The Neo-Latin poetry and prose from North America have already been well surveyed. Drawing on recent historical work, I propose instead to study the place of Neo-Latin writing in the broader

---

1 I am grateful to many scholars for their generous help: Kevin Chang, Anthony Grafton, Jaap Jacobs, Thomas Keeline, Donna LaRue, Stuart McManus, John Pollack, Michele Valerie Ronnick, Peter Schineller SJ, Michael Suarez SJ, Françoise Waquet offered crucial advice on many points; Joyce Chaplin, Caroline Winterer, and Jan Ziolkowski kindly made detailed comments on a draft.


---
history of attitudes toward Latin and the classics in North America (excluding Mexico, which follows the pattern of Spanish cultural assimilation best treated alongside Latin America).³

Latin culture arrived in North America with the first colonists who, in seeking to build a new society there, brought with them conscious aspirations and unconscious habits of mind, both of which assumed an important place for Latin. In imitation of Europe, for example, most American colleges focused on a classical curriculum, from the first institutions founded in 1636, to the 560+ in existence by 1870. In North America, mastery of classical culture and of Latin also served unique purposes, given the challenges of transplanting European culture to an environment generally considered wild and inferior in every respect to its principal parent countries (i.e., until the late nineteenth century: Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands). Knowledge of the classics was used to dispel the criticism of the colonies emanating from Europe, which bemoaned their low levels of culture and morality; furthermore, references to ancient political models offered valuable support for a new republic lacking in traditional sources of authority.

At the same time, however, the development of classical culture faced special difficulties in North America. Throughout the colonial period classical culture came under sporadic attack from multiple quarters—from Puritans who warned against letting attention to pagan authors detract from biblical study, and from those who advocated practical training and physically productive labour instead of apparently useless classical studies. Few Latin books were printed in

North America; instead Latin imprints were mostly imported from Europe, as was also the case in England. By the mid-eighteenth century, when the colonies had developed a significant cultured elite, the classics were widely available in vernacular translations and Latin had lost much of its status as the language of learning, even in Europe. While the Founding Fathers of the United States regularly invoked classical precedents and quotations and many of them had a classical education, they mostly engaged with ancient texts in translation and did not write in Latin.

During the nineteenth century, explicit and tacit references to antiquity in architecture, political discourse, names and inscriptions, and literature remained frequent, but the new country also generated a growing supply of its own historical episodes and heroes that gradually eclipsed examples from ancient history. Nonetheless classical studies and their teachers accounted for about half of university curricula and faculty until the 1880s. Around that time, in North America as in Europe, classics gradually became a specialised field among many others in the new research universities. American college matriculation requirements in classical languages were dropped earlier than in Europe, between the 1880s and the 1930s. High school instruction in Greek shrivelled promptly, while Latin declined more gradually, but took a steep turn after 1960.

Overall, Neo-Latin writings from North America are relatively sparse and of unremarkable quality; in many instances they were the work of writers educated in Europe (and occasionally of Americans who travelled to Europe). North American Neo-Latin writings

---
postdate the period when new contributions to knowledge were routinely articulated in Latin, and cluster mostly around a few generic or cultural contexts. In universities and schools Latin served as a language of display and instruction. Beyond educational contexts, Latin was a vehicle for solemn records of events both public and private, and was useful even within the American colonies for communicating across language barriers. The official and unofficial activities of the Catholic Church also cultivated the use of Latin, down to 1963. Finally, various individuals in the twentieth century have contributed Neo-Latin poetry and Latin prose translations of vernacular works.

*Neo-Latin in colleges*

The North American colonies appealed to many kinds of religious migrants seeking freedom from constraints or persecution in Europe: Puritans flocked to the New England colonies, Quakers to Philadelphia, Catholics to Maryland; those who did not fit a category represented elsewhere favoured Rhode Island as a rare haven of religious toleration. These religious migrants were generally highly educated: by 1646, for example, one hundred and thirty graduates of Oxford and Cambridge had migrated as Puritans; in largely Anglican Virginia (which, like the Carolinas, especially drew migrants with the promise of rapid wealth through the cultivation of tobacco), more than one hundred clergy had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge or both. The early colleges—Harvard in Massachusetts, 1636; William and Mary in Virginia, 1692; Yale in Connecticut, 1701; the College of New Jersey (later Princeton), 1746; King's College (later Columbia) in New York, 1754—were all founded in order to train Protestant ministers of various denominations (and, in the early days, to evangelise local Native Americans). Despite their geographical and confessional diversity and the generalised use of the vernacular in Protestant
preaching and popular religious instruction, these colleges all followed a similar classical curriculum. In the seventeenth century the requirements to enter Harvard College, for example, called for reading Cicero extempore, ‘speak[ing] true Latin poetry and prose’, and knowing the conjugations of Greek verbs. Entrance examinations took the form of a brief interview with the president of the College.

Maintaining Latin as the language of learning on the edge of the wilderness was clearly not easy. The requirement that Harvard students speak only Latin with tutors and peers even outside class was likely seldom observed, despite exhortations to do so; but the assessment of two Dutch travellers in 1680 that the Harvard students they met spoke no Latin was probably the result of an oral language barrier formed by their different ways of pronouncing the language. Latin was the language of instruction in seventeenth-century Harvard—a language heard in teachers' lectures, spoken in student exercises (like recitations, declamations, and disputations), read in almost every textbook used in the college, and written in the prose and poetry that students composed with the aid of Latin phrasebooks (no written exams were required until the nineteenth century). Some surviving Neo-Latin poems were probably first composed as student exercises, notably at Harvard, including a twenty-four-line Latin elegy and a Greek epitaph on the death of Rev. Thomas Thacher in 1678, composed by the Native American student Eleazar.

