The tenth annual meeting of the Hopedale Community on 14 January 1852 brought an "unprecedented attendance" of virtually every member. In part, the meeting conducted its usual business of electing its official servants for the year, including a new president, Ebenezer Draper, the former treasurer. The high point of the gathering, though, was the valedictory address given by the retiring president, Adin Ballou. Although he planned to continue as an influence and inspiration in the community, he abdicated his executive powers and responsibilities in the conviction that Hopedale had been able to devise "a system of social machinery which . . . will operate happily for mankind under the superintendence of any fairly honest and intelligent management." His years of sacrifice, he said, were amply rewarded by the earthly success of Practical Christianity: "To see what I daily behold in this orderly, tranquil, hopeful Dale—abounding in privileges and comforts and quiet dwelling-places—and to hear the whisperings of angels assuring me that this is but a single cluster of unripe grapes compared to the luxuriant vineyards yet planted—surely this is a reward not to be estimated in dollars and cents." 

Ballou emphasized the importance of general adherence to religious principles for the continued success of the community. He was careful to distinguish between essential and nonessential principles. On such matters as particular economic and social arrangements, there was room for disagreement and change: "Be characteristically an advancing people. Do not crystalize, do not petrify." On essential moral principles, on fundamentals, however, there was need for unity and obedience. Only by conforming to the principles preached
and exemplified by Christ could humankind realize God's intention that all people be restored to the innocence and bliss he had intended for them on earth as in heaven. Christianity was not a religion of dogmas or ceremonies but of fundamental, immutable principles—"a religion for both body and soul, for the next world and for this world, for individuals as such and for society as such, for all peoples throughout all ages." These principles, which had carried Hopedale through its times of trouble and change, were the foundations for what might become a paradise in the world.²

In this discourse and elsewhere, Ballou maintained his most basic belief that the world could be saved only when individuals voluntarily conformed their behavior to these principles. Over the years, though, he had come to appreciate the importance of social influences on human action. In the great world of fraud and force, he said in 1850, there was little chance of living a truly Christlike life. It was necessary, then, for those who would be Christians in practice to associate themselves to form a society in harmony with their principles. Whatever its specific form, the true Christian society would be socialistic, "a state of society in which individual interests are harmonized into one common interest." In 1853 he specified the general objectives of Christian socialism as practiced at Hopedale: "There must be sufficient unity and cooperation to guarantee justice to all, necessary employment and subsistence to all, a decent education to all, and a tolerable moral culture to all."³ Only under such conditions, freed from competition and conflict, would the spirit of Christianity flourish.

Although he accepted the need for some social arrangements, Ballou continued to insist that humanity would never achieve a higher social state until its members voluntarily conformed their behavior to moral principle. Any socialism that based its hopes on the premise that human evil resulted from an evil society alone would inevitably fail because it neglected the mainspring of human conduct, individual responsibility. No matter how perfect the society, it rested ultimately on moral foundations.

He refused, in this regard, to make a distinction between private and public conduct. Private virtue was not virtue unless it also governed one's actions in the social world. Indeed, the greater the success in achieving a virtuous private life the greater the duty to avoid
any support for the world's wicked ways. In 1848 Ballou stressed the obligation of every virtuous man to "come-out" from a corrupted society so that his virtue would not be seen as support for "social and organic sins." Such a man should not become a permanent "stay outer," however, since he had the obligation and opportunity to support the creation of a virtuous moral order. 

Ballou's ideal society was a voluntary community of individuals committed not only to living moral lives themselves but also to supporting each other's efforts to live a moral life; all should be willing to reprove their brethren for deviations from fundamental moral standards. Those applicants who refused to make such a commitment would be denied membership; those members who refused to honor it would, after sufficient warning, be expelled. The key to the success of such a community was a clear, comprehensive, and practical code of behavior rather than vague moral pieties, so that no one would be left in doubt about his or her obligations. At Hopedale, this code was provided by the Standard of Practical Christianity and its abridgment, the Declaration, which remained unchanged, the moral bedrock for social change and innovation, throughout the history of the community.

