'Chief Commissionership in Assam' means
constitution of Assam into a Province with a Local
Government of its own under a Chief Commissioner on being
separated from the Lieutenant Governorship of Bengal in
February 1874. Since then Assam continued to be a Chief
Commissioner's province up to 2nd January 1921 except for
a short space of about six and a half years from 16 October
1905 to 31 March 1912 when it was united with East Bengal
to form the Lieutenant Governorship of Eastern Bengal and
Assam.

The constitution and reconstitution of the Province
of Assam as aforesaid were so closely connected with the
administrative system of Bengal to which it was added in
1826 and continued to be administered therewith prior to
the formation of Chief Commissionership in 1874, that the
former cannot be followed in its true historical
perspective without a discussion of the latter in some
details. The Separation of Assam from Bengal in 1874 and
its amalgamation with East Bengal in 1905 in the wake of
a great debate and prolonged discussion on the
administrative system of Bengal both in India and in London,
has interesting, important but unrevealed history behind
it.

In the following pages, an attempt has been made
to present the political and administrative development
leading to the establishment of Chief
Commissionership in Assam in 1874 (Chapter III) and
the Constitution of the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam in 1905 (Chapter V). The administrative area of the Chief Commissionership of Assam has been described in Chapter IV. The powers and functions of the Chief Commissioner of Assam and the Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam have been dealt with in Chapter VI while their administrative systems have been discussed in Chapter VII. The personality of the Chief Commissioners and the Lieutenant Governors who served Assam and Eastern Bengal and Assam respectively during the period from 1874 to 1921 has been briefly dealt with in Chapter VIII, styled 'Succession of Chief Commissioners'. These Chapters have been preceded by an introduction of Land and People (Chapter I), the necessity and importance of which is beyond question in all historical works, more so in the case of Assam and particularly, the instant work. In Chapter II, a brief account has been given of the historical and administrative background, which I consider to be essential to follow the course of events of the period under discussion.

Geographically, historically, ethnographically and also from the strategic point of view, Assam occupies a unique position in the Republic of India. But in spite of her importance, she could not be always in the limelight apparently because of the apathetic attitude of the administrators, statesmen and historians, both
foreign and Indian, for the easternmost part of India.

Sir Alexander Mackenzie rightly remarked that had the field of David Scott's activities been in central or North western India instead of amid the jungles of Assam, he would have occupied a place in history by the side of Malcolm, Elphinstone and Metcalfe. The same point was brought home by John McCosh, M.D., F.R.C.S. when he stated that the Indian and Home Governments and the people of this country were generally so morbidly sensitive about the North-western Frontier of India, whilst the North Eastern was utterly neglected and that the political and commercial interests of the empire were in that quarter left to their fate.

Though Assam, with her multifarious peoples and races and her relations with the tribes presents to the historian a very engrossing field of study, it is regrettable that even to the historians of modern and independent India Assam has not so far got the treatment she so well deserves. To some extent, it may be attributed to her geographical position in an extreme corner of a vast country - the North East.


2Political Department Proceedings, January, 1874, No.2954 P, dated Fort William, the 30th December, 1873.
The only authentic amount of Assam as a whole has been given by Sir Edward Caint in his admirable work 'A History of Assam'. But with all regard for the great scholar for his pioneer work on Assam, it may be stated that he has not done full justice to the modern period and has not even attempted to bring to light the subject under discussion. Moreover, the learned author's 'History of Assam' does not stand the test of time. As a part of the British administrative machinery, it was but natural for him to see and judge everything through the glasses of imperial interests.

Alexander Mackenzie did not deal either with the internal history of Assam or with the question of the separation of Assam from Bengal in his famous work 'History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal.'

Dr. S.K. Bhuyan, in his valuable and laborious work 'Animal-Assamese Relations' dealt with the difficult question of the relation of the British with the Assamese. The students of modern history of Assam are very much indebted to Dr. Bhuyan for his indefatigable efforts in preparing the ground work of modern history of Assam and for indicating the scope for further research work. But several parts of Bhuyan's work are not relevant.
'The Eastern Frontier of British India' written by Dr. A.C. Banerjee, is a very comprehensive and noteworthy publication on the history of Assam from 1784 to 1826, narrating the policy followed by the British Government towards Burmese and Assamese. R.M. Lobie in his well-known work 'The Annexation of Assam' has covered the period from 1824 to 1854. R.K. Barpujari in his praiseworthy book 'Assam : In the Days of the Company' has carried the work further to cover the period up to 1860. Even in the 'Political History of Assam' (1826-1919) edited by Dr. Barpujari, the subject under discussion in the present work has not received adequate treatment.

In preparing this thesis, therefore, I had no well marked tracks to follow and had to depend mainly, if not exclusively, on original sources preserved in the Record Office, Government of Assam, Shillong, now partly shifted to Dibrugarh, The West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta, The National Library, Calcutta, the Bidhut University Library, The West Bengal Secretariat Library, The Guwahati University Library, and The Office of the Director, Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati. In some cases, the original sources have been supplemented or confirmed by fresh data, information or quotation from contemporary works and Memoirs of the persons involved in the relevant events.
For the first two Chapters, I do not claim any originality. They are based on official records, reports, and authoritative works on the subject. I have all along endeavoured to reveal facts in their true historical perspective and to interpret them as correctly as I am capable of and I would like to conclude by quoting from Professor B.H. Carr that "History is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and past............ a dialogue between the events of the past and progressively emerging future ends... To enable men to understand the society of the past and to increase the mastery over the society of the present is the dual function of history."3

It is my pleasant duty to acknowledge my indebtedness to my esteemed guide Dr. V. Venkata Rao, B.A. (Hons), M.A., M.Litt., Ph.D., D.Litt., Professor Emeritus, Guwahati University, who has supervised my work all through. But for his special care, ungrudging help, affectionate guidance and valuable suggestions, it would not have been possible to bring the project to completion. I also take this opportunity to express my thanks and gratitude to Reverend Brothers E.B. Vidyra and M.C. Shannon, erstwhile and present Principals, St. Edmund's College, Shillong who offered me all possible facilities to do my research work. My thanks are due to Dr. B Dutta Ray and Shri P.C. Sarma, M.A., Keeper of Records, Assam Secretariat (Civil) Shillong

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for the help and encouragement received from them. I am also grateful to the Authorities and concerned staff of the Centers of Studies and Research referred to above and to the Librarians, Office of the Deputy Director, Anthropological Survey of India, Shillong and the State Central Library, Shillong, now shifted to Gauhati, for their help and cooperation. I gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance extended to me by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, Eastern Regional Centre, Calcutta under its Study Grants Scheme. I am also grateful to Devajani Chaliha and Associates, who extended all possible facilities in connection with my research work in Calcutta. My sincerest thanks are due especially to my friends Sarvashree R.K. Chakraborty, B.Sc., Umapada Bhattacharjee, B.A. and my cousin U.R. Chakraborty, B.A. who have always encouraged me in this project and helped me in very many ways in every stage of my work. Of my colleagues, my thanks are due to Sarvasree M.R. Bhattacharjee, M.A. (Double) of St. Edmund's College and Dr. Pratyush Ranjan Purkayastha of Sankardav College, Shillong who gladly took the trouble of checking and comparing the entire work. Lastly, my thanks are also due to Higherland Sylvanish who has typed the work with all possible care and sincerity and to Shri Rathin Chandra Roy for drawing the maps.