

Who Is in the Grave?

A Coloma Mystery Unearthed



The Mystery

When a couple purchased a piece of property near **Coloma, Wisconsin**, they were intrigued by a cryptic note in the deed that there was a gravestone was in the corner of the land. Curious about who might be buried there, they sought answers—but all they uncovered were fragments of local lore and anecdotal stories.

The **Coloma Historical Society** eventually connected the couple with **Learn Your Family History**, hoping that more thorough genealogical research might solve the mystery.

After navigating through the woods to reach the grave, the stone was found to be weathered and difficult to read. But with careful observation, a partial inscription emerged:

John
Son of J. and M. Knight
Died
March 28, 1873

(The last line is mostly unreadable. The first word may be "Love.")



So, Who Was John and What Happened to Him?

Tragically, baby **John Knight** lived only **one day**. The cause of death is unknown, but infant mortality was heartbreakingly common in the 19th century. According to *Historical Statistics of the United States*, white infant mortality between 1850 and 1880 ranged from **17.5% to 21.7%**, with infectious diseases like cholera and respiratory ailments claiming many young lives.

Who were his parents?

John's parents were **John Knight** and **Amelia Knight** (née Bechmann). Based on census records, Amelia also went by the names **Melia** and **Molly**, which can and is likely why the gravestone refers to John's parents as "J & M Knight."

John was born **January 26, 1846**, in **Erbach, Germany**, the son of **Johann Neidt** and **Justine** (surname unknown). His last name appears in historical records as **Knight**, **Night**, and **Neidt**, the latter being the original German spelling.

He married **Amelia Bechmann** on **February 23, 1869**, in **Neshkoro, Wisconsin**, born **October 17, 1845**, in **Lindenburg, Germany**, the daughter of **John Bechmann**. Her mother's name remains unknown.



Source: 1870 and 1880 census records, obituaries, findagrave.com and public family trees published on Ancestry.com.

John & Amelia's Early Years

The couple immigrated to the United States in **1869**. The same year they were married and lived in Seneca, WI, according to census records.

Note the spelling of their last name in the 1870 census records. It's the original German spelling "**Neidt.**" It is spelled "**Knight**" in the 1980 census. And, while Amelia is referred to by her full name in this sentence, in the 1880 census she was referred to as "**Melia.**"

Source: 1870 Census Records.



Page No. 1 Inquiries numbered 7, 16, and 17 are not to be asked in respect to infants. Inquiries numbered 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20 are to be answered (if at all) merely by an affirmative mark, as /.

SCHEDULE 1.—Inhabitants in the Town of Seneca, in the County of Green Lake, State of Wisconsin, enumerated by me on the 1st day of August, 1870.

Post Office: Neshkoro, Waushara Co.

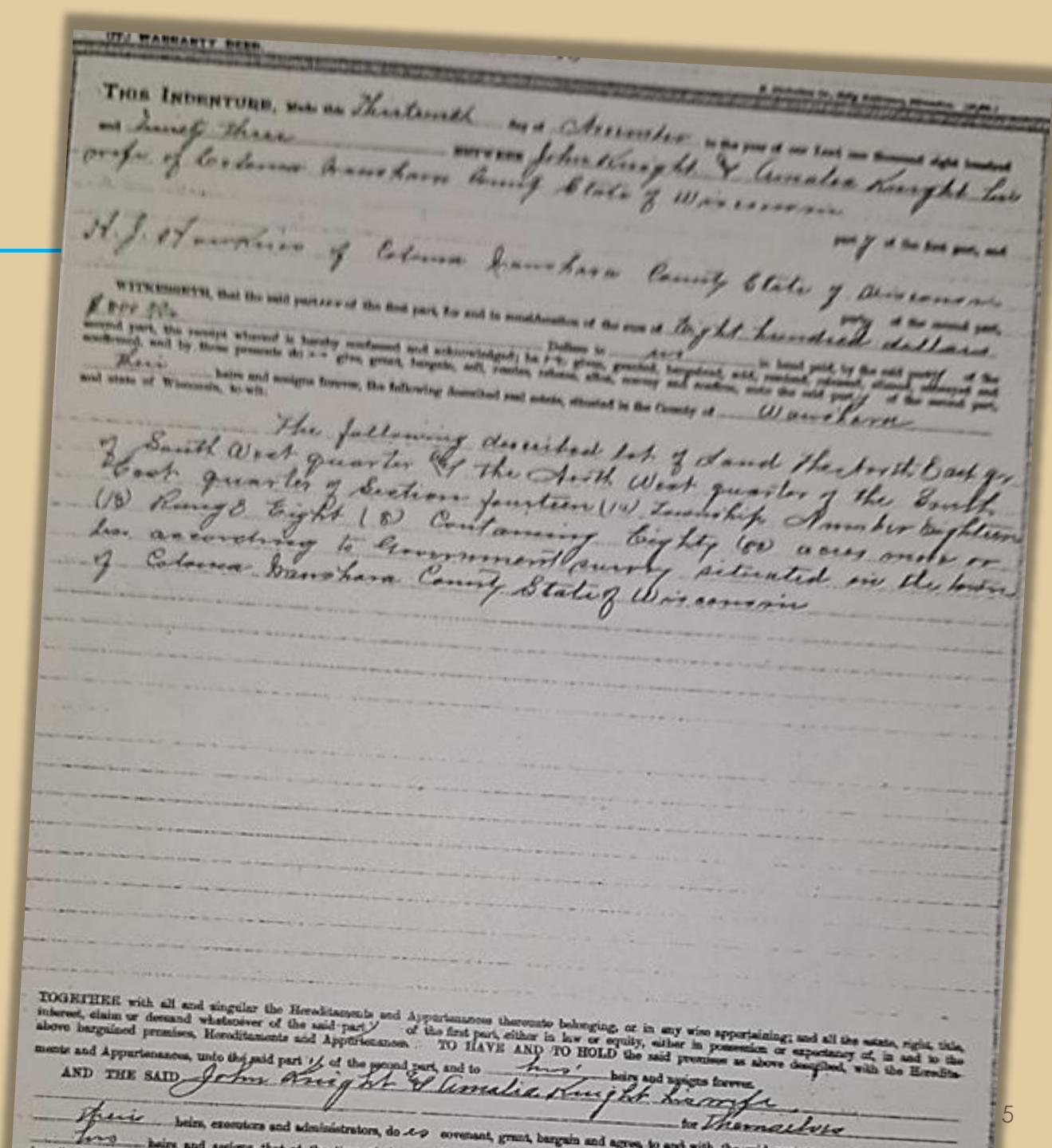
Shes McCumell, Ass't Marshal.

