The founding of the Hopedale Community was part of a much larger striving in New England and elsewhere to find a new basis for society. By 1840 economically depressed times had excited efforts to escape from defective social institutions as well as from corrupted churches. In 1846 William Henry Fish wrote that "the community enterprise" had been initiated simultaneously in various places "by men who had never had any intercourse or acquaintance with each other." Fish believed that this expressed a growing hunger for some fundamental social reform:

The old order of society had come to be felt, by many of the most progressive class of minds, to be selfish and burdensome, and they could not, with easy consciences, longer sustain it—at least without trying for something better. They saw that labor was unequally divided—that property was—that nearly all the conveniences and luxuries of life were; and that this was wrong—unquestionably wrong.

Horace Greeley, a leading "progressive" mind and editor of the New York Tribune, made the same point when he included Hopedale among various experiments in "Socialism," a new term that he defined as an effort to apply "Christianity to the Social Relations of mankind."

It was much easier, however, to condemn existing society than it was to agree on the fundamentals of the new social order, as Adin Ballou quickly discovered. When Ballou published his preliminary plan for a community in September 1840, he excited the interests of other progressives, notably George Ripley and his fellow Transcen-
dentalists, who had grown increasingly uneasy with the gap between the ideal and the real. Ripley, who was in October to announce his resignation from the ministry and soon after to launch Brook Farm, apparently had already begun to discuss the idea of a model community with the Practical Christians. On 18 October Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a rather befuddled bystander, reported that the "Out-and-Outers" had "formed a holy alliance with the Transcendentalists. Out of this fermentation of mind has sprung up a new plan, namely to form a new community, to be called 'The Practical Christians.'" Whatever chance there was for an alliance, however, was nullified by the refusal of some of the Transcendentalists to accept the Standard of Practical Christianity as the required basis of the community, although Ripley himself seemed disposed toward such a test.  

This disagreement involved a critical question that was frequently to disrupt socialism over the next century. Although many might dream of a society founded on brotherhood, they disagreed over who were qualified to be members of that brotherhood. Transcendentalists rejected the Standard as a condition for membership because they believed it exalted conformity to law over spirit. Their position was stated by Elizabeth Peabody in Emerson's *Dial* in 1841. Peabody praised Ballou's plan as reflecting "a deep insight into the Christian ideal" but criticized the Standard as failing Christ's ideal of a "world-embracing church" open to all: "This can be founded on nothing short of faith in the universal man, as he comes out of the hands of the Creator with no law over his liberty but the Eternal Ideas that lie at the foundation of his Being." For Transcendentalists like Emerson, even exalting Christ as a model of human behavior limited what they believed was the infinite potential of the human self, which should be freed from the confinement of all creeds and institutions.  

The Transcendentalists were among various critics who decided that the Practical Christians were simply another religious sect whose membership requirements would exclude the great majority of the human race from a paradise that rightly belonged to all. Ballou insisted, however, that these requirements were nonsectarian, since they did not demand adherence to Restorationism or to any other of the various theologies that had long disrupted Christianity.
Above all, they were not dogmas to which the mind must conform: at Hopedale, there was to be freedom of thought and belief, the continuation of a dissenting tradition that extended back to Roger Williams, and one on which Ballou depended in his own search for ultimate truth.¹

If there was to be a community of "free minds," though, its members were obligated to do "what was clearly right," since the good society could be realized only when people conformed their behavior to a clearly defined code of conduct. Ideally, conduct would be animated by the spirit of Christian love, but there had to be a practical basis and guide for that spirit. While some progressives believed that right behavior would result naturally from the liberated self, Ballou held that practical righteousness depended on the discipline of self, on a committed effort to rise above the imperfections of human nature. Convinced that the Standard required only the behavior that God had intended to produce human happiness and holiness, he saw nothing sectarian about making it a condition of membership: "Is he a sectarian because he wishes to found a community from which war, slavery, etc. are utterly excluded?"⁵

