ONEIDA’S UTOPIA: A RELIGIOUS AND SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT

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Abstract

of

ONEIDA’S UTOPIA: A RELIGIOUS AND SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT

by

Katherine Anne Heim

The Oneida Community was a Perfectionist communal venture undertaken in Madison County, New York from 1848 until 1881. The group’s leader, John Humphrey Noyes, and his followers claimed to be conducting a scientific social experiment based on their religious tenets. Historical scholarship has placed little emphasis on the scientific aspects of the community in the context of antebellum Evangelical religion and has instead focused on the community’s social organization, economic organization, and the theocratic leadership of Noyes. The community’s copious publications and member correspondence provide the foundation of primary sources. Secondary sources provide background on the popularly held beliefs of the role of science and the millennial religious fervor of the antebellum era associated with the Second Great Awakening.

The conclusion drawn is that the Oneida Community did engage in a series of scientific experiments founded on their religious beliefs that challenged traditional marriage practices, domestic living arrangements, and human reproduction in an attempt to prove the pangenesis theory and herald the millennium.

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Date

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

*This country has been from the beginning, and especially for the last forty years, a laboratory in which Socialisms of all kinds have been experimenting. It may be safely assumed that Providence has presided over the operations, and has taken care to make them instructive.*


When John Humphrey Noyes published *History of American Socialisms* in 1870, he was the charismatic leader of a communal residential, industrial, and religious colony known as the Oneida Community. Located on the outskirts of the village of Lenox, in the heart of the “Burned-over District” of New York, the Oneidians expanded from an initial membership of Noyes, his wife, and several of his siblings and friends, numbering about 40 total to over 268 individuals at its peak in the early 1870s. Founded in 1846 and transplanted to the New York location from Putney, Vermont in 1848, the community engaged in a variety of scientifically based social experiments that challenged the prevailing middle-class norms of family structure, housing, and reproduction.

Guiding their experimental social venture were the members’ Perfectionist religious beliefs. Early nineteenth-century Perfectionism was a New Testament Protestant religious sect whose origins can be traced to the Finney Movement and the Protestant

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religious revivals that swept through upstate New York during the 1830s. Charles Grandison Finney, a Presbyterian minister in 1830s, brought to the public an interpretation of Christianity that discarded Calvinist predestination and emphasized that individuals could attain a higher spiritual life and that human activity would renew society through their own efforts. Finney’s Evangelical message united individual spirituality with popular social reform movements of the era such as temperance, abolitionism and voluntary benevolent societies to assist the poor.

The belief that society could be reformed and renewed by the Christian faithful led some to attempt to create new model communities during the antebellum period. Within this atmosphere of Evangelical religious fervor, no fewer than forty utopian or intentional communities organized in an attempt to create the ideal society. Many of these communities were faith driven, had a cooperative economic foundation, and embraced communal property. Yet, the overwhelming majority of the communal adventures initiated during the antebellum period left little historical footprint. Community planners wrote constitutions, solicited monies and invested their capital in property and buildings, only to succumb to internal dissent or financial defeat within months of their founding.

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5 Ibid, 174.
Amid the numerous failed attempts at association, the Oneida Perfectionists are distinctive because they thrived for over three decades.⁸

The Oneida Perfectionists were chiliasts, or millennialists, and shared the widely held conviction among early nineteenth-century Evangelical Protestants that Jesus would return to earth and commence a reign of 1,000 years. Since the late Middle Ages, millennialism was one method utilized by Christians to explain and rationalize the human experience.⁹ In the early nineteenth century, particularly in the northeastern United States, American social and economic patterns were in the midst of rapid transition. Historian Nathan O Hatch characterizes the period 1780-1830 as a time when “the cement of an ordered society seemed to be dissolving.”¹⁰

The feelings of social disorder experienced by many white Americans during the first third of the nineteenth-century were generated in part by technological innovation and the resulting changes in social organization. The opening of the Erie Canal, the rapid expansion of transportation networks that facilitated the comparatively swift movement of people, products and ideas over space, and the organization of reform societies advocating for abolition and temperance exemplify the economic and social changes

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taking place. In addition, the increasingly market-oriented economy and shifting demographics produced profound population growth in urban centers that were simultaneously transitioning to a more industrial-based economy. Frontier and rural communities moved westward as new transportation systems facilitated rapid urbanization into geographic regions that hitherto had been comparatively isolated.  

These and other transformations taking place within the broader American society changed the ways in which individuals interacted with each other and altered familial relationships. The small interdependent communities of previous generations were being replaced by more impersonal and competitive industrial and commercial urban centers with ties to the developing transportation networks. Within the family, traditional hierarchal deference was strained as adult members increasingly worked outside of the home and a generation of children abandoned long-established family-centered farms and businesses for urban employment. These comparatively rapid changes in daily life contributed to a general feeling of disorder for the white Christian middling classes.

Christianity for white immigrant groups in colonial and Revolutionary America had provided a degree of community stability and reinforced the long-standing hierarchal deference within the family unit and broader society. Early Euro-American settlement patterns in North America demonstrate that ethnicity and religious affiliation served as the foundation for community life. In these comparatively small communities, shared customs and values were often reinforced by the local church membership, which also

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sponsored social events and in the absence of official law enforcement, served as a self-policing agency for the community.\textsuperscript{13} During this era of political, social, and economic change, the long-established Congregational, Calvinist, and Anglican religious denominations were increasingly scrutinized by their adherents. Each experienced a precipitous decline in church membership as new Protestant denominations gained in popularity.\textsuperscript{14} Protestant Evangelical leaders such as George Whitefield, Lorenzo Dow, and Finney adopted a reassuring message of salvation, due in part as a response to their followers’ demands for an ecclesial explanation of the rapidly changing American social conditions affecting the white middle-class Christian membership.

Mobilizing itinerant preachers and utilizing traveling revival techniques perfected by preachers such as Finney, the new message this generation of ministers proselytized was that “the perfection of the world would not occur...through divine intervention,” but gradually as divinely inspired individuals came to dominate society.\textsuperscript{15} The revivals that swept through rural regions of the northeastern United States beginning in the 1790s and climaxing in the 1830s, did not foretell of the cosmic end of human history, but rather that the millennium could be heralded through concerted human effort. Saved individuals would create an outwardly spreading ripple effect, engulfing and converting non-believers, eventually bringing holiness and salvation to all.

Some of the faith-driven utopian communities of this period, such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Kirtland, Ohio (1831), Hopedale (1841), an

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{14}] Hatch, 6-15.
\item[\textsuperscript{15}] Barkun, \textit{Crucible}, 26.
\end{itemize}
intentional community advocating “Practical Christian Socialism,” and the series of Transcendentalist Fourierist Phalanxes, most notably, Brook Farm (1841-1847), were attempts at reconciling “the larger drama that was unfolding in American society that pitted values and ideals against financial expediency and marketplace economy.” These faith-driven communities emphasized theology, cooperative labor and the pooling of members’ economic resources to offer participants both a sense of religious purpose and socio-economic stability.

Similar to these communal ventures, Noyes and the Oneida Community members were postmillennialists, in that “they projected the perfect society into the future as the cumulative consequence of incremental improvement.” The Oneida Community also operated within the constraints of Perfectionist theology, cooperative labor and the memberships’ collective economic resources. However, unlike some of the utopian communities of the era, the Oneidains also applied contemporary science in their working model of the ideal society for others to emulate.

The Oneida Community members, who were prolific writers in an era when letter writing, diary keeping, and small scale printing ventures flourished, extensively documented the community’s social practices. In addition to the writings generated by community residents, detractors of Oneida’s social experiments and communal living arrangements published contemporary observer accounts of the “vicious teachings” and

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17 Barkun, *Crucible*, 64.
“licentiousness” practiced within the community.\textsuperscript{18} The conflicting impressions of community life left by members and observers provide historians with a wealth of resources. Overwhelmingly, the most frequented topic of both era observers and subsequent historical analysis has been the Oneida Community’s varied sexual practices.

Former community members wrote and published the earliest histories of the Oneida Community. Allan Estlake’s [Abel Easton], \textit{The Oneida Community: A Record of an Attempt to Carry Out the Principles of Christian Unselfishness and Scientific Race-Improvement}, Corrina Ackley Noyes’ \textit{Days of My Youth}, Pierrepont Noyes’ \textit{My Father’s House: An Oneida Boyhood}, and Harriet M. Worden’s \textit{Old Mansion House Memories: By One Brought Up In It} are representative of reminiscences of member experiences as leading or “central” community members.\textsuperscript{19} These histories, some written decades after Oneida transitioned to a joint stock company, emphasized the religious aspects of the community and distanced themselves from the controversial topics of extramarital sexual intercourse and selective human breeding.

Subsequent generations, in particular two grandchildren of the community’s founder, Constance Noyes Robertson and George Wallingford Noyes, continued the


family tradition, emphasizing the religious tenants and economic success of Oneida as was described within the publications generated by the community. Not surprisingly, the Oneida Community’s newspapers, *The Perfectionist*, *The Witness* and *The Circular*, presented a portrait of harmonious community life. Not until the 1960s, did professional historians delve into some of the internal workings of one of the most protracted utopian experiments of the nineteenth century.

Since the 1960s, historical inquiry has almost exclusively focused on Oneida’s sexual practices and gender relations. The community practiced what Noyes labeled, “complex marriage,” as commanded by his interpretation of the New Testament. In complex marriage, adult community members in full-fellowship were free to engage in sexual intercourse with other adult members in heterosexual pairings of their own choosing, subject to final approval of Noyes or his designees. In addition to complex marriage, birth control was taught to members and practiced community-wide, children lived separate from adults in the “Children’s House,” and men and women worked side-by-side in a variety of community occupations during an era when wage work was typically segregated by gender.

In *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860*,

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historian John Spurlock categorizes the followers of Noyes as sexual reformers. The Perfectionists’ complex marriage practices were contradictory to the middle-class majority who were busily transforming “marriage into a religious vocation...a means of salvation for the married couple and a source of regeneration for the world.” The American Woman’s Home, a prescriptive compilation of domestic advice works authored by Catherine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe published in 1869, is representative of middle-class marriage aspirations and was embraced by those who sought the renovation of marriage into a “religious vocation.” Within The American Woman’s Home, readers could study and learn the skills necessary to create the “Christian Family,” the “Christian Home,” as well as attain membership into the “Christian Neighborhood.” The Christian family and home the Beecher sisters advocated was a nuclear family consisting of a male head of household, his dependent wife and their biological children nestled within a single family residence, preferably in the suburbs. The husband’s responsibility was to provide and the wife’s duty was “chief minister of the family estate.” Oneidains rejected monogamous marriage and their 93,000 square-foot home accommodated over 300 family members.

A few historians have merged the Oneida Community’s renunciation of the legal bonds associated with heterosexual marriage at the into the broader “Free Love” movement of the same era. Taylor Stoehr’s Free Love in America: A Documentary

25 Ibid, 73.
28 Ibid, 19.
History and Spurlock both provide insight into the often turbulent arguments for and against the institution of marriage during the early nineteenth century.29 However, comparisons of the “free love” movement of the antebellum era and Oneida’s complex marriage can be problematic because the two practices derive their origins from two different catalysts. “Free love” developed much of its momentum from the emerging women’s rights movement and the comparison of married women’s civil status to that of slaves. Supporters and practitioners of “free love” in this instance were not seeking salvation and a heralding of the millennium, but rather a woman’s legal right to sue for divorce, obtain custody of children, and the establishment of individual property rights.30 Complex marriage, conversely, was the claimed creation of Noyes and maintained as its objective the rejection of “exclusiveness” in sexual relations. Unlike the supporters of the “free love” movement, the Oneida Community membership advocated neither gender equality nor women’s rights. The New Testament prescribed “the doctrine of the subordination of women to men” and Oneida members believed the “Kingdom of Heaven” would be heralded if personal possessions, including the exclusive relationships shared between spouses, “were surrendered.31 Community members could and did petition for specific sexual partners, but sexual pairings required the approval of the community leadership and individual rights and preferences were subordinate to the community’s religious doctrine.

30 Spurlock, 164-65 and Stoehr, 3.
31 Harriet Worden, “Women’s Subjection,” The Circular, 02 March 1876.
Historians Richard DeMaria and Robert David Thomas emphasize the sexual and reproductive practices of the Oneida Community within the context of Noyes’ Perfectionist theology.\textsuperscript{32} Drawing from community-generated publications and secondary sources, DeMaria’s \textit{Communal Love at Oneida” A Perfectionist Vision of Authority, Property and Sexual Order} and Thomas’ \textit{The Man Who Would be Perfect: John Humphrey Noyes and the Utopian Impulse} explore the reorganization of sexual order and obligations at Oneida within Perfectionist doctrine. DeMaria narrowly focuses on what “love” meant to Oneida participants and the subsequent community behavioral manifestations; Thomas offers a top-down psychoanalytical assessment of Noyes’ “theocracy” at Oneida, emphasizing how Perfectionist doctrine was received and executed by the membership.

More than one historian of the Oneida Community offers insights into the community’s unusual sexual practices and social organization by including a posthumous psychoanalysis of Noyes and his adherents. For instance, Lawrence Foster in \textit{Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons} argues, “John Humphrey Noyes...showed strong manic depressive tendencies.”\textsuperscript{33} Similarly, in \textit{Oneida: Utopian Community to Modern Corporation}, Maren Lockwood Carden speculates on the psychological stability of Noyes, devoting several pages to his “nervous physical disorders” and episodes of “anxiety and neurotic fatigue” as a preface to the founding of the Oneida Community and the practice of complex


\textsuperscript{33} Lawrence Foster, \textit{Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons} (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 167.
marriage. Foster and Carden both provide a now oft-told and accurate rendition of the community’s sexual, and by extension, social practices. However, by placing their analysis within a deviant behavioral framework, the authors neglect the Oneida Community’s self-acknowledged postmillennial aspirations and their scientifically founded experimental nature.

Sociological studies of the Oneida Community include Rosabeth Kanter’s *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in a Sociological Perspective* and Louis Kern’s *Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias: the Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community*. These two studies, assess what individuals who joined the subject utopian communities anticipated attaining through membership. Their contributions to the study of utopian communities of the antebellum era focus on the socialist infrastructure that facilitated communal living, how members organized their work, the distribution of property, and analysis of the internal decision-making processes.

Historian Robert Fogarty’s two books, *Special Love/Special Sex: An Oneida Community Diary* and *Desire and Duty at Oneida: Tirzah Miller’s Intimate Memoir* incorporates two member diaries, each reproduced in their entirety; into his assessment of Oneida. Fogarty presents an insightful overview of the broader Oneida historical context as relates to the sexual and reproductive practices of complex marriage and “Scientific Propagation,” a selective breeding experiment conducted among selected community

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members. Yet, his focus deviates from other assessments of the Oneidians by emphasizing the perceptions of those participating in the community experiments, rather than community leadership and Noyes. Fogarty suggests a ‘darker side’ of community life, where non-central community members expressed feelings of coercion from the community leadership. The two diaries, written during the final decade of the community, reflect the emotional stress “selective breeding” placed on some of the participants.

