

## **Gambler Tanner “Odit-ta-gay-win-nin<sup>1</sup> or Atakawinin”. (d. 1916)**

Gambler Tanner (*Odit-ta-gay-win-nin, Atakawinin or Otahaoman*): Gambler Tanner was the eldest son of Chief Picheito Tanner. He was probably born in the Red Lake area of Minnesota since the Red Lake Band moved freely back and forth across the international border. Gambler was the grandson of John “Falcon” Tanner (The White Indian) and his Saulteaux wife, Mis-kwa-bun-a-kwa “Red Sky of the Morning.” Like his cousin (also John Tanner, son of Edwin James Tanner),

Gambler had several wives and sired at least two sons and nine daughters. He died on January 22, 1916, on Keeseekoowenin Reserve.

Gambler had served in the American Army during the Civil War. Following the war he became a trader in the Qu’Appelle Lakes region. He rarely traded at Fort Ellice, preferring to do business further north at Fort Pelly. In earlier years Gambler, along with his father Picheito, had been deeply involved in the freighting business between St. Paul, Minnesota and Winnipeg. Archdeacon Cochran states that when he arrived in Portage la Prairie in the early 1850s both Picheito (Image) and Atakawinin (Gambler) were living there as permanent residents (Garrioch, 1923: 94).

Gambler was one of the Plains-Ojibway’s most noted warriors against the Sioux at Portage la Prairie during the 1860s. during the 1870s he lead a band of at least 30 families including his siblings, Joseph (*Kasesaway*, Bright Star), Thomas John (*Cheton*), Edward (*Ahjjukoonce*), Bazel, and Alexander. Little more is known of him until he appeared as spokesman for the Saulteaux at the Treaty Four negotiations.

### **Indian Chief Lived Century “The Gambler,” Dead at Elphinstone, Had Been a Great Fighting Brave**

Elphinstone, Man., Jan. 26: On Saturday, January 22, the death took place on the neighbouring Indian reserve of one of the old Indians of the type now rapidly disappearing. This was “The Gambler,” ex-chief of the Gambler band, now dispersed. It is impossible to estimate the age at which the old man passed away, as the Indians of the early days kept no records.

The friends of the deceased state that he must have been at least 100 years old. Sixty years ago he was an active warrior, fighting the Sioux whenever circumstances seemed to demand it. Nothing delighted him more during the last years of his life than to relate his experiences to young Indians of the present generation. Being too feeble to take any active part in life for several years, he spent his time sitting or reclining upon his cot smoking his pipe and living in the past and dreaming of the “good old days.”

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<sup>1</sup> The late Hugh McKay, former Chief at Waywayseecappo, says that the correct spelling of Gambler's Indian name is *Odit-ta-gay-win-nin*.

The fighting spirit always ruled his life, and when Lieut.-Gov. Morris was negotiating the Qu'Appelle Treaty in September, 1874, "The Gambler" balked proceedings somewhat by demanding that the Hudson's Bay Co. be tied down to trading at their posts and nowhere else. He declared that the company had robbed the Indians. When asked by Lieut.-Gov. Morris what they had been robbed of he replied: "The earth, grass, stones, and all which I see with my eyes." He wished to have the company bound down by written agreement before he would consider making a treaty with the queen.

"The Gambler" leaves a brother remaining on the reserve at Rosburn and another living upon a remnant of the old Gambler reserve near Binscarth, Man. He leaves two married daughters whose homes are on the Okanse reserve at this point. His body has been laid to rest at Clear Lake, about 25 miles northeast of here, where the Indians possess some land used as a fishing station.

In the accompanying photo the old veteran is partially dressed in his war regalia. The thunder birds are hung across his body to inspire him and strike terror into the foe.



