

# *Wheelock's Latin Workbook*

By Paul T. Comeau

## **Preface**

This workbook was first published in 1980 as part of the College Outline Series and was intended as a companion to the highly respected *Wheelock's Latin*, by then in its third edition after its initial publication in 1956. The book should not perhaps have been the brainchild of a French teacher with no real credentials in classical languages; and though the venture has enjoyed a modicum of success over more than 15 years and, I believe, been well received in the classical teaching community, I have always felt a certain inadequacy as the author, though always enthusiastic about the endeavor and fully captivated by it.

My initial contact with Latin, as with many of my generation, came through the pre-Vatican II Catholic liturgy in a French-speaking parish as a youngster in the late 1930s. Still vivid are my memories of innumerable Holy Mass or Vesper services recited or sung in Gregorian chant, with much of the text not fully understood. My true introduction to classical Latin and Greek, however, took place on the benches of a typical Quebec boarding school at Joliette, near Montreal, in the early 1940s, where endless hours were spent for more than four years (even on Sundays) translating the ancient languages to and from French, using four-inch thick dictionaries. It was a true "immersion experience" -- although, in today's language-teaching community, that term usually applies more to listening and speaking skills than to the reading and writing skills that were so paramount in those days to the teaching of Latin. When I left Canada in December, 1944, and was drafted into the US. Army only a few weeks later, I truly felt that my exposure to the classical world had ended.

Little did I know at the time that fate would lead me to earn graduate degrees in French at Princeton University, to spend six years on the faculty at the U.S. Air Force Academy, and, upon my retirement from the Air Force in 1975, to qualify for the position of Head of the Foreign Languages Department at New Mexico State University. One of the first requests made by my new Dean of Arts and Sciences, just a few days before the beginning of classes for the 1975-76 academic year, was that I establish a Latin program. Needless to say, I was not at all sure that I was up to the task. Nevertheless, my first action was to obtain and consult all the available bibliographies for Latin textbooks, and then to select several and quickly order examination copies. After a perusal of the four or five best options, it immediately became evident that none matched the thorough coverage, the efficient and logical organization, and the clear and concise explanations of Professor Frederic Wheelock's text, and so "Wheelock's Latin," as everyone called it in those days, literally became part of my life.

Not only did I have to stay ahead of the students, trying to revive grammatical principles which had lain dormant for years in my subconscious, but I also had to accustom myself to comparing Latin words to English, rather than to French. It was truly amazing, however, that paradigms of declensions and conjugations drilled into my memory some 35 years earlier could be successfully recalled. Thus began a new phase of my academic life with Latin, which lasted from the late 1970s through the 1980s. Within a few months of beginning my first course, I felt a strong need for some device to force my students to commit to learning the grammatical elements by illustrating their newly-acquired knowledge in an ordered, concise format, complete with practical exercises. Out of that need, the workbook project was born.

As I look back, I am delighted that so many students of Latin have diligently used and, I hope, benefitted from the first two editions of this *Workbook for Wheelock's Latin*. I wish to reiterate my debt of gratitude to my wife Ruby, to my editors, first at Barnes and Noble and then at HarperCollins, to my many Latin students who patiently suffered through the loose-leaf phase of the project from 1976 to 1979, to my colleagues who worked with the preliminary version in their classrooms at the University of Texas at El Paso and at New Mexico State University, and finally to the staff members who typed and proofread the manuscript. I am especially grateful and indebted to Professor Wheelock, who, though initially reluctant, later agreed to let his outstanding book be "accompanied." My wife and I had the unique privilege of spending a few hours at his lovely country home in New Hampshire as luncheon guests one summer day in 1981, and I often fondly recall the experience to this day.

I firmly believe that the workbook's existence is now at a crossroads. Professor Richard A. LaFleur, a scholar of stature and Head of the Department of Classics at the University of Georgia, has assumed the task of producing this revised and much improved third edition. It will serve as a fit companion for the recently published fifth edition of *Wheelock's Latin*, also revised by Professor LaFleur and the subject of extremely favorable reviews in the classical language teaching community.

When I retired from active teaching as Professor Emeritus of French, I felt that my professional life was, for all intents and purposes, at an end, and that the list of my publications--mainly in French literature and literary history--would stand undisturbed. I am deeply grateful to Patricia Leasure, Executive Editor at HarperCollins, and her assistant Rob Amell for promoting and pursuing this new edition and especially for persuading Professor LaFleur to accept the role of revision editor. The primary objective was to make the subject matter of each workbook chapter agree with the new, fifth edition of *Wheelock's Latin*, and to integrate its new vocabulary into the workbook exercises. Professor LaFleur has done so much more, however, that what had been an adequate work has now become an outstanding one. The Workbook's new editor has been creative and innovative, improving nearly every feature, from the new Latin titles for the sections of each chapter to the redefined objectives (the *Intellegenda*), the recast grammar questions (*Grammatica*), the varied types of drills (*Exercitātiōnēs*), the more challenging practice sentences and reading comprehension items (*Lēctiōnēs*), and the exciting "Word Power" items of the new *Vīs Verbōrum* sections.

This revised workbook is so improved that it should appeal to the harshest critics, should play a capital role in imparting the knowledge of Latin to today's students, and should convince its teachers to consider *Wheelock's Latin* an attractive, indispensable textbook/workbook package. I consider it a privilege to have had the opportunity to collaborate with Professor LaFleur on this new edition, though my personal contribution has been decidedly meager, and I look forward to the continued resurgence of interest in Latin among American students that the new *Wheelock's Latin* is certain to inspire.

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