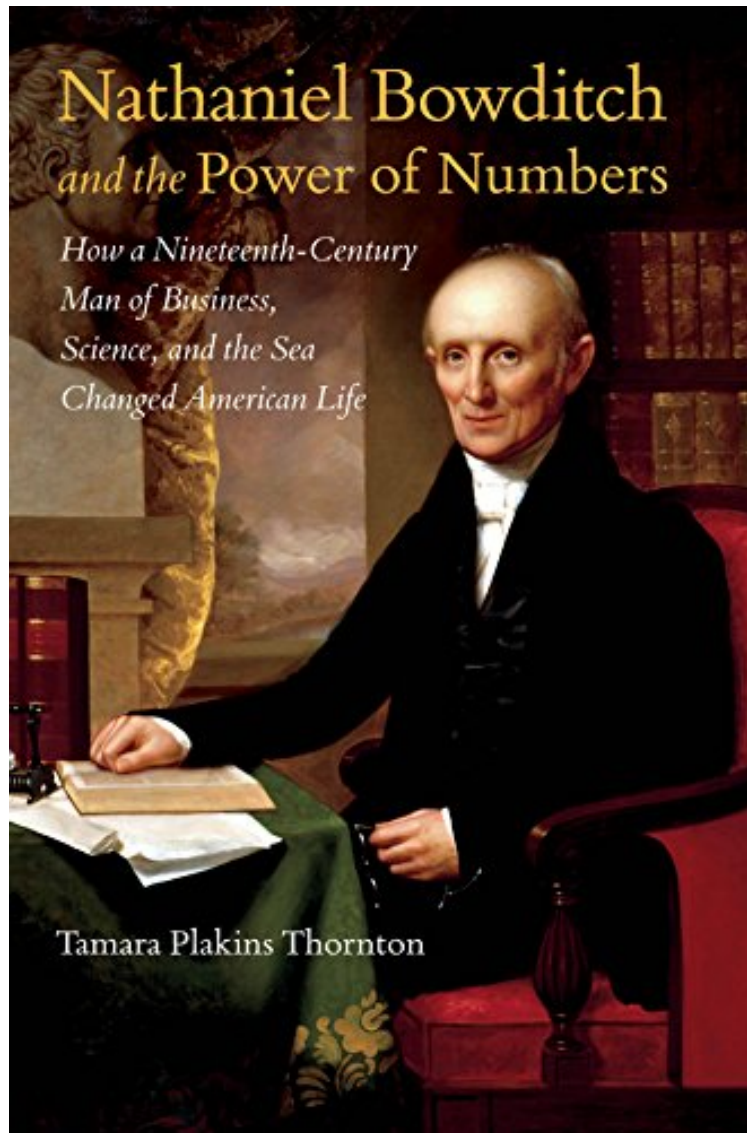


[Download] Nathaniel Bowditch and the Power of Numbers: How a Nineteenth-Century Man of Business, Science, and the Sea Changed American Life

## **Nathaniel Bowditch and the Power of Numbers: How a Nineteenth-Century Man of Business, Science, and the Sea Changed American Life**

*Tamara Plakins Thornton*

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**Tamara Plakins Thornton : Nathaniel Bowditch and the Power of Numbers: How a Nineteenth-Century Man of Business, Science, and the Sea Changed American Life** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Nathaniel Bowditch and the Power of Numbers: How a Nineteenth-Century Man of Business, Science, and the Sea Changed American Life:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. no one has ever thought that this might be a useful question--this is a must read

**By Customer**  
A lovely read, meticulously researched and important. For any one interested in how ideas and mathematics of navigation and business might fit together--ok, no one has ever thought that this might be a useful question--this is a must read. An intellectual biography with a difference.

**3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.**

**One of Our Many Unknown Heroes**  
**By Randy Sales**  
This biography does two things very well: 1) It gives us a believable window into typical lives in the years between the American revolution and civil wars, and 2) It brings to light an individual that is not well known today but still of significance to all of us for multiple reasons. Starting with category two, I hope this is a new genre of biography: less known figures that make up the fabric of our times by contributing key practices and principles, without necessarily being political lights, yet being bright enough to illuminate the communities they inhabit. Most of us have no idea who Nathaniel Bowditch was, I certainly didn't. But the big and little names of his time knew him and of him. And he affected the lives of many, by his writings and translations, and his impact on how business is organized and overseen to provide transparency and integrity in deals, asset management and investments. He kept his honor and integrity intact through many opportunities to excel financially by doing otherwise. He held family and community close, expecting much of all, especially himself. He also knew how to laugh and play and allow others to be different while still maintaining strong and well supported opinions. Most of our biographies are about our heroes, those that stand out because of politics or business. This one could be about you or me. For every hero we read about, there are hundreds that followed their dreams and were a blessing to others, staying below the radar and yet affecting and inspiring many around and above them. Without the environment, infrastructure and integrity these many unknowns contribute, there would be no place we could recognize as our world today. We all could grow and be encouraged from knowing about more of these unknown heroes. My hope is that this book would add to the trend of teaching and learning about those individuals that feel more approachable than our heroes and that offer significant insight and encouragement in how to live lives that make a difference and leave a trail of truth that others can conceive of as possible for themselves. Regarding category one, I've read many books about the two wars mentioned, and several about the period between, but most history is about war and politics, filled with times of extremity and personalities most of us only see on TV nowadays. Getting to hear about families and individuals that lived "normal" lives, before steam and electric power, makes it possible to imagine living in that world. These types of stories restore value and significance to ordinary lives and living, which is where the majority of us will live our lives and leave our legacies. Without taking from the value of our heroes, this book adds to the value of the rest of us. Highly recommended.

