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*Remembering Gnadenhütten: Painful Histories and Public History*

This presentation will focus on the Day of Remembrance, held annually since 2017 on March 8th, commemorating the 1782 Gnadenhütten Massacre, in which 96 Mohican and Delaware residents, most of them baptized members of the Moravian Church, were murdered by members of an American militia. In the three years I have attended (2024-2026), there has been a growing number of descendant attendees from the five primary Munsee and Mohican communities: the Stockbridge Munsee community of Wisconsin, the Delaware Nation of Oklahoma, the Delaware Tribe of Oklahoma, the Delaware Nation at Moraviantown of Ontario, and the Munsee-Delaware Nation (also of Ontario).

My paper analyzes public addresses delivered at the ceremony over three years, contrasting the message of local, non-Native community leaders — which closely echoes the 1872 obelisk's inscription, “Here triumphed in death 90 Christian Indians” — with the addresses of descendant community members, which emphasized renewing, forging, and preserving relationships, with fellow Munsee communities, with ancestors, with the local community, and with generations to come. The obelisk's language fixes the massacre's meaning, like a butterfly pinned under glass, while the descendant addresses model a different relationship to a painful history — one that holds multiple, evolving meanings at once, and treats that multivocality as the mechanism by which community is forged and sustained. I argue that this approach to painful histories offers an important model that may be capable of challenging triumphalist narratives without resorting to new orthodoxies.