

# The New Circular

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

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Issue 2

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## The Hubbard Place and the Oneida Community

by Tony Wonderley



*The Hubbard place today*



*Map of about 1855 showing  
location of the Hubbard house  
(center)*

THE OLDEST SURVIVING landmark from Oneida Community days is an unprepossessing farmhouse just north of today's Mansion House at the corner of Hamilton Avenue and Sherrill Road. This building figured in Community history at least three times: at the beginning of the association, just after the breakup of the Community, and during the stockholders' vote of 1895 which ended the ruinous control of the spiritualist party over Oneida Community, Ltd. I tell the earlier story largely from George Wallingford Noyes' account of early Community life published as *Free Love in Utopia* (edited by Lawrence Foster). The later episodes are conveyed in the words of Corinna

Noyes (*The Days of My Youth*, pp. 89-92) and Pierrepont Noyes (*A Goodly Heritage*, pp. 83-84).

Sherrill's oldest building (built 1840s) was erected as the home of Noahdiah Hubbard and his daughter, Tryphena, the Oneida Community's first local convert. The twenty-one-year old woman was in the nearby residence of Jonathan Burt when John Humphrey Noyes lodged there at the beginning of 1848. Stealing a glance at the manuscript he was working on (*Bible Argument*), she was astonished to learn his sentiments on marriage and sex. Nevertheless, Tryphena Hubbard was won over to Perfectionist religion by the end of the summer. She was welcomed into the Community





*Tryphena Hubbard  
Seymour*

in a way that would not give offense to local canons of morality. The Perfectionists had her married to one of their number, a young man named Henry Seymour.

Early the following year, Tryphena's father became "somewhat excited" when he learned the details of the Community's marriage arrangements. Hubbard probably threatened Noyes who later said his departure from Oneida was caused by Hubbard's enmity (Foster, p. 137). "Mr. Noyes's absence had the effect of quelling the excitement against the Association," it was noted at the time. Noahdiah Hubbard chuckled to hear "the old he-one of the flock is scared off" and demanded Tryphena's return (Foster, p. 28). Tryphena refused to do so and loudly denounced her father. For two years thereafter, Hubbard made a skulking nuisance of himself around the Mansion House--visiting, prying, stealing, radiating hostility, and manifesting a "sneering and contemptuous spirit" (Foster, pp. 77, 94-97).

Community life proved to be difficult for Tryphena. She was criticized for being despondent and unthankful. She came under judgment, the Perfectionists reported in late 1850, "for insubordination to the church and excessive egotism amounting to a kind of insanity. Yesterday the family had a meeting and it was unanimous judgment that Tryphena be placed under the special charge of Henry Seymour, and required to submit herself to him as her head and the representative of the church" (Foster, pp. 96-97).

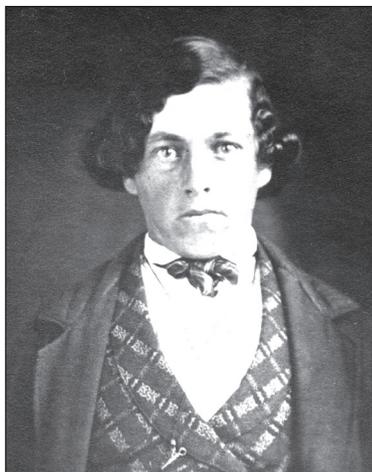
Submitting to Seymour included criticism and, in keeping with disciplinary norms of the day, physical punishment. At first, whipping seemed to produce good results. However, in September, 1851, the intensely pressured Tryphena began cry-

ing at night, speaking incoherently, and wandering about. Seymour went to the Hubbards to report her apparent insanity. "At first Tryphena's father spit out his wrath, but her mother checked him, saying it was no time to talk so now; she would forget all the past, and see what is best to do. When Henry informed them of all the means he had had taken, her mother inadvertently exclaimed, 'You ought to have been whipped yourself.' He made no reply, but afterward said he had used his best judgment and done as well by her as knew how" (Foster, p. 262).

