

"CHILDREN OF THE MANSION HOUSE"

(rev. 2012)

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAM
AT THE MANSION HOUSE

FOR 4TH- AND 5TH-GRADERS

TEACHER'S HANDBOOK OF CLASSROOM
PREPARATION MATERIALS

Oneida Community Mansion House
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TEACHER'S HANDBOOK FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAM

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I. BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

1. Select Bibliography

These are references for adults wishing to learn more about the history of the Oneida Community. Most of the books are available at the Mansion House gift shop.

Carden, Maren Lockwood

1969 *Oneida: Utopian Community to Modern Corporation.*

Edmonds, Walter D.

1958 *The First Hundred Years, 1848 – 1948.*

Klaw, Spencer

1993 *Without Sin: The Life and Death of the Oneida Community.*

Noyes, Corinna Ackley

1960 *The Days of My Youth.*

Noyes, Pierrepont B.

1937 *My Father's House: An Oneida Boyhood.*

Rich, Jane Kinsley (editor)

1983 *A Lasting Spring: Jessie Katherine Kinsley, Daughter of the Oneida Community.*

Robertson, Constance Noyes

1970 *Oneida Community: An Autobiography 1851-1876.*

1983 *Oneida Community: The Breakup, 1876-1881.*

Worden, Harriet M.

1950 *Old Mansion House Memories: By One Brought Up in It.*

2. Key Concepts

Bible Communism: communal lifestyle modeled after early Christian teachings.

Complex Marriage: practice of encouraging sexual relationships with any adult member of the opposite sex, replacing exclusive attachments (monogamous marriage) and nuclear families.

Mutual Criticism: rigorous critique of personality traits, behavior and spiritual development--the main method of maintaining discipline and handling conflict.

Perfectionism: belief in the possibility of personal and societal perfection, embedded in daily Community life and relationships.

Stirpiculture: Community's eugenics experiment from 1869-1879 in which potential parents were selected and matched for spiritual and personality characteristics.

3. Oneida Community Timeline

1834: John Humphrey Noyes declares himself free of sin through faith in Christ

1848: Noyes and others from Putney, VT, found the Oneida Community

1862: First section of today's Mansion House of red brick built, centered on the Big Hall

1868-70s: Community's chief industries: manufacturing animal traps and silk thread, with workers hired in a factory setting

1877-79: Crisis in Community leadership

1881: The Oneida Community becomes a company called Oneida Community, Ltd. (and later, Oneida Ltd) on January 1, 1881.

4. Brief History of the Oneida Community

(This background information is for teachers. The Children of Mansion House program is geared to the students and contains age-appropriate content for 4th- and 5th-graders. It does not include sexual content, nor does it discuss specific religious beliefs of the Oneida Community.)

Lasting from 1848 to 1880, the Oneida Community was one of the most successful and long-lived of the nineteenth-century utopian communities. It was based in Oneida, New York, a small upstate town in the middle of an area where religious revivals and utopian communities flourished to an unusual degree. John Humphrey Noyes, the Community's leader throughout its life, had a conversion experience at a religious revival in 1831 which made him dedicate his life to the ministry. He left the conventional Protestant church in 1834, however, when he proclaimed himself free of sin through his faith in Christ. Others also shared his belief in the possibility of personal and societal perfection, but the radical nature of his particular interpretation led to his expulsion from

Yale Theological Seminary and the loss of his license as a minister. He believed others could share his self-professed perfection and set out to teach them how.

Noyes, born in Vermont, made his first attempts at establishing a community in his hometown of Putney. His teachings stressed what he called "Bible communism," the belief that all should live as the early Christians did--sharing everything. Forced to leave Vermont by the surrounding residents' disapproval, Noyes and his followers went to Oneida, New York, to join with other perfectionists. There, in 1848, Noyes and his community were able to purchase cheaply a large tract of land. This would be the home of the Oneida Community until its dissolution in 1881.