If society were ever to be regenerated, it would have to begin with a rightfully organized association of "all-sided saints." Ballou and his associates insisted that the ideal community depended ultimately on the moral commitments of individuals rather than on social contrivances, but they also believed that humans were social beings who needed some form of social organization.⁶ Having decided to make the Standard the basis for their radically new civilization, they wrestled with the problem of creating a social framework for their moral principles. They investigated various plans of social organization, held frequent discussions, and in late January 1841 completed their "Constitution of the Fraternal Communion," a general plan for a national association of "Christian commonwealths" that they expected sympathetic Americans to form throughout the nation.⁷

They had to resolve the particularly difficult problem of the ownership and management of property, a central problem for both Hopedale and social radicalism in general. "The question of property will divide us into odious parties," wrote Emerson in September 1840. "And all of us must face it & take our part. A good man finds
himself excluded from all lucrative works. He has no farm & he cannot get one." In industrializing and modernizing New England, individual and local autonomy was giving way before a new economic order in which virtually everyone was becoming dependent on forces beyond his or her control. During the depressed times that afflicted many areas by the late 1830s, some thinkers were led to reconsider established ideas regarding property. If, as it seemed, the rich and powerful were devoting their possessions to their own aggrandizement at the expense of their fellow citizens, what could be done to assure the average man a share of property? In a society increasingly dominated by the wealthy few, how best to protect the welfare of the straitened many? By 1840 these questions, which were demanding attention throughout the modernizing North Atlantic world, had begun to attract the notice of religious radicals in the Blackstone Valley.

Ballou and his associates were generally conservative on economic matters, but they concluded that the times demanded an answer to the property question if their Christian commonwealth was ever to become a reality. Although they continued to emphasize the necessity of individual moral commitment, they were coming to believe that even the dedicated could not live truly Christian lives so long as property was left to the exclusive control of individuals. The growing gap between rich and poor, as well as the selfish striving and antagonistic competition for wealth, made for a society in which the practice of human brotherhood was impossible. The scramble for individual property, Ballou wrote later, was "engendering discontent, ill-will, resentment, animosity, hatred, and sometimes the spirit of revenge and open violence." If a society of loving, moral citizens was ever to become a reality, some way had to be found to Christianize and socialize property, to make it work for rather than against the Standard of Practical Christianity.

One way was already familiar to social radicals. In previous decades, they had looked to common ownership, to the collective possession of property for the good of all on the basis of personal needs. Robert Owen had experimented with this common-stock idea at New Harmony with disastrous results, but the idea had been put into notably successful practice by the Shakers, whose communities involved both common ownership and the basic communistic for-
formula of wealth distribution: from each on the basis of ability, to each on the basis of need. Since the Shakers had seemingly grown ever more prosperous during previous decades, their communism won considerable attention from religious and social radicals, including the Practical Christians. In early 1841 one of Ballou's followers told him that the common-stock principle was "a sovereign cure for covetousness" and that individual rights to property could not exist in a Christian commonwealth.

Ballou and most of his associates, however, were the products of a provincial middle-class culture oriented toward individual initiative and property. When Ballou first proposed the idea of Christian communities, he specifically rejected the Shakers as a model, in large part because he believed their system suppressed individual freedom and responsibility. Previously, he had made individual moral obligation the cornerstone of his Restorationism; now he made it an essential ingredient of his ideal community: "We go for unabridged individuality of mind, conscience, duty and responsibility." The next years deepened his aversion to communism into an outright loathing. Common-stock property, he wrote in 1841, "must have keepers and stewards, whom so much power will exalt and corrupt, whilst the majority habitually dependent for their food, clothes, and other comforts on the direction of these managers, will cower down, grow servile, lose all force of individual character, and finally become dull, unthinking drudges." If communism was to be rejected, though, what then could guide the use of property toward Christian ends?

