

# *Cultural Landscape Report*

*for the*

## *Oneida Community Mansion House Oneida, New York*



*prepared by*

*Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture, LLC*

*2024*



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Oneida, New York*

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2024

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## INTRODUCTION

The Oneida Community Mansion House stands on over 270 acres at the southern end of the city of Oneida, Madison County, New York. Originally territory of the Oneida Indian Nation, the land was purchased beginning in 1848 by the theologian John Humphrey Noyes, the leader of a small band of “Bible Communists” who migrated to central New York State to establish the utopian Oneida Community. The group purchased more acreage, erected buildings, cultivated the land, and established a subsistence farming operation centered on fruit production. As the Community grew, the need for larger accommodations ensued, and in 1861, the group began work



*The Oneida Community Mansion House as seen from the south lawn in April 2024.*

on what would become the 93,000 square foot Mansion House to support a membership of as many as three hundred. Income-generating activities shifted from growing and processing fruit to the manufacture and sale of animal traps, and provided enough revenue to upgrade the landscape. Adhering to contemporary trends, the members transformed the house environs into a pleasure ground complete with a winding drive, gently curving footpaths, clusters of deciduous and evergreen trees, and rustic furnishings, per the guidance of the leading landscape theorist at the time, Andrew Jackson Downing.

The Community remained intact until 1880, when outside hostilities and internal dissention led to its dissolution. A restructuring process followed, the outcome of which was a manufacturing-based corporation known as Oneida Community, Ltd. (later Oneida, Ltd.). The new entity retained the Mansion House, but incrementally modified the environs, introducing landscape elements typical of a 20<sup>th</sup> century private club. Several features dating to the communal period were removed, including agricultural buildings, fruit orchards, children’s play structures, perennial gardens, and free-standing reservoirs. Modern additions included a golf course, tennis courts, parking areas, Mansion House foundation plantings, and subdivision of outlying acreage into suburban single-family house lots.

In 1988, the newly established non-profit Oneida Community Mansion House, Inc. (OCMH) assumed stewardship of the property from Oneida, Ltd., including the Mansion House and surrounding 13.873 acres. Tasked with overseeing preservation efforts and raising revenue, OCMH staff secured grants, launched public programs, and rented the building and grounds for private events. OCMH commissioned Historic Structure Reports for the Mansion House’s several wings and commenced with the first of many building restoration phases. Turning next to the environs, OCMH secured funds for the foregoing Cultural Landscape Report (CLR). Compiled in the form of a “preservation treatment plan,” it defines a series of recommendations for preserving and enhancing the 13.873-acre landscape as way of achieving interpretive goals while, at the same time, bolstering revenue.

## GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The goals of the CLR were to determine how the Oneida Community Mansion House landscape appeared and functioned throughout its 176-year history; to determine a period (or periods) of significance to which the landscape should be preserved; and to develop a phased plan to stabilize, restore, rehabilitate, and/or reconstruct the landscape to reflect this (or these) period(s). Objectives for meeting these goals included documenting the physical development of the landscape, documenting and assessing existing conditions, developing a preservation treatment plan, and establishing management guidelines.

## METHOD

To complete the CLR, Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture (MLLA) collaborated with members of the OCMH staff through a multi-phased process. A detailed topographical survey of the 13.873-acre property, prepared by a licensed land surveyor while the CLR was underway, provided a basis from which to create a map of existing conditions. Work on the project spanned approximately twelve months, and consisted of:

- *Programming.* OCMH staff identified a program of improvements for the landscape based on the organization's long-term educational, interpretive, and financial needs.
- *Historical Research.* Resources, including maps, plans, photographs, publications of the Oneida Community and other written narratives from the OCMH collection and other repositories provided a base of information from which to compile an historical chronology and narrative history of the landscape. A complete listing of resources appears in the *Bibliography*, found in the *Appendix* of this report.
- *Period of Significance.* Based on findings from the historical research, MLLA and OCMH staff established a period of the landscape, defined by the National Park Service as "the span of time for which a cultural landscape attains its historical significance."<sup>1</sup> A description of this period appears at the end of the *Historical Development* section of this report.



*The Mansion House, 1878, photographed from the South Lawn. Historical photographs provided information about details found in the landscape from the Community's earliest days to the present. (OCMH Collection)*

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, 1995.

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- *Landscape Assessment.* MLLA made several visits to Oneida to study existing conditions, and then assessed the various natural, built, and functional features as to how well they support OCMH's programming and education goals. Using findings from historical research, MLLA was able to document the historical elements that remain, identify locations of elements that have been removed, and flag contemporary elements that have been added.
- *Treatment Plan.* Drawing on observations made in the landscape assessment and considering the program of improvements, MLLA developed a treatment plan, or series of recommendations for preserving the landscape.

All work on the CLR was completed in accordance with the *United States Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes.*

## LANDSCAPE PROGRAM

At the beginning of the project, OCMH staff identified the following program for the landscape to be incorporated into the CLR treatment plan:

- **A donor recognition feature**, such as a monument, engraved pavers, benches, and/or gathering space is needed.
- **Access** is a problem on the site. The building currently has one ADA-compliant entrance in the rear that is not accessible year-round, (this entrance is slated to become fully accessible twelve months of the year during the imminent "Phase 2 Preservation Project"), and circulation around the building is not possible using the existing pathways system.
- **Parking** is insufficient and confusing. Currently, three parking areas accommodate vehicles – the circular drive at the front of the building for museum guests, and lots for residents and overnight guests. A fourth area near the garages (rear of property) provides space for staff parking, but it is shared with residents. There is a desire to segregate the parking areas so that residents and overnight guests have separate lots, and to increase the number of spaces from approximately 68 to as many as 96.



*Currently the Mansion House is inaccessible to persons with disabilities; each of the building's entrances must be accessed via steps or stairs.*

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- **Wayfinding/interpretation** is needed to help visitors find OCMH and to navigate the property, including access to the front door and, when completed, the ADA compliant building entrance, and to convey information about the property's (and community's) history.
- **Outdoor event space** is necessary. In the past, OCMH has hosted a car show, architectural tour, strawberry festival, symphony performance, and weddings. OCMH would like these to continue, perhaps on a larger scale.
- **Site drainage** needs to be addressed. Improvements to the roof have created a need to capture and dispose of roof water so that it does not impact the building.

*In the central part of New York State there lies a broad and fertile valley which leads so far up between the wooded hills that its beginnings are lost among the faint blue forms of the higher hills which loom on the southern horizon...The stream that winds its serpentine course down this valley, having added to its upland inheritance the waters of many hillside brooks, runs out into the plane and on to Oneida Lake, a very self-respecting "little river."*

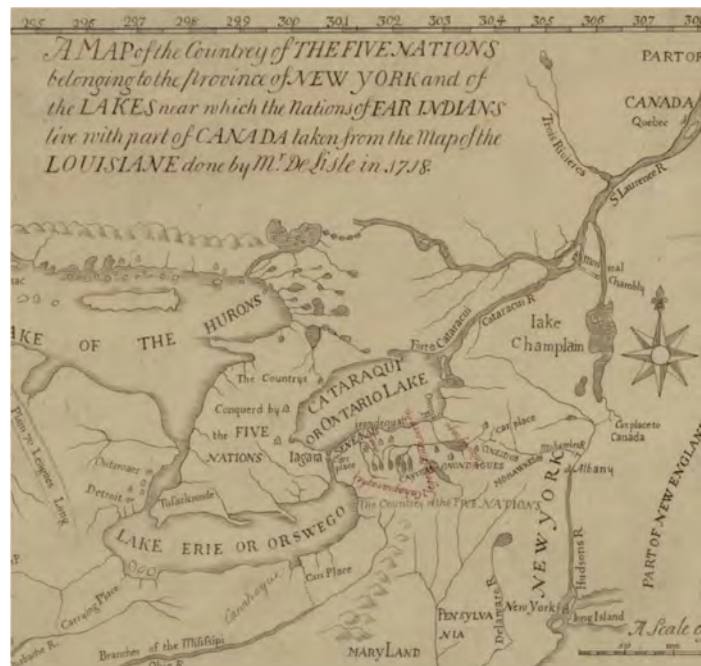
~ Pierrepoint B. Noyes, 1937

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MANSION HOUSE LANDSCAPE

Resources for the following historical summary were provided by the Oneida Community Mansion House (OCMH), Hamilton College and Syracuse University Libraries, and the New York State Archives, and included narrative histories, photographs, maps, and plans. The bulk of material was derived from two books, *Oneida Utopia, A Community Searching for Human Happiness & Prosperity*, and *The Look of Utopia: Oneida Community Buildings, Landscape Projects, and Photographs (1848-1880)*, both written by former OCMH curator Anthony Wonderley, as well as Historic Structure Reports prepared by Crawford and Stearns, and publications of the Oneida Community itself. The selection of images included in the summary, including maps, plans and photographs, represents a fraction of the OCMH and Syracuse University holdings; additional images have been included in the *Appendix* to this report. For a complete list of resources consulted as part of this summary, refer to the *Bibliography*, also found in the *Appendix*.

### BEGINNINGS (BEFORE 1848)

Land in central New York State that would become home first to Native people and later Euro- Americans was, for thousands of years, covered by the Laurentide Ice Sheet, a massive glacier extending from the Arctic. Fifteen thousand years ago, the glacier retreated and melted into Glacial Lake Iroquois, a large water body covering the Upper Mohawk Valley.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent melting eventually resulted in the formation of Oneida Lake and its tributaries, including Oneida Creek. Originating in higher elevations south of Oneida Lake, the creek flows northward, emptying into the lake's southeast side. Flooding along the creek banks produced a buildup of alluvial sediment, creating fertile ground.



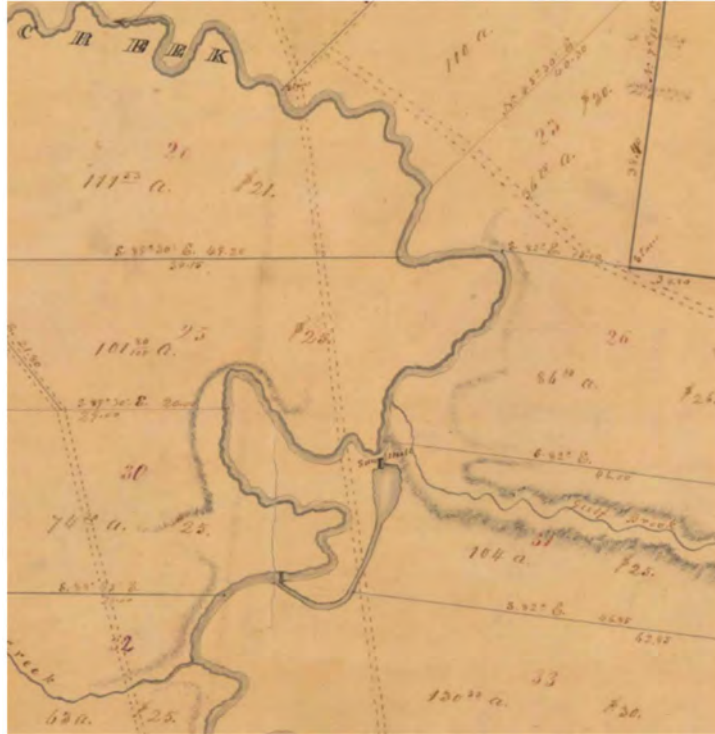
Excerpt of a 1718 map of the "Five Nations" shows the Oneida territory situated between the Onondagas to the west, and Mohawks to the east. (Darlington Library Collection, University of Pittsburgh)

<sup>2</sup> Koch, Daniel, *Land of the Oneidas*, 15

Nomadic people may have gravitated to the area around 4000 BCE, after warming temperatures resulted food sources that could be hunted, fished, and gathered. By the fifteenth century, the Haudenosaunee or “Five Nations,” including the Senecas, Cayugas, Onondagas, and Mohawks, occupied central New York State. The fifth group, the Oneidas, established main villages along Oneida Creek and in the hilly terrain of what became Madison County, and while known to relocate throughout the territory every five to twenty years, they did form semi-permanent settlements, surrounding them with high palisades.<sup>3</sup>

Between the 1780s and 1840s, the State of New York purchased millions of acres of Oneida lands through a loosely defined set of treaties, employing coercive measures, in violation of federal law.<sup>4</sup> Facing pressure to sell, many Oneidas gravitated to and settled in an area west of Green Bay, Wisconsin, where a reservation was established by treaty in 1838.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the 1840s, a small population of Oneidas remained in two villages located to the southeast and southwest of what would become the Mansion House site.

The Oneidas’ land had been divided into large rectangular lots drawn by the Surveyor General of the State of New York in 1780 and 1840, and attracted land speculators, missionaries, settlers, and boosters of Erie Canal development. The State disposed of the land in return for partial remittance, and upon payment in full, the buyers would then receive articles securing the deeds. A small communal group of three families, the Hatches, Ackleys, and Nashes from East Hamilton, New York purchased land near Oneida Creek, occupied a log cabin, and operated a lumber-sawing mill.<sup>6</sup>



A portion of “a map of that part of the Oneida Reservation directed to be surveyed and laid out into lots by an Act passed April 5<sup>th</sup> 1798,” created by the Surveyor General of the State of New York. A sawmill stood at Oneida Creek. The Oneida Community’s initial land purchase stood to the north of the sawmill, centered on the bend in the creek. (New York State Archives)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 19

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 18-19, 81. In 1798, the State of New York passed an act entitled, “An Act for the sale of certain lands in the Oneida Reservation.”

<sup>5</sup> *Tribes of Wisconsin, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin*, 1

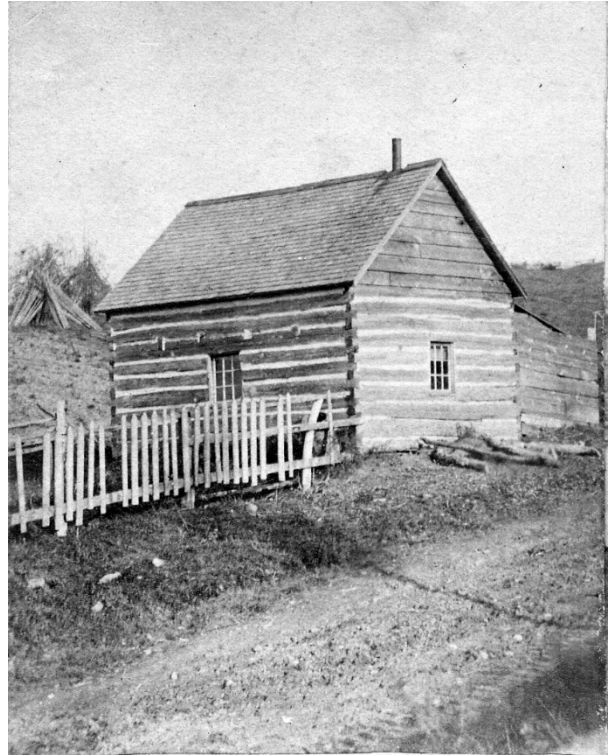
<sup>6</sup> Wonderley, *Oneida Utopia*, 48 This may be a sawmill established by the Oneidas, as it has been referred to as the “Indian Sawmill.”

## ESTABLISHMENT (1848-1861)

In 1848, a group of “Bible Communists” from Putney, Vermont, were invited to join the three families living near Oneida Creek. The leader of this group, Putney native and Yale-educated theologian John Humphrey Noyes, had gathered 45 members of his family and friends into a society that expounded a form of Christianity known as Perfectionism, expressed through communal living, unselfishness, and the practice of Complex Marriage. Communitarity extended to child-rearing, which elevated the status of women within the Community. Rejected by the larger Putney community, including local Calvinistic preachers, the group fled to central New York which, at the time, was known as the “burned-over district,” a hotbed of religious fervor harboring crusaders of the Second Great Awakening.<sup>7</sup>

Development of central New York during the mid-1800s was largely spurred by advances in transportation. The Erie Canal, connecting Albany to Buffalo, opened in 1825, allowing for more efficient movement across large stretches of land. In 1831, the Mohawk and Hudson Railroad opened and within twenty years would connect with several east-west routes to provide a single line between Albany and Buffalo. Beginning in 1868, construction on the New York and Oswego Midland Railroad began, with the intention of connecting New York City to Lake Ontario at Oswego. The canal and railroads fostered migration of people and expanded distribution of goods.

The Putney group migrated to the Oneida Creek site in stages, the first of which took place in March 1848 when group members crossed Lake Champlain via ferry, navigated the Erie Canal from Albany to Durhamville, and made their way southward.<sup>8</sup> With the financial backing of his wife, Harriet Holton, Noyes purchased a 23-acre property across Oneida Creek, known as the Francis farm.<sup>9</sup> Upon the group’s arrival, they took note of their new surroundings (as reflected up on twenty years later):



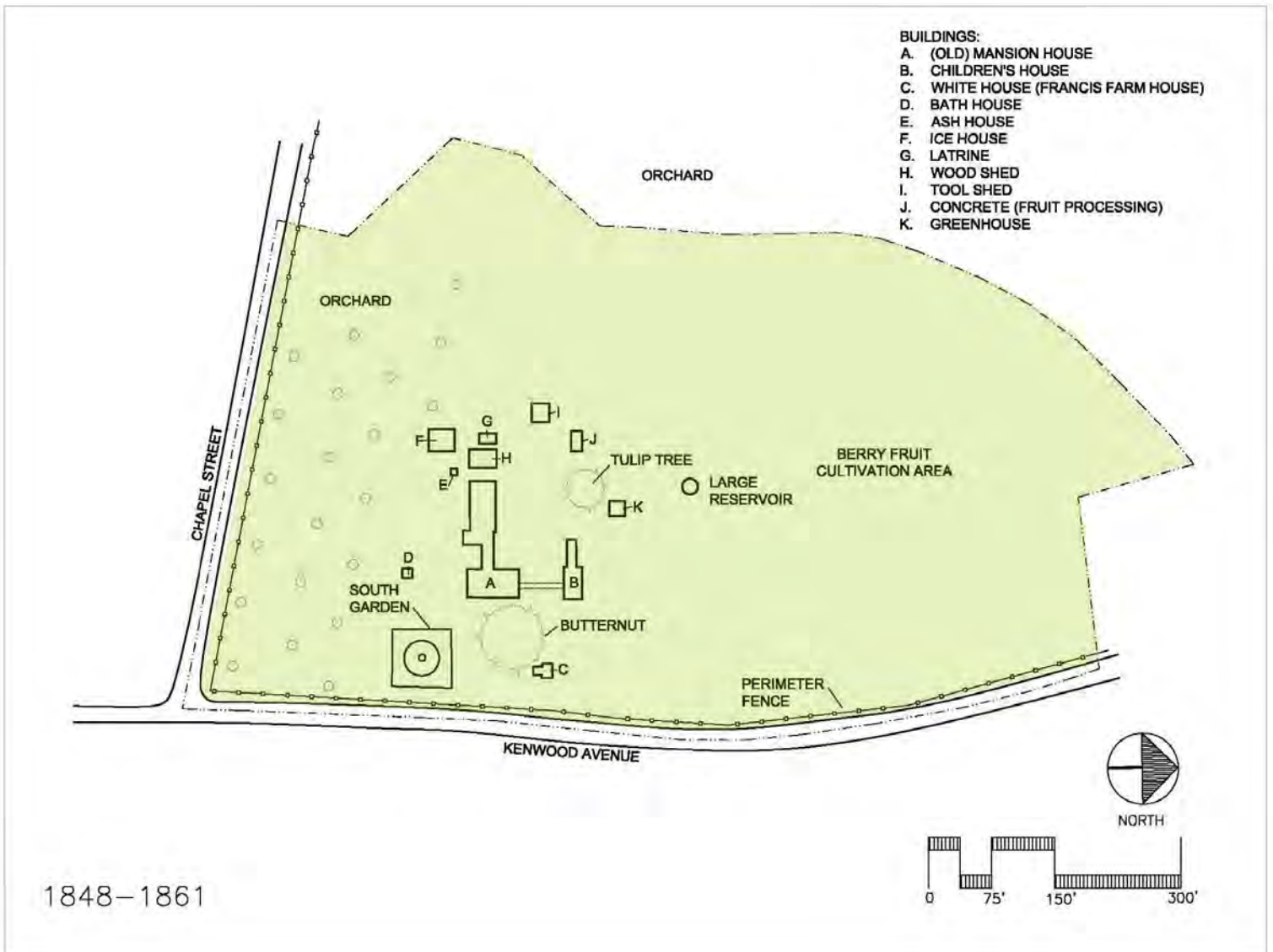
*The initial temporary shelter of the Perfectionists from Putney was a lonely cottage – 15’ by 15’ square log cabin – owned by Jonathan Burt. (unknown date, OCMH collection)*

<sup>7</sup> Koch, 81. Central New York was the breeding ground of religious awakening, or “Second Great Awakening,” that bled into the new social radicalism in the northern states, driven by opposition to African slavery (abolition), during the years before the Civil War. “So powerful were the fires of religious emotion in central and western New York during the 1820s and ‘30s that it came to be known as the “burned-over district.”

