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The Newsletter of the *Naturist Action Committee* and the *Naturist Education Foundation*

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Clothes-Free Living in America

A Cultural Contrast with Europe

By William J. Schroer

I am a naturist...also known as a nudist. (Nudist: The practice of non-sexual social nudity in private and public. Naturist: Integrates social nudity in harmony with nature and respect for the environment.)

In America...my statement is rarely uttered in public...or even in private. Americans are largely not nudists...and those who are are almost entirely in the closet. We'll talk more about American nudists (a secluded and rarely-sighted species) in a moment. First let's look at Europe....a continent that compares on many dimensions with America in culture, taste, dress, etc.

Nudism/naturism...(and for our purposes they will be seen as one and the same) has a legacy tied to health and wellness...first in Germany, then France.

The first use of the term "naturism" was in 1778 by Jean Baptiste Luc Planchon, a Belgian who used the term to advocate nudism as a mean of improving health...or healthy living. Jean Baptiste's writing happened to coincide with the advent of the Industrial Revolution....(1760-1830) widely seen as the most significant event in human history since the domestication of plants and animals. The global transition affected almost everyone.....and had a particular impact on farm workers. While the Industrial Revolution significantly raised the standard of living for almost everyone, it was also hard on workers...with dangerous work, often in unhealthy, squalid conditions for long hours. Essentially, farm workers by the thousands, used to working outside from dawn to dusk in the sunshine and fresh air were moved inside dark, scary, stifling factory environments. The result was both impaired physical and mental health. To compensate from this dramatic and unwelcome change in living legions of factory workers used their one day off to return to the pastures and woodlands, sunbathing, exercising, recreating and celebrating the sunshine and fresh air, often in the nude. This organic societal development, called the "Lebensreform" or Life Reform Movement grew from the middle of the 1800s on through the Weimar Republic in the 1920s.

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**NAC and NEF Join
AANR in Presenting at
the World Social Science
Association International
Conference**

The mission of NAC and NEF is to make naturism an accepted part of society, which requires educating the general public about naturism. For the first time, two naturist/nudist themed sessions were arranged at the WSSO conference. The six total presentations hopefully made an impact to get the non-naturist academic brains thinking about naturists and the challenges we face. William J. Schroer's presentation was intended to highlight the societal differences that have led to naturism being generally accepted in Europe but generally unaccepted in America.

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Adding credibility to the Lebensreform were studies published in Germany in 1902 and 1906 which concluded combining fitness, sunlight, fresh-air bathing (nudism) contributed to the mental, psychological fitness, good health and improved moral life view of the individual. The first journal of nudism appeared in 1902. Importantly, the movement was careful to de-eroticise the nude body.....instead emphasizing the health benefit of clothes-free exercise and exposure to the sun and fresh air.

The publication of these papers had an explosive growth on nudism in Germany and then Europe. The first large scale nudist park opened in 1903 near Hamburg.

In 1919 Dr. Kurt Huldshinsky discovered exposure to sunlight helped to cure rickets. Additional research supported sunlight on the body's contribution to helping to cure tuberculosis, rheumatism and scrofula....thus adding additional scientific evidence in support of the fresh-air/sunshine argument.

Shortly thereafter the French physicians Gaston and Andre Durville studied the effects of psychology, nutrition and the environment on health. They termed the concept "naturisme" and reinfirmed the fresh air and sunshine argument. Nudity became part of "naturisme", seen as the unemcumbered connection between the body and fresh air and sunshine.

Interestingly, many Germans also saw naturism as an antidote to the significant fears Germans had about the industrialized and urban future looming in front of them. Modernity..with its benefits brought much uncertainty and disruption...and the resolution of those fears and a more comfortable view of the future lay in the return to nature seen in "naturisme".

Naturism became widely accepted throughout the 1920s and established itself in France, Germany and other European countries, including Scandinavia.

In both Germany and France, nudism's popularity escaped the repressive Victorian influence of Britain during the 1920s (known as Wilhelmine period in Germany and the Belle Epoque period in France). This was a result of the strong correlation between nudity and health and the emphasis that nudism was not sexual.

Today, naturism is an accepted part of mainstream culture in most European countries: In Germany, Denmark, Sweden and in much of France, almost all beaches are clothing optional. Naturist sunbathing areas exist in city parks in major cities like Munich, Berlin and Paris. Spain has many clothing optional beaches and is known for its nudist friendly culture. Cap d'Agde in France is a fully nude community of up to 200,000 during the summer months. 2.6 million French make nudism part of their lifestyle. (3.8%) From 8-12 million Germans identify as nudists. (10-12%)

In effect, while not universally embraced, nudism is a mainstream part of much of European life. And, while not everyone agrees with nudism....nudists are seen as a part of society that one may agree with or not...but there are no



significant efforts to outlaw or eliminate it.

