Yearbook
At American Indian boarding school, students were forced to abandon their native languages and traditional learning practices; but many rose above the oppressive policies to participate enthusiastically in academics, vocational training, and extracurriculars. Although the Uniform Course of Study established by the Superintendent of Indian Schools in 1901—and implemented by Indian boarding schools across the United States—emphasized the notion that Native American people were best suited to manual labor and domestic work, many students challenged these limitations to pursue and excel in a myriad of career paths.

The skills that boarding school students gained—combined with resolve, resilience, and persisting cultural pride—produced generations of great leaders who have shaped Indigenous identity, advanced self-determination and sovereignty, and reframed the telling of America’s history. This yearbook contains a few of their stories.
Tsianina Redfeather studied classical piano at Eufaula Indian Boarding School (Oklahoma). She was selected to further her music training in Denver. For decades beginning in 1908, she lectured on Indian music and toured internationally with Indianist composer Charles Wakefield Cadman. Cadman and Redfeather collaborated on the opera *Shanewis (The Robin Woman)*—based on her stories of Indian life and her reflections on contemporary issues. The opera premiered in 1918 at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and soon after, she was playing guitar and singing for American troops on the European front during World War I. After her wartime service, Redfeather sang the mezzo-soprano lead when *Shanewis* toured, and she frequently soloed with various orchestras.

Often billed as “Princess Tsianina,” she performed in beaded buckskin dresses to meet audience expectations and attract interest, but her success allowed her to present Indian melodies as living music rather than relics of the past. Her fame also gave her a platform for criticizing government Indian policies. She retired from the stage and became an activist for Indian education, living to the age of 103.

**Dig deeper**

The “Indianist movement” synthesized traditional Indigenous music with western classical music, capitalizing on Americans’ deep interest in Indian culture. The result was a new American art form. Who led this movement? What are some of the pros and cons of this cultural synthesis?

Discuss Indian identity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. How did boarding school policies and student experiences impact this? How did growing public interest in Indianness play a role?

Charles Wakefield Cadman wrote what became Redfeather’s signature song—“From the Land of Sky Blue Water.” Research the inspiration for the song and look for the lyrics, sheet music, and old recordings.

Tsianina’s autobiography *Where Trails Have Led Me* was first published in 1968. Does a library near you hold a copy?
In American Indian boarding schools, students were forbidden to perform what were deemed the “savage” tribal dances and music from their Indigenous communities. Music education was offered at many Indian schools, but the instruction focused on Euro-American music as a means to “civilize.” School choruses and glee clubs performed Christian hymns and American patriotic songs. School orchestras and piano students played music from the western classical repertoire; and school bands marched and performed at athletic games, parades, and special events, looking and sounding very much like military bands.

Many students excelled in music, and some of the most talented became professional performers or returned to boarding school to become music teachers and band leaders. For some, music became a tool of cultural resistance, a way to strengthen Indianness and tribal identity. By incorporating tribal music traditions with classical training and instrumentation, their artistic expressions contributed to the development of authentic American musical forms.

Discuss

All boarding school students brought music with them from their tribal communities when they arrived at school. How do you imagine that these early musical imprints affected their identity and creative expression, despite school efforts at assimilation?

How does Native American music today reflect a variety of cultural influences?

Additional Resources to Explore


*To Win the Indian Heart: Music at Chemawa Indian School* by Melissa D. Parkhurst (Oregon State University Press, 2014).
Flandreau Indian School (SD) choir, c. 1909, photographer unknown; Courtesy of Library of Congress

Carlisle Indian School (PA) band in the campus bandstand, 1901, photo by Frances Benjamin Johnston; Courtesy of Library of Congress
Luther Standing Bear was born on the Spotted Tail Agency in Rosebud, Dakota Territory, a son of Brulé Lakota chief George Standing Bear. The Great Plains nations were greatly diminished in number by the time of his birth, and his father believed that his son’s greatest hope was to be educated in the white person’s ways. At age eleven, he was enrolled in the inaugural class of students at Carlisle Indian Industrial School—the first federal boarding school. Luther Standing Bear became an outstanding student and excelled in English.

