

Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte

Document 1

Graduation announcement of Susan La Flesche from the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, March 14, 1889 [not shown in online exhibition].

The following extract is from the Southern Workman:

Dr. Walker, one of principal lecturers of the college, in his address at its commencement, spoke thus of the Indian graduate:

Dr. La Flesche commenced her studies of English at the school on the Indian reservation. Coming East, she continued them for awhile at a boarding-school, and later at the excellent school for her people at Hampton, Va., where she graduated in 1886, and came at once to Philadelphia to study medicine. The impulse to a professional career was not of recent growth nor from friendly suggestions from those who had watched her course. It came as an inspiration when at home with her people and was born of a desire to see them independent, so far as she could make them, of the too frequently unskilled and oftener indifferent attention of the reservation doctor. What must those who oppose women physicians as impossibilities or monstrosities think of such a course? Thoughtful of a service to her people, child though she was, she permits not the magnitude of her task to stay the inspiration, but bravely, thoughtfully, diligently pursues the course, and to day receives her fitting reward. All this without a precedent. She will stand among her people as the first woman physician. Surely we may record with joy such courage, constancy and ability.

Source: Medical Missionary Record, vol. 4, 1889, p. 126.

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Document 2

...Back on the Omaha reservation, LaFlesche waged a tireless campaign against alcoholism, recounting stories of how Indians craving liquor used their rent money and even pawned their clothes in winter to obtain it. She wrote about Harry Edwards, who, on a winter's night in 1894, "fell from a buggy, was not missed by his drunken companions, and in the morning was found frozen to death" (Mathes, 1985, 75). From a medical point of view, LaFlesche believed that alcoholism was at the root of many of the physical, mental, and moral ills facing the Omahas and other American Indians...

Source: Johansen, Bruce Elliott, *Native Americans Today: A Biographical Dictionary*, 2010, p. 154.

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Document 3

Not content with her successes in health care, Susan stepped headlong into the volatile world of politics for the sake of her people...Government officials were convinced that all Indians were uneducated and backward. ...Ultimately the government added so many paternal restrictions that Omahas were unable to lease their lands or obtain tribal monies without going before a competency commission...Susan was the Omahas' unanimous choice to appear in Washington before the Secretary of the Interior and the United States attorney general...on 7 February 1910, Susan and the delegation were successful, and most of the Omahas were subsequently considered competent to rent or lease their lands and to receive their share of tribal monies.

Source: Mathes, Valerie Sherer, Great Plains Quarterly, Center for Great Plains Studies, *Susan Laflesche Picotte.MD: Nineteenth-Century Physician and Reformer*, 1-1-1993.

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Document 3b



In addition to her pioneering medical career, Dr. Picotte was a church and community leader, public health advocate, and Indian rights activist. Her life was devoted to promoting health, healing illness, serving community, and fostering respect between races.

Near the end of her life, she accomplished a goal that had eluded her many years. She raised the funds necessary to construct a hospital on the reservation in the town of Walthill. After Dr. her death in 1915, it was named in her honor. The hospital served both Native Americans and whites for over 30 years, then served as an elder care center for another 20 years.

In 1989, the building was rescued from deterioration by a local multi-racial committee whose goal was to establish a center to:

- commemorate Dr. Picotte as a role model of the servant, student, and healer
- celebrate the cultural diversity of the communities she served
- learn and teach the shared histories of the people who live in these communities
- encourage cooperative relations between the racial groups who live in these communities

The group acquired the property in 1988, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989, and declared a National Historic Landmark in 1993. It is owned by the Susan LaFlesche Picotte Center, Inc., a private, non-profit, tax-exempt corporation.

In 1993, An elementary school in Omaha, Nebraska (located at 144th and Ohio) was named after Picotte.

