

***Eighteenth-Century Naturalists of Hudson Bay.* By Stuart Houston, Tim Ball and Mary Houston. With a Foreword by Judith Beattie. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, Native and Northern Series, 2003. xxiv-360 p. ill., tables, maps, index. ISBN 0-7735-2285-9. CA \$49.95 US \$49.95 UK£37.95**

Debra Lindsay

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Beautifully illustrated and meticulously researched, this study of the men who first recorded the natural history of the Hudson Bay Company's (HBC) territory is an important contribution to the history of science. The author of several books on northern natural history, Stuart Houston is in his element when discussing evidence pertaining to the scientific work done by HBC employees in their spare time. A trained physician whose inclinations match those of his eighteenth century subjects, Houston has a keen appreciation for their trials and triumphs. Mary Houston, an avid naturalist in her own right, is equally empathetic and their enthusiasm is reflected in the vignettes making up the book. Their expertise is put to good effect in this collaborative work, as are the talents of climatologist Tim Ball, linguists Arok Wolvengrey and Jean Okimâsis, and archivists Deidre Simmons and Judith Beattie. Together they demonstrate that Company employees found new species, produced type specimens, collected anthropological and geographical data, and recorded meteorological information so important to advancing the efforts of European scientists such as Hans Sloane, George Edwards, Johann Reinhold Forster, Thomas Pennant, John Latham, and Carl Linnaeus.

The authors have a wealth of published material upon which to draw in pulling together the eight biographies making up *Naturalists of Hudson Bay*, but it is unevenly distributed. Better known naturalists receive

better coverage. For example, the chapter on Samuel Hearne is much fuller than the one on Moses Norton. The reprinted *Journey from Prince of Wales Fort*, as well as entries in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* and the edited documents published by the Champlain Society provide a foundation for the discussion of Hearne.<sup>1</sup> Published research is also put to good effect elsewhere in the volume, for example, Houston's own sketches in the *Biographical Dictionary of American and Canadian Naturalists and Environmentalists*, (Fidler, Isham), numerous entries in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (e.g. S. Van Kirk, "Moses Norton," F. Pannekoek, "Humphrey Marten," E.E. Rich, "James Isham;" G. Williams, "Thomas Hutchins" and "Andrew Graham"), documents reprinted by the Hudson's Bay Record Society and by the Champlain Society, as well as monographs such as MacGregor's *Peter Fidler*.<sup>2</sup> In some cases archival collections are key; in any case, the stories of these men—the *Naturalists of Hudson Bay*—have been nicely crafted through a judicious use of both primary and secondary sources, and a strength of this book is that it brings together disparate materials in essays artfully written.

Despite appearances, the biographical material contained in *Naturalists of Hudson Bay* is in many ways ancillary to the more technical detail found throughout. Appendices detailing chronologies and discussing issues substantively important to the natural history of Rupert's Land add materially to the biographical and thematic discussions forming the bulk of the book making *Naturalists of Hudson Bay* a rich source for anyone interested in either the fur trade or colonial science. It is here that the authors demonstrate their devotion to scholarship: Only the truly committed would trace in such careful detail the scientific work done by these unknown company men. Zoological and botanical specimens collected and identified in Latinized and common (that is in English and/or "Voyageur" dialect, as well as in Ojibway and/or Cree) nomenclature, with HBC or published sources cited, as well as the peregrinations of the collectors—journeys by ship to England and back—and Company directives pertaining to valuable species such as swans and geese add as much to our knowledge of eighteenth century natural history as the biographical information conveyed.