The Practical Christians tried to answer this question in their Constitution for the Fraternal Communion. On the one hand, they made "the honest acquisition of individual property" a basic goal. On the other hand, they limited that individual property to shares in a Christian joint-stock concern that would actually own and manage the land, residential properties, and productive enterprises of the community. Individual members of the Communion could buy or sell shares, and each would receive profits from the community proportionate to the number of shares he or she owned. In theory, all shareholders would have reason to contribute their work and talents to the enterprise, while at the same time the collective control of property, guided by the requirements of the Standard,
would assure that individual energies would serve the happiness and holiness of the whole community.¹³

This form of Practical Christian socialism was to endure. Much less durable was an attempt to bring property into harmony with the principle of equality, to which the Fraternal Communion was pledged by its constitution: “All members of every community shall stand on a footing of personal equality, irrespective of sex, color, occupation, wealth, rank, or any other natural or adventitious peculiarity.” Although the Shakers had practiced, and the Garrisonian abolitionists had supported, the principle of racial and sexual equality, this pledge was far ahead of any other constitutional commitment to equality at the time. Hopedale would long abide by it. It was soon to retreat, however, from the attempt to translate equality into economic terms by means of the constitutional provision that each member be paid a “uniform rate of wages” regardless of the nature or results of the work; similarly, members were to pay a uniform rate for housing, food, and other necessities.¹⁴

The fact that the constitution established any rates of reward and payment at all indicates that the Fraternal Communion had no intention of committing itself to pure communism, but even this partial commitment to economic equality was too extreme for Ballou, who said later that he had agreed to the wage provision only out of deference to the views of some of his associates. At the time, though, he did his best to defend it in the last part of his lengthy “Dissertation on the Fraternal Communion” published in three successive issues of the Practical Christian: “Thus the strong bear the affinities of the weak—the more capable assist the less.” It would, he said, assure that women would have equal pay with men, encourage the less competent to do their best, reinforce the benevolence of the more capable, and avoid the jealousies and resentments associated with unequal wages.¹⁵

Having completed their grand plan to regenerate the world, Ballou and his associates had to confront the need for hard cash to begin their first community. They were few and relatively poor, but they convinced themselves that the essential righteousness of their cause would bring success: “The elect of God for any great work of reform, are always few.” To begin their work, they succeeded in getting three thousand dollars in subscriptions to the joint stock of the
Fraternal Communion; nearly half of the fifty-dollar shares were taken by Ballou and four of his followers in Mendon, and another quarter by two men in nearby Uxbridge. Like other would-be founders of communities, they soon discovered that their plan won more attention from those in need than from those in the money, and they ended their first year of effort with a distinctly warlike complaint that secret adversaries were “pulling every wire and turning every stone to defeat us.” By the summer of 1841, however, they had raised enough support to purchase a place for their experiment.

They considered buying a tract of cheap land in the West, but they decided to remain in their native region, “surrounded at a little distance by the estates, dwellings, and villages of our fellow men, where we can at all times hold intercourse with our relatives, friends and neighbors.” In September they announced that they had contracted to buy a 258-acre farm located on both sides of the Mill River within the limits of the town of Milford. Although both the land and the buildings had been run down by decades of neglect, the farm had one notable asset, a twenty-four-foot fall in the river that could supply the waterpower sufficient for small-scale manufacturing. Waterpower not land was to be the central physical influence on their future; from the beginning, the City of God to which they aspired was to be a godly version of the mill towns that had marked the progress of their region. Long before, the place had been known as “the Dale,” so they christened it Hope Dale. By the fall they had hired a surveyor to lay out the streets for the projected village and had issued an appeal for donations of “money, or cattle, or books, or building materials” to help begin its development.

