

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable". For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Susan La Flesche Picotte House
Other names/site number TS06-052

2. Location

Street & number 100 Taft Not for publication
City or town Walthill Vicinity
State Nebraska Code NE County Thurston Code 173 Zip code 68067

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

/s/ Michael J. Smith
Signature of certifying official

September 23, 2009
Date

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. _____

see continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. _____

see continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register. _____

removed from the National Register. _____

other, (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- X Private
Public-local
Public-state
Public-federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- x Building(s)
District
Site
Structure
Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing and 4 rows: Buildings, Sites, Structures, Objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

NA

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN
OTHER: Folk Victorian

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation Concrete Book
Walls Wood
Roof Asphalt
Other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** Removed from its original location.
- C** A birthplace or a grave.
- D** A cemetery.
- E** A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** A commemorative property.
- G** Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SETTLEMENT

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1907 – 1911

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte

Cultural Affiliation

Native American – Omaha

Architect/Builder

Unknown

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- Previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- Designated a National Historic Landmark
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location for additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than 1 acre

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	14	707240	4669052	3.			
2.				4.			

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jessie Nunn / National Register Coordinator

organization Nebraska State Historical Society

date _____

street & number 1500 R Street, PO Box 82554

telephone 402-471-4775

city or town Lincoln

state NE

zip code 68501

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Vida Stabler

street & number 100 Taft

telephone 402-846-5654

city or town Walthill

state NE

zip code 68067

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, (15 USC 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 7 Page 1

The Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House is a two-and-a-half story frame house located on three lots (a quarter block) on the southeast corner of Main Street and Taft Avenue in Walthill, Nebraska, a town of approximately 909 residents on the Omaha Indian Reservation (2000 Census). Walthill is located in the valley created by South Omaha Creek, a route selected by Burlington Northern Railroad in 1905 for their Sioux City-Lincoln line. Beginning just east of Taft Street, the ground level rises as the landscape transitions from river valley to the rolling hills typical of Northeastern Nebraska. The house's main façade faces west and is centered on lots 1 and 2 with an approximately 30 foot setback from the street. The south lot is mostly open space, with the exception of a contributing garage near the rear of the property. Two mature deciduous trees adorn the northwestern corner of the property and others delineate the southern boundary.

The house was completed in late 1907 and is a modest, Folk Victorian, two-and-a-half story, frame structure with simple classical detailing and overhanging eaves. It sits on a low concrete block foundation. The rectangular footprint measures approximately 20 feet wide and 30 feet long, with a small 1-story addition on the rear elevation and a full 1-story porch on the façade. A combination of returning eaves and a jerkinhead creates a unique trapezoidal roof shape that distinguishes this from the simple front gable house form. The Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House is still clad in its original clapboard siding. It has recently been painted green with white and maroon trim, a color scheme that highlights its classically inspired architectural details and mimics the house's appearance during its period of significance.

The west façade faces Taft Street and is characterized by a full one-story porch, a symmetrical fenestration pattern and a unique roof shape. The original flat-roofed porch which featured a rough-faced stone railing, six cylindrical columns, and second-story wood balustrade was altered dramatically sometime before 1986.¹ Currently the original entablature sits on four slightly battered square piers that extend from the poured concrete floor. The second story balustrade was removed and the roof was converted into a low-pitched hip shape. Despite the changes, the porch does retain some of its original scale. For instant the original floor level and roof height have been maintained.

Under the porch is the centered entrance, which contains the original paneled wood door with rectangular light. The entrance is flanked by paired one-over-one double hung wood windows (all windows are original unless otherwise specified). The second story contains three evenly spaced one-over-one double-hung windows, with the central opening centered above the main entrance. Immediately above the second story windows sits a simple entablature which appears to be supported by slender pilasters with capitals on the corners of the house. This entablature, in combination with the returning eaves and a hip at the gable end of the roof creates makes the attic story a trapezoidal shape. A single one-over-one double-hung window provides light to the attic story. All windows and doors except those on the back addition have simple surrounds with decorative lintels that mimic a classical entablature.

On both side (north and south) elevations the building's full unfinished basement is indicated by two small wood windows. A cellar entrance with its original wood door covering and concrete steps leads to the basement near the back of the north elevation. The differing fenestration patterns on the side elevations indicate different uses, and in some cases public and private spheres. The first story of the south elevation contains a large opening with three multi-light wood window units. A lager window containing one multi-light replacement unit is located just to the east. While the windows themselves are early replacements, the size of the opening is original and was probably designed with Picotte's medical and personal affinity for good natural lighting and ventilation in mind. Furthermore these large windows provided light into the living room and dining room, where Picotte entertained guests and gave assistance to those in need. The first story of the north

¹ Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, "Site Card for TS06-052, Photo 8603/14:32" in the Nebraska Historic Building Survey Collection.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 7 Page 2

elevation contains an elongated one-over-one double hung window, a horizontal awning window and a square one-over-one double hung window. From west to east, these indicate the fireplace, the staircase and the kitchen, spaces which are much more private in nature. The second stories are similar with two one-over-one double hung windows each. However, a small stationary pane is located between the larger windows on the north elevation.

