In 1852 Hopedale completed the first decade of its development. What had been a woebegone farm had become a prosperous little town of nearly two hundred people. It had thirty-one houses, five mill and shop buildings, a printing office, a chapel and school, and various service buildings. Although it had no intention of becoming a farming community, it had through a series of land purchases nearly doubled its original "domain" of 258 acres. Beginning with less than four thousand dollars in assets, Hopedale had increased in value to over sixty thousand dollars, including both its joint-stock and individually owned property. Along with its farm, orchards, and gardens, it operated various small businesses: lumber, boots and shoes, cabinets, boxes, painting and glazing, printing, hardware, and, of special importance, power-loom temples. Much of this varied production was assisted by the force of the Mill River, which had a fall of nearly forty feet in its mile passage through the expanded community domain; some of its land purchases had been made to assure sufficient waterpower.¹

Hopedale had begun as a struggling commune in an isolated dale separated from thriving Milford center by the imposing Magomiscock Hill, but in less than a decade it made itself into a local industrial center and part of a regional network of trade. Much of its region in southeastern Massachusetts experienced rapid modernization and development between 1845 and 1855, having recovered from the depression of the late 1830s. Textile mills in the area had grown in size and efficiency, producing a demand for Hopedale's loom temples. And the population of the town of Milford surrounding it had tripled from 2,500 to 7,500 people, increasing local de-
mand for its foodstuffs and other commodities. The village made some effort to expand its outside connections. During the late 1840s it improved its roads both to Milford center two miles to the northeast and to towns to the south along the Mill River. It also contributed at least a hundred dollars to help bring a railroad to Milford, giving it access to Boston and to the industrial heartland of Massachusetts. By 1857 Adin Ballou was able to deny a newspaper charge that his followers had tried to isolate themselves from the world:

Highways are open through the settlement in various directions. A regular express carriage plies several times a day between their main street and the aforesaid center [Milford]. Transportation teams owned in Hopedale are driven several times a week to and from Woonsocket, R.I., ten miles distant laden with freight. Thousands of dollars worth of produce, raw material, mechanical fabrications, horses, cattle, grain, flour and various kinds of goods are being annually exchanged in trade. Market loads of garden vegetables, in the season of them, are almost daily carried from our dale into the neighboring villages.²

This was the work primarily of those who in the context of their small-town Yankee world could best be described as middle class. Of twenty-four male community members listed in the United States census of 1850, nineteen were born in Massachusetts, Connecticut, or Rhode Island. Most were in the prime of life: ten were in their forties, and the rest, with two exceptions, were younger. They were predominantly family men: eighteen were married, and of these, fifteen had a total of thirty-four children. And they were men equipped with some education and a variety of practical skills: only four were classified as laborers, while fourteen were artisans, especially machinists and carpenters, mostly independent workers with some entrepreneurial instincts; five others could be classified either as businessmen or as professionals (two ministers and a physician).³

Instinctively, they were active town builders in an age of often extravagant town promotions. The return of prosperity by 1850 excited many Americans to boost the growth of places of every size in anticipation of direct gains for themselves. Generally, the people of Hopedale were not above seeing personal benefit in the development of their village, and they often acted like town boosters else-
where. They had their own newspaper, the *Practical Christian*, which advertised their existence; they strove to add to their economy and to expand their ability to trade with the outside world; and as a community, they derived part of their collective income from the sale of town lots to their expanding membership.

The village was a special work of boosterism, however, by a special middle class. By 1850 the tide of religious radicalism that had arisen in the 1830s was fast receding into history, but its spirit had been incorporated into the town it had inspired. In 1851 Ballou described Hopedale as both "a Church of Christ" and "a Civil State, a miniature Christian Republic" within the state of Massachusetts and the United States, acquiescent to their laws but essentially independent of their corrupted governments:

> It has its own Constitution, laws, regulations and municipal police; its own Legislature, Judiciary, and Executive authorities; its own Educational system of operations; its own fire insurance and savings institutions, its own arrangements for holding property, the management of industry, and the raising of revenue. . . . It is the seedling of the true Democratic and Social Republic, wherein neither caste, color, sex nor age stand prescribed but every human being shares jointly in Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.4

Sensitive to the anarchist implications of nonresistance, he and his associates emphasized that they were striving not for "no-government" but for "true government," a regime devoted to the principles of Christ rather than to the use of force. Those men and women who governed their behavior by the Standard of Practical Christianity were welcomed as citizens; those who did not were excluded from the community. Whatever the changes made in Hopedale's organization, the insistence that members pledge themselves to Practical Christian morality remained firm.