---

7 Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism*, pp. 11-12.
In the seventeenth century criticism of the classical curriculum took the form of sporadic resistance from Puritans, who feared that studying pagan authors undermined the single authority of the Bible and put bad examples before the young. This concern had generated justification of such study by Christian teachers of liberal arts in late antiquity, scholastics who built their curricula around Aristotle, or humanists delighted with ancient authors, including their racy bits. The Puritans, seeking to found a uniquely godly community in a new place, appreciated the importance of mastering the biblical languages, including Latin, but some queried with renewed vigour the merits of maintaining the traditional educational focus on pagan authors. John Winthrop (1587-1649), one of the founders and then governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, voiced ‘apprehensions agaynst reading and learning heathen authors’ around 1642, which elicited a reply from Harvard president Henry Dunster (1609-59). But the authorities of Harvard College never wavered from their commitment to the study of pagan authors, following the humanist notion that a classical education was essential to the proper moral development of the young members of the elite.12

Increase Mather (1639-1723) and his son Cotton Mather (1663-1728), both Harvard graduates (and Increase served as president of Harvard 1692-1701) who were also leading Puritan preachers, modelled a solid alliance between their classical education and their Puritan objectives in their multiple writings focused on the success of the Puritan settlement.13 This can


12 Morison, Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century, pp. 174-177; Reinhold, Classica Americana, pp. 116-117, 135

be seen in a Latin epistle by Increase, *De successu evangelii apud Indos occidentales in Nova Anglia epistola*, which was published in London (1688) and Utrecht (1699).\(^\text{14}\) Cotton, on the other hand, wrote in English about the providential mission of the Puritan settlers, their successes, and their continued need for repentance and humility toward God. His copious prose was laced with biblical quotations in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, and with plentiful classical allusions. Cotton opposed reading the classics for frivolous reasons, warning against ‘a Conversation with the *Muses* that are no better than *Harlots’*, and instead put his classical knowledge to the service of religion.\(^\text{15}\) At age thirty-nine, Cotton Mather opened his *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) with a grand echo of Vergil's 'arma virumque cano' (‘I sing of arms and of a man’): ‘I write the *Wonders* of the Christian religion, flying from the Depravations of Europe to the *American Strand’.* The *Magnalia*, published in London due to Mather's lack of confidence in the local printing facilities, is a crucial source of quotations from the Neo-Latin writings of Mather's time (including the Indian student Eleazar's elegy) and was the object itself of six Neo-Latin celebratory odes printed in the volume, the longest of which, in seventy-two hexameters, was composed by the pastor of the Dutch church in New York, Henricus Selijns (1636-1701).\(^\text{16}\)

---


Cotton Mather admired the ‘true, pure, Ciceronian Latin’ of Urian Oakes (1631-1681), born in England and educated at Harvard, who became president of Harvard (1675-1680) after he was chased out of his Church in England for non-conformism. Mather owned copies of Oakes' five commencement orations, though these survive only in copies made in 1709 by a later Harvard president, John Leverett (1662-1728), who copied them carefully in his own hand, probably as an aid to composing his own commencement orations. Oakes followed the usual academic method of weaving into his prose quotations from and allusions to classical authors. Although he complained about many things in his speeches—from the burdens of his office and his ill health to the insufficient support of the community and the general decline of learning—he also made up words and perpetrated ‘a succession of puns and quips that must have brought bursts of laughter from an appreciative audience’ (Morison, 419), and he was much admired as a Latin orator. John Leverett also produced several Latin orations, for Harvard commencements and to welcome a new governor, but he seemed to find the process arduous, generating unused drafts and in the final version borrowing passages from Oakes' and his own earlier speeches. Governors were expected to reply in kind, but 1829 was the last occasion when the Governor of Massachusetts and the President of Harvard addressed each other in Latin.

---


Harvard students produced Latin orations too, such as the salutatory address of 1697 by Elisha Cooke.\textsuperscript{21} A surviving collection of the declamations that students delivered bi-monthly shows Joseph Belcher of the class of 1690 delivering (at least once in the presence of president Leverett) eleven short prose essays in Latin and one in Greek; he declaimed, for example, on ‘Fame’, ‘Poetry’, a ‘Horatian adage’, and ‘The Foulness of Country Life’ (in response to a classmate who had sung the praises of rural life), in generally playful tones.\textsuperscript{22} Declamations were also likely practiced in the early years of the secret societies that dominated student life in colleges from the 1750s to the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{23} But Latin declamation was not always voluntary: in 1824, two students at South Carolina College (founded in 1801 in Columbia SC) were punished for shooting their guns in town by being made to recite from memory fifty lines of the \textit{Aeneid} to the faculty.\textsuperscript{24}

Since Latin was the language of instruction, Latin textbooks were needed in American colleges. Most were European imprints, which migrants brought with them, or which Americans procured through booksellers or other intermediaries. In ethics, for example, Theophilus Golius' \textit{Epitome doctrinae moralis} (1592) was regularly used by Harvard students and recommended by Cotton Mather as late as 1726.\textsuperscript{25} In 1774, an \textit{Ethices compendium in usum collegiorum Americanorum} was published in New York, which was the work of Myles Cooper (1735-1785), an Oxford cleric and school teacher whom the Anglican Church sponsored to come to New York to become president of King's College. Cooper sought to model the future Columbia University

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript {21} Kaiser, ‘Contributions to a Census of American Latin Prose 1634-1800’, p. 171.
\item \textsuperscript {22} Morison, \textit{Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century}, pp. 184-185.
\item \textsuperscript {23} Richard, \textit{The Founders and the Classics}, p. 23; Winterer, \textit{The Culture of Classicism}, pp. 26-27.
\item \textsuperscript {24} Winterer, \textit{The Culture of Classicism}, p. 36
\end{itemize}
on Oxford rather than other American colleges and fostered loyalism at the college, until a revolutionary mob forced him to flee his house and the colonies; his textbook of the previous year was printed but probably hardly ever used.26

