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“THE GIFTED PEN”: THE JOURNALISM CAREER OF
SUSETTE LA FLESCH TIBBLES (1854-1903)

by

Erin Pedigo

A THESIS

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“THE GIFTED PEN”: THE JOURNALISM CAREER
OF SUSETTE LA FLESCHÉ TIBBLES (1854-1903)

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University of Nebraska, 2011

ADVISER: JOE STARITA

This thesis explores the journalism career of Susette La Flesche Tibbles (Bright Eyes), a 19th century Omaha Indian woman. She was the oldest daughter of Joseph La Flesche, Jr. (Iron Eye). Her father was *metis*, born of a French father and Ponca mother. Joseph La Flesche was the last chief of the Omaha tribe chosen in the traditional manner.

Susette’s work as an Omaha Morning World-Herald reporter during the Ghost Dance trouble and Wounded Knee massacre at Pine Ridge Agency from December 1890 to January 1891, and from 1893-1895 as a writer for both the American Nonconformist and the Lincoln Independent, two Populist papers, has been overlooked. Her journalism career has been overshadowed by her collaboration with the Ponca chief Standing Bear during, and following, the *United States ex. rel. Standing Bear v. Crook* case in 1879, which determined that Native Americans had some Constitutional rights that the government would acknowledge. Following this case she and others embarked on a lecturing mission to call attention to unfair treatment of Native Americans.

Her journalism career has been either largely overlooked or totally ignored, as in a 1974 biography, in larger works about her influential and unique family, and even in scholarly works. Examining her time as a reporter for three different papers rounds out her personality and passions. It also allows a glimpse into one second-generation mixed-blood woman's experience in the 19th century journalistic world.

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Tim, Joe, and Mark—I don't think it is entirely coincidence that the four of us all share interests in the Omaha and in the La Flesche family, somewhat divergent though those interests are.

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Chapter I. Introduction: Miss La Flesche

In the graduating class of 1875 at the Elizabeth Institute for Young Ladies, a finishing school for proper white girls in Elizabeth, New Jersey, Susette La Flesche was the only Native American student to receive a diploma. She had only begun learning English at the age of eight at the Presbyterian Mission school on the Omaha reservation in northeastern Nebraska, yet she was an excellent student. One author says that Miss La Flesche could possibly have passed for a student of European ethnicity.¹ Photographs of her taken in her early twenties do not show us, more than two hundred years later, what would stereotypically be a Plains Indian from the 19th century. Her father, Joseph La Flesche, though the last officially recognized chief of the Omaha, was in fact of mixed blood. Her mother, Mary Gale La Flesche, was also.

Photographs of Susette taken in 1881 show a petite woman with dark hair and eyes. Her skin was fairer than her father's. She had a youthful face with a kind mouth and her eyes were alive with some spark, befitting her Omaha name *Inshtatheamba*, translated as Bright Eyes. She favored austere dark dresses and never had one lock of dark hair out of place, "drawn tightly back in a bob in the style of conservative white women."² Her clothing choices were "sober and unpretentious in the best Presbyterian fashion."³ She was very shy and possessed all the good manners of a well-bred young lady, but when she was passionate about something, according to contemporary accounts, her eyes would come alive with brightness and that passion was somewhat contagious.

¹ Stephen Dando-Collins, Standing Bear is a Person: The True Story of a Native American's Quest for Justice (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 9.

² Dando-Collins, 9.

³ Dando-Collins, 9.

How she came to graduate from the Elizabeth Institute, a place in society not intended for Native Americans, is only part of her remarkable life story and that of her entire family (her younger sisters would also attend Elizabeth Institute). An aspect of her life that has been grossly overlooked in a 1974 biography, a book about her family, and more recent scholarly works is her journalistic career, which came late in life as a third accompaniment to teaching and lecturing. She wrote first for the Omaha Morning World-Herald in 1890 and 1891 during the speculation over the nature of the Lakota Ghost Dance being a prelude to war, and in the aftermath of the Wounded Knee massacre. Beginning in 1893 and lasting until 1895, she wrote her observations on the machinations of government and society for two Populist papers, the American Nonconformist and the Lincoln Independent. Her time as a journalist was varied and unique. If a picture can be completed of her as a serious journalist, journalism history, particularly that focused on women writers and editors of the 19th century, will become richer.

It was as a New Jersey finishing school student that her talents as a sharp, penetrating writer first became evident. Before she graduated several of her essays were published in the New York Herald Tribune, the paper Horace Greeley began in 1841. Unfortunately however, these essays have been lost to time, but they would have been some of the first exercises of a healthy writing talent. Almost immediately in her time as a journalist, “Bright Eyes” enjoyed recognition. It can be said, though, that this recognition came largely from her previous notoriety as a lecturer on Native American rights. The significance of her work for Native rights is not to be undermined in this discussion, but seen as a precursor to her long-forgotten journalism career. Though her contributions during press coverage of the Ghost Dance at Pine Ridge Agency and in the aftermath of Wounded Knee were praised, the praise was often loaded—it made mention of her race, and commentators expressed astonishment that a Native American could be a talented writer.

The coverage of the 1890-1891 Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee massacre was the major arc in her journalistic career. Coverage of the mysterious dance was being devoured by a country whose citizens held extremely conflicting and varied views about its indigenous inhabitants. Native Americans were viewed in the 19th century alternately as a people depraved and violent, as people in need of the reforming hand of government and education, or as the “noble savage.” The overwhelming tendency of the public sometimes tended toward the view of Natives as incessantly warlike, and so journalistic propagation of rumors about the nature of the Ghost Dance sold papers. An anonymous commentator in the December 8, 1890 edition of the Omaha Morning World-Herald wrote “those who read the clear, able, and just exposition of the Indian situation from the gifted pen of ‘Bright Eyes’ in Sunday’s Morning World-Herald must have wondered that an Indian should possess such a wide scope of knowledge and such powers of expression. ‘Bright Eyes’ is an Indian Hypatia. Her cultured mind, her womanly character, her intellectual dignity—all combine to make her a distinguished person and she would command attention even if it were not her lot to be born an Indian.”⁴

At 36 years old in 1890 when these comments were written, at this point in her life she was no stranger to praise, shy though she had been earlier in life. She had become well known in American society—as “Bright Eyes”—through the lecturing tours she gave for several years, beginning in 1879 after the resolution of the case *United States ex. rel. Standing Bear v. Crook*, which determined that Native Americans had some Constitutional rights, which would be recognized under the law. She also became well known in British society for similar lecturing. The fullness of the newspaper commentator’s comparison of her to the classical figure Hypatia is now lost on a 21st century audience but on the cusp of the 20th century its meaning would have been grasped and probably more fully

⁴ “An Indian Hypatia” The Omaha Morning World-Herald, 8 Dec. 1890: 4. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 5.

appreciated by Susette than another comment made just a month later by a reader of the Rocky Mountain News, misidentifying her as “an educated Sioux woman” during coverage of the Wounded Knee massacre’s aftermath.⁵ But like praise and popularity, race-based commentary was also something she was used to.

This type of commentary expressed astonishment, romanticism, condescension, pity or other feelings about Native Americans. She, Standing Bear, her younger half-brother Francis La Flesche (Woodworker), and eccentric newsman Thomas Henry Tibbles, (who later married her), had become the toast of much of upper crust New England society during a lecturing tour that lasted from 1879-1880. Indeed, in his book ‘I Am A Man’: Chief Standing Bear’s Journey for Justice, author Joe Starita writes that during their lecture circuits Susette La Flesche “would often read aloud to Standing Bear—stories about the ‘noble chief,’ the ‘Indian princess,’ the ‘noble warrior,’ the ‘Indian maiden,’ the ‘three fine spirits of the aboriginal race’ who were in Boston.”⁶ These designations she gleaned from the papers chronicling the efforts of the earnest little group. The group lectured on the mistreatment of the Ponca tribe, kin to the Omaha, and overall made some significant strides in the treatment of Native Americans.

It is her own work as a journalist in the years after her impassioned lecturing tours that will be the main focus of this conversation. Susette’s journalistic career is something that has been overlooked easily because of the prominence of her own family and her years of lecturing work. It is also possible that Susette’s contributions simply got lost in the larger tapestry of journalism history; this slight

⁵ “Bright Eyes and the Indians” The Omaha Morning World-Herald, 8 Jan. 1891: 4. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 6.

⁶ Joe Starita, ‘I Am A Man’: Chief Standing Bear’s Journey for Justice (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008) 187.

woman prone to a retiring manner, but who possessed an eloquence when she did speak and write, gained more recognition while alive for her lecturing work than for her journalism.

The longest available reference to her journalistic career at present has been mention of her coverage of the 1890-1891 Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee massacre in a chapter of Hugh J. Reilly's The Frontier Newspapers and the Coverage of the Plains Indian Wars, where her name was misspelled as Suzette.⁷ In some other scholarly work on the subject, her contribution was omitted. In a biography written by Dorothy Clarke Wilson in 1974, Bright Eyes: The Story of Susette La Flesche, an Omaha Indian, her career at all three papers was mentioned only the briefest of times, and the same happened in a definitive work on her whole family, Iron Eye's Family: The Children of Joseph La Flesche by Norma Kidd Green. The journalistic career of this woman needs to be elevated from historical obscurity. Her "lost" work for the Omaha Morning World-Herald provides more perspective on one of the most blatantly aggressive attacks on Native Americans. Her work alongside her husband for papers that trumpeted Populism, one of his grand passions, gives insight into how she combined a good mind, devotion to her husband, and a writing talent to a subject both obscure and polarizing in their Nebraska community. Her Populist work also allowed her to be a Washington correspondent. Before her work is examined however, an examination of culture, family, and identity can help illuminate Susette's world.

⁷ Hugh J. Reilly, The Frontier Newspapers and the Coverage of the Plains Indian Wars (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publications, 2010). It should be noted that there is some unavailable material on Susette. There is a non-circulating masters thesis, embargoed until May 2011, by Amanda L. Paige from the University of Arkansas, "Susette La Flesche: Rural Protest and Indian Rights in Nineteenth-Century America." The author is writing a book.

Chapter II. “My dear daughter”: Tribal background and family history

Buffalo Station

Kansas & Pacific R. R.

My dear daughter

We have got as far as this place about 40 miles farther than the Omahas [sic] were last winter but we have got no buffalo yet. You must not look for us until late in the winter.

We have got along very well so far all is well.

The horse disease that has been over state has got away out here among the settlers and our horses have caught [sic] from them but they have it in very mild form so that I don't think they will any of them die.

If you [sic] in need of provisions you can get with Hamilton to sell some of the wheat for you and get you provisions with the money. I want you to take good care of your little sisters. If you write to me direct your letter to Grand Island City. Union Pacific Railroad.

Your affectionate Father

J. Laflesche [sic]⁸

Personal correspondence offers glimpses into the thoughts of writers and also allows us to see how the overarching and more mundane aspects of history profoundly touched individual lives. This undated letter from the “affectionate” father to his “dear daughter” Susette was likely written before she went away to school, during a late fall or early winter buffalo hunt which was traditional among the Omaha. Her half-brother Francis likely joined this hunt.

If Susette wrote back to her father, the letter has been lost. While we cannot know if she availed Hamilton for any help, or how the four sisters passed the time while their father and half-sibling were absent, we do know that the Hamilton of the letter was the Reverend William Hamilton, the founder of

⁸ Joseph La Flesche, undated letter to Susette, La Flesche Family papers collection, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

the Presbyterian Mission and church on the Omaha reservation⁹. Family relationships and domestic responsibility, religious beliefs, and the traditional buffalo hunt—hallmarks of Omaha life—had all been affected post-contact with Europeans. The La Flesches were the most prominent mixed-blood family from the tribe. The accomplished and well-regarded family's long and colorful history is one set of threads woven into the immense tapestry of overwhelmingly French contact with this tribe and surrounding ones. A better understanding of how Susette may have viewed her own self will help us understand her as a journalist, and those understandings can first be gained through a brief look at Omaha history and her family's history.

The Omaha tribe's autonym was *Umoⁿhoⁿ*, “upstream,” or “against the current” and “had been fixed on the people prior to 1541,” according to the singular ethnographic work The Omaha Tribe compiled in the last century.¹⁰ Like many groups on the Great Plains, they came from elsewhere. The Omaha belong to the Dhegihan (also spelled Dhegiha) linguistic group within the division of central Siouan peoples.¹¹ Historian Tanis Chapman Thorne analyzes what she calls “the enigma of central Siouan prairie peoples” and quotes George E. Hyde, who calls “the archaeological situation” on central Siouan origin and migration “absolutely baffling.”¹² The Omaha tribe's convoluted journey to its land in Nebraska has been traced by anthropologists and historians. A common thread in the narrative is that the Omaha came from the east though there is speculation regarding exactly from where. Fletcher and

⁹ Though Hamilton was obviously Protestant, La Flesche family chronicler Norma Kidd Green writes that he was called “Father Hamilton” by the Omaha, whose previous outside religious experience had been Catholicism brought by the French.

¹⁰ Alice C. Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, The Omaha Tribe (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 36. In her book The Many Hands of My Relations: French and Indians on the Lower Missouri author Tanis C. Thorne writes that “Omaha” means “people of the bluff.”

¹¹ Tanis C. Thorne, The Many Hands of My Relations: French and Indians on the Lower Missouri (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 3, 13. Thorne notes that the Dhegihan linguistic group also included the Ponca, Kansas (sometimes Kansa or Kaw), Quapaw and Osage.

¹² Thorne, 13.

La Flesche wrote that they could have come from “among the Appalachian mountains, and all their legends indicate that the people had knowledge of a large body of water . . . This water may have been the Atlantic Ocean, for . . . remnants of Siouan tribes survived near the mountains in the regions of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina until after the coming of the white race.”¹³ Thorne writes that there is consensus that this language group, along with the Chiwerean speakers, “originally inhabited the Ohio River or Wabash area. As they migrated south and west from the woodlands, they intruded upon” the Pawnee and Arikara, who were already in the plains region.¹⁴ This idea sets the Dhegihan group of tribes somewhat northwest of Fletcher and La Flesche’s placement of them at the Appalachians, but in each scenario they are close to bodies of water—the Great Lakes and rivers in Thorne’s placement, and coastal waters in Fletcher and La Flesche’s.

Water figures centrally in the Omaha’s own creation myth. This myth is in the “emergence” category anthropologists and ethnologists have designated for creation and origin tales. Fletcher and La Flesche record it in detail: “In the beginning the people were in water. They opened their eyes but they could see nothing. . . . As the people came out of the water they beheld the day.”¹⁵ The people learned how to clothe their naked bodies with fibers and reeds, hunt and cook the animals they killed over the fire, to build houses, and to grow corn.¹⁶ Over time, in their eventual homeland of northeastern Nebraska the Omaha developed a complex culture around *Wakonda*, a central life force or power who had created all things, and a heavy attachment to cosmic forces. Their ultimate tribal division would consist of 10 clans divided into two parts, the Earth group (*Ho’gashenu*) and the Sky group

¹³ Fletcher and La Flesche, 35.

¹⁴ Thorne, 13.

¹⁵ Fletcher and La Flesche, 70. For this and more Omaha stories, see Roger L. Welsch’s *Omaha Tribal Myths and Trickster Tales* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1981).

¹⁶ Fletcher and La Flesche, 70-72.

(*I'shta'çu'da*). These divisions, wrote Fletcher and La Flesche, came about because at the beginning of time “human beings were born of a union between the Sky people and the Earth people, and in accordance with this belief the union of the Sky people and the Earth people was conceived to be necessary” in tribal organization.¹⁷ This myth may seem unrelated to the one of the people emerging from the water, but perhaps the people emerged from the water after their creation. The Omaha’s tribal unity only came about after two major splits during the migration period.

Thorne describes this period as “violent and chaotic” for several reasons. The European presence was felt as “Algonquians and other eastern peoples . . . with their superior armaments” gained from the Europeans, hassled the central Siouans, who were fighting among themselves.¹⁸ Thorne also writes that the major contention is not from where the Dhegihan group came westward but when, citing major researchers’ estimates of as early as A. D. 750 or as late as the early 17th century.¹⁹ Citing Fletcher and La Flesche’s ethnographic work, Thorne describes the central Siouan Dhegihan groups as highly socially organized prolific farmers and occasional hunters.²⁰ If, at the time of European contact, the earliest probably being Hernando De Soto in 1541 (Fletcher and La Flesche say he met the Quapaw)—these groups were so highly organized and segmented (Thorne writes that “at the time of first reports by Europeans, the Dhegihan and Chiwerean Siouan-speakers were widely dispersed: the Winnebago were on the Great Lakes, the Quapaw were on the Arkansas River, while the rest of the Central Siouan cognate tribes were settled in riverine valleys across the Midwestern prairies from South

¹⁷ Fletcher and La Flesche, 135.

¹⁸ Thorne, 23-24.

¹⁹ Thorne, 14.

²⁰ Thorne, 14.

Dakota to Oklahoma”²¹) it might make sense that the earlier the tribes had arrived there the more time their cultures would have had to develop.

Just as the time of arrival in the region is only estimated, so is the time of internecine rifts, during this “violent and chaotic” migration as groups fought one another over land, resources, and material goods. These cognate tribes—Omaha, Ponca, Quapaw, Kansa, and Osage—who were “once one people” according to Fletcher and La Flesche, broke off from one another. The Omaha preserved the memory of their splits from the Quapaw and Ponca in storytelling.²² The tribe’s parting from the Quapaw earned them their name “upstream people” as Quapaw meant “with the current” or “downstream.” “The people were moving down the Uha’ike river. When they came to a wide river they made skin boats in which to cross the river. As they were crossing a storm came up. The Omaha and Iowa got safely across, but the Quapaw drifted down the stream and were not seen again until the last century. . . . The Iowa accompanied the Omaha up the Mississippi to a stream spoken of as ‘Raccoon river’—probably the Des Moines, and the people followed this river to its headwaters.”²³ Another version of the story says that grapevine ropes used to get the people across the river broke “when about half their number were across, including the Iowa and Omaha” leaving the Quapaw marooned on the eastern bank. “This crossing was made on a foggy morning, and those left behind, believing that their companions who had crossed had followed the river downward on the western side, themselves turned downstream on the eastern side, and so the two groups lost sight of each other.”²⁴

²¹ Thorne, 14.

²² Fletcher and La Flesche, 36-37.

²³ Fletcher and La Flesche, 36.

²⁴ Fletcher and La Flesche, 36.

The splitting of the Omaha from the Ponca also resulted in a legacy of sorts. By the time this larger group split, the Omaha had created the religious cult of the Sacred Pole, whose legend is detailed in various sources. This pole, according to the story, was cut from a tree that was engulfed in flames but unconsumed by them. A young man witnessed this phenomenon. Fletcher and La Flesche recorded two similar versions of the story, with each set during a backdrop of tension and conflict. Susette La Flesche's father would be involved late in his life in a fight to have the Sacred Pole returned to the people. In any event, the Omaha developed a complex culture apart from the four cognate tribes to whom they are related and with whom they were once unified.

Susette La Flesche's family history bears witness to the rich history of intermarriage between central Siouans and Europeans, particularly the French. The French were the dominant colonial group in this region. The La Flesche children's paternal grandfather arrived in Canada from France, according to diligent notes comprising part of a journal written by Susette's youngest sister Susan La Flesche Picotte. Named Joseph La Flesche (spelled alternately Flèche), this man was very wealthy. La Flesche *père* must have begun his North American travels sometime in the late 18th century, though Susan La Flesche Picotte did not record any approximate dates of his arrival in Canada. Picotte wrote that their grandfather first worked as a *voyageur* (trader or canoe-man) for Hudson's Bay Company. After a while and perhaps many adventures "he came down among Poncas and married a Ponca woman. Later she came down with him to the Omaha tribe."²⁵ The name of his wife is not known, but it was among the Omaha that their son, named after his father in the French fashion, was born. According to Norma Kidd Green, a biographer of the La Flesche family, the younger Joseph La Flesche was born either in

²⁵ Susan La Flesche Picotte, journal, La Flesche Family papers collection, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

1818 or 1822.²⁶ His mother left his father for “someone else, had a boy and a girl,” Picotte wrote. La Flesche *père* took his wife’s infidelity in stride and married another Ponca woman, whose son was White Swan (also called Frank). This other half brother of Joseph La Flesche *fils* became an uncle of his children and would be an important influence in Susette’s lifetime.

Besides being a *metis* family, the La Flesche family also demonstrates a tangible link between the Ponca and the Omaha, as an interesting point of contention is the designation of “Omaha” on the family. Joseph La Flesche *fils* grew up among the Omaha but had a Ponca mother whose second husband was an Omaha man. Green writes that his mother grew intolerant of her “French husband’s long absences on trading expeditions. . . . Little Joseph was cared for by two aunts whose brother had been captured by the Sioux long before. This Omaha had grown up with the Sioux and become a man of considerable influence within the tribe.”²⁷ The younger Joseph became adept at inter-cultural relations through his experiences with his Ponca relations, the Omaha he lived among, and his work at a trading post with Peter Sarpy, whose stepdaughter he would later marry. Joseph spoke Omaha, Dakota, French, and other Indian languages, a skill which was “extremely important later and allowed him to interpret by putting the words of a white man speaking one Indian tongue into another Native dialect.”²⁸

Joseph La Flesche’s identity was for a while bound up in the role of *metis* interpreter and as “an employee, possibly a partner, in some of Sarpy’s several ventures” at posts of the American Fur Company situated “on each side of the Missouri [River]. St. Mary, for the white trade, was on the eastern side, a bit south of the present Council Bluffs, Iowa. Bellevue, for the Indians, was on the

²⁶ Norma Kidd Green, *Iron Eye’s Family: The Children of Joseph La Flesche* (Lincoln: Johnsen Publishing Company, 1969), 4.

²⁷ Green, 4. The name of the aunts’ brother is not known, nor which band of Sioux he lived among.

²⁸ Green, 4. Susan La Flesche Picotte noted her father’s language skills in her journal’s section on the family history.

western side at the old American Fur Company post, south of Omaha.”²⁹ While working at the posts, he met Mary Gale who was the stepdaughter of Sarpy and Nicomi, an Omaha-Iowa woman. Joseph and Mary were married by 1845 or 1846,³⁰ and Joseph’s identity soon changed as new layers were added to it.

The family history and the complex identity of the younger Joseph was but one of countless *metis* experiences over several generations in the north-central Plains. Thorne’s dissertation examines the complexities of French-Indian families along the lower Missouri River, examining family dynamics in economic, familial and political frameworks. The grandfather of Susette and her siblings fit into the paradigm of the Frenchman in approximately the fourth to sixth generation of contact who decided to stay among the Indians. Thorne carefully characterizes the French traders and trappers, warning that generalizations that they were on the whole corrupt and given to “licentiousness” and exploitation of Native women are inaccurate. To do this she argues that they “voluntarily chose to become Indianized [sic] in their habits and customs” in a desire to break free from the oppressively rule-bound French Old World culture.³¹ This paradigm shift in lifestyle and culture among the French in the New World began quite early. Thorne writes that by 1700, 100 “woodland runners” or *coureurs de bois* lived among tribes scattered along the river; 64 years later when the pivotal St. Louis fur-trading posts were established, this number only had exponentially increased and “the colonists of New France had been in contact

²⁹ Green, 5. Sarpy “dealt with the fur-traders, the French, the Indians, the English, and the Americans; with the would-be white settlers, the soldiers, the travelers, and the missionaries; and became a pivotal figure in many matters, large and small.” Sarpy ended up marrying the mother of Mary Gale, Joseph La Flesche’s eventual wife. Mary’s mother Nicomi was “an Omaha-Iowa” according to Susan La Flesche Picotte’s writing. Nicomi had left her husband, John Gale, an Army doctor, after he declared on his deathbed his intent have Mary removed from her mother’s family and properly educated. Nicomi “learned of Dr. Gale’s plan. She took Mary and fled to the woods, hiding herself and her child until the boat to St. Louis had sailed.” Eventually, Peter Sarpy, an old friend of Gale’s, married Nicomi after years of looking after her and Mary.

³⁰ Green, 8.

³¹ Tanis Chapman Thorne, People of the River: Mixed-blood Families on the Lower Missouri, Diss., University of California. Los Angeles, CA, 1987. AAT 8721067. 290.

with Native American peoples for several generations.”³² The French colonists, (exclusively male in the earliest days) she argues, had been “an uprooted people, detached from their agricultural heritage by the shift to fur-trading livelihoods: trapping, rowing, trading” and they also were “subject to a high degree of social change in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the family was their lodestone.”³³ That said, Thorne’s assertions—that the Frenchmen who formed families with Native and *metis* women have been over-generalized to be opportunistic, profligate seekers of impermanent relationships—stand. Many constructed a new type of family dynamic freed from the Old World’s restrictiveness, and these families in many cases were not unhappy.

Relationships could be temporary, like grandfather Joseph La Flesche’s marriage to his first Ponca wife. By the time the younger Joseph had reached maturity the very definitions of marriage and family were significantly altered but usually successful far away from the French Crown: “The second quarter of the nineteenth century was thus a period of blending of French and Indian peoples and cultures, but the social forms organizing family and community life were incipient rather than manifest. The great diversity of unions and acculturation patterns for children seemingly defied categorization. While many marriages between Indian women and Frenchmen were monogamous, others were polygamous. Some were long-lasting and produced many children, while others were temporary . . . The mothers of mixed-bloods not infrequently had more than one spouse, remarrying a Frenchman or Indian after the death of their first husbands.”³⁴

By the time the younger Joseph La Flesche had married Mary Gale, and by the time of Susette’s birth in 1854, he had long grappled with a multi-faceted identity and used it to his advantage at Sarpy’s

³² Thorne, 10-11.

³³ Thorne, 10.

³⁴ Thorne, 286.

trading post. Thorne mentions that Frenchmen and *metis* men often made strategic marriages with “tribal nobility”(women of high standing) to advance their positions in the lucrative fur trade. The steady encroachment of the Americans—Protestant missionaries, government agents, railroad builders, emigrants—which had been going on for over ten years by 1854, added a layer of complexity to his children’s lives and had a great impact overall on the Omaha livelihood. Joseph’s decision to send his children to the reservation school and beyond to attain more education went more smoothly with Mary Gale (and eventually another wife) than education decisions sometimes went in many mixed-blood families. Thorne writes that education, among other issues, was sometimes contentious enough to break families apart.³⁵

Among the Omaha kinship networks were only as strong as women’s abilities to make meaningful decisions about how their families were raised. Thorne gives the example of Nicomi, Mary Gale’s mother, and others who were “contemporaries, and most were members of the tribal nobility. . . . Neither powerless nor passive these women fought against common threats and struggled to defend their rights as mothers prescribed by their cultures.”³⁶ These women each had struggled to keep their children under various circumstances, and “Nicomi was among the many full-blooded Indian women who resisted being separated from their daughters and resented the implication that they were unfit to raise their children properly.”³⁷ Into this mindset the younger Joseph La Flesche set up a home and family with Nicomi’s daughter, and their children grew up to weather greater injustice and challenges than either of them had. The way of life the Omaha were by now familiar with was shifting away from

³⁵ Thorne, 292. She writes, “The Frenchman’s preference for patrilocal residence and Indian mothers’ preference for matrilineal settlement, as well as different views about the educational and religious upbringing of mixed-blood children, sometimes produced irreconcilable conflicts which separated husbands from wives and parents from children, creating gaps and fractures that were filled by extended family members.”

³⁶ Thorne, 300-301.

³⁷ Thorne, 300-301.

the French New World *mélange* of previous decades. Encroachment of the Americans and the federal move toward reservation life for Natives, along with a declining fur trade and a burgeoning Industrial Revolution, were on the horizon. These problems, and another specific to the Omaha—the influence of the Presbyterians—would necessitate for the next generation more adaptation.