The rear elevation is dominated by a small one-story hipped roof addition that may have originally been a porch. At an early date this space was framed and enclosed. Like the rest of the house it is clad in clapboard siding. The rear addition contains multi-light windows similar those found on the south elevation of the house, indicating that these alterations happened at the same time. Paired windows are located on the north and south side of the addition. On the east side, windows flank the house's rear entrance. Above the addition, the rear elevation is identical to the façade.

Interior

Upon entering the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House, one is immediately struck by the amount of light that floods into the main living room area. To the south is a large window and to the north is a brick fireplace that serves as the centerpiece of the room. A panel with the phrase, "East, West – Home's, Best," in low relief is carved into the mantle. This popular Scottish saying was of obvious significance to Picotte, who had lived far from her traditional homeland, particularly during young adulthood. Its use here expresses the sentiment that she was finally home in her Walthill house. The original wood staircase which projects from the east wall is the second character-defining interior feature located in this room. It has a turned balustrade and rail and squared newel posts with decorative paneling. Decorative panels hide storage space under the stairs and add massing, making the staircase an impressive visual backdrop for the living room.

The living room area also includes both original features and alterations that are found throughout the house. Wood floors, and dark wood baseboards and trim are found on both stories, although the main staircase and second story hall have been covered with carpet. All doors and windows are surrounded by simple low profile trim with cap molding. Original push button light switches are also found on both floors, although some have been replaced with modern units. Finally, the plaster walls and ceilings have been retained; however, the simple crown molding at their junction has been painted. The original radiators have been replaced with modern baseboard units that now heat the house.

The dining room is accessed from the living room through an enlarged opening surrounded with trim. This room is much smaller than the living room but still formal in nature. The small kitchen, which has been extensively remodeled, is accessed through a doorway on north wall of the dining room. The original rear door was moved to the new exterior wall of the house when the rear porch was enclosed. It was replaced by a multi-light door. A final feature of the dining room is a small five panel door—a miniature of the house's other interior doors—that leads to the basement. A portion of the ceiling angles down to meet the top of this door giving the dining room an asymmetrical, cottage-like quality.

The second floor of the Susan La Flesche Picotte House has a simple floor plan with three bedrooms and a bathroom centered on a hallway. Immediately north of the main staircase is a secondary stair that descends to the kitchen. The largest bedroom, most likely Picotte's, is at the front of the house and once accessed the roof of the porch through one the house's central upper story windows. The other bedrooms were likely used by her sons, Caryl and Pierre, and possibly for an office. Upper story rooms feature wood floors, original trim and original five panel interior doors. In some of the rooms, traces of historic wall paper are still visible.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 7 Page 3

Garage

The garage is a simple one-story frame building with a rectangular footprint and a gable roof. Gable ends face north and south. The garage is clad in clapboard siding wider than that on the house. Asphalt shingles cover the roof. Historic photographs indicate that the garage was originally used to house Picotte's carriage and that the entrance was on the south side. A subsequent owner moved the entrance to the north side and a modern garage door has been installed. As a doctor and tribal leader, Susan La Flesche Picotte was often called upon to travel long distances and this carriage house/garage is symbolic of that part of her life.

Condition and Integrity

The Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House is in relatively good condition, due to the stewardship ethic of its current owner. This property does have some significant integrity issues, the most glaring of which are alterations to the front porch. However, it is worth noting that the exterior and interior integrity has actually improved since 1986, the last time the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office surveyed the property. Carpet has been removed to reveal hardwood floors and the house has been painted in a historically appropriate style. On the south elevation, awnings covering each window were also removed to again let in the ample sunlight Picotte appreciated. Restoration efforts will most likely continue after National Register listing. Furthermore, the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House still powerfully conveys historical significance through its surviving integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, location, feeling and association.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 1

The Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B for its association with Susan La Flesche Picotte and her contributions in the areas of settlement and social history to Walthill, Nebraska and the Omaha Indian Reservation. While her medical and activist activities are already recognized in the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Memorial Hospital NHL, Picotte was heavily involved in assisting with the day-to-day bureaucratic requirements of her fellow Omaha tribal members as they continued to transition from a traditional lifestyle to one dictated by Euro-American laws and regulations. These activities are so wide ranging that Picotte may in fact be significant in a multitude of National Register-defined areas. However, since her motivation was always the "welfare of society," social history seems the most appropriate area of significance for her contributions.

Additionally, Picotte was a Walthill pioneer, the only Omaha and the only woman to file in the second lot sale. She was also instrumental in ensuring tribal members were able to sort through the cumbersome and sometimes corrupt allotment system and made various attempts to influence allotment policy. Sometimes money received by tribal members from allotment, inheritance or trust lands went into constructing a new house for Omaha families, which Picotte both encouraged and on more than one occasion helped plan. Finally, Picotte also financed the construction of at least three cottages for rent in Walthill. Picotte is, therefore, significant at the local (and tribal) level in the area of settlement in addition to her contributions to social history. Her house served as a law and land office, hospital and counseling center, conference room, telephone exchange, and social/cultural center in Walthill from its completion in late 1907 until the hospital was built in 1912. It was her house at 100 Taft Street where people sought out Picotte's assistance, as well as her point of departure, return and reflection during this period of her life.

