

*Letter from  
Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte  
to the  
Commissioner of Indian Affairs  
April 29, 1914*

*Concerning Liquor Traffic on the Reservation  
and the Health Condition of the Omaha*

Courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society, RG2026-LETTER-1914

## Letter from Dr. Picotte to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 29, 1914, Page 1

Walthill, Nebraska, April 29, 1914.

Honorable Cato Sells,  
Commissioner of Indian Affairs,  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:-

I am a member of the Omaha Tribe of Indians.

I call your attention to two problems that are of vital interest to my people, which your Department can and ought to remedy. One is the liquor traffic which is carried on very extensively and openly among them; the other, the Health Condition prevailing among them, due to changes in their mode of living.

Two weeks ago an old Indian man was murdered; the accused, a young man, committing suicide, all through lemon extract; the white man who sold it being well known,- nothing has been done about it. It seems useless to pursue the usual mode of procedure in trying to locate the whiskey dispenser that has been followed in this locality.

I wish to ask your Department to let me have the use of your Tuberculosis exhibit so I can go to the public gatherings of the Omahas and give them lectures on the Prevention of the Disease. I have been working among them for over twenty-five years; know their customs and language and for the last seven years have been working under the Presbyterian Home Mission Board.

My work as Chairman of the State Health Committee of the Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs for three years brought me a great deal of information as to the latest and most efficient methods of preventing the disease and caring for the sick. I have conducted a publicity campaign among the Omahas by families and individually, but I find it just the same among them as among your people, "Eternal Vigilance" is possible only where you stand a trained nurse over them.

I have given lectures to them in the Indian Church at Macy, as well as to the white people here in Walthill, on the Dangers of the Fly as Tuberculosis, and have scattered fly posters among them.

I would like to reach every family this summer with the slides. We have moving pictures here in Walthill, but I want your Office to let me have what can be used in the field. I won't keep them long.

I did not know that Dr. Shoemaker was coming or I would have had a better audience for him. The weather was very cold but I stood in the street for two hours telling every body to come and we got about forty Indians and about the same number of white people. There is no reason why with the facilities your Office has that they could not be utilized for reaching all these people.

I would like to make the suggestion that a lecture on Tuberculosis, The Evils of the Drinking Cup, Flies, etc., be given in the Indian Schools, and the children conduct Fly Campaigns.

I also wish to ask that the children gathered in the Government Schools be examined monthly for the disease, for I have ~~find~~ found several children

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## Letter from Dr. Picotte to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 29, 1914, Page 2

Hon. Commissioner of Ind. Affairs- #2.

come home from one of these large schools, who had been suffering for several months from Tuberculosis. One girl, eighteen years old, came home January 18th, with temperature of 102- 103; had been ailing since November. I diagnosed abscess of the lung with no discharge; sent her to Arizona but she died in a short while. The Superintendent told me she had been examined in January and passed. Another came home in March; I found her with Tuberculosis of the lung; she lived only six weeks. In spite of all precaution she infected her mother and grandmother, who both died. Another came home in June with headaches; she had a skin disease which is a precursor of Tuberculosis, and died of T. Meningitis in three weeks. There is no telling how many these infected in that large school which could have been Prevented by proper examination.

In doubtful cases I have them examined microscopically; one boy so examined was found with Tuberculosis. I had him kept out of school. Without my knowledge he was sent to Genoa; I wrote the Superintendent, who sent him home on the next train. He is out of doors all the time and is well now.

I am sending you a Fly Poster which I believe is the best of any I have seen for it tells what to do to kill the eggs of the fly, and other posters do not give this information.

It is so terribly hard to see the people undergoing the hardships from a civilization new to them. I believe a personal visit from you in the near future would be a great encouragement to them; a word from you would go a great ways, and I hope you will come.

The attention of your Department has been called several times in the last two years to the violations of the liquor law by the bootlegger, who sold the lemon extract that caused the murder and suicide, mentioned above.

Respectfully,

*Dr. Picotte*

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## TRANSCRIPT

Walthill, Nebraska, April 19, 1914

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Hon. Commissioner of Ind. Affaire- #2.

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