

**GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS RELATING TO
AFRICA IN MICROFORM**

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GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS RELATING TO THE GAMBIA

1822 – 1965

Introduction by

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Government Publications Relating to the Gambia, 1822—1965

Introduction

This introduction is not intended as a capsule history of the Gambia, but as a guide to the documentation; the *Annual Reports*, *Blue Books*, and *Government Gazettes*, presented in their entirety from commencement to independence. For the convenience of librarians and researchers the microfilms have been divided into four sections, corresponding to major phases in the administrative history of the Gambia.

The former British Colony and Protectorate of the Gambia has been referred to as an "historical accident in political geography",⁽¹⁾ one of the kinder descriptions of this tiny riverine enclave, so often the butt of pejorative humour. Extending along the river some three hundred miles into the side of Senegal yet rarely more than ten kilometers wide on either riverbank, it has a total area of only 4,003 square miles. Lady Southern called it a "geographical misfit", "... it appears in the map like a thin red line... literally length without breadth".⁽²⁾ Yet it was the river which attracted European traders in the first place, the very *raison d'être* for The Gambia. To quote Lady Southern again, "... the river dominates the Colony — in fact it can claim that *Tetat c'est moi*." ⁽³⁾ With its wide mouth and deep bar, the Gambia River for centuries proved one of the major avenues into the West African hinterland, being navigable by ocean sailing craft for some 265 miles, to a distance of 288 miles by boats with a draft of less than one fathom.

Modern European commercial and political connection with the Gambia can be traced back to the arrival of the Portugese in the fifteenth century. In 1455 and 1456 Portugese expeditions under the command of Alvise de Cadamosto (a Venetian) and Antoniotto Usi di Mare (a Genoese) first explored the lower reaches of the river. It was during the second expedition that a sailor named Andrew died and was buried on Saint Andrew's (later James) Island in the Gambia, the first of many European visitors who were to succumb to "fever" (malaria, yellow fever, etc.) over the next four

1 Berry N.Floyd, "Gambia; A Case Study of the Role of Historical Accident in political Geography", *Journal of the Sierra Leone Geographical Association*, X (1966), pp. 22-38.

2 Lady B.S.southorn, *The Gambia; The Story of the Groundnut Colony* (London, 1952), p. 12.

3 *ibid.*, p.21.

centuries. The Portuguese even attempted to establish settlements along the river, one of the earliest attempts at European colonization of Tropical Africa (predating the founding of Luanda by a century or Table Bay by nearly two centuries). Though without permanent success, these settlements fostered a Portuguese heritage, not only in the mulatto (Conpradores) population, but also in loan-words, place-names (the town of Geregia is said to derive from the Portuguese word for "church" – *igere/a*), in architecture and boat building techniques and design. However disease took its toll, while the Gambia proved no El Dorado. Slaves, hides, peppers, wax, ebony, ivory, even a little gold were to be had, but such were available and in greater quantities elsewhere along the coast. The Gambia was soon overshadowed, though never entirely forsaken. During subsequent centuries the lure of rich trade with the interior was to attract merchant-venturers from Portugal, Spain, France, England, the Netherlands, and Courland, as well as pirates and privateers.

From the mid-seventeenth century the principal European rivals for control of the Gambia trade were the British, based on James Island which they had captured from the Courlanders in 1661, and the French, located from 1680 onwards at Albreda on the north bank just below James Island. These ill-designed, often poorly provisioned little fortified trading posts, their garrisons generally sorely depleted by disease, rarely proved effective against attack. They were demolished, abandoned, and rebuilt with monotonous regularity as the Gambia was buffeted by the ebb and flow of the power struggles of Europe. For example, in a period of just over twenty-five years Fort James was three times captured by the French, in 1695, 1702, and 1704. The garrison mutinied in 1708 and the fort lay abandoned from 1709 to 1713. In 1719 it was seized and demolished by interlopers and in 1721 the new garrison mutinied. In addition several disaster were narrowly averted by buying off the would-be attackers.

