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## Review of *Eighteenth-Century Naturalists of Hudson Bay* By Stuart Houston, Tim Ball, and Mary Houston

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**Eighteenth-Century Naturalists of Hudson Bay.** By Stuart Houston, Tim Ball, and Mary Houston. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. xviii + 333 pp. Illustrations, color plates, tables, appendices, notes, references, index. \$49.95 cloth.

*Eighteenth-Century Naturalists of Hudson Bay*—by Stuart and Mary Houston, veteran Saskatchewan ornithologists and historians of northern Canadian exploration, and climatologist Tim Ball—provides a welcome, colorful addition to McGill-Queen's University Press's thirty-four-volume Native and Northern Series.

The 1670 Crown charter to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) granted a vast trading territory including substantial parts of the northern Canadian Plains and a portion of North Dakota and Minnesota. Furs were brought from a network of posts for shipping out of Hudson Bay, primarily at Fort Churchill and York Factory. Most of the posts and their commercial activities were outside of the Great Plains, although Cumberland House in Saskatchewan has figured prominently in Plains history.

HBC trading activity developed coincidentally with the surge of European exploration and the burgeoning interest in the systematic study of natural history. The HBC encouraged its personnel to participate in these world-wide projects in mapping, documenting, and collecting fauna and flora, in recording the customs and traditions of Native people (on whom the isolated HBC personnel were heavily dependent), and in making astronomical and meteorological observations. The astonishingly rich records and collections now in the HBC Archives in Winnipeg are a unique treasure, not only for historical studies but also for researching new problems such as climate warming.

After a brief summary of the development of HBC activity in North America, the authors provide separate chapters on eight HBC employees who engaged in substantial investigations or collections in natural history, particularly ornithology, and made systematic records in meteorology, astronomy, and the evaluation of new instruments. The skillful portrayal of the differing personalities and styles of these spirited individuals is one of the strong points of the volume. The authors effectively show the lasting importance of the work done on the margins of fur trading in a variety of ways, by including illustrations and copies of original pages from traders' records, along with an assortment of lively anecdotes, and a nice selection of accounts, such as the first determination of the freezing point of mercury. The hundred pages of appendices are about as varied as I've ever seen. They cover sailing dates, the provenance of the journals, Cree names recorded for

species, the fascinating story of how HBC fur records contributed to ecological theory by revealing animal population cycles, and (my favorite) an account of how the European demand for swan quills for writing instruments almost led to the extermination of the trumpeter swan. **Greg Michalenko**, *Environment and Resource Studies, University of Waterloo*.