

ROYAL COLONIAL INSTITUTE

IMPERIAL STUDIES, No. 2

THE BRITISH WEST  
AFRICAN SETTLEMENTS

1750-1821

EVELINE C. MARTIN

An account of the administration of the British holdings in West Africa in the second half of the eighteenth century. In spite of the existence of a considerable literature on West Africa no detailed account has been written of the various forms of control set up there between the period of the seventeenth century joint-stock companies, and that of Crown government in the nineteenth century. These experiments in administration that were made between 1750 to 1821 are described:—Control by a regulated company, the Company of Merchants trading to Africa which was established in 1750, Crown control which was introduced by the erection of the Province of Georgia in 1765 and which ceased after the war, and an experiment in self-government which was begun at Sierra Leone in 1787.

This book suggests the place of those experiments and the varied devices for the management of the trading stations in the eighteenth century empire. Perhaps the most interesting connection is the deliberate use of the American colonies as a model for the Senegambian constitution.

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*General Editor*—A. P. NEWTON, M.A., D.Lit., B.Sc., F.S.A.,  
Rhodes Professor of Imperial History in the University of London.

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**The British West African Settle-  
ments, 1750-1821.** A Study in Local  
Administration. By EVELINE C.  
MARTIN, M A., Ph D, Lecturer in His-  
tory, Westfield College, University of  
London. 8vo.

LONGMANS, GREEN & CO, LTD.  
LONDON, NEW YORK, TORONTO, CALCUTTA,  
BOMBAY AND MADRAS.

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BY

EVELINE C. MARTIN, M.A., Ph.D.

Lecturer in History, Westfield College, University of London.

*WITH TWO MAPS*

Published for THE ROYAL COLONIAL INSTITUTE by  
LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO. LTD.  
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C. 4  
NEW YORK, TORONTO  
CALCUTTA, BOMBAY AND MADRAS

1927

**A Thesis approved for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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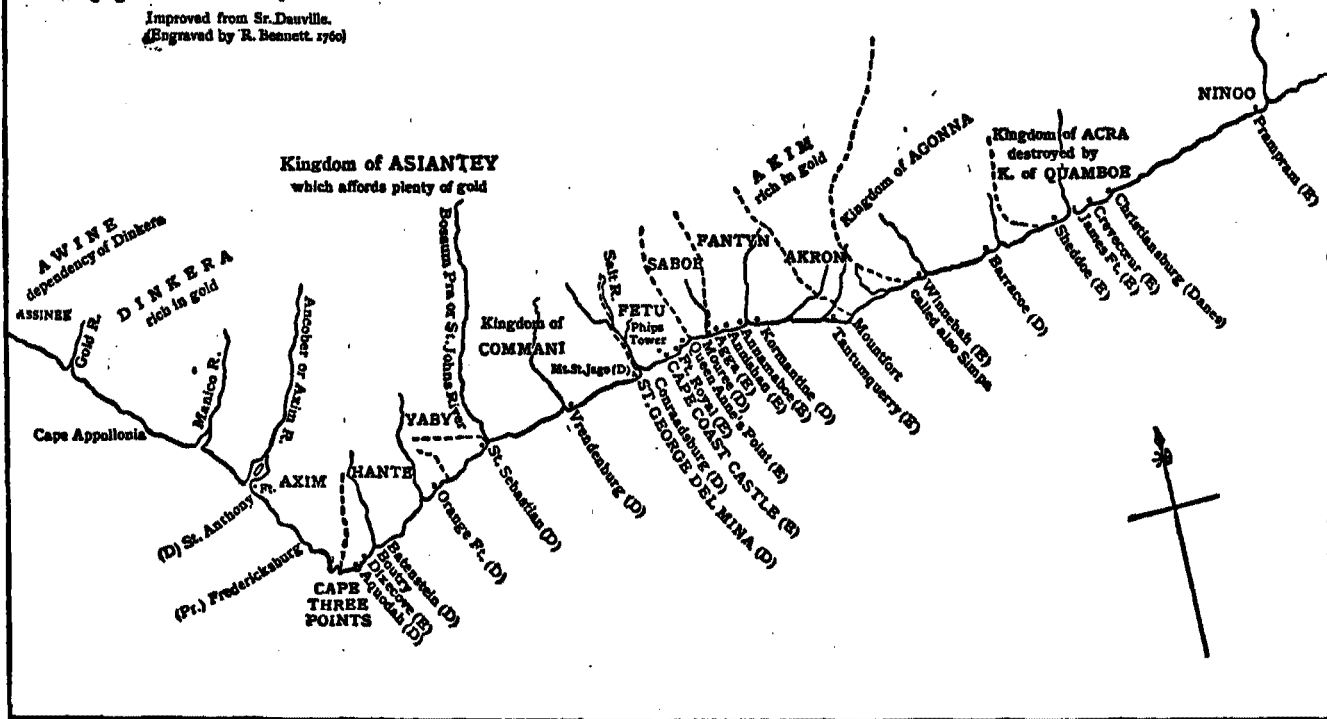
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## PREFACE

