The Hopedale Community

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A wave of social inspiration, aspiration and experimentation swept through the country during the decade of the 1840s with many attempts being made to build new societies based upon the new ideas of the time. One such attempt was the Hopedale Community—a small society of about 200 members which was located about thirty miles from Boston.

The Hopedale Community was "a compact village of Practical Christians, dwelling together by families in love and peace, insuring to themselves the comforts of life by agricultural and mechanical industry and devoting the entire residues of their intellectual, moral and physical resources to the Christianization and general welfare of the human race."[1] Before a discussion of the community can begin one must first look at the life of its founder, Adin Ballou.

Ballou was born in Cumberland, Rhode Island on April 27, 1803. His father was a Christian with Calvinist learnings who inoculated his children with a strict sense of morality at an early age. Because of his strict religious upbringing, Ballou developed a deep interest in religion. As a result, he attended Yale College for one year but was forced to withdraw because of problems at home. His interest in religion continued, however, and he finally was ordained as a minister at a Southern Association of Universalists meeting held in Milford, Massachusetts, on December 10, 1823, at the age of twenty.[2] Ballou became the pastor of the Universalist Church in Milford in 1824 and he remained there until 1827.

Following his resignation from the Milford parish in 1827, Ballou made his first attempt at publishing. He founded a semi-monthly paper entitled *The Dialogical Instructor*; it was not too successful, surviving only thirteen issues.[3] After the demise of the paper, Ballou accepted a job in New York City where he worked for one year. He then returned to Milford, serving the parish until 1831 at which time he moved five miles west to the Mendon parish where he remained for eleven years. In 1831, he again tried his hand at publishing with a weekly periodical entitled *The Independent Messenger.* This time Ballou was fairly successful — the journal had 325 subscribers who were willing to pay $1.50 a year for its eight year existence.[4]

Ballou's ideas began to deviate from those of the Universalist Church and he began to challenge the hierarchy. Because of his ideas Ballou became a Christian Non-Resistant at a meeting held in Boston in 1838. Almost immediately after entering the Non-Resistants Ballou formed his own offshoot which he called "Practical Christians." His new sect was based upon the New Testament, with the objective of the sect being developed by Ballou himself. It was dedicated to "promoting Christian piety and morality in their primitive purity."[5] Because his new faith meant abstinence from every kind of "injurious and unbeneficent force," Ballou began to develop ways to bring these ideas into reality.

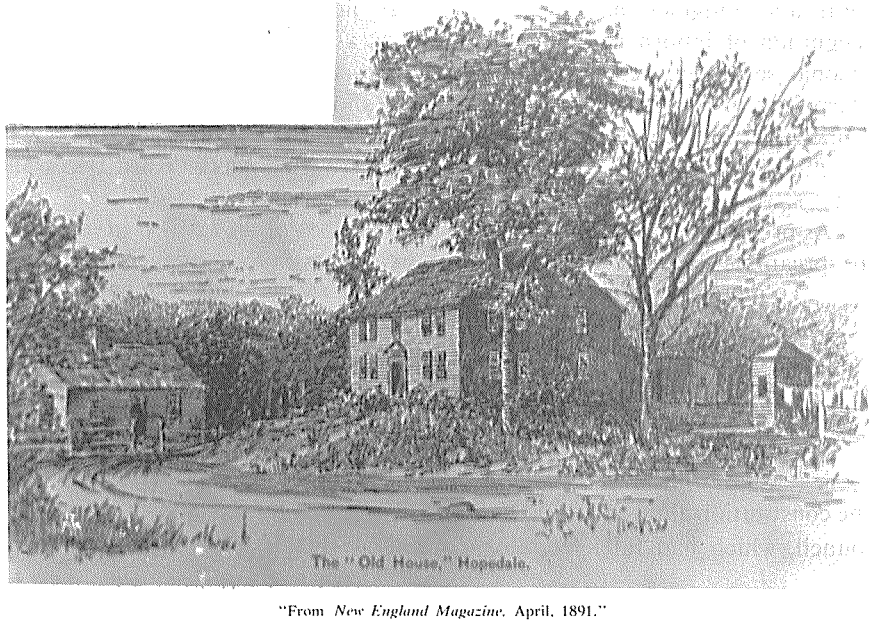
His first idea was to publish a paper to express his new religious views. The bi-monthly paper, *The Practical Christian,* began publication on April 1, 1840, for the purpose of "a faithful exposition, defense and promulgation of Practical Christianity, in all the prominent characteristics, aspects and bearings of its theology, piety and morality."[6] The paper was so successful (500 subscribers) that it lasted twenty years, three of which were after the Hopedale Community had collapsed. It was through this paper that Ballou revealed his plans for the community.

