

BACKGROUND

My third great-grandfather, William Case, was 85 years old at the time of his death in 1920, placing his birth prior to extant civil vital records. I've not located a family bible, nor a church recording of his birth date.

RESEARCH QUESTION

When was William Case who died in Saranac, Michigan, on 16 January 1920 born?

RECORD LISTING (in chronological order)

Record 1: Probate – petition for guardianship of William Case (17 January 1853)

The image shows a handwritten document, a petition for guardianship of William Case, dated 17 January 1853. The document is written in cursive on aged paper. The text is as follows:

To: ~~William Case~~ ^{Alfred L. Root} Secy of Probate
of the County of Ionia

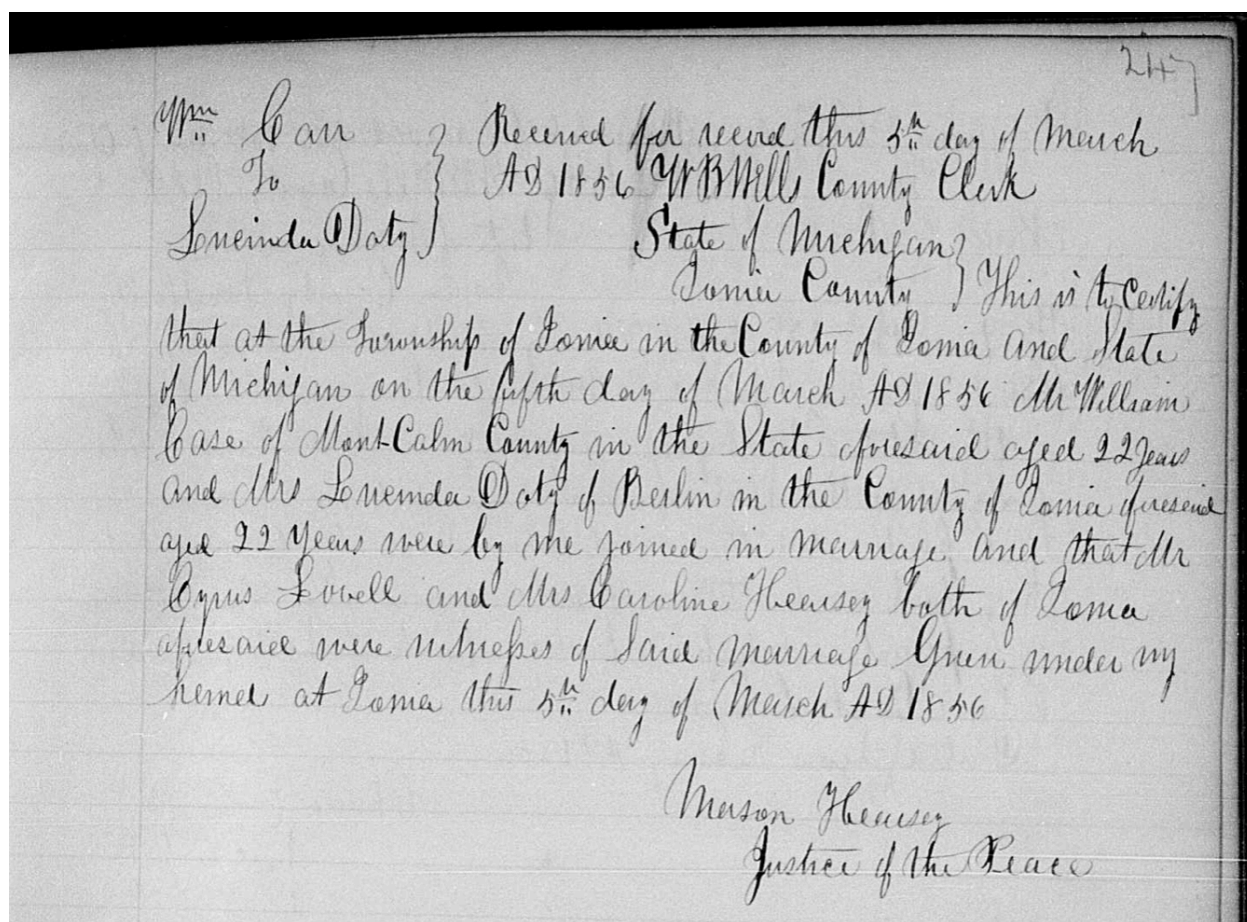
The petition of William Case of
the Township of Benton the County of Ionia and
State of Michigan respectfully sheweth That he is a minor
over the age of fourteen years and under the age of twenty
one year and of the age of nineteen the second day of
August next that he is a minor and has a
Guardian appointed to take charge of his estate and
be his protector during his minority Therefore the said
William Case respectfully petition you honor
to appoint J. B. Pagnon of the Township of Ionia
in the County of Ionia to be and act as Guardian until
I shall attain the age of twenty one years
Dated at Ionia this 17th day of January 1853
William Case