Historical research relating to the Oneida Community was complicated by restricted access to the community’s documents until 1993. The commune’s successor company, Oneida, Ltd., destroyed nearly everything pertaining to the decade-long human-breeding experiment that produced fifty-eight children between 1869 and 1879. Historian Robert Allerton Parker’s *A Yankee Saint: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community* is the most definitive source on this unique aspect of community life, as it antedates the 1947 document purge and includes citations to sources no longer extant. Much of what historians have been able to uncover on the selective breeding experiment is not found in any official papers sanctioned by the community’s press but

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38 Ibid and Robertson, *Oneida Community Profiles*, 5.
rather from personal papers that continue to periodically surface and find their way into the hands of researchers.40

Although the experimental nature of the Oneida Community’s sexual and social practices are acknowledged by virtually all community researchers, where the impetus for the burst of scientific experimentation at Oneida originated is less well documented. The Oneida Community was founded on Perfectionist religious tenets, but utilized and incorporated scientific methodology in the development of their sexual and social practices. How did the community’s fascination with mid-nineteenth century science intersect with Perfectionist doctrine and millennial theology? Is there any interpretive significance to be found in the community’s extensive library and the construction of a “chemical laboratory” adjacent to the main house?41 Are evangelical religion and mid-nineteenth century science inherently incompatible, as was argued by Oneida Community contemporary John Draper in History of the Conflict between Religion and Science? Or, alternatively, are religion and science complementary as contemporary scientist William Paley proposed in Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances in Nature?42

Analysis of the Oneida Community demands a reassessment of Perfectionist theology within the context of early-nineteenth-century scientific methodology. Oneida represents a three-decade-long controlled laboratory experiment conducted by the

40 Hawley, xiv-xv.
41 Nordhoff, 278.
membership, where theories were tested, and “lessons learned from experience.” Perfectionist doctrine and the belief that human perfection was attainable through conscientious work on self-improvement motivated Oneida Community members to embark on a variety of speculative scientific approaches to achieve their objectives. The Oneidaians deemed scientific study and education so integral to their Perfectionist millennial aspirations that they constructed their own library, made primary education compulsory, sent their young men to college, and constructed a fully equipped chemical laboratory for community wide use. Notably, the Oniedians built two schools, a library and the laboratory, but never constructed a place of worship or other religious structure.

During the Association’s tenure, multiple aspects of Oneida’s communal living arrangements were tested, findings discussed, and if the situation warranted, modified or discarded as members worked diligently to attain their “Kingdom of Heaven.” Drawing from some of the most publicly debated social and reproductive science of the era, the Oneida Community members created a controlled, closed laboratory where group experiments in family organizational structure and human reproduction were carried out and conclusions ascertained and published. For the Oneida Community, the practical applications of the tools of modern science were an integral component of Perfectionist theology and their attempt to herald the millennium.

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43 John Noyes, History of American Socialisms, iii.
Chapter 2

A HOLY UNION OF RELIGION AND SCIENCE

In the kingdom of heaven, the institution of marriage which assigns the exclusive possession of one woman to one man, does not exist.

*Bible Communism*, 1853.44

John Noyes accepted a complementary relationship uniting science and Christian ecclesiology. He was educated at three different universities, completing two courses of study. The first was a secular law degree, where he successfully completed coursework in “languages, grammar, logic, rhetoric...mathematics, chemistry, philosophy, and astronomy,” providing the rational scientific arguments evident in many of his writings. The second was theological, attained during a period of Evangelical fervor. In combination, Noyes’ interpretation of contemporary science and Perfectionist theology provided the foundation for the Oneida Community.

Noyes was born at Brattleboro, Vermont in 1811. The eldest son in a family of nine children.

Illustration 1


his mother Polly Hayes was a homemaker and devout member of the Congregational church. His father, John Noyes, was college educated, had served as a minister for a year, taught school and was a successful businessman. Noyes’ father served as a Representative in the Vermont Legislature and “was sent to Washington for two years as a member of the House of Representatives” at the close of the War of 1812.\(^{45}\) The Noyes family was well-situated economically and politically affluent. They relocated from Brattleboro to Putney, Vermont in 1822.\(^{46}\)

Noyes attended several boarding schools while completing his elementary education and concluded his college preparatory instruction at Brattleboro Academy. In 1826, at the age of fifteen, Noyes entered Dartmouth College and graduated four years later.\(^{47}\) In the year following his graduation, Noyes began his study of law under the tutelage of his brother-in-law in Chesterfield, New Hampshire. As chance would have it, during a brief sojourn to his family’s home, a detour before resuming legal studies at his uncle’s home in Brattleboro, a “minor revivalist” came to Putney and conducted a “protracted meeting.”\(^{48}\)

Up until this time, Noyes remained skeptical of organized religion, the associated Evangelical revivals sweeping through the region, and the belief that the millennium was about to commence. He attended an Evangelical revival not because he sought a religious conversion experience, but rather as an opportunity to socialize. Although, if Noyes was not enthusiastic about attending the four-day-long revival, his mother was exceedingly

\(^{46}\) Ibid, 11.
\(^{47}\) Ibid, 15-6.
hopeful that her eldest son would receive the word, while he warned her in advance, “she would be disappointed.”

Though not professing a conversion experience during this revival, Noyes was “caught in the snare” that second week in September 1831.

That same year he abruptly changed vocations and entered Andover Theological Seminary. Having concluded a year of study at Andover, he then transferred to Yale Theological Seminary, where for eighteen months he studied New Haven doctrine under Nathaniel W. Taylor. By 1833, Noyes passed his examinations and received his license to preach by the New Haven West Association, under the direction of Taylor. His message from the pulpit proposed that the “development of Christianity was progressive,” and that “growth is a principle” of Christianity, rather than the stagnant Christianity of Congregationalism. Dissatisfied with the popular religious revival atmosphere prevalent in the New Haven, Connecticut region, Noyes expanded on New Haven doctrine, proposing that a state of perfect holiness was attainable for the masses not through sermons on “moral discourse,” but rather through introspective “prayer of faith.”

In 1834, Noyes made the heretical proclamation that he had achieved a state of “sinlessness” through prayer of faith. This declaration was made when “perfect holiness,” not a state of sinlessness, was the highest level of holiness within the New Church.

Sinlessness contradicted the New Haven eschatology and challenged Taylor’s political

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52 Ibid.
53 Ibid, 9-10.
54 Ibid, 9.
power as the leading figure within Yale Seminary. A heated debate among theologians at Yale, moderated by Taylor, followed Noyes sinlessness claim. In anticipation of Taylor’s New Haven West Association annulling his license, Noyes surrendered it in 1834.\textsuperscript{55}\n
Noyes spent the next four years traveling as an unlicensed itinerant preacher, seeking converts to his version of the Perfectionist faith and divine guidance on how to proceed with his life.

During these four years some of Noyes’ family feared that he was insane, as his sojourn took him among the “lesser sort,” where he often roomed with strangers and ministered to the poor.\textsuperscript{56} While Noyes himself believed his actions following separation from the New Haven West Association were rational, his family had difficulty comprehending why an affluent young man would discard two promising careers and forsake the comforts of a middle-class life-style to live below his means. If some of his family members and close friends doubted Noyes’ sanity, others in his inner circle viewed his anxiety and questioning of organized Christianity in America as a part of a much broader public theological debate.

In the northeastern United States during this time, other millennialists were organizing into new denominations that challenged the established church order. They did this by restructuring Christianity to integrate with popular culture. In many of the new denominations, religious services were conducted in the language of the common people attending, laypersons replaced the college-educated clergy of the past, and the New

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 82.
Testament, distributed by Bible Societies, was left for the reader to interpret. Church doctrine and membership were democratized, drawing leadership from the common people to serve their local communities.\textsuperscript{57}

Some of the new Christian denominations sought separation from the wider American society as their hope for salvation. Joseph Smith’s Latter-day Saints were expanding rapidly and seeking refuge, William Miller and his followers were forming what would be later known as the Seventh-Day Adventists, Adin Ballou, a Unitarian Restorationist minister was composing the \textit{Standard of Practical Christianity}, which he used as a foundation for his intentional community, Hopedale, and George and Sophia Ripley were in the early planning stages of their transcendentalist communal venture, Brook Farm.\textsuperscript{58} Noyes’ unorthodox interpretation of Perfectionism should be placed in the context of this atmosphere of heated ecclesial debate on personal salvation and the millennium. Noyes was an active participant in the widespread challenge by multiple individuals and organized groups to restore social order through the restructuring of religious institutions.

Similar to his contemporaries, whose ideas regarding Christianity varied from subtle shifts in ecclesiology to the radical restructuring of religion and American society, Noyes utilized the press to spread his Perfectionist message well beyond the geographic regions he visited. Between 1834 and the founding of his Perfectionist Putney Community in 1838, Noyes published his own serial, \textit{The Perfectionist}, and wrote several

\textsuperscript{57} Hatch, 7-9.
\textsuperscript{58} Bushman, 143-78; Barkun, \textit{Crucible}, 33-41; and John Noyes, \textit{History of American Socialisms}, 102-03 and 119-22.
articles that appeared in competing theologically oriented periodicals.\textsuperscript{59} Within the pages of these early publications, Noyes expanded on his analysis of the New Testament, and his methodology to achieving sinlessness. He also offered an unorthodox version of the writings of the apostle Paul, whom he interpreted to have rejected marriage and individual property ownership. The publications provided Noyes a public platform to express his Perfectionist doctrine and facilitated a reciprocal dialogue between other religious and social visionaries.\textsuperscript{60}

It was also during this four-year period of self-reflection that Noyes’ partiality to scientifically observing his world through the lens of Perfectionism, both temporally and metaphysically, became apparent. In this excerpt from \textit{The Perfectionist}, Noyes contrasts the knowledge individuals “guess, think, believe and hope to be true” and those beliefs that have been “tested” and scientifically proven to be true.

\begin{quote}
What we positively \textit{know}, is all the mental capital we can count upon as safe and available. What we guess, think, believe and hope to be true, in paper capital, that may be genuine or may be counterfeit … It is well enough to have on hand a great heap of guesses. But we must not think of living on them, or using them as winnowed truths. Nor must we allow them to get mixed up with our store of known verities… Then we may go on to examine and work up our heap of guesses, so as to convert them as far and as fast as possible into known truths, taking good care not to add any of them to our sure treasure, till we have thoroughly tested them.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{59} The most widely publicized and controversial article appeared in \textit{The Battle Axe and Weapons of War}, August 1837, where John Noyes denounced the institution of marriage.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{The Perfectionist} included commentary and “open letters,” from William Lloyd Garrison, Joseph Smith, and Adin Ballou.
\textsuperscript{61} John Noyes, \textit{Confessions}, 41.
Noyes’ higher education is evident in his methodical cause-and-effect conclusions regarding Christianity and existing American social institutions.

Noyes spent months as an iterant preacher following his departure from Yale. During a protracted stay in New York City, Noyes’ accommodations varied and included Tammany Hall, a series of boarding houses, and a few nights on the streets wandering the Battery. Mingling among the working classes of New York City, Noyes noted in *Confessions*, “I was now learning pretty rapidly the 'ways of the world' in which I found myself,” experiencing first hand the social, living, and working conditions of the laboring classes and the destitute of the city.\(^\text{62}\)

Noyes refers to his time spent in New York City frequently throughout his subsequent writings, drawing examples from his interactions with the urban working class in his arguments for a need to reorganize Christian American society. Some Oneida historians attribute Noyes’ challenge of the established theological doctrine, wanderings among the urban working classes, and itinerant preaching of Perfectionism as evidence of mental instability as his family did.\(^\text{63}\) It is apparent in the Putney Community’s *Statement of Principles* (Appendix A) and *Bible Communism* (Appendix B) that the inequity in the distribution of wealth and the glaring differences between the living conditions of the haves and have-nots that he observed while in New York, made an indelible impression on him.\(^\text{64}\) Many aspects of the social experiment in communal living and the practice of

\(^{62}\) John Noyes, *Confessions*, 42.

\(^{63}\) Carden, 27-33 and Foster, 167.

\(^{64}\) George Noyes, ed., *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 205-06 and *Bible Communism*. 
personal property held in common by Oneida Community members derive their impetus from Noyes’ personal experiences while in New York City.

While a portion of antebellum American society was rushing to “biblical prophecy for help in understanding the troubled times that were upon them,” a more secular segment was turning to natural science to decipher and rationalize the changing world.65 Natural science, or natural philosophy, during the first third of the nineteenth century focused on observable phenomenon and incorporated accepted scientific laws such as Kepler’s law of planetary motion and Newton’s laws of motion. A scientist, described as person who followed a prescribed systematic approach to expand knowledge that produced a predictable or reproducible outcome, was a professional identification first introduced in 1833 by William Whewell. Scientists of this era differed from natural philosophers in that the former conducted experiments and the latter gathered observable data. Professionalization of the majority of the sciences such as biology and chemistry was not realized until the second half of the nineteenth century and standardized research methodology during the antebellum era was non-existent.66

Science during the antebellum period has been characterized by religious and intellectual historian Walter H. Cosner, Jr. as “practical and utilitarian in outlook,” and scientific work “in the early Republic was still carried out by individuals who were usually self-taught or else educated in ancillary fields such as medicine.”67 In the early nineteenth century, a significant portion of the scientific community endorsed positivism

65 Hatch, 6.
as the scientific method of choice. Historians John Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor, characterize the scientific process of positivism as “empirical; that is founded on observation, experience or experiment.”

Experimentation in this era was not characterized by double-blind studies with a control groups and the elimination of variables that may compromise results, but rather by subjective surveillance. The most common scientific methodology positivism utilized was observation; and from observation alone, many of the popularly accepted antebellum era scientific theories drew their conclusions.

Perhaps because of the lack of professionalization, a multitude of “self-taught” individuals who sought technological advances and “useful knowledge” rose to prominence within the field of science during the antebellum era. For instance, physician and astrologer Franz Anton Mesmer popularized the practice of mesmerism, a procedure executed by a “mesmerist” that involved restoring the balance of “animal magnetism,” an invisible vital force within the human body thought to be responsible for disease, by touching or passing the hands over the afflicted. Mesmerism enjoyed widespread popularity in antebellum America as a “science of human nature,” and thousands witnessed first hand the miraculous cures wrought by mesmerists’ at public demonstrations of this new science. The Oneida Perfectionists embraced mesmerism

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69 Conser, 11.
71 Ibid.
with prayer and healing through touch the medical treatment of choice utilized at the Putney community and written about extensively in the community’s publications.

Joining mesmerism as a scientific breakthrough and accepted scientific truth during the ante-bellum period was phrenology, the study of the “cranium’s contour,” to determine an individual’s “intellectual, moral, and affective character.” Phrenology was also accepted by a large portion of the white middle-class American literate public as a useful tool in “extirpating ‘tyrannical customs’ and checking imperfect [government] legislation.” The most noted American phrenologist, Orson Squire Fowler, educated at Amherst College for the ministry, “regularly and systematically fused romantic Jacksonian optimism and American millennial expectations” in public lectures during his forty-year career. For a small fee, phrenologists would map a client’s cranium and then referring to standardized charts produce a profile of social and intellectual traits. Phrenological terminology appears repeatedly throughout Oneida publications, again particularly during the first decade. Mesmerism and phrenology relied heavily on empirical observation to substantiate their efficacy, and were publicized as science by their proponents, not professional scientists.