THE subject of the present sketch is a series of experiments in providing administration for the British holdings in West Africa in the second half of the eighteenth century. In spite of a considerable and growing literature on West Africa, the English administration there has received scant attention between the period of the seventeenth century joint-stock companies and that of the Crown government in the nineteenth century. An account of this neglected African administration is needed, both because it is essential to the general history of the administration of the empire in the eighteenth century, and because it is on the foundations then laid that the administrators of the nineteenth century have had to build.

As a part of eighteenth century administrative history these African experiments show a variety of attempts to devise satisfactory forms of administration which should be free from certain dangers or disadvantages that were feared at the time. The conception of what should be aimed at, and what avoided, in administration-making varies through the period, and the three experiments here described reflect some of those changes. The organisation that gives unity to this sketch is the Company of Merchants trading to Africa, which was incorporated in 1750 and dissolved in 1821. This was an attempt to provide an adequate government for the slave trade posts which were the British West African settlements of the mid-eighteenth century. By this organisation it was hoped to avoid both the monopolistic tendencies of rule by a joint-stock company, and the expense of government by officers commissioned and paid by the Crown. The Company was established to assist the development of the slave trade, but it survived the abolition of the trade by fourteen years.

The next experiment of the period was the erection of the first Crown colony in West Africa, the Province of Senegambia, in 1765. In this administration the influence of the elder Pitt's views is seen in the attempt to avoid the danger of weakness due to unstatesmanlike economy. The model used in planning the form of government for Senegambia was that of the American colonies, which, it was thought, might be set up in tropical Africa.

The third experiment is that of government by a company of trading philanthropists, or philanthropic traders, who obtained from the government permission to set up a colony. Their aim was to revolutionise English commercial relations with Africa by substituting "honourable trade" for the slave trade, and by setting up a colony where native Africans should be given a large measure of self-government.

These three experiments each have a separate history until after the abolition of the slave trade, and the history of the British administration of West Africa in the second half of the eighteenth century is the history of three British administrations in West Africa. In the nineteenth century after the abolition of the slave trade certain developments took place which led to the formation of a unified administration for British West Africa under the Crown. That movement is outlined in the last chapter of this sketch. During that period of unification, from 1807 to 1821, there appear the lines of future development by which the subject of this study is linked to the next period of British West African history.

The list of acknowledgments due to those who have helped me in the preparation of this book is so long that unless I were to imitate Marcus Aurelius and devote a complete chapter to the subject I should not be able to discharge my debts at all adequately. Accepting Bacon's view that "to praise a man's self cannot be decent, except it be in rare cases; but to praise a man's office or profession, he may do it with a good grace," I must limit my expression of thanks to that due

## PREFACE

xi

to the Imperial Studies Committee of the Royal Colonial Institute for undertaking the financial burden of publication, to the Rhodes Professor of Imperial History in London University, Dr. A. P. Newton, for his constant help and criticism and for the stimulus of his research seminar, to the Professor of History at Westfield College, Dr. C. A. J. Skeel, to whose inspiring teaching and unfailing help and encouragement I owe a debt that quite defies expression, and to the Westfield College History School for their tolerance of the pre-occupation of their lecturer.

E. C. M.

WESTFIELD COLLEGE,  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON,  
*May, 1927.*

# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE.
I. THE ENGLISH CONNECTION, WITH WEST AFRICA IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY . . . . .	I
II. GOVERNMENT CONTROL IN WEST AFRICA THROUGH THE COMPANY OF MERCHANTS TRADING TO AFRICA, 1750 TO 1821 . . . . .	15
III. THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE COMPANY OF MERCHANTS TRADING TO AFRICA . . . . .	29
IV. ADMINISTRATION ON THE COAST UNDER THE COM- PANY OF MERCHANTS TRADING TO AFRICA . . . . .	43
V. THE CREATION OF THE PROVINCE OF SENEGAMBIA, 1765 . . . . .	57
VI. SENEGAMBIA UNDER GOVERNOR CHARLES O'HARA, 1765 TO 1776 . . . . .	76
VII. THE END OF THE CROWN COLONY OF SENEGAMBIA	91
VIII. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COLONY BY THE SIERRA LEONE COMPANY . . . . .	103
IX. CONSTITUTIONAL DIFFICULTIES AND CHANGES IN SIERRA LEONE . . . . .	121
X. THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS UNIFICATION OF GOVERN- MENT ON THE WEST AFRICAN COAST, 1807 TO 1821 . . . . .	145
NOTE ON AUTHORITIES . . . . .	167
INDEX . . . . .	178

