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Janet White
Cornell University

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OUT OF THE FOLD.

"Oh, dreadful! They dwell in peace and harmony, and have no church scandals.
They must be wiped out."

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Building Perfection: The Relationship between Physical and Social Structures of the Oneida Community

BY JANET WHITE

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY has traditionally focused on formal aesthetics and the monuments of a "high culture". This approach accedes no place in the canon to the buildings of the Oneida Community. While they tend to be nicely sited, spacious, and constructed of handsome materials, they are not architectural masterpieces. The main complex combines elements from a jumble of styles; it has awkward joints where the products of three different building campaigns were unskillfully linked; and its towers are either stubby and ungraceful or capped by overwrought roofs (fig. 1).

It is, however, possible to approach the study of architectural history from another direction. One can focus not on the building as objet d'art, but on the interaction between built form and the society that produced and inhabited it. This approach asserts that buildings are interesting (though perhaps in differing degrees) because the built form a society creates for itself both reflects and influences the beliefs and behaviors of that society. Study of *any* building of a particular culture therefore holds out the possibility of illuminating, affirming, or challenging our perception of that culture.

This relationship between builder and built is most immediate when both the social structure and the physical environment are self-conscious creations of the same individuals, as is the case with the utopian settlement created by the Perfectionists at Oneida.¹

1. This article assumes a basic familiarity with the beliefs and practices of Perfectionism. For readers not familiar with the sect, I offer the following brief summary: John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the Oneida Community, preached that human beings could reach spiritual perfection on earth, that he himself was

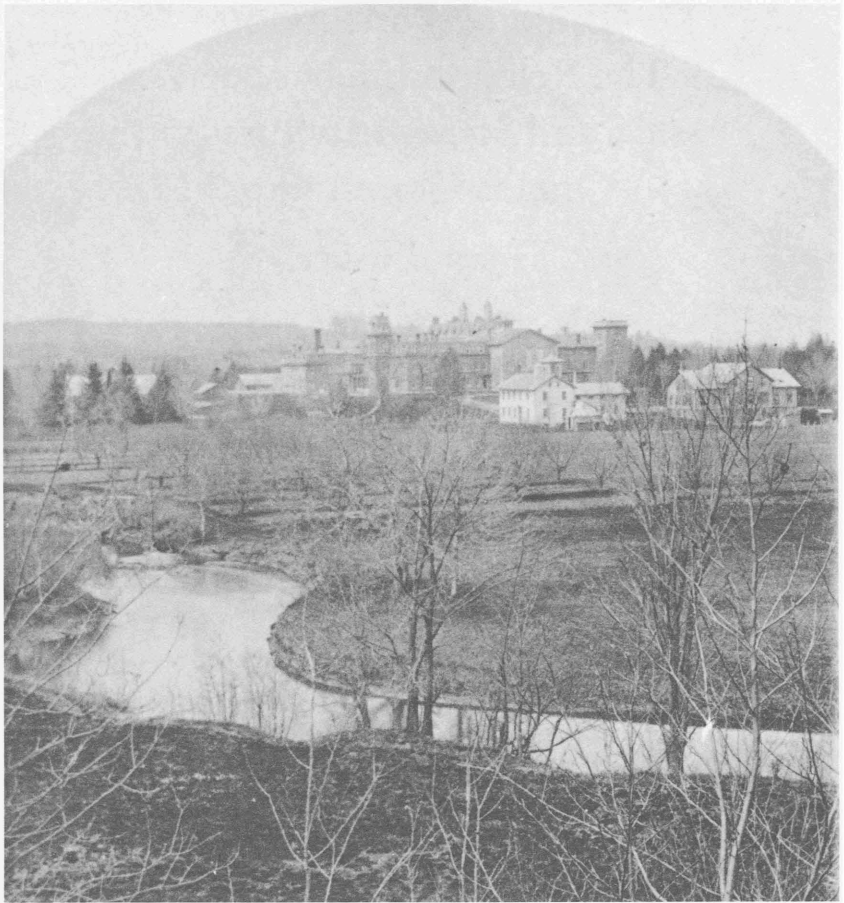


Fig. 1. View of the Oneida Community domain from across Oneida Creek, ca. 1878.

The Perfectionists were engaged in both constructing a new social order and devising “plans for a building which shall be in all re-

free from sin, and that by following him others could ascend to the same level. Achieving this perfection required a return to the practices of the first Christians. As interpreted by Noyes, this meant living in Bible Communism, working communally, and holding all property in common. His doctrine of “complex marriage” extended this communal principle to marital and parental relationships: all Perfectionist men and women considered themselves to be married to each other, and children of any birth parents were considered to be children of the entire “family” thus created.

spects adapted to a Community like ours”.² By reconstructing the building history of the Community and examining it alongside the social history, it is possible not only to “read” the evidence of one to illuminate the other, but also to discover ways in which the two influenced each other.

Moreover, by comparing the social environments of one micro-society, the Perfectionists, to those of another micro-society based in the same western European culture, a cloistered community of Cistercian monks, we can begin to explore a larger question: whether the presence of particular characteristics in a social structure can be causally linked to the presence of particular types of spaces.

