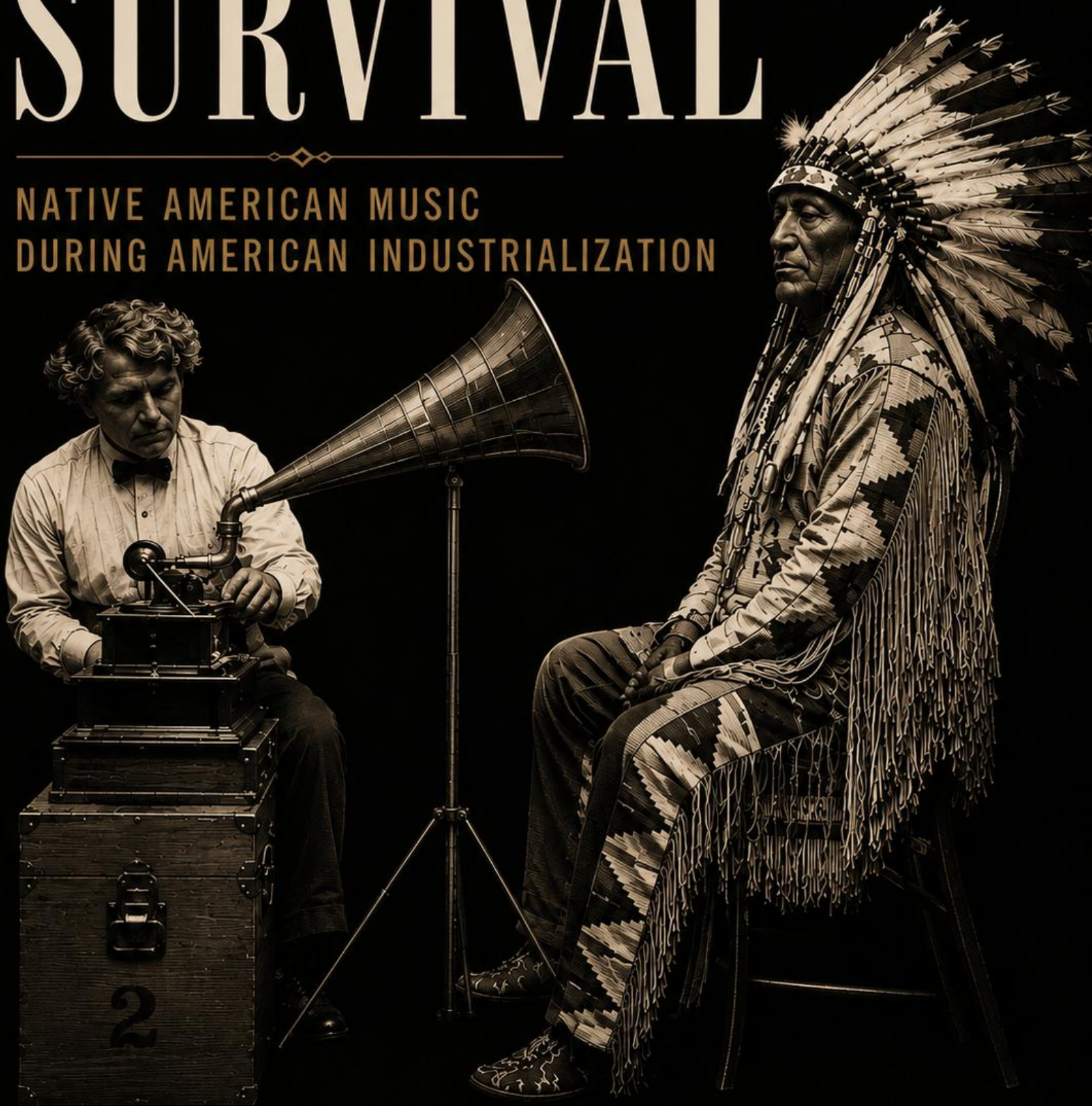


SOUNDING SURVIVAL

NATIVE AMERICAN MUSIC
DURING AMERICAN INDUSTRIALIZATION



Sounding Survival: *Native American Music During American Industrialization*

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First Edition

Listening at the Edge of Industrialization

The *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* for 1885 opens not with Native communities or with the schools themselves but with administration.¹ The Commissioner addresses Congress through the Secretary of the Interior, reviewing appropriations, agency management, reservation policy, agricultural production, education, and the expanding responsibilities of the federal government. Hundreds of pages follow. Tables record acreage under cultivation, numbers of livestock, school enrollment, expenditures, contracts, and population statistics from agencies across the country. The report presents administration as something that can be measured, tabulated, and compared from one year to the next. Music is almost entirely absent from that statistical landscape.²

The organization of the volume reinforces those priorities. Reports from boarding schools, reservation agencies, and the Superintendent of Indian Schools proceed through enrollment, construction, industrial training, health, finances, and discipline with remarkable regularity. Bands, choirs, and concerts appear only intermittently, almost always as evidence that institutions functioned efficiently or that students had acquired habits of order and public decorum. Music entered the federal record not because officials wished to understand Indigenous musical traditions, but because performance occasionally served administrative purposes. The documents measured institutions more carefully than they listened to the people living within them.³

Yet the silence of these reports should not be mistaken for the silence of Native communities. Songs continued to accompany ceremonies, healing, seasonal gatherings, family life, and religious practice regardless of whether government officials considered those performances worthy of documentation. The archive is therefore uneven from the outset. It preserves the priorities of institutions more faithfully than it preserves the musical worlds those institutions attempted to regulate. Recognizing that distinction changes how these documents must be read. Their omissions are themselves historical evidence.⁴

This essay argues that the industrialization of the United States transformed not only the ways Native American music was documented but also the institutions responsible for deciding what counted as documentary evidence. Between the 1830s and the opening decades of the twentieth century, artists, missionaries, anthropologists, educators, and federal officials developed increasingly sophisticated methods for preserving Indigenous music through sketches, administrative reports, ethnographic description, musical notation, photography, and eventually mechanical sound recording. These innovations greatly expanded the historical record. They also reflected the priorities of the institutions that produced them. Songs entered archives through systems of classification, publication, and administration that inevitably shaped how later generations encountered Indigenous musical life.⁵

That process, however, was never entirely controlled by collectors. Every recording required a singer willing to perform. Every translation depended upon individuals who explained meanings across languages. Every transcription originated in conversations through which performers determined what could be shared, how it should be understood, and, at times, what should remain

outside the documentary record altogether. The archive emerged through encounters rather than extraction alone. Native musicians were not simply recorded; they participated in the creation of the historical evidence that survives today, even when the published documents only partially acknowledge that collaboration.⁶

The tension between institutional documentation and Indigenous knowledge forms the central concern of this study. Some sources preserve songs while saying little about the communities from which they emerged. Others describe ceremonies in extraordinary detail while leaving their music almost entirely unheard. Still others record voices on wax cylinders while separating those voices from the ceremonial worlds that originally gave them meaning. No single document captures the whole. Read together, however, these records reveal how industrialization transformed the relationship between music, technology, government, and historical memory.⁷

The pages that follow examine that transformation through the work of George Catlin, the annual reports of missionary organizations and the Office of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington Matthews, Jesse Walter Fewkes, Frances Densmore, and the federal boarding-school system. Rather than treating these sources simply as repositories of musical information, this essay considers them as historical artifacts whose methods of observation, classification, and preservation shaped the documentary life of Native American music. At the same time, it asks what remained beyond those systems of documentation: performances that were withheld, meanings that resisted translation, and musical traditions whose continued survival depended as much upon Indigenous choices as upon the technologies that sought to preserve them.⁸

