

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK Theme: Social and Humanitarian

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic ONEIDA COMMUNITY MANSION HOUSE

and/or common Oneida Community Mansion House

**2. Location**

street & number Kenwood Avenue and Skinner Road \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Oneida \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of

state New York code 36 county Madison code 53

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Oneida Ltd.

street & number Kenwood Avenue

city, town Oneida \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state New York

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Madison County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Wampsville \_\_\_\_\_ state New York

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title None has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

date \_\_\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

### Check one

unaltered

altered

### Check one

original site

moved

date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Oneida Community Mansion House is a rambling U-shaped, brick, Victorian building which was constructed in part at different times and incorporates a variety of architectural styles.

Constructing a permanent domicile was one of the earliest projects of the Oneida Community, after its founding in 1848. The members lived temporarily in wooden houses while erecting the Mansion House. The east or main section of the house, which forms the base of the U, was the first part to be completed and the south wing, which was completed in 1852, was the second. The main section consists of a rectangular central block, three and a half stories high, with a gable roof topped by a belvedere. A one story portico projects over the central entrance. Above the portico stretch the two story high windows of the Great Hall. These three tracery windows have stone keystones in their hood moulds. The same local stone is used in the quoining of the central block and the south wing. On the north side of the central block, a recessed, two and a half story wing extends north to a square, four story tower with a flat roof surmounted by a parapet. Attached to the tower at the third floor level, and running parallel to the two and a half story connecting wing, is a three story building which is also attached to the north wall of the central block. It is covered with a gable roof, topped with a smaller belvedere.

A second, two and a half story recessed connecting wing extends south from the central block to the south wing. Both the connecting wing and the south wing are roofed with mansard roofs, which are regularly pierced with flatroofed dormers, and covered with polychrome tile. The irregularly massed south wing is dominated by a four story Victorian Gothic tower, also with a mansard roof, covered with geometric polychrome tile, and topped with a weather vane. A series of porches, both open and glass-enclosed, run the length of the south facade of this wing at the first floor level. At the western terminus of the south wing, an open porch extends across the wing at the second floor level.

The north wing, which was completed in 1869, is connected to the east section by a short two and a half story wing. The north wing is three and a half stories high, with a hip roof covered with polychrome tile and pierced regularly with arched dormers with lancet windows. A hexagonal bay, centrally positioned on the northern wall of the wing, extends the full height of the building. Three faces of its peaked roof are pierced by dormers. Geometrical duochrome patterns highlight the brickwork of the north wing. An external gable end chimney is located at the western end of this wing.

At approximately the same time that the north wing was completed, the detached kitchen and dining wing was erected at the western open end of the U. This two and a half story building is also built of brick, has a mansard roof and several flatroofed dormers. In 1914, a two story lounge wing was constructed, thereby connecting the north wing with the kitchen wing.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1848 to 1879 Builder/Architect

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Oneida Community, officially founded in 1848 by John Humphrey Noyes, was one of America's most radical and most successful experimental communities. Based on the concepts of perfectionism and a form of communism patterned on an extended family system, the Community adopted such practices as complex marriage and selective breeding. The group also flourished economically, initially, by the manufacture and sale of steel traps, and later by a whole set of industries including a silverware factory. Due to external pressure and the decline of strong leadership, the Community dissolved in 1881, and the business reformed as a joint-stock company.

The Oneida Community Mansion House is a rambling U-shaped building, built in successive sections, which housed the Community since the construction of the east section in the early 1850's. The House was converted from single occupancy rooms to family apartments in 1880, and is now maintained as a private apartment building, but otherwise is relatively unchanged in appearance or function. It is located on Kenwood Road in Oneida, New York.

### History

The history of the Oneida Community begins with the history of its founder and leader, John Humphrey Noyes. Born in 1811 in Putney, Vermont, Noyes graduated from Dartmouth College and was reading law when he underwent a religious experience. Deciding to prepare himself for the ministry, he abandoned law and in 1831 entered the Theological Seminary at Andover. Because he felt the students too worldly, he transferred in 1832 to the Theological Department at Yale University. There he became associated with a group of revivalists and with them organized a free church. Sharing the then widespread reaction against Calvinist doctrine of human depravity, he became convinced that it was possible for man to attain perfection in life on earth.