## MAPS

A CHART OF THE GOLD COAST . . . . .	viii
WEST COAST OF AFRICA . . . . .	xiv

# INDEX

- ACCRA, English post on Gold Coast, 5, 32, 35, 37, 38
- Acts of Parliament :
- 1750, Company of Merchants established, 9-10
  - 1752, Royal African Company divested of Charter, 13
  - 1764, Senegal vested in Company of Merchants, 61
  - 1765, Senegambia made a Crown Colony, 64-65
  - 1783, Gambia restored to Company of Merchants, 101
  - 1791, grant of land to Sierra Leone Company, 110-112
  - 1807, Sierra Leone re-vested in Crown, 140, 141
  - 1821, Company of Merchants abolished, 163-166
- Addington, Henry, Chancellor of Exchequer, grant refused to Sierra Leone Company, 138, 139
- Admiralty, relations to Company of Merchants, 12, 28
- Afzelius, Adam, Swedish botanist in Sierra Leone, 124
- Albreda, French settling rights dispute, 77, 79, 82, 87-88
- African Institution, establishment and objects, 143
- African Trade the Pillar of British Trade in America*, pamphlet, 2
- Ammoniah, territory ceded by, for fort, 49
- "An African Merchant," on treatment of soldiers, 38
- Angola, Portuguese slave trade base, 6
- Annamaboe :
- Omission from list of forts, reason, 6
  - Importance to English, 33, 34, 35
  - Rebuilding grants, 17, 18, 25
  - Siege by Ashantis, 151-152
- Anti-Slave Trade agitation ; *see* Slave Trade : Abolition
- Appolonia, fort built, 17, 49
- Arguin, French designs for post, 5, 83
- Ashanti :
- Exploratory missions under James and Dupuis, 158-160
  - Treaties with Company of Merchants, 159, 161
- Ashanti, King of ; forts rented from, 49
- Ashanti War (1807) :
- Invasions of Gold Coast, 54, 151-152, 158
  - Terms arranged between England and Ashanti, 152
- Bacon, Anthony, petition against O'Hara, 80-81
- Bain, French trading post, 79
- Barter system, 44
- Bathurst, Henry, third Earl, correspondence with Company of Merchants, 161
- Board of Trade ; *see* Trade and Plantations, Board of
- Bosman, William, on native hostility, 51
- Bowdich, T. E., Mission to Ashanti, 159
- Bristol merchants :
- Representation on Company of Merchants, 30
  - Views on African trade, 9, 111
- Brown, Robert, partner of O'Hara in trade, 89
- Buchanan, fort chief, cruelty, 38
- Buchanan, surgeon, incompetence, 41
- Bullock, Joseph, agent for Senegambia, 73
- Bullock, Thomas, agent for Senegambia, 73
- Burke, Edmund, defence of Company of Merchants, 19, 20
- CAPE Coast Castle :
- English headquarters, 5, 15, 32
  - Rent for, 48
  - Repairing grant, 17
- Castlereagh, Robert Stewart, second Marquis :
- Advocacy of Slave Trade abolition, 157, 162
  - Correspondence with Company of Merchants, 40, 146, 150, 153