When we begin reconstructing the history of Oneida’s physical environment, we find that its form evolved significantly from 1848 to 1881, the years the Community existed as a Perfectionist commune. Its inhabitants built, demolished, remodeled, and rebuilt with extraordinary frequency. This, as Dolores Hayden suggests, is in keeping with the tenets of Perfectionism: they extended their belief in the perfectibility of the individual to the built environment.³

Within this framework of almost continual change, four major building campaigns can be distinguished. Each accompanied a significant stage in the Community’s social development. First, between 1848, when the Perfectionists relocated their main settlement from Putney, Vermont, to Oneida, New York, and 1853, when the first campaign ended, construction was undertaken primarily to meet the basic needs of the newly founded settlement. Second, between 1860 and 1864, their financial status having improved, they focused on the accommodation of “complex marriage”. Third, during 1869–70, they replaced and expanded space

2. “Community Architecture”, *The Circular* (9 November 1853), 166.

3. Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism 1790–1975* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), 197. This is still the only comprehensive treatment of architecture and community in American utopian settlements. Though I do not always agree with her conclusions, I am much indebted to Hayden for first suggesting the connections between architecture and social structure at Oneida.

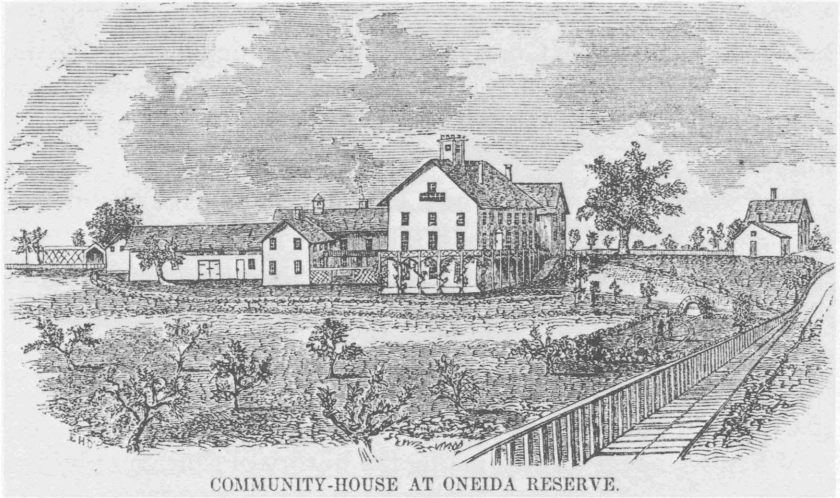


Fig. 2. Woodcut of the Old Mansion House, based on a sketch by Charlotte Noyes Miller. The “White House”, one of the pre-existing structures purchased with the property, is at the far right. The southeast corner of the first Children’s House can be seen behind the main block of the Mansion.

allocated to children in anticipation of the stirpiculture experiment.⁴ During the final campaign, 1877–78, they expanded the facilities to relieve overcrowding when the internal tensions that would eventually destroy the Community were beginning to be felt. This article will deal with only the first two campaigns, and with only one product of each: the Old Mansion House, a wood frame structure built in 1848, belongs to the first campaign; the first block of the New Mansion House, built in 1861–62, belongs to the second.

In 1848 John Humphrey Noyes moved his base of operations from Vermont to a site on the Oneida Creek in upstate New York. A small group of his followers already lived there, operating a farm and a sawmill. Others relocated to join him, living at first under very crowded conditions in the few pre-existing structures on the

4. The stirpiculture program was an attempt to produce spiritually superior beings by selective breeding. Spiritually “ascended” men and women were encouraged to produce offspring, in pairings approved and sometimes proposed by a central committee.