In March 1842 Ballou resigned his ministry at Mendon with a long discourse on the changes that had taken place in his thinking over the previous decade, changes that had led him to conclude that the Christianity of the Sermon on the Mount “must be made practical, both individually and socially, in respect to all the great interests of life, in order to realize salvation in ourselves and bring about a restoration of all things.” After declaring “I am a Fraternal Communionist,” he brought his family to Hopedale to join the people who were gathering there. By June twenty-five adults and twenty children had crowded into the broken-down buildings of the farm to begin the work of creating a Christian paradise: “There
came to the Dale a few Pilgrims of Zion / A band faint and feeble whose hope was in God."  

They came chiefly from the primary recruiting ground for Practical Christianity, an area of eastern Worcester County that extended southward from Boylston and Berlin to Mendon and Uxbridge and to Millville near the Rhode Island border. They were farmers, artisans, and small-town business and professional men, dreamers and realists, who shared the hope of creating a better world at least for themselves. Even the generally hardheaded Ballou could fantasize the town they would build: "There are various stores, mills, factories, barns. . . . Children, youth, young men and maidens have their becoming amusements, and choirs of music send up their symphonies, but vice and violence, and unseemly rudeness are put far away."  

Although they were forever short of the money needed for their work, these Yankee pioneers soon put nearly twenty acres of their farm under cultivation, repaired the dilapidated buildings, and constructed a new structure for a dormitory, a schoolroom, and an office to print the Practical Christian. They also began the construction of a large two-story mechanic's shop "with dam and water power sufficient to operate the more necessary labor saving Machines usual to such establishments." Before the end of their first year, they were planning to build a combined chapel and schoolhouse.  

Men, women, and children joined in the work. Even Ballou, their elected president, took on a share of the physical labor in addition to serving as minister, missionary, and the editor of the Practical Christian. In the Fraternal Communion, officers were the "official servants" of the people, and so he dedicated himself to such work as ditching and constructing the dam. At times the labor was so exhausting that he would lie down on the ground, wishing he would go to sleep and never awake, but he soon returned to work. He said later that during this year, he found his greatest respite in visiting nearby churches to preach funeral sermons. Although not all the members were so conscientious, the group was able to demonstrate some of the constructive power of committed collective labor when it is wisely organized and led.

The pilgrims of Hopedale were less successful, however, in dealing with themselves. At the beginning, their idea of the Fraternal
Communion involved an intensely collective life: the housing provision of their constitution gave exclusive attention to the construction of "mansion-houses" designed to accommodate a hundred or more people as members of one extended family. They recognized that intimate living, with its denial of the secracies that protected personal sensitivities and foibles, was likely to breed resentment and contempt. As Ballou was later to put it, they were challenging the entrenched idea that "ordinary civilized society with its partition walls, its class distinctions, its conventional barricades, and compulsory insularities, allows mankind quite as much unity and closeness of association as they will safely bear." They hoped that adherence to the Standard of Practical Christianity would refute that idea, since "what occasion is there for quarreling, or even hard feelings, among a body of people who are determined never to quarrel at all?"

During the first year the crowding of some two score adults and children into one "time-shattered" farmhouse put that hope to the test, and for a time it passed, in part owing to the capable management provided by two women who became mainstays of the community. One was Lucy Hunt Ballou, a determined and intelligent woman who years before had demonstrated her mettle when she had broken off her education at a women's academy in Providence to nurse her seriously ill husband-to-be back to health. Once her initial reluctance to join the community had been overcome, she became its energetic "Director of housekeeping." The other was Anna Thwing Draper, the wife of Ebenezer Draper, an independent-minded but amiable woman with a special talent for calming troubled social waters. Devoted to all aspects of Practical Christianity, she was the woman most often elected to some position of influence within the community. The Ballous and the Drapers formed a close and enduring friendship that served as the sustaining heart of the Hopedale experiment.

Even the noblest of dispositions, however, could not eliminate the frictions of intimate living. "We have found ourselves in close contact with each other," it was reported in June, "and of course had ample opportunity to know each others weaknesses, failings and besetting sins." For a time, it seemed as if adherence to the Standard might assure harmony, but the interaction of sometimes eccen-
Christian Socialism?

