Covenant, contract and consent: an analysis of utopian engagement and its implications in the Oneida Community (1848-1880)

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1 Introduction

In spring 1848, a new community was founded in Madison County, New York, by John Humphrey Noyes and his followers (Oneida Association 1849, 4). Most of the members of the newly-created Oneida Community originally came from the town of Putney, Vermont, where they had previously organized into a commune – a type of community where members gave away their property to the group in 1836. The Oneida Community was known for its practice of complex marriage*, a form of group marriage where each adult male and each adult female were heterosexually married (M. C. Smith 2021, 11). This social and religious institution was one of the leading causes for the community's displacement: when Noyes announced in October, 1847 that the Putney communards were planning on implementing complex marriage, [1] he was charged with "adultery and fornication" (Eastman 1849, 36; Foster [1981] 1984, 102). At that time, the Perfectionists were also the object of a looming threat of mob attack by their neighbors (Robertson 1970, 12). These factors pushed the members of the Putney Association to leave Vermont and look for a new territory. At Oneida, they could settle and organize their geographic, social and economic space in such a way as to accommodate their heterodox theology with its social and sexual corollaries.

1.1 Before the Oneida Community: foundation(s)

1.1.1 The religious principles of the Putney Association and Oneida Community

John Humphrey Noyes (1811-1886) was born in Brattleboro, Vermont, to Poly Hayes and John Noyes, two white, middle-class descendants of New-England families. After he dropped out from the study of the law at Dartmouth, New Hampshire, he moved to Connecticut and joined the Andover Theological Seminary in 1831, before gaining admission to the "more liberal and innovative" Yale Theological Seminary in 1832 (Foster [1981] 1984, 76). He obtained his license to preach in 1833, and served as a minister at the New Haven Free Church[2] where he met James Boyle, with whom he published a newspaper, the *Perfectionist*.

[1] The definitions of the words followed by an asterisk can be found in the glossary included at the end of this dissertation.

[2] "Free church" was a term used to describe churches where believers were presented with unorthodox and radical teachings that they could not find in more traditional denominations (Parker [1935] 1972, 21).

Only a few issues were released before 1834, when Noyes's career in New Haven came to an end.

At the Yale Theological Seminary, he had indeed become familiar with the prophetic teachings of Moses Stuart (Giltner 1988, 32), whose views were that the Second Coming of Christ would occur in the near future (Foster [1981] 1984, 77). Drawing on Stuart's vision of the imminent Coming of Christ and the subsequent beginning of a thousand years of divine rule – a theory known as millennialism (Thorsen 2020, 184) – Noyes elaborated his own theology. Notably, he coupled Stuart's thesis with a preterist view[3] of the events described in the Book of Revelations, i.e. that the events prophesized by Jesus Christ, including his Second Coming and the Final Judgement of souls, had already occurred during the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Noyes affirmed that the Second Coming was to be understood as a spiritual event (Parker [1935] 1972, 112). Consequently, the age in which Noyes and his contemporaries lived was already "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1, King James Version). In addition, his study of the Bible convinced him that "[t]he total perfection that God demanded of all true Christians was a right attitude and *inner sense of assurance of salvation from sin*, not any outward works per se" (Foster [1981] 1984, 77 [my emphasis]). In elaborating such scandalous opinions, Noyes was tiptoeing the fine line between Bible literalism and blatant unorthodoxy. He crossed that line on February 20, 1834, when he preached on a verse from the Book of John: "He that committeth sin is of the devil" (1 John 3:8, King James Version). For his audience, his stance amounted to declaring that he was free from sin; this blasphemous sermon led to his being expelled from the ministry, and his return to Vermont.

Since he was the spiritual leader of the Putney and Oneida communities, Noyes's religious beliefs shaped the ideological orientation of the groups as a whole: in a reply to a letter sent to the Oneida Community, Noyes's brother George wrote "[i]t is true that the most direct method of becoming acquainted with the position of the Association […] is by a thorough understanding of the published works of J. H. Noyes, who is its central mind" (Oneida Association 1850, 31). Upon returning to Putney, Noyes led a group of believers,

[3] The view described here is that of "full preterism" – also known as the "70 AD doctrine," or "realized eschatology." It defended the view that all the prophecies announced in the Book of Revelations of the Bible had already taken place (Thorsen 2020, 184).

known as the Putney Bible School. Among them were his youngest siblings: Harriet (born 1817), Charlotte (born in 1819), and his brother George (born in 1822), along with Quaker preacher John L. Skinner from New Hampshire who joined in 1839, Perfectionists Mary and George Cragin from 1840, and Putney-based storekeeper John R. Miller from April 1841 (G. W. Noyes 1931, 49; Parker [1935] 1972, 10; 91; 95). Charlotte married John R. Miller in 1841, a few months after Harriet's own marriage to John L. Skinner (Parker [1935] 1972, 93). In 1838, Noyes had himself married Harriet Holton, with whose dowry money they were able to afford a house and a printing press that enabled him to resume the publication of the *Witness*, a newspaper that had been discontinued after three editions in 1837. The year 1837 was indeed marked by the publication of a scandal-inducing letter, in which Noyes expressed unorthodox views on marriage. In the "The Battle-Axe and Weapons of War" letter, Noyes indeed stated that "[w]hen the will of God is done on earth, as it is in heaven, there will be no marriage"[4] (J. H. Noyes 1837). His rejection of the institution went as far as negating the validity of monogamy: "I call a certain woman my wife – she is yours, she is Christ's, and in him she is the bride of all saints. She is dear in the hand of a stranger, and according to my promise to her, I rejoice" (J. H. Noyes 1837). While Noyes developed theories about non-monogamous unions throughout the 1830s and 1840s, no practical implementation of his ideas happened before May, 1846, when he and his wife came to an agreement with Mary Cragin and her husband George, to give each other "full liberty" within their little group of four (G. W. Noyes 1931, 201). This was the basis for subsequent developments of marital arrangements in the Putney Association, and then in the Oneida Community. As more and more people were introduced to group marriage, starting with Noyes's siblings and their spouses, the question of controlling potential births became central.

Throughout her first six years of marriage, Harriet H. Noyes underwent five pregnancies, only one of which resulted in the child's survival. The strain that child-bearing placed on women's lives was later identified by John H. Noyes as the trigger for the elaboration of his theory of sexual restraint in 1844, known as "male continence" (Wonderley 2017, 53). It

[4] "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30, King James Version). This verse was pivotal in delineating the Shakers' and Mormons' attitudes towards marriage, along with Luke 20:35 ("But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage" [King James Version]) (Davenport 2022, 39).

was rooted in the distinction between the "amative" – the affective relationship created through love – and the "propagative" – or reproductive – aspects of a sexual relation (Oneida Association 1849, 28). From that distinction Noyes deduced the benefits of engaging in amativeness without giving in to propagative instincts. Several publications emphasized this point, such as this passage in which Noyes's ideas were didacticized and published in print:

> It consists in analyzing sexual intercourse, recognizing in it two distinct acts, the social and the propagative, which can be separated practically, and affirming that it is best, not only with reference to remote prudential considerations, but for immediate pleasure, that a man should content himself with the social act, except when he intends procreation.
> (Oneida Community 1867, 70; republished in. J. H. Noyes 1872, 8)

The ideas of John H. Noyes were exceptional as for the solution he proposed, but as far as they addressed the issue of "involuntary propagation" (J. H. Noyes 1872, 4), they were tackling a widespread concern for reformers in the nineteenth century. Robert Dale Owen, for instance, had also denounced the unwanted conception of children in his 1846 *Moral Physiology*, through a pathetic lamentation of unplanned pregnancies: "Thus many children that are brought into the world owe their existence, not to deliberate conviction in their parents that their birth was really desirable, but simply to an unreasoning instinct, which men, in the mass, have not learnt either to resist or control" (Owen 1846, chap. 2). The subtitle of his essay, *A Brief and Plain treatise on the Population Question* further highlights the challenge that birth control represented for reformers in the nineteenth century.

1.1.2 The Putney Perfectionists: delineating the limits of engagement

In many regards, the Association of Perfectionists in Putney was a precursor of the more-developed, larger Oneida Community. However, this does not imply that the Putney Association did not have institutional complexity of its own. It was indeed structured through a series of signed contracts and even a constitution – something that never existed at Oneida. After John H. Noyes's return to Putney, the Bible School was formally constituted on January 31, 1841, when the members signed a first constitution instituting a set of rules through its six articles detailing its purpose, which was in particular to "assist each other by discussion and exhortation in the faith of salvation from sin" (Article IV, qtd. in G. W. Noyes; 1931, 48).

Subsequently, the members pooled together their resources: the Noyeses's parts of their father's property, along with consequent contribution from Harriet H. Noyes and John R. Miller, and comparatively more modest participation from the Cragins and John L. Skinner. Together, their capital amounted to about $38,000; because of its explicitly economic dimension, the Association became referred to as the Putney Corporation (G. W. Noyes 1931, 49). In 1841, the Perfectionist store and a chapel were built in Putney on the main square, thereby developing their public image among the Putney inhabitants (Parker [1935] 1972, 96). The store was kept by Miller, and contributed to the corporation's finances, along with the revenue from two farms held by the Noyeses (G. W. Noyes 1931, 55). Only after the consolidation of the economy of the Association were non-contributing members allowed to join in. From 1843 to 1846, the Putney Corporation financially supported twenty-eight adults and nine children (G. W. Noyes 1931, 50; Parker [1935] 1972, 96). While the Perfectionists shared an aspiration to "publish the gospel and help one another in spiritual things," and might have thus needed to structure their finances, they did not in fact intend to consolidate into a full-fledged community – at least as this point in their development (John H. Noyes, letter dated January 10, 1843 qtd. in G. W. Noyes 1931, 55).

On February 26, 1844, a new contract was signed, turning the corporation into a joint-stock company legally owned by the four male founding members: John H. Noyes, George W. Noyes, John R. Miller and John L. Skinner. Under this "Contract of Partnership," the property and debts of the corporation were held in common among the four men (G. W. Noyes 1931, 70). The contract was upheld until March 9, 1845, when it was replaced by a new constitution involving all the members, whether or not they contributed financially. It ensured that, in the event of dissolution, each person would receive an amount of money proportional to the time they had spent in the group. It guaranteed financial support by the common purse in exchange for the supervision of the members' expenses by the elected officers of the corporation. Indeed, the 1845 constitution also provided bases for the election of community officials: Miller was elected president, Skinner became the secretary, and the two Noyes brothers, alongside George Cragin, held the positions of directors (G. W. Noyes 1931, 72–73). The constitution was renewed the following year; however, Oneida descendant George Wallingford Noyes noted that the constitution and its authority soon lost their importance – one sign being that it was not repeated afterwards (G. W. Noyes 1931, 73).

As far as legal bases for the repartition of property were concerned, the Putney corporation therefore experimented with several formats, settling for a solution in which the members and the group were financially bound together. If no more attempts at structuring the Association occurred at the economic level, some steps were still taken in the religious and social domains. In early November, 1846, the Noyeses, Cragins, Skinners and Millers signed a "Statement of Principles" in which they agreed on the terms of their "social union": in addition to surrendering all private property, they placed themselves under the guidance of John H. Noyes, as the "father" of their "family" (qtd. in G. W. Noyes 1931, 205–6). Following this new compact among the families, the practical implementation of Noyes's theories about complex marriage started. The Noyeses and the Cragins moved in together, and the Millers and Skinners formed another household with the Leonards.

While the Perfectionists refined and carried out several forms of Association, tensions arose with the neighboring Putney inhabitants. The Putney communards were accused of living an immoral life. For instance, the birth of Mary Cragin's twins[5] in September, 1847 – whose father probably was John H. Noyes – was frowned upon in the vicinity (Parker [1935] 1972, 130). Less than a year after the beginning of the experiment of complex marriage, on October 27, 1847, Noyes was charged with adultery; his bail was paid and he was released awaiting trial.

In parallel, in early September, 1847, two Perfectionists conventions were held in Lairdsville and in Genoa, two towns in the state of New York. It was attended by members of Perfectionist groups from the state, and from Vermont. John and Harriet Noyes went to the meetings in the name of the colony of Putney. The ideas and practices of the Putney group were at the center of the debates among Perfectionists during both conventions (Wonderley 2017, 48). After the Lairdsville meeting, the Perfectionists agreed to collaborate with the Putney corporation. In the wake of the Genoa meeting, the New York Perfectionists also resolved to emulate the example of Putney in creating a similar association in the state of New York. Among those who pledged their intention to work towards the advent of such community was Jonathan Burt, who had bought some land in Oneida Reserve (see Appendix 1). By the end of November, 1847, a few Perfectionist families from the nearby town of New Hamilton had settled on his land : the Hatches, the Nashes and the Ackleys (Wonderley 2017, 48). In

[5] The twins were named Victoria and Victor Cragin Noyes. Victoria died during infancy.

November 1847, as their leader was becoming investigated by the justice system, the Putney Perfectionists started their "exodus" westwards (Oneida Community 1867, 10).

1.2 Settling in Oneida: a brief presentation

1.2.1 Places and members

The new Perfectionist settlement at Oneida first consisted in two dwelling houses and two cabins that the members used as dormitories (Oneida Association 1849, 4). Very soon, with the help of Erastus Hamilton, an architect who had joined from Syracuse in spring of 1848, a wooden Mansion House was erected, accommodating a dining-room, a kitchen and a cellar on the ground floor; a parlor and diverse reception and more informal spaces on the second floor; bedrooms and more private sitting rooms on the third floor. In 1849, the Oneidans added a new wing, supplied with running hot water with a laundry room and additional baking space, as well as more dormitories on the second floor (Oneida Association 1850, 5). A separate building for children was also created in 1849, even though they still took their meals in the common Mansion House (Oneida Association 1850, 5). With the increase of the number of members, the Oneida Community hired workers to build a brick Mansion House between 1861 and 1862 – a building that is still standing today (Wonderley 2017, 127). In total, five other buildings were added to the central dwelling place of the adult Oneidans, among which were one for "general dining-hall," another one for the preparation of baked goods, and the Tontine, a building equipped with machines for the washing, fruit-canning, bag-making departments and the printing office (Oneida Community 1867, 4; Wonderley 2017, 126).

In the first years of its existence, the Oneida Community developed a network of satellite communities. For instance, when Henry Allen, his wife and their family moved to Oneida in 1851, they gave their family house in Wallingford, Connecticut, to the Community (Rich and Blake 1983, 11). This led to the establishment of the Wallingford branch – which was preserved until the 1880s, and where the first flatware manufacture was established, before being relocated to Niagara Falls in 1881. Another significant branch was the office that the Community had been given by member Abram C. Smith at No.41 Willow Place, in Brooklyn. Between 1849 and 1854, this is where John H. Noyes, Harriet Noyes and the Cragins resided and had installed a printing office dedicated to the publication of the *Circular*, the Community newspaper (Oneida Association 1850, 22; 1851, 17). During that time, the person in charge of

the Oneida Community was Noyes's brother-in-law John R. Miller, who supervised the Oneidans until his death in 1854 (Foster [1981] 1984, 108). Other "stations" were opened: in New York, they had a machine-shop in Newark in 1852 and a farm in Manlius, as well as continued contact with members in Vermont, in the towns of Putney and Cambridge. All these branches were closed before 1857, with the exception of the Oneida and Wallingford locations and the Brooklyn office (Oneida Community 1853, 17).

In 1848, the young Oneida Community consisted of 21 adults between the ages of 25 and 35, in addition to 10 children (Fogarty 1994, 12). The new settlement proved extremely attractive, and as soon as 1851 the *Third Annual Report* declared that the Community was full, while still considering occasional applications when candidates displayed their commitments to join (Foster [1981] 1984, 108). By 1868, the group was composed of 210 members at the main Oneida Branch, in addition to 44 at Wallingford, and 16 at the office in Brooklyn (Fogarty 1994, 23).

Very early on, the sartorial style of women of the Oneida Community became a distinctive feature of depictions of the group. Indeed, the women of the Community had adopted the habit of pairing pantaloons with a knee-length frock (see Appendix 2), allowing them to have more freedom of movement (Oneida Association 1849, 8). They also wore their hair short, above the shoulders – a fashion that was seen by the Oneidans as respecting all the rules of propriety and modesty prescribed by the Bible (Oneida Association 1849, 9).

The 1850 *Second Annual Report* provides an overview of a typical day at the Oneida Community in winter in its early years. The day started at seven. The members would work all morning until dinner, which was served during a break of one or two hours. In the afternoon, they resumed working, and they would be served tea. Every afternoon, they would meet at seven for an evening meeting during which community affairs were discussed among the group, before a reading of community correspondence and of the private letters of those of the members who wished for them to be read out loud. The last part of the meeting was devoted to discussions and the confession of religious experiences (Oneida Association 1850, 17).

1.2.2 Relations to the exterior

Instrumental to the construction of the public image of the Oneida Community were its magazines, published almost throughout its existence: the *Spiritual Magazine* (1846-1850),

the bi-monthly *Free Church Circular* (1850-1851), which became the weekly-issued *Circular* (1851-1870) – first printed from Brooklyn and then from the Wallingford commune in the mid-1860s – and finally the *American Socialist* (1870-1879). These publications were dedicated to sharing the Community's views and theories on matters of religion and social organization. The passing of the Comstock Laws in 1873 put an end to the diffusion of material about sexual practices – especially male continence – in communal publications.

The Oneida Community was an example of an experiment that was resolutely open to the outside. The Perfectionists' decision to publish their theology and spreading it to a large audience for a very cheap price illustrates the professed main objective of the Community, which was the "publication of truth" and thus made printing their "central trade around which all other industrial interests shall organize" (Oneida Association 1851, 8). Far from being a community enclosed onto itself, with minimal contact with people from the outside, the Oneida Community was well-connected to the rest of the United States through its publications, but also thanks to trade. The Oneidans furthermore allowed numerous visitors to come for day-trips – visits that were made easier by the construction of a railroad and the creation of a depot a hundred yards from the Mansion House in 1858. Up to thirteen hundred visitors could come in one day and even though 16,000 visitors were recorded between 1862 and 1867, it is estimated that over 45,000 people actually came to the Oneida Community, making it veritably open to people from the mainstream (Wonderley 2017, 139; Fogarty 1994, 4; 2000, 16). Those people often came from nearby Rochester or Syracuse, and sought to enjoy a meal and take a stroll on Community grounds (Fogarty 2000, 16).

However, the Oneidans did create a stir in the area when they moved in. In 1850, 1851 and 1852, external parties attacked the Community in court (Wonderley 2017, 67). For instance, between 1850 and 1851, more than a hundred Grand Juries sat in cases involving complaints against the Oneidans. Some community members were called upon to testify in 1851 at Utica, answering obscene questions about their most intimate experiences in the commune (Foster [1981] 1984, 109). In this particular instance, the charges were dropped. But attacks did also appear in the press, especially in the pages of the *New York Observer*, a religious newspaper which published sharp denunciations of the Perfectionists. In the concluding segment of one of them was a violent criticism of the immorality of the Oneidans:

> The doctrine that the unformed, or perverted, or degraded conscience of the individual should override all laws, which divine wisdom has revealed, or human reason established, leads naturally to results as demoralizing, as those in which the swinish "Perfectionists" delight.
> (New York Observer 1852)

Such attacks from the outside had strong impact on the Oneida Community. Rumors of mob attacks had pushed the Perfectionists to leave Putney; after the salve of criticisms in the first years of the Oneida Community's existence, complex marriage was discontinued between March and August 1852 (Wonderley 2017, 70). After decades of relative peaceful cohabitation, the 1870s saw renewed confrontation with the local clergy led by John W. Mears. Finally, in 1879, it was rumored that John H. Noyes might face prison charges brought forward by the clergy, and supported by dissident factions withing the Community itself. On June 22, 1879, an aging Noyes left to Niagara Falls, Canada, with a few selected followers. Subsequently, the *American Socialist* declared that complex marriage should be abandoned. By many aspects, the outside did therefore influence collective decisions and had significant impact on the members' lives (Rich and Blake 1983, xiii–xiv).