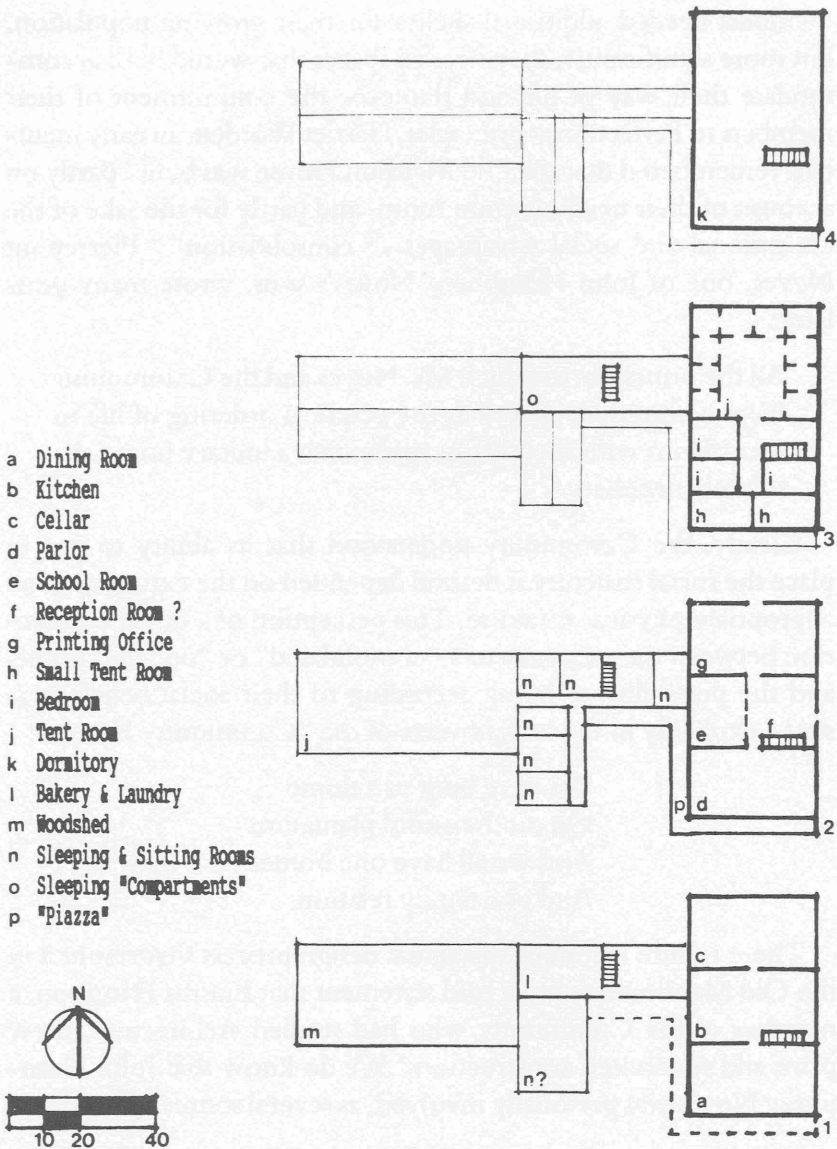


Fig. 3. Plans of the Old Mansion House as reconstructed by the author.

property. Despite straitened financial circumstances, they immediately began building what came to be known as the Old Mansion House (figs. 2 and 3).

The motivation for constructing this building was threefold: the

members needed additional shelter for their growing population, but more significantly, they needed spaces that would both accommodate their way of life and reinforce the commitment of their members to Perfectionist principles. Harriet Worden, an early member, remembered that the Old Mansion House was built “partly on account of their needing more room, and partly for the sake of the educational and social advantages of consolidation”.⁵ Pierrepont Noyes, one of John Humphrey Noyes’s sons, wrote many years later:

All the principles to which Mr. Noyes and the Communists were committed, as well as the practical ordering of life in accordance with their plans, made such a unitary home absolutely necessary.⁶

Clearly, the Community understood that its ability to put in place the social structure it desired depended on the existence of an appropriate physical structure. This perception of a direct connection between the existence of a “consolidated” or “unitary” home, and the possibility of living according to their social beliefs, was stated explicitly in the second verse of the “Community Hymn”:

We have built us a dome
On our beautiful plantation
And we all have one home
And one family relation.

There is little record of the actual design process that resulted in the Old Mansion beyond a bald statement that Erastus Hamilton, a member of the Community who had studied architecture, drew plans and supervised construction.⁷ We do know that John Humphrey Noyes was personally involved, as several sources record that

5. Harriet M. Worden, *Old Mansion House Memories* [essays published in *The Circular* during 1871–72 (Utica, N.Y.: The Widtman Press, 1950), 7.]

6. Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father’s House: An Oneida Boyhood* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937), 10.

7. George W. Noyes, second-generation Oneida family member, quoted in Constance Noyes Robertson, *Oneida Community: An Autobiography, 1851–1876* (1970; reprint, Syracuse N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1981), 13.



Fig. 4. A June 1863 photograph showing the New Mansion, the first Children's House, and the Old Mansion.

he and Hamilton together staked out the ground for the foundations. Hamilton was ostensibly the architect for many of the later buildings as well. However, the more detailed information available for the later campaigns suggests that he functioned primarily as a recorder, using his architectural training to convert the results of Community decisions into floor plans and elevations. Given the nature of the relationship between Noyes and his followers in these early years, it is very likely that Hamilton's role was largely a matter of producing what today would be called construction documents from an architectural program⁸ determined by Noyes.

However it was developed, the plan of the two lower floors was straightforward, with both levels simply divided into thirds. On the lowest floor were a cellar built into the hillside, a kitchen, and a dining room. The second floor housed the printing office, school room, and meeting parlor. The *First Annual Report of the Oneida Association* also lists a reception room; possibly the school room was divided to create a reception area behind the door on the east fa-

8. In modern architecture, a *program* is the list of functions to be incorporated into the design and the approximate square footage assigned to each.

cade (figs. 3 and 4). The third floor was originally to have been divided into a number of double bedrooms, with the attic left undivided as a dormitory. A lack of money and the need to finish the building before winter set in led instead to the creation of the original, much celebrated “Tent Room”, in which a number of double sleeping compartments opening onto an open sitting area were created by hanging curtains on wires eight feet above the floor. As more members arrived, three wings were added; these housed primarily housekeeping facilities on the lower floors with sleeping space above.

The second-floor parlor space was the heart of the daily life of the Community, and of its spatial strategies for reinforcing desired beliefs and behaviors. The Community reasoned that a family spends its evenings together in a parlor; they defined themselves as a family; if they met in a parlor in the evening, it would make everyone feel more like a family; therefore, they needed a space large enough to hold the entire assembled membership. The space that made possible this evening ritual was actually called a parlor in the Old Mansion. In the New Mansion it came to be called “the Hall”, probably because it was so much larger than a single family parlor that the term could no longer support the exaggeration.