<sup>8</sup> Noyes, Corinna Ackley, *The Days of My Youth*, 5. Durhamville was a small hamlet in the town of Verona, located approximately two miles north of the city of Oneida, and is now part of Oneida.

<sup>9</sup> The “Francis farm” may have been associated with Job Francis, a farmer who owned land near Oneida Creek in the mid-1800s. In 1840, he was listed as a Pensioner (military service person) in the 1840 Madison County New

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“As we approached the outskirts of the domain now owned by the O. C., dilapidated fences, tall, black-looking stumps, with here and there a log hut, met the eye in almost every direction. One unacquainted with the locality twenty years ago, can scarcely imagine the transformation nature has undergone through the agency of human skill and industry.”<sup>10</sup>

York Census of Pensioners and was 72 at the time. He resided in Stockbridge. (Hammond, Luna M., *History of Madison County, State of New York*, 104)

<sup>10</sup> Guiler, Tom, “175 Years in Oneida,” *Oneida Community Journal*, Fall 2023, 3, from “The Old Log Hut,” *Circular*, October 5, 1868

The Community member Harriet Worden described the property as “so uncultivated as to be passed by unnoticed”:

“One lonely cottage stood on the hillside; a barn across the road; a butternut-tree, which has since been famous in the annals of the Community, the only suggestion of romance or beauty in the vicinity. Neighboring buildings were few and scattering. Nearly a quarter of a mile from the cottage alluded to, long known as the “White House,” were three farm houses, together with a saw-mill.”<sup>11</sup>

Early records of the Community confirmed the existence of these buildings and described members’ attempts to maximize their use, noting that “original accommodations of the Association, consisting of two ordinary dwelling houses and two small cabins, were put to full occupation in the course of the year; but their capacity, with the help of ingenuity and good will, proved to be infinitely elastic, and sufficed, (with the addition of a round board shanty early erected for the dormitories of the young men) until more liberal quarters could be prepared.”<sup>12</sup>

The property contained “great quantities of blackberries” (covering the top of the high point, or “knoll”), as well as celandine and a large butternut tree standing on the east face of the knoll. A cultivated field of potatoes and corn filled the area to the south of the knoll, and to the north were apple orchards.<sup>13</sup> At the time, present-day Kenwood Avenue existed, but was unpaved.

The ground just below the knoll was selected for the site of the first communal home, referred to as the Mansion House, and designed collectively by the members. Noyes and a new Community member, carpenter/architect of record Erastus Hamilton, staked out the foundation walls for a rectangular three-story building, 60 feet long by 35 feet wide, oriented north-south with the northern end abutting the knoll’s south slope and the front facing Oneida Creek. Hamilton embellished the stark-looking building by adding a crenellated cupola to the roof and an arcaded walkway or “piazza” to the east and south facades.<sup>14</sup> Noyes, who documented the Community’s first few years in *Annual Reports of the Oneida Association*, described the Mansion House site as,

“...an elevated plot of ground in the right angle formed by the intersection of two roads; one of which it fronts on the east, at a distance of six rods (approximately 100 feet), and the other on the south at a distance of twenty-five rods (approximately 415 feet). The space between the mansion and the southern road is naturally suitable for a garden and lawn, and is already planted with shrubbery and fruit-trees.”<sup>15</sup>

Members brought an array of skills, including farming, carpentry, masonry, machinery, blacksmithing, cabinetmaking, shoemaking, harness-making, milling, wagon-making, gunsmithing, and lead pipe-making, as well as architecture, engineering, teaching, and printing, all of which contributed to the making of the Community’s new home. Construction of the Mansion House, which took less than one

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<sup>11</sup> Worden, Harriet M., *Old Mansion House Memories By One Brought Up In It*, 1. The saw-mill was referred to by the Community as the “Indian saw-mill,” as noted in “A Community Transplanted – from Putney to Oneida, VIII,” *American Socialist*, October 2, 1879, 317

<sup>12</sup> *First Annual Report of the Oneida Association, 1849*, 4

<sup>13</sup> Wonderley *Oneida Community Buildings, Grounds, and Landscape, 1848-1880*, 41

<sup>14</sup> Wonderley, *Oneida Utopia*, 59

<sup>15</sup> *Second Annual Report of the Oneida Association, 1850*

year, was a Community-wide effort, engaging both men and women, to clear swamps, dig foundations, frame the structure, and erect chimneys.

By 1850, the Community had made several additional land purchases, bringing the total to 273 acres on both sides of Oneida Creek.<sup>16</sup> The 1849 *Annual Report* noted that the property contained mostly alluvial soil of good quality and an excellent water privilege occupied by a sawmill and other lumber machinery. Taking advantage of the soil and water, members made significant agricultural improvements, in an effort to make the entire property into a “Garden of Eden.” Noyes reported,

“Very much has been done during the past year in the agricultural department, in the way of improvement, and of reclaiming the soil to a proper state of cultivation. In this direction, *Thoroughness* has taken precedence of extension. The instincts and tastes of the Association, from the commencement of operations at



A sketch of the Mansion House and Children's House, created in 1851, showed the orchard plantings to the south of the buildings, and the outline of a geometrically shaped garden. (OCMH collection)

Oneida, have led steadily to a revolution of the practices and notions, commonly associated with the idea of farming. Motives of [proficiency], as well as good taste and the habits of community life, invite our efforts in the direction of making our domain a *garden*, rather than what is usually understood by [the] term *farm*.”<sup>17</sup>

Initially covering one acre, the “garden” was enlarged to approximately five acres with the intention of blending it with “farming interest,” and extending it “so as to cover substantially the whole domain.”<sup>18</sup> Crops raised during 1850 included 350 cabbages, 19 bushels of onions, 75 bushels of tomatoes, 200 bunches of celery, three bushels of sweet or southern potatoes, as well as broom corn, oats, barley, wheat, buckwheat, beans and more. Although not the focus of the farming operation, cattle and hogs were raised for the production of milk and meat.<sup>19</sup>

Noyes advocated for the growing and harvesting of fruit. He wrote, “[c]attle occupy more of the soil at present than men. The cultivation of trees will be better sport than plowing, hoeing corn, digging

<sup>16</sup> *Third Annual Report of the Oneida Association*, 1851

<sup>17</sup> *First Annual Report of the Oneida Association*, 1849

<sup>18</sup> *Third Annual Report of the Oneida Association*, 1851

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

potatoes, and waiting on cows and pigs.”<sup>20</sup> The Community augmented the large plantation of existing fruit trees by adding another 621 young trees gifted to the Community by George W. Robinson and Henry Thacker, a nurseryman and by 1849, “Horticulturist in the Community.”<sup>21</sup> The trees included 155 varieties of apple (80 trees/35 varieties), pear (77 trees/36 varieties), plum (80 trees/24 varieties), cherry (53 trees/17 varieties), peach (236 trees/23 varieties), quince (25 trees/2 varieties), dwarf pear (40 trees/15 varieties), and grapes (30 vine plants/3 varieties). In addition to the cultivation of trees and grapes, the Community grew strawberries and vegetables, largely on top of the knoll. The main strawberry bed was “an oblong square of an area of about ¼ of an acre, divided into four or five strips running lengthwise of the bed, about four feet in width, and with spaces between of about a four and a half to two feet.” Two rows of trellises held the grapes, and an onion bed covered one acre of ground.<sup>22</sup>

Following the 1849 construction of a Children’s House located to the north of the Mansion House, the Community built a children’s playground (location unspecified), erected fences, and began planting trees for aesthetic reasons. As early as 1851, they developed the South Garden. Designed in a geometric shape, it contained a large circle in its center from which radiated four right angles, forming a star. In 1855, members built a reservoir, fed by an existing well, that supplied water to a fountain that had been placed at the garden’s center.<sup>23</sup> Maintained by individuals with an interest in growing flowers, the South Garden was originally filled with roses, but an infestation of slugs prompted the caretakers to replace the roses with perennials. *The Circular*, a publication that supplemented the *Annual Report*, detailed the garden:

“Besides our public flower-garden [on the north lawn], which receives the special attention of the floral department, we have another garden just below the terrace south of the house, which might be appropriately called the “home garden.” Its numerous beds are divided among certain members of the family who have a taste for flowers. Here they have ample opportunity to display their native genius for flower culture. At sunset on pleasant evenings this garden presents a busy animated appearance. Its walks are thronged by the owners of the different flower-beds, who are enthusiastically hurrying to and fro with watering-pots, rakes, hoes, cuttings, plants to be set out, etc., etc. Many prepare for the summer campaign during the long months of winter, day after day carefully nourishing a dozen or more choice plants or tender cuttings. When the blue skies and warm winds of summer come, their pets reward them with lovely flowers.”<sup>24</sup>

The Community further embellished their landscape by placing seats throughout and installing paths.”<sup>25</sup> Charles Ellis, a Community member, fashioned rustic furniture, outdoor benches and chairs, out of the gnarled roots of white cedar harvested from the surrounding swamps, “tastefully shaped into sofas, divans, and settees.”<sup>26</sup> By 1854, garden paths, ranging in width from eight to nine feet, had been added to the landscape, as documented in *The Circular* by Jonathan Burt, who may have been responsible for their layout and construction:

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<sup>20</sup> Wonderley, *Oneida Utopia*, 92

<sup>21</sup> *Second Annual Report of the Oneida Association*, 1850

<sup>22</sup> Wonderley, *Oneida Community Buildings, Grounds, and Landscape, 1849-1880*, 12

<sup>23</sup> The well allegedly stood on the former Francis farm; the locations of the well and reservoir are unknown.

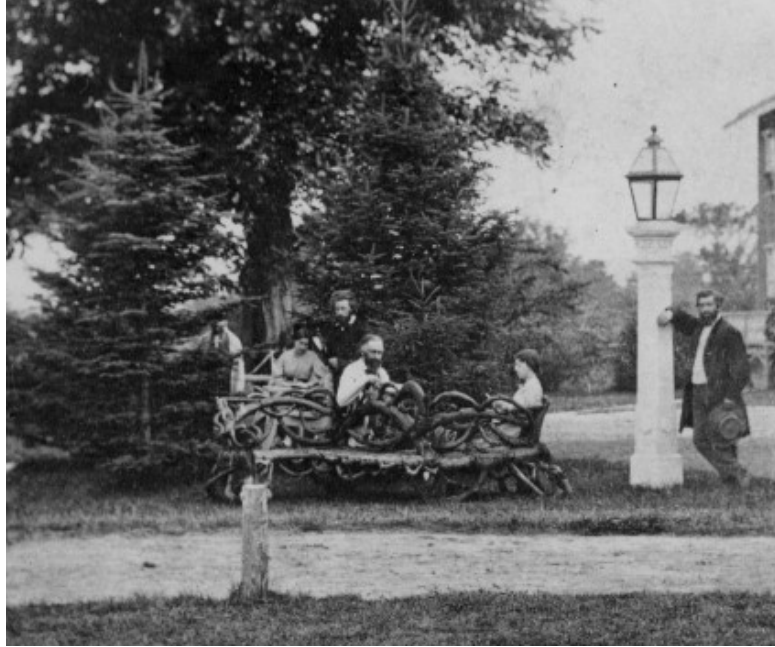
<sup>24</sup> *Circular*, May 29, 1871

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, September 23, 1854

<sup>26</sup> Wonderley, *Oneida Community Buildings, Grounds, and Landscape, 1849-1880*, 43

“I have been engaged the last two days in marking out and working the wide paths for our new garden-ground. Its site you will understand is in part the spot where the barns formerly stood. We have two of these main paths crossing each-other at right angles.

The one begins at the south end of the old barn-site, and runs north to the new one, about 700 feet long by 9 wide. The other crosses it directly in line with the walk leading from the mansion-house to the road. This is eight feet wide, and will lead across the pear orchard into the meadow flats below, its length being about 400 feet. I confess that in this approach toward a scientific and artistic arrangement of our gardens, I find a relish which I have not been wont to have in tilling the ground.”<sup>27</sup>



*Community member Charles Ellis created rustic furniture out of white cedar roots, collected from the surrounding swamps. (ca. 1865, OCMH collection)*

By 1858, a small greenhouse was under construction to the north of the Mansion House (in what would become the Quadrangle). Undertaken by a Mr. Bradley, the glass-covered structure measured 14' by 25' and included a concrete wall located partially underground. The building was doubled in size the following year with the addition of a 15' by 26' wing, and was mostly devoted to the propagation of plants for future planting out, or sale.”<sup>28</sup> Another Community publication, *The Daily Journal*, described the greenhouse in 1866:

“The green-house presents the finest display of flowers now that we have ever seen in it. The Azaleas, of which there are a number of varieties, have been in full bloom during the past week. Several varieties of roses are also in bloom, including the Lamark, a most delicate and highly perfumed white rose, and the splendid Augusta, which has been flowering for several months, and bids fair to continue for a good while to come. The Cactuses are putting forth their great flower buds. Orange blossoms fill the air around them with their rich perfume. Pelargoniums and numerous other flowers add their beauty to the scene. There are forty-three different

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<sup>27</sup> *Circular*, May 23, 1854

<sup>28</sup> *Circular*, December 22, 1859

kinds of plants in blossom, besides many varieties of some kinds. There are nineteen varieties of Azaleas in full bloom.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1858, the Community launched a “Fruit Business,” consisting of retail sales of tomatoes, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, cherries, and grapes sealed in glass jars, an enterprise that would continue for the next ten years and expand to include sales of preserved cherries, corn, grapes, strawberries, tomatoes, and other fruits and vegetables raised on the 273-acre domain, an operation that continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Visitors from the outside world began arriving, some out of curiosity about the way of life, but others to sample food, including strawberries and cream, produced by the Community. Production of animal traps, initiated by Community member Sewall Newhouse, augmented the fruit-growing and preserving industry.

The landscape during the first fourteen years of the Oneida Community’s existence was one in which the land, including orchards, vegetable and flower gardens, and pasture dominated the built structures. Other than a few small sheds and other outbuildings, structures were limited to the original Mansion House and Children’s House. Focused on subsistence, Community members cultivated the acreage largely for food production, and after a decade of labor, began profiting from sales of preserved fruits, vegetables, and traps, allowing their enterprise to expand.

#### EXPANSION (1862-1880)

By the early 1860s, the Oneida Community’s population exceeded 200, and the original Mansion House, Children’s House, and associated small support buildings could no longer accommodate Community needs. Members designed and commissioned the construction of a new, larger home on the crest of the knoll above the first Mansion House. Despite the need to dismantle the garden that members had established atop the knoll, Noyes viewed this location as superior for several reasons:

“The advantages of this spot are its conveniences of access, its nearness to the existing buildings of the community, its dry situation and good prospect. The most apparent objection that rises against the locality, is the fact that the building and its surroundings will occupy some of our choicest garden ground that is now used for the production of strawberries, grapes and vegetables. But on the whole we want just such land for our site, and all the associations connected with this spot are home-like and loving. It will be in the center of what has been the favorite promenade of old and young since the beginning of the Community.”<sup>30</sup>

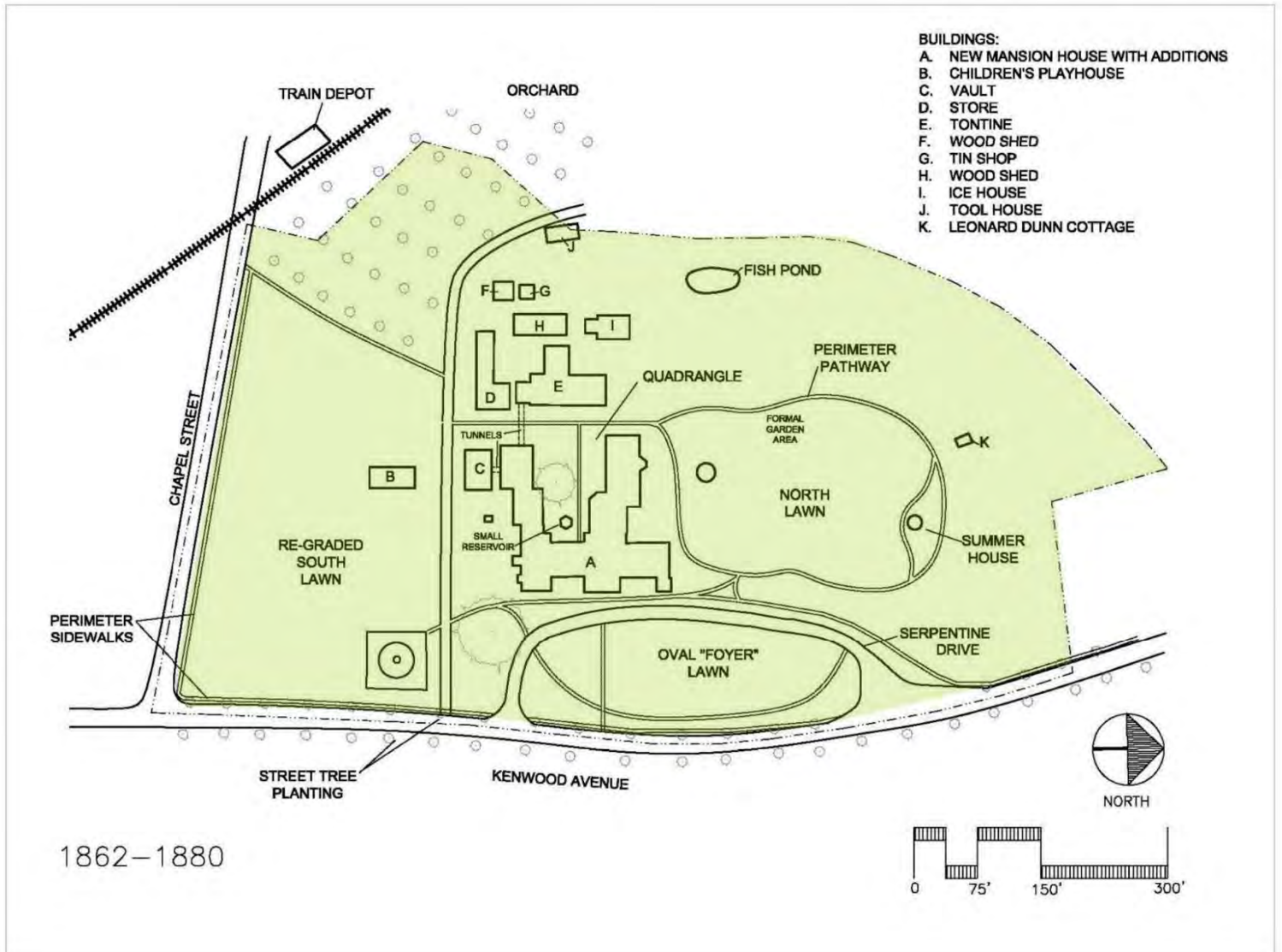
Erastus Hamilton, once again architect-of-record, guided the communal effort to design the new Mansion House (1861-1862). Construction of the “Tontine,” a building to house printing, cooking, laundering operations, and other light industries situated to the west of the Mansion House, took place in 1863.