**THE GAMBLER.**  
Aged Indian Chieftain Who Has  
Just Died.

#### **Negotiated Treaty 4**

In the 1870s he was one of the most vigorous opponents of the Hudson's Bay Company land holdings and had a great influence in the making of Treaty Four. This antipathy for the HBC was likely inherited from his (step) great-grandmother Netnokwa

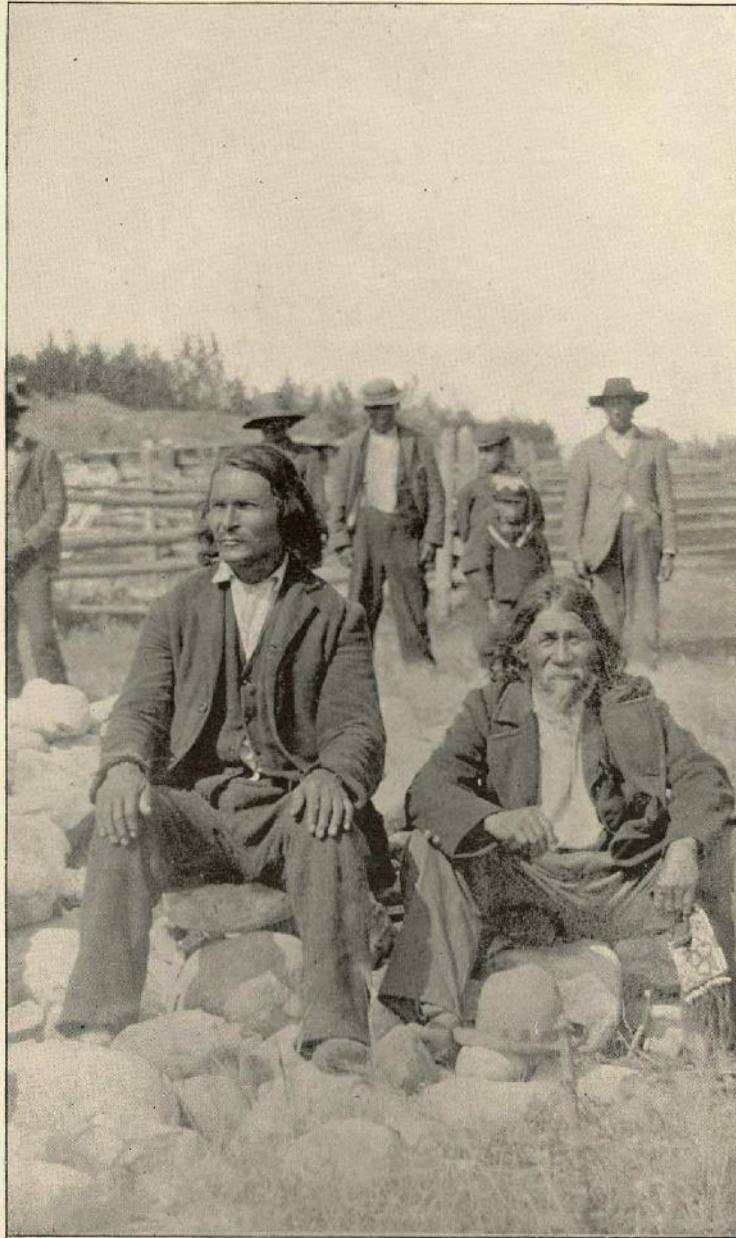
(an Odawa) who was affiliated with the North West Company. He represented the Qu'Appelle Lakes Saulteaux in this negotiation.

Gambler was originally slated to live on the Waywayseecappo reserve at Lizard Point, however, in 1881, a dispute arose between Chief Waywayseecappo and his headman, Gambler. By way of settlement, a portion of the Lizard Point Reserve (30 square miles) was allocated for Gambler and his followers. They were given this appropriation at Silver Creek, situated approximately five and one half miles southwest of the present day Binscarth Manitoba.