When Ballou became a Practical Christian he was faced with the problem of bringing his idea into reality. "How could the principles and sentiment it contained be made the basis of individual and social life."[7] Ballou felt that he and his followers had to try to build a new civilization radically better than the old. Yet, they had nothing to guide them as they were pioneers in the field of social reconstruction.

Ballou first thought of buying a farm where he and his followers could live in peace, but this soon grew into the idea of a community. He first explained his plans in *The Practical Christian* on September 15, 1840. He described "the desirability of establishing a colony of persons pledged to these principles of our standard, for mutual encouragement and support in proclaiming and exemplifying those principles before the world."[8]

Between 1839 and 1841 six meetings were held to formulate plans for the new community. Adin Ballou and a group of friends discussed plans for the formation of a religious, industrial joint-stock organization dedicated to Christian Socialism.[9] A constitution was presented and ratified in 1840 and the community was named "Fraternal Community No. 1."[10] In August of 1841 Ballou selected a site for the community, in Milford. It contained 258 acres with a considerable stream of water, the Mill River. The farm was known by two name—Jones Farm and the Dale by virtue of its location (in a small valley).[11] They christened the site "Hope Dale," "a name which united the high expectations we cherished for the future of our movement with the previous appropriate designation of the pleasant valley in which those expectations were to be realized."[12] The 258 acres were purchased for $3,800—less than $15 an acre.[13] In addition to this work the group passed resolves, by-laws and rules for the new community. Elections were held at the final meeting with Ballou elected President and William W. Cook elected Secretary.[14]

By the end of March, 1841, seven families and one unmarried member had moved to the "Old House"—the 140 year old house of the former owner.[15] On March 27, Ballou left his Mendon parish and moved to Hope Dale. The first few weeks were very rough—"the twenty-eight members ate at common tables and lodged in small but distinct apartments in the Old House. Their high hope, faith and zeal enabled them to bear these unbearable conditions."[16]



"From *New England Magazine*, April, 1891."

The first meeting held in Hope Dale was on April 3, with all members in attendance. Ballou gave a long sermon in which he praised everyone for the needed co-operation. Four days later, April 7, was State Fair Day. A celebration was held, and Frederick Douglass gave a stirring address and "broke into fragments the pro-slavery ice in Milford and vicinity." [17]

The first order of business in the new community was to get everything organized and to assign jobs. A practical division of industrial operations was arranged and each member was assigned to a position of responsibility. Immediately after this was done the members took to planting Indian corn, potatoes and beans in 17 acres of cultivated land. [18] Construction of new buildings started soon after the occupation of Hope Dale, with the first building being erected by the end of April. It was "32 feet by 14½ feet, 1½ stories high and had 6 rooms which became a printing office and a school." [19] The population rose rapidily in Hope Dale. By the end of June the community had 44 persons—10 men, 12 women and 22 children while the farm had 13 cows, 4 oxen, 2 horses and 6 swine. [20]

As months passed and the novelty of the situation passed enthusiasm diminished; then the people of Hopedale realized that they had undertaken more than they could handle. They soon became overcrowded with new-comers who constantly appeared. Ballou recognized much of the problem: "My hope was too large and my economic judgement was too small." [21] Many quarrels subsequently broke out. The problem was twofold—the virtual abandonment of family life and a growing preponderence of material interests over those of a moral and religious nature. [22] What was needed was a more practical recognition of inborn rights and obligations as well as more opportunity for personal seclusion, activity and development and more individual freedom, enterprise and responsibility. Above all there should have been a true and clear distinction made between the dictate of charity and those of strict justice. [23] As a result of these problems, a change in the constitution was deemed necessary.