The Significance of Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte

The historical significance of Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte (c.1865 – 1916) as the nation's first Native American woman to graduate from medical school has been previously established and recognized by the National Register with the listing of the Dr. Susann La Flesche Picotte Memorial Hospital in 1988.² Just five years later this property, which is also located in Walthill, was later designated as a National Historic Landmark (NHL). While the NHL rightfully recognizes the national significance of Susan La Flesche Picotte in the areas of medicine, ethnic history and social movements it fails to fully convey her day-to-day importance at the local level in Walthill and on the Omaha Indian Reservation. It also does not recognize her significance in the area of settlement. Furthermore, the period of significance for the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Memorial hospital does not begin until 1912, when the hospital was constructed, and does not appropriately recognize her important contributions to history prior to that date.

The National Register Bulletin *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Properties Associated with Significant Persons* states, "In some cases, different properties may represent different significant accomplishments or activities of a person's life, whether at different times, in different communities or in different fields. Therefore, several properties may qualify for National Register listing under Criterion B for associations with the same person."³ Picotte's residence can, therefore, be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B in addition to the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Memorial Hospital (Picotte Hospital NHL). Its associations with Picotte possess a different scale of significance, occurred during a different period of significance and reflect a previously unidentified area of significance.

² Edwards, Rae. "Dr. Susan Picotte Memorial Hospital, National Register of Historic Places Nomination," NPS # 19881216.

³ Boland, Beth Grosvenor. *National Register Bulletin 32: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Properties Associated with Significant Persons*, 20.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 2

Scales and Periods of Significance

During her life, and particularly after moving to Walthill, Picotte constantly balanced her nationally significant achievements and influence with her day-to-day activities on the Omaha Indian Reservation. By returning to Nebraska, Picotte was able to use her influence to address the particular needs of her people. As Benson Tong notes in his biography of Picotte, "Unlike her contemporaries Charles Eastman and Carlos Montezuma, who supported the Society of American Indians' pan-Indianism movement, Susan's activism revolved around local affairs."⁴ Tong's biography and numerous other publications clearly establish Picotte as an exceptional woman in United States history.⁵ However, contemporary sources such as the *Walthill Times* and her own journal more clearly illustrate her profound local significance.

Picotte's significance to Walthill and the Omaha Indian Reservation prior to the construction of the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Hospital Memorial Hospital NHL in 1912 is irrefutable. It marks the high point of her political involvement in issues ranging from the ending of the original Omaha trust period to proposed agency consolidation. This period was also a pivotal time in establishing her legacy as an Omaha leader. As she struggled to preserve Omaha rights and autonomy in the wake of these issues, Tong suggests that, "This may have been a turning point in Susan's life; not only would she now tie her fortunes to those of her people, but also she would try even harder henceforth to escape the stifling grasp of white paternalism."⁶ Picotte's outlook and efforts became more locally and tribally orientated during this period.

The period of significance begins in 1907 with the construction of the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House. 1911 serves as a rational ending date for the period of significance of this property and its direct association with the productive life of Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte. The most obvious reason is that after 1911 her attention and work was transferred from her residence to the newly constructed hospital until her death in September of 1916. Picotte also became gravely ill in the last half of 1911, bringing her activist work to a halt.⁷ By 1911 the political flurry of activity surrounding tribal issues had also slowed as decisions were made about the trust period, inheritance and agency consolidation. Finally, Picotte resigned from the Walthill Board of Health in March of 1911, effectively ending her direct involvement in town administration.

Other Properties Associated with Susan Picotte La Flesche

Outside of the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Memorial Hospital NHL, no other extant properties in Walthill or on the Omaha Indian Reservation have been identified that are so directly associated with her productive life from 1907-1911.⁸ It is possible that one of the cottages financed by Picotte still stands in Walthill, but it would not convey the full breadth of her significance as the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House does. Similarly, Picotte was heavily involved with Presbyterian missionary work, as well as gathering funds and volunteers for the construction of the Presbyterian Church building in 1911, but attempting to spread Christianity was certainly not her only contribution to local or American History.

The Picotte Hospital NHL obviously conveys her significance in the areas of medicine and social history after 1911, but cannot represent her contributions prior to that time. It also cannot appropriately convey her significance in the area of

⁴ Eastman and Montezuma were also early Native American Doctors. Tong, Benson. *Susan La Flesche Picotte, M.D.: Omaha Leader and Reformer*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, OK, 1999, 88.

⁵ *Iron Eye's Family: The Children of Joseph La Flesche, Homeward the Arrow's Flight: The Story of Susan La Flesche, and A Doctor to Her People* are just a selection of examples.

⁶ Tong, Benson. *Susan La Flesche, M.D.*, 161.

⁷ See "Local News Items," in the *Walthill Times*, August 11, September 15, November 11, December 8, 1911.