George Catlin's Problem

When George Catlin began traveling through the American West during the 1830s, the United States possessed no institutional framework for documenting Indigenous music. There was no Bureau of American Ethnology, no federal archive devoted to Native languages or ceremonies, and no technology capable of preserving sound itself. A visitor who wished to record a performance relied upon the tools immediately available: observation, memory, handwritten notes, sketches, and, in Catlin's case, paintings. The absence of recording technology did not mean that Indigenous music escaped notice. It meant that every attempt to describe it depended upon the observer's ability to translate a fleeting performance into words and images before the moment disappeared.⁹

Catlin recognized this limitation more clearly than many later readers have acknowledged. Throughout *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, he repeatedly interrupts his narrative to admit that language could not fully communicate what he had witnessed. Ceremonies unfolded through the interaction of song, dance, movement, costume, drumming, and communal participation. His illustrations preserved visual detail with extraordinary precision, yet he understood that the printed page could only approximate the sonic dimension of those events. The written account remained dependent upon analogy, metaphor, and description because the sounds themselves vanished as soon as they were performed.¹⁰

That awareness shaped the documentary philosophy underlying *Letters and Notes*. Catlin did not approach songs as isolated musical compositions. They appeared within descriptions of diplomacy, hunting, warfare, medicine, mourning, celebration, and ritual because he encountered them as integral elements of Indigenous social life. Music entered his narrative through context rather than through classification. The reader rarely encounters a melody separated from the ceremony in which it was sung, for Catlin understood—even without the vocabulary later developed by anthropology—that performance derived its meaning from the cultural worlds that produced it.¹¹

His frequently cited concern that Indigenous societies might disappear under the pressure of American expansion has often been interpreted as evidence of a simple "salvage" impulse. The text itself presents a more complicated picture. Catlin consistently emphasized movement, adaptation, diplomacy, exchange, and the persistence of community life alongside his fears of cultural loss. His project sought to preserve evidence of societies undergoing profound historical change, yet his descriptions repeatedly portray those societies as active participants in that change rather than passive victims awaiting extinction. The resulting narrative records transformation more often than disappearance.¹²

This distinction becomes especially important when considering Catlin's descriptions of music. Performances were not staged for future archives or museums. They were created for participants who already understood their ceremonial responsibilities, historical meanings, and social obligations. Catlin occupied the position of an invited observer whose understanding depended upon explanations offered by those willing to share aspects of their traditions. His account therefore documents encounters rather than unilateral observation. Every description rests upon relationships through which access was negotiated, trust established, and cultural boundaries maintained.¹³

The paintings reinforce this interpretation. Readers often approach Catlin's visual record as transparent documentation of Indigenous life, but the images themselves reveal a more selective process. Public ceremonies, dances, councils, and gatherings receive sustained visual attention because they could be observed. Other practices remain absent or appear only through brief textual references. The unevenness of the archive should not be dismissed as accidental. It reflects distinctions made within Indigenous communities concerning what visitors might witness and what remained beyond public observation. Silence, in this context, becomes historical evidence rather than documentary failure.¹⁴

Catlin's work therefore occupies a distinctive place in the history of Native American musical documentation. It stands at the threshold of ethnography before anthropology existed as an organized discipline and decades before sound recording transformed field research. His achievement lies not in providing comprehensive musical analysis but in recognizing that Indigenous music resisted reduction to the documentary technologies available during the early nineteenth century. That recognition would become the central methodological problem confronting every investigator who followed, from the Bureau of American Ethnology to Frances

Densmore: how could a performance rooted in living social relationships be preserved once the performance itself had ended?¹⁵

The question proved larger than music alone. It challenged the capacity of language, illustration, and eventually technology to represent cultural experience without separating it from the communities that sustained it. Catlin never resolved that problem, nor could he have done so. He nevertheless identified it with remarkable clarity. The history of Native American music during American industrialization begins not with an archive already in existence but with an artist who understood that some of the most significant dimensions of musical life could be observed, described, and admired without ever being fully captured on the printed page.¹⁶

George Catlin Learns His Limits

The longer one remains with Catlin's narrative, the more striking its restraint becomes. Readers searching for detailed musical analysis will not find extended discussions of intervallic structure, rhythmic organization, or formal design. Catlin possessed neither the analytical vocabulary nor the documentary tools that later scholars would employ. His descriptions instead dwell upon qualities that could be apprehended immediately by an attentive listener: the solemnity of ceremonial singing, the force of communal drumming, the emotional character of lament, or the extraordinary coordination between movement and sound. These observations reveal less about musical structure than about musical experience. They preserve the impression that performance made upon an observer while simultaneously acknowledging that much of its substance remained beyond his ability to describe.¹⁷

That limitation should not be interpreted simply as a deficiency of nineteenth-century travel writing. It reflects the broader documentary conditions under which Catlin worked. Staff notation had long existed in Europe, yet it offered little practical assistance to a traveler moving continuously through communities, often without trained musicians, instruments, or opportunities to verify transcriptions after a performance had ended. Even had Catlin attempted extensive notation, it would have preserved only selected dimensions of what he heard. Vocal inflection, flexible rhythm, collective participation, and the constantly shifting relationship between singers, dancers, and drummers would still have escaped the page. His reliance upon descriptive prose therefore arose as much from necessity as from literary preference.¹⁸

The paintings expose the same problem from another perspective. They preserve clothing, architecture, instruments, ceremonial objects, facial expression, and the arrangement of participants with extraordinary care. Modern readers can study those visual details repeatedly, discovering information that even Catlin himself may not have emphasized in the accompanying text. The sonic dimension, however, remains irretrievably absent. One can observe the position of a drum without hearing its resonance, examine the movement of dancers without perceiving the rhythm guiding their steps, or identify singers gathered within a ceremony without recovering the melodies that united them. The imbalance between image and sound illustrates the unequal capacities of nineteenth-century documentary media.¹⁹

Catlin occasionally acknowledged these limitations with unusual candor. He admitted that certain ceremonies exceeded the descriptive powers available to him and that explanations supplied by Indigenous participants remained indispensable to his understanding. Such admissions deserve greater attention than they often receive. They reveal an observer willing to recognize the boundaries of his own knowledge rather than presenting himself as a fully authoritative interpreter of every event he witnessed. That intellectual humility distinguishes portions of *Letters and Notes* from many contemporary travel narratives, whose authors frequently wrote with greater confidence than their evidence warranted.²⁰

The implications extend well beyond Catlin himself. His experiences demonstrate that the documentary history of Native American music did not begin with technological innovation but with an epistemological problem. Long before the invention of the phonograph, observers confronted the difficulty of preserving performances whose significance depended upon sound, movement, memory, language, ceremonial responsibility, and community participation. Every later development—from the establishment of the Bureau of Ethnology to the introduction of wax-cylinder recording—would seek to address that problem without ever eliminating it entirely. Catlin therefore occupies an essential place in the history of ethnographic documentation because he identified, through experience rather than theory, the fundamental challenge that would shape the discipline for decades to come.²¹

Mission Stations

The missionary literature that followed Catlin documents Native American music from an entirely different institutional perspective. Whereas Catlin wrote as an independent traveler attempting to preserve what he believed might soon disappear, missionary organizations produced annual reports intended for denominational boards, church members, and financial supporters. Their objective was accountability rather than ethnography. Statistics concerning conversions, school enrollment, church attendance, agricultural production, and expenditures occupied far more space than descriptions of Indigenous cultural life. Music entered these reports only when it advanced those institutional aims.²²

This administrative orientation shaped the documentary record in important ways. Congregational singing, hymn instruction, and school choirs frequently received favorable attention because they demonstrated discipline, literacy, and the apparent success of Christian education. Indigenous ceremonial music, by contrast, usually appeared only when missionaries regarded it as evidence of practices they hoped would diminish through conversion. Songs associated with medicine societies, seasonal ceremonies, or communal dances were often mentioned briefly, interpreted through theological language, and seldom described with the care devoted to Christian worship. The resulting archive preserves missionary priorities far more completely than it documents Indigenous musical life.²³