Long before he had married, Joseph had chosen to live among the Omaha as one of them. This decision was not considered lightly, and a heavy influence over it was the interest the Omaha chief Big Elk had taken in him. Big Elk died an old man at 76. He was born before the Revolution, in 1770, and had seen much in his lifetime as the French, his own tribe, and other regional tribes all converged in his small part of the frontier. After the 1803 Louisiana Purchase the Americans made the Omaha's small part of the frontier theirs, and Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery spent considerable time there encountering first the Otoe, who were part of the Chiwerean language group of Siouan peoples, as aforementioned. If the French made life for the Omaha and related groups complicated on relational levels, the Americans made life for the people complicated on bureaucratic levels.

Big Elk had adopted Joseph La Flesche sometime between the younger man's teenage years and late twenties. Big Elk's own hopes and dreams might have been dampened by the fact that his own son "was never strong." With a foresight that came from living in a pre-modern world where many died early, Big Elk adopted Joseph while Cross Elk, his own sickly son "was still a minor" according to Green and told Joseph he was next in line if Cross Elk died.³⁸ Joseph's Omaha name was *Inshtamaza*, translated as Iron Eye. Over the coming years, his roles as a leader, husband, and father all converged and his influence would pass to his children. He and Mary had been married for about ten years when

³⁸ Green, 8.

he and other leaders signed a crucial land treaty (which had been no small decision), the tribe lost an important leader, and when Susette, his “dear daughter” was born.

Big Elk’s family situation is elaborated upon in the article “Omaha Chieftainship in the Nineteenth Century.” According to Green, Cross Elk, who was looked after by Joseph, was too young to be hereditary chief anyway by the time the Omaha began negotiations about a reservation around 1854. Cross Elk was an eight-year old “under the care and protection” of the mixed-blood trader.³⁹ This agreement of caretaking was solemnized in La Flesche’s adoption.⁴⁰ Joseph was thrust into various leadership and decision-making situations with a handful of other prominent men including *Shongaska* (Logan Fontenelle), *Gratahnehje* (Standing Hawk), and *Tahwahgahha* (Village Maker). The French had added a cultural element, but the Omaha had remained free to roam. Their territory encroached on the lands of their friends and relations (for example, the Ponca) and also their enemies (the dominant, exclusively migratory Sioux bands to the north). It was extensive and provided for every need.

The Omaha villages had earthen structures for ceremonies and “feasts, councils, or dances.” Dwellings were made of bark in the hot summers, and composed of groups of tipi-like structures in the winter and on the hunt.⁴¹ The people were farmers, growing corn, squash, and beans; they were also fishermen and hunters, skilled traders, and they shared with the cognate groups they broke away from the complex tradition of the calumet pipe, which is detailed extensively in Thorne’s Many Hands.

³⁹ Green, 14.

⁴⁰ John M. O’Shea and John Ludwickson, “Omaha Chieftainship in the Nineteenth Century.” *Ethnohistory* 39 (Summer 1992), 339. The “apparent” condition that La Flesche care for Cross Elk was not information Green included.

⁴¹ James Owen Dorsey. “Omaha Dwellings, Furniture, and Implements,” *Bureau of American Ethnology 13th Annual Report 1891* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896), 270, 276, 280-281. Dorsey recorded three types of pipes and their uses: “sacred pipes including war pipes and ‘those used by the chiefs in making peace’ (*niniba waqube*), calumet (calumet dance or dance of adoption) (*niniba weawa*) and hatchet pipe, or the white men’s pipe (*manzepe niniba*).”

Lewis and Clark's expedition had been the first wave of unrelenting American expansion across the United States driven by motives political, economic, and intellectual in nature. Indeed, William H. Goetzman writes that in forming the expedition Jefferson had a "breadth" of reasons; one of them, to have Lewis and Clark "study the Indians carefully, especially their numbers and intertribal alliances and animosities, as well as their customs, their economies, and the possibilities of trade with them."⁴² With the eventual confluence of John Sullivan's "manifest destiny" philosophy with technology (railroads and telegraph), religious fervor (missionaries to the Native tribes and Mormon persecution) and entrepreneurial ventures (homesteading, mining, and others), Native tribes were caught in the middle. Outside groups all viewed the Natives differently, though many times sentiment overlapped. The Natives were viewed as educable in the Christian religion and white way of life by missionaries, as a dangerous nuisance by emigrants, and as eventual wards by the government. The government aggressively pursued treaty agreements with tribes often to the express advantage of emigrants on the trails west. The government handled all of this through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which had first been called the Office of the Superintendent of Indian Affairs. The Omaha in particular were at the crossroads of culture, being integral to the trading posts along the Missouri River. They were at the center of all of this foot, rail, wagon, and boat traffic.

Joseph La Flesche assumed the chieftainship, amid all of this change, after Cross Elk died very young and his friend and fellow prominent *metis* Logan Fontenelle died violently in 1855. A sudden raid by Lakota killed Fontenelle, who was the son of trader Lucien Fontenelle and an Omaha woman. Fontenelle had signed a few treaties.⁴³ The surprise attack and death of Fontenelle sent shockwaves of

⁴² William H. Goetzmann, "From the Northwest Passage to the Great Reconnaissance," in Major Problems in the History of the American West (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 131.

⁴³ O'Shea and Ludwickson, Table 2 "Omaha document signers 1815-1870," 329-330. Logan Fontenelle was from the Earthlodge Maker clan and also was known as White Horse. White Horse must have been the name of a close male

disorganization through the tribe, who “fled southward in terror” from land it had recently acquired through the previous year’s treaty. The tribe had only been on that land about six weeks.⁴⁴ The American agents might have been more concerned about the Omaha devolving into a disorganized band than the people actually were, and so they became fairly heavily involved in the choice of Joseph as chief and the events that followed.

Without Fontenelle, who had “carried himself as a man of the world and was a natural spokesman” and spoke better English than Joseph La Flesche, the tribe really was in chaos because it could not reach an agreement with American agents over the location of their lands.⁴⁵ One year earlier several drafts of a treaty had been signed in Washington, D. C. in which the tribe ceded all lands “west of the Missouri river [sic] and south of a line drawn due west from a point in the center of the main channel of said Missouri river due east of where the Aoway [sic] disembogues [sic] out of the bluffs, to the western boundary of the Omaha country, and forever relinquish all right and title to the country south of said line.”⁴⁶ In this agreement the tribe also agreed to move to a designated area and receive annuity payments over three-, 12-, and 15-year periods.⁴⁷

La Flesche and Fontenelle were part of the 1854 treaty delegation. While Fontenelle was still alive in 1855, however, the transition from treaty to reservation had not gone smoothly. In 1855, the

relative, because Fontenelle *filed* is listed as “White Horse II” in this article, meaning that he appropriated the name at some point in his life.

⁴⁴ O’Shea and Ludwickson, 19. The raiding party supposedly included a teenaged Crazy Horse, who went at the time by the name of Curly. Curly accidentally killed an Omaha woman during this fight, and disgusted at his action upon this discovery, he was unable to take her scalp and was subsequently mocked. This account can be found in Mari Sandoz’s 1942 biography, Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1942).

⁴⁵ O’Shea and Ludwickson, 12.

⁴⁶ “Treaty with the Indians, March 16, 1854,” La Flesche Family papers collection, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln. The document in the collection is the photocopy of the typewritten Treaty.

⁴⁷ “Treaty with the Indians, March 16, 1854,” n. p.

Americans expressed their misgivings. Their uncertainties were intertwined with the somewhat intractable behavior of the tribe. Green writes that the tribe and some of the Americans shared the same views on several issues. One American, Hepner, noted that “the Sioux might drive the Omaha off the plains during the fall hunt” and that this would affect their seasonal planting, which was already late.⁴⁸ Eventually, land was chosen for the reservation “in a place near the river and a little south of Blackbird Hills” but then Fontenelle was killed.

After the other man’s death, the Americans were not certain La Flesche was the best choice for chief but the options the tribe had were limited by the earlier deaths of Cross Elk and Big Elk, who died in 1853. La Flesche was described as “fanatical” by Army Major Vanderslice.⁴⁹ La Flesche had been working with his friend the Reverend William Hamilton, who according to Green wanted to set up a Presbyterian Mission school on the Omaha reservation (when its final location would be established), drawing on the success of the Mission at Bellevue—which had been on the “Native” side of Sarpy’s fur trading post where La Flesche worked.⁵⁰ How acclimated the Omaha were with Presbyterianism at this point is an interesting question to ponder, but La Flesche certainly would impress upon his children the importance of a solid education in the Christian tradition. Vanderslice might have seen “fanaticism” in La Flesche’s wish to have the Mission school on the new reservation built “fifteen or eighteen miles away from the village making it harder for the children to run away,”⁵¹ but in La Flesche’s mind perhaps, there was more practical concern about the future than any kind of fanaticism. His own upbringing had been a *mélange* of French colonial and Native culture, and his own children would be in

⁴⁸ Green, 17-19.

⁴⁹ Green, 21. The Major’s first name is not provided.

⁵⁰ Green, 20.

⁵¹ Green, 20.

the same position; however, the world his children inherited would be one of increased interference by the American government in Native affairs, often to their detriment.

Far from a “fanatic,” La Flesche was simply practical. Perhaps Vanderslice could not possibly understand the perspective the other man had. La Flesche had not been alone in this thinking, either. Logan Fontenelle and his siblings had been well educated by their trader father. La Flesche, unlike his friend if he had ever stopped to consider it, had a long life in which to ponder his identity and help shape his children’s futures. Arguably La Flesche moved between two identities, as he had two names. As a Frenchman’s son he wished to impart to first the tribe and then his children the aspects of wider culture, but as the adopted son of a chief and as the man *Inshtamaza* he had the traditional interests of the Omaha at heart. The pace of life accelerated for La Flesche around the time the Omaha were finally moved onto their new reservation in 1854.

Chapter III. Personal Identity

Joseph's "dear daughter" was born on April 8, 1854, on the Bellevue Indian settlement. She would grow up in two cultures and deal with bureaucratic and legal strikes against Natives, but she would be more familiar with the white world than her parents were. The church records show her as Yosette, but this may have been typographical or the family simply chose to change her Christian name to Susette.⁵² She did not get her traditional name *Inshtatheamba* (Bright Eyes) until she was about four years old in a sacred rite called *Thikuwixe*, "turning the child." Both male and female children underwent this rite. *Thikuwixe* was done to ensure that children would grow up properly, and it was "directly related to the cosmic forces—the wind, the earth, and the fire. . . . Through this ceremony the child passed out of the stage in its life wherein it was hardly distinguished from all other living forms into its place as distinctively a human being, a member of its birth gens, and through this to a recognized place in the tribe. As it went forth its baby name was thrown away, its feet were clad in new moccasins . . . and its *nikie* name was proclaimed to all nature and to the assembled people."⁵³ From this springtime ceremony in 1856 or 1857 onward she had two names to fit into one identity.

It is hard to imagine Susette as anything other than the cultured young woman she grew up to be, but as a product of two cultures, one dominated by the other, she had to navigate between them to find a middle ground. At eight years old she and other children were sent to the reservation's Presbyterian Mission School to learn English. In her now dated biography of our subject, whose work as a journalist is given the scarcest mention, the author Dorothy Clarke Wilson described with some

⁵² Church records, La Flesche Family papers collection, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln. The family's genealogical material (including the part of Susan La Flesche Picotte's journal dealing with their grandfather) is housed in its own folder in the collection.

⁵³ Fletcher and La Flesche., 117.

degree of imagination what Susette's childhood would have been like. Wilson described how Iron Eye, setting an example of progress for the tribe, had a large European-American style house built for his family. "There were scoffers, some in his own household. One was Oldest Grandmother, *Memetage*, Nicomi's half-sister [who said] '*Pe-ah-zhi*, it is bad! Ugly! All straight lines going this way, that way, like sharp arrows! Has not *Wakonda* made all things round?'"⁵⁴ Wilson wrote that Susette also did not like the house at first and much preferred her family's traditional dirt-floor round lodge made of wood, earth, and bark.⁵⁵ Green also confirms in her own book that Joseph La Flesche purposely advocated and implemented white culture on the reservation.⁵⁶ The vanishing tradition of the buffalo hunt was another period of adjustment for Susette, who went along on one at five years old. The little girl "caught her breath. The yellow plain below was mottled with black splotches, ugly in shape yet strangely beautiful. There was grace in their very awkwardness of motion. Their black hides glistened in the sun, and the long yellow grass flowed and rippled about them like waves. Father dismounted and lifted her down. 'Look well, little one,' he told her, 'and remember. For the thing you will see now will soon be gone forever.' She watched, fascinated."⁵⁷

Susette La Flesche had six younger siblings, three by her father's second wife *Ta-in-ne*. A second marriage was not uncommon for men in positions of power in the tribe, and Susette would even comment on this tradition of plural marriage in letters to a friend later in her life. She was actually the

⁵⁴ Dorothy Clarke Wilson, *Bright Eyes: The Story of Susette La Flesche, an Omaha Indian* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), 27. Wilson's writing style and lack of footnoting belies a fairly well-researched book. Wilson never referenced within the text the material used in her book. Her sources included the La Flesche Family papers and other repositories, which she relied heavily on for the facts. It should be noted Wilson lists both the State Historical Society of New Jersey and the Elizabeth Public Library as sources for her book. When they were contacted during the writing of this thesis they could not provide any information relating to Susette's years at the Elizabeth Institute.

⁵⁵ Wilson, 28.

⁵⁶ In Green's book the chapters "The Early Reservation" and "Joseph as A Family Man" are illuminating.

⁵⁷ Wilson, 39.

second child—the first child had been a boy. Louis La Flesche died in 1860 at the age of 12. Susette was the first daughter. Susette’s half-brother, Francis, was born in 1857 when she was three years old, and her sisters Rosalie, Marguerite, and Susan followed in 1861, 1862, and 1865. One half-sister, Lucy, was born in 1865, and in 1872 another half-brother, Carey. Of her three sisters, Susette thought Marguerite was the prettiest. She even put “Mag’s” charms on paper:

Mag is a sunflower
 Mag is a daisy
 Mag is the very gal
 To set “herself crazy.”⁵⁸

While she thought her second youngest sister beautiful, petite Susette was a tireless worker almost imbued with a sense of urgency about a world that was becoming increasingly difficult for Native Americans. She witnessed much in a short time. Her father remarked that “he had often gone a year or two without seeing a white man and then suddenly they came in vast numbers.”⁵⁹ These white men were not without merit sometimes; they were educating his children, improving the lives of his people, and they even saved his life. In 1859 white surgeons amputated one of Joseph La Flesche’s legs below the knee after he suffered an infection from stepping on a rusty nail. Though it was “done awkwardly and Joseph continued to suffer” he eventually got better care (another surgery and a cork leg) in New York.⁶⁰ As excruciating as it must have been, “all he wished to live for, he told [a

⁵⁸ Green, 49. This is taken from Susette’s personal autograph book (a book like a diary or a scrapbook).

⁵⁹ Green, 39.

⁶⁰ Green, 28.

Presbyterian missionary in Omaha territory], was to see his people on the road to improvement, their money matters made straight and the Mission in full favor.”⁶¹

The white teachers at the reservation’s Presbyterian Mission School were tasked with Susette’s education. By this time, the little girl had been living in a “citizen” style home for some years (this was the designation given to white people’s architecture, clothing, or other goods) but she still retained an identity as *Inshtatheamba*. Her father had by this time relinquished the chieftainship, and she saw through a child’s vantage point the agonies that her people’s kin the Ponca were experiencing. Wilson writes floridly about the first report the Ponca gave the Omaha about conditions on their own reservation in 1861. When this happened Susette was still little. Susette’s Ponca uncle White Swan and Chief Standing Bear visited the La Flesche house. This was not to be their last meeting.

Susette “returned from school one day to find a familiar figure seated on a pile of blankets . . . It was White Swan, or Frank, Joseph’s half-brother, who was a chief of the Poncas [sic]. She had been to visit him more than once in his village far up the Smoky Waters at the mouth of the Niobrara. She had so much fun playing with his two little girls, her cousins.” Wilson continues, “The men talked seriously, low and quiet, about the Ponca’s lack of annuity payments or goods. This was only the beginning of injustice for them, and Susette “knew well the meaning of ‘hunger’ and ‘fear’. Somebody, she got the message clearly, had broken a promise. A wrong had been done. She stared at Standing Bear in amazement. . . . [She] was fascinated by Standing Bear. Little did either of them guess that night, the man of about forty-odd and the child of about seven, how closely their lives were to be linked.”⁶²

⁶¹ Green, 28.

⁶² Wilson, 68-71.

The child did become familiar with the Ponca's plight through Standing Bear and her uncle. As she grew older and more accustomed to white American society her own struggle for identity exerted itself. It would ultimately, of course, be an identity that many times fit smoothly into the white world. This is not to say that she never felt caught between the two ways of life, unsure how to proceed, or that she did not hesitate to point out the differences between them that only became more apparent and polarized as she reached adulthood. In 1877, after graduating from the Elizabeth Institute for Young Ladies, she wrote to a former classmate describing a lifestyle the girl, Annie E. Howe, could not possibly imagine.

“How I should have enjoyed being with you at the Centennial. What do you suppose that brother of mine said when I asked him if he did not want to go to the Centennial. Why, ‘No, I would rather go to the Black Hills.’ I wonder if your brother would have said the same thing. Frank will very likely get his wish as he is just now on the “Buffalo Hunt” to be gone till Spring. Nearly the whole tribe has gone. Father has gone with Seizzie, his other wife, leaving my own mother home to keep house with ‘us four’ sisters.”⁶³

In this same letter she also describes a colorfully unusual Presbyterian church service at the Reservation. “I wish you could meet us in our little chapel on Sundays. Standing Hawk, the headchief [sic] comes to meeting nearly every Sunday with two of his wives (he has four) [sic] Once he laid himself full length on the bench, in the midst of the preaching, and lay staring at the ceiling. Mr. [Hinman, a preacher well liked by the people], feeling, I suppose, that this was not exactly respectful, drew up near him and commenced preaching at him in Iowa. First the Indian turned his head away, then more; and more till he had his face covered up with his arm and his back to Mr. H. while his wives sat

⁶³ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, letter to Annie E. Howe, 16 January 1877, University of Nebraska Archives and Special Collections MS Coll 313, Don L. Love Memorial Lib., Lincoln. Susette was 23 at the time.

nudging each other and laughing. The whole thing was so ludicrous, I could have laughed out.”⁶⁴ In this letter Susette both distinguished and distanced herself from her own people. She made these observations only after being steeped in her finishing school education, which had begun around 1870.

Always an avid learner, she had thrown herself into schoolwork and been dismayed when the Presbyterian Mission School closed its doors in 1869. The shy teenager was recommended heartily to the Institute by a former Mission School teacher. Her years at Elizabeth Institute have scant information toward them in the historical record but during them she apparently excelled in her studies. Almost as little is preserved about the school itself, which was founded in 1861 as the Union School. Its name was changed in 1870, and the school, located at “No. 521 North Broad Street” enjoyed success for decades, even under two eventual mergers.⁶⁵ Returning to the reservation after graduating in 1875, Susette felt stifled. She was in the unusual position of having knowledge and skills unsuited and unfamiliar to traditional tribal life and additionally her father’s progressive attitude had been to the detriment of traditional skills. According to Green, ideas concerning what was suitable and critical to the advancement of children in this time of great cultural upheaval were coming into vogue that would have rattled the stalwarts.

Green speculates on different thoughts Joseph La Flesche and other leaders might have grappled with: “Why train a boy to hunt and wage war when there was little game to hunt and war had become the business of the United States government? Why teach a girl to dress skins and fashion garments of

⁶⁴ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, letter to Annie E. Howe. The Omaha and the Iowa did not get along.

⁶⁵ The Library of Congress, *The School Interests of Elizabeth, a city of New Jersey, U. S. A.* (Washington, D. C., n. d.), 71-72. The original author of this book was Elias D. Smith, identified as “a former superintendent.” The book was originally published in Elizabeth in 1911. The back of the book states “this reproduction was printed from a digital file created at the Library of Congress as part of an extensive scanning effort started with a generous donation from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.” Efforts to find, through the Historical Society of the State of New Jersey and the public library in Elizabeth, materials relating to Susette’s years at school were unsuccessful.

leather and fur when these materials were no longer available? And how could men till the soil when it had always been the duty of women? How should children be trained under such circumstances?”⁶⁶

Susette used her restless energy to wrest a teaching job at the reservation school from a less than willing Indian Commissioner. The Commissioner’s initial refusal to hire her for the job, which had been “her childhood dream,” was in direct violation of the suggestion in the Rules and Regulations for reservation education that said the Natives themselves should receive hiring preference.⁶⁷ Given the job after passing a certification test with “the hardest reading and arithmetic sections” and enthusiastic letters of recommendation handily supplied by a teacher from the Institute, Susette reveled in her line of work.⁶⁸ Soon the plight of the Ponca would compete for her attention.

At this point—late spring 1877—the Ponca had been forced out of their Nebraska homes onto “the Ponca Trail of Tears,”⁶⁹ a name alluding to the long miserable march of the Cherokee people decades earlier. Both groups were among hundreds or thousands shuffled bureaucratically over the decades to “Indian Territory” which later became Oklahoma. The Ponca called the area “the warm country” and dreaded going there because of ample reports of an uncomfortably hot and humid climate, poor soil, close quarters and disease. Susette and her father were called away from their lives on the Omaha reservation about this time out of a sense of familial duty. White Swan, her uncle, had written to

⁶⁶ Green, 38. The Omaha were like many of the northern and central Plains tribes who viewed most or all of the farming as women’s work. When the government tried to transform the men of these groups into settled farmers, who no longer were expected to hunt either exclusively or in addition to agriculture, it did not always go over well. When not enough food was produced, relationships between Natives and white agents deteriorated. One example of this was the 1862 New Ulm Massacre, in which groups of hungry Dakota Sioux men attacked food warehouses and killed hundreds of people. When these people had been settled on a small allotment of reservation land, only one-quarter of the Dakota men agreed to become farmers. For more on the incident see Hugh J. Riley’s The Frontier Newspapers and the Coverage of the Plains Indian Wars (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publications, 2010).

⁶⁷ Starita, 70.

⁶⁸ Starita, 70-71. Susette was the first Omaha teacher on the reservation.

⁶⁹ Starita, n. p. A map after page 48 details the 600-mile journey undertaken by the tribe from May 16 to July 9, 1877.

her father telling him about the impending mass migration.⁷⁰ Father and daughter with “about ten others” saw, around Columbus “the long line of wagons and horses and oxen coming slowly across the Platte River toward Columbus,” and Susette observed that “they were crying, the men as well as the women—all were crying.”⁷¹

At this point in her life perhaps Susette was only just becoming fully aware of issues of the gross inequality and unfairness facing those in her racial group. Black slaves had long been free through the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862, though they would face tragic discrimination long into future generations. Blacks, both free and those who had once been slaves, had a vast freedom of movement compared to Natives, who were being systematically pushed into confinement on reservations. However both groups had neither citizenship nor the trust of many of those outside their racial groups. Miss La Flesche was fortunate enough to have gotten a good education, but it was a white woman’s education encouraged by her *metis* father. The importance of the question of whether Susette had fully forged her own identity at this point is critical to her later careers as both a crusader for better treatment of Native Americans and as a journalist. Perhaps only when she saw the close relatives of her people weeping and displaced the gravity of the situation became clearer.

Her letter from January of that year to her school friend Annie Howe offers glimpses into a curiously detached awareness of the situation Natives faced. Because it was written before the Ponca trouble it discloses its writer as only peripherally aware of the situation—aware that she had distanced herself from her peers and kin by strides in education, learned behaviors, and skills, and aware that the rest were somehow lagging behind. By calling Standing Hawk “the old Indian,” and by expressing

⁷⁰ Starita, 70.

⁷¹ Starita, 71.

gentle annoyance that her brother's desire to go on the (rapidly waning) traditional buffalo hunt was not as good a desire as wanting to attend a European-American event, as a writer she makes herself seem to be someone perfectly content to observe and report on the old ways—because they were interesting—but more comfortable outside of them. In the same letter, in her spidery and confident hand this cultured “Miss” wrote to another of things far less amusing than colorful church parishioners and irritating younger brothers. Susette wrote of the effect the school day assimilation process had on a small boy, still intimating that she was someone who knew her proper place. Even more telling is that she seemed to express little sympathy for the boy's psychological state and express approval for the machinations of the schoolroom.

She wrote that she needed to hurry and finish the letter because her students would arrive soon: “We made a shirt for one little fellow, who comes here to school, and Mrs. Hamilton gave him a coat, as he had neither. When we dressed him up in them, and sister Rosa cut his hair, which hung in a fringe all round his head, the top of his head being shaved off close, to represent some wild animal; we could not induce him to come into school for a long time. I presume he was ashamed of being ‘civilized.’ When we did get him into the room, we could not get him to come into the class, until his little sister, not much bigger than himself, fairly lifted him off his feet, and partly carried and partly dragged him into the class. This same little sister used to be very much afraid of white ladies. For a while we could not get her to near Mrs. H. Now, if her little brother does not behave in school, she is very apt to take matters into her own hands, and often gives him a knock on the head before I can reach them, the knock being often accompanied by a shrill ‘keep still’ delivered in the best of Omaha. The little fellow does

not cry, but like a true Indian brave, returns the pummeling with interest. Neither of them understand [sic] a word of English.”⁷²

Though she might have roundly approved of the school day assimilation process, it was not out of heartlessness. She still was *Inshtatheamba* by virtue of tradition and this would never change. Proud of her identity, she was only concerned with making sure the children of the reservation had the wherewithal to succeed in the new world being rapidly created and expanded around them without their consent or input. Later in her life, she published Omaha oral tales in a children’s serial magazine and expressly explained that she did it out of a desire to preserve the old customs for which she was heartsick. Because she had an education she could imagine no other kind of life viable for the younger Omaha. She had become truly invested in education during her time at Elizabeth Institute, and though a sampling of the curriculum is unavailable, Starita writes that she voraciously read Shakespeare⁷³ and Green lists a few of her favorite books. “Two were gifts from the school—probably awards of some sort—Travels in Arabia by Bernard Taylor and Personal Reminiscences edited by Henry Stoddard. She read these over and over” and there was another book, given to her by the reservation’s own William Hamilton. He had given her a copy of George MacDonald’s Within and Without either before or after she left for New Jersey.⁷⁴

⁷² Susette La Flesche Tibbles, letter to Annie E. Howe. Different Omaha clan groups had complicated designs they would cut the hair of men and boys into, and similar customs were present in the Ponca and Osage tribes. For details, see Alice C. Fletcher and Francis La Flesche’s The Omaha Tribe. Hair—its upkeep and often its length—was considered something sacred to many tribes. The education process, whether at on-reservation schools (day or boarding) and off-reservation boarding schools, robbed a generation—at least—of children of tradition when their hair was purposely cut.

⁷³ Starita, 70.

⁷⁴ Green, 48. MacDonald was a Scottish Victorian children’s author.