Within its moral walls, the community was a democratic republic whose members, male or female, had equal rights and responsibilities. Ballou, the heart and mind of the community, was undoubtedly the first among equals, the dominant influence on public decisions. His influence, however, depended primarily on general respect for his ideas and for his evident dedication to the community rather than on a commanding personality; no charismatic miracle
worker, Ballou normally had his way because he shared the hopes and concerns of his followers. Although Hopedale's policies were normally those proposed by him and a few close associates like Ebenzer Draper, he had to persuade the community to ratify his major proposals at its various legislative meetings, where all members, male and female, were entitled to cast one vote each. At its annual meetings at the beginning of each year, the community elected its "official servants" to manage its executive business; in his original proposal in 1840, Ballou had written that these servants "shall be accountable to their constituents and subject to their instructions and removals at their pleasure," presumably a view on which the community was prepared to act.\(^5\)

Most of the actual business of the community was done by an annually elected executive council that, with the president, was responsible for managing general economic and financial affairs. Its duties were diverse. Among various other things in 1846, for instance, it appointed Ballou to take charge of the grafting of fruit trees, attempted to find a "suitable horse" for community use, decided to purchase a waterwheel to power a new mill, and initiated an effort to establish a soap-making business. In 1849 it was instructed by the community to rent out the carpentry business—one of its many duties regarding the joint-stock property—and was authorized to levy a small tax on individual income, the revenue to be used for educational purposes. In the same year it established Hopedale's own postal service from the United States post office at Milford; this service was financed by requiring receivers as well as senders of letters to buy the special stamps of the "Hopedale Penny Post."\(^6\)

Guided by their basic commitment to Practical Christianity, the people at Hopedale strove to create a superior version of the small towns they had known. They looked upon big cities as essentially evil. In 1840 Ballou urged parents to dissuade their young from pursuing their ambitions in cities: "The snares of vice and pollution, and infamy are more numerous and deceitful in populous places than in rural abodes." In such places could be found extremes of wealth and power threatening to hopes for the good life. "All great cities are probably unchristian from necessity," said William Henry Fish in 1846. "It is an artificial mode of living that cannot be sus-
tained but by fraud, cunning and selfishness." Yet they were also aware of the advantages of city life, which were drawing people away from the towns and countryside; indeed, Fish's comment had been evoked by the visit of some twenty Practical Christians to Boston for the annual reform meetings scheduled there. They dreamed of elevating the New England town into a new social form not only by Christianizing it but by incorporating into it the positive features of urban and industrial life, eliminating the need for cities and creating the conditions that would keep their children from migrating to distant places.

By 1844 the community had survived its early troubles and was able to begin the planned development of the village. At the annual meeting, the executive council was instructed to draft a plan for the layout of streets and lots—an already familiar practice of town developers but one with special conditions at Hopedale. Individual land sales were to be limited to a half acre or less, in line with the community's commitment to equality. Even more important, the council was instructed to sell grants of "perpetual title" only to members of the Practical Christian community pledged to the Standard and only on the condition that the property not be put to uses "notoriously inconsistent" with Practical Christian moral principles; to erect a tavern on a lot, for instance, would nullify the title to the property.

Soon after this plan was approved, the council devised a street plan based on the then fashionable—and convenient—grid system of straight streets and right-angled intersections, a neat and simple geometry that repudiated the often disorderly street patterns of older places like Boston. It was notably prosaic in naming the three thoroughfares that ran parallel to the Mill River (respectively Water, Main, and High streets—with Main being half again as wide as the other two), but it enshrined the idealism of Hopedale in the names of the six cross streets (Freedom, Chapel, Social, Union, Peace, and Hope). Ballou built his house at the corner of Peace and Main streets; in 1846 he received permission to move some soil from Peace Street to his lot, provided that he replaced it with as much gravel for the street. As the plan was implemented, there were four principal residential blocks, each with four houses on half-acre lots, situated between Chapel and Hope, and Main and High streets,
with most of the rest of the houses located nearby. The area along the river was assigned chiefly for industrial use because of the dependence on waterpower, and the block between Freedom and Chapel, and Main and High streets was set aside as a village square where the combined chapel and school was located.