The whipping of Tryphena provided Mr. Hubbard with a basis for legal action. In October, Seymour was indicted by the Oneida County Office of the District Attorney in Utica for assault and battery. Other Community men were served warrants for arrest, apparently as accessories. Several Community members were summoned to Utica to give testimony. "Sensitive and high-minded women," according to Parker, "were asked obscene questions about the most private experiences but without evasion or complaint they told all. The women were never to forget the ignominy of this ordeal" (*Yankee Saint*, p. 189)

The Oneida Community believed they had reached an out-of-court settlement with Hubbard later that year. They would pay Tryphena's expense at an asylum and, after release, pay her an annual sum (\$125-200) determined by the state of her health. They also agreed to pay for a divorce if that was what Tryphena wanted. District Attorney Samuel Garvin consented to the agreement and said he would drop the charges.

Garvin, however, made no move to quash the proceedings. On the contrary, he seemed to grow increasingly angry with the Community and may have encouraged Hubbard to maintain the suit. Hubbard, at any rate, abrogated the agreement and began to make noises about prosecuting the Perfectionists for the seduction of Tryphena. Garvin considered the Oneida Commu-



*Henry Seymour*

nity worse than any house of prostitution and made it clear he hoped to prosecute an action against the Community as such an establishment.

The Perfectionists were greatly distressed. Noyes, who had moved to Brooklyn in 1849, announced himself willing to have the Oneida Community disbanded to avoid further trouble. In April, John Miller, the Oneida Association's financier and treasurer, dutifully conveyed the offer to the D.A. in Utica. Ending the Oneida Community was fine with Garvin, but he still did nothing to dismiss the case.

Just as the Oneidans conceded total defeat, a sympathetic neighbor encouraged them to strengthen their resolve. Timothy Jenkins, a lawyer of nearby Oneida Castle, had been, earlier, the county's prosecuting attorney and was, at the moment, the district representative to the United States Congress. He understood that Garvin's case really was being tried in a court of public opinion and was, at heart, a political affair. Jenkins advised the Perfectionists not to give in but to fight back.

That summer, the Oneida Community waged a public relations battle for the hearts and minds of their neighbors. In June, they held what they called a "peace offering," a strawberry festival (Foster, p. 182). It turned out to be a big neighborhood party attended by hundreds who happily gorged themselves on berries served with sugar, cream, biscuits, and butter. While they were at it, the Community staged another strawberry get-together to show their appreciation to the Oneida Indians for their neighborliness. At both events, visitors feasted on strawberries notable for their flavor, lusciousness, and size (*Circular*, July 11, 1852). These fruits, developed after only a year under the care of gardener Henry Seymour, were a timely demonstration of the Community's horticultural prowess.

In July, the Oneida Community collected the signatures of "the leading citizens" of their area on a petition to Garvin.

The document strongly suggested the time had come for Garvin to back off. "We, the undersigned, having understood that a prosecution in behalf of the people against several of the prominent members of the Oneida Community had been commenced and is now pending, beg leave to say, that in our judgment, if there has ever been any cause for such a prosecution, it has been wholly removed, and does not now exist, and in our opinion it is not demanded or deemed advisable, on the part of the people at large out of that Community best acquainted with their present management and conduct, that the prosecution should be further carried on against them, and we recommend that it be discontinued" (Foster, p. 189).

This was political push-back Gavin understood. The court declared *noli prosequi*—prosecution ended—in September 1852. The Oneida Community paid court costs of \$20 and proceeded to enjoy friendly relations with the outside world for over twenty years.

As for Tryphena Hubbard, she lived out her life in the Oneida Community in a quiet and seemingly normal frame of mind. "In the excitement of the persecutions attending the founding of the Community," Dr. Theodore Noyes noted years later, "she was temporarily insane for a few months, but recovered, and has continued well" (*Circular*, November 7, 1870).

Hubbard's case came close to destroying the Community. But the Perfectionists prevailed and did so without help from Noyes in Brooklyn. They acted neither on Noyes' suggestion to capitulate nor on his recommendation to pay Hubbard off. The victory resulted from Jenkins' "kind offices and friendly advice" and the Community's work to forge good neighborly relations in Oneida (*Circular*, January 5, 1860).



*Corinna Ackley,  
fifteen years old,  
when she lived at the  
Hubbard house*



*Martin Kinsley*



*Alice Ackley*

## The Hubbard Place

about 1882-1894 by Corinna Ackley Noyes [The author's parents, Martin and Alice Kinsley, had been Towners, members of the faction critical of John Humphrey Noyes' leadership in the final days of the Community. Following the breakup, they left the Mansion House and, for a time, lived in the Hubbard house with several children including Corinna (born 1872).]

