

Jane Elizabeth Van Meter Waldron, a South Dakota pioneer, teacher, and civil servant, fought for the rights of both mixed-blood persons and women in turn-of-the century South Dakota.

Waldron was born 21 September 1861 in Vermillion, Dakota Territory, to Arthur Charles Van Meter, a former scout for General William S. Harney, and Mary Aungie Van Meter, a mixed-blood Dakota woman whose ancestors included the prominent fur traders Robert Dickson and Augustine Aungie.

Waldron was raised in her mother's culture, living in a tipi and speaking the Dakota language. At the age of eight, she began attending the first school established in present-day South Dakota. She went to work as a teenager, setting type for the *Vermillion Plain Talk* with her friend, Alice Bower, who went on to own and edit the *Rapid City Daily Journal*. Waldron's interest in education led her in 1880 to Ripon, Wisconsin, where she attended college.

In 1883, the Van Meter family moved to Stanley County, and Jane began teaching in Fort Pierre. She later transferred to a government school on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation, where her command of English and Dakota made her an effective teacher.

On 30 June 1885, she married Charles Waldron, and the couple settled north of Fort Pierre on land the United States government had allotted her under the Sioux Agreement of 1889. Black Tomahawk, a full-blood Dakota Indian, claimed a portion of the same land, alleging that Waldron's mixed heritage negated her right to it. In response, she sued. The decision handed down from federal court in 1905 affirmed Waldron's right to the land and established persons of mixed ancestry as legitimate and equal tribal members.

Waldron was active in community and state affairs, holding appointments to the State Board of Charities and Corrections from 1897 to 1905. She also served for many years as the state corresponding secretary for the South Dakota Equal Suffrage Association.

In 1912, Waldron moved with her husband to a farm in Canada. After his death in 1935, she reestablished her United States citizenship and returned frequently to visit family and friends. Waldron died at her sons' ranch in Saskatchewan, Canada, on 2 January 1941.

by B. Katie O'Mara

Dakota Images



Jane Van Meter Waldron

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