

## A Settler's Year: Pioneer Life Through the Seasons

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Ferguson's meticulous research makes this book useful for students of the War of 1812. In particular, he sheds light on lesser-known events and small battles that characterized this conflict in a region that has been largely ignored by scholars. However, readers will be well advised to supplement this work with those that present a more balanced examination of the Indians' participation in this conflict.

*A Settler's Year: Pioneer Life Through the Seasons*, by Kathleen Ernst; photographs by Loyd Heath. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015. 191 pp. Illustrations (mostly color), notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Jeff Bremer is assistant professor of history at Iowa State University. He is the author of *A Store Almost in Sight: The Economic Transformation of Missouri from the Louisiana Purchase to the Civil War* (2014).

This wonderfully illustrated book brings to life nineteenth-century Wisconsin settlement. Organized around the seasons that dictated farm life, *A Settler's Year* does not provide a romanticized view of the life and work of farm families. It does detail the unceasing work, bitter winters, and other difficulties families faced. Enhanced with descriptive quotes from original sources, most of the book is dedicated to telling the story of pioneer life through pictures. It contains only about 25 pages of text, but has about 150 photos (mostly color) taken at Old World Wisconsin, a 500-acre living history museum with ten working farms and interpreters in period costume. This beautiful book will be of interest to anyone seeking a brief introduction to the frontier experience in the northern Midwest.

The text mostly focuses on the story of European immigrants to Wisconsin, who made up about a third of the population of the state before the Civil War. Germans, Poles, Norwegians, and English came by the thousands each year, pushed out of their homelands by high taxes, military service, religious oppression, or a lack of economic opportunity. Their experience in Wisconsin was much like that of new settlers across the northern United States. They found seemingly endless labor, isolation, and loneliness, made tolerable by rural bonds of cooperation that provided support for farm families.

Each season has a short narrative, describing the work and daily life of pioneers. In spring, families planted crops and everyone completed chores as the days grew longer. Women and girls cared for gardens, while children guarded fields. One girl remembered her father saying that kids were cheaper than fences. In summer, all helped to cut and store hay, suffering from mosquitos, as they battled birds

and gophers who tried to consume plants in their fields. Drought, severe weather, and fires threatened harvests. Some children went to school in the summer, their labor easier to spare than in the autumn.

In the fall, days grew shorter and families rushed to gather their foodstuffs for the long winter that everyone knew was coming. Vegetables such as pumpkin and squash were gathered, wheat was cut, and people completed tasks, often in the company of neighbors. Quilting and shucking bees, as well as house-raising, provided much needed labor and company. Pigs were slaughtered and pork stored away. Men took surplus crops to nearby towns and cut large amounts of wood to burn to keep families warm. During winter, children went to school, and life continued at a slower pace, even as water froze in glasses on tables inside cabins. The arrival of a new spring brought a new year of work.

This brief book will be a useful addition to libraries, but *The Wisconsin Frontier* by Mark Wyman is a far more detailed survey of the topic.

*Wisconsin Agriculture: A History*, by Jerry Apps. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015. xi, 321 pp. Illustrations (many in color), sidebars, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Pamela Riney-Kehrberg is professor of history at Iowa State University. She is the author of *The Nature of Childhood: An Environmental History of Growing Up in America since 1865* (2014) and *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (2005).

In *Wisconsin Agriculture: A History*, Jerry Apps presents a thorough and engaging look at Wisconsin agriculture through the decades. He begins with the geology and climate of Wisconsin, moves on to Native American history, and then into nineteenth-century settlement and development of farms throughout the state. He then proceeds through the development of agriculture over time and among crops. Although dairying gets a considerable number of pages, he also deals with crops such as cranberries, tobacco, honey, mink, and “muck” crops, such as sphagnum moss. Before reading this book, I had no idea that Wisconsin was the only state in the union with a sphagnum moss industry. There are many such nuggets buried in Apps’s narrative.

This is no dry, academic text. Apps tells his story in a number of different ways. The narrative is heavily illustrated with photographs and artwork. There are plenty of facts and figures for those who want that kind of nitty-gritty detail. There are personal stories for people who want their history with a human face. Informational sidebars about various topics have been placed throughout the text, giving