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<sup>29</sup> *The Daily Journal*, April 4, 1866

<sup>30</sup> *Circular*, July 2, 1857

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ANDREW JACKSON DOWNING

Design for the Mansion House environs reflected the late-19<sup>th</sup> century American trend in the design of domestic buildings and landscapes advocated by Andrew Jackson Downing.<sup>31</sup> A county boy from Newburgh who apprenticed at his brother's nursery, Downing studied the English "natural style" of William Kent, Capability Brown, and Humphrey Repton, and set out to adopt it for Americans. He was convinced that the physical environment affected human behavior, and it was within reach for every individual to improve his/her own surroundings.

To complement the new buildings, the Community endeavored to create a pleasure garden, possibly per the notions of Downing, spelled out in his 1841 *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America; with a View to the Improvement of County Residences*, an 1854 edition of which is housed in the Community library. Downing's *Treatise* claimed,

"[T]here is no employment or recreation which affords the mind greater or more permanent satisfaction, than that of cultivating the earth and adorning our own property...[A]s the first man was shut out from the garden, in the cultivation of which



*The Community established a verdant lawn on the grounds surrounding the Mansion House, per the guidance and recommendations of Andrew Jackson Downing. (ca. 1874, OCMH collection)*

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<sup>31</sup> Scholars and historians have speculated that the Community relied on Downing's popular handbook, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, for inspiration in designing the Italianate style new Mansion House.

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*In conjunction with the construction of a new, larger Mansion House in 1862, the Community laid out a system of curving pathways throughout the grounds. Allees of shade trees were planted along Kenwood Avenue. (1863, OCMH collection)*

no alloy was mixed with his happiness, the desire to return to it seems to be implanted by nature, more or less strongly, in every heart.”<sup>32</sup>

In regard to the relationship between architecture and landscape, Downing opined,

*“[a]rchitectural beauty must be considered conjointly with the beauty of the landscape or situation. Buildings of almost every description, and particularly those for the habitation of man, will be considered by the mind of taste, not only as architectural objects of greater or less merit, but as complement parts of the general scene; united with the surrounding lawn, embosomed in tufts of trees and shrubs, and if properly designed and constructed, they will even serve to impress a character upon the surrounding landscape.”<sup>33</sup>*

Downing promoted specific elements that would bring nature into the core of home life, many of which appeared in the Community’s new landscape:

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<sup>32</sup> Downing, Andrew Jackson, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America; with a View to the Improvement of County Residences*, IX

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 370



*The garden located to the north and west of the new Mansion House, Tontine, and South Wing complex. The curving pathways. Community access to plant and building materials allowed for the uniting of architecture and landscape. (ca. 1871, OCMS collection).*

- *House with a view.* The new Mansion House was sited on a high point allowing long views both across the domain and over the outlying rural landscape.
- *Approach to the house.* Community members laid out a gently curving drive leading to the Mansion House's front door allowing visitors glimpses of multiple building angles as they approached, and creating an oval front lawn or "foyer" to announce the building.
- *Lawns.* Grassy lawns extended to the north and south of the Mansion House, providing an ample, comfortable setting, one that gave the large building room to breathe. The grassy oval, created by the curving front drive, provided a "foyer" to the front door.
- *Plantings near the house.* Plantings were set away from the house's foundation, allowing the attractive natural stone to be seen.
- *Plantings of trees.* Trees were planted both singly (as in the black walnut and tulip tree) and in masses arranged to exaggerate the building's architectural lines.
- *Plantings in beds.* Gardens of perennials provided color and texture, and were set away from the Mansion House so that they could be viewed from the interior.

- *Ornaments.* These included rustic furniture and a summer house, located on the north lawn. These provided places for Community members to gather, but also added folly to the landscape.

Coupled with Downing's theories was the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century burgeoning New York State horticultural industry of many large nurseries, fruit tree growers (pomologists), horticultural publishers, and seed production companies. Begun in the early 1700s on Long Island, New York, the business of growing trees and shrubs expanded into the central part of the state following the opening of the Erie Canal (1825) and building of railroads (begun in the 1830s). Settlers to the area discovered ideal conditions for farming and fruit growing, and by the mid- to late-1800s, thousands of acres were devoted to cultivation of fruit trees and ornamental



*The summer house, built by Community member Henry Thacker and a workman, rested at the north end of the north lawn. (1865, OCMH collection)*

shrubs, with millions of trees shipped to other states and overseas. As early as 1817, the Geneva-based partnership of Boardman & Wheeler was grafting fruit trees and by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city was the site of over 8,000 acres of tree, shrub, and flower-growing land.<sup>34</sup> Further to the west, Rochester was home to 23 nurseries and Monroe County held six others.<sup>35</sup> In conceptualizing the new Mansion House and its surrounding landscape, the Community had access to information about the design principles, as well as the ability to obtain seeds, plants, and other landscape construction materials.

Development of the grounds around the new Mansion house was directed by Community member Alfred Barron, who embraced Downing's philosophy that the purest embellishment resulted from choosing the finest in nature and artistically enhancing it. In his lectures with Community members, he stated, "[t]he earth is a great repository of wealth and beauty, of that which is calculated to please the eye, and administer to the happiness of man; and a great part of man's happiness lies in his power to develop and reveal these hidden treasures."<sup>36</sup> He quoted Downing, "to appear to advantage, requires

<sup>34</sup> Grebinger, Paul, *To Dress and Keep the Earth*

<sup>35</sup> Sheret, John G., "The Chase Brothers Nurseries," *The Crooked Lake Review*, Winter 2004

<sup>36</sup> Wonderley, *Oneida Utopia*, 117

some extent of surface; its lines should lose themselves indefinitely, and quite agreeably and naturally with those of the surrounding country.” He urged members to think beyond the geometric, “to the natural school of landscape derived from ‘the genius, enthusiasm, and fine writing of Downing.’”<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the views, lawns, plantings, and ornaments advocated by Downing, Barron introduced a graveled walkway winding around the periphery of the lawn north of the Mansion House. A team of volunteers removed the cherry trees, grape arbor, and onion bed, and in their place graded the terrain, constructed paths, and planted shade trees. Flower beds were added, as was a summer house, made by Henry Thacker and a workman, located at the north end of the lawn.<sup>38</sup> The *Circular* included lists of trees and shrubs planted on “O. C. Lawn” (1863 and 1870), and in a report on the landscape in 1862, described the completed composition.

“Our new lawn, for the first time close shaven, begins to have the carpet feeling and finished reflection which is required; and notwithstanding the lack of shade, which only years can supply, with its paths and verdure pleasantly environs, our Community dwelling. Whatever may be true of other objects of human art, a lawn may be watched for increasing beauty for many years. Our grounds are planted in clusters and with an eye to judicious arrangement, with a variety of trees, including elm, chestnut, basswood, maple, beech, tulip, black walnut, gingko, locust, oak, & etc. The evergreens consist of Scotch and American pine, Norway spruce, Arbor vitae, hemlock, larch, & etc.”<sup>39</sup>

Other improvements around the Mansion House included the construction of a system of pathways. In 1866, the *Daily Journal* reported on the method being used to build the paths:

The patent walk from the front of the [Mansion House] was laid yesterday...the process of laying the walk was as follows: A lot of sand and gravel from the creek was sifted. The coarse gravel and stones were thrown into one pile and the fine gravel and sand into another, coal ashes being mixed with each. Then into each pile a sufficient quantity of coal-tar is missed to thoroughly saturate the whole mass, so that each individual grain or pebble is completely coated with it. The foundation of the walk being prepared by excavating to a depth of three inches, the coarse part of the prepared material is laid down and carefully leveled with a rake. Then the fine material is laid on and leveled in a similar way. A sprinkling of the dry sand and ashes is then thrown on, and the whole surface leveled by being heavily stamped with a plank and pounder. Another sprinkling of dry sand is now thrown on, and evened with a broom, and the walk is then rolled with a stone roller about two feet long, fourteen inches in diameter and weight, six-hundred pounds. This rolling process is continued for some time until the material is graded. Another sprinkling of fine sand is added, and the walk is

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>38</sup> *The Circular*, May 9, 1864

<sup>39</sup> *The Circular*, September 11, 1862



*The South Lawn, with the addition of a cupola-topped playhouse. (1875, OCMH collection)*

finished. The result is very satisfactory walk, smooth, impervious to water, and durable.”<sup>40</sup>

After completing enhancements to the immediate environs of the Mansion House, the Community turned its attention to outlying lands to create an additional pleasure ground. Named “Spring Grove,” it stood to the west of the Mansion House bordered by a pear orchard. In 1871, Henry Seymour planted a two-acre grove of larch trees through which strollers would need to pass through to reach Spring Grove.<sup>41</sup>

In 1869, work began on a South Wing, an addition to the Mansion House that would accommodate children. To make way for this expansion, the Community moved the old Children’s House across and down the highway (today’s Kenwood Avenue) and created a children’s play area, with a graded slope/sledding hill, sand bed, and in 1875, a cupola-topped playhouse measuring 60’ by 24’.<sup>42</sup> The new South Wing, South Lawn, and playhouse were depicted in an 1869 plan of the *Oneida Community’s*

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<sup>40</sup> *Daily Journal*, May 2, 1866

<sup>41</sup> *Circular*, April 10, 1874; September 2, 1872; June 28, 1875; July 26, 1875. Natural springs in this area provided a water source for the Mansion House, beginning in 1862.

<sup>42</sup> *Circular*, May 24, 1875



*J. J. Skinner's 1869 drawing illustrated the extent of structures and landscape within the Oneida Community's holdings. Orchards and gardens stood to the west of the Mansion House complex, and allees of shade trees lined Kenwood Avenue. Curving pathways led throughout the site. (OCMH collection)*

*Building and Southern Grounds*, drawn by J. J. Skinner, with assistance from Alfred Barron. This beautifully detailed drawing showed the layout of the Mansion Houses (both old and new), and the old Children's House, relocated to the east of Kenwood Avenue. Other elements of the plan included grading of the South Lawn into a bowl or amphitheater shape; layout of a main vehicular drive leading to the front of the Mansion House, and detailing of an elaborate system of walkways, gently curving throughout the property. Details included plantings of orchard trees (organized in regular grids) to the west of the Mansion House complex and to the west of the Children's Lawn; allees of shade trees along both sides of Kenwood Avenue; and the formal garden, set below the Mansion House at the northeast corner of the Children's Lawn. As evidenced by this 1869 plan, the Community appeared to have fulfilled its goal of creating a "pleasure garden" "in the spirit of Andrew Jackson Downing. Beginning in the fall of 1869 and the completion of the Midland Railway and depot located to the southwest of the Mansion House, efforts to upgrade the landscape went on display. Hundreds of summer visitors began making excursions by rail to view the site.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Worden, preface

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The “Quadrangle” formed by the Mansion House, South Wing, Tontine, and New House provided an intimate space for the Community to gather. Long, linear pathways led into and across the space, framing the reservoir, tulip, and linden trees. (1878, OCMH collection)

The Community demolished the original Mansion House in 1870, and in 1877-1878 constructed a large extension to the west end of the new Mansion House, referred to as the New House, to accommodate a group of Perfectionists from Wallingford, Connecticut, a branch of the Oneida Community. With the addition of this four-story structure, a “Quadrangle” was formed, enclosing the reservoir (built in 1855) and tulip tree (planted in 1851 by Henry Thacker) within a walled rectangular space. Members built long, linear east-west pathways in alignment with the buildings and around the existing reservoir and tree.

The shift from subsistence landscape (1848-1861) to pleasure garden (1862-1880) was propelled by two major factors, the first of which involved changing views of landscape from one of utility and subsistence, to one of leisure and pleasure. Downing’s *Treatise* provided instruction on the best type of landscape to build, but equally influential was the Community’s success at making money. When the initial group arrived in Oneida in 1848, they came with little or no financial cushion, and spent the first decade focused on subsisting, erecting shelter, preparing soil, cultivating crops, and harvesting food.<sup>44</sup> In 1853, the phase “Horticulture the leading business for subsistence” began running on the first page of almost every issue of the Community newspaper, and continued to do so until the early 1860s.<sup>45</sup> The canning and selling of fruits and vegetables, together with the invention and eventual mass production of animal traps (late 1850s) allowed the Community to acquire wealth, hire outside help to construct the Italian villa style Mansion House and several additions, and plan and build a pleasure garden.

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<sup>44</sup> By 1849, the Community consisted of 87 members, 58 adults and 29 children.

<sup>45</sup> Wonderly, *Oneida Utopia*, 93

## MODERNIZATION (1881-1987)

In 1881, the Community dissolved as a result of outside hostilities and internal dissention among members. All property, real and personal, was distributed on an equal basis, and the businesses, including silverware and trap-making were incorporated in a joint stock company (Oneida Community, Ltd.), with the shares apportioned. Many members chose to remain in Oneida and live at the Mansion House. Maps dating between 1899 through 1920, including several Sanborn Fire Insurance

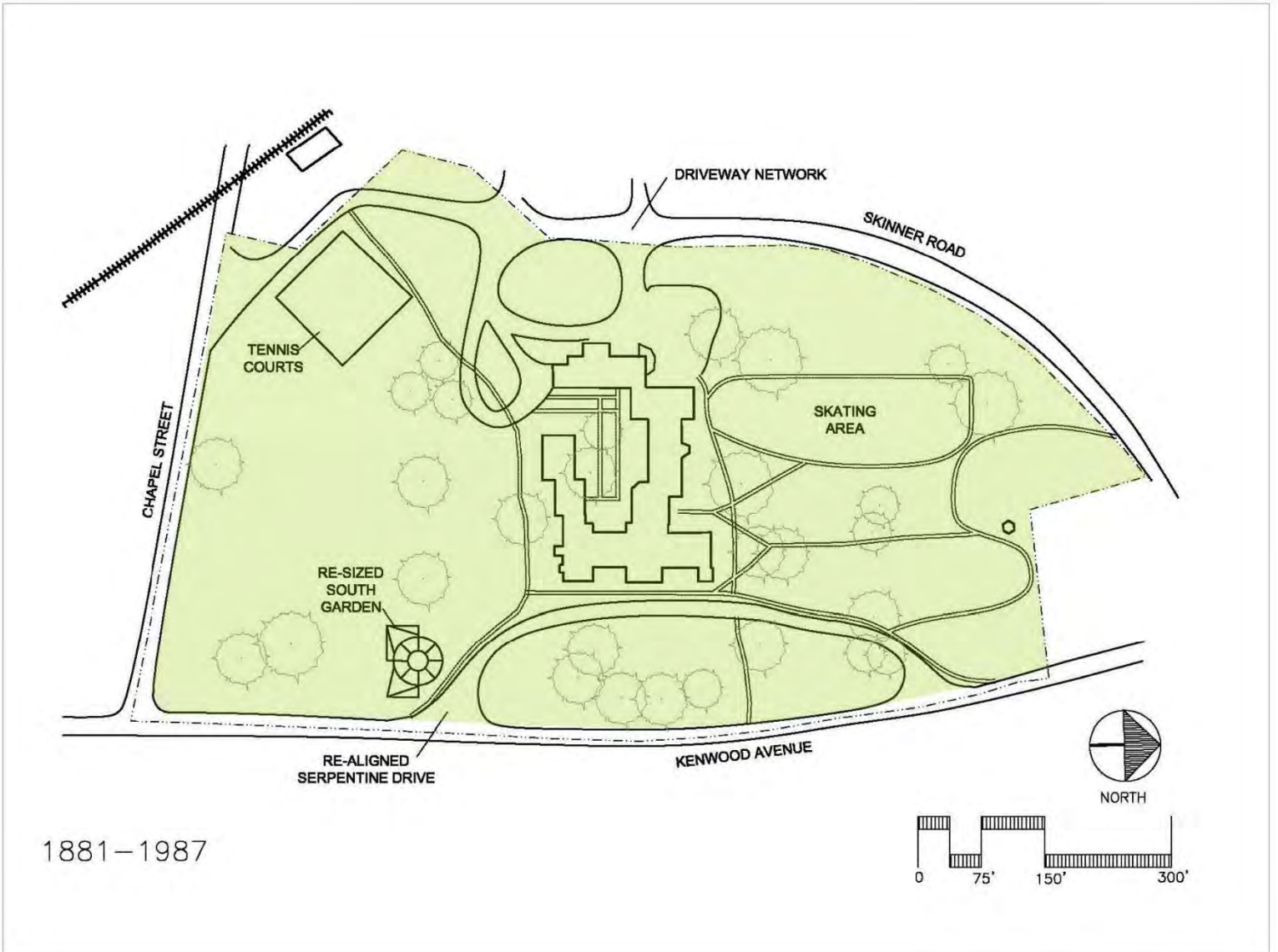


*The east façade of the Mansion House, 1898 (OCMH collection)*



*Community members resting in rustic chairs on the Mansion House lawn, 1888. Following the dissolution of the Community, many members chose to stay and live at the Mansion House. (OCMH Collection)*

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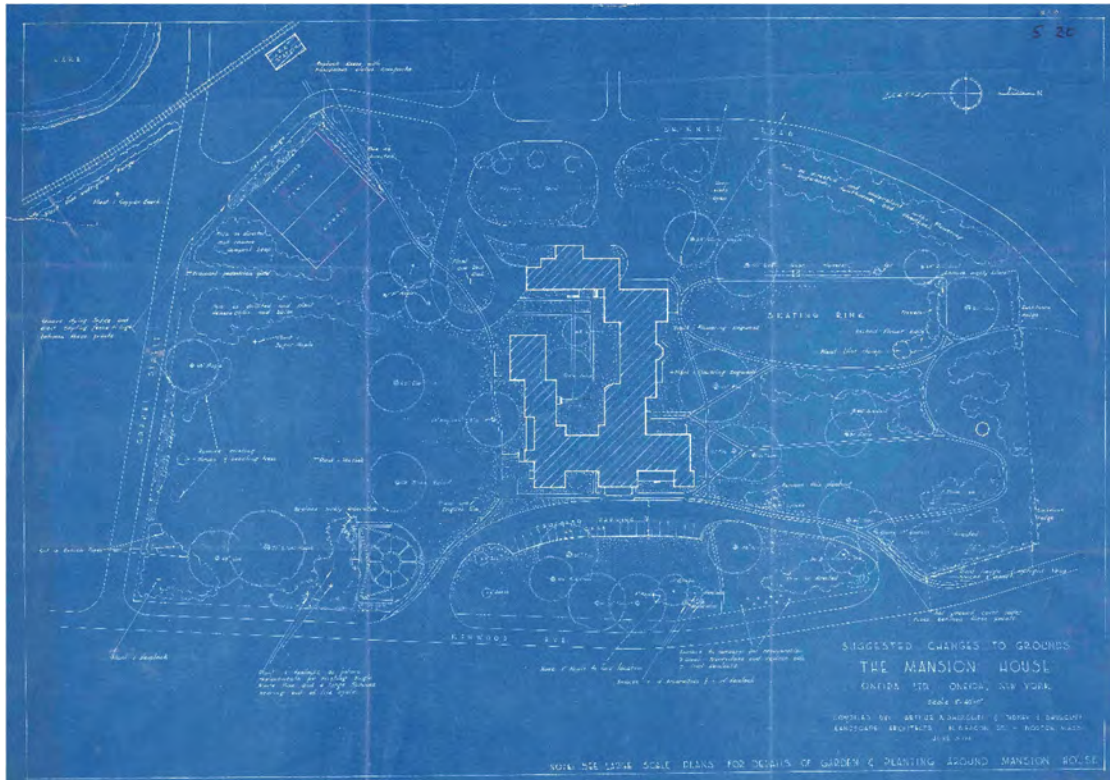
Comparison of the 1899 and 1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps of the Oneida Community show an incremental removal of buildings, and the development of a residential neighborhood centered around a green (“The Vineyard”) on the east side of Kenwood Avenue.

