



Top: Ancient Greek Olympics, Michelangelo's David, Anthony Comstock, Kurt Barthel; Lower: Calisthenics at Freilichtpark, Germany, Rev. Ilsley "Danny" Boone, and Ed Lange, founder of Elysium Fields, Topanga, CA.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF NUDISM AND NATURISM IN AMERICA

By Gary Mussell

In the Beginning...

For most of human history, nudity was a natural and normal part of life. People were nude when environment and conditions favored it. The true foundations of nude recreation and social nudism started in **Ancient Egypt** under Pharaoh Akhen-Aton (1385 - 1353 B.C.). It was during these times that students in Greece exercised and received their education in the nude. Also, most athletes played in the nude including the early Olympic Games in Greece. It is this proof that might lead one to assume that the Greeks and Romans lived in a clothing optional society.

Before the Judeo-Christian-Moslem concept of body shame, most of the tropical and temperate world was one big nudist camp. **Greeks and Romans** wore clothing when necessary or for certain social functions, but bathing and sports were openly enjoyed while naked. As exhibited by their sculpture and ceramics, the Greeks revered youth and physical fitness. To them the body was truly a work of divinity to be admired in its entirety. The Olympics were an offering of the best young athletes, unencumbered by restrictive and concealing clothes. Gymnos, or naked, was how the athlete trained and competed. The Olympic Games came to an end in 393 A.D. when a Christian emperor banned them because he thought they were Pagan.

It wasn't until the Renaissance period that nudity was truly accepted again. In these times nudity was seen as a form of art. Back in Europe, the Renaissance had reawakened the body-acceptance and art of the ancients. Humanism and the celebration of the body were back, and even the reluctant Church had to accept the idea that God created man in his own image, and thought the work looked good.

A 16th century Christian group of Puritans strongly opposed the religious tolerance of the Church of England. With their exile to New England, they became the non-pleasure, morality enforcing people associated with Puritanism. They were so afraid of the lust that they refrained from bathing, because in their eyes, it promoted nudity. (Many religions that are outraged at nudity avoid the fact that Jesus was naked at his baptism.)

In the late 18th and early 19th Century, Benjamin Franklin and Henry David Thoreau helped the American public come to terms with nudity for awhile. Thoreau had daily naked walks which he called "air baths". Other nudists of

note included President John Quincy Adams, who regularly bathed nude in the Potomac. It was common for Americans who lived in the frontier west to use the local creek or “swimming hole” to take care of the daily dirt. Mark Twain’s beloved fictional characters Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn skinny dipped with joy and abandon, capturing the era perfectly. Bathing suits and brassiers were not invented yet so it was common for groups of co-workers, siblings, or friends to go down to a nearby lake, pond, or river after a hard day’s work, separate themselves by gender to different designated locations out of sight from one another, then strip off their clothes and swim naked.

The Victorian Era that followed was not as accepting of nudity. In these times it was common to cover a person's legs, a piano's legs, even a chair's legs in order to prevent sexual arousal. The first domestic swimsuit designed for "decency" appeared in 1830 in France, but did not become popular in America until the 1890’s. These first bathing suits covered nearly the entire body of both men and women, so going all the way from the wrists to the ankles and up to the mid neck.

In the 1890’s the invention of the indoor toilet had an unintended effect on this nude tradition. Until then, it was common practice for the family bathtub to be located in the kitchen area, near where the necessary hot water was heated on the stove. Once or twice a week, with the entire family would strip one at a time and use the same bath water. When outhouses became outmoded, new houses were redesigned so that plumbing was directed to a separate room where the toilet and bathtub could share a common water pipe. With the ability to close a door for privacy, family members rarely saw each other naked anymore. The human body became an object of shame to be hidden and shaped by layers and layers of clothing.

The Birth of the Modern Nudist Movement

Naturism began as a self-help reform movement in reaction to the debilitating aspects of industrialization and urbanization during the late nineteenth century. At a time when medicine could neither explain nor cure disease, many people believed that crowded and unsanitary cities, tenement housing, restrictive Victorian clothing, and oppressive working conditions all led to poor health and rampant illness. Some observers concluded that what people needed was exposure to the natural healing elements or fresh air, sunlight, and water--preferably with loose or absent clothing. An informal coalition of natural lifestyle reform movements took shape, combining clothing reform, vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, and naturopathy. Inevitably some pioneers suggested that nudity must be an integral part of lifestyle reform.