FATHER WAS ABLE TO BUY THE OLD Hubbard farm of 150 acres, located at the Four Corners, not far from the Mansion House...Now Father and Mother had really left Eden. Mother had become the hard-working wife of a hard-working farmer but never did they complain. They had made their choice and were willing to abide by the results.

Mother must often have remembered the days when singing was her chief delight and sometimes, when I would be playing the simpler accompaniments of her old songs on the organ, she would suddenly appear from the kitchen and sing as she did in the olden days, her tone as rich and full as ever with no sign that it had suffered from lack of practice...

The Hubbard house was simply a very decent farm-house of white clapboard of a type quite common through the countryside and had no conveniences such as we had been used to. There was no running water and no bathroom. All the drinking water had to be pumped from a well thirty feet from the house and the soft water we used for washing clothes and dishes we pumped by hand from a cistern underneath the kitchen floor--when we had had sufficient rain...

For heat we had a coal range which heated the kitchen and dining-room and a large base-burner for heating the sitting-room and two adjoining bedrooms. In mild weather a suggestion of heat could be felt from the stovepipe which went up to the chimney that went through the bedroom Meg [Margaret Kinsley] and I used. The other upstairs bedrooms were almost as cold as the weather outside but we got used to it, taking heated flatirons to bed with us and sleeping under a mountain of covers. What ordinary farm folk did for baths, I do not know. We were still Community members and use of the Turkish Bath was one of our privileges.

We now lived near enough to the Mansion so we could take part in all the social events and

attend the school. Comparison between the Clark place and the hard work and drawbacks of farm life gradually receded into the background and we children began to see the attractions of a farm as seen through the eyes of the Mansion House children who were frequent visitors...

Occasionally really gay events would take place. There would be a birthday to be celebrated and Mother was renowned among the children for her parties. During the winter there would be at least one molasses candy-pull and a straw ride when the sleighing was good and the moon riding high. That was fun! A bob-sleigh drawn by two horses, piled with fresh, clean straw and plenty of blankets and buffalo robes and a dozen happy, hearty children, singing at the top of their lungs to the accompaniment of sleigh bells. We would be gone for an hour or more then come home to hot cocoa and cookies.

The farm itself, on which our livelihood depended, was a very good one. There was a sugar bush, fine pasturage for a good-sized dairy herd, plenty of land for raising wheat, oats and hay and a five-acre hop field in thriving condition. For several years before our ownership of the farm, hops had been the best-paying crop that could be raised and modest fortunes had been made all up and down the valley. Prices had risen steadily and naturally more and more fields had been set out. Then, just the year before we bought the farm, the crash came. The price of hops had reached \$1.25 a pound. The wise ones sold. The greedy ones held on and, in the end, were glad to get five cents a pound. Some used their hops for bedding the cattle rather than sell at that price.

Father had known the recent history of the hop market but, with most of the hop-growers, felt sure that the normal price of between 25 and 50 cents a pound would return, but it never did. The buyers began to rely on the hops raised in Oregon and Washington, found them of better quality, and the days of profitable hop-raising in New York State were over.

Father kept on raising them for five years, however, though it meant a lot of hard work and no profit. Then he cried quits and used the field for other crops. One was potatoes. They had been bringing high prices--75 cents, then a dollar a bushel. Every-one planted a big crop and it looked most promis-

ing. Then the rains came, day after day, rain, rain and more rain, and when the weather finally cleared the potatoes had rotted in the ground.

Today it still comes back to me painfully the awful discouragement that farmers have to face, the incessant hard labor and yet they have the courage to go on. Wonderful men! That was my father's part, to see his labor gone for nought. My mother had to share in his bitter disappointment, too, and besides caring for our family, provide bed and board for three hired men. Though we tried to keep a hired girl they were not easily found. Even in those days girls didn't like to work on a farm.

A year before we moved to the farm, Mr. Abram Burt and his brother-in-law, Manley Aiken, caught Exodus Fever, bought land just beyond the Hamilton Bridge on the left side of the road and built a house large enough for their two families. Both men were in company employ. Shortly after that, Mr. Orrin Wright, then a foreman at the factory, bought the next lot and Mr. Frank Wayland-Smith, superintendent at the factory, his wife being the bookkeeper there, also took the lot adjoining on the corner opposite our house. Both men built their barns first and lived in them a year while building their homes. Thus we had a group of five families, all old Community friends, with a deep acquaintance that few people know, but Father and Mother were the only ones completely on their own in meeting the vicissitudes of the outside world without company support...