Other texts were brought over as manuscripts or compiled by tutors from various sources but never printed. Instead, undergraduates were assigned to make their own manuscript copies from the teacher's exemplar, in multiple installments throughout a semester. Thus, when Charles Morton left the Newington Green Academy for dissenters that he had founded in London and arrived at Harvard in 1686, he brought with him a ‘Compendium physicae’ that he had compiled and taught with in England. Harvard students copied this text from 1686 to 1729 so often that twenty-eight manuscript copies of it still survive. But in keeping with his non-traditional orientation of dissenting education, Morton taught and wrote his textbook on natural philosophy in English (despite the Latin title).27 In it he discussed elements of the new science (Copernicus, Galileo, and Descartes) and also included a section on alchemical transmutation. George Starkey was probably not alone in experimenting with and theorising about alchemy while a student at Harvard in the class of 1646. Born in Bermuda, Starkey left the Boston area for London in 1650; he published in English under his own name, but also under the pseudonym Philalethes ('truth-loving') in English and in Latin, and left many Latin manuscripts.28

26 Raven, ‘Classical Transports’, p. 175; on Cooper see American National Biography Online.
A Latin genre produced in greater abundance than textbooks at American colleges in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the collection of undergraduate theses printed for graduation (following the practice of Scottish universities). The names of the graduating students (usually six to twenty names) were printed on a broadside along with five to ten theses in each of the disciplines (grammar, rhetoric, logic, metaphysics, physics, ethics, and politics).\textsuperscript{29} The idea was that each student should be able to defend any of the theses using syllogistic logic if challenged to do so. In practice, at Harvard for example, one or more designated students would defend specific pre-arranged theses as part of the commencement exercises. Candidates for a master's degree at Harvard were expected to defend publicly printed \textit{quaestiones} in their field at a disputation held two days before commencement. The publication of questions ended in 1820.\textsuperscript{30} In 1885 the Harvard Board of Overseers resolved to allow the president of the university to make his commencement address and to print the programme in the language of his choice. Commencement programmes continued to be printed in Latin through 1943; Harvard diplomas, issued only starting in the nineteenth century, remained in Latin until 1959.\textsuperscript{31}

Kaiser's census of Neo-Latin prose includes many inaugural medical dissertations, starting in 1737; by mid-century they outnumbered any other Neo-Latin prose genre (including the orations, mostly from Harvard, which loomed so large for the earlier years of the census).

\textsuperscript{29} For some examples from the University of Pennsylvania in 1761 and 1763 see respectively http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/pages/index.cfm?so_id=6423 http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/pages/index.cfm?so_id=6424


These dissertations generally took the form of thirty-to-forty page printed octavo booklets outlining a set of arguments on a medical topic, which the candidate likely wrote himself, defended in a public setting, and then published in order to obtain his doctoral degree. Although most of the medical theses in Kaiser's census were published in Edinburgh or Leiden, the students were identified as ‘Americanus’ on the title page—hence their inclusion in Kaiser's census. There were no medical schools in North America until one of these American graduates of the University of Edinburgh, John Morgan (1735-1789), founded the Medical College of the University of Pennsylvania in 1765. The first properly American medical dissertations were published in Philadelphia beginning in 1771, and after 1788, occasionally in a student's hometown (like Wilmington, Delaware). Harvard's medical school was founded in 1782, and its first dissertation was published in 1795. These theses were university exercises, for which Latin was the norm, and the use of the learned language enabled these students and their publications to cross linguistic barriers. Thus, thanks to Latin, Americans in search of a medical education could attend great Protestant universities like Edinburgh and Leiden, whether or not English was spoken there.

*Neo-Latin in schools*

The Latin entrance requirements and Latin-based curriculum of American colleges were sustained by, and in turn sustained, a network of schools designed to prepare students to attend

---

33 Some of the theses are available on ECCO (e.g. Joseph Hart Myers, Edinburgh, 1779) and Early American Imprints (Jonathan Elmer, and Jonathan Potts, Philadelphia, 1771; Henry Colesberry, Delaware, 1792; John Fleet, Boston, 1795). See Ku-ming (Kevin) Chang, ‘Collaborative production and experimental labor: two models of dissertation authorship in the eighteenth century’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 41 (2010), 347–355.
college, in the colonies or in England or Europe, for the elite families that could afford it. By 1650, grammar schools offering instruction in Latin were set up under community or church auspices in Virginia, Maryland, New York, and New England; by 1689 there were six, one, and eleven grammar schools in the first three of those states respectively, twenty-three in Massachusetts, and at least two in Connecticut.  

Latin schools were a major locus of Neo-Latin composition. Students were assigned translations of verse and prose from English into Latin, as well as composition exercises, which have generally not survived. Teachers of Latin composed much of the Neo-Latin poetry of the colonial period—whether to call attention to their skills in order to attract pupils, or simply out of the pleasure of exercising well-honed habits. Many of those who wrote Neo-Latin poems were educated in England and arrived in the colonies as adults. Elijah Corlet (1610-1687), for example, immigrated at age thirty-two and was headmaster of the Cambridge Grammar School (in which capacity he helped Cotton Mather overcome his stutter)—we have two substantial (thirty-to-fifty-line) Latin epitaphs of his. Thomas Makin (1665-1733) taught Latin in England before coming among the early settlers to Philadelphia, where he was named headmaster of the Friends' Grammar School in 1690. He dedicated two odes of praise about his adoptive residence—‘Encomium Pennsyluaniae’ (1728) and ‘In laudes Pensylvaniae, seu descriptio Pensilvaniae [sic]’ (1729)—to James Logan, the best classical scholar of the city. When the second, two hundred and seventy-line poem in elegiac couplets was printed with an English translation in 1797, its editor surmised that Makin wrote ‘chiefly for amusement in his old age etc’. But Kaiser

