

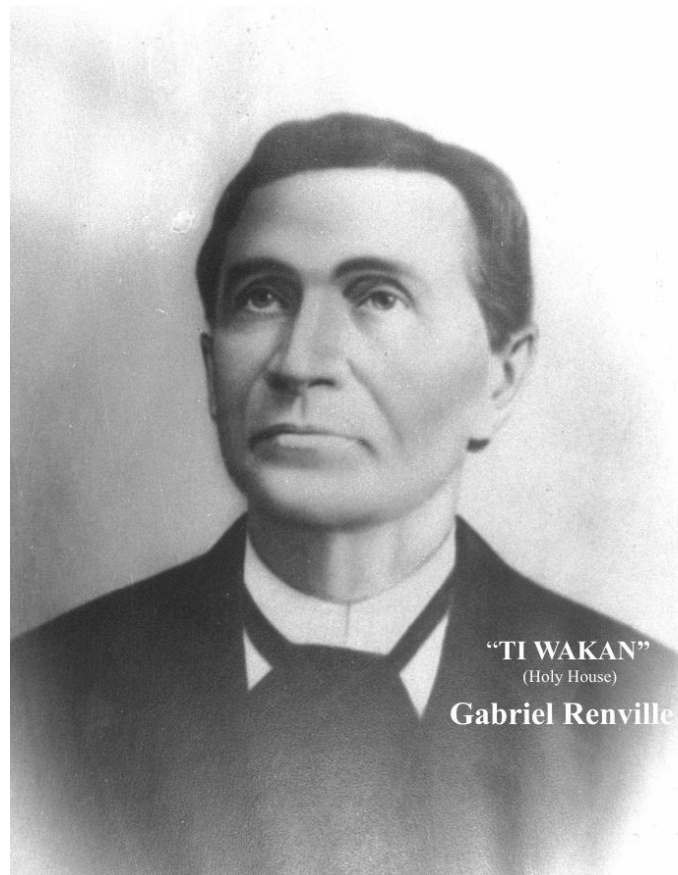
## **Gabriel “Tiwakan” Renville. (1824-1892)**

Gabriel Renville was born at Sweet Corn village on the west shore of Big Stone Lake in April, 1825. He was the son of Victor “Ohiya” Renville and Winona Crawford. His father was the son of Joseph and Miniyehe Renville and his mother was the daughter of Tatanka-mani (Walking Buffalo). He spoke French and the Dakota language of which he was a recognized expert. He made several trips to Washington to assist the Dakota in their negotiations. He acted as a guide for General Sibley on his expedition to Devil’s Lake and became a chief of the Sisseton Sioux.

### **Obituary:**

September 2nd, 1892

The death of this noted Indian Chief – the tried and faithful friend of the white man, which occurred at my residence at Browns Valley, Aug. 26<sup>th</sup>, 1892 is an event which should elicit a far more elaborate notice of his life and character than I now care attempt to present.



A faithful memoir would be little less than a complete history of governmental intercourse with the Sisseton Sioux, from a period when this part of the Northwest was comparatively unexplored – when the country between the Mississippi River on the eastward to Missouri on the west was the home and tramping ground of the nomadic Sioux – The Red Men of America, and the wild buffalo – When his people wore blanket, dressed in skins, lived in tip's and followed the chase as a means of subsistence and clothing – up to the present time, for Gabriel Renville, whose Indian name was TiWakan by which he was known far and near throughout the seventy odd thousand Sioux speaking people has figured more or less conspicuously for a period exceeding the life time of a generation affecting both the Indians and whites of this region. The deceased was born on the western shores of Big Stone Lake, at the big bend in March or April of the year 1825 and therefore was well on to three score and ten at the time of his death.

He was the son of Victor Renville and a nephew of Joseph Renville who figured so prominently in the early days of Minnesota and for whom the county of Renville this state was named.

When Gabriel was about seven years old his father, who was on the warpath against the Chippewa's was killed and scalped by those hereditary enemies of the Sioux near the present city of Sauk Centre. Soon after this event my father took Gabriel to Chicago for the purpose of educating him and left him there apparently contented, but he soon tired of the restraints of school and "ran away."