The physiological scientific advances such as mesmerism and phrenology were joined by renewed interest in the natural sciences including geology, botany, physics, zoology and astronomy. Botanical and zoological sciences emphasized the collecting and categorizing of native flora and fauna by professional scientists and laypersons, often for

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72 Ibid, 122-23.  
73 Ibid, 123.  
74 Ibid.  
75 Ibid.
display. Professional and amateur geologists studied topographical formations in addition to collecting specimens for display. Fascination with the collecting and organizing of samples continued through the opening of the nineteenth century and led to the founding of The Academy of Natural Sciences in 1812, an association that emphasized in its’ first decades the continuation of collecting and analyzing native specimens. The Academy differed from later professional organizations in that it accepted as members both novice collectors and scientists.\textsuperscript{76} The Academy was a privately funded venture; a key financial supporter was William McClure, a London merchant and amateur scientist. Maclure, presiding president of the Academy from 1817 until 1840, also funded the intentional experimental community, New Harmony, in Indiana, a scientific center for the region through the antebellum period.\textsuperscript{77} Dependent on private financial donations, the Academy functioned as a repository for scientific collections, operated a public museum in Philadelphia, and organized expeditions to explore the western wilderness.

A second scientific organization, The American Association for the Advancement of Science was organized on September 20, 1848. Similar to the Academy of Natural Sciences, it accepted “all friends of science” as members, “whatever their actual attainments in research.”\textsuperscript{78} The objective of the American Association for the Advancement of Science was to facilitate the sharing of scientific information across scientific disciplines, regardless of contributors’ proficiency in scientific methodology.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 31-32.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 200.
Publically funded, the focus of the Association was shared knowledge, rather than the collection and display of scientific collections.

Expert scientists, some of whom did not accept the Associations’ conclusions, tainted as they were by input from laypersons, pressured Congress to form a national scientific body composed of professional scientists. Congress established The National Academy of Sciences in 1863.\(^{79}\) The American Civil War prompted the timing of the founding of the National Academy of Sciences; the federal response to the influx of technological advances in weaponry it replaced the U.S. Navy as the federal government’s weapons efficacy screening center for the Union Army. The National Academy received funding from Congress, placing the federal government in a position to define what constituted “science” at the conclusion of the Civil War. Although the majority of National Academy members continued to draw their scientific conclusions from positivist observational evidence, federal government bureaucrats could regulate Academy membership and sponsor, or conversely withhold funds for public research.\(^{80}\)

The Oneida Community was founded and conducted its social experiments during this era of increased public awareness and general interest in the sciences. Botany, zoology and geography captured the attention of the community membership as evidenced by their subscriptions to Nature and the Journal of Applied Chemistry.\(^{81}\) The community maintained its own displays of botanical, zoological and geological specimens. Members were encouraged to pursue individual studies in the natural sciences

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\(^{79}\) Ibid, 200-03.
\(^{80}\) Ibid.
\(^{81}\) Martin Richards, “Perfecting People: Selective Breeding at the Oneida Community (1869-1879) and the Eugenics Movement” New Genetics and Society 23:1 (April 2004), 50.
and were supported financially by the community. Noyes’ scientific interests, in addition to biology and social sciences, included geography. He studied the works of the premier geologist of the era, Charles Lyell, a British lawyer and geologist, and gave lectures at the community on the topic. Oneida Community members embraced the findings of contemporary science as integral to their millennial aspirations of reforming and renewing American society.

There were no professional scientists among the founding Oneida members, and with the exception of Noyes, the founding members were characterized as “New England farmers and mechanics.” The 1850 Federal census enumerated twenty-three farmers, five printers, five carpenters, two cabinetmakers, two shoemakers, two millers, two laborers, a blacksmith, a machinist, a wagon maker, and an editor. These farmers and mechanics were “former Congregationalists and Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Baptists.” Several of the founding members were previously associated with the earlier Millerite and Perfectionist movements, but no evidence suggests “special peculiarities” or that the members had a “history of migration from group to group in a constant search for truth.” “All evidence about Oneida’s members confirms what someone in the community wrote in 1853: ‘the main body of those who have joined the Association at Oneida, are sober, substantial men and women, of good

82 Nordhoff, 263.
83 Seventh Census of the United States, 1850. National Archives and Records Administration. Microfilm rolls, M432-526, 239B-241B.
84 Nordhoff, 263-64.
85 Robertson, Oneida Community Profiles, 32 and Carden 25-26.
previous character, and position in society."86 The initial membership reflected a cross-section of white American middle-class Christians.

Although members’ occupational and religious affiliations prior to joining Noyes in Putney reflect the emerging white middle-class, nothing suggested in 1846 that the group was about to embark on a three-decade long scientific experiment on family organizational structure and human reproduction in an attempt to herald God’s Kingdom on Earth. In Utica, Oneida County, New York, a mere twenty-seven miles distant, historian Mary P. Ryan’s white middle-class subjects were embracing the Evangelical revival movements sweeping through the region, forming voluntary self-improvement associations, and reinforcing the Beecher sisters nuclear “Christian Family.”87 At Oneida, Perfectionist Christianity and voluntary self-improvement was united with scientific social experimentation.

The intersection of Christian theology with scientific advances was a hotly debated topic among some white Protestant Christians. The problem was one of chronological dating. Christian orthodoxy dated Creation based on Biblical chronology as occurring on October 23, 4004 B.C., as computed in the seventeenth century by Archbishop James Ussher. Geological evidence and fossil remains unearthed in Europe and North America suggested that the earth was much, much older. Chronological dating created conflicts between Christian theology and science and this conflict intensified following the release of Charles Darwin’s, *On the Origins of Species By Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of the Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* in

86 Carden, 26.
87 Ryan, 105-36.
1859. In Darwin’s *Origins*, the theory of evolution, a species’ observed changes over time in adaptation to shifting environmental conditions, did not support the presence of a single creative event. Christian theology was increasingly being expected to “conform to the conclusions of science.” The comparatively stagnant Christian creation model of human history, the story most widely accepted by antebellum white Protestant Christians, was in direct conflict with the new science founded on evolutionary theory.

In addition to geological and fossil evidence presented by geologists and paleontologists, the presence of non-white cultures with differing creation stories challenged the Genesis Biblical account. While the non-biblical creation stories of non-white Christians could be easily dismissed as originating from an inferior culture, geological and fossil evidence required a re-working of the biblical story to one of polygenesis, or multiple creations, to explain the diversity found on the earth’s surface. Religious historian Walter H. Conser asserts that most white Christians rejected the polygenesis theory due to “its repudiation of Scripture,” and instead turned to the Bible for “sufficient evidence to establish racial hierarchies,” thereby providing an alternative to disagreeable scientific conclusions. The majority of antebellum white Christian Protestants chose to ignore the scientific evidence and remained loyal to their supernatural Genesis creation story.

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91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
Conversely, the more readily accepted role of science by Christians in antebellum America claimed that the objective of scientific study was to observe “the laws of God, exhibited in the living organisms which exists on its surface.” In this interpretation, referred to as Natural Theology, scientific knowledge and its useful applications provide an intellectual understanding of God’s miraculous powers. This peaceful co-existence of religion and science placed the role of the antebellum scientist as a student of the natural world whose objectives were to “understand, explain, and illustrate the divine plan.” Millennialists and Protestant social reformers, such as Noyes and the Oneida Community members, believed that the principles of natural theology would assist in revealing God’s plan and usher in the millennium.

At the Oneida Community, evidence of positivist scientific methodology was present throughout the colony’s existence. Noyes believed that “God designs to bring science and religion together and solder them into one;” to this end many of the community members were active participants in observing, documenting and arriving at scientific conclusions based on their observations within the ecclesial confines of Perfectionist doctrine. *The Berean*, Noyes’ first book-length publication released in 1848, incorporates many of the popular scientific truths of the era and bridges the science-versus-religion chasm by endorsing Natural Theology. Noyes’ explanation of the physiological location of the human “soul” or “spirit,” in one example from *The Berean* references both contemporary science and Leviticus. Beginning with scientific findings,

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93 Brooke, 192-96 and Conser, 15.
94 Brooke, 192-94 and Brooke and Cantor, 50-59.
95 Conser, 17.
Noyes references the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*, and the experiments conducted on cadavers and foetal subjects by physiological researchers. The research, confirmed through laboratory observation led Noyes to conclude “the sanguineous system lies at the foundation of every other department in the physical economy. We thence infer that it is the residence of the spirit; and then it follows that the central seat of the spirit is in the chest.”\(^{96}\) The sanguineous system, or circulatory system, identified by contemporary science as the location of the Christian soul was confirmed with the observation, “God is certainly the best of all witnesses, in questions relating to his own workmanship.”

Biblical evidence from Leviticus 17: 10—14, “*For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the alter, to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul,***” substantiates the physiological location of the human soul.\(^{97}\)

Anticipating a counter argument that the soul was located in the brain, additional support for Noyes’ conclusion that the human soul was located in the chest cavity was drawn by him from Genesis “The Lord God formed man in the dust of the ground, and breathed *into his nostrils* the breath of life.”\(^{98}\) Physiologically, Noyes argued, “the nostrils are the channel, not to the brain, but to the lungs, and through them to the blood. ‘The breath of life,’ then first entered the blood; and the point of junction was within the thorax.”\(^{99}\) Through this rational and observable progression, integrating contemporary

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\(^{97}\) Ibid, 63 (emphasis original).

\(^{98}\) Ibid, (emphasis original).

\(^{99}\) Ibid.
science with Biblical interpretation, Noyes unequivocally concludes that the human spirit was located in the chest cavity.

*The Berean*, which outlined Noyes’ emerging “theological system,” received a decidedly skeptical evaluation from the book review editor of *The New Englander* in April of 1848.\textsuperscript{100} The anonymous reviewer, the official mouthpiece of Yale University and highly critical of any Perfectionism, wrote a scathing nineteen-page book review that reached thousands of subscribers.\textsuperscript{101} Incredulous of the inclusion of entire chapters on mesmerism and phrenology within *The Berean*, the reviewer noted, “Nothing is too absurd to be believed by somebody... We should not wonder if Perfectionism, of the sort before us, of which the latter is the very life and soul, should again break forth upon the churches with still greater resources of mischief, and more deplorable success than before.”\textsuperscript{102} The reviewer compared the unorthodox Perfectionist doctrine to the recent “careers of Millerism and Mormonism,” the future Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints, as *defunct* examples of Christian theology gone awry.\textsuperscript{103} This lengthy book review emphasized the union of popular science with Perfectionism, suggested that *The New Englander* editorial staff perceived Perfectionism and contemporary science as a threat to the established New England churches and the “New Haven system” at Yale, where Noyes had previously studied.

\textsuperscript{100} *The New Englander, Volume VI—1848* (New Haven: A.H. Maltby [Yale College], 1848), 177-96.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, 193.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid (emphasis added). In 1848, Millerism was no longer perceived as a threat to established churches and the majority of the Mormons had migrated out of the United States in 1846-47 to establish their “city on the hill,” in what was then Mexico. On February 2, 1848, the conclusion of the Mexican-American War again placed the Latter-day Saints within United States territorial borders.
Phrenology and mesmerism were embraced as contemporary scientific truths within the Oneida Community, even as they were criticized by the *The New Englander* review author as “absurd.” In its “First Annual Report,” it was announced that the women of the community had cut their long hair, an act that contradicted their religious beliefs, but reflected the community’s acceptance of phrenology. In this example, the apostle Paul commanded that women should wear their hair long for the purpose of a covering their bodies in the absence of clothing. Phrenology concluded that the back of the head and neck are “the seat of amativeness,” or sociability traits. The Community observed that women’s hair was not utilized as a covering, rather it was a time-consuming chore to maintain and pin-up daily, an act that in turn left the phrenologically identified amative portion of the back of the head and neck exposed. Community members resolved this conflict by rationalizing that since the women of Oneida were wearing clothing and that loose long hair was a safety hazard when working in the kitchen or near machinery, collar length hair on women provided coverage as commanded by Paul and protected the sensitive amative portion of the head and neck as identified by phrenologists. ¹⁰⁴ Hair length was a decision made by individual Community women and photographic evidence suggests that bobbed hair was prevalent among community females.

Noyes accepted a complementary relationship uniting science and Perfectionist ecclesiology, and he attracted like-minded individuals into his expanding Perfectionist sphere of influence. Settling at his family home in Putney, Vermont, he began to

formulate a course of action to correct the evils he perceived afflicted American society, initially focusing on the inequitable distribution of wealth, which he believed served as a catalyst for sin. Firmly believing the millennium was attainable through organized human effort, Noyes discounted the efficacy of the popular Evangelical movements emphasizing mutual improvement through association and the formation of benevolent societies, which he argued failed to address the core issue of complete submission to God.105 Additionally, Noyes had studied and observed a variety of human behaviors across socio-economic tiers, from prestigious private boarding schools to shared residence in abandoned buildings with the poverty stricken of New York City. His conclusion was that the achievement of a sinless state, an individual’s complete submission to God in all things, required the unselfish relinquishment of personal possessions.106 Conversely, the emerging middle class during the mid-nineteenth century was characterized by increased consumption. Noyes’ observed this materialistic, “selfish” behavior and concluded this was one of the obstacles preventing the attainment of sinlessness. Equipped with observational data collected while traveling over the previous four years and utilizing popular positivist scientific methodology, the Putney Perfectionists, under the supervision of Noyes, began one of the Associations’ social experiments: the relinquishing of “proprietorship either of persons or things.”107

105 Ryan, 105-27 and George Noyes, ed., John Humphrey Noyes; The Putney Community, 205-06.
106 George Noyes, ed., John Humphrey Noyes; The Putney Community, 205-06.
107 Ibid.
Chapter 3

MATRIMONY AND REPRODUCTIVE SCIENCE AT ONEIDA

*The refining effects of sexual love (which are recognized more or less in the world) will be increased a thousand-fold, when sexual intercourse becomes an honored method of innocent and useful communion, and each is married to all.*


In keeping with the tenets of Perfectionism developed at Putney by Noyes and his small cadre, the community believed that sin was directly related to selfishness. Selfishness, or the exclusiveness of possessions and persons, promoted jealousy and conflict between individuals and interfered with a pure communion with God. Noyes frequently communicated his social theories within his correspondence and a private letter made public on the front page of the reform periodical, *The Battle-Axe and Weapons of War* in August 1837. In the “Battle Axe Letter,” he argued that in heaven the legal bonds of marriage did not exist. (Appendix C) Heterosexual marriage, the physical and legal possession of one man of one woman, was viewed as another example of the selfishness that polluted the human race.

In the “Battle Axe Letter,” Noyes wrote to his friend David Harrison, “In a holy community, there is no more reason why sexual intercourse should be restrained by law, than why eating and drinking should be—and there is as little occasion for shame in the one case as in the other… The public dissemination of “The Battle Axe Letter,” a

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110 DeMaria, 84.
private correspondence between like-minded Perfectionist theorists, made public in 1837, brought the bachelor Noyes considerable publicity within the Christian press. His challenge of both the religious and legal definitions of marriage unleashed a flurry of protest from established religious denominations, including Putney Methodist minister Hubbard Eastman.