As previously stated, the constitution of Hopedale was ratified in late 1840. The preamble gave the reasons for the existence of the community: [24]

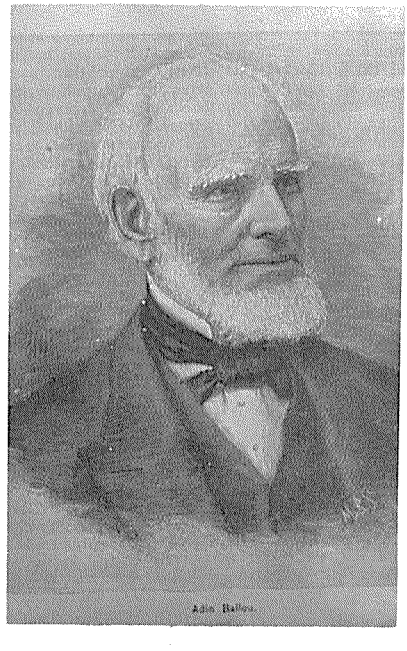
> To more effectively illustrate the virtues; and promote the ends of pure religion, morality and philanthropy; to withstand the vices, and reform the disorders of the present social state; to secure to our own posterity the blessings of a more salutary, physical, intellectual and moral education; to establish a moral, economical and productive system of industry; and to facilitate the honest acquisition of individual property for laudable purposes.

The constitution allowed for a Board of Trustees and an Executive Council. The Council, which had full governing powers, elected Ballou as President.

One important aspect of the constitution that should be dealt with provided for membership into the community. All members had to be eighteen years of

age. Any person regardless of "sex, color, occupation, wealth, rank or any other natural or adventuous pecularity" [25] had a right to become a member and be on equal terms with everyone else. Each member entering the community had to make a 250 word statement called "The Declaration," proclaiming his beliefs and responsibilities to the new community. Some major points were:[26] "never to kill, assault, beat, torture, slander, injure, envy or hate any human being...never use intoxicating liquor, serve in the army or navy, hold office, use profanity or be subject to idleness or gambling." This policy of admission worked very well until 1850 when because of increased applications and outsiders living in the community, a new policy was instituted with stricter moral regulations.

To solve the problems that had arisen in Hopedale in 1842 Ballou instituted seven distinct changes. Because of these changes six members left Hopedale. However, after these alterations the Hopedale Community began to flourish. For four years the community prospered and expanded. The harvest was good, several kinds of mechanical activities were in operation and others were being planned. In addition, the mill-dam and attached shop were almost completed. Yet, Hopedale showed a deficit for the first two years, due to initial operating expenses and a lack of subscribers.[27] With the constitutional changes, the deficit was slowly eliminated. Evidence of this new prosperity was the building of three houses, a schoolhouse and graded streets.



"From *New England Magazine*, April, 1891."

During the early years of Hopedale, most of the industry was organized and carried on under the joint-stock arrangements of the constitution. Under this plan members could buy stock at $50 per share and they would receive a dividend if a profit was made during that year. As a result of this system Hopedale was able to make a profit of $752.64 in 1844. This prosperity allowed new construction which was sorely needed as Hopedale's population had sharply increased to 200 members. These early years were so profitable that the leaders voted to pay all federal, real estate and poll taxes for all members so long as the total valuation did not exceed $1,000.[28]

But four years later, 1846, problems again plagued Hopedale. The community was struck by sickness, several deaths, and a general decline in business prosperity. It was noted that the industries were lacking efficiency and good management. This forced the elimination of the existing industrial arrangements. Industries owned by the community were sold to private investors. Little did they know that this was the beginning of the end for Hopedale since its economy was based on its own industries. The system of operations was simplified and temporarily at least, the affairs of Hopedale were administered with greater efficiency. Because of the many problems that Hopedale had faced Ballou decided to officially name his community "The Hopedale Community" and thus giving up his hope of developing other similar communities.[29]

Because of the changes made in 1846 Hopedale was able to make a profit in 1853 and 1854. The 1853 treasurer's report revealed that a profit of $21.72 was made during the previous year. It also indicated that the valuation of the community and its manufacturing enterprises was $55,225.00—an increase of $46,567.00 in ten years.[30] The following year, 1854, was the most prosperous year Hopedale ever had. It was the "palmiest year in the history of the Hopedale Community. It flourished in all its departments, operations and interests. Materially, socially and religiously its progress was most satisfactory."[31] The community made its largest profit in 1854 — $1,821.44.[32]
largest profit in 1854—$1,821.44.32