1.2.3 Finances and commercial ventures

The Oneida Community was not an agrarian commune striving to attain agricultural self-sufficiency. This aspect alone distinguishes it from other utopian experiments of the time whose core vision was rooted in an agricultural prospect.[6] The first inventory of the Community was compiled in 1857, and marked the year of the first financial profit registered by the Perfectionists. Over the first nine years, they had indeed lost over $40,000 in capital in their various developments (Oneida Community 1867, 19).

While the commune was never autonomous in terms of food production, it did nonetheless strongly integrate the capitalist markets of the wider society through its four main ventures, and became profitable. The Oneidans' first source of income was what became known as their "fruit business": the distribution of canned goods in glass or tin containers from 1858 through most of the rest of the Oneida Community's existence. The food they prepared – cherries, corn, grapes, peas, strawberries, tomatoes and other fruit – came from

[6] An example of such experiment is Brook Farm (1841-1847), a utopian experiment inspired by Transcendentalism.

their horticultural production. They also crafted steel traps for trappers. In 1863, the demand for traps was so high that the Community became a permanent employer for several hundred workers who were employed both in the trap-making factory – established in 1864 and named Willow Place in homage to the Brooklyn office – and at the Mansion House. Wonderley remarked that the working conditions for those workers were superior to what they could have found elsewhere. In 1866, the Community started manufacturing silk threads. Employees worked on the threads, while community members produced skeins[7] out of raw silk – a task that required more precision. The silverware business, finally, was started in 1879, two years before the Community incorporated into a company – Oneida Ltd. – centered around this flourishing commercial pursuit.

1.3 What was the Oneida Community?

> *"Oneida was never a single set of ideas but was rather a changing set of assertions and practices dictated by its patriarch, John H. Noyes." (Fogarty 2000, preface)*

1.3.1 Definitions

Reaching a satisfactory definition of the Oneida Community is an arduous endeavor, due to the many aspects of this three-decade-long experiment that could constitute a study in their own rights. The Oneida Community was primarily presented as a religious group committed to fostering social change, like many other utopian experiments of the nineteenth century, as shown in the collection gathered by Oneida community member William Hinds in *American Communities* (1878).[8] But the utopian appeal of the Oneida Community alone does not account for the community's place in the broader reform movements of the nineteenth century, for instance in the suffragists' fight. Despite his never endorsing the idea that women should actually have the right to vote, John H. Noyes's thoughts were taken on by activists who used the longevity of the Community as evidence that their objectives of equality were

[7] A skein is a loosely coiled length of yarn or thread wound on a reel (*Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "skein," accessed May 16, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/skein.).

8 Hinds, William Alfred. *American Communities: Brief Sketches of Economy, Zoar, Bethel, Aurora, Amana, Icaria, the Shakers, Oneida, Wallingford, and the Brotherhood of the New Life* (1878).

achievable. Indeed, Caroline Fairfield Corbin cited the Oneida Community as "a congenial home to woman suffrage" (Corbin 1900, 3). The Oneidans were also included in works questioning Darwinism and other heredity-related beliefs shared among progressive groups of that time, for instance in Kimberly Hamlin's *From Eve to Evolution* (2015).

Among the reasons justifying the attention paid by scholars to the Oneida Community, its refusal to endorse monogamous marriage undoubtedly played an important part. It is the focus of John C. Spurlock's *Free Love. Marriage and Middle-Class in America. 1825-1860* (1988), a work dedicated to the study of a fringe of American radicals who rejected the conventions of marriage in an attempt at equating social practices with their own convictions that love should be at the basis of a legitimate relation. However, this vision of society – one that made the Oneida Community a progressive landmark – should not obscure the fact that the communards' views were resolutely conservative. They traced their principles back to the apostolic church (Foster [1981] 1984, 227), like other religious groups of the time such as the Mormons or the Shakers, two groups that also rejected the conventions of marriage. *Polygamy. An Early American History*, by Sarah M. Pearsall (2019), elegantly surveys the fine line between conservative polygamous practices and the threats – either real or fantasized –that they represented for the social order in the United States.

If the Oneida Community was aimed at eliciting a form of religious and social project, recent feminist studies also showed that it was an organization made unique by its special emphasis on economy.[9] The relation between this economic side and the social and religious structures of the Community cannot be easily deciphered: was Oneida a capitalistic attempt at sustaining a religious cult? Were its economic developments the consequences of spiritual guidance? More importantly, what was the relation between economics and religion at Oneida?

Works about the Oneida Community developed following four major directions influencing the definition of the group and of its context. First, the Oneida Community was defined as a utopian commune at a time marked by socialist experiments; secondly, it was seen as a religious group born out of the Second Great Awakening; thirdly, it was viewed as an organization magnifying the sexual and social contestations of the reform movements; and

[9] On reform organizations whose fight encompassed economic concerns, see for instance Boiteux 2023.

finally, the Oneida Community was studied as the prefiguration of the company that was created in 1881. Similarly to the way in which other utopian experiments have been celebrated, the historiography of the Oneida Community strove to highlight its audacity and success, without clearly delineating the inherent darker sides of the organization. In parallel to these hagiographical productions, more critical studies were written, shedding light on excesses, abuses, and dangerous or immoral practices. Criticisms strongly targeted the eugenics project that the Community adopted after twenty years of birth restrictions with the objective to participate to the improvement of the human race (Kephart 1963, 268). The imbalance caused by the sexual intronization of young adults by older members who were higher in the religious hierarchy was also noted by more scrutinous scholars (Krischner 1983; Klee-Hartzell 1993; M. C. Smith 2021). It is all the more problematic as the younger members entered complex marriage at an early age: children were fifteen years old on average – with one documented case of a girl who was 10 years old when she had her first sexual relation (Van de Warker 1884, 13; Wonderley 2017, 158). This context of age- and status-related domination gave even more weight to suspicions of sexual abuse or non-consensual sexual relations (Wonderley 2017, 105). The scholarship about the Oneida Community is therefore located at the crossroads of several memorial tendencies, pushing scholars to study it with more interdisciplinarity. Refining definitions is all the more crucial as the memory of the Community is a part of the heritage claimed by the company Oneida Ltd. and its brand.

1.3.2 The history of utopian communities

From its creation in 1848, the Oneida Community was the object of descriptive and comparative studies on socialist and utopian societies in the nineteenth century. Some of these analyses were realized by contemporaries – members of the Community or people from the outside – and aimed at presenting a comprehensive, if not exhaustive, panorama of the utopian scene. Notable works include William Dixon's *New America* (1867), Charles Nordhoff's *The Communistic Societies of the United States from Personal Visit and Observation* (1875), and Alfred Hinds's *American communities* (1878).[10] Later historians also apprehended the Oneida Community as an element of a broader, idealist, and definitely innovative movement, such as

[10] Nordhoff, C., *The Communistic Societies of the United States from Personal Visit and Observation* (1875); Hinds, Alfred, *American communities: brief Sketches of Economy, Zoar, Bethel, Aurora, Amana, Icaria, the Shakers, Oneida, Wallingford, and the Brotherhood of the New Life* (1878).

Victor Claverton in *Where Angels Dared to Tread* (1941)[11] or Mark Holloway in *Heavens on Earth* (1950).[12] The focus of the present research reflects the appeal of the commune as a social and ideological experiment among others. A recent example of the appeal of utopian communities for a twenty-first century audience is Chris Jennings' popular history book *Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism* (2016), convoking the Oneida Community along with other groups influenced by religious, Fourierist, Owenite and Icarian ideals,[13] in order to delineate a contextual and historical frame for what the author presents as a yearning for utopia in the current society of the United States.

Law professor Carol Weisbrod adopted a legal perspective on several utopian communities in order to tackle the relation between collective property and individual rights in communes – groups where the admission of new members is marked by their relinquishing their belongings and property to the community. In *The Boundaries of Utopia* (1980) she focused on litigation between four communistic groups and former members who were suing in demand for a more substantial monetary compensation. Weisbrod showed that the courts generally dismissed the plaintiff's requests in the name of the freedom to establish contract. This study therefore enriches the definition of the Oneida Community as a legal entity, foregrounding the existence of a tacit contract between the individual members and the group.

1.3.3 The Oneida Community and religious history

Another branch of historiography regarded Oneida through its theological bases, primarily using accounts of the life of John H. Noyes and his writing. It is not surprising that the following publications should give pride of place to Oneida's founder, to the detriment of a more collective history of its members. Their focus was twofold: on the one hand, they explored the riddle posed by the group's exceptional longevity in comparison to other

[11] Claverton, Victor, *Where Angels Dared to Tread: Socialist & Communist Utopian Colonies in the United States* (1941).

[12] Holloway, Mark, *Heavens on Earth: Utopian Communities in America, 1680-1880* (1950).

[13] « Fourierism »: a form of socialism inspired by the ideas of Charles Fourier, aiming at the creation of self-sufficient communities, or phalansteries. It was popularized in the United States under the name "Associationism" by Albert Brisbane; "Owenism": theories developed by Robert Owen promoting a communitarian form of living based of cooperation, science, education and equality; "Icarism": utopian movement inspired by Etienne Cabet's strand of Christian Communism.

religious communities or other cults.[14] But religious studies of the Oneida Community also tended to replace the commune into the broader protestant theology and center on the reasons that led to its dissolution, linking it with the notion of declension. A key notion in puritan thought, and in American religious history as a whole, "declension" was the name given to a state of weakened, tepid religious rigor, marking sharp degradation from an initial state – be it historical or biblical.[15] These works thus underline how, with the passage of time, the religious founding principles of the Community were modified, softened and tampered with.

George Wallingford Noyes, a nephew of John H. Noyes,[16] dedicated two books to the life of his uncle: *Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes, Founder of the Oneida Community* (1923) and *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community* (1931). By doing so, he also contributed to the publicization of parts of the source material about the Oneida Community.[17] In 1935, Robert Allerton Parker published the first biography of John H. Noyes, *A Yankee Saint*.[18] In this hagiographical account, the author argued that the Oneida Community was the materialization of the spiritual energy of his founder (Parker [1935] 1972, 308) and paved the way for psychological approaches of Noyes's personality.

In the 1970s, the Oneida Community's longevity was the central focus of historical research projects which granted a more significant place to the ideological context of the mid-nineteenth century than had been previously done. For journalist Ernest Sandeen in "John Humphrey Noyes as the New Adam" (1971) the Community's endurance could be explained by the convergence between Noyes's ideas and those of the mainstream society of his time – that is, the gap between the innovations at Oneida and the more conventional ideas of people from the mainstream would not have constituted an unbridgeable divide. Conversely, in *The Man Who Would Be Perfect* (1977), Robert Thomas suggested that the Oneida Community's failure to become a model for the mainstream, as evidenced by its dissolution, revealed how

[14] The relatively short life-span of utopian experiments can be explained, among other reasons, by their constitutive experimental dimension, allowing their members to try out new ways of life, which can in turn lead to the fragilization of the community (Antony 2016, 16).

[15] On the interactions between puritanism and the idea of declension, see Miller 1939.

[16] Georges Wallingford Noyes (1870-1941) was the son of John H. Noyes's brother, George Washington Noyes (1822-1870), and his niece Tirzah Miller (1843-1902).

[17] This is all the more significant as Oneida Ltd., the company created out of the Oneida Community in 1881, organized the burning of a part of the community's archives in its possession in 1947 (Wayland-Smith 2016, 254–60).

[18] Parker, Robert A., *A Yankee saint: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community* (1935).

foreign its innovative principles had been to the rest of the nation.[19] By replacing the Oneidans within the national history of the United States, these works offer the possibility to study the Community as a part of a social movement, and not as an anomaly. Journalist Spencer Klaw's *Without Sin* (1993) further suggested that Noyes's theological considerations must be read as a legitimization of his libido, and that, as a consequence, the religious principles came second, not first.[20] In this light, it appears that the Oneida Community should be analyzed within the ideological context of reform movements of the nineteenth century, through its questioning of social and sexual norms.

1.3.4 The Oneida Community within the history of reform movements – questioning gender domination

From the early 1820s and up until the Progressive Era at the end of the 1890s, several movements aiming at reforming the American society emerged in the North, and then in the West, of the United States. Across their respective fields of action, activists shared a similar aspiration to foster social changes in such diverse domains of private and public life as the abolition of slavery, the promotion of temperance, the reform of the banking, educative, carceral and medical systems, the prohibition of prostitution or the obtention of more rights for women.[21] For some people – including the members of the Oneida Community – this last revendication necessarily implied that the norms surrounding the convention of marriage had to be reevaluated. It sprung from the jarring discrepancy, felt in the middle-class circles of the "free lovers," between the legitimacy of an unmarried relation based on love and that of a loveless marriage (Spurlock 1988, 2). Some free lovers, and the Oneida Community as an entity, went as far as comparing the possession of a wife by her husband to that of a slave by their owner (Oneida Association 1851, 30). As a consequence, Oneidans and other free lovers did not believe that sexuality ought to be restricted to the sacred ties of matrimony, the legitimacy of which they did not recognize. Some progressive groups therefore felt the need to step out of the oppressive mainstream in order to reject norms in which they no longer

[19] Thomas, Robert, *The Man Who Would Be Perfect: John Humphrey Noyes and the Utopian Impulse* (1977).
[20] Klaw, Spencer, *Without Sin: The Life and Death of the Oneida Community* (1993).
[21] Revendications of rights for women were often limited to the rights of white, middle-class, heterosexual women (Newman 1999; Rouse 2022).

believed. By establishing a separate settlement, they found the space to elaborate their own social norms.

Communes are sites where different gender norms are imagined and materialized through control, physical shaping of behavior, and other strategies (Spencer-Wood 1996, 407). Through their relative symbolical and physical isolation, they leave room for the articulation of feminist demands, questioning of monogamous norms and subversion of male domination. In Robert Muncy's view, nineteenth-century utopias created space for increased gender equality in their very platform (Muncy [1973] 1974, 218). In *Women, Family and Utopia* (1991),[22] Laurence Foster argued that women at Oneida enjoyed far more freedom and individuality than their counterparts outside of the Community, and that "Oneida did represent one of the most radical institutional efforts to change relations between the sexes and improve women's status in America" (Foster 1991, 91). However, in *An Ordered Love* (1981),[23] Louis Kern showed that, on the contrary, gender equality was not established as Oneida, and his work therefore undermined the myth of the utopian settlement as a space of total questioning of gender norms. Even more explicitly, political science professor Marlyn Klee-Hartzell stated that, far from becoming emancipated, women at Oneida "simply exchanged one smaller, patriarchal family structure for a larger, collective one" (Klee-Hartzell 1993, 184). These historians uncover the tension lying at the heart of women's relative emancipation in the Oneida society, where they still identify the permanence of a form of patriarchal domination.

With the opening of the archives of the Oneida Community to the public in 1991, historians gained access to new documents, among which were the personal correspondence of members where the question of sexuality is prominent. These sources required deciphering, as the « Bible Secretiveness » of the communards led them to use codes when referring to their most unusual practices in order to protect their thoughts from prying eyes (Foster 1988, 8, qtd. in Smith 2021, 116). In the diary and the memoir he edited, Robert Fogarty foregrounded the tension between an individual's monogamous desires and the pantagamous[24] norms of the

[22] Foster, Laurence, *Women, Family and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (1991).

[23] Kern, Louis, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias - The Shakers, The Mormons and the Oneida Community* (1981).

[24] The term "pantagamy" designates the "marriage practiced in some communistic societies in which every man is regarded as the husband of every woman and vice versa" (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "pantagamy," accessed May 16, 2024, https://www.merriam-

group. This opposition could be explicit, as in the case of the Community's rejection of the request of two members to conceive a child together. It happened to Victor Hawley, whose diary for the period spanning from January 1876 to December 1877 was published under the title *Special Love / Special Sex: An Oneida Community Diary* (1994). Hawley had arrived at Oneida as a child in the 1850s, and recorded notes on his sex life with fellow member Mary Jones with whom he had a special bond, a deviance from Community practices. At a time when the Community implemented stirpiculture* (the Oneida brand of eugenics), the couple was trying to conceive a child despite the Community's opposition. In the privacy of his diary, Hawley thus expressed his frustration with the communal rules and revealed how he elaborated forms of resistance. But the divide between an individual member and the group could also take on more secret forms, hinging on the tacit agreement to obey the Community's directives. The core of *Desire and Duty at Oneida: Tirzah Miller's Intimate Memoir* (2000) is a memoir written by Tirzah Miller, who was the niece of John H. Noyes, as well as one of his sexual partners and confidante. Spanning over thirteen years of Miller's life (1867-1880), it broached on the topics of sexual relations, marriage, property and power in the Community from the perspective of a woman. Most interestingly, it depicted the tension between Miller's individual desire for romantic connection and her duty to the Community. Both publications therefore add to the study of the interactions between individual and collective interests.

In order to explore this conflict, scholars were led to pay attention to the place of what was not recorded or preserved in the archives. This silence can be caused by the destruction of sources or their unavailability. Sometimes, sources are lacking and cannot shed light on every contested aspect of the Oneida Community. Juxtaposing documents can then give insight into the biases of the accounts that are available, with some texts not relaying denunciations, while some others contain far more critical testimonies. Thus, William La Moy showed that parts of the criticisms were not acknowledged by the more official voices of the Oneida Community. In "Two Documents Detailing the Oneida Community's Practice of Complex Marriage" (2012) he reproduced a 1915 address – unpublished until then – from former community member Dr. George E. Cragin to the Oneida Medical Club (a group without affiliation with the Oneida Community). It provided physical and theoretical descriptions of the practice of male

webster.com/dictionary/pantagamy.). The adjective "pantagamous" has been used to define the Oneida Community, such as in Sokolow and Lamanna 1984.

continence along with its effects on fertility and female pleasure. While Cragin asserted that no negative impact had ever been recorded, La Moy called this into question by reprinting excerpts from an 1884 report by Syracuse physician Ely Van de Warker. The report was striking due to its negative tone and damning constatations that the practice induced a number of abuses, especially as to the very young age at which children were introduced to sexual relations, or the social pressure felt by some women to have intercourse. This publication of two dialoguing primary sources highlighted the discrepancy between voices when it comes to individual members revealing their opposition to at least some of the group's norms.

1.3.5 Corporation history

It is in works dedicated to celebrating the commercial achievements of the flatware company Oneida Ltd. that the Oneida Community was first understood as an economic entity. In his retrospective work sponsored by the company, historian Walter Edmonds bolstered the argument of a connection between the community and the corporation, asserting that the innovative spirit of the company and its concern for the common interest were inherited from its communitarian beginnings (1958). One decades later, in *Oneida: Utopian Community to Modern Corporation* (1969), sociologist Maren Lockwood Carden sought to assess the pertinence of defining Oneida – both the community and the company – by evaluating its propensity to foster the happiness of its members and its employees. As early as the late 1960s, her work therefore played up the strong interconnectedness between individual and organizational interests. With the notable exception of Carden's work, the economic history of Oneida was primarily company-issued. A former curator at the Oneida Community Mansion House museum (OCMH), Anthony Wonderley adopted a similar approach in *Oneida Utopia* (2017),[25] but substituted prosperity for happiness in his evaluation of the community. He advocated a vision in which the communitarian aspect of the Oneida Community was but one facet of a wider entity whose diverse economic ventures prefigurate the large-scale production of flatware by Oneida Ltd. His thesis concurs with Kevin Coffee's, another former executive at the OCMH, who stated that the economic dimension of the Oneida Community cannot be dissociated from its religious components. In "The Oneida Community and the Utility of

[25] Wonderley, Anthony, *Oneida Utopia: A Community Searching for Human Happiness and Prosperity* (2017).