A few villagers continued to dream of a some kind of communal "mansion-house," an idea that was reinvigorated under the influence of Fourierism. "From the commencement of our enterprise," wrote Ballou’s son-in-law, William S. Heywood, in 1853, "a unitary Mansion has been contemplated," and one "worthy of us in its architectural proportions and finish" would be constructed for those with a taste for collective living once the community acquired the money to build it. The prevailing taste, however, was for the single-family household in the single-family house. By the early 1850s more than twenty houses of various styles had been erected. Most of them were built by private effort, but during the period of the well-organized economy the community itself assisted in the construction of several houses. In 1846, for instance, it agreed to "dig the cellar, haul the lumber and set the underpinning" of a house to be built for a new member. Whoever constructed them, Hopedale houses, including Ballou’s, were plain and small; one was twenty-five feet by twenty-one feet and another thirty by fourteen. They were built of lumber from the community sawmill, at least until the 1850s, when several “gravel wall houses” were attempted, with rather dubious results. “These houses,” wrote William Henry Fish, “sometimes fall down before they are finished, and when they are finished they don’t always prove to be so economical after all.”

The greater part of village effort was directed toward public improvements. Over the years, streets and sidewalks were graded and graveled. In 1844 the community laid a “pipe aqueduct” to bring water from a spring a quarter of a mile away into the village for public and private use. In the same year, it voted to add a cupola to the chapel-schoolhouse and appointed Ballou to acquire a bell to be installed there. The following year it laid out a burial ground for the community on the other side of the Mill River, although little work was done on the cemetery until 1847, after the typhoid epidemic made death a reality. Eventually, the village constructed an ice-
house and a woodshed for common use, as well as various work buildings.\textsuperscript{12}

While concentrating on developing the village, the community also gave some attention to the rest of its domain, in part to try to balance Hopedale's industrial accomplishments. The villagers, said one, were too much "a mechanical people, laboring under disadvantages, perplexities, and troubles incident to that kind of pursuit." In 1850 Ballou urged greater attention to improving agriculture, for both religious and economic reasons: "Here we are to gardenize the earth—to restore land and man to their Eden-like condition."\textsuperscript{13} As he recognized, however, the soil throughout the whole Milford area was not good for general agriculture or even for pasturage: "Our arable lands produce meager crops without frequent manuring." The new emphasis therefore had its greatest effects on the community's Horticultural Branch, particularly on its nursery, which, beginning in 1851, advertised that it had for sale "the most valuable varieties of Fruit Trees, Ornamental Trees and Shrubs, Plants, Roots, Flower Seeds, and Garden Seeds." In 1853 Ballou estimated that the nursery had between seven and ten thousand young trees being grown for sale in markets as distant as Boston.\textsuperscript{14}

Agriculture of this sort was natural to a village people whose hearts and hands were in their gardens rather than on the farm. Much of their work went into the planting of shade and fruit trees and shrubs and flowers on their own properties, an activity that became village policy in 1849 when the community required all owners of house lots to plant and care for either shade or fruit trees on the frontage of their properties.\textsuperscript{15} Over the next years Hopedale came close to the ideal of a village in a garden. In the summer of 1853 a visitor from neighboring Milford said that it was "one of the quietest and most Eden-like places we were ever in. It does one's soul good to ride through it on a June morning, and breathe the 'fragrance of a thousand flowers,' that cluster around and entwine the snow-white cottages and dwellings of the 'community.'" Two years later the editor of the Woonsocket Patriot took note of the "pretty dwellings and their surroundings" and praised Ballou as "the presiding genius of this 'Happy Valley.'" Ballou himself took great pride in this horticultural accomplishment, later calling Hopedale a "gem"
among Massachusetts towns, where the passing years had only "heightened the prevailing loveliness and fascination of the scene."  