Hopedale had many industries which were responsible for the success of the community during 1845 and 1854. The community had common farming, gardening, carpentry, printing, and hat making. In addition, there were tin, sheet metal and iron shops and boot and shoe manufacturing along with a machine shop, a mechanic shop and a saw-mill.[33] Because of the success of these industries Hopedale was able to expand and flourish more than any other utopian community of the time. In fact, within a decade the Hopedale Community had gained control of 500 acres and had built 30 new dwellings, 3 mechanic shops, a chapel, several barns and the saw-mill.[34]

Before the final demise of the Hopedale Community is examined it would help to look at the social aspects of the community. Hopedale was a center of moral reform in New England—closely associated with temperance, education, anti-slavery, and the peace movement. As Ballou said, "Hopedale became a place where anyone interested in a new movement could find listeners and usually support."[35]

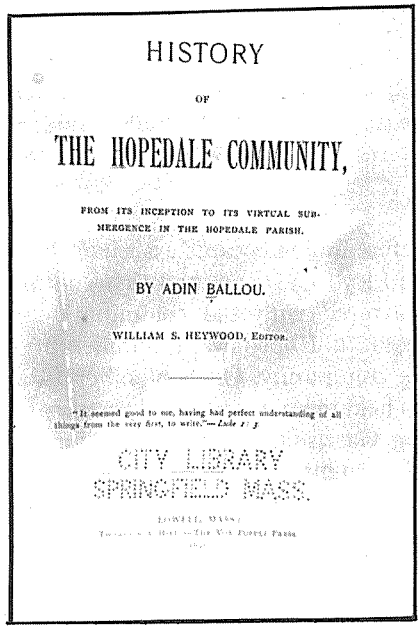
During the years before Ballou became associated with Hopedale he talked frequently with William Lloyd Garrison, and they continued to see each other after Ballou became involved with the community. Since the anti-slavery movement was prominent in Hopedale, a number of times Ballou invited Garrison to address the community. On September 14 and 15, 1845, a large anti-slavery meeting was held there. Guest speakers were Garrison and Edmund Quincy. At the meeting Garrison collected $150 for the anti-slavery cause. Several times Garrison brought Frederick Douglass with him.[36] Each year Hopedale held a meeting celebrating the British emancipation of the slaves in the West Indies in 1834. The meeting in 1855 was attended by 700 people.[37]

The Hopedale Community was founded on the religious principles of Practical Christianity—an offshoot of the Non-Resistant faith. As a result, the Non-Resistant movement was a major reform in Hopedale. The members had regular religious meetings with two or three on Sunday and a special social-religious meeting on Thursday evenings. The meetings were usually led by Ballou, who always started the meeting with a long discourse on Non-Resistance.

In conjunction with the Non-Resistants, the women of Hopedale organized a religious society called "The Inductive Communion" for "all those in the community who are in strong sympathy with its religious doctrines and principles."[38] The group met on Monday evenings begining on February 12, 1849. In 1851 it issued a paper entitled *The Inductive Harbinger.* This society was fairly popular, with a membership of 82.

Partly because of "The Inductive Communion" Hopedale became a center of the women's rights movement. When Ballou was asked if he was going to allow the same wages to women as to men, he answered, "If females devote their strength and skill in the best manner they can, why not allow them equal wages." [39]

The final and probably most important reform movement in Hopedale was that of education. One of the first things that Ballou did when Hopedale was started was to build a school. This small two-room school lasted until 1848 when Ballou's wife, Abbie, opened a new school. By 1853 Hopedale had forty to fifty



HISTORY

OF

THE HOPEDALE COMMUNITY,

FROM ITS INCEPTION TO ITS VIRTUAL SUBMERGENCE IN THE HOPEDALE PARISH.

BY ADIN BALLOU.

WILLIAM S. HEYWOOD, EDITOR.