The parlor or hall thus became symbolic of the self-identification of the Perfectionists as one large family. Explicit statements to this effect abound in Community publications, such as the 1867 *Handbook*, which records that the members gather in the Hall “in the same manner that a family gathers around the hearth”,⁹ and the 1871 version, which refers to the space as the “Family Hall”.¹⁰ The meeting itself provided a crucial “social and educational advantage”, making it possible for all members of the Community to meet and participate in a shared spiritual and community life. The symbolic importance of the evening meeting and its role in melding Community members into one psychological unit is also frequently recognized in Community publications. One such article explained that the evening meeting called on the individual “to as-

9. *Handbooks of the Oneida Community 1867 & 1871 Bound with Mutual Criticism* (New York: AMS Press, 1976), 5.

10. *Handbook 1871*, 10.

sume his public or organic character”, to participate in a communal act that was “partly social, partly intellectual, partly industrial, and partly religious in character”.¹¹ The gathering was, in fact, a major component in the social glue that held the Community together. This function was so important from the very beginning that, at a time when some members were still sleeping in the shanties and the log cabin, when private space was severely limited, an entire third of a floor in the Old Mansion was devoted to the evening meeting “parlor”.

While the space given to the parlor reflected an internal objective, the printing office embodied the external objective to which John Humphrey Noyes devoted the majority of his time: conversion of the world to Perfectionism. Noyes and others of the Community produced a steady flow of newspapers, pamphlets, and books designed to spread the good word. Again, the amount of space allocated is a clue to priorities; the Printing Office occupied as many square feet as the parlor.

The plan of the Old Mansion House can also be “read” for evidence of the degree to which the Perfectionists’ professed commitment to Bible Communism and complex marriage was actually put into practice in the new settlement. Fully communal housekeeping was a reality. The single large kitchen and dining room in the original block, and the laundry with huge hot water boilers and a bakery with an eight-by-ten-foot brick oven in the wings, were obviously sized for collective use.

The physical evidence also makes it clear that with the completion of the Old Mansion, communal child raising was fully implemented. There was no space in the new structure for children to live with their birth parents. The written record tells us that when the adults moved into the Old Mansion, children and their designated attendants remained in the pre-existing structures till the next year. The physical record agrees; a separate communal dwelling, the first Children’s House, was erected in 1849.

Surprisingly, given that it was introduced among Noyes’s Putney followers before the relocation to Oneida, we do *not* see phys-

11. “Community Journal”, *The Circular* (10 February 1859), 11.

ical evidence suggesting that complex marriage was being practiced in 1848. There are no single bedrooms such as would later appear in the New Mansion House.¹² Although shared sleeping spaces would not necessarily make it impossible to implement complex marriage, the physical environment of 1848 gives no indication of its having been designed with the multiple interactions of complex marriage in mind.

The floor plan could easily have been reorganized to facilitate complex marriage by dividing the Tent Room and attic into smaller, single compartments. But despite a demonstrated willingness to remodel the Old Mansion to accommodate other changing needs,¹³ there is no evidence that the sleeping accommodations were rearranged. The physical evidence, therefore, strongly suggests that full integration of complex marriage into the social environment was a considerably longer process than much of the written record implies.

By the time the New Mansion House was built in 1861–62, we *do* find the Community producing a physical environment conducive to the practice of complex marriage. Indeed, it is likely that part of the motivation for building the New Mansion derived from the fact that the social environment had evolved in this regard, and that the Community therefore no longer found comfortable the “fit” between itself and its physical surroundings.

Full implementation of complex marriage, was not, of course, the only motivation. There was sheer population pressure: *The Circular* had been discussing the need for more residential space since 1855, when the Community population had reached 170. Certainly the success of the Community’s industries after the mid-

12. Moreover, the double bedrooms and Tent Room compartments on the third floor are specifically described, both in the *First Annual Report* and in Harriet Worden’s later account, as being for “married pairs”. Unmarried females shared compartments in two smaller tent rooms, and “unmarried men and boys” slept in the attic dormitory. This use of the terms “married” and “unmarried” in an official publication also suggests that complex marriage was not yet a fully accepted part of the social environment.

13. See for example the extensive reorganization of the cooking and dining facilities described in “Community Culinary Department”, *The Circular* (13 September 1869), 206.

A Principal Entrance
 B Wing
 C Tower
 D Second Entrance
 e Tower Entrance

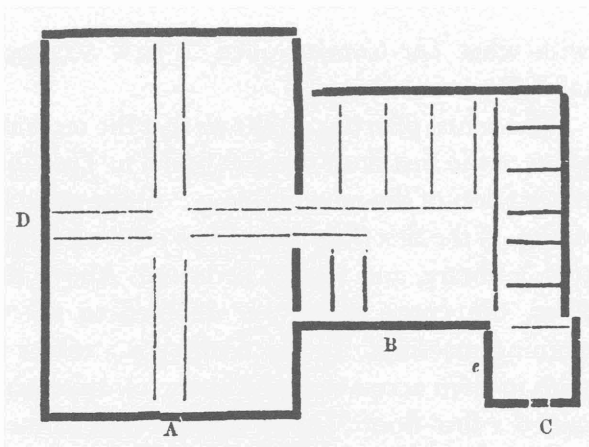


Fig. 5. Diagrammatic plan of the first floor of the New Mansion House, which appeared in an 1861 issue of *The Circular*.

1850s was a major factor. The new affluence made it financially possible not only to build a new home, but also to build it on a larger and grander scale (fig. 4).