- Chaplains :  
 To Company of Merchants, 42, 148  
 In Senegambia, 97-98
- Clarke, John, Governor of Senegambia :  
 Appointment and terms of commission, 92  
 Charges against, 96-97  
 Death, 98-99
- Clarke, Capt., Deputy Governor for O'Hara, 85
- Clarkson, Lieutenant William, First Governor of Sierra Leone :  
 Appointment and character, 117  
 Nova Scotians transported to Sierra Leone, 115  
 Retirement, 125
- Clarkson, Rev. T., 113, 142
- Coast Council :  
 Accountant, duties, 42  
 Establishment and composition, 33-35  
 Functions, 35-37, 42  
 Relation to London Committee of Company of Merchants, 35-36, 37  
 Secretary, duties, 42  
 Suspension on charges by Commons, 1779, 34
- Cockburn, John, rise in African service, 39
- Collingwood, Captain, enquiry on Senegambia Coast, 83
- Colonial Secretaries, relations with Company of Merchants, 21-24
- Commenda, English fort, 33, 49, 54
- Commissioners on African Forts, 1810, findings and replies, 153-157
- Committee for Relieving the Black Poor, 104
- Compagnie de Sénégal, attempts to settle on Gold Coast, 34
- Company of Merchants Trading to Africa :  
 Abolition of slave trade, attitude, 146-147, 152  
 Administration :  
 Government enquiries and debates, 18, 21, 96, 155-156, 162  
 Report of Board of Trade, 1765, 62-63  
 Vote of confidence in Commons, 1758, 18  
 Weakness, 55-56  
 Commissioners appointed by, to examine coast government, 26
- Committee :  
 Duties and powers, 11, 12, 30-31  
 Election, charges of corruption, 19-20, 30, 155  
 Names, 14  
 Number reduced, 163  
 Personnel, 10-11, 29-30, 155  
 Constitution and Powers, 10-12, 15  
 Emergency Council to examine abuses, 34  
 Expenditure, objects, 44-46  
 Finance :  
 Control by Exchequer, 12, 19, 44  
 General regulations, 10-12  
 Forts taken over from Royal African Company, 6  
 Grants from Exchequer, amount and conditions, 17-18, 21, 44  
 Incorporation, 9-10  
 Military forces, 36  
 Monopoly charge by Luttrell, 20  
 Native policy, summary, 54-55  
 Officials in Africa :  
 Changes after end of Royal African Company, 32-33  
 Compensation on winding up, 166  
 Governor; *see* Gold Coast, Governor in Chief  
 Payment, 39, 40, 45, 150  
 Promotion system, 38-39, 148  
 Qualifications, 43  
 Senegambia, in, 61  
 Trading by; *see* Private trading  
 Papers, disposal after winding up, 170  
 Petition for administration of Senegambia, 60-61  
 Petition against Royal African Company, 14  
 Reorganisation scheme of 1804, 147  
 Reply to Commissioners of 1810, 156-157  
 Rivalry with Sierra Leone Company, 108, 149  
 Secretary, yearly re-election, 29  
 Territory administered, 15  
 Unification of West Africa resisted, 154, 165  
 Winding up, 165-166  
 Coomassie, consul appointed, 160  
 Cornwallis, Captain William, quarrel with O'Hara, 85  
 Cumming, Thomas, Senegambia projects urged on Pitt, 57

- DARTMOUTH, William Legge,**  
 Second Earl of:  
 Correspondence with O'Hara,  
 82-85, 86  
 Support of Company of Merchants against Dutch, 22
- Dawes, William, Governor of Sierra Leone:**  
 Appointment, 125  
 Councillor at Sierra Leone, qualifications, 119  
 and Nova Scotians, dispute on land, 125  
 Proposals for government of Sierra Leone, 121
- Defensive Alliance with Holland,**  
 36
- Dixcove, rent for,** 49
- Dispatches, capture at sea,** 98
- Dupuis, Joseph, mission to Coomassie,** 160-161
- Dutch in West Africa:**  
 Aggression against Company of Merchants, conference in London, 22-23  
 and Ammoniah, quarrel, 49  
 Defensive Alliance with English, 36  
 Fighting with Company of Merchants, 36-37  
 Settlements, 5
- EGREMONT, Charles Wyndham,**  
 Second Earl of, appeal to, for Senegambia monopoly grant, 59-60
- Elmina, Dutch headquarters on African coast,** 5, 36
- Exploration, missions to Ashanti,** 158-160
- FALCONBRIDGE, A. M., Chief Agent for Sierra Leone:**  
 Dismissal, 120  
 Relief operations conducted, 110, 113-114
- Falconbridge, Mrs. A. M., letters on life in Sierra Leone,** 118, 120, 130
- Fall, Ensign, seizure of command at death of Clarke,** 99
- Fantis:**  
 Danger to English forts, 34  
 Relations with settlers, 52, 151  
 War with Ashantis; *see* Ashanti War
- Fetu, Dey of, payments to,** 48, 52
- FitzHerbert, Alleyne, on African provisions in Treaty of Versailles,** 100
- Fort St. Louis:**  
 Capture from French, 57, 77  
 Cession to England, 58  
 Re-capture by French, 99  
 Slaves purchased for, 98  
 Trade monopoly, charge against MacNamara, 95
- Forts:**  
 Chiefs; duties and powers, 37-38  
 Condemned by Commissioners of 1810, 154  
 Control refused by Board of Trade, 27  
 Description, 6  
 Inspection by naval captains, 12  
 Necessity, view of Company of Merchants, 1812, 156  
 Number and position, 5, 6, 32  
 Order of importance, 35  
 Proposals for control, 1750, 8-9  
 Rents paid to natives, 48-50  
 Supplies to, nature and methods, 44-46  
 Value to native traders, 50
- Freetown:**  
 Attack by French, 126-127  
 Municipal institutions granted, 134  
 Planning, difficulties, 120
- French in West Africa:**  
 Gold Coast post obtained, 28  
 Infractions of Peace of Paris, 77, 79, 82-83, 84  
 Portendic trading right, dispute, 83-86  
 Senegambia, in, 62, 63-64, 87-88  
 Settlements in eighteenth century, 5  
 War with English for Senegambia, 99-100
- GALAM:**  
 Cession to England, 58  
 English settlement proposed by O'Hara, 79
- Gambia district:**  
 Board of Trade report on British claims, 1765, 62  
 Exclusive trade rights claimed by England, 86  
 French vessel seized by MacNamara, 86  
 Retained by England in 1783, 100  
 Settlements under Company of Merchants, 5, 15  
*See also* Senegambia

