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HISTORY OF NUDISM IN MODERN AMERICA

Kissimmee, Fla., — Early New England settlers — 16th century Puritans — with their non-pleasure, morality-enforcing ways were so afraid of nudity, and the lust they felt it could foster, that they refrained from bathing. Long forgotten were the robust ways of the ancient Greeks, who performed feats of strength and skill during the first Olympics, which of course was the earliest documented form of nude recreation.

However, as the colonial era gave way to a free and independent United States of America, “radical thinkers,” including Benjamin Franklin and Henry David Thoreau, publicity lauded the benefits in daily naked walks, or as they were called, “air baths.” Other nudists of note included President John Quincy Adams, who regularly bathed nude in the Potomac, as did the much beloved fictional characters of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn who skinny-dipped with joy and abandon.

But these so-called radicals continued to remain a very small minority of the population until the dawn of the 20th century brought more formal nudism to America.

Kurt Barthel, acknowledged as the founder of American nudism, was acquainted with other German nudists late in the 1920s and had allowed his name to be used as a local New York contact. On Labor Day of 1929, Kurt led a small group of individuals to a picnic in the buff in the Hudson Mountains near Peekskill, New York, and organized nude recreation in America was born with his dues-paying club, called the “American League for Physical Culture” (ALPC).

The first official nudist club opened soon after on June 21, 1930, near Spring Valley in Rockland County, New York. By 1931, ALPC had welcomed over 200 new members and moved to an area near Dover, New Jersey. In October of 1931, Ilsley Boone, the ALPC’s Executive Secretary was asked by Barthel to take his place as leader of the ALPC, in the newly renamed American Sunbathing Association. The ASA grew to its present size of nearly 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 of its membership.

Boone’s concept of the nudist lifestyle was 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. This definition contemplates that there is nothing shameful in nakedness per se; that there is no need for discrimination between the several parts of the body as regards their respectability and acceptability; that for many forms of outdoor and indoor work, for outdoor sports, for swimming, possibly for life within the home, nudism offers a much more wholesome and healthy way of life than does clothed society. Nudists do not advocate a clothesless social order in the twentieth century, though such an eventuality is not inconceivable.”

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Member of:
American Recreation Coalition
National Recreation and Parks Association
National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds
International Naturist Federation
Local Chambers of Commerce

After more than 70 years, nude recreation continues to grow as more people choose clothes-free vacations. Today, the American Association for Nude Recreation includes almost 50,000 members and nearly 270 affiliated clubs, RV campgrounds, bed & breakfasts, and resorts in the U.S., Canada and beyond.

The American Association for Nude Recreation is the oldest and largest organization of its kind representing people who enjoy clothes-free and clothing-optional recreation throughout North America. For further information on nude recreation and the association's affiliated clubs, contact AANR at **1-800-TRY-NUDE** or visit the association's web site at www.aanr.com.

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