

Fall 1993

## Foreword and Preface, from Courier, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, Fall 1993

Robert Fogarty  
*Antioch College*

Mark F. Weimer  
*Syracuse University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/libassoc>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Fogarty, Robert and Weimer, Mark F., "Foreword and Preface, from Courier, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, Fall 1993" (1993). *The Courier*. 299.

<https://surface.syr.edu/libassoc/299>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Libraries at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Courier by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact [surface@syr.edu](mailto:surface@syr.edu).

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY ASSOCIATES  
C O U R I E R



OUT OF THE FOLD.

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

VOLUME XXVIII, NUMBER 2, FALL 1993

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY ASSOCIATES  
COURIER

VOLUME XXVIII

NUMBER TWO

FALL 1993

---

Foreword

By Robert Fogarty, Professor of History and Editor,  
*The Antioch Review*, Antioch College 3

Preface

By Mark F. Weimer, Curator of Special Collections,  
Syracuse University Library, and Guest Editor,  
*Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 7

John Humphrey Noyes and Millennialism

By Michael Barkun, Professor of Political Science,  
Syracuse University 11

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

By Janet White, Ph.D. Candidate in History of  
Architecture and Urbanism, Cornell University 23

Women, Family, and Utopia: The Oneida Community Experience and Its Implications for the Present

By Lawrence Foster, Associate Professor of American  
History, Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta 45

“Mingling the Sexes”: The Gendered Organization of Work in the Oneida Community

By Marlyn Klee-Hartzell, Associate Professor of  
Political Science, Adelphi University 61

Breaching the “Wall of Partition Between the Male and the Female”: John Humphrey Noyes and Free Love

By Louis J. Kern, Professor of History,  
Hofstra University 87

An Interview with Spencer Klaw

By Mary Beth Hinton, Editor,  
*Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 117

From the Collections

129

# Foreword

WHEN IN 1962, I first visited the rare book collection of the Syracuse University Library to begin researching the history of the Oneida Community, I explored the foundation of what is now a distinguished and growing body of material related to America's most complex communal venture. That foundation had been laid when Lester G. Wells, then curator, acquired a full run of the Community periodicals and a substantial body of pamphlets. The "O. C. Collection" as outlined by Wells in his 1961 bibliography\* provided me with enough data to grasp the details of Community life reported in their own periodicals. Since then many researchers have journeyed to Syracuse to mine those periodicals and pamphlets (in 1973 they were made available on microfilm to other libraries), and I am sure that scholars will continue to explore the primary sources gathered by Mark Weimer and opened in 1993.

There has never been a shortage of interpretations of the Community, and the essays in this volume reflect the growing sophistication of writers about Oneida. That was not always the case. For some earlier commentators the Community's leader, John Humphrey Noyes, was either saint or satyr; and the Community itself either on the flying edge of the future or regressing into another century. The approaches taken in these essays stand on a body of source material grown richer over the years; on scholarly work that has treated Noyes seriously and has regarded the Community within a wider pattern of social reform and a narrower one of personal development; and on a continuing debate in scholarly circles about the meaning and import of the Oneida Community.

Michael Barkun was among the first scholars to focus on the millennialist thought of Noyes and the impact of a "Last Days" theology on the membership. By placing Oneida within the Millerite context, he has been able to draw attention to the importance of

\*Lester G. Wells, comp., *The Oneida Community Collection in the Syracuse University Library* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Library, 1961).

millennialist notions not only for the Oneida Community but for other utopian communities, past and present. Both Louis Kern and Lawrence Foster have, in their distinctive ways, forced students to look closely at the intellectual character of Noyes's theology and social theory. John Humphrey Noyes thought of himself as a serious thinker, and he pondered the meaning of sexuality in closely reasoned pamphlets and "Home Talks" to the society. His views on "complex marriage" emanated from a theology shaped by a century of debate over the meaning of "perfection", by a society struggling to define its own boundaries and to reach consensus about the meaning of community and individualism. Oneida—for Barkun, Kern, and Foster—was part of a larger social and intellectual struggle, and there is still much to be learned from it today.

Yet Oneida was not just an abstract idea, as both Janet White and Marlyn Klee-Hartzell amply demonstrate; it was a growing and contradictory community. For all their talk about equality and freedom between the sexes, the members maintained some traditional domestic routines and barely reshaped the work agenda. How men and women related to one another was at the core of the Oneida experiment. Klee-Hartzell's close probing of work assignments and attitudes is part of a "gendering" process that measures social rhetoric against reality. White has been drawn to the architecture of Community life and finds that the building plan at Oneida, developed under Erastus Hamilton's hands and John Humphrey Noyes's eyes, closely resembles the plan of a medieval monastery, its spatial arrangements being dictated by religious and social logic.

Spencer Klaw's fascination with the Oneida story and his progress through Community documents that led to the publication in 1993 of *Without Sin: The Life and Death of the Oneida Community*, shows how powerful a magnet the Perfectionists have been for researchers who try to comprehend not only the Community but also its place in nineteenth-century American society. With the opening to the public of additional source material in 1993, Mark Weimer reminds us that the story and the personalities—both major and minor—will continue to intrigue scholars.

