
Richard Dunn
En somme, l’auteur a effectué une excellente biographie sociale de son personnage pour lequel il a toutefois été clément, sans doute par emphatie, par rapport à certaines de ses actions moins avisées comme son conflit d’intérêt potentiel concernant le contrat de construction accordé à son frère par les commissaires de la CECM, son cumul de fonctions et de salaires auprès d’un même employeur et, enfin, sa pension perçue comme ancien enseignant alors qu’il était encore à l’emploi de la CECM.

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In his introduction to Enlightened Zeal, Ted Binnema notes that there has to date been no comprehensive treatment of science undertaken in the context of the chartered monopolies. This broad survey of science in the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), specifically of the science that made it to outside recipients and the public domain, is an attempt to put that right, and the HBC is a perfect subject, given the extensive surviving archive on which Binnema draws.

Binnema’s central argument is that ‘the HBC’s large 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 (and to a lesser extent, HBC labourers and aboriginal people) in mutually beneficial and satisfying relationships’ (xvi). The narrative identifies three broad periods. In its first century, the HBC made scant contribution to public knowledge and could even be a barrier to the dissemination of information. Minor exceptions came in efforts to locate the Northwest Passage and the work of individuals such as Christopher Middleton. This changed after the company became involved in the scientific activities surrounding the 1769 Transit of Venus. Henceforth, being seen to collaborate in scientific undertakings—exploration, surveying, cartography, and the observational sciences (astronomy, meteorology, natural history and ethnology)—became important to the company and its public image. This might include facilitating travel, collecting and transporting specimens, and allowing or encouraging company officers to participate.

A second turning point came with the merger with the North West Company in 1821, ending decades of fierce territorial competition. Thereafter, the HBC and its officers productively collaborated and fed into European and American scientific discussions. The company supported Royal Navy explorations into the Arctic and in search of the Northwest Passage, as well as launching its own expeditions, including those of John Rae. It joined the “magnetic crusade,” helping Toronto become an important scientific node following the foundation of the Magnetical and Meteorological Observatory. It also supported Paul Kane’s attempts to document “western Indians” and the collecting activities of the Smithsonian Institution, which became the foremost repository of scientific knowledge about HBC territories.

Binnema is keen to emphasise throughout that “science is driven by interests” (294), with those of the HBC focusing on corporate image in its attempts to combat ongoing hostility towards monopolies. In this context, scientific practitioners’ published praise for the company’s support could be more powerful than any lobbying or advertising. Scientific collaboration could, however, be a double-edged sword: come the nineteenth century, the HBC found itself embroiled in the expansionist movements developing in America and Canada. Enlightened Zeal has much to say about the history of Canadian science and the emergence of Canadian national identity, and about broader themes too: commercial interest as a driver, and concomitant arguments for sharing or hoarding knowledge; the tension between exploration and science on expeditions purporting to undertake both; the importance of individual (rather than corporate) interest and participation. On this last point, Binnema notes that, “[s]cientific networks were maintained by the self-interest of the many that were involved in their intricate connections, but really flourished when sophisticated and empathetic scientists stirred the scientific enthusiasm of lay collectors” (289). He also notes that HBC territories were generally conducive to science: relatively free of disease, with a climate that was not too problematic for deploying instruments, and which provided an ideal laboratory for low-temperature investigations.

This is self-consciously a big picture narrative, with Binnema citing John Pickstone’s Ways of Knowing (University of Chicago Press, 2000) in support. With this in mind, I felt that the narrative could more explicitly acknowledge the ways in which scientific practice changed over the period covered. Doing science in the late seventeenth...
By Robert Craig Brown. Toronto: University of
Toronto Press, 2013. 352 p., notes, bibl. ISBN 978-1-
44264-51-34, $46.50).

The University of Toronto and its constituent
elements have been the subject of several historical
studies in recent years. The centrepiece is Martin
Friedland’s The University of Toronto: A History,
a splendid comprehensive history that both
synthesised existing research and stimulated
further research. But works also have appeared
on the university’s individual colleges, faculties,
and departments, including this reviewer’s history
of its engineering faculty, The Skule Story, done
on conjunction with Friedland’s book. There is
no clear explanation for this new work. It has
not been funded or promoted by any agent.
Perhaps just the absence of histories about such
an important public institution has spurred it
along, though one suspects the growing number
of retired university academics is a factor as well. In
any case, here is another contribution.

“Craig” Brown, as he was always known, was
among the earliest of the new generation of
Canadian historians at the University of Toronto.
An American, from western New York, who did
his undergraduate degree at the University of
Rochester, Brown came to the University of
Toronto for graduate studies in the late 1950s and,
studying under Donald Creighton, completed his
PhD in 1962 with a dissertation on Canada-US
relations. He was appointed to the teaching staff of
the History department a few years later, and there
he remained, advancing through the ranks and
serving in various administrative posts until his
retirement. Essentially a liberal humanist, with an
inclination for portraying the big picture, Brown
is perhaps best known as co-author, with Ramsay
Cook, of Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed,
one of the better, and still quite useful, volumes
in the Canadian centenary series, but his history
of Robert Borden is also well regarded, and
the Illustrated History of Canada, which he edited,
remains a respected, and good-selling, popular
history.

It is hard to say exactly what this book is about.
At first glance one might call it a history of the
university’s Faculty of Arts and Science, but on
second glance one will see that the word “faculty”
is absent from the title, probably because from
1853 to 1901 there was no Faculty, per se, as the
teaching staff all belonged to individual colleges.
So the book is actually about “Arts and Science”
in the generic sense, rather than as a formal
institution—although this leads to confusion
since much of it is in fact about the Faculty as an
institution. Also problematic in definitional terms
is that since teaching and research in “arts and
science” are the university’s fundamental purpose
the history of those two words is essentially the
history of the university. And sure enough for
maybe its first two-thirds the book is little more
than a retelling of the standard, chronological
narrative of the University of Toronto’s history
—founded as King’s College, reconstituted as
University College, amalgamated with the religious
colleges, reconstituted again with professional
faculties, and on into the world wars, the influx of
veterans, and the great postwar expansion. One
reads about the 1890 fire, the 1911 looking over of
British historian Lewis Namier, the 1930s struggles
with Frank Underhill, and many other such events,
most of which are well covered in Freidland’s
history—which is often cited as a source.

Yet this lack of originality is not a significant
shortcoming, at least not to this reader. Brown
writes clearly and insightfully, often connecting
events at the university with events in the world
around it, and in doing so tells the story in an
engaging, readable manner. By no means is the
book entirely devoid of original observations or
comments; his frequent inclusion of professors’
salaries and student fees is intriguing, as is his
critical portrayal of physicist J.C. McLennan in