We know a great deal more about the design process for the New Mansion House than we do for the Old. As early as 1856 the whole Community was involved in discussion of how to create what *The Circular* called “Community architecture—a style of building which shall be adapted to the character of our institution, and which shall represent in some degree the spirit by which we are actuated”.¹⁴ Harriet Worden reported that the design of a New Mansion was hotly debated in the evening meetings. Many specific plans and diagrams were put forward, some of them “amusingly elaborate”.¹⁵

Some of these schemes were described in *The Circular*. They fall into two general types. One group proposed various sizes of octagonal or round buildings, all with a large domed central space ringed by rooms for sleeping and other uses. Another group proposed a plan like that of the Old Mansion, generally making it larger and

14. “Community Architecture”, *The Circular* (9 November 1856), 166.

15. Worden, *Old Mansion House Memories*, 105.

with what *The Circular* called “a new arrangement of inside details”.¹⁶

The actual plan (fig. 5) shows that the second group won. A diagram of the first floor was published in *The Circular* with a detailed description of the new building.¹⁷ In the main block (designated A on fig. 5) the first floor housed an office, a reception room for visitors, a library, and a guest bedroom. Above these, on the second floor, the entire space was devoted to the two-story Hall for evening meetings. To the north was a tower forty feet high (C), with its own access stair and entry (e). Between them a wing contained a first-floor “family sitting room flanked on three sides by private apartments” (B). Above it was located a double-height sitting room of the same size flanked by two stories of private apartments, access to the third floor rooms being provided by a balcony that overlooked the second-floor sitting room.

After all the community-wide discussion that generated this plan, the only real “new arrangement of inside details” is the change from sleeping spaces shared by two or more individuals, to private bedrooms for all adults. The other changes were merely expansions to a more lavish scale of elements already present in the Old Mansion: a bigger meeting hall with an elaborately painted ceiling; two more tent room configurations, in which sleeping spaces open onto a sitting area; a suite of reception spaces; and a library instead of just a school room.

The only programmatic change—the introduction of individual private rooms—created an environment obviously more conducive to the smooth functioning of complex marriage. With the double bedrooms went the last remnants of dyadic marriage customs; individuals were now spatially free to conduct their sexual lives without inconvenience or embarrassment to others.

This switch to private rooms may also be indicative of a gradual realization that the occasional opportunity for individual privacy was a necessary safety valve in the intensely communal life of a Perfectionist settlement. In 1852 *The Circular* proclaimed:

16. “Community Architecture”, *The Circular* (9 November 1856), 166.

17. “An Oneida Journal”, *The Circular* (5 September 1861), 123.

It is our policy in everything, to favor and make attractive the common gathering place, rather than the private retreat. The balance of inducement should always be toward aggregation and not separation.¹⁸

By 1869, however, the tone had changed: while “it is not usual for individuals to make a sitting room of their private dormitories, still it would be perfectly proper for them to do so if they chose”.¹⁹ The plan of the New Mansion suggests that by 1861 the Community had come to appreciate the need for privacy, and therefore included this policy modification in the program for its new physical environment.

To summarize, comparison of the plans of the two Mansions suggests that four significant changes occurred in the social environment between 1848 and 1861: the Community got bigger, it got richer, it fully accepted complex marriage, and it developed an awareness of the need for individual privacy in the context of communal life.

It seems clear that social and physical environment were related at Oneida—but what was the nature of the relationship? Did the physical and social environments exist in a relationship of mutual causality? Might not human microsocieties possessing similar social structures tend to develop similar architectural programs? Are there instances of parallel behavior in communities that have evolved similar physical environments? I have approached these questions by identifying a second physical environment—which contains many of the same elements found in Oneida’s architectural program—and then asking whether the microsocieties that inhabited the two environments also shared elements of social organization.²⁰

Initially it may seem surprising to yoke a celibate microsociety with one in which members had multiple sexual partners; nevertheless, I have found that the architectural program for a monastery

18. “The Tent Room”, *The Circular* (25 April 1852), 94.

19. “The Upper Sitting Room”, *The Circular* (11 January 1869), 347.

20. This is not a cross-cultural argument; the working assumption is that the social structures of different cultures are inherently so different that this type of comparison would not be valid, though the possibility opens up another area of research.

of a Roman Catholic cloistered order strongly resembles that of the Oneida Community. Though individual monastery designs are affected by such factors as historical circumstances, location, ritual requirements of a particular order, and climate, the architectural program of Christian cloistered monasteries has been remarkably constant over time and geographic range. This generic program shares a remarkable number of elements with that of the Oneida Community.

The plan of the Cistercian Fountains Abbey in northern England illustrates this similarity. At its peak the population of the Abbey may have been twice that of Oneida at its highest point,²¹ so although the amount of space allocated to each function is often larger at Fountains, the catalog of functions is similar. Despite the difference in size, I chose Fountains Abbey from among the many possible examples because it is located in a part of England where the climate is similar to that of upstate New York, because much of the original fabric of its buildings is still in place, and because the functional program of its rooms and spaces is well established.