Company maps, show the gradual removal of Community buildings and subdivision of outlying land, largely into single-family residential lots. By the early 1900s, a golf course replaced the Community’s fruit orchards on land to the west of the Mansion House, and a set of tennis courts stood to the southwest, near Chapel Street. By 1914, “Vineyard Park,” the rectangular green located across Kenwood Avenue from the Mansion House, had been established and several houses had been built around its periphery. The circular drive leading from Kenwood Avenue to the Mansion House turned at a right angle in front of the house, before returning back to Kenwood Avenue. In the 1930s, Oneida Community, Ltd. became Oneida, Ltd., and in so doing, retired its name, a title that had symbolized the vision of Noyes and his followers since the 1850s, “community.”

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## SHURCLIFF & SHURCLIFF

Documentation of changes to the landscape during early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century is limited to a small collection of photographs and utility maps, however in 1951, Oneida, Ltd. hired landscape architects Arthur A. Shurcliff and Sidney N. Shurcliff to provide advice about improvements. Born in Boston, Arthur Asahel Shurcliff (1870-1957) graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, having



Arthur A. and Sydney N. Shurcliff's 1951 "Suggested Changes to the Grounds of the Mansion House detailed many of the landscape features, including several mature trees and the curving pathways. (OCMH collection)

studied mechanical engineering. Advised by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. to pursue landscape architecture, Shurcliff attended Harvard, studied under Charles Eliot, and went on to work in the Olmsted firm. By 1904, Shurcliff had established his own firm, and specialized in town planning. Among his many commissions was the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, where he served as chief landscape architect. He also presided over the American Society of Landscape Architects (1928-1932), to which he had been elected as a Fellow in 1905. In 1927, Shurcliff was joined in practice by his son, Sidney Nichols Shurcliff (1906-1981), who had completed three years of graduate study in landscape architecture at Harvard. He became a firm partner in 1933 and continued to work alongside his father until 1954, when the senior Shurcliff retired. For the next several decades Sidney worked in partnership with other landscape architects, creating master plans for several college campuses, and designing one of the country's first suburban shopping malls. He also became an ASLA Fellow and was the first American to serve as president of the International Federation of Landscape Architects.

The Shurcilffs' drawing, "Suggested Changes to the Grounds of the Mansion House," illustrated pathways around the north lawn, and identified mature trees, many of which were likely planted before the Community dissolution. These included elm, black walnut, ginkgo, hemlock, maple, and oak. The drawing also showed the tennis courts ~ now abandoned ~ to the southwest of the Mansion House, a "drying yard" to the west of the Tontine, a skating rink area on the west side of the north lawn, and a completed circular drive leading to the front of the Mansion House. Skinner Road had been



*Tennis courts, located on the North Lawn, were banked and flooded beginning in 1939 to make a skating rink. By 1959, the courts had been relocated to the southwest of the Mansion House. (photograph ca. 1950s, OCMH Collection)*

constructed and extended from Kenwood Avenue (north of the Mansion House) to Chapel Street (south of the Mansion House). The Shurcliffs detailed the Quadrangle formed by the 1862 Mansion House (east), 1863 Tontine (west), 1869 South Wing (south), and 1877-1878 New House (north), showing a system of geometrically arranged paths leading from the South Lawn into and through the Quadrangle courtyard with a linden and tulip tree shading the paths. The drawing did not distinguish between existing and proposed features.

Changes suggested by the Shurcliffs included the addition of 24 parking spaces for perpendicular parking in front of the Mansion House, widening the drive in this location to 42 feet, and opening long westward views from the northwest corner of the Mansion House (New House/North Wing). Many other suggestions pertained to removing, moving, and installing new plant materials. The Shurcliffs also created a *Plan for Improvements to the Flower Garden, The Mansion House*, where they specified the construction of a stone wall around the perimeter and a set of 14' wide steps leading into the garden at the north end. While few of the Shurcliff suggestions appear to have been implemented, the drawings suggest that many of the landscape details constructed after 1862 remained intact into the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In June of 1965, the Oneida Community Mansion House received designation as a National Historic Landmark, issued by the United States Department of the Interior as part of a National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. Photographs taken from this time show a neatly manicured front lawn, and an intact formal garden with its outer edge defined by a low, clipped evergreen hedge. A concrete pathway led from Kenwood Avenue along the outside edge of the circular drive. Vines (presumably ivy) covered most of the tower of the South Wing, below the mansard roof.

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*An aerial view of the Mansion House and environs, ca. 1940. (OCMH Collection)*



*The Mansion House in 1965. While the Community no longer existed, the new overseer, Oneida, Ltd., maintained the grounds at a high standard. (National Historic Landmark Nomination photograph)*

## MUSEUM (1988-PRESENT)

In 1988, 13.873 acres of the original Oneida Community domain were deeded by Oneida, Ltd. to a new not-for-profit educational institution, the Oneida Community Mansion House, Inc. (OCMH), formed in 1987. The acreage surrounded and included the Mansion House and wings, South Lawn and South Garden, and North Lawn. At the time of the organization's establishment, a number of deciduous trees remained near the Mansion House, including many on the North Lawn and in the oval lawn formed by the circular drive. The geometric configuration of pathways inside the Quadrangle had been simplified into a single north-south and east-west route, but the linden and tulip tree remained. An L-shaped garage had been constructed on the site of the former tennis courts to the southwest of the Mansion House. Some of the North Lawn's elaborate pathway system may have remained intact. The OCMH continued to lease residential apartments in both the main house and the additions, rented the larger interior spaces for private functions, and created guest rooms. Both of these uses resulted in an increased need for vehicular storage on the property, and asphalt and gravel parking areas were added to the landscape on the west and south sides of the Quadrangle.

In the 36 years since then, the OCMH has focused on preserving the 93,000 square foot Mansion House complex, completing Historic Structure Reports for the Main House (1997), South Wing (1998), Tontine (1999-2001), and New House (1999-2002). These reports, combined with an aggressive fundraising effort, resulted in over \$1.9 million in rehabilitation work on the roof, façade, and complex access, completed in one phase.<sup>46</sup> This undertaking spurred the OCMH to look at the Mansion House landscape through a parallel preservation lens with this goal of bringing the grounds into better alignment with the OCMH's hospitality, educational, and interpretive programming.

## PERIOD OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The period of historical significance for the Oneida Community Mansion House landscape begins before 1848 and extends to 1987, with an emphasis on the communal years, 1848-1880 (referred to hereinafter as the "emphasized period of significance"). For several centuries before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, land along Oneida Creek was territory of indigenous people, and remained so until 1848 when John Humphrey Noyes purchased an initial 23 acres, encouraged his Bible Communist followers to join him, and established the Perfectionist community. Within two years, Noyes had increased the land holdings to 273 acres, much of which was devoted to agriculture. Between 1848 and 1862, the Community focused on subsistence, building modest farm and residential structures, establishing extensive fruit orchards and vegetable fields, and producing Sewall Newhouse's animal traps. After accumulating capital largely from the sale of traps, the Community modified the landscape – including its buildings – to reflect financial success, transforming the property into a pleasure ground per contemporary late-19<sup>th</sup> century trends. Following the Community's dissolution in 1881, the property's new owner, Oneida Community, Ltd. (and later Oneida, Ltd.), gradually modernized the landscape into one of a suburban private club, complete with tennis courts, a golf course, parking lots, and neatly manicured grounds. Future efforts to preserve the landscape should respect the longer 129-year period, but reflect, to the extent possible, the years 1848-1880 (emphasized period of significance) for which the utopian Oneida Community is most widely known.

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<sup>46</sup> Phase two of this preservation effort was underway at the time of the writing of this report.

*Oneida Community Mansion House, Oneida, New York  
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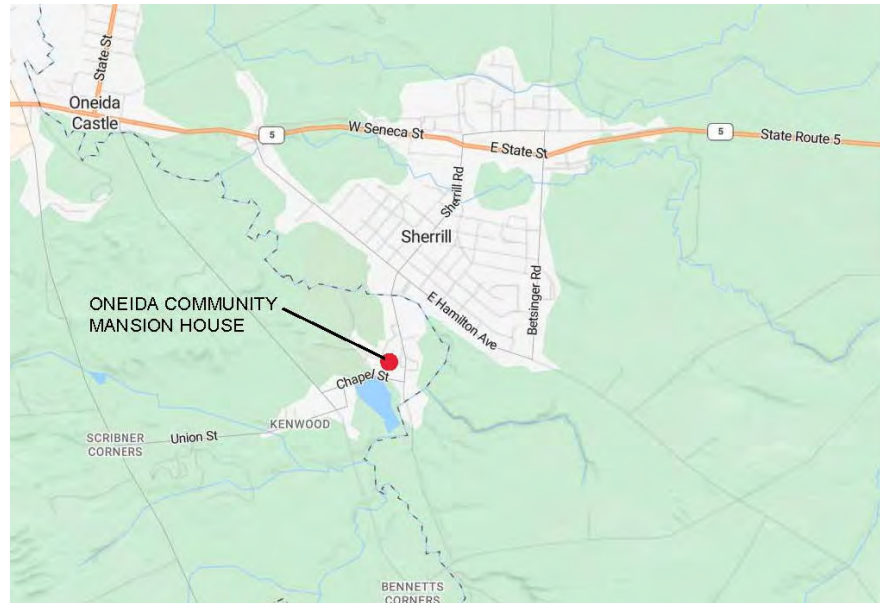
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## ASSESSMENT

The following assessment of the Oneida Community Mansion House landscape documents and evaluates the condition of its prominent natural, built, and functional features, including edges, views, entrances, circulation, slopes, accessibility, plant communities, and character-defining landscape details. Assessment consists of three steps, (1) an inventory of features existing on the property today; (2) an analysis of their condition and relevance to the property's history; and (3) and evaluation, or series of preliminary recommendations for stabilizing, removing, rehabilitating, and/or reconstructing the features in the future. The United States Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties, Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (1992) provided a framework for the assessment. Note that representative existing conditions photographs have been included in this assessment. For additional images, refer to the *Appendix* to this report.

## CONTEXT AND SETTING

The 13.873-acre Oneida Community Mansion House property lies along the eastern edge of Madison County in the city of Oneida, a largely rural region of central New York State lodged between the cities of Utica (to the east) and Syracuse (to the west), and dominated by rolling hills and dairy farms.<sup>47</sup> The city of Sherrill, a small urban center that once held the Community's manufacturing operations, is the closest population center. The Mansion House stands to the south of Sherrill in a suburban-like setting of single-family homes on ample lots. Rural lands extend to the east, south, and west of the Mansion House property, and Oneida Creek, a meandering waterway originating in the town of Smithfield (to the south) and outflowing into Oneida Lake (to the north), winds around the



*The Mansion House property (red dot) lies along the west side of Kenwood Avenue, on the outskirts of the small city of Sherrill in a suburban setting. Rural, rolling land extends to the east, south, and west, and Oneida Creek meanders near the south and east sides of the site.*

<sup>47</sup>Forty-eight percent of Madison County's lands are dedicated to farming with nearly 700 active farms. The dairy industry dominates, and the County is ranked 8th in total dairy production for the State. (www.madisoncounty.org)

east and south sides of the property. Another small water body, the human-made Sunset Lake, sits between Oneida Creek and the site.<sup>48</sup>

Visitors to the Mansion House generally arrive by vehicle from either the north or south via Kenwood Avenue, a north-south, two-lane, lightly-traveled thoroughfare extending from Sherrill southward to Peterboro Road and crossing Oneida Creek at the half-way point. Suburban-type development edges the northern half of this route, but on the southern half, development thins and the landscape becomes rural. Across Kenwood to the east is “The Vineyard,” a horseshoe-shaped street of single-family homes fronting a central park-like lawn. Chapel Street intersects Kenwood to the south of the Mansion House property and rims its southern edge. Skinner Road, a roughly-paved residential street, intersects Kenwood to the north of the property and defines most of the northern and western property edges. Adding to the quiet, suburban feel of the setting are many mature and towering deciduous and evergreen trees lining the roadways and dotting neighborhood lawns.



*The north entrance off Kenwood Avenue into the Mansion House. The setting for the property is suburban, but rural lands extend to the west, south, and east.*

## EDGES AND VIEWS

Edges of the property range from well-defined or structured to loosely/poorly defined. The structured edges, including the east, south, and a small portion of the west, are lined with trees or woodlands and are reinforced by topography. Kenwood Avenue rims the entire **east property line**, approximately two-tenths of a mile (1,070 feet). For most of this distance, mature shade and evergreen trees stand just off the road edge, acting like a tall fence, and through the trees, visitors take in glimpses of the Mansion House.

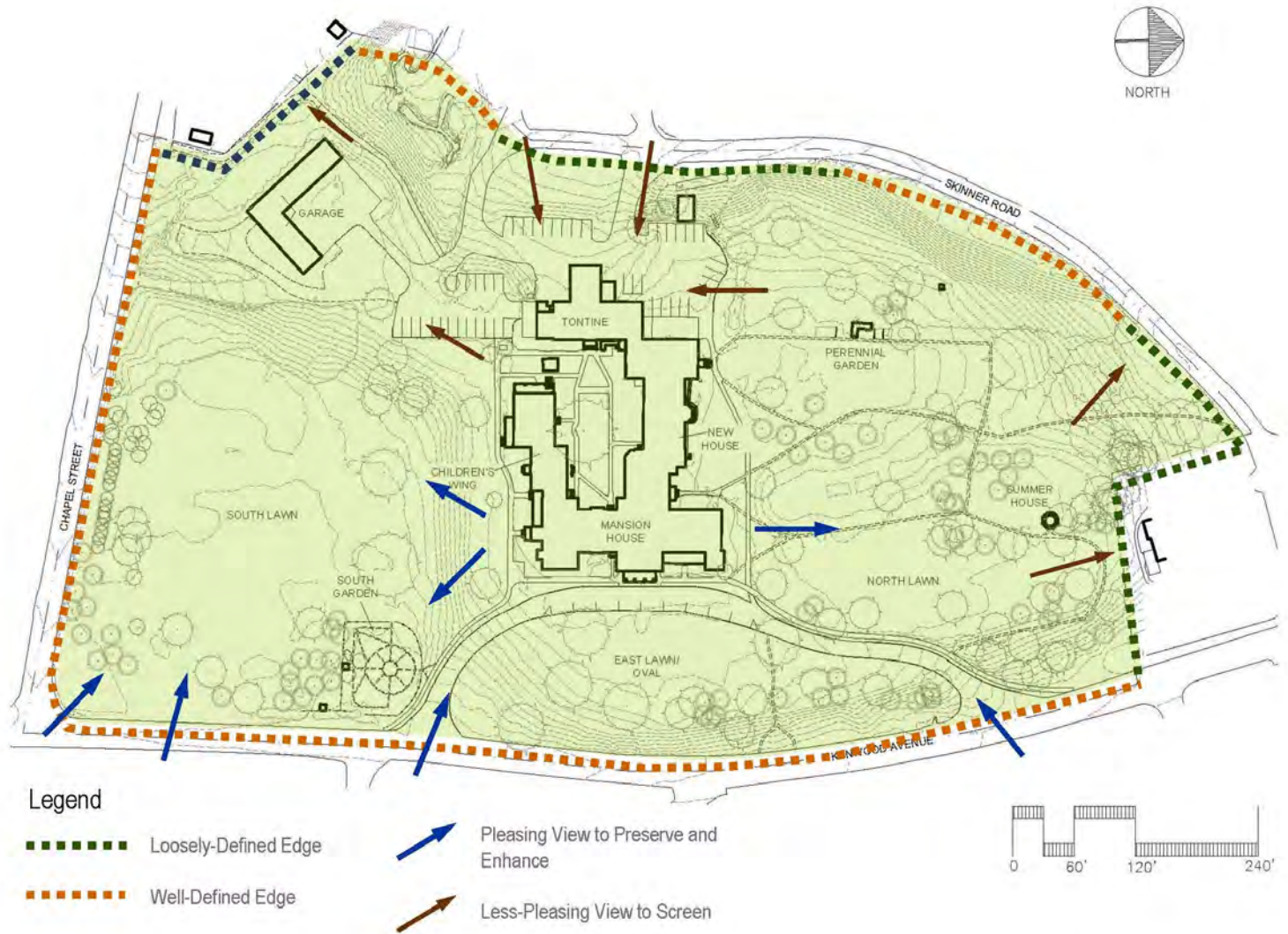


*The east edge of the property viewed from across the South Lawn. A mix of deciduous and evergreen trees provides structure to the boundary line.*

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<sup>48</sup> Sunset Lake was created to support operations of Oneida Ltd. at the knife plant, located farther to the south on Kenwood Avenue.