Along with an education and a love of books, something else set the young woman apart. As the daughter of a powerful leader, she would have been greatly respected if she had taken the “mark of honor” tattoo, reserved for women of high status. The mark of honor allowed women who bore it to become part of the *Hohewachi*, an “honorary chieftain society” that stood in for any formally organized Omaha societies for women.⁷⁵ Stephen Dando-Collins remarks that Iron Eye forbade his daughter to take the mark because it would inhibit her ability to integrate into white society. The mark of honor consisted of two tattoos: the first was a dark circular mark on the forehead, and the other, at the base of the throat, was a circle with four lines—top, bottom, sides—radiating out. Traditional tattooing was common to many tribes related to the Omaha and to tribes beyond. Proponents of civilizing reform for Natives saw it as wholly unacceptable. Dando-Collins is correct; Joseph La Flesche’s oldest daughter would never have been able to become so successful in the larger society if she had borne the mark. It certainly would have made her more of an exotic curiosity to the people nationwide and even across the ocean who would come to know of her through her lectures as “the Indian princess Bright Eyes” and the “Indian maiden”. It is not known if her sisters Susan, Rosalie, and Marguerite were ever asked to bear the mark. Their mother did not.⁷⁶

Thus lacking the mark of honor but possessing an education, some worldliness, and a tenacious desire to not be brushed aside in any pursuit, Susette La Flesche observed the increasing misery of the Ponca and became directly involved in the saga of one of their chiefs. It would be through her

⁷⁵ Mark Awakuni-Swetland, *Dance Lodges of the Omaha People: Building from Memory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 12. The book includes photographs of a woman with the “mark of honor” both displayed and concealed.

⁷⁶ Indigenous tattooing is an interesting subject. The practice was widespread. For Native Canadian practices see *Tattooing Practices of the Cree Indians* by Douglas Light (Calgary, Alberta: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1972). Closer to home, see *Traditions of the Osage: Stories Collected and Translated by Francis La Flesche* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010). The most famous non-Native who was tattooed is probably Olive Oatman. See *The Blue Tattoo: the Life of Olive Oatman* by Margot Mifflin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

involvement in the Standing Bear affair that she would fully come into her own as a champion of Native rights and she would meet the man who would later help launch her newspaper career—which is overshadowed by her work with the Ponca chief.

Chapter IV. *United States ex rel. Standing Bear v. Crook*, 1879: The Players' Destinies

Having first met Standing Bear when she was just a child, Susette encountered him a second time as a young woman. She had changed, and grown up with good experiences, but the man she became reacquainted with had endured much misery. He might have looked at her, with her face full of quiet concern, and felt sorrow for young people like her in this changing world. Even as a chief, Standing Bear had possessed no influence in trying to keep his people from being deported to Indian Territory. The first leg of the journey, the so-called "Trail of Tears" from May 16 to July 9 of 1877, had resulted in the death of his daughter Prairie Flower and many others died also, suffering from the grotesque condition of lymph nodes that had "swollen and broken through the skin," and various respiratory problems.⁷⁷ It was as this journey began that Susette and her father had first encountered the people, all weeping.

After the long walk was finally over, the Ponca were forced to make "the warm land" their new home, none too happily. Their agent was dismayed to find a completely exhausted monetary fund and the presence of liquor in their new home, and soon many of the people became sick and lethargic. This agent was frank enough to record his own opinion that "the removal of the Poncas [sic] from the northern climate of Dakota to the southern climate of the Indian Territory, at the season of the year it was done, will prove a mistake."⁷⁸ Besides the overwhelming heat and crowded tent-living conditions, there was no food. Standing Bear said "when we got there the Agent issued no rations for a long time.

⁷⁷ Starita, 72. Standing Bear, his brother Big Snake, and others had put up a long fight with white bureaucrats to try and avoid southward deportation. Standing Bear and Big Snake had been confined in jail at one point, separated from their people for three months. After the recalcitrant mixed-blood Ponca were finally subdued, the rest of the people eventually lost that initial fight and began the move on May 19, 1877.

⁷⁸ Starita, 90.

For months we had to beg off of other tribes. We were all half-starved.”⁷⁹ Standing Bear and others sought relief for the people in Washington, D. C., and were told they could choose another piece of land in the Territory. This had to wait until spring, but the search throughout 1878 resulted in many cases of malaria, and they were aimlessly drifting among the Quapaw allotments and other places.⁸⁰

The La Flesche family was abreast of these terrible events while hundreds of miles removed from it. Susette may have heard via gossip or picked up a newspaper or a letter after a day of teaching in the one-room school. “I was surprised to find that the white settlers around the reserve opposed the Poncas [sic] being taken away, and that they thought it was an outrage. I was surprised because I heard that white settlers hated the Indians and wanted to get their lands.”⁸¹ That was her reaction to the news “in the local papers” that the Lakota had recently moved back north from the former Ponca lands, finding them undesirable.⁸² Letters arrived from Indian Territory, written by interpreters for the Ponca there and then delivered to the Omaha. They would have been terrible to read: “My sister’s husband, as your son is dead, my heart is always sad,” began one letter. “The sickness is bad. I send to you seven days after the death of my brother-in-law. The woman I married came near dying,” lamented another. Another told of a younger brother’s death: “He was a very stout-hearted man. The men and the chiefs are very sad. Even the women and the young children are sorrowful.” In yet another, a grandparent

⁷⁹ Starita, 91. Starita writes that they arrived too late to plant crops, they had sold many horses, and livestock died their new land from disease.

⁸⁰ Starita, 94-98.

⁸¹ Starita, 96.

⁸² Starita, 96.

reassured a grandchild: “Though I always remember you, no matter what happens, yet I am sad when anything unpleasant occurs. I say that *Wakanda* [sic] shall decide for me about my affairs.”⁸³

Reading others’ accounts was not enough. Susette visited the area once in 1878, having traveled comfortably by train and stagecoach and was shocked at the conditions.⁸⁴ Perhaps she had already become somewhat determined to help remedy the situation by the time Standing Bear ended his arduous journey north with the bones of his son Bear Shield in a casket atop a wooden wagon. The old chief had taken his son’s body off the Territory area the Ponca were in without permission, and he had taken the body back to Nebraska accompanied by about 30 other people. Bear Shield had only been a teenager when he died and his last request had been to be buried back home.

Susette’s family had been expecting Standing Bear eagerly and nervously “ever since her uncle sent a message from Indian Territory”⁸⁵ and when the exhausted group of Ponca, toting the dead young man, arrived it was a very solemn reunion indeed for the man and the young woman. “For the second time in two years they were shocked at what they saw—faces hollowed from hunger and skin blackened from frostbite, gaunt children, ragged clothes, emaciated horses and so many sick. One man wore a string around his neck tied to a sack containing the bones of his grandchild.”⁸⁶

Surrounded by death, Susette met the man who eventually became her husband. Susette’s association with Thomas Henry Tibbles, the larger-than-life newspaperman 14 years her senior, began

⁸³ Starita, 99-100.

⁸⁴ Starita, 100.

⁸⁵ Starita, 110.

⁸⁶ Starita, 110. The unnamed man wearing the sack of bones, along with Bear Shield’s skeleton in the casket, attests to the importance of proper burial and the lengths gone to in order to carry it out. Mark Awakuni-Swetland, professor of anthropology and an Omaha cultural expert, says that among Omaha and Ponca beliefs “an improperly buried person was thought to wander the face of the earth unconsolated and unable to take the final step to the next world.”

after the man's idea of a lawsuit on behalf of Standing Bear was found agreeable by an attorney, John Lee Webster. Tibbles was filled with zeal for any project he undertook, while the young Susette, though horrified at the injustices being done around her, was filled with reserve. The two would eventually marry, but if the following account is to be believed, their paths seemed connected from a long way off. Tibbles claimed a connection to the Omaha—long prior to his first meeting with Susette—that is curious indeed. According to Evan S. Connell's research into his 1984 book on George Armstrong Custer, Son of the Morning Star, Thomas Henry Tibbles was the only white man alongside General George Crook to be initiated into the Omaha "soldier lodge" fraternal organization.⁸⁷ At 39 in 1879, Thomas Henry was a tall man with a thick thatch of dark hair and was currently married to a woman named Amelia. They had two daughters, Eda and Mae. Amelia had been long-suffering throughout his varied career, and as work with Native rights would soon consume much of his time and passions, Thomas Henry was even more frequently apart from her and the girls. Tibbles was a man who was "idealistic and given to large generalities which he visualized in dramatic situations" and "had always responded to the stimulus of a crowd."⁸⁸ In short, he was perfectly suited for the role he found himself in by the spring of 1879—Standing Bear's principal promoter.

He was at first reluctant to take on the problem, as he told in his memoir Buckskin and Blanket Days. When Crook came to see him, he balked at the idea of campaigning for the Ponca's rights, knowing it would set him back financially and he already lamented that his work as a newspaper editor—which he truly seemed to love—kept him apart from his family. He had said "when a man gets

⁸⁷ Evan S. Connell, Son of the Morning Star (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), 228. Dando-Collins confirms this in his book. Both Connell and Dando-Collins took this information from Tibbles' own memoir, Buckskin and Blanket Days.

⁸⁸ Green, 75. Before working as an editor, Tibbles had been a "circuit preacher, army scout, manager of 'grasshopper relief.'" He wrote more than one memoir (The Ponca Chiefs: an account of the trial of Standing Bear and Buckskin and Blanket Days: memoirs of a friend of the Indians).

into the newspaper business, he acquires the journalistic disease, a malady harder to overcome than the opium habit”⁸⁹ but after that long talk in the offices of the Omaha Herald he became fervently devoted to the Ponca cause. “At nearly one in the morning, March 30, 1879 . . . I was working hard in the Herald editorial rooms. My chief was away, and I was carrying his share, too. Suddenly General Crook came in. I could see by his face that something had gone very wrong.”⁹⁰ General Crook, a man whose conscience sometimes bothered him about Native Americans’ treatment, was troubled by the fact that he had received orders to once again round up Standing Bear and the 30-odd others who had illegally left the Ponca reservation in the Territory to take Bear Shield’s body home. The group had sought refuge near the La Flesche home on the Omaha reservation but from there had been taken to Fort Omaha. In his moment of moral conflict Crook turned to his old friend because he knew if anyone could make a public stand for the Ponca it might be Tibbles. Thomas Henry could also use his writing talent—“ ‘you have a great daily newspaper here which you can use,’ Crook argued finally. You’re perfectly acquainted with all the crimes of the Indian Ring at Washington. I ask you to go into this fight against those who are robbing these helpless people. You can win, I’m sure of it. The American people, if they knew half the truth, would send every member of the Indian Ring to prison.’ ”⁹¹

Tibbles agreed to the challenge at the cost of his editing career and at the expense of physical energy. One of the first things he did was walk, and then run, to several churches in Omaha to raise

⁸⁹ Thomas Henry Tibbles, Buckskin and Blanket Days: memoirs of a friend of the Indians (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1957), 152. The book’s first printing under the University’s Bison Books label was in 1969 as a reprint from an earlier 1957 edition.

⁹⁰ Tibbles, 193. By 1890, when Susette was writing for the same paper it was known as the Omaha Morning World-Herald.

⁹¹ Tibbles, 195. The “Indian Ring” was a network of bribery under President Grant’s administration. It was separate from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which had its shortcomings as well as its successes. For more on Grant see Frank J. Scurro’s President Grant Reconsidered (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1999) and Jean Edward Smith’s Grant (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002) to name a few.

support for the Ponca cause. His enthusiasm won him some converts, so to speak, to the cause: “by pelting back and forth from church to church with speeches to the congregations and pleas to the ministers I succeeded in lining up all the chief Omaha churches in an urgent appeal to Washington to let the sick, weary Poncas [sic] stay on the Omaha reservation.”⁹²

Then, he wrote about the Ponca situation after meeting Crook, Standing Bear and “shabby Indians in white man’s dress” at Crook’s office the following day and heard Standing Bear’s firsthand account. It is unclear whether his report appeared in the Herald because he seemed to make a distinction in his memoir, saying that “the Ponca material” was distributed (“sent it out broadcast”) before he finished his work for the Herald and “settled down to sleep contentedly” around three in the morning.⁹³ In whatever medium his account of Standing Bear’s predicament was made known, the response from some quarters was immediate, but the hoped-for attention of the federal government did not materialize—“next day the newspapers everywhere came out strongly pro-Indian, but the Secretary of the Interior sent no answer whatever to the appeal of the Omaha churches.”⁹⁴ Spending much time away from his wife and daughters, Tibbles sought his solution to the grave injustice in a law library, coming up with the idea to have Standing Bear sue for his basic right of personhood under an interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment. “It defined the right of any *person* in the United States to his life, liberty, and property unless these were removed by due processes of law. I felt sure that it gave these Indians as *persons* a right to call on the courts to defend them.”⁹⁵ Tibbles’s optimism probably stemmed from his years of fascination with and time spent with Natives. This is slightly ironic because even though he,

⁹² Tibbles, 196.

⁹³ Tibbles, 198.

⁹⁴ Tibbles, 198-199. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was housed in the Department of the Interior. The Bureau originally was in the War Department.

⁹⁵ Tibbles, 199.

Susette, and others would fight for the rights of Native Americans, they would not be granted full citizenship as a racial group until 1924 and would continue to endure harsh privations. Throughout the span of time of the civil suit *United States ex. rel. Standing Bear v. Crook* and its dramatic conclusion, Tibbles got to know Joseph La Flesche and his “dear daughter.”

Two days prior to Crook’s meeting with Tibbles in the newspaper offices on March 30, 1879, Susette and her father had met with the General. “[E]xhausted by their journey yet driven by their determination to plead for justice . . . she implored him to allow [the Ponca] to go home to the Niobrara river to bury the remains of Standing Bear’s son in the traditional Ponca burial grounds and to regain their old way of life in the land of their fathers.”⁹⁶ In order to meet with the General, the pair had “slipped out” of the Omaha reservation without telling any agents and ridden on horseback a long way.⁹⁷ Susette’s shyness belied a personality of spirited convictions that clung tenaciously to what it believed to be right and deserved. In her case what was right was that she get the teaching position on the reservation’s school, or in the case of the Omaha’s close kindred the Ponca, legal fairness and kindness was to be expected. Thomas Henry Tibbles and Joseph La Flesche’s eldest daughter would find themselves drawn together over many months with Standing Bear as the force between them.

April of 1879 passed with the key players in the Ponca drama nervous. John L. Webster, an attorney, had taken on the case pro bono and hired A. J. Poppleton, “the chief attorney for the Union-Pacific Railroad” to “[act] as counsel and appear in court.”⁹⁸ Judge Elmer Scipio Dundy had been “the most anxious person I ever saw to have a writ served on him,” Tibbles wrote, when he had first been

⁹⁶ Dando-Collins, 50. The actions of father and daughter were those of desperation. Susette’s letters sent to church congregations through the hand of missionary-anthropologist James Dorsey were ineffective tools, according to the author.

⁹⁷ Dando-Collins, 50.

⁹⁸ Tibbles., 199.

approached with Standing Bear's *habeas corpus* suit, refined and polished by the two lawyers.⁹⁹ Standing Bear and those who had made the 600- mile journey in the dead of winter back to Nebraska with him were held at Fort Omaha until the case went to court. On that morning, April 30, 1879 the courtroom was packed with "clergy, finely dressed men and women, and deeply interested lawyers. General Crook appeared in the elaborate full-dress uniform which he almost never wore, attended by an equally ornate staff. Standing Bear came in his formal regalia, followed by his leading men in their hopelessly tattered clothes."¹⁰⁰ Everybody was on edge with nerves, and the lawyers filled the hours with their legal arguments. Standing Bear, however, wanted to speak, and asked Tibbles to seek permission from Dundy, who wryly smiled and quipped, "Was Standing Bear ever admitted to the bar?"¹⁰¹

So on the hearing's second or third day, Susette La Flesche became Standing Bear's translator. Tibbles merely called her "an excellent interpreter" of Standing Bear's speech, which today edges on melodramatic but had a stunning effect on the crowded courtroom.¹⁰² Susette probably did not feel such acute fear at the task of public speaking as she later did on marathon lecture tours, and the chief's words conveyed through her had an impact. The crowd wept and was generally overcome with emotion, several people swarming to shake the chief's hand after they heard him describe a metaphoric sequence of being "on the bank of a river. My wife and little girl are beside me. In front the river is wide and impassable, and behind are perpendicular cliffs. No man of my race ever stood there before. There is no

⁹⁹ Tibbles. 199. The judge had been "somewhere in the wilds on a bear hunt" when messengers attempted to track him down with the writ, according to Tibbles.

¹⁰⁰ Tibbles., 200. Crook would likely have been wearing his United States Military Academy uniform, and Standing Bear's "full regalia" was "that red blanket trimmed with broad blue stripes, that wide beaded belt, and that necklace of bear's claws."

¹⁰¹ Tibbles, 200.

¹⁰² Tibbles, 200. Ponca was mutually intelligible with Omaha.

tradition to guide me.”¹⁰³ The chief described raging floodwaters, symbolic of white encroachment and the washing away of traditional Ponca life—the erosion of security, food, health, and homeland. The man in the dreamlike sequence had to climb sharp rocks before he beheld what was symbolic of freedom, “a rift in the rocks” and “the prairie breeze” on his cheek.¹⁰⁴ Susette then translated his last lines about Judge Dundy being “that man” who blocked the dream-sequence Ponca’s way to freedom and the final resting place of Bear Shield—“if he says I cannot pass, I cannot.”¹⁰⁵ The courtroom audience had been stunned by this and also by words translated earlier, as Standing Bear held a hand out to them for dramatic effect: “that hand is not the color of yours, but if I pierce it, I shall feel pain. If you pierce your hand, you also feel pain. The blood that will flow from mine will be of the same color as yours. I am a man. The same God made us both.”¹⁰⁶ Standing Bear’s request to speak had been granted after the official legal proceedings had ended, but the case’s outcome ultimately hung on his contribution.

The case’s resolution was a joyous one for the little band seeking fuller rights for a marginalized people. The decision was handed down well into May of that year, and it declared that “an Indian is a PERSON within the meaning of the laws of the United States, and therefore has the right to sue out a writ of habeas corpus in a federal court . . . Indians possess the inherent right of expatriation as well as the more fortunate white race, and have the inalienable right to ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’ ”¹⁰⁷ Dundy also ruled, “General Crook had illegally detained the Ponca prisoners” at Fort

¹⁰³ Tibbles, 201.

¹⁰⁴ Tibbles, 201.

¹⁰⁵ Tibbles, 201.

¹⁰⁶ Tibbles, 201.

¹⁰⁷ Starita, 157.

Omaha and that the military “had no legal authority to forcibly remove the Ponca to Indian Territory” and that they “must be discharged from custody, and it is so ordered.”¹⁰⁸

After the verdict in this civil case, Standing Bear and the other Ponca still had to delicately navigate the unfamiliar legal system and struggle to understand the nation’s varying views about the decision—a largely sympathetic eastern white population and a largely hostile western white population—while all they wanted was to be left alone. Standing Bear had been told by Poppleton and Webster immediately after the case closed that “if you set foot now on any Indian reservation, you can be arrested as an intruder,” but this was quickly remedied by making camp “with his people at a safe distance outside the Omaha reservation boundaries.”¹⁰⁹ On May 19, he kept his promise to Bear Shield and set off north to the old Ponca lands along the Niobrara River. There he buried his son’s remains, which had stayed in that wooden box for so long.

Poppleton, Webster, Dundy, Joseph La Flesche and his eldest daughter resumed their lives while Tibbles, energetic as ever, set off toward the close of June 1879 to the eastern United States to seek financial support for the Ponca cause. Prior to this, however, Susette’s beloved routine of teaching was once again disrupted at Thomas Henry’s prompting. He urged her to go down to Indian Territory with her father so they could visit White Swan, the uncle who loved her dearly. The meeting would be strategic as well as social, because “now that we wanted reliable messengers to carry our good news to

¹⁰⁸ Starita, 157. *United States ex. rel. Standing Bear v. Crook* was not the first case dealing with Natives that the Honorable E. S. Dundy had presided over. Professor and scholar James Riding In gives an excellent assessment of the very little known 1871 case *United States v. Yellow Sun et al.* This case was heavy on circumstantial evidence, had no reliable key witnesses and resulted in “twenty-two months of torturous confinement” for Pawnee man Yellow Sun and others. Dundy and another judge, John F. Dillon, presided over the case and were criticized for their handling of it. See James Riding In, “The United States v. Yellow Sun et al.” (The Pawnee People): A Case Study of Institutional and Societal Racism and U. S. Justice in Nebraska from the 1850s to the 1870s” in *Wicazo Sa Review* 17 (2002), 13-41.

¹⁰⁹ Tibbles, 203.

the stranded Poncas [sic] and bring back word just how things stood there, this girl and her father seemed the best choice.”¹¹⁰

In Tibbles’s estimation, Susette / *Inshtatheamba* was “rated by the Omahas [sic] and Poncas [sic] as clever and dependable, with an eager instinct for learning white people’s customs . . . her brilliance, her willingness to work hard, and ‘her pleasant, winning ways.’”¹¹¹ Their visit was welcome, and the old Ponca White Eagle wrote to inform the little party of earnest would-be reformers that their decision to have Standing Bear file suit had been a good one: “We had thought there was none to take pity on us. I thank you in the name of my tribe for what you have done for Standing Bear, and I ask that you go still further in your kindness and help us to regain our land. I want to save the remainder of my people, and I look to you for help.”¹¹² It was clear the little group needed to do much more if they were to make the inroads on Native rights that they hoped to. Now at 25 years old, Susette would soon leave her teaching career behind to embark on a series of lectures given both at home and abroad about the injustices done to her tribe’s close kindred, and about the need for more fairness in dealing with Indians. The first speaking engagement was close to home, at an Omaha church on September 6, 1879.

For these lecture tours Standing Bear would soon be roused from his place along the Niobrara, but with his son’s last wish fulfilled he could be at peace to continue at a frenetic pace. The first of the very shy young woman’s speaking engagements would end abruptly when she appeared about to faint,

¹¹⁰ Tibbles, 205.

¹¹¹ Tibbles, 205.

¹¹² Tibbles, 206.

but her eloquence left an impression on the audience in that “large Omaha church.”¹¹³ Her short speech struck a nerve with those whites desirous for the Native Americans to assimilate more fully into white society. “Why should I be asked to speak? I am but an Indian girl, brought up among the Indians. I love my people; I have been educated and they have not. I have told them that they must learn the arts of the whites and adopt their customs; but how can they, when the government sends the soldiers to drive them about over the face of the earth.”¹¹⁴ The audience was pleased to see this properly educated young lady desirous of her kinfolk adopting what she was familiar with, and they were also stricken with pity when she described the hardships Standing Bear’s family endured on the long march south, namely the death Prairie Flower, his daughter and her childhood friend: “The Christian ladies of Milford, Nebraska came to pray for the dying girl, and give her Christian burial. Oh, the perplexities of this civilization! Part of the white people murder my girl companion and another part tenderly bury her, while her old father stands over her grave and says ‘my heart breaks.’”¹¹⁵

Her instantaneous popularity as a speaker set events in motion quickly. Tibbles had acquired some significant funding (at least \$600) for the Ponca cause and the larger one of Native rights, and he was anxious to return to the eastern states for more lecturing. Along with Joseph La Flesche, Tibbles was hesitant to include Susette in the plan. Her father did not want to send her to eastern cities on a lecturing circuit with Standing Bear out of a sense of protectiveness, while Thomas Tibbles was concerned “if only because of the added cost” she would accrue: the newspaperman had signed a

¹¹³ Tibbles, 211. Tibbles wrote that she “waited there a full moment, plainly frightened almost out of her senses, like a bird in a net, but hers was a graceful, appealing fright that never lost its dignity.” When she became unable to continue, “women on the platform hurried to lead her away.”

¹¹⁴ Tibbles, 212.

¹¹⁵ Tibbles, 212.

speaking tour contract “with Mr. Williams of the Boston lecture bureau.”¹¹⁶ Joseph La Flesche allowed his daughter to go only after deciding to send her half-brother Francis along.¹¹⁷ Susette initially had not wished to go, but saw that her own discomfort with the idea was outweighed by the importance of the larger issues at hand. She was needed to spread awareness of the Ponca’s mistreatment and fight further for more rights for indigenous groups. The speaking tour “would be more formal, better organized, and include far more cities. At each stop, it would focus on four things: the initial inspection tour and long walk home by the chiefs in 1877, the forced removal south that spring, the deaths and deplorable conditions in the warm country and the freedom flight north.”¹¹⁸ The group left in mid-October 1879. It was in Chicago that they had their first speaking engagement, and then tragedy struck that would bring them all closer together in ways they might not have imagined possible before.

Very shortly after they arrived in Boston, the speeches at the Second Presbyterian Church of Chicago well behind them, Tibbles and Standing Bear both received news of death—the newspaperman’s beloved Amelia had died suddenly of acute peritonitis, and the chief’s brother Big Snake had been shot to death in a confrontation¹¹⁹. Surely it was very awkward for the other half of the group—Susette and Francis—to deal with. Her 19 year old half-brother was not particularly fond of the newspaperman. They were likely desirous to give both shocked and grieving men some space. This was one experience that they could not share, though they had all been in close confines for so many weeks. The group had “shared hotels, restaurants, and railroad carriages”¹²⁰ but grief was exceedingly

¹¹⁶ Tibbles, 212-213.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 213. In I am a Man Starita writes that this “proved to be a wise decision.”

¹¹⁸ Starita, 177.

¹¹⁹ Details of Big Snake’s death are recorded in full in “I Am A Man”.

¹²⁰ Dando-Collins 209.

personal. Tibbles wrote in his memoir that he was so stricken with grief after the news was delivered that he fled to the privacy of his room.¹²¹ There is no doubt from the man's own way of writing about his wife that he loved her.

Thomas Henry had met Amelia Owen around late 1860 or early 1861, when she was freshly arrived in Pennsylvania from England. "She was so different from the women I had known in my pioneer life that at first sight her indefinable look of refinement and culture literally overwhelmed me," he wrote. "She had lovely rosy English coloring, large brown eyes, a lithe, faultless figure, beautiful white rounded arms, and dimpled hands. But she talked so earnestly to me about my life among the Indians that my embarrassment soon passed away. I began to ride over that way often on my beautiful, fast, but very vicious horse."¹²² The eccentric man of many careers and a fascination with Native Americans clearly felt that Miss Owen was someone who accepted these things not as peculiarities but as things to be admired and discussed. If her immediate acceptance of this was not enough, the clincher was the fact that she was an excellent horsewoman. Tibbles stood amazed as she had no trouble pacifying his temperamental beast of a horse. With a flair for the dramatic, he then told of a wild chase after her as she rode his horse "down through the village where people stared after them" that ended with Amelia unfazed and still atop the horse. " ' You're brave enough to be the wife of a frontiersman!' 'Do you think so?' she asked. 'Yes, indeed I do.' "¹²³ So the couple had married on October 1, 1861 and they had two daughters, Eda and Mae. Amelia had died while he had been away, consumed by his newest passion of lecturing about Native rights. As much as Francis La Flesche disliked Tibbles, he made a point to accompany Standing Bear into the grieving widower's room and translate the old

¹²¹ Tibbles, 214.

¹²² Tibbles, 149.

¹²³ Tibbles, 150-151.

chief's comforting remarks.¹²⁴ The earnest little group of self-made activists continued with their grueling schedule despite the two shocking deaths, but Tibbles readily admitted that his mind "was living over, moment by moment, eighteen hard, brave, wonderful years that were now done."¹²⁵

The lecturers continued to be wildly popular and well received, first at Boston's Horticultural Hall by members of Boston's Indian Committee and others, then the Old South Church in early November. They hobnobbed with important New England society figures like author and poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who declared upon seeing Susette at a dinner party, "*this* is Minnehaha," referencing his famous poem *The Song of Hiawatha*.¹²⁶ The 1855 epic poem had revived a sense of sentimentality in 19th century white consciousness toward Natives.

Susette strongly disliked being compared to the "Indian princess" and "Indian maiden" who existed only in other people's imaginations, but on this speaking tour she had no choice but to bear it politely. Longfellow even inscribed part of his poem into her autograph book (a 19th century book like a scrapbook or diary) when the group visited a house in Cambridge, Massachusetts for that dinner party. The autograph book appears to have been a gift; an inscription inside toward the front reads "*Inshtatheamba*, Bright Eyes, from her friend B. W. Williams, Boston, Feb. 5 1880."¹²⁷ Throughout her time as a lecturer, indeed even prior to that as Standing Bear's courtroom interpreter, she had been forced to remake her own identity as *Inshtatheamba* more than Susette La Flesche. Presented to crowds

¹²⁴ Both Dando-Collins and Starita write at length about Standing Bear comforting his lecturing companion and include his remarks.

