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*The role of Latin in the Moravian world of the early Americas*

This is an exciting and opportune time for reassessing the role of Latin in the Moravian world of the early Americas. Recent work by Keeline, McManus (2019), and Palmore (2026) has demonstrated the importance of the creative use of the Latin language for 18th -century Moravian communities, but many stones remain unturned. After providing an overview of the current state of the field, this presentation aims to address a central question: what was motivating Moravians in the Americas to write in Latin? For some, the answer is surely nostalgia: composing occasional poetry in Latin continued an academic game that had begun in classrooms at Jena and Halle. For others, Latin was a common language that both transcended cultural boundaries (cf. Erben 2012) and also engaged in dialogue with the past.

In addition to these somewhat specious answers, I will demonstrate how Moravians in Pennsylvania (and perhaps North Carolina) used Latin as a tool to build social and intellectual capital with one another, especially within the *Schreibercollegium*. This was certainly the case for at least some of Wedsted's compositions, particularly those he addresses to more accomplished Moravians like Peter Böhler or Ludwig von Zinzendorf himself. Here and there in his Latin poems, Wedsted is explicit about some implicit Moravian hierarchies: in one poem, for instance, he expresses his joyful surprise about an unexpected invitation to a *Poeten Liebesmahl* that he received in person from August Spangenberg in 1755.

Yet compared to his language-focused peers, there is something peculiar about Wedsted's continuous production of occasional poems in Latin (and even German) that suggests he struggled with the expectations of Moravian life on the Pennsylvania frontier. A few occasional poems among members of the *Schreibercollegium* demonstrate the point: while Wedsted composed a 1756 birthday poem for Christian Seidel in Latin, Fabricius the year prior had addressed a birthday poem to Seidel in Delaware with an interlinear English translation. There are, in fact, no present instances of any material to or from Wedsted written in an Indigenous language. Wedsted had arrived in Bethlehem with fanfare about his language abilities, but perhaps his classical learning did not translate to the new world as easily as was hoped. For Wedsted, Latin was a familiar refuge.

What is true for Wedsted, however, cannot be true of another prolific Moravian Latin poet, Matthew Hehl. Wedsted addressed two of his lengthiest and most complex Latin poems to Hehl, and Zinzendorf, in a Latin poem he wrote for Wedsted, classed Hehl among early Christian Latin poets like Ausonius and Prudentius. Hehl's own accomplishments in the Moravian community left him with very little to prove to his peers, but he continued writing in Latin until the end of his life. Original archival work on Hehl is ongoing, but at present there are four Latin poems that showcase Hehl's style. I will close with a comparison of Wedsted's and Hehl's motivations and accomplishments as Latin poets.

Works Cited

- Keeline, T. and S. McManus. 2019. "Aenigma omnibus: The Transatlantic Late Humanism of Zinzendorf and the Early Moravians," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 82: 315-356.
- Palmore, A. 2026. *The Latin Poems of Christian Wedsted*. Bloomsbury.
- Erben, P. 2012. *A Harmony of the Spirits: Translation and the Language of Community in Early Pennsylvania*. UNC Press.