

The New Circular

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

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Edited by Anthony Wonderley

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The Oneida Community in 1864

from *The Circular*, Oct. 17, 1864, pp. 246-47

THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY

Two articles have recently appeared in the Utica Daily Herald, written by the agricultural editor of that paper, descriptive of the Oneida Community. They were in the form of notes taken by this gentleman during a recent visit to the Community. Under the various heads of "Religious Principles—The Buildings—The Farms—Orchards and Fruit Department—Grape Culture—The Barns—The Trap Factory, &c., &c.," appears a very candid and friendly account of the Community, for which the writer and the editors of that paper will please accept our thanks. In the accounts given of the Buildings, Farm, and various industrial operations of the Community, we find some statistics that add to our information

on those matters and that may not be without interest to the reader in the extract below. The paragraphs relating to the Barns and Trap Factories sketch some of the improvements which have been carried forward during the past year.

THE FARMS

The farms embrace some 556 acres, pleasantly situated, a part lying in the town of Lenox, Madison County, and a part in Vernon, Oneida County. Three acres are in strawberries and three acres are in grapes. About 150 are in meadow, and the balance of the land is used for pasturage and grain crops, of which the last season there were 17 acres in barley, 17 acres in oats, and 16 acres in corn. The hay crop was cut short by drought, but was estimated to yield 200 tons—barley 45 bushels to the acre, oats 30 bushels and corn 60 bushels per acre.

THE ORCHARDS AND FRUIT DEPARTMENT

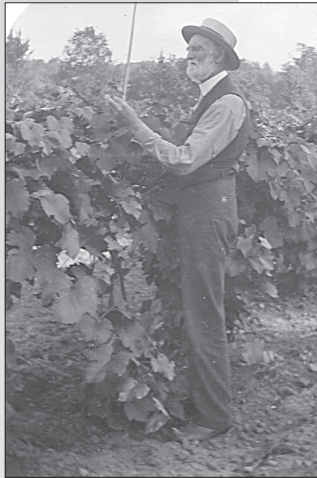
The orchards and fruit department are under the management of Mr. Thacker, who with Mr. Hamilton, a very courteous and intelligent

gentleman, and one of the leading members of the Community, took us over the grounds and explained the methods of culture adopted for the different varieties of fruits.

Of the trees there are upwards of a thousand in apples, a thousand in pears, two hundred in plums, and one hundred and thirty in cherries. They embrace all the best known varieties that can be grown in this latitude, and one seldom sees a healthier or more thrifty lot of trees together. The cherries, many of the plums and early pears, of course have been gathered, but varieties that were in season made a splendid show on the heavily-laden trees. Some of the plum-trees seemed to be literally a mass of fruit, and were supported by props.

The grapes and some of the other fruits had been very much injured by a severe hail storm which passed over this section on the 15th of July, the hail stones striking the immature fruit and marring it. Grapes, on this account, would yield

no more than one-half a crop. The yield of fruit this year was estimated at 1,000 bushels of choice apples, besides imperfect specimens or older apples, 200 bushels of pears, and 100 bushels of plums. The cherries and strawberries, which had been light, give 30 bushels of the former and 232 of the latter. The yield of grapes was thought to reach no more than 4,000 pounds; last year the crop was 7,000 pounds and the strawberry crop 400 bushels.



Henry Thacker

Fruit Label



Strawberry Label



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Of the pears, the Bartlett does well, but the Flemish Beauty, Louise Bonne de Jersey, Belle Lucrative and some other varieties appeared to be better adapted to the soil and climate. The Beurre Clairgeau is grown here, and the fruit readily brings \$5 per bushel. The ground is plowed between the trees with a two-horse team, leaving strips near the trees which are cultivated out with one horse, and the remaining work is done with hoes. Of all the crops to be grown among the trees, beans are preferred, as shading the ground less and admitting of thorough culture.

The strawberry plantations are made in April or May, the plants being set in rows, two and-a-half feet apart, and ten inches in the rows. The runners are kept off the first season and the next season the plants are in bearing. They are usually allowed to bear but one year, when the plantations are plowed, since it does not pay to let them run longer. The Wilson variety is preferred for main crops for canning, but the Triomphe de Gand for eating.

The raspberries are trained on wires stretched from posts set in the ground, and in the fall the old stakes are cut down and the young wood laid down and covered with earth by running a plow along the rows. In spring they are raised with a fork and trained to the wires.

