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THEATRE COMPANY

SILVERHILL

BY THOMAS GIBBONS
STUDY GUIDE

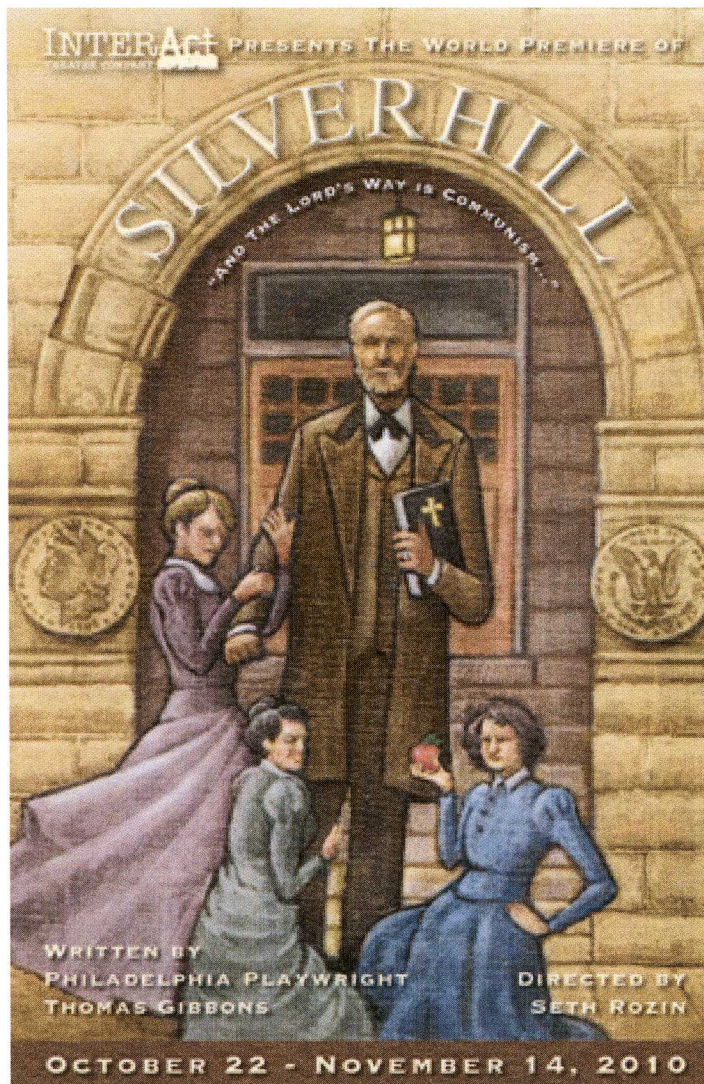


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THE GILDED AGE

The end of the 19th century in the United States saw some of the most rapid economic and population growth in the country's history. This post-Civil War and post-Reconstruction period witnessed the formation of a modern industrial economy, the beginnings of contemporary business-labor relationships, the rise of the modern city, a surge in immigration, and important shifts in political, religious and social thought. Spanning roughly 1865 to 1901, this period is often referred to as the Gilded Age.

The Gilded Age was characterized by the social dominance of dazzlingly wealthy industrialists and financiers, often referred to as "robber barons" by historians and critics. During the 1870s and 1880s, the U.S. economy grew at the fastest rate in its history, with real wages, wealth, GDP, and capital formation all increasing rapidly. A national transportation and communication network was created, the corporation became the dominant form of business organization, and a managerial revolution transformed business operations. By the beginning of the 20th century, the United States led the world in per capita income and industrial production. The businessmen of the Second Industrial Revolution started new factories and hired an ethnically diverse industrial working class, many of them new immigrants from Europe. Industrial towns and cities in the Northeast grew, as did small business and the middle class. The increased urbanization and rapid changes in cities gave rise to innovations in architecture and transportation. Steel frame skyscrapers pushed cities upwards, and elevated railways and later electric streetcars and subways, pushed them outward.

During the Gilded Age, approximately 14 million immigrants came to the United States. To accommodate the influx of people into the U.S., the federal government built Ellis Island in 1892 near the Statue of Liberty. After 1892, those arriving at Ellis Island had to undergo a short physical examination; those with contagious diseases were not admitted. The majority of immigrants remained in the North or traveled West; few immigrants went to the poverty-stricken South. As immigrant populations swelled in Northern cities, poverty rose as well. New immigrants were often forced to live in crowded tenements in the poorest urban areas, including the Five Points and Hell's Kitchen in Manhattan.

These areas were quickly overridden with crime gangs such as the Five Points Gang and the Bowery Boys.

Chinese immigrants, unwelcome in many areas, often settled in the "Chinatown" districts of large cities. Immigrants from China were not allowed to become citizens until 1950; however, as a result of the Supreme Court decision in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, their children born in the U.S. were full citizens. The construction of the Central Pacific Railroad in California and Nevada was handled largely by Chinese laborers. Labor unions (including the AFL) strongly opposed the presence of Chinese labor, on grounds of both race and economic competition. Congress banned further Chinese immigration through the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882; the act prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the United States, though some students and businessmen were allowed in.

