SAMPLE REPORT · NAMES AND RECORD NUMBERS WITHHELD

One letter, two certificates

Project Scroll
RESEARCH DESK

Prepared 17 October 2026 · A case from the desk's own files · Status: OPEN

The question

A pioneer died in Michigan in 1912. Did he have a middle initial, and if so, what was it?

The short answer

> Not settled yet. The record made closest to his death gives him no middle initial DOCUMENT. A record made twenty-three years later gives him one, the same initial his son carried DOCUMENT. The earlier record carries more weight INFERENCE, but it does not by itself prove he had none. The next records to check are listed at the end.

What we found

#	RECORD	WHEN IT WAS MADE	MARK	WHAT IT SAYS
1	His death certificate, Michigan	1912, about a month after he died	DOCUMENT	A plain first and last name. No middle initial.
2	The county histories that mention him	Various years	COUNTY HISTORY	A plain first and last name. One adds "Senior."
3	His son's death certificate, Michigan	1935, twenty-three years after the father died	DOCUMENT	In the box for the father's name, a middle initial: the son's own.

Where the records disagree

- **His middle initial.** Record 1 gives none; record 3 gives one.
- **His birthday.** Record 1 and one of the county histories are two days apart.
- **His father's birthplace.** Record 1 names one state; the same county history names another.

Nobody lied. Each record is somebody's memory: a death certificate gives what the informant believed, on a hard day, and county histories were usually written from what the family supplied, and rarely checked.

What we make of it

- Record 1 was made a month after his death; record 3, twenty-three years later, by someone remembering a man long gone. The first informant was closer to the event INFERENCE.
- Father and son shared a name, and in 1935 the informant gave the father the son's initial too READING.
- "Senior" fits here, since a son of the same name does turn up; but in the 1800s it sometimes meant only the older of two men with one name in town INFERENCE.
- He may never have used a middle initial at all. A record made in his lifetime or at his death that gives his full name would settle it HYPOTHESIS.

Still open, and where to look next

- A local newspaper notice from the days or weeks after his death PERIOD PRINT.
- His probate file, at the county probate court DOCUMENT.
- The cemetery's burial records, or a transcription of his stone COMPILED. Read the stone on paper; there is no need to visit it.

Free places to search: the Archives of Michigan's death certificates, 1897–1952 (michigan.access.preservica.com); FamilySearch (familysearch.org); Find a Grave (findagrave.com).

Sources

- Michigan death certificate of the pioneer, 1912. Archives of Michigan.
- Michigan death certificate of his son, 1935. Archives of Michigan.
- County histories naming the pioneer (titles withheld with the name).

This sample comes from a real case on the Project Scroll desk, with names and record numbers withheld. A client report follows the same form, at whatever length the question needs. projectscroll.com