

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

DR. SUSAN LAFLESCHE PICOTE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: DR. SUSAN LAFLESCHE PICOTTE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Other Name/Site Number: Walthill Hospital

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 505 Matthewson Street Not for publication:___

City/Town: Walthill Vicinity:___

State: NE County: Thurston Code: 173 Zip Code: 68067

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private: X
Public-local:___
Public-State:___
Public-Federal:___

Category of Property
Building(s): X
District:___
Site:___
Structure:___
Object:___

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
1
1

Noncontributing
buildings
sites
1 structures
objects
1 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this _____ nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Entered in the National Register _____

Determined eligible for the _____
National Register

Determined not eligible for the _____
National Register

Removed from the National Register _____

Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Health Care

Sub: Hospital

Current: Other
Vacant

Sub: Non-profit Office Space

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION

Late 19th Century and Early 20th Century American Movements:
Bungalow/Craftsman

MATERIALS

Foundation: Concrete
Walls: Wood
Roof: Asphalt
Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.DESCRIPTION OF SITE:¹

The Dr. Susan Picotte Memorial Hospital is located in Walthill, Nebraska, a town situated on the Omaha Indian Reservation in the northeastern portion of the state. The one-and-one-half-story frame building was constructed in 1912-13 to serve as a facility for the practice of Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte, the first native American woman to practice medicine in the United States. The hospital's primary function was to serve Picotte's people, the Omaha Indians. Designed by Sioux city, Iowa, architect William Steele, the building is a product of the Craftsman style of architecture and features a prominent full-length recessed porch along the main facade. Structural and historical integrity has been retained except for the addition of asbestos siding over most of the original clapboarding.

Situated at the top of a hill in the northwest end of Walthill, Nebraska, and overlooking the village, the Dr. Susan Picotte Memorial Hospital was built on Matthewson Street, which runs east and west, in a primarily residential area. The Craftsman style building was designed as a hospital facility and measures approximately 42 feet by 78 feet. The one-and-one half story building is built on a concrete foundation with exterior walls of narrow horizontal wood siding now covered with asbestos, double hung sash windows and a low-pitched gabled, wood shingled roof with wide eave overhangs, exposed roof rafters, and large braces beneath the eaves.

The recessed porch, which runs the full width of the main (east) facade, is the building's main embellishment. It incorporates a colonnade comprised of a series of nine round-arched openings which are screened. The gabled roof is penetrated by a transverse dormer, which contains four small divided-pane windows in both the east and west ends. The dormer has a gabled roof with wide eave overhangs, exposed roof rafters, and braces beneath the eaves. Changes to the building's exterior have been minimal. The original narrow wood siding on the building's exterior has been covered with asbestos siding, and the wood shingled roof is now covered with asphalt shingles.

The building's interior has all plastered walls, painted white. The woodwork is pine and was originally varnished; presently much of it is painted. Construction materials are primarily of wood.

¹ This building description is derived from the National Register nomination form, prepared by Rae Edwards, Greg Miller, Joni Gilkerson, Center for Rural Affairs, P.O. Box 406, Walthill, Nebraska, August 1988; Telephone conversations between Dennis Hastings, Omaha Tribe Historian, Don Ralston, Administrative Director, Center for Rural Affairs, Walthill, Nebraska, and Page Putnam Miller, May 15, 1992; Telephone conversation between Don Ralston and Jill Mesirow, June 8, 1992.

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The concrete foundation is in some places underlaid with brick and mortar.

Access to the lower or ground floor is through a service entrance opening on the east side of the building. The full-sized basement contains the furnace and boiler rooms, kitchen, dining room and housekeeper's quarters. A wooden stairway leads from the ground floor, south of the service entrance, to the first or main floor.

The first floor was designed for patients and contained the general and private wards, operating and maternity rooms, diet kitchen, office and bathrooms. From the central hall, a stairway leads to the second semi-story which originally served as staff quarters for the use of the superintendent and nurses. It contains three bedrooms, a bathroom and linen closet.

Each room on the first floor has at least one, and in the end rooms, two windows, the exception being the operating room which has five windows on the north side and four on the east side. The interior doors have transom windows.

