

The New Circular

Showcasing historic writings and photographs of the Oneida Community and its legacy.

December 2012

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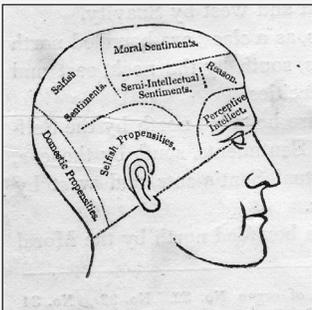
*Special points
of interest:*

Look for
The New Circular
in December and
June of each year –
by mail, if you're a
member, or on line
at www.oneida.community.org.

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The Knife Plant Cafeteria— Theodore Skinner's Last Work



The Knife Plant cafeteria building, 1955.

Next time you pass what is left of the old Knife Plant, mentally tip your hat to Theodore Skinner's last work--a cafeteria built in 1944. It was attached, on its north end, to the "old mill"—the Oneida Community's flour and saw-mill built in 1851 and, like the cafeteria, still standing today.

Earlier, the Oneida Community-born architect (1872-1944) had designed a number of Kenwood homes, performed important alterations to the Mansion House, and created several buildings in Sherrill. Indeed, his first company work, the 1905 Hardware Department building on Seneca Avenue near Route 5, seems to look across town to his

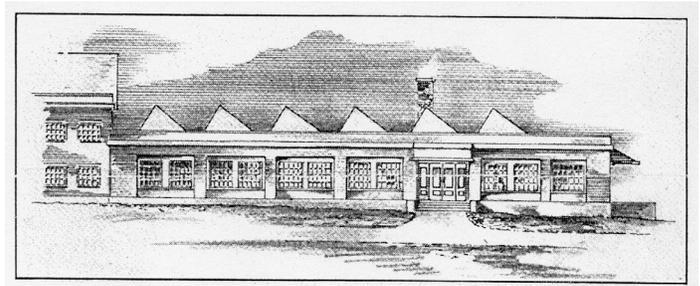
final project, the World War II addition to the Knife Plant.

The Knife Plant was booming with war production which included the manufacture of surgical instruments, bayonets, bomb shackle parts, and parachute hardware for the military. Presumably the brick, steel, and concrete construction filled an important need for the company and its workers. Although a housewarming dance was held to inaugurate the building in April, 1944, the facility was not completed until October—a month and a half after Skinner had passed away at the Mansion House.

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Aerial view of the Knife Plant, about 1949. The cafeteria building juts out to the lower left.



Skinner's drawing for the cafeteria as published in the "Community Commando," Oneida Ltd.'s wartime newspaper (Dec. 11, 1943).



Lunch in the new cafeteria ("Community Commando," Dec. 1944).



"Housewarming Dance" for the cafeteria building ("Community Commando," June 1944).



The serving counter in the new cafeteria ("Community Commando," Dec. 1944).

Phrenology in the Oneida Community

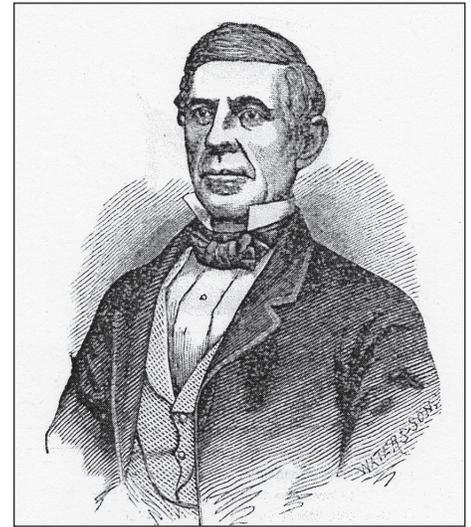
by Tony Wonderley

As twenty-year-old Pierrepont Noyes crammed for entrance exams to Harvard in the winter of 1890-91, he spent considerable time in the library with Mansion House librarian, Chester Underwood. Noyes knew the older man was a phrenologist who “had studied the science under Fowler and during Community days had acquired a very considerable reputation for reading people’s character by feeling the bumps on their heads.” Contemptuous of what seemed to him a pseudo-science, Noyes belittled Underwood’s faith in a “theory of bumps.” “I hope that in the end I came down off my high horse of sophomoric wisdom and conceded something to his pet theory,” he later mused, “but I only remember Mr. Underwood’s shaking his head and saying, more to himself than to me, ‘I am sorry.’ Whether his sorrow was for me or for himself, he did not indicate. I hope he was sorry for me” (*A Goodly Heritage*, p. 35).

A craze that swept America during the 1830s-1840s, phrenology was the belief that a person’s skull revealed his or her personality. A phrenologist analyzed a subject’s character by examining the cranium at 37 locations, called “organs” or “faculties,” each thought to be the center of an emotional or intellectual trait. By the 1850s, phrenology was big business centered in the New York firm of Fowler and Wells. Lorenzo Fowler, Orson Fowler, and Samuel Wells published manuals and distributed educational materials on the topic. They also lectured widely and provided, for an additional fee, individual phrenological readings.

