

(No. 84.)



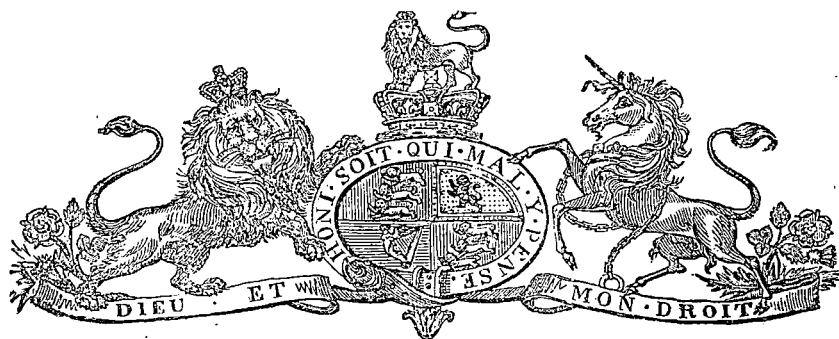
1860.

T A S M A N I A.

R E P O R T

ON THE WASTE LANDS BETWEEN THE MERSEY AND LEVEN.

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Colonial Treasurer, and ordered by the House to be printed, 31 August, 1860.



Survey Office, 31st August, 1860.

SIR,

I VERY much regret the delay that has taken place in the presentation of my Report of those parts of the Devon County lately visited by me, (namely, the tract of country lying between the Mersey and Leven Rivers,) for the purpose of determining roughly the position of such new lines of traffic as may be essential to the opening up and settlement of the above-named tract of territory,—a delay which, I beg to assure you, would not have occurred had I not been unwell for several weeks.

The district which I am about to describe, though containing some very infertile spots, is nevertheless a most magnificent country, an expression by which I mean you to understand that its soils and forests are not to be surpassed in Tasmania; the former in excellence, and the latter in the seemingly exhaustless stores of useful and ornamental woods that they contain. It will be necessary that I should describe these subjects, as also the harbors and climate of this quarter, before proceeding to the consideration of the necessity of opening the lines of traffic precedingly referred to, that you may have a clear idea of the value of the district on which I intend suggesting an expenditure of some thousands of pounds.

SOILS.

The good soils of the district in question are almost uniformly of a red colour, and are of very considerable depth, varying from about four to eight feet in thickness. Their capacity for production will be pretty well understood from the statements that, notwithstanding the very rude and primitive fashion in which they are generally cleared and cultivated, they will yield forty or fifty bushels of wheat to the acre; and that the same, if laid down in English grass, will carry ten sheep on the same space all the year through.

Of this description of land there are not less than 150,000 acres, still the property of the public (between the Rivers Mersey and Leven alone), and capable of supporting 1900 families at eighty acres each.

If the statement respecting the adaptability of such lands as those described above for pasture be correct (and which I believe has been satisfactorily ascertained on similar soils of the adjoining County of Wellington*), it may eventually prove of great advantage to the Colony; more especially should it ever happen that Australia ceases to require our exports of grain, potatoes, timber, &c.: for as the cost of clearing these lands, under the prevailing system of "scrubbing and ringing," is not more than £5 10s. the acre, it will be obvious that the annual clip of ten sheep would not be at all a bad return for such outlay.

It may be worth remarking, that the fine soils of this district are less often found in the great valleys than on the undulating table lands that lie between the rivers.

FORESTS.

The lands described above are now, as most probably they ever have been, covered with very heavy forests of Gum trees, and also with a close undergrowth of Sassafras, Musk, Dogwood, Fern trees, and scores of unnamed trees and shrubs, to whose decay the vast accumulations of rich red soil that cover the wide surface we have now under notice is, doubtless, mainly ascribable. With the favourable experiences we have had during the past seven years of the value of the woods of such forests, it is needless to attract attention to the fact here; and I merely introduce the subject into my Report now to show that, vast as they are, and also seemingly insuperable obstacles to the occupation of the district they cover, they are not *now* looked on as such very serious impediments to settlement as they were in by-gone times, before the present cheap and comparatively easy style of clearing came into fashion. The system of "scrubbing," by which the underwood alone is removed, and of "ringing," whereby the larger trees are simply killed (by cutting through the bark and sapwood all round), does not cost over £5 10s. per acre; the operation of destroying all that ever is destroyed extending over portions of three seasons.