Some elements of moral conduct were more general and fundamental than the rest. The most essential and most distinctive of Hopedale's moral foundations was its commitment to nonresistance. Members were bound to refrain from any injurious force not only among themselves but toward anyone under any circumstance. They might resort to noninjurious moral force, but even this could be applied only within the limits of the Christian obligation to treat the evildoer as a neighbor to be loved as oneself. Nonresistance also obligated all members of the community to abstain from outside political activity, since even the act of voting was an act of support for a government based on the use of force. In the 1850s the Practical Christian twice broached the idea that civil government allow voters to specify publicly what political public actions they did not support, giving them the chance to absolve themselves from any complicity in immoral acts. Under such conditions it was theoretically possible for nonresistant voters eventually to eliminate injurious force from the governing process. In fact, however, Hopedale remained an isolated island set against a world of violence and
force: “Man devours man,” Ballou wrote in 1850. “Man continues to steal and rob and treat man as a chattel.”

Hopedale’s virtuous isolation was given particular emphasis by the outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846. In the eyes of nonresistants, the war was an act of aggression by the United States, a bloody business deprived of even the usual justification of being a defensive war. Soon after war was declared, Ballou expressed the hope that it would end in defeat for the United States as the aggressor, and he made the by-no-means inaccurate prediction that victory would prove to be a greater curse than defeat: “Mark the prediction.—Your success will be the ruin of your country.” For support, the community could look outside to a few opponents of war, most notably the New England Non-Resistance Society. In 1843 Ballou had become president of the society and Hopedale its leading supporter. Near the end of the war in 1848, the society held one of its meetings in the village which concluded with the expressed hope that the war had begun “a great revolution of public sentiment” in favor of nonresistance. The war soon ended, however, and by 1850 the society had disappeared. For a time Ballou took some interest in the short-lived American League of Universal Brotherhood, but during the 1850s Hopedale became even more a lonely outpost of nonresistant principles.

Hopedale’s commitment against slavery as a particularly unchristian use of force gave it a longer but also ultimately more troubling outside relationship, with the abolitionist movement. The community’s leaders remained committed to Garrisonian abolitionism. In 1844 Ballou and Ebenezer and Anna Draper were among the some 250 members of the New England Anti-Slavery Convention who supported a resolution calling for the dissolution of the American nation in order to free New England from any contact with slavery. Ebenezer Draper served for a time as president of the Milford Anti-Slavery Society, and Hopedale hosted various abolitionist meetings, including, in August 1854, “a general Mass Meeting of the Friends of Universal Freedom” attended by nearly a thousand people who listened to speeches by Sojourner Truth and several white abolitionists. Hopedale’s commitment to abolitionism, however, was not as strong as its commitment to nonresistance, in part because slavery belonged to a world distant from the village.
More significant was another principle inherited originally from Garrisonianism: racial and sexual equality. There were apparently no black members of the Practical Christian community, hardly a surprise given the small number of black people in Massachusetts. In some cases the community modified its policy against nonmember residents to provide a temporary home for various blacks, including Lundsford Lane, who had bought himself and his family out of slavery, and Enoch Walker, a young free black laborer. In 1846 the community agreed to provide board and schooling to "a color’d girl" from Uxbridge at a rate, apparently charged to the town, of $1.50 per week. In the early 1850s Ballou became the guardian of the sons of "my colored friend" James Johnson, who had died in nearby Millville. He attempted to place the younger son with some worthy family in which "color shall be no detriment," explaining, perhaps a bit uncomfortably, that he could not find a place for the boy at Hopedale because "we have such an oversupply of boys." Overall, it seems evident that the Practical Christian commitment to racial equality, while real, was more a matter of principle than of fact.