His vocational training was tinsmithing, which he later proclaimed was a useless trade both on and off the reservation. In time, the school’s founder Richard Henry Pratt assigned him to an Outing with a department store entrepreneur (these student work placements were usually in farm or domestic settings). He also served as a Lakota interpreter and a recruiter for Carlisle.

After graduation, Luther Standing Bear moved to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, where he served as day school teacher, opened a dry goods store, and ran the post office he helped establish. He was also a rider and interpreter for Buffalo Bill’s touring Wild West Show. Standing Bear’s life and point of view, however, were transformed by two events: the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee and a train accident that seriously injured him in 1904. Thereafter, he began to lecture and write about the wisdom and strength of Indigenous people and the tragic consequences of government Indian policies.

Luther Standing Bear petitioned for citizenship in 1911, asking for support from the superintendent at Carlisle Indian School. He was granted citizenship thirteen years before the American Indian Citizenship Act (1924) was passed. Actual voting rights were not given to Indigenous people in some states for another thirty-seven years (1948 in Arizona and New Mexico).

Luther Standing Bear combined his traditional tribal education with his boarding school education and language proficiency to publish several books. He wrote about the culture, events, and perspectives of the Lakota people and also about his personal experiences: at boarding school, as a lecturer and performer in a white man’s world, and as an Indian returning to the reservation. The many books he published continue to be important resources about the American Indian experience and worldview.
One of the primary purposes of American Indian boarding schools was to teach children from many different nations—who spoke many different languages—to speak, read, and write English. The methods for accomplishing this were cruel. Students were forbidden from using the only language they knew—and even their own name—as soon as they arrived; and they were punished harshly if they broke this rule.

Luther Standing Bear was one of the first graduates of Carlisle. Considered the model Indian school, students there divided their days between vocational training and academic instruction. A variety of extracurricular activities were offered to further "civilize" them. School administrators and politicians continuously publicized evidence of the school’s success, and Luther Standing Bear was hailed as a shining example. He would not always welcome this attention, however, and eventually spoke out against boarding school policies.

Dig Deeper

Consider Luther Standing Bear’s quote at right. How did he, in his life’s work, both embrace the language policies of school as well as use the skills he gained to speak out against them? Research to learn statistics about lost and surviving Indigenous languages in North America today. Locate a Native language revitalization program in your region.

In the classroom photo above, a debate topic is written on the chalkboard. It says: “Resolved—That the negroes of the south should not be denied the rights of citizenship.” Why could that be considered a particularly insensitive topic for these students in 1901? Write a caption for this photo that explores the incongruities.

Many former boarding school students who excelled in various fields also became Indian activists, advocates for reform. Discuss how life experiences can lead to activism. Share examples of individuals who have become leaders—in the past and in recent times.

By that time we had been forbidden to speak our mother tongue, which is the rule in all boarding-schools. This rule is uncalled for, and today is not only robbing the Indian, but America of a rich heritage. The language of a people is part of their history. Today we should be perpetuating history instead of destroying it, and this can only be effectively done by allowing and encouraging the young to keep it alive. A language unused, embalmed, and reposing only in a book, is a dead language. Only the people themselves, and never the scholars, can nourish it to life.

—Luther Standing Bear, Land of the Spotted Eagle, 1933
Explore a Historical Resource

Years after Standing Bear’s graduation, he and his classmates were still being celebrated by Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Review the reprint of the school’s 1902 catalogue included in the education outreach kit.

Find the photo near the front, “First Party Eighty Two Sioux Arrived at Carlisle Oct. 6, 1879.” Luther Standing Bear, age eleven, is seated in the lower photo, front row center (beneath the door), with his hands wrapped around his knee. Why do you think the 1879 students are still pictured in the 1902 catalogue?

