

## Report EAAS Transatlantic Grant 2022

Vincent Veerbeek

Doctoral candidate, University of Helsinki (Doctoral Program in History and Cultural Heritage)

**Host institution:** United States National Archives in Washington, DC

**Dates:** March 9 through April 2, 2023

In March of 2023, I was able to spend three weeks at the United States National Archives in Washington, DC to gather primary sources for my doctoral dissertation thanks to the financial support of the European Association for American Studies. My dissertation studies the use of music as a tool for assimilation in US government boarding schools for Native American children at the turn of the twentieth century. More specifically, my research aims to better understand the central significance of military-style marching bands, as I seek to analyze the origins of these bands at different off-reservation boarding schools during the 1880s and 1890s, and their subsequent evolution. In doing so, I pay particular attention to the experiences of Indigenous musicians both as students and as band directors. Indeed, student musicians frequently went on to have careers leading their own boarding school bands and teaching the next generation, which raises questions about identity formation, processes of assimilation, and the complexities of Indigenous agency within settler-colonial contexts. In order to study the history of these school bands, my research combines different types of sources including student writing and oral histories, as well as official records from federal and local institutions.

The National Archives in Washington hold a major collection of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) records, which include significant material pertaining to my subject matter. After a short visit to this archive in the spring of 2022, I was looking forward to the opportunity to conduct further research there. This time around, I focused on two series within the National Archives collection in particular: “Central Classified Files, 1907-1939,” and “Letters Received, 1881-1907.” With the help of this material, I was hoping to find more details about the marching bands at certain schools and their specific histories, as well as to identify connections between schools, and to locate material pertaining to specific Native American band directors. Despite covering different time periods, the two series complemented each other well, and both provided valuable information that has given me greater insight into the functioning of the boarding school system and its musical organizations, the experiences of important individuals, as well as the connections between music, discipline, and the BIA’s assimilation agenda.

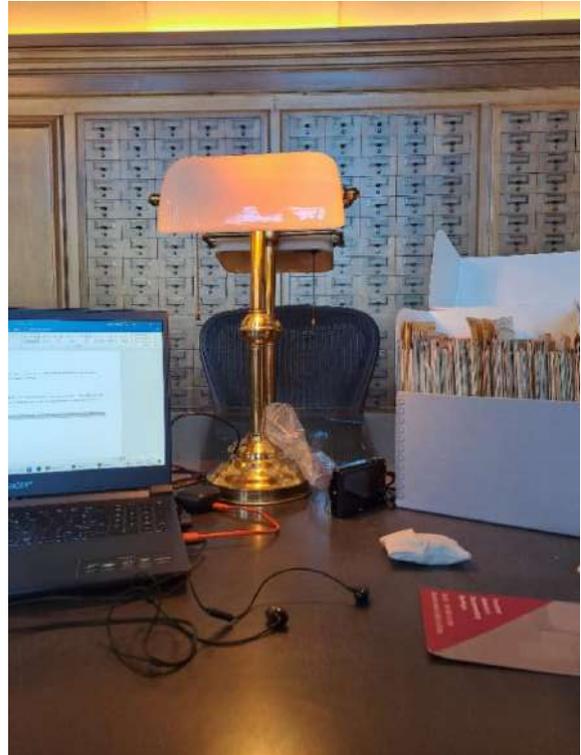
For one, I went through correspondence from the 1890s and 1900s related to some of the Native American musicians who are at the center of my project. In this manner, I was able to find out additional information about ten of them, expanding their biographies and learning more about their careers working for the government and elsewhere. In some instances, I even got glimpses of their worldviews and ideas about topics like education and assimilation. In the process, I occasionally encountered other letters related to music and various aspects of everyday life at these schools as well. These provided further insight into, for example, the rationale for hiring certain types of individuals as school band directors, the purchase of musical instruments, and the ideas that officials had about the significance of music for maintaining discipline. More generally, these letters offered insight into the dynamics between federal officials in Washington, and white and Indigenous employees across the country.

The Central Classified Files are general records related to the various BIA schools and agencies that are organized into thematic categories, some of them related specifically to music. While the material in this series is fairly miscellaneous in nature, and did not contain relevant documents for every institution, I nevertheless came across a number of valuable sources. These included for instance records about music education, correspondence about band performances for the general public (which sometimes led to conflicts with career musicians) as well as inspection reports containing photographs and descriptions of daily life at the schools.

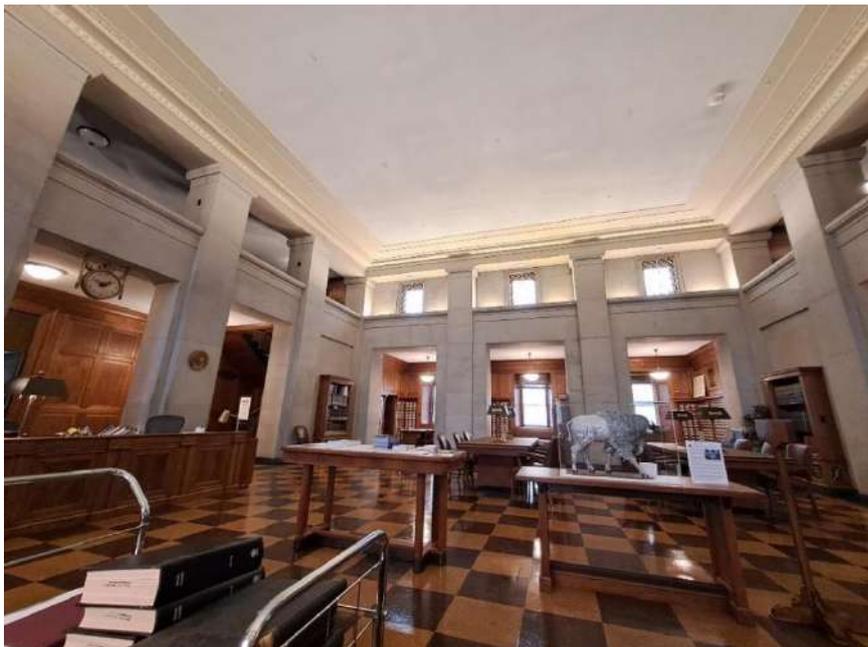
On top of my main research work at the National Archives, I spent two days working with other collections. During my second week, I spent a morning at the Archives Center of the National Museum of American History to look at records from their 'Native Peoples, Musicians and Music Collection.' Most significantly for my dissertation, this collection contains postcards from the turn of the twentieth century with photographs of boarding school marching bands. These provided me with a tangible reminder of the importance that these bands played in creating a public image of the schools and the government's assimilation policies more generally. During my last week in Washington, I also spent a day at the library of the Department of the Interior, where I was able to access material that included both rare scholarly works on boarding school history and published material from the boarding schools themselves, most notably newspapers and other periodicals created by those schools.

I would like to thank EAAS again for helping to make this trip possible, as I was able to collect a considerable amount of material that is vital to the progress of my PhD. A special word of thanks also to the archivists and librarians who helped me at the different institutions I visited. Furthermore, I would like to thank the University of Helsinki Doctoral School for providing additional funding. Finally, I would like to thank everyone else who provided me

with guidance along the way for inspiring and motivating me, and for giving concrete advice on the research work that helped me shape this trip. I am grateful to have had this opportunity and I look forward to incorporating the rich material I collected into my dissertation.



*The National Archives Building in Washington, DC.*



*The library at the Department of the Interior.*