¹²⁵ Tibbles, 215.

¹²⁶ Starita, 184-189. The archetypal "Indian maiden" represented in the fictional character of Minnehaha was popular among East Coast "friends of the Indians" who had a sentimental attachment to what they thought was a long-destroyed nobleness that once existed in these people and was annihilated by the arrival of white culture.

¹²⁷ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, autograph book, the La Flesche Family papers collection, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln. The Historical Society possesses photocopied pages of the actual book.

as Bright Eyes, Susette eventually became resigned to this as a form of address, introduction, and later in her newspaper career, as a byline in publications. Her autograph book entries from this time period of constant lecturing, beginning in 1880, reveals a slew of heartfelt notes addressed to Bright Eyes. One from New Jersey in particular reads:

“Inshtatheamba Susette—
What can a bright-eyed lily be?
As Aaron’s rod, Lord, used by thee—
So may her race uplifted be—
The glory all shall be to thee.”¹²⁸

Tibbles, Susette, Francis, and Standing Bear were not too long together before feelings began to grow between the newspaperman and the bright young woman. She loved reading and writing and though she was shy it was not long before she became an effective public speaker. Tibbles and Susette would marry in the summer of 1881. By the end of the 1879-1880 New England jaunt, they had spent nearly a year on the road with her half-brother and Standing Bear, lecturing and being feted at parties and receptions. The group had become extremely fatigued toward the end of their contract and took a short vacation; it was provided by Mrs. Hemenway, a well-to-do Boston woman they had met on a train.¹²⁹ Besides meeting Longfellow, other important people they met who would later be key to their cause for Native rights were Helen Hunt Jackson and Senator Henry Laurens Dawes. After the 1879-1880 lecturing tour ended they arrived in Nebraska exhausted in the middle of a dust storm, Tibbles recorded, that had been swirling for three months in their absence. Even while home and mostly doing separate activities—Susette helped her family do farm work, Tibbles reunited with his now motherless daughters—the two were not long parted.

¹²⁸ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, autograph book, n. p.

¹²⁹ Tibbles, 221. He recorded the end of their first lecturing tour and their vacation in April 1881, but Dando-Collins records it as April 1880. This is one of many contested dates in Tibbles’s memoirs.

Tibbles continued to have ceaseless energy. He had gone in June 1880 to Indian Territory, working with Henry Fontenelle (Logan's brother), White Eagle, and lawyer John L. Webster, who he communicated with via telegram¹³⁰. A new tactic aimed at legislation began in autumn of 1880. Tibbles wrote "the President, confused and worried by the many quirks and turns of [the Ponca problem] finally appointed a splendid Ponca commission of his own which included both Brigadier General Crook and Brigadier General Miles, to visit the actual ground of both the old and the new [reservation] tracts and bring him back to the whole truth. Their report amply justified every step we had taken to save the tribe. Better still it led to a bill which Congress passed on March 3, 1881 in the very last hours of its session which let each individual Ponca choose the land he preferred, either in the Territory or on the Niobrara."¹³¹ Years later the Omaha got allotments in severalty on their own reservation lands through the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887.

When the group had still been in Boston, they had met the indomitable lady ethnologist Alice Fletcher, who would later become a close family friend of the La Flesches. She came to Nebraska in the summer of 1881 soon after Tibbles and Susette were married and went on an extensive camping and research trip with the newlyweds. Tibbles writes that during this trip the trio visited the Sioux on the Rosebud Agency and met Sitting Bull; Miss Fletcher received an Omaha name that Tibbles shortened in translation to Highflyer. While adventuring with Alice Fletcher among the Ponca homeland along the Niobrara, Tibbles had carried Susette across the river on his back when they left the camp one evening. They were stranded on one side because a boat was missing, and as they were crossing, the camp caught fire. "Looking up the bank I saw our camp truly was on fire. I speeded up. Bright Eyes was

¹³⁰ The chapter "I Visit the Indian Territory" in Tibbles's memoir covers this and more.

¹³¹ Tibbles, 234.

slender, but I learned then that any woman grows heavy when one is running through three feet of water over a quicksand bottom.”¹³²

The bond between Susette and Tibbles had formed slowly enough during their months on the lecture circuit throughout 1879-1880. The two were total opposites in personality, but the older newspaperman had certainly noticed her. He clearly thought her beautiful, or at the very least, just her eyes: “they were wonderful eyes. They could smile, command, flash, plead, mourn, and play all sorts of tricks with anyone they lingered on.”¹³³ During their time lecturing, moving from Chicago to Boston to New York, Tibbles had been careful to watch after Susette’s health (Francis probably looked after her, as well). She was easily tired, prone to illness if too exhausted—the 19th century catch-all condition of “weak constitution.” Tibbles became alarmed at her exhausted state several times during their lecturing, and at one point “instructed the tour manager provided by the Boston committee” to ask people to be more gentle when shaking her hand after he saw that it was bruised.¹³⁴

Given the passage of time the 1881 wedding seemed only natural for this pair, though Dando-Collins makes interesting assertions that Tibbles tried to “camouflage their relationship early on” because he was afraid of rumors being circulated that they “had begun their affair while he was married” and that after Amelia’s death, Susette became “an emotional backstop” for him.¹³⁵ The notion of keeping propriety makes sense, but even prior to marrying her, Tibbles seems to have genuinely valued Susette as a person. He praised her intellect, wit, and facility with the spoken word and of course commented on those “wonderful eyes.” Relegating her to “an emotional backstop” might seem unfair, but certainly she would have comforted him in his grief over Amelia, just as she likely comforted

¹³² Tibbles, 241.

¹³³ Tibbles, 211.

¹³⁴ Dando-Collins, 210.

¹³⁵ Dando-Collins, 224.

Standing Bear over the murder of his brother by an Indian agent. The widower's affections for this woman 14 years his junior were almost certainly genuine, but Susette left nothing in the written record regarding her own feelings. Once she married their father, her relationship with Eda and Mae was not always harmonious. She struggled at first to be a kind and fair stepmother with the two girls but she could never fill the Amelia-shaped hole of loss. When they married on July 23, 1881 she and "T. H." (as her family all called Tibbles) were described as "the loving couple, Mr. and Mrs. T" in Alice Fletcher's diary.¹³⁶

The La Flesche family was not all entirely warm with Tibbles from the beginning, and their relationship with him changed for the worse over the years. Francis thought Thomas Henry to be an insufferable man who had flirted with his sister while Amelia was still living.¹³⁷ Susette's engagement to T. H. was the beginning of a rift between the half-siblings. Francis was miserable his own bad marriage and Wilson writes that he had become increasingly "fuming" and "idle . . . The knowledge of Susette's plans only aggravated his unhappiness."¹³⁸ Wilson's assessment of the extended family's relationship with Thomas Tibbles is that it was not cordial as the years went on, but in the beginning everyone besides Francis was happy. Wilson describes it thusly: "However, the rest of the family gave hearty approval. Joseph, who had never been easy about his daughter's unorthodox and recently unchaperoned journeys, gave his relieved consent. 'Uncle' Two Crows was equally agreeable. The three women of the household, having almost given up hope for this normal development, were

¹³⁶ Dando-Collins, 224.

¹³⁷ Green, 64.

¹³⁸ Wilson, 282. In her own book Green offers insight into Francis. She writes that out of all the family members he is the one who has been "the subject of as many hearsay stories, as many unfounded and inaccurate statements." He had been married in 1877 "to a member of the Omaha tribe" and one year later his father wrote that this woman "was dead." Green questions whether it was a literal, physical death or if she had been "unfaithful [to Francis] and was 'dead' to the family?" When Francis filed for divorce, which was granted in 1884, he alleged his wife's infidelity with "two prominent Omaha men." The wife's name is given as Alice Mitchell.

overjoyed. In fact, the news was received with elation by the whole tribe. Thomas Tibbles, savior of the Poncas [sic] . . . their champion was to become one of themselves.”¹³⁹ He may have been held in high esteem then, but Susette’s husband would become over the years a polarizing force among his friends and in-laws. Susette’s own wedding took place little more than a year after her younger sister Rosalie’s. Rosalie had married an Irish-American, Ed Farley, in 1880 when she was 19.¹⁴⁰ So it was that on July 23, 1881, “Bright Eyes” and her erstwhile lecturing companion were married. The two were certainly matched in their desire for Native Americans to achieve more rights, and also were both Presbyterians.

After they were married, the couple’s long fight for justice continued, but they eventually both devoted themselves to journalistic pursuits. It is arguable that had Thomas Henry Tibbles not been a passionate newspaper editor and journalist himself, Susette would have had no cause to pick up journalism as a profession. Their journalistic endeavors were at first concerned with the Native issues of the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee massacre. They then veered sharply into Populism, a political philosophy T. H. became enthusiastic about (indeed, it seems the man was equally passionate about everything). He had spent time before he met Susette involved in the “grasshopper wars,” concerned with the plight of farmers on Nebraska’s tough land ravaged by the crop-eating insects on a large scale. When Populism burst onto the country’s political scene, he became one of its foremost enthusiasts.

Susette would pick up the pen as “Bright Eyes” and her writing work would take her first to South Dakota’s Pine Ridge Agency and a few years later to Washington, D. C. Her journalistic career has been overshadowed by her work lecturing on Native rights. Although it was a career secondary to both her beloved teaching and to her lecturing, it is important because her time as a journalist shows us a unique woman in a job that was largely considered a man’s realm in the 19th century, and she—an

¹³⁹ Wilson, 282.

¹⁴⁰ Green, 64.

oppressed minority—was a Washington correspondent for a while. This career as a journalist has only been given the barest mention in the biography by Wilson and the compendium on her family by Green. No reference was mentioned in the two books on the Standing Bear case, though its relevance even in passing would have been debatable. Susette's reporting on the 1890 Ghost Dance controversy and the aftermath of the Wounded Knee massacre in 1891 is arguably her most important work; it has not been given its due in scholarship on the subject. She became part of the tapestry of women writers in the 19th century, both on the frontier and in the nation's capital, and we can assess her unique experience.

Chapter V. Home and Away: 1881-1890

There is a gap of time between the end of the first East Coast lecture tour with Standing Bear, the couple's marriage, and the beginning of Susette's journalism career in the shadow of her husband's. These ensuing years are made more difficult to sort out due to conflicting dates recorded in Tibbles's own memoir and the research of others like Dando-Collins, Wilson, and Green. After the original lecture tour begun in 1879 ended, most probably around May 1880, everyone but Tibbles stayed in Nebraska. As aforementioned, he rapidly found himself in Indian Territory, often alone but occasionally with the help of Henry Fontenelle (whose last name he spelled Fontanelle in his memoirs). Negotiations were made leading to the bill passed by Congress on March 3, 1881 that granted the Ponca land allotments in severalty. Eventually, on July 23, 1881 Tibbles and Susette were married in the reservation's Presbyterian Mission¹⁴¹ but not before they found themselves back in New England lecturing once again.

Tibbles recorded that they lectured again throughout 1882-1883, but Dando-Collins's research places them back in New England in 1881. Arrangements had been made through B. W. Williams, a "lyceum agent" and the couple moved from Boston to Worchester, Massachusetts, in the beginning of the second lecturing tour.¹⁴² So it was that lecturing, that fashionable 19th century intellectual pastime, dominated their lives for yet another while. Passion for the Ponca cause and the general plight of the Native American had not faded for the couple, but because the Omaha's kin were now no longer persecuted openly some of the problem's closeness seemed to diminish for the couple. Tibbles

¹⁴¹ There is considerable variance on the wedding date. The most reliable would seem to be Thomas Henry's memoir from his own hand—the date was recorded as June 29, 1882. Wilson, however, confirmed the date and ended the controversy with a note in the back of her biography: "the date of Susette's marriage, July 23, 1881 (not 1882, as affirmed in *Buckskin and Blanket Days*) is confirmed by the County Judge of Burt County, Takamah, Nebraska." Dando-Collins recorded the same date and cited "county records and newspaper articles" as well, and said that the date in Tibbles's memoir had been provided by his daughters.

¹⁴² Dando-Collins, 215.

recognized this when he wrote that his new wife “lectured with less effort and very few collapses, though she always actually suffered from timidity when she faced an audience,” and he also wrote that in his own case he could “carry on the fight more impersonally, now that Congress and the courts had proven it was so completely justified.”¹⁴³ Though they continued to fascinate East Coast crowds with their powerful tales of experience, and though there was still a novelty for the crowds in the “Indian princess” construct realized in flesh and blood, it seems the couple was torn between their cause and thoughts of a permanent home away from the commotion. They took advantage of a lecture season that waxed and waned according to the general public’s spikes in interest in the problems of Native Americans as well as the machinery of federal legislation.

Tibbles wrote proudly that he helped create legislation that eventually became the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887: “Some of the Boston Committee asked me to try my hand at drafting a severalty bill which would express my ideas. I turned my attempt over to a committee member, Professor J. B. Thayer, head of the department of constitutional law at Harvard. He made a few technical changes and then sent it on to Washington. There, because of politics and other reasons, a few more points were altered. But in the long run that rough draft of mine became the backbone of the [Act]. This was the final step of ending the Indian Ring’s control over Indian life and property.”¹⁴⁴ Though Tibbles summarized the process so neatly and concisely and gave himself a large amount of credit, the actual creation of the Dawes Act took years to be smoothed over by both academics and lawmakers, and “Indian life and property” would remain well into the next century in some ways very much unequal.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Tibbles had actually met and shaken hands with Senator Dawes, and as their second round of speaking tours pulled them from their lives in Nebraska, they cultivated a fine

¹⁴³ Tibbles, 294.

¹⁴⁴ Tibbles, 295.

circle of friends. On her second foray into high-brow New England society, this time as a married woman, the “Indian princess Bright Eyes” could already count among acquaintances from the previous lecture circuit Helen Hunt Jackson, the tenacious reformer for Native Americans, and the late Longfellow, who had died months before her wedding. This time, as a couple they had a warm reception “especially in Boston” among the writers: “Whittier, Lowell, Holmes, Miss Alcott, and Edward Everett Hale could all be counted upon as firm friends. Dr. Hale gave many luncheons and dinners at his home so Bright Eyes could meet noted writers and artists. By this time she herself was writing Indian stories and articles for St. Nicholas and other magazines and was growing increasingly interested in painting.”¹⁴⁵ It only makes sense that the couple was befriended by this group. They were trying to spread the word about injustices done to Native Americans and they used the courts and the legislature for this cause. Many in this group of writers were social reformers and former abolitionists—proponents of equality and at the least, better treatment.

When Tibbles and Susette had married, they had not expected their lives to be settled. However, over the next decade Susette became increasingly homesick and even physically ill. In the earliest days of their marriage they lived at the reservation’s Mission, “then they were in Omaha for several months, probably during one of [T. H. ‘s] more concentrated periods of writing” for the Omaha Herald.¹⁴⁶ Wilson writes that the house in Omaha did not feel like a home to either of them. It had been the home Amelia raised her family in. Eda and Mae were with them, and they decided to move back to the reservation, settling in on Susette’s allotment.¹⁴⁷ The house on this allotted land, Green writes, was

¹⁴⁵ Tibbles, 295. John Greenleaf Whittier was a noted Quaker abolitionist writer; James Russell Lowell had also been an abolitionist and was one of the American Romantic poets; “Miss Alcott” was Louisa May Alcott of Little Women fame, also a former abolitionist; and Edward Everett Hale was another writer.

¹⁴⁶ Green, 74. Tibbles simply called the newspaper either the Omaha Herald or the Herald in his memoir. At this time—late 1881—he had probably returned to his former job of editor, which he had abandoned in 1879.

¹⁴⁷ Wilson, 298-299.

partially made of sod.¹⁴⁸ The La Flesche family's friend, ethnologist Alice Fletcher, had helped the family's various members acquire land allotments in the new town of Bancroft "just over the southern line of the Reservation" and "Susette's allotment was a fourth of a mile north of the bridge and only about a mile east of Rosalie's home."¹⁴⁹ It sat just outside the town of Bancroft.

They tried to begin a semi-settled life with Eda and Mae, who had lacked stability and a mother figure in their home life for so long. If the house in Omaha had been unsettling because the memory of Amelia hovered over Susette's step-parenting efforts and saddened the other three occupants, life just outside of Bancroft was no easier. The girls had spent a year away at school at Elizabeth Institute, but did not get along with their stepmother. Susette tried hard to be a good stepmother but the three were often at odds. A cultural gulf existed between Susette and her husband and his children, no matter how accomplished and educated a Native she seemed to be. Green had examined a letter that Mae had written when she was an adult to Susette's sister Marguerite—the beautiful sister. Green concluded from the letter that "Mae Tibbles Barris . . . revealed something of the poignancy, the elements of tragedy in the strangely assorted group of people trying to become a family in surroundings strange to most of them. Susette had been living among white people most of the time for fourteen or fifteen years . . . Now she was housekeeper with meager equipment and the responsibility for two strange children who she felt were resentful of her."¹⁵⁰ Mary Gale La Flesche was the intermediary between the angry and frustrated Susette and the girls (Mae described herself in the letter to Marguerite as having been an unruly child).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Green, 74.

¹⁴⁹ Green, 74.

¹⁵⁰ Green., 74-75.

¹⁵¹ Green, 75.

The help of her mother smoothed their relationship over well enough, but her mother's involvement stirred memories of Susette's old life, in which she had lived in a round house with a dirt floor and worn moccasins. Her early childhood as *Inshtatheamba* dueled with her adult life as the cultured young woman, the life she had been leading since she was a teenager. She knew the way her mother had raised her would never again be practiced. As Mae's letter indicates, Mae and her sister did not realize the predicament their stepmother was in, nor did they appreciate the situation until they were older. The girls did experience guilt at not being Native themselves, but their father, who was "out of his element" in the blended family situation, "gave them a long discussion on Western man, of his development and achievements, and restored to them a sense of pride in their own race" after realizing that they were being unduly influenced by "a one sided view of the life around them" on and near the reservation.¹⁵²

Their little house on Susette's allotment, and the other allotments for the La Flesche family members that Alice Fletcher helped them to get, was part of new legislation directed at the Omaha tribe. Wilson writes that Fletcher's role was purposeful: "In April 1883 [she] had been appointed special agent" in the allotment process with Francis as her "interpreter and assistant."¹⁵³ Though Susette and the people who mattered most to her all had roofs over their heads, these allotment years were lean ones. Tibbles wrote angrily in his memoir about unfair prices for farmers and that corn intended for food was instead burned for fuel. The little patchwork family muddled through, despite its problems. Eda and Mae were now teenaged, and their father had been constantly absent their whole lives. Wilson writes that during the winter of 1884 he was often away, "gone for many weeks in the East"¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Green, 75.

¹⁵³ Wilson, 302.

¹⁵⁴ Green, 311.

doubtless working on what he called “the Indian situation.” Before that hard winter of 1884, though, no one in the family had really been settled. The girls had been at the Mission school, “now a boarding school for girls only”¹⁵⁵ and their father and stepmother were still periodically making public appearances. When they had first returned to Boston and entered into the writers’ circle of Lowell, Alcott, Whittier and others, Susette had begun writing and publishing stories dealing with traditional Omaha life and customs, as her husband had noted.

While the essays published when Susette was a student in New Jersey are the overall identifying point of a healthy writing talent, some short stories dealing with Omaha life were a creative outlet. Susette retold and gave new titles to Omaha oral tales in the collection “Omaha Legends and Tent-Stories” published in the children’s serial magazine Wide Awake. Her first contribution appeared in 1883. Wide Awake was published by Charles Trowbridge Pratt through the Chautauqua Young Folks’ Reading Union. This educational magazine had sections on practical housekeeping and cooking, science, history and biography, and literature. Susette’s 1883 contribution to Wide Awake carried the byline “Mrs. Susette Tibbles (Bright Eyes).”

“Omaha Legends and Tent-Stories” was an exercise in nostalgia. She wrote “I have written them down just as they were told to me by my father, mother, and grandmother, only of course I have translated them into English.”¹⁵⁶ Reaching into the past for inspiration to write also served the purpose of preserving Omaha culture. Susette had lamented the lack of proper education among Omaha children previously in her life; perhaps passing on the stories to a larger audience would help preserve them

¹⁵⁵ Green, 310.

¹⁵⁶ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “The Babes in the Woods” Wide Awake 16-17 (1883) 14 April 2011 <http://books.google.com/books?id=dNnNAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=wide+awake+1883&hl=en&ei=gqGvTaqRN8nXiALHrfCvBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=book-thumbnail&resnum=1&ved=0CDIQ6wEwAA#v=onepage&q=omaha%20legends%20and%20tent%20stories&f=false> 21-25.

because they could be read and understood in English. The first story published was her retelling of a story she titled “The Babes in the Woods,” about a brother and sister abandoned by their father after he accidentally kills their mother and blames them for it when they track him to a neighboring camp.

In her introduction to the story Susette expressed anguish at deep cultural loss: “I wish I could have written the music of the songs. I think they are beautiful. I have heard some of your finest singers, but nothing I ever heard from them has touched me so profoundly as the singing of the Indians,” and she also took pride in her culture. “I never read any of your ‘Mother Goose Rhymes’ until I was grown up and I used to be inclined to feel sorry sometimes that I had missed them in my childhood; but if I had known them I probably would not have known the nursery stories of my own people and so I am satisfied. . . . When thinking of those old days I often wonder if there is anything in your civilization which will make good to us what we have lost. . . . Thinking of these legends brought back the old days so vividly. I wish I could gather up all the old legends and nursery songs so that they could live after we were dead.”¹⁵⁷

In an anthology, Wielding the Pen: Writings on Authorship by American Women of the Nineteenth Century, Susette’s introduction to her translated story in Wide Awake is discussed briefly as a piece of writing that “relates the centrality of storytelling for ‘a people with no literature’ and questions, as Zitkala-Ša later would, the superiority of white literature and culture.”¹⁵⁸ Zitkala-Ša, whose Christian name was Gertrude Bonnin, was a Lakota writer born 22 years after our writer. She coped with the trauma of immense cultural loss and the impacts of boarding schools and Christianity on her life through writing fiction and essays on traditional culture. Here the comparison is made and

¹⁵⁷ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, 22.

¹⁵⁸ Anne E. Boyd, ed. “Susette La Flesche Tibbles (Bright Eyes) (1854-1903)” in Wielding the Pen: Writings on Authorship by American Women of the Nineteenth Century (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 334.

Susette is only seen as a fiction writer, but her own contribution is still important. It helps establish her wider range as a writer—someone intensely focused on Native issues, in this case, preserving traditional stories. Susette’s writing at this stage was unique because it was reaching out to children in a clear effort to preserve Omaha culture. “In reading these legends I hope my readers will try to imagine themselves in a tent, with the firelight flaming up now and then, throwing weird effects of light and shadow on the eager listening faces, and seeming to sympathize and keep pace with the story; and how we have had only these legends and stories in place of your science and literature. After all, that is only what your forefathers had before the days of books, and perhaps remembering that will make your thoughts more charitable toward a people having no literature.”¹⁵⁹ A finishing school in the eastern United States produced a writer for “a people having no literature,” which is remarkable.

The couple’s occasional lecturing and gatherings with the finest New England authors came to an end eventually, over a period of years. Thomas Henry made a vague intimation in his memoir that they would go back and forth from their homestead in Nebraska to places like Boston whenever the “Indian situation” needed addressing. The August 1885 death of Helen Hunt Jackson deeply affected Susette. Her husband wrote that she “shut herself in her room and wept all day long.”¹⁶⁰ Jackson had been called “H. H.” by the couple, according to Dando-Collins. Jackson was inspired by the efforts of Susette, Francis, Tibbles, and Standing Bear in 1879 to write her novel Ramona about California Indians. In the late 1880s the legislative machinations of the Dawes Act were finally at a point where it would soon be passed into law—it moved slowly, inching along until the 1887 passage. During one of the couple’s final lecturing tours in Boston sometime in 1885, they were approached about lecturing on

¹⁵⁹ Boyd, 336.

¹⁶⁰ Tibbles, 126. Helen Hunt Jackson’s other, less popular work was A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government’s Dealings with some of the Indian Tribes, published in 1881, only three years before Ramona. While Century is a nonfiction work tracing contemporary government dealings with natives, Ramona is a novel about a young mixed-blood girl in Spanish California.

the same cause in the United Kingdom. They would again be separated from Thomas Henry's children, this time by thousands of miles.

In May of either 1886 or 1887¹⁶¹ the couple packed their bags for a journey to the United Kingdom, their last large-scale public appearance before they both settled into newspaper careers. They had been invited the year before by a man named only in Thomas Henry's memoir as Major Pond, who met them through the Boston Citizenship Committee (an organization dedicated to lobbying for the citizenship rights of Native Americans). The couple, focused on farming on their small plot of land and easing into a new family dynamic, "hesitated a long time, but finally signed the contract" in which they would lecture five days a week for a year.¹⁶² It is most likely that they left in May of 1887.

Their stay in England bore some similarity to their American lecture tours—speech after speech and the first one was, as in Omaha in 1879, in a church. Tibbles wrote that well-connected friends had sent him overseas with "over four hundred letters" and one, addressed to "Rev. Dr. Frazier, then the head of the Presbyterian Church in England" came from James Russell Lowell, who they had dined with in Boston.¹⁶³ The English Presbyterians were not as welcoming at first as the congregation of the church in Omaha had been. "At first Dr. Frazier was appalled at the idea of letting Bright Eyes speak

¹⁶¹ Here again there is controversy over dates. Dando-Collins corroborates Tibbles's memoir as saying they sailed for England in May 1886 and remained there until 1887. Wilson says that Tibbles's track record is unreliable, and places their voyage in May of 1887. "It was not surprising in that recollection that he and Bright Eyes were touring England and Scotland during months when newspapers were recording their attendance at affairs in Boston or that British and Scottish dignitaries were writing their names in Bright Eyes' autograph album when he remembered her as back home in Nebraska." Wilson included in one of her brief notes in the back of her book that "exhaustive research in England failed to disclose corroborative evidence of the Tibbles' year spent there, but Susette's autograph album and a long account by Thomas Tibbles giving full detail of the trip (much fuller than in *Buckskin and Blanket Days*) were treated by the author as reliable sources". Susette's autograph book was signed in Scotland in May 1888, and this seems like the most convincing proof they were there in 1888, and it is clear the duration was only a year. If they had left in May 1886, 1888 would have been one year too long. The couple was settled again on their Nebraska allotment by June 1888. After a grasshopper infestation, in that month Tibbles leased the farm and returned to his editing job at the Omaha newspaper.

¹⁶² Tibbles, 297-297. Their first agent, sent by Major Pond, was a "former theatrical manager."

¹⁶³ Tibbles, 297.

there, because women should keep silent in the churches, but that was before he talked with her. Then he arranged an evening service to meet the legal minimum of a hymn of one stanza, a scripture lesson of two verses, another one-stanza hymn, a three-minute sermon, and a brief prayer. With only eight minutes spent, he had me give my talk and then introduced ‘the Princess Bright Eyes from America.’”¹⁶⁴ The newspaperman’s second wife was sensational, for all of the reverend’s hesitation: “The moment my wife finished speaking, Lady Ellen, the sister of the Duke of Argyle, came forward to kiss her on both cheeks. Immediately the well-trained congregation hastened to do the proper thing likewise. Contrary to Dr. Frazier’s predictions, as great a crowd pressed around Bright Eyes then as ever had flocked around her in America.”¹⁶⁵

Susette’s husband always referred to her as Bright Eyes in all of his writings, even before they were married. The circle of people interested in the couple’s lectures in England and Scotland found it a charming name and used it promotionally. As before during her work with Standing Bear, this was something Susette disliked but bore politely. Tibbles put it mildly that she was “far too democratic” to correct the people’s sentimentality, which he blamed on precedent: “Their unchanging English customs insisted on carrying on the tradition begun with the welcome of Princess Pocahontas two hundred and seventy years before.”¹⁶⁶ Susette seemed to be such a charming and influential speaker that she was asked—it appears her husband was not—to lecture on temperance, another popular 19th century cause. Susette was reluctant at first to drift from her topic of choice, but spoke in “one of the large London theaters,” the event having been arranged by “Lady Henry Somerset, the English temperance leader.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Tibbles, 297.