There have been few alterations to the building. In the 1980s, one bathroom was removed to expand the size of one of the wards, but the floor plan remains the same. Other modifications include updating the building to correspond with fire regulations and the removal of one set of stairs from the north end of the porch that became hazardous. Other renovations consisted of the removal of asbestos insulation in the basement, the update of the boiler and plumbing system, painting the exterior of the building and the installation of a forced heating and cooling system. In order to provide space for duct-work for this system, the 11 foot ceiling in the hallway was dropped about 15 inches.

The building served as a hospital for both Indians and whites until the late 1940s. Since that time, it has served as a nursing home, a bakery, a family residence, and an auto upholstery shop. Three rooms on the ground floor are presently used as a museum, which displays photographs and some artifacts on the history of church missions and the Omaha and Winnebago tribes. Also within the building is an Indian run counseling service. The rest of the building stands vacant. The building has undergone few alterations, especially to the exterior, and is structurally sound.

The National Park Service allocated \$64,000 to the Center for Rural Affairs, the current owners of the building, to continue restoration. The Center plans to update the electrical system, weatherize, install a handicap access ramp, rebuild window wells and add new storm windows. These wood frame windows have already been purchased and have been approved for use in historic buildings.

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There is currently one non-contributing structure on the property. A chicken coop was placed there several years ago, and the Center for Rural Affairs plans to have it removed within the year.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B X C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A B C D E F G

NHL Criteria: 2

NHL Theme(s): XIII. Science
 F. Medicine
 XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements
 K. Emergency Aid and Health Care
 B. Temperance and Prohibition

Areas of Significance: Health/Medicine
 Social History

Period(s) of Significance: 1912-1940

Significant Dates: 1912, 1915

Significant Person(s): Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: William Steele

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

The Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte Memorial Hospital, formerly the Walthill Hospital, was built by Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte, the first Native American physician. This building is nationally significant because of its association with Susan Picotte who pioneered in providing health care for Native Americans. In addition to providing health care for her people, Picotte served her tribe in other ways; she was an active temperance advocate, and she served as an advocate for Omaha Indian rights. The Picotte Hospital was the fulfillment of her lifelong dream; that people, both Indian and white, should have access to quality medical care. According to the National Park Service Thematic Framework, the Picotte Hospital falls under themes: XIII. Science, F. Medicine; XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements, K. Emergency Aid and Health Care, B. Temperance and Prohibition.

Although scholarly work in the field of Native American women's history is limited, there is no doubt of the national significance of Susan LaFlesche Picotte. Essays on Susan Picotte appear in two of the most recent scholarly books on nineteenth century Native American leaders. In *Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Studies of North American Frontiers*, there are thirteen essays of which only three focus on women. Picotte, a leader in health care, is one of these three. In the second book, *Indian Lives: Essays on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Native American Leaders*, eight leaders are discussed, mostly warriors and chiefs. Of the two women included, Picotte is once again the only leader in health care and the only professional woman. Picotte's national leadership is also reflected in early twentieth century medical journals and reform newspapers. She is featured prominently in the *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association*, which was the only national professional publication for women physicians, who were at that time excluded from the American Medical Association. Furthermore, in discussing Susan Picotte's national significance with Omaha tribe historian Dennis Hastings, he noted that Picotte is important not only for her past contributions to Native Americans but also as a role model for today's young Native American women.¹ Several notable books for children and young adults such as Jeri Ferris' *Native American Doctor* and Marion Brown's *Homeward the Arrow's Flight* are now in many public libraries and used in middle and high schools. Hastings applauded these books as a significant way for young people to learn about Picotte's life and career. In addition, an Educational Television production on Picotte's life is currently in the works.

There are two extant buildings associated with Susan LaFlesche Picotte. Those most familiar with Picotte, such as tribe

¹ Dennis Hastings, Omaha Tribe Historian, telephone conversation with Page Putnam Miller, NCC, May 15, 1992.