Such omissions should not be mistaken for evidence that ceremonial traditions were declining. The reports were never designed to record the full musical life of Native communities. They were institutional publications written to secure financial support and demonstrate

measurable progress. Their authors generally described what occurred within schools, churches, and mission stations while leaving largely unrecorded the musical practices that continued within homes, ceremonial grounds, seasonal gatherings, and community life beyond missionary supervision. The silence of the documents therefore reveals the limits of their purpose rather than the absence of Indigenous musical activity.²⁴

Even so, careful reading occasionally exposes moments that complicate the missionary narrative. Reports sometimes acknowledge that students participated enthusiastically in hymn singing while maintaining older musical traditions outside the classroom. Others note irregular attendance during ceremonial seasons or describe families who adopted selected aspects of Christian worship without abandoning established religious practices. These observations rarely occupy more than a few sentences, yet they reveal Indigenous communities exercising considerable agency in determining how new musical forms would be received. Musical exchange was neither complete acceptance nor complete rejection. It unfolded through selective adaptation governed by local priorities rather than missionary expectations.²⁵

The repertoires themselves illustrate that process. Christian hymns translated into Indigenous languages acquired meanings unavailable in their original English forms. European melodies entered communities whose vocal aesthetics, concepts of rhythm, and performance practices differed substantially from those assumed by missionary composers. Instruments introduced through mission schools could be incorporated into existing musical traditions without displacing them. Such developments remind us that cultural transmission rarely proceeds in a single direction. Music circulated through negotiation, reinterpretation, and local adaptation even when official reports described those same processes as straightforward evidence of religious progress.²⁶

The contrast between missionary hymnody and Indigenous ceremonial music also reveals competing understandings of musical purpose. Within mission schools, singing promoted regular worship, literacy, moral instruction, and congregational unity. Within Indigenous communities, songs frequently carried responsibilities extending far beyond aesthetic expression. They marked seasonal cycles, accompanied healing, preserved historical memory, affirmed kinship obligations, and maintained relationships between communities, ancestors, and sacred traditions. These functions cannot be measured according to the administrative categories that structured missionary publications. Reading the reports historically therefore requires distinguishing institutional objectives from the broader musical worlds that continued alongside them.²⁷

Modern historians increasingly recognize that missionary archives preserve as much through silence as through description. The absence of detailed discussions concerning particular ceremonies may reflect editorial priorities, limited access, or deliberate decisions by Indigenous communities concerning what knowledge would remain outside missionary observation. Sacred traditions have often depended upon careful regulation of performance, explanation, and transmission. Some ceremonies were public enough to be observed by visitors; others were not. The documentary record therefore reflects negotiated boundaries rather than unrestricted access.²⁸

By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, two distinct documentary traditions had begun to emerge. Catlin attempted to preserve Indigenous societies through personal observation, illustration, and narrative. Missionary organizations documented schools, churches, and religious instruction through bureaucratic reporting. Both recorded Native American music only partially, although for very different reasons. Together they established the documentary landscape inherited by the Bureau of American Ethnology, whose investigators would attempt to replace episodic observation with systematic ethnographic research grounded in long-term field investigation and institutional support.²⁹

The Bureau of Ethnology

The establishment of the Bureau of Ethnology in 1879 marked one of the most consequential changes in the documentary history of Native American music. Earlier observers had worked largely as individuals whose records reflected personal interests, artistic ambitions, religious commitments, or governmental assignments. Under the direction of John Wesley Powell, documentation became an organized federal enterprise. Languages, ceremonies, oral traditions, material culture, and music were no longer collected only through isolated expeditions but through an institution capable of supporting long-term investigation, coordinating research across regions, and publishing standardized reports for scholarly audiences.³⁰

Powell understood that the expansion of the United States threatened more than Indigenous landholdings. Languages disappeared as communities were displaced. Ceremonial traditions became increasingly difficult to observe as federal policy disrupted established patterns of life. Oral histories that had been transmitted across generations risked being lost if they remained undocumented. The Bureau's annual reports repeatedly emphasized that the preservation of Indigenous knowledge constituted a scientific responsibility as well as a national one. Music occupied only one component of that broader ethnological project, yet its significance steadily increased because songs preserved linguistic forms, ceremonial structures, and historical memory unavailable through other documentary sources.³¹

The Bureau differed from earlier documentary efforts because it treated music as part of an interconnected cultural system rather than as an isolated curiosity. Songs were published alongside discussions of mythology, kinship, language, religious practice, and ceremonial organization. Investigators increasingly recognized that performance could not be separated from the occasions that gave it meaning. A healing song derived its significance from the ritual in which it was performed; a ceremonial chant could not be understood apart from the religious obligations governing its use. This contextual approach represented an important methodological departure from much earlier travel literature, where musical performance frequently appeared as colorful illustration rather than analytical evidence.³²

Institutional organization made this change possible. The Bureau accumulated collections over decades rather than months. Researchers built upon one another's investigations instead of beginning each project independently. Museum collections, linguistic studies, archaeological reports, and ethnographic monographs gradually formed an integrated archive through which

comparisons could be drawn across communities and regions. Industrial methods of administration—filing systems, standardized editorial procedures, government printing, and systematic cataloguing—entered anthropology as thoroughly as they had entered other branches of the expanding federal government. Documentation itself became an organized bureaucratic activity.³³

Yet institutional growth also introduced new forms of interpretation. Information gathered within Indigenous communities did not enter publications unchanged. Songs became numbered examples. Ceremonies became chapters. Languages were classified into families. Material objects acquired accession numbers and museum catalogue entries. These practices made comparison possible on a national scale, but they also reorganized Indigenous knowledge according to documentary conventions established within federal institutions. The resulting publications preserve invaluable evidence while simultaneously revealing the intellectual frameworks through which that evidence was arranged and presented.³⁴

Powell himself recognized many of these difficulties. Throughout the Bureau's early reports he emphasized the necessity of careful linguistic work because translation alone could never communicate the conceptual worlds embedded within Indigenous languages. Religious terminology, ceremonial vocabulary, and musical expression frequently lacked direct English equivalents. Successful documentation therefore depended upon sustained collaboration with interpreters and community members capable of explaining meanings that extended well beyond literal translation. Ethnographic investigation became as much an exercise in interpretation as in observation.³⁵

This reliance upon Indigenous expertise complicates older portrayals of the Bureau as an institution that simply collected information from Native communities. Investigators undoubtedly determined editorial organization and publication, yet the knowledge itself originated elsewhere. Ceremonial specialists explained ritual practice. Singers performed repertoires whose histories remained within their communities. Linguistic consultants clarified concepts unavailable to outside observers. Federal institutions could preserve, organize, and disseminate this material only because Indigenous individuals chose to share it. The archive therefore expanded through collaboration as well as bureaucracy.³⁶

Even the Bureau's most ambitious publications reveal the limits of institutional preservation. Printed reports could reproduce translated texts, musical notation, drawings, photographs, and increasingly detailed ethnographic description, but they could not reproduce the physical presence of ceremonial performance. Readers encountered songs through paper, ink, and notation rather than through the acoustic environment in which those songs originally sounded. The experience of hearing voices resonate within ceremonial space, observing movement among participants, or witnessing the interaction between music and ritual remained beyond the capacities of nineteenth-century publication. Every report therefore represented an approximation rather than a complete preservation of lived musical experience.³⁷

