

WAUMANDEE MILL, WISCONSIN — 19TH CENTURY MILL
Fifth In A Series Of Articles On The 19th Century Photography Of Gerhard Gesell

The Waumandee country was first settled in 1855 by Henry Mueller and Mathia Profitlitch. A short time later Theodore Meuli settled in The Big Waumandee Valley. In 1854 came Ulrich Knecht, J H Manz and probably John Bringolf. Robert Henry came that year, and then returned to Racine for his family, which he brought the following spring, making the trip with an ox team and a covered wagon.

At that time there was no mill in operation in the Waumandee valley or neighborhood and the earliest settlers were obliged to go to Rollingstone to get their grain reduced to flour. Groceries and other necessities were to be found in Fountain City or Alma.

The Waumandee Mill was built by John Oschner in 1863 as a flouring mill and operated by himself and his favorite miller for many years, Mr. William Lillywhite. The mill was powered by a mill dam in the Waumandee Creek and a long sluice carried water to the powerful wheel at the water's end of the mill. The mill was the only know river-powered mill in the valley and is the oldest mill still standing in Western Wisconsin.



Oschner's flour was the White Rose, and he also made a Wheat Gritz cereal that sold locally in many stores and even to the Queen of England according to some. L Kessinger, author of 1888 *History of Buffalo County, Wisconsin*, stated that "the Waumandee Mill is located in the most fertile valley of Buffalo County and has the advantage of plenty of water at all times".

As reported in the *Buffalo County Journal*, the mill was central to community activities. In 1875 the Waumandee Mill hosted a July 4th celebration when the mill was opened for a dance in the afternoon "inviting friends from far and near to shake their joints and swing their partners on the broad and level floor. Not a few responded to the invitation, of course mostly Teutons, who well know how to make themselves happy on such festive occasions. The young danced and sang to their hearts' content as the old looked on and smiled as they remembered the time when they also 'tripped it deftly on the light fantastic toe'."

Gesell's 1895 picture of Waumandee Mill captures in time the mill, the sluice and the dam on Waumandee Creek. It is one of his most artistic endeavors. Today you can still see the Waumandee Mill. Located just south of Waumandee, take the Mill Road east off of County Road U, it's a beautiful backroad drive and seeing the mill is a thrill even if it is only a shadow of its former glory.

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Photo: Waumandee Mill (WHS Image 37042)