In 1896, when the modern Olympics were revived, it sparked a cultural interest in all things Greek and again drew attention to classical nudity. As a result, mainland Europe developed a tolerance of sensuality and body acceptance – but not in the United States. Works of art and literature that were acceptable on the continent were routinely banned in the U.S. as obscene, and persons who sold or purchased such items (such as the oil painting "September Morn" by French artist Paul Chabas) were often thrown into jail. Anthony Comstock, self-appointed chairman of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice is given credit for stirring up local newspapers and politicians against such “evils” and even had Margaret Sanger, the early pioneer of birth control and founder of Planned Parenthood, thrown into prison for distributing her pamphlets.

In 1901, the ideas of modern social nudism first found expression in several books written in Germany. German sociologist Heinrich Pudor, sometimes referred to as the "father of nudism", wrote "*The Cult of the Nude*" promoting naturism. Shortly after, in 1903, Freilichtpark (Free Light Park) in Lubeck, Germany was the first known Nudist Park to be opened. Founder Paul Zimmerman opened another near Hamburg, Germany. It was the beginning of the first organized nudist movement, or as the Germans called it, Freikorperkultur (Free Body Culture.) Participants stressed a healthy naked lifestyle which included daily exercise, a spartan like outdoor living, and vegetarian diets.

After the First World War, tens of thousands of people, especially German youths in their 20’s, romped in clubs, free beaches, and city parks and swimming pools. During the “Roaring 20’s,” other European countries began also to see their first nudist clubs established, including the popular Sparta Club in France and the Spielplatz in England. The first nudist magazine, *Gymnos*, started printing in 1921, soon followed by the popular *Health & Efficiency* in Britain and *Vivre d'Abord* in France.

In 1931 representatives from the various clubs and societies gathered in Germany to form an international nudist organization. But the depression years were not the best time to start new ventures, and this early experiment came

to an end. Yet the pioneers had established nudism on a sound footing, and it would revive and flourish in Europe after the next war.

Kurt Barthel

Nudism in North America followed the European pattern. Bernard MacFadden, an early pioneer of health reform, promoted natural living in his *Physical Culture* magazine and at his Physical Culture City, as did William Call in his Common Sense Club. In 1929 the first real nudist outing to be held on American soil was organized by a group of German-Americans who were familiar with European naturism. After group discussions in New York City led by Kurt Barthel, they rented a piece of remote, unimproved property over Labor Day weekend, and enjoyed a pleasant weekend outdoors. The next spring, Barthel decided to form a regular club, which he named The American League for Physical Culture. A year later, the ALPC opened a permanent site near Spring Valley in Rockland County, New York, which they named Sky Farm. Over 200 new members joined that first year. Police raids soon followed as word of Sky Farm spread. When the case came to trial at the end of 1931, to everyone's surprise, the judge acquitted the entire group. He ruled that not only were they doing all they could to maintain their privacy they were not guilty of any lewd behavior. This unexpected victory gave the nudist movement a tremendous boost. Publicity alone attracted many new members. What had started as an attempt to stop American naturism gave it the publicity it needed to grow.

Barthel's plans for the future of naturism in America were restrained and sound. There is no way to know how nudism in America might have developed had he remained its sole leader. But Americans were impatient. Within a short time, an American-born minister, Ilsley Boone, wrested control of the nudist movement away from Barthel. Boone would transform the American Nudist Movement and lead it off in a new, more daring direction.

Rev. Ilsley "Uncle Danny" Boone

Among these courageous nudist pioneers none are remembered with greater gratitude than the Rev. Ilsley ("Uncle Danny") Boone, who fought successfully to win official recognition for the First Amendment rights of nudist publications. At his side stood Edith Church, the crusader, whose efforts won legal status for nudist clubs in the Bible Belt of the Midwest.