⁸ Save America's Heritage, "Nebraska Historic Building Survey: Reconnaissance Survey Final Report of Thurston County." Prepared for the Nebraska State Historical Preservation Office, 1988.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 3

settlement. It is her residence in Walthill, the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House, that is most closely associated with the significant socio-political work she was doing in the areas of settlement and social history from 1907-1911.

Significance in the Area of Settlement

Walthill Pioneer

On November 17, 1906, Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte braved the cold to attend the second lot sale in the newly formed town of Walthill, Nebraska. Six days later she was listed as one of twelve recent lot buyers intending to build a residence immediately and call the fledgling railroad boom town home.⁹ As the only woman, and presumably the only Native American, on this list of buyers, Picotte's purchase of land and participation in a public sale is noteworthy. Like most women of the day, even those drawing a salary like Picotte, her personal finances and decisions were still influenced by men in her life, including her late husband Henry Picotte and her sister Marguerite's husband, W. T. Diddock. The money she used to build her home most likely came from the sale of trust lands in South Dakota inherited from her husband earlier in 1906.¹⁰ Diddock accompanied Picotte to the November 1906 sale and purchased a lot across the street where he intended to move his family after building a house. As a real estate man, Diddock may have seen economic opportunity in Walthill and influenced her decision to invest in rental cottages.¹¹

Despite the extensive scholarship available on her life and work, it is still not entirely clear why Picotte chose to move to Walthill. She was a single parent to two young boys, had an ailing mother and was suffering from an unknown chronic ailment. A nice, modern home in a new town must have been appealing. Tong writes that, "She made no mention of using the money to purchase another farm, even though she and Henry had run a fairly successful one before his demise."¹² While Tong contends this decision was due to her health, early letters home also indicate a proclivity for town life. To her sister Rosalie, she confesses, "...and when I come home I may swing an ax or harness the horses to keep up my practice but you won't get me anywhere near the cows. For I am afraid of those critters."¹³ A potential fear of cows aside, her appreciation for the niceties of a modern home are evident at the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House in Walthill. Finally, as a largely white community enveloped by the Omaha Indian Reservation, Walthill may have simply been a natural choice for someone with a foot in both cultures.

Picotte's status as an early resident of Walthill alone might not sufficiently establish her significance in the area of settlement, even as a rare female and Native American pioneer. Anyone else may have just enjoyed their new home, but not Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte. She used the limited influence she had gained as a model of how Native Americans could succeed through acculturation to push the Federal Government for the protection of Omaha land rights. Her ability to negotiate both Omaha and Euro-American worlds, along with a strong desire to be of service, allowed Picotte to contribute in ways that shaped Walthill and the Omaha Indian Reservation during a pivotal period in history.

Allotment Assistance and Land Rights

Within the 1854 Treaty in which the Omaha ceded most of their lands, there was also a provision allowing for the survey and partitioning of reservation lands for individual tribal members.¹⁴ Allotment began for the Omaha in 1871 with fifty-one individuals taking lands, but was solidified with the Omaha Allotment Act of 1882 that allowed 160 acres for each head of

⁹ Anonymous. "Second Lot Sale." *Walthill Times*, November 23, 1906.

¹⁰ Tong, Benson. *Susan La Flesche Picotte, M.D.*, 148.

¹¹ W. T. Diddock ran regular advertisements in the local paper. See *Walthill Times*, October 11, 1907 for an early example.

¹² Tong, Benson. *Susan La Flesche Picotte, M.D.*, 152.

¹³ Picotte, Susan La Flesche. "Letter to Rosalie La Flesche," ca. 1887. RG 2026, Reel 1, NSHS Archives.

¹⁴ Awakuni-Swetland, Mark J., "Make-Believe White-Men" and the Omaha Land Allotments of 1871-1900," in *Great Plains Research*, 4 (August 1994), 202.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 4

household (male or female), 80 acres for each single adult, 80 acres for each orphan child and 40 acres for each child. Allotment and tribal lands were then held in trust by the United States for a twenty-five year period, which meant that Omaha allottees needed permission to manage their lands and receive revenue from them. The General Allotment Act or Dawes Act of 1887 was in large part based on policies established on the Omaha Indian Reservation.

Picotte's experiences helping her fellow tribal members and selling her own inheritance and trust lands made her fully aware of the how the allotment system could affect the welfare of her people. For many Native Americans, allotment land was their primary material asset when attempting to enter American capitalist society. Without control of their allotments, Omahas could not buy goods or receive medical care without waiting for government approval. Moreover, after the Burk Act of 1906, the competency policy required that all Omahas be judged individually to assess their ability to manage their own property and assets, a policy that continued after the trust period was extended for ten more years in 1909. Even Picotte herself had to go through the application process to prove her competency.¹⁵ In her March 1910 appeal for a "liberal interpretation of the law," she passionately expressed her frustration with the system exclaiming, "I am fighting for the manhood of my people. I am fighting for those you call incompetent."¹⁶ Picotte was ready to abandon the whole concept of competency in favor of equality among all Omaha.

