

The Rapelje family

Joris Janson de Rapelje, a Huguenot, who fled from Rochelle, France, at the time of the Huguenot Persecution is the common ancestor of all the Rapeljes in America. He landed in 1673 on the shores of the New World, and purchased a large tract of land from the Indians where the city of Brooklyn now stands. He was a leading citizen and held important offices during the Dutch Administration.

The Dutch Governor of the New Netherlands gave a solid silver spoon to Sarah Rapelje, she being the first white child born in the colony, A.D. 1635. Daniel Rapelje, his wife and three children and his brother Jeronimus migrated to Canada in 1807 and settled in the township of Woodhove.

in Simons County. They remained there eight years, and during that time four more children were added to Daniel's family. In May 1810,

Daniel Rapelje with his wife & children and his brother Jeronimus embarked in a boat at Port Dover, and sailed westward along the shores of Lake Erie to the mouth of Kettle Creek. There the wife & children of Daniel remained while he and Jeronimus cut out a new track to the 8th concession of Yarmouth, and built a log cabin on lot one, a little east of the spot where the M.C.R. bridge joins the top of the hill, and a little south of John Bobie's residence. David Secord and David Mandeville were the other settlers on Talbot Street in 1810.

The Talbot road was surveyed the year following by Col. Burwell, and shortly after a few more

settlers located on the lots which now comprise the city of St. Thomas. Daniel Rapelje, like many other pioneers in Elgin, had a hard task before him, but with a look forward to the happy times coming when he saw, as in a vision, a city rising around his lonely cabin, and he heard the voices of thousands of people mingling with the rippling of the creek that lay at his feet, he took heart, and plied his axe to the tall trees around his cabin, and started to build the city which he did not live to see, yet before he passed over the dark river he knew that his vision was true. For two years Daniel Rapelje toiled in peace and made good progress with his clearing, but war breaking out in 1814, the settlers in the Talbot district were called upon to take up arms, and assist in repelling

the invaders, Dan Rapelje and his
son George, who was 18 yrs of age,
joined Capt. Secord's company, and
were in the thick of the battle at
Lundy's Lane. They escaped unhurt
on that historic occasion and
returned home, but only to meet new
dangers and to suffer great losses.
About the first of October, 1814, a
detachment of American horse 1,000
strong, crossed the frontier at Detroit,
and came east by way of Morrisville
through the Longwoods, Westminster,
Oxford, and went as far east as
Oakland, where they burned Malcolm's
mill. They returned west through
Houghton, Bayham and Malabar,
to the Taabot road, thence on through
the southern townships to Detroit.
It seems that existing histories
do not give particulars of this road,
probably deeming it of insufficient
importance, but in a manuscript

which lies before us, written by one of the Rapelje family, it is described as "the worst scourge the Talbot settlers experienced." This manuscript further says, "the products of Daniel Rapelje's new farm had all been gathered in joy & gladness, that which had been waited for, toiled for in patience, had been reaped. This troop of horse, commanded by McArthur, arrived at Daniel Rapelje's farm a little before sunset, but found him away. He had seen the troop at a distance, at Malcolm's Mills, but it had reached Kettle Creek before him. Here the troops camped for the night in Rapelje's clearing, about where the city Hall & St. Andrew's Market are located. At dark, the whole place was in a glow of light. The soldiers piled the fencing in heaps and set them on fire. It was a wonderful sight for

the young to behold, the tops of the trees along the north bank of Kettle Creek, cast a gloomy shade over the place. In the morning that which had been given was all destroyed & gone, the wheat & hay scattered over the fields, and corn taken out of the crib, the sheep were all slaughtered." This is the account given by one of the children who was a witness of the event.

Col. Talbot, while at Kettle Creek a few days previous to the first raid, had left a box full of valuable papers at Rapelye's and he gave strict injunctions that they were to be kept safely at all hazards. The box was placed under the bed which would have been a secure place under ordinary circumstances, but not when a visit is made by a band of savage marauders. When the American forces appeared in Sigat

on the hill opposite the cabin. Mrs. Rapelje took the box and placed it on the ground between some beehives, which were located in the hemp "patch". She has protected the box and shortly after it was placed in Col. Talbot's hands with all the contents intact.

After peace was declared in 1815, the Talbot settlers took fresh courage, the Rapeljes and their neighbors went to work with a will to repair the great losses they had sustained. There was no mill in the settlement, the people were getting tired of pounding their wheat in hollow stumps and Daniel Rapelje having a water privilege on his lot they urged him to build a mill, promising to help him every way possible. He consented, and the word was passed around that on a certain day work would be

commenced on the dam, and the whole settlement turned out to help build it. It is said that even the women & children assisted, so great was the eagerness to obtain a mill in the settlement. The little log mill was erected at the foot of the hill, near the end of the cemetery and was the only mill for several years in this part of the country. Settlers from far and near came to it with their grists and though it was run to its utmost capacity, it could not meet the requirements of the people, and many had to continue pounding on stump or to use a hand power mill.

There was great difficulty in securing stone of the right quality for the mill but David Coughell found some which would answer the purpose, on the shores of Catfish Creek in Malheur and he brought them to St. Thomas with great difficulty over ox sled.

Rapelje gave him a twelve pail
iron Kettle for furnishing the Stones
and that Kettle has been in continued
use ever since in the Caughell family
It is now in possession of John C.
Caughell, Regent Street, where it is
used to make the annual supply of
Soft Soap.

In 1818 Dan Rapelje, in company
with Horace Foster, built the mill
on the site of the New England mills
now owned by Turwill Bros. which
is one of the few land marks
remaining to greet the old settler.
There is no city to-day but what
some reason can be found for its
existence. Undoubtedly Rapelje's
little log mill was the starting
point of the city of St. Thomas. It
brought settlers to-gether from all
parts of the district and at the
meeting place would be the most
desirable point for the merchants

and mechanics to settle. It became evident in 1817 that near the spot where Talbot road crosses Kettle Creek a village would spring up, so Daniel Rapelye laid out the front of his farm into town lots. He offered to give a good deed to anyone who would erect a good frame building thereon for any public or charitable purpose. He was anxious for the prosperity of the village which he had founded, and did his utmost to induce business men and others to establish themselves in it. Not so with some who owned land in the vicinity. The garrison, which was in St. Thomas and, which would have remained here under other circumstances, was removed to Loudon, which took the lead and grew to be the most important place in the western peninsula, while St. Thomas remained a sleepy little village for many years.