Liberal Capitalism" (2019), he indeed indicated that members interpreted their economic prosperity as the confirmation of the validity of their religious approach. For both Wonderley and Coffee, the Community's institutional legacy underlies the identity of the Oneida, Ltd. company.

1.3.6 Cross-disciplinary inputs

In recent years, scholars have tried to bridge the seemingly strict divide between the main ways of apprehending the nature of the Oneida Community. This endeavor has been undertaken by taking some distance with the historical methods – probably due to the impression that available sources had been overly used – and the introduction of new tools borrowed from the fields of narrative structure analysis, or gender studies and rhetoric.

From the perspective of American Narrative History, Stewart Davenport took on the legacy of historians of sexual reform in the Oneida Community. Like Kern and Foster, he aimed at exploring the place of sex in the social organization of nineteenth-century groups, arguing that "sex became a means of reinforcing sectarian identity" (Davenport 2022, 8). In *Sex and Sects*,[26] his research's starting point is the centrality of narratives and stories in the understanding of the inner workings of these sects.[27] He identified the metanarratives pertinent to each religion and compared them to each other. Contrary to previous scholarship, his book wove together the stories of Mormons, Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists within the chapters themselves, offering a comparison of how they each overcame obstacles, functioned once fully institutionalized, and eventually failed. Intermingling the stories of the groups allowed *Sex and Sects* to underline the profound similarities in their developmental arc. The result was both a study of Oneida's sexuality and religious beliefs, and an attempt at theorizing the Community according to a narrative frame, thereby focusing on the general outlines and structures instead of the inner workings as previous studies had done.

[26] Davenport, Stewart, *Sex and Sects. The Story of Mormon Polygamy, Shaker Celibacy and Oneida Complex Mariage* (2022).

[27] "[T]his book emphasizes the power of religious stories to move people and the power of narrative structure to make complex phenomena comprehensible" (Davenport 2022, 10).

Michelle Smith's approach was informed by gender studies, feminism, and the study of what she called "ecologies of gender."[28] In *Utopian Genderscapes* (2021),[29] the author convoked the Oneida Community as a case study in her analysis of three nineteenth-century intentional communities as the site of possible reconfigurations of gender roles in the context of industrialization. Her sources range from personal correspondence of members to general reports on the life of the Community, but she also observed the increased delegation of traditionally feminine tasks either to machines or to people of color. Her focus on the "rhetoric of *choice*" (M. C. Smith 2021, 5 [emphasis in original]) – opposing women's work and motherhood at Oneida in a zero-sum logic – connects with contemporary questions and brought nuance to the innovative dimension of the Perfectionist group. The strength of this work lies in its exploration of the ways in which utopian communities were places where the undercurrents running through the mainstream could take form, revealing the nature and the extent to which gender reforms were "thinkable and achievable" at the time (Smith 2021, 3).

This overview of the historiographical production about the Oneida Community echoes the fragmentation of its various constitutive aspects and the compartmentalization of research. Scholars of the organization are faced with the relative scarcity of works articulating the mutual influences of the economic, social and religious dimensions of the utopian group. The object of this dissertation will be to propose a study of the Oneida Community fostering dialogue between the available sources in order to better delineate the nature of the Oneida Community.

1.4 Thesis and corpus

My focus will be on the various instances of explicit and tacit commitments that were established by the members, among themselves and with the group. The notion of contract will thus be central in order to offer a common lens and a supporting perspective through which to grasp the multiple forms of influence at play at Oneida. A contract is a form of procedural, legal or economic agreement resting on the acceptation of terms by private parties

[28] "I use ecologies of gender as a shorthand for the notion that *gendering is an emergent and ongoing rhetorical process resulting from the intra-actions of human and nonhuman bodies*" (Smith 2021, 7 [emphasis in original]).

[29] Smith, Michelle, *Utopian Genderscapes: Rhetorics of Women's Work in the Early Industrial Age* (2021).

– persons or entities – paired with the definition of sanctions in case of failure of either party to uphold their side of the bargain (Tucker 1965, 487; Illouz 2020, 21). The aim of this dissertation is to offer an introductory view of a strategy to improve the overall understanding of the nature of utopian engagement by applying the contractual framework of analysis to three domains of Oneida communards' lives.

1.4.1 Contract(s) and covenant(s) at Oneida

The members of a community follow a certain set of rules of behavior and have common interests that allow them to form a cohesive, recognizable group (Queen 1923, 382). Considering the existence of a community therefore implies the necessity to take these underlying rules into account. I contend that paying attention to the very structure of agreement-making and utopian engagement can offer a transversal analytical tool to apprehend the nature of the Oneida Community as a whole. To do so, this study will focus on the forms of contracts, covenants and other non-formal engagements that the members agreed to during their life in the Community. The notion of contract is close to that of *covenant*, to the point that both terms are sometimes employed indifferently.[30] For clarity's sake, in this dissertation, the two notions will be used to refer to different orders of agreements. Drawing from Nock's and Brinig's definitions, "covenants" will be limited to those agreements that are non-rational and pertain to the realm of faith and trust; on the opposite, "contracts" will designate the rational arrangements made with the objective to maximize self-interest (1999, 18–19). In any given situation, a contract is entered by two consenting parties.

In the biblical sense, a covenant designates the alliance between God and humankind, and it was a prominent aspect of the political and religious systems developed by the Puritan settlers of New England in the seventeenth century.[31] As a series of mutual agreements concluded between God and humankind, the covenant made humans "cooperator[s]" in God's great scheme and gave a justification for the enforcement of the moral law not rooted in the fear of unpredictable divine punishment (Miller 1939, 373; [1956] 1964, 89). In order to

[30] An overview of the significance of contracts and covenant underlining how those two terms can sometimes be merged together can be found in Tucker 1965, 487.

[31] On the links between the covenant theory and the development of the American political system, including the emergence of the American Constitution, see for instance Lutz 1980, Rothman 1980 and Wardle 1987.

follow the covenant, believers must transform the world and implement the moral law. For Oneida Perfectionists, this mission implied stepping out of society and joining a community where the way of life would allow them to work towards this goal. The Oneida Community will therefore be understood as a group of believers united through a shared agreement to follow the religious teachings of their faith – in other words, as a church unified by a covenant.

The communitarian form of the Oneida Community reveals the existence of an intrinsic, informal social contract among its members, in which voluntary adhesion is founded on placing their properties and workforce in service of the group. In exchange, their needs would be covered by the Community. This "utopian contract" (Weisbrod 1980, xiii) materialized in the members' participation in the debates and discussions during the evening meetings of the Community, as well as in their contribution to physical and educational tasks. However, the question of property and its repartition is a stumbling stone for the "utopian contract," since it offers no provisions for the mandatory pecuniary compensation when members leave the group. At best, the Community could profess its intention to provide them with some compensation:

> [I]n case of the subsequent withdrawal of the member, the Association, according to its practice heretofore, will refund the property or an equivalent amount. This practice however stands on the ground, not of obligation but of expediency and liberality; and the time and manner of refunding must be trusted to the discretion of the Association.
> (Oneida Association 1849, 16)

Indeed, no legal engagement bound members together until the Constitution of the Four (around 1868), when community property was transferred to four male members (Teeple 1984, 62; Parker [1935] 1972, 225; Robertson 1972, 11). The notable absence of such an agreement for the first two decades of the Community's existence and the fragmentary legal apparatus defining the Community as an entity with regards to its members both raise questions, especially as to the level to which members who left were compensated in similar ways.

Not only did the contracts entered by the members tackle their religious beliefs and social behaviors, but they also required them to commit to sharing parts of their intimate lives. Integrating the group marked one's entry within complex marriage: a non-legal – if not illegal – form of contractual agreement. This contract, binding together all the adult members of the

Community, also implied their adhesion to the other organizational principles of the group, including sexual practices. The members indeed placed their reproductive force under common rule. This relinquishing of one's body autonomy paves the way for scholarly investigation about the (im)possibility of refusing to have sexual relations within a pantagamous group – a male member indeed declared that he had never been refused sexual relations by his fellow female communards (Kephart 1963, 267). There seems to exist a contract of sexual nature among the members, whether it be explicitly stated or not. Feminist political theorist Carole Pateman conceptualized the double nature of this political contract that establishes both the domination of men over women and their access to women's bodies – a contract that is at the same time patriarchal and sexual (Pateman 1988, 2). In this sense, sexual liberation or domination at Oneida cannot be distinguished from its social and political branches. Interrogating the "contractual" aspect of the most intimate relations between members of the Community will offer further insight into the structure of the Community as a whole, as well as of its daily organization.

This thesis will first study the contractual nature of the religious commitment of the Oneidans to their Perfectionists ideals. It will be demonstrated that the members joined primarily for religious reasons, and that the implications of the religious covenant had repercussions on the social organization of the members' lives, down to their sexuality.

The second section will be dedicated to outlining the structure of social rights and obligations that the Oneidans agreed to when they joined the Community. Deriving from their religious convictions, they constituted a group contractually bound by informal ties that dictated each member's possible course of action. In order to highlight the limits of this communitarian engagement, with emphasis on the expression of discontent by members, and the extent to which members were accompanied when they decided to leave.

Finally, particular attention will be given to the characteristics of sexual life in the Oneida Community. Since group marriage was one of the core tenets of the group, the extent to which sexuality can also be interpreted as part of a contract will be questioned. After discussing the emancipating quality of contracts and the relative agency that women could experience in the Oneida Community, the question of consent and *ad hoc* agreement to sexual relations will be tackled.

1.4.2 Primary sources

The corpus for this dissertation will exclusively be composed of sources that are available online or that have been published by previous scholars.

Some community-issued documents have been digitized. Such is the case for the three *Annual Reports* published at the end of the years 1849, 1850 and 1851. Each of them comprised a factual presentation of the organization's size, membership, environment, trades, and most importantly its spiritual and economic health. They also presented the several major tenets organizing the daily life of members. Readers from outside the Community could also learn about the internal organization of the decision-making process at Oneida. The reports were completed by *Bible Communism* and the *Hand-Book of the Oneida Community*, two additional presentations issued respectively in 1853 and 1867. Both documents contained reprints of passages of the previous reports as well as excerpts from the Community's magazines. These five documents geared towards the external readership are accessible on the website of the Special Collections Research Center of the Libraries of the University of Syracuse (New York). They will constitute the basis upon which this analysis of the ways in which the Community presented itself to the exterior is built.

Due to the overwhelming quantity of data and its partial availability, the Oneida Community newspapers will not be studied in any exhaustive way for the completion of this thesis. However, occasional reliance on these sources will help to supply information about the structure of the Oneida Community.

Finally, documents produced by community members in their own names will be used to assess the personal and inter-personal dimensions of life at Oneida. In particular, Tirzah Miller's memoir (1867-1880) and Victor Hawley's diary (1876-1877) will be explored here to study the effects of the religious and social organization on two individuals' lives (Fogarty 2000; 1994). Additional reference will be made to *A Lasting Spring*, *Jessie Catherine Kinsley, daughter of the Oneida Community*, the biography of a member written posthumously by her grandchild Jane Rich (1983). Born in the Community before the stirpiculture experiment, Jessie Baker spent her childhood and early adulthood at Oneida. At the dissolution in 1880, she married fellow communard Myron Kinsley. Her testimony will be especially instrumental in capturing the coming of age of a child of the Community and the various steps marking the beginning of adulthood. Conversely, the two autobiographies by Pierrepont Burt Noyes, *My*

Father's house: an Oneida Boyhood (1937) and *A Goodly Heritage* (1958), as well as Corinna Ackley Noyes's *The Days of My Youth* (1960) will be excluded from this study. The young age of the authors, both of whom were born during the stirpiculture program in the last ten years of Oneida, precludes them from offering insight into the engagements taken by adults in the Community.

2 Perfectionism and religious covenant: religious hierarchies and contractual domination

"I know that the religious fervor developed a narrowing fanaticism in some; yet quite quickly a bright line -the philosophy of playfulness and artistic endeavor —began to grow into the warp of religious life." (Rich and Blake 1983, 10)

Religious heterodoxy was at the center of the Oneida Community's structure, principles and image. While the Oneidans lived differently from their contemporaries both in public and in private, the genealogy of the creation of the organization reveals that it was a form of religious revival that spurred John H. Noyes to elaborate his social and sexual theories. Therefore, a study of the implications of religious forms of contracts needs to come first. This part will be dedicated to retracing the ways in which religion was an overarching element of the Oneida Community, playing a determining role in people's decisions to join, as well as in the general organization of the experiment. The nature of the links established between the individuals and God, and among the members themselves, will also be tackled in light of this interpretation.

2.1 Oneida in its context: a Perfect society

The Oneida Community emerged out of a context of Christian revivals taking place in the North East of the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century. The chronological boundaries of the Second Great Awakening are debated among historians, but it is admitted that this phenomenon of increased religious devotion – Donald Matthews wrote of a "re-vitalizing of religion" (Mathews 1969, 24) – was especially active during the 1820s and 1830s.[32] While scholarship diverges on the geographical, spiritual, social and ideological scope of the

[32] For Perry Miller, the Second Great Awakening started with the Connecticut revivals of the 1790s and lasted until the 1820s (Miller 1961). For Paul E. Johnson, however, the Rochester revivals of the early 1830s are a key element of the movement (Johnson 1979).

movement, it is generally accepted that it was especially prominent on the frontier of the states of Vermont and New York, and especially in the Western part of that latter state. The region became known as the "burned-over district," because of the intensity of its religious flame (Cross 1950). Incidentally, these are two major places in the history of the Oneida Community, since it was created out of the transplant into New York territory of the Putney Association organized by John H. Noyes in Vermont.

The first chapter of *Oneida Utopia* (2017), Anthony Wonderley's comprehensive book on the Oneida Community, was dedicated to outlining the religious background of the experiment. The synthesis links Oneida's theology to those of preachers Charles Finney and John Wesley, who were major figures in the emergence of Methodism and Perfectionism (Wonderley, 2017, 18). Their teachings hinged on the possibility of human Perfection, which was the idea that humans could be saved in the earthly realm before being resurrected. However, the term itself is misleading, as it did not imply that humans could reach a state in which absolutely nothing in them needed to be improved anymore. Rather, as Foster put it very clearly: "'Perfection did not mean that one was not capable of improvement, but simply that so long as one's attitude and motivations were right, one's acts would follow a pattern acceptable to God" (Foster [1981] 1984, 77). Welsey thus believed that human perfection was enabled by faith (Foster [1981] 1984, 18). It is also assumed that Welsey had an influence on Finney, who rose to fame as a preacher only a few decades later.

In the state of New York in the early 1830s, Finney's sermons popularized a form of Protestantism that was fundamentally non-Calvinist, thereby countering the then-accepted understanding that humans were devoid of agency in their fate, since God had already organized it for them. For Finney, even though God was omnipotent, penitent humans could actively choose to accept the salvation offered by Christ's sacrifice (Foster [1981] 1984, 15). Those who remained in a state of passivity toward this urging call to salvation were sinners and were inherently committed to Satan (Foster [1981] 1984, 18). Noyes was familiar with Finney's teachings since he attended one of his revivals in 1831 when he was still a law student. Like Finney, he believed in biblical literalism, in the possibility of human perfection and of salvation from sin (Fogarty 2000, 8). However, his Perfectionism had more pragmatic consequences than Finney's. In Noyes's view, perfect Christians needed to actively choose Christ. It was not enough to have faith: one had to confess to Christ and to being free of sin,

something he did on February 20, 1834 – a date celebrated at Oneida as the "High Tide of the Spirit" (Robertson 1970, 14; Wonderley 2017, 20). This action carried the seed of the later Oneida Perfectionists' impulse to change the structure of society. In this new religious order, the ones who were saved had a moral duty to share their vision and act according to God's design, bringing forward the divine realm on Earth (Wonderley 2017, 20). This was symbolized by the Oneidans entering the "New Covenant" with God, a term that appeared repeatedly in the Community's publications geared towards an external audience, from T*he First Annual Report* of 1849 to the 1867 *Hand-Book of the Oneida Community*:

> God takes the entire responsibility of the State; and the only compact in the case, is the very one-sided one called by the prophet the 'New covenant.' It is summed up in these words: - 'I will be to them a God and they shall be to me a people' (Oneida Association 1849, 12)

In *Bible Communism*, they also declared: "We believe in the 'New Covenant,' which enlists soldiers for life; or, in other words, for perpetual holiness" (Oneida Community 1853, 7). Oneida Community theology therefore equated with the core tenet of Perfectionist beliefs. Through the renewed embracing of their salvation, the Oneidans reactivated the tradition of religious covenants made by God with humanity. It should also be noted that their description of themselves as God's "soldiers" is on par with the spirit of the times, when reform movements presented their fight to improve society as "crusades" against alcohol, slavery or tobacco (Fogarty 2000, 4).

2.2 Retracing the religious compact within the Oneida Community

2.2.1 Religion as a primary factor of membership

In order to assess the repercussions of the religious foundations of the Oneida Community on its members' lives, we first need to examine the reasons put forward by prospective members who sought admission to the commune. By doing so, they committed their economic power, labor force and family to Oneidan rules. Personal preference and life situations made each person's choice a singular one; but looking at the different statuses of people entering the Community can shed light on the several reasons motivating their life-altering decision.

Some of the members joined as transplants from the Putney Association. They were the founders – the Noyes siblings, their spouses and the Cragins – along with several Vermont families among which the Kinsleys, the Barrons, the Joslyins, the Bakers and the Burnhams (Parker [1935] 1972, 167). While married couples often joined the Oneida Community as a pair, for some of the members, communal living was a choice they made as single adults. It was the case of James Herrick (1837-1912), a New York Episcopal minister who joined the Oneida Community in 1868 without his wife Sophia Blescoe – who subsequently divorced him in 1873 – or any of their five children (Teeple 1984, 120). As a single man, Herrick was able to be consolidated in his communal commitment through his marriage to Charlotte Miller in 1873, as a tool to further usher him into the social structures of the Community (Fogarty 2000, 195). His choice to live in accordance with his religious convictions was therefore contractually reinforced by a marriage – albeit not in the exclusive, monogamous sense. At a time when unmarried women's economic prospects were limited, some of them also sought improvement of their condition through their admission into the Oneida Community. It was the case of Laura Burgess Smith (1816-1888), a widow and a teacher who visited a group in Michigan before being admitted into the Oneida Community on probationary bases in 1851 (Teeple 1984, 77). It is probable that the structure of complex marriage provided the Oneidans with more flexibility as to the marital lives of their recruits. In his landmark collection of biographies of Oneida communards, Oneida descendant John B. Teeple gave evidence that close to 30 widowed women joined the Community throughout its existence (Teeple 1984). Conversely to divorced men, they often brought their children with them; but it was also the case with some fathers who found themselves at the head of a motherless family. The group would then take them in and raise them communally.