Between 1765 and 1783 Fort James formed part of the brief-lived British colony of Senegambia, created following the British seizure of the French station at Saint Louis on the bank of the River Senegal. British interests on the Gambia River were to be represented by a Superintendent of Trade resident at Fort James who was ostensibly responsible to the Governor at Saint Louis. Of the first Governor of Senegambia, Colonel Charles O'Hara, it has been written, "He had apparently an overmastering aversion to correspondence, and his dispatches are so sporadic that they give a very

incomplete picture both of his doings as Governor and of the fortunes of the Province under his rule".⁽⁴⁾ Though some original correspondence relating to the Senegambia has survived (in the Public Record Office, London), the government publications which are the subject of this microfilm series had not yet come into being.

The Senegambia did not commend itself to men of the highest calibre and its history, briefly stated, is a rather sordid tale of strife amongst its various officers, punctuated by frequent deaths. In particular, the relations between the Superintendent of Trade on the Gambia and his erstwhile superior at Saint Louis were more often those of mutual enmity than co-operation. A French fleet effectively put an end to Senegambia in 1779, when it recaptured Saint Louis and razed Fort James. Later in the year a British squadron landed a garrison at Goree Island, recently abandoned by the French, south of Cape Verde off the Senegalese coast, but no attempt was made to rebuild Fort James which, with one transient exception during the Napoleonic Wars, was not again to be reoccupied by the British as a defensive position.

In 1783, by Act of Parliament, the Gambia reverted to the jurisdiction of the Committee of the Company of Merchants Trading in Africa, but this was merely a legal nicety without consequence. French interests were focused at Albreda, while British private traders were scattered along the river. As in the past, trading factors on the Gambia were embroiled in the Anglo-French wars between 1793 and 1815, during which time much of the trade of the Gambia fell into the hands of American merchants, who were able to trade with both sides under a flag of neutrality (or any other which proved convenient) and undercut their rivals with cheap New England rum and Virginia tobacco. Even war between Britain and the United States did not eliminate the American presence; "... in March 1814, an unnamed American brig attacked a Liverpool brig off Senegal with indecisive results. What was apparently the same vessel — believed owned by James de Wolf (of Rhode Island) — showed up in the Gambia a few days later under Spanish colors and loaded four hundred slaves".⁽⁵⁾

It was the slave trade which attracted European merchants to the Gambia and it was the desire to control that trade which lay behind the frequent clashes between European interests on the Gambia. When the British government prohibited its subjects from engaging in the slave trade from 1808, British merchants felt themselves to be at a distinct disadvantage. It

5 George E. Brooks, Jr., *Yankee Traders, Old Coasters and African Middlemen* (Boston, 1970), pp.69-70.

was asserted that the so-called 'legitimate' trade, in items such as hides, gum, wax, ivory, etc., would languish in competition with the slave trade. Consequently, in order to suppress the slave trade, on the 20th July 1815 the Earl of Bathurst, the Secretary of State, authorized Governor MacCarthy of Sierra Leone to reoccupy James Island or "... any other situation in that neighbourhood (which) offers superior advantages either in point of defence or as a commercial establishment...".^(6*)

In March 1816 a detachment of the Royal African Corps from Goree under the command of Captain Alexander Grant arrived at the river. After a tour of inspection it was decided that Banjol Island at the mouth of the Gambia, rather than James Island further up-stream, offered the more satisfactory defensive location for the control of commerce on the river. Hence, in April, an agreement was negotiated with the local African ruler, the King of Kombo, who ceded Banjol, renamed Saint Mary's Island by the British.

For a number of years thereafter the legal position of the new garrison settlement, known as Bathurst, remained uncertain. Technically it was still within the area of jurisdiction of the moribund Company of Merchants Trading in Africa and the British government was reluctant to incur more than modest expense, much less direct responsibility. It was not until 1821 that Bathurst was formally incorporated, as part of a general administrative reorganization of British West Africa, under the authority of the Governor of Sierra Leone, resident at Freetown.