The Putney and Oneida Perfectionists, challenged the widely accepted and historically long-standing model of Christian marriage. To this end, “political and legal authorities endorsed...a particular marriage model: lifelong, faithful monogamy, formed by the mutual consent of a man and a women, bearing the impress of the Christian religion and English common law in its expectations for the husband to be the provider, his wife the dependent partner.”[^112] Since the earliest European colonization of North America, serial monogamy following this model has been the only legally recognized form of marriage and non-compliance carried with it the possibility of arrest, fines and/or imprisonment. For example, in Vermont at this time, adultery, sexual intercourse between a married person and another person who is not his or her spouse, and fornication, sexual intercourse between persons not married to each other, were both criminal offences.[^113] Noyes rejected this representation of marriage and argued that the Bible did not direct men and women to marry, but rather to love each other unselfishly.

[^113]: Eastman, 39-45.
Justifying the community practice of “complex marriage” and citing biblical authority, Noyes presented the community’s Bible Argument, an interpretation of apostles Paul and Matthew. The Bible Argument instructs, “In the kingdom of heaven, the institution of marriage which assigns the exclusive possession of one woman to one man, does not exist.” ¹¹⁴ In this biblical elucidation, “the abolishment of sexual exclusiveness is involved in the love-relation required between all believers by the express injunction of Christ... ‘The new commandment is that we love one another’... en masse.” ¹¹⁵ Noyes interpreted selected passages of Paul and Matthew as a rejection of monogamous marriage and subsequently applied his construal into Perfectionist doctrine that the Putney Perfectionists practiced as a component of its millennial aspirations.

In his letter of proposal to his future wife, Harriet Holton, Noyes very specifically indicated what Harriet could expect from their legal union. “I am also willing to testify practically against that 'bondage of liberty' which utterly sets at nought the ordinances of men, and refuses to submit to them even for the Lord's sake. I know that the immortal union of hearts, the everlasting honey-moon, which alone is worthy to be called marriage, can never be made by a ceremony, and I know equally well that such a marriage, can never be marred by a ceremony.” ¹¹⁶ A financial supporter of Noyes’ Perfectionism prior to their engagement and subsequent marriage suggests that Harriet Holton-Noyes was not only aware of Noyes’ complex marriage intentions, but that she supported his theology and consented to participate in the social experiment.

¹¹⁴ Bible Communism, 26.
¹¹⁵ Robertson, ed., Oneida Community: An Autobiography, 267 (emphasis original).
¹¹⁶ “The Battle Axe Letter.”
Public censure in local and national newspapers did little to deter Perfectionist membership expansion, which grew from the initial eight adult members and their children in 1846 to at least 205 by 1850. Not all Perfectionist members were participants in complex marriage; instead, the decision to engage in complex marriage was up to the individual. Participants and historians often refer to those engaging in complex marriage as members in full-fellowship or “central” members as compared to the Perfectionists aspiring to full-fellowship, minor children and non-resident Perfectionist supporters. For example, the Noyes’ son Theodore, Noyes’ mother Polly, and his minor siblings were all Perfectionists, but only Noyes, his wife and three married couples living on the Noyes’ Putney property were in full-fellowship. The eight adults in full-fellowship in residence at the Noyes farmstead proclaimed in writing their love for each other on June 1, 1846, and made the vow “before heaven and earth, we trample underfoot the domestic and pecuniary fashions of the world. Separate household interests, property and exclusiveness, have come to an end with us.” Noyes commented in his journal that it took several months for the eight adult members of the inner group of adherents residing at Putney to throw off the “shackles of mundane morality,” and participate in the heterosexual conjugal relationships signifying the Perfectionists’ transition to a state of unselfishness and the corresponding acceptance of Christ.

117 Seventh Census of the United States, 1850. The actual Association membership is difficult to ascertain from census records. At the Oneida site, there were 205 persons in residence and they were enumerated as a single household “Oneida Association,” but Noyes was living in Brooklyn, NY at a satellite location and there were several other small satellites, including one at Putney, VT and another in Wallingford, CT. There were also members who chose not to reside with the Perfectionists, but supported the venture financially or by providing services.
118 Parker, 120.
119 Ibid.
While the Putney Perfectionist adults were experimenting in conjugal relationships within the central membership, ministers of other denominations in Putney and neighboring Brattleboro, Vermont, in conjunction with local concerned parents, organized an opposition group and sought legal counsel. Specifically, the Perfectionists were accused by Rev. Eastman of executing “a scheme designed to sever the ties on consanguinity—sunder the social relations—[and] subvert the present order of society,” all of which were true. 120

The Community’s first legal entanglement followed in 1847. 121 The inner group of Putney Perfectionists had remained close-lipped regarding their conjugal relations, until Noyes’ nephew, George Noyes, approached fifteen-year-old Putney resident Lucinda Lamb, soliciting her and her two sisters to join the church. The solicitation of the Lamb sisters coincided with a breach of the community’s policy of “Bible Secretiveness,” the withholding of community facts “from those who were babes in their comprehension of the higher wisdom,” and escalated opposition activity in Putney to the “Noyesites.” 122 The Putney Perfectionists refused to cooperate with the inquisition of Eastman, the self-appointed leader of the organized Putney opposition to the Noyesites, and continued to practice complex marriage amidst the gathering storm of protest.

Unable to prove the commission of a crime by any of the Perfectionist followers, Eastman and the extended family of Lucinda Lamb conspired to entrap one or more of the Perfectionists in an illegal sexual act, in an attempt to facilitate legal proceedings

120 Eastman, 36 and v.
121 Parker, 133.
122 Ibid, 135.
against the group. The conspirators, in hindsight, need not have bothered, for on
September 6, 1847, Mrs. Mary Cragin, a central Perfectionist member and resident at the
Noyes’ farmstead, gave birth to twins. The daughter, Victoria died a few days later, but
Victor Cragin Noyes survived and provided the “evidence” needed by Eastman and his
adherents to have an arrest warrant issued for Noyes’, who had readily admitted
paternity. 123 On October 26, 1847, Noyes was formally charged with adultery and
fornication and arrested. 124 The warrant named the three married women, Mary Cragin,
Fanny Leonard, and Achsah Campbell as the injured parties. No charges were filed
against the women. The women were not seeking legal redress against Noyes or the
community and they were all central Perfectionist members. Noyes posted bond and left
the Brattleboro tavern, turned courthouse, four hours later. 125

Following their leaders’ arrest and subsequent release from custody on bond, the
Putney Perfectionists held a series of meetings and decided to temporarily disband and
regroup at a more receptive location, realizing that Eastman and his faction of moral
agitators would not rest until every trace of “Noyesism” was extricated from Putney. The
murder of Latter-day Saints’ leader Joseph Smith in 1844 served as reminder of how
dangerous angry mobs could be, and, with this in mind, Noyes, and the majority of the
fledgling membership from the Putney area left the village before Christmas with the
intention of regrouping in a more theologically sympathetic area. 126 The Witness
production staff and printing operations, Noyes’ wife Harriet, and most of the children of

124 Parker, 133.
125 Ibid, 134.
126 George Noyes, John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community, 322.
the founding central members remained in Putney awaiting instructions from Noyes on where the group was to reassemble.\textsuperscript{127}

In January of 1848, Noyes arranged for the combined purchase of 160 acres of property, six miles distant from Lenox, New York, the nearest village.\textsuperscript{128} The group chose the new location on the recommendation of a Perfectionist farmer already in residence and because the region was not as densely populated, as compared to Putney. By March, the founding eight members and their children had “found a quiet home,” and the social experiment resumed amidst the relative isolation of a rural farmstead.\textsuperscript{129} Noyes did not appear in court as ordered in Brattleboro and forfeited his bond.

The ongoing battle over morality between the Oneida Perfectionists and Eastman continued after the Association’s relocation. The Putney faction, led by Eastman, continued agitating for the arrest of Noyes and for a brief period continued to harass the Perfectionists in Oneida. The community obtained outside legal counsel in 1849. The reconstituted Oneida Perfectionists found themselves defending their social practices to the Madison County, New York, Grand Jury in 1850.\textsuperscript{130} Aside from the Putney nuisance, the community’s \textit{Second Annual Report} released in 1850 summarized, “We have been well treated by the people immediately around us, though our principles are fully known, and the emissaries of the Putney inquisition have done all they could to disturb our relations with our neighbors. Our last year’s Report has met with a civil, and in most

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, 301-22.
\textsuperscript{128} Parker, 164-65.
\textsuperscript{129} John Noyes, \textit{First Annual Report}, I.
\textsuperscript{130} Parker, 186-87.
cases a favorable reception, in the most respectable quarters.” The Perfectionists had relocated in a region more receptive to complex marriage and Eastman eventually abandoned his legal machinations directed at Noyes.

Receiving little opposition from their new neighbors in Madison County, the central Oneida Community members called on Perfectionists’ scattered adherents to join them at their new location. The Second Annual Report indicates that one hundred-twelve adults and sixty youth and children had assumed residence by 1850. With the membership in residence increase, concerns arose within the central membership in regards to maintaining the integrity of purpose of complex marriage. The community initiated a screening process for prospective sexual pairings.

The objective of the screening process was three-fold. First, the community wanted to winnow out those who were attempting to join the community in the misplaced belief that Oneida was a “free love” commune. Complex marriage pairings henceforth would require the approval of an evenly gender divided panel of central members, so that “unhealthy and pernicious” attachments among members would “never gain foothold in the community.” Second, a third-party liaison was added to act as the mediator between the man and woman who wished to form a sexual pairing. Within Oneida, “every woman was free to refuse any, or every man’s attentions,” and “when two members aspired to closer relations, an imitation to that effect was given by the man, but

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132 Ibid, 3.
always through the medium of an older woman who represented the Community.”

Lastly, a system of ascending and descending fellowship, where community members were encouraged to seek the sexual companionship of those more spiritually advanced (ascending), and the spiritually advanced were encouraged to uplift the less experienced (descending). This system of checks and balances served as a deterrent to licentiousness for individuals seeking community membership, acted as a restraining mechanism for members, and facilitated the implementation of the Scientific Propagation experiment yet to follow.

Documentation of the challenges complex marriage presented to community members is extensive. Preliminary conclusions regarding complex marriage and the ongoing dialogue from the evening community meetings are documented within the journal pages of community members and were published in the community newspaper. Complex marriage adapted to community needs, as the membership grew larger, third party intermediaries were added to protect the women from unsolicited advances and screening panels utilized to identify matches deemed inappropriate by the community’s central members. By the 1860s, a formal request or application was required and the sexual liaison, if approved, was documented in the community records. The community operations were executed by 21 standing committees and 48 departments with adult members of both sexes rotating through the different departments. Department head meetings were on Sunday mornings and open to all members and the

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134 Ibid.
135 Hawley, 133.
136 Robertson, ed., Oneida Community: An Autobiography, 272-76.
137 Carden, 52-4.
138 Ibid, 54.
minutes were discussed at the community meeting that evening. The Oneida community committees and departments maintained extensive records on their membership and the complex marriage experiment.

The success or failure of the complex marriage experiment is difficult to quantify. Community members pronounced it a resounding success, and wrote out testimonials to that effect. Community membership over the three decades of its existence provides a more measurable and reliable indicator of member satisfaction with the experimental practice of complex marriage. “Of the 109 adults who joined in the first two years, at least 84 either died in the Community or lived there until the break-up;” a minimal retention rate of eighty-two percent over thirty years for the founding members.

Gender ratios were comparatively balanced in 1850, with ninety-five males and eighty-seven females residing at Oneida Reserve. By 1870, females outnumbered men 143 to 115 at the Oneida and Wallingford locations. Turnover was highest among adults who had been with the community the shortest length of time, with “the median length of stay for all [adult] seceders...between three and four years.” Most of the seceders left quietly and very few attacked the Community after leaving. It is difficult to factor in the effects of outside interference and seceders when assessing member satisfaction with the community’s complex marriage experiment.

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139 Nordhoff, 279.
141 Carden, 77.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid, 79.
The legal proceedings pursued by Rev. Eastman and his supporters isolated Noyes as the sole defendant, but the practice of “Bible Secretiveness” by members indicates that members were well aware that adultery was illegal and they ran the risk of arrest when practicing complex marriage. To the charges that Oneida was a “free love” community, the Oneidains maintained, “Free Love with them does not mean freedom to love to-day and leave to-morrow; nor freedom to take a woman's person and keep their property to themselves; nor freedom to freight a woman with offspring and send her downstream without care or help; nor freedom to beget children and leave them to the street and the poorhouse.  

The Oneidaians perceived themselves as a single-family unit, the adults each married to the other as instructed by the Apostle Paul and property belonged to and was the responsibility of the entire membership.

Only Noyes was brought before the Grand Jury at Putney, although there were at minimum eight “adulterers” in the group, and probably more. Perhaps the Putney opposition believed by “cutting off the head of the snake” and removing Noyes, the Perfectionists would quietly disappear. Their rationale for selecting only Noyes for prosecution is lost to history. The practical results of the Putney legal maneuvering are known: the Perfectionists regrouped in more receptive Madison County, New York and their number of followers soared. The cause for the dramatic increase in membership following settlement at Oneida is probably multifactorial; the pursuit of sinlessness, sexual intercourse with a variety of partners, economic stability, and the security of an extensive support group who share common values and goals are all possibilities.

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144 “Special Notice,” The Circular (21 August 1871).
145 Carden, 77-79.
The practice of complex marriage initiated at Putney and concluded at Oneida was a methodically planned and executed, controlled scientific experiment that challenged the prevailing norms of legal marriage in the United States. Members theorized that loving another human spiritually and conjugally brought them closer to God and that spiritual and conjugal love should not be exclusively between one man and one woman. The experiment had strict procedural guidelines and those who took part were consenting adults by era standards. For three decades, complex marriage was practiced at Putney and Oneida, and no record has yet surfaced of legal action brought by one member against another in regards to its practice. Empirical evidence of member satisfaction as expressed in their affidavits and reinforced by the longevity of the practice at the community, suggests that the experiment’s results fulfilled the expectations of the hypothesis.

