

Van and Gus Rapalje

Nicholas Van Antwerp Rapalje (1846-1917), Anna Augusta Boerem (1850-1892)

In the 1850 US Census Report, Nicholas Van Antwerp Rapalje, born in 1846, and his sister Cornelia, born in 1848, lived in a household in a mill on Flushing Creek with their parents and their grandparents. Their grandfather Daniel D. Rapalje died in 1852, and their grandmother Rensie Wyckoff Rapalje died in 1853. Their mother Ryme Kouwenhoven Rapalje died in 1854 at the age of 39, and their father John D. Rapalje died the next year in 1855 at the age of 40. In addition, these children lost a brother Daniel in 1848 (age 2) and a sister Catherine in 1854 (age 1). However, after the death of both parents (John and Ryme) and both grandparents (Daniel and Rensie) in the decade, actually within 4 years, in the 1860 Census Report, Nicholas and Cornelia, ages 14 and 12 respectively, are found in the family of Ryme's brother William G. Kouwenhoven and his wife Phoebe. Nicholas and Cornelia remained in the Kouwenhoven household in the 1870 Census. For many years I wondered what happened to this family. I thought perhaps a plague, maybe Cholera or Typhus, may have hit Newtown in the 1850s. To make matters more difficult, some of the death dates for members of the family were in error. **[Special thanks to my cousin, good friend, and genealogical giant Kathleen Litwin for research in correcting longstanding errors and helping determine exactly what happened to this family!]**

After the beginning of our own COVID plague in 2020, I learned that indeed there was a plague of Cholera in New York in the 1850s! Indeed, this would explain so many deaths in one household in such a short time. I've also learned from diaries of Kathy Litwin's great grandmother Emma Vanderverg (1854-1890), that, while Dad and I used to call him "NVAR," he was known to his friends as "Van" and his wife Anna Augusta was known as "Gus."

I have two booklets of calligraphy written and signed by Nicholas Van Antwerp Rapalje, of Flushing Institute in 1863, which appears to have been a boy's school that was built in 1827 and torn down in 1925. Please see the next page for a sample of his work.

Rapalje
N. V. A. Rapalje
Flushing Institute
New York, N.Y.
Nov 26th/63
N. Y.

It seems that NVAR (Van as he was called!) was a multi-talented man. In addition to calligraphy, he was also a woodworker. I inherited two of his wood planes and other woodworking tools, which are now antiques. Notice his initials N.V.A.R in these pictures, with the "R" worn almost completely off the planes.



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 [my grandfather], 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 (Van's grandson) 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 Dad, 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.

Birth of NVAR's Grandson, John D. Rapalje, Jr.

The following is an article from *The Newtown Register*, Thursday, August 24, 1916, provided by Kathleen Litwin:

“On Saturday, N. V. A. Rapalje, of Queens Boulevard, Forest Hills, received news that he had another grandson whom he would be proud to see. Regardless of the heat, he started for Harrington, Del., to see little John D. Rapalje, Jr. The little fellow is a hustler and weighs nine pounds.”

Burial. Nicholas (Van), his wife Anna Augusta (Gus) Boerem, their son William DeBevoise, their son Robert, Van's mother-in-law Sarah Anne Rapelye (1822-1902), Van's father-in-law Robert Boerem (1823-1900), Robert A. Rapalje (son of Daniel L.), Cornelia K. Rapalje (Aunt Neil), and Clark Card (a son-in-law of Robert Boerem) are all buried in Plot 400, Lot #245 of Maple Grove Cemetery in Kew Gardens, Queens County, Long Island, New York.

NOTE: It's interesting that Kathy Litwin and I are cousins, and we met by internet connection only. We both have sisters named Nancy, we both have great grandmothers named Emma, and we lost our mothers in the same week in 2014! Oh, and BTW, her husband is Bob! Our mothers, fathers, grandparents, great grandparents, and Kathy are probably in Heaven right now talking about these stories that I'm writing, wondering if I will EVER get them right!! At least I will try to tell a few of their stories.

[Return to homepage](#)

Dr. Robert J. Rapalje, Retired

Seminole State College of Florida

Altamonte Springs Campus

Email: rapaljer@mathinlivingcolor.com