Explore this catalogue further. What do the photos and descriptions communicate about the school? Is this a propaganda piece? Justify your answer with specific examples of images or text in the publication.

Imagine if you lived traditionally on the reservation and a family member left to attend Carlisle. How do you feel you would respond to this catalogue? Draft a letter to the student in your family to express your thoughts.

Find a photo in the catalogue of students participating in an activity that you pursue at school today. How is it alike and different from your school experiences? Find evidence of the student labor that helped the school to operate.

Additional Resources to Explore


*My Indian Boyhood*, autobiography by Luther Standing Bear, originally published in 1931 (modern edition by University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

*Land of the Spotted Eagle*, an ethnographic account of the Lakota and his own experiences, by Luther Standing Bear, originally published 1933 (modern edition by University of Nebraska Press, 2006).


Joy Harjo is an internationally renowned performer and writer of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and was named the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States in 2019—the first Native American poet to serve in the position. Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, she asked to be transferred to an Indian boarding school as a teenager—a strategy to escape an abusive stepfather. During the process of enrolling in Chilocco Indian School in 1967, the BIA agent learned of her talent for painting, so she was instead sent to the new arts-focused Indian boarding high school—the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. (In 1975, IAIA became a two-year college; today it is a tribal college offering undergraduate and graduate degrees.) Harjo studied studio arts and music (as well as drama and dance) at IAIA. Later, during her university training, she shifted her focus to creative writing.

The author of nine books of poetry, several plays and children’s books, and a memoir, Joy Harjo has earned many literary honors, including: the Ruth Lily Prize for Lifetime Achievement from the Poetry Foundation, the Academy of American Poets Wallace Stevens Award, a PEN USA Literary Award, two NEA fellowships, and a Guggenheim fellowship. Harjo is a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, a founding board member of the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, and a creative writing teacher.

Crazy Brave: A Memoir was published in 2012 (WW Norton & Co.). For a Girl Becoming (University of Arizona Press, 2009) is a picture book that welcomes an infant girl into the world and gives her advice to carry her through the journey of her life. The poetry collection An American Sunrise: Poems was published in 2019. Also an accomplished jazz musician (saxophone and vocals), Joy Harjo has recorded five albums of original music. She lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she is a Tulsa Artist Fellow.
Boarding school students wrote for their school newspapers, newsletters, and literary magazines—publications such as: *The Red Man* (Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Pennsylvania), *The Chemawa American* (Chemawa Indian Boarding School, Oregon), *Hallaquah* (Seneca Indian School, Oklahoma), and *The Word Carrier* (Santee Normal Training School, Nebraska), among others. In addition, some students learned to operate the school printing presses as part of their vocational training; the boarding schools of Carlisle, Haskell, Chilocco, and Phoenix all had full print shops.

While school administrators often selected student writing that supported the assimilationist agenda of the schools, writing became an important way for Native American students to find their own voice as well. Through writing, they could recount their personal experiences (including boarding school memories); they could describe and document their culture; they could raise awareness of issues important to their communities; and they could record history from the Indigenous perspective. Once they left school, the school publications allowed students from distant places to keep in touch. Writing advanced identity building and self-determination.

Many Indigenous writers in recent years have continued to take up the literary mantle, adding to a growing chorus of Native voices in both nonfiction and fiction. Several have explored the boarding school legacy and its ongoing intergenerational trauma in their work. In her recent poetry collection, *An American Sunrise: Poems* (WW Norton & Co., 2019), Joy Harjo writes about the legacy of the boarding school experience in the poem, “Exile of Memory”:

. . .

*We are still in mourning.*

*The children were stolen from these beloved lands by the government.*

*Their hair was cut, their toys and handmade clothes ripped*  
*From them. They were bathed in pesticides*  
*And now clean, given prayers in a foreign language to recite*  
*As they were lined up to sleep alone in their army-issued cages.* . .