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*Edges & Views.*

Reinforcing this edge is a steep slope. From the northeast corner, the topography begins to rise up at a grade of as much as 33% from the road, reaching an elevation of twelve feet above the pavement. Proceeding southward, the trees thin and slope levels out, providing a view of the South Garden. From the garden southward, dense flowering shrubs and mature trees stand along the road edge all the way to Chapel Street. Mature trees, including a stand of hemlocks, line the **south edge** along Chapel Street, blocking views into the property. Woodland and steep slopes define a 335-foot stretch of Skinner Road along the **north property line**, obstructing views from the roadway into the North Lawn area.

Loosely-defined edges appear along the north and portion of the west property lines. Along the **north edge**, the lack of trees, fencing, and/or topography results in a ragged appearance along Skinner Road. Lack of screening of the back yard of a private home located at the corner of Kenwood Avenue and Skinner Road compromises privacy for both the Mansion House residents/visitors and the homeowner. The absence of edge materials along Skinner Road to the west of and behind the Mansion House allows clear views of the OCMH service vehicles, dumpsters, and other behind-the-

scenes objects. At the **southwest corner**, the boundary between OCMH and adjacent private property remains undefined and unclear.

Views into and through the property correspond to the edge quality. The most pleasing views – those to be preserved and enhanced – are observed from the edge of Kenwood Avenue looking westward toward the Mansion House and the South Garden. Glimpses of the Mansion House’s south elevation across the South Lawn are possible from the Chapel Street edge, looking northward through the trees. Less pleasing views to be screened include those looking northward from the North Lawn into the neighbor’s back yard; eastward from Skinner Road over the parking lots, dumpsters, and service vehicles; and southwestward from the OCMH property line into the abutting neighbor’s property. Pleasing interior views include those from the Mansion House looking south across the South Lawn, and north across the North Lawn to the Summer House. Less pleasing interior views take in the parking lots and garage at the southwest corner.

## TOPOGRAPHY AND HYDROLOGY

Grades across the site range from nearly flat to quite steep, and varying grades help to define five spaces within the landscape, each with a distinctive character. In general, low points stand along the edges and from these points, slopes rise to the highest elevation on the property, the centrally situated Knoll. Water flows downward from the Knoll draining to Chapel Street, Kenwood Avenue, and Skinner Road; at the property’s southwest corner, an open drainage channel containing stormwater flows northward through a set of culverts into a subsurface pipe.<sup>49</sup> Aside from two small fishponds located within the garden areas, the property contains no other surface water.



*The South Lawn features a level expanse of grass, cradled on the north and west sides by steep slopes, taking the form of an amphitheater.*

The five topographically defined spaces are as follows.

- **South Lawn.** A flat grade extends from the southeast corner across this 2.5-acre expanse, ending at a semi-circular-shaped slope rising ten feet toward the north and west, the resulting landform resembling a 3.5-acre amphitheater.
- **Service and Parking Area.** Located along the property’s west side, this 2.6-acre behind-the-scenes area has been graded into a series of gently sloping areas to hold parking lots and a

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<sup>49</sup> The outflow point of this stormwater pipe was unknown at the time of writing of this report.

*Oneida Community Mansion House, Oneida, New York*  
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garage). The lots rest on two terraces or tiers, and the garage sits atop the site of former tennis courts. To the west of the garage, the slope drops fourteen feet to the drainage channel; from the parking lots, the grade falls approximately eight feet to Skinner Road. The undulating landform across this area breaks up and softens the expanses of pavement created by the parking lots. Unmanaged stormwater flowing along the edges of the drive leading into the parking area has resulted in eroded pavement conditions.

- **North Lawn.** Grading across this four-acre area at the north end of the property rises steeply from the west, north, and east edges to support a gently rolling, grassy, tree-shaded lawn. Elevations at the edges of Skinner Road (north and west of the space) stand as much as twenty feet below the lawn; Kenwood Avenue lies approximately ten feet below the lawn (east side of the space). A linear three-foot depression, located at the center of the lawn and running north to south, divides the lawn into two nearly level areas.
- **East Lawn/Oval.** The 1.2-acre oval-shaped East Lawn serves as a foyer for the Mansion House, separating and buffering the building complex from Kenwood Avenue. Landform across this wide area rises steeply from Kenwood Avenue, gaining eight feet across approximately 70 feet, and leveling off at the west side of the oval, near the Mansion House's front door.
- **Quadrangle.** Landform across this approximately 12,300 (0.3 acre) square foot enclosed space is nearly flat, with four walls of the Mansion House, South Wing, Tontine, and New House defining its edges.

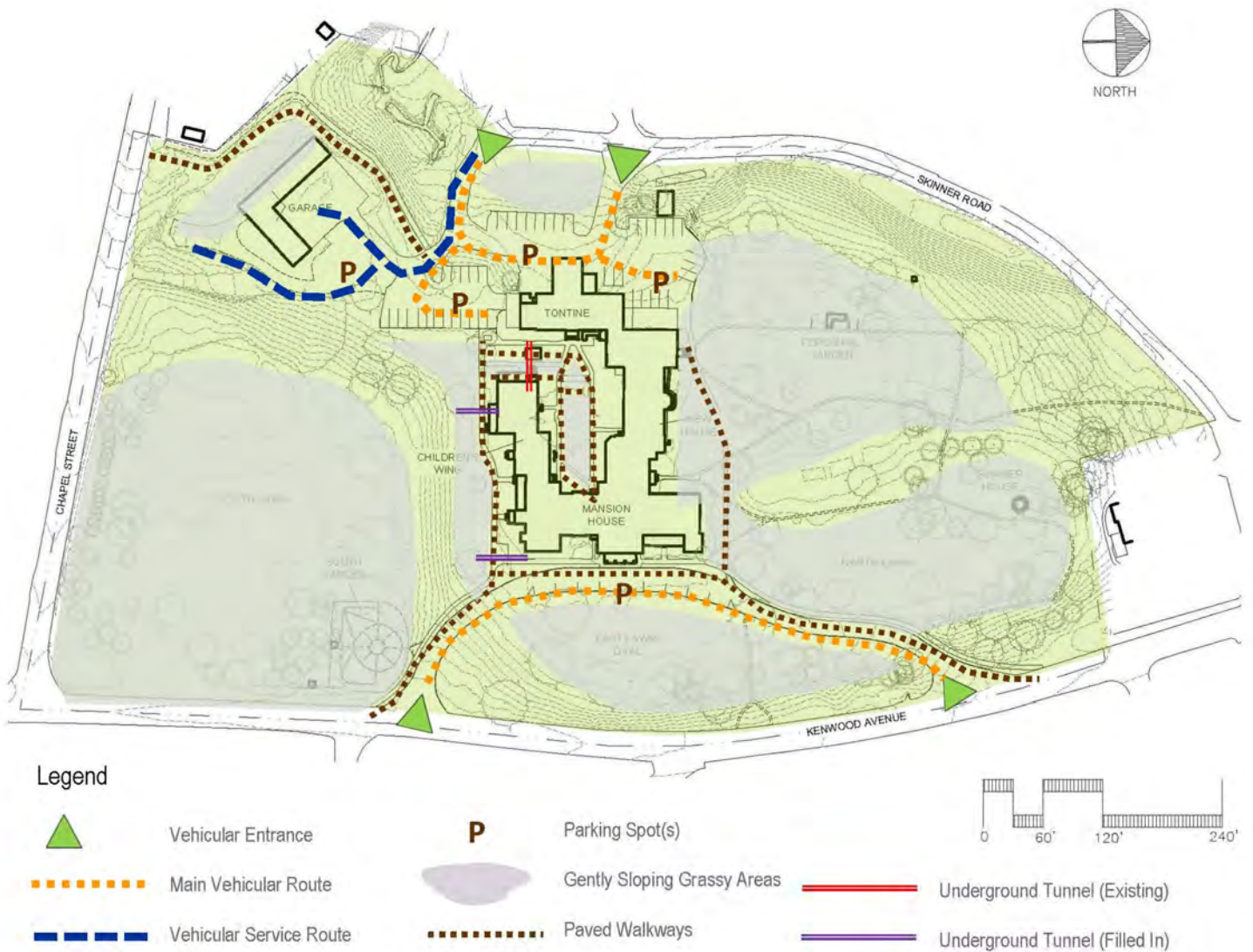
## ACCESS, PARKING, AND CIRCULATION

As noted under *Context and Setting*, visitors to the Mansion House travel by vehicle along Kenwood Avenue, approaching from the north and south and typically enter the property via the oval drive. Because visibility is poor when exiting from the north end of the drive onto Kenwood, OCMH staff encourage drivers to enter at the north end and exit at the south. Secondary access to the property is off the end of Skinner Road, where residents, staff, and overnight visitors can access back entrances to the building complex. The makeshift appearance of this behind-the-scenes area, including exposed dumpsters and fragmented asphalt pavement, is unwelcoming to visitors.



*The behind-the-scenes area of the property includes several small parking lots set on varying grades.*

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*Access, Parking, & Circulation.*

Parking is provided in front and behind the building complex. Nine parallel parking spaces along the oval drive accommodate visitors near the front (main) entrance. Additional spaces with three labeled as designated for handicapped drivers, divided amongst several small lots, extend along the west side of the property behind the Mansion House complex, and additional, unmarked parking is provided in a gravel-surfaced lot. While the handicapped spaces are clearly marked, only one connects to an accessible route (ramp) to the buildings. The others lack connections to clear ADA-compliant routes to and into the building complex.

A network of paved walkways and gravel footpaths provide a means for visitors, residents, and staff to access most of the property. Walkways paved with concrete extend along the inside of the oval drive, leading from Kenwood to the Mansion House's front door. Extensions of these walkways rim the south side of the complex and connect to the parking areas behind the building complex, and circle

through the Quadrangle. An old concrete walkway, once connecting the Mansion House to a train depot, leads from the parking areas southwestward, passing by a private home and ending at Chapel Street. The condition of these walks varies; older concrete contains exposed aggregates and contrasts with newer, finely-textured material, resulting in a patchwork of colors and textures. A lone asphalt-covered walkway runs along the north side of the complex, connecting the oval to the parking areas, and while in acceptable condition, the asphalt contrasts with the concrete, which appears uniformly elsewhere on the site. A network of narrow, gravel-covered footpaths threads through the North Lawn, allowing users to access all corners and the Summer House, located at the far north end. A similarly constructed footpath leads to the South Garden from the walkway along the oval drive, and from Kenwood Avenue across the oval to the Mansion House front door. The informality and light imprint of these paths melds with and complements the lawn's historic character.

In general, the site lacks wayfinding signage, directing visitors, overnight guests, residents, and staff to vehicular and pedestrian entrances, parking, and circulation throughout, including navigation for persons with disabilities.

## PLANT COMMUNITIES

Plants growing on the 13.873-acre property fall into four general categories, as follows:

- **Specimen Trees.** Mature deciduous and evergreen trees stand throughout the property, punctuating the landscape, providing shade, and bringing the massive Mansion House complex into scale with its setting. A survey, drafted while this report was underway, mapped over 200 trees, a large number of which are native to central New York State. Notable specimens include tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), oak (*Quercus spp.*), beech (*Fagus spp.*), Japanese pagodatree (*Sophora japonica*), yellowwood (*Cladrastus kentukea*), and several species of pine (*Pinus spp.*), spruce (*Abies spp.*), fir (*Pseudotsuga spp.*), and Larch (*Larix spp.*). Native trees, including oak, hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), tulip tree, walnut, and maple (*Acer spp.*) represent the time of occupation by the Oneidas and early days of the Community. Imported species, including European beech, Japanese scholar tree, Norway spruce, and Austrian Pine, were introduced later in the 1800s, and reflect the Community Expansion



The black walnut growing on the South Lawn is one of several specimen trees of significant size and age.

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*Plant Communities.*

period (1862-1880) and the decades that followed. The apparent good health of these trees is likely the result of OCMH investing time and resources into their ongoing management and care.

- Tree Groves/Managed Woodlands.** Trees standing in clusters at the edges of the South and North Lawns, within the North Lawn, and on a portion of the East Lawn/Oval buffer the property from adjacent streets, and, like specimen trees, provide shade and bring the Mansion House into scale. While composed of a mix of deciduous and evergreen trees, the groves are dominated by evergreen species, including spruce, pine, larch, and hemlock. Akin to groves are the managed woodlands, stands of trees growing above groundcover plants, with minimal understory plantings. Such woodlands grow along the west edge of the South Lawn, covering the steep slope below the garage. Eastern redbud trees grow at the edge some of the woodlands, and when in flower set off a tinge of color set against the darker deciduous backdrop.

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- **Naturalized Woodlands.** Stands of trees mixed with understory plantings cover the southwest and northwest edges of the property, stabilizing the steep slopes upon which they grow.

- **Ornamental Plantings (Shrubs, Perennials, and Bulbs).** Arrangements of deciduous shrubs, herbaceous perennials, and spring flowering bulbs grow in the form of gardens and plantings along the Mansion House complex foundations. Two gardens exist on the property, the South Garden tucked into the northeast corner of the South Lawn, and a Perennial Garden, located at the west end of the North Lawn.



- ~ *South Garden.* Originally established by the Community within its first few years, this fenced octagonal South Garden consists of a eight wedge-shaped plots filled with herbaceous perennials and bulbs. Plants include ajuga, geranium, iris, lirioppe, trillium, peony, poppy, lamb's ears, lupine, sedum, sage, rudbeckia, and others and provide color and texture throughout all seasons. Flat stones divide the plots, and gravel-covered pathways allow gardeners and visitors to circulate within. A pair of crabapple trees and tree lilac anchor the garden's south edge, and a small goldfish-type pond, set amongst the trees, provides further detail. A concrete urn marks the garden's center.

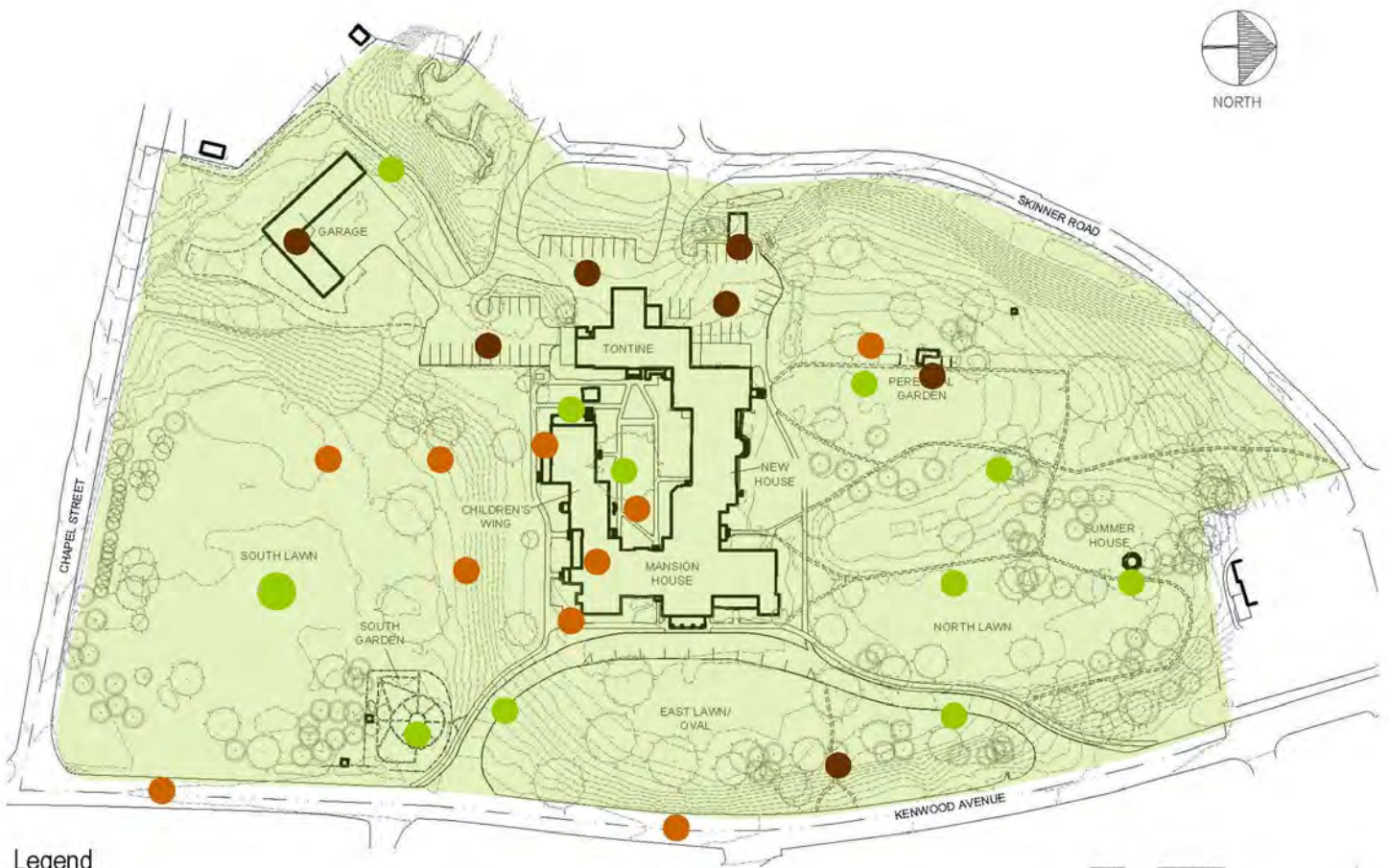
*The South Garden, located at the northeast corner of the South Lawn, contains herbaceous perennials and bulbs and provides texture and color throughout all seasons.*



*The Quadrangle contains the tulip tree, planted in 1851. Low groundcover plantings soften connections between building and ground but allow for the stone foundations to be seen.*

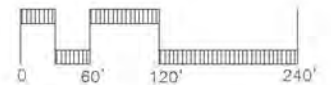
- ~ *Perennial Garden.* Laid out in a long, linear pattern, this garden consists of several rectangular plots containing both perennials, bulbs, and shrubs, including peony, daffodil, iris, mullein,

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Legend

- Extant Historic Feature
- Missing Historic Feature (Location)
- Contemporary Feature



*Character-Defining Features.*

poppy and boxwood. Its central feature is a wood open-air structure with an accompanying small goldfish-type pond.

- ~ *Mansion House Plantings.* Herbaceous perennials and accenting deciduous shrubs grow at the base of the Mansion House complex, softening the building's contact with the ground, but appropriately leaving its stone foundation exposed. Perennials include periwinkle, hosta, fern, sedum, and pachysandra. Shrubs, including lilac, spiraea, viburnum, holly, and quince provide accents.