The Gilded Age was rooted in industrialization, especially heavy industry like factories, railroads, and coal mining. The First Transcontinental Railroad opened in 1869, providing six-day service between the East Coast and San Francisco. The United States became a world leader in applied technology. From 1860 to 1890, 500,000 patents were issued for new inventions like air brakes for trains, the integrated power plant, and a number of electrical devices. The American Telephone and Telegraph Company was established, as was Standard Oil, and General Electric. The voracious appetite for capital of the great trunk railroads facilitated the consolidation of the nation's financial market in Wall Street. By 1900, the process of economic concentration had extended into most branches of industry—a few large corporations, called "trusts", dominated in steel, oil, sugar, meatpacking, and the manufacture of agriculture machinery.

Increased mechanization of industry is a major mark of the Gilded Age's search for cheaper ways to create more product. Innovations in the speed and efficiency of factory machines increased the productivity of factories while undercutting the need for skilled labor. This mechanization made some factories an assemblage of unskilled laborers performing simple and repetitive tasks under the direction of skilled foremen and engineers. It was in part these new developments that gave rise to the labor union movement. Craft-oriented labor unions grew strong in the Northeast after 1870. There

were several critical strikes that resulted in violence, including the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, which lasted 45 days, and the Haymarket Square Riot, which resulted in the killing of several police officers. Such revolutionary labor efforts mostly led to failure, which cleared the field for the new American Federation of Labor, headed (after 1886) by Samuel Gompers. Gompers wanted better deals for his members, not revolution, and his AFL unions gained strength through 1919.

The rise of the robber barons also contributed to a rise in American philanthropy, using private money to endow thousands of colleges, hospitals, museums, academies, schools, opera houses, public libraries, symphony orchestras, and charities. Andrew Carnegie, who by 1890 dominated the fast-growing steel industry, preached the "Gospel of Wealth," saying the rich had a moral duty to engage in large-scale philanthropy. Carnegie created many institutions, such as the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now part of Carnegie Mellon University,) which upgraded craftsmen into trained engineers and scientists, and built hundreds of public libraries, as well as several major research centers and foundations. John D. Rockefeller, after building Standard Oil into a national monopoly, retired from the oil business in 1897 and devoted the next 40 years of his life to giving away his fortune using systematic philanthropy, focusing especially on upgrading education, medicine and race relations. Cornelius Vanderbilt, who was born a poor farm boy, built an empire in steamships and railroading, pioneering modern business models and becoming the wealthiest man in the world in his day. His heirs became famous for their ability to both increase and spend their wealth, building gigantic and lavish mansions and dominating Gilded Age high society, as well as endowing Vanderbilt University.

During the Gilded Age, presidential elections between the two major parties (the Republicans and Democrats), were closely contested, and Congress was marked by political stalemate. Mudslinging became an increasingly popular way of gaining advantage at the polls. Republicans employed an election tactic known as "waving the bloody shirt" whereby candidates would make a point of reminding voters that the Republican Party, which was practically brand-new at the time (having been founded in 1854 by anti-slavery activists and others,) had saved the nation in the Civil War and

claiming that the Democrats had been responsible for the bloody upheaval. While congratulating themselves for saving the Union, abolishing slavery and enfranchising the freedmen, the Republican Party also adopted many modernization programs such as national banks, railroads, high tariffs, homesteads and aid to land grant colleges. In the South, the political humiliations of Reconstruction were still fresh in many minds and Democratic candidates routinely invoked images of the "lost cause" and the glorious "stars and bars" in much the same way Republicans "waved the bloody shirt." In the late 19th century, Republicans consistently carried the North in presidential elections while the South became the Solid South, nearly always voting Democratic.

Political corruption during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age meant that this new Third Party System quickly came to include many factions crying for systemic political reform. The Bourbon Democrats led the call for a free market, low tariffs, low taxes, less spending and, in general, a Laissez-Faire (hands-off) government. They specifically denounced imperialism and overseas expansion. Labor activists and agrarians focused their attacks on monopolies and railroads as unfair to the little man. Many female abolitionists, disappointed that the Fifteenth Amendment did not extend voting rights to women, took up the issue of women's suffrage which had lain dormant since the Seneca Falls Convention. With leaders like Susan B. Anthony, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was formed in order to secure the right of women to vote. Many women also became involved in reviving the temperance movement, and joined the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in an attempt to "bring morality back to America."

New trends in political and religious thought also shaped the Gilded Age. As Darwin's theories of natural selection took widespread popular hold, English philosopher Herbert Spencer proposed the idea of social Darwinism. This new concept justified the stratification of the wealthy and poor and coined the term "survival of the fittest." The Gilded Age also witnessed the Third Great Awakening, a period of religious activism characterized by a strong sense of social activism, which gave force to the social gospel movement and the worldwide missionary movement, and gave rise to Christian Science, among other new sects of Christian thought. Followers of the new Awakening promoted

the idea of the Social Gospel, which gave rise to organizations such as the YMCA, the Salvation Army, and settlement houses such as Hull House founded by Jane Addams in Chicago in 1889. Another result of late 19th-century religious fervor was the formation of experimental Utopian communities, intellectual and religious sects who chose to live together according to a particular set of social rules and religious beliefs.

