One recent summer, Political Science Professor Khristina Haddad, a student herself in the Moravian Archives German Script Course taught by Director and Archivist Paul M. Peucker, encountered a poem written in 1755 by Brother Rundt, a Moravian missionary in Pachgatgocch, about the schoolboys back in Bethlehem who copied texts for the missionaries and other congregations. The poem imagines the boys copying and writing with a profound love for words that was characteristic of the early Moravians in America.

Something of their joyful reverence for writing surely has come down through the centuries to our twenty-first century Moravian College. This is apparent, for example, in Professor Haddad’s wish to foster such feelings in her own students. It must have motivated the three students who wrote prize-winning essays during their first-year seminars last fall and the dozens of other students who have competed for the annual FYS Writing Prizes. The Writing Center tutors and faculty members who served as judges also shared in that joy and reverence. Recognizing this intellectual and emotional connection to our eighteenth-century predecessors helps to contextualize these contemporary essays, as well as Moravian’s institutional goal supporting good writing across the curriculum, within a tradition of personal and global communication.

The FYS Writing Prizes themselves follow in a somewhat briefer tradition established by the annual awarding of prizes for the Best Writing 100 Essays, beginning in 1998-1999. Published in print editions for more than a decade, the Best Writing 100 Essays now make way for digital dissemination of the newly prized essays. What would those boys quietly plying their pens and ink in 1755 have thought of this development? What would they have thought of the range of courses from which the eighteen submissions to this year’s competition were drawn? They probably would have felt relatively comfortable in courses such as Medievalism, Self-Discovery, What is Education For?, Random Acts of Compassion, Water in a Thirsty World, and Composing the College Essay. Courses such as Gandhi and Nonviolence, The Body and Science, and Ethical Issues in Healthcare might have challenged them with new information but within familiar conceptual contexts. Imagine their surprise, however, when confronted by History of Rock ‘n’ Roll, The Biology of Love and Sex, and Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics. On second thought, they probably would have fit right in with all of them, writing multiple drafts, offering valuable feedback to each other, and revising their way towards winning essays.

Our prize winners did just that. What is that noise we hear off in the distance but moving closer? Two hundred and fifty-eight years of joyful and reverent tradition. Two and a half centuries of good writing. A boatload of hard-earned and well-deserved applause.