The first task is to demonstrate that the plans of a typical monastery and of the Oneida Community do indeed contain many analogous program elements. A point-by-point comparison of the program and plan of the Mansion House complex after 1878 (figs. 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3) with those of Fountains Abbey (figs. 7.1 and 7.2) is presented in Table 1, which also serves as a key to the plans.²²

Many of the shared elements, such as dining rooms, kitchens, sanitary facilities, and laundries, are common to most human housing arrangements and so not particularly relevant for our purposes.

21. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Fountains may have housed five to six hundred, while Oneida's highest count (in 1878 and including only the adults) was 309. The Fountains figure is from R. Gilyard-Beer, *Fountains Abbey* (London: HMSO, 1989), 9; the Oneida number is from Robertson, *Autobiography*, 23.

22. The plans shown in figs. 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 are essentially the plans published by Hayden in *Seven American Utopias*. I've corrected them in some places. The plans shown in figs. 7.1 and 7.2 are from an untitled pamphlet on the Abbey published by English Heritage (the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission of England) for the National Trust in 1986 and reprinted in 1989.

However, the two plans also share a number of elements that are not merely concomitants of communal living.

Both plans include reception areas that create a threshold and serve as places for interaction with the world outside. Monasteries have a porter's lodge, guest parlors, and overnight accommodations. Oneida had the office where one of the older women waited to receive visitors, a reception parlor, and a guest room (respectively labelled I, J, and K on both figs. 6 and 7). While these elements are also common to the plan of a boarding school, as is the library (L), the boarding school derives directly from the medieval monastery and replicates specific aspects of its social order. We can therefore allow for correspondence in their physical environments in areas where their social purposes overlap.

Monks and cloistered nuns gathered (and still do) daily in a Chapter House to hear the Bible read, learn of changes in work assignments, and discuss the affairs of the community. The Perfectionists had their Hall, in which they did many of the same things (F). Fully vowed members of orders and Oneida adults were typically assigned private rooms or cells (M), while both religious novices and Oneida children slept in dormitories (N) under the surveillance of novice masters or mistresses, or Children's House attendants. The private spaces in both cases are small, plainly furnished, and undecorated. The collective environments are both more elaborately decorated and more generous in scale.

In both cases the accommodations of the leader are exceptional. The abbot or abbess had more space, often with more direct access to the outside, than did the rest of the community. The abbot's quarters at Fountains, a suite of several rooms with its own stair, are located on the second level, across the reredorter from the cells of the monks. It should be no surprise to learn that John Humphrey Noyes first occupied one of the three noticeably larger rooms located in the tower of the New Mansion, which had its own entrance and access stair, or that after the 1868 construction of the Children's House wing he moved to a second-floor suite covering more square feet than a communal sitting room, next to a stair leading directly to the new side entry (P).

Both the typical monastery and Oneida include an open space

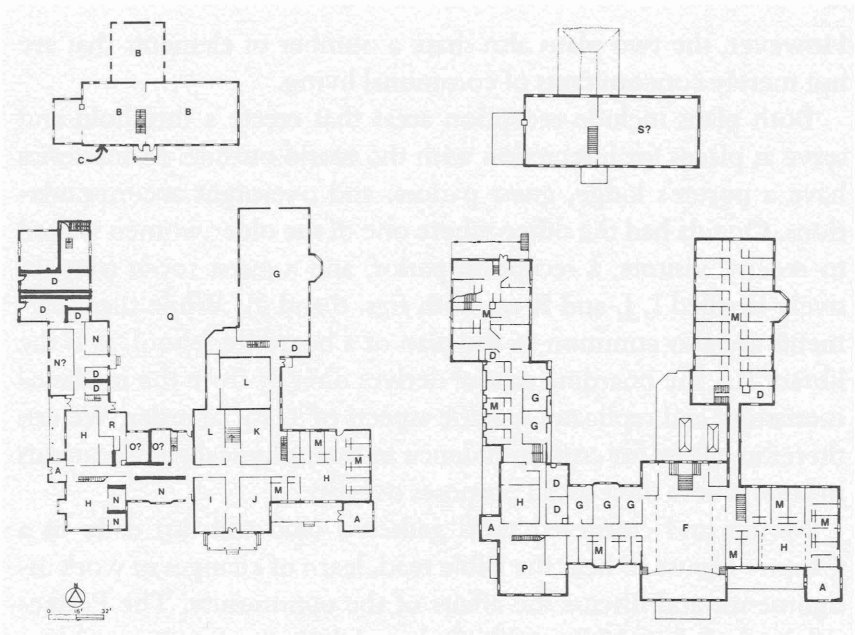


Fig. 6.1. First-floor plan of the Mansion House after 1878.

Fig. 6.2. Second-floor plan of the Mansion House after 1878.

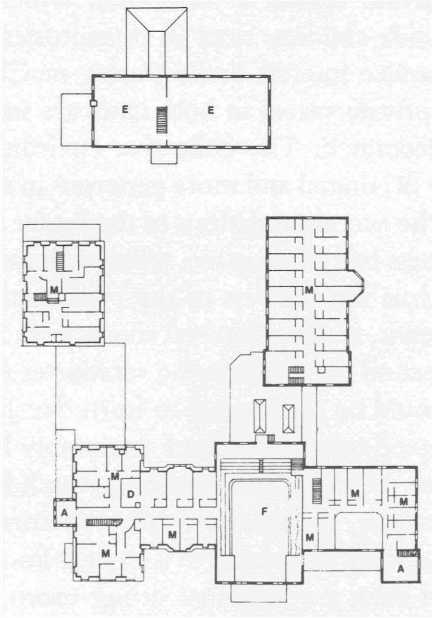


Fig. 6.3. Third-floor plan of the Mansion House after 1878.