¹⁶⁵ Tibbles, 297.

¹⁶⁶ Tibbles, 298.

¹⁶⁷ Tibbles, 298.

More importantly, however, the couple continued to cultivate a circle of people deeply interested in the topics they had planned to speak on.

After what Tibbles described as “that amazing year” they returned to Nebraska in time to endure a plague of grasshoppers and eventually leased their farm before Tibbles returned to newspaper work in Omaha.¹⁶⁸ Susette’s father died a few months after she and her husband returned home, on September 24, 1888. Joseph La Flesche had always treated Tibbles kindly, though over the years Tibbles would become both an alienated and alienating figure. By this time the Omaha had become citizens of the United States under the Dawes Act, which made all “allotted Indians” citizens¹⁶⁹ but strides still needed to be made in equality for all Native people. Joseph La Flesche had lived long enough to see a completely different world form around his tribe.

Years of frenetic lecturing had ended. Susette had charmed those interested in the lectures in both America and the United Kingdom as “Bright Eyes.” Her autograph book brims with well wishes from both sides of the ocean, many addressed to “Bright Eyes” and all very sincere in their affection and pride in her work for “the cause,” as the struggle for Ponca rights and wider awareness of the injustices faced by Indians was called in their circle of friends. A few mementos of their time in Britain are there, too. A Scottish mealtime blessing was written in the book during the couple’s stay in Glasgow on May 12, 1888 by Alexander Brown. Brown was the leader of a social movement called Boy’s Brigade. A drawing of a Scottish cottage is also included in the book as a souvenir from those days. Many of the well wishes for “the cause” would continue into the days of her newspaper career, such as this one from 1894:

¹⁶⁸ Tibbles, 300.

¹⁶⁹ Green, 80.

“My kind friend: Long may you continue your grand work for humanity. More such evangelists are needed who count life’s moments precious. That a universal sisterhood would unite in persistent effort to elevate the races of America above the present state of thralldom and unrest. To help others is a sure way to attain individual development and worth. This is the secret of your own signal influence for good. You have been a blessed inspiration to me,” wrote her friend Martha Powell Davis, in July 1894 from Washington, D. C. when Susette and T. H. worked in that city as news correspondents.¹⁷⁰ “The cause” by 1894 had expanded to include Populism, but during Susette’s first foray into journalism the cause closest to her heart and her husband’s was still the unjust situation Native Americans were faced with.

While Tibbles worked for the Omaha Morning World-Herald and his family tried to blend into an easy dynamic, tensions were growing in South Dakota between the Army and the Lakota Sioux. As rumors spread that the Lakota were becoming increasingly warlike because of a mysterious dance and might wage large-scale attacks on white settlers and the Army, press interests grew. Press coverage only served to perpetuate the rumors. Finally, a press corps of about 20 reporters from around the nation headed to Pine Ridge Agency with great expectations of conflict. When the group had been there about a month, one of the most blatant attacks on Native Americans unfolded in the cold of December 1890.

¹⁷⁰ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, autograph book, n. p.

Chapter VI. The Omaha Morning World-Herald: Telling the Truth, 1890-1891

In early December 1890 Tibbles and Susette joined the rush of other news writers in what would become known as the “Wounded Knee press corps” to Pine Ridge Agency, that desolate pocket of South Dakota where the Lakota Sioux had been relegated after finally surrendering to the United States government, but not before humiliating and bewildering the military in the crushing defeat of George Armstrong Custer and a large contingent of the 7th Cavalry in 1876 at Little Bighorn. By 1890 the religious cult of the Ghost Dance had swept the Lakota. Its interpretation and use among this tribe was grossly misunderstood by outsiders. There was much tension surrounding the lives of the Lakota on the reservation, and indeed there was much tension among the tribes all across the Plains and the West that had all been forced onto reservations. The Ghost Dance cult was absorbed by the Lakota as it swept eastward from its beginnings in Nevada with the Paiute Wovoka (“Jack Wilson”) a man whose dream or vision portrayed a world strictly for Natives, ruled in peace and brimming with prosperity.¹⁷¹ Wovoka’s vision was altered by tribes to fit their needs and understandings of the vision, but the basic premise common to all was that if a certain dance was performed in a certain prescribed manner, there would be a return to peace, prosperity, and abundance for Indians, while whites would vanish. Tribes’ and bands’ names for the Dance were all different. The Lakota called the Dance *wanági wachípi ki*. This was “best translated as ‘the spirit dance,’ the word *wanági* referring to the spirits of the dead. Frightened whites, however, gave it the name it became known by all over the world: the ghost dance.”¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ James Mooney’s contemporary ethnographic work Ghost-Dance Religion and The Sioux Outbreak of 1890 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) traces Wovoka’s life. Mooney thought that a syncretic religious group called the “Shakers,” along with other movements in the Pacific Northwest, influenced Wovoka prior to his vision that contained the Dance, which he had during a total solar eclipse.

¹⁷² Rani-Henrik Andersson, The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 29. According to a map reprinted in Andersson’s book from ethnologist James Mooney’s work on the phenomenon the Ghost Dance’s reach barely missed the Omaha, ending just west of the reservation and traditional lands.

Tensions between Natives and whites and indeed, internecine tensions within tribes had been high across the Plains while the dance cult swept eastward across it. By 1890 the Lakota had problems of their own. The people had long been artificially divided by the allegiance of some to the whites (who were called “loafers”) since the 1850s and those who were not. “Thus a very rough division was recognized: those who had lived for a longer time on the reservation formed the group that the whites called progressives, while the newcomers were considered non-progressives.” Also, “all of their ceremonial dances had been outlawed in 1883.”¹⁷³ Though not all Lakota leaders accepted or advocated the Dance, hundreds of Lakota on Agency lands began to practice it in spite of the ban on ceremonial expression. Over the course of 1890 nervous whites and their Indian agents and police watched the Dance unfold on the reservation, and doubtless were already aware of it sweeping other quarters before this one. It had been brought back to Pine Ridge by Short Bull, who had visited Wovoka in Nevada as part of a delegation in June 1889.¹⁷⁴ The Lakota reservation policeman George Sword wrote down what the delegation told him, which was a mixture of things heavenly and temporal.

The Lakota delegation had reported that the Christian religion’s figure of Jesus was most definitely involved in Wovoka’s vision. George Sword wrote “when the smoke disappeared there was a man about forty years old, who was the Son of God. The delegates said they had seen the signs of crucifixion on the man’s body. This was considered a true sign and evidence that they were indeed dealing with the one who was called the Son of God by the Christians. . . . He had come now to help the Indians and to punish the whites for their wickedness and wrongdoing toward the Indians.”¹⁷⁵ More

¹⁷³ Andersson, 20.

¹⁷⁴ Andersson, 34.

¹⁷⁵ Andersson, 34. The Lakota, and perhaps other Indian groups, called *Wovoka* “the Messiah”. The seven bands of Teton, or western, Sioux comprise the Lakota people. They are *Sičhángŋu* (Brule/Burnt Thighs), *Oglála* (Scatters their own), *Itázipčho* (Sans Arcs/No Bows), *Húŋkpaphá* (Head of the circle), *Mnikǰówožu* (Miniconjou), *Sihásapa* (Blackfoot Sioux), and *Oóhenuŋpa* (Two kettles/ Two boilings).

earthly and immediate concerns for “all Indians” were that they educate their children on reservation schools and work as farmers. Diverging into the spiritual again, the delegation said it had witnessed miracles performed by Wovoka, who also boasted he could obliterate the whites with the sweep of a hand.¹⁷⁶ Andersson is quick to point out that the Lakota on the whole had rejected Christianity so their description of Jesus was a product of confusion; they inadvertently twisted Wovoka’s own words, saying that the man had called himself the “Son of God.”¹⁷⁷ Whatever the misinterpretation, it did not dampen the Lakota’s enthusiasm for the dance cult.

Farming and education would have been critical to the survival of the Lakota, but they took refuge in the dance cult. Despite its confused mix of spirituality this dance cult offered hope for peace and prosperity that farming, for this traditionally migratory hunting group, could not. The reluctance of many Natives in general to have their children educated under the whites—whether at on-reservation day or boarding schools or off-reservation boarding schools—was a cultural chasm that was not being bridged easily. The level of Lakota enthusiasm for this point of Wovoka’s teaching was likely low. The formerly belligerent and aggressive people withdrew into the dance cult, cold, sick, and hungry without their annuity rations. Their leadership had long been fractured and galvanized. The stabbing death of Crazy Horse in 1877 at Fort Robinson, Nebraska had effectively ending the renegade movement, while the eventual return of Sitting Bull to the area from Canada provided some stability. Sitting Bull was killed shortly before the tensions exploded over the Ghost Dance, but the tension built slowly. Slowly enough, in fact, that it provided the time for at least 20 reporters from across the nation to form a press corps and travel to Pine Ridge.

¹⁷⁶ Andersson, 34-35. Wovoka was gaining momentum as a powerful leader from this dance cult, as the delegation said “Wovoka taught them a new dance and told them to call him *Até*, father.”

¹⁷⁷ Andersson, 38.

Among them were Susette and her husband. They had been sent by the staff of the Omaha paper, now called the Omaha Morning World-Herald, to “go to the bottom of the Indian troubles and tell readers of the World-Herald the truth. They will visit the Sioux. No other newspaper correspondents have done or could do this,” the paper explained.¹⁷⁸ It is safe to speculate that they either approached someone at the paper about undertaking this task to clear up the misinformation, or that someone on staff approached them. They left sometime in early December 1890, travelling to South Dakota, informed of the problem there: “Of course Bright Eyes as the daughter of the Omaha’s head chief, promptly heard from her own people some of the earliest reports to reach civilization.”¹⁷⁹ Joseph La Flesche, Tibbles forgot, had long given up the chieftainship before his death, but Susette would have heard through family and peers about the trouble. On that point Tibbles was correct. The couple, like everyone else, knew not what was going to transpire but they also were in the majority of people who simply understood the problem as an outgrowth of religion. Arguably, only when they witnessed what happened could they fully understand. “Both of us, rightly estimating the movement as just a religious craze of the sort we had often seen run through large groups of white people, refused to worry at the news,” Thomas Henry wrote.¹⁸⁰ “The news” they had heard was half-fact, half-fiction. It was true that the *wanági wachípi ki* had swept into Pine Ridge with fervor, but there was no danger of the Lakota mounting a deadly uprising. That was the untruth. In spite of the couple’s unconcern with the rumored problem, they headed to South Dakota at the direction of their employers, chosen because of their “Indian affiliations” as Tibbles so modestly put it.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ “An Indian Investigation,” The Omaha Morning World-Herald 11 Dec. 1890: 3. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 5.

¹⁷⁹ Tibbles, 300.

¹⁸⁰ Tibbles, 300.

¹⁸¹ Tibbles, 300.

They may have been accompanied by reporters from other papers on their short journey north, but in any case when they arrived they met the others who had swarmed to cover anticipated blood-curdling action in this desolate place. The husband and wife approached the situation much more rationally. “We found there an amazing state of affairs. Though there had been no outbreak of any kind, the place was jammed with ‘war correspondents’ who were expecting to produce thrilling ‘war news’. Hanging around the hotel day after day they constantly dispatched new inflammatory stories made out of whole cloth.”¹⁸² The stories these other “reporters” invented out of tedium were certainly not happening. The couple chose to stay in a cabin at the Agency with a Lakota family, but it is not known whose family this was. They did this so they could get the facts alone, and it worked very well. They were constantly supplied with information: “Here the Sioux men called on us and kept us informed of every event in the tribe and the whole Sioux nation. They confirmed our theory that except for the sudden craze for ghost-dancing [sic] in ghost shirts, all was peaceful. Four of our friends had actually made a long journey up into the mountains to see and talk with the messiah.”¹⁸³ The couple was privy to the revelations of Short Bull and others who had gone to see Wovoka in 1889, which were written down by George Sword.

Because Christianity, specifically Presbyterianism, played such a large role in Susette’s life (though Tibbles does not give the same impression of piety, he was Presbyterian as well) it is interesting to speculate how she might have viewed this much maligned dance cult. The dance cult, being an offshoot of Wovoka’s larger spiritual revelations, was just one aspect of spiritual revitalization among numerous Native tribes. Spiritual revival itself has a long history in the United States.

¹⁸² Tibbles, 301.

¹⁸³ Tibbles, 301. The Ghost shirts were part of the Lakota’s adaptation of the Dance to fit their needs. These supposedly kept wearers safe from harm, but they were ordinary garments. It is widely accepted in scholarship that the Lakota “militarized” the peaceful Dance, and that is why it attracted so much attention.

Andersson's research cites other scholars' work on messianic religious movements throughout the 19th century frontier's varied religious landscape, not just this one among Native American tribes. Tibbles's remark in his memoirs that he and his wife brushed off the dance cult as a religious fad is important. It indicates that though Susette was from a different cultural background she was deeply entrenched in Christian doctrine. The couple was only able to understand it—which at this point they had only heard about, not seen—as something transitory akin to the fervor that would occasionally sweep a place when a Christian tent revival or other evangelism rolled in.

The “action” the other journalists were hungry enough for to fabricate was very slow in arriving at first. Susette published a few accounts dispelling the rumors and decrying the sensationalism of others, but the bulk of her work really did not appear until after the massacre. This is a strong indicator that although communications professor Hugh J. Reilly calls her “certainly America's first female Native American war correspondent” and “one of the first female war correspondents to be officially employed by any newspaper,”¹⁸⁴ a war correspondent in the truest sense of the term she was not. Two contemporary women who were true “war correspondents” came a few years after Wounded Knee. They were Kathleen “Kit” Coleman and Anna Benjamin. Both women covered the Spanish-American War from the inside. Coleman was Canadian¹⁸⁵ and Benjamin was American. These two women defied the gender norms of the day for female news writers and were an exception in covering conflict. Benjamin purposely did not choose “‘a woman's angle’ featuring care of the wounded and accounts of Cuban refugees in Florida. Benjamin resolved to follow the American troops to Cuba in 1898. [She said] ‘but just let me tell you, I'm going through to Cuba and not all the old generals in the army are

¹⁸⁴Reilly, 117.

¹⁸⁵ Coleman, Kathleen. The Canadian Encyclopedia, 10 December 2010
<<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0010046>>.

going to stop me.’”¹⁸⁶ In contrast Susette did not desire to break gender barriers for her employment at the Omaha newspaper. Susette’s work about the human side of the Wounded Knee massacre was solely in the accepted realm of the female writer. She let America and the world ponder the social and human aspect of violence—the misery of the aftermath and the task of reasoning with readers comprised her writing’s bulk. This angle that Benjamin apparently hated was more the norm of the day.

Susette’s work at Pine Ridge Agency at the close of 1890 was different in several ways from women’s journalism of the time. It was unlike the journalism of women like Coleman and Benjamin who charged into battle coverage and while it was socially conscious journalism it was a unique experience that other female reformers who picked up the pen never had. Susette probably had little desire, based on her gentle nature, to agitate for a chance to cover all things martial. Indeed, in this instance a war or conflict had not even been declared and was said to be imminent only through rumor. Male reporters outnumbered her, and among them was her husband. Carl Smith and W. J. MacFarland of the Omaha Morning World-Herald and Charles H. Cressey of the Omaha Bee were among many men whose stories dominated the pages of their papers, but for different reasons. Reilly characterizes Cressey’s coverage as unrestrained, given to cynicism and suspicion: “Cressey, the Bee’s primary correspondent, delighted in painting a graphic picture of the situation in South Dakota. He made the most mundane event seem sinister.”¹⁸⁷ In contrast, the reporting coming from the Morning World-Herald’s Smith, MacFarland, Tibbles, and “Bright Eyes” was one with “a more measured approach to the events coming out of the Dakotas.”¹⁸⁸ Male writers seemed to dominate the national consciousness

¹⁸⁶ Maurine H. Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons, Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism (Washington, D. C. : The American University Press, 1993) 139. Benjamin was quite successful, “scooping her competitors with news of American victories. The next year she covered the Philippine insurrection, and, in pursuit of news, journeyed on to Japan, China, and Russia. She died in Paris at age 27.”

¹⁸⁷ Reilly, 115.

¹⁸⁸ Reilly, 115.

in the trouble at Pine Ridge; even L. Frank Baum, who would later write The Wonderful Wizard of Oz for children, blasted forth an angry editorial about the death of Sitting Bull, who was killed shortly before the tensions at Pine Ridge caused the massacre.¹⁸⁹ Susette seemed to sense that her place as a reporter in this unfolding drama was at her husband's side as a co-worker. In this investigation they had both been sent to "go to the bottom of" it together. There was no need to feel contempt, as Benjamin did, for all of the men—in Benjamin's case "all the old generals"—representative of some kind of oppressive force against female journalistic ambition. Susette stuck to her job, which was the dissemination of the truth.

She was probably proud that this task was to be hers and her husband's. She was nationally and internationally recognized as the intelligent, appealing speaker "Bright Eyes," a champion of the cause of Native rights with inside knowledge and experience that other reformers in the same cause, such as her late dear friend Helen Hunt Jackson, could not convey because it was not theirs. Tibbles had put this fact of her race modestly as "our Indian affiliations." The task of telling the truth about the Ghost Dance, which had stoked countless imaginations, began in earnest as soon as the stories were written and could be telegraphed back to the staff. Soon after their arrival Susette wrote an article headlined "Fleeing From Each Other" that was datelined out of Norfolk, Nebraska (from where it had been telegraphed). In the article, as "Bright Eyes" she assured readers of the Omaha newspaper that there was no danger at the Agency or in its surrounding environs, and she also criticized the "present system," faulting it as the cause of the commotion and rumors. "Here on the one hand are hundreds of white people leaving their homes because they are afraid of the Sioux. On the other hand there are hundreds of Sioux fleeing to the Bad Lands because they fear the white people, troops having been sent

¹⁸⁹ Reilly, 115. L. Frank Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz is seen by some as a Populist allegory. Henry M. Littlefield's scholarly article "The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism" appeared in the journal *American Quarterly* in 1964 and the discussion has never died down. Published in 1900, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz was the first in a series of books for children that extended until 1920 with Glinda of Oz, published after his death.

in among them. No one has been killed, no blood shed [sic] no assault made by the Indians on the whites and none on the Indians by the whites.”¹⁹⁰ The “system” she criticized was the reservation system, which had fostered animosity between Indians—dependent on the government for a place to live, annuity rations, schooling for their children, and the teaching of skill sets such as farming—and the whites, which category included the government and settlers. Distrust, corruption, bigotry and suspicion on both sides were hallmarks of this “system” which Bright Eyes warned could become a continuing state of affairs.¹⁹¹ As no hostilities were arising from the Lakota, who had been swept by the fervor of the Ghost Dance cult, she saw no reason for “the presence of troops who have been moved at the expense of thousands of dollars” to the Agency.¹⁹²

As rumors still persisted over the weeks, she and T. H. worked hard to get the unvarnished facts, relying on their Lakota hosts and neighbors. Other papers continued to fan the flames of Americans’ imaginations, overactive when it came to the subject of Native Americans since before Cooper’s time. Reilly writes that papers in the Plains region such as Leadville, Colorado’s Leadville Evening Chronicle offered a typical example of frontier newspaper coverage of the crisis. Under the headline ‘Insane Indians,’ the newspaper claimed that the Lakota were ‘lashing themselves into a frenzy of excitement’ ” during the Ghost Dance.¹⁹³ This dance was viewed as a prerequisite to war. This is why settlers left their homes in droves during what Bright Eyes called “this inclement season of the year,”¹⁹⁴ harsh on the Plains, and why troops fidgeted nervously, anxious at the slightest provocation. Reilly quotes

¹⁹⁰ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Fleeing From Each Other,” The Omaha Morning World-Herald, 11 Dec. 1890: 2. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 5.

¹⁹¹ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, 2.

¹⁹² Susette La Flesche Tibbles, 2.

¹⁹³ Reilly, 113.

¹⁹⁴ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, 2.

historian Elmo Scott Watson's observation that in this rumor mill, journalistic standards and practices actually regressed: "Watson adds that when it seemed likely the Sioux would again 'take the warpath, journalistic practices of a quarter of a century earlier were repeated. Unverified rumors were presented as 'reports from reliable sources' or 'eye-witness [sic] accounts'; idle gossip became fact; and once more a large number of the nation's newspapers indulged in a field day of exaggeration, distortion, and plain faking.'"¹⁹⁵ Surrounded by reporters who delighted in this, Susette told the truth and brought to this telling an experience none of the other reporters could have if they had tried.

As a Native woman, she offered readers of the Omaha Morning World-Herald a view of the situation that was essentially an insider's view but was remarkably even-handed in its treatment of both groups involved in the conflict. Readers could see that her rational thinking was not distorted by wild accusations against the white half of this conflict. Instead she was able to convey, with the same level of logic and a little less pathos than in her lectures on the plight of the Ponca, that although she belonged to the racial group loathed at present as animalistic and belligerent, she had something to really offer her readers. This was in no small part due to her education, her experience growing up as a second-generation *metis*, and all of her work during and after the Standing Bear case. She clearly saw the financial mismanagement the government and the military engaged in when they stationed "thousands" of soldiers at Pine Ridge Agency. Although she did not elaborate why it was fiscally foolish or what she thought could better be done with the expenditures, it clearly showed she understood the troops were being wasted on the matter. Her reasoned telling of the facts earned praise. The anonymous reader who called her "an Indian Hypatia" and praised her "gifted pen" expressed

¹⁹⁵ Reilly, 113. This came a few years before Hearst and Pulitzer ignited "yellow journalism" which was at its zenith when Coleman and Benjamin, protesting women writers' marginalization, determinedly covered the Spanish-American War from the battlefield perspective. The "journalistic practices of a quarter of a century earlier" that Watson refers to was about the time of the end of the Civil War.

surprise that a writer so clever and rational could have been Native. But for this truth telling she, along with her husband, ran into professional condemnation from her employer.

Tibbles wrote in his memoir about how underappreciated the efforts at clarity he and his wife undertook as journalists were, by the very paper that had boasted “the World-Herald expects to be able to give its readers a highly interesting and entirely novel series of letters from these two remarkable persons and will lay before Washington authorities the real facts in the case as they shall be found to exist.”¹⁹⁶ The high principles the staff sent the married pen-wielders out on were quickly compromised when the staff no doubt realized that other papers such as the Leadville Evening Chronicle and Omaha’s Daily Bee had higher readership thanks to the rumors their reporters churned out. Tibbles wrote “other dailies had whole columns of thrilling stuff, but our readers, finding no exciting ‘news from the front,’ flung their papers down in disgust. Because we absolutely refused to manufacture tales about a ‘war’ which simply did not exist, we were soon sharply ordered home as complete failures. Only a personal appeal to the various powers from General Miles, the division commander who was with another line of troops some sixty miles north, made it possible for us to stay on at Pine Ridge, where we so greatly wanted to stay.”¹⁹⁷ Despite the dissatisfaction communicated to the couple by their exasperated employer, more anonymous praise seemed to make the paper, through its writers, lofty again amid all the swirling falsehood. An anonymous article, “Bright Eyes Sees the Truth” referenced Susette’s article “Fleeing from Each Other” and said “The World Herald congratulates itself on having

¹⁹⁶ “An Indian Investigation,” The Omaha Morning World-Herald, 12 Dec. 1890: 1. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 5.

¹⁹⁷ Tibbles, 305. Tibbles wrote also that along with his work for the Morning World-Herald, his articles were to also appear in the Chicago Express. Reilly’s book confirms that Tibbles’s work was to be strung in the Express but not his wife’s. Only Tibbles is mentioned as a reporter in William S. E. Coleman’s Voices from Wounded Knee (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). Susette is not even listed in the index. At any rate, in Coleman’s book Tibbles is only identified as working for the Omaha Morning World-Herald.

two absolutely truthful and conscientious persons to furnish its readers with accurate information on this troublesome subject.”¹⁹⁸

The husband and the wife were both “truthful and conscientious” but Tibbles was a man given to “grand passions” as Green says, and hyperbole. He brought to this journalistic investigation his romanticism about Native Americans and his wide imagination, along with a different worldview and a different mindset than “Bright Eyes” brought to the same experience. His reporting on the persistent rumors was as measured and calm as his wife’s, but he possessed an entirely different worldview from hers, having been born a white male. It bears mentioning again that he had extolled to his daughters the virtues of “Western man, of his development and achievements, and restored to them a sense of pride in their own race.”¹⁹⁹ While Tibbles had long seen injustices against Native Americans for what they were, his personality and imagination would have worked best in this instance compartmentalized, put away from his mission of straight reporting. From being Standing Bear’s promoter and chief advocate from the beginning of that saga in 1879, to proudly showcasing “Bright Eyes” to New England and Britain, he was more of a natural dramatic than his devoutly Presbyterian wife in her somber colored, modest dresses. Additionally he still brought to coverage of the Ghost Dance rumors a white (and male) worldview.

As the tensions escalated between the Lakota and the white soldiers, the work of Susette, Tibbles, and even the less-scrupulous reporters reflected the tension. By the end of the month, Susette wrote of “drama,” “disarming” and “hostiles”. The situation was about to boil over. Prior to the fatal

¹⁹⁸ “Bright Eyes Sees the Truth,” The Omaha Morning World-Herald, 13 Dec. 1890: 4. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 5.

¹⁹⁹ As aforementioned on page 64 of the thesis, Tibbles had reassured Eda and Mae of the virtues of white Americans when the girls were upset at all of the cultural melding in their household. Green writes that the girls “were always hearing about injustice to the Indians, about the Indians’ high mystical concept of life and nature, their pride of race and the glories of their past. The girls began to feel there was something wrong with them. They had nothing to be proud of, white people were always cruel, prejudiced and unfair. Eda and Mae began to wish they had been born Indian. They felt more than a little guilty about being white” (75).

day of December 29, conditions for the Lakota had been deteriorating. The Lakota were hungry, cold, and brooding over the Ghost Dance cult. Tibbles had recalled that counter to the wild stories cooked up by bored reporters from competitors' papers in the first weeks of December that at Pine Ridge Agency "the Sioux crowded the trader's store, the children went to school, the congregations worshipped as usual, and rations were distributed methodically,"²⁰⁰ but this order was unraveling. Sitting Bull was killed at the Standing Rock Agency on December 15 by whites suspicious that he might support and encourage more Ghost Dancing among the people. At Pine Ridge, there began to be an influx of Lakota from various bands from the Bad Lands, a dry wasteland area west of the Agency whose Lakota name is a literal translation—*Makhóšiča*—bad land. These groups of men, women, and children had retreated there based on rumors they would be killed by the white soldiers who always seemed to be present. Some of the people there were "genuinely hostile" as Susette wrote, an exception to the majority still at the Agency.

Susette talked to a woman from the Rosebud Agency, who told her "that they had left Rosebud Agency because the police came to them at night and told them the troops were coming and would be on them before morning and for them to get away as quick as they could. She said they fled that night and started for this agency. When they got as far as Wounded Knee they were told by people at this agency that the troops from this place were coming on them. They then turned and fled toward the Bad Lands."²⁰¹ Susette again criticized the action of whites. She provided her opinion with the usage of the first person. Both of these constructs were fixtures not at all uncommon in 19th century news items. She wrote, "I think this affair could be more easily settled if Governor Thayer would keep off the cowboys

²⁰⁰ Tibbles, 301.