—from “Exile of Memory” by Joy Harjo
A remarkably versatile athlete, Jim Thorpe was an Olympic gold medalist and pro football Hall of Famer who was considered to be the greatest athlete of the first half of the twentieth century by the Associated Press. Born in the Sac and Fox Nation on land that would become Oklahoma, Jim Thorpe was in and out of schools throughout his childhood; first the reservation school, then Haskell Institute, a local public school, and finally—in 1904, at age sixteen—Carlisle. Strong, swift, and agile from his boyhood pursuits of hunting, fishing, and breaking horses, Thorpe’s athletic abilities blossomed at Carlisle. He became competitive in track and field, baseball, football, and even ballroom dancing there.

Excellent at every sport he tried, Jim Thorpe gained his greatest fame by winning both the decathlon and pentathlon events at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm, setting records that would hold for decades. Thorpe’s gold medals were taken away after a reporter pointed out that he had been paid a small per-game sum to play in minor league baseball games in 1909 and 1910. (His medals were restored posthumously in 1982.) Just months after the Stockholm games, the Carlisle Indians won the 1912 national collegiate football championship—under the leadership of coach Glenn “Pop” Warner, and with team captain Thorpe scoring twenty-seven touchdowns and 224 points during the season.

After leaving Carlisle, Jim Thorpe played six seasons of major league baseball (1913–19) and overlapped careers when he became the first big name athlete to play professional football, signing with the Canton Bulldogs of the American Professional Football Association (later known as the NFL), in 1915. He played pro football through 1928 and then served as the first president of the league. After his retirement from sports, Thorpe acted in Hollywood movies, advocated for equal pay for Native actors, and toured the nation lecturing for Indian self-determination.

Select Athletic Accomplishments of Jim Thorpe:

- First team All-American halfback, 1911, 1912
- Olympic gold medal, Decathlon, 1912 Stockholm
- Olympic gold medal, Pentathlon, 1912 Stockholm
- Professional major league baseball player, 1913–19
- Professional football player, 1915–28
- College Football Hall of Fame, 1951
- Pro Football Hall of Fame, 1963 (its inaugural year)
- US Congress Joint Resolution recognizing Thorpe as “Athlete of the Century,” 1999
Dig Deeper

Some historians have suggested that the rise of American football coincided with the end of the battle for land in the West; that once America was fully colonized, the gridiron became the new place for young men to carry out their aggressions, to conquer the opponent. What do you think of this analysis?

Research the traditional Indian sports like lacrosse, foot racing, and hoop-and-pole. How did these games reinforce cultural values, traditions, and skills? How do they compare to the Euro-American games of football, baseball, and basketball?

Investigate one of the many successful athletic teams that have been a part of Indian boarding school history. Produce a digital history project (video short, podcast, blog, interactive timeline, story map, etc.) or a more traditional narrative product (sports feature article, encyclopedia entry, yearbook page) that tells the story of a team, season, or game.

Review some of the “effects of playing sports” listed in the column to the right. Which seem to convey the viewpoint of school administrators? Which seem to convey the viewpoint of students? Write a persuasive piece from the perspective of either a school administrator or a student, trying to convince your readers that football is a beneficial (or a detrimental) activity for Indian boarding school students. Or stage a mock debate considering the pros and cons.

**Effects of playing sports:**

- Brings positive attention and financial and political support to the school
- Beating dominant white teams instills pride
- Advances assimilation goals
- Players feel accomplishment, notoriety as individuals
- Recreation is fun, healthful
- Challenges stereotypes of/ assumptions about Native Americans, race
- Disciplines minds and bodies
- Students spend time with students at other schools, both Native and non-Native
- Offers opportunities to “burn off steam” (aggression, frustration)
- Distracts from school routine, vocational duties, and academics
- Fosters Pan-Indian community
- Teamwork and leadership skills transfer to other activities
- Develops identity, dignity
- *Add your own thoughts here*
Additional Resources to Explore—


Jim Thorpe, Original All-American by Joseph Bruchac (Dial, 2006).


