

# BEACH BUZZ

September – October 2001

Volume 2, Number 4

a publication of B.E.A.C.H.E.S. Foundation and its Chapters  
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*"Keeping Our Beaches Bare"*

## Bodies Beautiful at the Wolfsonian Library

### From Wolfsonian Newsletter

When American in the 1920s, '30s or '40s wanted to learn about "natural treatments for bronchitis," how to "banish insomnia," or why walking is "the fountain of youth" they may have picked up a copy of Physical Culture Magazine, published by the health and hygiene guru Bernarr Macfadden, the magazine reflected the tenets of the American Physical culture movement: healthy living through exercise, good nutrition, and proper hygiene.

Robert J. Young, a self-proclaimed "Physical Culturalist" and lifetime member of the American Sunbathing Association [currently called the American Association for Nude Recreation], last December donated an early complete run of Physical Culture Magazine to the Wolfsonian-Florida International University (Miami-Dade County).

Young has been collecting materials relating to the Physical culture and Nudist movements in the United States for many years; included in his gift of more than

ninety items were other Macfadden publications. Among these are rare health and nutrition books and numerous issues of the magazine The Nudist: Sunshine and Health, from 1933 forward. Frank Luca, the Wolfsonian's associate librarian, considers the donation an "outstanding collection of materials."

Macfadden led the fight against Victorian prudery and tried to show that the human body was not obscene. He was "instrumental in promoting the American Physical Culture movement in the late nineteenth century, which blossomed into the "back to nature" movement of the early twentieth century," Luca explains.

The strapping young women who jump hurdles, throw javelins, or row their boats on the covers of Physical Culture Magazine emphasized Macfadden's beauty-through-fitness message. It was further reinforced in articles such as "Every Woman Can Be Lovely – Here's How" and "I Won Back Health and Husband." Other articles seem more contemporary: "Five Minutes of Exercise for the

Busy Man" and "Exercise to Retain Youth" easily could be titles found in magazines published today.

Bernarr Macfadden made millions of dollars promoting his health and fitness regimen. Besides his numerous publications, he opened several physical fitness hotels, including on Miami Beach – the Macfadden-Deauville. During the Great Depression, concerned as always for the physical well-being of Americans, he opened the Penny Restaurant chain, where nutritious, healthful meals could be purchased for just a few cents.

Young's gift provides wonderful documentation of the Physical Culture and Nudist movements from the turn of the nineteenth century through the 1940s. They will be considered for the exhibition The Body Politic: Modern Design and the Body, now being developed by Assistant Director for Exhibitions and Curatorial Affairs Marianne Lamonaca. This forthcoming exhibition will examine concepts of the body, health, and fitness during the first half of the twentieth century. ☆