²⁰¹ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, "At the Pine Ridge Agency," *The Omaha Morning World-Herald*, 17 Dec. 1890: 2. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 5. The group from Rosebud Agency described in the article is "Two Strike's Indians".

and militia, and something could be done to stop the lies that are sent to the papers about fights that never occurred. I am sure that the military are able to cope with the situation.”²⁰² She let readers see that the unbridled manufacture of rumor in many papers was actually causing dissension and confusion among the Lakota and it only fueled military intervention. Below her article, one without a byline called “Orders and Counter Orders” told how the 7th Cavalry had first been ordered to march to Pine Ridge, then had been recalled. The mood at the Agency according to this piece was “as peaceful and quiet as a New England village” because it was ration day, but it was rumored Sitting Bull was dead.²⁰³

The Army’s grasp on the situation began to deteriorate when it was reported that Miniconjou leader Spotted Elk, also called Big Foot, was on his way to Pine Ridge Agency. One of many Lakota on the move between agencies, he was seeking safety with Red Cloud but an order was put out for his arrest. He had been allied with Sitting Bull, and many of the dead leader’s followers had congregated on his Cheyenne River Agency. Afraid of reprisals, he left with them for Pine Ridge. Ill with pneumonia, he rode in a wagon. He had 350 people with him. On the 28th the group was stopped by soldiers and agreed to make camp near Wounded Knee Creek. The next day—the fatal day—the group was disarmed and surrounded by soldiers, many from the 7th Cavalry.²⁰⁴

While Spotted Elk’s band was still on its way through the cold to Pine Ridge, Susette exposed the problem of widespread hunger among the Lakota to World-Herald readers. On December 18, 1890 “Why They Are Starving,” which had been telegraphed on December 11, appeared in the paper. “Bright Eyes Tells How the Crops at Pine Ridge Were Allowed to Wither” explained the headline. The grace

²⁰² Susette La Flesche Tibbles, 2.

²⁰³ “Orders and Counter Orders,” The Omaha Morning World-Herald, 17 Dec. 1890: 2. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 5.

²⁰⁴ Reilly, 120. He calls this group “the final tragic players” and writes that Major Samuel Whitside was sent out to arrest him with four troops of the 7th Cavalry.

period for “hostiles” holed up in the Bad Lands—some of whom, it must be remembered from her interview with the woman from Rosebud Agency, did actually harbor intentions to fight—was over. “Today is the last day of grace accorded the hostiles. If they are not in by today the soldiers will be sent against them. This is literally forcing them to fight,” she wrote. On the subject of hunger, she wrote of a drought in the previous months: “The Indian at whose house we are staying says that the tribe raised no crops at all this summer on account of dry weather, and that those who might have succeeded in raising a little in spite of that had their crops destroyed by being called into the agency for fifteen days while the commission was here last spring. That those who had put in crops had them destroyed by roaming cattle when they were not at home to attend to them . . . The Indians say that their rations have been entirely inadequate. One Indian woman had the curiosity to count the number of grains of coffee issued to her as her part of the rations, and the number of grains amounted to just thirty for two weeks.” She also wrote that though “they would rather die than come in” one hundred “armed Indians” began to trickle into the Agency from the Bad Lands.²⁰⁵

Conditions were poor, the Army was getting restless about Spotted Elk and his group, and things continued to hold in a fragile, nebulous calm. Susette wrote of a council between Pine Ridge and Rosebud Lakota that attempted to unite to provide more protection and food for more people.²⁰⁶ Tibbles wrote of discontent between Red Cloud and the “hostiles” on December 19, and Susette wrote of the common misconception that all of the Native dancing was interpreted as martial. In “Drama Among the

²⁰⁵ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Why They Are Starving,” The Omaha Morning World-Herald, 18 Dec. 1890: 5. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 5.

²⁰⁶ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “An Indian Council,” The Omaha Morning World-Herald, 19 Dec. 1890: 1. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 5. “First, a Pine Ridge Agency man would speak, then a Rosebud Agency man. One of the former said: ‘You are our friends. You come here and we don’t mind dividing our rations with you and sharing with you what we have since you have come in and are doing what you were asked to do, and we will try to help you all we can but you must help us also. All those of you who have relations left over there go back to them and persuade them to come in too. All those you can persuade to come in will save so much trouble. We do not want the soldiers to go out after them.’ ”

Sioux” she wrote of how “what the white people call a ‘war dance’ was held here yesterday afternoon on a principle street of the agency. It is called by the Sioux the ‘Omaha dance.’ The whole of the first part of the performance was really a theatrical representation of actual scenes of warfare which had taken place in the history of the performers themselves, the principal actor of each scene having been the actual hero of the drama he was enacting on the stage.”²⁰⁷ The dance that would cause the tragedy at Wounded Knee 11 days later was of course the Ghost Dance.

On December 28, Spotted Elk’s camp had been made at Wounded Knee Creek hastily but peacefully under guard. The group had surrendered to Major Samuel M. Whitside that morning. The previous night, the campsite had been surrounded by four large Hotchkiss guns. Arguably it was intended to be a peaceful surrender, and the group’s disarming had been requested on the 29th. Among the Lakota gathered there, though, there was unease. Rumors circulated the makeshift camp that the people would be sent to prison or they would all be killed here, in the cold. On the 29th everything unraveled after a major disruption occurred as Colonel James Forsyth tried to orchestrate a peaceful turnover of weapons.²⁰⁸ While some soldiers tried to take the gun of a young man who refused to give it up, one lone man had decided to begin the Ghost Dance. Yellow Bird donned a Ghost shirt and began dancing. On this day the Dance was never completed, nor was it performed in the prescribed manner. It was completely impromptu. A detailed description of the Ghost Dance at its fullest and most organized comes down to us from Special Indian Agent Alisha B. Reynolds. His account of the Dance came from one he saw performed by some Lakota long before the Wounded Knee massacre, when the people were unified and caught up in the transitory spiritual fervor. Reynold’s description is in part as follows:

²⁰⁷ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Drama Among the Sioux,” *The Omaha Morning World-Herald*, 19 Dec. 1890: 3. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 5. This is an example of cultural exchange between the Central Siouan Omaha and their northern neighbors.

²⁰⁸ Reilly, 120. Lieutenant Colonel James Forsyth took over for Whitside and had told the Lakota that they would be “shipped to a military prison in Omaha, Nebraska” according to the author.

“The men were arrayed in their war paint, consisting of red, black, and yellow, feathers in their hair, leggings on their lower limbs, blankets wrapped round their bodies and moccasins on their feet. The women were clad in dresses of variegated colors, some were beaded in the most artistic style and their faces were painted profusely. The Indians forming the outer circle sat down on their feet and remained quiet for some time, when they broke out a sort of plaintive cry . . . Then some one [sic] passes around with a vessel in his hand containing some kind of roots . . . after this is partaken of at a given command the Indians rise to their feet and join hands forming a complete circle. Having occupied this position for a moment they begin to chant their opening hymn . . . and commence a slow measured movement from right to left increasing the pace as they go, and it is not long before all, old and young, are singing and becoming excited. This is kept up for a half hour when many being overcome with the exercises and excitement connected therewith, fall where they were standing in the ranks or leap wildly from the circle into the open space, fall flat on their faces upon the ground, strike the ground furiously with their hands as though they were endeavoring to dig a hole therein, leap up wildly again, rush from one side of the circle to the other throwing out their arms and finally fall exhausted and apparently lifeless.”²⁰⁹ This, Agent Reynold’s eyewitness account which Andersson used in his book, depicted the ritual dance at its fullest and went on to describe the ecstatic visions some of the dancers reported experiencing.²¹⁰

The dancing that occurred spontaneously on December 29, 1890 when Yellow Bird donned the Ghost shirt never reached its transcendental ecstatic crescendo. Instead, Yellow Bird created confusion when he threw a handful of dirt into the air. “The soldiers began to search the men for weapons, and

²⁰⁹ Andersson, preface, *ix-x*.

²¹⁰ Reynold’s contemporary account told of a young woman’s encounters with a giant eagle as well as Jesus Christ who “shook hands with her three times and said He was glad to see her as she had been there before.” The dancers shared their experiences as “a group in the center of the space” they sat in.

one young man leapt to his feet, angrily holding aloft a gun and saying he had paid good money for it and would not give it up. Some Indian witnesses said he was named Black Coyote and others said it was a man named Hosi Yanka, which means ‘deaf.’²¹¹ Whatever the case it was considered an illegally harbored weapon. The young man’s gun—or someone else’s—suddenly went off, and in the confusion the 7th fired on the group as “several young warriors threw off their blankets and fired a brief volley into the soldiers’ ranks.”²¹² The Lakota were outnumbered and outgunned. In the freezing temperatures, those who could tried to follow Wounded Knee Creek in a southerly direction toward a ravine. Once there, they were not spared, either. “Now that the Indians had separated from the soldiers, the Hotchkiss guns on the ridge began to rake the camp with a withering fire. As more and more Indians sought refuge in the ravine, the deadly artillery turned its attention there and began to rain shells on the crowded mass of Indians. Men, women, and children were slaughtered in its close confines. Only a few survived the murderous barrage. Some survivors were hunted down and killed miles from the camp.”²¹³ The majority of the violence lasted only about 20 minutes, but at least 170²¹⁴ Lakota including Spotted Elk were killed.

Thomas Henry Tibbles himself missed the action—according to Reilly, before it broke out the newspaperman “had decided that there would be no trouble and had left the camp in the morning to get his dispatches to the telegraph office at Pine Ridge. He had not gone far when he heard a single shot, quickly followed by several more. By the time he returned most of the fighting was over and he was witness to only the rounding up of a few survivors.”²¹⁵ His wife was likely at the Agency the whole

²¹¹ Reilly, 121.

²¹² Reilly, 121.

²¹³ Reilly, 121.

²¹⁴ Reilly, 121. The author writes that the exact number is not known, but 170 is an agreed-upon estimate.

²¹⁵ Reilly, 121.

time. Tibbles encountered groups of Lakota and white soldiers while he was trying to find a telegraph line to send his daily report, which would be amended to say that something was definitely going on; Tibbles wrote in his memoir that only later was he told all of the details of what had occurred.²¹⁶ Soon after the roughly twenty minute massacre rumors began to circulate that the guns would be turned on much of Pine Ridge Agency. “I found a frightful panic starting at the agency. Women and children, white and Indian both, were rushing into a big group down among the buildings” Tibbles wrote later.²¹⁷

In this crush of people he sought his wife, who he found surrounded by many women and children. She was “standing on a box”, urging them to retreat indoors to the cabins whose log walls would provide more protection than flimsy clapboard buildings.²¹⁸ Susette’s calmness earned praise. Her husband wrote that a man, Major Butler, happened by and told him to “please give Bright Eyes my compliments and tell her the order is for women and children to retire to the log houses for safety and that she’s requested to force them to do so.”²¹⁹ Susette refused to obey a second order to retreat indoors for her own safety—“soon afterward the major [sic] found her standing on a well curb on the firing line, for a better view of the whole field of operations.”²²⁰ Her enthusiasm for finding out what was happening was in the best tradition of women journalists infiltrating the man’s realm, or any other realm where their curiosity and assignment duties should not have led them. Though she was not nearly

²¹⁶ Tibbles, 311-316. He was not allowed to use the Army’s telegraph, so he settled for another one “headed for Rushville” and was confident, as far as he knew, that his report to the Omaha Morning World-Herald “was the first to reach any newspaper in the United States.”

²¹⁷ Tibbles, 317. He had observed a crier telling the people “around the main part of the agency” the rumor that they would be fired upon and they were all rushing to gather in a central area.

²¹⁸ Tibbles, 318. He recorded her as saying “Why do you come here? These thin board buildings can’t protect you from bullets. They’d go right through them. Go back to the log houses.” Susette probably had a Lakota interpreter but could have known some of the language. As Green mentioned, her father spoke at least one of the Sioux dialects—Green said it was Dakota—but it is unclear how much Susette knew.

²¹⁹ Tibbles, 318.

²²⁰ Tibbles, 318. The well curb is that top part of a well that is rounded to keep objects from falling into the well.

as brash as Anna Benjamin and Kathleen “Kit” Coleman would be almost a decade later in their coverage of the Spanish-American War, she certainly did not defer to authority or even a strongly worded suggestion that she stay inside with other women. Others like Benjamin and Coleman would come after and their personalities might have been much better suited to reporting in the thick of battle. In this instance Susette demonstrated that she would not be held to gender norms and would stay outside like any man.

It is interesting to note that her husband wrote that the Major saw her *watching* the action from her perch on the well. Tibbles wrote of himself during the same event as sitting “down on a cracker box *to take notes*; now and then the dust would fly up when a rifle ball struck the ground far away.”²²¹ One can assume that since Susette’s job was news reporter for the Omaha Morning World-Herald, she was taking notes as well, but the historical record only indicates that she was observing. What she, T. H. and others observed was a defensive maneuver. Throughout the time leading up to the Wounded Knee massacre, the Lakota as aforementioned had been fractured as a group through leadership losses and other tensions. The Brulé leader Crow Dog was a controversial figure in Lakota society at this time; he had killed Spotted Tail, a fellow Brulé, in 1881. Tibbles, Susette, and Alice Fletcher had met Crow Dog “at Rosebud on our Sioux trip in 1881” Tibbles wrote, and also wrote of their second meeting at Pine Ridge Agency. During this meeting with Tibbles Crow Dog dismissed the Ghost Dance as foolishness, but even so, after the terrible massacre at Wounded Knee Creek, thousands of his followers “were merely gathering as a rear guard for the women and children while these fled for refuge to the Bad Lands.”²²² The breathless words of the crier that the Agency might be fired on—the words that sent all the women but Susette into the relatively strong log cabins—can be better explained in light of this

²²¹ Tibbles, 319.

²²² Tibbles, 303, 318-319.

information—the white soldiers who stood at attention in the Agency’s main section might be fired on. Those white soldiers, who were by now, Tibbles wrote, only “the remnant of Captain Illsey’s battery and some of the second infantry, who, sure that all the trouble was over, had been breaking camp”²²³ would have been the targets of the Lakota gathered “from a deep gulch in the north.”²²⁴ But no major firefight occurred right away; the stray rifle ball came, here and there, and this is what Susette observed from the top of the well. It intensified later and the Lakota “Indian police” suppressed it—80 policemen “broke away from their officer and charged the hostile gang in the gulch” according to Tibbles.²²⁵ The attempted defensive maneuver by holdouts in the Bad Lands was over. Nightfall brought an end to the tragic day. The reports Susette wrote in the days following of the pathetic condition of survivors appeared in the Omaha newspaper and won her acclaim from at least one anonymous commentator.

When a dangerously cold blizzard blew in, the bodies of the approximately 170 dead, strewn all about Wounded Knee Creek, were left alone for three days. When the weather finally cleared enough that they could be buried in mass graves, the bodies were frozen in grotesque poses—Spotted Elk, who had been too sick to leave his tent in the camp near Wounded Knee Creek, died lying down. His corpse was frozen in a half-reclined, half-upright pose, like he had tried to sit up and reach out for something or rise from where he lay. Before the blizzard arrived, when evening fell on December 29, many wounded and some dead were brought to the Agency. The wounded were piled atop one another for transport: “Forty-nine wounded Sioux women and children had been piled into a few old Indian wagons. The army wagons . . . had been cleared of all stores and used to bring in the wounded soldiers and Sioux warriors. The former loads had been left strewn over the battlefield—large quantities of

²²³ Tibbles, 318.

²²⁴ Tibbles, 318.

²²⁵ Tibbles, 320.

bacon, wooden cracker boxes, sacks of rice, and other supplies—abandoned there for days in a region of almost starving Indians, but not one red man would touch them. The many wounded troopers and the five wounded Sioux warriors were all taken promptly to the soldier’s quarters for treatment, but the wounded women and children were left lying in their open wagons in the bitter cold,” Tibbles wrote later.²²⁶ Susette, her husband, and others including Agency teacher Elaine Goodale tended to the wounded for a while in the Agency’s Episcopal church that was still decorated from the Christmas celebration: “Across the chancel front, above the pulpit, hung a great banner on which we read: ‘Peace on earth, good will to men’. Major Butler ordered the seats torn out and the floor covered a foot deep with hay. On this they laid the rows of wounded.”²²⁷ An eerie silence hung in this makeshift hospital for a while, as the wounded Lakota women and children refused to cry out in pain—Tibbles wrote that this “unnatural silence” was part of the people’s belief “in not letting their enemies hear them complain.”²²⁸ Working through the cold night, Susette was instrumental along with Elaine Goodale in convincing the massacre survivors that their caretakers had no wish to kill them. The two women succeeded in first reassuring an elderly grandmother, then others: “Bright Eyes began to talk earnestly to her and the others . . . Up to the moment when they actually began to believe her they still kept their unnatural silence . . . They must die as Indians should . . . But the instant they were freed from that duty, they began to moan and cry so dreadfully that we could hardly bear to hear them.”²²⁹

It may have been hard for everyone to bear the sounds in the makeshift hospital, but Susette had no trouble conveying through words to the paper’s readers her experiences there. In an article headlined “Horrors of War” that ran January 2, 1891 she recounted her experience in the church as an impromptu

²²⁶ Tibbles, 321.

²²⁷ Tibbles, 321. Elaine Goodale married the Dakota Charles Eastman.

²²⁸ Tibbles, 324.

²²⁹ Tibbles, 324.

nurse: “There was a woman sitting on the floor with a wounded baby on her lap and four or five children around her, all her grandchildren. Their father and mother were killed. There was a young woman shot through both thighs and her wrist was broken. Mr. Tibbles had to get a pair of pinchers to get her rings off. There was a little boy with his throat apparently shot to pieces. A friendly Sioux had gone around giving an apple to each one and this little boy showed his apple. He was a horrible sight, having nothing around him but a blanket, and his little bare, lean arms looked pitiful. They were all hungry, and when we fed this little boy we found he could swallow. We gave him some gruel, and he grabbed with both his little hands a dipper of water. When I saw him yesterday afternoon he looked worse than the day before and when they feed him now the food and water come out of the side of his neck.”²³⁰ Her coverage of the aftermath of the massacre was a continuation of her level way with readers, telling them the unvarnished truth and giving them a glimpse into the event’s human toll.

Reilly writes that the Omaha Bee was the first paper to publish a report about the massacre, headlined “A Bloody Battle—Many Red Devils Bite the Dust” that only partially told the story. “The story . . . covered only the basic fact that a battle had occurred and there had been heavy casualties.”²³¹ Appropriately enough since that paper’s report was the first, the Bee’s Cressey had been present when the fight broke out. Reilly quotes historian Watson as saying that “the part Cressey played in the fight is not known. It is probable that he saw at least part of the fighting, but it is doubtful he had any such valorous role as he later claimed.”²³² While men like Cressey promoted themselves on the back of tragedy and their papers only reported part of the story, Susette took the opportunity to keep telling the whole truth and tried to steer public opinion to favor a swift, peaceful resolution to the conflict.

²³⁰ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Horrors of War,” The Omaha Morning World-Herald, 2 Jan. 1891: 1. Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 6.

²³¹ Reilly, 121.

²³² Reilly, 121.

Telling the truth, at this stage, meant that Susette was free to be a bit one-sided in her pieces, which were suffused with opinion and usage of the first person (as aforementioned, a common practice at this time). In an article headlined “Pleading for Her People—Bright Eyes Urges Earnestly That General Miles’ Request Be Speedily Granted” she wrote of the urgent need, in General Miles’ opinion, that the all Lakota agencies in South Dakota be placed under martial law (“in command of the military”) “until this matter can be settled.”²³³ She touted it as an expedient solution to the conflict and appealed to her readers’ logic using the example of her race: “I predict that if this can be done this war will be ended and peace assured in a much shorter time than if it is not done. I am the only Indian speaking to the public through the press for the Indians, and I demand in the name of the race and for their welfare that it shall be done. I ask the Indian societies in the east, the Women’s Indian association and the ‘Indians’ rights association’ to press this demand on the President.”²³⁴ Here Susette asserted her unique qualification on the subject and presented herself as someone with considerable power, “demanding” that something be done. Contemporary readers who might have been familiar with her as “Bright Eyes” from her lectures might have viewed her now as a foremost authority on this matter. Any strong emotions Susette might have felt were directed at the powers controlling Lakota lives. Even prior to the massacre, she had tried to reason with readers that the solution to the problem—and indeed, the root of the problem—likely lay in the federal and state/territorial administration of Native affairs. In an article, the bulk of whose headline has been partially torn away, she said that the uproar due to misunderstanding over the Ghost Dance and the murder of Sitting Bull at Standing Rock Agency—“this whole affair” as she put it—“from beginning to end, with all its cost to the government and the

²³³ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Pleading For Her People,” *The Omaha Morning World-Herald*, 3 Jan. 1891: 1, Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 6. She wrote that “all agencies where this trouble is going on” were to be affected by Miles’s policy if it went through.

²³⁴ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, 1.

people concerned in it, and the loss of life in the recent affair at Standing Rock Agency, has been caused by the blundering of the interior department.”²³⁵ She detailed the Lakota’s grievances of inadequate or no annuity goods or payments, the fact that their newfound spiritual practice was grossly misunderstood and concluded that no one in charge at the Agency, Lakota or white, was to blame; blame should only rest on “system of Indian management,” the net in which they were all caught.²³⁶

The anticipation of the reporters from other papers such as the Omaha Bee that they would be able to write about a bloody conflict had been rewarded. In an article that ran in the paper six days after the massacre, Susette reported simmering bloodlust that was real, not fabricated this time. “Thirsting For Blood Now—The Big Foot Massacre Arouses the Worst Passions and Fears of Redmen [sic]” mentioned that grave diggers had been dispatched because there was enough of a thaw to bury the corpses, but the grave diggers had to be escorted by soldiers for fear of Lakota lurking nearby.²³⁷ Along the eerily quiet, abandoned “way to Wounded Knee . . . the trail around the hills to the agency has been little used. There is abundant reason for this. The fight was the spark which ignited anew the nearly extinguished fire of discord, discontent and thirst for blood which moved the Indians to their present outbreak. It did more than this. Before there was no reason to publish the reiterated statements that the Indians were out looking for blood. Now there is really founded fear for life.”²³⁸ Eventually, with the intervention of the Army an uneasy peace and an era of marked intensity of tense Lakota-white

²³⁵ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Some Evidences of Row—Bureau Persistently Abuses its Power—What the Ghost Dance Was,” The Omaha Morning World-Herald, 24 Dec. 1890: 3, Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 6.

²³⁶ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, 3.

²³⁷ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Thirsting For Blood Now—The Big Foot Massacre Arouses the Worst Passions and Fears of Redmen,” The Omaha Morning World-Herald, 4 Jan. 1891: 1, Nebraska State Historical Society microfilm (2010): film 071 Box 6.

²³⁸ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, 1.

relations settled onto the Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Standing Rock Agencies, but both sides involved in the Wounded Knee massacre would never forget it.

After a time Susette and her husband packed their bags, bid their Lakota host family and others farewell, and headed south for Nebraska where they could settle back into their homestead allotment with Eda and Mae and Susette's extended family nearby. What Susette's coverage of the Ghost Dance controversy and the aftermath of the resultant Wounded Knee massacre shows us is a woman determined to tell the people in her country the truth about another conflict involving her racial group. She did not seek to break barriers of gender or decorum like Benjamin and Coleman would a few years later in their war reporting, but Susette did report on a conflict—one of mind and spirit as much as deadly physical confrontation. The entire affair's cornerstone was cultural misunderstanding over the dance cult, something that was ironically grounded in a utopian future and an end to the Natives' persecution. (Granted, the utopia was entirely one-sided.)

She was somewhat the equal in employment and ability to her husband in this reporting assignment, although in current scholarly literature on both the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee she is either omitted from the record, as was the case in William Coleman's book, or presented only in passing, as was the case in Reilly's book. In Andersson's book chapter on the press coverage of the Ghost Dance, "In an atmosphere pregnant with mysteries," she and T. H. are both completely omitted. Reilly makes an interesting assertion in his brief mentions of her Wounded Knee coverage. (It should be noted that he misspelled her name as "Suzette".) He correctly characterizes her reporting as rational, and unique that it "provided . . . a perspective missing from the coverage of earlier Indian wars."²³⁹ Indeed, it is arguable Wounded Knee can be called a "war" as it was a blatant, unprovoked attack on the Lakota by the Army. It is perhaps more accurately characterized as a freak event originating all too

²³⁹ Reilly, 117.

tragically out of many people's *expectations* of a war. Reilly cites an early December article, "What Bright Eyes Thinks" in which Susette implores readers to try to understand the psychological attachment the Lakota had to their dance cult, as "typical of her writing."²⁴⁰

Reilly's troubling assertion comes amid paying Susette precious little attention (he does not even acknowledge which tribe she came from) in his evaluation of the reporting on both the Dance and the massacre. He surmises that she was put up to her job: "Bright Eye's reporting on the action is a little-known but truly remarkable occurrence. It may not have been an attempt to provide balance and accuracy, but simply a cynical ploy to create reader interest owing to the novelty of an Indian woman reporting on an Indian war."²⁴¹ He is right that it was novel indeed and is "truly remarkable"—her journalism career has been paid so little attention—but his theory that it could have all been a scheme does not sit well. Several factors make his idea of a "cynical ploy" a bit too outrageous to have ever succeeded.

First, the Omaha Morning World-Herald staff would have needed to be aware of the ploy or even created it, but as evidenced in its explanations, the "Indian Investigation" it launched was devoted to the exposure of truth about the Dance, aiming to dispel the rumors frightening so many people. The paper displayed alternate pride in, and frustration with, the couple's reporting. Even though they were sharply reprimanded by their employer as failures for not providing fodder for hysteria, Susette and Tibbles eventually received ample praise. Who would have thought of such a thing as Reilly's "cynical ploy"? If the plot had more merit than it appears to have had, Tibbles would have been a likely suspect, but still this is doubtful. True, the man's fascination with Native cultures and a life spent on the Plains

²⁴⁰ Reilly, 117. Susette displayed here a mastery of communicating to her overwhelmingly non-native audience by discussing the Lakota's fervor for the dance using a Christian religious analogy: "Picture to yourself the effect were you to have lived your life thus far . . . without having heard of the life of Christ and someone were to come suddenly before you, someone in whom you had perfect faith and trust, and were to tell you for the first time . . . of a deliverer."

²⁴¹ Reilly, 117.

moving between “civilized” life and Native encampments fostered a great imagination and respect for these people. It is also true he clearly preferred to call his second wife Bright Eyes and delighted in the name’s use in public; he may have been sentimental and romantic about Native Americans, but he seems to have loved Susette truly and taken pride in their efforts as a couple working toward greater equality for Native Americans. Tibbles became a hard man to like and by the time Susette died in 1903, Tibbles had almost no friends left in Bancroft, Nebraska, but he would not have had anything to gain professionally, monetarily, or personally from Reilly’s idea.

Another factor weakening Reilly’s idea is that of the novelty aspect of Susette’s race. As a Native writer covering this most misunderstood and tragic of Native issues, she gained praise for clear, intelligent, and moving yet non-hysterical reporting. Papers flew off the newsstands when they contained falsehoods and pejorative statements, but it is arguable that the more discerning readers likely appreciated Susette’s truth-telling more. She had credibility built on her time as a lecturer on the plight of the Ponca and the larger need for better treatment of Natives. Novelty—of a reporter’s race or anything else—did not sell papers as well as stereotypes and falsehoods did. The fact that Susette and her husband’s reports are not even mentioned in the present scholarly work of Andersson, or are glossed over in the works of Coleman (who omitted the female half of the couple) and Reilly, lends credit to the notion that even over two hundred years after the Ghost Dance and the Wounded Knee massacre, “if it bleeds, it leads,” even in academic analysis. Also, Susette’s passion for the Native cause and her forthrightness with readers would have never allowed any kind of “cynical ploy” to last. She, like her husband, would have had nothing to gain and the reputation and financial health of the newspaper would have been at stake. Finally, Reilly’s assertion seems like it was made without full thought to the matter or deeper study on Susette’s life, character and personality, and journalism career.