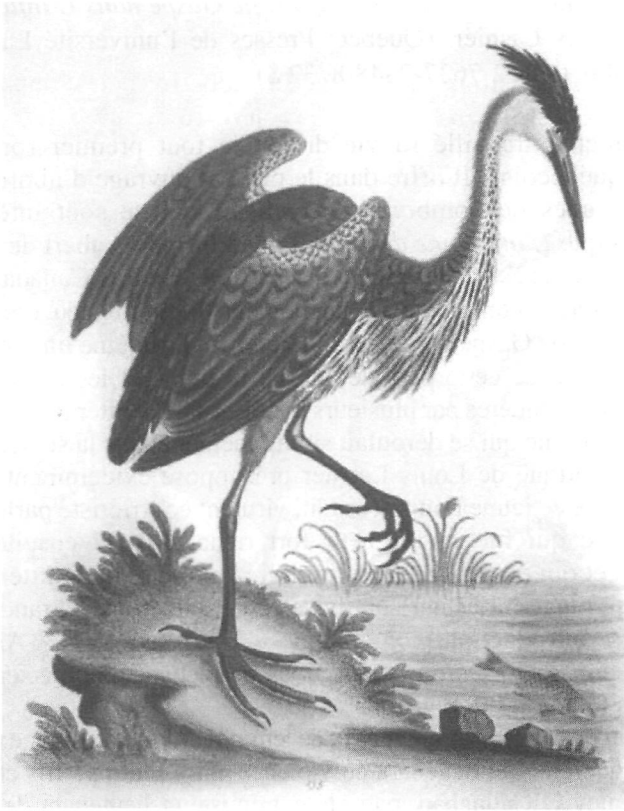
Also instructive are discussions revolving around provenance and authorship: Who really penned what amounted to ten volumes of manuscript material sent to England and used by eighteenth century scientists such as Latham and Pennant? Was Thomas Hutchins, a surgeon with the Company, educated and able to employ Latinized terminology, responsible for creating the manuscripts? Was Andrew Graham, the poorly educated but well travelled and observant employee the author of these records? Previously scholars had either over or under-acknowledged

the contributions of both men. Following a trip to the Orkney Islands where the authors happened to discuss the matter with an expert on the manuscripts in question, they began to probe further, comparing HBC manuscripts to those in the Royal Society Archives. Careful “sleuthing,” amusingly relayed in Appendix C, revealed that Hutchins and Graham collaborated. With the assistance of Glyndwr Williams, the authors rectified a longstanding misunderstanding, and their rendition of attempts to unravel this mystery remind us that the work of the historian is never as straightforward as it often appears.

While it would seem churlish to end negatively when there is so much about the *Naturalists of Hudson Bay* to commend it to a wide audience, it is disappointing that the authors do not explore fully the north-south theme presented at both the beginning and the end of the book. They draw attention to similarities between activities in northern and southern territories, stating that “Hudson Bay was second only to South Carolina as a source of records and data” for the classificatory work of Linnaeus. Both areas officially deemed English by royal charter in 1670, had men on the spot whose interest in science was sufficiently strong that “Major natural-history collections were sent to England from Charles Town between 1712 and 1725, and from Hudson Bay in the 1770s.” (p. 14) Devoting a mere eight pages to South Carolinian scientists, a fuller examination of those mentioned—John Lining, Lionel Chalmers, Mark Catesby, Alexander Garden—would contextualize colonial science generally and the HBC role specifically along a slightly different axis than usually found in the literature. The suggestion that these two regions are comparable is a good one; it is an insight deserving more thorough analysis.

Debra Lindsay

1. Samuel Hearne, *A journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean in the Years 1769, 1770, 1771 and 1772*, with introduction by J. B. Tyrell (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1911), with and introduction by Richard Glover (Toronto: MacMillan, 1958). C. S. Mackinnon, “Heame, Samuel,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. iv (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 339–342. Samuel Hearne, *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor*, with introduction by J. B. Tyrell (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1934).
2. Keir B. Sterling et al., *Biographical Dictionary of American and Canadian Naturalists and Environmentalists* (Westport: Greenwood, 1997). Glyndwr Williams, ed., *Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767–91* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1969). E. E. Rich, ed., *James Isham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1743 and Notes and Observations on a Book Entitled A Voyage to Hudson's Bay in the Dobbs Galley, 1749* (London, 1949). James Grierson MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor, 1769–1822* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966).



Great Blue Heron by George Edward, 1750  
(Source : Houston et al., *Eighteenth-Century Naturalists of Hudson Bay*, colour plate 1)

**Biographical Note:** An Associate Professor in the Department of History and Politics at the University of New Brunswick, Debra Lindsay began working on science in Rupert's Land as a graduate student; her doctoral dissertation was published as *Science in the Subarctic: Trappers, Traders, and the Smithsonian Institution* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993). Recent research includes work on women and science, including a study of the women of the Audubon and Bachman families who lived together periodically during the 1830s in Charleston, South Carolina, and on the earth sciences, specifically John William Dawson's contributions to palaeobotany. *Address:* Department of History and Politics, University of New Brunswick, Saint John campus, P.O. Box 5050, Saint John (New Brunswick) E2L 4L5, Canada. *Email:* <dlindsay@unbsj.ca>