When he announced in 1834 that he had attained a state of perfection, or sinlessness, he was deprived of his license to preach, was requested to withdraw from the college, and was dismissed from the free church. For the next two years he attempted to draw the numerous perfectionist groups together and endeavored to interest reformers in his new theology, but he had little success. Discouraged, he returned to his family's home, then in Putney, Vermont, where he gathered his family and friends together and expounded to them his views.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

- S. Sydney Bradford, "Oneida Community Mansion House," National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings for 10-317, 3/21/65.  
Allan Eastlake. The Oneida Community (London, 1900).  
Walter Edmonds. The First Hundred Years, 1848-1948 (n.p., 1948).  
~~John Humphrey Noves. History of American Socialisms (Philadelphia, 1870).~~

## 10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property 13,873 acres

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References

A 

1	8	4	5	0	7	2	0	4	7	6	7	4	8	1	0
Zone		Easting				Northing									

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing									

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing									

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing									

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing									

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing									

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing									

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing									

Verbal boundary description and justification

(See continuation sheet)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_

state \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Richard Greenwood, Historian, Landmark Review Task Force

organization Historic Sites Survey date 1/20/76

street & number 1100 L Street telephone 523-5464

city or town Washington, D.C. state \_\_\_\_\_

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

title \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

  
Keeper of the National Register

date 2/18/85

Attest:

Chief of Registration

date \_\_\_\_\_

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The inner courtyard of the Mansion House is simply landscaped, with paths crossing the lawn, and several trees, including an ancient tulip poplar, planted during the active days of the Community.

The interior of the Mansion House consisted of primarily the single room apartments and secondarily, the public rooms which included the common washrooms, the upper and lower sitting rooms, the Great Hall, the library, the schoolroom and the nursery kitchen. When the house was converted into an apartment house, the single rooms were enlarged to serve as family apartments. Bathrooms were installed as well. Otherwise, the interior has remained basically unchanged. The library, a small room which faces west across the courtyard, is still walled with bookshelves which contain the Community journals and many if not all of the writings of John Humphrey Noyes and his followers and descendants. Adjacent to the library, on the north side of the courtyard, is the Community schoolroom which is now the library of the apartment community. The nursery kitchen and the Great Hall are the best preserved of the house's rooms. The nursery kitchen, located across the courtyard from the schoolroom, has been restored exactly on the basis of photograph. It is a simple room, with duochrome wood panelling and chair rails. It has been furnished with a wood stove, original chairs and a coat rack.

The Great Hall, where the nightly meetings were held has recently been repainted. It is a large room, two stories high, with a stage at one end, and a balcony at the other. Painted in a cream and blue color scheme, the Hall is further ornamented with a trompe l'oeil painting in the center of the ceiling. The original deacon's benches are positioned on the floor below the stage. The interior of the kitchen and dining building has been enlarged by the removal of partitions, and its facilities have been modernized, but are essentially unchanged.

The grounds around the house are neatly groomed lawns, planted with trees. A small summerhouse is located north of the north tower and is the only associated outbuilding. The Children's House, the frame residence of the Community children, has been moved from its original location near the Mansion House. It is now a private residence, located south on Kenwood Avenue.

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During this period, Noyes further refined his ideas, and was greatly influenced by accounts of several communistic experiments in the United States, including Brook Farm. By 1839, his group met regularly and developed a society whose aim was to spread perfectionism by means of its publications. The society adopted a communal way of life; however, this was adopted more from expedience rather than from principles.

As early as 1834 Noyes became convinced that monogamy was not compatible with perfectionism, but it was not until 1846 that the Putney community began practicing complex marriage. This practice aroused the indignation of the neighborhood, and Noyes fled to central New York State. Some twenty or thirty of Noyes adherents followed him, and with him founded the Oneida Community in 1848. Despite the intense labor of the members, the early years were not easy ones. The settlers shared a common equality and all members worked, with Noyes himself leading in the digging of foundations and erecting chimneys. Women worked beside the men, even helping to clear swamps. Upon the arrival of a convert, who offered the Community the rights to a steel trap of his invention, a factory was constructed and production of what proved to be a highly successful article was begun. Other industries were soon adopted, including the production of embroidered silks, canned fruits, cutlery and silver spoons. By 1867, the Community's profits had accrued to the amount of \$180,000. This success enable the Community to buy more land, which, by 1874, amounted to approximately 900 acres.

Material success at Oneida stemmed from more than just hard work. Indeed, the spiritual and social beliefs of the settlers inspired their will to work.

Two aspects of the Oneida philosophy stand out today, "Complex marriage" and "Mutual criticism." Apropos of complex marriage, Noyes believed that purity of the soul depended upon the banishment of selfishness from man. Communal ownership of property ended the possession of private property, and the abolition of traditional marriage extinguished man's selfishness about woman. Freedom to love any woman existed at Oneida where complex marriage enabled a large family, in the broadest sense of the word, to exist in place of the traditional family. Freed from the self-interest and possessiveness of the outside world, an individual's soul stood the best chance of becoming pure. Sexual relations were strictly regulated and birth control was practiced. The Community elders decided who would have children and when.

Just as complex marriage provided a path for spiritual regeneration, so did mutual criticism enable the community to govern itself. In order to maintain social discipline, any individual in the community could be criticized by his fellow members, rather than undergoing a trial. A standing committee of criticism, selected by the community, supervised the practice. One could request criticism or be requested to suffer criticism. In addition to helping bind the group together, it was thought that mutual criticism would help one's self-improvement.