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historian Dennis Hastings, agree that the former Walthill Hospital is the most appropriate for NHL designation. The home that Picotte built in Walthill in 1906 is still standing. Although she lived there for the last nine years of her life, it does not represent her career as well as the hospital building. Susan Picotte's career was medicine, and it was through her practice among the Omaha tribe that she had the most impact. The Walthill hospital was the culmination of this productive medical career, and was the first hospital for an Indian reservation that was not funded by government money.² It was built with money raised by Picotte and served as a hospital facility for those individuals who otherwise would not receive adequate medical care. Picotte's earlier places of work, the Government School and Dispensary Building on the Omaha reservation are no longer standing. In addition, her home in Bancroft, Nebraska, has also been demolished. Thus, although Picotte's actual association with the hospital was brief--she died two years after it opened--it accurately reflects her entire life and is the most appropriate site for designation.

Susan LaFlesche Picotte was born on June 17, 1865 on part of the Omaha reservation which is now Thurston County in northern Nebraska. She was the youngest child of Chief Joseph LaFlesche (Iron Eye) and his wife Mary (One Woman). Her father was the last recognized chief of his tribe, and advocated Indian integration with white society. He raised all of his children to be independent; he saw to it that they were educated and able to adapt to what he viewed as a changing Indian society. As a result, Susan first attended the mission and government schools on the reservation, and then the Elizabeth Institute for Young Ladies in New Jersey, following which she enrolled in the Hampton Institute in Virginia. She graduated in May 1886 as salutatorian and she also received a prize for high academic achievement.³

Susan was unique in her decision to attend medical school. At this time, formal medical training was rare for women and unheard of for Indian women. Native Americans who practiced healing did so as shamans and medicine women, where preparation consisted of visions, trances and some specialized training. She enrolled in the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1887, her tuition financed by the Connecticut branch of the Woman's National Indian

² Dennis Hastings, Omaha Tribe Historian, telephone conversation with Page Putnam Miller, NCC, May 15, 1992.

³ There are several biographical works that discuss Susan LaFlesche Picotte's early years, including: Valerie Sherer Mathes, "Susan LaFlesche Picotte: Nebraska's Indian Physician, 1865-1915," *Nebraska History* 63 (Winter 1982): 502-30; Edward T. James and Janet Wilson James, eds., *Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary* vol. 3 (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971), 65-66; Jeri Ferris, *Native American Doctor: The Story of Susan LaFlesche Picotte* (Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, Inc., 1991); Marion Marsh Brown, *Homeward the Arrow's Flight* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980).

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Association. Her education consisted of courses such as chemistry, anatomy, physiology and histology, as well as a weekly clinic at the Woman's Hospital. In addition to her academic work Susan LaFlesche attended literary and musical events and visited the Philadelphia Academy of Art, thus gaining a cultural education as well. She also attended various missionary meetings and visited Indian children at the Educational Home and the Lincoln Institute, both located in Philadelphia, and she spoke several times for the Connecticut Indian Association.⁴

Most holidays and vacations, Susan LaFlesche stayed in Philadelphia or visited her sister who was enrolled in the Hampton Institute. When visiting the Hampton Institute, she served as a role model to other Native American students. She returned to her home on the reservation for the summer after her second year of medical school. The Omaha were experiencing a severe measles outbreak, and she helped to treat those who were ill. Since families lived far away from each other, she could often visit only ten patients per day. Through the course of these visits, Susan LaFlesche saw that many of the Omaha needed to be educated regarding cleanliness and health care.⁵

In 1889, Susan LaFlesche graduated from the three-year medical program, completing her work in only two years, and was at the top of her class. She then completed a four month internship at the Woman's Hospital in Philadelphia before returning home permanently. Despite the years she spent in the East, she never abandoned her heritage, and always thought of herself as an Omaha Indian. She stayed close to her family while she was away by writing frequent letters and often giving medical advice. She urged them when ill to seek trained medical help, and to maintain standards of cleanliness and sanitation.⁶

In 1890 Susan LaFlesche accepted a position as physician at the government boarding school on the Omaha reservation. In addition to treating children, she was also permitted to treat the adults of the tribe. She assisted the existing physician on the reservation, caring for many of his patients since she spoke the local Indian language. When the senior physician left, she assumed the health care for all 1,244 tribal members. In her office, located near the school, she served not only as the tribe's doctor, but also as teacher, social worker, advisor and interpreter for Christian church services.⁷

⁴ Mathes, "Nebraska's Indian Physician," 507-10.