The old hands among our settlers will bear me out in the statement, that this outlay is much less than what they used to pay for clearing comparatively open land under the old processes of grubbing (or even of simply falling) and burning off.

I have been at a little pains to collect the details of cost of preparing heavy forest land for the plough, whereof the following is the result:—

* Mr. Scott, Surveyor, is my authority, and his statement was confirmed by Mr. Fenton of the Forth.

FIRST YEAR.		£	s.	d.
Scrubbing per acre, <i>i.e.</i> , falling all trees not over a foot through, and ringing all large standing trees, about.....		1	10	0
Burning off same.....		0	10	0
Hoeing or chipping in grain.....		1	10	0
Cost of labour for first year's crop.....	£3	10	0	
SECOND YEAR.				
Burning off stubbles, and grubbing all small stumps* left after last year's operation, which fits the land for ploughing.....		1	10	0
THIRD YEAR.				
Removing fallen logs, grubbing roots, &c.		0	10	0
		£5	10	0

If there be any who are under the idea that there is the slightest reluctance to occupy such lands as I have described, on account of the extraordinary forests they produce, they may be easily convinced of their error by referring to many official returns which the Survey Department has prepared for the information of Parliament, which will show that it is in the Northern Counties, (where the choice lands are almost invariably the most thickly timbered) that settlement is proceeding most rapidly, and which will show how favourably they are thought of by the great majority of selectors, who regard such forests as the most certain indicators of the quality of the soil. Dogwood scrubs, (the brown wattle of the South), so very abundant, are in the greatest request.

Before despatching these sections of my Report, I cannot help referring you to the vast areas of fine land, still the property of the public, in the three Northern Counties alone (Dorset, Devon, and Wellington), which the researches and disclosures of some of our Surveyors have so recently made us acquainted with.

The estimates they have given us of their extent are, of course, only approximations to truth: but, knowing, as we do, how apt persons are to be cautious in making statements in figures which are preserved as the perpetual tests of their credibility, and remembering also the imperfect manner in which the Northern Counties have even yet been examined, it is difficult to divest one's self of the idea that our future experiences are likely to teach us, that the areas they have assigned to the first class lands of the North have been underrated. It is, however, gratifying to learn that, taking their acreage as reported, even now, these first class lands alone will support four thousand families.

In considering the important subject of land occupation, however, we must not put out of sight the fact that, in the Districts under notice, there are very considerable tracts of *fair* land that are not included in the Reports of our Surveyors, and which will come into demand on the exhaustion of the bettermost soils they have described; for the occupation of the one will necessarily give value to the other.

It would be, however, rash to hazard any conjectures as to the precise capacity of the waste lands of the North for the support of population; but that they are capable of maintaining many thousands of families, will never be doubted by any one who has even a cursory acquaintance with them.

Having now obtained a moderately good idea of the extent and quality of at least one class of the public lands, the next duty that suggests itself to us is to speed their occupation by all legitimate means in our power. If it be argued that their too rapid absorption will be fatal to the Land Revenue, I respectfully reply that this loss will be doubly compensated us through other channels, and that the Ordinary Revenue of the Colony will improve just in proportion as settlement advances. If this view of the case be not a true one, then what, I will humbly ask, is the present flourishing condition of the Launceston Customs Revenue (and of Launceston Exports also) ascribable to?

To bring about the rapid settlement of the fine wastes I have described, they must, I respectfully submit, be penetrated by fair roads. While, at the same time, I must observe (under correction, of course), that we should give greater publicity than we do to our Land Regulations, and circulate fair and impartial reports of the good and bad of our waste lands generally abroad.

These latter ideas are not put forth as original ones, as I know they have been advocated before in the Colonial journals.

In describing the climate of Devon, I shall quote from my own Report on this subject which I presented to the Government fifteen years ago (1st December, 1845):—

CLIMATE.