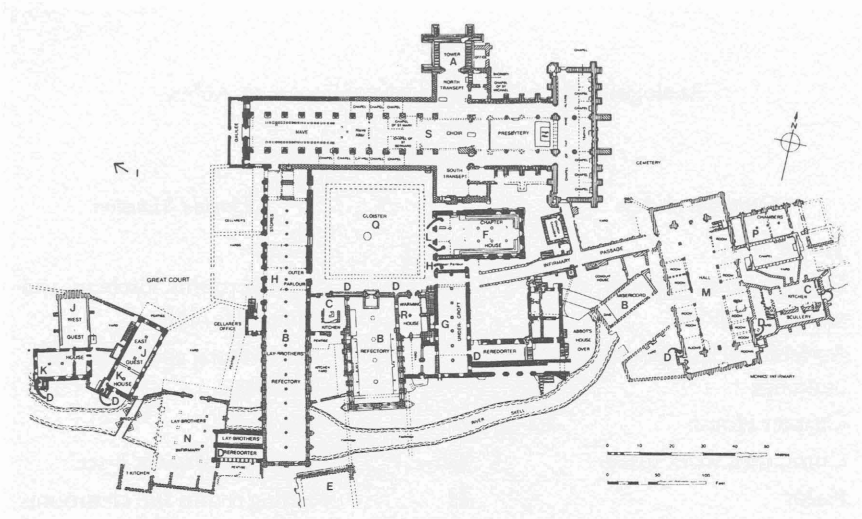


Fig. 7.1. First-floor plan of Fountains Abbey.

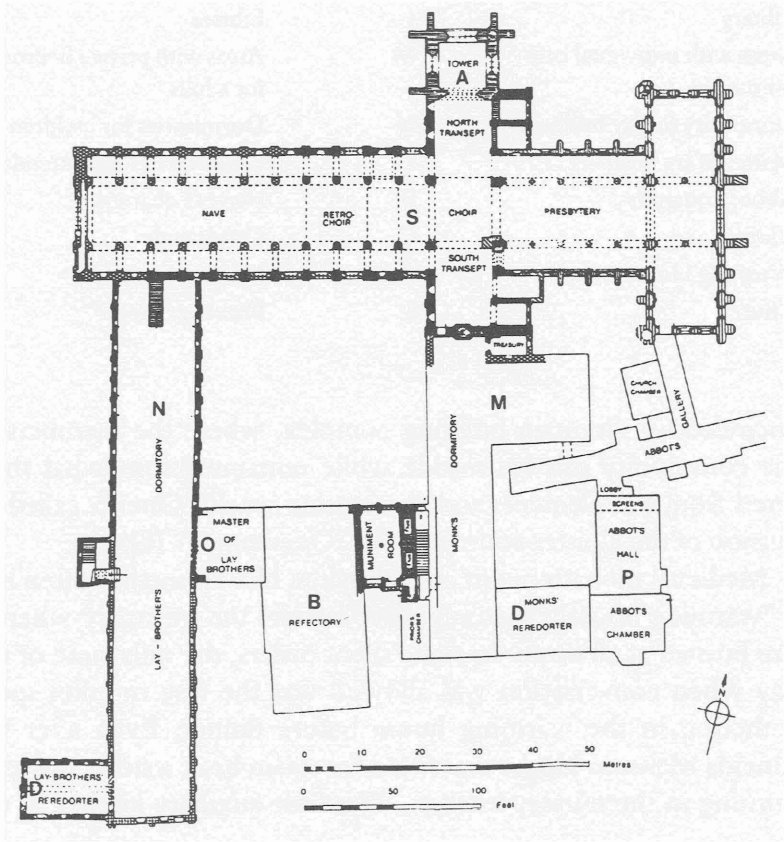


Fig. 7.2. Second-floor plan of Fountains Abbey.

Table 1
 Analogous elements in the plans of Fountains Abbey
 and of the
 Oneida Mansion House complex

<i>Fountains Abbey</i>	<i>Key</i>	<i>Oneida Mansion</i>
Tower	A	Tower
Dining rooms, kitchens, and sanitary facilities	B,C,D	Dining rooms, kitchens, and sanitary facilities
Agricultural and industrial buildings	E	Agricultural and industrial buildings
Chapter House	F	Big Hall
Communal work space	G	Communal work space
Parlor	H	Sitting rooms and classrooms
Gatehouse, guest parlors, and guest rooms	I,J,K	Office, reception parlor, and guest room
Library	L	Library
Areas with individual cells for monks	M	Areas with private bedrooms for adults
Dormitory for lay brothers	N	Dormitories for children
Master of lay brothers	O	Children's House attendants
Abbot's quarters	P	Noyes's quarters
Cloister	Q	Quadrangle
Warming House	R	Nursery kitchen
Church	S	Printing office

encircled by the main building complex, where the members of the community can be outside while remaining somewhat sheltered from the elements and the outside world. Oneida called its version of the cloister courtyard the “Quadrangle” (Q).