## LANDSCAPE DETAILS: EXTANT HISTORIC FEATURES

In addition to and including some of the features discussed above, the landscape retains several details that date to the period of significance:

- **Landform.** Topography across the 13.873 acres has been largely manipulated to support building construction, agricultural operations, pleasure gardening, and recreational activities. The “knoll” (high point holding the Mansion House complex), South Lawn, North Lawn, and East Lawn/Oval all reflect this moving of earth to support the Community home.
- **Specimen Trees.** Large specimens, black walnut, magnolia (South Lawn), red oak, beech (North Lawn), and tulip tree (Quadrangle) remain on the property. The tulip tree dates to 1851, but the ages of other specimens are not known, and can only be estimated by the caliper (diameter at breast height, or DBH) of the trunks, several of which exceed 60”.
- **South Garden.** Established as early as 1851, this octagonal plot originally held a fountain at the center that was supplied by a reservoir (built in 1855, location unknown). While slightly altered in shape and no longer containing the fountain, the garden remains a treasured feature of the OCMH site and is maintained by descendants of Community members.
- **Quadrangle.** This rectangular area at the heart of the Mansion House complex and containing the 173-year-old tulip tree originated with the construction of the new Mansion House (1862), but did not take on its final shape until 1877-78 with the addition of the New House on the north side.
- **Tunnels.** Invisible to those unfamiliar with the belly of the Mansion House complex, yet an important part of Community history, are three tunnels, all connected to the South Wing. Two of these tunnels, one leading to the Vault (no longer extant) and the other leading to the Old Mansion House, extended southward from the wing and each has been filled in. The third, connecting the Tontine to the South Wing remains intact and continues to serve as access to the vast basement area.
- **Oval Entry Drive.** While the original alignment of this drive was altered between 1914 and 1951 (the south end was re-shaped from a straight line leading to a perpendicular intersection with Kenwood Avenue into an elongated, gently curving line, more closely matching the drive’s alignment at the north end, and forming the oval), it dates to before 1869 and was likely built to provide a graceful and grand entry to the new Mansion House, following its completion in 1862.
- **Footpaths.** Historical documentation detailed the layout and construction of footpaths on the property beginning in 1854, and photographs, taken after the new Mansion House was completed, confirm a system of pathways. It is likely that the original layout has been altered to accommodate changing uses (including building a skating rink before the 1950s), but their presence commemorates Community history.
- **Walkway to Train Depot.** The remnants of a walkway that once led to the train depot adjacent to the southwest corner of the property remain in place. Today the walkway connects to parking lots to Chapel Street.

- **Summer House.** Constructed by Henry Thacker and an unidentified “workman” in 1863-1864 at the north end of the North Lawn, this small ornamental structure has undergone re-roofing and other repairs, but remains as the only outbuilding dating to the Community’s active years.



LANDSCAPE DETAILS:  
MISSING HISTORIC  
FEATURES

The changing use of the property by generations of Community members and others who followed

led to the removal of historic features associated with the period of significance. These features appear in historic photographs and/or written descriptions, and include:

*The Summer House, built on the North Lawn in 1863-1864, is the only remaining outbuilding dating to the Community’s active years.*

- **Butternut Tree.** Noyes and his original followers from Putney noted several features present on the land that would become their home, including a “large butternut tree standing on the east face of the knoll.” The tree was depicted in a later photograph.
- **Original Mansion House.** Constructed in 1848, this three-story, rectangular structure stood to the south of the (new) Mansion House complex, on what was likely higher ground, later re-graded to form the South Lawn. The building was destroyed in 1870.
- **Original Children’s House.** Completed in 1849, this two-story wood frame structure was removed in 1862 to make way for the new Mansion House and relocated across Kenwood Avenue, farther to the south.
- **Fruit and Vegetable Production Site.** Acreage that would eventually hold the Mansion House complex was originally cultivated land. Upon arrival at the site in 1848, Community members documented “large quantities of blackberries and celandine.”<sup>50</sup> Once established, members planted strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and other fruits to fuel a canning business.
- **Fencing Along Kenwood Avenue.** An 1851 sketch of the Community and photograph taken between 1862 and 1887 show picket-style fencing lining the west (and east) sides of Kenwood Avenue, serving to enclose the property.

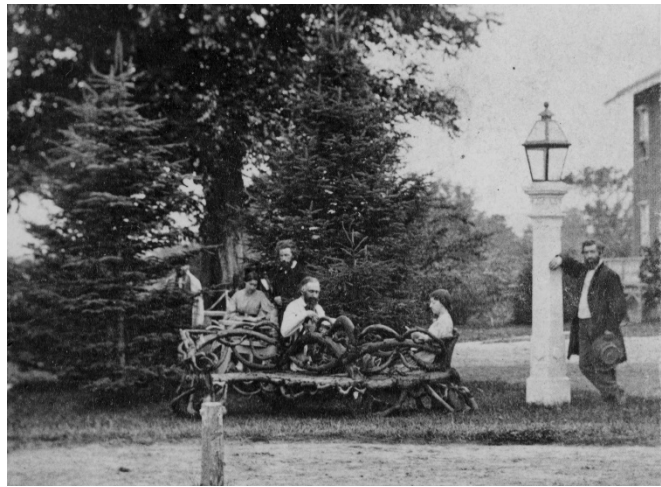
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<sup>50</sup> Celandine is an herbaceous perennial native to North America, and has been used as a remedy in homeopathic medicine.

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- **Street Tree Planting along Kenwood Avenue.** Alongside the fencing along Kenwood Avenue were regularly-spaced deciduous trees, also shown in photographs and on the 1869 Skinner plan of the “southern grounds.”
- **Perennial Garden on North Lawn.** Shortly after completing construction on the new Mansion House in 1862, the community redeveloped the North Lawn, transforming it from a fruit production site into a pleasure garden. A perennial garden, complete with winding pathways and flower beds was made to augment the planting of trees and shrubs, and re-grading of the lawn.
- **Reservoirs.** Up until 1860, the Community pumped water from a nearby well to a reservoir located to the north of the (original) Mansion House, likely in the area known as “The Larches.” In 1862, they then constructed an eight-foot-tall octagonal reservoir tower to hold gravity fed water, sourced from natural springs at the west edge of the property. This reservoir was located behind the new Mansion House in what would become the Quadrangle.

- **Site Furniture.** Beginning in the 1850s, the Community member Charles Ellis fashioned rustic furniture out of white cedar roots collected from local swamps. Several photographs of the Community depict benches and chairs made from this material, placed throughout the landscape.



*A rustic bench, made from roots of white cedar, in use by Community members. (ca. 1865, OCMH Collection)*

- **The Vault.** This partially subterranean structure was built into the south slope and connected to the South Wing via an underground tunnel. A driveway led from Kenwood Avenue to the face of the vault, where coal could be carried in and waste could be collected and transported off site.
- **Children’s Playhouses.** The Community built one, and possibly two playhouses for the children. The first such structure is documented to have appeared in 1849 at the time of the original Children’s House. The precise location of the building is not known, but a second playhouse was built in 1875 on the newly graded South Lawn. Photographs depicting this building show board-and-batten siding and a cupola atop the side-gabled roof.
- **Outbuildings.** As the Community grew in numbers and agricultural operations expanded, members built several outbuildings to support the enterprise. Included in these were a greenhouse, ice house, and several small sheds for storage of wood, coal, and other utilitarian materials/objects. Each was located to the west and behind the Mansion House complex.
- **Tennis Courts.** Likely constructed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a set of tennis courts stood near the southwest corner of the property, on the site of the existing garage.
- **Skating Rink.** Also likely created in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a rectangular skating rink area stood at the western end of the North Lawn, replacing what was once an elaborate perennial garden. The

1951 Shurcliff plan for the property depicted a long-linear perennial garden edging the west side of the rink area. This area may have held a tennis court at an earlier time.

## LANDSCAPE DETAILS: CONTEMPORARY FEATURES

The changes in use, particularly in the mid- to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, resulted in the addition of several contemporary features that conflict with the period of significance and should be considered for rehabilitation or removal. These include:



- **Parking Lots.** The routing of Skinner Road around the west side of the property took place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the road originally extended to Chapel Street. The current roadway and parking configuration was conceived in 1989, but not fully detailed and constructed until the late 1990s.
- **Garage.** Built between 1951 and 1989, this L-shaped one-story structure sits on the site of the former tennis courts.
- **Garden Structure.** Constructed after 1951, this wooden open-air structure stands within the linear garden on the west end of the North Lawn.
- **Paint Shop.** Added to the property in 1952, this concrete block structure is built into the west slope of the site and is accessed from Skinner Road.



*The Paint Shop, built in 1952, is one of several of the behind-the-scenes features located to the west (rear) of the Mansion House complex.*

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SUMMARY OF CHARACTER-DEFINING LANDSCAPE DETAILS

  Shaded cells contain features within the Period of Significance. Darker shade indicates features within the Emphasized Period of Significance.

| Period                                 | Extant Historic Features  | Missing Historic Features  |
|--|---|--|
| Beginnings/Oneida Lands<br>Before 1848 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Alignment of Indian trail (Kenwood Avenue)</li> <li>▪ Knoll at center of site</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultivated fields of corn and potatoes (south of knoll)</li> <li>▪ Apple orchards (north of knoll)</li> <li>▪ Lumber-sawing mill at Oneida Creek</li> <li>▪ Francis farmhouse and buildings</li> <li>▪ Butternut tree</li> </ul>  |
| Community Establishment<br>1848-1861   | All of the above and... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Specimen trees (native species)</li> <li>▪ Original Children's House (moved to off-site location)</li> <li>▪ South Garden</li> <li>▪ Tulip tree</li> </ul>                         | All of the above and... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Original Mansion House</li> <li>▪ Fruit production site</li> <li>▪ Well-fed reservoir</li> <li>▪ Fencing along Kenwood Ave.</li> <li>▪ Street trees along Kenwood Ave.</li> <li>▪ Cedar root site furnishings</li> <li>▪ 1<sup>st</sup> children's playhouse</li> <li>▪ Outbuildings</li> </ul> |
| Community Expansion<br>1862-1880       | All of the above and... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New Mansion House</li> <li>▪ Tontine</li> <li>▪ South Wing</li> <li>▪ New House</li> <li>▪ Summer House</li> <li>▪ Tunnels</li> <li>▪ Specimen trees (imported species)</li> </ul> | All of the above and... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ North Lawn perennial garden</li> <li>▪ North Lawn footpaths</li> <li>▪ The Vault</li> <li>▪ 2<sup>nd</sup> children's playhouse</li> <li>▪ Additional outbuildings</li> </ul>   |
| Modernization<br>1881-1987             | All of the above and... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Concrete walkways</li> <li>▪ Specimen trees</li> </ul>   | All of the above and... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tennis courts</li> <li>▪ Skating rink</li> <li>▪ Complete linear garden along skating rink</li> </ul>   |

## EVALUATION

The following evaluation identifies preliminary recommendations for proceeding with preservation treatment of the Mansion House landscape, compiled from (1) the period of significance, pre-1848-1987; (2) the landscape program; and (3) the assessment the existing landscape and its features. They provide a basis for the recommendations found in Section 4 of this report and adhere to the four treatment methods outlined by the United States Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*. They include:

- *Preservation*, where existing form, integrity, and materials of the landscape will be sustained;
- *Rehabilitation*, where features in the landscape will be repaired or altered to make their appearance and/or use compatible with the landscape's historical value;
- *Restoration*, where landscape features will be returned to their original form; and
- *Reconstruction*, where landscape features no longer extant will be recreated.

### Edges & Views

- Preserve the existing well-defined edges (east and south) by replacing trees as they decline with new trees, especially those species predicted to survive the effects of climate change.
- Improve the north and west edges by introducing trees to screen incompatible adjacent uses.

### Topography & Drainage

- Address erosion along the rear entry drive by designing and constructing a system to divert water from the road surface.

### Access, Parking, & Circulation

- Create a system of wayfinding signage, including directional, informational, and interpretive, to guide visitors, residents, and overnight guests to designated parking and accessible building entrances and to the museum entrance. Include in this system, signage directing visitors to enter the oval drive at the south end, and exit at the north end.
- Upgrade and expand, to the extent possible, the number of parking spaces from the existing 52. In so doing, establish separate areas designated for museum visitors, residents, overnight guests, and staff. **Concentrate on placing parking as far away from the historic core as possible, preserving land with interpretive value.** As part of this effort, re-grade existing parking and upgrade drainage.
- Develop a vocabulary for pedestrian pavement, including a hierarchy of primary and secondary routes.
- Evaluate and refine the existing network of paths, reflecting, to the extent possible, historic patterns.

### Plant Communities

- Continue to maintain the existing trees, especially those with historical significance. Remove diseased and dying trees and replace them with new species expected to perform under changing climate conditions.

### **Character-Defining Landscape Details**

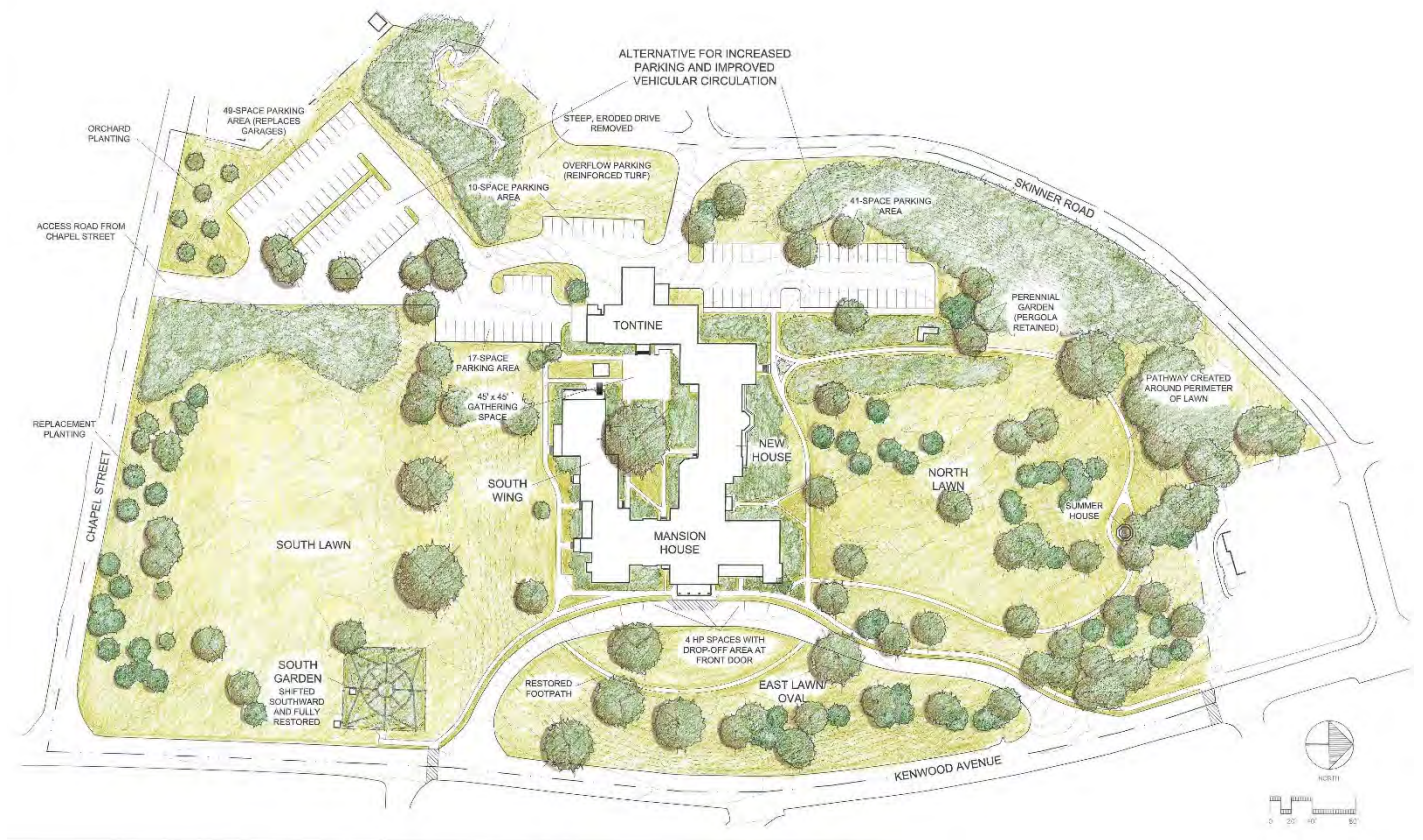
- Preserve existing historic features, including the manipulated landform (North and South Lawns), South Garden, Quadrangle walkways, and Summer House.
- Remove or rehabilitate contemporary features that do not support the period of significance and/or are no longer in active use, including the garage, garden structure (North Lawn), Paint Shop, and parking areas.
- Revise the layout of the footpaths on the North Lawn to better serve contemporary and future needs.
- Consider reintroducing historic features that support OCMH's interpretive and education plans, including a small orchard planting, berry bed and or patch, and expanded North Lawn Perennial Garden.
- Reintroduce, to the extent possible, rustic site furnishings, including benches, chairs, and settees.
- Develop a landscape interpretive program to illuminate (without reconstructing) historic features that have been removed. This could include a signage program, virtual map, and/or physical imprint(s) on the landscape.

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## TREATMENT PLAN

This section of the Cultural Landscape Report provides specific recommendations for treating the Oneida Community Mansion House landscape. Plan 2, shown below and in 11" x 17" foldout format, illustrates the entirety of the recommendations. Organized into four “**treatment projects**,” the recommendations aim, as much as possible, to reflect the Oneida Community’s aesthetic exhibited during their active period, 1848-1880 (emphasized period of significance) and, at the same time, to accommodate contemporary and future uses of the property as cultural institution, hospitality site, event venue, and residence. The treatment projects have been developed according to the United States Secretary of the Interior’s *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*.<sup>51</sup> Note that the projects have been numbered for reference purposes only; financing opportunities and fundraising efforts may shuffle this sequencing.



Plan 2: Treatment Plan

In addition to the four projects, the plan outlines several “**site-wide recommendations**” for enhancing the Mansion House setting and facilitating a broader interpretation of the entire 13.873-acre property. These include recommendations for parking and circulation, planting, hardscape materials, seating, commemoration, wayfinding, and landscape interpretation.