This was one Eden where Man was an active agent, striving through well-organized labor to improve his surroundings. In the early years the community was directly involved in improvement work, but the termination of the well-ordered society in 1847 required a new form of public labor. In 1849 the community created the Hopedale Industrial Army, in which all permanent residents were obligated to serve, with a mission to "promote the cheerful prosecution of public improvements and a generous assistance of persons needing occasional aid"; its male division was responsible for physical improvements. In line with Fourierism, it was organized into "efficient divisions and subdivisions, with suitable chiefs." It was the peaceful army of nonresistance: one of its leaders, Edmund Soward, wrote in 1851 that its detachments were busy "not in the work of destruction but of construction, not rendering beautiful places dreary and desolate but rendering the wilderness beautiful as a garden, not polluting the earth with blood and covering it with the carcasses of their fellow creatures but causing it to assume greater attractions." The Industrial Army offered an idea that a later New Englander, Edward Bellamy, was to develop in his utopian novel, *Looking Backward*, into a plan for the reconstruction of America.

Unlike Bellamy's methodically organized labor force, however, the Hopedale Industrial Army was more a peace-oriented version of a local militia unit than anything else. Although all resident males were obligated for service, the army was generally unable to mobilize everyone for the few days of community work to be accomplished each year, and members were soon allowed to commute their obligations at the rate of eight cents per hour of required labor. Nor was the battle for improvement always well fought. After completing the community icehouse with much labor on a cold December day, the army discovered that it had built it in the wrong location. In another case the soldiers of peace beat a hasty retreat from their labors when it began to rain, except for their commander, who, "glittering in his shirt sleeves thro' the falling rain drops," con-
continued to work; the event evoked a wish from Soward, one of the few members with a sense of humor, that community leaders would learn the science of meteorology.19

Whatever its foibles, the Industrial Army did exemplify some of the positive features of community service. Each year its members met to determine their future projects, most of which were accomplished energetically and with good cheer. On one hot summer day, the army, equipped with “a train of artillery in the shape of a good strong plough drawn by a powerful team,” graded the public square, their thirst being satisfied by two women who “visited the field of action” with buckets of iced lemonade. The next day the army fought through the rain to complete a swimming area for the children of the community. Over the years between 1849 and 1854, various detachments graded streets and made sidewalks, dug a long ditch to drain a troublesome wet area, planted trees, built a community woodshed, laid out a playground, plowed and planted a widow’s garden, and made numerous improvements in the cemetery and public square, proving, at least to their own satisfaction, that the shovel and the hoe were a mightier force than the sword and the musket.20

The Industrial Army was only one of several communal ventures conceived after the termination of the well-ordered society. By the late 1840s Hopedale had begun to take an interest in fire protection—but not in time to prevent Edmund Soward’s home from being burned down in April 1851 with an uninsured loss of four hundred dollars. In response, the community decided to make itself into a “Mutual Fire Insurance Company” to guarantee against similar losses in the future and to uphold fire safety regulations, including one that required every head of family to keep a fire bucket in a convenient place. In the same year it also established a savings bank (with 4 percent interest on deposits) and enacted a small tax on property for a relief fund to affirm its pledge to protect all its members against poverty; the fund was to be administered by an annually elected relief committee responsible for providing material assistance and, if needed, labor to all who could not support themselves.21 Earlier, the community had even debated the idea of “Health Insurance,” but the idea was eventually voted down.22 The
The record does not indicate the reasons for this rejection, but likely it was related to another health venture that Hopedale was about to support. The new venture involved the water cure, a species of medicine peculiarly suited to the spirit of the community. Having decided that the corrupted churches and other prevailing institutions of society defied God's intentions, Practical Christians were inclined to be suspicious of conventional physicians, and with some reason. Although medicine had moved away from the old days of bloodletting and leeches, it had come to depend heavily on drugs, a "multitude of poisonous agents" like arsenic and lead that more than occasionally devastated the body. The use of such unnatural agents seemed to defy God's physiological design that people ultimately make themselves physically as well as morally perfect through the responsible care of their bodies. If, as was often believed, illness was caused by man's abuse of his physiological "system" through such bad habits as drinking and the use of tobacco, medicinal drugs were more likely to hurt than to help. "If I am sick and cannot live without dangerous medicines," wrote Ballou's son, Adin Augustus Ballou, in the late 1840s, "let me die. I am sure I had rather die and go to a holier, happier clime, then live broken down in body by so-called medicine." A few years later, young Ballou was to die at the very beginning of his manhood, but his comment at the time was less a dire prophecy than an expression of hope, since by then Hopedale seemed to have found a better way to health and well-being in the form of the water cure.