For Picotte, however, this had come to mean that all lands should continue to be held in trust. This protected them from unscrupulous land speculators, who, according to Picotte, were becoming more numerous as the end of the trust period approached in July of 1909.¹⁷ Picotte had to walk a fine line between arguing for equality among all her people and protecting their interests. Completing applications for patents to allotment lands and overseeing their sale was probably the simplest way Picotte could help Omahas avoid losing their land without sufficient payment, at least in her own mind. (See "Acting Tribal Secretary" below). By 1909, however, she was driven to more direct action. She called upon the Department of the Interior and the Indian Office to investigate a land syndicate operating in the area and to increase efforts to enforce regulations.¹⁸

Just days before the Omaha trust period was to end on July 10, 1909, President Taft extended it for ten more years.¹⁹ However, the extension contained a major exception that did little to alleviate Picotte's fears. On April 1, 1910 the *Walthill Times* published a list of two hundred names of Omaha individuals who had been declared competent and would receive patent in fee simple to their allotment lands in the near future.²⁰ Ironically, the liberal interpretation of the allotment policy Picotte had lobbied for had been adopted, but it had a heavy price. Within 5 years, 95% of the two hundred Omaha individuals declared competent in 1910 had surrendered their deeds through various land sales.²¹

It is difficult to assess Picotte's actual impact on the federal government's decisions about Omaha allotment policy in 1909 and 1910. However, her very public appeals and work for the protection of Omaha land rights were certainly significant to the Omaha Nation. Allotment had a significant impact on settlement patterns on the reservation. Initially, it affected how Omaha tribal members lived as they moved from villages to individual tracts of land.²² After patents to their land were issued to "competent" Omahas starting in 1906 and en-mass in 1910, allotment policy permitted the unrestricted sale of

¹⁵ Tong, Benson. *Susan La Flesche Picotte, M.D.*, 149.

¹⁶ Picotte, Dr. Susan La Flesche. "Dr. Picotte's Appeal," *Walthill Times*, March 4, 1910.

¹⁷ Tong, Benson. *Susan La Flesche Picotte, M.D.*, 158.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 159.

²⁰ Anonymous. "Competent Omahas," *Walthill Times*, April 1, 1910.

²¹ Tong, Benson. *Susan La Flesche Picotte, M.D.*, 159.

²² Mark J. Awakuni-Swetland's 1994 article "Make-Believe White Man" published in *Great Plains Research* looks at pragmatic ways Omahas were able to maintain kinship and communal ties under the allotment system, even in the face of such monumental changes.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetDr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 5

individual Omaha allotment parcels to non-Omahas. By 1934, this had led to the alienation of 108,870 acres of Omaha allotment lands (80%)—creating a checkerboard pattern of Omaha and non-Omaha ownership that still exists today.²³ Whether her lobbying could be called a success or not, Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte was an indisputably significant and influential Omaha voice during a transitional phase in allotment policy.

Omaha Indian Residences

Omaha tribal members who acquired money from the sale or rent of their allotment lands or from trust funds often chose to use it for the construction of new Euro-American style homes—just as Picotte had done herself. Some Omaha living on farms also wanted to rent properties in Walthill. Picotte offered assistance and advice to both groups. In these more personal and localized involvements with Omaha settlement, Picotte likely found more satisfaction than in her broader dealings with allotment policy.

Her surviving journal from 1910 and 1911 reveal her significant advisory role in domestic planning. In September and October of 1910, White Horse and his wife consulted with Picotte on several occasions about their plans to build a house and enlisted her services in finding them a new range.²⁴ Teresa Morgan stopped by twice on November 2, 1910 to discuss buying a lot in Walthill and building a house. Picotte recorded both of Morgan's visits in her journal writing that, "She does not want a very large house and wants it built as cheaply as possible," but that later she returned and, "wanted the house a little bigger than we had planned."²⁵ A request from Charles Robinson to find a house to rent for his wife led Picotte to a property owned by Joseph Merrick, but "he wanted too much rent for no conveniences."²⁶ Instead of leaving it there, Picotte advised Merrick to improve his property and even called the Indian Office to secure funding for the project. Five days later she "explained to him about enlarging his house and building conveniences."²⁷ Bringing the story full-circle, Picotte eventually told the Robinsons they should buy instead of rent if they intended to keep their children in school.²⁸

These conversations and actions extended beyond simply helping out friends. As an Omaha who had a great deal of experience with Euro-American society and customs, and who had recently constructed her own house, Picotte was able to offer assistance with the transition from allotment houses and/or traditional Native American houses to more substantial residences. Her presence in Walthill may have also influenced other Omaha families and individuals to move there, or at least proved that it was possible to live in a mixed community.²⁹ A final legacy left by Picotte is a scrapbook with nearly 150 photographs of early Omaha residences. While her involvement in the creation of the scrapbook is undocumented—it was presented to her by a Dr. Will Bates—it appears she labeled the photographs in pencil herself.³⁰ Certainly she would have been able to identify many of the residences from her medical visits around the Reservation. Picotte likely took great pride in the scrapbook as evidence of her people's "progress." In combination with her journal, this scrapbook offers a rare glimpse into life on the Omaha Indian Reservation during the early 1900s.

