

## **Pitikwahanapiwiyin (c1842-1886): Biography**

Pitikwahanapiwiyin, or Poundmaker, was, like Mistahimaskwa (Big Bear), convicted of Treason-Felony for his role in the 1885 Resistance. Once his band became involved in the Resistance, Pitikwahanapiwiyin, being a peace chief, did everything he could to forestall violence and bloodshed but, like Mistahimaskwa, he too was overruled by his warriors. Also, like Mistahimaskwa, Pitikwahanapiwiyin died a broken man after his short period of imprisonment following the 1885 Resistance. Pitikwahanapiwiyin's reputation has been rehabilitated due in large measure to the Oral Tradition and a reassessment of his role in history. Rather than being a rebel, Pitikwahanapiwiyin is now viewed as a great orator and a skillful leader who guided his people during the transition following the conclusion of the bison hunts, the treaty process and the 1885 Resistance.

Pitikwahanapiwiyin was born around 1842 in what is now the North Battleford region of central Saskatchewan. He was the son of Sikakwayan (Skunk Skin), a Nakota shaman and a mixed French-Canadian-Cree woman, the sister of the Cree chief Mistawasis (Big Child). Culturally, he was Cree despite his Nakota and French-Canadian ancestry. Pitikwahanapiwiyin and his siblings were orphaned at an early age and were raised in the Pihew-kamihkosit (Red Pheasant) band near present-day North Battleford. Losing their parents at an early age, forced the children to become self-reliant. The Oral Tradition maintains that Pitikwahanapiwiyin and his older brother Yellow Mud Blanket were good hunters. In fact, Pitikwahanapiwiyin received his name as "Poundmaker" because of his skill in hunting bison. He was

particularly adept in making buffalo pounds, which were used to trap herding bison.

Pitikwahanapiwiyyin first became noticed as a potential leader in the early 1870s. In 1873, he was adopted by Isapo-Muxika (Crowfoot) the principal chief of the Crees' traditional enemy, the Blackfoot. His Blackfoot name was Makoyi-koh-kin (Wolf Thin Legs). After returning from the Blackfoot as Isapo-Muxika's adopted son and bringing back numerous horses, Pitikwahanapiwiyyin's stature among the Cree rose considerably. In 1876, by the time the treaty process (Treaty 6) reached the First Nations of what is now central Saskatchewan, Pitikwahanapiwiyyin was considered a minor chief or councilor in Pihew-kamihkosit's band. However, he stood out and gained a following because he argued that before the First Nations should sign the treaty, the government should be prepared to teach them and future generations how to farm and provide for them in lean years in exchange for surrendering their lands. He felt that the treaty as it presently stood would not enable him to "...clothe my children and feed them as long as the sun shines and water runs".

Pitikwahanapiwiyyin also felt that the land belonged to the First Nations. He was not comfortable with the idea of having outsiders coming in and dividing land given to the First Nations by the Creator: "This is our land! It isn't a piece of pemmican to be cut off and given in little pieces back to us. It is ours and we will take what we want".

From 1876 to 1879, Pitikwahanapiwiyyin refused to sign Treaty 6. Instead his band continued to hunt the few remaining bison. In 1879, he took treaty and established a reserve at the confluence of the Battle River and Cut Knife Creek, 64 kilometres out of Battleford. Realizing that the Euro-Canadian and European immigration was to continue and that farming would become the mainstay of the region's economy, he told his people in 1881 that First Nations should live in peace with the newcomers:

*...The whites will fill the country...and they will dictate to us how they please. It is useless to dream that we can frighten them, that time has passed. Our only resource is our work, our industry, our farms.*

Between 1876 and the signing of Treaty 6 and the outbreak of the 1885 Resistance, Prairie First Nations suffered. Disease and famine were commonplace and the federal government was not providing enough food to feed First Nations people. This in particular angered Pitikwahanapiwiyyin's warriors. In the summer of 1884, Pitikwahanapiwiyyin's reserve hosted one thousand Cree for a sacred Thirst Dance. The Cree leadership was also present to discuss the government's failure to properly honour the spirit and intent of the treaties. First Nations historian Blair Stonechild maintains that the First Nations leadership was looking to build a political movement that would lobby more effectively for the government to more properly honour the treaty rather than look for a military solution.

During the dance, the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) attempted to arrest a First Nations warrior who earlier assaulted a non-Aboriginal farming instructor. Pitikwahanapiwiyyin offered himself to be taken in place of

the accused man, but relented and allowed the man to be taken away. However, he indicated his anger by shaking his war club at the police for violating this sacred ceremony.

Discontent continued to brew on Pitikwahanapiwiyin's reserve throughout 1884 and the winter of 1885. Angry young Cree, Nakota and even Métis joined his camp. The warriors' "Rattler Society" had taken control of Pitikwahanapiwiyin's band. First Nations Oral Tradition maintains that the Nakota, in particular, were bent on making war on the non-Aboriginal population and that they were goaded into doing so by Métis in the camp who wanted the First Nations to take up arms and join the Métis cause.

On March 26, 1885 news of the Métis' victory at Duck Lake over the N.W.M.P. and the Prince Albert Volunteers reached Pitikwahanapiwiyin's camp. The "Rattler Society" thought that it was an opportune time to attack. Pitikwahanapiwiyin thought otherwise. He proposed a march of sixty men, women and children on Fort Battleford to plead for food rations. Pitikwahanapiwiyin sent a note to the Battleford Indian Agent stating that his people had no interest in fighting, but wanted the rations to which they were entitled. On March 30, his delegation swelled and the freighted non-Aboriginal settlers of Battleford went into the fort for protection. Angry that they were not able to obtain rations and that the Indian Agent would not speak to them, the First Nations warriors looted the town.

The events of Battleford were viewed as a siege and Pitikwahanapiwiyin's band were portrayed as "savage rebels". On April 24, Lieutenant-Colonel William Dillon Otter lifted the "siege" of Battleford and

marched on Pitikwahanapiwiyyin's reserve. The end result was the Battle of Cut Knife Hill on May 2, 1885 in which five hundred Cree and some Nakota led by war chief Kah-Me-Yo-Ki-Sick-Way (Fine Day) defeated Otter's forces after seven hours of fighting. Pitikwahanapiwiyyin prevented a slaughter of the retreating soldiers by pleading with his warriors not to pursue them.

After the battle, several Métis tried to persuade Pitikwahanapiwiyyin to join Louis Riel. From May 3 until May 26, when he gave himself up, Pitikwahanapiwiyyin tried to go to Devil's Lake rather than commit to fighting. He also protected Euro-Canadian captives from his warriors, and on May 12, sent father Louis Cochin on a peace mission to General Middleton. Pitikwahanapiwiyyin was ready to make peace. Middleton wanted Pitikwahanapiwiyyin to surrender unconditionally, which Pitikwahanapiwiyyin and his followers did on May 26, 1885.

Pitikwahanapiwiyyin's trial for Treason-Felony occurred in Regina in July 1885. He told the jurors that he worked for peace and tried to prevent bloodshed. Pitikwahanapiwiyyin further indicated that he was not captured, but gave himself up peacefully. Nevertheless, he was convicted and sentenced to three year's imprisonment. The only concession granted, which was done not to anger Pitikwahanapiwiyyin's adoptive father Isapo-Muxika, was that his hair was not shaved like Mistahimaskwa's had been. Pitikwahanapiwiyyin left Manitoba's Stony Mountain Penitentiary after only a year after having his health and spirit broken. In 1886, at the age of 44, he died on Isapo-Muxika's reserve of a lung hemorrhage.

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