He does not even mention her once in his preceding chapter on news coverage of the Standing Bear case.

Overall, Susette's press coverage of the Ghost Dance phenomenon and the aftermath of the Wounded Knee massacre is invaluable because of the perspective it provides, not only into her mind as a Native writer on this issue, but as the voice of reason in the midst of so much sensational journalism disseminated on the subject. The more sensational stories are the easiest ones for scholars to examine and pick apart, but hers need to be more carefully considered after being so long ignored. They are invaluable to future Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee scholarship.

Susette had no formal journalistic training, yet these most powerful and clear-headed of articles have been ignored even in a survey of Native Americans' contributions to journalism. In Let My People Know: American Indian Journalism, 1828-1878 Susette is not even indexed, indicating her contribution to this tragedy was totally ignored. The compilation's editors had brief mention of the only other woman involved in press coverage of the tragedy—Teresa Howard Dean. Dean was “sent by the Chicago Herald to Pine Ridge, South Dakota in 1871,” the text reads, as 1871 is clearly a typographical error for 1891. “Before this assignment she had covered weddings, church and social events, and Indian affairs.”²⁴² Dean was not Native American. The authors quote Douglas C. Jones when they talk of her inexperience and unfamiliarity with her new subject matter: “ ‘Like a great many other writers who had never been near a Plains Indian, she wrote a number of items deploring the state of Sioux existence, brought on, she indicated, primarily through a Native laziness and indolence.’ She carried a gun and heeded a warning that reporters who were too friendly risked being asked to leave. She filed such tidbits as ‘The only incentive to life is this fear of being scalped by red men.’”²⁴³ The Murphys write

²⁴² James E. Murphy and Sharon M. Murphy, Let My People Know: American Indian Journalism, 1828-1978 (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 6.

²⁴³ Murphy and Murphy, 6.

that Dean's impressions of the Lakota changed slightly during her time at Pine Ridge Agency at the behest of the Chicago Herald. They never entirely moved away from the non-Native's proclivity to stereotype and disparage the Native American, though. The authors write that Dean stayed at the Agency's school and "she got to know some of young Indian students, and she soon became aware of the conditions under which the government forced them to live" and this resulted in scathing reports to the Chicago Herald.²⁴⁴ Dean wrote of "hunger caused by lack of provisions, education far inferior to that offered by the nearby Catholic mission school for white children, the non-arable lands assigned by the government, and the inability of the local Indian agent to deal with the Ghost Dance religion in any other way than to send for the army."²⁴⁵

These were many of the same issues Susette wrote of in the nebulously calm atmosphere before the massacre, but clearly Susette's coverage lacked the prejudice lurking underneath Dean's and others' coverage; any aversion Susette had toward the whites she tried valiantly to parlay into even-handed coverage, jabbing at the "system" of reservations and annuities in such a reasoned manner when trying to persuade readers to accept the idea that the best solution to the tragedy's aftermath was the expedient and peaceful plan of General Miles. Dean may have been another woman, but she was not in Susette's position of that most unique of writers—a Native American at Wounded Knee. The Murphy's concede that Dean's coverage was not coolly level like Susette's: "Teresa Dean also met and talked with Indian adults (and brought what she called a 'scalping knife' failing to note in her copy that such knives were used by Indians for skinning game and preparing food). Other examples of her work show how even she, like her fellow reporters, failed to see Indians as people . . . The product of white schools and books and a reader of white newspapers written by reporters like herself, Teresa Dean's statements

²⁴⁴ Murphy and Murphy, 6-7.

²⁴⁵ Murphy and Murphy, 7.

mirror the attitudes and viewpoints in the media of the time, as well as those of a political system that permitted and propagated the atrocities she was witnessing.”²⁴⁶

This leaves our subject, Susette La Flesche Tibbles, as the only Native female writer whose remarkable coverage of the tragedy outstripped Dean and the rest of the “press corps” in truthfulness and plain-spoken calm, but she has once again been omitted from the record by the Murphy’s, who, in neglecting her coverage in their compendium of Native American journalists over a 150 year period, do disservice to both general scholarship of Native American journalists in history and also in Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee scholarship in particular.

The tragedy at Pine Ridge behind them as they headed for home, Susette and her husband settled in for a short time of other pursuits before journalism beckoned again. The “dear daughter” of Joseph La Flesche would enjoy just two quieter years home in Nebraska until 1893. By now the “journalistic disease” had lain dormant long enough. This time its symptoms looked like Populism, the impassioned agrarian movement that had a short duration on the Plains. Tibbles, the man of grand passions and restless energy, had embraced Populism unsurprisingly after years of working to improve conditions for farmers beset by grasshoppers, left with ruined crops and precious little livelihood. The couple’s journalistic work for the Populist cause took them to Washington, D. C., an ironic place for Susette as it was the seat of the “system” she had railed against after the Wounded Knee massacre that controlled so tightly and miserably the lives and happiness of the nation’s indigenous population.

It is arguable that during their assignment at Pine Ridge Agency the couple was roughly equal in both employment and passion for the task. However, in their work for the American Nonconformist and the Lincoln Independent Tibbles seems to have taken the lead. Journalism was still in many aspects a man’s profession. In 1896 he became editor of the latter paper, when it had become the Nebraska

²⁴⁶ Murphy and Murphy, 7.

Independent. The Jefferson County Democrat's acknowledgement of the change appeared in the January 23, 1896 issue of the newly-renamed newspaper: "The Wealthmakers and the Lincoln Independent have been consolidated and will be under the name of the Nebraska Independent, with Mr. T. H. Tibbles as editor and Frank D. Eager, business manager. Mr. Tibbles has lately taken the position as editor of the Independent . . . giving the people of the state a first class Populist paper—bold, independent, and aggressive—and deserves their patronage. We wish it the success it justly merits."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ The Nebraska Independent, 23 Jan., 1896: 5, Nebraska State Historical Society (2010) film 630.62 Box 3.

Chapter VII. The American Nonconformist and the Lincoln Independent: Washington and Lincoln, 1893-1895

In Buckskin and Blanket Days Tibbles omitted any mention of newspaper work for the American Nonconformist and the Lincoln Independent and skipped straight to their involvement with the press corps at Wounded Knee in 1890 when they worked for the Morning World-Herald. Perhaps he viewed their time with the two Populist papers as insignificant in that memoir, not as noble as their work for the Native cause and not pertinent to the book. In any case, though, the fact that he took up the pen for the Populist cause is not surprising, nor that his devoted wife followed suit. In this instance Susette was the dutiful 19th century wife tagging along after the husband. She may have been interested in Populism to some degree. At this point in her life she was pulled into different directions by this polarizing man, who Ed Farley, her sister Rosalie's husband, distrusted by this time. Tibbles still had Francis's unending loathing. Susette's father, who had loved his "dear daughter" and always treated Tibbles kindly, was dead, buried in Bancroft. Susette had her mother and siblings, but each was busy with his or her own life.

Everything relating to Tibbles's interest in Populism and the resultant two years the couple spent in Washington, D. C. "acting as correspondents for a number of papers, mouthpieces of different groups of the People's or Independent Party"²⁴⁸ and then writing for the cause in Lincoln came about by chance. As a man of grand passions, "idealistic and given to large generalities" as characterized by Green, Tibbles would not have been able to resist this agrarian movement because one of his passions was the Nebraska farmer, put upon economically as well as by grasshoppers. His second wife, although longsuffering to his whims, realized that people within her own family found him difficult and even disagreeable. Even so, she wanted to remain closer to her family. Hers was a predicament—according

²⁴⁸ Green, 101.

to Wilson, by this time even “Highflyer” Alice Fletcher disapproved of T. H. and Susette wanted to remain near family but could not bear the antagonism. She also suffered from a divided loyalty to her husband and his causes and her devotion to the tribe, and watched as her three sisters helped the people.²⁴⁹ T. H.’s daughters were by now grown; Eda would marry in 1894. Susette had no choice but to follow wherever her husband’s newest fervor took them.

Populism was a third-party effort that attempted at its highest point to get a Populist president elected but at its lowest point broke into factions and eventually faded out of the political scene devoid of strength. This agrarian third party ended up having a brief foothold during the 19th century in the western and southern portions of the United States. Populists were opponents of big banks, big business, and the railroad conglomerates and were advocates of farmers and poor people, as well as some degree of currency reform. It was perhaps noisiest and most visible in Kansas in 1890, after a watershed election victory. Nebraska farmers who were suffering in the western half of the state from little rainfall and everywhere from crop-destroying grasshoppers and dust might have espoused the movement in the hope that their grievances would be addressed. Nationwide the political party was not well received uniformly; it had its detractors. It was as polarizing a topic in Nebraska as Thomas Henry Tibbles was starting to become to the people around him.

The general idea of political third parties was uncomfortable to many in the nation because third parties worked outside the system of Republicans and Democrats and agitated for varying degrees of reform in society. “To some [Populism] represented an outpouring of the dangerous elements of the frontier combined with the beginnings of socialistic and anarchistic tendencies in the cities. An English observer characterized the supporters of [William Jennings] Bryan in 1896 as the ‘forces of political

²⁴⁹ Wilson, 354. “Susette was not jealous of her three sisters, she loved them too much for that; yet she envied them their opportunities of service.” Alice Fletcher quietly expressed her disdain of Tibbles to Rosalie La Flesche Farley through letters, according to Wilson.

and social revolution.’ A western editorial writer wrote that ninety percent of the leaders of the Populist Party were ‘destitute of personal or political integrity’ and classed them as vagabonds, slanderers and demagogues.”²⁵⁰ This third party began, and to some extent stayed, terribly disorganized and fragmented even though it was “built largely upon the structure of the Farmers’ Alliance” which was a farmers’ solidarity movement originating in Texas. The Party “was created out of quarreling groups of disaffected Republicans, dissident Democrats, Greenbackers, Union Laborites and Prohibitionists united only by economic hardship and common opposition to the continued hegemony of the major parties, Republicans in the West and Democrats in the South.”²⁵¹ This disparate group hoped to change the social and financial landscape to its advantage. The bitterness, for farmers from the South to the West, of crop failures, unsympathetic leaders of government, the encroachment of behemoth railroad corporations and anger at the banking system led to the formalization of the Populist, or People’s, Party on July 4, 1892 in Omaha.

Prior to this formalization, several of the disparate groups comprising its patchwork makeup held conventions where platforms were established; these would remain essentially unchanged for the new party. The earliest platform according to William A. Peffer’s contemporary account of the Populist movement was in Texas in 1879, where it all began. “The Farmers’ Alliance and Industrial Union,” he wrote, had the following principles:

“To labor for the education of agricultural classes in the science of economical government, in a strictly nonpartisan spirit;

²⁵⁰ John D. Barnhardt, “Rainfall and the Populist Party in Nebraska,” The American Political Science Review 19.3 (1925) 7 April 2011 <<http://0-www.jstor.org.library.unl.edu/stable/pdfplus/2939131.pdf>>

²⁵¹ William A. Peffer and Peter H. Argersinger, ed. Populism, Its Rise and Fall (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 3-4. William A. Peffer was a senator from the party and he wrote this in 1899 “as a series of essays in the Chicago Tribune.”

To develop a better state mentally, morally, socially, and financially.”²⁵²

These are only two. Over the years and depending on the location, the precepts of what became the Populist party varied somewhat but a common theme of farmers’ and poor settlers’ distrust of large corporations, large banks, and anger at price fluctuation in the crop market was discernable. From the December 1889 meeting—where only the Farmers Alliance and the Knights of Labor had representatives, according to Peffer—they desired:

“[The] abolition of national banks and the substitution of legal tender treasury notes in lieu of national bank notes, issued in sufficient volume to do the business of the country on a cash system, regulating the amount needed on a per capita basis . . . “

“We demand the free and unlimited coinage of silver.”

“We demand that Congress pass such laws as shall effectively prevent the dealing in futures of all agricultural and mechanical productions . . . ”

“ . . . [We] demand that taxation, national or State, shall not be used to build up one interest or class at the expense of another.”²⁵³

By the time the party was officially incorporated in 1892 at Omaha, the precepts also included a graduated income tax, direct election of President, Vice-President, and senators, “the most rigid, honest, and just national control and supervision of the means of public communication and transportation; and if this control and supervision do not remove the abuses now existing we demand the government ownership of such means . . . ”²⁵⁴ The newly formed Populist party was fueled by the discontent of the average laborer and farmer. As third parties often do, it rode high on sentiment until it was overpowered

²⁵² Peffer and Argersinger, 31.

²⁵³ Peffer and Argersinger, 33-34.

²⁵⁴ Peffer and Argersinger, 42. Peffer writes that at the Omaha convention the “demands of the platforms” from St. Louis and Ocala, Florida were all adopted.

by the established parties. It imparted to the average worker or farmer many dreams—dreams of combatting the railroad financiers or the machinery of money, of getting a fair price for crops during a hard year. Eventually though it petered out, but discontent would always find a new home. In Nebraska in 1893, it swept in during hard times of “drought and bank failures”²⁵⁵ and the Tibbles family like others was affected by this. The party’s official rise coincided with the economic discontent.

William Jennings Bryan, the Nebraska politician whose nickname in his younger days was the “boy orator of the Platte” was gaining nationwide attention for his speeches. He was the state’s Congressional representative. Sometime in 1893 Thomas Henry met Bryan and spent considerable time “making connections” with party members.²⁵⁶ Bryan had more than a few characteristics in common with Thomas Henry—he was a gifted speaker, familiar with the law, and a fervent Presbyterian as well as a Populist. Bryan met Susette in October of that year, writing in her autograph book a passage from William Cullen Bryant’s poem “The Battle-Field”:

“Peculiarly appropriate at this time are the following words . . . ‘Truth, crushed to Earth, shall rise again; The eternal years of God are hers; But Error, wounded, writhes in pain, and dies among his worshippers. Yea, though thou lie upon the dust, When they who helped thee flee in fear, Die full of hope and manly trust, Like those who fell in battle here. Another hand thy sword shall wound; Another hand thy standard wave; Till from the trumpet’s mouth is pealed the blast of triumph o’er thy grave.’”²⁵⁷

Bryan was clearly an ardent believer in the potential of this third party, but the question remains whether Susette espoused it as fiercely as she had the cause of injustice done to the Ponca in particular

²⁵⁵ Green, 100. The “Panic of 1893” was an economic depression.

²⁵⁶ Green, 100.

²⁵⁷ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, autograph book, La Flesche Family papers collection, Nebraska State Historical Society, n. p.

and Native Americans at large. Her educational background and many years spent living among white people left her fully acculturated, but politics was simply not a woman's realm in the 19th century. They could not even vote. Along with her peers—women—Susette was outside the parameter on this subject. However to any other woman, there might have laid little value in politics and the machinations of government, but she had seen directly the impact of legislation on her own tribe—for good and ill. At 25 she had seen Native Americans declared as people with certain Constitutional rights under the law; now at 39 she watched as Rosalie and others tried to sort out the problems the land allotment process had caused in and around the Omaha reservation. Populism's championing of the downtrodden farmer may have appealed to her though, despite the very marginal role women played in politics. Her own people were traditionally agrarian and she had seen from her earliest days the painful transition the tribe made from traditional subsistence farming, supplemented by hunting and trading, to exclusive farming. Life as a married woman on her allotment's farm had been tough in the past few years. Though she had these indelible experiences it is safe to suggest that Susette picked up the pen not entirely out of an innate passion for this political movement, but more out of deference to her husband's interests.

Almost as quickly as Thomas Henry became enamored of Populism, a journalistic job opportunity presented itself to the couple. Once more, they would be away from the tribe. It was an exciting life, but certainly not a settled one. Green writes that T. H. took his wife with him to Chicago in July 1893—the couple was in the midst of the famous World's Columbian Exposition, commonly known as the World's Fair. Into this extravaganza Susette and her husband descended for “several days” in July according to Green.²⁵⁸ One wonders what their feelings were if they saw the exhibits touting the success of the boarding and day school programs for Native American children at the Fair.

²⁵⁸ Green, 100.

A contemporary piece from the New York Times recorded people's reactions and the writer's impression of a display "in the little wooden building which held the Government exhibit of the industrial school for Indian boys and girls at Genoa, Neb." A woman exclaimed to her husband the exact thoughts of the writer when she said "your own children, Hiram, couldn't do better work than these little redskins have done."²⁵⁹ The writer described some of the works on display: "quantities of folios lying on the tables around the room and the maps and kindergarten work hung on the walls. In penmanship, in neatness, in correct and logical solutions to problems in arithmetic, in sentence building, and in exercises in philosophy, none of them displayed any trace of race except in giving the name and school . . . these folios were not alone from Genoa but also from many Indian schools scattered over the far west . . ."²⁶⁰ The reporter also described the students' skills in various crafts such as sewing and shoemaking. A white teacher remarked to the reporter that for him or her, as well as the students, "it has been irksome to stay as exhibits in the fair, to be gazed at and questioned these long months . . ."²⁶¹ What thoughts, feelings, and memories an exhibit like this one might have stirred in Susette.

At any rate, after taking in the Chicago World's Fair for a few days, the couple remained in that city for a discussion on bimetallism,²⁶² a Populist ideal. Bimetallism endorsed the backing of paper currency with silver or gold, and Populists would lean heavily on the "free silver" argument, outlined in the party's platform as the "unlimited coinage" of silver. After the discussion, T. H. landed a newspaper

²⁵⁹ "Work of Indian Children—Its Interesting Showing at the Columbian Exposition" New York Times, n. a. 12 November 1893 <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F30F15F73B5F1A738DDAB0994D9415B8385F0D3>>.

²⁶⁰ "Work of Indian Children," n. p.

²⁶¹ "Work of Indian Children," n. p. A scholarly article, "Selling Indian Education at World's Fairs and Expositions, 1893-1904" by Robert A. Trenner, Jr. appeared in American Indian Quarterly in 1987 and offers insight into this phenomenon.

²⁶² Green, 100.

job. According to Green, Rosalie La Flesche Farley had been hoping he would edit a paper for the Bimetallic League, the organization that had held the discussion. Rosalie was concerned about her sister and brother-in-law's financial situation: she "hoped this would be the time they would 'get hold of something and make it pay.'"²⁶³ Offers opened up for both of them—"an opening came to serve several Populist journals that wished to have direct reports from Washington"²⁶⁴ and so once again they left the Omaha tribe. They were in the nation's capital for two years as "special correspondents."

In this city that was the seat of power for those who ruled Native lives and livelihoods, Susette had the opportunity to espouse her husband's latest cause for her line of work—reporting from the Senate on Populist machinations—but additionally, according to Wilson, "she wrote, she painted, she attended concerts and lectures, she visited art galleries, she enjoyed the stimulating company of friends old and new."²⁶⁵ Among those people she knew residing in the same city were her own half-brother Francis, long estranged, and Alice Fletcher. The two shared lodging and worked closely with one another on ethnological projects.²⁶⁶ Francis would try to smooth things over with his half-sister when she had been in the city about a year. The amusements and socializing possibly filled her time more meaningfully, for a while, than her job as special correspondent for Senatorial workings of the party that was really her husband's passion. Wilson writes that "[though] many of her articles were in support of the tenets of the Populist party, they lacked the spontaneous verve and color of her stories of Indian life."²⁶⁷ "Color" is an interesting choice of words—Wilson used the word in reference to Susette's 1883

²⁶³ Green, 101.

²⁶⁴ Green, 101. It is entirely possible the couple contributed occasionally to more than one paper. Susette's extant contributions are for the American Nonconformist.

²⁶⁵ Wilson, 355. Her husband reported from the House of Representatives.

²⁶⁶ Wilson, 355.

²⁶⁷ Wilson, 355.

story for children, the retelling titled “Babes in the Woods,” which by 1893 was a decade old. Susette’s 1890-1891 reports on the Ghost Dance trouble and the aftermath of Wounded Knee did not have “color” as much as they had valuable (truthful, plain-spoken, detailed) journalistic insight into a horrific event that other reports on the same conflict completely lacked.

The American Nonconformist entered our journalist’s life from Indianapolis, Indiana. It had been established in Winfield, Kansas, the state where Populism became most vociferous by 1890. It began as a merger product—it started out as the American Nonconformist and Kansas Industrial Liberator. In The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History author Lauren Kessler writes about the Populist press as a phenomenon so forceful that it bolstered this third-party movement considerably, turning its beginnings as the Farmers’ Alliance, “at first an apolitical self-help movement” in Texas into the nationwide force it became. The Populist press was not to be underestimated. Those trying to popularize the movement “were led by stump lecturers and hundreds of their own reform newspapers. The editors formed a national reform press association to coordinate propaganda and education efforts that, by the mid 1890s, numbered more than 1,000 members. In that decade, the culmination of the Populist movement, more than 900 newspapers and periodicals were devoted solely” to it.²⁶⁸

The spread of Populism certainly would not have been so rapid, penetrating (across the South, Midwest, and West) or prolific without the function of the press. Populist editors, publishers, and writers all formed part of the larger landscape of hardscrabble frontier journalism, forming their own publications with a specified content that responded to surroundings and circumstances. As it was for papers in mining towns or other frontier outposts—even frontier towns—money was a problem as far as

²⁶⁸ Lauren Kessler, The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1984) 112.

regular publication was concerned. Kessler concedes that “. . . radical journals of all stripes shared at least one problem: money. Anticapitalist [sic] publications naturally contained no consumer advertising. In those publications that accepted advertising—many did not—commercial messages were usually limited to announcements of radical books, pamphlets, and journals . . . Radical publications were almost always run at a loss, and their editors and writers received little pay, if any.”²⁶⁹ It is not known if while working in Washington, Susette and T. H. were paid for their work but it is likely they were, given Rosalie’s insistence that they find work that was fairly lucrative. These papers massed in Washington that desired special correspondents were not part of the “countless rural weeklies that reached only a few hundred subscribers”²⁷⁰ in the very wide scope of the Populist press.

Kessler gives us an idea of the press’s range—“no other radical or reform group in America was as journalistically active as the Populists,” she writes. “Several thousand different Populist journals were published during the life of the movement, ranging from the 100,000-circulation National Economist to countless rural weeklies . . . During the 1890s alone Populists published more than 1,000 journals . . . Most journals were the organs of county, state, and regional alliances, but some were the efforts of unaffiliated Populists.”²⁷¹

The American Nonconformist was one of these unaffiliated papers. It was “one of the best known” in this category, established by Henry Vincent in 1886 when he was 24 years old. “[He] set up exchanges with other agrarian and labor newspapers.”²⁷² Information exchanges were a common way to share news and information on the frontier. Kessler makes an interesting assertion that must be at least partially incorrect—“The Nonconformist died in 1891, probably due to financial concerns”—but there

²⁶⁹ Kessler, 114.

²⁷⁰ Kessler, 117.

²⁷¹ Kessler, 118.

²⁷² Kessler, 118.

are extant articles of Susette's for the newspaper from 1893 to 1894. Kessler likely did not realize that the newspaper in 1891 had become the American Nonconformist and National Industrial Liberator. This was a variant of its original title when it had first begun as a merger product of the Indianapolis paper and the Kansas Industrial Liberator. The newspaper had begun under Vincent, but by 1893, when Susette began writing about the Senate for it, the paper's editors were Lucius A. Stockwell and Chas. X. Mathews. The editors called it "a weekly journal devoted to the interests of the wealth-producing classes" and by this year the paper's title had been whittled down to simply the American Nonconformist. Templeton, East, & Co. published the paper on Thursdays, and the editors belonged to the Independent Rural Press Association. The paper's total circulation, from July 6 to October 26 of 1893 was 435, 519.²⁷³

Susette's first article in the Nonconformist, headlined "Overloaded with Cold Tea—A Tipsy Senator Makes as Holy Show of Himself" would be the first in a long list of articles detailing the minutiae of activity in the Senate. Here she also offered an opinion. Here, she said, all of Washington was talking of "the man who so disgraced himself." "Senator Harris of Tennessee" disgraced himself by getting drunk during official business hours but also by having "deserted the Populists at the most critical moment of the struggle by suddenly dropping the fight for free coinage."²⁷⁴ She expressed her disdain for drunkards, but also criticized other lawmakers' reactions. Many were smearing Harris's name. Alcohol's repercussions on both one's reputation and the efficiency of governance were encapsulated in this article in a fairly highly moralizing tone: "The whole matter is sickening to one who tries to believe the best one can of human nature, and what hurts one the most is the laughter of

²⁷³ The American Nonconformist 2 Nov. 1893: 4, Nebraska State Historical Society (2010) film 630.5 C34 Box 4.

²⁷⁴ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, "Overloaded with Cold Tea," The American Nonconformist 16 Nov. 1893: 1, 5, Nebraska State Historical Society (2010) film 630.5 C34 Box 4.

senators over a drunken old man, and that one of their own number, as if it could ever be amusing to witness the degradation of a human soul.²⁷⁵”

After the Congressional recess, she reported during the new year of 1894 on Senatorial business. Her work as a Washington correspondent is dull compared to the work she did at Pine Ridge Agency—“Glimpse of the Senate—What the Old Fellows Have Done Since the Holidays” spoke for itself. Readers were dragged through the proceedings in not just this article, but many more. In this case “On Wednesday the Senators met for one hour and twenty minutes, half of which time was spent in executive session. Nearly the whole of the time in the open session was occupied by the senators in presenting petitions from cigar manufacturers. Thursday the same program as above. The senate then adjourned until Monday. Friday no session at all.”²⁷⁶

The activity of the nation’s capital revolved around itself in a tightly formulated bureaucratic routine with little deviation. An April 4, 1894 article titled “Dull Times in the Senate” spoke for itself almost as easily as “What the Old Fellows Have Done Since the Holidays” had done—the reporting of Senatorial routine. Some of the more interesting issues Susette wrote about—always as Bright Eyes—included the debate over progressive federal income tax (The Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act) and the urgent arguments led by Democratic Senator Richard P. Bland in favor of bimetallism because of the economic depression. She also saw Senator Peffer himself on the floor of the Senate many times.

According to a scholarly article on the work of Congress during President Cleveland’s administration, the first issue addressed in the Congress was the “free silver” debate. The backdrop of economic hardship prevailed—“Just ten days after President Cleveland’s inauguration, the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad went bankrupt. Within another six weeks, the U. S. Treasury surplus fell below

²⁷⁵ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, 5. The La Flesche family was one of teetotalers.