In October of 1931, Ilsley Boone, was the ALPC's Executive Secretary. Barthel asked him to take his place as president of the organization. Boone agreed, and immediately renamed the group The American Sunbathing Association, beginning a remarkable 21 year reign as its leader. Boone preferred to call his members "nudists" to differentiate it from the European term "naturist." He wrote that "a nudist is one who believes and practices that one may freely go without clothes unless for some specific reason — such as bodily comfort or social requirements — it is essential to wear them." Along with that came a strict set of behavior guidelines Nicknamed by his nudist detractors as "The Dictator," he began chartering new clubs affiliated with his own across America, and Boone maintained strict control over who could run the clubs and enforced strict guidelines over who could become members. By the mid 1930s there were eighty-one nudist camps across America. Most of these camps, to some degree, were experiments in natural living, they imposed the full natural regimen on all guests: nudity rain or shine, abstinence, vegetarianism, and mandatory calisthenics. In 1935 he bought Sunshine Park near Mays Landing, NJ. The ASA office was housed there and the American Sunbathing Association was incorporated in New Jersey on February 18, 1937. After that, the name Mays Landing was synonymous with American naturism.

Two years earlier Boone published the first illustrated nudist magazine, *The Nudist*. This was a successful magazine that could be found at newsstands across the nation. The controversy of the magazine drew a lot of public attention to the nudist movement, again. A few years later he changed the magazine's name to the less confrontational *Sunshine and Health*.

Soon thereafter, Jan Gay published his book "*On Going Naked*" and in 1935, Mich Mindins released his film, "*This Nude World*". Both helped the public become aware of the size and significance of the nudist movement, and realize that clubs were popping up all across the nation. The public – and the politicians – were starting to feel more comfortable with the idea that showing a little skin wasn't lewd. In 1936, the law was changed in New York that decriminalized a man going topless. Up until then, if a man of his shirts to cool off, he could be arrested. But anti-nudist groups fought back and in 1941, Congress reinstated the original 1873 Comstock Law" passed to prevent the US Post Office from allowing material it deemed to be "obscene" from travel through the mail system. Nudist

publishers immediately stopped their USPS shipments in fear of fines. Ilsley Boone took up the challenge and filed suite claiming the law was unconstitutional on free speech grounds. The appeal process took years and nearly broke Boone and the organization. But in a landmark decision on January 13, 1958, the U.S. Supreme Court finally agreed with the ASA leader, agreeing that nudist magazines -- even those with full-frontal nudity -- had the right to be mailed through the U.S. Post Office.

Over the years, several attempts were made to wrest control of ASA from Boone, but none was successful until August 1951 when a very well organized opposition orchestrated his demise. Boone immediately drove home from Penn Sylvan to Sunshine Park and tied up both the membership roster and the funds. It took a court case against him (and a full year) before he would release both to the new, and rightfully elected, directors. In 1952 Mervin Mounce became the first ASA president not directly under the control of Boone.

By 1963, Boone's Sunshine Publishing Company was out of business and Boone was broke. Edith Church of the National Nudist Council let him live at her place in Ohio until his death on Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1968. His obituary in the New York Times called him "the czar of the nudist movement in the USA."

"There is little question that Ilsley Boone has been the most controversial figure in the American nudist scene. Opinions of him range from the fervent and unyielding admiration of some of his contemporary followers . . . to the loathing of some of his detractors, who considered him a pretentious phony and an unctuous con man. . . ." writes Cec Cinder in his book, *The Nudist Idea*, a history of the nudist movement.

Despite his controversial reign, Boone's legacy is secure. By the mid-1980's, the national organization he founded, the ASA, grew to its peak of over 50,000 members through the U.S., Canada and Jamaica. One last name change occurred in 1995 when the ASA became the American Association for Nude Recreation (AANR) -- to better reflect the activities and goals of the organization.

The "Golden Age" of America's "Nudist Colonies"

Following the favorable 1958 Supreme Court ruling, nudist (and men's skin magazines) began to flourish. In Michigan a year later, its State Supreme Court ruled that naturists had the right to practice nudism with private resorts.