Investments in Real Estate

Picotte's investments in Walthill real estate were some of the few documented actions in her life that appear to be purely

²³ Indian Land Tenure Foundation, "Allotment Information for Great Plains BIA Region," accessed online @ <http://www.indianlandtenure.org/ILTFallotment/specinfo/sc%20Great%20Plains.pdf>, 05 August 2009.

²⁴ Picotte, Dr. Susan La Flesche. "Susan La Flesche Picotte Diary, 1910-1911," in *The La Flesche Family Papers, 1859-1939*. Journal Entries for September 21 and 24, October 3, 4 and 10, 1910.

²⁵ Ibid., November 2, 1910.

²⁶ Ibid., November 21, 1910.

²⁷ Ibid., November 26, 1910.

²⁸ Ibid., November 29, 1910.

²⁹ In 2000, Walthill's population was 75% Native American. U.S. Census Bureau, "Fact Sheet: Walthill Village, Nebraska,"

³⁰ The "Omaha Indian Photo Album," (RG 4963.PH) is held at the Nebraska State Historical Society Archives.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 6

financial in nature. Intending to use the money earned from rental fees for her sons' education, Picotte built at least three cottages in Walthill in 1907 and 1908.³¹ In contrast to her house, the cottages were to be constructed with cement block, "on account of their cheapness, less need of repair and less danger of fire."³² It is likely that the cement blocks were provided by her brother-in-law, W. T. Diddock, who was manufacturing them in Walthill as early as March of 1907.³³ While her reason for building the cottages was the financial security of her children, Picotte was also providing much needed housing in a growing town. In the midst of reporting on the progress of her house and the cottages during late 1907, the *Walthill Times* also reported that "four and five room cottages are renting for \$10 a month in Walthill and the supply does not meet the demand."³⁴ Picotte was making money and facilitating the growth of a town on what was once Omaha Indian Reservation land. In essence, she was a Native American woman participating in Euro-American capitalism, a venture that was both ironic and impressive for that time period.

Significance in the Area of Social History

"Dr. Picotte Entertains"

Picotte's new house in Walthill was finished by March of 1908 enabling her to entertain around forty guests from the surrounding area on a Tuesday evening.³⁵ It is difficult to imagine forty guests crowding into the Taft Street residence but this was not the last time Picotte would open her house to friends and the general public on a grand scale. She must have also utilized the large yard, particularly in the summer months. Many of these gatherings were not just parties or dinners, but full-fledged celebrations of Omaha culture intended for both Omaha and white audiences. As such, they were also attempts at preserving Omaha culture through its integration with broader American culture, society and scholarship.

August and September of 1909 were particularly busy months at the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House. On August 9, Picotte hosted a piano recital by pianist and composer Charles Wakefield Cadman that also featured a performance and interpretation of the Omaha pipe dance by her brother Francis La Flesche. The recital was attended by about fifty guests and its positive reception was apparent in the next issue of the *Walthill Times* which reported Cadman's program:

...was for the most part, made up of selections of Omaha Indian music; songs, those sung at the ceremonies and dances, harmonized and idealized by Cadman for piano. We, who have heard this music, rendered only in the open and not by selected musicians have not regarded it as especially pretty but as it has been arranged by Mr. Cadman and as rendered by him it is beautiful.³⁶

The *Times* was also pleased with Francis La Flesche's performance, commenting that his interpretation of the pipe dance meant "its full significance and interest were for the first time appreciated by all."³⁷ Eventually, Cadman and Francis La Flesche would collaborate to create the opera *Da-O-Ma* based on an Omaha legend.³⁸

In September of 1909, another of Picotte's influential friends, Alice C. Fletcher, stayed with her in Walthill during a visit to the Omaha Indian Reservation. An ethnologist, Fletcher all but developed the allotment system for the Omaha, and had a

³¹ Anonymous. "Local and Personal." *Walthill Times*, September 6, 1907; October 8, 1907 and March 6, 1908.

³² Picotte, Susan La Flesche. Letter to Frances E. Lennep, July 8, 1907. Quoted in Tong, 151.

³³ Anonymous, "Local and Personal." *Walthill Times*, March 15, 1907.

³⁴ Anonymous. "Local and Personal." *Walthill Times*, November 8, 1907.

³⁵ Anonymous. "Dr. Picotte Entertains." *Walthill Times*, March 27, 1908.

³⁶ Anonymous, "Piano Recital By Charles Wakefield Camden," *Walthill Times*, August 13, 1909.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *Da-O-Ma* was apparently never produced or preformed. Correspondence and other materials related to *Da-O-Ma* can be found in the La Flesche Family Papers, RG 2026, held at the NSHS archives.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 7

long connection with the tribe both as a scholar and government official. According the *Times*, several tribal elders visited Fletcher during her visit and on:

Sunday afternoon about thirty people from here in town called upon her and spent several hours listening to her entertaining recitals of portions of old Indian religious rituals and ceremonies and their interpretation...her presentation of it is fine and reveals a power and beauty in Omaha Indian character and customs that most of us had never dreamed of.³⁹

While the ethics of ethnological and cultural appropriation by non-Native Americans, and occasional Native Americans themselves, has long been debated, there is no denying the impact of the cultural entertainments at the Susan La Flesche Picotte House during its period of significance. Such events did work to preserve culture, bridge cultural divides and bring a certain appreciation for Omaha culture to whites living in and around Walthill that they may have otherwise missed.

