

TRUEMPLER FARM, MILL CREEK, WISCONSIN — 19TH CENTURY FARM
Sixth In A Series Of Articles On The 19th Century Photography Of Gerhard Gesell

The destiny of Buffalo County was agricultural settlement from its early pioneer days. The land provided advantages for an agricultural community as well as affording live stock a natural protection which is not found in a country essentially level for many miles and open to sweeping winds and apt to experience periods of drought. The changes of hill and dale, of highland and lowland, make up the local topography. Newcomers usually preferred valleys to bluffs, open or slightly wooded land to heavy timber.

The land in Buffalo County first came to market in 1849, it was withdrawn from the market in 1856 to allow the West Wisconsin Railroad an opportunity to select the land granted to aid its construction, and it was restored to the market in 1858. Pioneers traveled to the La Crosse US Land Office to file their land patent or homestead certificate. In the summer La Crosse could be reached by steamboat or on foot any time during the year with a horse and wagon.

Many pioneers did not want to settle on open land because they knew what a scarcity of wood meant from their experiences in their European homelands. They spent the majority of their first season in Wisconsin constructing a dwelling, using raw materials taken from the forest constructing a log home. Building a shelter was critical for the new immigrant, and it took at least a month. Once a roof over the family's head was secured, attention was turned to felling trees and clearing enough land for a subsistence garden and later for larger-scale farming soon thereafter. Livestock on the early farm usually consisted of a pair of oxen for plowing and transportation, some chickens and perhaps a cow and calf.

A man was considered well off if he owned a wagon, a plow, a yoke of oxen, the most necessary kitchen and household articles and an axe. Over time things improved, fences and houses were up, crops and cattle had the necessary protection and farmers began to desire machinery to extend their operations. Oxen were indispensable for breaking up the new land, mowing grass was done by hand and horses were later introduced as draught animals with the improvement of roads. Crops of grain were the primary concentration initially with the planting of wheat, corn, oats, barley, rye and buckwheat, but wheat was "king". Other agricultural crops included roots, potatoes, beans & peas and sorghum. Seed crops included clover, timothy and flax. Fruits included apples, grapes and berries. Bees and their wax and honey were also a cash crop although limited in Alma township.



In the 1870s the Truempler family homesteaded land in Mill Creek in the Township of Alma, Buffalo County, Wisconsin and their son Edward is featured in Gerhard Gesell's photograph of their prosperous farm some 20 years later. They had come a long way from their homesteading days and carving out a farm from the wilds of Buffalo County.

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Photo: Edward Truempler Farm, Mill Creek (WHS Image 25780)