²⁷⁶ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Glimpse of the Senate” *The American Nonconformist* 18 Jan. 1894: 1, Nebraska State Historical Society (2010) film 630.5 C34 Box 4.

the ‘safe’ threshold of \$100 million for the first time. In May news of fraudulent dealings of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroads and the collapse of the National Cordage Company caused a further erosion of public confidence in the financial stability of the nation.”²⁷⁷ Congress was urged to have a special session to repeal the Silver Purchase Act, which “the financial community” saw as “the root cause . . . of the economy’s collapse.”²⁷⁸ Depending on how soon, from their trip to Chicago in July of 1893, Tibbles and Susette relocated to Washington, D. C. and began writing for the House and Senate respectively, they might have missed the Silver Purchase Act’s repeal on August 7. There was still plenty of antagonism over the free silver question and other aspects of bimetallism when Susette was writing. The issue of “free silver” according to Kessler did not come into vogue for the party until late in its formation. She asserts that it was a new addition to the “greenback” currency policy favored by Populists and became popular with less traditional or less hardline members of the party, especially after William Jennings Bryan’s nomination to the party ticket for the 1896 presidential election.²⁷⁹

Nonetheless, Susette, as “Bright Eyes” wrote much for the Nonconformist about the debate over the progressive income tax bill, but also recorded details of pro-silver Senator Stewart and the Bland Bill. According to Bard the “Bland Bill for coining silver seigniorage” “applied to a small amount of silver dollars and was seen [by Cleveland] as a possible means of maintaining support of silverites.”²⁸⁰ Susette wrote in March 1894 that senators were in an uproar over the Bland Bill, “introduced into the

²⁷⁷ Mitchell Bard, “Ideology and Depression Politics I: Grover Cleveland (1893-1897),” Presidential Studies Quarterly 15 (1985), 82 < <http://0-www.jstor.org.library.unl.edu/stable/pdfplus/27550165.pdf?acceptTC=true>>

²⁷⁸ Bard, 82. Bard writes that Cleveland sided with Easterners (“industrialists” and “capitalists”) and called the special session of Congress on June 20, 1893 “to meet on August 7 to repeal the Silver Purchase Act.”

²⁷⁹ Kessler, 119-120. She writes “Only a handful of editors supported the party’s new doctrine of silver-backed currency; most editors dropped out of both the party and the press association.” Despite this drop off in support from journalists, it is clear that the “free silver” issue was vigorously debated by lawmakers.

²⁸⁰ Bard., 82. According to the author, the Democratic party, many of whom’s members were pro-coinage to some degree, was on the verge of a “dangerous schism” since Cleveland had been secluded due to a cancerous mouth ulcer and the Democrats had been afraid to repeal the Silver Purchase Act.

Senate on Monday by our silver hero, Senator Stewart.”²⁸¹ She called the activity, which she recorded in lengthy detail, “the exciting scenes of the silver session . . . enacted over and over again.”²⁸² The repetitive nature of recording Senate activities extended from the struggle over “free silver” and bimetallism to the protracted struggle over the proposed income tax tariff.

Populists in the Senate of course favored the progressive income tax bill. Susette reported in June 1894, shortly before the bill was passed, that some senators from the main parties, for whatever reason, were siding with the third party on the tariff issue—“It is funny how very popular the Populists are in the senate just at this time and what particular attention and deference is paid to them throughout the discussion now going on. It is quite the ‘fad’ for a republican [sic] or democratic [sic] senator to say, in the course of his speech ‘ I wish to call my Populist friends’ attention to these facts and figures.’ No wonder Senator Allen refrained from announcing what his vote would be on the tariff bill, and no wonder he succeeded in having his amendment putting all lumber on the free list passed as well as his amendment on barbed wire. The vote stood: Yeas, 35 nays, 24. The farmers all over the country can be proud of such a senator.”²⁸³

The progressive income tax bill passed on July 3, 1894, but not before more wrangling ensued. Susette wrote about the so-called “Sugar Trust” backed by Senator Gorman, whose name was on the proposed tax bill. The term “trust” seems appropriate for this group of powerful sugar industry backers. The 19th century political scene was one of protectionism for special interests: “In addition the Senate had become known as the ‘Millionaires Club.’ Senators no longer were loyal to their popular

²⁸¹ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Panic in the Senate,” The American Nonconformist 15 March 1894: 1, Nebraska State Historical Society (2010) film 630.5 C34 Box 4.

²⁸² Susette La Flesche Tibbles, 1.

²⁸³ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Debating the Income Tax” The American Nonconformist 7 June 1894: 1, Nebraska State Historical Society (2010) film 630.5 C34 Box 4. The “free list” was the list of items exempt from the proposed progressive income tax.

constituencies; they had become captives of economic interests, such as lumber, oil, sugar, silver, copper, and steel.”²⁸⁴ Susette was again writing about corruption, but this time it had nothing to do with the treatment of Indians. She surely realized the darker inner workings behind lawmaking and the grasp she had on Populism and its ups and downs in the Senate seemed strong, although it is arguable she was not as enthused about it as her husband in the earliest stages.

During her two years with her husband writing as a special correspondent, Susette felt compelled to interject her race into a piece about her coverage. On November 15, 1894, an article she wrote headlined “Comments by Bright Eyes—An Indian Woman Analyzes With Keen Philosophy” discussed the potential of Populism and the strides the party was making, but based on the headline alone perhaps she was also assessing her own reception within Washington as a writer—readers needed to know that her analysis was as good as a white writer’s. Her work here lacked the type of praise her 1890-1891 work had gotten.

The position of Susette as a Washington correspondent is important. There were other, earlier female journalists in the nation’s capital, but they were all white. Maurine Hoffman Beasley wrote about several, including Jane Grey Swisshelm, Sara Clarke Lippincott and Anne Royall, in her brief compilation The First Women Washington Correspondents. “Opportunities dwindled for middle-class women to develop careers outside the home in the nineteenth century,” she wrote, continuing that in the decades before the Civil War there was a “cult of domesticity” surrounding women and governing their behavior, and that female writers were largely restricted to “tearful novels aimed a female audience or syrupy magazines that fostered piety and ladylike conduct.”²⁸⁵ Though these women were Susette’s predecessors, some of them writing—like in the case of Swisshelm—a few years before she was born—

²⁸⁴ Bard, 84.

²⁸⁵ Maurine Hoffman Beasley, The First Women Washington Correspondents (Washington, D. C.: George Washington University, 1976), 3.

they made the inroads in female journalistic work from the nation's capital. Swisshelm, the first correspondent, "marched into the Senate press gallery" where Susette would later observe proceedings, on April 17, 1850. Beasley wrote that Swisshelm was "intent on claiming equal privileges with male journalists" and after "her historic day in the press gallery Mrs. Swisshelm left the capital . . . It was not until thirteen years later that she came back to Washington as a correspondent."²⁸⁶ Decades later, Susette would not be given over to idle gossip, but would report on the workings of the Senate. Swisshelm may have been the first mid-19th century woman to work from Washington, but Beasley concedes that there were some predecessors even earlier in that century—the earliest was Mrs. A. S. Colvin, of whom little is known, followed by Anne Royall, and both actually published papers from the nation's capital.²⁸⁷ Royall was described by Beasley as the "first important" female Washington correspondent²⁸⁸ and so it was in the footsteps of good journalism that Susette followed in the 1890s, though it is highly likely she was not aware of her predecessors. For Susette journalism was an avocation, something she probably never saw herself doing and probably would never have done had her husband not been devoted to it. It worked well, because she clearly had a talent for writing. The Washington correspondents who came before her paved the way for her turn in the Senate press gallery, but they never could have imagined that a woman who was not white would have that privilege. Susette's race was something she readily pointed out during her time there. The other women simply wanted a chance to be viewed as more equal with male journalists; that was not a concern of Susette's,

²⁸⁶ Beasley, 3. "She feared to stay and face the hubbub that arose over a column in which she accused Daniel Webster of fathering a mulatto family," Beasley explained.

²⁸⁷ Beasley, 3. Colvin "published the Weekly Messenger, believed to have been issued first in 1817," and "Mrs. Colvin's career was eclipsed by that of Anne Royall . . . who has gone down in history as a bizarre character who interviewed President John Quincy Adams by sitting on his clothes while he was swimming in the Potomac and refusing to get up until he answered her questions. As a recent biographer noted, the trouble with this delightful tale is that it probably never happened since Adams befriended Mrs. Royall and willingly spoke with her on many occasions," Beasley wrote.

²⁸⁸ Beasley, 3.

who by the end of her time as a Senate observer seems to have espoused Populism because it favored those who felt they were oppressed. Much like during her coverage at Pine Ridge Agency Susette never devolved into rumor or gossip and had a clear understanding of what she was writing about.

Perhaps by this time Susette had actually begun to develop a real passion for the “People’s Party”—she and her husband were sometime farmers themselves, and her own people were now pushed into larger-scale farming. The indications that she understood the workings of the Senate, could comment somewhat caustically on its dark secrets and the human foibles of its members, are there. If she felt a real connection to Populism, it would have been because the political party was formed by the underrepresented class who saw themselves as repressed by the “system”—not the reservation system this time, but the fluctuations of the market, business, and the way money was controlled. In the same November 15 piece in which she mentioned her race, she expressed confidence that the Populist influence was causing a “revolution” in American society even though its gains sometimes appeared small or insignificant. The Democratic party had just lost control of the Congress in a “decisive” Republican victory.²⁸⁹ Democrats and third party Populists were upset and indeed, much of the second page of the Nonconformist was filled with commentary on the matter. Susette’s commentary was encouragement for the party. Another article “What They All Say About It” by an unnamed writer had Colorado’s governor Waite asked “if he thought the Populist party will ever again regain power . . . [He] said “I believe it will but it may not be for some time. . . However, I advocate this being done in a peaceful manner, if possible, a peaceful revolution.”²⁹⁰

Susette obviously had faith in the Colorado governor’s idea when she wrote her remarks.

“Peaceful revolutions are slow but sure. It takes time to leaven a great unwieldy mass like this nation

²⁸⁹ Bard, 85.

²⁹⁰ “What They All Say About It” The American Nonconformist 15 Nov. 1894: 2, Nebraska State Historical Society (2010) film 630.5 C34 Box 4.

with the leavening [illegible] ideas of justice and liberty, but the evolution is all the more certain in its results because it is so slow.” She continued, her tone sounding supportive of dismantling the status quo in order for those on the bottom to rise: “Into the life of a nation the existing conditions must go to pieces, there must be disintegration before the people can move up toward a higher plane of living.” Toward the end of this piece she stirred emotions: “The fact that we have gained, and that over the country as a whole the Populist vote has been trebled, is a solid fact for us to rest on. I would like to say to all farmers’ wives and daughters, toiling day after day in seemingly hopeless drudgery under disadvantages brought about by bad money laws, that the future was never so full of hope as now.”²⁹¹ Judging by this column Susette, or rather Bright Eyes, had by now fully cast her lot with the Populist party, taking up the burdened female farmer as her imagery of choice and inserting herself, unnoticeably perhaps to the contemporary reader, into the ranks with the use of the word “us” for those impassioned for the cause. She and T. H. would take their cause back to Nebraska.

She and her husband lived in the nation’s capital for the better part of two years. The extant material for her work as a special correspondent for the Nonconformist ends in November 1894. They returned to Nebraska in the summer of 1895, but it is not known if they had been under any contracts that had run out or whether they simply had their fill of days and weeks spent in the Congressional press galleries. Nearly a year before they left Francis had gently reached out to his estranged half-sister by writing a heartfelt note in her autograph book.²⁹² The two of them never were close again, but he wrote the sheet music and Omaha lyrics to “Children’s Play Song” and included this:

²⁹¹ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Comments By Bright Eyes,” The American Nonconformist 15 Nov. 1894: 2, Nebraska State Historical Society (2010) film 630.5 C34 Box 4.

²⁹² Susette La Flesche Tibbles, autograph book, n. p.

Dear Susette,

This is a little song we have often sung, years ago in our play with the children of the *Winjahghe* village. We used to form in a single line and march through the village singing this at the tops of our voices, following the leader wherever he went, through vacant houses, deserted wind-lodges, the tall grass, and through mud puddles. Little beaded moccasins would be a sorry sight when we got through. I put this in your album to remind you of the fun we used to have.

Your brother

Frank La Flesche

Washington, D. C. October 7, 1894

Green writes that Tibbles and Susette stayed with Rosalie until October 1895 before they moved away from the tribe again, this time to Lincoln. They had a well-furnished house in the capital city; a photograph shows a comfortable sitting room with a day bed or couch covered in throw blankets, rugs on the wooden floor, and photographs adorning the walls. While living in this house, Susette embarked on the last phase of her journalism career, for another Populist paper, the Lincoln Independent. Tibbles had taken a job in that city “when a group of men who were publishing the Weekly Independent . . . asked [him] to be the editor. Later this became the Lincoln Independent and the official organ of the Populist party.”²⁹³ Green writes that while he worked, Susette focused on moving into the new house, where they would live for the next five years. T. H. had thrown himself “into the new political campaign and spent the next month making speeches in support of the Populist ticket throughout the north-central part of the state.”²⁹⁴ Susette’s contribution to the Lincoln Independent was extremely brief; the only extant material is four articles. These are much more easily classed as opinion pieces, far different from her work at Pine Ridge Agency where the use of the first person did not water down her

²⁹³ Green, 109-110. As aforementioned, when T. H. became head editor in 1896 the paper was renamed the Nebraska Independent (the merger of the Wealthmakers and Lincoln Independent.)

²⁹⁴ Green, 110. This campaign was for the 1896 election, in which William Jennings Bryan lost to William McKinley.

truthful news reporting. These pieces are also different from her Washington reporting on Senate minutiae, with the major exception to that tedium being her November 15, 1894 piece from Washington, which was extremely impassioned for the party.

Her first Independent article was quite long and described the temperaments and characters of senators sympathetic to the Populist cause or simply “populistic” in their views.²⁹⁵ The next article came in early November; there was a lengthy gap between the first October 18 article and this one. In it she railed against the establishment influence in university education. “Our Universities—They Dare Not Teach the Truth” blared the headline from November 8, 1895. She stated plainly her opinion in the opening sentence. “People do not seem to realize to what an extent our universities are being run to suit the views of the millionaires and the corporations of the country,” she wrote. She was angry that a certain Professor Bemis from “a Chicago university” had been “discharged” for views counter to those of the people in charge there. “Professor Bemis is not a socialist [sic]; he is not even advanced enough to be a populist [sic] but he thinks it would be wise that our cities should gradually come to own in the interests of the people, the street car lines, the water works and gas works as is done in the cities of Glasgow and Birmingham. For this utterance” he lost his job, she explained after apparently examining what she knew of his political stance.²⁹⁶ Susette clearly was in favor of civic improvement, which was part of the fabric of social reform movements at the time. As a fairly well educated woman she had some credibility blasting policies in an educational institution that she felt were unfair, but a woman’s view at this time on the subject of education was still tenuous, though women had made significant gains in attending colleges, mostly all-female. She also clearly thought of herself, with her political

²⁹⁵ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “The U. S. Senate” The Lincoln Independent 18 October 1895, n. p., mailed from Sequoyah Research Center, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Fall 2010.

²⁹⁶ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Our Universities” The Lincoln Independent 8 Nov. 1895: n. p., mailed from Sequoyah Research Center, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Fall 2010.

views, as more politically enlightened than this man, who she cut down but then brought up again on the merit of his half-formed ideas about civic betterment.

Her third piece for the Independent blasted the social system of England. Drawing on her time there, she wrote of how most of the wealth was concentrated and the extremely misfortunate starved to death. Her husband had written of their stay in England and Scotland, “three or four times we stayed with working folk.”²⁹⁷ Susette wrote of England’s long history with the gold standard and added “I went to England. A few years ago I gave no thought to the money question . . . I judged of England through her literature and thought that the people would be in keeping with that literature. The first thing that struck me on the streets of London was the poverty-stricken appearance of the masses of the people. I am a small woman. Walking through one of the crowded streets of London I found myself head and shoulders above the majority of the pedestrians. They looked as though they had been stunted in their growth,” she wrote. She continued, telling the reader how the overcrowded conditions compared to America: “New York is bad enough but London is worse.”²⁹⁸ She concluded that the class and wealth disparity—and the “cheapness of everything” all came down to improper circulation of currency. “Can a workingman [sic] earn living wages when the products of his labor are held so cheap? . . . The insufficiency of money is caused through evil legislation . . .” She also expressed her support for universal education, noting “the English lady contended that it was not good for the masses of people to be educated.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Tibbles, 299. “Almost always we were guests in private homes,” he wrote in Buckskin and Blanket Days.

²⁹⁸ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Merry England” The Lincoln Independent 29 Nov. 1895: n. p., mailed from Sequoyah Research Center, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Fall 2010.

²⁹⁹ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, n. p. One wonders if Susette ever read Dickens. His novels have been examined for much commentary on social stratification of the early Victorian era.

In another piece, yet again as Bright Eyes, she waxed eloquent on American social stratification caused during “a republican administration of the financial affairs of the country, under the gold standard and the demonetization of silver” that had “resulted in the making of multi-millionaires.” She answered the question of this article’s headline “Who Is Responsible?” by discussing the law’s role in social inequalities.³⁰⁰ By 1896 her husband was editor-in-chief of the paper under its latest merger and name change. Throughout 1896, Susette was an occasional contributor, but by 1897 her health was steadily failing and she was suffering. “Who Is Responsible?” was one of the last passionate pieces she wrote before this steady decline.

This marks the end of the journalism career of Susette, known to readers as Bright Eyes. She seems to have been an ardent champion of the less fortunate through her exposure to the political philosophy of Populism, and it meshed with her earlier—and never unflagging—championing of the Native American and the dedication to improving the welfare of her own tribe. She would only live seven more years, dying of illness at age 49. She died in Bancroft, nearer to the reservation and her family than she had been for so long in those final years, following her husband first to Washington and then to Lincoln.

Green writes that in 1897, Susette became “seriously ill” so her husband brought her to her sister Rosalie. Susette, of the shy and gentle nature, had become not only “exhausted from working too hard on her husband’s newspaper” but “for several years she had had an increasing tendency to become irritable and at times extremely angry.”³⁰¹ For a time she seemed to recover, but became ill again by 1903. Rosalie had died in 1900, having been ill herself for years. By 1903 Susette had lost her father and one sister and was estranged from her brother. By then she was so ill her physician sister Susan

³⁰⁰ Susette La Flesche Tibbles, “Who Is Responsible?,” The Lincoln Independent 12 Dec. 1895: n. p., mailed from Sequoyah Research Center, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Fall 2010.

³⁰¹ Green, 113.

“lost hope.”³⁰² Susette lay dying on May 23 of that year with Susan, their mother Mary Gale La Flesche, and a family friend named Winnie in the room with her. Her husband could not bear to be in the room with her that long day, according to Green.³⁰³ When her eldest daughter died “Mary, her mother, who had seen so many others go and who had watched so much tragedy during her life, broke into a wild weeping—weeping mingled with the Indian mourning wail.”³⁰⁴ Thomas Henry spent a lonely wake that night with the body of his “Bright Eyes”; he was very much alone, having alienated all his friends in Bancroft except Nebraska writer John G. Neihardt. Neihardt recalled the night of the wake, during which his friend told him stories until quite late (or quite early the next morning). The news of Susette’s death “had spread abroad,” Neihardt wrote, by the time he paid his visit. Tibbles took him into the room where her body lay so he could see it. He then broke down weeping, saying both to Neihardt and the stillness “isn’t she beautiful?”³⁰⁵

³⁰² Green, 120.

³⁰³ Green, 120.

³⁰⁴ Green, 120.

³⁰⁵ John G. Neihardt. Patterns and Coincidences: A sequel to All is but a beginning (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 43-44.

Chapter VIII: Conclusion: Susette La Flesche Tibbles as Journalist

Susette La Flesche Tibbles was a woman who had three careers in her lifetime; she was first a teacher, then a lecturer, and then a journalist. She had journalistic peers in two facets of society—in Washington, D. C., and on the 19th century Western frontier that was her world—but hers was a very unique case within these frameworks. The position of female journalists in the mid-to-late 19th century was one of being on the cusp of many more opportunities in employment equality to come in the following century, but it was also somewhat tradition-bound. The “tearful novels and syrupy magazines” still existed for, and were many times published by, women, but in these same years women like Coleman and Benjamin were gaining access through force of will to battlefield reporting; this was work they saw as much more meaningful than writing about the human toll of conflict.

On the 19th century Western frontier, the woman’s role in business and economics, particularly in newspaper publishing, has been somewhat ignored. While Susette did not have an active role in this facet of journalism, it is important to see women on the frontier as more capable of meaningful industry and less of a stereotype from the early 20th century that Sherilyn Cox Bennion quoted in her book—the frontier woman dreaming of her log cabin, “the gaunt and sad-faced woman sitting in the front seat of the wagon, her face hidden by the same ragged sunbonnet which had crossed the Appalachians and the Missouri long before.”³⁰⁶ Susette La Flesche Tibbles was not, of course, a white emigrant settler’s wife, but she was part of the tapestry of the frontier as a second-generation *metis*. Her life’s work as a journalist on the frontier was somewhat ironic, as a Native woman covering the tragedy at Pine Ridge Agency.

³⁰⁶ Sherilyn Cox Bennion, *Equal to the Occasion: Women Editors of the Nineteenth Century West* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1990), 7.

Her journalism career for all three newspapers has been almost entirely ignored save the barest references in Wilson and Green's books, and perhaps the most grievous slight is that her work from Pine Ridge Agency has been either omitted or glossed over within Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee scholarship. The study of that tragedy is so far incomplete without her contributions, whose depth of perspective, clarity, and truth can provide scholarship with a new angle. It is remarkable that a Native woman was able to cover the tragedy, and its significance multi-layered. First, her perspective was controlled and free of prejudices, and the one most able to understand how the government and the military were working against the Lakota. Secondly, the work she and her husband did for the Omaha Morning World-Herald was the most unvarnished, plainly told accounting of the events. As one half of the couple, though, her work was devoid of the white ethnocentric bias and the wild imagination of her husband. It has been easier for scholars to focus on newspaper coverage of the tragedy by examining the stereotypes and the outrageous material found from other papers, concluding that truth was overrun by rumor. Reilly's work examined the sensationalism in great detail, but pushed Bright Eyes, the truth teller, to the side. He even questioned the impartiality and validity of her work by suggesting she might have been in on a scheme. Thirdly, her work at Pine Ridge Agency needs to be better known because she can serve as a symbol of empowerment for Native female writers of our day. The fact that one of their own was there needs to be lifted out of the shadow of the sensational reports of men like Charles Cressey. In works like the Murphy's overview of Native Americans' contributions to journalism over the centuries, she needs to be included.

Her work out of Washington for the Nonconformist shows her own growth of political feeling, though it is a straightforward, sometimes dull, accounting of seminal events in the Senate that affected the Populist party's support level and degree of influence on the nation. She was very much distinct from her Washington correspondent predecessors Swisshelm, Royall, and others (and even possible

contemporaries) because she was not white. She managed to fit neatly into her role as perhaps little more than a Senatorial press gallery stenographer recording daily details, because her education, intelligence, and writing ability eclipsed her mixed heritage in this case. Her final newspaper work for the Independent, settled somewhat closer to her family than she had been in a long while, shows that though her health was quickly waning her most impassioned work for Populism and “populistic” philosophy favoring the downtrodden came out of this period. She had developed at the end of her life a sturdy belief in the value of agrarian and poorer urban upward mobilization, first fueled by her husband’s new passion for Populism in 1893.

Though she developed this new political belief, her heart was always with the Omaha tribe. She was always Susette but she was also always *Inshtatheamba*. No matter if she was across the ocean or home visiting family, her devotion to the tribe’s betterment never waned. She did not leave in the historical record her feelings on her newspaper career or indeed many of her most personal feelings at all, but it seems she was fully invested in her work as a journalist, as fully invested as she had been when she was 25 and fighting for the freedom and betterment of Standing Bear and the Ponca.

Her newspaper career came late in a long chain of events in the lives of Native Americans—her work in the courtroom and on the lecture circuit, along with others’, first led to freedom for a grieving father to bury his son and for Native Americans to be recognized as people under the law with some Constitutional rights. Then, lecturing and other work helped lead to more awareness of injustice, as well as to the Dawes Act, which provided Natives with allotted lands and some degree of “citizenship” though females could of course not vote and Native lives were still ruled by the iron fist of Washington. She died having seen many strides in her own tribe and its kin, as well as great tragedy.

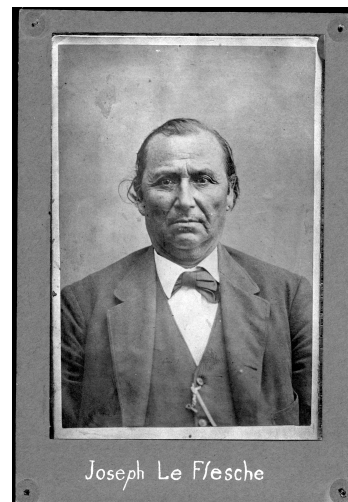
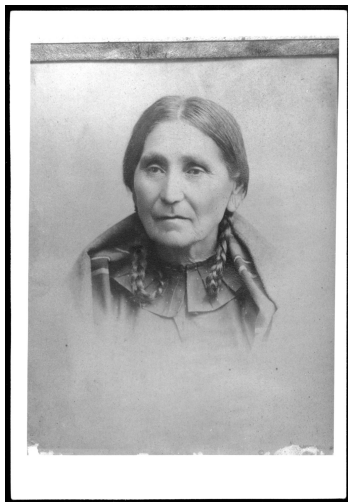
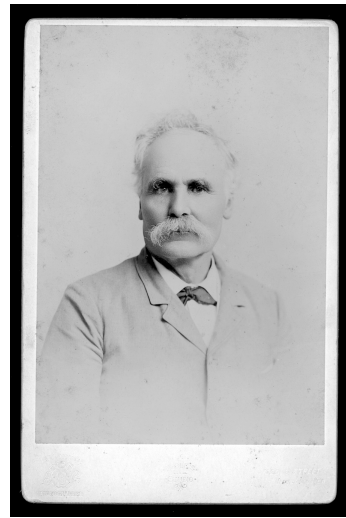
This woman of two identities—Susette the second-generation mixed-blood woman and *Inshtatheamba* the Omaha woman—fit comfortably into white society but undeniably felt at times that

she was on the periphery, not fitting in as well as she'd hoped. Her struggle to help raise Eda and Mae and her resignation to the fact that many in her own family disliked her husband is proof of this. Her grandmother Nicomi, as Thorne pointed out, had stayed strongly by her ideals as an Omaha-Iowa and tried not to let white influence into her daughter Mary Gale's life. Mary Gale La Flesche in turn imparted her own strength to her eldest daughter, who became successful in a new world—a world different from the “new world” of her parents' own early lives—through her father's insistence that she be well educated. Indeed, all of the La Flesche children, from both of their father's wives, were successful, as Green chronicles in her book.

As an outsider in so many ways in white society, Susette La Flesche Tibbles managed to fit neatly within it during the last phase of her newspaper career writing for the Populist papers. During the early phase of this career, she had a more awkward position, conveying the truth about a tragedy affecting her own racial group from the seat of educated, literate privilege. Native Americans, blacks, Hispanics, Chinese, and women were all “press outsiders” in the 19th century, according to a compendium that somewhat briefly examines their contributions, edited by Frankie Hutton and Barbara Strauss Reed³⁰⁷. The frontier was also on the edges of the newspaper industry in many ways.³⁰⁸ It was the perfect place for a person like Susette, who fit into two worlds, to have her journalism career. Always writing about the marginalized, always telling the truth, and never losing her integrity in the profession were her hallmarks. Her journalism career, on fuller examination, shows that hers was a unique slice of life on the 19th century frontier and her work is a rich contribution to scholarship.

³⁰⁷ Frankie Hutton and Barbara Strauss Reed, eds. Outsiders in Nineteenth Century Press History: Multicultural Perspectives (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1995).

³⁰⁸ Journalism historian and professor Barbara Cloud has written extensively on the uniqueness of the press on the frontier. In The Coming of the Frontier Press: How the West was Really Won (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008) she details the civilizing and economically stabilizing effect newspapers had on mining towns, town and city promotion, and the railroads. In The Business of Newspapers on the Western Frontier (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1992) she tells of the unique hardships faced by entrepreneurs, businessmen, and editors and publishers on the frontier.



(From top left) Susette La Flesche Tibbles (*Inshtatheamba*); Thomas Henry Tibbles; Mary Gale La Flesche; Joseph La Flesche (*Inshtamaza*).

Courtesy: Nebraska State Historical Society

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