In America... Kurt Barthel, a German emigrating to the US in the late 1920s established nudism, first in New York City for his "American League for Physical Culture". But then, finding no outdoor venue that would allow clothes-free athleticism, sunshine and fresh air that true naturism demands, found a location in Spring Valley in Rockland County and then to New Jersey, establishing Sky Farm in 1931.

In effect, then, the Europeans had about a 30 year head start in establishing nudism over the US.

It would seem we might have caught up by now. We haven't. The question of "Why not?" has bothered me for a long time....and is the point of this exercise.

We need to go back as far as the Puritans. Puritanism began in the mid-1500s as an attempt to remove all vestiges of the Catholic Church from England. In 1558 when Queen Elizabeth took the throne she re-established the separation of the Anglican Church from Catholicism....but not separate enough for the Puritans.

The Puritans, were not amused by Queen Elizabeth's moderate rulings and implemented what can only be seen as a no-nonsense strand of Christianity. According to Puritans only a few are selected for heaven...but that is known only by God. Each person must have a covenant with God and strive toward goodness....but their ultimate fate was predestined. They were Calvinists in the extreme...believing man to be sinful in nature. By 1630, single mothers were being whipped and abortion had been made punishable by death. Women who failed to conform or were alleged to be adulteresses were being declared witches and hunted, hanged or burned at the stake.

These practices were not in accord with the Anglican Church, which while not supportive of sex outside marriage or adultery, did not condone the extremist practices of the Puritans. This led to a Puritan rebellion and ultimately a civil war in 1642.

Which is not to say the Puritans didn't approve of sex at least within marriage. However, you couldn't have too much fun with it.

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The minister Samuel Danforth's warning against excessive passion even among married people was typical...: "Let thy lustful body be everlasting fuel for the unquenchable fire ; let thy lascivious soul be eternal food for the never-dying worm. Hell from beneath is moved to meet thee

A group of some of the most virulent Puritans escaped prosecution by moving to Holland in 1608. They were hardly welcome there. Not only were they considered fugitives from England their religious practices didn't sit well with the more tolerant Dutch. After living for 12 years in Holland and facing increased pressure from Dutch authorities the Puritans escaped by the skin of their teeth to America in 1620, establishing the Plymouth colony in November, 1620.

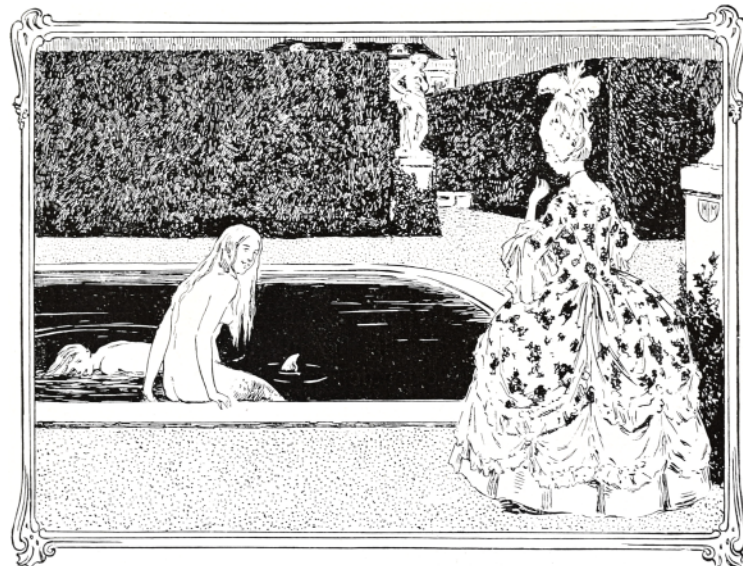
You can imagine this fun group's...(which subsequently conducted the Salem Witch Trials in the 1600s) attitude toward nudity.

In effect, one of the first main differences between the US and Europe is the legacy of the Puritans of guilt, shame and repressiveness, which was rejected in Europe and which we are still dealing with today.

The second major influence which separates Europe from the US as it relates to nudism is the Victorian era.