Medieval monasteries in cold climates, like Fountains, often had a “warming house”, the only place besides the infirmary where a fire burned at all times. In some silent orders, the only time of the day when conversation was allowed was the few minutes spent gathering in the warming house before dinner. Even after the Oneida Mansion House was fitted for steam heat, a stove was kept burning in the nursery kitchen. This little auxiliary kitchen at the

junction of the New Children's House and the adults' quarters was furnished with sofas and rockers, and was a favored place for conversation (R).

There is of course one element of the program of a monastery that is conspicuously missing at Oneida: the church. The Perfectionists set aside no space as consecrated or sacramental, just as they observed no holy day; Sunday was a day like any other. For the members of a cloistered order, the church is not only a ritual space, but also the place in which they do their most important public work. While a monk or cloistered nun has personal devotions and duties related to the ongoing operation of the House, his or her primary purpose is to pray for the well-being of the world. Perfectionists were also involved with their own spiritual development and with daily operations, but they too had a larger goal: to show the world the path to perfection by spreading the word in their publications. Might not the church be seen as a functional equivalent to the Oneida Printing Office (S)?

If one accepts that there is a high degree of congruence between the two architectural programs, the next step is to compare the social practices to see whether they too exhibit similarities. This does indeed turn out to be the case.

Fundamental to the social structure of both microsocieties is the discouragement of attachment between individuals in favor of attachment to the collective. In religion it is called "particular friendship"; at Oneida it was "special love". In both instances it was severely criticized. Mechanisms that worked to prevent it were found in both types of community, including rotation of work assignments, and rules governing individual social interactions.

Both built into the social system the modification of deviant behavior by means of group critique. Perfectionists judged to be in spiritual error were called to face a session of "mutual criticism", in which members of the Community discussed the individual's failings and offered spiritual advice. An erring member of a cloistered order might be called to admit his or her error during a "chapter of faults". In both environments this public critique and spiritual guidance by other members of the community could also be undertaken voluntarily.

Questions of property were dealt with in much the same way by the two groups. Upon entry to either, individual holdings were put into a common pool of capital and goods. The original sum was returned when an individual left either community, unless, in the monastic case, full vows had been taken.

Full membership in both communities was granted only after a period of study by the applicant and approval of his or her spiritual progress. In religion this took the form of the novitiate, while the Perfectionists required applicants to study by correspondence before they could be accepted into the Community.

There are further parallels: a member of an order and a woman of Oneida were both immediately recognizable by their distinctive clothing; few personal possessions were allowed in either type of community; and most members spent their days on the grounds of the institution unless sent out with a mission. Two final issues deserve special attention: political organization and sexuality.

Politically, the cloistered order and the Oneida Community were structured similarly, each having a leader who held nearly absolute authority but was advised by a council. An interesting difference emerges, however, when we look at the transfer of leadership. In cloistered orders a new leader was elected by a vote of all members who had taken full vows. This practice promoted cohesion, as the majority of the community must have declared themselves to be in support of a candidate before he or she assumed office. John Humphrey Noyes did not follow this pattern, attempting instead to name his oldest son as his successor. His attempt to establish a dynastic succession generally has been recognized as one of the causes of the Community's ultimate dissolution.

On the question of sexuality, at first glance it hardly seems possible to find two communities more *un*-alike than Oneida and a cloistered monastery. Stepping up a rung on the abstraction ladder, however, changes the view. In both cases control of individual sexuality was given over to the collective. Conformance to a nonstandard group norm was required, so that both communities existed in the context of a larger society that did not share that norm. The practice of celibacy and the sanctioning of multiple sexual partners are both behaviors unacceptable to society at large, though perhaps

for rather different reasons. As Lewis A. Coser points out, successful utopian communities—into which category fall both the generic monastery and Oneida—recognize that dyadic sexual relations threaten allegiance to the collective, and either eliminate or strongly de-emphasize attachments between individuals.²³ Roman Catholic monasticism and Noyesian Perfectionism chose different mechanisms for accomplishing analogous goals.

There are in fact so many commonalities, both in architectural program and in social structure, that one is tempted to ask just how much John Humphrey Noyes knew about medieval monasticism. There is no evidence that he ever studied or visited monasteries, however, which makes it unlikely that these similarities stemmed from an intentional recreation of the monastic model. Instead, it seems clear that they resulted from what might be called convergent evolution. As the social structure and the architectural program of both groups evolved, both found that certain ways of arranging the physical environment were most successful in accommodating and reinforcing the behaviors mandated by their social environments. Just as the desired behaviors are congruent, so are the spaces that house them.

A monastic community and the Oneida of the Perfectionists had the same ultimate goal: making it possible for members to devote their lives to a vision of spirituality, whether that be called saintliness or perfection, in order that they might work toward their own and the world's salvation. To achieve this goal, both found it necessary to create a nonnormative social environment in which untypical social behaviors were required of members. There are numerous parallels in the structures of these social environments. Though they evolved independently, the architectural programs of the institutions created to house both groups also share many elements. Without sliding into environmental determinism, we can conclude that there is a component of mutual causality in the relationship between the social and physical structures developed by the two groups. Both chose to include particular elements in their physical environment because those elements were the ones that,

23. Lewis A. Coser, *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment* (New York: The Free Press, 1974), 138.

out of the nearly infinite possibilities, best reflected and reinforced the common elements of their social environments. These make up architectural programs of striking similarity, because they are “in all respects adapted to a Community like ours”.