For the sake of convenience Bathurst was administered from 1816 to 1821 through the Governor of Sierra Leone but was not a part of the latter colony.' The real authority and driving force at Bathurst was Alexander Grant, who served as Commandant of the Gambia Settlement from 1816 to 1817, 1819 to 1820, and 1822 to 1823. Under his leadership the settlement grew, despite appalling conditions and an almost suicidal mortality rate. In 1818 Governor MacCarthy established, subject to his review, a local court and civil government for Bathurst, a Committee of Merchants, to advise the Commandant.

The first reel of *Blue Books* for the Gambia commences with a number of items from this period; "A Statement of Exports and Imports for Bathurst, 1819, and the amount of Duty Payable in Great Britain", a list of the Civil Establishment, etc., for Saint Mary's, Gambia, for 1822, and "Abstracts of

6 Earl of Bathurst to Governor MacCarthy, 20 July 1815, Public Record Office. CO 268/14. Quoted in J.M.Gray, *A History* .

the Net Revenue and Expenditure of the Settlement of St. Mary's, Gambia, for the year 1822".

The administration of the Gambia from Freetown proved to be a highly unsatisfactory arrangement since communications were very difficult, prevailing winds and currents making the passage by sail from Freetown to Bathurst a long and arduous journey. Consequently in 1827 the Commandant at Bathurst was given special permission to correspond directly with the Secretary of State and, in 1829, became titled "Lieutenant-Governor", a measure of autonomy symbolized by the commencement in 1828 of a separate *Blue Book* for the Gambia. An annual which was to appear in an uninterrupted series until 1945, the *Blue Books* are invaluable sources, e.g. clearly charting the development of the groundnut trade from its beginnings in 1830.

Yet the Gambia remained tied to Sierra Leone, legislation relating to the Gambia still had to be forwarded to Freetown for enactment and possible revision by the Legislative Council, while all important civil and criminal cases continued to be tried before judges from Sierra Leone. These continuing links resulted in needless time-consuming complications. Hence, in 1842, a Parliamentary Select Committee recommended that the Gambia be fully dissociated from Sierra Leone.⁽⁷⁾ The following year the Gambia became a separate colony with its own Governor, Legislative and Executive Councils, and Judiciary. The first *Annual Report* for the Gambia was that for 1848; Governor MacDonnell wrote in his covering letter of the 16th June 1849, "As I infer from the records here that no full report respecting either the commerce or other general prospects of these settlements have been forwarded with any previous Blue Book to England, I shall endeavour in this Report to collect such information regarding the Gambia as may in some measure remedy that defect...".

The actual colonial territory of MacDonnell's Gambia, as distinct from the ill-defined British sphere of influence, was quite small, consisting of a piecemeal collection of scattered holdings amounting to only about sixty-nine square miles. In addition to the original Saint Mary's Island, there was a convalescent station on Cape Saint Mary, acquired in 1821 and regularized by treaty in 1827. In 1840 the expanse of the Cape, known as British Kombo or Kombo St. Mary, was formally incorporated as Crown Land. Meanwhile, in 1823, Major Grant had procured by treaty Lemaine Island, renamed MacCarthy Island, as a base from which to protect British traders

7 *Report of the Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa* (1842).

on the upper navigable reaches of the river. However Fort George, as the garrison with its mud earthworks was styled, remained an isolated outpost. Of more immediate importance to Bathurst was the accretion of the "Ceded Mile". British fears of yet another war with France and of the growth of French influence on the north bank, led them in 1826 to extract under duress a concession from the King of Barra of a strip of the north shore opposite Bathurst, from Junnak Creek on the west to Jakadu Creek on the east for a depth of one geographical mile, excluding the French station at Albreda which was thus encircled. After a war with the Mandingo on the north shore in 1832, the "Ceded Mile" was extended in the west to the Atlantic Ocean. Under the Anglo-French Convention of 1857, Albreda was eventually ceded to the British in return for British renunciation of rights in the Portendic (Mauritania) gum trade. Finally, in 1827, Major-General Sir Neil Campbell, Governor of Sierra Leone, had acquired by treaty with the King of Brikama a site on the south bank below MacCarthy's Island, as well as concessions at the port of Fattatenda on the upper river.