The end of the Gilded Age is marked by the Panic of 1893, a deep depression that lasted until 1897 and marked a major political realignment that led to the Progressive Era. The Progressive Era (1890s-1920s) is generally thought of as a period of social and political reform. Some social critics, who understand the Gilded Age as marked by political corruption and staggering disparity between financial giants and average Americans, are likening our current American moment to that late 19th century period.



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The
Encyclopedia of
New York State

The Oneida Community

THE SHAKERS / ONEIDA COMMUNITY
by Randall Hillebrand, (Part Two) *

The founder of the Oneida Community was John Humphrey Noyes. He was born in Brattleboro, Vermont, in 1811. John Humphrey came from a well established home where his father, also named John, was a congressman and Dartmouth graduate. His mother Polly was sixteen years younger than his father and was a very strong-willed and deeply religious woman. She always taught her children "to fear the Lord." She even prayed before John Humphrey's birth that someday he might become a devoted minister of the gospel. Up until John Humphrey's conversion, he was known as a rebel who had little interest in theology or in his studies. He entered Dartmouth in 1826, the year that revival had hit its peak under Charles Finney. But to no avail, John was not affected by it and looked at religion with great cynicism. Five years later though, at the request of his mother, John attended a four-day revival meeting in Putney, Vermont, again under the ministry of Charles Finney. At first he was not moved by what he heard, "but after the meeting he suffered a feverish cold which led him to think of death, and to humble himself before God." He vigorously embraced the faith and the expectation of the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom. Later he studied at Andover and Yale Divinity School with a vision of going into the ministry.



While at Yale, Noyes came to a new understanding of the way of salvation which he labeled as Perfectionism. This view did not hold to total depravity as did the Calvinists' view, but it saw man as reaching a state of perfection or sinlessness at conversion. When Noyes asserted this doctrine of complete release from sin at conversion while studying at Yale Divinity School, he was denied ordination. It is said that one of the reasons that Noyes adopted this doctrine was the fact that he could not believe that he was a sinner, since he could not summon up from within any feeling of deep guilt and despair. For whatever reason he adopted this doctrine, it was the underlying foundation of his future endeavors.

History of the Movement

In 1834, John Humphrey Noyes started developing the theories that would later become the foundation of truth in the Oneida Community. Over the next three years, John canvassed New York state and New England trying to make new converts with no avail. Finally, after a tough three-week period in New York City, he reached the verge of a complete mental and emotional breakdown. To top things off, his first and most faithful follower, Abigail Merwin, left him to marry another man.

Shortly after these events, Noyes started writing articles which were published in a new periodical called the "Battle-Axe". His first article was on the denunciation of the institution of marriage. Also, in September of this year (1837), part of a letter written by Noyes to a friend was anonymously published by the editor in the Battle-Axe. This letter stated that Noyes felt from his interpretation of a biblical prophecy, that he was clearly convinced he was God's agent on earth. This article did not bring as much outrage by the people as did a later article that outlined his beliefs on sexual relationships in the spiritual world and that would prevail in the millennial kingdom (Whitworth 95).

Through the writing of these articles, a woman by the name of Harriet Holton, the granddaughter



of the Lieutenant-Governor of the state, became interested in Noyes and his work. She started to financially support him, and later, after Noyes realized that he would never get Abigail Merwin back, slowly came to the point where he realized that Harriet was filling the void that Abigail had left. In June of 1838, Noyes wrote Harriet a letter in which he proposed in a very careful way. He explained to her that their marriage would be a spiritual one, even though for that time period it would be a carnal or earthly marriage. But, he felt that the marriage would benefit both of them and that they, according to his teachings, would not selfishly possess one another.

One of his main reasons for getting married was that he felt the marriage would advance the work of God in which he was engaged. Also, it showed others who were criticizing him of his celibate state that he was not for celibacy, as were the Shakers. Noyes also said that, "By this marriage, besides herself, and a good social position, which she held as belonging to the first families of Vermont, I obtained money enough to buy a house and printing-office, and to buy a press and type." The press was then used to propagate Noyes' teachings through a publication called "The Witness," which he had to discontinue due to a lack of funds. So this marriage seems to have been based mainly on convenience.

After his marriage, Noyes then helped to arrange the marriages of his sisters to two of his closest followers, John L. Skinner and John R. Miller, who were students from his Bible institute which he had started in 1836 in Putney. He also gained the loyalty of his younger brother George and later, due to much pressure, his own mother who had been previously very upset by the way in which he had been using up the family estate to finance his religious endeavors. So at this point, John and George Noyes, Skinner, Miller, and a later addition of George Cragin became the center of an informal governing group of the movement.

Finally, in 1840, "the Putney Association came into being - as a purely religious body." Then, in 1844, the group formally adopted communism by which to live. This communism "included all property of family living and associations." At this time there were approximately thirty-seven members that were involved. They lived in three houses, maintained a store, and worshiped together in a small chapel. They also ran two farms at this time, and because of the death of Noyes' father who left \$20,000 each to four members who were in the community, they were able to support themselves.