⁵ Mathes, "Nebraska's Indian Physician," 511.

⁶ Jerry E. Clark and Martha Ellen Webb, "Susette and Susan LaFlesche: Reformer and Missionary," in *Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Studies of North American Frontiers*, ed. James A. Clifton (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1989), 150.

⁷ Mathes, "Nebraska's Indian Physician," 513.

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Susan LaFlesche changed the standard of medical care for the Omaha on the reservation. As the only physician, she often made house calls despite the fact that her patients were scattered over a wide area. The roads to reach these patients were poor, and she often walked to see them if she could not hire a team of horses. During the winter of 1890, there was an influenza epidemic that accounted for much of her work, but by the summer of 1891 her patient load seemed to lessen. Susan LaFlesche treated ailments such as dysentery, cholera, and conjunctivitis, but also instructed her patients on using separate basins and towels from the rest of the family to help prevent the spread of illness. For poor families, she provided food and other necessary items, often cooking meals for the entire family of her patient. She was dedicated to the welfare of the entire tribe, and often stayed overnight at the home of a critically ill patient. Despite the hard work, Susan LaFlesche felt that her experiences as the tribal physician were positive. She wrote, "I am enjoying my work exceedingly, and feel more interest in and more attached to my people than ever before. I have not a single thing to complain of, for . . . my life here is a very happy one."⁸

Susan LaFlesche was actively involved in the Nebraska medical community; she was a member of the Nebraska State Medical Society, and helped to found the Thurston County Medical Association. She served on the Board of Health in Walthill where she organized several public health programs including the installation of drinking fountains in public schools, physical exams for school children and health inspections of other Walthill places.⁹

She never wrote about the effect her work was having on her own health but she began to suffer from illness. By 1893 she was forced to retire as government physician. The following summer, to the surprise of her friends and family, she announced her upcoming marriage to Henry Picotte, a Sioux. The Picottes had two sons, and the family lived part-time in the town of Bancroft. There, Susan practiced medicine treating both Indians and whites. She earned the respect of the other physicians and was often called upon to assist them with difficult cases. But once again in the summer of 1897 Susan Picotte became very ill.¹⁰

Despite her poor health, Susan Picotte had always been an active speaker. She lectured at Hampton Institute, delivering the commencement address in 1892, and she also became an active temperance speaker. Throughout her practice Picotte observed the effects of excessive alcohol on the Indian population. She observed that "men and women died from alcoholism, and little children reeled in the streets of the town. Drunken brawls in

⁸ As quoted in Mathes, "Nebraska's Indian Physician," 515.

⁹ Clark and Webb, 155.

¹⁰ Mathes, "Nebraska's Indian Physician," 516-19.

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which men were killed occurred and no person's life was considered safe."¹¹ Her father had successfully instituted a program that limited alcohol on the reservation but following his death in 1888, liquor again flowed freely. In addition, Susan's own husband had begun to drink heavily. Thus she actively spoke out against alcohol abuse. Picotte lobbied successfully against alcohol use. Due to her efforts the Secretary of Interior ruled that liquor could not be sold in newly established towns on the Omaha reservation.¹²

In 1905 Susan Picotte's husband died of illnesses due to his drinking. She cared for her invalid mother and her two sons while continuing her campaign against alcohol abuse. That same year she was appointed as a missionary for her tribe by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions. Appointing a woman as a Presbyterian missionary had never been done before; Susan Picotte was the first. In 1906, along with her sister, Picotte purchased a lot in the new town of Walthill, Nebraska. There she built a new house. In Walthill, she continued her community activities and also taught Sunday School.¹³

In addition to temperance, Susan Picotte was actively involved in other issues of concern to her tribe. When the Omaha were to obtain the title to their land according to the Omaha Allotment Act of 1882, the Federal government arbitrarily extended the period that the land was held in trust for the Omaha from 25 to 35 years. The government reasoning for the extension of the trust was that the Omaha were uneducated and thus in need of protection. Susan Picotte spoke out against this policy, and defended the literacy and self-reliance of her people.¹⁴