While the colony thus grew in size, it also grew in population. Not only was British territory a refuge for escaped slaves and fugitives from the surrounding countryside, during the 1820s and 1830s, until Lt-Governor Mackie put a stop to indiscriminate immigration, Bathurst served as an overspill area for the increasing numbers of recaptives liberated by the Anti-Slave Trade Squadron at Freetown, as well as a dumping ground for undesirables from Sierra Leone. These recaptives not only served as a labour force to build Bathurst, they provided the core of its early population.

In 1866, as the result of yet another Parliamentary Select committee report, ⁽⁸⁾ the Gambia, the Gold Coast, and Lagos were incorporated under the authority of the Governor of Sierra Leone, styled the Governor-in-Chief of the West African Settlements. The official in charge of the Gambia was demoted to "Administrator", assisted by a small advisory council. Nevertheless, the Gambia continued to submit its own *Annual Reports* and *Blue Books*. Moreover, in the same year, the French Government put forward tentative proposals for the cession of the Gambia to France in return for French territory elsewhere along the coast. From the 1850s to the 1880s the Gambia area was embroiled in the Soninki-Marabout wars which disrupted trade, threatened to involve the British colony, and thus encouraged those who wished to relinquish the Gambia. The fate of the colony hung in the balance while negotiations dragged on over the next two decades. The British authorities were divided and even those in the

Government who advocated cession of the Gambia tended to set too high a price on it, with the result that negotiations broke down and the Gambia remained British. Naturally while this had been going on the ever parsimonious British Government had been reluctant to develop an investment which it might at any moment surrender.

In 1874 Lagos and the Gold Coast were separated from Sierra Leone. Despite faster and more reliable steamships, centralized control continued to prove impractical. On the other hand the Gambia was not reconstituted as a separate colony until 1888.⁽⁹⁾ The cession of the Gambia to France was still being discussed in Parliament in 1876, besides the Gambia had a net revenue surplus which could be set against the deficit in the accounts of Sierra Leone. It was this surplus which enabled the Gambia to launch its own *Government Gazette* in 1883. The *Gazette* was to appear in an uninterrupted sequence thereafter and is reproduced in this series in its entirety to independence, in 1965.

The Colony of the Gambia in 1888 was the same size as it had been nearly fifty years earlier, with most of the area along the river no more than an undefined British sphere of influence. With only minor alterations, the modern boundaries of the Gambia were laid down in the Anglo-French Convention of 1889, the most striking feature being that for over half its length the Gambia was defined as the territory within ten kilometers of the banks of the river. The Convention suddenly increased the area of direct British responsibility from a Colony of some sixty-nine square miles to include a Protectorate of nearly four-thousand square miles. The extension of the system of British Crown Colony government to the diverse polities of the newly acquired territory was impractical. In January 1893 two Travelling Commissioners were appointed for the north and the south banks, respectively. By an Order-in-Council in November 1893 the Legislative Council of the Gambia was empowered to promulgate Ordinances for the administration of the Protectorate. The Protectorate Ordinance of 1894, which laid the foundation for British indirect administration in the Gambia, declared;

"... all native laws and customs in force in the Protected Territories which are not repugnant to natural justice nor incompatible with any ordinance of the Colony which applies to the Protected Territories, shall have the same effect as regulations made under this ordinance."

Subsequent Ordinances, published in the *Government Gazette*, were to extend the sphere of colonial laws and regulations applicable to the

9 Though the Executive and Legislative Councils were immediately restored, the title of "Administrator" was not upgraded to "Governor" until 1901.

Protectorate. Ordinance No. 30 of 1913 repealed all the previous Ordinances and brought all their various provisions systematically together in a single Protectorate Ordinance.