<sup>51</sup>Birnbaum, Charles A and Christine Capella Peters, eds., U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources Stewardship and Partnerships, Heritage Preservation Services, Historic Landscape Initiative, Washington, D. C., 1996

TREATMENT PROJECTS

**Project 1: East Lawn**

The East Lawn consists of the oval-shaped grassy area in front of the Mansion House, as well as the horseshoe entry drive connecting Kenwood Avenue to the building's front door. Both the drive and oval date to the emphasized period of significance, 1848-1880. Currently, nine parallel parking spaces line the east edge of the horseshoe, and users must cross the drive to reach the building. Project 1 will upgrade the look of these historic features by:

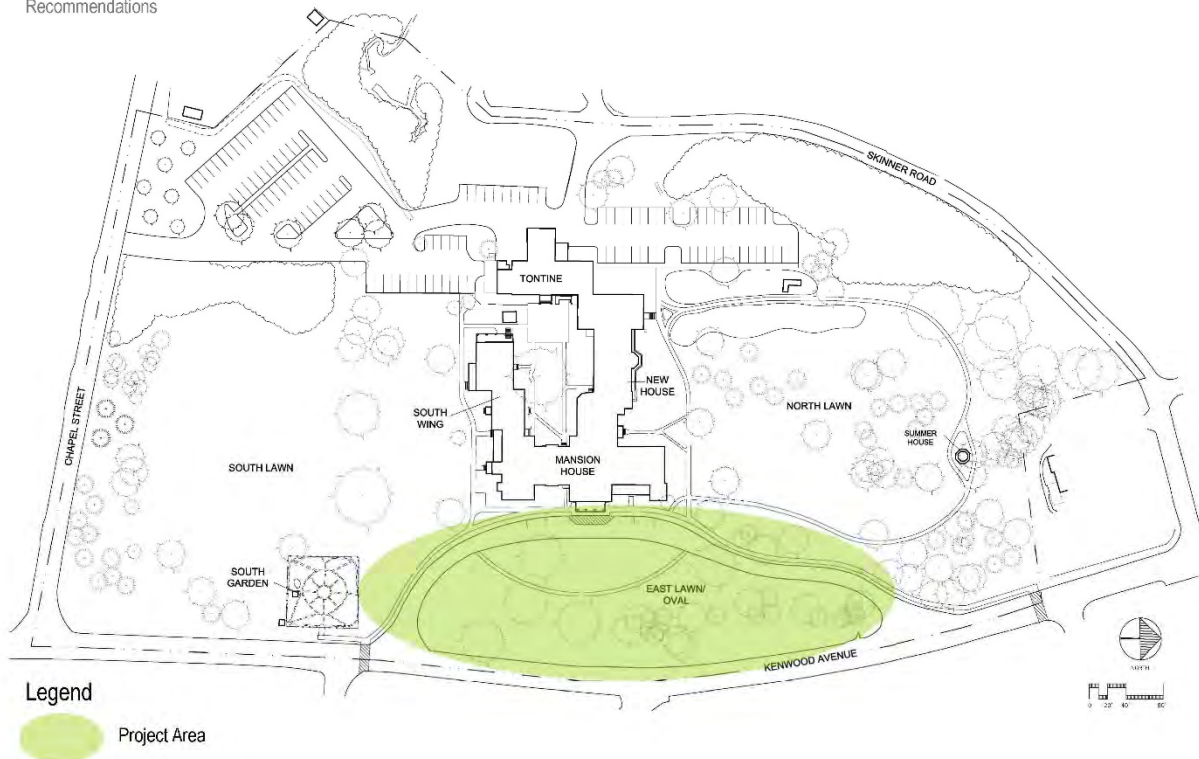


*Project 1 will enhance the sense of arrival at the Mansion House and provide expanded use of the East Lawn.*

- Creating a drop-off area in front of the Mansion House's main entrance and, if desirable, moving parallel parking to the west side of the drive and establishing four handicapped designated spaces, two on either side of the drop-off area
- Removing the straight footpath leading from Kenwood Avenue up the steep slope of the oval
- Restoring the arcing footpath that historically traversed the oval placing seating along the outer edge of the footpath, directed towards the Mansion House's east façade.

**PROJECT 1: EAST LAWN**

Recommendations



**Project 2: North Lawn**

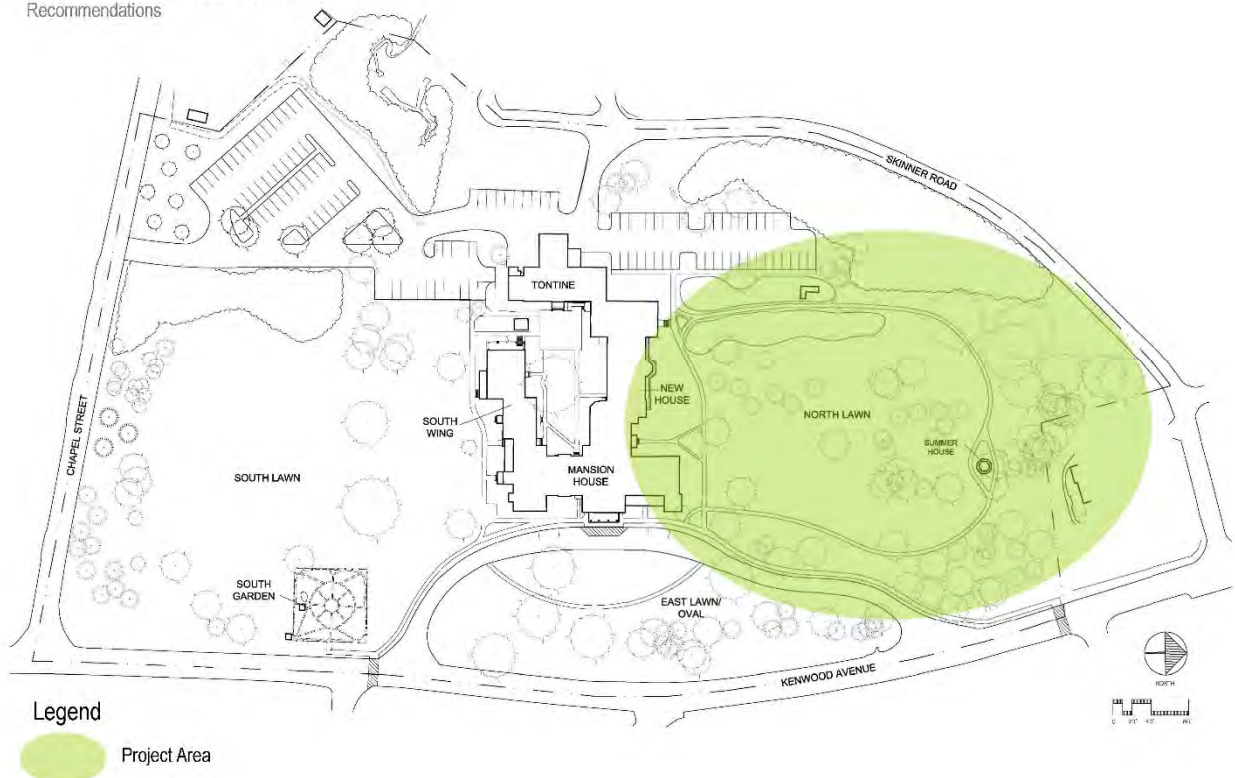
The four-acre north lawn, extending from the north side of the Mansion House (New House wing) to Skinner Road, is one of the property’s most historically significant areas. Originally the site of fruit growing (strawberries, etc.), it became, in the 1860s, a pleasure garden, complete with a gently-curving path rimming an ample grassy lawn, and plantings of deciduous trees in the spirit of Andrew Jackson Downing. Project 2 aims to restore the intent of this area by:



*Project 2 will simplify and refine the North Lawn by revising circulation, thinning trees, and recreating the perennial garden.*

- Removing the existing network of stone dust-covered footpaths
- Gradually removing trees growing on the interior of the lawn as they die
- Removing the existing perennial garden; retaining, to the extent possible, existing plants
- Installing a pathway leading from the northeast corner of the Mansion House around the perimeter of the lawn, passing the summer house and perennial garden
- Establishing and replanting the perennial garden along the west stretch of the pathway
- Placing seating along the outer edge of the pathway, directed towards the Mansion House’s north façade (New House)

**PROJECT 2: NORTH LAWN**  
Recommendations



### Project 3: South Lawn & South Garden

Equal to North Lawn in historical significance, the 3.5-acre South Lawn was the site for the original 1848 Mansion House, two children's playhouses, the vault, and plantations of orchard trees. The South Garden, tucked into the northeast corner, is one of the property's oldest extant features, dating to 1851. Project 3 involves modifications to existing plantings, as well as reconfiguration of the South Garden, including:

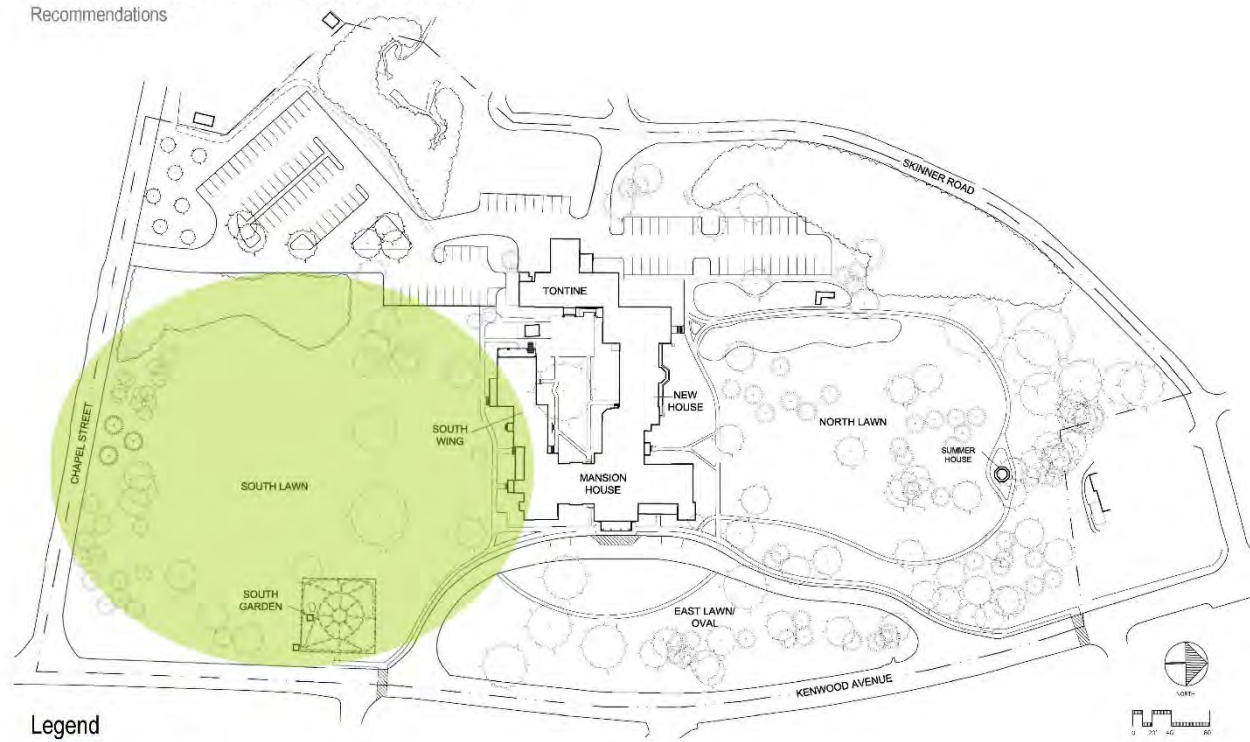


*Project 3 will preserve the elegance of the South Lawn and revive the South Garden, restoring it to original 1851 proportions.*

- Removing any diseased or dying trees, including the grove of Canadian hemlocks growing along the southern edge (near Chapel Street)
- Where needed, replacing trees with disease resistant and climate adapted species
- Shifting the South Garden southward and restoring the plot to its original 1851 square dimensions
- To the extent possible, constructing an ADA-compliant path leading from the Mansion House path system to the South Garden

### PROJECT 3: SOUTH LAWN & SOUTH GARDEN

Recommendations



Legend

 Project Area

### Project 4: Quadrangle

The long rectangular space created by the intersection of the Mansion House, South Wing, Tontine, and New House, historically performed a number of functions, including serving as a Community gathering space and holding on octagonal-shaped reservoir. It harbors the iconic tulip tree, planted in 1851 by Community member Henry Thacker. Protecting this tree should be the top long-term priority, however opportunity exists to re-establish a portion of the Quadrangle for use by Mansion House residents, guests, and future restaurant-goers. Project 4 involves creating a gathering space at the west end, by:

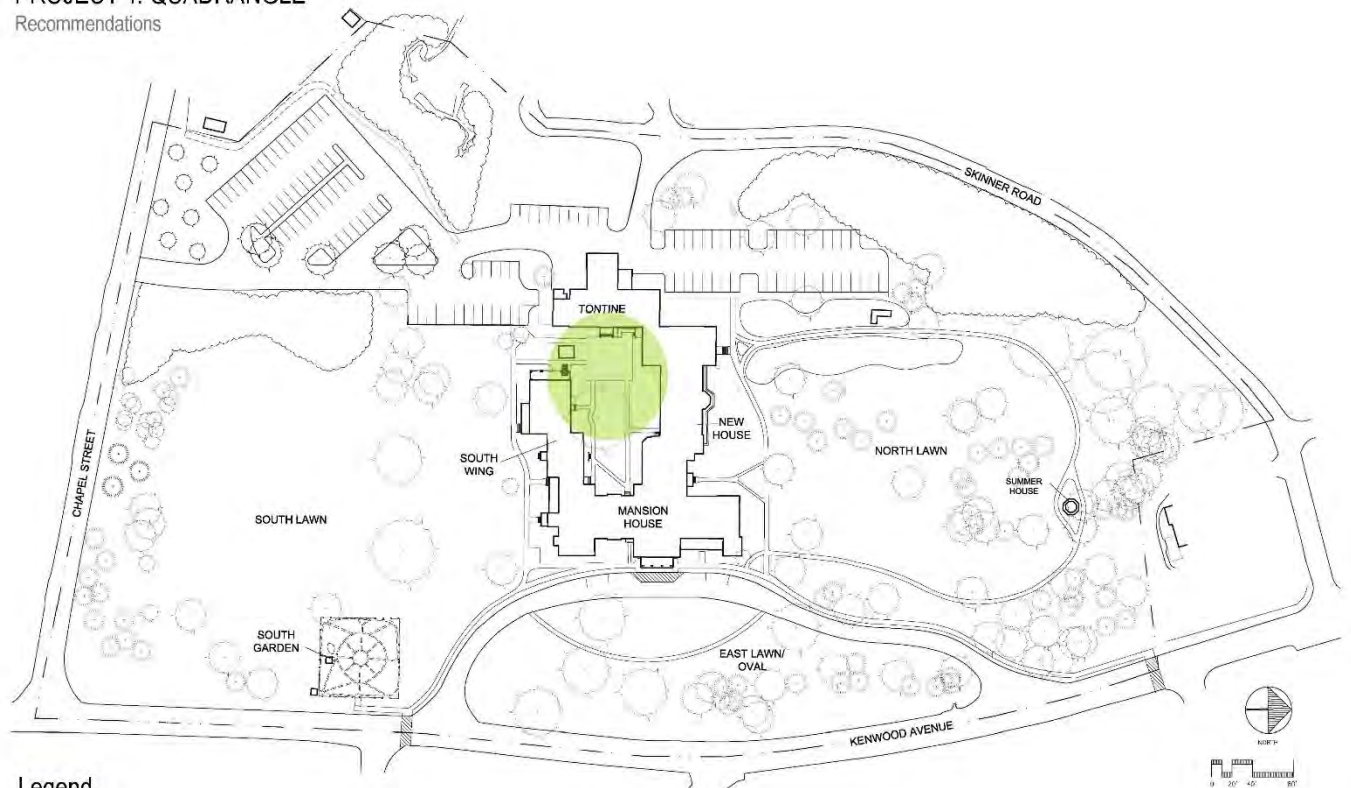


*In Project 4, a gathering space for residents, guests, and future restaurant-goers will be created at the northwest corner.*

- Stabilizing and upgrading the pathway leading into to Quadrangle from the South Lawn area, including securing the area above the underground tunnel
- Designing and building an outdoor hardscape (such as a dining patio) near the building entrance at the northwest corner (this hardscape could also serve as a commemorative space)

### PROJECT 4: QUADRANGLE

Recommendations



#### Legend

 Project Area

## PRELIMINARY BUDGET PROJECTIONS

The following are preliminary budget projections for implementing each of the four treatment projects, intended to be used for fundraising purposes only. The projections have been prepared at the planning level using 2024 construction industry estimates and do not include fees for archaeology, design and/or engineering, or permitting. Actual costs of implementation will change as the projects' scopes are more fully developed and any design/engineering work is completed. Prior to commencing with any of the projects, OCMH should prepare more exact estimates that incorporate costs of precise materials to be used and current labor rates. *Note: for each of the projects, OCMH should hire a landscape architect to develop a design, prepare detailed construction documents, and update the budget projection, prior to undertaking changes. Design and engineering fees have not been included in the budget projections.*

### **Project 1: East Lawn and Oval: \$50,000 - \$60,000**

- Create drop-off space at front door
  - ~ Sawcut existing pavement
  - ~ Install contrast pavement for drop-off
- Re-stripe pavement for HP spaces (4)
- Install oval footpath circling lawn

### **Project 2: North Lawn: \$160,000 - \$175,000**

- Remove and stockpile crushed aggregate from existing paths
- Remove and heal-in plants in existing garden
- Remove pond
- Fill path beds with 6" loam and seed
- Establish perimeter 4' width pathway
- Remove shrubs at southwest corner
- Prepare beds for enlarged garden (remove turf, install loam, compost, and mulch)
- Re-plant garden; install new plantings in garden

### **Project 3: South Lawn and South Garden: \$100,000 - \$110,000**

- Remove existing diseased hemlocks from south edge
- Replant with evergreen trees to maintain screen
- Enlarge the South Garden:
  - ~ Remove Arborvitae cluster from south end (of garden)
  - ~ Remove and stockpile existing fencing, paving material (pea stone gravel, stone pavers), urn, and sheds
  - ~ Remove pond
  - ~ Remove and heal-in plants on northern ½ of garden (120 sf)
  - ~ Prepare beds to extend southern ½ of garden (120 sf)
  - ~ Reinstall fencing; supplement with additional fence panels, as needed
  - ~ Re-set sheds
  - ~ Install pathways
  - ~ Re-plant garden; install new plants in garden
- Extend concrete sidewalk to connect with garden gate

### **Project 4: Quadrangle: \$200,000 - \$250,000**

- Remove existing concrete paving (walkways) in northwest corner
- Install new 2,025 sf patio

## SITE-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the treatment projects described above, the OCMH should consider several other efforts to improve visitors' experience and more broadly convey the landscape's history, each affecting the entire site rather than just one geographic area.

### **Parking & Circulation: Comprehensive Study**

As articulated in the landscape program and confirmed in the circulation and parking assessment, (see *Introduction* and *Landscape Assessment*), parking around the Mansion House is insufficient and confusing. The bulk of existing parking spaces lie scattered across the western end of the property in oddly shaped, poorly defined areas, and nine parallel spaces line the horseshoe-shaped entry drive. The total number of existing spaces is 68, while demand for parking exceeds 100 spaces. During the emphasized period of significance (1848-1880), the area west of the Mansion House held an assortment of support structures (sheds, workshops, etc.) connected by a network of paths and drives.

To address the need for clearer circulation and additional parking, OCMH should commission a comprehensive parking and circulation study. Such an effort would assess the following:

- **Quantity** - existing parking and circulation supply and projected future needs;
- **Functionality** - how well the existing vehicular and pedestrian circulation systems are functioning, given the current and future users and uses of the Mansion House and grounds, including residents, staff, museum visitors, attendees of events, and overnight guests;
- **Condition** - stability of roads and sidewalks and drainage associated with these.