Inquiries numbered in the order of questions.		The name of every person whose place of abode on the first day of June, 1870, was in this family.	DESCRIPTION.			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male or female.	VALUE OF REAL ESTATE OWNED.		Place of Birth, naming State or Territory of U. S.; or the Country, if of foreign birth.	PARENTAGE.		If born within the year, state month (Jan., Feb., &c.)	If married within the year, state month (Jan., Feb., &c.)	Attended school within the year.	EDUCATION.	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic.	CONSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS.	
1	2		4	5	6		8	9		11	12							13
1	1	Neidt, John	37	M	Farmer	✓	1200	600	Prussia	/	/							
2	1	Neidt, Julia	35	F	Keeping house				Prussia	/	/							
3	1	Neidt, August	9	M	At school				Prussia	/	/							
4	1	Neidt, William	7	M					Prussia	/	/							
5	1	Neidt, Ambrose	5	M					Prussia	/	/							
6	1	Neidt, August	3	M					Prussia	/	/							
7	1	Neidt, Emma	7	F					Prussia	/	/							
8	2	Neidt, Jacob	30	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
9	2	Neidt, Julia	27	F	Keeping house				Prussia	/	/							
10	2	Neidt, Christ	6	M					Prussia	/	/							
11	3	Neidt, Michael	67	M	Farmer	✓	1800	500	Prussia	/	/							
12	3	Neidt, William	62	M	Keeping house				Prussia	/	/							
13	3	Neidt, Samuel	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
14	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
15	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
16	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
17	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
18	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
19	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
20	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
21	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
22	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
23	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
24	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
25	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							
26	3	Neidt, William	19	M	Farmer	✓			Prussia	/	/							

The Purchase of the Property

They purchased the Coloma property, the site where the gravestone is located, in **1870 for \$800**, based on court documents and sold at least a portion of it in 1893.

Source: Property Deed records, Waushara County, WI.



The family also owned property that was farmed which was sold in 1900. A local newspaper clipping from *The Hancock News* (Nov 23, 1900) marked the occasion:

A diagram of a tree with its roots exposed, illustrating the concept of a root system. The tree has a thick, brown trunk and a dense, green canopy. The roots are shown as a complex network of light brown, fibrous structures extending horizontally and vertically into the dark brown soil below the ground line. The background is a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds.

learnyourfamilyhistory.com

[illegible]

John & Amelia's Final Years

- **Amelia “Molly” Knight** passed away on **November 24, 1900**, at the age of **55**. An obituary in the *Hancock News* described her as “a very kind-hearted, motherly woman, devoted to her home and children.”
- **John Knight** died on **October 11, 1919**, at **age 73**, after residing with his daughter **Mrs. Henry Clocksin** near **Pleasant Lake**. He was remembered in the *Coloma News* as a long-time resident, with funeral services held at the local **Methodist Episcopal Church**.
- Both are buried in **Hillside Cemetery** in Coloma, Wisconsin—**not far from their infant son**, whose gravestone still marks the corner of the old homestead.

Sources: Findagrave.com, cemetery visit and cemetery records.