Two years later, in 1846, the community adopted Noyes' teachings of "Mutual Criticism," "Complex Marriage" and "Male Continence". At this time in the groups history, these practices were only practiced on a small scale among leadership, and not until 1848 in Oneida, New York, would these be practiced by the whole community. Because of these practices, the community came under much persecution, even to the point where Noyes was indicted for adultery. Noyes, not wanting to become a useless martyr, and who by this time was viewed by the group as the Moses of the new dispensation who was going to lead them to the promised land, quickly purchased twenty-three acres of land that contained some buildings in Oneida, New York.



Their "Promised Land" was near the Canadian border which would be very convenient in case of future persecution. Then in 1847, the Putney group agreed "that the Kingdom of God had come." The community could believe this because of two of Noyes' teachings: one being that Christ's second coming took place in A.D. 70, and the other being that they could bring in the millennial kingdom themselves. Forty-five of his followers from Putney followed Noyes to Oneida and by the end of 1848, their

membership grew to eighty-seven.

The economic base of the Oneida Community was agricultural and industrial. They had approximately forty acres of partially cleared land on which to farm and an Indian sawmill in which to produce lumber. Over the next year, the community purchased and cultivated additional land, established a variety of minor craft industries, built a communal dwelling house [now a

museum, pictured above], appointed administrative committees and set up a pattern of daily living which the community followed for the next thirty years.

As stated earlier, Noyes' teachings were practiced here by the community. The main teaching which received the most criticism was that of "Complex Marriage." In Complex Marriage, every man was married to every woman and vice versa. This practice was to stay only within the community and had to stay within two main guidelines. The first was that before the man and woman could cohabit, they had to obtain each other's consent through a third person or persons. Secondly, no two people could have exclusive attachment with each other because it would be selfish and idolatrous. Any two people found in any such situation would be separated and not allowed to see each other for a certain length of time.

[Note: The cover of Puck shown at right portrays its critics proclaiming the Oneida Community members to be living in peace and harmony, without clergy scandals, and that therefore "They must be stopped!"]



Another teaching practiced at the Oneida Community was that of "Male Continence," which was a type of birth control. In the practice of Male Continence, "a couple would engage in sexual congress without the man ever ejaculating, either during intercourse or after withdrawal." Noyes justified this practice because his wife Harriet in the first six years of their marriage had five difficult childbirths, four of which were premature and resulted in the deaths of the children. Noyes came to the conclusion that where an unwanted pregnancy occurred, there was a waste of the man's seed and that it was no different in practice to masturbation. With the implementation of Male Continence, which lasted from 1848 to 1868, some forty children were born in the community of about two hundred and fifty people.

Another teaching practiced along these same lines was that of "Ascending Fellowship." Ascending Fellowship was set up to properly introduce the virgins into Complex Marriage. This practice also worked to prevent the young members from falling in love with each other and from limiting their range of affection to just the younger members. The main people picked to care for the virgins were people who were considered to be closer to God. These people were of course older and had a special title which was that of Central Member. These Central Members were allowed their pick of a partner over which they would have the responsibility of spiritual guidance. It usually worked that the male Central Member would pick any female virgin of his choice. Due to her lower order, she was compelled to accept. In the case of the female Central Member, they were usually past the age of menopause, and when they chose their male virgin, they were obligated to honor the request. The reason women past menopause were chosen was so that as they taught the younger men Male Continence, they would not have to worry about unwanted pregnancies.

The fourth major teaching practiced was that of "Mutual Criticism." Mutual Criticism was established to assure the integrity of the community by conformity to Noyes' morality. The way in which Mutual Criticism worked was that a member, under communal control, was subjected to criticisms of either a committee or the whole community. The criticisms were usually directed toward the "member's bad traits (those thoughts or acts that detracted from family unity), and an individual could be put through a shameful, humiliating experience." Only Noyes himself would not go through this unless he decided to, because he felt that a group should not criticize their leader.

In the area of government of the Oneida Community there were "twenty-one standing committees and forty-eight administrative departments. This organization covered every conceivable activity and interest from hair-cutting and dentistry to education and silk-manufacture." The Oneida Community had no definite rules restricting a member's time of rising in the morning for work, but they had very few problems with people taking advantage of it. Also at Oneida, the women



had equality with the men and served on these committees and shared in all activities.

[Note: Women at the Oneida Community wore a short dress over pants, shown at right. This outfit custom have been inspired by the native women of the region, and may have also been known to Elizabeth Smith Miller, who lived nearby, and is generally credited with inventing the "Bloomer" costume.]

In 1849, a small branch community started at Brooklyn, and others followed" at Wallingford, Newark, Putney, Cambridge, and Manlius. But in 1855, some of these communities were abandoned so that a concentration of members would take place at Oneida and Wallingford." By this time, "relative tranquility had been achieved and almost all the theories and practices that would make Oneida one of the most distinctive of all American ventures in religious and social reorganization had been at least provisionally established."