- Gascoyne, Bamber :  
 Attack on Company of Merchants, 20  
 Collection of African papers, 167
- Germaine, Lord George, Colonial Secretary :  
 Correspondence with governors of Senegambia, 90, 92, 93, 97, 98
- Gold Coast :  
 Ashanti invasion ; *see* Ashanti war  
 Defects in administration, report of 1765, 63  
 Forts, reduction recommended, 154  
 Governor-in-Chief :  
 Duties, 33, 35-37  
 Government control instituted, 163, 164  
 Independence of Council, 148  
 Reform scheme of 1804, instructions to governor, 147-148  
 Relations to Committee in London, 35-36  
 Store ships, and, special duties, 47  
 Vice-Admiralty Court requested, 148-149
- Goree :  
 Attack advocated by Governor Clarke, 94  
 Fortified by French, 63  
 Capture from French, 57, 99  
 Restored to France, 58, 100
- Grigg, missionary, in Sierra Leone slave trade, 124
- Guinea Coast, English and Dutch settlements, 5
- Gum Trade :  
 Capture of cargo by French, 82, 83, 84  
 Duty imposed, 67  
 English rights admitted in Peace of Versailles, 100-101  
 Importance, 57  
 Proposal to include gum in enumerated articles, 64
- Gunpowder, exemption from export restrictions granted to Company of Merchants, 26
- HALIFAX, George Montague Dunk, Second Earl of, African affairs referred to, 22, 62
- Hallowell, Captain, report on Sierra Leone, 138
- Hillsborough, Wills Hill, Second Viscount, support of Company of Merchants against Dutch, 22
- Hobart, Robert, Baron Hobart, suggestions as to government of Sierra Leone, 137
- Hundredors and tithingmen :  
 Appointment and duties, 121-122  
 Legislative powers claimed, 122-123, 128
- JAMES, Frederick, mission to Ashanti, 158-159
- James Island and Fort, 5, 77, 82, 99
- Jolly, French trading post, 79
- LACY, Lieutenant, quarrel with Fall, 99
- La Grosse*, French vessel seized by MacNamara, 92
- Lancaster merchants, views on African trade, 111
- Liverpool merchants :  
 Representation on Committee of Company of Merchants, 30  
 Views on African trade, 9, 10, 111
- Lloyd, Captain, leader against Temnes, 136
- London merchants :  
 Representation on Committee of Company of Merchants, 30  
 Views on African trade, 111
- Lower Guinea, Portuguese domination, 6
- Ludlam, Thomas, Governor of Sierra Leone :  
 Appointment under Sierra Leone Company, 131  
 Appointment under Crown, 141  
 Rebellion crushed by, 132-133
- Luttrell, Temple, attack on Company of Merchants, 20
- Lysacht, Patrick, fort chief, cruelty, 38
- MACAULAY, Zachary, Governor of Sierra Leone :  
 Appointment to Sierra Leone Council, 119  
 Hundredors' demands granted, 123, 129  
 Nova Scotian revolt against, 127-129  
 Slave traders, and, 124
- Mackenzie, Captain Kenneth, Commander of Independents