Daniel B. Pagnon writes

Probate Court, Ionia County, Michigan, probate case file 99, Chauncey, William and James Case (1853), petition for guardian by William Case, 17 January 1853; digital images, "Michigan, Wills and Probate Records, 1784-1980," Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8793/> : accessed 20 April 2020) > Ionia > Probate Packets, 98-117, 1853 > image 77.

Source	Original – The document is included with other loose files as part of the pension case packet. The scan of the files is of very good quality. The handwritten petition for William is one of three written for three Case brothers. Based on handwriting analysis, each petition was drafted by the same individual and signed by each minor. William’s signature is very similar to other known examples, but shows some differences that may be a result of a younger person’s effort; it appears written with more precision and care.
Information	Secondary, possibly primary – Prior research indicates that William’s mother was alive at the time that the guardian probate was filed in Ionia County. While William signed the petition, his mother possibly was the informant for his birth information.
Evidence	Direct – While the birth year is referenced against the date of the petition, the month and day are clearly noted.

Record 2: Marriage record – William Case to Lucinda Doty (05 March 1856)

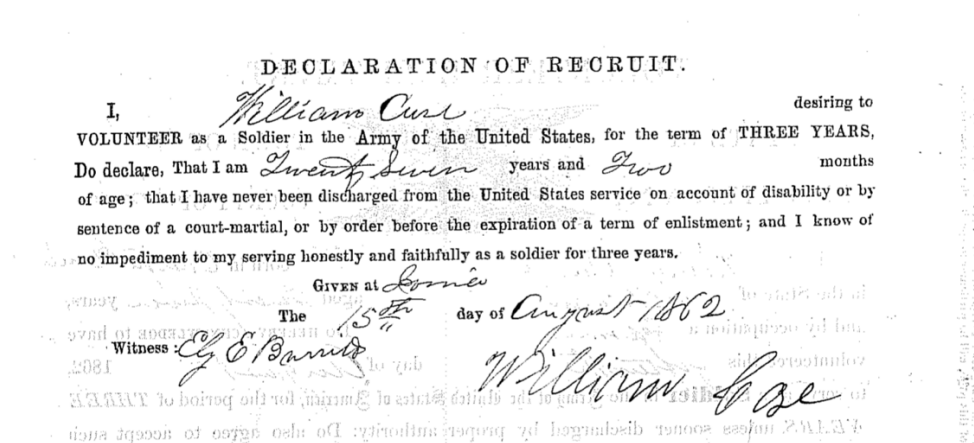


“Michigan, County Marriages, 1820-1940,” *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1810350> : accessed 19 April 2020) > Ionia > Marriage certificates, 1847-1863, v. B1 > image 131, Wm Case to Lucinda Doty, 5 March 1856, handwritten page number 247.

Source	<p>Derivative, possibly original</p> <p>Derivative – The marriage return is chronologically written into a bound volume for Ionia County. The handwriting is consistent for multiple entries, no original signatures are found. Based on the history of Michigan state law, this marriage occurred prior to state registration requirements. The officiant typically sent a return to the county clerk for recording in this type of bound volume. Microfilm scans include cover of ledger; pages are completely scanned and legible.</p> <p>Original – Based on the Ionia County Wiki on FamilySearch, the County Clerk and state Department of Health have marriage records beginning in 1867. This marriage occurred in 1856 and the text indicates the return was “received for record” on the same date of the marriage. It’s probable that the return no longer exists and the contemporaneous recording of the marriage would allow the register to be considered an original record. Also, the record indicates that William and Lucinda were married by a Justice of the Peace. A civil marriage would leave no original church record for the event.</p>
Information	Secondary – William’s knowledge of his birth date would have been reported to him by a parent.
Evidence	Indirect – William’s birthdate can only be determined by comparing his given age with the date of his marriage to provide a time range.