"It seemed good to me, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write."—*Luke 1 : 3.*

pupils in school. It was a school "...in which the powers of the mind are developed and cultivated and nothing is left undone to preserve the health and secure symmetrical growth of the body."[40] The children received a very good education from Mrs. Ballou, who in 1855 had access to a new library which contained over 600 volumes.

Because Hopedale was a community where reforms were always taking place, the members made sure that they kept their community attractive. The Industrial Army—a group of men from the community—took care of the improvements in Hopedale such as building a common ice-house, grading the streets, building a bridge across Mill River and cutting brush in the village square. Because of the constant improvements being made and the fact that this was an ideal community, "you will not find...a single poor house, or jail, or prison, or gallows, or grog shop—no lawyer or constable or soldier nor even a gun stored away as a memento to their brave grandfather.[41]

But all of the prosperity and happiness that Hopedale had enjoyed abruptly came to an end in 1856. E.D. Draper, President of Hopedale after Ballou retired in 1852, reported on January 9, 1856, that the industrial and financial outlook for the coming year was bright and encouraging. But four weeks later he reported that the financial condition of the community was so desperate that he and his brother George had decided to withdraw their investment from the joint-stock capital. The contradiction was because Draper gave his first report before the new treasurer's report was completed. The withdrawal of the

Draper investment was a fatal blow to Hopedale. The Draper brothers, because of their ownership of the machine shop, had become the wealthiest members of the community. Whenever the community was in trouble they would buy more stock to keep Hopedale going. By 1856 the Drapers had gained control of ¾ of the joint-stock which was valued at $41,000.[42]

When the new treasurer's report came in it showed a deficit of $10-12,000 instead of the $146.15 deficit that the first report showed.[43] As a result of this large deficit, a community meeting was held to find a solution to the problem. It was realized that if the Draper brothers left Hopedale the community would be destroyed. They tried to convince the brothers to stay but George was steadfast in his ideas. He felt that the system was impractical and he was able to convince his brother to join him. Since their opinion could not be changed, it was decided to end the community. The final settlement of the affairs was done to the satisfaction of all concerned. All industrial arrangements were abolished, all real and movable property was transferred to the proper claimants and the Drapers agreed to pay the outstanding debts of the community.

The community was thus reduced to a religious society—a mere shadow of its former self. With this done many members withdrew. "And never afterward did a single person settle in Hopedale from any regard to its moral, social and religious principles."[44] Ballou was distressed at the sudden turn of events, "I feel like one prematurely consigned to a tomb. My darling expectations were blasted, my noblest ambition crushed."[45] The Hopedale Community retained a few nominal guarantees against ignorance, poverty and vice and it struggled in its dismantled state as best it could. It kept up public and social meetings with a good degree of regularity.

But the Hopedale Community fell away from the high moral level formerly attained and "slowly descended the plane which inclined towards the old social state." *The Practical Christian* died four years later on April 14, 1860. The members continued to live in Hopedale but the membership continually decreased. By 1865 the membership of Hopedale had been reduced to 50 members.[46]

The end for Hopedale came in October of 1867. At that time the Hopedale Community was changed to "The Hopedale Parish" whose membership was composed of persons outside as well as inside the pale of the Community who desired to unite and work together for the moral and religious education and improvement of all classes of the population and for the public welfare and happiness."[47]

And so a noble experiment in human living came to an end. The Hopedale Community had lasted longer than any of the many utopian societies during this

period. It was the first to be organized and the last to be abandoned. Where in 1840 stood a run-down farm was now a peaceful, law-abiding village surrounding the machine shops that employed many in the surrounding area.

On August 5, 1890, Adin Ballou died at the age of 87. After almost seventy years of service to his fellow man Ballou could now rest comfortably. William Draper, a close friend of Ballou's said of him: "He is to me the highest embodiment of Christian character and unselfish devotion to duty that I have met."[48] William S. Heywood, editor of Ballou's autobiography, had this to say, "He was a man of superior intellectual ability, of generous and genial social qualities and a character above reproach and without guile."[49] Ballou's only fault was that he undertook too extensive a venture without adequately devising a detailed enough plan and taking into consideration the many problems to be faced. Ballou held to the belief in the possibility of creating a perfect self-regulating society in which the moral priority of the individual would mysteriously, through his faith in principles and written documents, harmonize with the needs and demands of the community. But this was not to be.

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