These children would then become another category of adults: those who had not joined the Oneida Community of their own free will. Such was the case of prominent members such as Francis/Frank Wayland Smith (1841-1911), one of Laura Burgess Smith's two sons; Tirzah Miller (1843-1902), the daughter of Charlotte Noyes Miller and John R. Miller; or Victor Hawley (1843-1893) who arrived alongside his siblings, following their widowed father's move to the commune. The 141 members who were brought to the community before they had turned sixteen, or who were born there before 1869 and the beginnings of the eugenic experiment, were identified by Joseph Krischner as the second generation of members of the

Oneida Community (Krischner 1983, 21). But there was also a third generation of Oneidans, comprising the 58 children born out of the stirpicultural experiments that took place between 1869 and 1879 (Kephart 1963, 267). Those children – "stirps" or "stirpicults" in Oneida Community jargon – bring the total number of members who had no say in their joining the Community to over two hundred. Teeple's registry has 493 entries for members having lived at Oneida for two years or more (Teeple 1984, 261). A significant part of the Oneida Community membership therefore does not fall into the present investigation of the reasons for seeking admission into the group. The following discussion on the reasons pushing members to join the Oneida Perfectionists will focus mostly on adult members. This aspect of the Oneida membership should be complemented by further study of the factors leading to community member's maintaining their presence in intentional groups.

When tackling the attraction that the Oneida Community exerted on Perfectionists throughout the North East of the United States, utopian settlement specialist Robert Fogarty delineated two main reasons for the admission of new members. The first one was purely a question of faith and religious teachings, and was closely linked to Noyes's preaching and writings. The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of intense religious expression, linked to gnawing concerns about one's salvation and the means to achieve it. Noyes was very much a man of his time, being a religious leader with strong persuasion skills. These preachers' ideas found their way into new churches and new denominations (Hatch 1989, 12) that competed for the salvation of souls and the conversion of sinners. In Fogarty's view, the period was characterized by a "frantic" domestic space in which many people were offered new theological positions. Gauging their own level of religiosity was a task charged with anxiety, especially in a context of aggressive competition between denominations whose objective was to convert the most people (Fogarty, 1994, 15). For some of those nineteenth-century "religious seekers" (Fogarty 1994, 15), Perfectionism was the doctrine that aligned the most with their faith and beliefs. Gaining access to Noyes's teachings – either in person when he was a young itinerant preacher or in writing – provided them with a line of argumentation that they could agree on. It is probable that Perfectionists found comfort in the sense of identification in what they read, as "[t]hey yearned for release from this emotional rollercoaster, and thus were attracted by Noyes's promise to provide 'salvation from sin' within a stable, supportive, and authoritative communal structure" (Fogarty 1994, 15). Religious motivation was all the more

significant since, as shown by Oneida Community publications and some historians, the Community did not seek to be presented as a secular utopian experiment. While much scholarship does include the Oneida Community among examples of socialist settlements of the time – including Noyes's own *History of American socialisms* (1870) – the Oneidans regularly defended themselves against any association with Fourierist communes. The distinction was made explicit in the first part of *Bible Communism* (1853), a presentation of the Community written as a dialogue between the Reader and an allegorical "Mr. Freechurch." To the question of whether the Oneidans shared similarities with their Associationist counterparts, Mr. Freechurch argued that Fourier's theories rested on material motivations (greater access to utilities, the development of a better economy, etc.) and aimed at developing a new religious spirit bringing forward the true relation between the sexes. On the other hand, the Oneidans' ideas started with faith and the "reconciliation of the sexes" and they expected it to improve their industry and physical health as a consequence (Oneida Community 1853, 7–8). The Oneida Community did not wish to be construed as a variation on secular socialism. For Fogarty, the second reason why Perfectionists were drawn to Oneida more than other utopian experiments is the fact that its principles were derived from religion, and therefore more in keeping with other denomination-based communes like the Shakers – a comparison that was tackled in a kinder fashion in Oneida-issued documents. For instance, the Oneida Perfectionists requested toleration of their beliefs and their social system on the grounds that they should be views as other religious sects of that time:

> The Association may fairly demand toleration of its theory and experiment of society, on the ground that liberty of conscience is guarantied [sic] by the Constitution of the United States, and of the several states, and on the ground that Quakers, Shakers, and other religionists are tolerated in conscientious deviations from the general order of society.
> (Oneida Association 1849, 17)

The Oneida communists would not present themselves as a utopian experiment per se, but rather as "willing hands" (Fogarty 1994, 16) working towards the implementation of a heavenly form of social structures that the rest of society did not feel compelled to embrace, because they had not yet accepted that they were already free from sin. Indeed, it is religious conservatism – the aspiration to restore the harmony of the primitive church – that led the

Oneidans to propose radical social change. Through these radical ideas, they appeared similar to other socialist experiments of their time; however, their religiosity was a distinctive feature that they repeatedly put forward (Foster [1981] 1984, 227).

The primacy of religion was further emphasized by Foster in his paper reconstructing the sexual ideologies and attitudes that underlaid the Oneida experiment, together with the way in which sexual expression occurred and was channeled in the Community. The author observed how the sexual practices at Oneida were not the leading justification for joining, and could even sometimes act as a deterrent (Foster 1986, 21). Even when people aligned with Oneida's religious values, they could still be in conflict with its social and sexual implications. One of such people was Lorinda Burt, the wife of one of the owners of the land on which the Oneida Community was transplanted. The Oneida experiment required more than what her religious convictions inclined her to accept, and for a few weeks she remained outside of the Community even though her husband had joined (Teeple 1984, 5; Parker [1935] 1972, 161–64). She was integrated into the Community a little later and accepted to participate in complex marriage. Marlyn Klee-Hartzell highlights the obstacles posed by previous socialization and ethical values to the acceptance of new forms of familial love at Oneida (Klee-Hartzell 1993, 183). Still, even though complex marriage was a key principle of the commune, for the first few years of its existence there were still several couples leading a monogamous, conventional married life (Fogarty 1994, 11). Deviance from the Oneidan norms regarding complex marriage were still recorded in 1866, when new member Louisa Easton wrote in her journal that she was struggling to rid herself of "an idolatrous love for [her] husband" and asked God "to remove all idols from [her] heart" (*Daily Journal*, Nov. 20, 1866, qtd. in Klee-Hartzell 1993, 184).

Some of the members therefore showed signs that they struggled to adapt to complex marriage, and that they relied on religious strength to overcome their initial rejection. These signs of dissent and tension thereby shed light on the sacrifices required of members. They agreed to a form of religious and social contract that was the ground for their long-time stay in the commune. How did Oneida-based Perfectionism allow believers to respect the terms of their religious commitment?

2.2.2 Doing away with superficial institutions to give pride of place to an individual relationship with God

Most adult members decided to join the Oneida Community out of religious motivations. However, for the aspiring members to join, there was a need to establish unifying rules and principles defining the Oneida Perfectionists as a community. Some of these features were expounded in the *First Annual Report of the Oneida Community* in 1849. About the Oneidans, it was stated that "[t]heir doctrine is that of community, not merely or chiefly with each other, but with God; and for the security of individual rights they look, not to constitutions or compacts with each other, but to the wisdom and goodness of the Spirit of truth, which is above all" (Oneida Association 1849, 15). Here seems to lie a paradox: in the Oneida Community, one of the central aspects was the fact that community members agreed to not enter into an agreement with each other. Their communal engagement was not an agreement with their counterparts, but one that they made with God. In other words, it was their individual faiths that held the Community together: only through their personal commitment to a heavenly-sanctioned plan did they make forms of governance possible. In a religious, Perfection-driven vision, this was the direct consequence of the establishment of a theocratic government – God's "absolute monarchy" (Oneida Association 1849, 12) – which they intended to promote. In this theocratic society, there would be no limitations by "constitutional forms and provisos," and no contract among people: the only relation that mattered was the "New Covenant" passed between God and Their people (Oneida Association 1849, 12). Officially, the central principle of the Oneida Community was that there was to be no human hand in the overall design of the commune.

This particular aspect of the Oneida Community should be considered both as its strength and as a limit. Because the unifying elements between members were limited to faith and trust in the others' religious beliefs, it allowed for flexibility and adaptation to the Community' shifting needs. Indeed, membership grew from less than 50 in 1848 to an estimated average of 250-300 members by the 1860s (Foster [1981] 1984, 103), and its geography expanded with the opening of branch communities. But on the flipside, the lack of precise agreements on the structures in place left room for contestation and potential abuse of power by the leading figures, legitimized by the development of a religiously-sanctioned hierarchy. These elements can be seen in the episodes of tensions documented by members and their

descendants. In *Oneida Community: the Breakup, 1876-1881*, Constance Robertson Noyes provides insight on several crises related to the Community's leadership. One of them was triggered by John H. Noyes's stepping down to have his son Dr. Theodore Noyes become the leader in May 1877. Accusation of filial preference – "philoprogetiveness"* – coupled with Theodore Noyes's disagreement with Perfectionist principles resulted in John H. Noyes's return to the head of the Community in January 1878 (Robertson 1972, 31). Subsequent tensions emerged as to the leadership positions, especially after 1875 with increased infighting and the emergence of competing factions crystallizing around the figures of John H. Noyes, James Towner and Theodore Noyes (Robertson 1972, 19).

Although they were described by Oneidans as being biblically-inspired, communal rules did not prevent conflict and friction from arising. Nevertheless, members considered their objection to promulgating and following human-made rules to be the keystone of their identity, strongly differentiating them from other communities, including the Shakers. The Shakers were an association "governed not by grace, but by walls, and rigid rules"; the Oneidans' lives were directed by "inspiration" (Oneida Association 1849, 63). While the term "contract" seems unsuitable to characterize the ties between members due to their vehement protestation against it in their texts, I argue that what they instituted was a form of covenant – that is, a mutual engagement based on trust and faith in God and in each other's faith (Nock and Brinig 1999, 26). Their commitment to doing away with any form of legal apparatus – at least during the first years of the Community's existence – can also be observed in their refusal to keep track of donations made to the group:

> As to the legal titles or land and other property, no special measures have been taken to secure the Association from individuals. Those who owned or purchased lands in their own name at the beginning have retained their deeds, and no formal transfer of any property brought in by the members, has been made to the Association. The stock of the company has been consolidated by
> love, and not by law. (Oneida Association 1849, 15–16)

The Oneida Community rules therefore strongly emphasized the vacuity of human-made forms of conventionalized agreement in the establishment of a biblically-sanctioned order. The covenant of the Perfectionists was above all personal, passed between God and individuals. Only after they had recognized the signs of their own salvations could they form a group,

making human interactions fundamentally secondary to the individual's relationship with God. The personal experience of salvation was indeed central to the Perfectionists' beliefs, to the extent that children were taught to "Confess Christ" (Rich and Blake 1983, 28) at the Children House, which they attended from infancy, and until their reached puberty (M. C. Smith 2021, 113). In the autobiographical narrative she wrote for her daughter Edith, Jessie Kinsley (1858-1938) recalled that as a child she did find comfort in the prayer "I confess Christ in me a good spirit" (Rich and Blake 1983, 28), thereby showing how central individual assurance of salvation was to the running of the Community as a whole. While confessions of religious experiences were important for Oneida Perfectionists, they were also surprisingly absent from other sources. For instance, neither did Victor Hawley's diary (1994) nor Tirzah Miller's memoir (2000) focus on the religious experience of their writers. Several reasons can explain this absence. The documents only reflect moments in the lives of these individuals (the two years leading to his departure from the Community for Victor Hawley; a selection of moments between 1868 and 1879 for Tirzah Miller) that do not correspond to their entering into Perfectionism, or to their joining the Community. It may also be that no recording of their impressions at an earlier stage of their religious development was saved. In addition, it is possible that they did not deem it worth keeping in writing; in that case, it would be a sign of just how common and unremarkable it appeared to Oneida Community members.

With religion as the professed reason for joining the Community, the individual's relation to God had pride of place in the political organization. The religious covenant dissipated the need – at least in theory – for a contract among members, since each Perfectionist was bound to God by trust and faith, and shared a similar commitment to bringing forward the heavenly order. But faith and trust met their limits in the implementation of these ideals: *ad hoc* committees could for instance be created when the need arose, like the Stirpicultural Committee (1875-1876) that was created for a time in order to assess whether or not two prospective parents would be a positive match in an eugenic perspective (Parker [1935] 1972, 259–60). Committees and boards such as these were in use at Oneida to organize social life but also economic ventures, indicating the need for a formalized form of agreement with constraint not only with God but also with the rest of the Community. In other words, in order to make the divine designs happen for the Community, more formal, human-made forms of engagement needed to be contracted.

2.3 Social and sexual implications of the religious covenant

In his founding study of the Western part of the state of New York, *The Burned-Over District*,[33] American historian Whitney Cross assimilated the Perfectionists at Oneida with the most radical form of Perfectionism. In accordance with their evangelical beliefs, they held that they were the only authentic heirs of the original church; that they had been purified through religious experience and that their sinlessness was but a step on the way to spiritual growth (Cross 1950, 335–36). Progress was still possible, and would be brought forward through the establishment of new institutions allowing for the blossoming of human "natural" development, in opposition to more "artificial" institutions (Fogarty 2000, 4). Indeed, in 1849, when the Oneida Perfectionists published their *First Annual Report of the Oneida Community*, they linked the two, stating that they pursued the double objective to "develope [sic] the religion of the New Covenant" and "la[y] the foundation of a new state of society, by developing the true theory of sexual morality" (Oneida Association 1849, 27).

The Oneida Community was therefore presented as dual by nature in writings, even though those texts did not render explicit the rules and norms required by the religious covenant. In practice, life at the Oneida Community was ruled by a set of organizational principles that were part of the theories developed by John H. Noyes. In this section, emphasis will be laid on the practical implementation of religious principles.

2.3.1 The encroachment of religion on social life

Looking for occurrences of the word "covenant" in the Oneida Community main publications – and especially in *Bible Communism* (1853) – reveals the deep connection between the religious "New Covenant" and the institution of marriage. When reference was made to marriage, contrast was placed on its realization in a genteel society, in opposition to a perfect one. In the world, marriage was a "code," a convention (Oneida Community 1853, 83). It could also be a "contract"; but this term was reserved for cases in which marriage was misleading as it allowed for a situation where "parties can arrogate the claim of entire devotion and the right to exclude each other from the service of God" (Oneida Community 1853, 127). Neither of these terms emphasized the sacrality of marriage nor its instrumentality in the realization of a

[33] Cross, Whitney, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York. 1800-1850* (1950).

divinely-ordained society. However, to designate the positively-seen realization of wedlock, the phrase "marriage covenant of God" was used (Oneida Community 1853, 114), bringing marriage into the realm of religion and rendering visible the overarching quality of marriage as both a social and religious institution. This departed from orthodox Puritan theology, in which marriage was not understood to be a sacrament.

This merging together of the vocabulary used to refer to both God's alliance and marriage was also pointed out by a member in 1853, who wrote that "[h]ere the *family* and *church* are united. They congregate every evening in the week, not for formal, legal worship, but for social benefit; and to speak as the 'Spirit of Truth' giveth utterance" (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 19 [italics in original]). This passage tightly links the domestic, private structure of life with the public, spiritual one; an association of ideas made central by the Oneida Community rhetoric that assimilated the group of believers to a family. Similarly, entries from Victor Hawley's diaries point to the identification of social commands with religious rules. On March 20, 1867, he and Mary Jones slept together and had intercourse without observing male continence, despite having been forbidden to do so by prominent members of the Oneida Community. By April 5, Hawley wrote in his journal that "[he] asked God and the community forgiveness" (Fogarty 1994, 66). His inclusion of the communards among those they had slighted underlines to the assimilation of the Perfectionists to a God-ordained group who would then also be able to forgive faults. Even in their personal writings did members testify to the impact that religion had on the social understanding of communal rules.

The Community's economic wellbeing was also seen through the lens of spiritual enrichment. To the Oneidans, their ability to provide for themselves was valued insofar as it was a "key indicator of moral probity and religious fitness" (Coffee 2019, 2). Therefore, religion was the measuring stick against which the whole structure of life at Oneida rested. God would provide them with the "opportunity" to sustain themselves; should they be righteous, their industry would lead them to "show the world not only the best results of work, but happy workmen, whose whole life is a worship and a praise instead of a curse"(Oneida Association 1851, 15). If the religious calling of Perfectionists superseded other necessary forms of contractual agreement that ensured the commune's functioning, it was still strongly linked to their material development.

2.3.2 A religion-based social hierarchy

Both the Putney Association and the Oneida Community were organized around the figure of John H. Noyes, their charismatic leader who had received gifts from God.[34] As the most advanced of Perfectionists, Noyes was at the head of the social and theological hierarchies in the Oneida Community, where religious elevation conditioned one's level of responsibility and respectability. Not only did Noyes write many of the founding texts of the Oneida Community; he was also in charge of making decisions and imposing them, for instance on October 5, 1874, when he expressed his disagreement with the way in which Tirzah Miller preserved a strong attachment to her own child – something frowned upon by the Oneidans (Oneida Association 1849, 7). "Mr. Noyes wanted to have me wean little Haydn. I consented, though it is one of the greatest sacrifices of my life. I have enjoyed nursing the sweet little fellow very much indeed. […]" she recorded in her diary (Fogarty 2000, 102), noting both her acceptance of the decision and her reticence to part with her son. Noyes was also one of the deciding figures with regards to the Community's wellbeing. He would broach on topics in his "Home-Talks" or during evening meetings in which members were expected to take part whenever possible. This remained true throughout the Oneida Community's existence. A typical illustration of the process was given in June 1879, when he tackled the question of linking the interests of the hired workers more strongly with those of the Oneidans, as a form of insurance against possible attacks. The issue at hand was the possibility of hiring those workers permanently. This suggestion was answered the following day by William A. Hinds, who was opposed to this measure, and Noyes subsequently responded. As member Francis Wayland-Smith later recorded, Noyes was the one deciding to abandon the debate – a sign of his pivotal role in the organization of social life at Oneida: "The next morning, fearing that the profit-sharing plan might lead to discussion and party differences, Mr. Noyes had to throw cold water on the discussion of it" (qtd. in Robertson 1972, 107).

Some women were recognized as leaders, or "Mothers," for other members, such as Harriet Holton Noyes (1808-1895), Charlotte Noyes Miller (1819-1874), Harriet Noyes Skinner (1817-1893) or Ann Hobart (1846-1908). Other male members close to Noyes had strong

[34] "Charisma" – literally "gift of grace" – was used from 1641 and until the late nineteenth century and was applied by Weber to leaders who emerge in times of crisis, like during the nineteenth-century waves of religious revivals (Olin 1980, 287).

influence on communal life: George Cragin (1808-1884), John Miller (1813-1854), William Woolworth (1824-1904), Erastus Hamilton (1821-1894) and Theodore Pitt (1831-1921). They were the ones who spoke the most in the evening meetings, who wrote articles, who counseled Noyes and shared his vision. Their influence came from their commitment to the ideals of the Community, but also from Noyes's own respect for their education or their spirituality, that were more developed than those of other members (Klee-Hartzell 1993, 182). As spiritual ascendants, Noyes and his close male circle were the ones to introduce young women to complex marriage – having intercourse with them when they reached puberty. The exercise of "sexual seignorial rights" (Fogarty 1994, 216) by Noyes was seen as deriving from his religious superiority and benefitting to the younger person, who could therefore gain access to spiritual elevation. In an unsent letter to anthropologist Anita Newcomb McGee, Theodore Noyes remembered:

> As to father's practice in this function of first husband, I have always been satisfied with his announced rule – that as soon as the growing boy or girl arrived at a state of development such that they should be led into safe, improving relations to forestall unsafe, dangerous ones. If it be admitted that our state as a whole was desirable, then the sooner a girl was launched upon it after she arrived at the requisite control for insuring moderation. Moderate association with men is normal to any healthy women beyond the age of puberty, and she is better for it in every way, if social conditions are honorable and attractive.
> (Theodore Noyes, 1892, qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 216)

Indeed, to gain higher spiritual elevation that would translate into improved respectability in the commune, Oneida community members had to engage in "ascending", or "godly fellowship" (Rich and Blake 1983, 40). In the system of ascending fellowship*, younger members were encouraged to seek association – both social, for instance in work, and sexual[35] – with more elevated and often older members. Furthermore, for the first years of their sexual lives, young members were kept separate in order to limit the risks of "horizontal" or

[35] "The separation of the amative from the propagative, places amative sexual intercourse on the same footing with other ordinary forms of intercourse, such as conversation, kissing, shaking hands, embracing, &c. - So long as the amative and propagative are confounded, sexual intercourse carries with it physical consequences which necessarily take it out of the category of mere social acts" (Oneida Association 1849, 34).

