

In the Form of Simplicity

Diane Meyer

LIFE in my hometown is exceptional. Its people are uncommon, its physical appearance is unusual, and its community spirit is one of unique strength and tolerance. Randall Stewart, in his essay *On the Meaning of Vanderbilt*, spoke in regard to a university situation when he wrote “. . . traditions and ideals bind us together in a community.” However, this does not disregard the idea that common traditions and ideals will bind any people anywhere in a spiritual community. My hometown, Nappanee, Indiana, is alive with a story of its own traditions and ideals to exemplify Stewart’s truth.

To understand Nappanee’s wonder, one must first know of its composition. Driving through Nappanee is not shockingly different from viewing any mid-western town of five thousand. Two main streets intersect in the heart of the town and are lined with old grey stone and reddish-brown brick buildings, occasionally interrupted with a sign of progress in the form of a modern structure. The first hint of its unique quality is announced by a clippity-clop as a horse-drawn buggy ambles through the street. Suddenly one notices a few quaintly-garbed folk, surrounded by multitudes of children, either visiting in groups or scurrying from store to store. Or perhaps it is Sunday in Nappanee. Long caravans of buggies can be chanced upon faithfully journeying to a good-hearted neighbor’s where a worship hour is being held. These people impart a fairy-tale aura which envelops the town giving it character and individuality. You see, Nappaneans are forty percent “plain people,” or Amish, a religious sect believing in true simplicity in living.

Nappanee is awake to these people’s needs and respects their wishes and beliefs. Recently the town cleared a parking lot for Amish horses and buggies. In the stores merchandise shows antiquity as items from butter churns to gas lamps are standard. Barbers must also gear their trimming knowledge to beard-shaping and “bowl” hair-cuts.

As is naturally expected, conflicts arise between this seemingly non-progressive, conservative faction and the business, progressive, educational and professional factor. This is where the divine wonder of Nappanee’s community spirit dominates. The basic goal of Nappanee citizens is “to make Nappanee morally, economically, and religiously, a good place to live and raise a family.” This element of conservatism provides Nappanee with a most precious and intangible strength. The influence generated by this forty percent, who so puritanically believe in a morally sound and religiously pious community, brings into close association their “good simple life,” Thoreau’s panacea, with that business, social, and material aspect in Nappanee’s community existence. In the combination of these two,

a feeling of brotherhood and unity in all functions, social, business, or religious, prevails. Stewart referred to an "honor system" as a result of the community feeling. Nappanee's answer to his "honor system" is the common trust which allows citizens to leave their doors unlocked, with no qualms of theft. Living to make life easier for all in the community is the prevailing spirit with which Nappanee is endowed.

As the "plain people" are a personification of "in the world, but not a part of it," so their existence provides an invisible adhesive to bind all opposing components into one striving for a common goal. Thus, in the form of simplicity, is Nappanee blessed with a true, living community spirit.

Versailles—Lost Wonderland

Clara I. Frisbie

"**B**REATH-TAKING . . . unbelievable . . . shimmers with a glow of the past." I read again the words in the travel folder describing the palace of Versailles. I had studied the history of the great palace which today still stands as a monument to the glory of France; now for the first time I was going to see that monument. In just a few moments I would be standing in front of the gates of a world museum, a museum of grandeur and excellence.

I settled back in my seat and listened to the sound of the motor as the bus moved swiftly along. I tried to picture how Versailles would really look. I could imagine it shimmering in the distance, gradually taking shape as I drew near, the huge gates gleaming as the sun shone on their golden tips. I could almost see the dazzling path that led up to the huge iron doors and the splendor of each room as it unfolded before me still enveloped in the robes of the past.

The bus jolted to a stop and I came out of my world of day-dreams. I was seized with a feeling of intense anticipation. My excitement mounted as I gathered up my things and hurried towards the door. By the time I managed to get out of the bus, I trembled uncontrollably.

For a moment I was afraid to raise my eyes and see the reality, but slowly, almost without volition, I lifted my head and saw Versailles, wonderland no more.

There were the huge gates with their tips of gold, but the gold was tarnished and chipped with age. The touch-up painting made it look like an old woman trying to cover up ugliness with cosmetics. The dazzling path was of cold, gray brick, and instead of being bathed in sunlight it was washed in a foggy drizzle. The doors, it's true, were of heavy iron, but they didn't open unfolding rooms of "unbelievable splendor." They opened unfolding rooms that seemed neither splendid nor quaint, but merely in poor taste.

The Hall of Mirrors was a long corridor with windows on one