

Native American –Alaskan Aleut History Month

Susan “Bright Eyes” LaFlesche Picotte: The First Indian Doctor

Susan LaFlesche and her sister Marguerite grew up on the Omaha Reservation amid terrible poverty. They attended school there and were awarded scholarships to attend Hampton Institute. Hampton is a historically black school and it began accepting Indian students in 1879. There she was influenced by Dr. Martha Waldron, Hampton’s doctor and one of the few women doctors in the U.S. She graduated from Hampton in 1886 as class salutatorian.

Dr. Waldron encouraged LaFlesche to apply to the Women’s Medical College in Philadelphia. She was accepted and received financial support from the women of the Connecticut Indian Association. After receiving her medical degree she returned to the Omaha Reservation where she was at first the school doctor then became the government doctor for the whole reservation. She had long hoped for a hospital on the Omaha Reservation but was forced to work from home, making rounds on horseback often without sufficient medicine.

After several years, she had to leave her job for health reasons. Shortly afterwards she married Henry Picotte and they had two children. Afterwards, she had a private practice. When her husband died, she returned to the reservation as a Presbyterian missionary to the Omaha tribe, becoming the first Indian every chosen to be a missionary. Ultimately, her dream became reality when the Omaha hospital opened in January 1913. Sadly she died two years later at age 50.

Choctaws and the Irish Famine

A few short years after the Trail of Tears, a group of the Choctaw Nation organized themselves and collected \$710, a small fortune for 1847 for Irish famine victims across the ocean in Ireland. Members of the Nation contributed as well as traders, missionaries and agency officials. The Choctaw, who had survived starvation during the Trail of Tears, knew the meaning of hunger. The donation established a long-standing close relationship between the Choctaw Nation and the Irish which continues to present.

Sherman J. Alexie, Jr.

Sherman J. Alexie, Jr. was born in October 1966. A Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian, he grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit, WA, about 50 miles northwest of Spokane. Approximately 1,100 Spokane Tribal members live there.

Alexie learned to read by age three. Though a great achievement, it also ostracized him from his peers who made him the brunt of jokes. As a teenager, after finding his mother's name written in a textbook he was assigned at the Wellpinit school, Alexie made a conscious decision to attend high school off the reservation in Reardan, WA, where he knew he would get a better education. At Reardan High he was the only Indian, except for the school mascot. There, he excelled academically and became a star player on the basketball team. He graduated from Reardan High and went on to attend Gonzaga University in Spokane on scholarship in 1985. After two years at Gonzaga, he transferred to Washington State University (WSU) in Pullman, WA.

Alexie planned to be a doctor and enrolled in pre-med courses at WSU, but after fainting numerous times in human anatomy class realized he needed to change his career path. That change was fueled when he stumbled into a poetry workshop at WSU. Encouraged by poetry teacher Alex Kuo, Alexie excelled at writing and realized he'd found his new career choice. Shortly after graduating in American Studies from WSU, Alexie received the Washington State Arts Commission Poetry Fellowship in 1991 and the National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship in 1992.

Not long after receiving his second fellowship, and just one year after he left WSU, two of his poetry collections, The Business of Fancydancing and I Would Steal Horses, were published. Alexie had a problem with alcohol that began soon after he started college at Gonzaga, but after learning that Hanging

Loose Press agreed to publish The Business of Fancydancing, he immediately gave up drinking, at the age of 23, and has been sober ever since.

Alexie continued to write prolifically and his first collection of short stories, The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, was published by Atlantic Monthly Press in 1993. For this collection he received a PEN/Hemingway Award for Best First Book of Fiction, and was awarded a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award. Alexie was named one of Granta's Best of Young American Novelists and won the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book

In 1997, Alexie embarked on another artistic collaboration. Chris Eyre, a Cheyenne/Arapaho Indian, discovered Alexie's writing while doing graduate work at New York University's film school. Through a mutual friend, they agreed to collaborate on a film project inspired by Alexie's work. Released as *Smoke Signals* at the Sundance Film Festival in January 1998, the movie won two awards: the Audience Award and the Filmmakers Trophy. Alexie's recent honors include the 2003 Regents' Distinguished Alumnus Award, Washington State University's highest honor for alumni. Alexie has published 17 books to date. (excerpted from the Sherman Alexie website)

Native Americans in World War I

Much is known about the code talkers and other Native Americans who fought during the second World War. Little is known about those who fought in the first World War. About 17,000 Native Americans served in the Great War which was not even thirty years after the end of the Indian wars, American Indians were willing to fight alongside their former enemy. Scholars have been surprised by this fact and also that the soldiers fought for the U.S. when they were not even considered citizens; Native Americans had not been American citizens before the American Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.

They enlisted voluntarily, without even waiting for military draft of 1917. They served in every category of the Army, motivated in many cases by the military and patriotic training they had received in government schools, and they proved as worthy on the front as any other soldier. American Indian civilians also contributed their effort to the war, by buying Liberty Bonds, working for the Red Cross, or participating in the general wartime work effort.

Women also entered military service. Tsianina Redfeather, a Creek Indian, went to sing to American soldiers at the front. The Cherokee Nation's Anne Ross and Iva J. Rider, also known as "Princess Atalie," went to France with the Young Women's Christian Association. Ross worked in the canteen service, and Rider on entertainment. Some Indian women also enlisted as nurses; their numbers were limited because nursing had only been recently introduced in Indian schools so there were few American Indian nurses. By one count, there were six American Indian women in hospitals in the United States and overseas.

Source and contains excerpts from: Diane Camurat, *The American Indian in the Great War: Real and Imagined* Master's Thesis, 1993, Institut Charles V of the University of Paris.

Maria Tallchief

Maria Tallchief was born in 1925. She became the first internationally known, Native American ballerina. She danced with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo from 1942 to 1947. Then became the prima Ballerina with the New York Ballet Co. where she was prima ballerina from 1947 to 1960. Later she founded the Chicago City Ballet and became ballet director of Lyric Opera Chicago in 1979. Tallchief received numerous honors including being named to the National Women's Hall of Fame and the International Women's Forum Hall of Fame. Tallchief received the National Medal of the Arts from then-President Bill Clinton in 1999.