"descending" fellowship that would hinder their progression (Klee-Hartzell 1993, 196). Sexual association with older members offered social opportunities to young Perfectionists, since those who consented to have sexual intercourse with older members were thought to embrace and understand the Community's spirit, and to be taking part in the Perfectionist scheme (Klee-Hartzell 1993, 197). In other words, the institution of ascending fellowship illustrates the incentives offered by religious self-interest to enter into a mutually beneficial agreement among members in order to improve one's own position in the Community. For older members, partaking in sexual community-sanctioned intercourse with younger members indicated that they were in a dominant position. On the other hand, Fogarty highlighted the strength of the duty to cooperate with communal designs, making it a duty to partake in sexual relations with higher members (Fogarty 1994, 29). That is to say, it presented a "potential for abuse in which some – especially young women – might be pressured into having sex with partners they did not desire" (Wonderley 2017, 105). The religious principles at the heart of the Oneida Community therefore had consequences on the spiritual and social lives of its members, and even converted into injunctions that pertained to very intimate aspects – such as the possibility to decline a sexual offer in the context of ascending fellowship. Individuals thus committed both publicly and privately to the system stemming from their shared religious beliefs.

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From the first contact with Perfectionism to the daily life at the Oneida Community, religion offered the main source of rules and teachings. The Oneidans' religious commitment to implement a heavenly-inspired order was at the foundation of their communitarian engagement, shaping the relations between individuals, their faith, and the group. A remarkable feature of the Oneida Community was its putting forward of a divine covenant as the main source of structural authority – more precise rules regarding the communards' lives coming second. Religion shaped both the social and sexual hierarchies in the pantagamous community, translating into the control mechanism of "ascending fellowship" which ensured the cohesion of the group through the encouraged association of older, spiritually-superior members with their younger, less-perfect counterparts in work, daily tasks and amative sexual relations. Notably enough, the alliance with God, in the shape of a covenant that each Perfectionist had to accept in their own hearts through their confession of sinlessness, did not

engage the Oneidans towards one another. However, it will be argued that communal living also rested on other forms of communitarian commitment binding the members together into a family-inspired group: a "utopian contract" (Weisbrod 1980, xiii).

3 Contracting with the group: community engagement and the "utopian contract"

> *We have had visitors from time to time who have testified without exception (unbelievers as well as believers) that we were a peaceful, harmonious, happy, family. (Oneida Association 1849, 61)*

One of the few legal documents about the Oneida Community was drafted at the end of the 1860s to designate four members who would become the legal holders of communal property in response to "the pressure of external circumstances" and to the threat posed by rebellious members (Teeple 1984, 62). The chosen men were John H. Noyes (1811-1886), Charles O. Kellogg (1836-1918), William Woolworth (1824-1894), and Erastus Hamilton (1821-1894) (Teeple 1984, 62; Parker [1935] 1972, 225; Robertson 1972, 11). It was understood at the time that this was an arrangement of circumstance that would not disturb the organization of communal life. Little information about this agreement was provided by the available scholarship – reference to it is even absent from several works. This in itself testifies to the scant legal apparatus of the Oneida Community.

Another of these community-wide documents was the one marking the end of the experiment. A proposal drafted with the legal help of Senator Kernan of the State of New York was submitted to the vote of the "family" on August 30, 1880. Almost all the motions of the "Agreement to Divide and Reorganize" were voted unanimously. Its opening section read:

> We, the undersigned, members of the Oneida Community, hereby *covenant and agree with each other* to abide by the following terms of division of ownership or property, real and personal, and of reorganization of our business and domestic affairs, whether such property be held in joint tenancy by the four Property Holders or in any other manner, except personal property acquired by individuals legitimately by means of the personal appropriations authorized by the Community […].

(qtd. in Robertson 1972, 302 [my emphasis])

The "Agreement" effectively signaled the incorporation of the Oneida Community into a fully commercial entity. It marked a rupture with the previous mode of organization in which no full-sized signed agreement had ever been required to define the structure of the group or its core tenets; the construction of social life in the Oneida Community did not follow legal patterns. However, it will be argued that contractual forms of utopian engagement still existed in the Oneida Community before 1880. Indeed, Carol Weisbrod emphasized the fact that "nineteenth-century American utopias were voluntary associations" resting on "a contractual act" in a broad sense (Weisbrod 1980, xii). Even though she centered her study around the litigation about the limits of communitarian engagement, her definition for "utopian contract"(Weisbrod 1980, xiii) allows for the characterization of the agreement passed by members with the Community, without necessary reference to the law:

> Under the terms of the agreement, on joining the communistic society a member would give everything he had to the community and would accumulate nothing privately by way of property of wages during the period of association. In return, he would be supported by the group. He would be entitled to withdraw whenever he liked, but his support by the group would continue only during the period of association. […] As a matter of right under the contract the member would be entitled neither to return of property brought in nor to wages […]. As a matter of right the member had been entitled to support during membership, and that he had already received. A contract with this overall orientation is referred to here as a utopian contract.
>
> (Weisbrod 1980, xii–xiii)

Such a contract therefore binds the members with the group upon their entering the community and is enforced throughout their stay. Its scope spans the entirety of the member's presence within the settlement, starting from their giving away their property rights and ending with their leaving the community. A crucial aspect of it is that under no circumstance were those utopian communities taking responsibility for the difficulties that their former members might experience should they decide to re-enter mainstream society. In line with this general orientation, *The First Annual Report* of the Oneida Community explicitly enunciated that:

> On the admission of any member, all property belonging to him or her, becomes the property of the Association. A record of the estimated amount will be kept, and in case of the subsequent withdrawal of the member, the Association, according to its practice heretofore, will refund the property or an equivalent amount. *This practice however stands on the ground, not of obligation but of expediency and liberality*; and the time and manner of refunding must be trusted to the discretion of the Association […], no accounts are kept between him and the Association, and *no claim of wages accrues to him in case of subsequent withdrawal*.
> (Oneida Association 1849, 16 [my emphasis])

This initial statement was reinforced by an agreement – of which, again, little mention was made in the scholarship – signed by members in 1864, declaring that the income generated by their work was compensated by the cost of their room and board. This meant that they could not ask for compensation if they decided to leave (Carden 1969, 80). The Oneida Community is a telling example of a society where the notion of "utopian contract" applies fully, as membership was dependent on the free donation of the members' belongings to the group. Contracts of this nature will constitute the focus of the present study. It will first be demonstrated that the engagement of Oneida Community members reflected their joining a "family" (Oneida Community 1867, 11), an analogy that overlaps with contractual agreements in its organization of mutual rights and duties. The act of leaving and its consequences will be the focus of a second part, aimed at highlighting the consequences of putting an end to the "utopian contract." How did members fare in the outer world after leaving, and what help, if any, did the Community provide them with?

3.1 Community engagement and familial structure: rethinking social models

Both in publications geared to an external audience and in their internal communication, Oneida Community documents refer to the Perfectionists as a "family" (Oneida Community 1867, 11) – a term in keeping with the prevalence of marriage as an organizational principle. This was the Oneidans' proposed rewriting of one of the central structures of American society at the time: since true marriage was made valid by love, then complex marriage could be just as legitimate as monogamous marriage, as long at its participants felt love for each other (Spurlock 1988, 2). The rejection of the "marriage code" by

the Oneida Perfectionists (Oneida Community 1867, 55) therefore needs to be mitigated inasmuch as they were not advocating the end of marriage, but the constitution of a broader forms of marriage. When a newly admitted member entered the Community, they would become one of the elements of complex marriage, technically joining into an extended family. Strikingly enough, Teeple's register of members of the Oneida Community was entitled *The Oneida Family*, foregrounding the strength of the family metaphor for the Community's image. Like a family, the Oneida Community was structured into a hierarchy with parents – the prominent members at the top of the religious hierarchy – and children – most adult members and the actual children of the Community (Klee-Hartzell 1993, 183). They were bound together by common interests, and were expected to respect the obligations they had towards each other.

3.1.1 A contractual family

"Indeed, the Community organization began as a family, and has grown as a family […]," the 1867 *Hand-Book* stated (Oneida Community 1867, 11), taking up the metaphor that had been used from the early days of the Oneida Community. *The First Annual Report* had indeed declared that the Oneida Community rested on the idea that "all believers constitute the family of God; that all valuables, whether persons or things, are family property; and that all the labors of the family are directed, judged and rewarded in the distribution of enjoyments by the Father [sic]"(Oneida Association 1849, 15). In this family, the "Father" was unmistakably John H. Noyes. However, the typographic proximity with the Holy Father should not be attributed to pure coincidence here. Indeed, the father of the Community was the one taking care of his children, since they subordinated their independence to him, just as the Perfectionists relinquished the control over their new society to God's designs. Following Klee-Hartzell's observation that "[the Oneidans] gave up their independence to Father Noyes, who, in their own best interests, directed their work and play, their education, their religious development, and their sexual activities […]," it appears that the leading members of the Community had a strongly paternalistic influence on the group,[36] i.e. on the "children in the collective family" (Klee-Hartzell 1993, 183). The hierarchy in this family was open to change as

[36] Paternalism is used here to refer to the relation between individuals when it is mirroring the influence of a father towards his child (Fotion 1979, 1).

some of the "children" developed their spirituality and increased their importance in the group. Some members could rise to prominence due to their involvement in communal matters. It was for instance the case of Tirzah Miller (1843-1902), who was raised in the Oneida Community. She took part in the stirpicultural experiment, bearing three children: George Wallingford Noyes in 1870, Haydyn Inslee (later called Paul Herrick) in 1874 and Hilda Herrick in 1878. Her devotion to the Community was highlighted in her memoir, where she detailed her struggle to fight off "special" – exclusive – love and the ways in which she turned to older members for advice, and in particular to John H. Noyes. In Victor Hawley's diary, however, she was one of the members whose opinions and decisions were heeded to. When Victor Hawley was denied the right to conceive a child with his lover Mary Jones by the Stirpiculture Committee, he told other members that "there was little hope of happiness as things had gone [t]here" and that "[he] thought [he] should be happier away from [t]here" (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 65). This admission led to a confrontation with Tirzah Miller herself: "Tirzah came and said she was dissatisfied with my course of action and that I had better go" (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 65), a testimony to her symbolical importance in the Community. In other words, the analogy with a family befits the Oneida Community as to the relations linking the members to one another, but these categories should not be understood as being static and definitive. Indeed, some members, especially among those who had grown up at Oneida, could acquire intermediate statuses, in which they were both parented by older members and parenting others. This was key in stabilizing the Community as it developed, and as its original founders grew older. The *Hand-Book* clearly equated the older members' desire to "multiply the fathers and mothers of the Community" with their objective to train "others to fill their places as guides and counselors […]" (Oneida Community 1867, 11).

In the Oneida Community family, communism – understood here in the non-Marxist sense of pooling together resources and abolishing private property but without explicit society-wide political goals – was what held the members together. For Jessie Kinsley, it was even the principle lying at the core of "every family," since relatives do not "keep accounts" with each other (Rich and Blake 1983, 34), living together as if they were only one person and had the common interest at heart. In the Oneida Community, this translated into a form of communal living which left little room for privacy, and where private matters could be discussed publicly. One enlightening example of it was provided by Victor Hawley, who

reported on February 9, 1877 that "[a]fter dinner Mary said that Emma spoke to her about our being together so much that GEC said it would be worse for us in the future. Most likely LFD had been making a fuss, because she was at the DO & he was seen talking with GEC afterwards"[37] (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 51). The passage displays the way in which a certain piece of information spread among members. The conduct of a given member could indeed become a concern for other Perfectionists if they strayed from their expected attitude, and the Oneidans' concern about their counterparts' reaction can be read in their writings. For instance, when Tirzah Miller fell in love with the father of her community child, James Herrick, she recorded her dismay as she wanted to embrace their love without infringing the Perfectionists' repudiation of "special love"*:

> There have been some exquisite love passages between Mr. H. and me, and yet there had been trouble too. The case is peculiar, and we feel that the communistic problem is put right in our hands to work out: how to love each other, and yet keep clear from the marriage spirit, and *from all appearance of it*.
> (qtd. in Fogarty 2000, 162 [my emphasis])

Indeed, living in a community structured as a family did not relieve members from following certain rules that were deemed fundamental. One of them was to refrain from exclusive love; another one was to attend daily meetings in which community affairs were discussed; and another one was to strive to annihilate any form of selfishness from their lives. To this aim, mutual criticism* was instrumental, targeting a person's flaws to provide them with the opportunity to mend their ways[38]. In the Oneida Community, it took on several forms through the three decades of the group's existence, but the basis remained the same: a given member would receive strong criticism of their character by other members, in view of correcting their flaws and improve their perfection. While this was above all designed to foster "improvement and fellowship" (Oneida Community 1867, 11) and relied on the expression of "the most

[37] GEC: George Cragin; LFD: Leonard F. Dunn, one of the men trained as a dentist in the Oneida Community; DO: Dentist Office

[38] Noyes did not invent this system: mutual criticism was already practiced among members of the Andover Theological Seminary (*Mutual Criticism* 1876, 5–6). After his time at New Haven, Noyes implemented the system in Putney, among a "Society of Inquiry" (Robertson 1970, 8). Furthermore, a presentation of mutual criticism is included in list of remarkable feature of the Oneida Community in its *First Annual Report* (Oneida Association 1849, 10), testifying to its importance as one of the group's founding tenets.

perfect sincerity" of one's observations (Oneida Community 1867, 12), it could also lead to moments of distress for the person submitted to it. In communal documentation, negative reactions to criticisms were to be imputed to those "whose egotism and vanity are stronger than their love of truth" (Oneida Community 1867, 12). However, testimonies show that it created a situation of heightened vulnerability for the member whose judges were called upon to offer feedback on their character "with no knowledge of psychology" (Rich and Blake 1983, 41). Victor Hawley wrote in several instances that he cried because of the criticism he received. In October 1877, soon before his definitive departure from the Oneida Community, he noted: "Mr Towner made me cry he talked so to me" (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 205). He also noted that Mary Jones had sometimes strong physical reactions to being criticized, like on April 1, 1877, when her sister pointed out her selfish choice to work less with children during her pregnancy: "Emma talked so to Mary about her working that she had a crying time, and has thrown up her supper" (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 158). Hawley's diary also provided examples of blatant signs of rebellion as he worked his way to the decision to leave the Community on August 2, 1877. Nevertheless, there seems to be no sign of discontent aimed at mutual criticism as an institution. Either the members agreed with the necessity of such a structure, or criticizing it did not appear possible. It did nonetheless remain in place until the end of the Community's existence as part of the key elements providing cohesion to the group, as a fundamental tenet of the "utopian contract" the members agreed to.

3.1.2 Contractual obligations and mutual duties

In the Oneida Community "family," members were also tied together by a set of mutual obligations, to which they had agreed when they contracted with the group. One of these roles was communal childrearing, a commitment they shared from the foundation of the Oneida settlement, and more massively after the first stirpicults were born after 1869. For instance, some of the adults were tasked to take care of the children in the evening and have them stay with them at night. Parents could visit their children when they were in the "Children's Department" and mothers could take their child away daily for an hour, but children were to sleep in the same room as other adults at night (M. C. Smith 2021, 113). It was for instance one of the roles attributed to Victor Hawley, accounting for the otherwise surprising mentions "I slept with Doty [Ethelbert Pitt (1874-1944), then two years old] tonight" in his diary entries (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 58). Communal childrearing seemed to provide a mode of life protecting

children from the qualms and the ills of mainstream society. Only when they started "mingling with the world" did they come in contact with selfishness (Rich and Blake 1983, 34). The "utopian contract" therefore partook of the creation of a community ruled by norms that were different thanks to the reshuffling of the individuals' duties.

Above all, due to their relinquishing of property rights, the members of the Oneida Community were held together by common economic interests. They were responsible for the $2,000 debt corresponding to the purchase of the land – a payment they could postpone as long as they paid the interests to the state (Oneida Association 1849, 5). The costs incurred from the running of the Community were also to be compensated – around $24 for board and $10.5 for clothes per person per year in 1849 (Oneida Association 1850, 6). Financial strain was especially substantial in the first nine years of the Oneida settlement, when the Community did not yet generate profit and was living off of its members' contributions (Oneida Community 1867, 19; Foster [1981] 1984, 103). The debt was shared between the initial members in 1848, and each member who joined later carried a part of the financial burden of the Oneida Community. Crucial to the group's survival was that the Community remained economically sound. In this view, in 1875, community member and lawyer James Towner drafted a document to ensure that none of the Oneidans would:

> bring any action, either at law or in equity, or other process or proceeding whatsoever against said Community or its branches, or against the agents or property-holders thereof, or any person or corporation, for wages or other compensation for service, nor for the recovery of any property by us . . . nor make any claim or demand there—for, of any kind or nature whatsoever.
> (J. W. Towner, transcript of an untitled document dated August 17, 1875, Oneida Community Mansion House Archives, qtd. in Wonderley 2017, 160)

Yet, it is probable that this agreement had little force of law and that if members did indeed live harmoniously, it is to be attributed to "force of habit" (Wonderley 2017, 160).

The Oneidans' economic prospects were tightly linked to their production of various goods. Their four main commercial ventures centered on fruit-canning, trap-making, silk-skeining and silverware-smithing. In addition, the Oneidans ran a dairy farm and crafted carpet and lunch bags, nickel trimming for Pullman carts or lace-paper doilies (Robertson 1972, 314). On most days, each member had a role to play in either one of the commercial ventures

or in the tasks of daily life, among which caring for the children, working at the printing office or at the dentist office, cooking, doing laundry etc. However, whenever a heavier work force was needed, members organized into "bees," intensive working sessions during which they strove together to complete one task in a short amount of time (see the pictures of such "bees" – Appendix 1), especially before hired work became more important in the mid-1860s. In such moments, members were relieved from their usual tasks and were expected to take part in the "gamelike" activity in which Fogarty read the "corporate involvement" of the Perfectionists (Fogarty 1994, 18). Developed though the system of working bees was, there was still a need for hired workers in order to meet the demand – especially in the bags, traps and silk production. By the mid-1860s, most of the labor in these three domains was the result of wage-earning employees who worked in factories under the supervision of Oneida Community members (Fogarty 1994, 22; Wonderley 2017, 130; Coffee 2019, 10).

The individuals living in the Oneida Community were therefore part of a group which was striving to emulate a large-scale rendition of family dynamics, and followed the blueprint of the "utopian contract." The members' interests were not supposed to diverge from those of the group, and this conformity was rewarded by a strong emphasis on collectiveness – in work, but also in private, through the mutual surveillance of close friends or relatives and the counseling of younger members by older ones. Nevertheless, for some members the constant proximity with fellow Oneidans did not dissipate a feeling of loneliness and unease. It was the case of Victor Hawley, whose diary puts forward his personal doubts and anxieties about his finding comfort in the Oneida Community (Fogarty 1994, 31). He was one of the members who put an end to the "utopian contract," leaving the group on August 2, 1877 and establishing himself in nearby Syracuse.

