Proposed title: Reflecting on an alternative future. How members of Utopian communities framed their experience in the Gilded Age.

Preferred supervisor: ███████████

Historians of nineteenth century American Utopian communities have, by definition, recognised the emergence of these groups of people practising alternative economic, social, and sexual models of organisation as part of a wider phenomenon specific to that time. What is less explored by these historians, is the extent to which members of these numerous and varied communities saw themselves as part of a wider movement and whether they recognised their own communities decline within this context. This is what I would like to tackle in my dissertation.

By looking at how members of both Shaker communities and Oneida framed their experience during the Gilded Age I hope to understand their relationship to each other, the wider American Utopian community movement, as well as how they did (or didn't) recognise the decline of this movement.

Whilst my undergraduate thesis investigated some of these themes for the Oneida Community, I hope to explore this further, by expanding the scope of research to more than one community (by which means it is possible to ascertain whether or not Oneida's attitudes were reciprocated by the Shakers) and understanding how members understood the change their communities were going through (transforming from a Utopian perfectionist community to a joint stock company in the case of Oneida, or experiencing significantly declining membership in the case of the Shakers).

Many historians have focussed on why these communities failed, either as studies of individual communities (S.J. Stein, M.P Roach, or M.L. Carden), or as part of a wider study of multiple communities (C. Brumann, I. L. Mandelker). They have largely looked at internal forces that caused this decline (and the commonality of these forces between different communities), such as generational disparity in ideological commitment, an aging charismatic leader, or their economic means of existence becoming ends in themselves. I would hope to understand how this decline was framed by members, why so many members of Oneida chose to stay long after Utopian perfectionism had ceased being practiced, and how members of both Shakers and Oneida understood this decline (if at all) themselves. By gaining an understanding of how members framed the decline of their own communities, one can appreciate the wider causes of this decline in a new context.

Many historians have studied these communities' unique attitudes towards, and organisation of, family, gender and sexuality, such as L. J. Foster, L. Kern, or C. Brumann. Whilst they have recognised similarities between different communities' attitudes and how these attitudes fit in a broader societal context, they have largely not discussed different communities' awareness of and influence on each other.

There is evidence of these communities awareness of each other in W.A. Hinds' decade's long communication with multiple American Utopian communities which were contemporaries to Oneida (including the Shakers). It will be integral to research the nature of, and extent to which, Shakers corresponded with other communities and whether this mirrored how members of Oneida corresponded with other communities or not. I will aim to understand why this difference or commonality existed between the two communities. Through this difference or commonality it will become clearer whether or not members of American Utopian communities did see themselves as part of a wider movement, beyond their own communities.

I will revisit *American Communities*, W.A. Hinds (1878) and *History of American Societies*, J.H. Noyes (1870) to compare both their account of the Shakers with Shakers own narrative of their community, and how Oneida related to other communities differed from the Shakers own relations.

Beyond external community correspondence, community publications will be central to my research, giving an insight into community identity in the context of a wider movement, as this is how both the communities and the individual members chose to represent their experience to those outside of their community.

Autobiographies of members (*Autobiography of a Shaker: And Revelation of the Apocalypse*,F. W. Evans (1869), *Brief History of Early Life Prior to Becoming a Member of the Shaker Community, Also, an Outline of Life and Experience among the Shaker,* M.A. Doolittle (1880), and *My Father's House: An Oneida Boyhood ,*P. Noyes(1937)) will offer insight into how experience of these communities was framed retrospectively. Oneida's founder's son P. Noyes' autobiography will also detail how the community weathered the dramatic transformation from Utopian community to a Joint Stock company; squaring their radical Utopian past, with their respectable silverware company.

How did members frame their experience in the context of their communities' decline? How did communities relate to each other? And, to what extent did they see each other as part of a wider movement of American Utopian communities? These are some key questions I hope to gain answers to over the course of my MPhil dissertation.