Record 3: Civil War enlistment - William Case (15 August 1862)

(partial screenshot of record)



Compiled service record, William Case, Pvt., Co. K, 21 Michigan Inf., enlistment paper dated 15 August 1862; Carded Records, Volunteer Organizations, Civil War; Record Group 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1762-1984; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Source	<p>Original – The document was included in the Compiled Military Service Record electronic file ordered from NARA. The image reflects a form completed by more than one individual, based on the handwriting differences. William Case’s signature can be found on both the front and</p>
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	back of the enlistment form; the signature matches examples on other documents in researcher's files.
Information	Secondary – William's knowledge of his birth date would have been reported to him by a parent.
Evidence	Indirect – William's possible birthdate can only be determined by combining this information with the date of his enlistment on the record.

Record 4: 1900 U.S. census – William Case household (06 June 1900)

(partial screenshot of record)

88	89	Case, John	7-17-77	son	W. M.	June 1904	26	14	4	4	4	Michigan	Case
		Case, Mary	12-1-74	daughter	W. F.	Mar 1880	20	14	4	4	4	Michigan	Case
		Case, John	12-1-74	son	W. M.	Apr 1878	21	14	12			Michigan	Case
		Case, Mary	12-1-74	daughter	W. F.	June 1878	21	14	2	2		Michigan	Case
		Case, John	12-1-74	son	W. M.	May 1878	21	14	6			Michigan	Case
		Case, Mary	12-1-74	daughter	W. F.	June 1878	21	14	3			Michigan	Case

“1900 United States Federal Census,” Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7602/> : accessed 19 April 2020) > Michigan > Ionia > Orange > District 0023 > image 8, Line 76, Dwelling 88, Family 89, Wm Case household, 6 June 1900.

Source	Original – Microfilmed image from NARA is of original document. Page appears intact and complete in image, similar to assessing original physical document. The scan quality on about 50% of the households is very light and requires effort to read, including the subject of research.
Information	Unknown origin – While assumptions could be made relating to the potential supplier of the information, we do not know and cannot distinguish their level of knowledge.
Evidence	Direct – The explicit month and year of birth were provided as part of the 1900 U.S. census data taken by the enumerator.

Record 5: Military pension declaration – William Case (04 March 1907)

(partial screenshot of record)

above and was duly employed in the military or naval service of the United States until being discharged as shown above. That his personal description at enlistment was as follows: Height, Five feet six inches; complexion, Fair; color of eyes, Blue; color of hair, Brown; that his occupation was Farmer; that he was born June 24, 1834, at Easton, Iowa Co. Irish.

That his several places of residence since leaving the service have been as follows: _____
(State date of each change, so nearly as possible.)

That he is now a pensioner. That he has heretofore applied for pension Certificate No. 388515
(If a pensioner, the certificate number only need be given. If not, give the number of his former application, if one was made.)

That he makes this declaration for the purpose of being placed on the pension roll of the United States under the provisions of the act of February 6, 1907.

That his post-office address is Sarasota, county of Idonia, State of Michigan.

Attest: (1) John P. Anderson (Claimant's signature in full.)
(2) Luke Otis

Also personally appeared John P. Anderson residing in Sarasota and Luke Otis residing in Sarasota, persons whom I certify to be respectable and entitled to credit, and who, being by me duly sworn, say that they were present and saw William Case, the claimant, sign his name (or make his mark) to the foregoing declaration; that they have every reason to believe, from the appearance of the claimant and their acquaintance with him of 25 years and 25 years, respectively, that he is the identical person he represents himself to be, and that they have no interest in the prosecution of this claim.

John P. Anderson
Luke Otis
(Signatures of witnesses.)

Subscribed and sworn to before me this first day of March, A. D. 1907, and I hereby certify that the contents of the above declaration, etc., were fully made known and explained to the applicant and witnesses before swearing, including the words _____, erased; and the words _____, added; and that I have no interest, direct or indirect, in the prosecution of this claim.

