall bee from henceforth one of the same Company to bee elected and appointed in such form as hereafter in these presentes is expressed which shall be called the Governor of the said Company And that the said Governor and Company shall or may elect seaven of their number in such forme as hereafter in these presentes is expressed which shall be called the Committee of the said Company which Committee of seaven or any three of them together with the Governor or Deputy Governor of the said Company for the tyme being shall have the direction of the Voyages of and for the said Company and the Provision of the Shipping and Merchandizes thereunto belonging and alsoe the sale of all merchandizes Goodes and other things returned in all or any of the Voyages or Shippes of or for the said Company and the manning and handling of all other business affairs and thinges belonging to the said Company....<sup>4</sup>

Thereafter the company was administered by a governor, a deputy governor and seven appointed members of the Committee. The number of members of the Committee was increased in the twentieth century through Supplemental Charters. The Supplemental Charter of 1912 increased the Committee to nine members. In 1957 the number was increased again to twelve thus allowing for the creation of the Canadian Committee of the Board of Directors:

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<sup>4</sup>Charters: 5-6.

The Board shall consist of a Governor, Deputy-Governor and a Committee of not less than ten nor more than twelve members. The Governor and Deputy-Governor shall be persons ordinarily resident in Our (Elizabeth II) United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and not more than six Members of the Committee may be persons ordinarily resident outside our said United Kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

In 1960 the number was increased to sixteen and in 1963 to 20. Finally, according to the Supplemental Charter (Canada) of 1970, the company was to be managed by a board of directors consisting of not less than twelve and not more than twenty-two, of which one was to be elected governor and another to be elected deputy governor of the company. During the early days the governor and Committee made all of the decisions regarding business. As indicated in the minute books, matters such as the hiring of trades people and the appointment of individuals to posts in Canada were documented as rigorously as decisions to expand into new territory and to purchase new ships. The governor and Committee were kept informed of all aspects of the company's operation in North America and very little occurred without the Committee's knowledge or approval.<sup>6</sup>

The Hudson's Bay Company initially conducted its business at factories on the shores of Hudson Bay and James Bay. There the early company governors established their headquarters, first at Charles Fort, Rupert River, then at Moose Factory, and later at Albany Factory. When the French were in possession of this area, from 1686 to 1693, the company moved its headquarters to York Factory, on the west coast of Hudson Bay. York Factory was subsequently lost to the French and recaptured from them several times until under the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), it was finally secured by the company and remained thereafter an important site of company operations.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 72s-72u.

Although not all of those who were in charge of this area resided there, York Factory continued to grow in importance throughout the eighteenth century. Dependent posts were established at Churchill (1717), Severn (1759), and along the Saskatchewan River (from 1774). Albany had been re-established by the company in 1693. Along with the other posts at the southern end of James Bay, Albany received instructions directly from London and remained independent of York Factory.<sup>7</sup>

In 1810 the company's posts were divided into two departments. The large Northern Department consisted of York Factory, Churchill, their dependencies, the posts on the Saskatchewan River, and those west and south of Lake Winnipeg.<sup>8</sup> The Southern Department included Albany, Moose, Eastmain, and their dependencies. A governor was placed in charge of each department. In 1815 the position of Governor-in-Chief was created in response to a desire for greater central control over the company's territories. In the reorganization following the coalition of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company in 1821, William Williams and George Simpson were appointed Governors of Rupert's Land. William Williams was appointed Governor of the Southern Department and George Simpson Governor of the Northern Department.<sup>9</sup>

As a result of the 1821 union between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, the "new" company was faced with the task of reorganizing in order

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<sup>7</sup>Rich, vol. 1: 372-389.

<sup>8</sup>Harvey Fleming, ed., Minutes of Council, Northern Department of Rupert's Land, 1821-1831, Introduction by H. A. Innis, vol. 3 (London: The Champlain Society for Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1940): li-lix.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

to control the vast territory and to protect it from American and Canadian competition. Central control was established through a committee in London which managed the southern area through Moose Factory, the northern area through York Factory, and the eastern area through former agents of the North West Company.<sup>10</sup> By then the Northern Department's area extended beyond the boundaries of Rupert's Land into country east and west of the Rocky Mountains. The Southern Department's area extended to the Labrador coast and the former King's Posts in Upper and Lower Canada. When Governor Williams retired in 1826, Simpson assumed responsibility for the Southern Department as well as the posts formerly managed by the North West Company agents in Montreal. Governor Simpson was therefore the governor of the whole of territories under the company's influence, although he was not formally recognized as such until 1839.<sup>11</sup>

In 1826 Simpson reorganized the company's territory into four departments: the Montreal, Southern, Western, and Northern departments. The Montreal Department had control over all of the business in Upper and Lower Canada, including the King's Posts and a portion of Labrador. The Southern Department controlled the east shore of Hudson Bay and the entire territory between James Bay and the Montreal Department. The area west of the Rocky Mountains was the responsibility of the Columbia District, later the Western Department. The Northern Department was the largest and most important one. It included the region between Hudson Bay and the mountains and between the United States and the Arctic Ocean.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter HBCA) London Office correspondence, A.6/20 fos. 12-21, Governor and Committee to Simpson, 27 February 1822.

<sup>11</sup>HBCA, Minutes of Council, D.4/2 fos. 3-6, Simpson to the Governor and Council of the Southern Department, 30 August 1822.

<sup>12</sup>HBCA, London Office Correspondence, A.6/21 fo.71d, Governor and Committee to