34 The Dutch in New Amsterdam founded a Latin school, but the Swedish colony in the Delaware River Valley was too short-lived (1638-1655) to form a school, though Queen Christina had granted it the right to. Lawrence Cremin, *American Education. The Colonial Experience 1607-1783* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 182-184.
observes that Makin likely sought to secure ‘some small reward’ from his compositions, given
the poverty of his later years.35

John Beveridge (1703-1767) left Scotland for America in 1752. While a Latin teacher at
the Academy of Philadelphia, he published a collection of Latin poems, which ‘were originally
the effusions of friendship, and the amusement of leisure hours’, followed by some translations
in English verse by his students (and some former students, judging from the title of Rev. Dr. J.
Mayhew) that were variously signed by name or initials only. The two hundred and sixty-six
subscribers listed in the front of the volume account for two hundred and ninety-seven copies, no
doubt enough to fund a small printing of the ninety-eight-page book.36 Many of those to whom
Beveridge addressed his poems were peers who also wrote Neo-Latin verse, including John
Lovell and Nathaniel Gardner, respectively headmaster of the Boston Latin School from 1734 to
1774 and a Latin teacher there, from 1750-1760.37

As at the colleges, the teaching manuals used in the schools were mostly imported from
Europe. The first handbook of Latin used in New England was the English-language Short
Introduction to Grammar (1511) by William Lily, headmaster of St Paul's School in London. It
remained the dominant text until the publication in Boston in 1709 of A Short Introduction to the
Latin Tongue for use in the Lower Forms of the Latin School, being the Accidence ‘Abbridged
and Compiled in that most Easy and Accurate Method wherein the Famous Ezekiel Cheever

(subscriptions, including a number for multiple copies), p. 61, 63. Kaiser, *Early American Latin Verse*, 1625-1825,
pp. 104-119.
taught’. Cheever had died the year before. Born in London in 1614, he arrived in Boston in 1637 and taught for seventy years, as the title page boasted, the last thirty-eight of them as Headmaster of the Boston Latin School. The Accidence, as it was known, went through twenty-three American editions down to 1838. At least Latin did not pose the complication of another alphabet: in 1760 James Otis wrote a work on Greek prosody, but he complained that it could not be printed because ‘there were no Greek types in the country, or, if there were, there was no printer who knew how to use them’. Few aids to classical learning were published in the colonies and those that were printed there were often not highly regarded. One of them, A Latin grammar for the College, published in Philadelphia in 1763, prompted a satiric pamphlet highlighting its one hundred and fifty-one errors. Similarly, in 1815 Robert Finley, a trustee of the College of New Jersey, complained of the low quality of American editions of classical texts: ‘They abound so exceedingly with typographical errors’ that he recommended having at hand a European edition of the same text from which to correct the faulty American editions assigned to the students. One can surmise that it was more difficult for printers to hire competent compositors and proofreaders of Latin in North America than in England or Europe.

Despite the deficiencies of Latin instruction and predictable complaints about a classical education (Henry Adams, for example, thought his Harvard education had left his mind ‘empty’, with the exception of ‘two or three Greek plays’), the experience also left pleasing memories

38 Eliezer Cheever, A Short Introduction to the Latin Tongue, [or] ... Accidence (Boston: Benj. Eliot, 1709); see also Belcher Noyes, The Rudiments of Latin Syntax and Prosody (Salem: Samuel Hall, 1783).
39 Reinhold, Classica Americana, p. 29.
40 Francis Hopkinson, Errata, or the Art of Printing Incorrectly (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1763). In retaliation Hopkinson was prevented from participating in the Commencement that year; Reinhold, Classica Americana, p. 44, n. 35. Also Raven, ‘Classical Transports’, p. 171.
41 Richard, The Founders and the Classics, pp. 22-23.
42 Reinhold, Classica Americana, p. 332.
and skills. John Adams, for example, recounted in his diary (for August 19, 1770) how during an inspection of a lighthouse off Nantasket he and his colleagues from the State House tried to recall a Latin verse couplet that they had learnt at school.\footnote{John Adams, \textit{Works of John Adams} (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1856), II, p. 248, discussed in Nicholas Ostler, \textit{Ad Infinitum. A Biography of Latin} (New York: Walker and Co, 2007), pp. 285-286.} We have reminiscences, too, about the school exercise of capping in Richmond, Virginia, in the 1820s. Capping was a ‘competition in which one person quotes a line of poetry and another is obliged to respond with a line that begins with the final (or in alternate forms, the first) letter of the one just quoted’. Edgar Allen Poe excelled at capping during his years in a Richmond academy, as we learn from the reminiscence of a classmate who was thrilled to have once bested Poe in a contest. We also have a Latin oration written by Nathaniel Hawthorne while a student at Bowdoin College.\footnote{Jan Ziolkowski, ‘Capping verses’, in \textit{The Vergil Encyclopedia} (forthcoming Harvard University Press), who cites John Henry Ingram, \textit{Edgar Allan Poe: His Life, Letters, and Opinions} (London: John Hogg, 1880), pp. 22-23. Michele Valerie Ronnick delivered a paper ‘Concerning Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Latin Composition "De Patribus Conscriptis Romanorum"’ at the American Philological Association, Washington, D.C., January, 1999.}