By establishing a permanent federal institution devoted to ethnological research, Powell created the conditions under which Washington Matthews, Jesse Walter Fewkes, Frances Densmore, and numerous other investigators could pursue increasingly sophisticated studies of Indigenous music. Their work did not emerge independently. It developed within an institutional framework that combined federal resources, museum collections, government printing, and long-term field research into one of the most ambitious documentary enterprises of the nineteenth century. The history of Native American music during American industrialization cannot be separated from that institutional transformation, for it was within the Bureau of Ethnology that music first became the subject of sustained, systematic, and nationally supported scholarly investigation.³⁸

Washington Matthews and the Architecture of Ceremony

Washington Matthews entered ethnographic research from a direction unlike most of his contemporaries. Trained as an army surgeon, he spent years living and working among the Navajo, where sustained residence gradually replaced the episodic observation characteristic of earlier travel accounts. Time altered the quality of his documentation. Instead of describing isolated ceremonies witnessed during brief visits, Matthews followed ritual cycles, learned elements of the Navajo language, and recorded explanations supplied by ceremonial specialists over extended periods. His work illustrates how proximity transformed ethnographic method during the final decades of the nineteenth century.³⁹

Published in the *Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, *The Mountain Chant* represented a decisive methodological advance because it treated music as one element within an integrated ceremonial system. Songs appear throughout the volume, yet they are never separated from mythology, prayer, sand painting, ritual movement, sacred objects, or the sequence of ceremonial acts that gave them meaning. Matthews consistently refused to isolate melody from ritual context. Readers encounter music as participants in the ceremony would have encountered it: as one component of a larger religious experience whose significance emerged through the interaction of many elements rather than through sound alone.⁴⁰

This approach distinguished Matthews from earlier observers whose descriptions frequently emphasized spectacle. Ceremonial performance certainly remained visually compelling, but Matthews shifted attention toward structure. He reconstructed the order of ritual events, explained the responsibilities of participants, documented the relationships between songs and ceremonial actions, and demonstrated that individual performances could only be understood within the broader architecture of the chant itself. Music functioned neither as entertainment nor as decorative accompaniment. It constituted an active force within ceremonial practice, inseparable from healing, prayer, and communal obligation.⁴¹

Language occupies an equally important place in Matthews's documentary method. Throughout *The Mountain Chant*, translated texts appear beside discussions of Navajo terminology, reflecting his conviction that ritual meaning could not be conveyed through English alone. Musical performance depended upon words whose significance extended beyond literal

translation, carrying religious associations, historical references, and ceremonial responsibilities embedded within the language itself. Matthews repeatedly acknowledged that interpretation required assistance from knowledgeable Navajo collaborators whose explanations made the publication possible. The resulting study therefore records intellectual exchange as well as ethnographic observation.⁴²

The publication also reveals the practical limits of nineteenth-century documentation. Matthews could describe ceremonies in remarkable detail, yet he remained unable to preserve their acoustic reality. Musical notation appears only sparingly, and no recording technology accompanied his investigations. Readers learn when songs were sung, who performed them, and how they functioned within the ceremonial sequence, but they cannot hear the changing vocal timbres, rhythmic flexibility, or collective sound that animated the ritual itself. The written record had become richer than anything available to Catlin, yet it still depended primarily upon language to represent performance.⁴³

Modern scholarship has occasionally approached *The Mountain Chant* as though it were a complete account of Navajo ceremonial practice. Matthews himself suggested no such thing. He acknowledged that certain aspects of ritual could not be fully explained within a published volume and that some knowledge remained restricted by ceremonial tradition. Those silences should not automatically be interpreted as omissions resulting from incomplete research. They may equally reflect decisions made by ceremonial authorities concerning what could appropriately be communicated beyond the community. The archive therefore preserves evidence of cultural boundaries as well as ethnographic inquiry.⁴⁴

Matthews's work also challenged assumptions about what constituted legitimate evidence in anthropological research. Earlier travel narratives frequently relied upon isolated observation, while missionary reports emphasized institutional progress. *The Mountain Chant* instead argued that songs, prayers, ritual objects, myths, and ceremonial actions formed mutually dependent sources of knowledge. No single component adequately explained the others. Understanding required sustained attention to the relationships binding them together. That holistic perspective would become one of the defining characteristics of later ethnomusicological research.⁴⁵

Although Matthews never possessed the recording technologies that transformed fieldwork during the following decade, his publications prepared the intellectual foundation upon which those innovations would build. By demonstrating that music could only be interpreted within its ceremonial and cultural setting, he established a principle that mechanical recording alone could never replace. Wax cylinders might preserve sound with unprecedented accuracy, but without contextual knowledge they remained incomplete historical documents. Jesse Walter Fewkes would soon confront precisely that problem as he introduced the phonograph into ethnographic field research, extending documentary practice beyond the limits that Matthews had so carefully identified.⁴⁶

Jesse Walter Fewkes and the Wax Cylinder

When Jesse Walter Fewkes carried an Edison phonograph into Passamaquoddy communities in 1890, he confronted a problem that had remained unresolved since Catlin first attempted to describe Indigenous musical performance nearly sixty years earlier. Catlin had depended upon memory and language. Matthews had reconstructed ceremonial systems with extraordinary ethnographic precision while remaining unable to preserve the sound itself. Fewkes introduced a technology capable of recording voices, yet he quickly discovered that mechanical preservation did not eliminate the interpretive challenges that had confronted every earlier investigator. It merely shifted them into a different documentary form.⁴⁷

The phonograph fundamentally altered the status of musical evidence. A performance no longer disappeared at the moment of its completion. Wax cylinders preserved voices that could be replayed repeatedly, permitting investigators to compare successive hearings, verify melodic details, and study performances long after leaving the field. For the first time, scholars possessed evidence that existed independently of memory or written description. This technological innovation transformed ethnographic method by allowing musical analysis to proceed from recorded sound rather than from recollection alone.⁴⁸

Fewkes himself emphasized that this represented a methodological rather than merely mechanical advance. Recordings made it possible to return to the same performance repeatedly, correcting earlier impressions and identifying details that might have escaped notice during the original event. Rhythm, phrase length, melodic contour, and vocal inflection could be examined with a degree of precision unavailable to previous generations of researchers. Mechanical recording therefore expanded not only the quantity of surviving evidence but also the standards by which ethnographic observations could be evaluated. Investigators increasingly possessed a permanent point of reference against which later interpretations might be tested.⁴⁹

The apparent objectivity of the phonograph, however, deserves careful qualification. Recording sessions required performers to adapt themselves to an unfamiliar machine whose physical limitations shaped every aspect of the encounter. Singers gathered around the recording horn at prescribed distances, adjusted their voices to the sensitivity of the apparatus, and often shortened performances because a wax cylinder could preserve only a few minutes of sound. What entered the archive was therefore not an untouched ceremony but a performance reorganized, however briefly, by the practical requirements of recording technology.⁵⁰

Photographs of Fewkes's recording sessions quietly illustrate this transformation. The phonograph occupies the center of the gathering, directing the position of singers who ordinarily would have stood or moved quite differently during ceremonial performance. Spatial relationships were temporarily reorganized so that sound could be captured effectively. The resulting recordings remain invaluable historical documents, yet they also preserve evidence of the technological conditions under which they were produced. Mechanical recording altered performance even as it attempted to preserve it.⁵¹

Equally significant is the continued role of Indigenous agency throughout the recording process. The phonograph could register sound, but it could not determine what would be sung, who would perform, or what explanations would accompany the recordings. Those decisions remained with the communities themselves. Performers selected repertoires, identified ceremonial contexts, translated texts, and explained meanings that no machine could recover independently. Every wax cylinder therefore embodies two complementary histories: the history of a technological innovation and the history of collaborative decisions through which particular performances entered the documentary record while others remained outside it.⁵²