Perfectionism, Bible communism, and complex marriage were the ideological foundations of the Oneida Community. Following Noyes, the Community members believed perfection was possible in this world through dedicating their lives to Christ. Bible communism led them to live together in what they would call the Mansion House, a complex of connected buildings that underwent construction and modification throughout the Community's life. At the height of the Community, over three hundred people lived there, sharing material resources and necessary labor. There were smaller branch communities in Brooklyn, NY; Newark, NJ; and Wallingford, CT.

Complex marriage was the most controversial of the Community's beliefs, and the one that most strongly precipitated their retreat from Vermont. Noyes believed that conventional monogamy fostered possessiveness and that women were oppressed by the inability to control the timing of childbearing. Complex marriage involved Community members in a system allowing and encouraging them to form sexual relationships with any other adult member of the opposite sex. The Community disdained exclusive attachments which might mimic monogamy. Men bore the responsibility for birth control, practicing "male continence" which prohibited ejaculation (*coitus reservatus*). This proved a successful method during the early years, before the Community's financial success enabled it to embark on the "stirpiculture" experiment designed to breed a highly spiritually-developed generation of children to carry on the Oneida Community.

During the life of the Oneida Community, industrialization began to edge out agriculture as the base of the American economy. The Community's search for economic stability was similarly affected. They began by selling canned fruits and vegetables, but by the dissolution of the Community their prosperity relied on factories producing animal traps, silk thread, and silverware. In 1879, the Oneida Community abandoned complex marriage and Bible communism; on January 1, 1881,

it became a joint-stock company, Oneida Community Ltd. Now called Oneida Ltd., the company was, for many years, a leading tableware manufacturer.

The original Mansion House was a frame structure built in 1848 when the Community consisted of 50 members. By the early 1860s, the Community had outgrown this building and Erastus Hamilton, the Community's architect, designed a new building in the Italianate villa style. The Community built the present Mansion House in stages between 1862 and 1914. Hamilton and successive planners constructed the building to fit the needs of the Community and to encourage the communal aspects of daily life. At the center of the building was a large meeting hall with a stage suitable for evening meetings, plays, and concerts. Around a central core of rooms open to the public were family sitting rooms and individual or double sleeping rooms.

In 1863, the Tontine, then a separate building, went up. It contained work space for various enterprises. The Community added the South Wing, also known as the Children's Wing, to the main building in 1869 to hold the nursery and rooms for the children and their education and entertainment. The final addition before the end of the Community was the New House wing (1877) which accommodated a large influx of members when the Community closed the Wallingford branch and brought those members to Oneida. The current Mansion House was completed in 1914 with the construction of the Lounge.

After 1880, the Mansion House and Kenwood (as the surrounding neighborhood came to be called) remained the center of the community of descendants who were also the managers of the company. The building was a residence and social center for Community descendants and a guest facility for Oneida Community Ltd. Even today, the informal community of descendants continues and remains focused on the Mansion House. Some of the current residents are descendants. While it would be misleading to say that the Oneida Community continues, there is a sense of tradition and connection to the past that endures and that adds to the visitor's experience.

Today the 93,000 square foot, three-story brick structure is a National Historic Landmark housing some thirty apartments, a bed-and-breakfast business, and a restaurant space. In 1987, the building was separated from Oneida Ltd. to become a not-for-profit museum called the Oneida Community Mansion House.

II. CLASSROOM PREPARATION

1. Select Time Line

1700s: 1774: First Continental Congress
 1776: Declaration of Independence
 1776 - 1782: American Revolutionary War
 1788: United States Constitution Ratified

First Presidential Election

First Congress

1791: The Bill of Rights: first ten amendments to the
 Constitution

1800s: 1825: Erie Canal
 1830s - 1840s: Irish immigration to America
 1835: Beginning of Abolitionist activity
 1837 - 1901: The "Victorian Era": reign of England's Queen
 Victoria

1848 - 1881: 1849: California Gold Rush
 1861- 1865: American Civil War
Oneida 1862: Emancipation Proclamation
Community 1865: XIIIth Amendment outlawed slavery
 1865 - 1877: Reconstruction of American South
 1870: XVth Amendment gave all (male) citizens the right to
 vote
 1876: Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia (Presentation of
 Declaration of Women's Rights by Susan B. Anthony)
 1893: World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (Electric
 City)

1900s: 1919: XVIIIth Amendment established Prohibition
 1920: XIXth Amendment gave women the right to vote

2. Outline of Pre-Visit Historical Background

By arrangement, one of our docents can visit your classroom to introduce this material illustrated with photographs. Presentation of historical background enhances the students' experience of the Mansion House.