Money was scarce. To help provide for the children's needs, Mother borrowed a chain-making machine from the company factory--a simple affair operated by a foot treadle--and managed to make a hundred or more chains a day, besides running the house, caring for the children and doing the family sewing. I don't know how she did it. She certainly had very little time to herself. I had to go to school, of course, but I could do a good deal to help, mornings and afternoons after school, and I was glad to do it. I loved my mother deeply and helping her was a pleasure, not a sacrifice. I am painting a pretty drab picture of our life on the farm, I am afraid, but being the oldest and of a rather serious turn of mind, that is the way it looked to me much of the time.



*Pierrepont Noyes, about 1894*

### The Hubbard Place

January 9, 1895

by Pierrepont B. Noyes

*[The previous year, the author (born 1870) had married Corinna Ackley and been appointed to the Board of Directors of Oneida Community, Ltd. Deeply disturbed by the incompetence of the ruling majority, the "Spiritualists," Noyes campaigned vigorously to end their reign by vote of the share-holders at the annual stockholders' meeting.]*

ONE OF THE LEGENDS OF THE "Great Election," a legend which the ensuing sixty years of political peace have made only a humorous memory, is my midnight awakening to the fact that we had won. I slept that night in the Kinsleys' house at the Four Corners. It was an old-fashioned farmhouse, and the second-story bedroom, occupied by my wife and myself, was heated by a stovepipe which

admitted warmth from the room below. Lying awake, I mentally reviewed the votes and the voters. A month of proxy-chasing had fixed in my mind the ownership of every share of stock and on which side it had probably been voted. Suddenly I recalled that a block of stock which had not been voted at all was figured by us as entirely negative, while it should have been reckoned one half in our favor. That changed a small minus into a sixteen-share plus--a defeat into a victory!

I arose and called down the stovepipe hole to my father-in-law. "We've won the election!" He [Martin Kinsley] told me afterwards that he thought I was having a nightmare, but I promptly descended and convinced him that I was right. We had won, by a sixteen-share margin, an election wherein nearly twenty-four thousand shares were voted. On that day, or perhaps I should say on that night, in January, 1895, the new Oneida Community, Ltd. was born.



*First OCL Agents' Meeting, January, 1900. Present here are several directors elected in 1895 including Pierrepont Noyes (back row, third from right), Martin Kinsley (front row, second from right), and President Theodore Noyes (front row, third from left).*

## A Visit to Oneida in April, 1852

*At the darkest moment of the Hubbard lawsuit, the Oneida Association was visited by Polish socialist Leon Rymarkiewicz who left this account (Circular, May 16, 1852).*

I WAS CONVEYED IN A one horse gig, partly on a plank road, and partly by a cross road, to a forest-beshaded, hill-surrounded valley. The colony of Perfectionists at Lenox, was the object of my excursion. In the distance, already I perceived the beautiful buildings, in which an Association of good men have united their quiet fortunes. H. W. Burnham, a member of the family, (as he called them,) received me on the piazza, and took me through a small carpeted ante-room, into the drawing-room, which is finely fitted up in the American style...and into their meeting room, where they have a pretty well furnished library. He presented me with several numbers of their paper called "The Circular;" which is published in Brooklyn, by J. H. Noyes, who is a theologian, and the founder of the Society: also with a book in which the views, opinions, and objects of the Perfectionists are explained...

They have a fine large house, three stories high, sixty feet long, and 35 feet wide. Below, in the basement, is the kitchen, larder, and dining room. On the ground floor are the reception room, ante-room, and the general parlor where their meetings are held; all finely arranged. The upper stories are divided into sitting and sleeping rooms. Near it is a smaller house, where the children live and have their school. Farther off stand the wash-house, stables, granary, &c., and at a little distance, the large mill and machine-shop. The Community or family consists of 150 members, poor and rich, English and American; women and children included...