Susan Picotte's lifelong dream of a hospital to care for her people became a reality in January 1913. The \$8,000 project had been funded from a variety of sources; The Home Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church and the Society of Friends as well as local individuals provided the money to build the hospital. In 1910 there was a benefit concert held at Carnegie Hall in New York City. Her sister donated a plot of land, and the hospital was equipped through other donations. The ground breaking for the new hospital was in 1912 and it opened just one year later. The building contained two general wards, five private wards, a maternity ward, operating room, kitchen, reception room and two

¹¹ As quoted in Mathes, "Nebraska's Indian Physician," 519.

¹² Valerie Sherer Mathes, "Native American Women in Medicine and the Military," *Journal of the West* 21 (April 1982), 43.

¹³ Mathes, "Nebraska's Indian Physician," 521.

¹⁴ Valerie Sherer Mathes, "Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte: The Reformed and the Reformer," in *Indian Lives: Essays on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Native American Leaders*, L.G. Moses and Raymond Wilson, ed., (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 78.

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bathrooms, and served both Indian and white patients. In 1915, 448 patients were admitted--126 of them Indian.¹⁵

Susan Picotte died on September 18, 1915. The *Walthill Times* paid tribute to her by printing the following:

Hardly an Omaha Indian is living who has not been treated and helped by her, and hundreds of white people and Indians owe their lives to her treatment, care, nursing.... We are confronted here with a character rising to greatness, and to great deeds out of conditions which seldom produce more than mediocre men and women, achieving great and beneficial ends over obstacles almost insurmountable.¹⁶

¹⁵ Dennis Hastings to Page Putnam Miller; Clark and Webb, 150-51; Mathes, "Nebraska's Indian Physician," 524.

¹⁶ As quoted in Mathes, "Nebraska's Indian Physician," 525.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Mathes, Valerie Sherer. "Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte: The Reformed and the Reformer." In *Indian Lives: Essays on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Native American Leaders*, ed. L.G. Moses and Raymond Wilson, 61-90. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ___ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register (part of historic District)
- ___ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- ___ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- ___ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # _____
- ___ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- ___ Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- ___ Local Government
- ___ University
- ___ Other (Specify Repository):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Less than one (1) acre

UTM References: Zone Northing Easting

 A 14 4669440 707000

Verbal Boundary Description:

 The property is located on lot 3, block 27, in the town of
 Walthill, Thurston County, Nebraska.

Boundary Justification:

 The boundary includes the town lot which has historically been
 associated with the property.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Jill S. Mesirow, Dr. Page Putnam Miller
Org.: National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History
Street/#: 400 A Street, SE
City/Town: Washington
State: District of Columbia
ZIP: 20003
Telephone: (202) 544-2422
Date: June 29, 1992