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Day-by-day life at Oneida moved smoothly with the colonists living full lives. Twenty-one standing committees directed the various affairs of the colony, and there were forty-eight supervisors of various departments. Every evening a daily meeting occurred with a moderator controlling the meeting but all members being free to participate in the discussions about the settlement's business and other activities. The health of the members was better than average, women were held in high esteem, children were excellently trained, the work was fairly divided and the profits were shared equally.

Culture occupied an important place at Oneida, and vigorous encouragement supported education and the arts. An excellent school served the children, and the adults had access to a library of between 5,000-6,000 volumes. The community issued several publications, the most popular being the the Oneida Circular, a superior magazine.

As the Oneida Community thrived, its enemies increased. A meeting of a critical opposition, mostly ministers, was held in Syracuse, New York, in 1879. Misunderstanding of the community, allied with the traditional points of view, particularly insofar as complex marriage was concerned, inspired the meeting to condemn the settlement. Noyes, already upset by early sniping and abuse, thus decided that complex marriage should be abandoned. The community agreed to his suggestion in August, 1879.

Noyes emigrated to Canada with a few followers and for a while directed the Community from there. However, the elimination of such a basic tenet led to a quick decline and in January, 1881, the Community dissolved. All property, real and personal, was distributed on an equal basis; the business was incorporated into a \$550,000 joint stock company, and the shares were apportioned. Noyes died not long after, in 1886.

The Oneida Ltd. silver company is a direct descendant of the Community, and its headquarters is located just down the road from the Mansion House, which is presently maintained as an apartment building with many descendants of the original settlers as its occupants.

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Beginning at a point on the centerline of Kenwood Avenue, said point standing at the intersection of the centerline of Kenwood Avenue with the centerline of Chapel Street; thence N31°41'52"E 73.34 feet along the centerline of Kenwood Avenue to a point; thence N32°23'59"E 214.61 feet continuing along the centerline of Kenwood Avenue to a point; thence N32°39'26"E 88.61 feet to a point; thence N36°09'00"E 111.07 feet to a point; thence N35°51'52"E 105.74 feet to a point; thence N30°25'00"E 77.16 feet to a point; thence N24°37'57"E 63.54 feet to a point; thence N21°53'00"E 92.84 feet to a point; thence N19°43'59"E 105.45 feet to a point; thence N16°30'00"E 78.84 feet to a point; thence N13°06'00"E 50.08 feet to a point; thence N11°41'12"E 39.54 feet still along the centerline of Kenwood Avenue to a point standing at the intersection of the centerline of Kenwood Avenue with an easterly extension of the southerly boundary of the lands leased to William H. and Sandra M. Hicks (Now or Formerly) as set forth in a lease dated February 13, 1976 and filed in the Madison County Clerks Office in Liber 690 of Deeds at Page 633; thence N66°54'01"W 204.50 feet along the southerly boundary of Hicks and said aforementioned easterly extension there of to a point on the westerly boundary of Hicks; thence N14°15'26" 141.93 feet along the westerly boundary of Hicks and a northerly extension thereof to a point on the centerline of Skinner Road; thence N86°59'21"W 3.50 feet along the centerline of Skinner Road to a point; thence S81°27'00"W 37.37 feet continuing along the centerline of Skinner Road to a point; thence S76°34'28"W 50.10 feet to a point; thence S75°41'47"W 38.05 feet to a point; thence S74°56'00"W 70.71 feet to a point; thence S66°57'20"W 75.74 feet to a point; thence S58°06'00"W 64.98 feet to a point; thence S53°06'04"W 76.62 feet to a point; thence S49°11'11"W 49.93 feet to a point; thence S37°25'00"W 51.10 feet to a point; thence S28°59'34"W 57.54 feet to a point; thence S29°23'06"W 74.81 feet to a point; thence S34°49'02"W 100.57 feet to a point; thence S32°39'41"W 49.76 feet still along the centerline of Skinner Road to a point; thence S72°01'00"W 125.31 feet to a wooden hub; thence S44°13'26"W 83.68 feet to an iron pin standing at the northeasterly corner of the lands leased to James L. and Zillah M. Crowley (Now or Formerly) as described in a lease dated June 1, 1971 and filed in the Madison County Clerks Office in Liber 658 of Deeds at Page 274; thence S13°00'00"E 170.70 feet along the easterly boundary of Crowley to an iron pin standing on the southerly boundary of Crowley; thence S43°09'00"W 85.70 feet along the southerly boundary of Crowley and a westerly extension thereof to a point standing on the centerline of Chapel Street; thence S48°43'35"E 489.16 feet along the centerline of Chapel Street to a point; thence S48°38'29"E 99.95 feet continuing along the centerline of Chapel Street to the point and place of beginning containing 13.873 Acres of land more or less.



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Excepting and reserving the rights of the public to that portion of the above described premises contained within the bounds of Kenwood Avenue, Chapel Street and Skinner Road.

Also excepting and reserving any easements, covenants or restrictions of record.

These boundaries enclose the Mansion House proper and its associated grounds.