The soil here is a clay loam with a stiff clay sub-soil, but can be worked early in the spring, and is well adapted to fruit.

GRAPE CULTURE

The manner of preparing the soil for grapes is briefly as follows: Muck and ashes are drawn on to the land at the rate [of] 100 cart-loads of muck and 10 of ashes, and spread under with a double-Michigan plow. The plow is run about a foot deep and followed by a sub-soil plow, loosening the earth for at least 10 inches below the depth made by the double-Michigan. It is then leveled down and manures and composts cultivated in at the rate of 20 cart-loads per acre. It is then marked out in rows 8 feet apart, and stakes set at the crossings where the vines are to be planted. Holes are dug around the stakes and the plants set with the stakes standing. They are trained to these stakes for two years, and after the first year no crops are grown between the rows, the ground being cultivated from time to time, and kept free from weeds. Manure is applied once in three years, and not oftener, as it is found that too much enriching stimulates too great a growth of wood. By moderate manuring the grapes are earlier and of better quality.

After cultivating to stakes two years, cedar posts are set 16 feet apart, and 6 feet high on which five wires are trained and tied. In the fall all surplus wood is cut out and the vines laid down and covered with the earth. A number of varieties of grapes are here cultivated, but the Purple Concord, the Delaware and Diana are the favorites.

These gardens and fruit grounds are highly cultivated; they are laid out with taste, and while they serve the purpose of ornament and pleasure, are conducted in such a manner as to be a source of profit.

THE BUILDINGS

The main building stands on an extensive lawn terraced up from the street and neatly cut with walks and drive-ways. It is of brick, 50 by 72 feet, three stories high, and has a wing 45 by 57 feet. Attached to the wing, a tower 18 feet square rises a considerable distance above the other parts of the building, and from its top a view of the Community farms may be had, and of the surrounding country for miles. On the tower floor of this building are the parlors, the business offices, and the reception rooms. In the second story the great hall, running the whole length and breadth of the main part, with its handsome frescoed walls, its galleries and appurte-



Described as the "laundry and bag-factory," the Tontine is visible to the right of the Mansion House

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The first Mansion House served as the communal dining area in 1864 (drawing by Milford Newhouse)

nances, makes a very convenient and pleasant room, where the members of the Community and a large number of visitors can be accommodated.

The laundry and bag-factory stands a little back of the main building, is 72 feet by 36 feet, and two stories. The basement is fitted up with conveniences for canning fruits and vegetables, and on the floor above are the washing and wringing machines, all of which are run by means of a steam-engine of twelve-horse power. On the upper floor the rooms are arranged for conducting the business of manufacturing carpet-bags and satchels, and where some very beautiful work is turned off. The amount of work manufactured here will average about \$2,000 per month.

Another large building stands below the terrace, on one side of the lawn adjoining the flower-garden, the basement of which is used for a dining-hall, where the whole family take their meals.

The dairy-house stands nearly opposite the brick mansion, and is fitted up to receive the milk from eighty cows, the present size of the dairy.

These are the principal buildings grouped together about the lawn.

THE BARN—THE TRAP FACTORIES, ETC., ETC.

In previous notes on the Oneida Community we omitted to give a description of the barns, which are in many respects models, and should be seen and studied by those who contemplate building. The hay and stock barn recently erected and not yet fully completed,

is 135 feet by 70 feet broad. It consists of a wooden structure resting on a stone basement 9 feet high. The basement is divided off by walls into spaces for the manures, the root-cellar, and bottoms for hay mows.

There are three drive-ways or barn-floors running across the building with bays 30 feet square on either side of the central drive-way, so that the teams can deliver their loads from the three floors. The stables run all around the outside, except in the spaces taken up by the drive-ways. The stables on the sides between the floors have nine stalls each, so that 76 animals can be housed at one time. Under the middle drive-way is the root-cellar, where the roots are dumped by opening a trap-door. On the other floors are traps for dropping muck into the manure cellars.

The drive-ways are 14 feet wide and the width of stables 16 feet, including the mangers which are 3 feet. Back of the cows there is a manure sink 2 feet wide, and from this to the outside of the building there is a span of 5 feet. There are four ventilators that run from top to bottom so as to give good ventilation to all parts of the building. Sawdust and straw are used for bedding stock; of the straw about 500 loads are taken for this purpose during winter. All the hay is to be cut and mingled with meal or bran before being fed to stock. When bran is used, the cows get each about 4 quarts per day. The root-cellar holds 4,000 bushels, and the roots are fed during winter. The construction of this barn differs materially from any we have seen, and is in every respect a model of convenience. The cost of the structure was \$6,000.