Closely intertwined with the Oneida Community’s practice of complex marriage was the community-wide practice of birth control, “male continence.” During the first six years of their marriage, John and Harriet Noyes conceived five children. Of these five pregnancies, four were stillborn. Seeking a means to “establish intelligent voluntary control over the propagative function,” Noyes began a series of trials to prevent conception. Discarding coitus interruptus, a method of birth control recommended by Robert Dale Owens in Moral Physiology as an “artificial trick...for frustrating the natural effects of the propagative act,” Noyes developed his own variation and entitled the

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146 John Noyes, Male Continence, 6.
method Male Continence. (Appendix D)\textsuperscript{147} In Noyes’ Male Continence, male ejaculation was suppressed entirely during sexual intercourse.\textsuperscript{148}

In his rationale for seeking a natural and reliable method of birth control, Noyes began his discussion with Malthusian population theory, drawn from Thomas Robert Malthus’ \textit{An Essay on the Principle of Population}.\textsuperscript{149} Malthusian population theory or Malthusian catastrophe contended that throughout history all societies have a percentage of their population relegated to poverty, and that this is in part caused by population growth that exceeds the ability to produce food. In addition, overpopulation creates a surplus of laborers, thereby depressing wages, and producing a cyclic pattern of scarcity, a population-reducing event, such as war, epidemic or starvation, followed by a population increase until again reaching scarcity. Lastly, Malthusian catastrophe argues that population increase is exponential, whereas the ability to produce food is mathematical; a society’s population will always increase at a rate that exceeds food production.\textsuperscript{150}

Working from a Malthusian catastrophe foundation of a need for society to suppress overpopulation, Noyes identified and reduced the methods of suppressing population growth to “three classes” of antebellum birth control. First, was abstinence, as practiced by the Shakers. Second, was to interrupt the propagative act through the use of

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\textsuperscript{147} Robert Dale Owen, \textit{Moral Physiology; on, A Brief and Plain Treatise on The Population Question} (London: J. Watson, 1842) and John Noyes, \textit{Male Continence}, 6.
\textsuperscript{148} John Noyes, \textit{Male Continence}, 6.
\textsuperscript{150} Malthus, 9-18.
\end{flushleft}
prophylactics or *coitus interruptus*. Third, were abortionists and those who practiced infanticide.\textsuperscript{151} Noyes claimed that his method of birth control was superior to any of the classes identified because it was natural. Noyes argued that men were fully capable of controlling their behavior, including the act of sexual intercourse, up to the point of ejaculation; thereby avoiding “undesired consequences.”\textsuperscript{152}

Noyes’ dissection of human sexual intercourse began by separating “the social function...from the procreative.”\textsuperscript{153} In his scientific analysis of “the act of sexual intercourse,” Noyes described the beginning phase “as the simple presence of the male organ in the female.”\textsuperscript{154} The second phase consisted of a “series of reciprocal motions,” and then a final “reflex nervous action or ejaculatory crisis which expels the seed.”\textsuperscript{155} Male Continence, advocated by Noyes and practiced at Oneida, acknowledged that sexual intercourse prior to reaching the *point of ejaculatory inevitability*, was voluntary, “entirely under the control of the human faculty, and can be stopped at any point.”\textsuperscript{156} Sexual control, specifically the suppression of male ejaculation during sexual intercourse, provided the opportunity for “rational beings to forsake the example of the brutes and improve nature by invention and discovery in all directions.”\textsuperscript{157} The influences of Natural Theology were expressed clearly; intelligent Christians were capable of observing God’s

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{151}{John Noyes, *Male Continence*, 7.}
\footnotetext{152}{Ibid, 9.}
\footnotetext{153}{George Noyes, ed., *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 113.}
\footnotetext{154}{John Noyes, *Male Continence*, 8.}
\footnotetext{155}{Ibid.}
\footnotetext{156}{Ibid. The *point of ejaculatory inevitability* is a modern medical term for the somatic nervous system’s physiological response that comprises the final involuntary phase of male ejaculation. John Noyes refers to this phenomenon as a “reflex nervous action.”}
\footnotetext{157}{Ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
work and through experimentation could improve upon the shared experience of sexual intercourse while suppressing population growth.

Between 1849 and 1869, the community “deliberately refrained from bringing children into the world, increasing its number by less than two a year in a population of some forty families” utilizing male continence.\(^{158}\) The community collectively adhered to the zero population growth goal, as determined by the central membership. Additional evidence indicates that the childbearing rate for Oneida women was actually much lower, with “only twelve unplanned births in a group numbering approximately two hundred adults, equally balanced between the sexes and having frequent sexual congress” over two decades.\(^{159}\) Both statements suggest that male community members had become quite proficient at the technique. Noyes believed that men were fully capable of controlling the voluntary aspects of copulation and could determine whether sexual intercourse was an act of spiritual communion between community members or an act of propagation.

Suppression of ejaculation by community male members during sexual intercourse separated sexual pleasure from sexual reproduction for both sexes. Oneida Community women, protected “from the perils of pregnancy,” engaged in sexual intercourse with a variety of partners “every two to four days” and were expected to experience orgasm during these liaisons.\(^{160}\) Women as sexual beings contradicted the white elite and middle-class Victorian model in which female sexuality was often

\(^{158}\) Parker, 256.

\(^{159}\) Foster, 82-83.

synonymous with promiscuity and licentiousness. With a relatively reliable method of contraception, “technique and conscious attention to the details of the act” elevated sexual intercourse to an art form among community members of both sexes.

In reply to the argument that suppression of ejaculation by men during sexual intercourse was “unnatural,” and against “God’s will,” Noyes responded, “cooking, wearing clothes, [and] living in houses are unnatural in the same sense.” Noyes reconciled the suppression of ejaculation, a “natural act” by writing, “Nay, it is the glory of man to control himself, and the Kingdom of God summons him to self-control in all things.” Having successfully isolated the social or “amative” aspects of sexual intercourse from its “propagative” functions through the practice of male continence and having demonstrated that the propagative aspects of sexual intercourse could be suppressed through male self-control, the Perfectionist members were free to pursue the amative spiritual function of bringing man and women together for mutual “immediate pleasure.”

The practice of complex marriage carried with it community obligations. From the outset of Oneida’s founding, Noyes regulated sexual pairings, personally reviewing all of the potential amative and propagative couplings of the community from 1846 through its dissolution in 1881, with a committee of up to six community men and six community women pre-screening potential applicants. Community members

164 Ibid.
165 Parker, 129-35 and Eastman, 35-46.
acknowledged sexual intercourse as a natural bodily function, but the voluntary suppression of male ejaculation was an acquired skill, mastered only with practice. Noyes and central community members addressed this instructional obstacle by creating a policy of “ascending” and “descending” fellowship among members.\textsuperscript{166} The keystone of this practice was unquestioning deference to your spiritual elders, those long-term members in full-fellowship who had perfected male continence and had extensive experience within the complex marriage system. Since sexual intercourse in its amative form was spiritual, the responsibility of preparing new members and resident teenagers for sexual communion became the responsibility of the senior community members.\textsuperscript{167}

The community practice of ascending fellowship directed the religious and sexually inexperienced Oneida members to seek the companionship of those who were closer to God than they were, so that they might share in their holiness. Spiritual amative sexual relations within the community adhered to this ascending pattern until perfect holiness was attained. Teenage boys and male initiates were encouraged to seek post-menopausal females, specifically women who were beyond their childbearing years, with which to sexually commune and practice suppressing ejaculation, until they had reached the next level of ascension, signified in part by their ability to suppress ejaculation during sexual intercourse.\textsuperscript{168} Similarly, adolescent girls and female initiates were paired with senior community males to facilitate the expansion of their spiritual horizons through sexual intercourse with a male elder. The objective theologically was to attain sinless

\textsuperscript{166} DeMaria, 145-49.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid, 154-55.
\textsuperscript{168} Estlake, 53-57 and DeMaria, 175.
state possessed by Noyes. Once Noyes, in consultation with the community’s elders, was satisfied with a member’s spirituality, they were free to pursue descending fellowship, working down the hierarchal spiritual and sexual organization to bring other less-enlightened members closer to God.

For those men who had not attained perfect holiness, and transcended the desired spiritual “amative” act of sexual intercourse to the undesired potentially “propagative,” the latest technological advances, in the form of preloaded syringes for douching, were strategically located in the hallways. The contents of the syringes and their frequency of use have been lost to history, but their presence suggests that ejaculation did occur during sexual union when propagation was not desired. There was considerable social pressure within the community to refrain from procreating, and men were held responsible when unplanned children were conceived.

From a utilitarian perspective, the practical application of a routinely practiced method of birth control at Oneida facilitated sexual freedom by avoiding undesired children. Suppressing the propagative aspects of sexual intercourse demographically resulted in fewer dependents to provide for, and women of childbearing years were free to engage in community enterprises such as constructing animal traps or food preparation in the cannery, or pursue personal interests that could include music, theatre or writing. The comparatively large adult population translated to material prosperity for all Oneida

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169 Estlake, 55.
170 Hawley, 133.
171 Miller and Fogarty, ed., Desire and Duty at Oneida, 37.
members, reflected in their communal property acquisitions and infrastructure improvements.

Noyes’ ideological focus was human perfection and the Oneida Community domestic living arrangements reflected experiments in achieving that goal. Perfectionist theology condemned the exclusive ownership of property and in the fall of 1846, the adult membership at Putney signed a *Statement of Principles.* ¹⁷² The statement of principles condemned the ownership of personal property, and all material possessions were relinquished to collective ownership. In addition, in the year prior to abandoning the Putney location, the Perfectionists had blended their nuclear families, compressing those in residence at the Noyes’ farmsteads into two of the three homes and mingling their former personal property. ¹⁷³

The Perfectionists not residing at Putney also began combining households. William Hatch of East Hamilton, New York wrote to Noyes in December 1847, “Our community house is built, and Brother Ackley and family are on the ground.” ¹⁷⁴ The Perfectionists at this location numbered twenty-three with two more families expected “to follow in the spring.” ¹⁷⁵ At the future Oneida Community site, the Burt household numbered sixteen, with several more expected, and the Cook household head had “fourteen converts under his care,” and was in the process of purchasing property adjacent to the Burk home at the future Oneida site. ¹⁷⁶ By the winter of 1848, thirty-one adults and fourteen children had moved into the yet incomplete Mansion House, the first

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¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 372.
¹⁷⁵ Ibid.
¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 374.
communal structure constructed on one-hundred and sixty acres adjacent to the Oneida Depot.\textsuperscript{177}

The Oneida Community’s experimental domestic living arrangements changed over time. Communal living and sharing of property were initiated at the Putney location and became the community norm at the Oneida site as an experimental attempt to integrate Perfectionist theology with the realities of economic and communitarian survival. Domestic living arrangements evolved over time to meet the changing needs of the community following a scientific pattern of problem identification or thesis, experimentation and observation, followed by conclusions and revisions as evidenced by the frequent building additions and renovations.

Members, regardless of their pre-community marital status, lived in the Mansion House, a multi-winged, multistoried edifice. Segregated by age and gender, the residents resided in single or dual occupancy apartments, with common areas for eating, meetings and socializing. Sleeping rooms were small and members “were urged to keep in circulation,” utilizing the strategically placed sitting rooms scattered throughout the Mansion House that facilitated mingling among the adult members.\textsuperscript{178}

Built in phases over a period of twenty years, the four-story Mansion House provided private sleeping quarters, community dining and kitchen facilities, as well as a multi-room shelved library, two formal parlors, a 600 person capacity meeting room with stage, and several smaller “sitting” areas for use by its extensive 300 “family”

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid, 393.
\textsuperscript{178} Pierrepont Noyes, 39.
members. The emphasis on shared community space discouraged personal isolation and selfish exclusiveness, a tenet of Perfectionist doctrine and in their Statement of Principles. The 1850 census enumerator documented the membership in nuclear family groups, but placed them in a single-family residence identified as the Oneida Association.

Architectural historian Janet White argues “the motivation for constructing this building [The Mansion House] was threefold; the members needed additional shelter for their growing population, but more significantly, they needed spaces that would both accommodate their way of life and reinforce the commitment of their members to Perfectionist principles.” Their experimental society needed a building that reflected its occupants and objectives. Private living space and sleeping rooms were small and intentionally designed for sleeping or sexual “interviews.” It was expected that all other entertaining be conducted in the public sitting rooms located

Illustration 2

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179 Hawley, 35.
180 Seventh Census of the United States, 1850.
near the bedrooms. The Mansion house was designed to minimize isolation while at the same time “decreased the possibility of exclusive [sexual] arrangements.”

The original Mansion House, constructed between 1848 and 1852, emphasized meeting the needs of family functions for a population of 200. The first floor housed the cellar, kitchen and dining room, where due to a lack of space, meals were consumed in shifts. The third floor housed the “Tent Room,” where the Perfectionists hung canvas from the ceiling to form sleeping partitions. The Oneida family spent the majority of their indoor time on the second floor that housed the printing office, schoolroom, and the family parlor, where “spatial strategies” reinforced desired behavior. Evening meetings where the entire adult membership assembled were held in the spacious parlor.

The parlor was also home to the library during the early years at Oneida and contained “about 700 volumes,” in February 1850, and would expand to cover most of an entire floor by the time of the community’s dissolution. In addition to religious instruction and addressing community issues, evenings were also the time when “the whole adult portion of the Community, are encouraged to form themselves into groups and circles for intellectual improvement. In this way the sciences, general literature, music and the arts; have been to some extent cultivated.”

In the Second Annual Report the head of the education department, George Campbell summarized, “Our ideas of education are far

181 Hawley, 34.
185 John Noyes, Second Annual Report, 16.
186 Ibid, 15.
more enlarged and comprehensive than those generally entertained” and “to the pursuit of this universal education all our hearts are devoted.”\textsuperscript{187}

The Oneida Community’s commitment to adult education and the sciences are reflected in the buildings the community constructed. When Charles Nordhoff visited Oneida, circa 1874, he noted that the library-room contained “about four-thousand volumes” and “files of newspapers.” Across from the Mansion House were the schoolhouse and “a lecture room with chemical laboratory.”\textsuperscript{188} According to Nordhoff, “every member, young and old, not only was encouraged to learn, but as classes in dozens of subjects were formed, a real passion for learning swept the community.”\textsuperscript{189} The Oneida Community stressed the millennialist tenet of self-improvement and during the 1850s “middle-aged women” convened in the parlor in the evenings to study grammar, French, German, Greek and

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid, 16.
\textsuperscript{188} Nordhoff, 277-78.
\textsuperscript{189} Robertson, ed., \textit{Oneida Community: An Autobiography}, 23.
mathematics.\textsuperscript{190} The millennialist objective of self-improvement through education for Oneida women was facilitated in part by the low birth rate, attributable to the practice of male continence.

If the communal living arrangements for adults seemed unusual for the period, the living arrangements for the community’s children were especially experimental. Removed from the adult living quarters, “the children between ages two and twelve were housed in a separate building” when the Perfectionists relocated from Putney to Oneida.\textsuperscript{191} Constructed between 1848 and 1850, the Children’s House, “situated 36 feet north of the mansion house...is 43 by 24 feet, two stories high, with an attic.”\textsuperscript{192} In 1869, a larger multi-story wing, attached to the Mansion House, was constructed to house the “stirpicults,” community children from the selective breeding experiment begun by the community that same year. Community children lived segregated, with separate living quarters, recreation areas, and sleeping rooms until 1880, when the community disbanded.

By separating weaned infants and children from their parents, the Community hoped to suppress \textit{philoprogenitiveness}, a phrenological term frequently used by the community to describe excessive parental displays of affection for their own children, particularly by their mothers. In the community’s view, the amative relationships between men and women took precedence over the relationships between parents and their children. In both instances, exclusive relationships, implying individual ownership,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid, 311.
\textsuperscript{192} John Noyes, Second Annual Report, 5.
\end{footnotesize}
rather than communal property, were to be avoided. The rearing of children fell under the jurisdiction of the Children’s Department, with the connotation being that the community’s youth were “wards of the whole community, rather than the property of their parents,” an extension of the Statement of Principles broadened to include the community offspring.