One of the original investors in the joint-stock association, Sally Borden, had come to Hopedale to recover from the nervous breakdown that had temporarily confined her in the state insane asylum; she found no respite and withdrew to a decade of physical and mental torment that ended only with her death at age forty-three. Hopedale remembered her as an early friend. It was equally ready to forget Clothier Gifford, a self-proclaimed "practical phrenologist," who apparently joined the community in the hope of finding a permanent audience for his views. By early August, after his obstinate eccentricities had irritated most of the membership, Gifford departed with the announcement that he was planning to form a community on an "entirely different" plan. When he ignored requests that he resign his membership, he was formally expelled from the Fraternal Communion.

The experience with Gifford helped persuade the community to suspend the admission of new residents, but this decision simply intensified internal discord. By the fall, what had initially seemed to involve little more than expected differences in personality was becoming a far more serious disagreement over Hopedale's fundamental principles between two of the men who had formulated the Standard of Practical Christianity. On the one side was Daniel Lamson, who pushed the ideal of fraternal community to a logical but threatening extreme. If the spirit of Jesus truly governed the community, Lamson had written in 1841, then "it will be our highest pleasure to do good to one another." At Hopedale, he interpreted this to mean that the poorest and least capable should have their needs met first and fullest. He took up the particular cause of new mothers, insisting that they receive regular wages for taking care of their babies. When the majority agreed to this policy, he then used the principle "the last shall be first" to demand that the weakest be given the best of the community's limited housing space.

Lamson soon made himself a great irritant to Ballou, not least because of his insistence that as Practical Christians, all were bound by the Standard "to do good as we have opportunity unto all mankind, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, minister to the sick." To those who like Ballou were exhausting themselves to establish the community, he was pushing this element of righteousness at the
wrong time and, as was duly noted, to his own special advantage. Not only was his wife then nursing a baby but in April, during planting time, he had conveniently absented himself to Providence, Rhode Island, in order to get a new wooden leg, having at some point lost a lower limb. A man of greater sense and sensibility might have recognized the need for discretion, but Lamson insisted on pressing the issue to the point of condemning the already overworked Ballou for not giving more attention to nursing mothers.27

By October Ballou had decided that Lamson and some others were determined to convert Hopedale into a common-stock community where the least capable and productive would be favored. Although he did not reject religious communism as an ideal, Lamson's version of it offended Ballou's sense of equity as well as his belief in the essential importance of individual responsibility: a voluntary community based on love was “heavenly and will yield heavenly peace,” but there was nothing heavenly about a system that forced honest labor to support “idlers and loafers.” Previously, he had given little thought to the way that wealth would be distributed at Hopedale. Now he was forced to formulate a principle of distribution in harmony with his idea of Christian socialism. Within some general limit to be agreed upon by the community, he concluded, every person should receive a just compensation for work performed, and the poor should be assisted as a matter of religious duty, not because they had a formal right to the wealth of the productive. To adopt Lamson's position would only create a false right for the lazy and irresponsible to “perpetrate virtual robbery by piecemeal,” assuring the ruin of any community.28

At a special meeting of the community in October 1842, Ballou was able to gain the three-fourths majority needed to purge the Constitution of the Fraternal Communion of both communism and excessive communalism. Six months' experience with communal living persuaded the majority to scrap the idea of mansion houses and collective work in favor of a provision allowing individual members to build their own houses and transact their own business so long as they were not “notoriously inconsistent with the principles of this Association.” In place of equal wage rates and living conditions, all workers were to be “allowed a fair compensation according to the nature and productiveness of the service rendered” up to a maxi-
mum of a dollar per day, and everyone would be enabled to purchase what he or she needed at a price as close to the original cost as possible. In response to charges that “a money-loving, aristocratic spirit” was behind these changes, it was also agreed to limit dividends on the joint stock to 4 percent; the remainder of any profits were to be either divided equally among the workers or given to the community for its joint use. 29