- Attack by natives, 51  
 Campaign against Dutch, 37  
 Outrages committed by, 55  
**MacNamara, Lieutenant Matthias,**  
 Lieutenant Governor of Senegambia :  
 Character, 96  
 Appointment, opposition of O'Hara, 87  
 Charges against, by O'Hara, 88, 91  
 Dismissal, 92, 95-96  
 French vessel confiscated by, 86, 92  
 Report on governorship by Board of Trade, 95  
 Trial, 94, 95-96  
 Maroons, settled in Sierra Leone, 133, 137  
**Marryat, James,** bill for abolition of Company of Merchants opposed, 165  
**Mason, Major,** Governor of Fort St. Louis, 58  
**Melvil, Thomas,** Governor of Gold Coast :  
 Appointment and instructions, 32-33, 40  
 Removal demanded by Board of Trade, 25  
**Meredith, Henry,** Commander of Annamaboe, murdered, 153  
**Meredith, Sir William,** bill for regulating elections in Company of Merchants, 19, 30  
**Miles, Richard,** Governor of Gold Coast, 43  
**Mill, David,** Governor of Gold Coast, 35  
**Morse, Edward,** Chief Justice of Senegambia :  
 Governor Clarke, on, 96  
 Judicial reforms, 93  
 Justice in Senegambia, on, 80  
 Maladministration charges, 94  
**Mutter, William,** Governor of Gold Coast :  
 Dismissal for exporting slaves, 40  
 Rise in service, 39  
  
**NAIMBANNA, King,** sale of land to settlers, 105, 114  
 Native races in W. Africa :  
 Bribery by settlers, 51-52  
  
 Free labour, 52  
 Policy of Company of Merchants, 54-55  
 Presents and dashees, 53  
 Revenge on unpopular settlers, 50-51  
 Rulers renting land to English, 48-49  
 Unrest caused by abolition of slave trade, 153  
 Navigation Acts, interpretation, dispute, 80-82  
 Negroes in America and England :  
 Problems after War of Independence, 103-104  
 Settlers in Sierra Leone; *see* Nova Scotians  
**Nesham, Christopher,** agent for Senegambia, 73  
 Niger in early maps, 4, 5  
**North, Frederick, Lord,** defers regulation of African trade, 21  
 Nova Scotians :  
 Agitation for independence, 127-129, 131-132  
 Friction with white settlers, 127  
 Grant to Sierra Leone Company for settling, 135-136  
 Native attack led by, 136  
 Quarrel with governor on land question, 125  
 Settlement in Sierra Leone, 114-115  
  
**O'HARA, Colonel Charles,** Governor of Senegambia :  
 Charges against on retirement, 88-89, 91-92  
 Commission and instructions on appointment, 68-72  
 Defence of Senegambia, suggestions, 78  
 Dismissal, 90-91  
 Navigation laws upheld, 81  
 Neglect of dispatches, reply to charges, 76-77, 82-85, 86  
 Trade protection, measures, against French, 84  
 Ordnance Board, inquiry into condition of African forts, 18  
  
**PEACE of Paris (1763),** terms regarding West Africa, 23, 58  
**Peace of Versailles (1783),** terms regarding West Africa, 23, 100  
**Pitt, William, the Elder,** views on Peace of Paris, 58