\textit{Neo-Latin beyond the educational contexts}

For the first one hundred and fifty years, colonists used Neo-Latin poems to participate in the European political culture of obeisance to and celebration of monarchs. Some of this activity was even stipulated in writing. For example, the College of William and Mary was granted twenty thousand acres of land by the British crown on condition of a gift of two Latin poems to be presented to the governor of Virginia on the fifth of November every year (Guy Fawkes Day, which commemorated the failure of the gunpowder plot to assassinate James I in 1605). Only a few of these poems have been identified, all anonymous.\footnote{Kaiser, \textit{Early American Latin Verse}, pp. 153-165.} Harvard College published a one hundred and twenty-one-page volume of Latin and English poems to celebrate the accession of
George III in 1760. Some of the materials for the volume were likely gathered through a contest announced in March 1761 for the best oration, hexameter poem, elegy, and ode in Latin, with six shillings to the winner in each category. The project was prompted by Francis Bernard, who contributed the final poem; he came from England as Governor of New Jersey in 1758 and had just begun his tenure as Governor of Massachusetts (1760-1769). Other contributors included James Bowdoin, who was at the time a wealthy merchant and patron of learning and would later found prizes for Latin and Greek composition at Harvard that are still awarded today, and John Winthrop, professor of mathematics at Harvard, who associated the accession of George III with the transit of Venus of 1761. The preface of the resulting volume started by acknowledging ‘the great disparity between this little seminary and those eminent seats of learning’ (i.e. Oxford and Cambridge which had already published volumes of poems for the occasion) and closed with a plea for ‘Royal Munificence’—to no avail. Even during the Revolution a monarchy elicited Neo-Latin congratulatory poetry from Americans, but it was to the French rather than the English Crown. When a son was born to Louis XVI, a sixteen-page pamphlet appeared in Philadelphia containing two anonymous Latin poems of sixty and two hundred and forty verses celebrating the birth of the new Dauphin—complete with a place for the printer's signature to guarantee authenticity against pirate editions.


In these cases, Latin verse dedicated to European monarchs served to demonstrate the cultivation and competence of a geographical and cultural backwater attempting to gain favour and respect from the metropolis. In more private poems, North Americans who composed in Latin likely sought to confer solemnity and significance to the occasion or experience being described. Most Neo-Latin verse produced in North America comprised short, occasional poems, including dedications and commemorations, as well as elegies and epigrams on death and other misfortunes. For example, James Logan, who received a thorough classical education at his father's school in Bristol, arrived in Philadelphia in 1699 as the secretary to William Penn and became a leading citizen famous for his classical learning; he composed a thirty-line elegy on the death of his infant daughter Rachel in 1723.\textsuperscript{49} Epitaphs long remained a site for Latin expressions, especially when written by or for learned men.\textsuperscript{50} Another example is Benjamin Young Prime, of Huntington, Long Island, who studied at the college of New Jersey and took a medical degree at Leiden, where he composed poems in honour of his teachers, including one John Maltby on his departure to Bermuda, and Aaron Burr [senior] who had taught him in his school in Newark, New Jersey. Prime also composed Latin poetic versions of biblical episodes, such as the fall of Goliath.\textsuperscript{51}

One third of the poetry surveyed by Leo Kaiser was signed pseudonymously or by initials only, while many other items are anonymous.\textsuperscript{52} Many were never printed, but can be found in


\textsuperscript{50} See Leo M. Kaiser, ‘A Sheaf of Latin Epigraphs from Early America’, \textit{The Classical Bulletin}, (Summer 1984), 57-61, and William Thaddeus Harris, \textit{Epitaphs from the Old Burying Ground in Cambridge} (Cambridge: John Owen, 1845)—most are in English, but the epitaphs for learned men, often Harvard affiliates, were in Latin.

\textsuperscript{51} Kaiser, \textit{Early American Latin Verse}, pp. 88-104.

personal papers or commonplace books, such as the neat copy of an anonymous forty-line poem, 
*In obitum Josephi Norris*, found in a later commonplace book. Others were lost, such as 
*Expeditio ultramontana*, a 1717 poem by Arthur Blackamore telling of the expedition led by 
Governor of Virginia Alexander Spotswood across the Blue Ridge Mountains into the 
Shenandoah Valley to foster a settlement there. We know of it only through its English poetic 
rendition by George Seagood, printed in 1729.

Latin composition served a rather unusual purpose for Stephen Sewall (1734-1804). Born 
in York, Maine, he attended Harvard and stayed on as librarian and instructor in Hebrew, 
publishing a Hebrew grammar in 1763. After the death of his wife, Sewall's alcoholism 
warranted his removal from his position by the Harvard Board of Overseers. Kaiser surmises that 
in order to show that his skills were unimpaired, Sewall translated into Latin verse the first 
‘night’ of the best-selling work by Edward Young, *The complaint, or, Night-thoughts on life, 
death, and immortality* (1743), which had already been translated into multiple vernaculars. 
Sewall signed his twenty-page *Nocte cogitata* as ‘America’ and dedicated it to John Hancock, 
president of the American Congress and Governor of Massachusetts. Three years later Sewall 
published, again under the pseudonym America, a short *Carmina sacra*, comprising poetic 
renderings of Psalms 23 and 134 and an excerpt of the *Song of Songs* in Latin, as well as a two-
page ode in Greek. Similarly, translation from vernacular into Latin verse was a retirement 

---

56 *Carmina sacra quae latine graeceque condidit America* (Wigorniae [Worcester, Mass.]: Isaiah Thomas, 1789). Left unpublished at his death were a grammar and dictionary of Syriac and Aramaic.
activity for the abbé Etienne Bernard Alexandre Viel (1736-1821), who was born in New Orleans and educated in Paris as an Oratorian. After working in Louisiana as a pastor between 1792-1812 (because the French Revolution had dissolved religious orders), Viel returned to France where, after suffering a stroke, he devoted himself to translating Fénélon's didactic novel Téléméaque. Viel's Telemachiada comprised a substantial duodecimo of four hundred and forty pages, published in Paris in two editions. Viel also translated the eighth canto of Voltaire's poem celebrating Henri IV; this work was published separately in forty-nine pages, then as part of a volume of Miscellanea latino-gallica along with a few other translations of his.  

