

**HBCA B.239/b/60**

**Letter of Mr. Geo Sutherland to Mr. Tomison**

**YF Aug.10, 1798**

Sir

In looking over the correspondence Book of last year I there saw your most ungenerous letter to Mr. Colen Dated Gordon House August 6 1797 wherein you observe that many Packages rest there which the Canoes brought from the Factory but were left by Messrs Sutherland, Ross & Fidler as also all the Steel Iron Bars Hatchets &c.

Now Mr. Tomison give me leave to remind you of what you so well knew at the time of writing the above letter. Viz. that all the Packages Steel Iron &c alluded to were sent in a Boat from the Factory to Gordon House; the Design of sending this Boat and Cargo was to load Canoes for the Settlements provided I could engage any number of the twenty four Canoe men whose contracts expired that season. However only one man (William Johnston) would engage before the arrival of the Ship: the consequence was that I found myself under the necessity of proceeding Inland with two Canoes only. These I brought with their Cargoes from York Factory therefore the Boats Cargoe must of course be left there thill the arrival of the fall Canoes. –

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The next paragraph worthy of the least attention runs thus Sir neither did he (Tomison) load his Canoe with necessaries for himself and leave the Companys Goods behind.

Sir I am really at a loss to conjecture what you would insinuate by saying that I loaded my Canoe with necessaries for myself as it was notorious to every Officer at York that the state of the Warehouse could not admit of even the usable Quantity of provisions taken Inland annually and this very circumstance created some dissatisfaction among the men that season. Indeed so different was it from what you advance that I was under the necessity of leaving at Gordon House the butter that I had for my passage up: but perhaps you allude to my Keg of salt and I dare say you do not think me deserving even of this article: but it is rather a fortunate circumstance for me that few people agree with Mr. Tomison in this as well as in every other respect: probably you may allude to the small Box of crockery ware which I brought from England some years ago and carried up last Summer. I freely confess that this was a great

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Innovation on our Inland customs. Yet I cannot help thinking it rather beneath the Dignity of the Honb<sup>le</sup> Hudsons Bay Company that their Inland Master should ask the Gentlemen from Canada who are his neighbours to take a glass of wine or a Cup of Tea out of a tin pot more especially as when they treat us we see Silver, China, and Glass on the Table, this is all I can urge in my Defence on this head. I am glad I was

not concerned in the affair for which you threaten to mutilate some of the Officers and this I consider as a fortunate circumstance for my poor ears.

You say matters have gone a great length this year but which you will not permit another. Let the consequence be what it will. In answer to the paragraph, I can only say that had you remained in England I would have carried matters to a far greater length but I frankly confess we have done tolerably well considering it was only my first year. I imagine you allude to the Trade at Edmonton House being carried to a greater length than usual or possibly you mean the length of the Boat or the great distance they have been Navigated. In either case you have most religiously kept your word having docked both most effectively this Season

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and we all know the consequence. But you will be pleased to recollect that by means of these very Boats eighteen men carried up no less then two hundred pieces of Trading goods great and small. you also know that this Quantity of Goods required no less than forty men when employed on your old stale plan of conducting the Business with those insignificant Craft Canoes.

But this you call a great innovation on our Inland customs we all admit this to be true. however, there are people here who insist upon its being not only an improvement but a very great one, and this opinion they are determined to abide by until you can prove (which appears to these officers intermeddlers rather paradoxical) that it is better for the Honb<sup>le</sup> Company to maintain and pay one hundred men then it is forty five; this being the exact proportion between carrying on the Business at the upper Settlement with Canoes or with Boats. Upon the whole the Venom contained in this your letter cannot fail of Moving its own antidote as the most voracious appetite for scardal and Defamation can hardly venture to swallow such a pill. by the bye it is nothing new from Mr. Tomison nor can it ever be otherwise the Ethiopian cannot change his Skin.