The Oneida Community never did become very large. In January of 1849 the community had 87 members; 172 members by February of 1850, and by February of 1851 the number rose to approximately 205 members. The records show that in 1875 there were 298 members, and by 1878, the beginning year of the breakup, there were 306 members. From the original 87 members at Oneida in 1849, the totals from that year on were group totals from all of the communities combined.

Over the years from 1849 to 1879, "the community remained true to its original ideals." Problems started to occur in 1876 when Noyes tried to hand over leadership to his son, Dr. Theodore Noyes, who was an agnostic. Not only was the fact that he was an agnostic bad enough, but he ran the community with a tight fist which was resented by the people. It got so bad that John Humphrey Noyes himself had to come back from Wallingford where he was living to put things back in order. By then it was too late, factions within the community had already formed, some even with the opposition on the outside. And then in 1879, due to the opposition and hostility from the surrounding communities, Noyes, who had already withdrawn from active leadership, felt compelled to abandon the system of Complex Marriage. Even though Noyes wanted to keep the community together after this, some living married and others celibate (not preferred), problems occurred.

Many of the members quickly got married, but since Complex Marriage was such an integrated part of their lives, the community could not settle down to their normal style of living. In 1880, a committee was appointed "to consider the advisability of re-organizing upon a joint-stock basis." In January of 1881 the joint-stock company, called the "Oneida Community, Limited," was set up and the Oneida Community was abandoned.

Noyes did not see the necessity of observing the Sabbath (Whitworth 104). They did have a Sunday chapel meeting in which outsiders were allowed in. After work in the evening they would sing and pray and be taught such languages as Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Not much else is written on the topic.

Doctrines

- (1) COMPLEX MARRIAGE - This is where every man and every woman is married to each other. They could engage in sexual intercourse, but could not be attached to each other as stated earlier.
- (2) MALE CONTINENCE - This was a form of birth control where during and after sexual intercourse the man could not ejaculate.
- (3) ASCENDING FELLOWSHIP - This is where the young virgins in the community were brought into the practice of Complex Marriage. The older godly members who were in a special group and were called Central Members would pick a virgin to be spiritually responsible for. This took place when the young people were about fourteen years old.
- (4) MUTUAL CRITICISM - In Mutual Criticism, each member of the community that was being reprimanded was taken in front of either a committee or sometimes the whole community to be criticized for their action.

- (5) CONFESSION - The members of the community, according to Noyes, were sinless after conversion, so no confession would be needed.
- (6) REGENERATION - That Christ's death was not for the sins of man, but was the first blow to Satan. But that by believing in the death of Christ, one was released from sin, because Christ destroyed the central cause of sin. By believing then, one is regenerated (Whitworth 101-102).
- (7) SEPARATION - The members did separate into a community, but their main separation was to be a sexual one.
- (8) REVELATION - Noyes never said that he received special revelation, though he did have some twisted interpretations. Noyes once wrote an article in "The Berean" and emphasized the credibility of scripture and denounced those who denied the validity and relevance of scripture.
- (9) EQUALITY OF THE SEXES - The Oneida Community believed in equality of the sexes as stated earlier.
- (10) MILLENNIAL KINGDOM - That the Millennial Kingdom had been introduced in A.D. 70 at which time Noyes thought Christ had made His Second Coming (Hudson 186).

The full, unannotated and footnoted text of this article is found at:
<http://www.believersweb.net/view.cfm?ID=632>