The Children’s House had two supervisors, one male and one female, and was staffed by rotating community volunteers of both genders. All of the charges following an established routine of dressing, prayers, breakfast, work, school, lunch, work, playtime, supper, prayers, and study--adjusted according to “age and ability.”

Parents with children were initially allowed to visit with their own children and rotate into the Children’s House to care for all the children on a regular basis. This practice stopped in 1863, when overly attentive parents, exhibiting philoprogenitive behaviors were perceived to be causing disruptions in the management of the children. After 1863 and until 1869, parental visitation was limited to once weekly, a privilege that could be

Illustration 4

194 Pierrepont Noyes, 11.
rescinded for behavior emanating from either the child or the parents suggesting “exclusiveness.” Two Oneida memoires, written by community offspring who spent a part of their youth in the Children’s House, recalled the distress of separation from their biological parents in their reminiscences.

With male continence proven as an effective method of birth control; the intricacies of complex marriage established as the community’s sexual social pattern; and the challenges of communal childrearing resolved to the memberships’ satisfaction, the Oneida Association was prepared to embark on what would prove to be its last, and most controversial community-wide social experiment: a selective breeding program. Labeled as “Stirpiculture” by the community, the Oneidians’ proposed to selectively pair men and women within the community to breed offspring for the community to rear collectively. The Stirpiculture experiment was conducted from 1869 until 1879.

The concept of selectively producing offspring within the community appeared in print in 1866. In *Male Continence, or Self-Control in Sexual Intercourse: A Letter of Inquiry Answered by J.H. Noyes*, the topic of “how to subject human propagation to the control of science,” was emphasized in his explanation and rationalization for controlling ejaculation. Noyes proposed challenging “nature,” arguing that God had provisioned humans with the intelligence necessary to avoid human overpopulation and the cyclic prophecies of Malthusian catastrophe. Over the next three years this idea coalesced into a theory that the community planned to test.

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196 Ibid, 312.
197 Corrina Ackley Noyes, 16 and Pierrepont Noyes 21-48.
Frequently referencing Charles Darwin’s *On the Origins of Species*, Noyes’ *Essay on Scientific Propagation* draws from the writings of prominent scientific researchers of the era. In 1865, Francis Galton published, “Hereditary Talent and Character,” adding credence to Darwin’s evolutionary theory that as physical characteristics such as head shape and eye color were hereditary traits, so too were attributes such as intelligence, spirituality, and manners were also passed from parent to offspring (pangenesis theory). Galton cautioned the scientific community “must ever bear in mind our ignorance of the laws which govern the inheritance even of physical features,” but his observational statistical data supported that “talent is transmitted by inheritance in a very remarkable degree.”¹⁹⁹ Noyes’ included in his scientific community of supporters of human selective breeding physician, James Caleb Jackson, polymath Galton and physician Charlotte Lozier.²⁰⁰

The *Essay on Scientific Propagation* presented a well-organized scientific argument for continuation of the stirpiculture program that had begun at Oneida in 1869 and professed how this modern science would improve American society. In his pamphlet Noyes advocated “breeding in and in,” as was done in Biblical times and was being done with livestock, “to keep the line pure.” As a human selective breeding proponent, Noyes declared, “that the very highest premiums ought to be offered for new social inventions favorable to the scientific propagation of human beings,” and that


“marriage is an absolute bar to scientific propagation.” He continued by rebuffing Galton who advocated “confining our attention to the agencies that are already at work,” and did not propose in his ongoing research to conduct a manipulated laboratory style experiment on human beings. Galton supported and executed a Baconian empirical model of data collection and interpretation in his research, carefully analyzing his observations of existing phenomenon. Conversely, Noyes interpreted Galton’s preliminary findings as yet another scientific avenue to be pursued in the Oneida Community’s quest to herald the millennium by producing children with inherited intelligence and spirituality.

Noyes’ intent was to experiment with Darwinism, utilizing his Perfectionist community members as human subjects. Articles began appearing in the community’s mouthpiece, The Circular, including one written by an anonymous community member asserting, “natural selection and the survival of the fittest

Illustration 5
Diagram of biblical “in breeding.”

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201 Ibid, 18.
202 Ibid.
among the lower forms of life, leads right on to the idea of improvement of man by voluntary selection,” and that “in ordinary society the application of science in this direction is almost impossible.”

Oneida was not an ordinary society, but rather a closed community under the direction of Noyes, and as such could experiment with Darwin’s theory on humans.

In 1869, the Oneida Community formed a Stirpiculture committee and began gathering community data and forming additional community member committees to assess the members’ readiness to embark on this experiment. Volunteers for the scientific propagation experiment were solicited from the existing membership and in preparation for possible controversy, the community “refused to accept any new members.”

Convinced that the Oneida members were the chosen people for this experiment, The Circular proclaimed, “in the Community are the requisite numbers, the requisite culture and character, the varied development, the theory and practice of self-control, and above all the freedom to experiment, that are necessary to found a bureau of stirpiculture.”

Then, late in 1869 after months of discussion and infrastructure planning, Noyes determined that the Community had attained “responsible maturity and favorable circumstances,” and was ready “with one heart, for a faithful trial of the experiment of rational breeding.”

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204 “Stirpiculture,” The Circular, 28 March 1870.
205 Ibid.
206 “Stirpiculture,” The Circular, 28 March 1870.
207 Ibid.
The Oneida community believed that by propagating the most highly regarded spiritual and intellectual men of the community with healthy, spiritually superior and intelligent community women, their offspring would inherit these desirable attributes from both the parents. The experiment began initially with fifty-three young women and thirty-eight young men.\textsuperscript{208} Describing the participants as “young” is subjective, as Noyes, the most active male participant was fifty-eight years old when the human breeding experiment began and seventy at its conclusion. Approximately thirty-three percent of the Oneida Community population participated in the experiment, suggesting that participation by members was optional, but that most of the female membership of childbearing years participated.\textsuperscript{209}

The resolution the women signed in order to participate in the stirpiculture program included an acknowledgement of the scientific nature of the experiment, attesting “that we will if necessary, become martyrs to science, and cheerfully resign all desire to become mothers, if for any reason Mr. Noyes deem us unfit material for propagation.”\textsuperscript{210} In addition, the young women offered themselves “to be used in forming any combinations that may seem to you [Noyes] desirable.”\textsuperscript{211} The men participating signed similar resolutions, giving up parental rights, and claiming “we are your true soldiers.”\textsuperscript{212} Noyes, highest within the ascending fellowship social scheme

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\textsuperscript{209} Ninth Census of the United States, 1870. There were 268 community residents enumerated in 1870 and ninty-one stirpiculture participants in 1869, reflecting an estimated participation rate of thirty-three percent across all ages and genders.
\textsuperscript{210} Robertson, ed., \textit{Oneida Community: An Autobiography}, 338.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{212} Richards, 57.
\end{flushright}
among the Perfectionists, sired “at least nine of the fifty-eight children born under the
stirpicultural regime,” more than any other male participant.\textsuperscript{213}

Initially, Noyes made unilateral pairing decisions; he was after all the group
theocratic patriarch and recognized as the community member closest to perfection. The
women participating in the Stirpiculture program even acknowledged this in their
participation pledge under article one: “We do not belong to ourselves in any respect, but
that we belong first to God, and second to Mr. Noyes as God’s true representative.”\textsuperscript{214}

After the initial enthusiasm waned, the review and approval of propagative pairings
created considerable controversy within the community as the debate over what defined a
“desirable trait” heated up and the necessary exclusionary nature of the scientific
experiment became apparent. A committee of six men and six women was formed to
decide procreative pairings; of the six men, two were physicians.

Stirpiculture generated more controversy from Oneida members than the
community’s earlier experiments with male continence, complex marriage, the separating
of children from their parents, and the other experimental living arrangements. One area
of contention was criteria for participation in the breeding experiment. Theodore Noyes,
the physician son of Noyes, and the community’s heir apparent, did not agree with his
father on the stirpiculture programs’ inclusion traits. Theodore Noyes advocated that
greater emphasis be placed on phenotypical attributes such as physical size and overall
health, while his father, Noyes, believed the traits most desirable should be those of
spirituality and intellect. Extant evidence suggests that there were no standardized tables

\textsuperscript{213} Parker, 257.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
of measurement of inclusion criteria, and that most of the pairings were subjective. The conflict on inclusion criteria between father and son was unresolved when the community disbanded.

Similarly, as with all valid scientific experiments, there are instances where some subjects are eliminated from the test group. Such was the case of Mary Jones-Hawley, a long time resident of Oneida who had the misfortune of delivering two stillborn infants, fifty percent of the community’s total stillborns over an eight-year period. Mary was involuntarily removed from the stirpiculture subject pool in accordance with the resolution she signed at the beginning of the experiment, this although she wished to continue “trying” because she desperately wanted a child. Mary’s second stillbirth was fathered by Theodore Noyes and as the heir apparent and clearly, of superior breeding stock, it was obvious to the stirpiculture committee that Mary was unfit for breeding. The refusal of the Stirpiculture committee to allow her to continue as a subject in the breeding experiment provides

Illustration 6

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215 Hawley, 176.
evidence that this was in fact a scientific experiment, that participation was voluntary, and that the community reserved the right to eliminate unfit subjects from the participant pool. Mary’s exclusion from the stirpiculture experiment led both her and her future husband, Victor Hawley, to withdraw from the community in 1877.  

As for the rest of the community, many expressed optimism that the stirpiculture experiment would further human reproductive science with one member writing, “The science is in its infancy; everything has to be learned. We may make mistakes, may have to observe long and patiently; but there can be no mistake about the final result, which will be to place the science of human breeding at least on a level with that which, in the case of plants and animals, has produced the Race-horse and the Triomphe de Gand.” Another member wrote, “Stirpiculture has a new interest to me lately...I can tell just when all of this repeating of troubles over and over is going to end. It will be when wisdom and righteousness are fixed in the blood, so that lessons which the parents have learned by experience, the children will have in them when they are born.” These two excerpts reflect the differing views of the stirpiculture inclusion criteria held by community members, the first phenotypical and the second, Lamarckian hereditary traits. Both authors agree that the breeding experiment has the potential to improve human reproductive science, although they do not share a common goal on what form that improvement will take.

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216 Ibid, 206.
217 “Stirpiculture,” The Circular, 28 March 1870.
218 “Hereditary Perfection,” The Circular, 06 December 1875.
Perfectionist doctrine and Natural Theology appear together in the final lines of *Essay on Scientific Propagation*, where Noyes’ united the Perfectionist millennial vision with the Oneida human breeding experiment: “Whether the time for the decease of marriage has come or not, let us not doubt that it must come before the will of God can be done on earth as it is in heaven; and let us be ready, when it does come, to make sure that the formative idea of the dispensation to come after it shall be nothing less than scientific propagation.”

As the Oneida Community’s stirpiculture experiment’s preliminary results did not prove pangenesis theory nor did a second coming of Christ appear imminent, the community terminated the program in 1879.

Small fractures in the community’s cohesion appear prior to the beginning of the stirpiculture experiment. The complementary relationship between science and religion that the founding generation embraced was eroded by the gradual increase of scientific professionals during the mid-nineteenth century. The Oneida Community had sent many of its young men to college during the 1860s and of them, two became physicians, Theodore Noyes, and George Cragin, and a third, William Arthur Hinds, a professional scientist. The two physicians, Theodore Noyes, and Cragin, both served on the Stirpiculture committee, and found themselves increasingly frustrated with the human breeding selection process; Noyes continued to advocate community pairings for spiritual qualities, while the two physicians were focusing on physical attributes. This conflict

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221 Carden, 97.
permeated the community, with many of the experiments’ participants advocating either one position or the other.

Millennialism, the belief that Jesus will return to earth and commence a reign of a thousand years in the near future or that diligent work on improving oneself would hasten the second coming, also lost momentum within the second generation. Spiritualism, a derivative of Swendenborgism, offered followers “a new heaven as well as a new earth,” by reducing “the universe to scientific order.” Spiritualism joined science with mystic components that united believers with invisible worlds, such as the spirits of the dead.222 Theodore Noyes, as well as the recognized leader of an emerging internal opposition faction, John Towner, had abandoned Noyes’ Perfectionism and embraced Spiritualism.223 The “Townerites,” as the Towner followers were referred to, not only represented a movement away from Perfectionism, but also began to disagree publically with Noyes on the selection process for the stirpiculture pairings, and perhaps more significantly, on the initiation of teenage females into the complex marriage system.224 Towner had joined the Oneida Community in 1874, a Universalist minister, lawyer, and former member of the defunct Berlin Heights Community, a short-lived free love commune comprised of about thirty members.225 Towner resented the control exercised by Noyes over the sexual pairings and questioned the Oneida Community’s ascending and descending fellowship, particularly the sexual initiation of pubescent girls

224 Carden, 98-99.
225 Fogarty, 112-13 and 126.
by elderly Oneida Community men. At approximately the same time as the arrival of Towner, the teenage female population at Oneida began to refuse to participate in the complex marriage experiment. The refusal of Oneida’s young female population to enter into complex marriage was first discussed among Oneida community members during the late 1870s. The disagreement escalated when the central male community members began to bicker among themselves over the teens and Noyes began appointing the female initiates “first husbands,” feeding more fuel into the Townerite factions’ fire and prompting Frank Wayland-Smith to write Noyes to complaining:

A number of the young women of Lily Hobart’s class do not hesitate to say that they will have no children except by a husband to whom they have been legally married. The next younger class is still more set in this feeling. I have questioned Emily Easton on the point. She tells me that quite a number have decided not to have anything more to do with our sexual system. This feeling has taken such a hold that some us find ourselves practically monogamist, or nearly, perforce.226

As the letter indicates, the young women were no longer going to submit to the sexual advances of the elder male members of the community, nor were they going to consent to participate in the Community’s complex marriage and stirpiculture experiments.

In 1877, two years before Frank Wayland-Smith complained to Noyes about his impending monogamy, grievances originating from the Townerites prompted Theodore Noyes to bring in an independent physician to examine the community’s women to determine if their health had been adversely affected by “the peculiar sexual practices” of

The independent examining physician, Dr. Van de Warker, found in his non-random sample of forty-two Oneida women, for those who experienced menarche while residents of the community, their initiation into the complex marriage experiment occurred between the ages of ten and eighteen, with a mean age of thirteen. Accusations of statutory rape began to circulate within the community with John Noyes, the first husband for many of the women, implicated as the primary defendant if any community members with underage daughters should choose to file charges. Adult male Townerites were in an equally compromised position, as they too were engaging in sexual intercourse with underage community females. No rape charges were immediately filed, but the central membership was now keenly aware of the growing dissention of the community’s teenage females regarding complex marriage and the rumors of rape spread beyond the confines of the community.