In more mundane ways, Latin was a language of communication across different vernacular language communities, both within the colonies and with the European continent. Members of the Dutch community based in New Amsterdam (which the British took in 1664 and renamed New York) used Latin to correspond with English-speakers in the North American colonies. For example, Willem Kieft (1597-1647), one of the leaders of New Netherlands, wrote letters in Latin to the Governors of Massachusetts and Maryland, and Johannes Megapolensis of New Amsterdam wrote in Latin to the Jesuit Simon Le Moyne in New France about theological matters. A century later, in 1744, a Swiss immigrant settled in Georgia, J.J Zubly, published a commentary on I Cor 7:36 (on marriage vs. virginity) in Latin (Charleston, 1775), and then in


German in 1776. The work may have been the grounds on which Zubly was awarded honorary master's and doctoral degrees by the College of New Jersey. Subsequently, Zubly published English sermons and pamphlets about the colonies' relations with England.\(^{59}\) Another highly cultured German-speaking migrant, Francis Daniel Pastorius, self-consciously wrote in English in the large notebook of reflections and observations he drew up for his sons, but adorned his house and the margins of his books with Latin sayings, and corresponded with European and a few American friends in the language of the international republic of letters.\(^{60}\)

Latin also became the international language of botanical nomenclature, thanks to the success of Linnaean classification. Linnaeus identified seven hundred North American species in his *Species plantarum* (1753); North American botanists contributed much of this information, in correspondence with Linnaeus and in conversation with students of his who travelled to America. The longevity of Linnaean nomenclature ensured familiarity with botanical Latin down to the twentieth century, including among women.\(^{61}\)

*Latin in the New Republic*

During the eighteenth century, as ancient authority was challenged in many fields—notably scientific ones—some parents, educators, and political figures called for alternatives to


the classical curriculum in schools. These critics complained that years of learning Latin were ‘unnecessary to most people, Latin being a dead language and spoke nowhere as a Mother Tongue’, and worried that the classical curriculum endured simply out of custom, and at the cost of better instruction in English and in valuable scientific and practical knowledge.\textsuperscript{62} Few of the Founders of the new American state were hostile to a classical education, given the cachet it conferred (Benjamin Rush was the most unrelenting critic). George Washington, for example, who had learnt no Latin, ensured that his stepson and step-grandson learnt enough Latin to be admitted to college.\textsuperscript{63} John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison also cultivated an interest in the classics generated by their elite schooling.\textsuperscript{64} But following recent European trends (such as reforms at the University of Aberdeen where the mediaeval curriculum was completely overhauled, or critiques of classical education by Denis Diderot and other \textit{philosophes}), in 1749 Benjamin Franklin proposed a revised curriculum at the College of Philadelphia, in which English would be the language of instruction.\textsuperscript{65} Many colleges debated the place of the classics starting in 1770s, and at Yale and Princeton English replaced Latin as the principal language of instruction.\textsuperscript{66} Nonetheless, requirements in Latin and Greek for college entrance remained in place, and the Morrell Act of 1869, founding land grant colleges in the rapidly developing mid-West, called for instruction not only in agricultural and technical subjects but also in classics, resulting in strong classics departments in many Midwestern state universities (even down to the

\textsuperscript{62} Reinhold, \textit{Classica Americana}, pp. 118-120.

\textsuperscript{63} John Parke Custis briefly attended King's College and his son George Washington Parke Custis, who was raised by George and Martha Washington after his father's death, attended the College of New Jersey.


\textsuperscript{66} Hall, ‘Learned Culture in the 18th Century’, p. 419.
In the 1820s, in response to significant population growth, the first free public high schools offering a utilitarian curriculum posed ‘the first serious institutionalised challenge to the classical curriculum’.  

Public libraries in established cities generally included a good collection of classical editions formed over time by purchase and bequest. James Logan left his exceptional personal library of twenty-two hundred books, mostly in Latin, by forming an institution for the use of others which was later integrated into the Library Company of Philadelphia, a subscription library that counted nine signers of the Declaration of Independence among its members. In Charleston, South Carolina, when a fire forced the library to be rebuilt from scratch, the town agreed to rebuild the collection of classics, although first priority was given to books in English and those considered of practical utility.

The years preceding and during the American Revolution were the heyday of the American invocation of classical models to justify a republican form of government. Classical pseudonyms were widely used in polemical and political tracts, and a cluster of fundamental Latin legal texts were in high demand in the midst of colonial conflict over the Townshend duties; these new taxes imposed on the American colonies in 1767 triggered denunciations of their legitimacy and growing hostility to British rule. American legal practise borrowed many judicial expressions from Roman law and favoured the citation of legal maxims; some of these

---

69 Pseudonyms included names of ancient figures or abstract Latin terms designating a virtue or an office (e.g. Cato, Candidus, Benevolus, or Censor); see Eran Shalev, ‘Ancient Masks, American Fathers: Classical Pseudonyms during the American Revolution and Early Republic’, *Journal of the Early Republic*, 23 (2003), 151-172, esp. pp. 153, 157. On the demand for political texts, see Raven, ‘Classical Transports’, p. 177.
passed into common usage and remain current, although the use of Latin expressions in legal arguments is now discouraged. One of the first acts of the new state was to name a committee to design a great seal. After six years Congress approved a design that involved three Latin mottos: ‘annuit coeptis’ ('he nodded to the undertakings') from Aeneid ix.625; ‘novus ordo seclorum’ ('a new order of the ages'), loosely based on Vergil's fourth eclogue, and ‘e pluribus unum’ ('from more, one'), which appears only in the Moretum, a poem once attributed to Vergil, to describe the making of ‘a certain sort of savoury dish’.70 New buildings were frequently inscribed with Latin phrases.71 Latin was also used to commemorate early national events, associating the achievements of the new nation with those of much older and more authoritative states. One A.B., for example, composed a poem in honour of Kentucky becoming the fifteenth state of the Union in 1792.72 In 1815, Samuel Wilson of Kentucky composed an ode celebrating the victory of Andrew Jackson against the British at the Battle of New Orleans.73 Some celebratory uses of Latin were ephemeral, like the ‘illumination’ from candles to form letters in the windows of Massachusetts Hall on the Harvard campus, celebrating victory in 1815 by spelling ‘Arma cedant toga[e]’.74

