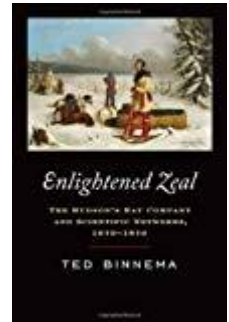


**Theodore Binnema.** *Enlightened Zeal: The Hudson's Bay Company and Scientific Networks, 1670-1870.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. xvi + 458 pp. \$37.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4426-1475-8.



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**Published on** H-War (July, 2015)

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Oftentimes as we consider the broad scope of English colonization in North America, individuals, ethnicities, and religious groups move to the fore. Compelling anecdotes of dour Puritans, adventurous French fur traders, and sturdy Ulster Scots obfuscate the importance of another factor in the Anglo settlement narrative: joint stock companies. These corporations provided the sizable investments needed to cross the Atlantic Ocean and survive in the New World, all for the promise of guaranteed land and potential profits. Histories of science can suffer a similar fate. Images of Enlightenment-era thinkers toiling alone with beakers and magnets mask the integral roles played by formal institutions and corporate interests in the pursuance of knowledge.

Ted Binnema addresses both of these common oversights in his book *Enlightened Zeal*. Mapping the interrelationship between the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) and Atlantic world scientific networks, Binnema outlines the formation of, for the most part, mutually beneficial ties between these two entities. For the majority of its incorporation,

the HBC enjoyed a unique prerogative over most of central and western Canada. Through its control over these millions of acres—spanning diverse biomes, meteorological regions, and degrees of latitude—the HBC found itself well situated to meet the needs of an increasingly active scientific establishment. HBC lands presented a cornucopia of biological, geological, and ethnographic finds for Enlightenment- and industrial-era scientists to feast upon; they only needed the support of the HBC, be it through transport, collection, or direct assistance, to accomplish this.

And, throughout the majority of its history, the HBC did just that. From the company's directors down to local post managers, most members of the HBC welcomed the ability to assist scientists in their studies. Such assistance ranged from sending specimens back to London museums for study, logging meteorological and astronomical data, providing guides and escorts in the untrammelled Canadian wilderness, or paying the transportation costs for independent cartographic and geographic expeditions. While some directors or factors

may have been more avid in their support than others, Binnema shows how the HBC generally cultivated collegial and professional relationships with the formal and informal scientific communities.

One would assume, correctly, that the HBC viewed this relationship as more than just run-of-the-mill philanthropy; the company had to have its own interests in mind. It did, but did not pursue them in the expected way. As Binnema notes, the HBC stood to gain little from a full cartographic rendering or biological charting of its territory. Opening its land to prying scientific eyes would only serve to entice future visitors and settlers, disrupting the HBC's trading monopoly.

Therefore, the HBC played a dangerous (for it) game: cultivating scientific relationships in order to garner *public tribute*. As Binnema notes, this proved to be "the most important and obvious benefit that the HBC enjoyed because of its support of science" (p. 11). During the mid-eighteenth century, the directors of the HBC realized that its position as a monopolistic joint stock company stood to become more tenuous as settlers expanded westward, and smaller businesses derided the government about the HBC's antiquated economic preference. The directors believed that by cultivating the HBC's image as a virtuous patron of the sciences, they could divert attention away from any political or economic issues surrounding its monopolistic origins. Thus, the HBC would benefit from scientists offering it tribute, oftentimes in an acknowledgement in a published work of scientific observations, but at times to include formal recognition in front of scientific bodies and at museums. This recognition bolstered public opinion of the HBC, allowing it to maintain its rights in central and western Canada long after the British government curtailed the legal and economic prerogatives of most other joint stock companies.

Almost unintentionally, *Enlightened Zeal's* narrative encapsulates one of the most important changes in modern intellectual history: the profes-

sionalization of science. As Binnema states, "the HBC's largest contributions to science were made possible by the development of extensive networks that linked metropolitan and elite scientists, company directors, and HBC officers in North America ... in mutually beneficial and satisfying relationships" (p. xvi). This notion of a transatlantic network linking together individuals sharing scientific data and knowledge is important, particularly if we recognize that it only exists if a common professional respect is shared among all of the parties. Once this deteriorates, this network collapses. In terms of the HBC, this dissolution did not come about due to rancor or infighting. Rather, the nineteenth century's tendency towards scientific specialization and professionalization left little room for "lay" or "hinterland" scientists--those lacking formal education or credentials. In the early periods of the HBC's scientific cultivation, scientists viewed district factors and employees as reliable sources of empirical data. As the years progressed, scientists foreswore this relationship in favor of direct observation and collection. Professionalization removed a crucial link in the networks of scientific study, centralizing scientific authority in formal institutions, predominantly in London, and later in Toronto.

This brings up another issue. Binnema skirts the conflicts presented by combining interested corporations with disinterested science. It could be that the HBC never matured to the point where its cultivation efforts suppressed empirical data that ran counter to the company's goals. In fact, the opposite proved to be true. The HBC allowed the Canadian Society, a proto-Canadian nationalist intellectual group, to survey several areas within the company's territorial boundaries during the mid-nineteenth century. While the accounts published after the surveys provided more bombastic boosterism than data description, these accounts helped lead the charge for the eventual incorporation of HBC land into a continental Canadian nation. If the HBC had spent the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cultivating scientists that helped

popularize a narrative that derided settlement plans in western Canada, the expansionist narrative could have been stymied by a combination of public tribute, HBC backing, and narrative formation. Binnema may rightly claim that the HBC never dallied in “truth-making,” but the nature of its role, particularly in the context of scientific professionalization and centralization of authority, creates an interesting dynamic outside the scope of *Enlightened Zeal*, but well within the concerns of the present day.

Such questions should help position Binnema and *Enlightened Zeal* at the nexus of two emerging historical trends: capitalism studies and network integration. By examining the reach of the HBC into the burgeoning scientific communities of the post-Enlightenment era, Binnema provides a blueprint for future studies examining interested entities and the (notionally) disinterested practice of knowledge creation. Binnema argues that joint stock companies may provide the perfect vehicle for future study. “The inherently complex and ambiguous position of chartered monopolies,” he states, “vis-à-vis the governments that chartered them and the nations in which they were based also makes them excellent vehicles for better understanding the complex interactions among metropolitan, elite scientists and scientific organizations, chartered corporations, their directors, and colonial employees, and the indigenous people that inhabited chartered corporations’ overseas territories” (p. 6). *Enlightened Zeal* shies away from passing moral judgment upon the HBC and its cultivation of science; future historians may forego Binnema’s blueprint, instead analyzing the implications of corporations and their interested support of science. One need only chart the linkages between fossil fuel companies and scientists and institutions that denigrate climate change data to see the import of this analysis.

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**Citation:** Andy Forney. Review of Binnema, Theodore. *Enlightened Zeal: The Hudson's Bay Company and Scientific Networks, 1670-1870*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. July, 2015.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=43361>



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