- Pitt, William, the Younger, letters of Sharp to, 109
- Portendic :  
 Attack by English, 86  
 French trading claims, 83, 84, 85
- Portodally, French trading post, 79
- Portuguese in West Africa, eighteenth century settlements, 5, 6
- Ports in England :  
 Protests against Sierra Leone Company, 111  
 Representation on Committee of Company of Merchants, 9, 10, 30, 155, 163-164
- Postlethwayt, Malachy, description of West Africa, 5
- Private trading :  
 Company of Merchants' officials, by, regulations, 39-41  
 Governors of Senegambia charged with, 89, 95  
 Senegambia, regulations, 71
- Privy Council, Committee on Trade and Plantations :  
 Company of Merchants, and, relations, 27  
 MacNamara's appeal dismissed by, 95-96  
 Provisions sent to West Africa, difficulties, 46
- QUAQUE, Rev. Philip, Chaplain on Gold Coast, 42
- ROBERTS, Governor John, neutrality with Dutch, 36
- Royal African Company :  
 Company of Merchants, and, overlapping and friction, 13-14, 31-32  
 Establishment, 7  
 Grants for upkeep of forts, 7-8  
 Winding up, 12-13, 14
- Rum, changes in trade, 45
- St. GEORGE'S Bay Company :  
 Monopoly of Sierra Leone trade sought, 108-109  
 Petition for grant of land, 110  
*See also* Sierra Leone Company
- St. Louis Island; *see* Fort St. Louis
- Senegal :  
 British expedition against French, 57
- Cession to England by Peace of Paris, 57, 58
- French posts in eighteenth century, 5
- Restoration to France, 100  
*See also* Senegambia
- Senegambia :  
 Agents, duties and names, 73  
 Board of Trade Report on O'Hara's government, 88-89  
 Chaplains, difficulties of appointment, 97  
 Chief Justice, position, 68  
 Constitution, 66  
 Council :  
 Composition and procedure, 66-67, 69  
 Defects, 102  
 Crown Colony :  
 Establishment, 64  
 Failure, causes, 101-102  
 Definition by Order in Council, 66  
 Financial system, 72  
 French and English rivalry, 62, 63-64, 77, 79, 87-88  
*See also* Portendic  
 Gold Coast, and, status compared, 64, 74-75  
 Governor :  
 Debts incurred by, 73-74  
 Duties and powers, 66, 68-70  
 Grants from Treasury, 73-74  
 Judicial system :  
 Failures, 94, 102  
 General account, 67-68, 69  
 Reform by Clarke, 93  
 Lieutenant Governor, reform of position, 98  
 Military establishment :  
 General account, 68, 70  
 O'Hara's reforms, 78  
 Military rule during war with France, 100  
 Naval defence question, 85-86  
 Naval regulations, 71  
 Officials :  
 Civil establishment, 67  
 Salaries, 72  
 Parliamentary debate on, 1777, 97  
 Protection scheme, 98  
 Trade :  
 Difficulties at founding of province, 79  
 Regulations of 1765, 70-71  
 Vested in Company of Merchants, 60-61

- Sharp, Granville :  
   Director of Sierra Leone Company, 113  
   Letter on changes in Sierra Leone under Company, 116  
   Negro emigration scheme, 104, 106  
   Relief of Sierra Leone colony, appeals to Pitt, 109-110  
   Views of government of Sierra Leone, 106, 107
- Shelburne, William Petty, Second Earl of, interest in African affairs, 22
- Shirley, Captain Thomas, leader of expedition against Dutch, 37
- Sierra Leone :  
   Base for suppression of Slave Trade, as, report of 1810, 154, 155-156  
   Constitution :  
     Changes under Royal Charter, 134  
     Free State scheme, 106  
     Sierra Leone Company's scheme, 117, 120-123  
   Council :  
     Failure of first body of eight, 117  
     Reduced to two members, 119  
   Defence, defects, 130  
   Early difficulties of Colony, 105, 123-124  
   First emigrants, 114-115  
   French attack, 125-126, 127  
   Governor :  
     Absolute power granted by Company, 118-119  
   Grants from Treasury :  
     Increase in reply to petition, 1802, 137  
     Refusal in 1803, 138  
   Judicial system :  
     Company, under, 122  
     Changes under Royal Charter, 134  
     Weakness, 130  
   Land :  
     Distribution and tenure under Sierra Leone Company, 119-120, 125, 129-130, 134  
     Grant to St. George's Bay Company, 110-112  
   Legislative chambers established, 129  
   Native attack, 109  
   Negro settlers from Nova Scotia; *see* Nova Scotians  
   Negro settlement scheme, 104-106
- Quitrent dispute, 128
- Rebellion against Governor Ludlam, 132-133
- Re-establishment of colony by Sierra Leone Co., 114-115
- Relief expedition, 110
- Royal Charter to Sierra Leone Company, provisions, 134
- Status of settlers under Sierra Leone Company, 115-116
- Temne invasions, 136
- Transfer to Crown from Sierra Leone Company, 137-141
- Sierra Leone Company :  
   Anti-slavery measures, 135  
   Capital, effect of French attack on settlement, 126  
   Directors, names of first Board, 113  
   Failure, parliamentary criticism, 140-141  
   Grants from Treasury :  
     Civil establishment, 135  
     Increases in 1802 and 1804, 137, 138  
     Refusal in 1803, 138  
   Land granted, conditions, 129-130, 134  
   Objects, 113  
   Papers, disposal after winding up, 172  
   Philanthropic endeavours, summary, 143-144  
   Rights granted by Parliament, 111-113  
   Royal Charter granted, 131, 133-134  
   Winding up, 142
- Slave Coast, settlements of Company of Merchants, 15, 32
- Slave Trade :  
   Abolition :  
     Company of Merchants' attitude, 146-147  
     Effect on officials' salaries, 40, 150  
     International co-operation, difficulties, 162-163  
     Resentment of African natives, 152-153, 157  
   Base of West Indian prosperity, 1  
   Crippling effect on other forms of commerce, 135  
   Forbidden in Sierra Leone, 107, 135  
   Investigation by Board of Trade ordered, 27, 146