The people of Hopedale were receptive to what they considered to be progressive medicine. In the earlier 1840s the idea of curing illness through the liberal use of water, especially in the form of cold baths, had been imported from Europe and was soon taken up by many of those dissatisfied with established medical practices. By 1844 the idea had reached the village through the newly established Water-Cure Journal, published in New York City. In November the Practical Christian welcomed the first issue of the journal with the comment that "it is a pleasing reflection to contemplate the wisdom and goodness of the creator, in affording his children an abundant supply of water to heal the maladies of the body." The belief that the
body could be redeemed through a water cure complemented the faith of religious progressives that God intended all to be saved and all to be happy. Universal salvation in this world and in the next, wrote one enthusiast, had its physical side: "The doctrine of being spiritually saved and physically damned will not produce a Millennium [sic], nor answer as a foundation for a truer order of society. Health—universal Health—only will produce the Millenium."

More practically, the new cure suited the temperance instincts of the villagers, particularly when they found evidence that water could be used as an effective home remedy, to be applied to the body as well as ingested. In 1845 Henry Fish, a member of the community, claimed that he had conquered a severe fever by taking three "sweats," after each of which he plunged into a cold bath. Fish soon proclaimed in the regular physiological column of the *Practical Christian* that the practices of "old school doctors" were being put to shame by the new reform approach with its "simple and true remedies" for preventing as well as curing disease.\(^{25}\)

The water cure became more than a home remedy at Hopedale, however, thanks to the conversion of the village's resident physician, Dr. Butler Wilmarth. Some twenty years before, Wilmarth had begun a career in conventional medicine with no formal training other than a two-year apprenticeship with a physician at Amherst. Although he was able to achieve some local popularity as a country doctor at Leverett in western Massachusetts, he grew dissatisfied both with his career and with society. By the late 1830s he had become one of Ballou's most devoted followers, inspired by the hope that the combination of "the Bible and Science" would provide the knowledge "necessary for perfect human happiness." One of the early signers of the Standard of Practical Christianity, he had provided some of the money needed to begin Hopedale, but he attempted to continue his practice outside until 1844, when physical exhaustion and little profit persuaded him to join the community.\(^{26}\)

Wilmarth hoped to maintain a limited medical practice at Hopedale supplemented by a "botanical garden" for the preparation of natural medicines. He soon discovered that the rapid spread of the water cure among the villagers left them indifferent to his skills, and he began to rethink his own views of medicine. By the late spring of
1847 he had decided to test the power of water to cure his own ailments by taking a course of treatment at the New Lebanon Water-Cure Establishment, one of many such facilities that were then springing up throughout the Northeast. In May he wrote to Hopedale that the establishment seemed "well calculated for breaking off pernicious habits and learning correct views of living in all things relating to physical man, and to a good degree to the moral and spiritual man also." A month later he announced that he was "about five-eighths converted" to water as a curative agent, at least if it were combined with the proper diet and behavior.27

Wilmarth was so thoroughly converted that by September 1847 he was advertising in the *Practical Christian* for people to buy stock in his proposed "Hopedale Water-Cure Infirmary," intended to be a boarding establishment for the sickly of the outside world. Despite his promises that the infirmary would cure a long list of nervous and physical disorders, he initially got little support, but eventually the community gave him some assistance. He was a popular figure at Hopedale, beloved for his flashes of high good humor and his sharp eye for the ludicrous side of human behavior.28 Moreover, with the end of the well-regulated economy, his projected infirmary seemed to be the kind of business the village needed. When in 1849 the community again initiated a program to expand the range of its enterprises, it fitted up its largest house for the infirmary and granted six hundred dollars to begin the new business, the money to be raised by the sale of a special issue of its joint stock. By May 1850 the *Practical Christian* announced that Hopedale was prepared to accommodate twenty-five water-cure patients, noting that it was only thirty-two miles from Boston by railroad: "We have a free circulation of air through the Dale, abundance of good water, pleasant scenery, delightful walking grounds." 29