On a former occasion you told me when I had done what you had done I should find &c &c. Now Mr. Tomison I will just ask you what are those matters you have performed, why I believe they are all partly well known, Sir, that you went Inland upwards of twenty years ago

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when you found Cumberland House and the Trade established on Mr. Cockings relieving you was appointed Master of that Settlement. **Very Well!** you came down annually with your Trade to the Factory and carried up some trading Goods pray would not any other person in your station have done the same at length the Canadians went farther up the Saskatchewan River to establish Trading Houses, and you crawled after them an in this manner you have followed them from Cumberland to Edmonton House yet I cannot see any thing so extravagantly clever in all this: as any man (a Natural excepted) would and must, have done the same.

But Mr. Tomison did you ever make an attempt during the long period you resided Inland to conduct the Business with any more Craft than Canoes and thereby have saved the Honb<sup>le</sup> Company an enormous expence? No you did not! did you ever attempt (even during the Period you was Chief) to erect any out post, and by that means extend the Trade. Certainly not! on the contrary it is notorious to every Officer on the York establishment that you opposed in all its stages every generous effort that has been made to promote the Trade by erecting settlements in different Quarters, thereby to keep the enterprising Canadians at a respectable distance from the lower Settlements; and by this means Securing the very best Trade this Country produces. If I remember right when you were first in England in the year 1790 Settlements were erected at Swan and Nelson Rivers as also the expedition to the Northward was set on foot.

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But on your arrival here the Chagrin you felt and the part you took against these necessary establishments are too well known for me to dwell on the subject: this great truth requires no farther confirmation than your own publick letters and Journals, yet notwithstanding the obvious disadvantages these and other Settlements erected since have laboured under, they have produced upwards of Sixty two Thousand made Beaver; and you will know all or nearly all this Trade would have been lost to the Honb<sup>le</sup> Company without those establishments.

On your arrival last Nov<sup>r</sup> at Edmonton House you there saw both the new Boats for the first time; you know the great Cargoes of Trading goods they carried up without a single article being in the least damaged; you also know they arrived earlier (notwithstanding the comparative lateness of that Season) than the Canoes ever did. If you recollect you asked me how the Boats answered; my reply was that they spoke fir themselves; you then asked me if I did not think it was too hard work for the men and whether they did not grumble &c – I told you I did not think they were much harder worked than the Canoe men were; and at the same time I gave you to understand that my men never grumbled and to tell you my mind freely I have no Idea of consulting the inclination of the men at any time far less when the Companys Business is concerned yet strange to tell not a man will say that I used

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him ill in any respect whatever.

Sir I will now ask you if you did not find materials at Edmonton House for building Canoes? did you not also find materials for building two more Boats of exactly the same size as the others they having been found by experience to answer our most sanguine expectations? now Sir what could induce you to cut five feet from each of the Keels designed for the new boats and thereby render the plan in a great measure abortive? we all know the reason why forsooth because they were brought into use by another person; it is very plain that these Boats are a great eye sore to you yet I cannot help thinking but that our employers have too just an Idea of their own

interest to suffer you or any other person so far to impose upon them, as to reduce the Boats in size far less annihilate them which I am given clearly to understand is your avowed intention, as soon as you can by any means find a plausible pretext for so doing: by the bye you are not likely to have an opportunity of this kind in this Century or even the next; as to the next especially towards the conclusion of it we need not be very solicitous about it as in all probability ere then old Charon with his wonted goodness may give both you and me a cast in his Boat which I understand is constructed on a different principle from these required up the Saskatchewan River.

To be serious you cannot for a moment suppose that you can injure me by reducing the Boats: the very Idea of this is laughable yet be most true that by so doing, you have injured the Honb<sup>le</sup> Company and that in no small Degree.

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Mr. Tomison this your conduct but ill accords with the Idea the Honb<sup>le</sup> Committee have, to my certain Knowledge; entertained of your faithful services, abilities, experience &c.