The Oneida Community has remained for me a constant source

of wonder and interest—wonder because it succeeded in such a bold manner for so long, and because it was able to transform itself on several occasions; interest because of its many facets: it played an important role in our culture’s intellectual history and an inspirational role in the history of social settlements. It contained both believers and skeptics; it was both a conservative system and a radical one. The contradictions it embraced continue to fascinate historians of religion, sociologists of small groups, and political scientists of democratic institutions. The writings drawn together here raise key questions, key issues. More will be written.

ROBERT FOGARTY  
Professor of History and  
Editor, *The Antioch Review*



# Preface

SEVENTY YEARS AGO—in reply to a letter from Hope Emily Allen that was full of trepidation about the handling of the Oneida Community’s legacy, especially by one Mrs. Smith—George Bernard Shaw wrote:

I agree with you that only a symposium could do justice to the Oneida Creek Community’s history: but the difficulty seems to be that the witnesses wont sympose. This being so, there is nothing for it but to let Mrs. Smith tell her history and provoke retorts, so that we shall get the symposium in different covers instead of in one book.<sup>1</sup>

Hope Allen, a respected medievalist, was born in the Mansion House a few years after the breakup of the Oneida Community. She became the Community’s archivist after her return as an adult to Oneida. Shaw’s keen interest in the Oneida Community was most fully articulated in his essay “The Perfectionist Experiment at Oneida Creek”, which appeared as part of “The Revolutionist Handbook” appended to *Man and Superman* (1903).

Neither Shaw nor Allen lived to see the first Oneida Community symposium, organized in 1984 by Hope Allen’s grandniece, Sister Prudence Allen, R.S.M., and entitled “The Oneida Community: What Are Its Lessons for Today?”<sup>2</sup> Nine years later, on 3–4 April 1993, a fuller symposium such as that envisioned by both Shaw and Allen took place as “family” members or descendants of the original Community, Mansion House residents, friends and neighbors, and committed scholars gathered in the Big Hall of the Oneida Community Mansion House to share experiences, memories, and scholarship.

1. The full text of the extant Hope Emily Allen–George Bernard Shaw correspondence is published here in “From the Collections”.

2. An “Evening Dialogue” presented on 24 May 1984 in Washington, D.C., under the auspices of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Smithsonian Institution.

The 1993 meeting, organized by Mansion House Director Richard Kathmann and funded, in part, by the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, was a celebration not only of the Community's history but of its surviving archives and, perhaps most significantly, the acceptance by this generation of Community descendants of their ancestors' unique vision and experience.

The connection between the Oneida Community and Syracuse University began in 1879 when the University hosted a convention of clergy whose stated goal was the complete eradication of the Community (see *Puck* cartoon on the cover). With that beginning, relations could only improve, and over the past forty years they have done just that.

In 1983 the Oneida Community descendants who were entrusted with the Community's historical records transferred them to the Syracuse University Library to ensure both their preservation and their future accessibility to scholars and "family" members.

The Syracuse University Library now holds the largest collection of Oneida Community records in existence. Gathered together by my predecessors, especially Lester G. Wells and Jack Ericson, and augmented by the remarkable manuscript material received in 1983, the Oneida Community Collection contains every surviving book, newspaper, pamphlet, and example of job-printing. In addition, the George Wallingford Noyes Papers contain more than 2000 pages of typed transcripts of manuscripts that were intentionally destroyed in the 1940s by Community descendants who feared that public knowledge of the Community's history might hurt the image of the silver company. Photographs, diaries, business records, letters, sketchbooks, and stenographic reports of meetings and talks give us a vivid picture of life in the Community that is far richer than the extensive yet mostly secondary sources that had been available to scholars before 1983. Over many years the Library has provided access to the Oneida Collection not only in the reading room of the Department of Special Collections but also through microfilm and other technologies, including electronic transmission: scholars around the world can now retrieve selected digital images through the Internet.

Furthermore, Syracuse University Press has published and con-



tinues to make available critically important works relating to the history of the Oneida Community. Given this close relationship with the University, it is appropriate that selected papers from the 1993 Oneida Community Seminar appear now for the first time in this issue of the *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier*.

In 1924 Shaw was disappointed that the symposium would come out “in different covers instead of in one book”. Yet many books have been and will be written, because the Oneida Community raised fundamental and universal questions about humanity in relation to love and to work and to God. Those who live in the Mansion House, visit the museum, and study the archives continue to ponder these questions. The papers gathered here will, I feel, prompt further investigations, fascinations, and celebrations of the Oneida Community. This is not *the* symposium, but rather a new chapter in an evolving and enlarging multivolume study made possible because finally, in our time, the witnesses *will* sympose!

MARK F. WEIMER  
Curator of Special Collections,  
Syracuse University Library, and  
Guest Editor, *Syracuse University  
Library Associates Courier*

Note: The editors would like to thank Gail Doering, Curator of the Oneida Community Mansion House, for her help in selecting and providing background information about the photographs in this issue.