George Washington was the object of two Latin prose biographies published in 1835 and 1836. Only one of these is well studied, the Washingtonii vita by Francis A. M. Glass (1790-


During the nineteenth century Latin was a growth field for two constituencies hitherto mainly denied access to it—women and black Americans. As in Europe, a classical education in the colonies was the preserve of a male elite; through the revolutionary period ‘there was little classical education for women out of fear of virile women’, but that attitude started to change in the 1790s, when a girl’s education was increasingly valued as providing ‘sound companionship’ to her husband and support for the education of her sons. Some three hundred academies for girls were founded in the century that followed, a varying proportion of which offered instruction in Latin.\textsuperscript{78} Women's colleges were founded in the last decades of the nineteenth century and included a Latin requirement (Helen Keller made a braille version of the Latin \textit{Aeneid} to prepare for her admission to Radcliffe in 1900). The feminist and suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who made a point of mastering the traditionally male subjects (including Greek and riding on horseback), was unusually skilled in Latin, and praised Massachusetts Governor John Davis Long on his 1879 English translation of the \textit{Aeneid}.\textsuperscript{79}

Since the days of the early humanists, girls could learn Latin at home, from fathers or brothers or hired tutors; growing up in Barnstable, Massachusetts, Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814), for example, studied alongside her brothers with their tutor, all the while resenting the fact that her brothers would attend Harvard College while she could not.\textsuperscript{80} Indeed, in one wealthy merchant family in Boston, the adolescent daughter of the house taught a slave girl of seven or eight years old to read and write in English and to read Greek and Latin classics by age twelve.

\textsuperscript{78} Winterer, \textit{The Culture of Classicism}, p. 23.
This experience of Phillis Wheatley, who was born in West Africa in 1753 and lived as a slave in Boston from 1761 until she was freed at the death of her master in 1778, was completely exceptional. Given the prowess the girl showed in learning, the Wheatleys supported her work and she published a collection of her English poems in London in 1773. But the death of her master meant the end of that patronage and during the revolutionary war she was unable to get a further volume of poems published. She fell into poverty and died young, in 1784.81

Under ordinary circumstances slaves were forbidden from learning to read and write; the only association with antiquity they might have had was a classical name given them by their master. The most common were Pompey, Caesar, and Cato for men, and Venus for women, but many other classical names were also used. Classical names for slaves were most popular before the Revolution, accounting for up to 24% of male names and 14% of female names, before settling around 10% and 5% respectively after 1800.82 But Phillis Wheatley was not the only exception. The only recorded Neo-Latin writing by an African-American is the work of Francis Williams, born in Jamaica ca. 1690 to a prosperous family who won unusual freedoms. Williams is thought to have received a classical education in England. He inherited wealth in Jamaica but also taught school in Spanish Town. One forty-six-line Latin poem he wrote in honour of the new Governor of Jamaica is recorded in a 1774 History of Jamaica.83 These isolated cases of

---

Latin mastery by people of African descent played an important role in arguments against the assumption of their natural intellectual inferiority.

After the Civil War, a few African-Americans not only acquired a classical education but also became specialists in the field. James Monroe Gregory (1849-1915) studied at Oberlin and Howard University where he became Professor of Latin. William Sanders Scarborough (1852-1926) was born in slavery in Macon, Georgia, of a free father and a slave mother. His mother was allowed unusual privileges and the boy was taught to read and write. After the Civil War, Scarborough moved rapidly through school and attended Atlanta University, then Oberlin College where he earned an M.A. in Classics. Scarborough spent most of his career at Wilberforce University, where he was Professor of Ancient Languages and published *First Lessons in Greek* (1881). He was the fourth black man to join the American Philological Association, of which he was a member for forty-four years.84

Scarborough became a classicist just as the field was becoming professionalised by the rise of the research university and of academic journals and associations. The processes of specialisation and professionalisation eventually cost Latin its place as the unifying foundation of higher learning, but at the same time, a watered-down classicism of names and allusions became more widely diffused across the cultural landscape. Although Jefferson's attempt to coin a variety of classical place names for new states (such as Polypotamia, Metropotamia, and Sylvania) failed, during the nineteenth century Latin was a favourite source for place names, as

---


well as state and university mottos. The bifurcation between a specialised academic study practised at a high level and a diffuse familiarity with a few basics persists still today, when one encounters Latin in inscriptions and names, tattoos and T-shirts, but also in orations at college commencements and in the standard ‘blind text’ used as a placeholder by printers since the early modern period and now in electronic publishing.

The Catholic context

Latin remained in active use longer in the Catholic Church than in the universities, but played a lesser role in North America than in other colonial settings. Some of the earliest Latin writings in America were the Jesuit Relations, reporting from New France on the success of their missions. The Jesuits and other religious orders there made converts among the natives and disseminated elements of Latin liturgy and religious music. The reports from New France were unique among the Jesuit Relations in that they were gathered for publication in short order; the first such collection was published by Franciscus Creuxius as the Historiae Canadensis, seu Novae-

85 Wilbur Zelinsky, ‘Classical town names in the United States’, Geographical Review, 57: 4 (Oct 1967), 463-495, esp. p. 474: counts 2405 names of agglomerations and 690 names of counties. Almost half the state mottos (23 of 50) in the United States are Latin expressions; for a list see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._state_and_territory_mottos (consulted in May 2012). Of 199 American university mottos, the vast majority of which date from after 1800, 141 are in Latin and only 46 in English, according to this list:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_university_mottos#United_States

86 On bifurcation, see Joseph Farrell, Latin Language and Latin Culture from Ancient to Modern Times (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 95. For a site boasting of grammatically correct Latin phrases for tattoos see http://latinforyou.webs.com/latinfortattoos.htm. Starting in 1949 the Harvard University archives include an English translation of the Latin oration delivered at Commencement, indicating that few were expected to understand the oration if it was left untranslated. On the ‘lorem ipsum’ text which is a distortion of a passage from Cicero's De finibus bonorum et malorum, I.32-33, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorem_ipsum.

