

Impact Statement

Oliwia Kardas, Grade 11

Susan La Flesche Picotte-a symbol of emancipation, 2024.

Marker and pen on paper, 16.6 x 11.7 inches

Zespół Państwowych Placówek Krształcenia Plastycznego im. Jana Cybisa, Opole,
Poland

Unsung Hero: Susan La Flesche Picotte

Susan La Flasche Picott is a remarkable woman, especially when viewed from the perspective of historical realities. As a woman born in the 1860s, she did not have an easy life, in addition, the professional path she took was difficult. Women in the U.S. until the 1950s were seen primarily as creatures destined to marry and become mothers, they were less often viewed as equal to men and as good at doing professional work. Having said that, Susan had already graduated from medical school in 1889 with the best grade in her class. I myself consider this a remarkable achievement, especially since at the time Susan studied, only a handful of universities in the world admitted women to college. Surprisingly, in those days, in many parts of the world, women who graduated from medical school were prohibited from practicing medicine. It is also fascinating that Susan La Flasche Picotte undertook the tremendous effort, transcending all the divisions in place at the time for work from a true vocation. When she was still a little girl, she was to witness a situation in which it was a doctor who refused to provide medical care to an Indian woman, simply because of her ethnicity. Susan, being a child of Native Americans, probably also experienced discrimination at first hand more than once. Perhaps because of this memory of a doctor whose racial prejudice overshadowed empathy and duty to save lives, Susan became who she was.

A trait that also impressed me while acquiring biographical information about Susan La Flasche Picott was her devotion to people like her - Indians. Susan, having received a careful medical education and having become similar in dress as well as hairstyle to her white peers, never forgot her origins. In 1889 Susan returned to her hometown to take a job as a doctor at a boarding school run by the "Bureau of Indian Affairs." Her professional duties included only teaching the principles of hygiene and preventive health care. However, La Flasche was not limited in her work only to do chores, and instead took care of many members of the Native American community free of charge. Thanks to her altruism, she was able to work 20 hours a day, taking care of more than 1,200 people in the process. This is amazing to me because I myself have never met a person in my life who was able to devote her entire life to other

Susan also showed incredible persistence in her crusade against tuberculosis. Nothing was impossible for her, and the lack of a cure for tuberculosis that existed at the time

did not prevent her from campaigning and pro-health education to avoid the disease. Tuberculosis was another problem facing not only her tribe, but also the most important person in her life. Her husband Henry died in 1905, during an epidemic that killed hundreds of residents on the Omaha reservation. Picotte recommended frequent cleaning, extermination of house flies, thought to be pests that spread TB, and getting out in the fresh air frequently as part of TB prevention.

Susan La Flasche Picotte is a multifaceted character who, throughout her life, crossed boundaries that even today seem impassable to some people. She fulfilled herself not only as a wife and an ideal, warm and loving mother, but also as a doctor working out of vocation as well as kindness of heart. Nor did she cut herself off from the culture in which she was raised. It can be said that Susan La Flasche Picotte was not a human being, but an angel who fought for the lives, well-being and better future of people to whom no one else would have been able to pay as much attention as she did.

In my illustration, I have depicted Susan La Flasche Picotte wearing a buff-colored dress of the era, which was worn by many white women in the 19th century, and with her hair pinned up in a bun, this is a representation of Susan already out of school, when she started her medical practice. In her upswept hair she has an eagle feather drawn as a symbol of remembrance of her Indian ancestry. For me, it is also a symbol of devotion to the Indian community.

In the illustration, Susan holds a white stethoscope in her right hand, a reference to her vocation and career, while her left hand, which is closer to her heart, extends toward the window, behind which is her reflection in Indian clothing, which does not represent her past, but also the present future of the Omaha Indian tribe community, and Susan's devotion to that community. Both characters depicted smile at each other to show the respect shown to each other.

Susan in my illustration is in her office on the reservation, where I have placed a tabletop on which are scattered the letters that Susan La Flasche Picotte had to translate to the uneducated residents of the reservation, a poster referring to her campaign against alcohol consumption and documents, and next to them are spread two jars of medicine that are supposed to be a reference to her fight against tuberculosis.

The last item I placed on the countertop of her office is a black stethoscope, which is a symbolic representation of La Flasche's recollection of an Indian woman who was denied medical help because of her ethnicity, after all, this event had a huge impact on Susan's future.

Behind the Cabinet Window is a dark teepee, it is there because I wanted to show how close the Omaha were to Susan, who never refused their help or expected anything for it. The last symbol shown in my illustration is the leafless tree behind the reflection of the young Indian woman. It is meant to be a symbol of Susan's fight for the land that belonged to the Native Americans.