- Markets provided by forts, 50  
 Restrictions on practice by officials of Company of Merchants, 40  
 Sierra Leone Company founded as counter-blast, 108  
 Slaves in British settlements :  
   Cape Coast Castle, at, special regulations, 52-53  
   Marriage with the free, 53  
   Payments and presents to, 53-54  
   Purchase for St. Louis by government, 98  
 Smeathman, Dr. Henry, scheme for relief of negroes, 104  
 Smith, John Hope, mission to Ashanti organised, 158  
 Society for Education of Africans, 136  
 Soldiers, ill-treatment in Coast Forts, 38  
 Spirits, drinking by natives, 46  
 Stanton, Lieutenant, quarrel with Fall, 99  
 Store ships :  
   Abuses, 48  
   Valuing of cargoes, 47  
 Succondee, rent for, 49  
 Succondee, Governor of, native attack upon, 51  
 Surgeons in coast service, 41-42
- TANTUMQUERRY :**  
 Fanti danger to, 34  
 Rent for, 49  
 Governor of, beaten by natives, 51
- Temnes, attack on Sierra Leone colony, 136  
 Thompson, Captain, leader of negro emigrants to Sierra Leone, 104, 105, 106  
 Thornton, Henry, first chairman of Sierra Leone Company, 113, 140  
 Tilley, factory chief, assistance to Macaulay, 124  
 Tithingmen ; *see* Hundredors and Tithingmen  
 Tom, King :  
   Quarrel with slaver, 131  
   Sale of land to settlers, 105  
 Torrane, George, Governor of Gold Coast :  
   Appointment and instructions, 147-148  
   Reform of African Service, 147-149
- Touchett, Samuel, Senegal monopoly sought, 59-60  
 Trade and Plantations, Board of :  
   Company of Merchants, and, relations, 12, 21, 24-27  
   New Board, 1784, change of attitude, 27-28  
   Proposals for control of African Forts, 1750, 8-9  
   Reports on African affairs :  
   1765, British establishments on coast, 62-64  
   1776, O'Hara's governorship, on, 88  
   1776, Senegambia, on, 88-89  
   1777, Trade to Africa, on, 20  
   1778, MacNamara's rule, on, 95  
   Responsibility for acts of Company of Merchants refused, 26-27  
 Trading Posts ; *see* Forts  
 Trial of white men by negroes, 130  
 Trinder, Thomas, rise in service, 39
- VERSAILLES, Treaty of ; see** Peace of Versailles
- WALL, Captain, Lientenant Governor of Senegambia :**  
 Appointment, 98  
 At Goree, 99-100  
 O'Hara's charges against, 91  
*Weasle*, sloop of war, protection of Senegambia coast, 85
- West Africa :**  
 British establishments, report, 1765, 62-64  
 Commissioners to investigate condition of Forts, findings and replies, 154-157  
 European settlers, distribution of nationalities, 5  
 Exploration of interior, O'Hara's suggestion, 79  
 Geographical knowledge of in eighteenth century, 4  
 Natives ; *see* Native races of West Africa  
 Trade :  
   Alternatives to slave trade suggested by Company of Merchants, 153  
   Board of Trade report, 1777, 20  
   Coast price, meaning, 47

- Commodities, changing demand, 45, 46  
 Foreign vessels banned, 81, 82  
 Merchants' appeal for freedom, 9  
 Value in regard to West Indies, 1, 7  
 Unification schemes :  
 Opposition by Company of Merchants, 154, 165  
 Union of all districts under Crown, 166  
 West Indies, dependence on African trade, 1
- Whydah, English fort, 5, 34, 38  
 Wilberforce, William, 113, 140  
 Williams, Secretary to Sierra Leone Company, letter to Company of Merchants, 108  
 Winnebah :  
 Fanti danger to, 34, 35  
 Rent for, 49  
 Worge, Lieutenant-Colonel, Governor of Fort St. Louis, 58
- YORKE, Sir Joseph, Ambassador at the Hague, 22, 23, 35