Fewkes never suggested that mechanical recording rendered ethnographic observation unnecessary. His published studies consistently combine recordings with descriptive commentary, linguistic explanation, and discussions of ceremonial practice. The cylinders preserved voices; they did not preserve the cultural knowledge required to interpret those voices. A melody detached from its ceremonial setting remained only partially intelligible. In this respect, Fewkes extended Matthews's central insight rather than replacing it. Technology could preserve sound with unprecedented fidelity, but understanding still depended upon relationships between investigators and the communities whose music they documented.⁵³

Modern listeners often approach these recordings as archival objects because they survive within museum collections and research libraries. At the moment of recording, however, they were living performances addressed to immediate participants rather than future historians. Voices entered the recording horn carrying accents, breathing, hesitation, confidence, and expressive nuance shaped by particular ceremonies and communities. The wax cylinder preserved those sonic traces with remarkable effectiveness, yet it inevitably separated them from the social worlds in which they originally possessed meaning. The recording survived; the event itself could not.⁵⁴

The introduction of the phonograph therefore did not resolve the documentary questions inherited from Catlin and Matthews. It deepened them. Scholars could now hear performances repeatedly, compare recordings across communities, and preserve musical evidence with unprecedented accuracy, yet interpretation remained inseparable from language, ceremony, translation, and Indigenous systems of knowledge. The technological history of ethnomusicology advanced dramatically during the closing years of the nineteenth century, but its intellectual foundations continued to rest upon collaboration rather than machinery alone. These principles would reach their fullest early expression in Frances Densmore's *Chippewa Music*, where recording, transcription, translation, and ethnographic analysis became parts of a single documentary method.

Frances Densmore's *Chippewa Music*

By the time Frances Densmore began her work among the Ojibwe during the opening years of the twentieth century, the documentary landscape had changed fundamentally. Catlin had demonstrated both the possibilities and limitations of visual and written observation. The Bureau of Ethnology had established ethnographic investigation as an organized scientific enterprise. Matthews had shown that music could not be separated from ceremony without sacrificing much

of its meaning, while Fewkes had demonstrated that the phonograph could preserve sound itself. Densmore inherited each of these developments simultaneously. Her contribution did not consist simply in adopting mechanical recording but in bringing observation, recording, transcription, translation, and ethnographic interpretation into a single documentary method that would shape the study of Indigenous music for decades to come.⁵⁵

When *Chippewa Music* appeared as Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 45 in 1910, it represented considerably more than a collection of songs. The publication announced an approach to documentation in which every performance occupied multiple forms at once. A song existed as a wax-cylinder recording, as a musical transcription, as translated text, as ethnographic description, and as evidence situated within a larger ceremonial and social framework. Densmore refused to privilege one of these forms at the expense of the others. Instead, she treated each as a necessary but incomplete representation of musical life, requiring continual comparison with the rest.⁵⁶

The opening pages of the bulletin establish this documentary philosophy immediately. Before presenting musical notation, Densmore explains where recordings were made, identifies the individuals who participated in the investigation, describes her methods of transcription, and introduces the ceremonial settings within which different repertoires were performed. These introductory chapters are methodological as much as ethnographic. They prepare readers to understand that the melodies appearing later in the volume cannot be interpreted independently of the circumstances in which they were collected. Songs emerge through relationships among performers, ceremonies, language, and community rather than through notation alone.⁵⁷

Densmore's organization of the bulletin reinforces this point. Instead of arranging songs according to the chronology of fieldwork or the order in which recordings were made, she grouped them according to ceremonial and social function. *Mide'wiwin* songs, dream songs, war songs, love songs, moccasin-game songs, and children's songs occupy separate sections whose sequence reflects Ojibwe cultural life rather than the chronology of research. Classification becomes an interpretive act. Readers move through an Indigenous musical world ordered according to purpose and responsibility instead of archival convenience.⁵⁸

Equally significant is the degree to which performers remain visible throughout the publication. Individual singers repeatedly reappear across different categories, identified by name and associated with particular ceremonial knowledge or musical responsibilities. Their continued presence prevents the repertoire from becoming anonymous folklore detached from living communities. The bulletin consistently reminds readers that every transcription originated with particular individuals whose knowledge, memory, and willingness to collaborate made the documentary project possible.⁵⁹

Densmore's method also reflected a significant shift in the relationship between fieldwork and publication. Earlier investigators frequently recorded observations in notebooks intended primarily as personal aids to memory. Densmore treated her field notes, phonograph recordings, musical transcriptions, and interviews as components of a single documentary process. A melody was recorded in performance, replayed repeatedly during transcription, checked against additional

hearings, discussed with the performer whenever clarification proved necessary, and only then prepared for publication. The finished notation therefore represents the culmination of repeated acts of listening rather than a single moment of observation.⁶⁰

This iterative process deserves emphasis because it distinguishes *Chippewa Music* from many earlier documentary collections. Mechanical recording did not eliminate interpretation; it redistributed it across successive stages of research. Decisions concerning phrase divisions, rhythmic values, tonal centers, and translated texts were informed by repeated comparison between the wax cylinder and the knowledge shared by performers themselves. Densmore understood that the phonograph preserved acoustic evidence, but she also recognized that evidence required continual interpretation before it could assume documentary form. The printed page represents the end of that interpretive process rather than its beginning.⁶¹

Readers often approach the bulletin through its musical examples, yet the surrounding ethnographic commentary occupies an equally important position within Densmore's method. Descriptions of ceremonial practice, explanations of Ojibwe terminology, observations concerning performance, and biographical remarks about individual singers accompany the notation with remarkable consistency. These passages do not function as editorial ornament. They establish the circumstances through which melodies acquired social and ceremonial meaning. A transcription without that accompanying commentary would preserve intervals and rhythms while leaving unanswered the larger historical questions concerning why a particular song existed, when it could be performed, and what responsibilities accompanied its transmission.⁶²

The prominence Densmore gives to Indigenous collaborators further distinguishes the bulletin from many earlier ethnographic publications. Throughout *Chippewa Music*, singers are identified, translators acknowledged, and ceremonial specialists cited as authorities whose explanations shape the interpretation of the material. Although the bulletin bears Densmore's name, its documentary authority rests upon a much broader network of contributors whose expertise extended beyond anything an outside investigator could independently acquire. Every successful transcription depended upon performers who not only sang but also interpreted, corrected, and contextualized the material being preserved.⁶³

That collaborative foundation also explains many of the silences within the publication. Certain ceremonial traditions receive extensive treatment, while others appear only briefly or not at all. Some performers willingly discussed the origins and functions of particular songs, whereas other repertoires remained only partially explained. Such unevenness should not automatically be interpreted as incomplete scholarship. It frequently reflects Indigenous systems governing the circulation of ceremonial knowledge. Densmore repeatedly encountered traditions whose authority depended upon careful distinctions between public explanation and restricted instruction. The documentary archive therefore preserves evidence not only of what entered print but also of the cultural boundaries that shaped publication itself.⁶⁴

Viewed in its entirety, *Chippewa Music* represents far more than the preservation of Ojibwe repertory. It documents an evolving philosophy of ethnographic research in which recording

technology, musical analysis, language, ceremony, and collaborative fieldwork became inseparable. The bulletin demonstrates that Indigenous music could be investigated with analytical rigor while remaining rooted in the communities that sustained it. That synthesis explains why the publication continues to occupy such an influential position within the history of ethnomusicology and why it remains one of the most significant documentary achievements produced by the Bureau of American Ethnology.⁶⁵

The Anatomy of a Song

The individual song entries in *Chippewa Music* reveal the full maturity of Densmore's documentary method. A reader moving beyond the introductory chapters quickly notices that each entry follows a remarkably consistent sequence. The performer is identified whenever possible. The circumstances of performance are described. The text is translated or summarized. Only then does the musical transcription appear. The notation occupies the visual center of the page, yet it is surrounded by evidence that continually directs attention back to the people, places, and ceremonial settings from which the melody emerged. The bulletin teaches readers to encounter songs historically before encountering them analytically.⁷⁴

