

SUSETTE LA FLESCHE

Susette La Flesche (1854-1903) campaigned for the rights of Native Americans and was an inductee in the National Women's Hall of Fame. She was the first Native American lecturer and the first published Native American artist and writer.

Susette was the daughter of Chief Joseph La Flesche, whose father was a French trapper, and an Omaha woman. Her father, who was familiar with both the Omaha and French cultures, lived as an Indian, but sent his children to a Presbyterian mission school in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Her sister became a physician and her brother became an ethnologist. After completing her schooling, Susette returned to the Omaha reservation and taught at a government school.

Susette soon became involved in the fight for Native American rights. The Ponca Indians, relatives of the Omahas, were uprooted from their Nebraska homes and moved to Oklahoma by the U.S. Government. In 1879, Ponca Chief Standing Bear and several followers returned to Nebraska and were arrested. Susette joined forces with Thomas H. Tibbles, a newsman from the Omaha Herald. Tibbles instigated a habeas corpus hearing that led to the release of the Poncas and the establishment of a legal precedent in recognizing Native Americans as persons before the law.

Susette then joined Tibbles on a lecture tour throughout the Eastern U.S. to publicize the wrongs against the Ponca Indians. Using her Omaha name, "Bright Eyes," Susette was able to reach influential circles and bring about the passage of the Dawes Act in 1887.

Susette and Tibbles were married in 1881 and returned to the Omaha reservation, where Susette continued in the fight for Native American rights. She also wrote and illustrated Indian stories and anonymously wrote *Ploughed Under: The Story of an Indian Chief*.

Susette died on her farm near Bancroft, Nebraska, on May 26, 1903.