Oneida Community 1848-1880

Mansion House

- Still lived in today (apartments, tours, weddings, funerals, lectures, parties, musical events)
- Kenwood, Golf Course

John Humphrey Noyes (JHN):

- Educated at 3 colleges- lawyer, minister
- “free from sin”
- Thrown out of ministry, came to Oneida farm owned by Jonathan Burt
- 31 adults, 14 children
- JHN wanted to create a perfect society, “heaven on earth”
- “Perfectionism”
- grew to 300 people (100 men, 100 women, 100 children)
- Members considered one large family

Five main building blocks of a society are: Religion, Education, Government, Economics, Family

1. Religion

- Way of life based on religious beliefs and JHN’s interpretation of the Bible
- “Complex Marriage”: all married to each other, no regular marriage
- Could not become too attached to another person- or to belongings, clothes, or bedroom
- Very religious community, religion studied every day but no church services or crosses, etc.

2. Education

- All were well educated
- Taught each other
- Kids lived and learned in the Children’s House

3. Government

- Committees for everything
- Men generally in charge but women had much more say than ladies outside the Community
- Women’s clothing and hair
- Mutual Criticism

4. Economics

- Self-supporting, many industries (silk thread, but also carpet bags, canned fruit/vegetables)
- Especially animal traps- Sewell Newhouse (and chain-making)
- Everyone worked, even in the kitchen and factories
- “Bible Communism”- everyone shared all possessions

5. Family

- Kids left mother at 1.5-2 years of age, lived in the Children’s House
- If parent’s attachment too strong; might be sent away

Mansion House built in four stages

Break-up

- JHN aging- hearing and throat problems, ineffective leader
- JHN afraid of outside interference against his community’s way of life
- Older children coming home from college, wanted own marriages and families

Lasted 32 years: Oneida Community longest utopian society in the country

III. WORKING WITH PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

All of these documents can be studied to reveal aspects of life in the Oneida Community. The first five are written texts and can be read by the students or, especially the first two, read aloud to them. In addition to the texts, we present other kinds of primary documents including printed matter, pictures, and drawings.

1. Cheated of a Prize, by Pierrepont Noyes

This passage describes an example of the Oneida Community’s educational philosophy which left a deep impression on a seven-year old boy. Some of Pierrepont’s words which may be unfamiliar to your students (underlined) are explained at the end of the text.

“It was the spring of 1877 that our teacher, Mr. Clarence, announced ‘Every boy who swims across the creek before winter will be given a coconut.’ Oh, joy! A whole coconut! At rare intervals we had tasted small sections of coconut, but to have one all our own, white meat, milk, shell and all, seemed too good to be true. How we splashed and churned the waters of our swimming hole – and dared. Before the season had ended, eight of us had qualified for

coconuts. Some may have dog-paddled their way to the other bank, but all had crossed the deep-hole, unaided.

“Mr. Clarence called us together, the Eight, and congratulated us on learning to swim. Already we could taste the coconuts. But I remember well the words that dashed our hopes: ‘You are each entitled to a coconut, but don’t you think it would be more profitable to put together the cost of eight coconuts and buy something of lasting value? With that money we can buy a good book which all can read and which will last. The coconuts would soon be gone.’

“I need hardly describe our dismay. We wanted coconuts and we didn’t want a book; but we dared not exhibit our spiritual crudeness to Mr. Clarence.

“After Mr. Clarence’s talk, there followed a significant silence which he chose to overlook. I think instinct told us that opposition would only bring us under criticism without accomplishing anything in the way of coconuts. That is why that particular book is in the Mansion House library today.”