Clerk of the Privy Council, J.D. Cote approved this allocation by Chief Waywayseecappo on April 27, 1881. This was recorded on July 27, 1881 and confirmation of Gambler's reserve became effective on May 17, 1889, eight years later. Two years previous to this confirmation, Longclaws, Gambler and their followers decided to return to Lizard Point, claiming that there was insufficient wood and water available at Silver Creek. In 1887, Gambler and his followers returned to Lizard Point, giving as a reason, the shortage of hay land at Silver Creek. There was also some indication the land survey at Silver Creek did not place the reserve exactly where Gambler had originally requested it. The resultant location excluded the wood and hay areas across the river. This was not a problem in the early 1880s, as there were few other people in the region and the group continued to make use of this land and its resources in spite of its location off-reserve. However, as settlement and immigration increased Gambler recognized that these practices could not continue. He made several efforts in 1885 and 1886 to make a land exchange for land with better hay and wood resources but was rebuffed or ignored by officials. An additional reason to move was that the Lizard Point Reserve was much closer to their traditional hunting and trapping areas. Between 1880 and 1890 some of Gamblers followers joined the Indians who lived at Valley River, leaving only members of the Tanner family living at Silver Creek. The census of 1901 shows that by that year, only 14 people remained at Gambler Reserve:

John Tanner (age 40), wife Marie (35), 5 sons and 2 daughters;  
Ah-pa-tis' widow (age 69);  
John Cook (Pa-pa-mas, age 21);  
Mrs. Swan (age 40); and  
Nazakeeass (Jim Tanner, age 24) and his wife.

By 1905, only John Tanner and his son Joseph Tanner and their families remained at Gambler. Note that of Gambler's brothers, Joseph Tanner (Kakashaway, Bright Star) died at Waywayseecappo in 1893. His widow then lived at various locations in the North West Territories. His daughters took Métis scrip one year after his death (1894). Bazil Tanner later transferred to the Cowessess Band. Alexander Tanner (Pawanaway-askung), Tommy Tanner (Kakeewaycomo) and John *Cheton* Tanner [d. 1937], and his wife May [d. 1922] stayed at Silver Creek, but in 1894 they took Métis scrip and were discharged from Treaty status. Other relatives such as Ambroise Fisher also took scrip as Métis, in 1900 Ambroise was granted 80 acres. Because of legal difficulties, Alexander later fled to North Dakota.



LOUIS O'SOUP AND THE "GAMBLER," TWO WELL-KNOWN INDIANS OF THE NORTHWEST

Louis O'Soup and Gambler (from Canada Sessional Papers)

Gambler had two other brothers, Joseph (*Kasesaway* or Bright Star) and Edward (or *Ahjjukoonce*). *Kasesaway* (*Kissoway*) was a trader and freighter on the St. Paul-Pembina-Winnipeg route; he was known to have as many as 200 Red River carts on the road at one time. He married Chief Yellow Quill's sister and was a member of Yellow Quill's band. He died in 1897 at the Crooked Lake Reserve. *Ahjjukoonce* (Edward) never

lived on Gambler's reserve. He likely lived at White Earth reserve in Minnesota, having moved there in the 1870s.

From 1874 until 1893 Gambler was Chief at Silver Creek. With his wife *Kaytepaytonook* and his family, he lived in a converted granary which, according to the Indian agent, was, "partitioned, whitewashed, a good comfortable dwelling." He owned fine horses, cattle, geese and pigs. He had fifty acres broken and had a large stable and other buildings. For pets he had a moose calf and later a young adult moose. He and a neighbour purchased a mower and a rake together to further their farming activities. In his later years living on the Silver Creek Reserve, Gambler provided a home for his aunt Poopie, widow of the Reverend James Tanner. She left his care in 1910 to live with her son John and his wife at Kinosota, Manitoba.

Gambler moved to Waywayseecappo's Reserve in 1887 and then moved on to Pine Creek in 1897. Eventually, Gambler withdrew from the Birtle Agency on June 29, 1898. Edmund Morris records in his diary (August 30, 1908: 90) "The Gambler lives at Shoal Lake between Lizard Point and Minnedosa." According to the recollection of others he moved to Valley River and then to Pine Creek, near Camperville Manitoba, where he became a member of that band. He spent the last years of his life at Big Stone in the Riding Mountain. He died Jan. 22, 1916 at Elphinstone while living with his daughter at Keeseekowenin. He was buried on Indian land at Clear Lake (Manitoba Free Press, Jan. 29, 1916).



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Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell  
Coordinator of Métis Heritage and History Research  
Louis Riel Institute