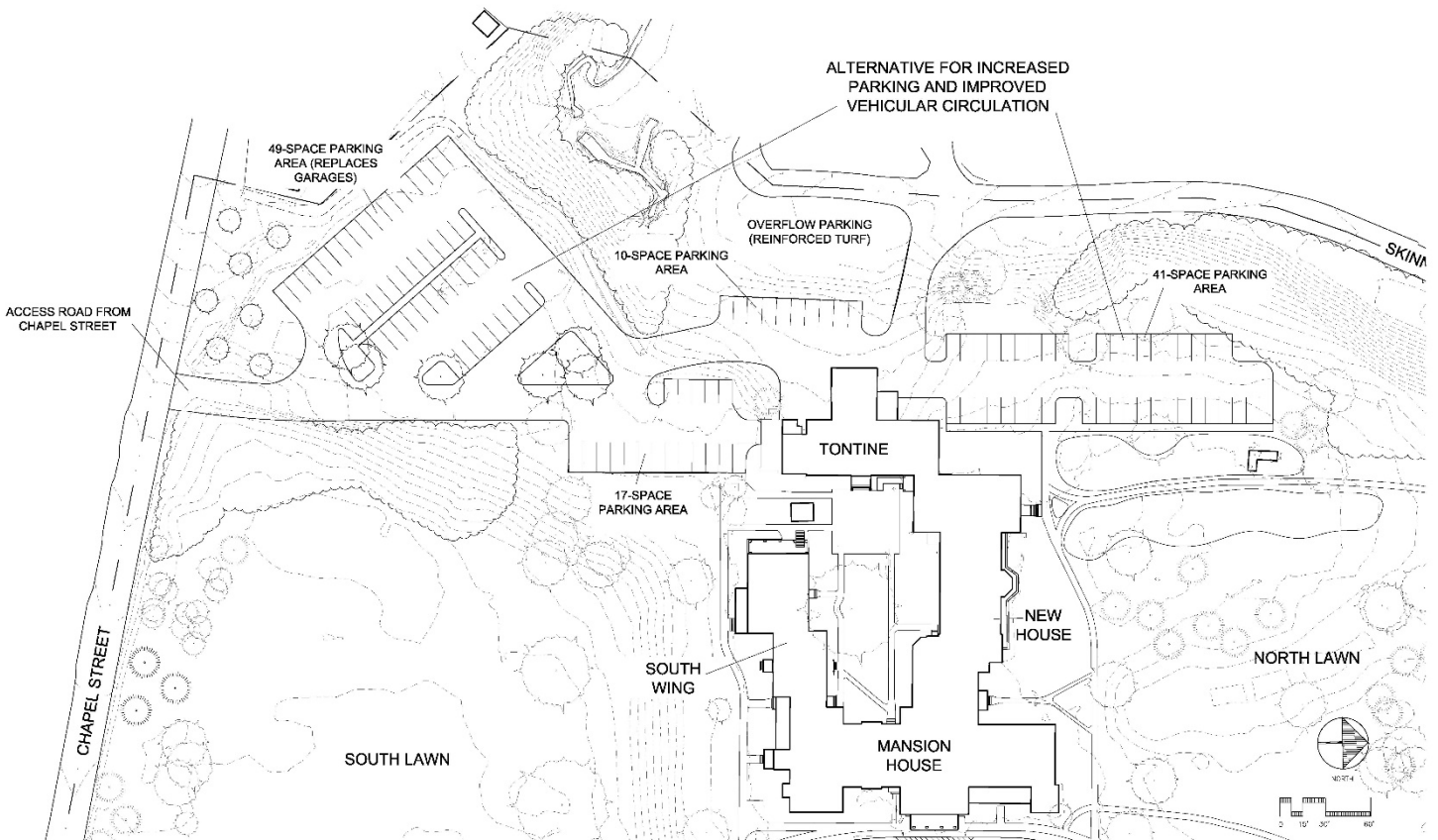


*Existing parking area at the west end of the Mansion House complex would be evaluated as part of the parking and circulation study.*



*Parking designated for handicapped users at the rear of the Mansion House complex.*

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*One parking alternative that would result in over 100 parking spaces, all concentrated on the west side of the Mansion House complex, accommodating visitors, guests, residents, and staff. Several other alternatives should be considered in the study.*

The study should then explore different alternatives for addressing the findings in this assessment, keeping in mind the need to preserve the historical integrity of the Mansion House environs. One such alternative, illustrated above, would concentrate most of the parking on the west side of the property, an area that historical held work-related operations of the Community. Several other alternatives are possible and each should be fully explored before a final decision is made.



*Parallel parking spaces are provided along the outside of the horseshoe-shaped drive in front of the Mansion House.*

### **Pedestrian Safety: Crosswalks**

Visitors utilizing overflow parking in the Sales Office lot must cross Kenwood Avenue to reach the sidewalks leading to the Mansion House's front door. The lack of defined crossings over Kenwood results in an unsafe situation for pedestrians. To address this, OCMH staff should work with the city of Sherrill/Oneida to establish crosswalks along Kenwood Avenue that align with and connect to the OCMH sidewalks (rimming entry drive). Several options are available for crosswalk markings, including application of paint, placement of pedestrian crossing signs, variation in pavement color and texture, and slightly elevated pavement.

### **Planting**

The treatment plan calls for both removal of existing plants, as well as introduction of replacement or new plantings. When selecting new species, OCMH staff should consider the following:

- **Reintroducing species planted by Community members** during the emphasized period of significance (1842-1880). Compilations of these appeared in the *Circular*, including the May 28, 1863 issue which listed maple, elm, chestnut, black walnut, horse chestnut, arborvitae, hemlock, oak, birch, ash, beech, basswood, hickory, tulip, and white pine. A more complete list appeared in the September 26, 1870 issue of the *Circular* under the subheading *Trees on the O. C. Lawn*.
- **Refining the list of planting introduced by the Community** to eliminate any species that are (1) considered to be invasive; (2) intolerant of warming temperatures and wetter weather conditions; and (3) susceptible to diseases. **Refer to the plant list at the end of this section for a preliminary refinement of trees listed as growing on the Mansion House grounds in 1870.**

### **Hardscape Materials**

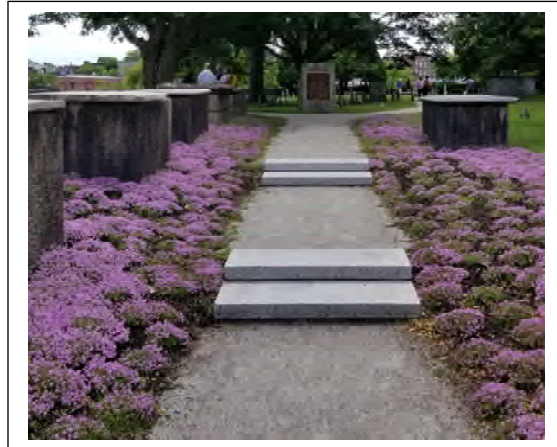
Hardscape materials, including curbing and paving, appear throughout the Mansion House property and are necessary to accommodate pedestrian and vehicular traffic, control the flow of stormwater, and hold landscape features, including benches. To simplify the landscape, OCMH should establish a palette or vocabulary of materials to be used for sidewalks, footpaths, curbing, bench pads, parking areas, building on what already exists on the site, as follows:

- **Sidewalks:** exposed aggregate concrete
- **Footpaths:** stabilized aggregate (such as Organic Lock) or asphalt with oil/stone finish
- **Curbing:** granite
- **Roadways and parking areas:** asphalt
- **Bench pads:** exposed aggregate concrete (to match sidewalks)

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*Exposed aggregate concrete (left); granite vertical granite curbing (right).*



*Oil and stone pavement (left); stabilized aggregate (Organic Lock) (right).*

**Seating: Benches**

The treatment plan calls for benches to be placed along several of the sidewalks and footpaths as a way of enticing visitors to explore the property and take in long views of the Mansion House and surrounding landscape. The OCMH should select one manufacturer and a model of bench that comes in a variety of sizes, with or without arms, and one that provides for commemoration. Recommended manufacturers include:

Kenneth Lynch and Sons  
114 Willenbrock Road  
Oxford, CT 06478  
203-264-2831  
[www.klynchandsons.com](http://www.klynchandsons.com)

Landscape Forms, Inc.  
7800 E. Michigan Avenue  
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49048  
269-381-0396  
[www.landscapeforms.com](http://www.landscapeforms.com)

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Kenneth Lynch and Sons “Hermann Park” bench (left); Landscape Forms “Plainwell” bench (right)

### Commemoration

Several opportunities exist for honoring individuals and organizations associated with the Oneida Community:

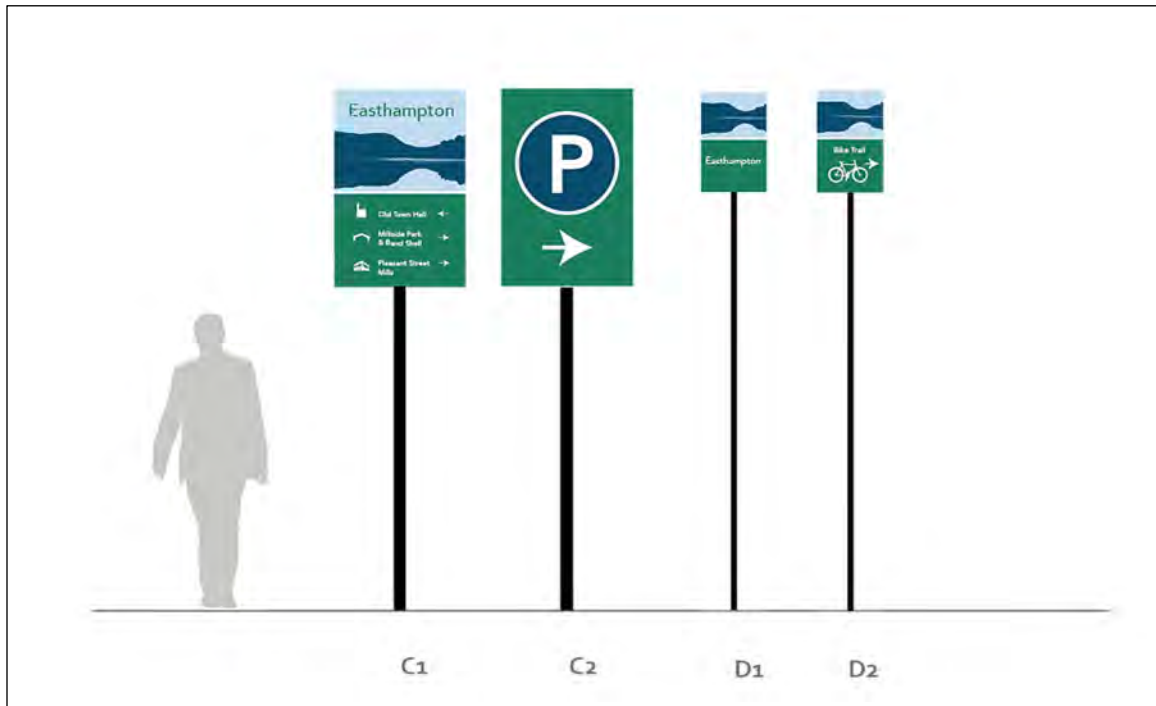
- **Benches.** Placing a small plaque on the bench back with the name or names of individuals to be honored and remembered
- **Sidewalks.** Setting inscribed granite slabs or cast bronze plaques into concrete sidewalks
- **Trees.** Creating a plaque or equivalent, mounted in a prominent location (either inside or out), showing the locations of trees that have been dedicated, together with the name(s) of the honoree(s). This could also be done virtually.



Bronze commemorative place set into concrete pavement (left); commemorative words inscribed in granite (right)

### Wayfinding: Signage Program

As articulated at the start of the CLR project, OCMH staff expressed concern about the lack of wayfinding to help guide visitors. Planned future expansion of visitor services and events will only exacerbate this need. To address this lack, OCMH should develop a comprehensive signage program that provides a design hierarchy for all wayfinding on the site. This program should include directional (both on- and offsite), welcome, and informational signs, and should spell out sizes, materials, colors, fonts, and general layout. Any current and future branding efforts (logos, etc.) should be integrated into the program.



Wayfinding program developed for the city of Easthampton, Massachusetts by Mark Favermann, Favermann Design:  
<https://www.favermanndesign.com/>

### Interpretation: Landscape Interpretive Plan

As documented in the previous sections of the CLR, the 13.873-acre landscape played a significant role in the establishment and success of the Oneida Community, as a subsistence farm, a pleasure garden, and a 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban style private residence. While many historical features are no longer extant, opportunity exists to illuminate them, using a variety of interpretive methods, including:

- **Tangible Methods**, such as placement of interpretive signs in locations where missing structures and landscape features may have existed, or where notable events occurred;
- **Virtual Methods**, development of technology-based applications, such as interactive maps, that provide historical information to be accessed on mobile devices. For an example, see: [www.smalltown360.com](http://www.smalltown360.com).

To plan for a more inclusive approach to site interpretation, OCMH should commission a landscape interpretive plan. Such a document will explore and establish the best methods for sharing historical information about the property. The historical narrative included in this report, together with previously written site histories, can provide a base of information from which to build the plan.

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Interpretive sign program developed for Thompson Island (Massachusetts) by Design Division, Inc., <http://www.designdivisioninc.com/>

ANALYSIS OF TREE SPECIES  
GROWING ON THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY LAWN, 1870

**Notes:**

Orange shading = Contemporary Botanic Name

No shading = Contemporary Common Name

Gray shading = Invasive Species

❖ = Species Susceptible to Disease

| TREE SPECIES – BOTANIC NAME              | TREE SPECIES – COMMON NAME   | NOTES                                |
|--|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Abies excelsa</i>                     | Norway spruce                | <i>Picea abies</i>                   |
| <i>Abies balsamea</i>                    | Canadian balsam              | Balsam fir                           |
| <i>Abies canadensis</i>                  | Hemlock                      | <i>Tsuga canadensis</i>              |
| <i>Pinus strobus</i>                     | White pine                   |                                      |
| <i>Pinus sylvestris</i>                  | Scotch pine                  |                                      |
| <i>Pinus austriaca</i>                   | Austrian pine                | <i>Pinus nigra</i>                   |
| <i>Pinus montana</i>                     | ?                            | Mugo pine                            |
| <i>Pinus pumila</i>                      | Dwarf pine                   | Japanese stone pine                  |
| <i>Pinus mugo rotundata</i>              | Dwarf pine (mugo)            | Swiss mountain pine                  |
| <i>Thuja occidentalis</i>                | American arborvitae          |                                      |
| <i>Thuja var. sibirica</i>               | Siberian arborvitae          |                                      |
| <i>Thuja var. hoveyi</i>                 | Hovey's arborvitae           |                                      |
| <i>Biota orientalis var. aurea</i>       | Golden arborvitae            | <i>Thuja occidentalis</i>            |
| <i>Juniperus virginiana</i>              | Red cedar                    |                                      |
| <i>Juniperus communis</i>                | Common juniper               |                                      |
| <i>Juniperus communis var. succia</i>    | Swedish juniper              |                                      |
| <i>Juniperus communis var. hibernica</i> | Irish juniper                |                                      |
| <i>Juniperus chinensis</i>               | Chinese juniper              |                                      |
| <i>Larix europea</i>                     | Scotch larch                 | <i>Larix decidua</i> /European Larch |
| <i>Larix americana</i>                   | Tamarack                     | <i>Larix laricina</i>                |
| <i>Salisburia adiantifolia</i>           | Ginkgo                       | <i>Ginkgo biloba</i>                 |
| ❖ <i>Acer saccharinum</i>                | Sugar maple                  | <i>Acer saccharum</i>                |
| <i>Acer saccharinum var. nigrum</i>      | Black maple                  | <i>Acer nigrum</i>                   |
| <i>Acer rubrum</i>                       | Red maple                    |                                      |
| <i>Acer dasycarpum</i>                   | Silver maple                 | <i>Acer saccharinum</i>              |
| <i>Aralia saccharinum</i>                | Hercule's club               | <i>Aralia spinosa</i>                |
| <i>Betula laciniata var. pendula</i>     | Cut leaf weeping white birch | <i>Betula pendula</i> 'Laciniata'    |
| <i>Betula alba var. populifolia</i>      | White birch                  |                                      |
| <i>Betula lutea</i>                      | Yellow birch                 | <i>Betula alleghaniensis</i>         |
| <i>Crataegus laevigata</i>               | Thorn                        | Hawthorn                             |
| <i>Crataegus</i> _____                   | Double flowering             | <i>Crataegus laevigata</i> cultivars |
| <i>Carya alba</i>                        | Shagbark hickory             | <i>Carya ovata</i>                   |

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| TREE SPECIES – BOTANIC NAME                    | TREE SPECIES – COMMON NAME     | NOTES   |
|--|--------------------------------|---|
| ❖ <i>Castanea vesca</i>                        | Chestnut                       | <i>Castanea dentata</i> (American)<br>UNDERGOING RESTORATION                        |
| <i>Euonymus atropurpureus</i>                  | Burning bush                   | <i>Euonymus alatus</i>  |
| ❖ <i>Fagus ferruginea</i>                      | American be[e]ch               | <i>Fagus grandifolia</i>  |
| <i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i>                   | Honey locust                   |   |
| <i>Gymnocladus canadensis</i>                  | Kentucky coffee tree           | <i>Gymnocladus dioicus</i>  |
| <i>Ostrya virginica</i>                        | Iron-wood                      | <i>Ostrya virginiana</i>  |
| <i>Carpinus americana</i>                      | Water be[e]ch                  | <i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>   |
| <i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>                  | Horse chestnut                 |   |
| <i>Aesculus hippocastanum double-flowering</i> | Double flowering horsechestnut | Aesculus hippocastanum<br>'Baumann'/Bauman Double Horsechestnut                     |
| <i>Juglans nigra</i>                           | Black walnut                   |   |
| <i>Juglans cinerea</i>                         | Butternut                      |   |
| <i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>                 | Tulip tree                     |   |
| <i>Magnolia glauca</i>                         | Magnolia                       | Sweetbay magnolia   |
| <i>Magnolia umbrella</i>                       | Umbrella magnolia              | <i>Magnolia tripetala</i>   |
| <i>Populus balsamifera var. candicans</i>      | Balsam of Gilead               |   |
| <i>Populus</i>                                 | Poplar                         | <i>Populus deltoides</i>  |
| <i>Populus dilata</i>                          | Lombardy poplar                | <i>Prunus augustifolia</i>  |
| <i>Prunus chicasa</i>                          | Chickasaw plum                 |   |
| <i>Quercus rubrum</i>                          | Red oak                        |   |
| <i>Quercus robur</i>                           | Royal oak                      | English Oak   |
| <i>Quercus cerris</i>                          | Turkey oak                     |   |
| <i>Quercus prunus var. pumila</i>              | Dwarf chestnut oak             |   |
| <i>Rhamnus catharticus</i>                     | Buckthorn                      | <i>Rhamnus carthartica</i>  |
| <i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>                    | Locust                         | Black locust  |
| <i>Pyrus sambucifolia</i>                      | American mountain ash          | <i>Sorbus americana</i>   |
| <i>Pyrus aneuparia</i>                         | European mountain ash          | <i>Sorbus acuparia</i>  |
| <i>Tilia americana</i>                         | Basswood                       |   |
| <i>Tilia europea var. aurea</i>                | European basswood              | <i>Tilia x europaea</i>   |
| ❖ <i>Ulmus americana</i>                       | Elm                            | DISEASE RESISTANT CULTIVARS<br>RECOMMENDED (Princeton,<br>Prairie Expedition, etc.) |
| <i>Virgilia lutea</i>                          | Yellow-wood                    | <i>Cladrastus kentuckea</i>   |

*Oneida Community Mansion House, Oneida, New York  
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