--Pierrepont Noyes (excerpt from *My Father's House*)

Definitions:

Dashed- broke; you have no more hope if your hopes have been dashed.

Entitled- deserving; if you are entitled to something, either you earned it or it already is supposed to belong to you.

Profitable- useful.

Dismay- sadness and disgust; if you are dismayed, you are “bummed out.”

Instinct- your good sense; what your brain tells you without having to think about it.

Opposition- disagreement.

Discussion Questions:

-In what way are the experiences being described similar to or different from your own experiences?

-Would you have enjoyed having these experiences?

-It sounds like a coconut was rare treat. Why would the boys rather have coconuts than a book? Which would you rather have?

-Have you ever had an experience like Pierrepont and his friends?

-Do you think Mr. Clarence was trying to be mean to the boys?

-What lesson was he trying to teach the boys? (Don’t be selfish; don’t think only of yourself. The best things are those that can be shared and will last.)

-What does Pierrepont’s story of the coconuts tell us about the Oneida Community?

2. Separated from Mother, passages by Jessie Catherine Kinsley and Corinna Ackley Noyes

At about the age of fifteen months, Oneida Community left their mothers to live in the Children's Department or House. They could still see their mothers every day, but they were not supposed to spend too much time together. If a mother displayed too close an attachment to her child, the Community would separate the two, keeping them apart for a week or too.

There follow two memories of childhood by Oneida Community members Jessie Kinsley (born 1858) and Corinna Noyes (born 1872). They both indicate how Community children were taught to accept the separation and to learn emotional self-discipline.

"When our mothers had weaned us from the breast, we went to live in the Children's House. Certain rooms were assigned for our use: playrooms, schoolroom, bathroom, nap-room, etc. At night, until we were somewhat grown, we slept with our mothers. Living in the Children's House did not change or lessen our love for our mothers, rather I imagine that love was strengthened. We were disciplined if we became too attached or 'sticky' to our mothers. As a child I remember my mother praising me for letting her go from me, and for going from her room back to the children's rooms by myself *without crying*."

--Jessie Catherine Kinsley (excerpt from *A Lasting Spring*)

"What my mother felt during periods of separation, I can only guess, but I can remember well my own feelings when, during one two-week period of separation, I caught a glimpse of her passing through a hallway near the Children's House and rushed after her, screaming. She knew--what I was too young to know--that if she stopped to talk with me another week might be added to our sentence. There was no time to explain. Hoping, I suppose, to escape, she stepped quickly into a nearby room. But I was as quick as she. I rushed after her, flung myself upon her, clutching her around the knees, crying and begging her not to leave me, until some Children's House mother, hearing the commotion, came and carried me away. That has been a painful and lasting memory, but there were many pleasant ones."

--Corinna Ackley Noyes (excerpt from *The Days of My Youth*)

Discussion Questions

- Do you share a room with anyone? Do you ever have sleep-overs? Can you imagine sharing your room with lots of other children?
- If you had to let go of your mother, like the Community children, do you think you could leave without crying?
- Do you think this separation was hard for the mothers, too?
- Are there any situations in which you should hide your real feelings? Can you think of a situation in which that might be good?

Many Community children remember having a wonderful time growing up, with lots of friends, and much attention and affection from many adults who took care of them.

-Can you think of some good things about having many adults to take care of you? (You would always have someone to go to, if you needed help. You would never really be away from your family.)

3. "Habit Is a Tyrant"

The article that follows was written by a member of the Oneida Community in the *Circular*, a publication of the Oneida Community that documented the Community's utopian project to the outside world. It describes changes made by the Community in their habits and routines. They reduced their meals from three to two daily, altered the timing of the meals, and rescheduled their daily communal meetings.

"One of the signs of the unity and flexibility of the Community, of which we have lately spoken, is seen in the hearty readiness with which new and revolutionary manners are adopted at the suggestion of the scientific and spiritual. Up to the twentieth day of October, 1872, the Community, like most families, has taken three meals per day; and the routine of breakfast, dinner, and supper has been as practically invariable as the rising and going down of the sun. Today, after presentation of scientific and physiological reasons by Doctors Noyes and Cragin [medical doctors who were Community members] and the more cogent spiritual reasons suggested by Mr. [John H.] Noyes, behold, a new regimen begun without opposition, almost without discussion.