Acting Tribal Secretary

When Picotte wrote, "The Omahas want a whole live superintendent. The one they have now is busy all the time and can't fulfill all the demands made upon him," during an attempt to consolidate the Omaha and Winnebago agencies, she knew what she was talking about.⁴⁰ Her journal from 1910-1911 is packed with references to helping Omaha tribal members negotiate the complicated processes of American laws as they strove to protect their rights and property. It was complicated business. The Omaha Agency was clearly either understaffed or unwelcoming, considering the amount of requests for assistance that came Picotte's way on a daily basis. Fortunately, Picotte had the tools to help. Fluent in both Omaha and English, she was a favorite interpreter for letters and negotiations. She was also able to write official letters or wills and complete various applications. Finally, beginning in January 1908, her residence was listed on the Walthill telephone exchange.⁴¹ While a telephone was probably most useful as a life-saving device in the house of a doctor, it also allowed Picotte to place calls to local and tribal officials to initiate and expedite bureaucratic processes.

A selection of entries from Picotte's journal over a two day period best illustrates her significance in the lives of Omaha tribal members. On October 3, 1910:

Mrs. R. Harlan asked me to phone for her to see about rent money...Thos. P. Webster asked me to write a letter for him to Dept. & Kneale ... Phoned to Macy for Frank Cox who wants his rent money... Good Old Man wants me to see about his funeral expenses being paid out of his wife's money...Teresa Blackbird spoke to me about some lots she wanted to buy...Isaac Preston asked me to phone for him to Macy to get authority to buy a team...Lots of Indians in town today.⁴²

The next day was just as busy:

White Horse came in to see me about the plans for the new house...Dan Wolf and his wife came in. He wanted me to interpret for him in his will. His wife asked me to look after her lands; that she had received no rent for 2 years...Theresa B. came in to ask me to phone for her to Govt. Office about

³⁹ Anonymous, "Miss Fletcher Visits Walthill," *Walthill Times*, September 24, 1909.

⁴⁰ Picotte, Dr. Susan La Flesche. "Picotte Discusses the New Policy." *Walthill Times*, December 31, 1909.

⁴¹ Anonymous. "New Phones on the Walthill Exchange." *Walthill Times*, January 10, 1908.

⁴² Picotte, Dr. Susan La Flesche. "Susan La Flesche Picotte Diary, 1910-1911," October 3, 1910.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 8

the girls' money. Wrote a letter for Nedair Walker to T. L. Sloan in Washington asking him to get her patent in fee to Jas. Walker (heirship) land. Had [Tribal] Council in P.M.⁴³

Picotte's help unquestionably improved the lives of countless Omaha tribal members, who were forced to confront language and cultural barriers daily for even their most basic needs. Her assistance likely made the bureaucratic process necessary to Omaha survival at this point in tribal history a little less degrading and confusing.

Politics and Policy

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte's role in the political debates about allotment policy and agency consolidation have already been discussed above. However, it bears mentioning that she was selected along with Daniel Webster, Simeon Hollowell and Hiram Chase for an Omaha Indian Delegation enlisted to travel to Washington, D.C. in early 1910 to discuss these issues. According to the *Walthill Times*, the delegation was, "empowered to secure a reversal of the plans of the Indian office in respect to the Omahas, and failing that to take steps toward freeing the tribe from governmental supervision."⁴⁴ Clearly, she had proven herself as a competent advocate for her people by this time, and her place among Omaha leaders was firmly established by her selection to this delegation. As a leader and advocate, Picotte also played an active role in other political issues during the period between 1907 and 1911 that directly impacted the welfare of the Omaha Nation, including the controversy over the inheritance rights for women and children of multiple marriages.

On March 2, 1911, the association between Picotte's significance in the politics of social welfare and the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House reached a dramatic apex. Over 60 Omaha gathered there to meet representatives of the Nebraska House Judiciary Committee to discuss the Gallagher Bill, an attempt to protect the inheritance rights of Native American wives and their children.⁴⁵ In what the *Walthill Times* described as a "strange meeting," Representatives Grossman (the committee chair), Howard and Koutouc met with the Omaha Tribe at "Dr. Picotte's." The bill was read in the Omaha language and then supporters of the bill were given a chance to speak. Grossman clearly opposed the Gallagher Bill, however; and apparently interrupted pro-Gallagher speakers—all except for Picotte who chose to address her people in Omaha not English. Her decision was both symbolic and practical, as it rendered her immune to Grossman's interruptions. In the end, the *Times* reported that Grossman's, "attempts to prejudice [the] tribe against the measure," were in vain.⁴⁶ Picotte's significance in Walthill and among her people is evident in the selection of her home as a political meeting place, in the Omaha Nation's decision to support the Gallagher Bill and in her portrayal as a heroine by the local Euro-American paper.

