ing do" with things as they were, regardless of how bad they were.

This ambivalence was grounded in a need for American democracy to have a proper, if surrogate, history and identity. And no one, in my estimation, felt that need more keenly than James Fenimore Cooper who felt the tugs of democracy and the claims of "tradition." By Twain's time, however, America had a real history (and literature) and American interest shifted, as Commager notes, away from Britain and to the Continent. Thus it is that this splendid anthology drawn from the diaries, letters, travel books, and magazine pieces of nearly one hundred various travelers or residents is really about the nineteenth century and gives us a fascinating panorama of the mind of America. Three-quarters of the material included is from the last century, and, on the whole, the selections from the twentieth century (the last one, a balanced assessment of Emerson's *English Traits* by Commager, is dated 1948) lack either passionate curiosity or vitality, though the snippet (pp. 722-728) from Margaret Halsey's *With Malice Toward Some* is superb. Her malicious jibes at English inconsistencies make up for the saccharine quality of the next selection.

One has trouble thinking of any other scholar who might have compiled this book as carefully or as imaginatively as Henry Steele Commager. Prolific, humane, perceptive, he has spent part of each year of his life explaining America to the British. He inaugurated the teaching of American history at Cambridge; he has held distinguished professorships at Oxford, Cambridge, and London universities. His book is a model of scholarly editing: the selections have been judiciously chosen and carefully and chronologically arranged to give the full sweep of opinions; the titles are pithy; the headnotes are informative, pertinent, and often witty. Even Henry James, Sr., would have approved.

*Department of History*

*Allegheny College*

*Meadville, Pennsylvania*

---


Constance Noyes Robertson is well qualified to write the account
of the breakup of the Oneida Community. She is the granddaughter of John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the community, and most of her life has been spent in the Oneida area. Her parents belonged to the community, and her father, Pierpont B. Noyes, was active in reactivating the joint stock company which succeeded the old community and is now Oneida Limited, modern silversmiths.

Mrs. Robertson has had access to documents, diaries, and other manuscripts of members of the community. In addition, she has been able to consult the various newspapers published by Oneida Community. She uses these records to reveal the problems which led to the final breakup of the community in 1881.

The dissolution of Oneida Community was the result of more than one factor. Mrs. Robertson, in *Oneida Community*, discusses a number of problems which resulted in the final breakup. She writes that probably the first problem was the dominant influence of John Humphrey Noyes which lasted until age and infirmity lessened his effectiveness as a leader and weakened his hold over the community’s members. The ultimate result was a division between his followers, the Noyesites, and the anti-Noyesites. The latter group were generally the younger members who believed they did not have enough voice in matters affecting the community.

Another problem, and one which Mrs. Robertson ranks as probably second in importance, was Complex Marriage — the community’s system of each member being married to all members. This social system worked quite well in the early years of the community. As the community came closer and closer to its eventual breakup, Complex Marriage became one of the very bitter issues of difference between the older and younger members of Oneida Community. Harriet Skinner, a member who kept Mr. Noyes informed about affairs at Oneida when he was not there, wrote in a letter to him of August 30, 1879, that the community kept yielding to and pacifying the young people. In other reports to Mr. Noyes during August and September of the same year information is given that young people wish to be married to each other in the same way that this is done in the outside world. Some even ran away from the community to be married by other ministers. This distressed Noyes who wrote to community members that there were ordained ministers within the community who could perform the necessary ceremonies. As a result of this controversy, Harriet Skinner drew up a set of “Suggestions for the guidance of those persons in the Community who contemplate marriage under the new Constitutional
Provision authorizing it.” Appended to the suggestions were forms for applications for marriage licenses, for marriage licenses, and for marriage contracts.

A problem closely related to Complex Marriage was the practice which the Oneida Community named “Stirpiculture.” This was a form of eugenic selection. Selected young people were allowed to mate and have children. At first the experiment was very successful. Criticism of both complex marriage and Stirpiculture by clergy who were not community members made life in the community difficult.

It was not just one problem, but a number of difficulties which resulted in the breakup of Oneida Community. By letting newspaper accounts, correspondence, minutes of meetings held at the community, and diaries tell the story of conflict between the younger members and older members of Oneida Community, Mrs. Robertson lets us see the end of the experiment as though we had been there ourselves. In her preface she explains that these records came from material collected by George Noyes, who wrote two histories of the community, and from two boxes of documents which she received from her father. In addition, Mrs. Robertson has quoted relevant passages from various of the socialist newspapers which the community published.

Oneida Community, The Breakup, 1876-1881 is a companion volume to Mrs. Robertson’s Oneida Community: An Autobiography, 1851-1876. The careful research and the frequent quotation from documents do not in any way lessen the readability of this excellent history of John Humphrey Noyes’s social experiment. The bibliography includes rich sources for additional information about communistic societies in nineteenth-century America.

Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh


There has been much talk in recent years about Alvin Toffler’s Future Shock and of the traumatic uncertainties anticipated for the last decades of this century. Similarly, Herman Haupt stands as a classic example of a man caught up in the sharply accelerating changes of nineteenth-century industrial America.