The Real Americans: The Team that Changed a Game, a People, a Nation by Sally Jenkins (Anchor, 2007).


Born on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, Billy Mills trained in track and field at Haskell Institute. He won the gold medal in the 10,000 meter run at the Tokyo Olympics.

The Carlisle Indians pulled off a huge upset against the Dartmouth Big Green. Final score 35–10.  

Billy Mills crossing the finish line at the 1964 Olympics, October 14, 1964, photographer unknown; Courtesy of United States Marine Corps

Carlisle v. Dartmouth Game, November 15, 1913, photo by Bain News Service; Courtesy of Library of Congress
The legendary Fort Shaw (MT) Indian Boarding School girls basketball team captured the imagination of the nation, overwhelming their peers on the court, consistently beating college teams, and winning an event deemed the “World’s Championship” at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair.

Just one year after the BIA opened the Mt. Edgecumbe Indian boarding school in Sitka, Alaska, their men’s basketball team defeated Sheldon Jackson School to win the Sitka City League basketball championship.
During his younger years growing up in Oklahoma and Kansas, Woodrow Wilson “Woody” Crumbo did not regularly attend school, but his art talents were identified and encouraged by Susie Peters at the Anadarko Agency, where a group of talented Kiowa teens were receiving Indigenous art training. At age seventeen, he enrolled at Chilocco. While the boarding school emphasized practical vocational—especially agricultural—training, by 1905 the school had begun to teach students some traditional arts including beadwork; art which it sold to generate income for both the school and the participating students.

Woody Crumbo continued his art studies at American Indian Institute in Wichita, Wichita University, and University of Oklahoma, and he earned income during his college years performing as a traditional Indian dancer. He observed the dances by visiting reservations across the country in the 1930s during a government-sponsored tour, and he formed his own dance troupe to share what he learned with the public.

Crumbo was also an accomplished Native American flute player, and he collaborated with University of Wichita resident composer Thurlow Lieurance. Like Crumbo, Lieurance had traveled to reservations to study Indigenous music and make Edison recordings. The research inspired Lieurance to compose Indianist works—performed by the orchestra he founded in Wichita—with Crumbo featured in the performances as a flutist and dancer.

In 1938, when he was only twenty-six, Woody Crumbo was appointed director of the Indian Arts Program at Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma—a department known for strong artistic leadership. (Acee Blue Eagle, Dick West Sr., and Ruthe Blalock Jones also directed the art program there at various times.) While there, he extended his own studies to silverwork and weaving, expanding the Bacone curriculum to include these traditional media. He also surveyed Indigenous art in museum collections across the country to increase his knowledge and understanding.

After studying mural painting techniques with Swedish painter Olle Nordmark, Crumbo completed several murals, including in the US Department of the Interior Building in Washington, DC, and aboard the USS Oklahoma battleship (which was destroyed during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor). In 1945, he received a Julius Rosewald Fellowship in painting.

Woody Crumbo spent time in other professions—as an aircraft designer, minerals prospector, and a museum curator assembling collections of Native American art—but he was, above all, a prolific artist. His paintings and silk screen prints are found in major art museums across the country; but perhaps his greatest contribution was his lifetime devotion to studying and sharing knowledge of traditional Indian arts.
Half of my life passed in striving to complete the pictorial record of Indian history, religion, rituals, customs, way of life, and philosophies. It is now accomplished—a graphic record that a million words could not begin to tell.

—Woodrow Wilson “Woody” Crumbo, 1952

Dig Deeper

The exhibition *Away from Home* explores how the early boarding school curriculum emphasized classical western art training as a means to assimilate the students, but gradually, Indigenous art practices were included. In time, several schools developed significant art programs that fostered the talents of Indian artists and contributed to the development of identifiable art styles that were shaped by Native culture and aesthetics. Research the art programs at Riverside Indian School in Anadarko, Oklahoma, Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and Santa Fe Indian School, New Mexico.