* * * "Much more rain falls in the north-west quarter of the Island than in the eastern and south-eastern district, in other words the Settled districts, the difference being great. Singular as this may appear at first sight in so small an Island, I think it is easily accounted for. It cannot have escaped observation, that the greatest quantity of rain falls in Tasmania when the winds blow from west and south west;

* They are chiefly dragged out by Bullocks.

and those who are acquainted with the mountainous districts must have observed an elevated region stretching *in an irregular direction*, 130 miles, from the 'Extreme Western Bluff' to Mount Wellington, with very few breaks in the same, and those of slight extent. This high land must naturally intercept much of the moisture so copiously driven in from the Pacific Ocean during the prevalence of westerly winds, and (except in very stormy weather) such vapours as rise above this range (from 3000 to 5000 feet high) pass across the eastern parts of the Island in the form of fine weather clouds. When I was on the western side of these mountains, in the summer months of 1841-42, I experienced the greatest inconvenience in prosecuting my duties, from the apparently never-ceasing rain which then deluged the western districts; while, at the same time, the herbage of the Settlements was literally burned up, not a drop of rain falling for many months." * * * "To the north and north west of the Extreme Western Bluff most of the surface is *comparatively low*, and unprotected by the great screen which wards off from the settled districts many a summer storm that explodes along the western coasts. The tract described in this letter, namely, the county of Devon, lies to the northward of the Extreme Western Bluff, and receives a more plentiful supply of rain than falls in the eastern portions of Tasmania."*

The large amount of rain that falls in the northern parts of the Island is, of course, very favourable to production. Hence, I presume, the extraordinarily rank growth of the forests and underwoods of this quarter: and hence also the great depth and richness of the soil, which are doubtless, in a great measure, the results of their decay.

HARBOURS.

The harbours on the coast line of Devon are moderately good. Port Frederick (the estuary of the Mersey) is suited for vessels of considerable size, as there are not less than six or eight feet of water on its bar at low tide; and as the tides of Bass' Straits rise about ten feet, such vessels have no difficulty in entering. The mouths of the Don, Forth, Leven, and Blyth are also all bar harbours, and with not very many *inches* of water on them at low tide. Nevertheless, good-sized craft, chiefly from Melbourne, are constantly found in them, entering of course at high water. Port Frederick is a large port, and it is generally believed (and with a very good show of reason) that it is destined to become a place of great commercial importance.

GUNN'S NEW COUNTRY.

This tract lies on the east bank of the Leven River, and is about 12 or 15 miles above its estuary. It seems to me to contain about 3000 acres of generally rich and level land, and is shut in on the east and north by lofty hills, some parts of the last-named portion being very sterile. Of this tract about 150 acres are quite open, and covered with a thick swarth of grass, mixed with some cutting-grass, and a fair sprinkling of the common thistle. The open land is chiefly contained in four small plains, and two or three others which are too slight to merit particular notice. It seems probable that the open land was at no remote period far more extensive than now, as the forests that surround the plains are generally composed of very young trees only twelve or fifteen inches through. Wombats are very plentiful here, and keep down the fine grass of the plains even closer than sheep would do. Limestone is abundant in the neighbourhood, namely, on the western side of the Leven.

PROJECTED SECONDARY ROADS, AND THEIR PROBABLE COST.

The roads required at present (independent of what is called Kentish's line) to commence the opening up of the fine lands precedingly described are five in number, none of which would I propose carrying back from the Coast more than ten miles just now, which I apprehend will be quite enough for several years, when they can be extended southerly according to the direction which settlement is likely to take, but which can hardly be foreseen at present. One other road must be surveyed and reserved, but which need not be opened now.

The first is a line of 7 miles to connect Kentish Plains with the Township of Tarleton, on the Mersey (No. 1).

The second, from the Estuary of the Forth along the Western Bank of the Forth, 10 miles inland (No. 2).

The third, from Ulverston on the Leven River in a southerly direction for 10 miles (No. 3).

The fourth, from a point on Kentish line near the Estuary of the Leven southerly 10 miles inland (No. 4).

The fifth, from Heybridge on the Blyth southerly 5 miles (No. 5).

PROBABLE COST OF ROADS.

No. 1. Seven Miles.