This editorial arrangement differs fundamentally from the organization of most printed music collections of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Conventional anthologies generally treat notation as the primary object of interest, relegating explanatory remarks to introductions or footnotes. Densmore reverses that hierarchy. The score does not stand independently. It derives meaning from the ethnographic material surrounding it. Readers are encouraged to understand who performed the song, how it entered community life, and under what circumstances it could properly be sung before considering questions of melodic contour, rhythm, or form. Musical analysis becomes inseparable from historical context.⁷⁵

The performer's continued presence throughout the bulletin carries important methodological consequences. The singer does not disappear once the melody has been transferred onto the staff. Instead, each entry repeatedly returns attention to the individual whose knowledge made the documentation possible. Some commentaries explain how songs were learned through family relationships or ceremonial instruction. Others describe when particular repertoires could be performed, who possessed authority to sing them, or the responsibilities accompanying their transmission. Such observations shift the documentary center of gravity away from the collector and toward the communities whose musical knowledge sustained the tradition across generations.⁷⁶

The varying length of these accompanying commentaries is equally revealing. Certain entries require only brief identification, while others are followed by extensive discussions of ceremonial meaning, language, performance practice, or historical background. Those differences reflect neither inconsistency nor editorial oversight. They preserve the uneven character of ethnographic encounter itself. Some performers chose to explain their traditions in considerable detail; others offered more limited commentary. Densmore occasionally acknowledged uncertainty when translations remained incomplete or when aspects of ceremonial practice could not be

adequately clarified. The bulletin therefore records not only songs but also the varying degrees to which performers elected to interpret them for an outside audience.⁷⁷

Translation occupies a similarly complex position throughout the volume. Ojibwe words frequently remain alongside their English renderings, quietly reminding readers that translation never produces complete equivalence. Certain ceremonial concepts move into English only approximately, while others retain meanings inseparable from the linguistic and cultural contexts in which they originated. By preserving the original language whenever possible, Densmore acknowledged that musical understanding depended upon more than melody alone. Language itself formed part of the documentary evidence, carrying historical and ceremonial associations that could not always be reproduced through English prose.⁷⁸

Listening to the Printed Record

Reading *Chippewa Music* from beginning to end produces an experience quite different from consulting a handful of individual songs. The importance of the bulletin emerges gradually through repetition. Each entry follows a familiar documentary sequence: a performer is identified, the circumstances of performance are described, the text is translated or summarized, the melody is transcribed, and additional commentary situates the song within a broader ceremonial or social context. After encountering dozens of examples, readers begin to recognize that the bulletin documents not merely songs but a consistent method of preserving musical knowledge.⁸²

That consistency served practical as well as intellectual purposes. By 1910 the Bureau of American Ethnology had spent nearly three decades refining procedures that allowed observations collected by different researchers to be compared across regions and communities. Densmore's bulletin reflects those institutional standards without becoming subordinate to them. Categories remain orderly, musical examples are presented according to a recognizable format, and ethnographic descriptions follow a disciplined editorial structure. At the same time, each entry retains enough individuality to remind readers that the material originated in conversations with particular people rather than in an abstract filing system.⁸³

The cumulative effect is subtle but significant. Repeated encounters with named performers, ceremonial explanations, and translated texts gradually undermine the impression that the archive consists merely of detached musical specimens. Instead, the bulletin begins to resemble an extended record of human relationships. Familiar names reappear across different sections, revealing singers whose knowledge extended into several ceremonial domains. Songs separated by dozens of pages become linked through shared performers, related rituals, or recurring themes. What first appears to be an orderly catalogue slowly reveals the continuity of a living musical community.⁸⁴

This continuity also alters the reader's understanding of classification itself. The categories organizing the bulletin—Mide'wiwin songs, dream songs, war songs, love songs, game songs, and others—initially appear administrative. Continued reading demonstrates that they correspond to relationships recognized within Ojibwe society. Classification therefore reflects both institutional order and Indigenous systems of knowledge simultaneously. The Bureau required organization for

publication, while the performers explained why songs belonged within particular ceremonial traditions. Neither system entirely displaced the other. The printed volume preserves their coexistence.⁸⁵

One of Densmore's most enduring achievements lies in maintaining this balance between scholarly organization and ethnographic fidelity. Her editorial decisions rarely obscure the voices of the individuals who made the publication possible. Instead, organization becomes a means of illuminating relationships that might otherwise remain unnoticed. Readers move from one repertory to another without losing sight of the performers, ceremonial specialists, translators, and communities whose participation sustained the documentary enterprise. The publication thus becomes an archive of collaboration as much as an archive of music.⁸⁶

The bulletin consequently rewards sustained reading in ways that isolated musical examples cannot. Individual songs certainly possess historical value, but their fullest significance emerges only when considered within the documentary network surrounding them. The accumulation of performer biographies, ceremonial descriptions, translations, and musical transcriptions produces an understanding that no single entry could communicate independently. By the closing pages of *Chippewa Music*, readers have encountered not only hundreds of melodies but an entire philosophy of documentation grounded in the conviction that Indigenous music can be preserved responsibly only when sound, language, ceremony, and community remain inseparable.⁸⁷

Beyond Preservation: The Limits of the Archive

By the closing chapters of *Chippewa Music*, Densmore's documentary method reveals both its greatest strength and its unavoidable limitations. Hundreds of songs have been recorded, translated, transcribed, and situated within ceremonial life, yet the publication never claims to preserve Ojibwe music in its entirety. The archive represents an encounter between living musical practice and documentary technique. It preserves performances at particular moments, under particular circumstances, through technologies whose capabilities and limitations shaped every stage of the investigation. The bulletin therefore documents not only Ojibwe music but also the historical conditions under which that music entered the written record.⁸⁸

This distinction becomes increasingly important when considering what remains absent from the publication. Readers cannot hear the acoustic character of the ceremonial space in which a song was originally performed. They cannot observe the interaction between singers and participants, the physical movement accompanying performance, or the subtle changes in tempo, vocal color, and collective response that emerge during extended ceremonies. Even the phonograph, revolutionary though it was, captured only one dimension of a much larger cultural event. The printed transcription preserves melodic structure with considerable precision while inevitably reducing the broader sensory experience through which that structure originally acquired meaning.⁸⁹

Densmore repeatedly compensated for these limitations through careful ethnographic explanation. Descriptions of ceremonial practice, discussions of performers, and observations concerning the function of particular songs remind readers that notation alone never constituted

the objective of the investigation. Musical transcription served as one form of documentary evidence among several. Its value increased when read alongside translation, historical commentary, and the explanations provided by Ojibwe collaborators whose knowledge extended beyond anything preserved on the musical staff. The publication therefore resists any interpretation that would elevate notation above the cultural relationships from which it emerged.⁹⁰

The archive itself consequently becomes an object of historical study. Modern scholars frequently consult *Chippewa Music* for its melodies, but the bulletin offers equally valuable evidence concerning early twentieth-century ethnographic practice. Editorial organization, descriptive language, methods of classification, and decisions concerning publication reveal how the Bureau of American Ethnology understood the work of documentation during this period. The volume preserves Ojibwe musical traditions while simultaneously preserving the intellectual assumptions, institutional procedures, and documentary conventions through which those traditions entered federal publication.⁹¹