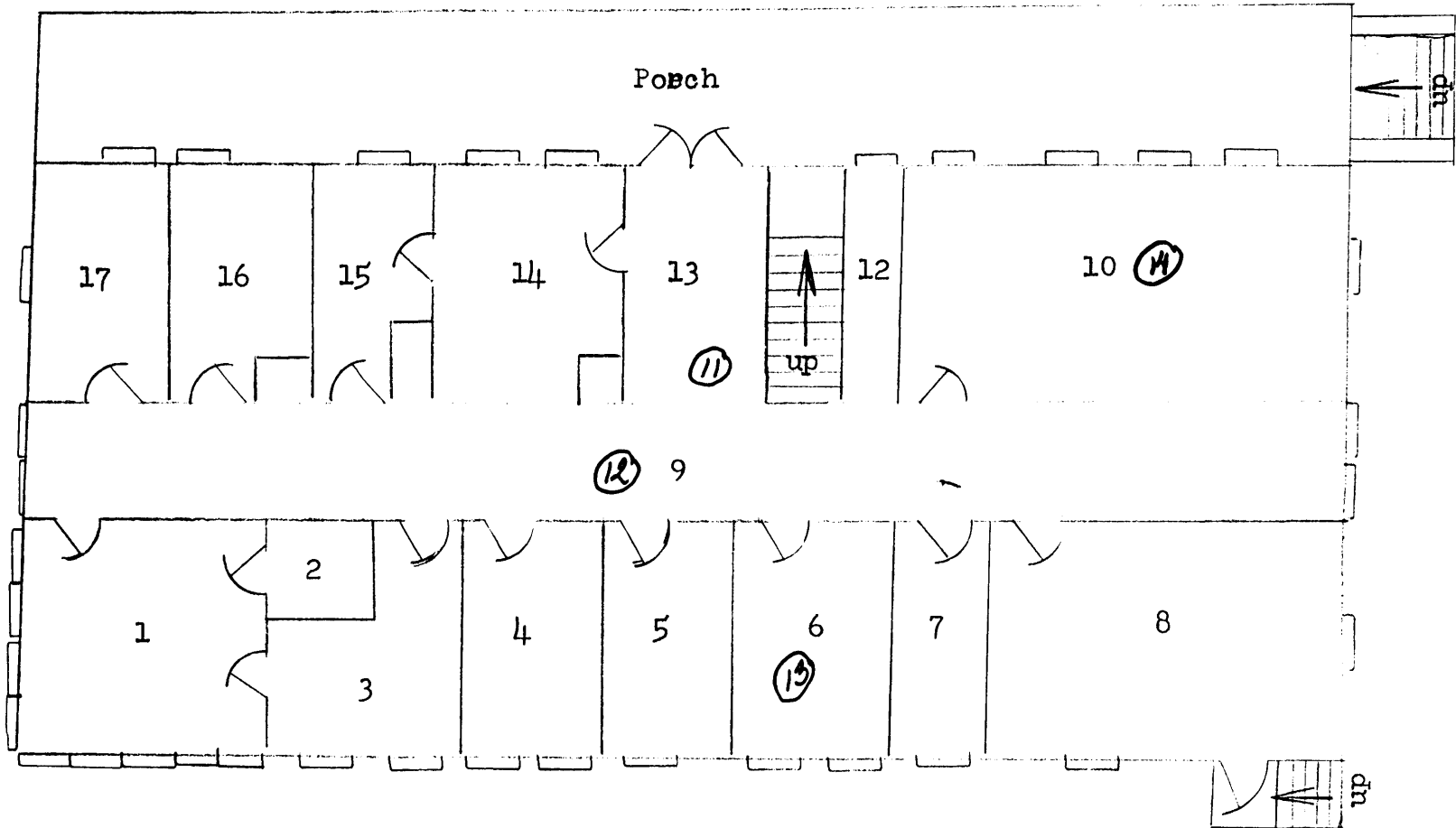
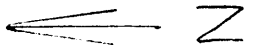
Susan LaFlesche Picotte Center - June 12, 1992

Room No.	Original Use	Current Use
Main (first) floor		
1	Surgery	Red Feather Family Services (tenant)
2	closet	closet (tenant)
3	Surgery prep	office (tenant)
4	Patient room	counseling room (tenant)
5	Patient room	not used
6	Maternity ?	patient room display
7	Ward bathroom	bathroom
8	Ward	LaFlesche family historical display
9	Hallway	hallway and local history display
10	Ward	Susan Picotte historical display
11	Ward bathroom	part of Picotte display
12	closet	furnace room
13	entry/reception	entry
14	office	gift shop
15	dispensary ?	gift shop inventory
16	patient room	historical document storage
17	patient room	Hethuska Society room
Basement		
18	?	not used
19	kitchen	not used
20	hall	hall
21	pantry	not used
22	?	meeting room
23	?	storage
24	bathroom	bathroom
25	hall	hall
26	dining room?	tenant youth activities
27	laundry room	not used
28	boiler room	not used
29	?	not used
30	closet	storage
31	coal bin?	not used
2nd floor (dormer)		
32	hall	hall
33	sleeping room	not used
34	bathroom	bathroom
35	sleeping room	not used
36	sleeping room	not used
37	linen closet	not used