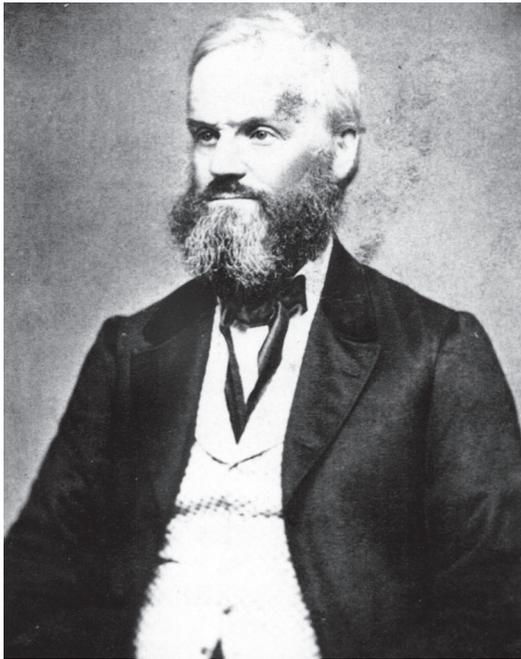
Evidence of the Oneida Community’s interest in phrenology is widespread in Mansion House collections. Preserved among the holdings, for example, is a copy of an article about Perfectionist Sewell Newhouse that appeared in the “American Phrenological Journal” (a Fowler and Wells publication) of September 1864. “Self-Esteem and Firmness are evidently large,” opined the anonymous author studying the picture of Newhouse reproduced here, “but, judged by the face, those organs would be immense. According to our reading, we find the indications of strong practical sense; excellent powers of observation, great industry and perseverance, good mechanical abilities, with far more prose than poetry in the whole.”

The library of the Oneida Community includes many phrenological tomes including at least three copies of the basic Fowler and Wells text (*Illustrated Self-Instructor to Phrenology and Physiology*). One of the latter, just as Pierrepont Noyes indicated, is inscribed to Chester Underwood by Orson Fowler. The Oneida Community Mansion House owns one of the small plaster busts sold by Fowler and Wells as an aid to learning the phrenological zones. Several phrenological terms were taken up by the Community (amativeness, philoprogenitiveness, alimentiveness). Perfectionists, clearly, were on familiar terms with the subject.

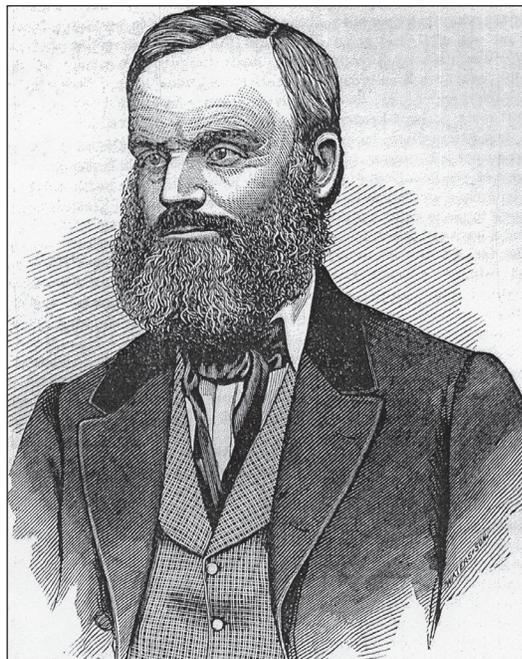


Wood engraving of Sewell Newhouse, published in the “American Phrenological Journal,” 1864.

The most enthusiastic proponent of phrenology in the Oneida Community was probably John Humphrey Noyes. When he introduced himself to readers



Photograph of John H. Noyes and the wood engraving made from it, published in the "American Phrenological Journal," 1866.



early on, he thought it appropriate to share a phrenological analysis of his personality:

“The following sketch of my character, by Brevoort, a Phrenologist, in New York, given before knowing my name...will be worthless to you, unless you are a believer in Phrenology.

“Amativeness, large; Philoprogenitiveness, very large; Adhesiveness, large; Inhabitiveness, full; Concentra-

full; Cautiousness, large; Approbateness, moderate; Self-esteem, large; Firmness, very large; Conscientiousness, full; Hope, large; Marvellousness, very small; Veneration, large; Benevolence, very large; Constructiveness, very large; Ideality, large; Imitativeness, large; Individuality, full; Form, very large; Size, large; Weight, large; Colour, small; Order, moderate; Calculation, full; Locality, large; Eventuality, full; Time, small; Language, full; Causality, very large; Comparison, very large.

