

Unveil Plaque In Memory of City's Founder

24 Sept 5

Constable Robert Rapelje, a member of the City Police force since last February, yesterday had the honor of uncovering a plaque commemorating his great-great-grandfather, Captain Daniel Rapelje, as founder and first citizen of St. Thomas. The plaque, erected on the City Hall lawn by the Department of Travel and Publicity on the advice of the Ontario Archaeological and Historic Sites Board, was unveiled in an impressive ceremony before more than 200 Grade VIII students from St. Thomas Public and Separate Schools. The inscription in gold lettering on a blue background, reads:

"Captain Daniel Rapelje, 1774 - 1828 — Emigrating from New York State to the Long Point Settlement in 1802, Rapelje later received 200 acres of land on the south side of the Talbot Road at Kettle Creek. He settled here with his family in 1810. A veteran of Lundy's Lane and other battles of the War of 1812, he became a captain of the 1st Middlesex Militia. In 1814 he built a log gristmill and subsequently divided a portion of his land into town lots. The settlement that Rapelje established formed the nucleus of the City of St. Thomas."

Guest speaker at the ceremony was Hon. Bryan L. Cathcart, Ontario Minister of Travel and Publicity, who stressed the importance of preserving Canadian history, not only for this generation but also the one to come, said it was imperative that an impression be made on young minds.

He paid tribute to St. Thomas and to Daniel Rapelje, who 150 years ago built a European-type home here and also made a grant of two acres of land to build the old St. Thomas Church on Walnut street.

"As we look at our churches and homes and take advantage of untold blessings," Mr. Cathcart said, "we cannot help but be grateful for men like Rapelje, who left a great heritage for their descendants."

Captain Rapelje in the speaker's opinion, was a great family and community man, who gave unstintingly of himself in a quiet, unassuming way. He compared him to Col. Thomas Talbot, who founded the Talbot Settlement, and stated that their personalities were vastly different. Col. Talbot, he said, was an eccentric man, but a great organizer in spite of his brusque and often rude manner.

"This nine member board has contributed unlimited service in directing the Department of Travel and Publicity in proper location of plaques throughout Ontario," he said.

CORRECT IN DETAIL

These plaques, he pointed out, are erected only after intensive research study and they must be correct in every detail. It is to be hoped, he added, that "we never make a mistake."

Up until three years ago, the minister stated, the erection of 200 plaques in Ontario was mostly the result of excellent work done by the Department of Highways. But within the last three years 150 additional plaques have been erected and the Ontario Archaeological and Historic Sites Board is directly responsible.

He invited his listeners to read the Rapelje plaque carefully "and allow yourselves to be transported back 150 years to the time when this history was made. Maybe in that way you will be able to recognize the great debt owing to those who have gone before."

Mr. Cathcart concluded his address by stressing the importance of acquainting tourists with local history. He urged St. Thomas citizens to encourage them and stated that only through personal contact can the people of Canada get to know each other better.

The speaker was introduced by Ronald K. McNeil, M.P.P. for Elgin County, with Mayor Vincent A. Barrie master-of-ceremonies for the occasion. Other speakers included Reeve John B. Wilson, of South Dorchester, and Mrs. J. B. Futcher, who urged the school children to acquaint themselves with Canadian history.

In quoting from an inscription on the door of a famous American University Mrs. Futcher stated that "he who knows his own generation only remains always a child."

James A. McBain, M.P. for Elgin, and Warden Lloyd Gurr, of Port Stanley, were unable to attend the function, owing to other commitments. Rev. J. K. West, president of the St. Thomas Ministerial Association, closed the ceremony with prayer.