It was here he developed the daring spirit for which he was noted in his after life, for as young as he was he alone and with nothing but roots and herbs to live on, he traveled across the trackless prairies of western Illinois and through dense forests of Wisconsin back to his people in Minnesota a distance of not less than five hundred miles. At the age of about twenty-two he was engaged in the fur trade for General Sibley, Commodore Kittson, and Major Brown and was located on the James River near the present city of Aberdeen. In 1858 and 1859 he was government farmer for the Indians on Big Stone Lake and Lake Traverse. During the latter years he had several hundred acres of ground broken for the Indians on what is now the Beck farm just north of this city.

At the time of the outbreak of 1862 Gabriel was a prosperous farmer near Yellow Medicine Agency a few miles below the present city of Granite Falls. He has ever been a true friend of the whites and an earnest and anxious laborer in the cause of civilization amongst his people and owing to these facts his property worth several thousand dollars accumulated by industry was destroyed by hostile bands.

From the first indication of hostility in 1862 he with his step-father Joseph Akipa Renville who died about a year ago and other relatives among whom were John B. and Michael Renville and Major Amos and Two Stars acted boldly on the side of the whites and did not cease their exertions to save the whites and punish the hostile Indians until peace had been declared. Those organized for an armed resistance to the depredations of

the hostile bands were largely and almost entirely of the relatives of the chief. During the month of May 1865 thirteen Indians who were on their way to depredate upon the whites were killed at different times by these friendly Indians which acting as scouts for the protection of the frontier under the immediate command of Gabriel Renville, their chief. Through influence of him self and relatives the hostile Indians were prevented from killing the white captives in their possessions and it was their relatives with whom Gen. Sibley cooperated in rescuing and releasing those captives to their friends. It was on account of Gabriel Renville's constant and unsevering friendship for the whites with every efficient and he rendered Gen. Sibley and his peculiar ----(Unable to decipher) otherwise for the position that he was made chief of the Sisseton's. He was first appointed by Gen. Sibley in 1862, elected by the Indians in 1864 and reelected in 1866. He was recognized by the government the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1867 and elected for life by the Indians in January 1864. Gabriel Renville was a great hunter. He was in his element when on a buffalo chase. He always rode the fastest horse and made the best run. I have seen him on a single chase shoot and kill sixteen buffaloes in sixteen shots in less than sixteen minutes. Armed with a Henry Rifle – now known as the Winchester – and mounted on a swift horse, he took after a drove of about 500 buffaloes and shot as rapidly as he could pull the trigger and at every shot brought down a buffalo and they were choice animals, too, good, fat young cows. Buffalo robes at that time were worth from twelve to fourteen dollars apiece this run netted Gabriel about \$200. The newspapers of the day were filled with stories of his wonderful feat and it was seriously contented that Gabriel Renville made the best run on records. He was also expert with the bow and arrow. I have seen him kill two buffaloes with one arrow at one shot. One of the buffaloes was a calf running beside it mother. The arrow pierced the cow and struck the calf both of which dropped dead. I now have the steel point of that arrow in my possession.

Gabriel Renville never learned to speak English but he spoke good sound sense in Sioux. Prof. Painter of the Indian Rights Association in Washington said this of Renville, "He is a fine specimen of the noble Red Man' stately, dignified, reticent, intelligent, straight forward and manly in his bearing impressing those about him as possessing great reserve force which could easily be called into action if his good sense and perfect mastery of himself consented."

In my interview with him I was impressed always and increasingly so by the quiet dignity and greatness of the man. He told the story of his great voyage with unruffled composure and dispassionate calmness which appeared to be indifference but there was then flashes of lighting in his eye which revealed reserves of great strength and feeling which were under control of a master mind and will – but this rambling sketch already too long I fear must be brought to a close and in doing so I desire to say that the family and relatives of the late chief wish through me to express their gratitude too the members of the common council of Browns Valley and to his many friends who were present and assisted at the funeral and also to sincerely thank those who presented floral emblems and decorated the casket so beautifully for the last rites.

S. J. Brown

(Reproduced by Grady Renville from a document obtained from the Minnesota Historical Society)



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