3.2 Ending the "utopian contract": leaving the community and finding a place in society

Turnover at the Oneida Community was rather low. Out of the 109 members who had joined over the first two years, 84 did in fact die in the Community – an impressive seventy-seven percent. On average, only one to two women and two to three men left Oneida every year (Carden 1969, 77). When a member left to go into mainstream society, they put to the test the limits of the "utopian contract." As Weisbrod stated, the end of community living marks

the end of the group's obligations towards its former member – the agreement does not hold anymore, and dissenters cannot ask for help in their return into mainstream society. Those people however occupy a pivotal position for the study of communal engagement, as they embody the line between the external and the internal rules and teachings of the community – even though they might have disagreed with them. For some members like Victor Hawley who had joined with his father as a child, it was the first time in their adulthood that they experienced life outside the social system of the Oneida Community. Yet, it should be noted that utopian communities played a major role in societal debates and ideas, and that some of the ideological movements that were present in mainstream society would have been familiar to community members who had been steeped in the promotion of social, political and economic reforms (Rose 1981, ix). Nevertheless, upon leaving the Oneida Community, members were faced with very critical problems such as looking for a job and a place to stay, in a society from which they had stepped away several years earlier, or in which they had never really lived. The following development will center on the testimony of Victor Hawley, whose diary describes his two departures from the Oneida Community, first as a single man, and subsequently as a husband to fellow communard Mary Jones.

3.2.1 Working as a way to transition into mainstream society

In the Oneida Community, work was one of the core foundations of a harmonious social order. Labor as a "means of improvement" was meant to foster "good and industrious habits," and while the Community refused to implement any policy aiming at making work mandatory for its members, it was strongly committed to the positive impact of labor (Oneida Community 1867, 20). As part of their dedication to Perfectionist ideals, members were expected to work several jobs in the various community offices, even though for some – like Victor Hawley – the repeated changes of jobs and locations also revealed his inability to find a fulfilling place in the communal work network (Oneida Community 1867, 20; Fogarty 1994, 39). In return, the work mobility advocated by the Oneida Community provided members with several skills that could be turned into trade qualifications if they ever needed to earn a living outside. The diary entries of his first two days outside the Oneida Community, reproduced in their entirety here, indeed reflected Hawley's preoccupation with finding a job right from the first day of his new life:

> Thursday August 2 1877: $4.50 at Talbot House/ R Finished packing my bag and off for Syracuse at 8.30 The parting was severe for a little while. At Talbot house looked for work some & went to see if Mary was on the noon train. Wrote to her after dinner & then looked for Dentist work I have not made out to get any yet Out till 8 oclock. Only 2 D.O. [Dentist Offices] left to go. Shall I try Engineering. Going to bed 10.45.
>
> Friday August 3 1877: At work for Barnes mending a plate. 1.50 then went to Dr Cherrys to work and tried to see a couple Dentists but they had gone from their offices. Then called on Ingersole who was a Dentist but was half drunk & the rest gass blown over. As I went out into the St another Dr. said it is not all gold that is brass, good advice against the humbug.
>
> (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 190)

These entries retraced Hawley's job hunting, visiting dental practices in order to gather some work that he could use to be able to afford his room at Talbot House. After meeting several dentists, he secured himself some plate-mending[39] for two different employers. The enumeration of different dentist offices, including the uncommendable example of "Ingersole," also indicates that this profession was rather common and sought-after. In that regard, the way of living implemented at Oneida did not leave its members resourceless in case they decided to leave – on the contrary, from the second day of its new life Victor Hawley had encountered a way to make money, putting to good use the job training he had received at Oneida in order to actively integrate into Syracusean society. It was not an easy endeavor: he also listed his numerous failures at finding a trade, for instance on August 4, 1877, after which he spent time watching salt workers[40]: "I went to see 2 Dentists but could not get work, then I went to the Salts Works which was quite a sight seeing them boil at a rate of 100 barrels a day with a 20h. boiler & engine to blow the fire I was too late for the 8 PM Auburn train."(qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 190). This unstable employment situation lasted for several months, as on November 3, 1877 he was still writing that he was "[l]ooking for work but ha[d] not made out to get any yet" (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 205). He also expressed his distress as to his new position

[39] Plates were dental fixtures made with metal or brass, and were used by patients who needed replacement teeth.

[40] Syracuse became a prominent salt-producing city thanks to the availability of large quantities of brine in the south of the Onondaga Lake (Faust and Roberts 1983, 20). Workers were employed to boil the brine in order for the water to evaporate.

in the world, and revealed his uncertainties when, over one month later, he still wondered whether to fully commit to being a dentist: "I thought what shall I work for now that Mary had forsaken me shall I get a lot of Entomological books or turn Dentist" (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 199). Outside of the Oneida Community, it seemed that he had no purpose, and no determining skill or passion to guide him in his new life.

In many ways, Hawley's experience of labor in the Oneida Community – something that was part of the duties he had accepted as one of the parties of the "utopian contract" – had preventively also prepared his possible reintegration into mainstream society. However, no Oneidan did come and visit him, or offer him support. To this extent, it seems that the unraveling of the contract between Victor Hawley and the Oneida Community followed a course that perfectly illustrates Weisbrod's definition: the community provided its member with social support, resources, and a trade. Upon Hawley's leaving, he had to fend for himself.

3.2.2 Supporting the members who left

While Victor Hawley felt that he was very much alone in dealing with his post-Oneida situation, he was still welcome in the Community. Indeed, he went back for the first few Sundays. He also left with a trunkful of belongings which his siblings helped him pack. The Community provided him with enough money to find board.

Within the same diary, Hawley offered an interesting counter scenario where the Oneida Community provided more support to another member who had separated from the group. After he left the Community, Hawley indeed came back, and went away for good in November 1877 with Mary Jones, whom he had married. The last entries of his journal enumerate the details of the objects and care that Mary was given by the Oneidans when she left. For instance, she obtained many more material goods pertaining to the domestic realm. On September 7, after a visit to the Oneida Community, Hawley noted that "Mary came this evening on the 6.37 P M train. She got Husks, Tick,[41] Sheets, Tin ware lamp Crockery &c at O.C. [Oneida Community] & Oneida" (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 207). These donations made the life of the newlyweds more comfortable as they quickly started furnishing their own space when they moved out of the boarding house.

[41] Corn husks were used to stuff mattresses; "tick" refers here to ticking fabric, that was strong enough to be slept on without letting the filling material poke through the mattress.

Several reasons can explain the difference in treatment between Mary Jones and Victor Hawley. When Jones left, she was a married woman whose role in society was strongly tied to the domestic space. Even with the Oneida Community's rhetoric disidentifying women with motherhood – presenting childbearing and childrearing as a "profession[s]" in themselves (M. C. Smith 2021, 107, 123) – and with the fact very few occupations were formally unavailable to women at Oneida (Foster [1981] 1984, 105), women still tended to select tasks that were traditionally female. Despite the reform impulse that lay at the heart of the Oneida Community, they were still the ones responsible for most of the affairs regarding the running of the household. It could also be that when Jones and Hawley left as a couple, they were much less likely to ever come back to the Community, hence the group's providing them with more help than they had given Hawley on his own. When he had first left to remove himself from an uncomfortable situation, he was still in a position of being possibly reintegrated, as it actually happened for a short period of time in October 1877 (Fogarty 1994, 204). The fact that men tended to leave the Community twice as often as women – a situation that Foster attributed to their easier reintegration into society – could also have influenced the perception that the Community had of single men's needs when they left (Carden 1969, 77; Foster [1981] 1984, 95). Additionally, Mary Jones might having been accompanied more thoroughly through her departure because of her participation in the stirpicultural experiment, as she had been pregnant with Theodore Noyes's child, even though the baby did not survive (Fogarty 1994, 164). Her commitment to Perfectionist values and the advancement of the eugenics project might have inclined the Oneidans to help her more.

These two situations – albeit reflecting the experience of only two community members – therefore highlight the blurriness that is inherent to the end of the "utopian contract." For as long as they stayed in the Oneida Community, their needs were taken care of and they could rely on the group to develop the skills they needed to find their place in the commune. When members left the community, the "utopian contract" technically did not hold anymore. However, the discrepancy between Hawley's treatment as a single man and the help received by the Jones-Hawley couple when they left also underlines how fundamentally unstandardized the procedure was since multiple factors could justify prolonging communal support.

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Weisbrod's "utopian contract" provides a fruitful frame of analysis to understand the tensions within the utopian engagement of members of the Oneida Community, symbolically structuring individual engagement into a general pattern. However, the intrinsically informal dimension of such a contractual form must serve as a warning against the tendency to oversimplify human interactions. Dissolving the contract, for instance, was subject to variations depending on the person, as well as on their attitude towards the Community in general. The Jones-Hawley comparison thus sheds light on the varied levels of engagement that members could feel with regards to their contractual obligations. It should also not be dismissed that neither Jones nor Hawley were adults when they joined the Oneida Community. It could be argued that this offsets the basis for the use of the notion of the "utopian contract" altogether, as far as they were concerned.

Another criticism that could be levied against reading all community engagements as a "utopian contract" lies precisely in the fact that it tends to unify individual experiences, effectively aggregating every member into a single group. As such, it does not account for the various facets of an individual's reaction to communal life, especially when it comes to their bodily integrity and their private thoughts and feelings. When pregnant Mary Jones was hurt by a child who ran into her belly, she made the decision to cut down on her workload, "as though she had given away so much of her life to the children that she need[ed] a rest" (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 130). She sought respite from community children in order to take care of her own body and her own child. This transition from communal labor to personal care is emblematic of her own shift in priorities, and brings forward the necessary analysis of the interactions of intimacy and self-preservation in a communal setting.

4 An implied sexual contract? Utopian engagement and intimacy

The question now arises: What is the effect of this tremendous, irresponsible government, upon individual liberty ? can freedom exist under it? (Oneida Association 1849, 13)

The decline in the number of pregnancies that an average white woman had to go through in her life in the nineteenth century – from an average of 7.04 children per woman in 1800 to 3.56 in 1900 – marked a turn in the history of the emancipation of women, allowing for their evolution towards being more active members of society (D. S. Smith 1973, 43–44). Control over one's sexuality was central to the improvement of women's conditions; in that sense, the Oneidans' experiment constitutes a mine of information for the historical study of gender domination and emancipation. The previous developments showed that the communistic and religious impulses animating the Oneida Community had consequences on the social and the sexual lives of its members. Entering the "utopian contract" implied that one was aligned with the group's values in terms of spiritual beliefs, but also that one agreed with their reorganization of familial structures, including their stance against monogamous, "simple" marriage. Joining the Oneida Community family meant that the new members entered complex marriage. In other words, the "utopian contract" had a corollary: a sexual contract. There were three layers to this sexual contract. Firstly, it referred to the *ad hoc* agreement of a heterosexual pair of Oneidans to have intercourse – it then adopted a meaning close to that of "consent." Secondly, it also described the implied sexual availability of the Perfectionists who joined the commune, a structuring feature of which was group marriage – I will call this the utopian sexual contract. Finally, the sexual contract is a concept that was framed by Carole Pateman to argue that contractual societies rely on patriarchal domination over women as the foundation of their system (Pateman 1988, 2).

Central to the idea of a contract is its reliance on the parties' freedom to bind themselves to the other. But was such freedom guaranteed in the Oneida Community for both men and

women? The official statements of the Oneida Community indeed seemed to foster an atmosphere of consent and respect of each other's boundaries, as per this previously-cited passage:

> Another principle, well known and carried out in the Communities, is, that persons shall not be obliged to receive under any circumstances the attentions of those whom they do not like. They abhor rapes, whether committed under the cover of marriage or elsewhere. The Communities are pledged to protect all their members from disagreeable social approaches. Every woman is free to refuse every man's attentions.
> (Oneida Community 1867, 15)

This commitment to allowing women to turn down sexual proposals was reinforced by a rule positing that such offers were to be made through a third party – a requirement ensuring that the request was easier to reject. It also brought increased accountability of the members' sexual lives through the intervention of an onlooker. These rules were followed with "little difficulty" by members, who aimed at increasing their self-control as they became "enlightened" in the ways of the Community (Oneida Community 1867, 15). Sexuality at Oneida thus adopted the form of a contractual agreement, at least in theory. But its implementation did give rise to tensions justifying the present attempt at questioning the ability to capture the complex interactions between duty and liberty in the members' sexual lives with the contractual analogy.

It will be shown that the commune was a space in which the limits between voluntary agreement – consent to sexual relations – and constraint were blurred. Further reconsideration of the impact of the sexual contract for women in the Oneida Community is brought forward by Pateman, for whom "[c]ontract is the specifically modern means of creating relationships of subordination, but, because civil subordination originates in contract, it is presented as freedom" (Pateman 1988, 118). This theoretical frame sheds a new light on the intersection of private and public lives and the consequences of the religious and social contracts structuring the Oneida Community. Indeed, a paradox emerges: gaining control over one's body and reproductive options were permitted by the sexual contract, issued from the members' utopian engagement. But in order for women to be able to contract such an agreement, they needed to

be considered as individuals – that it, persons with control over their own bodies[42] – a status that was traditionally denied to women, since for instance there existed no such thing as marital rape in the eyes of the law (Spencer-Wood 2006, 154). Women in the Oneida Community were therefore considered as individuals in their own rights insofar as they seemingly could agree to the sexual contract – but were they truly free to contract such an agreement, and in a position to consent to having sexual relations with other members? Does the utopian sexual contract even leave room for consent? While the present study does not aim at making any psychological analyses, it will center on testimonies to pinpoint the major friction points between the freedom to contract and gender domination. The aim of it will be to assess the extent to which they validate or undermine the contractual framework that legitimized the sexual structures of the Oneida Community.

A contract is an agreement concluded between two individuals who are free to bind oneself to the other; all the more when sexuality and intimacy are concerned. In the context of the Oneida Community, it will be necessary to study traces of the permanence of each members' individuality and their ability to establish such contracts freely, in order to then assess whether they were in a position allowing them to consent to the communal sexual implications brought forward by their admission into the group.

4.1 The emergence of communal individuality

4.1.1 The (im)possibility of emancipation for Oneida Community women

Among Pateman's heaviest criticisms of the rhetoric of the contract is its application to marriage. In her view, the marriage contract is but the disguise of the domination of men over women's bodies, consolidating unequal gender dynamics (Pateman 1988, 110). Parts of her conclusion were not foreign to nineteenth-century Perfectionists themselves, who deplored the fact that marriage implied a loss of ownership over their own bodies, likening it to a "sale" of one's "right to their bodies" (Oneida Community 1853, 102). To them, it was all the more detrimental as it created a competition with "Christ's ownership" over their persons: husbands and wives had proprietary rights over each other, and therefore did not fully belong with Christ (Oneida Community 1853, 112). A few decades earlier, one of the earliest feminist

[42] "The individual owns his body and his capacities as pieces of property, just as he owns material property" (Pateman 1988, 55).

criticisms of marriage as a contract was articulated by William Thompson in his *Appeal of One Half the Human Race* (1825).[43] He concluded that only with the obtention of political rights for women and the end of capitalism would the imbalance in gender relations be redressed (Pateman 1988, 156). Strikingly enough, the Oneidans advocated change on both subjects. Calling themselves "Bible Communists" (Oneida Community 1853, 41), they did reject capitalism and money-based exchanges in the social structures of communal life – with the important exception of the production of goods that they sold on the national and international markets.

They also promoted more political rights for women, especially through the development of a "rhetoric of choice" intended to establish a distinction between motherhood and womanhood. Women could actively make a choice as to their contribution to the Community, either by embracing motherhood – especially after the beginning of stirpiculture in 1869 – or through some other work (M. C. Smith 2021, 107, 123). The equivalence between motherhood and a profession was at the basis of the Oneida Community's approach to women's condition, providing them with the possibility to choose the course of what could be termed as their professional lives. In his article discussing the attitudes that various critical trends have assumed about the Oneida Community, Foster pointed out that one branch of research had envisioned the commune as the "vanguard of sexual liberation and woman's rights" (Foster 1981, 165). While he dismissed the historical accuracy of such arguments, Foster nonetheless suggested that the Community enabled significative change, albeit temporary, in gender relations (Foster 1981, 182).

However, scholars have also pointed out the imperfection of the Oneidans' fight against gender inequality, construing the Community as the site of failed feminist experiments. Kern concluded that women were far from being as autonomous and able to self-determine as previous scholarship had idealized them to be. At Oneida, the reform of gender structures was "reform mainly *of* the female, only secondarily *for* her, and very seldom *by* her" (Kern 1981, 273 [emphasis in original]). Smith argued that, inasmuch as the Oneida Community was the product of nineteenth-century feminist impulses (especially in that it identified the root of gender inequality with women's reproductive role), its implementation

43 Thompson, William, *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic, Slavery* (1825).

of feminist reform was not as groundbreaking as its leader thought it was. On the contrary, she demonstrated that "efforts for women's liberation [served] to reinforce gendered hierarchies and undermine women's agency," adding ever more constraints on women while not fostering the conditions that they needed to achieve "sexual and maternal autonomy" (M. C. Smith 2021, 110).

It therefore appears that there should be no idealization of the condition of women in the Oneida Community. While they benefited from the social and religious experiment that enabled a softening of some of the pressure bearing down on middle-class, white women – in particular about their reproductive role – they did not overcome many of the nineteenth-century restrictions linked to traditional associations with womanhood. The Oneidans' objective of reaching a state of society in which women would have become "female m[e]n" played up the ambiguity of the realization of gender equality (Oneida Association 1849, 41). Furthermore, Foster argued that in the Oneida Community, domination was better apprehended in terms of social and religious hierarchies, rather than in strictly gendered patterns (Foster [1981] 1984, 106). The object of this development is certainly not to dismiss the relevance of gender distinctions in the understanding of social phenomena in nineteenth-century United Stated. The relevance of such approach was evidenced by scholarship studying traditional historical fields through a gender-sensitive lens: politics (Baker 1984; Yellin and Van Horne 1994; Newman 1999), marriage (Faulkner 2019; Pearsall 2019), economic citizenship (Boiteux 2023), reform movements (Conway 1971; Ginzberg 1990; 2000; Narvaez 2022), science (Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg 1973; Hayden 2013; Hamlin 2015), etc. However, in order to determine how the admission into the Community impacted members in terms of their potential emancipation, a perspective should be adopted that focuses first on the relations between the individuals[44] and the group.

4.1.2 Maintaining privacy and self-determination in a community of property, body and souls

Victor Hawley's diary tells of the sometimes-hostile reactions that some members felt towards the intrusion of the public eye in their personal life. For instance, on April 15, 1877, he

[44] However, Pateman's criticism of the apparent universality of the contractual notion of "individual" as inherently placing women under patriarchal domination should be kept in mind (Pateman 1988, 77–78).

wrote about his frustration when Harriet N. Skinner refused to ask Mary Jones to come to his room:

> I asked Mrs Skinner to ask Mary to come to my room tonight but Mrs Skinner would not ask her and said she was afraid my influence would be bad for Mary & draw her down into a sickely [sic] state They think the separation is what has helped Mary but it is the change of rooms & the medicine which Dr Carpenter sent which has stopped the Leaccaped & throwing up phlegm, & chewing spruce gum has enabled her to swallow the saliva which she had to spit it out.
> (Fogarty 1994, 161)

In this passage, Hawley distinguished himself by rejecting what other members – "they" – believed about his relationship with Jones. Admittedly, in the eyes of complex marriage advocates, the very strong ties between Jones and Hawley definitely constituted a case of special, exclusive love; and as fellow members of the Community, it would have been the duty of those onlookers to step in and try to call the sinners' attention to their faults. But instead of recognizing the group's opinion as valid, Hawley strengthened his dissent and left evidence of a strong sense of individuality, even in a communal society. This raises the question of the ways in which the Oneidans managed to balance their membership in a communal society with a sense of self and separation from the group.