Seen from this perspective, *Chippewa Music* occupies two historical moments at once. It documents musical traditions whose histories extend far beyond the twentieth century, and it records an era in which anthropology increasingly sought systematic methods for preserving Indigenous knowledge before further disruption produced by federal policy, economic change, and expanding industrial society. The bulletin therefore belongs equally to Ojibwe musical history and to the history of American ethnography. Appreciating both dimensions allows the publication to be read neither as a transparent record of Indigenous life nor merely as a product of federal scholarship, but as the result of sustained collaboration between communities whose priorities occasionally converged while remaining fundamentally distinct.⁹²

This collaborative character explains the continuing importance of the bulletin within ethnomusicology. Later investigators would employ magnetic tape, video recording, digital audio, and increasingly sophisticated analytical methods, yet the central questions confronting Densmore remain remarkably familiar. How should musical performance be documented without separating it from the social relationships that sustain it? How can notation coexist with oral tradition? How should scholars distinguish between what a recording preserves and what it inevitably leaves behind? *Chippewa Music* does not eliminate these questions. It frames them with unusual clarity, ensuring that the publication continues to function not simply as an archive of songs but as a foundational reflection on the practice of documenting music itself.⁹³

Native Music and the Boarding School Archive

The documentary world represented by *Chippewa Music* developed alongside another federal archive whose purposes differed profoundly. While Densmore and the Bureau of American Ethnology attempted to preserve Indigenous musical traditions through recording and ethnographic description, the Office of Indian Affairs documented music primarily through the administrative language of education. Annual reports from Carlisle, Haskell, Chilocco, Genoa, and numerous reservation schools repeatedly mention bands, orchestras, choirs, commencement exercises, and public concerts. Their concern, however, lay less with music as cultural knowledge

than with music as evidence of institutional discipline. Performances demonstrated order, regular attendance, successful instruction, and the apparent progress of assimilationist education.⁹⁴

Within these reports, music functioned as administrative proof. Brass bands appeared during visits by government officials, choirs performed at commencement ceremonies, and orchestras accompanied public exhibitions designed to reassure Congress and denominational supporters that federal schools were producing industrious citizens. Musical accomplishment became another statistic of institutional success, recorded alongside enrollment figures, industrial production, agricultural yields, and financial expenditures. Songs entered the archive because they illustrated the effectiveness of the school rather than the continuity of Indigenous musical traditions.⁹⁵

The repertoires cultivated within boarding schools reflected those priorities. Students learned Protestant hymnody, patriotic songs, military marches, parlour music, and arrangements derived from European concert traditions. Such music rewarded uniformity, regular rehearsal, and strict ensemble coordination. Administrators valued these characteristics because they reinforced habits extending beyond the rehearsal room. Musical discipline became educational discipline. The synchronized movement of a marching band or the carefully balanced voices of a school choir symbolized the broader social order federal officials hoped to cultivate through industrial education.⁹⁶

These institutional objectives differed fundamentally from the ceremonial roles occupied by music within Indigenous communities. Songs documented by Densmore frequently accompanied healing, seasonal ceremonies, religious obligations, diplomacy, family relationships, and the transmission of sacred knowledge. Authority rested not upon classroom instruction but upon kinship, ceremonial responsibility, and community recognition. Musical performance carried obligations that could not be measured through attendance records or public concerts. Reading the boarding-school archive alongside ethnographic publications therefore reveals two documentary systems recording different understandings of what music was and what it ought to accomplish.⁹⁷

Yet the historical record also demonstrates that these worlds were never entirely separate. Former students carried songs learned at boarding schools back into their communities, while many continued to participate in Indigenous musical traditions despite institutional efforts to discourage them. Hymns translated into Native languages acquired meanings unavailable within the schools themselves. Brass instruments occasionally entered community celebrations under Indigenous direction rather than federal supervision. Musical exchange unfolded through adaptation, negotiation, and selective appropriation rather than simple replacement. The official reports seldom acknowledged these developments because they fell outside the administrative purposes for which the documents were written.⁹⁸

Careful comparison of these parallel archives therefore reveals the limits of each. Boarding-school reports document institutional aspirations with remarkable consistency but say relatively little about the musical lives of Indigenous families beyond school grounds. Ethnographic publications preserve ceremonial repertoires with far greater sensitivity while devoting

comparatively little attention to the everyday musical experiences of students living within federal institutions. Neither archive provides a complete account. Each preserves one dimension of a far more complicated historical reality. The historian's task is not to privilege one body of evidence over the other but to read them together, recognizing that each records different aspects of Native musical life during the era of American industrialization.⁹⁹

This comparison also reshapes the meaning of preservation itself. Federal administrators frequently assumed that replacing Indigenous repertoires with Euro-American musical instruction constituted educational progress. Ethnographers, by contrast, feared that ceremonial traditions might disappear unless carefully documented. Indigenous communities often pursued a different course altogether. They preserved inherited repertoires while selectively incorporating new musical forms according to local needs and cultural priorities. Survival therefore depended neither upon complete resistance nor complete assimilation, but upon the capacity of communities to determine how musical knowledge would continue across changing historical circumstances.¹⁰⁰

Reading Against the Administrative Record

The contrast between ethnographic publications and boarding-school reports also illustrates a broader problem confronting historians of Native American music. Archives do not simply preserve the past; they preserve the priorities of the institutions that created them. Annual reports from the Office of Indian Affairs devote meticulous attention to budgets, enrollment, construction projects, and industrial instruction because those subjects justified appropriations and demonstrated administrative efficiency. Musical performance entered those documents only when it reinforced institutional objectives. By comparison, publications of the Bureau of American Ethnology devoted extensive attention to ceremonies, repertoires, performers, and language while largely overlooking the daily musical life developing inside federal schools. Each archive therefore presents a selective historical landscape shaped by its own documentary purposes.¹⁰¹

Reading these sources together requires a method different from accepting either at face value. Administrative reports reveal how federal officials wished schools to be understood. Ethnographic publications reveal how investigators attempted to document traditions they believed were insufficiently represented elsewhere. Neither body of evidence encompasses the full complexity of Indigenous musical experience during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their greatest historical value emerges through comparison. Agreements become significant, but so do omissions, inconsistencies, and differences in emphasis. Silence itself becomes a form of evidence when considered within the institutional context that produced it.¹⁰²

This comparative perspective also complicates familiar narratives of cultural disappearance. Government officials frequently measured success through indicators suggesting increasing conformity to Euro-American educational ideals. Ethnographers often emphasized preservation because they feared ceremonial traditions might not survive another generation. Indigenous communities, however, continued to adapt musical practices according to their own historical circumstances. Songs documented by Densmore remained embedded within living ceremonial traditions even as students encountered hymnody, brass bands, and classroom instruction in

federal schools. New repertoires entered community life without uniformly replacing older ones. Continuity frequently depended upon adaptation rather than isolation, a pattern visible only when multiple documentary traditions are considered together.¹⁰³

The documentary history examined throughout this study therefore resists simple narratives of either loss or preservation. Catlin's journals, missionary reports, Bureau publications, wax-cylinder recordings, boarding-school archives, and Densmore's *Chippewa Music* each illuminate different dimensions of Native musical life while leaving others unrecorded. Their collective significance lies precisely in their incompleteness. Together they reveal how industrialization transformed the technologies, institutions, and editorial practices through which Indigenous music entered the historical record, while simultaneously demonstrating that no archive, however extensive, could fully contain traditions whose deepest meanings continued to reside within the communities that sustained them. That tension between documentation and lived musical practice remains one of the defining challenges of ethnomusicology today and provides the foundation upon which the concluding chapter of this study is built.¹⁰⁴