After World War II, many of the early primitive "nudist camps" had been replaced by newer locations with a swimming pool, clubhouse, and restaurants. Nudists were no longer content to "rough it" in order to enjoy nude recreation. They demanded luxuries their dressed friends enjoyed at their summer resorts, as well as trailers and areas reserved for RVs and tents. American nudists, following the tradition of independence established when the colonies broke free of England, began calling these retreats "colonies" instead of "camps", and thus the term "nudist colony" came into vogue. For years, nudists were content to remain behind their fences, aware that the high walls served a dual purpose. They "protected" the non-nudist public from viewing nakedness, but they also kept people who were unsympathetic and sometimes aggressively condemning from harassing them. Their only deliberate contact with non-nudist society came through the nudist magazines and through the occasional radio interview of an active nudist couple who dared to "come out of the closet" and speak out for nudism. These few individuals did much to advance the goals of the nudist movement by acquainting non-nudists with the importance of body-acceptance and the joy of nude family recreation. They were aware that in the non-nudist population there were many people who loved to "skinny dip" and some who swam nude in their private fenced-in pools at home but who, for business reasons, did not choose to join a nudist group.

Beginning along the Eastern seaboard, American naturism spread west, but to this day the greatest number of these nudist sites has remained along the Atlantic coast. Sites opened in New York and Pennsylvania, in Washington D.C. and in the Carolinas, and on both coasts of Florida. In many states, law enforcement agencies were opposed to the idea of social nudity. Colonies wishing to practice nude recreation had to locate in the most inaccessible areas and could not advertise in many public newspapers or magazines until the 1970s.

In the Midwest, nudists established sites in Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and other central states but from the very start many faced a stronger and more unrelenting opposition than arose on either coast. In America's heartland, the usual legal and political opponents united with fundamentalist religions in the battle. Initially, only a few of the many camps that opened managed to survive. Successful camp owners like Alois Knapp and Edith Church made innovative attempts to publicize nudism and their camps despite legal roadblocks and boycotts in neighboring towns. During this era, nudists club leaders realized that attempts to close down their parks really had a positive effect, resulting in publicity that attracted many new members. Ironically for the anti-nudity lobby, it seemed any

action that brought nudism to public attention was providing valuable publicity to the nudist movement. Nudists allowed their children to pose with them for photographs published in magazine stories that described the mental, emotional, and physical advantages of recreating in the nude. Men bought most of these magazines to view the photos of naked bodies, but a high percentage of them read the articles and then, intrigued by what they read, brought the publications home to their wives. Many families who joined nudists groups during that period of time, first learned about nudism in this manner.

As the years passed, the attitude of society in general toward nudity began to change. Movies included nude scenes; "general- distribution" magazines relaxed their bans on semi-naked photos. And with the change in perspective, came changes in the laws. Nudist magazines began to include full frontal nudity of both men and women of both men and women which they felt was important, if they were to make the point that human bodies are good, and worthy of acceptance. [Note: By comparison, Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* did not print its first photo of a woman's un-airbrushed pubic hair until 1972.] The appearance of these photos emphasized the fact that nakedness was not synonymous with sex, that nude people could enjoy a game of tennis or a swim with the same friendliness as they would feel if they were clothed.

Despite legal progress, public acceptance of nudism in America was slow to develop. There was nothing that could be described as a movement. "Nudism" in America was cloistered and secretive; not quite an underground activity but far from mainstream. It wasn't until the 1960s, a time of intense social, cultural, and political ferment that attitudes began to change.



Top: Bates Beach, Carpenteria, 1999; TNS founder Lee Baxandall in 1978; Caliente Resort, Florida 1999;
 Lower: Promo photo for Bare Necessities Nude Caribbean Cruise, 2002; Naked Volleyball, a favorite pastime; Annual World Nude Bike Ride

The Free Beach Movement

There had been free beaches in Europe since the establishment of the one at Sylt, a long German North Sea island, in 1925. (The term "free beach" is a direct/literal translation of the German *freistrand*, and that the "free" has nothing to do with money but means the absence of mandatory swimsuit requirements.) There had been attempts to establish one in America, at Jones Beach, New York, around 1930. But it had failed, and there were no other successful attempts until San Gregorio, outside San Francisco, was unofficially recognized nearly four decades later.