For the members of the Oneida community, the melding of Perfectionist theology and contemporary science under the tutelage of their charismatic leader, John Noyes, appeared feasible from both a religious and scientific perspective. Perfectionist doctrine and the belief that human perfection was attainable through conscientious work on self-improvement motivated Oneida Community members to embark on a variety of speculative scientific approaches to achieve their objectives. During the community’s three-decade long tenure, multiple aspects of Oneida’s communal living arrangements were tested, findings discussed at community meetings, and if the situation warranted, modified or discarded as members worked diligently to attain their “Kingdom of

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227 Carden, 100.
228 Ibid.
Heaven.” Drawing from some of the most publicly debated social and reproductive science of the era, the Oneida Community members created a closed laboratory where group experiments in family organizational structure and human reproduction were carried out and conclusions ascertained and published. For the Oneida Community, the practical applications of the tools of modern science were an integral component of Perfectionist theology and their attempt to herald the millennium.
Chapter 4

EPILOGUE

The whole creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God---for the days of scientific, heaven-inspired propagation, which shall people the world with men and women who will never sin.


By the mid-1870s “age and debility” began to impair John Noyes’ effective administration of the colony and it became increasingly apparent a successor was needed. No longer competent to oversee the minute details of community operations, Noyes relied increasingly on other central members to execute community directives. Discord between members who filled the growing leadership vacuum, arising in part from generational differences in the Oneida Community’s experimental objectives and Perfectionist religious convictions, was compounded as the college-educated second generation came of age.230 In addition to the internal conflicts, there were threats from the outside of legal action against the communes’ male leadership for statutory rape, adultery, and the dissemination of pornography through the mail, outlawed with passage of the Comstock Act in 1873.231 Unable to resolve the developing internal factionalism or defend against legal maneuverings from outside forces, community members voted to disband their communal living arrangements, terminate the social experiments, and reorganize into a joint-stock company in 1881.

230 Pierrepont Noyes, 160.
With Noyes in quasi-community leadership retirement, the physician son, Theodore Noyes alternately accepting and refusing the vacant management position of the community, the Townerites openly opposing initiation of underage females and the young women refusing to consent to participate in the experiments, outside forces simultaneously began to hammer away at the weakened community infrastructure.

Leading the organized opposition to the Oneida Community’s social experiments was John W. Mears, a Presbyterian minister and Professor of Metaphysics at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, fourteen miles distant. Mears launched a negative publicity campaign in 1877 accusing the Oneida membership of committing vile acts “with the pretenses of science” and offering pamphlets on “their methods of regulating the relation of the sexes and of securing what they claim is the best breed of men, in all their nauseating detail.” Mears, the author of many of the scathing attacks against the Oneida Community in the press, garnered additional support from local Episcopal and Methodist clergy and attracted the attention of legal establishment at Syracuse, New York.

The tenuous social dynamics within Community ruptured in 1879, when Noyes fled to Canada amidst rumors of his impending arrest for fornication, rape and violations of the Comstock Act. From the safety of Niagara, Ontario, he advised the Oneida Community members to abandon their practice of complex marriage. Under the direction of Theodore Noyes, the community property was divided into stock shares,

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232 Robertson, ed., Oneida Community, The Breakup, 89.
234 Parker, 281.
factoring in initial monetary contributions and the amount of time a participant had lived within the community.\textsuperscript{236} It was determined at this time that the metal spoon manufacturing business and the trap factory would continue as the primary income for those who wished to stay on at the Mansion House.\textsuperscript{237}

The proposal to dissolve the communal aspects of Oneida and cash-out members who opted not to remain was put to a vote and passed by the adults on September 17, 1880, with only one dissenting “nay” out of the 212 votes cast.\textsuperscript{238} From an economic perspective, the days of “trampling underfoot the domestic and pecuniary fashion of the world” had ended.\textsuperscript{239} All community members were given the option of joining Noyes in Canada. Of the 212 adult members, five women and three men resumed their Oneida lifestyle in Niagara with Noyes. Management of the spoon manufacturing business, Oneida, Ltd., remained under control of Noyes’ descendants well into the 1940s.\textsuperscript{240} In a final purging act by Noyes’ heirs and the management of the multinational flatware company, Oneida, Ltd., the stirpiculture records and an assortment of related documents that had been carefully guarded for decades by some Oneida Community descendants were burned in 1947.\textsuperscript{241} Richards attributes this record destruction by Oneida, Ltd. as an attempt to sever the ties between the corporation and its controversial communal past.\textsuperscript{242}

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{238} Robertson, ed., \textit{Oneida Community: The Breakup}, 309.  
\textsuperscript{239} Parker, 120.  
\textsuperscript{240} Carden, 178.  
\textsuperscript{242} Richards, 64-65.
For those residing at Oneida at its’ dissolution, the community practices of ascending fellowship and complex marriage appear to have been tossed aside rather rapidly and there was considerable haste on the part of the Community to ensure that the unmarried mothers joined with husbands, to protect both the mother and her offspring legally. For some of the women, marriage to their offspring’s father was not possible, a fate that befell Harriet Worden who had three children by three different married men during the stirpiculture experiment.\textsuperscript{243} Despite this logistical obstacle, a flurry of marriages followed in the wake of the abandonment of complex marriage and stirpiculture. The \textit{Tenth Census of the United States}, enumerated on June 1, 1880, indicated that twenty-one females had “married during census year,” substantiating a rapid collapse of complex marriage, with an average of one marriage every eight days over the five-month period of January 1 through May 31.\textsuperscript{244}

Victor and Mary Hawley, who had seceded from the Oneida Community in 1878 after ten years of pleading with the stirpiculture committee to allow them to have a child, married and “contrary to the scientific prognosis at Oneida, produced five children, including a set of twins.”\textsuperscript{245} James Towner, a community elder and the leader of an opposition faction of Oneidians who opposed the initiation of underage women into complex marriage, sought to begin his own Perfectionist community. He and a handful of followers, removed to Anaheim, California, where he assisted in the organization of Orange County, California and later served as a Superior Court Judge for Orange County.

\textsuperscript{243} Parker, 286.
\textsuperscript{244} \textit{Tenth Census of the United States, 1880}, National Archives and Records Administration, Microfilm roll T9-860, 256A- 258A.
\textsuperscript{245} Hawley, 213.
As for the stirpicults, the fifty-nine children born during the decade-long selective breeding experiment, there is no evidence that superior genetic material played a role in their later life. Historical researchers indicate that environmental factors were more influential than genetic factors in the stirpicults’ later adult achievements. The stirpicults were “encouraged to go to college,” and were raised in a “healthy country environment with plenty of fresh air, good food and attention.” That many of them lived to old age has also been attributed to environmental factors. Spirituality, one of the traits Noyes theorized was inherited and an inclusionary criterion for prospective parents failed to manifest itself in the stirpicults; “very few were church members, and only one was a Perfectionist.” Theodore Noyes, in 1872, suggested that the stirpicults were no different from other American children in physical health, intelligence or spirituality, and this initial observation proved true.

246 Carden, 65.
247 Ibid.
248 Richards, 59.
Today, the Mansion House has been restored, appearing as it would to a community visitor in the 1870s. In addition to an Oneida Community museum, the Mansion House holdings include the Natural History displays of taxonomy animals, insects and geological specimens collected by members of the community, the extensive library holdings amassed over the three decades of Oneida’s existence, and restored living spaces where hundreds pursued human perfection through science and religion.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Statement of Principles

ABOUT NOVEMBER 1, 1846

We, the undersigned, hold the following principles as the basis of our social union:

1. All individual proprietorship either of persons or things is surrendered, and absolute community of interests takes the place of the laws and fashions which preside over property and family relations in the world.

2. God as the ultimate and absolute owner of our persons and possessions is installed as the director of our combinations and the distributor of property. His spirit is our supreme regulator.

3. John H. Noyes is the father and overseer whom the Holy Ghost has set over the family thus constituted. To John H. Noyes as such we submit ourselves in all things spiritual and temporal, appealing from his decisions only to the spirit of God, and that without disputing.

4. We pledge ourselves to these principles without reserve; and if we fall away from them, let God and our signatures be witnesses against us.

GEO. CRAGIN.
HARRIET A. NOYES.
CHARLOTTE A. MILLER.
HARRIET H. SKINNER.
MARY E. CRAGIN.
JOHN L. SKINNER.
JOHN R. MILLER.
APPENDIX B

John Humphrey Noyes, Bible Communism, February 1849.


2. The administration of the will of God in his kingdom on earth will be the same as the administration of his will in heaven. Matt. 6:10, Eph. 1:10.

3. God's plan at the beginning of the Christian era was not to establish immediately his kingdom on earth, but to march an isolated church through the world, establish the kingdom in the heavens, and prepare the way for the kingdom on earth by giving the Gentiles the Bible and religious training. Hence the Apostolic Church was directed to submit to "the powers that be." But at the end of the "times of the Gentiles" God will call his church to break in pieces the powers that be and take their place.

4. The institutions of the Kingdom of God are such that a disclosure of them in the apostolic age would have been inconsistent with God's plan of continuing the institutions of this world through the times of the Gentiles. Hence, the Bible must not be asked to lead us into the institutions of the Kingdom of God step-by-step, but only to point the way, consigning us to the specific guidance of "the spirit of wisdom and revelation."

5. In the Kingdom of God marriage does not exist. On the other hand there is no proof in the Bible nor in reason that the distinction of sex will ever be abolished. Matt. 22:29-30.

6. In the Kingdom of God the intimate union that in the world is limited to the married pair extends through the whole body of communicants; without however excluding special companionships founded on special adaptability. John 17:21.

7. The situation on the day of Pentecost shows the practical tendency of heavenly influences. "All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need."

Communism on the day of Pentecost extended only to goods, it is true. But the same spirit that abolished property in goods would, if allowed full scope, abolish property in persons. Paul expressly places property in goods and property in persons in the same category, and speaks of them together as ready to be abolished by the Kingdom of God.

The Communism of the day of Pentecost is not to be regarded as temporary and circumstantial. The seed of heavenly unity fell into the earth and was buried for a time, but in the harvest at the second coming of Christ it was reproduced and became the universal, eternal principle of the invisible church.
8. The abolishment of appropriation is involved in the very nature of a true relation to Christ. Appropriation is a branch of egotism. But the grand mystery of the gospel is vital union with Christ, which is the extinguishment of egotism at the center.

9. The abolishment of worldly restrictions on sexual union is involved in the anti-legality of the gospel. It is incompatible with the perfected freedom, toward which Paul's gospel of grace without law leads, that a person should be allowed to love in all directions, and yet be forbidden to express love except in one direction.

10. The abolishment of marriage is involved in Paul's doctrine of the end of ordinances. Marriage is a worldly ordinance. Christians are dead to the world by the death of Christ. The same reasoning which authorized the abolishment of the Jewish ordinances makes also an end of marriage.

11. The abolishment of the Jewish ordinances was the "offense of the cross" in the apostolic age. It brought the church into collision with the civil as well as the ecclesiastical authorities, compelled Christians to die substantially to the world at the outset, and exposed them to constant persecution and the hazard of literal death. If Christ and the unbelieving world are as hostile to each other now as ever (which is certainly true), the cross of Christ must have a development today as offensive to the Gentiles as the nullification of the Sinai law was to the Jews. Where then shall the death-blow of the flesh fall in the Gentile world? We answer, on marriage. That is a civil as well as religious ordinance, common to all Christian sects. The nullification of marriage in the modern world will be just such an offense of the cross as the nullification of the ordinances of Judaism was in the apostolic age.

12. The plea that marriage is founded in nature will not bear investigation. Experience testifies that the human heart is capable of loving more than one at the same time. It is not the loving heart but the green-eyed claimant of the loving heart that sets up the one-love theory.

13. A system of Complex Marriage will open the prison doors to the victims both of marriage and celibacy: to the married who are oppressed by lust, tied to uncongenial natures, separated from their natural mates; to the unmarried who are withered by neglect, diseased by unnatural abstinence, or plunged into prostitution by desires that find no lawful outlet.

14. The Kingdom of God on earth is destined to abolish death.

15. The abolition of death is to be the last triumph of the Kingdom of God. Christ cannot save the body until he has "put down all [present] authority and rule," and organized society anew. It is true that, since life works legitimately from within outward, the social revolution ought not to be commenced until the resurrection power is established in the heart. The shell ought not to be broken until the chick itself is strong enough to make the
breach. Yet in the order of nature the shell bursts before the chick comes forth. Just so the breaking up of the fashion of the world must precede the resurrection of the body.

16. The chain of evils which holds humanity in ruin has four links: first, a breach with God; second, a disruption of the sexes, involving a special curse on woman; third, oppressive labor, bearing specially on man; fourth, death. The chain of redemption begins with reconciliation with God, proceeds to a restoration of true relations between the sexes, then to a reform of the industrial system, and ends with victory over death.

It was the special function of the Apostolic Church to break up the worldly ecclesiastical system and reopen full communication with God. It is the special function of the present church, availing itself first of the work of the Apostolic Church by union with it and a re-development of its theology, to break up the worldly social system and establish true sexual and industrial relations.

From what precedes it is evident that no one should attempt to revolutionize sexual morality before settlement with God. Holiness, communism of love, association in labor, and immortality must come in their true order.

17. The amative branch of the sexual relation is favorable to life. The propagative branch is expensive of life. The problem that must be solved before redemption can be carried forward to immortality is to secure the benefits of amativeness while reducing the expenses of propagation to what life can afford. This can be done through Male Continence.

18. Sexual shame is factitious and irrational. The moral reform that arises from the sentiment of shame attempts a hopeless war with nature. Its policy is to prevent pruriency (sic) by keeping the mind in ignorance of sexual subjects, while nature is constantly thrusting those subjects upon the mind. The only way to elevate love is to clear away the false, debasing associations that usually crowd around it, and substitute true, beautiful ones.

19. The foregoing principles furnish motives for Association. They develop in a larger partnership the same attractions that draw and bind together a marriage partnership. A Community home, where love is honored and cultivated, will be as much more attractive than an ordinary home as the Community outnumbers a pair.

These principles also remove the chief obstruction to Association. There is a strong tendency to crossing love even in marriage. Association inevitably increases this. A confederation of contiguous states with custom-house lines around each is sure to be quarrelsome. The only way to prevent smuggling and strife in such a confederation is to abolish custom-house lines from the interior, and collect revenues by one customhouse line around the whole. The Shakers avoid this stumbling block, but they sacrifice the life of society in securing its peace.
20. Association to be valuable must be not mere compaction of material but community of life. A congeries of loose particles cannot make a living body; no more can a congeries of loose double particles. Just so in Association individuals and pairs as well as all larger combinations must be knit together organically and pervaded by one common life. Association of this kind will be to society what regeneration is to the individual, a resurrection from the dead. Bible Communism, as this kind of Association may properly be called, demands the surrender not only of property and conjugal interests but of life itself to the use of the whole. If this is the "grave of liberty," as the Fourierists say, it is the grave of the liberty of war, which has done mischief enough to deserve death; and it is the birth of the liberty of peace.