Find a reproduction of Crumbo’s artwork, *Eagle Dancer*, in the education outreach kit. Locate other images of his art online. Write a sample museum label for one of these works, to describe his painting style and how his work expresses Woody Crumbo’s artistic identity.

Compare the reproductions of artworks included in the education outreach kit with the art that students are creating on the Studio Art yearbook page that follows. Discuss how Native American students moved beyond assimilationist training to develop new approaches to art that assert their personal and cultural identities. Is there a parallel to this in boarding school music training?

Additional Resources to Explore—

*Uprising! Woody Crumbo’s Indian Art* by Robert Perry (Chickasaw Press, 2009).


*Indian Play: Indigenous Identities at Bacone College* by Lisa K. Neuman (University of Nebraska Press, 2013).


Art Department at Phoenix Indian School, 1900, photo by Alfred Fenton Messinger; Courtesy of National Archives

Painting watercolors of butterflies at Hampton Institute, c. 1899, photo by Frances Benjamin Johnston; Courtesy of Library of Congress
A few additional American Indian boarding school alumni to investigate:

- **Francis La Flesche** (Omaha, 1857–1932), anthropologist and writer; attended Presbyterian Mission School (Bellevue, NE)
- **Charles Alexander Eastman** (Santee Sioux, 1858–1939), physician, writer, and activist; attended Flandreau (SD) and Santee (NE)
- **Thomas L. Sloan** (Omaha, 1863–1940), attorney, mayor, activist, businessman, magazine editor, and a founder of the Society of American Indians; attended Hampton (VA)
- **Susan La Flesche Picotte** (Omaha, 1865–1915), medical doctor, reformer, and activist; attended Hampton Institute (VA)
- **William Pollock** (Pawnee, 1870–99), Rough Rider, artist, policeman; attended Haskell (KS)
- **Dennison Wheelock** (Oneida, 1871–1927), band conductor, composer, cornetist, attorney, and activist; attended Carlisle (PA)
- **Angel De Cora** (Ho-Chunk, 1871–1919), artist, educator, and activist; attended Hampton (VA)
- **Zitkála-Šá** (Lakota, 1876–1938), writer, musician, educator, and activist; attended White’s Indiana Manual Labor Institute (IN)
- **Henry Roe Cloud** (Ho-Chunk, 1884–1950), educator, college administrator, US government official, and activist; attended Genoa and Santee (NE)
- **Lewis (Louis) Tewanima** (Hopi, 1888–1969), 1912 Olympic silver medalist; attended Fort Wingate (NM) and Carlisle (PA)
Polingaysi Qöyawayma (Hopi, 1892–1990), educator, writer, and potter; attended Sherman Institute (CA)

Pablita Velarde (Santa Clara Pueblo, 1918–2006), artist and illustrator; attended Santa Fe Indian School (NM)

Charles Chibitty (Comanche, 1921–2005), World War II code talker; attended Fort Sill (OK) and Haskell (KS)

John Pinto (Navajo, 1924–2019), New Mexico’s longest serving state senator; attended Fort Defiance (AZ)

Adam Fortunate Eagle (Ojibwe, born 1929), activist, writer, and sculptor; attended Pipestone (MN) and Haskell (KS)

Dennis Banks (Ojibwe, 1937–2017), activist and leader of the American Indian Movement; attended Pipestone (MN), Wahpeton (SD), and Flandreau (SD)

Billy Mills (Oglala Lakota, born 1938), 1964 Olympic gold medalist, activist, and Native youth nonprofit co-founder; attended Haskell (KS)

Wes Studi (Cherokee, born 1947), Oscar-winning actor, film producer, musician, and activist; attended Chilocco (OK)

Patty Talahongva (Hopi, born 1962), journalist and documentary film producer; attended Phoenix Indian (AZ)

Dig Deeper

Discover interesting alumni who attended Indian boarding schools in your region.

Create additional yearbook profiles for some of the alumni above or to document your local stories.