

## **BUFFALO COUNTY'S 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PIONEERS**

### ***Seventh In A Series Of Articles On The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Photography Of Gerhard Gesell***

There were many men, women and children who came to Buffalo County, Wisconsin in the mid-1800s as "pioneers". The first were adventurers and did not settle in the county, Thomas Holmes being recognized as the first. According to Kessinger who wrote the 1888 *History of Buffalo County, Wisconsin*, "the real pioneers of our county are those who stayed and opened roads, built bridges, cultivated lands, founded homesteads for themselves and induced others to come and do the same."

At his own expense Lawrence Kessinger wrote and published this history, advertising the book for sale in the local newspaper to the citizens of Buffalo County. Read the history compiled by Kessinger and you will understand his deep knowledge of the county and its development as well as his personal relationship with many of our original pioneers. We owe Mr Kessinger a great debt of gratitude for documenting our history and capturing our pioneer heritage.

During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Gerhard Gesell also documented 159 Buffalo County pioneers in a photography collage which included the pioneer's name and year of arrival in the county starting with the settlement of Holmes Landing (now Fountain City) in 1839. A massive undertaking, the collage was published by Gesell in 1892. One of those prints is included in the Gesell exhibit, but if you want to see the original pioneer collage in its glory it hangs in the stairwell at the Buffalo County Courthouse in Alma, Wisconsin and can be viewed Monday through Friday during regular business hours. A 16"x22" poster of the collage is offered for sale by the Buffalo County Historical Society on their website at [www.bchs.com](http://www.bchs.com).

Keep in mind that there were many more pioneers that were not documented by Kessinger or Gesell because they were the women and children who accompanied the men of the day. Only one woman was included in Gesell's pioneer collage, Mrs Dr. Bodestab (formerly Mrs Henry Goehrke). Alas following the tradition of the day we do not know her first name ... "Mrs Goehrke, though not the first white woman to settle, was the first to settle and remain forever after her arrival in this county" according to Kessinger.

Gesell also documented pioneers beyond the scope of the pioneer collage. One of those pioneers was Abraham Schmoker, not a mover and shaker of his day, but a simple man who lived a simple life. This photograph by Gesell is one of the favorites of the exhibit. The usual vital statistics can be found on Abraham Schmoker doing a few genealogy searches: born in 1814, arrived in America at the age of 30 from Switzerland, registered in the 1860, 1870 & 1880 census records in the township & village of Alma, died May 1, 1896 at the age of 85.

Kessinger brings him to life further in his 1888 history indicating that he settled in Fountain City in 1850 and later moved to the township of Alma. He is classified by Kessinger as an "Early Settler".



Gesell makes him human and real to us today through his photography. His 1885 picture is taken in front of Mr Schmoker's log cabin where we see holes in his pants, rags stuffed in the broken windows of the cabin, and a sweet smile on his face as he poses for his picture holding a kitty. An unmarried hermit living in Stumptown above Alma, we see a picture of life that is real in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Alma, Wisconsin and a picture that endears him to us today. For that we owe Mr Gesell more than our thanks, we owe him the reality of our heritage.

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***Photo: Abraham Schmoker & His Log Cabin (WHS Image 25660)***