"Dr. Picotte"

In the very same issue of the *Walthill Times* that announced Picotte's purchase of a lot in the new town, the editor lamented, "That hustling young doctor hasn't arrived yet. When he comes he'll be sorry he didn't come earlier. The opportunity is Golden."⁴⁷ As a woman and a Native American, Susan La Flesche Picotte did not initially meet the criteria for a doctor as imagined by the residents of her new town. In the aftermath of a 1909 diphtheria scare, her work as a doctor in the Walthill area was apparently more appreciated. The editor wrote, "Dr. Picotte was especially active in this work...The community is fortunate to have her services, associated with our other two doctors on the board of health."⁴⁸

⁴³ Ibid., October 4, 1910.

⁴⁴ Anonymous, "Omaha Indian Delegation Goes to Washington, D. C." *Walthill Times*, January 28, 1910.

⁴⁵ Anonymous, "Committee Conducts Strange Hearing: Member of Legislature Meet at Dr. Picotte's." *Walthill Times*, March 3 1911. The Gallagher Bill (House Bill No. 285) also protected current plural wives and their children, but called for an immediate end to this custom among Nebraska Tribes.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Anonymous. "Local and Personal." *Walthill Times*, November 23, 1906.

⁴⁸ Anonymous. "Diphtheria Scare is Over." *Walthill Times*, September 17, 1909.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 9

just a few short years, "Dr. Picotte" as she was affectionately referred to in the *Walthill Times*, had earned respect as a professional in her field among Native Americans and whites alike. Her service on the Walthill Board of Health, also referenced in the *Times* quote, until resigning in March of 1911 is further evidence of the community's high regard for her medical skills and knowledge.⁴⁹

Even as she became embroiled in tribal affairs, Picotte continued to practice medicine. In fact, her journals are filled with both consultations in Walthill and medical house calls in addition to her self-imposed political and administrative responsibilities. On the same two days discussed above (October 3rd and 4th of 1910), Picotte administered six medical consultations and cared for a sick infant that was staying at her house.⁵⁰ During this period of her life (1907-1911), Picotte's influence in the medical field extended beyond Walthill and the Omaha Tribe. She was a founding member of the Thurston County Medical Association in 1907, and used her influence as Chair of the Nebraska Federation of Woman's Clubs to push for reform, education and the eradication of tuberculosis.⁵¹ Her success in securing funding for a hospital in Walthill (the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Memorial Hospital NHL), was a testament to what she had *already* accomplished.

Conclusion

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte made significant contributions to the history and development of Walthill and the Omaha Indian Reservation from 1907-1911. Motivated by a strong desire to secure the welfare of her fellow Omaha during a pivotal period of history, she served the local community and Omaha Tribe as a doctor, political activist, volunteer administrative assistant and hostess from her house at 100 Taft Street in Walthill. Her house was directly associated with her productive life during this period as a place where Omaha tribal members felt comfortable seeking assistance and as a site for political meetings and cultural events. It is also the only property associated with the broad range of her contributions during this period. The Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House is, therefore, eligible for the National Register under Criterion B at the local level in the areas of settlement and social history.

⁴⁹ Anonymous. "Appoint a New Board of Health." *Walthill Times*, March 17, 1911.

⁵⁰ Picotte, Dr. Susan La Flesche. "Susan La Flesche Picotte Diary, 1910-1911," October 3 and 4, 1910.

⁵¹ Tong, Benson. *Susan La Flesche Picotte, M.D.*, 178 and 181.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

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Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 9 Page 1

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Bibliography

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 9 Page 1

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet
Geographic Data**

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 10 Page 1

Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 1, 2, and 3, Block 12, Second Filing Addition, Town of Walthill, Thurston County, Nebraska.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel of land historically associated with the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House, Walthill, Thurston County, Nebraska.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet
Geographic Data**

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

Name of Property

Thurston County, Nebraska

County and State

Section Photos Page 1

Photographs

Photo 1 of 9. West Façade and North Elevation, Aspect: SE

Photo 2 of 9. Rear and South Elevations, Aspect: NW

Photo 3 of 9. West Façade, Aspect: E

Photo 4 of 9. Garage, Aspect: SE

Photo 5 of 9. Interior, Living Room and Fireplace, Aspect, NW

Photo 6 of 9. Interior, Staircase, Aspect: SE

Photo 7 of 9. Interior, Dining Room and Rear Addition, Aspect: NE

Photo 8 of 9. Interior, Dinning Room and Kitchen, Aspect: N

Photo 9 of 9. Interior, 2nd Story Bedroom, Aspect: NW

All photographs were taken by Jessie Nunn, Nebraska State Historical Society, November 25, 2008.

Photo 1 of 9



Photo 2 of 9



Photo 3 of 9



Photo 4 of 9



Photo 5 of 9



Photo 6 of 9



Photo 7 of 9



Photo 8 of 9



Photo 9 of 9