The "dairy-house" (or "Ark") was brand new in 1864



The "trap-factory" of 1864 was the Circularium (left), its forge shop housed in the one-story extension to the right

A short distance from the stock barn is located the horse barn, 100 feet by 40 feet, with basement of stone, which is divided up into 34 stables for horses. The building above the basement has 16 feet posts, and into this part the teams are driven unharnessed and taken to the basement below. The hay or straw is cut above by horse power and let down through tubes to the mangers. This barn also in its arrangements has many new features and is admirably adapted to the wants of the Association, in convenience and in the saving of labor. Twenty-two horses and three yokes of oxen are employed by the Community for farm and other work.

The general system of farming practiced by the Community is to take but two grain crops from the soil and then seed down to grass. The first crop is corn which is planted on the sod. The land is plowed in spring, with a double-Michigan plow 7 inches deep and followed by a subsoil plow, loosening the earth 8 inches further down. Manure is applied at the rate of 30 cart-loads per acre and thoroughly worked into the soil. The second crop taken off is usually barley or oats, when the land is seeded down with clover and timothy at the rate of 14 quarts of seed per acre or seven quarts of each. Formerly plaster was largely used on the farms, but latterly ashes and hen manure. The ashes are applied to grass-lands at the rate of 40 bushels per acre.

Some of the new seeding on the farms, especially a piece of 10 acres below the buckthorn hedge, was as thick and fine and had as large a growth of aftermath as any we have seen in any part of the country.

But of the doings of the Community perhaps the most interesting part is that of the Trap-factory inaugurated and perfected by Mr. Newhouse. The building is situated on Oneida Creek, is 50 feet by 75 feet and 3 stories high, and provided with various kinds of machinery ingeniously contrived for the purpose of manufacturing traps. So large is the demand for these goods that another factory is being erected by the Community on Skenandoah Creek at a cost of over \$20,000. This building, at the time of our visit, was being rapidly enclosed. It is of brick, the main part 124 feet by 26 feet, two stories high, with wings, one of which is 105 feet by 50 feet, two stories, and the other 105 by 46 feet, one story. It makes a large and showy building and is to be fitted up in all its parts in the most perfect manner. A vast amount of labor was here being laid out in the construction of the dam and in leading the water down to the factory. When all is completed and the buildings in running order it will be one of the most interesting factories in the country, since fine mechanical skill and inventive genius are here developed in curious and wonderful machines which do their work rapidly and in the most perfect manner.



The Willow Place trap factory was not yet operational in 1864

[The foregoing statements are generally correct, though a few errors have been noticed. The writer says: "Sawdust and straw are used for bedding stock, and of the straw about 500 loads are taken for this purpose during the winter." If this statement were correct, the bedding used for a stock of cattle would cost about as much as the hay they eat! Our farmers, we learn, purchase for bedding perhaps 100 loads, besides using what is raised on the Community farm. The total amount used for cattle, horses, &c., cannot exceed 150 loads.

Again, the writer states that—"all the hay is to be cut and mingled with meal or bran before being fed to stock." This is an excellent method, carried out by the Community, however, only in a partial manner.

Again: "Ashes are applied to grass lands at the rate of 40 bushels per acre." Of unleached ashes, we understand, only 15 bushels are applied per acre.

A few other small errors have been noticed, but they are comparatively unimportant. ED. CIR.]

"The Corn-cutting Bee"

by Charlotte Miller

from *The Circular*, November 10, 1852, p. 196

The great impulse to found communes that swept America in the 1840s was inspired by French theorist Charles Fourier (1772-1837) who claimed that humans act according to instincts and talents he called "passions." There were supposed to be 12 passions distributed among 810 personality types. If the precise mix of personality types were assembled in the correct number of people living together in a common residence (a phalanstery or phalanx), the result would be social harmony--utopia. Work would become enjoyable--"attractive"--because people were following out their innate self-interests and doing what they were meant to do. The key assertion of Fourierism was that "passional attraction"--meaning personal inclination and occupational leaning--rendered industry (work) "attractive." Finding that work was appealing, the men and women of a phalanstery would labor together in teams called "series."