Several strategies were implemented by members to achieve this result. The literature dedicated to retracing the individual experiences of members – either as autobiographies (P. Noyes 1937; Worden 1950; P. Noyes 1958; C. A. Noyes 1960; Robertson 1977; Rich and Blake 1983) or as biographical accounts (G. W. Noyes 1923; 1931; Parker [1935] 1972; Sandeen 1971; Thomas 1977; Teeple 1984; Klaw 1993) – is a prime example of these particular stories that were mingled in the broader history of the group. In some cases, testimonies are limited to the partial rendering of community experience. For instance, in 1892, about the introduction of young women to complex marriage by John H. Noyes himself or by the men he designated, his son Theodore Noyes wrote: "[o]f the details of the practice I know very little," (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 215) before moving on to a justification rooted in his acceptance of communal rules. Still, his refusal to bring in more details also highlighted his distancing – either genuine or for appearances' sake – from certain rules, as an individual. Conversely, the same strategy consisting in refusing to share some elements could nonetheless be used to assimilate

individuals more closely with the group, causing individual experience to be dissolved into a more collectively and curated account. For instance, when Jessie Kinsley wrote the narrative of her youth for her daughter, she deliberately hid certain aspects of her memories, explicitly stating: "I cannot tell you much about this part of my life in the Community because it is *too strange to be understood*. With my present growth I cannot, as I said before, look back upon it with understanding or gauge the depth of my own innocence" (Rich and Blake 1983, 39 [my emphasis]). This dissimulation of individual experience behind the curtain of communal, collective experience was reinforced by Kinsley's own admission that her autobiography was "not a history of the Oneida Community," and that she "did not deal intimately with certain parts even of [her] own life" (Rich and Blake 1983, 65). This last part, enigmatic as it is, posited a form of communion with the group that was so total that it disqualified members to speak about their own lives.

Still, some members retained a strong sense of individuality by consigning of their experience in a diary. Hawley's is a striking example of such display of separation with the group – albeit in the form of a completely private medium. He used Munson shorthand[45] (a type of symbolic writing) to encode certain passages of his writing relating to sexual practices that were in opposition with that of the Community – like privileging an exclusive partnership with Mary Jones and trying to conceive a child with her. Fogarty interpreted his resorting to Munson – a form of encryption widely used in the Oneida Community which would therefore not have prevented anybody from actually reading the notes – as a form of psychological relief, materializing his opposition by distinguishing the passages that were proof of his failure to conform to communal rules (Fogarty 1994, 33). Other members did also record their rule-breaking love in their diaries, such as Charles A. Cragin, whose entries were "full of passionate and pathetic love for [Jessie Kinsley's] precious Edith"[46] (Rich and Blake 1983, 47). Kinsley learnt this when the diaries of the late Charles Cragin were read to the full gathered community – "before everyone – everyone!" she remembered, underlying the breach of respect for the deceased's individuality and previous desires (Rich and Blake 1983, 47).

[45] An instance of Munson shorthand can be found in Van Sant, Elizabeth, and James E Munson, *Van Sant manual of shorthand,* Chicago, New York, Lyons and Carnahan, 1913. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/13018979/. Source in the public domain.

[46] Edith was a close friend of Kinsley's.

Preserving one's sense of distinctiveness from the group was therefore a contested endeavor that shed light on the tensions existing between the individuals and the group.

4.1.3 Women's resistance and struggle for privacy

Among the potential subjects of conflict with the Community, women were most targeted for their behaviors relating to their roles as genitors and caregivers. An emblematic example is the Stirpicultural Committee's reaction when Mary Jones expressed her desire to have a child, and to try again very soon after she gave birth to a stillborn child in 1877 (Fogarty 1994, 75). The point of entry in this contested interaction is third-party Victor Hawley who documented the situation – unfortunately, no account by Jones herself was preserved. The repeated expression of her desire to have a child posed a problem for the Community: was she not favoring the fulfilment of her own selfish aspirations, rather than communal objectives? In that case, was it not the Oneidans' role to curb this selfish impulse by withholding the permission to conceive a child from her (Fogarty 1994, 176)?

Similar concerns could be raised about the fault of "philoprogetiveness," an ill that was commonly imputed to mothers. *The First Annual Report* thus deplored the

> temporary distress of the mothers in giving up their little ones to the care of others, which made occasion for some *melo-dramatic* [sic] scenes; but the wounds of philoprogetiveness were soon healed, and the mothers soon learned to value their own freedom and opportunity of education, and the improved condition of their children, more than the luxury of a *sickly maternal tenderness*.
> (Oneida Association 1849, 6–7 [my emphasis])

The issues with "philoprogetiveness" became heightened after the start of the stirpicultural experiment, with more members becoming attached to their own child. But Hartzell-Klee also argues that it was a salient problem for the Oneidans because of its tight association with women. Oneida Community mothers were in charge of being the sole caregiver of their infants until their first birthday. That is to say that as mothers, women were empowered and given an important task; something that was to be taken away from them as their child grew up. It is thus not surprising that mothers should have resisted the forced severing of the close ties they had with their child, rejecting their loss of control in the one sphere where they had obtained it (Klee-Hartzell 1993, 190).

This is in line with Kern's reading of women as the imbalanced agents in the gender dynamics of the Oneida Community. In the leaders' views, women were potentially dangerous for the controlled, heavenly-inspired order they aspired to, as "predatory, sexually aggressive beings, who vampire-like [were] capable draining men of their vital fluids, or worse still, of emasculating them, and leaving them spiritually, and sexually and socially impotent" (Kern 1981, 228). This attitude corresponded to the patriarchal defiance towards women. The association of "women, their bodies and bodily passions" with nature and impulsiveness triggered the need for forms of social control to enforce order, necessary to the establishment of society (Pateman 1988, 100). To use Pateman's own words, potentially "[u]nlimited feminine desire must always be contained by patriarchal right. Women's relations to the social world must always be mediated" (Pateman 1988, 100). In the Oneida Community, and in the patriarchal society at large, the control exerted by men over women's bodies – especially through the implementation of rules and hierarchies resorting to the logic of religious, social and legal commands –were key to the preservation of the social order.

To some extent, the Oneida Community allowed members, and especially women, to gain a level of agency and freedom that could be seen in, for instance, the expression of their attachment to their children. However, while gender dynamics were rather less imbalanced in the Oneida Community than they were in the mainstream society of the nineteenth-century in the United States, women were still strongly repressed when they expressed desires and opinions that broke communal rules. In view of this targeting of women's individuality, the conditions for the contracting of *ad hoc* sexual agreements – consenting to having sexual intercourse – by women was threatened by the overarching utopian sexual contract – the implied acceptance of sexual participation in complex marriage – that they had tacitly agreed to when they joined.

4.2 Sexual contract or sexual constraint?

Arguing that every adult member in the Oneida Community had frequent sexual encounters with their fellow Perfectionists would be over-simplified. Pierrepont Noyes, for instance, mentioned in *My Father's House* that some male members like Henry A. Warne, who taught school to community children born in the 1870s and 1880s, did actually choose to live

a celibate life in the commune (P. Noyes 1937, 150; Foster 1986, 25). However, the fact that this particular situation was deemed worth mentioning also sheds light on the anomaly of such behavior. On the other hand, a female member who had left the Community also declared that she "ha[d] known of girls no older than sixteen or seventeen years of age being called upon to have intercourse as often as seven times in a week and oftener, perhaps with a feeling of repugnance to all of those whom she was with during the time" (Van de Warker 1884, 7). The Oneida Community members' sexual lives are thus to be understood as spanning a wide range of possibilities and intensity, and to be influenced by demographic factors such as gender and age, as well as by individual variations. For the purposes of this study, and in the absence of documentation contradicting the assumption that members conformed with communal rules and had sexual relations in compliance with the methodology of complex marriage and male continence, the following hypothesis will be accepted: membership at the Oneida Community translated into the members' sexual lives, at least symbolically. In other words, one of the defining criteria for the Oneidans was to have accepted the principles of complex marriage, and to be making choices within this hermeneutical framework. Among the decisions that the members could make was that of having sexual intercourse. In order to determine the extent to which the utopian sexual contract weakened or annulled the possibility for women to refuse sexual association with a fellow member, three conditions for consent will be investigated: freedom to choose one's partner; freedom to do so without external pressure; and freedom to decide to have sexual relations at all. Indeed, while the study of consent rests on the identification of the persons' decisions, the conditions surrounding their choices also need to be integrated in the reflection (Illouz 2020, 273).

4.2.1 Selecting one's sexual partners

As shown by the example of Mary Jones and Victor Hawley, sometimes communal objectives contradicted the member's aspirations, and encroached on their intimate choices. But there are also accounts of happy, enriching situations where a woman felt encouraged and rewarded by her sexual partners. For instance, Jessie Kinsley's first lover was George Allen, with whom she had what would be today called a long-term non-exclusive relationship, until she decided to put an end to it when he became more interested in another member (Rich and Blake 1983, 38–39). Kinsley thereby displayed agency and thoroughly followed the communal rule rejecting selfishness, especially within human interactions. She seems to have lived in

accordance with Oneida Community rules, as she pointed out that she "[could not] remember being criticised [sic] for special love. [She] loved G. [George Allen] and C. [Charles Cragin] and O. [Orrin Wright]. Yet always with reserve; unreserved love came when Community life was over and [she] married Myron, [her daughter's] father" (Rich and Blake 1983, 39). In many ways, this passage is emblematic of the paradigmatic shift that existed in the Oneida Community in terms of romantic and sexual life. While it might have been difficult even for Kinsley's daughter to comprehend it, relations existed in a realm dominated by restrain of one's impulses so as to establish a form of harmonious, "reserve[d]" love.

Even though Kinsley's own inclinations did not contravene communal rules, other members entered into more explicit opposition, especially after the start of the stirpicultural experiment in 1869. The heightened visibility of tensions at that time may be partly imputed to the possibility of these relations becoming materially embodied by children. Only 9 unions were approved out of the 51 pairs of potential parents who came up to the Stirpicultural Committee between January 1875 and April 1876 to request the authorization to conceive a child. In this context, unplanned or accidental pregnancies could be seen as forms of resistance. Kinsley herself mentioned the accusative remarks made by Marion Bloom when she had her daughter Edith in 1881, an unplanned pregnancy that Kinsley herself presented as "a happy 'mistake'" (Rich and Blake 1983, 57). Pregnancy control therefore put in sharp relief the inherent possibility of resistance by members who would want to overturn communal control over their bodies.

Still, significant part of the criticism levied about the organization of sexual life in the Oneida Community focuses on the first years of a member's active participation in complex marriage, and the transition from child to adult membership for "second-generation Oneidans" – those who had grown up in the Oneida Community (Krischner 1983, 19). Rumors of accusations of statutory rape were listed as one of the reasons that pushed Noyes to emigrate to Canada in 1879 (Wonderley 2017, 158). As positive a picture as she tried to paint of her life, Kinsley herself admitted to her incomprehension of the implications of her transition into adulthood. She recalled that "no sex instinct was consciously awake in [her]" when she was first introduced to the "strange, mysterious, uncomprehended [sic] means of Ascending Fellowship" at age sixteen (Rich and Blake 1983, 39–40). Whether her introduction was performed by George Allen or John H. Noyes is unclear – in either case, the gap in age and

hierarchical status would have been significant, as George Allen was twenty years older than Kinsley was, and John H. Noyes forty-seven. Kinsley's experience therefore illustrates the observation made by Hartzell-Klee on the Oneida Community practices of introducing adolescents into a system of sexual relations with very little foreknowledge of the details. She remarked that "Oneida children knew little of the sexual arrangements in the community" as they lived apart from adults – that is, until they reached puberty and fully transitioned into the system of adult membership (Klee-Hartzell, 1993, 196). On the contrary, Noyes held the belief that young girls started to feel "amative" inclinations from a young age and that their early inclusion into complex marriage was key to keeping them satisfied (Van de Warker 1884, 8). Drawing on data collected by gynecologist Van der Warker, Wonderley estimates that, on average, young women were fifteen when they entered complex marriage (Wonderley 2017, 158; Van de Warker 1884, 13). However, I contend that this average age was inflated by the integration of women who had been married before they joined the Oneida Community in the study sample. By removing these 14 women from the panel of 42 that Van de Warker had examined, the average age for introduction to complex marriage for girls who reached puberty at Oneida drops to a little under 14 years old, and the updated median age for the first "communistic marriage" becomes just 13, with the younger girl being but 10 years old (see Appendix 5). The gynecologist also reproduced the testimony of an anonymous woman who declared that some girls started having sexual relations "before" puberty, as young as 9 years old (Van de Warker 1884, 8). Disturbing as this reassessment of the children's age is – and should be –, most of the Oneida Community older males would still not have qualified for charges of statutory rape, since the age of consent in the state of New York at the time was 10 years old (Odem 1995, 13–14). Yet, the introduction of very young members into a social system based on religious and sexual hierarchies makes the plausibility of external pressure influencing female members of the Oneida Community to have sexual relations significantly higher.

4.2.2 Sexuality as a form of social control

The "control of young women" was the object of competition between men, Theodore Noyes wrote. To avoid undue contention between Oneida Community members, John H. Noyes or men from his close circles who had been instructed to do so were the ones introducing young women to sexuality, as a means to maintain social control by freeing them

from the "whole mass of sentiment and passion" of their virginity. The result was their accession to a status of dignity akin to that of a "matron" in ordinary society (Theodore Noyes 1892, qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 215). Such statement encapsulates the social and collective importance of the introduction of young members – and most importantly women – into complex marriage. As an illustration of the dynamics at play, Jessie Kinsley's lovers were all much older than she was: George Allen (1838-1912), Charles Cragin (1841-1878) and Orrin Wright (1847-1915) were all between eleven and twenty years older than the young woman who was born in 1858. She was introduced to complex marriage at age sixteen and was twenty-one when the Oneida Community was dissolved – i.e. still much younger than any of her partners had been. This imbalance in the age and status of the participants in sexual relations was reduplicated in the stirpicultural experiment, in which men were on average twelve years older than their female counterparts (Fogarty 1994, 24). From their first relations to until they turned twenty-five, young women had sex with older men only, because they were the one who had mastered the method of male continence; the same was true of young men, who would practice the techniques with menopausal women, thereby limiting the risks of unplanned pregnancy (Klee-Hartzell 1993, 197).

The justification given by the leaders for inducing very young children into sexual life – as a rational course of action designed to increase the harmony of the group – completely occults the personal interests and desire, or lack thereof, that the children would have felt at that point of their lives. Questionably, no testimony linked the transition from a sexless child of the Community into a sexually active member with a psychological maturing of the child. On the contrary, the introduction of girls to complex marriage was triggered by their first menstruations – that is, a purely physical sign. This is to be contrasted with the findings of later sociological studies that have shown that adolescence it a time when young girls experience a dichotomy between a loss of connection to their bodies paired with increased conscience of being sexualized (Tolman 1993; 1994; Tolman and Debold 1994). In this context, the probability for very young Oneida Community members to have sexual relations that they did not have the ability to agree to is very high. Their lack of understanding of what was implied, as well as the significant gap in age and status with their assigned partners did crystalize into a situation where neither their freedom to select their partner nor their ability to do so outside of the influence of external pressure could be established.

How did members over the age of twenty-five – and especially women – fare in the sexual economy of the Oneida Community? Tirzah Miller's memoir is a precious source on this topic, as it covers twelve years of her life, starting when she was twenty-four in 1868 and ending in 1880 when she was the thirty-six-year-old mother of three community children. Her entries focused heavily on her affective state, documenting her sex life and exploring the question of power dynamics and social pressure in one's personal experience in the Oneida Community. Indeed, she pointed early on to the fact that she felt torn between her desire for some of her partners, bordering on "special love," and her "duty" towards the Community's scriptural guidance (Fogarty 2000, 29). Even for respectable members like her, who had already given proof of their commitment to Noyes's vision, the pressure to maintain their position through renewed adhesion to communal rules was therefore omnipresent. In this view, sexuality was a tool wielded by the leaders of the Oneida Community to enforce social control. This was pushed even further during the stirpicultural phase (1869-1879) when sex was used to punish those in the second generation of Oneidans who acted in dissentious ways,[47] while rewarding the most loyal and promising members by granting them the permission to have children (Krischner 1983, 29).

Finally, sexuality was instrumental in the Oneida Community as it was a lever that women could use to reach a higher status. Religious and social hierarchies were central to one's decision and ability to accept or reject sexual proposals. An anonymous woman thus told Van de Warker that a woman who turned down a leading member was likely to be barred from keeping the "respectable position" that she might be holding at that time, as this decision would be seen as the evidence of her lack of humility – a flaw frowned upon by the Oneidans (Van de Warker 1884, 8). The testimony also remarked on the "moral pressure" that young women were put under when sought after by much older men (ranging from fifty to seventy years old) as their offers were seen as opportunities to increase their morality, as well as compliments to their physiques (Van de Warker 1884, 9). These considerations must have played heavily into the young women's decisions to refuse sexual relations – a choice upon which hinged the improvement of their social status and religious enlightenment.

[47] The communal opposition to the request of Jones and Hawley to conceive a child was an illustration of such reprimand of second-generation couples displaying objectionable behavior and being targeted for it (Krischner 1983, 29).

The religious and communal rules of the Oneida Community rested on the assumption that sexuality was constitutive of social experience, with Community leaders encouraging the other members to actively take part in it (Van de Warker 1884, 8). Yet, far from springing from the members' sole sexual desire, it was subject to collective control, and could even be orchestrated by Community leaders who used it as a tool to ensure social order. As much as individual testimonies from women show that some of the members' interests were met by the arrangements, they also reveal the extent to which sexuality was often out of their hands. It was especially the case for younger members who reached puberty in the Oneida Community and were expected to take part in the collective sexual life. Due to the superiority of their assigned first sexual partners both in age and status, the conditions were acutely unfit to provide them with the ability to consent to having intercourse.

4.2.3 Freedom to consent or implied sexual availability?

The previous developments have demonstrated that members of the Oneida Community, and especially women, were not free to choose their sexual partners nor to escape the encroachment of a collective sexual economy, or "sexual politics" (Krischner 1983, 17). However, the official position of the Oneida Community was one that emphasized the possibility for women to refuse those sexual encounters that they did not desire. Such rules, put into words in the 1867 official publication of the Community (Oneida Community 1867, 15), were replicated in Jessie Kinsley's autobiography, which is a proof that those words and principles did translate, in one way or another, into the members' lives:

> The man did not solicit the woman directly, nor the woman the man.[48] When a man imagined that he would be welcomed, he then ventured to ask a third party—usually an older woman — to arrange (not in his presence) a meeting for him with the desired one. And thus you see, the women of the Community had the freedom to say "no" or "yes" easily, while the third party also arranged for the place of meeting."
>
> (Rich and Blake 1983, 40–41)

[48] This particular turn of phrase seems to suggest that women could also initiate sexual proposals. However, I have not encountered testimonies or scholarly reference to such situations.

