



The American Association for Nude Recreation – Western Region

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The Pioneers:

Biographies of Nudists Leaders Who Made a Difference

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Kurt Barthel (1884–1969) Father of the Modern United States Nudist Movement

At first, nudism in North America followed the post- World War I European pattern of organizing small social clubs that met in people's homes or out of the way lakes and streams where outsiders rarely encountered them. 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.