

RAPIDAN.

This town is situated in the north-central part of the county and is traversed by the Maple and Le Sueur rivers in the east and Blue Earth and Watonwan rivers in the west. These streams furnish water powers that eventually must make the town the center of a large manufacturing industry.

On account of the territory embraced by the town being in the Winnebago reservation, settlement was retarded until a comparatively late date. The valuable mill site now occupied by the Rapidan mills in section 8, attracted attention at an early date. In 1854, quite a number had secured claims there; among them Basil Moreland, G. W. Cummings, William Washburn, Williston Greenwood. They were obliged to leave them after a vigorous protest on their part, in the possession of the Indians. The Indians were removed in 1863 and settlement began again. Among the earlier ones who came in were J. D. Hooser, H. C. Eberhard, C. G. Chamberlain, W. L. Stevens, Lucius Dyer, G. Schwan, E. C. Payne, A. J. Jewett, Charles Meiskie, M. Bosin, William and August Blume.

Mr. Dyer built the Maple River Mill on section 35, in 1867; it is a two run of stone, water power mill and only does custom work. After several changes, the property is now in the hands of J. Mericle. Mr. Jewett located in the south-west quarter of section 33, where the year following he with wife, father, mother and nephew were killed by the Indians, and his child about two years old wounded and left for dead, but by care recovered and now lives with his uncle in Boston.

The first school in the town was taught by Miss Emma Smith, during the summer of 1866, in what is now district number 79; the school-house was of logs, and had been built the previous spring and located in section 35. This building was used until the present house was erected a few years later. The town now has five school-houses.

The Union mill on section 31, was built in 1867, by George Heaton and Richard Rew; it is a frame mill, water power with two run of stone. It proved a financial elephant on the hands of the originators; it now stands idle.

The Rapidan mill was built by Silas Kenworthy & Co., in 1866, and operations begun in December of that year with two run of stone. The company have since added two more run. In the spring of 1880, Mr. Kenworthy sold his interest to Mr. Hans Knutson, who with the former partners of Mr. Kenworthy, J. W. Mendenhall and J. B. Swan, has formed a new company, known as the Rapidan Mill Company; it is a water power mill and has a capacity of about sixty barrels per day.

In 1867 the mill company laid off a small portion of their tract into lots and named their village, Rapids. If the splendid, natural power is ever used to its fullest extent, it is sure to be a widely known village. At present, only a few connected with the mill occupy the lots. The mill, one blacksmith-shop and cooper-shop constitute the business of the place. A fine iron bridge spans the Blue Earth at this place. It was built in 1879 and is the only bridge in the town. A little further down the river, the village of Rapidan was platted in 1864 on land owned by C. P. Cook, but nothing further ever came of it. In 1875 the railroad company established a station in the south-east corner of section 4. That year, Olof Olson put up a store, which, with a small warehouse, constitutes the station proper. About eighty rods further south a store was started in the fall of 1878 but was only continued about two years. A post-office was established at the station, in January, 1875 and Mr. Olson appointed postmaster, which office he continues to hold. Castle Garden post-office was established in 1867 and N. Bixby appointed postmaster and the office located at his house in section 15. He was succeeded by G. W. Derby, who held the office until it was discontinued about 1874.

The first town meeting was held April 15, 1865, at the house of E. C. Payne in section 21. Twenty votes were cast, and the following officers elected for the ensuing year. E. C. Payne, chairman; W. L. Stevens and J. Sanger,

supervisors; M. A. Reader, clerk; J. D. Hooser, assessor; G. Schwan, treasurer; C. P. Cook and A. J. Jewett, justices; P. Paff & H. C. Eberhart, constables. Mr. Payne resigned May 22, 1865 and Mr. Jewett failed to qualify as justice. Mr. Lucius Dyer was elected to fill both vacancies.

J. W. Derby, born in 1819, in Washington county, New York, was raised on a farm and learned the trade of carpenter. In 1844 he went to Wisconsin and there worked at his trade; after living in Illinois about two years he came, in 1855, to Minnesota and settled in Blue Earth county; at that time there was but one family between him and Blue Earth City. He was with the party who found the bodies of the murdered Jewett family. Married August 7, 1853, Jane E. Eldridge who died September 25, 1877, leaving seven children: Levina, Charles A., Ellen, Esther, Ida, George, and Lottie M.