"The family breakfast hours are now from eight to ten instead of from six to eight as heretofore, and the dinner and final meal for the day is served at three P.M. The medical men say that eating of three meals per day is a habit and not a natural instinct, and that it has been conclusively proved that better digestion, better assimilation, better sleep, and brighter faculties are the rewards of those who limit themselves to two meals. The physiological view of the change commends itself to us, but we are happily reminded of one whose eye is always on spiritual things that the great boon of correct dietetic habits is not primarily good digestion but a clearer spiritual life.

"Nor is this change of mealtimes the end of the turn-about. The evening meeting, the choicest hour of the day, has been put forward an hour, and is now held from seven o'clock till eight instead of from eight till nine as heretofore. The result of these changes thus far had been to promote sociability and break up habit in a manner that is eminently pleasing to the spirit of Communism. Habit is a tyrant, and it is good to rebel against it from time to time. Furthermore, we have a notion that it is possible to really hoodwink the devil when he thinks he

has got you started on some track, where he will be sure to find you all the time, by suddenly switching off and making him lose the scent.”

--*The Circular*, October 28, 1872

Document-based questions:

- These were abrupt and major alterations in Community life. Although different reasons are discussed (health, spiritual) for altering meal habits, what accounts for all the changes? (dislike of routine and predictability)
- What would happen in your school (church, family, community) if everyone suddenly did things differently?

4. Children's Diet, by Corinna Ackley Noyes

In this detailed description of food and meals, the author remembers her childhood from the distance of many years.

“The food the children ate was all very simple but prepared with much thought and care... [Most important] was graham flour to be made into bread or used as a cereal: mush, it was always called. After that, mush of several kinds was the great standby for the children's breakfast. Sometimes cut-up dates were added to the graham mush to make it more delicious. The oatmeal was coarse-ground, giving us something to chew on and thus benefiting both teeth and digestion. Farina was given us occasionally but graham and oatmeal were used most of the time and though syrup or molasses were given occasionally for a treat, brown sugar with milk or cream, or often just strained apple sauce, were the usual accompaniments.

“Milk was the basic nourishment, of course, and we were always encouraged to drink all we wanted. Aside from strained apple sauce or baked apples and prunes, we had no other fruit for breakfast. Oranges and bananas were practically unknown then.

“For our dinner, eaten at noonday, baked potatoes were staple fare, eaten with some kind of cream or fatless meat gravy. Soft-boiled eggs were freely eaten instead of meat and I suppose in the summer we must have been given peas, string beans and tomatoes, probably asparagus but my memory recalls very little about vegetables at this period.

“Dessert consisted largely of slightly sweetened stewed fruit of some kind, Indian meal pudding or baked or boiled custard. Pies were unknown to us but sugar and molasses cookies and sponge cake were frequent fare.

“Supper was a very light meal with the idea of avoiding any digestive disturbance and so preventing sleep, I suppose. Milk a-plenty, milk or cream toast, brewis--an old English dish of hot milk, slightly salted, with sizeable portions of bread soaked in it--and baked apples or applesauce are as far as my memory takes me here.

“Later...from the age of six or seven years on, our diet expanded, but it was still carefully thought out, according to the most hygienic principles then known. Milk continued being item number one. We were given all we could drink and I remember some of the older boys would drink three or four glasses at a meal. It undoubtedly accounted for the more than average height the children attained.

“As we got older, with noonday dinner came the introduction of meat in some form, or a meat substitute. The Community family were never heavy meat eaters. Pork in any form--ham, bacon or sausage--was taboo, as being indigestible. Lamb was probably used, though I never saw or ever heard of chops till years later. They must have been considered an extravagant cut. But I am sure beef pot roast must have been the favorite, both from point of taste and economy. Meat gravy, very carefully made with fat skimmed off and generously filled with bite-sized pieces of meat, or minced beef on toast constituted our first real acquaintance with meat. Fresh fish, enough for the family, was hard to get, I expect, as I never remember tasting it except when some lucky boy caught a sucker or a bullhead in the creek. But dried codfish in a rich cream gravy and dried beef gravy were very acceptable substitutes for meat.