**1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.**

**A Good Story About a Rock Star of Early America**  
**By Spoon**  
As a former naval officer and navigator, I'm pretty familiar with Nathaniel Bowditch's contributions to the art and science of navigation (his "New American Practical Navigator" is still being updated and published). This book, though, goes into depth about Bowditch's early life in and around Salem, Massachusetts in the late 1700s and his career through the early 1800s. Bowditch showed talent early on in mathematics and languages, eventually working a number of apprentice jobs for his extended Salem family. He devoured any book he could get and invented innovative ways to do everything from keeping a proper shipping log, keeping financial books for his Uncle's chandlery, to a simple way to navigate around the world. By the time he was 19, he was a polymath making voyages to the Indian Ocean to help trade with French merchants and inventing new ways to keep the books and determine insurance requirements. This book nicely captures the feel of a major shipping port during and after the Revolutionary War. Most of the families had been there for a century and most were related to each other, which greatly helped young Nathaniel. By the time he was 30 he was a rock star of his time, eventually founded a number of companies that still exist today, and was inducted into numerous scientific and learned societies throughout the US and Europe. His personal library (donated to the Boston Public library after his death) was larger than the one Thomas Jefferson used to found the Library of Congress. I love reading biographies of lesser known men and women, and for most people Bowditch is certainly a lesser known icon of American history. The author has done a good job of telling his story here and it is recommended. It's not a quick read, but at only 250 pages for the meat of the book (the rest being references and bibliographies) it won't take long to go through. Only complaint is a number of editing errors in the book, but nothing major.

In this engagingly written biography, Tamara Plakins Thornton delves into the life and work of Nathaniel Bowditch (1773-1838), a man Thomas Jefferson once called a "meteor in the hemisphere." Bowditch was a mathematician, astronomer, navigator, seafarer, and business executive whose Enlightenment-inspired perspectives shaped nineteenth-century capitalism while transforming American life more broadly. Enthralled with the precision and certainty of numbers and the unerring regularity of the physical universe, Bowditch operated and represented some of New England's most powerful institutions; from financial corporations to Harvard College; as clockwork mechanisms. By examining Bowditch's pathbreaking approaches to institutions, as well as the political and social controversies they provoked, Thornton's biography sheds new light on the rise of capitalism, American science, and social elites in the early republic. Fleshing out the multiple careers of Nathaniel Bowditch, this book is at once a lively biography, a window into the birth of bureaucracy, and a portrait of patrician life, giving us a broader, more-nuanced

understanding of how powerful capitalists operated during this era and how the emerging quantitative sciences shaped the modern experience.

An excellent survey of Bowditch's life, including his family background, childhood, marriage, and children, as well as the opportunities and choices that defined his career.--*Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Strongly recommended [for] anyone with an interest in the history of early America and the history of navigation and science in the early nineteenth century. . . . An excellent biography.--*NavList* Sheds a striking light on the science and activities of the early United States, and therefore is an important contribution to our historical understanding.--*Nautical Numbers* This is an outstanding book, and the author's research and writing are excellent.--*Diary of an Autodidact* Thornton's biography of Bowditch is remarkably fluid and her rich narrative profiles the social, economic and cultural issues that surrounded this extremely complicated man. . . . Give[s] the reader a probing, thoughtful, descriptive work about an unorthodox, quasi-genius Yankee.--*The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* The work is insightful in the manner in which it connects Bowditch's life and work to the rise of bureaucracy and capitalism in the US. . . . It deserves a presence in all libraries. Recommended.--*Choice* A real pleasure to read. . . . Thornton writes beautifully and uncomplicatedly about subjects that are neither beautiful nor uncomplicated. She breathes life and excitement into ledger books, forms, and actuarial tables and paints vivid portraits of corporate board meetings.--*American Historical* This recommended biography rediscovers an eccentric who was key in improving several emerging industries. Readers of early American history will find a rich story that moves between New England high society and the founding of the natural sciences.--*Library Journal* [Thornton] describes in an enjoyable way the lifestyle and society of Salem, at that time a wealthy port town, second only to Boston in New England.--*International Journal of Maritime History* An intelligent and reliable source of accurate information and an often charming account of a remarkably gifted mathematician/bureaucrat who rebuilt American corporate practice on strict mathematical principals.--*Isis Journal* A far more sophisticated account of a diverse career than has been available previously, offering a more plausible account of a man driven by number and showing how this played out in different spheres.--*Mariner's Mirror* Shows Nathaniel Bowditch as [a] business innovator. . . . [and] is a portrait of Salem during its golden age.--*Salem News* I loved this book from beginning to end. Well written, well argued, well organized, thoroughly researched, interesting, and thought-provoking, Tamara Thornton writes with complete command of both her immediate subject, Nathaniel Bowditch, and all the larger issues surrounding his life.--Sharon Ann Murphy, Providence College Thornton tells a fascinating story with considerable grace, and her conclusions make a significant contribution to the issue of social, economic, and cultural transformation in the early nineteenth century. Nathaniel Bowditch and the Power of Numbers is, among other things, a fluent biography of a significant if curious American public figure who possessed a broad splash of eccentricity that any reader would enjoy encountering.--Daniel Vickers, University of British Columbia About the Author Tamara Plakins Thornton is professor of history at the State University of New York, Buffalo.