First two miles from Tarleton, (pretty open) to be grubbed 15 feet wide, at	£	s.	d.
15s. each foot of width, being £11 5s. a mile	22	10	0
Scrubbing half a chain wide on each side of same, being 16 acres, at 15s.			
per acre, (half cost of usual scrub work) £10 13s. 4d., say	11	0	0
Carried forward.....	33	10	0

* From Tables furnished me by the V.D.L. Company in 1845, it seems that the annual fall at Circular Head was 32.46 inches (for the three preceding years.) At Cape Grim or Woolnorth 59 inches, and at the Hampshire Hills 67.44 inches. The fall at Hobart Town I believe is not much over 20 inches.

	£	s.	d.
<i>Brought forward</i>	33	10	0
Grubbing five miles of road, 15 feet wide, of heavy forest land, at £15 a mile, (being £1 for each foot of width).....	75	0	0
Scrubbing and ringing trees, half a chain wide on each side of same line of five miles, being 40 acres, at £1 10s. the acre.....	60	0	0
Bridges over the Don and some lesser streams	150	0	0
Survey of the whole seven miles, at £8 per mile	56	0	0
Incidental expenses of draining, superintendence, &c., at £40 per mile....	280	0	0
	<u>£654</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>0</u>
<i>No. 2. Ten Miles.</i>			
Grubbing ten miles of road, 15 feet wide, of heavy forest land, at £15 a mile, (being £1 for each foot of width).....	150	0	0
Scrubbing and ringing trees, half a chain wide on each side of same line of ten miles, being 80 acres, at £1 10s. per acre	120	0	0
Small bridges and culverts, say	100	0	0
Survey of whole ten miles, at £8 the mile	80	0	0
Incidental expenses of draining, superintendence, &c., at £40 per mile....	400	0	0
	<u>£850</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
<i>No. 3. Ten Miles.</i>			
Probable cost same as No. 2	850	0	0
<i>No. 4. Ten Miles.</i>			
Probable cost same as No. 2	850	0	0
<i>No. 5. Five Miles.</i>			
Probable cost half as much as No. 2	425	0	0
Surveying only of 10 other miles of a road to be reserved for future use, at £8 per mile.....	80	0	0

Making a total of £3709 10s., which I have the honor of asking you to place on the Estimates for roads leading down to the coast of part of the County of Devon.

That there are other portions of this county which will require some assistance hereafter I know, but these must form the subjects of future reports which I am not at present able to compile.

The superintendence of the construction of these lines should, I most respectfully submit, form the duty of a paid agent of the public. Such an agent might possibly combine with this work the duties of an Inspector of Timber Licences.

After the favorable description that I have given of the character of the waste lands of that portion of Devon I have lately visited, it will be unnecessary to trouble you with any reflections as to the returns likely to arise from the moderate outlay proposed, but that they will be very great you may be assured of.

While in the district from which I have lately returned, I was cautious not to commit myself by holding out any expectation that the Honorable the Parliament was likely to sanction any considerable expenditure in opening up the Waste Lands of this part of the Island; but I now find that since my return to head quarters a rumour to this effect has got abroad, and seems already causing a greatly increased demand for land here; nearly 4000 acres having been either selected, or which are in course of selection, as will be seen on perusal of the letter appended hereto, which I have very lately received from the Surveyor of the District, Mr. Dooley, who accompanied me in my various journeys through Devon, and greatly assisted me in collecting materials for this Report.

An illustrative sketch, showing the good waste lands referred to above, and the general direction of the proposed roads, accompanies this letter.

I have the honor, &c.

The Hon. the Colonial Treasurer.

J. E. CALDER.

River Forth, August 22nd, 1860.

SIR,

YESTERDAY, about noon, I arrived at the Forth, and to-day, by noon, I have written out applications for Seven parties amounting to 1970 acres, and hold inquiries for more than as much more. The rumour having spread of a probability of having roads opened to and through these Lands from the Coast, is producing this action or activity; and I think, Sir, you will agree with me that, should the opening of the roads projected by you become a reality, your most sanguine anticipations regarding the alienation of the Lands will be realized. These facts may tend to show that the contemplated outlay will be reproductive.