“Baked beans were a favorite dish--baked as only those old Community cooks knew how to bake them. The beans were boiled first until they were very tender, salted during the last stage of cooking, the water then strained out and the beans, which were by then of a lovely pinkish color, were turned into a big baking dish for the final touch. At this period, too, fresh vegetables became more important. In the spring radishes and lettuce from the home garden, then peas, string beans, beet greens and so on through the season. We were now almost on a grownup's schedule except that cooked cabbage was not allowed, as being indigestible. Potatoes in various forms were ever present.

“Desserts had a somewhat wider range, but ice cream was never heard of. Pies were not considered suitable for children, of course, but puddings of many kinds made the meals more tempting. Molasses and sugar cookies were on hand at least once a day.

“Candy was seldom seen. Candied sweet flag and bits of hard licorice were doled out occasionally, if a vestige of [having a] cold could be given as an excuse. But the lack of sweets and the unalterable rule of never eating between meals were accountable in a large measure, I fancy, for the good health and good appetites of the children.”

--Corinna Ackley Noyes (excerpt from *The Days of My Youth*)

Document-based questions:

-How did the diet of children in the Community differ from yours? How did their diet change as the children got older?

- This reading suggests that the children's eating habits were tightly organized by the adults of the Oneida Community. Why? (concern for the health, well-being of the youngsters)
- What does the author think of the regimented program? (approve/disapprove? remember with fondness/resentment?)

5. "Eggs, Two; Apples, Two," by Harriet M. Worden

Two table signs, limiting the amount of food available to each diner in the Oneida Community's early days, had been rediscovered in 1870 (see Figure 4). These touched off memories about leaner times.

"Workmen dismantling the old Mansion House [1870] found a pack of soiled and moldy cards. Not playing cards, they were lettered as follows: 'Pie, One,' 'Eggs, Two,' 'Apples, One,' 'Biscuit, Two,' 'Cake, One,' 'Cake, Two,' 'Biscuit, One.'

"The older inhabitants recognized these cards. The results of the frugal management in our kitchen at that time will be remembered by the boys who were then growing from two to four inches per annum and were always hungry. It was found that many members were liable to appropriate, under stress of appetite, more than their share of the delicacies of the table. To correct the matter and improve the moral nerve, the managers produced the cards as described. These cards were placed on the table beside the dishes of food and indicated that each individual was to limit himself to the number on the card. These hints were generally observed. The total amount of food was not limited, there being always plenty of the coarser kinds."

--Harriet M. Worden (excerpt from *Old Mansion House Memories*)

Document-based question:

- The signs show how it was necessary to establish rules for a large group of people. Were the rules imposed by some authority such as a school principal, a mayor, the president? Did anyone enforce the rules? (voluntary, decision of each individual, no police sanctions)
- How were Community members reminded to take only their fair share of food?
- Can you think of a better way to be sure that members get their fair share?

6. Studying Printed Document: "Season of 1878" (See Figure 5)

The Oneida Community always welcomed guests. To encourage more tourists, they printed handbills such as this one which told visitors what they could enjoy at the Community and how much the visit would cost.

A poem on the handbill ("Song about Picnic Baskets") is transcribed below (after the Document-based questions). It tells of a family deciding to visit the Community. Rather than bringing their own food with them, they buy a prepared meal. The "cars" taking them home that night are railroad cars.

Document-based questions:

-How did the Oneida Community accommodate a large number of visitors?
(refreshments and meals, a wide variety of entertainment, discounts)

Note the various meal plans available, as well as the cost for entertainment.