Even years after the experiment,[49] Kinsley reasserted the communal commitment to respecting the members' ability to exert agency in their sexual lives. The practice was thought to be justified by its importance in preserving the members' integrity and their propension to foster the best sexual encounter possible. An open discussion on this topic occurred between Tirzah Miller and her uncle and lover John H. Noyes on April 6, 1869. After they had sex, Noyes told Miller: "You impress me with the feeling that your sexual nature has been abused by your entering unto sexual intercourse *without appetite*" (Fogarty 2000, 60 [my emphasis]). The rest of the conversation delineated the importance of following one's inclination in terms of sexuality, as Miller admitted to having had intercourse with men against her wishes, out of a sense of obligation:

> "It is true, that I have slept with men without any appetite, and a great deal lately." "But why do you? I thought you promised me once you wouldn't." I told him I had not quite dared just follow my attractions in that aspect. But he said I must, or it would spoil it all for me. This is true even now, for I have been away so much this winter in a kind of *duty-doing spirit* with folks for whom I had no attraction, that I have lost all appetite for intercourse with men whom I love, and have always had splendid times with. I have felt that it was a great expense to me, and was taking all the romance out of life; but I didn't know what to do, and *thought I was doing my duty*. Oh! I feel so relieved! *I had hardly dared to hope I need do nothing in this line but what I felt an attraction for*.
>
> (Fogarty 2000, 60 [underlined word in original; my emphasis])

Two main conclusions can be drawn from this passage. First, even in the most intimate of settings, the official commitment of the Oneida Community to uphold a member's possibility to refuse sexual intercourse was reasserted – in this case, Miller was reminded of it by Noyes himself. She was to retake control over her sexuality. Strikingly, Miller's reaction displays a contradictory second conclusion. By acknowledging the "duty-doing spirit" with which she complied with the offers she had received, she also revealed the little agency she actually exerted on her own sexual choices. Indeed, she needed Noyes to tackle the subject for her to realize that she needed to "do nothing but what [she] felt an inclination for." Whether the principle was not known of all Oneidans is doubtful; however, it may be that the translation

[49] Kinsley's account was dated from the summer of 1914.

of this philosophy into daily practices was not integrated to the mindset of the members of the Oneida Community. Female communards therefore lived under a regime of assumed consent, as much for their male counterparts as in their own eyes. An example of the uncharted sexual tensions – exceeding the frame of consensual sexual association via a third party – was described succinctly by Smith, pointing to the trouble that some younger women felt when they were required to work alongside men. Those potential sexual partners would feel entitled to touching them improperly (M. C. Smith 2021, 115). Albeit it would need to be established by further research, this is one of the most explicit mentions of sexual assault relating to women's experience in the Community. Nevertheless, the fact that Tirzah Miller, a well-respected member at Oneida, testified to such a lack of agency suggests that her situation was not unique and that other women did perform their sexuality out of duty to conform to Perfectionist ideals.

In order to be able to consent to a situation, an individual must be able to refuse or withdraw their agreement. Yet, some women[50] of the Oneida Community explicitly relinquished their ability to do so. In 1869, in a declaration signed by those who entered the stirpicultural experiment, they declared:

> 1/ That we do not belong to ourselves in any respect, but that we belong to God, and second to Mr. Noyes as God's true representative;
> 2/ That we have no rights or personal feelings in regard to child bearing which shall in the least degree oppose or embarrass [sic] him in his choice of scientific combinations;
> 3/ That we will put aside all envy, childishness and self seeking and rejoice in those who are chosen candidates; and cheerfully resign all desire to become mothers, if for any reason Mr. Noyes deem us unfit material for propagation. Above all, we offer ourselves "living sacrifices" to God and true communism.
> (qtd. in Fogarty 1994, 25)

Through these three clauses, the women renounced their rights to govern themselves, to designate their potential sexual partner or to reject one that would have been suggested to them, and to choose whether to become mothers. The existence of such *Resolution* implicitly reinforces the existence of a double-standard system in the Oneida Community, in which

[50] At least 53 women were enrolled in the original experiment (Fogarty 1994, 25).

women's consent was both asserted in their contracting an engagement proclaimed in a collective document, and negated by the content of said document. Such was the nature of consent in the Oneida Community: in line with the contractual theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women's consent was in turns posited as fundamental to the running of society, and negated through institutional, social or informal practices aimed at disqualifying the very possibility of dissent (Pateman 1980, 150).

Sexual consent – the expression of voluntary agreement to a particular situation with a particular person – must be renewed for each potential sexual interaction (Vandervort 2013, 146). Yet the idea of a utopian sexual contract that would have been agreed to when the members entered the community and that would carry over to all subsequent sexual interactions profoundly jars with this notion, all the more since some members did not enter the Oneida Community as adults. At the heart of the utopian sexual contract therefore lies a fundamental inequality between the parties, paradoxically putting forward the emancipation of women, presenting them as free contracting individuals in order to legitimize their pressuring into joining a system of sexual domination.

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Analyzing the sexuality of Oneida Community members through the contractual lens leads to the double constatation of both the practicality of such analogy and its utter failure at capturing the multiplicity of interactions in the intimate realm between Oneidans. The utopian engagement appears to have a sexual component – the utopian sexual contract – warranting the inclusion of most community members into a market rooted in sexual economy. When they joined the Oneida Community, new members also embraced the social and sexual theories that the Oneidans had developed – an engagement that was implicit by nature, but nonetheless binding. For women, participation in this sexual economy was the opportunity to prove their loyalty to Noyes's ideals, but also to ascend the religious and moral hierarchy through the performance of sexuality with older male members – who constituted the majority of the leadership in the Community. The omnipresence of sexuality in women's lives – from a very young age – contradicts the basic assumption upon which the contractual analogy was built. Given the enmeshment of religious and social expectations in the lives of the female members, it is highly doubtful that they always had the possibility to refuse sexual intercourse – and the few testimonies that tackle this subject actually tend to suggest the opposite. Viewing

the sexual side of the utopian engagement as a contract therefore occults signs of the gender domination that was at play at Oneida, all the more since it is the very reliance of this system on the rhetoric of the contract that provided it with the appearance of legitimacy.

5 Conclusion

"Oneida […] was a religious cult but one that always had the feel of a secular utopia, a program to realize harmonious group living," Wonderley remarked in the opening section of his study dedicated to presenting both the utopian settlement and its evolution into a corporation (Wonderley 2017, 1). This statement encapsulates the utter imbrication of the religious, secular and communitarian logics in the Oneida Community, positing that each of these lenses offers insight into the protean nature of the settlement. It was therefore suggested here that using the contractual framework – in its religious, social and sexual dimensions – could further inform research on the dynamics at play in the Oneida Community itself, as well as provide elements to better define and question the conditions of utopian engagement.

It has been demonstrated that the religious covenant and the "utopian contract" both create a frame of analysis that allows for the aggregation of individual forms of commitment into a unifying collective pattern. The Oneidans were bound together by the alliance that each of them had contracted with God, spurring them to integrate an alternative society where biblical principles would be enforced. In this Perfectionist settlement, the organization of the social and private lives of members derived from their own, individual religious engagement, translating into reciprocal relations binding together the communistic "family." Far from constituting a collage of similar-minded people bound solely by their individual relation to God, the existence of a "utopian contract" justified their grouping into an actual community by orchestrating the rights and duties of members towards each other. This contract required the integration of new members into the system of complex marriage, and their partaking in the sexual interactions directing both one's own sense of love and one's hierarchical status. This is the stumbling block for the contractual analogy: when it comes to intimate relations, the existence of three forms of sexual contract on different scales – punctual consent; utopian sexual contract; Pateman's overarching patriarchal sexual contract – weakens the members' ability to establish contracts freely as individuals. The requirement in traditional contract theory that people become individuals by becoming emancipated from social pressure was not guaranteed by the structure of the Oneida Community. On the contrary, it contributed to reinforcing patriarchal domination and the possibility of sexual abuse. The complex nature of sexuality partially escapes the metaphor of the contract, which fails at grasping the gendered

tensions and the external pressures that undermined the very possibility of consenting to intimate relationships. The participation of members in complex marriage as part of their communitarian engagement indeed suspended their ability to reject sexual relations without disproving their utopian commitment at the same time.

The reflection that was started in this dissertation could benefit from further research focusing on the testimonies and private correspondence of other members in order to corroborate or add nuance to the conclusions that were drawn from the study of three source documents (Victor Hawley's diary, Tirzah Miller's memoir and Jessie Kinsley's autobiographical letter to her daughter). The destruction of the archives of the Community by Oneida, Ltd. in 1947 seems to imply that the documents that were then lost did contain sensitive information, especially about the members' sexuality. However, there still exists a significant list of documents emanating from Oneidans, both women and men, compiled at the Special Collection Research Center of the Syracuse University Libraries. The study of these archival elements could bring increased understanding of the vision that each member had of the limits and scope of their individual engagement towards the group – something that can be observed in menial discussions about labor or collective rituals, for instance. In this perspective, particular attention should still be given to women's voices, especially in instances revealing the negation of consent-based interactions in their sexual lives – even when they failed to articulate it explicitly.

An aspect that was tackled only on the surface in this dissertation, in spite of its centrality, is the economic core of the Oneida Community. Integration into the market economy was pivotal for the communist group, providing it with the means to maintain its existence long after the initial years of financial strain. The study of contracts of economic nature passed between the Oneidans and their employees, but also between the Oneida Community and its clients, would allow for the integration of a defining feature of the experiment into this analysis. It would be helpful to survey the interaction between paid work and communal work, with their own specificities, and to characterize the Oneidans' relation to the exterior via economic exchanges. In addition, these interactions with the mainstream would be better understood and identified through increased attention to the nature of the connection between the members of the Oneida Community and their numerous visitors.

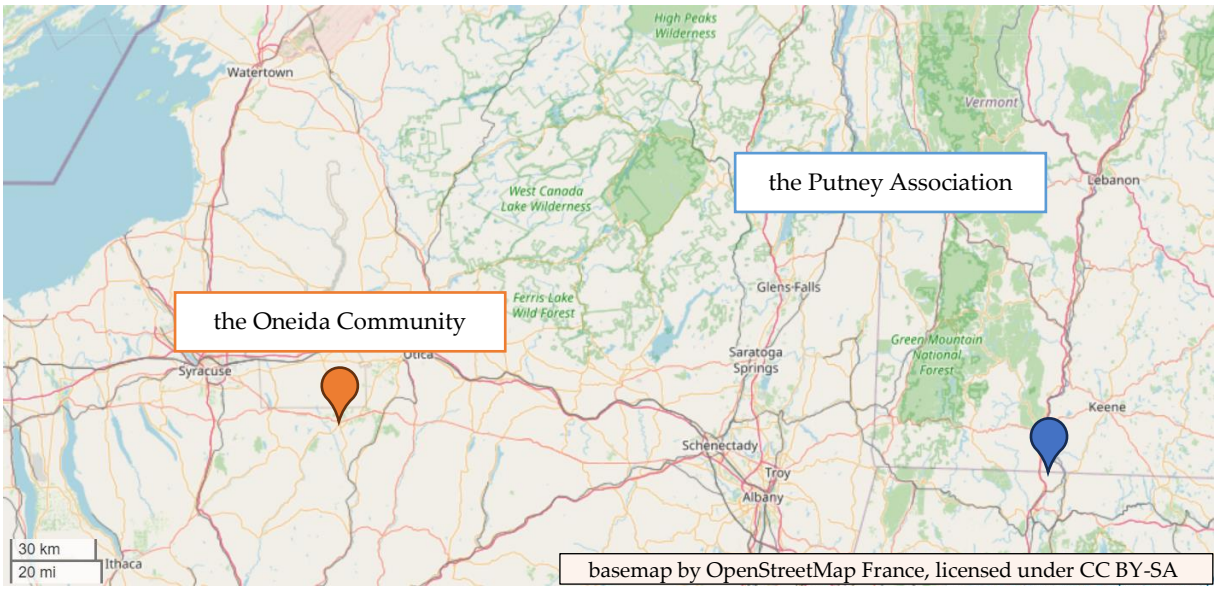
Were these visitors contributing financially to the economic health of the commune? How did the three statuses of community member, paid employee and visiting neighbor create a situation beneficial to the Perfectionists? In other words, the extent to which economic interests structured the utopian engagement of the Oneidans should be assessed by future research.

6 Glossary

* ascending fellowship: the social hierarchy organizing people's responsibility in the Oneida Community. It was thought to reflect the religious hierarchy between of members. A young member could increase their status by associating with older, more enlightened members. This association could take any form of social interaction: discussions, teamwork, sexuality.
* complex marriage: the name given by Oneidans to a form of group marriage where each adult male and each adult female were heterosexually married (M. C. Smith 2021, 11).
* mutual criticism: a system in which a member of the Oneida Community received criticism by other members in order to provide them with the means to root out selfishness from their character.
* philoprogetiveness: excessive attachment to one's offspring; it was frowned upon by the members of the Oneida Community. It was considered to be one of the biggest manifestations of selfishness, along with special love.
* special love: monogamous, exclusive love. This was contrary to Oneida Community teachings, and was seen as the manifestation of selfishness.
* stirpiculture: a word coined by John H. Noyes from the Latin "stirps" (stock, stem, or root) to designate the eugenic venture of the Oneida Community between 1869 and 1879 (Carden 1969, 61). 53 women and 38 men took part in the stirpicultural experience, giving birth to 58 community children – or "stirpicults" (Kephart 1963, 267–68).

7 Table of appendixes

7.1 Appendix 1: Localization of the Oneida Community and Putney Association



7.2 Appendix 2: Women's clothes at the Oneida Community

"Anna Bolles with OC mop wringer" (Oneida Community Collection, Quartex ID: oneida_comm_qx_00068, undated), digitized as part of the collection held by the Special Collections Research Center at the Syracuse University Libraries.

"Reproduced from originals in the William A. Hinds Album (1906) held by the Oneida Community Mansion House, Inc. Many of the photographs were by the Community's photographer, D. Edson Smith; others were done by commercial photographs. When possible, photographers are identified. Annotations and identifications used here appear in the original album and are by William A. Hinds, George E. Cragin, Hope Emily Allen, Carrie Bolles Cragin, and others."

https://digitalcollections.syr.edu/Documents/Detail/anna-bolles-with-oneida-community-mop-wringer/23663

7.3 Appendix 3: Photographs of work "bees" at the Oneida Community

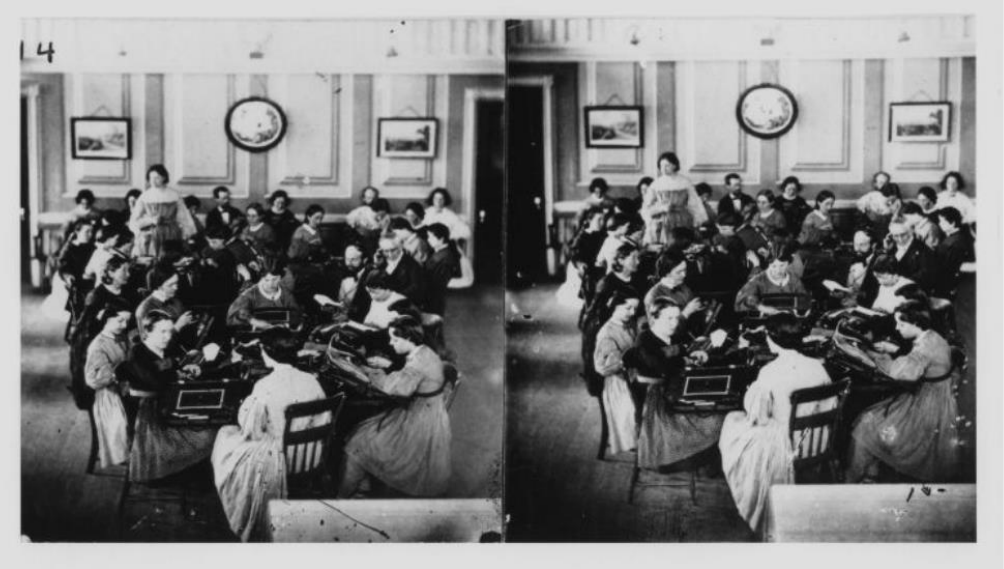
These photographs were digitized as part of the collection held by the Special Collections Research Center at the Syracuse University Libraries.

Photograph of a group of community members holding gardening implements as part of a Community Bee to clear the lawn.

"Community Bee to Clear the Lawn" (Oneida Community Collection, Quartex ID: oneida_comm_qx_00066, date unspecified).

"Reproduced from originals in the William A. Hinds Album (1906) held by the Oneida Community Mansion House, Inc. Many of the photographs were by the Community's photographer, D. Edson Smith; others were done by commercial photographs. When possible, photographers are identified. Annotations and identifications used here appear in the original album and are by William A. Hinds, George E. Cragin, Hope Emily Allen, Carrie Bolles Cragin, and others."

https://digitalcollections.syr.edu/Documents/Detail/community-bee-to-clear-the-lawn/23659



Stereoscopic photograph of women sewing bags as part of the Bag Bee in the Big Hall.

"Bag bee in big hall" (Oneida Community Collection, Quartex ID: oneida_comm_qx_00096, date unspecified).

"Reproduced from originals in the William A. Hinds Album (1906) held by the Oneida Community Mansion House, Inc. Many of the photographs were by the Community's photographer, D. Edson Smith; others were done by commercial photographs. When possible, photographers are identified. Annotations and identifications used here appear in the original album and are by William A. Hinds, George E. Cragin, Hope Emily Allen, Carrie Bolles Cragin, and others."

https://digitalcollections.syr.edu/Documents/Detail/bag-bee-in-big-hall/23719

Photograph of women seated at tables in the Quadrangle, sewing bags as part of the Bag Bee.

"Bag Bee in Quadrangle" (Oneida Community Collection, Quartex ID: oneida_comm_qx_00065, before 1868).

"Reproduced from originals in the William A. Hinds Album (1906) held by the Oneida Community Mansion House, Inc. Many of the photographs were by the Community's photographer, D. Edson Smith; others were done by commercial photographs. When possible, photographers are identified. Annotations and identifications used here appear in the original album and are by William A. Hinds, George E. Cragin, Hope Emily Allen, Carrie Bolles Cragin, and others."

https://digitalcollections.syr.edu/Documents/Detail/bag-bee-in-quadrangle/23657

7.4 Appendix 4: Age of first sexual relation for a panel of 42 women of the Oneida Community

The data in this table was extracted from 5 columns out of 15 in "Table 1 Antecedent Conditions" page 13 of Van de Warker 1884. Gray shading is our addition.

No.	Age.	Age when menstruation began.	Age when married.	Age at communistic marriage.
1	59	15	22	29
2	31	10		10
3	31	13		13
4	30	18		18
5	18	12 1/2		12 1/2
6	60	14	30	49
7	44	12	16	16
8	54	13	19	43
9	37	15	17	36
10	80	14	30	52
11	18	15		17
12	62	16	32	32
13	79	15	29	51
14	35	12		12
15	23	12		12
16	34	15		15
17	29	13		13
18	36	14		14
19	21	12		19
20	29	13		13
21	56	15	21	
22	55	16	24	30

23	71	12	27	
24	72	12	26	45
25	18	13		13
26	15	13		13
27	39	14		16
28	21	14		14
29	24	14		14
30	41	13		15
31	21	13		13
32	18	12		12
33	46	15	28	31
34	35	13		15
35	33	13		13
36	32	12		12
37	43	13	20	28
38	20	12		12
39	17	13		13
40	26	14		14
41	21	12		12
42	25	15		15

The grayed lines correspond to women whose first sexual relations did not take place in the system of complex marriage. This data was removed from the total sample in order to obtain the revised sample.

Age at first sexual relation ("communistic marriage")

Average Age (total sample)	20 2/3
Median Age (total sample)	14 1/2
Average Age (revised sample)	13 3/4
Median Age (revised)	13

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Note: All the links below were accessed on May 20, 2024 at the latest.

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“And now, with malice towards none and good-will towards all, we bid our readers adieu."

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