

The Grandparents I Never Knew

John D. Rapalje, Sr. (1874-1940), Nellie Seaman (1886-1935)

I don't know very much about Dad's mother and father—Dad never talked about them very much. They both died when Dad was a young man. However, don't mistake Dad's lack of conversation about his parents for lack of compassion for them. For his entire life, Dad kept a half dozen pair of socks that had been folded by his mother Nellie (Seaman) while he was in his first year of college. For all these years, our mother (Grandma Bunny!) was the only one who knew. Then, as late as last year (2020), I discovered a small plastic box that NO ONE ever told me about. This box contains what appears to be ALL of Dad's father's cancelled checks for his entire lifetime from 1915 to 1940. Can you believe my Dad kept socks folded by his mother and ALL his father's checks for his entire life, for 60 years, carrying them with him whenever he moved, from New York to New Jersey in 1940, to Chicago in 1946, and to Florida in 1949??

I remember one thing Dad told me about his father—Dad's father was broken-hearted about the loss of his beloved wife, Nellie, of appendicitis in 1935! His dad lived another 5 years, while Dad was in college in Philadelphia at Drexel Institute of Technology, now Drexel University. It appears that his dad never really recovered from her loss! Sadly, they were married for only 21 years before the death of his wife! His parents, Van and Gus Rapalje, were married for only 18 years before the death of his mother when he was only 17.

On one occasion I asked Dad's cousin Ed Powell if he had any memories of my grandmother Nellie (Seaman) Rapalje. Ed told me that he remembered her standing at the kitchen sink, washing dishes and singing "What a Friend We Have in Jesus!" No wonder I LOVE to wash dishes!

My grandfather John D. Rapalje, Sr., the eldest child of Nicholas Van Antwerp Rapalje, did appear in several U.S. Census Reports, beginning with the 1880 Report:

In the 1880 census, Nicholas was listed as the head of his own household at the age of 33, a farmer and gardener, with a 29 year old wife Ann Augusta "Raplye". Listed with them in this census are John D. "Raplye" [my grandfather], 5 year old son; Sarah A. "Raplye", 4 year old daughter; Wm. D. "Raplye", 3 year old son; Robert A. "Raplye", 1 year old son; Danl. L. "Raplye", 1 month old son [in reality, it was a daughter and her name was Cornelia K--we knew her as Aunt Neil]; and 4 farm laborers and servants ages 18-40.

The census of 1 June 1900 in Ward 2, City of New York, Borough of Queens, New York listed: Nicholas Rapalje, 53 year old widowed male head of household, a farmer; John D. Rapalje, 24 year old son, a farmer; Robert A.

Rapalje, 21 year old son, a farmer; Daniel Rapalje, 20 year old son, a farmer; Cornelia K. Rapalje, 18 year old daughter, a farmer; and Maria C. Rapalje, 16 year old daughter [we knew her as Aunt Rite], a farmer. So far, I have not been able to locate the 1910 Census Report, possibly because the family was moving from New York to Delaware!

Before the birth of my father, John D. Rapalje, Jr. in 1916, Nicholas had moved his family to Delaware, where he owned a farm with his son John D., Sr. near Harrington, DE. His other son Robert Augustus, who married Mary Quillen Dickerson, owned the adjoining farm. Nicholas passed away in 1917 and his son Robert in 1919. The 1920 Census shows these adjacent farms owned respectively by John D. Rapalje, Sr. and the Dickersons (parents of Robert's widow Mary).

According to my father John D. Rapalje, Jr., the Rapalje family moved back to Long Island in about 1921 and lived in Hicksville for about 5 years where Dad's father was hired as a foreman on a number of farms owned by Sam Burke. The family then moved back to Amityville, home of the Nellie Seaman's family. There, Dad's father was custodian for the Amityville Cemetery. Although I do not know the location or years of service, John Rapalje, Sr. was a member of the Firemen's Assn of the Town of Newtown. His badge #204 was passed down to me by his only child, my father John D. Rapalje, Jr.



[Return to homepage](#)

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