The next major juncture in the administrative history of the Gambia came with the appointment of Herbert Richmond Palmer as Governor, in 1933. Palmer issued a *Political Memorandum for the Guidance of Commissioners and other Government Officers Working in the Protectorate* and a series of Ordinances designed to bring the Gambia Protectorate into line with the administrative theories of Lord Lugard and Sir Donald Cameron. Though the mass of regulations issued by Palmer led to few immediate changes to the system established under the 1913 Ordinance (which was repealed in 1935), Palmer brought about a change in the philosophical attitudes and assumptions within the administration. By his action he cleared and underscored the distinction between the administrative apparatus of the Colony and of the Protectorate. It was not until 1944 that effective measures began to be taken to define Native Authorities and institute Native Treasuries, by which time British rule in the Gambia was about to enter its final phase, that of de-colonization, albeit few in the Gambia, not even the emerging nationalist leaders, probably conceived of the Gambia as an independent state in 1965.

In 1946 changes were introduced which allowed for a parity of unofficial members in the Legislative Council (three nominated unofficial members, two representative of the Africans of Bathurst and a representative of the commercial interests, had sat on the Council since 1915). Moreover one member was to be elected from a common roll to represent Bathurst and Kombo St. Mary. The Protectorate was represented by four unofficial appointees. In 1951 membership was revised to provide for a second elected representative from Kombo-Bathurst.

The "wind of change" was beginning to blow even in the Gambia. In 1954 a new constitution was introduced which provided for an unofficial elected majority in the Legislative Council, with seven representatives each from the Colony and the Protectorate. Though the representatives from the Protectorate were selected by a complicated indirect procedure, the new system constituted an important step toward the political integration of the Protectorate and Colony. The Executive Council was also reorganized with an unofficial majority to be appointed by the Governor after consultation with the elected members of the Legislative Council. Moreover three unofficial members of the Executive Council were to head ministries, though full ministerial responsibility was still withheld.

The next step came with the Constitution of 1960, which provided for a House of Representatives for the Colony and Protectorate with elections in

both on the bases of universal adult suffrage. The chiefs were allowed to select eight members to the House, in deference to the theory of Native Authority. In addition the notion of ministerial responsibility by unofficial members of the Executive Council was introduced.

Following a Constitutional Conference in London in 1961, the Gambia was given full local or internal self-government. New elections were held in May 1962 which gave the People's Progressive Party a majority in the House of Representatives and Mr. David Jawara became Prime Minister. The Gambia, after much soul-searching in the British press and official circles along the line of "can the Gambia stand alone as a viable state", received independence in 1963.¹⁰¹

Of course the history of the Gambia is not just groundnut exports and administration. It did have its lighter moments. The visit of the Prince of Wales in 1925 was dutifully recorded in the *Government Gazette* (XL11, 3 April 1925), as was the first intercolonial cricket match between Gambia and Sierra Leone (XL1V, 31 December 1927), surely one of the few instances when test match scores were published in an official *Gazette*. Land regulations, education ordinances, veterinary reports on cattle and horse diseases, these and many other aspects of colonial Gambia also appeared in the *Gazette*.

The first part of the microfilm series includes the *Annual Reports*, *Blue Books*, and *Government Gazettes* produced during the years up to and including 1887. The second section covers the whole of 1888, the year the Gambia regained its separate colonial status, to 1913. Part Three encompasses the period from 1914 to 1938, when publication of the *Annual Report* ceased for the duration of the Second World War. The final section covers the period from 1939 to independence. The *Annual Report* reappeared in 1946. Written in a more lively "public relations" style with increasing emphasis on "colonial development", it incorporated much of the information which hitherto had appeared in the annual *Blue Book*, which disappeared in 1945. Published as an *Annual Report* until 1949, it thereafter became a *Biennial Report*, continuing as such until independence.

10 For a more detailed account of the administrative history of the Gambia in the twentieth century, up to 1962, see; Harry A. Gailey, Jr., *A History of the Gambia* (London, 1964).

The standard bibliographies on the Gambia to date are: Audrey A. Walker, *Official Publications of Sierra Leone and Gambia* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1963), and David P. Gamble, *Bibliography of the Gambia* (Bathurst: Government Printer, 1967).

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