Unfortunately, the hope of making the village a center of Christian health was doomed to disappointment by the darker side of Wilmarth's personality. Given to fits of depression and irritability, the doctor soon decided that he could not succeed in the water-cure business at Hopedale, and in 1851 he departed to "operate on a larger scale Hydriatically" as the resident physician at the New Graeffenberg Water-Cure Establishment near Utica, New York; two years later, the community was still trying to find a use for the va-
In May 1851 Wilmarth was elected president of the American Hygienic and Hydropathic Association, but his career in the outside world was short. He became dissatisfied with his situation at Utica, and in 1852 entered into a partnership to open a new establishment at Westboro near Worcester, perhaps with some financial assistance from friends at Hopedale. Whether he would have succeeded in this new venture was never to be determined, since in May 1853 the train that he was taking to New York plunged off an open drawbridge into the Norwalk River in Connecticut, and this great advocate of the curative power of water was drowned along with more than fifty other passengers; his body was recovered and buried in the Hopedale cemetery, forever among friends. Later, his widow, Phila O. Wilmarth, studied at the Female Medical College in Philadelphia and in 1856 advertised that from her home at Hopedale she was prepared to attend to the medical problems of the women of the surrounding towns.

The water-cure disaster had little effect on Hopedale’s penchant either for "progressive" ideas or for new ventures. In 1851, for instance, it decided to experiment with a plan to encourage its members to form various small associations to do "any particular kind of business" under contract with the community, the aim being to "let every man, woman, and child have a chance to excel in a small sphere, though they cannot in larger ones." To assist small enterprises of this sort, the community created the Hopedale Commercial Exchange, an association of members with trading skills, which was to buy the products of the enterprises and sell them in outside markets, exacting a percentage on the sales for itself; any money beyond an agreed-upon profit was to be given to the community for public use. Acting within the constraints of Practical Christianity, the Exchange was expected to "centralize, harmonize and stimulate every industrial and pecuniary interest of the community"—all this in a village of fewer than two hundred inhabitants.

Although such experiments often failed, their cumulative effect was to encourage growth and innovation. During the late 1840s and early 1850s Hopedale attracted some new and talented people. William S. Heywood, for instance, was a young man with an interest in
both moral reform and education; after marrying Ballou's daughter, Abbie, he became an associate editor of the *Practical Christian* and, with her, the founder of the Hopedale Home School, one of the more successful of the village enterprises. William Henry Humphrey, born in Ballou's native town of Cumberland, Rhode Island, was a sash maker and Garrisonian abolitionist who was later remembered as being "very righteous, but very *un* self-righteous." Dudley B. Chapman, originally a brickmason from Connecticut, soon acquired a local reputation as "a genius, especially in the chemistry of soap ingredients." By 1855 Chapman was advertising that he had successfully tested and was manufacturing at Hopedale "a New and Superior Article of SOAP" that "performs its service with but comparatively little labor, and without the least injury to the article washed." From its small population, the village was able to generate a vitality greater than that of towns many times its size.

The dream of a miniature Christian republic appeared to be descending from air to earth. In 1852 the treasurer, Ebenezer Draper, reported that the community had ended the previous year with a profit rather than a loss and predicted that "very few deficits will come hereafter, unless by fire and flood." During another prosperous year, William Heywood was able to proclaim that "the Hopedale Community is a *Fact* of this nineteenth century. . . . It is, today, no mere fancy, no mere dream of a wild enthusiast, no Utopia of the far-off future." Finally, the community seemed to have found its way to a practical and dynamic Christian socialism in which social cooperation and individual freedom were brought into harmony. "Here exists a system of arrangements, simple and effective," wrote Ballou, "under which all capital, industry, trade, talent, skill, and peculiar gifts may freely operate and cooperate, with no restrictions other than those which Christian morality everywhere rightfully imposes." Nonresistance and the Standard of Practical Christian- ity had proved themselves to be the bedrock on which to build a heaven on earth.

Hopedale's principal founder and inspiration was pleased, not least because some of these successes had occurred without his direct leadership. Although Ballou recognized that the work was not completed, he concluded in 1851 that the community had attained
such strong foundations that his day-to-day leadership was no longer needed, and he resigned as its president and chief official servant after ten often anxious and exhausting years of service. His action would eventually prove to be the most hazardous experiment in Hopedale's history.