

VILLAGE VIEW

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The more things change, the more they stay the same. (That's not original, but it is reassuring.) It's reassuring because there seem to be some incredible changes in store. Just when things appear to settle down to a pattern, along comes a new wrinkle, and by golly, we're expected to adjust once more; the older one gets, the harder it is to do so. It's unsettling.

Younger people confronted with changes take them in stride. Their flexibility may come more easily because their habits aren't yet firmly established. They haven't reached a point in their lives where expectations and reality conflict. Their expectations are still fluid and reality isn't shock-treatment; it's simply the way things are.

For older people, however, expectations become static; surprises can force giving up activities long considered normal and changes such as that generate a good deal of resistance.

On the other hand, in many instances situations most resisted are often not so much a change as may first appear; rather they are more like a return to normalcy. By all rights, that's how the older generation should view them. It's almost like the "good old days" come full-circle.

Today's young adults who've never known the difficulties of a Great Depression, well-remembered by their elders, give every indication of adjusting to change more readily than their parents thought possible. All they lack is the experience and the nostalgia that characterizes the over-fifty age-group.

Stop and think: most people under forty learned to turn a light switch before they could feed themselves and to use the telephone before they could read. They can drive any kind of car, operate all sorts of new-fangled electronic equipment, but few have the remotest idea how to hitch a horse to a wagon or to milk a cow.

It's a pretty good bet, though, if the time comes they must learn those old-fashioned skills, they'll soon be experts. When it comes to accepting change, the young are setting good examples even though theirs is the greatest adjustment.

They've no memories of Grandmother's daily ritual of filling the lamps, trimming the wicks, washing and polishing the shades. They can't imagine life without modern plumbing, wiring and household appliances. They've never known getting water from pitcher pumps, preserving the food in ice boxes, using outhouses, reading by light of candles or kerosene lamps, or doing laundry in a washtub. Most never saw a scrub board and wouldn't recognize one if they fell over it.

They didn't grow up with a furnace that required fueling twice a day and produced ashes to be emptied at frequent intervals. For many, doing dishes and drying clothes have always been a matter of loading a machine, setting a control and pushing a button.

While older people see things coming back, like wood stoves and wood piles, and take a certain pleasure in them, it's a new experience to younger ones. And they rise to the occasion with enthusiasm. They get their wood under cover

and well-seasoned before they first cold snap in October, turn down their thermostats, shut bedroom doors, draw the shades at sunset and bundle up in sweaters, hats and mufflers.

If coal returns to its former throne, they'll order a couple of tons each fall, build a coalbin in a corner of the cellar, and feel satisfied and self-sufficient as the shiny lumps of anthracite rattle down the chute through the cellar window, just as Great-Grandfather did.

Daddies will find themselves shovelling coal before going to work in the morning as well as emptying ashes; should they forget to repeat the process before turning in for the night, mummies and kiddies will shiver; so will Dad, and he won't often forget.

It's possible the next decade will bring technological changes to make coal shovelling unnecessary; we're beginning to see solar collectors for heating hot water, and we'll be seeing many more in months to come. We'll see innovations as yet un-dreamed, one way or another.

The changes aren't all going to involve returning to a Nineteenth Century life-style; what we can anticipate is a combination of things that worked then integrated with technology since and yet to be developed. The hybrid solutions to our present problems will improve as well as change our methods over the long haul.

Most of our energy will come from the sun. Windpower is a form of solar energy, and we'll see more and more wind-generated electricity-producing systems in use. If the utility companies don't initiate it, householders will.

Rivers and streams, as they have in the past, will be used increasingly to produce power; tidal power will be harnessed in this country in similar ways it's being done in Europe.

Greenhouses, specially constructed to store the sun's heat, will be common additions to residential buildings; not only will they help keep us warm, they'll extend our gardening season well into the winter. We'll harvest vegetables in January and February.

Impossible? Unlikely? If the past provides lessons for the future, consider: how long did it take Americans to accept the advantages of indoor plumbing, electrical wiring, modern appliances or gasoline engines? How long did it take us to make telephones, radios and television a part of our everyday lives?

We're a nation with a history of adjusting to change, a history of accepting promptly the new and the different if it's an improvement. With each technological step forward have come larger benefits, more employment and higher living standards for everyone.

Although our youth are taking changes calmly and without complaint, and for the present are incorporating woodstoves and other energy-saving devices into their lives like veterans, they won't settle for them permanently. As new and better power sources are developed, they'll be adopted, improved, and accepted as the norm.

Yes, the more things change, the more things stay the same. Let's give the young people the respect and credit they deserve for their capacity to adjust to a difficult period. They're a hardy bunch and most are making the changes and sacrifices without a whimper. In fact, most are trying harder to meet the present energy emergency than are many older folk who, in some ways, find it harder to go back to the good old days than the generation they produced.

It's been quite a while since we could look proudly at the younger generation, but right now, it's the one setting good examples. More power to 'em.