



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

Tirzah Miller Herrick

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Written between 1867 and 1879, this memoir by the most prominent woman of the younger generation at the Oneida Community is the first that deals explicitly and openly with the sexual conflicts there. It chronicles Tirzah Miller's social and sexual life, including her relations with her uncle and lover, founder of the colony John H. Noyes, and her participation in the eugenics experiment Noyes dubbed ""stirpiculture"". Miller, a sensitive observer of the internal life at this celebrated communal family, details the shifting political forces within the community just before its breakup in 1880. Her memoir is full of intimate conversations with John H. Noyes about issues and personalities, her love affairs, her doubts about communism, her love of music, and her anguish over the loss of two partners. Throughout the account she is torn between her desire for romance and her duty to the community. The memoir, which begins when she is 20 and ends when she is 36, sheds light on several issues that are central to understanding this daring experiment in communal living and social engineering.



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