O. Holberg was born in 1827 and learned the shoe-maker's trade in Sweden, his native country. He has worked at farming since coming to America in 1868, though previous to that he had followed his trade. In 1870 he located in Blue Earth county. Mr. Holberg was married in 1860, to Miss Bridget Jonstetter. Their children are John and Erick.

Silas Kenworthy was born in Randolph county, North Carolina, December 29, 1803; when young, he moved with his parents to Ohio and in 1822 they went to Indiana. He and his father built a grist mill which he operated two years and afterward worked at farming for a time. In 1854 he came to Minnesota and the year following built a small flouring mill in Le Sueur county, which he sold in 1864 and came to Rapidan; in company with others he built what is known as the Rapidan flouring mill. Mr. Kenworthy has erected seven mills, all water power; three in Indiana and four in this state. He has held many town and county offices and in 1874 was elected to the state legislature. Married in 1827, Marion Mate. Nancy A., Cynthia A., Ella J., Elizabeth, and May are their children.

Hans Knudsen, born in 1842, is a native of Denmark. At the age of fourteen he commenced to learn the miller's trade and worked at that business in Denmark until 1873, when he came to the United States; worked in the Rapidan mill until 1880; at that time bought one-third interest in the mill. In 1873, he married Marie Nelson. Ida May is their only child.

H. W. Mendenhall was born in Montgomery county, Indiana, in 1828. He worked about six years at the trade of painter and then engaged in the miller's business until coming to Minnesota about 1854; settled on a farm in Le Sueur county. It was he who, in 1856, bought and ran the first reaper in the Minnesota Valley. From 1858 until 1864 he was in the milling business in that county, then in company with Kenworthy and Swan, built the Rapidan mill; is now senior member of the firm. Married in December 1848, Nancy A. Kenworthy. They have six children: Clara M., Orson S., Alice, Minnie E., William W., and Ida E.

Olof Olson, a native of Sweden, born in 1841, was brought up on a farm and given a high school education. He came to America in 1872 and worked at farming in Freeborn county until 1874 when he removed to Blue Earth county; the next year he established his general store at Rapidan station, where he also fills the office of postmaster. Nettie Roland became his wife in 1874. Oscar, Alfred and Lindo are their children.

Colonel B. F. Smith was born July 4, 1811, in Knox county, Ohio. For a number of years he was an assistant of his father, who was clerk of the courts of Knox county; was auditor of that county four years, and served in the Ohio legislature. From 1857 until 1861 he resided in Vernon Centre, Minn., and at the breaking out of the rebellion he recruited a company of cavalry; served as lieutenant-colonel of the Third Minnesota and then resigned because of poor health; was offered but did not accept the appointment of colonel of his regiment; was soon after put in charge of Fort Snelling and remained in the service of the government until 1866. In 1869 he was elected to the state senate; was four years in the land office at Redwood Falls, and six years register of deeds of Blue Earth county. Married in 1830, Julia Stilley. They have seven living children.

W. L. Stephens was born in 1826, in Knox county, Ohio. He accompanied his parents to Michigan in 1829, from there to Indiana, thence to Wisconsin and since 1864 he has been a resident of Blue Earth county. In 1850-1 he was in California, prospecting for gold; since coming to this state he has been farming and recently has made a specialty of stock raising. In 1853 he married Miss E. J. Smith, who died in 1866; her children are Buel V., Stella, Francis W. and Edwin. By his second wife, who was Sarah J. Christie, he has one child: Elizabeth.

James B. Swan, a native of Ohio, was born in 1836, in Medina county, and in 1857 located in Le Sueur county, Minnesota, where he served as register of deeds and county auditor. For several years he was engaged in farming and was one year in a flouring-mill. Mr. Swan was one of the volunteers stationed at New Ulm during the Sioux trouble. In 1866 he came to Blue Earth county and was one of the company to erect the Rapidan mill; is still a member of the firm. He has held various town and county offices. Married in 1859 Mary Kenworthy. Their children are Ora, Edson and Bertie.

W. W. Swan, deceased, a native of Canada, was born in 1825 and came in 1852 to Minnesota; the next year he settled in Le Sueur and until his death in 1856, held the offices of register of deeds, clerk of the court and postmaster. He was one of the original owners of the town site of Le Sueur, and was the first person buried in the cemetery.