

Agenda Item: 7.

MEMO

TO: John Winkler, General Manager

FROM: Jim Thompson, Director, Subd. 6

SUBJ: Naming of Dam Site 15A - Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte

Please have placed on the agenda for the Projects, Programs and Operations Subcommittee the following recommendation.

As we discussed, the Interlocal Agreement with the City of Omaha concerning the naming rights of Dam Site 15A states that they will take that action once the area is turned over to them for operation and maintenance. I know in previous projects naming rights varied depending on the ultimate ownership of the projects and we will need to discuss this policy for future projects. However, since this area is currently under construction and an amendment to the Interlocal Agreement might be problematic, I would like to send a resolution to the Omaha City Council with our recommendation for the name.

Attached is a brief synopsis of the remarkable woman. Also, a more detailed biography was printed by the Great Plains Quarterly by the Center for Great Plains Studies in 1993. (<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1766&context=greatplainsquarterly>). Also, there are numerous youtube episodes describing the role this woman and her accomplishments.

As far as I know, currently the only things named after this first Native American woman doctor is the Picotte Center in Walthill, NE., and the Picotte Elementary School in Omaha. The naming of this lake and recreational center for her would give appropriate public recognition for her and the unselfish role she played in Nebraska history. I would also want our Board to provide an appropriate historical marker for this area once it is fully constructed.

Subject to legal edit and/or wordsmithing by staff or reforming this idea into a formal "where-as" resolution, this is my intent:

**Recommend that the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District present a resolution to the City of Omaha that Dam Site 15A be officially named "Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte Lake and Recreation Area". In conjunction with the Nebraska State Historical Society, the PMRNRD will provide an appropriate marker recognizing the accomplishments of Dr. Picotte.**

Of course it is likely that normal signage, mapping, and public use of the area will shorten its name to Picotte Lake. Please let me know if you have any questions.

# Ancestors of Science: Susan LaFlesche Picotte

By [Next Wave and Science Staff](#) Apr. 15, 2005 , 8:00 AM

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## ANCESTORS OF SCIENCE

### **Susan LaFlesche Picotte (1865-1915)**

As a child, Susan LaFlesche Picotte witnessed an incident involving a Caucasian doctor who refused to care for a dying Native American woman. That moment inspired her to become the first Native American woman to earn a medical degree. In addition to her pioneering medical career, Picotte went on to become a public health advocate and a civil rights activist.

Born in 1865 on the Omaha reservation, near Macy, Nebraska, Picotte was the youngest member of the LaFlesche family. Her father, Iron Eyes, was the last recognized chief of the Omaha and influenced his children's educational and cultural outlook. Iron Eyes believed American culture would soon overwhelm Omaha culture and encouraged his people to acculturate themselves. At age 14 Picotte left home to study philosophy, physiology, and literature at the Elizabeth Institute for Young Ladies in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

After graduating at 17, Picotte taught at the Quaker Mission School on the Omaha Reservation from 1882 to 1884. There she tended to the health of Alice Fletcher, an anthropologist and Native American advocate who also worked at the Quaker school. Fletcher mentored Picotte and suggested she go to college at Hampton Institute--now Hampton University--in Virginia, which was known for its Native American outreach agenda.

At Hampton Institute Picotte met her second mentor, school physician Martha Waldron. After Picotte graduated from Hampton Institute in 1886--she was the school's salutatorian that year--Waldron encouraged her to apply to medical school at Waldron's alma mater, the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. The altruistic Fletcher helped Picotte acquire government grants for Native American education to pay for school.

In 1889, Picotte graduated in 2 years--as valedictorian--from the 3-year medical degree program. She then interned at the Philadelphia Women's Hospital for a year. Upon returning home in 1890, she worked as a government physician responsible for approximately 1200 people. Picotte worked 15-hour days, yet she earned only half of what others in that position received.



Picotte moved to Walthill, Nebraska, a town near her birthplace, in 1905, after her husband's death from complications related to alcoholism. She lobbied Congress the following year to ban alcohol on the reservation. Picotte also became a county health officer and lobbied the state legislature to improve public health laws.

In January of 1913, Picotte used grants and donations to open a new hospital on the reservation in Walthill. But her involvement with the hospital would be short-lived. Picotte underwent surgery to alleviate pain from her bone disease, and she died due to complications on September 18, 1915. The hospital was renamed in her honor and continued treating patients until the late 1940s. Declared a National Historic Landmark in 1993, the Susan LaFlesche Picotte Center now houses a museum dedicated to Picotte's work and the history of the Omaha and Winnebago tribes.