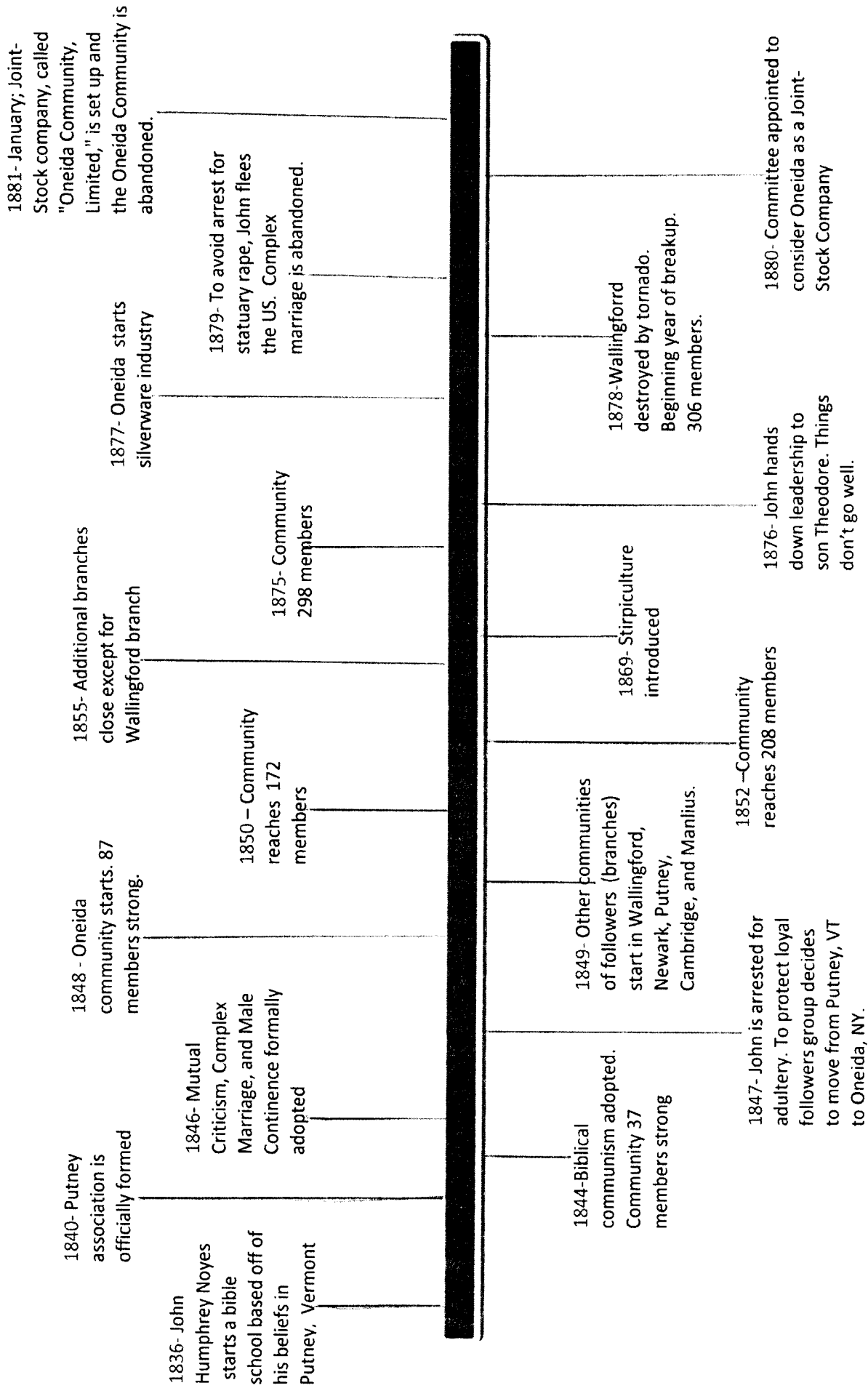
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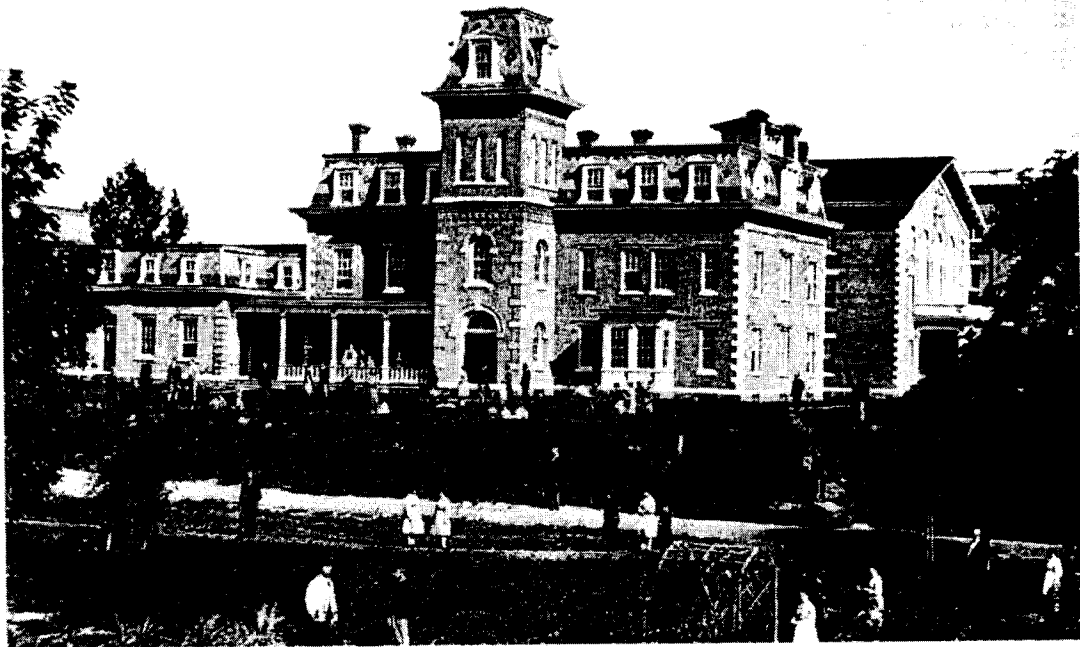
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The Oneida Community





John Humphrey Noyes, charismatic founder of the Oneida Community, called his followers to lives of complete unselfishness through Bible Communism.



The Oneida Community's successful business ventures enabled it to build the huge brick Mansion House. In addition to the Big Hall, where evening meetings were held, the building contained offices, sitting rooms, a large library, a nursery, a children's wing, a huge kitchen and dining room, and individual bedrooms for most adults.



The Oneida Community in 1863. From its inception in 1848, the community grew to more than 300 adult members.