29
In French Canada, the Catholic Church, which had set up the first schools there during the colonial period, continued to play a dominant role even once public education was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century; its numerous private schools especially emphasised Latin as an aid to understanding the liturgy and a means to identify potential seminarians. Wherever it spread, the Catholic Church used Latin as a language of liturgy, but also of ecclesiastical administration and personal devotion. In the predominantly Protestant colonies of the future United States, Maryland was the only Catholic state, and the first Latin printings in Baltimore were Catholic liturgies, in 1794. The Church also operated on a global scale, and American Jesuits could be posted outside the country. Among the Jesuit poets at the Society's College in Paris, Ludovicus Doissin (1727-1753) was called ‘Americanus’, though his origins were not described more specifically; he published two long poems in Latin, on sculpture and on engraving—Sculptura, 1752 (94pp) and Scalptura (Engraving), 1753 (76pp)—that also appeared in French translation in 1757 and 1753 respectively.

Down to Vatican II (1962-1965), Jesuit or other Catholic seminaries in North America, as elsewhere, operated in Latin at many levels, from formal instruction to administrative documents to the communal settings in daily life. Following the Ratio studiorum of 1599, Jesuit schools

---

90 Raven, ‘Classical Transports’, p. 175.
91 IJsewijn, Companion to Neo-Latin Studies, p. 291.
taught not only Latin but also classical texts; for those planning to enter the Order, seminary instruction involved three years of instruction in philosophy and four in theology, which culminated in oral examinations in Latin on set questions in both fields. Jesuit novices led their communal life in Latin: they spoke Latin at meals and each of them in turn (as manuductor) took on the task of maintaining a carefully handwritten diary of the house activities and devotions. The Jesuits of North America also printed a variety of Latin documents for internal use—lists of houses, of rules, and of members of the order. In 2012 Benedict XVI established the Pontifical Academy for Latin, devoted to strengthening the presence of Latin in the Church.\footnote{For example the Bellarmine College Novitiate Diary, Plattsburgh NY, 1959-1963, can be seen at the Jesuit Archives of the New York Province. I am grateful to Peter Schineller, SJ, for his generous and expert guidance there. Publications include: Consuetudinarium assistentiae Americae Soc. Jesu ad usum nostrorum tantum (Philadelphia: Dolphin Press, 1938), 123 pp; Catalogus provinciae Marylandiae - Neo Eboracensis Soc. Jesu. ineunte anno 1930 (Philadelphia: Dolphin Press, 1929), 160 pp; Consuetudines (New York, 1886), 36 pp. For Benedict's apostolic letter on the topic see http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20121110_latina-lingua_lt.html}

\textit{Modern Latin writing}

Regulations allowed for the submission of Latin doctoral dissertations at many universities until well into the twentieth century. In Europe this possibility appealed to students from countries with low-distribution vernaculars, like Hungarian or Swedish. A few Americans wrote theses in Latin in areas in which a mastery of Latin was assumed. For example, an American student at the University of Paris published a ninety-two-page \textit{thèse complémentaire} on the humanist Ermolao Barbaro in Latin; the most recent Latin PhD thesis at Harvard was submitted in the Department of Classics in 1947.\footnote{For the \textit{thèse complémentaire}, see Trumbull Stickney (1874-1904), \textit{De Hermolai Barbari vita atque ingenio}}
Many of the Latin poets active in North America in the late twentieth century were immigrants from Europe. A Hungarian émigré to the United States in 1878 published under the name Arcadius Avellanus a number of Latin translations of modern vernacular works, including Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Composed by authors of various nationalities, many Latin translations of modern works have been published in the United States, a few quite successfully. *Winnie Ille Pu* (1960), translated by a Hungarian émigré to Brazil, Alexander Lenard, and first published in Brazil at Lenard's expense, stayed on the New York Times bestseller for 20 weeks after its American publication. Terence and Jennifer Tunberg of the University of Kentucky have translated children's books by Dr. Seuss. The motivations are in part pedagogical—to facilitate understanding by reading beloved and familiar works in Latin (just as in Europe classics like Asterix and Tintin have been translated into Latin)—but they are also meant to be playful, for both translator and reader. They form part of a movement to promote spoken Latin in secular, mainly pedagogical contexts.

*Conclusion*

In Spanish America, the Catholic orders established themselves early as the predominant cultural force and Latin as the language of learning, so that Neo-Latin works in print and in

---

94 IJsewijn, *Companion to Neo-Latin Studies*, p. 293.


manuscript—from philosophical treatises to long, descriptive poems—survive in considerable numbers from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century, and in smaller numbers thereafter.97 By contrast, North America was sparsely settled for a long time. The Catholic orders struggled to keep their foothold in New France. In the largely Protestant, largely British colonies, the early universities and preparatory schools, with their imported Latin-based curricula, were the engines of Neo-Latin. They created a cadre of teachers and occasional graduates capable of writing in Latin, who did so for special occasions, solemn or festive, public or private. For American elites who strove for recognition from the metropole, but also sought to maintain their distinctiveness from it (especially after the Revolution), Neo-Latin names, inscriptions, and mottos became an attractive way of displaying their connection to a respected heritage that bypassed contemporary Europe. In the twentieth century, Latin receded earlier in North America than in Europe from educational requirements, but has settled into a steady state since the 1960s, making occasional appearances in mainstream culture, remaining an option in elite schools and universities, and acting as a source of inspiration for a select group of active Neo-Latinists.