"What the first sexual revolution in the U.S. attacked was not original Puritanism so much as its Victorian version—which had become a matter of prudery more than of purity, propriety more than of grace. The 19th century frantically insisted on propriety precisely because it felt moralists real faith and ethics disappearing. While it feared nudity like a plague, Victorian Puritanism had the effect of an all-covering gown that only inflames the imagination. By insisting on suppressing the sex instinct in everything, the age betrayed the fact that it really saw that instinct in everything. So, too, with Sigmund Freud, Victorianism's most perfect rebel." (Time Magazine, 1/24/1964)

Victorian ideals associated with modernization taught people to work hard, postpone gratification, repress themselves sexually, "improve" themselves, be sober, conscientious, even



compulsive. These values were not newly discovered at the accession of Victoria, but they were commanding wider and more zealous support than ever before. (American Victorianism as a Culture-Daniel Walker Howe, American Quarterly, Vol. 27, #5) Most of all, however, the Victorians pursued order in their personal lives. Here they could practice humanistic self-cultivation, Protestant self-denial, and/or bourgeois self-control, all in the name of regulated self-improvement. Order in the individual and order in society were, of course, mutually reinforcing in Victorian civilization.

During this same time Europe had the "Wilhelmine" era in Germany and the French had the "Belle Epoque". While there were modest trends toward conservatism, the society in both France and Germany enjoyed an optimistic outlook, artistic triumphs and social expansions. Cabarets, bistros and music halls flourished, the Can-can dance, the Moulin Rouge and the Follies Bergere were hallmarks of the liberalism of the time.

While the Europeans had only a 30 year head start on formal nudism vs. the Americans.....they had a huge perceptual advantage by seeing non-sexual nudism from a completely different perspective. The publication of scientific papers linking nudity with exercise, sunshine, fresh air and a return to nature provided a health oriented "shield" that prevented nudism from being seen from solely a sexual perspective and was not condemned or vilified as occurred in the US.

On the US side, the imprinting of Puritan values and the reinforcement of Victorian prudery provided exactly the opposite effect with nudism being axiomatically linked to sexuality and the accompanying moral turpitude suggested by the Puritan ethic and Victorian mores.

The Comstock Act institutionalized the criminality of nudity by requiring the postal service to seize sexually explicit or pornographic materials. Anything that had nudity in it was seen as explicit or sexual...even if it were pictures of nudists playing volleyball.

Nudist organizations in the US hid behind fake names such as the American Sunbathing Association or the Ohio Sun Club or The League of Physical Culture.

Nudist resorts had names like Sunshine Gardens or Sunsport Gardens, or Sky Farm and had to be located far from prying eyes....often in isolated parts of the countryside. Proprietors kept a low profile in case they would be spotted and the site raided by police. Nudist resorts couldn't advertise for fear of attracting attention. Memberships were small as most people never heard about the clubs or resorts or social nudism. There were few word-of-mouth referrals as no one wanted to admit being a nudist. Members didn't use last names...even with other members of the club or resort.

As a result of the small scale and limited funds and need for secrecy, resorts were hidden away, rustic and even primitive. Most were little more than campgrounds with possibly a pool and a volleyball court.

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Today, nudist organizations are more visible such as AANR, Southern California Naturist Association and resorts are also more public and not hidden away (although as late as 1955 the police still raided private nudist resorts and charged members with indecent exposure).

However, the pervasive cultural imprinting of the Puritans and the Victorian era continues to this day.

American nudists are still largely in the closet.

The Naturist Education Foundation, of which I am a board member conducts a national poll every 5 years or so to determine the attitude of average Americans about nudity. While 40% of Americans have gone "skinnydipping" or visited a nude beach and 75% of Americans believe space should be set aside for nude sunbathing, few Americans self-identify as nudists.

I own and operate a nudist Bed and Breakfast in Michigan. Since I've opened a little over 5 years ago I ask guests if they are "out" about being a nudist to their friends, family, co-workers, etc. 95% of my guests are not out to anyone, including their children about being nudists.

As the board chair of the Naturist Action Committee I have made a presentation on an annual basis to the Gay Naturist International annual gathering in Pennsylvania. I also do workshops there and when I ask members of the gay community if they are out as nudists, almost none of admitted they are. I would say "You are out as gay, but not as a nudist?" They answered that they were more likely to be accepted as gay than as a nudist.

The media, of course, is not helpful here, and continues to represent nudity only in the context of sex or sexual or promiscuous situations. TV shows like "Naked and Afraid" treat nudity as a ridiculous impediment to finding a path to survival or as a clown show. The media so colors and reinforces the Puritan/Victorian view that nudity is bad or evil, people in America have a hard time thinking otherwise.

I had a potential guest call me about a week ago at the B&B. He asked "This is a nudist place isn't it?" "Yes, I answered". "What do you do there?" he asked. "Well," I said, "you do what you would do in any resort environment: you swim, play pickleball or bocce, go for a hike in the woods, watch the stars at night, use the hot tub.....you do anything you would do at another resort, its just clothes free."