George W. Potter
Notary Public
(Official stamp)

U.S. DEPT. OF WAR
PENSION OFFICE
MAR 4 1907
RECEIVED

William Case (Pvt., Co. K, 21st Mich. Inf., Civil War), Declaration for Pension, 01 March 1907, pension no. S.C. 388,515, Case Files of Approved Pension Applications..., 1861–1934; Civil War and Later Pension Files; Record Group 15: Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Source	Original – The document was included in the Military pension file ordered from NARA in electronic format. The image is very legible and reflects a document in very good condition. The original 3-014 form (Declaration for Pension, Act of February 6, 1907) shows multiple handwriting samples, with signatures by William Case and two witnesses. The document was stamped as “received” by the Pension Office on 4 March 1907.
Information	Secondary – William’s knowledge of his birth date would have been reported to him by a parent.
Evidence	Direct – A specific date is provided on the declaration.

Record 6: Death certificate

(partial screenshot of record)

City _____ (if death occurred here)

2. FULL NAME Jas. Case

(a) Residence No. _____
(Usual place of abode.)

Length of residence in city or town where death occurred yrs. mo. _____

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

3 SEX Male 4 Color or Race White 5 Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced Married
(WRITE the word.)

6a If married, widowed, or divorced
HUSBAND of _____
(or) WIFE of _____

8 DATE OF BIRTH (Month, day and year.) June 2 - 1834

7 AGE Years _____ Months _____ Days _____

“Michigan, Death Records, 1867-1950,” Ancestry (<https://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=60872> : accessed 20 April 2020) > Certificates, 1897-1920 > 290: Ingham – Jackson, 1919-1920 > image 1301, Wm Case, stamped 342, Saranac, Ionia, Michigan, 16 January 1920.

Source	Original – Variations in handwriting and signatures between the medical portion signed by the physician, and the personal data completed by the registrar. Documents in collection are individual pages, filed in order of state stamped number. Source information indicates the certificates are from the State of Michigan. Image appears to have captured the entire record. Information is very legible.
Information	Secondary – Allan Case was the informant.
Evidence	Direct – A specific date is provided on the death certificate.

EVIDENCE CORRELATION

RECORD	BIRTH DATE	INFORMANT
Guardianship Petition	02 June 1834 (<i>calculated</i>) (“...the age of nineteen the second day of June August next”)	Probably William, possibly his mother
Marriage Record	March 1834 – March 1835 (“aged 22 years”)	William Case
Civil War enlistment form	Abt. June 1835 (“Twenty seven years and two months of age”)	William Case
1900 U.S. census	June 1834	Unknown
Pension Declaration	02 June 1834	William Case
Death Certificate	02 June 1834	William’s son, Allen Case

Of the six records, William is the known informant for three, and probably a fourth. The possibility of independent sources for the census and death certificate is low, as those informants were certain to have obtained the information from William himself. It is possible that William’s mother provided his birth information for the guardianship petition, but it cannot be proven.

While, the majority of the records point to William Case's birthdate as 02 June 1834, there are three inconsistencies to be addressed.

- The guardianship petition contains a redlined month (August), replaced by June above it. It is possible that the party that drew up the document confused William's birth month with his younger brother, James. Both petitions were written on the same sheet: William's first, followed by James's petition. The younger Case was born in August 1836, thus the potential for the confusion at the time the document was drafted and subsequently corrected.
- In the 1900 U.S. census, William's age is initially recorded as sixty-six, then redlined to sixty-five. Based on his reported birth of June 1834 within the census, and assuming the date of the second was his birthday, William would have been sixty-six years old at the time of the enumeration. Perhaps confusion stemmed from the fact that the census was recorded June 6, only four days after William's birthday. If someone other than William were the informant, it is likely that his age was second-guessed during the interview and the enumerator was instructed to change it.
- William's Civil War enlistment form places his birth in June 1835 (not 1834) based on his recorded age of "twenty seven years and two months." William may have chosen to reduce his age for personal motives, although the typical age range for enlistment during the Civil War was 18–45 years, making this an unlikely reason. Perhaps William's state of mind at the time of his enlistment to go to war for three years may have contributed to the minor error in his reported age by one year. Subsequent records show William reported his birthdate consistently prior to this record, leaving this an anomaly.

In spite of the minor inconsistency of the enlistment form, the overwhelming weight of the direct and indirect evidence supports William Case's birthdate as 02 June 1834.