The Oneida Community knew Fourier's ideas but set them aside when it came time to get something done. Out of the experience of building the first Mansion House came a labor pattern that translated Fourier's "series" into an American idiom of informal cooperation. "This practice of doing work 'by storm, or in what is more commonly called a 'bee,' in which the men, women and children engage, has been found very popular and effective," the Community reported in early 1850. "It may be employed in a great variety of occupations, especially of out-door business, and always contributes to enliven and animate the most uninteresting details of work."

Bees proved indispensable to mingling-- the working together of men and women, especially outdoors. And it was mingling--not Fourier's "passional attraction"--that made communalism work. Of perhaps thirty communities founded on Fourier's principle, hardly any lasted more than a year. "Fourier had a glorious scheme of Attractive Industry," Harriet Skinner observed more than a quarter century later, "but it was intricate and artificial. In practice the Community have found that the gregarious element, and especially the

combination of the sexes, is the main secret" (*American Socialist*, April 6, 1876).

In the text given here, Charlotte Miller describes an occasion for outdoor mingling as rich in "mirth and frolic." --AW



Charlotte Miller

Oneida, Sept. 18, 1852

You have often heard us speak of our mass-gatherings, or as we call them, Bees, for out-door employment, as one of the most novel and pleasing characteristics of Community life. I will endeavor to describe one of these storming parties to you; though I am aware it requires the powers of a far abler painter than I am, to give you a faithful, life-like

picture.

The season for out-door "bees" commences in the latter part of August, and continues till all the autumn work, such as cutting oats and corn, gathering beans and apples, husking, &c., is finished.

Let us take for our specimen, a bee for cutting corn, the description which is just now in vogue.

The day selected for the occasion, is mild and pleasant; and in the forenoon the chiefs of the farming department are employed in getting together and sharpening tools, and making arrangements. At the dinner table notice is given that a bee will come off in the afternoon at half past two o'clock; and the place of preliminary meeting is under the "butternut tree." This notice quickens the movement of the in-door machinery, at once; and if there is a prospect of some part lagging, a little extempore bee is called, to do up the after-dinner work, such as clearing and setting tables, washing dishes, &c. At the hour specified, the bell rings, and groups of men, women, and children commence gathering under the "butternut tree." A merry sight it is too; mirth and frolic are specially abundant; every one seems inspired by the occasion, with a gush of the free, buoyant spirit of childhood. The dress of the women is sometimes odd, but picturesque, and well adapted for rapid motion, crossing



"Vue générale d'un phalanstère," lithograph (early 1840s) given to the Oneida Community by French Fourierist Victor Considerant in 1875

fields and fences, passing between the rows of corn, &c. It consists generally of a frock, pantaloons, sun-bonnet and gloves.

When all are assembled, that is, some 70 or 80, men, women, and children, the chief calls off the names as they have been previously drawn, and arranged in groups. A group comprises four men to cut the corn, four women to take it and form it into stooks, and a man for a binder, who follows, with a woman carrying an armful of straw, to bind the stooks. When the groups are all organized, the men take each one a corn-cutter on his shoulder, and with a lady for his companion, the procession marches to the field of operations. Now we are there.—Each group takes a certain number of rows, and the process of cutting, carrying the stalks, and binding, commences with great spirit. In the course of a few moments this army of happy workers are spread over a large field; and the results of their sport are seen in the rapid fall of the luxuriant green stalks before the swift strokes of the cutters—and then, as if by magic, the tall stooks rise on every hand, changing the face of the field as rapidly as an army of locusts are said to do; not however, like them, leaving famine and desolation behind, but bountiful tokens of plenty and fruitfulness. It is an animating spectacle to watch the party

as now they plunge into the green depths of the corn, and anon emerge on the other side of the field, with the long rows of stooks behind them as trophies of their march.

In this way, field after field is harvested, without the weariness of worldly labor, and with the keen relish of healthful sport. Old and young—men, women, and children, uniting in these gatherings, each adds to the enthusiasm and enjoyment of the whole.

For women, the Bee is an unparalleled opportunity for exercise in the open air—and in companionship with men, too, which is of itself invigorating—and for men it takes off the ruggedness and drudgery of labor, by association with those whose presence naturally calls forth the refinement and chivalry of their nature.

Do you wonder that the Bee is one of the great charms of community life—or that Oneida appreciates it as one of her best ordinances?



Oneidans gather for an outdoor bee, 1867



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