“Brevoort’s remarks on Marvellousness were in substance as follows: ‘You have need of crying, O Lord, increase our faith, for you have no marvellousness at all, you are inclined to scepticism, require a reason for every thing you believe,’ &c. Said I, do you ever make any great mistakes? ‘Not within a year,’ he answered. But what if I should tell you, that I am accounted by those who know me, the veriest visionary in the land? He replied ‘I would not believe it, nature tells no lies,’ &c.” (“The Witness,” August 20, 1837)

In later years, Noyes was analyzed by Lorenzo Fowler and by Samuel Wells. Noyes, according to Fowler, “is more interested in facts connected with philosophy than in facts disconnected from philosophy--more interested in science connected with philosophy than in simple science. He is not a man of many words unless fully aroused by opposition. His thoughts are not burdened with words, but rather his words are burdened with thoughts. He is in the habit of talking just as he thinks--not much of a hypocrite--wishes every thing to pass for what it is, good or bad--tells people, if anything, what he thinks--is not mealy-mouthed in his words. He is capable of being very sarcastic, and of saying much in a little--if in argument with

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a man who advances a foolish idea, he is capable of making it appear very foolish.” (“Circular,” March 13, 1856)

Above all, Fowler emphasized the quality of Noyes’ intellect. “He thinks for himself--relies on his own judgment--is full enough inclined to his own opinion; and surrounds himself with an atmosphere that is not easily intruded upon.

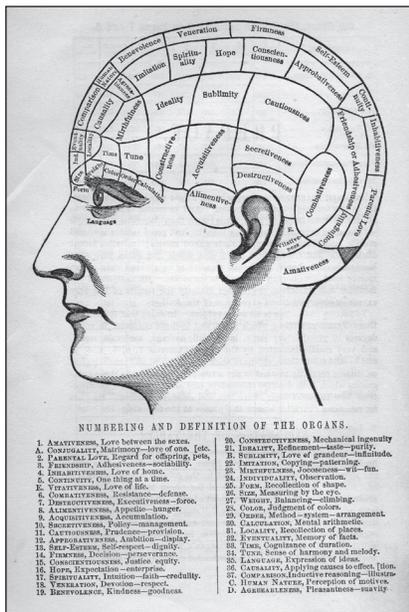


Chart of the 37 phrenological faculties, from a Fowler and Wells phrenology book owned by the Oneida Community.

He has not what might be called pride but independence of mind. [A] feature of his mind is to give a cause for everything. He is a great hand to inquire out the reason of things--he goes back and searches out the first causes.”

Samuel Wells thought Noyes’ theology was:

“apparently less emotional than philosophical. He is not moved so much by his feelings as he is directed by his judgment and by his faith. His religion is based, first, on kindness; second, on justice, in doing good and doing right rather than in

bowing down to authority in humility and observing forms and ceremonies. He has not that feeling of deference and respect for the opinions of others which would incline him to follow in any beaten path made by them. He would hold himself accountable alone to the powers above, and worship according to the dictates of his own judgment.

“He is not inclined to hope for too much, but will generally realize more than he anticipates. Some magnify their prospects, others undervalue them; he stands between those extremes. He would be somewhat rigid in his sense of justice, holding others to a strict accountability; and being very careful to fulfill all his own promises, would expect others to do the same. He appreciates words of approval and encouragement, but would turn neither to the right nor the left to secure flattery or avoid frowns.”

(“Circular,” November 26, 1866)

Wells, like Fowler, was impressed by Noyes’ intelligence:

“Intellectually, Mr. Noyes should be known for a disposition to investigate principles, to go back to the origin of things, to study cause and effect, or the why and the wherefore. He is even abstract in his speculations and metaphysical in his mental tendencies....His brain is of the larger class, well supported by a strong constitution, and a framework well filled up, and he ought to take a leading place among leading men. ‘Where much is given, much will be required.’”

In the end, what Brevoort, Fowler, and Wells agreed on was that Noyes ranked high in the faculty they called “causality,” a conclusion apparently based on the assumption that a large forehead indicated profound intellect.

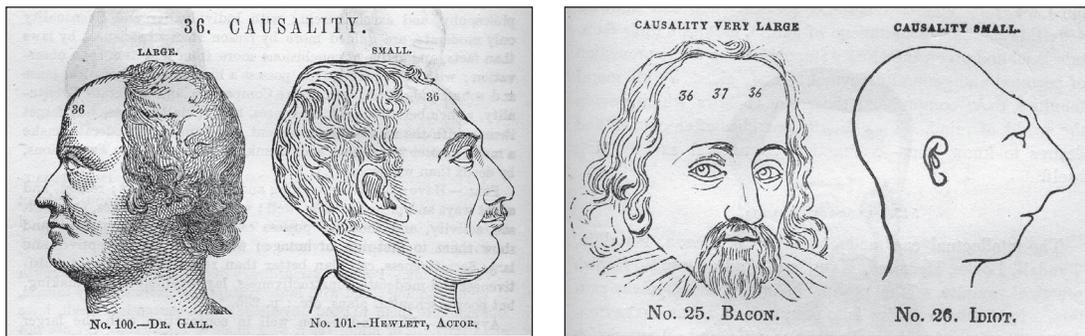
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Phrenology in the Oneida Community



How to recognize high causality, from Fowler and Wells phrenology books owned by the Oneida Community.

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