He thought about it for a minute wrapping his mind around the concept of nude living without it being sexual and then said "That sounds very interesting....I'll talk to my wife about it and call you back." "Great" I replied.

In effect, we have two groups of people, Americans and Europeans, who, while they have much in common culturally, diverge very significantly when it comes to the issue of social nudism. The Europeans have come to see nudism as more natural, more healthy and more organic in terms of a place in their society. As I noted, there are millions of nudists in Europe.

The Americans, heavily influenced by the Puritans and reinforced in those attitudes during the Victorian era, see nudity as shameful and inextricably linked to sex. Both are basically bad from a Puritan/Victorian point of view. In America there are perhaps 60,000 card carrying nudists. Although many more may participate in nudist activities, they don't admit it.

When I make presentations to groups like yours sometimes people say to me "I don't know any nudists". My response is "You don't know whether you know any or not. They are almost all in the closet."

So take a look at the person sitting next to you. Could they be a nudist?

Social nudism/naturism is a transformational and healthy way to live, to accept one's own and others' bodies, to embrace nature without the influence of clothing and to celebrate our connection with the environment in a remarkable and unique way.

But for most Americans, a favorite phrase comes to mind "We are all prisoners of our culture". And Americans cannot see past those Puritan/Victorian prison bars to see the light of naturism shining in the distance.

Thank you for your time and attention.





**World Naked Gardening Day is Saturday,
May 4, 2024!**

<http://wngd.info>

NEF Recognizes Preservation Week

At the NEF Research Library, we take our mission of "Preserving Naturist History" pretty seriously.

The library is housed in a secure and solid brick office building, and is climate controlled to a healthy temperature and humidity level. Being in Wisconsin, the area escapes things like hurricanes, earthquakes, and wildfires. Severe storms and tornados are the only worry but are far less frequent than other states.


The collection itself is stored depending on the item. Older and more fragile magazines are bagged, but not sealed. (Sealing items also seals them

with the humidity at that time, which could damage them faster if there are temperature changes that cause the humidity to condense.) Similarly, the celluloid films are boxed but able to breathe. Celluloid films decay and release vapors, and being sealed with those vapors speeds up the process. It's a good thing NEFRL had all of its celluloid tapes digitized a couple years ago.

VHS is another medium that has a time limit. According to Kodak, "on average, tapes degrade 10-20% over 10 to 25 years." NEFRL has tapes from the 1980's, making them 40 years old already. That's why VHS is the next



focus for preservation, and that activity starts now.

The Library of Congress has some fun preservation-themed bookmarks, one with nudity, at: <https://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/educational/bookmarks/preserveyour/index.html> The 2024 Preservation Week theme is **Preserving Identities**. 

New Items Available for Digital Loan

After re-cataloging the videos, and merging in new donations from several sources, there's a few more DVDs available for Digital Loan. (Patrons of the NEF Research Library can sign up and receive loans all for free.)

One of the features is "It's All In Good Taste", a film with Jim Carrey that was reviewed a few issues ago.

Thank You to ANRL for providing a few DVDs (listed here) and a large number of surplus VHS tapes.

Another film in the list is a misleading title "Modern Nudist" which is about a Korean model.

There's a couple exploitation films, the best of which is probably "Adam and Six Eves". The library's DVD is an older one, and I personally have a 3D blu-ray version of the film which I'd like to digitize somehow. (Keeping the 3D is a challenge!)

Lastly, there's some nude aerobics, yoga, and tai chi. They are about as boring as they sound.

Last Name	First Name	Video Title	Year	Asset Tag
Wallis	John	Adam and Six Eves	1962	video319
Holt	Joel	All of Me	1963	video320
Krovek	Achem	Babes in the Woods	1962	video321
Kramreither	Anthony	It's All in Good Taste	1983	video325
ANRL		Short Films for Nudist Families	1964/2023	video317
ANRL		Short Films for Nudist Teens and Older	2004/2023	video318
	Anonymous	British Naturism The Naked Truth	2006	video699
	ANRL	The Bruce Nutting Story	1990	video705
	DG Distributors	Totally Nude Aerobics	1996	video716
	DG Distributors	Totally Nude Yoga and Tai Chi	1995	video717
	KD Softbank	Modern Nudist	2001	video804
Watson	James	Art Follows Nature – a Conversation with Paul LeValley (E131)	2022	video691

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- ▶ the educational & public outreach efforts of the Naturist Education Foundation, &
- ▶ the preservation of naturist history by the NEF Research Library.

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