XB58Beach

In June 1958, Stan Sohler and a group of 60 adults spent an historic weekend at Davenport Landing, 12 miles north of Santa Cruz, on the California Coast. There, the group removed their bathing suits and proclaimed the place XB58. It was the first organized nude beach location. An account of the event was published by local newspapers and photos appeared in Life Magazine:

"There were 60 of them. 60 typical-looking Americans gathered for the weekend campout at the beach . . . They were with their children, house trailers, portable barbecues and tents. They were typical except for one thing they weren't wearing a stitch! These were nudists, members of the Western Sunbathing Association, and this was XB58 Experimental Beach 1958. In private life, they come from all walks of life. One is a leading Shriner, another a highly regarded psychiatrist, another an accountant, another an engineer, another a retired navy chief.... The group, turned down in their efforts to find a public beach, rented the Davenport Landing beach from former San Francisco police officer Charles Powell (who is not a nudist). There were no complaints."

Naturism reborn

During the late 1960's and early 1970's, public social trends finally caught up with social nudism. The sexual revolution produced a generation that was more nonchalant towards nudity and morality, and this affected mass popular culture in magazines such as *Playboy*) and in movies (*Midnight Cowboy* and *Blow Up*.) This new generation assumed that nudity was natural, and therefore appropriate almost anywhere. They also dismissed the quaint restrictions imposed by organized nudism at the ASA camps and colonies--no touching, no hand-holding, no singles.

The result was the Free Beach movement, which started in California and spread rapidly. This casual, informal, unstructured form of nudism acquired the term **naturism** to distinguish it from the more traditional nudism as defined by the ASA. Rebellious young people across Europe and America experienced the freedom of being nude at the beach, in the stream or wilderness, or on their back porch or sundeck, and to hell with the rules!

Among the first beach pioneers was Jeff Poland, a San Franciscan who braved arrest at San Gregorio beach, establishing a "beach head" through civil disobedience. His case went to the California Supreme Court where, in 1972, the California Supreme Court declared that "nudity" was not in itself illegal unless accompanied by "lewdness." This ruling opened the doors. Often, naturists simply took over a corner of an existing "textile" beach and claimed it as their own. If the locals objected too much, the group simply picked up and moved on until they found a beach where nobody (or few) objected and after a few years of use, that beach became known to all as a "nude beach."

In 1974 officials in Massachusetts pushed back and attempted to ban skinny-dipping at the Cape Cod National Seashore. One of those on the beach and arrested that day was a freelance writer named Lee Baxandall who was there with his wife and young son. Baxandall had a knack for organizing, and he used local ad hoc (so called "Free Press") newspapers to organize beach protests and rallies. Soon, he emerged as an influential voice in the rapidly growing free-beach movement.

Venice Beach

In 1974, naturists in Los Angeles attempted to open Venice Beach for social nudity. Nudists and naturists flocked to the beach with visions of establishing a foothold in this populated area that would soon equal the marvelous, open free beaches of Europe. But within a few days, Venice California was overrun with gawkers. Men and women crowded the streets that opened onto the beach, shoving and pushing for the chance to see the "nakeds." Property was trampled, traffic slowed to a stop. Members of the L.A. City Council saw this chaos as an ideal opportunity to get rid of the nude beach. Blaming the crowding on the nudists (the objects of the "sightseeing"), the city fathers hurried to pass an ordinance banning nudity on its beaches. The ordinance was worded to go into effect immediately and, overnight, nudists vanished from Venice waterfront.

Eugene Callen, a German-born fighter for freedom, could not accept this defeat without a longer fight. Meeting with other naturists who had enjoyed the brief freedom in Venice, he formed **Beachfront USA**, with the purpose of re-establishing free beaches (like Venice Beach) that had been closed and to create new accessible free beaches nationwide. His action coincided with the closure of the nude beach at Cape Cod National Seashore and an announcement by Assistant Secretary of the Interior Nathaniel Reed that this ban would soon be extended to Federal lands every- where.

Callen's Beachfront USA immediately went into action. In 1975, this organized effort helped bring a case (Eckl vs. Davis) to the California Court of Appeals, attempting to knock down the City ordinance. This appeal failed, and ever since all beaches in Los Angeles have been enforced as "clothing required."