The primary test of commitment to equality was the relationship between the sexes. In 1853 Ballou noted that women members had full equality with men, including an equal vote on community affairs. Two years before, he said that Hopedale had been founded on the principle that the sexes were "spiritually, morally and socially equal" and so were entitled to equal treatment. The specific nature of equality, however, was strongly influenced by the sexual division of labor to which the members were accustomed. Early in 1842 the Practical Christian promised that Hopedale "will follow the order of unperturbed nature, and endeavor to demonstrate the true equality of the sexes, without violating their mutual relations, or forcing either out of the sphere of usefulness ordained by the all-wise Creator." Especially during the first decade, this meant that women were involved primarily with their families in a community that emphasized the importance of family life. Although a few were single, most were wives and mothers; one of the first acts of the community in 1842 was to credit nursing mothers with the then-required forty-eight hours per week of work. Outside the home women had the right to vote in the community meetings, but with very few exceptions positions of authority were occupied by men.
The most significant public role assigned to women during the first decade of the community illustrates this division of labor. In January 1847, during the crisis of the well-ordered economy, the annual meeting established a branch of "Domestic Industry" to employ women and children during their idle times in service work for needy members. This soon became the Hopedale Beneficent Society, the female branch of the Hopedale Industrial Army, which was later called the Hopedale Sewing Circle and Tract Society. Meeting irregularly to sew and socialize, the Beneficent Society made clothing and various other items on order and for a price, the income generally being used for some charitable purpose or to support the publication of a tract such as "Away with War," printed for free distribution in 1848. At least occasionally the members expanded their work into a business by sewing clothes for public sale, placing their profits in the Hopedale Savings Bank. The Beneficent Society was not entirely segregated: in 1854 the secretary noted that "several gentlemen came in and our company was enlivened by music, singing, etc." Mostly, however, the women met to work and talk among themselves and to discuss matters of particular interest to women.

In 1851 the members of the Beneficent Society voted unanimously in favor of employing a female physician at Hopedale. This may have had some effect, since during the following decade the village did have Emily Gay, a single woman and early member of the community who, with some assistance from neighboring physicians, taught herself the basics of homeopathic medicine. She was remembered as having a "naturally intuitive perception of maladies" which won the confidence of her neighbors: "Through sympathetic magnetism, and often a fund of volubility and cheerfulness, as well as through the 'little pills,' she commanded the increasing gratitude of many in Hopedale and vicinity." For a few years after 1855 she was joined by a more formally trained woman physician, Phila Wilmarth, the widow of the water-cure advocate.

In the early 1850s the Beneficent Society also took up the discussion of woman's rights, encouraged in part by the national woman's rights convention at nearby Worcester in 1851. Although it is difficult to gauge the effects of this discussion, it seems to have encouraged an interest in extending the sphere of sexual equality in the village. At the same time, the reorganization of the community's
government involved women more fully in its public affairs, especially as members of committees responsible for relief, morals, and education. Between 1850 and 1856 seventeen different female members were elected to such committees. Although no woman was elected to an important executive position, the 1850s significantly expanded the public role of women at Hopedale with no apparent opposition from the men.

Abby H. Price was the leading spokeswoman for equal rights at Hopedale. Mrs. Price and her husband, an unsuccessful hatmaker, had originally joined the community in 1842. A member of the New England Non-Resistance Society and the author of at least ten hymns and various pieces of verse for the community, she was a talented woman whose abilities earned her election in 1843, at age twenty-eight, as the community's secretary, the one exception to the male dominance of major offices in the 1840s. Some unspecified "family cares" led her to withdraw temporarily from Hopedale, but by 1848 she had returned and was elected secretary-treasurer of the newly formed Beneficent Society. Early in 1851 Mrs. Price gave a long speech before the woman's rights convention in Worcester in which she claimed for women the same rights as men had, including participation in all the affairs of government and "suitable and well-compensated employment" to give them financial independence. The convention, well attended by women from Hopedale, approved a set of resolutions along these lines, giving special emphasis to voting as the "corner-stone" of the movement.