June 12, 1992

Susan LaFlesche Picotte Center
First floor

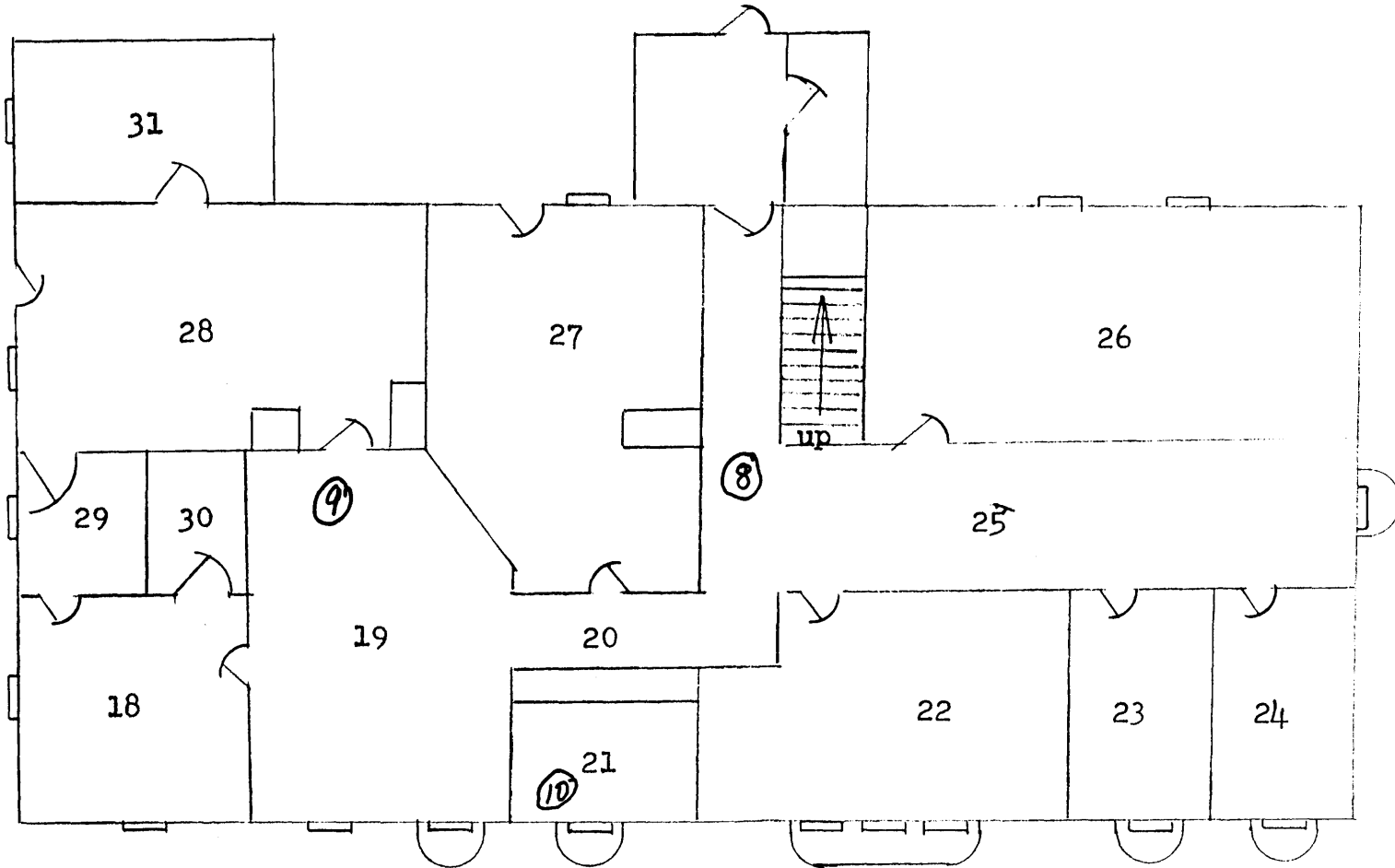
1"=10'



June 12, 1992

Susan LaFlesche Picotte Center
Basement

1"=10'



June 12, 1992

Susan LaFlesche Picotte Center
2nd floor dormer

1"=10'