But Callen was not through fighting. What had started as a fight for one beach quickly became a campaign for equal civil rights for nudists, including the cause of Cape Cod naturists and others in many states throughout the country. One positive result of this action is that Nathaniel Reed's plan to ban nudity on all federal lands never went into effect. To this day there is no ban on nudity while on federal land, although – at the discretion of local park superintendents – rangers may use local state and county laws to issue tickets, if they so choose.

Plans were made to celebrate the first National Nude Weekend, in August of 1976 Eugene Callen was already seriously ill (he died of bone marrow cancer in 1978) so the task of organizing this nationwide protest fell to Lee Baxandall.

Curiously, many of the ASA-affiliated nudist camp and park owners were suspicious of the Free Beach Movement, fearing that if it were successful, it might put nudist camps out of business. They refused to acknowledge the "free beachers" at their conventions and meetings and did not give official support to those trying to social acceptance of nudity outside the confines of the established clubs. It took years for this unofficial policy to be reversed, mostly because as many of the beach pioneers grew older they began migrating to and joining the parks as members.

The 1970's saw the birth of new vacation ideas that catered to the nudist marketplace, such as Windjammer Barefoot Cruises and Club Med. Club Orient opened in the Caribbean. In Texas, Bare Necessities, a travel agency exclusively for nudists, was established and began booking nude cruises. "White water" nude rafting trips are now common through the Grand Canyon and nude houseboating no longer turns any heads at Lake Mead and Lake Powell, Bed and Breakfast motels from Palm Springs to Palm Beach began to spring up that catered exclusively to nudist travelers. By the end of the 1990's, Forbes Magazine estimated that the nudist tourist industry was generating over \$800 million in business annually.

Remote hot springs began attracting many nudist/naturist tourists, and a number of them have developed a "clothing-optional" policy. Many of these locations, like Stinky Springs and Odgen Hot Springs in Utah are quite primitive. Others, like Desert Reef Beach Club in Colorado, offer cemented hot pools with certain days set aside for clothing-optional use. The ideal for naturists are places like Valley View Hot Springs, also in Colorado, where clothing is optional everywhere on the extensive grounds and water temperatures range from 85 to 105 degrees. Harbin Hot Springs in Northern, California is another example of a clothing-optional resort with many amenities.

But those successes were still in the future. By the late 1970's local authorities were pushing back on nude beaches everywhere and the future of the Free Beach Movement was in doubt. At "Hippy Hollow" on Lake Travis near Dallas, Texas, local politicians were successful in banning children under 18 from being nude at a site with a long tradition of family nude recreation and no legal trouble. After the Meese Report on Pornography was published in 1984, opponents to social nudity found they had a new wedge issue: if they couldn't ban nudity outright, they could get it labeled as an "adult activity" and thus get it regulated like a strip club and perhaps, eventually, zoned out of existence. The free beach fight needed a new leader.

The Naturist Society

In 1980, Lee Baxandall transformed his collection of beach volunteers, local publications, and legal advisors into what he christened The Naturist Society. TNS, as it is often called, is dedicated to a form of naturism that focused on grassroots activism and member participation. The choice of the word "naturist" in the name is telling. The term was widely used in Europe to denote family-friendly, body-friendly places, activities, and attitudes and, at the same time, it was free of the negative connotations "nudist" had acquired over the years.

Located in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, Baxandall's hometown, TNS collected information about every nude beach, hot spring, and nudist park in the world and in 1980 they published the first *World Guide to Nude Beaches and Recreation*, which soon became a best-selling travel guide and remains today one of the most respected resources of its kind. Baxandall soon launched a new magazine, *Clothed with the Sun* (later renamed *Nude & Natural* but referred to by nudists simply as "N") to promote a culture of body acceptance, with nude recreation and living at its core.

In the 20-plus years since its founding, TNS has changed with the times. Each year it sponsors what it calls "Gatherings" at select clubs and resorts across the United States. These get-togethers offer workshops and an array

of social, recreational, and cultural activities—all clothing optional, of course. In the early '90s, faced with growing opposition to nude recreation from the religious right, two allied organizations were formed. The nonprofit Naturist Action Committee became TNS's legal, political and lobbying arm while the Naturist Education Foundation, also a nonprofit, took up the challenge of promoting naturism to a sometimes skeptical public. At the turn of the new century, that challenge and others were being met in many ways—through local and regional groups in TNS's Naturist Network; through legal and lobbying activities; through opinion surveys that underscore widespread public tolerance of nude use on select public lands; and through educational and informational efforts that stress the family-friendly nature of TNS-style naturism.