Sir give me leave to ask you a simple Question Sir what benefit would have accrued to the Company from the use of Boats had you in your consummate wisdom introduced them fifteen or sixteen years ago? why I will let you into the secret: the Company in that case must have received during the last Sixteen years upwards of one hundred Thousand made Beaver, over and above, and would have saved upwards of nine Thousand pounds Sterling, in mens wages only, and, this you yourself must allow to be a very moderate calculation. Yes Sir these an indisputable facts and speak for themselves; but from your general conduct with respect to these useful Craft. I have reason to suspect you have advanced something when last in England about the impracticability of navigating them up and down the Saskatchewan River however the contrary has been already proved and that in a very satisfactory manner. There is another matter that requires some attention Viz. that we all know the Furrs traded at the upper settlements are of the very worst Quality sent to England from York: does it not therefore behove our employers to get these such as they are at as cheap a rate as possible? and in what manner is this to be accomplished? certainly not by reducing the Trading Goods either in Quality or Quantity, this would be

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as sound indeed where there is a competition: the only means therefore remaining is to conduct the Business entirely with Boats, and thereby save six hundred pounds a year in Servants Wages.

Possibly you may say the number of men required to Navigate the Boats would be incompetent to cope with the Canadians. I candidly confess I cannot comprehend what is meant by this I \_\_\_? unless it be going to open war with them which is well known to be highly prejudicial to the Interest of our employers for my own part I do not see the necessity of the Companys Keeping a standing army at the upper Settlements to protect their Trade as they themselves are well aware peace is more

congenial with the spirit of commerce in all Countries this is easily proved even at Edmonton House by our being in a state of profound peace last year but at open war since. You have to, my certain knowledge been perpetually writing to England these last ten years for more men and we all know the Company have kept sending out as many annually as there Ships could accommodate and very few have returned on proportion you also know that his must have been attended with a very heavy expence: have not our employers therefore expected an increase of Trade in proportion? however in this they have been greatly disappointed the cause I leave Mr. Tomison to answer.

But I ask you if the Company's Inland Servants have ever been judiciously employed. as everyone knows they have not! is there any prospect they will be so in future? why this rests entirely with

[Fo. 40]

Our employers in England; as there appears at present no greater sign of improvement than there was twenty years ago. You yourself must be sensible that the upper settlements have been shamefully neglected otherwise the Company must long ere now have received their Thousand Beaver annually from that Quarter but the great misfortune to the Company has been that they never had any person at the head of their Inland affairs but Mr. Tomison. Yes Sir I repeat it this has been a real misfortune to them, yet if I am rightly informed our employers are of opinion they have no person on this establishment so capable of conducting their Inland Business; as yourself if this be really the opinion of the Honb<sup>le</sup> Committee they have some reason to consider their Inland concerns from York in a very prosperous way at the same time I am willing to allow you every merit that is your due. I have understood from yourself and others that you always made it your study to make the most of the Companys Goods by making many excellent Bargains for them; for instance you have Traded many an old latch of a Gun from the Indians for a pot of liquor, or a yard of Tobacco and have afterwards had the same Stocked and varnished by the Armourer and then sold them to the Natives at the same price that you did new Guns from England; you have also sold old Kettles from the Kitchen at the same rate as new ones; or when an Indian brought you a Skin for a Hatchet, you have given him a Bayonet,

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Or a Knife in lieu thereof &c &c &c whatever merit may be in all this it is entirely yours. By the bye what you may think merit I call Imposition. Fraud appears to me the very worst method can be adopted to extend the Trade; it resembles a man who thinks to go the shortest way to Heaven by saying his prayers backwards. You seem to have forgot that you have opponents who are ever ready, by way of retaliation, to render you obnoxious to the Natives by putting the most unfavourable constructions on your mode of dealing with them and thus they turn you sordid disposition to their own advantage.

I now conclude but not before I give you to understand that what I have said in this letter is mere Charity to what I could have advanced were I so disposed.

I began it with a determination to write only what I can prove and I will prove what I have written.

For the disclosure of the before mentioned facts, you are indebted to yourself alone, the falsity and malignity contained in the letter above alluded to is so serious an attack upon my character and conduct that I should be unjust to myself if I omitted saying this little to exculpate myself otherwise in all probability the inconsistency of your conduct and your inability in the station you fill would have escaped the animadversion of

Sir

Your Humble Servant. G.S.

[Fo. 41]