Hoping you are now quite free from your late attack of illness, reached Hobart Town safely, and found your family all well, I remain, Sir,

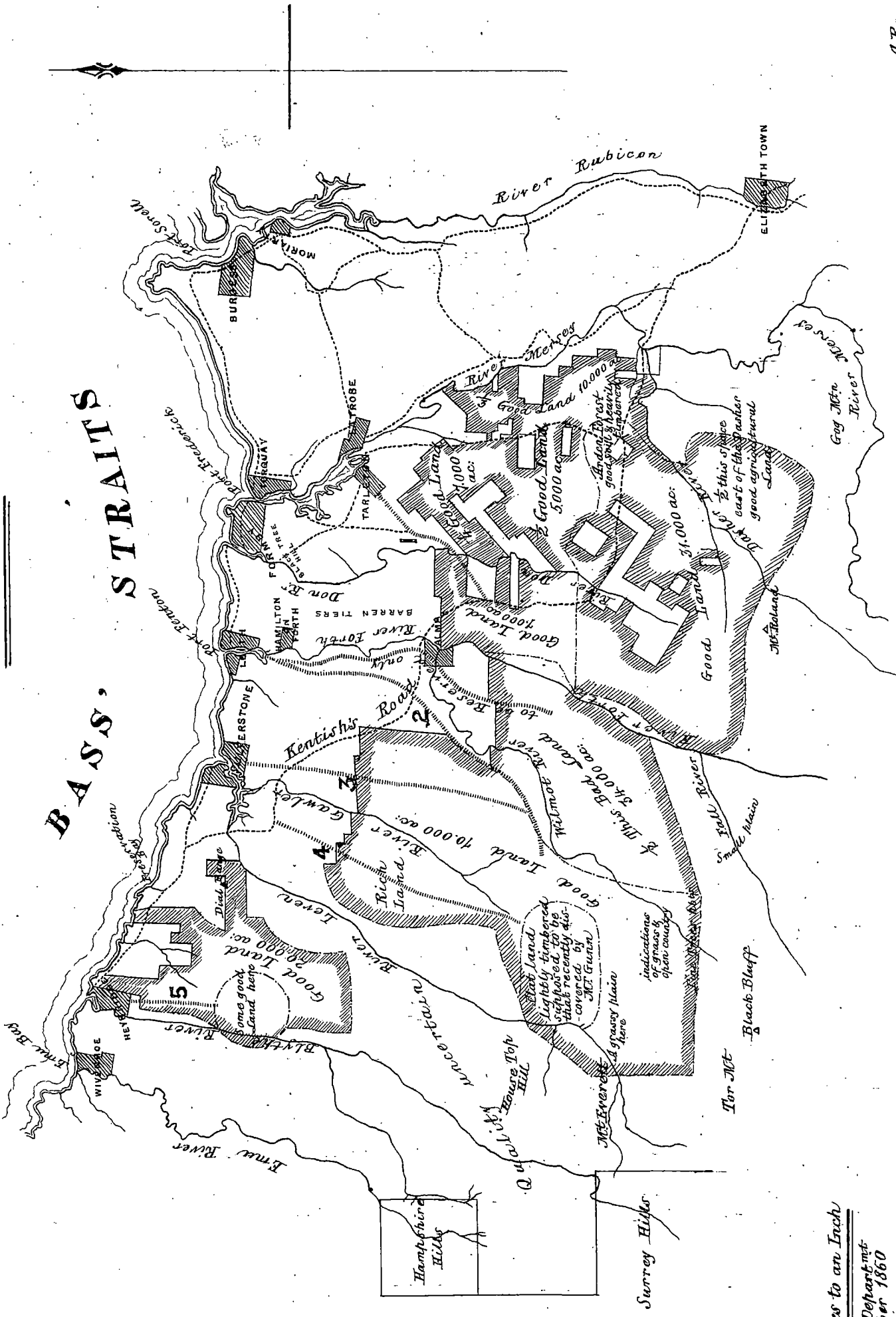
Your most obedient Servant,

JAMES M. DOOLEY, *District Surveyor,*

J. E. CALDER, *Esq., Surveyor-General.*

DEVON

BASS STRAITS



Scale - 5 Miles to an Inch
Survey Department
September 1860