The Nudist Movement Today: “Please Don’t Call Us “Colonies” Anymore!”

Today the nudist movement still struggles to be accepted by mainstream America. Despite frequent court victories by nudist supporters, there are still enough people in America who consider nudity objectionable to make it necessary for nudists to use common sense and caution before disrobing. Yet things are looking better, slowly, for nudists. More skin (albeit “pixilated”) is being seen on American television and in commercials despite cries of protest from conservative groups such as the Parents Television Council and the threat of huge fines from the FCC. And many organizations – from the Moose and Elks to Senior Citizen clubs – are selling nude calendars of their members as a fund-raising promotion.

That said, it is very easy for nudists to enjoy back- country travel in canoes, rafts, and houseboats by contacting travel agencies that specialize in such forms of recreation. Ships can be chartered for ocean sailing, and though the crew might remain dressed, the passengers enjoy all the comforts of a nude cruise without embarrassment.

The older nudist “colonies” of fifty years ago have been upgraded or replaced by upscale and all-inclusive destination “parks” and “resorts” with on-site motel-quality rooms, RV hookups, and full-size mobile homes that can be rented or purchased. Olympic-sized pools, tournament quality tennis and volleyball courts, saunas and hot tubs/Jacuzzis are standard amenities. In 2003, an article in Forbes Magazine said, “nudism is now an \$800,000 a year industry.”

Most parks and resorts also now sell memberships in their clubs, with the understanding that any violation of rules may be cause for cancellation. Bans against all body contact that were instituted fifty or more years ago have for the most part been dropped. This relaxation came about primarily because the true character of nudist resorts was no longer questioned. Not even the most avid objector to public nudity accuses nudists of holding orgies on resort grounds. Freed of this abnormal restraint, nudists have maintained the same high level of decorum as was evidenced before. But now they dare to show normal affection without fear of expulsion. A man and woman may walk arm-in-arm, bodies touching, without condemnation. The feared and unacceptable public sexual activity never did take place. Nudists are, after all, a great deal like their dressed neighbors, sharing with them conventional ideas about relationships and public display of affection.

These nudist parks now attract a definite upscale willing to pay a little extra cost to escape from nearby urban centers. Many of the nudist resorts along the Eastern seaboard are now established as the places to go when European naturists visit this country. Many national and regional organizations work to promote naturism/nudism including AANR, The Naturist Society, Beachfront USA, and the International Naturist Federation. It is these organizations that battle the courts, advertise and promote to the general public, and most importantly, educate those who are unaware of the ideals and benefits of nude recreation.

Today: 2017

After more than 80 years, nude recreation continues to grow as more people choose clothes-free vacations. Society's awareness of the naturalness of nudism continues to go forward, and those who practice social nudism/naturism look forward to the day when their chosen lifestyle no longer has to be practiced behind tall wooden fences or on remote sandy beaches.

In the past few years there has been a resurgence of young people enjoying nude recreation, although not in the parks and resorts. Instead many of the Millennial Generation has discovered nude hiking trails, lakes and hot springs scattered throughout the country. They are increasingly demanding that more WiFi connects be available in these remote areas so they can both text and post selfies of themselves and friends enjoying these more secluded spots. Meanwhile, attendance at the parks and resorts is on a steady decline as the Baby Boomers start to fade into history.

Smaller clubs are beginning to close as they fall into the red. Some of the larger clubs have decided to allow the swinger (i.e. "lifestyle") community to come in on weekends to hold dances. In America, AANR has pushed back and unaffiliated clubs that do this, but the traditional nudist clubs cannot help but notice the clubs that have crossed this line continue to thrive while the traditional clubs are starting to hurt in both members and profit.

The new generation has found ways to enjoy nude recreation without joining anything. As the old business model becomes less and less viable we will watch with interest how the next generation redefines the movement to fit its own priorities.