Ballou denied that these changes betrayed the original design. He argued that they provided a balance between personal individuality and the social cooperation needed to realize its nonresistance goals. The common commitment of individuals to behave as Christians would assure adequate protection for the unlucky and the under-endowed without inhibiting the efforts of the more capable. Moreover, the original guarantee that everyone would enjoy “a footing of personal equality” was given a practical basis in the maximums set for both wages and profits, which would protect the community from “those fictitious and extravagant compensations” that had created the false and unbridgeable inequalities of conventional society. This experiment with the principle of limited rewards had great social potential and was to endure as a basis for the community, although Ballou was later to regret that it had not been developed more fully. 30

The rejection of his ideas led Lamson to abandon Hopedale for the Shakers, whom he soon proclaimed to be more Christian than his old associates. Eventually, though, dissatisfaction with his new friends led him to condemn them in his Two Years Among the Shakers (1848), a book that Ballou said had, considering the character of its author, given him a better opinion of the Shakers. Lamson’s “crooked career” made him probably the only man Ballou ever really disliked. 31 Greater charity awaited another seceder who held to the communist ideal, Charles Gladding, one of the original signers of the Standard. After resigning in protest against the change, Gladding attempted to model his life on that of the Good Samaritan, giving so much of himself to the unfortunate that he assured his own personal failure, and eventually he fell fatally ill. Suffering from tuberculosis, he returned to the Practical Christian fellowship, there “to pine and die” among his old friends in 1854 at the age of forty-two. 32
The departure of these and other dissidents did far more to strengthen than to weaken the experiment. Remaining was a core of committed and productive members who were to lay the foundations for a successful community. Aside from Ebenezer Draper, who had some talent for business, they included Henry Lillie, a carpenter and millwright; Samuel Colburn, a baker; Lemuel Munyan, a sometime woolens manufacturer; Butler Wilmarth, a physician; and Edmund Price, a hatter. They all seem to have had little gift for success in the outside world (even Draper was eventually to fail outside), but they formed an assemblage of talent and experience that made Hopedale's success. It was to such men and women that Ballou referred when in his report on the first year he declared that while the rejection of communism would discourage many from coming to Hopedale, new members would likely be “persons who depend on their own capability, industry, and frugal economy, rather than on the resources, systematic management, and magic economies of an associated mass.”

This hope influenced the admissions policy of the community. Aside from pledging to uphold the Standard of Practical Christianity, applicants for membership were expected to supply detailed information regarding their education, skills, financial standing, and various other attributes before the community voted on their applications. Even then they were usually not admitted to full membership until they had lived for up to a year at Hopedale, where their usefulness and compatibility could be determined. In 1842 the Fraternal Communion created a recruiting device in the form of a projected system of “inductive conferences,” classes on Practical Christianity to be established anywhere within the reach of Hopedale's ministers, which would prepare interested people for membership:

Welcome the sterling mind,
The generous trustful heart,
The head to diligence inclined,
The hero of a noble part.  

A policy of selective membership made for a coherent community. It also made, though, for a small one. A year after the communist secessions, the Practical Christian estimated that the
community consisted of some one hundred members and their dependents, only forty-five of whom actually lived at Hopedale. Limited accommodations and opportunities prevented even a desired growth of population, especially in the range of skilled workers required for economic development. Ballou said later that Hopedale suffered from an excessive diversity of business undertakings created to accommodate the various skills of its members. Whatever the accuracy of his memory on this point, it is evident that the early community lacked some of the workers and industries needed to fulfill its ambition to become a commonwealth in miniature.