In her speech Abby Price expressed general satisfaction with conditions at Hopedale, citing it in support of her demand for equal political rights: "In the little commonwealth where I live all persons have equal rights in public deliberations. Men and women are alike recognized as having a common interest in public offices and measures." In an address given at Hopedale in 1852, she said that "Here woman has no restrictions imposed because she is a woman, but has a fair chance of being all she is capable of doing." But she also noted that equal rights had increased the burdens of women with homes and families; she herself had four children. To liberate woman from the tyranny of washing and ironing, therefore, the community should provide a "combined household, where she might be occasionally relieved from the care of the family—and be free to exert
her nobler powers unfettered." The idea of cooperative domestic work had already been sanctioned by such national feminists as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Amelia Bloomer. 

The male leadership at Hopedale postponed indefinitely the plan for a combined household, but in theory at least, it supported greater opportunities for women. Lucy Stone, the "gifted advocate of Universal Humanity," was well received when she gave two lectures on woman's rights at Hopedale in late 1851. Two years later William Henry Fish applauded both the ordination of a female minister and the publication of a feminist newspaper. Although Ballou's nonresistance principles left him with little enthusiasm for the woman's suffrage movement, he did open the pages of the Practical Christian to its advocates, publishing Abby Price's demand in 1853 that the state of Massachusetts eliminate the word male from its voting requirements.

Ballou showed greater enthusiasm for another of her projects, dress reform. A critic of the world's fashions, he had an instinctive distaste for the elaborate and confining dresses decreed for women. Women as well as men, he said in 1840, should be "dressed rationally, comfortably, modestly." A decade later he published Price's speech as president of the "Bloomer Costume Convention" at nearby Milford in which she advocated the new bloomer dress: "Woman has serious and important duties to do, and has no business to envelope herself in useless drapery." At least a few women at Hopedale experimented with the bloomer costume in the 1850s. One member who wore the new dress while she worked declared that it was essential for liberation: "The elevation of women to pecuniary independence can only be accomplished by increasing her strength of body and mind, and it is very evident the present slavery to fashion induces both physical and mental weakness." When some twenty-five bloomer-clad women from Hopedale and vicinity attended the woman's rights convention in Worcester, they attracted such a crowd that the police had to be called in to maintain order.

Overall, with the exception of the Shakers, Hopedale came as close to equality between the sexes as any place in America.

Women as well as men were also equally obligated to conform themselves to Practical Christian morality. In becoming members, they vowed never to use violence in any form, never "to violate the
dictates of pure chastity," never to trade in or use an intoxicating beverage, "never to indulge self-will, bigotry, love of pre-eminence, covetousness, deceit, profanity, idleness, or an unruly tongue," never to participate in games of chance or "pernicious amusements," and never to aid or abet others in any sinful act. These were not simply moral goals but moral requirements of daily behavior at Hopedale.

Most members saw nothing oppressive about these requirements, which they believed embodied the progressive morality of their reform culture. "In a truly Christian Community," wrote William Henry Fish, "every one may enjoy as much freedom and individuality as is conducive to the general good, including his own." Universal compliance with the requirements would result in a world without violence, slavery, inequality, arrogance, laziness, drunkenness, or sin in general, a world without war, armies, social parasites, prisons, or saloons. Whatever the limits on freedom, virtually all would achieve a greater freedom from the oppressive burdens and restrictions of the corrupted world. Moreover, Hopedale leaders were not narrow-minded bigots. When a woman in a neighboring town committed suicide, for instance, the Practical Christian refused to condemn the act as sinful: "Enlightened reason and humanity begin to perceive that such events happen both to the righteous and the wicked, and that they are the results of disease in the nervous system." Ballou detested tobacco smoking, but he reminded himself not only that he had once smoked but that tobacco had "so many respectable and even good hearted devotees, that I must not deprecate thy worship too harshly."

