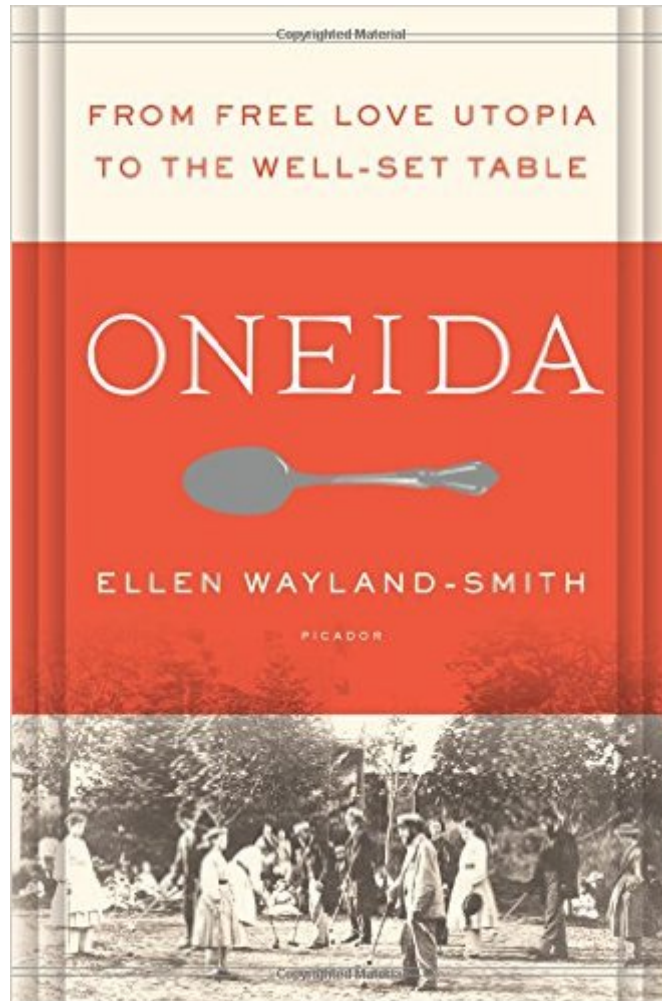


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# Oneida: From Free Love Utopia To The Well-Set Table



## Synopsis

A fascinating and unusual chapter in American history about a religious community that held radical notions of equality, sex, and religion—only to transform itself, at the beginning of the twentieth century, into a successful silverware company and a model of buttoned-down corporate propriety. In the early nineteenth century, many Americans were looking for an alternative to the Puritanism that had been the foundation of the new country. Amid the fervor of the religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening, John Humphrey Noyes, a spirited but socially awkward young man, attracted a group of devoted followers with his fiery sermons about creating Jesus's millennial kingdom here on Earth. Noyes established a revolutionary community in rural New York centered around achieving a life free of sin through God's grace, while also espousing equality of the sexes and a complex marriage—a system of free love where sexual relations with multiple partners was encouraged. Noyes's belief in the perfectibility of human nature eventually inspired him to institute a program of eugenics, known as stirpiculture, that resulted in a new generation of Oneidans who, when the Community disbanded in 1880, sought to exorcise the ghost of their fathers' disreputable sexual theories. Converted into a joint-stock company, Oneida Community, Limited, would go on to become one of the nation's leading manufacturers of silverware, and their brand a coveted mark of middle-class respectability in pre- and post-WWII America. Told by a descendant of one of the Community's original families, Ellen Wayland-Smith's *Oneida* is a captivating story that straddles two centuries to reveal how a radical, free-love sect, turning its back on its own ideals, transformed into a purveyor of the white-picket-fence American dream.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I'm an American Lit. teacher and lover of the weird and interesting people, cultures, and stories that fill our history. I also like good writing. I knew I was in for a treat when I read this on the second page of Oneida's intro, "As the twin dynamos of the market revolution and the Industrial Revolution were transfiguring the American landscape in the 1840s, John Humphrey Noyes and his followers energetically embraced capitalism and the technological wizardry of the modern era...as the wings that would bring fruition to the New Jerusalem." This seems to be Wayland-Smith's gift: taking seemingly disparate elements (capitalism and religion, sex and spirituality, advertising and proselytizing) and not simply drawing a connection, but showing how these elements coexist and evolve together to form America. The story itself is crazy and fascinating. If you enjoy books like *Seabiscuit*, *Unbroken*, *The Boys in the Boat*, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, *H is for Hawk*...books that bring together many characters, ideas, historical moments and make you feel like you see and understand, then Oneida is the book for you.

This is a fascinating book--a wild ride from free love utopia in New York to the silver kings of Oneida. Its great for American history buffs and an amazing family tale told by one of the descendants with the "inside" goods. I learned a lot about religion and advertising too. Waiting for the mini series!!!

Free love, Christianity and silverware â “ everything I want in a story. This is a fascinating tale about the rise and fall of the cutlery kings of New York, who also turn out to be a "band of bastards and fornicators", in the eyes of the world anyway. Wayland-Smith, a descendant of this eccentric clan, tells the family story in such elegant, clear-eyed prose, I literally couldn't put it down.

A fascinating, insider's look at the Oneida community. Wayland-Smith explores the darker corners of the utopian dream, using a rich trove of archival material. Her crisp, elegant prose keeps the reader hooked from beginning to end. A terrific read!

Wayland-Smith is an elegant writer, working with engrossing material. Before reading this book, the Oneida community had always existed in my mind as one of those mythical, mysterious entities. But it was even more fascinating than I had even imagined, particularly in the hands of such a gifted

storyteller and scholar.

In beautifully drafted prose, Ellen Wayland-Smith draws us into a deep family history, telling American history at the same time. I have a feeling this book is going to be made into a TV series or movie. It is rare that I am so captivated by a book and learn so much. I can't wait for her next book.

This is an interesting book about a very interesting group of people. It is not written as a novel, however, which causes the story line to lag a bit for the average reader. The author has approached this story of her family and Oneida from a scholarly viewpoint and has a scholar's insights as to the social and historical implications of the Oneida Community. I found it very interesting.

The author is an English professor and this book reads as such. Lots of interesting insights, but don't expect an easy read. I found the sentences quite long and requiring full engagement. Also, she rambles a bit throughout philosophical and religious history.

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