Efforts were made, therefore, to recruit selected workers, including a carpenter from Grafton and a boot- and shoemaker from nearby Milford, as well as various mechanics for the fledgling machine shop. This program grew into a larger industrial plan intended to expand the range of business. In 1844 the community appropriated a hundred dollars for a hatting business, purchased some of the equipment needed for a blacksmith shop, appointed a committee to make arrangements for box making, and considered the idea of producing a newly invented "air-tight cooking-stove." The stove business failed to materialize, and the desired skills were not always obtainable, but such policies did contribute significantly to Hopedale's development.

By 1844 two years of striving had begun to produce results. In May Ballou said that Hopedale was yet of "little consequence in the great world" and that its aims would take years of dedicated effort to achieve, but he expressed pride in the progress it had made. And his little community had begun to attract outside attention. In November the New England Non-Resistance Society commended it for its successful application of the principles of nonresistance. To satisfy the curiosity of the world, the Practical Christian printed the report of Hopedale's financial condition for 1844, which estimated that the assets of the joint-stock association exceeded its liabilities by $456.91 and predicted "a constantly increasing prosperity." Among the assets were four hundred acres of land, three dwellings, a mechanics shop, and a combined schoolhouse and chapel whose basement provided space for a community store. Not included were seven houses, each on half-acre plots, that were owned by individu-
ual members rather than by the community. What had been only a run-down farm less than three years before showed fair promise of becoming a prosperous industrial village.  

Thus by 1844 Hopedale seemed to be succeeding in its intention, stated in 1842, to combine “all the advantages of a well ordered village of free-minded, conscientious individuals, and of a close association of capital and labor, without the disadvantages of either.” Its system amalgamated three forms of property. Its joint stock owned the land and most of the other productive assets. Individuals had possession of their own houses and yards as well as personal effects under the general regulations of the community. And the maximum limits set on both wages and dividends were expected to yield a surplus profit from community enterprise, thereby creating a common fund to be used for the benefit of the needy, for education, and for the general good. Under this system, both labor and capital would be free to reap a just return for their efforts in productive cooperation with each other, while all members and their dependents would be protected against life’s adversities. Thus, the goals of socialism would be attained without giving “idlers and loafers” any right to the wealth of the productive and without limiting individual freedom. Once the community conformed its life to the Standard of Practical Christianity, its members would be both cooperative brothers and free, responsible individuals, each and all energetically engaged in the common pursuit of holiness and happiness.

In reality, though, Hopedale did not entirely satisfy its leaders. Although it had made notable economic progress, it fell far short of realizing Ballou’s hopes in 1841 that a cooperative community would so efficiently utilize its “money, time, strength, skill, learning, and everything else” that it would not cost “a quarter of what it now does to feed, clothe, educate and maintain our families.” It had not yet produced the promised 4 percent return on its joint stock, much less the hoped-for common surplus to be used for the common good. The cost of constructing the schoolhouse and chapel, the central building of the community, had been met largely by individual donations, more than half from outside.

The industrial policy initiated in 1844 promised eventual surpluses through quickened economic development, but the recruitment of skilled workers also helped create another problem that
threatened the very essence of the Hopedale experiment. When the community rejected communism in 1842, it allowed individuals to do business on their own account, opening the way for individual enterprise. Under this policy, Nathan Harris, a carpenter and one of the first residents at Hopedale, contracted to build three houses for other members. Whatever its immediate benefits, however, individual business served to weaken the collective, joint-stock business of the community and to drive a wedge into its society. When the community attempted to regulate Harris’s work, he resigned his membership and settled outside the village, dispelling some of the hope that Practical Christianity alone could control “selfish egotism.”

The recruitment of needed new skilled workers threatened to compound the danger.

If Hopedale was to grow without losing its soul, something had to be done to stem the growth of the individualism unleashed by the rejection of communism in 1842. How to preserve and to actualize the ideal of brotherhood during the passage from pioneer times to maturity? How to reorganize one last time so as to swing the pendulum back toward collective life? By the end of 1844 Ballou and his associates believed they had found the answer. The resulting reorganization, even in its failures, was to have a lasting influence on Hopedale’s character and future.