21. In Bible Communism excessive labor will be done away. Labor is excessive or not according to the proportion between strength and work. Bible Communism increases strength by placing the individual in an organization which receives life from its source and distributes it with the highest activity. It reduces work by reducing the needed amount of food, raiment and shelter. As society becomes vital and refined, drawing its best nourishment from happiness, the grosser kinds of food, especially animal food, will go out of use, and the fruits of trees will become staple. Woman's dress will be simple and beautiful and nearly the same as man's. Buildings too will be more compact, and much labor now expended in accommodating egotism and exclusiveness will be saved.

In Bible Communism labor, no longer excessive, will become naturally attractive. Loving companionship will contribute to this result. When the partition between the sexes is taken away, when fashion follows nature in dress and vocation, men and women will mingle like boys and girls in their employments, and labor will become sport.

22. We can now see our way to victory over death. Reconciliation with God opens the way for reconciliation of the sexes. Reconciliation of the sexes excludes shame, and opens the way for Bible Communism. Bible Communism increases strength, diminishes work, and makes work attractive. Thus the antecedents of death are removed. First we abolish sin, then shame, then the curse on woman of exhausting childbearing, then the curse on man of excessive labor, and so we arrive regularly at the tree of life. Gen. 3.

23. The men and women who are called to usher in the Kingdom of God will be guided not merely by theoretical truth, but by direct communication with the heavens, as were Abraham, Moses, David, Paul. This will be called a fanatical principle. But it is clearly a Bible principle, and we must place it on high above all others as the palladium of conservatism in the introduction of the new social order.

We hereby notify all that we neither license nor encourage any one to attempt the practice of this theory without clear directions from the government in the heavens. No movement in these matters can be made safely in the way of imitation, nor on the mere ground of acquaintance with the theory of the new order. Other qualifications besides theory are required for the construction and handling of a locomotive, and much more for the
management of such tremendous machinery as that of Bible Communism. Whoever meddles with the affairs of the inner sanctuary without true spirituality securing inspiration will plunge himself into consuming fire.
APPENDIX C

The Witness, January 23, 1839 from the Battle-Axe and Weapons of War August 1837.

"Dear Brother,--"Though the vision tarry long, wait for it--it will come. I need not tell you why I have delayed writing so long, and why I am in the same circumstances as when we were together--I thank God that I have the same confidence for you as myself--I have fully discerned the beauty and drank the spirit of Habakkuk's resolution; 'Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' Yea, brother I will rejoice in the Lord. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. The present winter is doubtless a time of sore tribulation to many. I see the saints laying off and on like the distressed ships at the entrance of New York Harbour, waiting for pilots, and I would advise them all, if I could, to make a bold push and 'run in' at all events. For one I have passed the Hook--my soul is moored with an anchor sure and steadfast--the anchor of Hope, and I am willing to do what I can as a pilot to others--yea, I will lay down my life for the brethren. As necessity is the mother of invention--so is the mother of faith. I therefore rejoice in the necessity which will ere long, work full confidence in God--such confidence as will permit him to save his people in 'a way they have not known.' In the meantime, my faith is growing exceedingly. I know that the things of which we communed at Newhaven, will be accomplished. Of the times and seasons I know nothing. During my residence at Newark, my heart and mind were greatly enlarged. I have full leisure to investigate the prophecies, and came to many conclusions of like importance to those which interested us at New Haven. The substance of all is, that God is about to set a throne on his footstool, and heaven and earth, i.e. all spiritual and political dynasties will flee away from the face of him that shall sit thereon. The righteous will be separated from the wicked by the opening of the books and the testimony of the saints. 'The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble. Survivors shall come upon mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.' Obadiah 18, 21. Between this present time, and the establishment of God's kingdom over the earth, lies a chaos of confusion, tribulation, woe, &c. such as must attend the destruction of the fashion of this world, and the introduction of the will of God as it is done in heaven. For the present, a long race and a hard warfare is before the saints, i.e. an opportunity and demand for faith--one of the most precious commodities of heaven. Only let us lay fast hold of the hope of our calling - let us set the Lord and his glory always before our face, and we shall not be moved. I thank God that you 'have fully known my manor of life - faith - purpose - afflictions' &c. to the end that you may rest in the day of trouble--for I say to you before God, that though I be weak in Christ, I know that I shall live by the power of God toward you and all saints. I am holden up by the strength that is needed to sustain not my weight only, but the weight of all who shall come after me.
I will write all that is in my heart on one delicate subject, and you may judge for yourself whether it is expedient to show this letter to others when the will of God is done on earth, as it is in heaven, there will be no marriage. The marriage supper of the Lamb, is a feast at which every dish is free to every guest. Exclusiveness, jealousy, quarrelling, have no place there, for the same reason as that which forbids the guests at a thanksgiving dinner to claim each his separate dish, and quarrel with the rest for his rights. In a holy community, there is no more reason why sexual intercourse should be restrained by law, than why eating and drinking should be--and there is as little occasion for shame in the one case as in the other. God has placed a wall of partition between the male and female during the Apostacy, for good reasons, which will be broken down in the resurrection for equally good reasons. But woe to him who abolished the law of the Apostacy before he stands in the holiness of the resurrection. The guests of the marriage supper may have each his favourite dish, each a dish of his own procuring, and that without the jealousy of exclusiveness. I call a certain woman my wife--she is yours, she is Christ's, and in him she is the bride of all saints. She is dear in the hand of a stranger and according to my promise to her I rejoice. My claim upon her cuts directly across the marriage covenant of this world, and God knows the end. Write if you wish to hear from me.

Your's in the Lord.
EDITOR OF THE CIRCULAR:

Dear Sir: I have read your paper for several months past, and although I do not agree with what you promulgate as the principles of enlightened Christianity, yet I have read each paper attentively and thoroughly, thus doing all justice to your ideas. I am now preparing to go to Europe to study medicine, and shall therefore no longer be able to receive your paper. But before bidding you good-bye, I would like to avail myself of your invitation to those who are not satisfied with your account of the Oneida Community as published on the last page of the CIRCULAR, to ask further. As I am to be a medical man, I would like to know definitely what you mean by your principle of "male continence." I have just graduated from college, and after hearing considerable discussion there in the shape of lectures, some relating directly to this subject, I am ignorant of any means of legitimate male continence but one. Of course I am well aware of the tricks of the French women, by which male continence is effectually secured on all occasions, but such a barbarous means of procedure cannot possibly be employed by you. The only means I am acquainted with, however, is entirely artificial, and is liable to the charge of abusing the organs, which should be held sacred and kept sound. If you should have time, I would like to have a detailed account of your process, which could not but be interesting to any professional man. * * * I remain yours, &C., - -.

ANSWER.

New York, July 26, 1866.

DEAR SIR -Your letter addressed to the CIRCULAR, asking for information in regard to our method of controlling propagation, has been sent to me, and as it seems to come from a well-disposed person (though unknown to me), I will endeavor to give it a faithful answer-such, at least, as will be sufficient for scientific purposes.*

The first question, or rather, perhaps I should say, the previous question in regard to "male continence" is, whether it is desirable or proper that men and women should establish intelligent, voluntary control over the propagative function. Is it not better (it
may be asked), to, leave "nature" to take its course (subject to the general rules of legal
chastity), and let children come as chance or the unknown powers may direct, without
putting any restraint on sexual intercourse after it is once licensed by marriage, or on the
freedom of all to take out such a license? If you assent to ~his latter view, or have any
inclination toward it, I would recommend to you to the study of Malthus on Population;
not that I think he has pointed out any thing like the true method of voluntary control over
propagation, but because he has demonstrated beyond debate the absolute necessity of
such control in some way, unless we consent and expect that the human race, like the
lower animals, shall be forever kept down to its necessary limits, by the ghastly agencies
of war, pestilence and famine.

For my part, I have no doubt that it is perfectly proper that we should endeavor to rise
above "nature" and the destiny of the brutes in this matter. I would have men seek and
hope for discovery in this direction, as freely as in the development of steam power or the
art of printing; and I would have them expect that He who has promised the "good time"
when vice and misery shall be abolished, will at last give us sure light on this darkest of
all problems - how to subject human propagation to the control of science.

But whether study and invention in this direction are proper or not, they are actually at
work, and most busily in the wrong quarters. Let us see how many different ways have
already been proposed for limiting human increase.

In the first place, the practice of child-killing, either by exposure or violence, is almost as
old as the world, and as extensive as barbarism. Even Plato recommends something of
this kind, as a waste-gate for vicious increase, in his scheme of a model republic.

Then we have the practice of abortion, reduced in modern times to a science and almost
to a distinct profession. A large part of this business is carried on by means of medicines
advertised in obscure but intelligible terms as embryo-destroyers or preventives of
conception.

Then what a of mechanical tricks there are for frustrating the natural effects of the
propagative act. You allude to several of these contrivances, in terms of reprobation from
which I should not dissent. The least objection-able of them (If there is any difference),
seems to be that recommended many years ago by Robert Dale Owen, in a book entitled
Moral Physiology; viz., the simple device of withdrawing immediately before emission.

Besides all these disreputable methods, we have several more respectable schemes for
attaining the great object of limiting procreation. Malthus proposes and urges that all
men, and especially the poor, shall be taught their responsibilities in the light of science,
and so be put under inducements not to marry. This prudential check on population - the
discouragement of marriage - undoubtedly operates to a considerable extent in all
civilized society, and to the greatest extent on the classes most enlightened. It has Paul's
authority in its favor (1st Cor. 7); and probably would not be condemned generally by
people who claim to be considerate. And yet its advocates have to confess that it increases the danger of licentiousness; and on the whole the teaching that is most popular, in spite of Malthus and Paul, is that marriage, with all its liabilities is a moral and patriotic duty.

Finally, Shakerism, which actually prohibits marriage on religious grounds, is only the most stringent and imposing of human contrivances for avoiding the woes of undesired propagation.

All these experimenters in the art of controlling propagation, may be reduced in principle to three classes, viz.

1. Those that seek to prevent the congress of the sexes, such as Malthus and the Shakers.

2. Those that seek to prevent the natural effects of the propagative act, viz., the French inventors and Owen.

3. Those that seek to destroy the living results of the propagative act, viz., the abortionists and child-killers.

Now it may seem to you that any new scheme of control over propagation must inevitably fall to one or these three classes; and yet I assure you that we have a method that does not fairly belong to any of them. I will try to show you our fourth way.

We begin by analyzing the act of sexual intercourse. It is not such a simple affair that it cannot be taken in parts. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. Its beginning and most elementary form is the simple presence of the male organ in the female. Then usually follows a series of reciprocal motions. Finally this exercise brings on a reflex nervous action or ejaculatory crisis which expels the seed. Now we insist that this whole process, up to the very moment of emission, is voluntary, entirely under the control of the moral faculty, and can be stopped at any point. In other words the presence and the motions can be continued or stopped at will, and it is only the final orgasm that is automatic or uncontrollable.

Suppose then, that a man, in lawful intercourse with woman, choosing for good reasons not to beget a child or to disable himself, should stop at the primary stage and content himself with simple presence continued as long as agreeable? Would there be any harm? It cannot be injurious to refrain from furious excitement. Would there be no good? I appeal to the memory of every man who has had good sexual experience to say whether, on the whole, the sweetest and noblest period of intercourse with woman is not that first moment of simple presence and spiritual effusion before the muscular exercise begins.

But we may go farther. Suppose the man chooses for good reasons, as before, to enjoy not only the simple presence but also the reciprocal motion, and yet to stop short of the
final crisis. Again I ask Would there be any harm? Or would it do no good? I suppose physiologists might say, and I would acknowledge, that the excitement by motion might be carried so far that a voluntary suppression of the commencing crisis would be injurious. But what if a man, knowing his own power and limits, should not even approach the crisis, and yet be able to enjoy the presence and the motion ad libitum? If you say that this is impossible, I answer that I know it is possible - nay, that it is easy.

I will admit, however, that it may be impossible to some, while it is possible to others. Paul intimates that some cannot "contain." Men of certain temperaments and conditions are afflicted with involuntary emissions on very trivial excitement, and in their sleep. But I insist that these are exceptional, morbid cases that should be disciplined and improved; and that, in the normal condition, men are entirely competent to choose in sexual intercourse whether they will stop at any point in the voluntary stages of it, and so make it simply an act of communion, or go through to the involuntary stage, and make it an act of propagation.

You have now our whole theory of "male continence." It consists in analyzing sexual intercourse, recognizing in it two distinct acts, the social and the propagative, which can be separated practically, and affirming that it is best, not only with reference to prudential considerations, but for immediate pleasure, that a man should content himself with the social act, except when he intends procreation.

Let us see now if this scheme belongs to any of the three classes I mentioned. 1. It does not seek to prevent the congress of the sexes, but rather gives them more freedom by removing danger of undesired consequences. 2. It does not seek to prevent the natural effects of the propagative act, but to prevent the propagative act itself, except when it is intended to be effectual. 3. Of course it does not seek to destroy the living results of the propagative act, but provides that impregnation and child-bearing shall be voluntary, and of course desired.

And now, to speak affirmatively, the exact thing that our theory does propose, is to take that same power of moral restraint and self control, which Paul, Malthus, the Shakers, and all considerate men use in one way or another to limit propagation, and instead of applying it as they do, to the prevention of the congress of the sexes, to introduce it at another stage of the proceedings, viz., after the sexes have come together in social effusion, and before they have reached the propagative acme; thus allowing them all and more than all the ordinary freedom of love (since the crisis always interrupts the romance), and at the same time avoiding undesired procreation and all the other evils incident to male incontinence. This is our fourth way, and we think it the better way.

The wholesale and ever ready objection to this method is that it is unnatural and unauthorized by the example of other animals. I may answer in a wholesale way, that
cooking, wearing clothes, living in houses, and almost everything else done by civilized man, is unnatural in the same sense, and that a close adherence to the example of the brutes would require us to forego speech and go on "all fours!" But on the other hand, if it is natural in the best sense, as I believe it is, for rational beings to forsake the example of the brutes, and improve nature by invention and discovery in all directions, then truly the argument turns the other way, and we shall have to confess that until men and women find a way to elevate their sexual performances above those of the brutes, by introducing into them moral culture, they are living in unnatural degradation.

But I will come closer to this objection. The real meaning of it is, that male continence, as taught by us, is a difficult and injurious interruption of a natural act. But every instance of self-denial is an interruption of some natural act. The man who virtuously contents himself with a look at a beautiful woman, is conscious of such an interruption. The lover who stops at a kiss, denies himself a natural progression. It is an easy, descending grade through all the approaches of sexual love, from the first touch of respectful friendship, to the final complete amalgamation. Must there be no interruption of this natural slide? Brutes, animal or human, tolerate none. Shall their ideas of self-denial prevail? Nay, it is the glory of man to control himself, and the Kingdom of Heaven summons him to control in ALL THINGS. If it is noble and beautiful for the betrothed lover to respect the law of marriage in the midst of the glories of courtship, it may be even more noble and beautiful for the wedded lover to respect the unwritten laws of health and propagation, in the midst of the ecstasies of sexual union. The same moral culture that ennobles the antecedents and approaches of marriage, will sometime surely glorify the consummation.

Of course, you will think of many other objections and questions, and I have many answers ready for you; but I will content myself for the present with this limited presentation- as becomes a professor of "male continence.

Yours respectfully, J. H. NOYES.
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