Sounding Survival

The documentary history of Native American music during American industrialization cannot be understood as the steady accumulation of increasingly accurate records. Every advance in documentation introduced new possibilities while simultaneously creating new forms of selection, interpretation, and omission. Catlin's paintings preserved ceremonies whose sounds could not be recovered. Missionary reports recorded institutions while overlooking much of the musical life beyond their walls. The Bureau of Ethnology transformed scattered observations into coordinated research, yet its classifications reflected the intellectual priorities of late nineteenth-century anthropology. Wax-cylinder recordings preserved voices with unprecedented fidelity while separating those voices from the ceremonial environments in which they acquired their fullest meaning. Densmore united recording, transcription, translation, and ethnographic explanation into a documentary method of extraordinary sophistication, but even her work acknowledged that no archive could encompass the entirety of lived musical experience.¹⁰⁵

Seen collectively, these sources reveal that documentation is itself a historical process. Songs do not move directly from performance into the archive. They pass through relationships among singers, translators, investigators, editors, government printers, museums, and readers, each of whom shapes the form in which the material survives. The resulting documents preserve Indigenous music, but they also preserve the intellectual and institutional histories of those who undertook the work of recording it. The archive therefore speaks with more than one voice. It contains traces of ceremonial authority, federal administration, scientific ambition, editorial judgment, and technological innovation, often within the same publication.¹⁰⁶

Recognizing this layered history encourages a different approach to ethnomusicological evidence. Musical transcriptions should not be treated as self-sufficient texts divorced from the circumstances of their creation. Nor should wax cylinders, photographs, or government reports be regarded as transparent windows onto the past. Each source records one dimension of a larger

historical encounter whose participants brought different expectations, responsibilities, and systems of knowledge to the act of documentation. Critical reading therefore requires attention not only to what survives in the archive but also to the documentary practices through which survival became possible.¹⁰⁷

The evidence assembled throughout this study also challenges narratives that frame Indigenous musical history exclusively in terms of disappearance. Federal policies undoubtedly disrupted communities, altered patterns of ceremonial life, and sought to reshape musical education through mission schools and boarding schools. Yet the documentary record repeatedly reveals Indigenous musicians exercising judgment over performance, translation, collaboration, and the transmission of knowledge. Songs persisted because communities continued to teach them, perform them, adapt them, and determine the conditions under which they would be shared. Documentation followed those decisions; it did not create the traditions it sought to preserve.¹⁰⁸

This distinction carries important implications for contemporary scholarship. Archives remain indispensable because they preserve voices, melodies, ceremonial descriptions, and historical observations that might otherwise have been lost. At the same time, the archive must never be mistaken for the tradition itself. Living musical cultures extend beyond the boundaries of published bulletins, museum collections, and recorded cylinders. Their histories continue wherever communities sustain performance through memory, kinship, ceremony, and cultural responsibility. The surviving documents illuminate those histories without exhausting them.¹⁰⁹

Industrialization transformed the technologies through which Native American music entered the historical record, but its deeper legacy lies in the documentary questions it raised. How should performance be represented once the event has ended? What responsibilities accompany the preservation of ceremonial knowledge? How can scholars distinguish between the evidence contained within a document and the cultural worlds that exceed its pages? These questions shaped the work of Catlin, Powell, Matthews, Fewkes, and Densmore, and they continue to inform ethnomusicological research today. The history traced here is therefore not simply the history of collecting songs. It is the history of how music, memory, and documentation became inseparable within the modern study of Indigenous North America.¹¹⁰

Notes

1. Philip V. Bohlman, *World Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1–14.
2. Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-Three Discussions*, 3rd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 1–25.
3. Beverly Diamond and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, eds., *Music and Gender: Perspectives from the Mediterranean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 17–32.
4. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 21–54.
5. George W. Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 3–28.
6. Curtis M. Hinsley Jr., *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846–1910* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 1–38.
7. Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 72–98.
8. George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, 2 vols. (London: Published for the Author; New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1842), 1:1–10. The opening letter establishes Catlin's purpose in documenting Native American societies, his plan to create a national gallery, and his belief that many Indigenous cultures faced profound disruption.
9. George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, 2 vols. (London: Published for the Author; New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1842), 1:2–10.
10. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:14–22.
11. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:23–41.
12. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:59–64.
13. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:80–90.
14. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:92–110.
15. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:127–140.
16. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:156–183.
17. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:185–201.
18. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:208–228.
19. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:226–240.
20. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:241–260.
21. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1:261–284.
22. Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, abridged ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 153–173.

23. William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789–1839* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 214–241.
24. Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865–1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 45–73.
25. William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries*, 242–276.
26. David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 21–48.
27. James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 273–305.
28. Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis*, 96–128.
29. Curtis M. Hinsley Jr., *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846–1910* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 39–68.
30. John Wesley Powell, *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1879–1880* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1881), vii–xliv.
31. Powell, *First Annual Report*, xvii–xxviii.
32. Powell, *First Annual Report*, xxix–xliv.
33. Powell, *First Annual Report*, 1–12.
34. Powell, *First Annual Report*, 13–36.
35. Powell, *First Annual Report*, 37–72.
36. Curtis M. Hinsley Jr., *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846–1910* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 99–132.
37. George W. Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 87–118.
38. Powell, *First Annual Report*, vii–xliv; Hinsley, *Savages and Scientists*, 99–132.
39. Washington Matthews, *The Mountain Chant: A Navajo Ceremony*, in *Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1883–1884* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1888), 379–467.
40. Matthews, *The Mountain Chant*, 379–467.
41. Matthews, *The Mountain Chant*, 379–467.
42. Matthews, *The Mountain Chant*, 379–467.
43. Matthews, *The Mountain Chant*, 379–467.
44. Matthews, *The Mountain Chant*, 379–467.
45. Matthews, *The Mountain Chant*, 379–467.
46. Matthews, *The Mountain Chant*, 379–467.

47. Jesse Walter Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 3, no. 11 (1890): 257–280.
48. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 257–280.
49. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 257–280.
50. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 257–280.
51. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 257–280.
52. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 257–280.
53. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 257–280.
54. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 257–280.
47. Jesse Walter Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, reprinted from *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 3 (October–December 1890), 1–4. The introduction explains the need for accurate preservation of Indigenous traditions and the methodological problems of relying solely on written transcription.
48. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 1–4. Discussion of preserving the speaker's exact words and minimizing interpretive error.
49. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 4–8. Discussion of songs, dances, and their relationship to oral tradition.
50. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 8–15. Ethnographic documentation of ceremonial performance and oral transmission.
51. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 15–22. Continued discussion of Indigenous narration, performance, and documentation.
52. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 22–30. Analysis of folklore, performance, and the role of documentation in preserving tradition.
53. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 30–39. Examples illustrating the relationship between oral performance and ethnographic recording.
54. Fewkes, *Contribution to Passamaquoddy Folk-Lore*, 39–43. Concluding observations on preserving Passamaquoddy traditions through systematic documentation.
55. Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 45 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), 1–4.
56. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, v–vi, 1–12.
57. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 1–12.
58. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 13–20.
59. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 21–51.
60. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 13–51.
61. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 24–50.
62. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 24–50.
63. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 51–55.
64. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 55–61.

65. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 62–74.
66. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 62–74.
67. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 82–91.
68. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 92–105.
69. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 106–115.
70. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 62–115.
71. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 13–115.
72. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 13–115.
73. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 13–117.
74. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 118–123.
75. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 123–126.
76. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 126–136.
77. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 118–136.
78. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 118–136.
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79. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 118–136.
80. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 136.
81. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 118–136.
82. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 137–142.
83. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 142–147.
84. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 137–147.
85. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 146–147.
86. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 137–147.
87. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 137–147.
88. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 148–151.
89. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 152–155.
90. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 148–155.
91. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 156–158.
92. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 159–160.
93. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 156–160.
94. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 166–173.
95. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 166–173.
96. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 173–175.
97. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 176–180.
98. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 176–180.
99. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 182–185.
100. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 186–191.
101. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 192–196.

102. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 198–206.

103. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 166–206.

104. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 166–206.

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