While the character Tirzah in SILVERHILL is a completely fictional person, the diaries of real life Oneida member Tirzah Miller provide interesting insight into the intimate politics of the community.

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Desire and Duty at Oneida: Tirzah Miller's Intimate Memoir

Utopian Studies, Wntr, 2001 by Wendy E. Chmielewski

Robert S. Fogarty, ed. *Desire and Duty at Oneida: Tirzah Miller's Intimate Memoir*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000. xiv 204 pp. \$27.95.

IN 1993, one hundred and twenty-five years after the break up of the Oneida Community, the archives of the community were first opened to scholars. Amongst the manuscript materials was a memoir by Tirzah Miller, a leading member of the Community. In this memoir Tirzah described her life at Oneida, a communal experiment in religious perfectionism, alternative sexual arrangements, and reordered social relationships, in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Editor Robert S. Fogarty discovered a typescript copy of this memoir amongst the Oneida archives deposited at Syracuse University and identified it as the most dramatic account of life in the Community. He has written an informative introduction to the memoir, setting Tirzah's story in the context of the larger history of Oneida and of its leader, John Humphrey Noyes. Noyes, deeply influenced by the religious revivalism that swept through New York and New England in the first third of the nineteenth century, based his ideas for the new social order in religious perfectionism. He believed that human beings could achieve perfection on earth, by destroying sin and selfishness in themselves. At Oneida all members were expected to "take on the task of personal reform and self-betterment" (Fogarty 10). In accordance with this belief Noyes initiated a "complex marriage" under which members of Oneida chose their sexual partners based on love and attraction, rather than the legal system of marriage. Noyes believed that complex marriage as it was practiced at Oneida would eliminate selfishness and possessiveness in sexual and social relationships.

Tirzah Miller was the daughter of Charlotte Miller, John Humphrey Noyes's youngest sister. Tirzah was born in 1843 in Putney, Vermont, soon after Noyes had converted his younger siblings and a few other early followers to his religious beliefs. They attempted to form a community based on these beliefs, but authorities tried to have Noyes arrested for sexual

community based on these beliefs, but authorities tried to have Noyes arrested for sexual indecencies. Noyes and his followers moved to upstate New York a few years later, where they were able to establish Oneida and its satellite communities. Tirzah grew to adulthood at Oneida and thoroughly absorbed its outlook and beliefs. Her memoir covers everyday life at Oneida from 1867 to about 1880 when the community disbanded. Readers learn about Community attempts to broaden some work roles for women, the political struggles for power amongst various members in the last years of the community, the role of mutual criticism (public discussion of how members' actions conformed to community standards), and of the eugenics program that Noyes put into place in the 1870s.

Noyes had great confidence in Tirzah and believed that she was one of the second generation of Oneida members who would be best qualified to lead the Community into the future. He arranged for her to have increasingly responsible positions as she grew to maturity. Tirzah worked on the editing committee of the Oneida Circular, the community newspaper and voice to the outside world. She was selected by Noyes to bear a child in the Community eugenic experiments of the 1870s. Not long before Noyes left Oneida in 1879, he told Miller that he thought of her as one of the "Mothers" of the Community, in other words one of the female leaders (Fogarty 107). This all demonstrated Noyes's confidence and belief in Tirzah Miller's abilities. It also reveals Noyes's confidence in Tirzah's acceptance of his leadership, her commitment to Biblical communism, and the primacy of the welfare of the Oneida in her life.

Most of the entries in this memoir chronicle Tirzah's romantic and sexual life. Under the system of complex marriage at Oneida it was assumed that the social and religious well-being of members would lead them to heterosexual relationships with a variety of partners. Tirzah herself was considered "magnetic" or attractive to many men, and she entered into both short and long term relationships. Although we do not learn from the memoir exactly when she became sexually active, Tirzah probably entered into community sexual practices at about the age of fourteen like other girls at Oneida. It is also likely that her uncle, John Humphrey Noyes, thirty-three years her senior, initiated her into the system of complex marriage. They were to remain lovers and confidants until Noyes left Oneida in 1879.

Although Tirzah grew up at Oneida, even she was unclear about her obligation to all men who requested sexual relations. She was still confused over this issue at the age of 26, after perhaps more than a decade of sexual activity. Tirzah reported in her memoir in April of 1869 a conversation with Noyes on this issue. She told Noyes that she had "slept with men without any appetite, and a great deal lately." Noyes replied that she must follow her own attractions. Tirzah was greatly relieved: "I have been ... in a kind of duty-doing spirit with folks for whom I had no attraction.... I have felt that it was a great expense to me ... but I didn't know what to do, and thought I was doing my duty.... I had hardly dared to hope I need do nothing in this line but I felt an attraction for" (Fogarty 60).

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InterAct is a theatre for today's world, producing plays that ask important questions about the social, political, and cultural issues of our time. One of the reasons why InterAct jumped at the chance to produce SILVERHILL is because the questions raised in the play resonate our current American moment. This Newsweek article sheds some light on some of those resonances.