The basis on which their ideas are built, and the source from which they spring, is the purest Christian religion...They were, by the world, called Perfectionists: they themselves see only brothers and sisters in their neighbors. By means of which, and a system like that of Rousseau's equal educa-

tion, they are formed children of nature, altogether unexposed to the passions which agitate the world. Their life is as far as possible undisturbed by attachments to earthly treasures. And yet they enjoy freely whatever pleasures fall in their way. Every approved member has brought and given all that he possessed—not always money, but heart, will, and talent, for the benefit of the family. Should he wish to leave, that which he brought will be returned to him...

It is understood with one accord that pleasure is to be divided, and labor to be performed with kindly free-hearted willingness. So far as is needful, all work, even the women and children. Jealousy and envy are frightened away. The whole family is one marriage circle. The hearts are conscious of one love; consequently all things are common among them—women, goods, ideas, and inventive skill. They are not Wesleyans; they believe that Christ has come on the earth the second time, and lives and works in the convert, saving him from sin. They do not follow Fourier, although in external regulations they take much from his system...

In ease of marriage the man and wife are not separated, but live together. Yet they love not themselves alone, but also those around them, and so their hearts are wide open to receive their neighbor into the circle of their love. One must elevate himself far above the passions of the multitude, in order to have the purity of morals necessary to engage in such a communion. That the Perfectionists are not sensual, is proved by their healthy appearance, their physical energy, and their blooming children. That they are not often carried away with the animal drift, is proved by the fact that in three years only child was born among them. Their life is spiritual, their communion lies more in the sympathies of society, than in corporeal attachments.

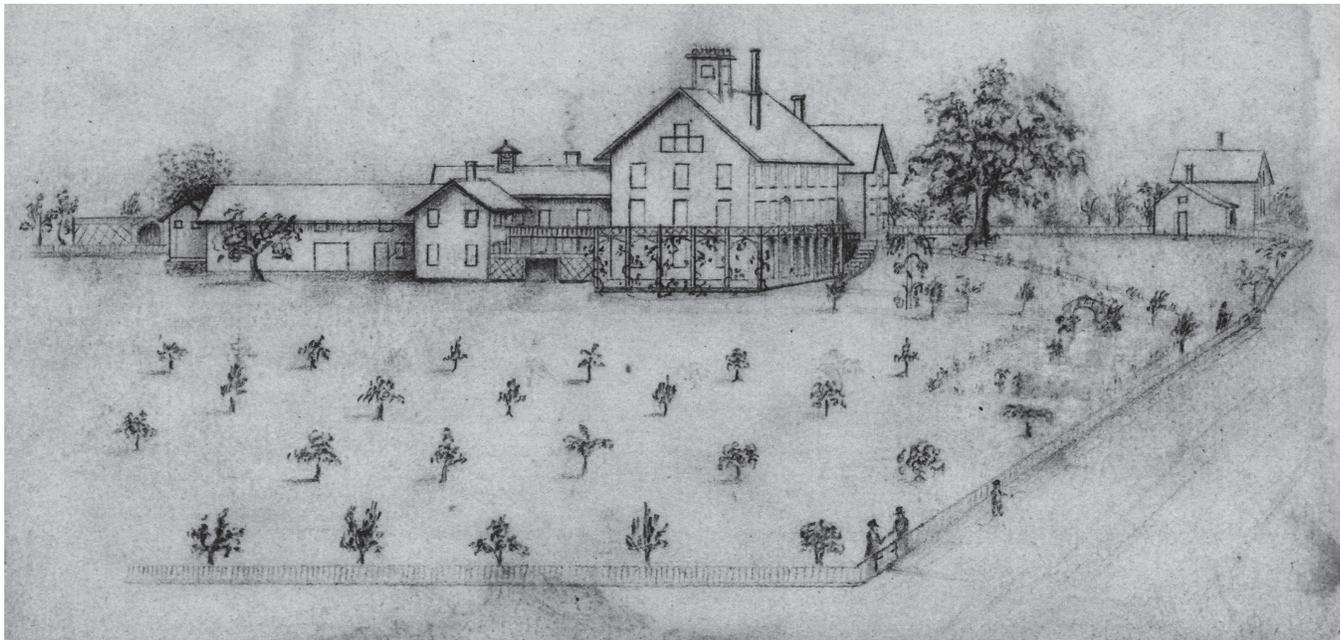
Oneida Community  
**MANSION  
HOUSE**  
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*The Mansion House about 1851, by Charlotte Miller (courtesy Pody Vanderwall)*