

George Sutherland (ca. 1754 – 1811)

George Sutherland was born about 1754 in Wick, Scotland and began his career in the Hudson's Bay Company in 1774 at Albany Fort where he acted as the servant to Thomas Hutchins. He contracted for five years at £10 per annum, but by 1777, Hutchins sent Sutherland to the north, and in 1778 he was sent to tent with Indians up to Lake Winnipeg. In 1779 he was sent to Sturgeon Lake (see map) to winter with the Indians there and scout out the Canadian Pedlar's business in the district. In July 1779 he moved inland with some of the Canadian servants who had been brought into the HBC by Germain Maugenest. He reached Sturgeon Lake in late September where he nearly starved for lack of fish and game animals; three of Maugenest's men died of starvation and the others joined the Canadians. Despite his near starvation, Sutherland described the territory, the Canadian methods of trading, and the lack of prospects in the district for the HBC. Barely surviving, he was helped back to Gloucester House by some trading Indians and his broken health necessitated return to England for a year. His second term at Albany (£20 per annum) ended in the summer of 1785, when he was transferred to Severn House and eventually to York Factory in 1786 to assist the inexperienced Joseph Colen as linguist and trader (£30 per annum). His salary was upped to £40 per annum in 1793.

He next took charge of York Factory in 1794 while Joseph Colen went back to England (he was at that time paid £80 per annum). In 1795 he was given charge of Cumberland House, and in 1796 he was put in charge of Edmonton House while William Tomison was in England. During this last posting he, with Joseph Colen's support, introduced Inland Boats (York Boats) to the transportation scheme along the Saskatchewan River. He was the first trader to use large boats instead of canoes for transport. He had two boats, with 30 foot keels, built at Buckingham House, modelled on boats Sutherland had seen used at Albany Fort to transport goods and furs to Henley House and Gloucester House.

When William Tomison returned from England the next year, he again took charge of the Saskatchewan District and residence at Edmonton House. Sutherland was demoted to Buckingham House (1797-98), and Tomison, who had always been an opponent of Boats on the Saskatchewan, used his position to undercut Sutherland. Sutherland responded in a long letter to Tomison (see transcription), defending the use of boats and deriding Tomison to the point he could never work with him again. Tomison was forced by the London Committee to institute boats on the Saskatchewan River, but Sutherland was recalled to Britain in 1799.

Sutherland's recall to Britain and exit from the HBC was made easier by the fact that his brother had died in Jamacia in 1798, leaving him the property there. Once back in London, he married Eleanor Judd and took up residence at Patriot Square, Bethnal Green, London. His brother, Alexander Sutherland, had been a slave owner in St. Catherine, Jamacia and his estate, "Berrydale" devolved to George. He

maintained this estate until his death in 1811 at which point he left it to Alexander Lean of Hudson Bay House to sell as soon as possible and to pay the interest to his daughter Jane until she was 21, with the rest of the estate going in trust to support his wife, Eleanor Judd Sutherland.

Sources: A.M. Johnson, editor. *Saskatchewan journals and correspondence: Edmonton House, 1795-1800; Chesterfield House, 1800-1802* (London, 1967); Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Sutherland, George," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 4, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1979; "Legacies of British Slave-ownership." <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146651189>