-How did this information encourage people to visit? (for example, good food, musical and theatrical entertainment, reasonable price, reduced prices for a train ride--especially for large groups)

-In the poem, "Song about Basket Picnics" (see next page), why should the family visit the Oneida Community? (woman happy to be relieved of food preparation)

Song about Basket Picnics, from the handbill, "Season of 1878"

One morning a sensible man
Jumped out of his bed and began
To put on his clothes; then rubbing his nose,
Said he'd thought of a capital plan.

"Let's go on a picnic," said he;
"You and our boy will make three
Of the jolliest set that ever was met—
We will take the first train for O.C."

"But what shall we eat?" said his wife;
"We've a basket, some forks and a knife,
With a little more time I'd fix a sublime
Good lunch for us all" said his wife.

"Leave your basket at home," said the man;
"The Community's run on a plan
That will furnish us victuals without our old kettles-
Don't load me with baggage, dear Ann."

"The lady endorsed this bright move
And said she *should* dearly love
To spend *one* whole day, at home or away,
Without roasting herself by the stove.

They went and had *such* a nice time
 That they called it superb and sublime!
 The music and berries, the cool shade and cherries
 Made the day jingle on like a rhyme.

They had plenty of company true,
 For other good folks went there too;
 And it only cost a little more than if they'd used their kettle,
 And they didn't have a bit of work to do.

When the cars took them home just at night
 They both said with a look of delight
 That they'd had what they desired and were not the least bit tired;
 They'd "*rather* leave the basket home a sight!"

7. Studying Photos: Women's Clothing in the Oneida Community (see Figure 6)

Three images illustrating women's clothing in the mid-nineteenth century are another kind of primary document. On the left is an 1855 fashion plate from *Godey's Lady's Book*, a popular women's magazine. This illustrates how women of the time dressed.

In the middle is a photograph of the costume worn by Oneida Community women. After moving to Oneida in 1848, John H. Noyes remarked, "Women's dress is standing lie. It proclaims that she is not a two-legged animal, but something like a churn standing on caster." Community women then invented a new costume--a shorter smock-like dress worn over legging-like pants. Called the "the short dress and pantalette," it enabled women to move around freely and work as men were able to do. At the same time, they cut their hair short to save the hour of vanity-time required to brush and put up long hair. The clothing and the short hair attest to the Oneida Community's commitment to equal rights for women and to their dislike of personal vanity.

On the right is a photo showing Oneida Community women with their characteristic clothing and short hair.

Document-based questions:

- Have students study the pictures. Try to imagine how much time each "look" required. How much time do their mothers spend preparing to go out or go to work?
- Talk about what a person can and can't do in the two sets of clothing. (walk around/stay inside; different kinds of work, etc.)
- How did the clothing of Oneida Community women differ from what was normally worn then? (list two ways)

-Why do you think their clothing differed from that of other women elsewhere in America? How does their clothing differ from yours?

8. Studying Drawings: Work in the Oneida Community

Two drawings by Milford Newhouse, a member of the Oneida Community, date to the early 1870s.

The first, "Retrenchment" (Figure 7), illustrates men and women working together to iron clothing. In the Oneida Community, men and women enjoyed working together in groups they called "Bees," large parties of volunteers formed to accomplish some task quickly.

"Men and women are more and more free to leave any post, and take hold in the helping spirit wherever most needed. It is grand to see two hundred thus engaged, working cheerfully, joyously, animated by the same purpose and seeking the same objects."

--Oneida Community, 1866

"The system of Bees is particularly useful applied to those monotonous kinds of work which in detail would tire one or two workers; done by storm by a large company, they are, as the phrase is, 'nothing but fun.'"

--Oneida Community, 1855

The second drawing, "Home Industry" (Figure 8), depicts children making chains for animal traps--the Oneida Community's chief product. In the Oneida Community, children were expected to do their part for the good of the whole.

Document-based questions:

- What would it be like to work in a Community and help in the "Bees"?
- Were Bees of the Oneida Community anything like the assembly-line method of manufacture used in factories?
- How are the Bees of the Oneida Community different from what children today have for choices?
- Discuss the fact the today's children do not work as is shown in "Home Industry." Why not? Do you think the work you do at home is important for your family?