Wall Street's New Gilded Age

A year after the crash, a few financial giants are back to making millions, while average Americans face foreclosure and unemployment. What's wrong with this picture?

by Niall Ferguson September 11, 2009

Since its birth, the United States has grappled with the problem of an over-mighty financial sector. With the exception of Alexander Hamilton, the Founders' vision was of a republic of self-reliant farmers and small-town tradesmen. The last thing they wanted was for New York to become the London of the New World—a mammon-worshiping metropolis in which financial capital and political capital were rolled into one. That was why there was such resistance to creating a central bank, and why—despite two attempts—we have no Bank of the United States to match the Bank of England. That was why populists railed against the adoption of the gold standard after the crash of 1873. That was why there was so much suspicion when the Federal Reserve System was created in 1913. That was why government regulation of Wall Street was so strict from the Depression until the 1970s.

But now, barely a year after one of the worst crises in all financial history, we seem to have returned to the Gilded Age of the late 19th century—the last time bankers came close to ruling America. A few Wall Street giants, led by none other than -JPMorgan, are back to making serious money and paying million-dollar bonuses. Meanwhile, every month, hundreds of thousands of ordinary Americans face foreclosure or unemployment because of a crisis caused by ... a few Wall Street giants. And what makes the losers in this crisis really mad is the fact that there's now one law for the small debtors and another for big ones. If you lose your job and fall behind on your \$1,500 monthly mortgage payment, no one's going to bail you out. But Citigroup can lose \$27.7 billion (as it did last year) and count on the federal government to hand it \$45 billion.

A hundred years ago, people angrily compared the House of Rothschild to a giant octopus with its tentacles wrapped around the U.S. economy. Today it's the turn of Goldman Sachs to be likened to a "great vampire squid." To understand why, you need to go back 12 months.

With the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. last September, 9/15 supplanted 9/11 as the costliest day in the history of New York City. It was also the most cataclysmic American bank failure since 1931.

The Lehman bankruptcy was in fact only one of seven events that, in the space of just 19 days, signaled the end of an epoch. On Sept. 7, the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp. (Freddie Mac) were nationalized. On Sept. 14, Merrill Lynch was bought by Bank of America. On the same day that Lehman

failed, the money-market fund Reserve Primary "broke the buck" because of losses on unsecured commercial paper it had bought from Lehman. The next day—to avoid a lethal chain reaction in the market for credit default swaps—the insurance giant AIG was given an \$85 billion bailout by the Federal Reserve. On Sept. 22, the investment bank went extinct as a species when Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley converted themselves into bank holding companies. Finally, on Sept. 25, Washington Mutual was placed into the receivership of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC).

Not everything that has gone wrong in the world economy since 2007 can be blamed on these seven events, much less on the Lehman bankruptcy alone. At most, about a fifth of the total 50 percent decline in the U.S. stock market between the peak of October 2007 and the low of March 2009 could be attributed to what happened in September of last year. (October 2008 was an even worse month for stocks.) But other indicators better reveal the scale of the financial trauma. In the 24 hours after Lehman failed, the London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR, for short)—the rate that financial institutions charge each other for unsecured borrowing—soared 3.33 percentage points, to 6.44 percent. The commercial-paper market froze. The resulting credit crunch set off a chain reaction. Firms canceled orders and started laying off workers. International trade collapsed.

Equally dramatic—and more long-lasting—has been the effect of the crisis on government policy. Prior to 9/15, it seemed unlikely that Congress would approve a large-scale bailout for Wall Street. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson had told potential buyers of Lehman Brothers there would be "no government money" to sweeten any takeover deal. Even after the Lehman failure, it still took two attempts to secure passage of the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program through Congress. Since then we've witnessed the fiscal equivalent of a dam bursting. We're now looking at \$9 trillion of new federal debt in the decade ahead.

Prior to 9/15, the Federal Reserve Board argued that the Fed could not buy "shaky assets" from Lehman, but could only lend against "good collateral." In the week that followed, the Fed's balance sheet leapt upward by 21 percent after the institution announced it would accept equities as collateral for the first time in its history. Other new measures included the FDIC's guarantee of all bank debt—a remarkable undertaking given the quantity of bonds issued by U.S. banks.

Six months earlier the Treasury and Fed had saved Bear Stearns from bankruptcy by brokering its sale to JPMorgan Chase. Though shareholders and bondholders had lost money, they had not been wiped out completely. By treating Lehman differently, the authorities shattered the illusion that some major financial institutions were "too big to fail." But starting with the bailout of AIG just a day later, they quickly began the expensive process of trying to restore that illusion. Now it's no longer an illusion. It's become a very dangerous reality.

In April this officially became the longest recession since World War II. The International Monetary Fund expects the U.S. economy to shrink by 2.6 percent this year. The unemployment rate is heading for 10 percent. With numbers like that, you'd think some radical reform was in order. But no. Despite much talk on both sides of the Atlantic of new financial regulation, the likelihood is that the most important flaw in our financial system will not be addressed. On the contrary, the emergency measures taken a year ago have made it significantly worse. That flaw can be summed up in a single phrase: banks that are "too big to fail." Let's call them the TBTFs.