No exception was made, however, in regard to the requirements established in the Standard of Practical Christianity. When a woman abolitionist was reported to have drunk a little wine in celebration of the antislavery cause, the Practical Christian condemned her for disregarding the need for total abstinence: "It is a great mistake to imagine that one good cause can be promoted by retarding another." All the required behavior was to be practiced all the time if heaven was to be established on earth: "A continual unscrupulousness in little things undermines all moral principle," Ballou warned. "Righteousness is an aggregate of the littles of life." He was too much of a realist, though, to believe that most people
could easily make themselves the “all-sided saints” that his heaven required. How, then, to protect the moral foundations of Hopedale or any other Practical Christian community?

In theory, Hopedale had already found the answer in its strict membership requirements. The community was to be limited to responsible individuals who had voluntarily committed themselves to abide by its moral principles. Surrounded by people who had made the same commitment, each individual would find it easy to practice and difficult to violate basic principles. Generally, there would be no conflict between individual freedom and duty, since every person would naturally choose to do what was right. In those few cases where human weakness overcame commitment, there would be those around who would reprove and correct the lapse. Only in rare cases would it be necessary to apply the supreme penalty available to a nonresistant community, disfellowship and expulsion. In the true Christian state, said Ballou in 1851, “nine out of every ten offenses now committed would be prevented, nine-tenths of the remaining one-tenth would be repented and forgiven without being bruited abroad. Nine-tenths of the last fraction would be peacefully settled by private and friendly arbitration.” In such a situation there would be no need for the coercing, punishing machinery of government.28

But reality was not the ideal. As Hopedale grew, it acquired numerous inhabitants who had not committed themselves to its moral order. In 1853, of 223 inhabitants, only 76 were members. Many of the rest were children not yet ready for membership, but 22 were probationers who had yet to prove their commitment to principle, and 52 were essentially outsiders. These last people were a matter of considerable concern, especially as possible bad examples for the children. In 1849 a community meeting had voted “that the protracted residence of persons on the Community domain who are not sympathetically interested in our objects, principles and social order has a demoralizing tendency and ought not to be encouraged.” However, the village had had trouble finding all the labor it needed among its members and had been forced to recruit outsiders “for the convenience of Industrial operations,” making so many exceptions to its policy of exclusion as to virtually nullify it. In 1848, for instance, it advertised for a blacksmith and five farmhands; in 1851 a
hired farm laborer drowned while attempting to swim in the community's millpond. 29

Growth also threatened to attract members of doubtful commitment. In 1851 the *Practical Christian* announced that people who wanted a secure and easy life were not welcome at Hopedale: "We want men and women of noble, generous Christianized souls, who come to us from convictions of duty and religion." Yet the very success of the village and the decline of religious enthusiasm outside increased the chances that at least some of the new members would be slack in honoring their commitments. "We are not sufficiently distinct from the world," warned Abby Price in 1852. "We are not yet that peculiar people . . . that we should be in order rightly to glorify our professions." 30

History was familiar with societies whose moral bases had been sapped by their prosperity. If Hopedale was to endure as a living model of Practical Christian socialism, some way had to be found to strengthen its moral foundations. In the early days of the Fraternal Communion, its Intendant of Religion, Morals, and Missions had been generally responsible for supervising the moral order; in 1846, for instance, the community instructed the Intendant to prevent some of its boys from fraternizing with the hired men. 31 That role seems to have been secondary to missionary work, however, and in any case, the office was abolished with the termination of the well-regulated economy in 1847. In 1848 the community first attempted to resolve the problem by instituting monthly meetings "for Christian discipline & improvement" which all members were expected to attend, in addition to the two religious meetings held every Sunday. In April 1849 the community tightened its control over children by requiring that they be at home at night and that their parents keep them from "habits of injuring, annoying or teasing their playmates." 32

The circumstances of the expanding community persuaded Ballou of the need for some form of "moral police," and in 1850 Hopedale created "the Council of Religion, Conciliation and Justice," an annually elected body that was to implement decisions made by the monthly moral improvement meetings. The council was responsible for screening prospective members and for supervising behavior in the village. It was "to reprove, admonish and endeavor to correct all
anti-Christian customs, habits and practices springing up within the Community; to advise, mediate, conciliate and adjudicate in all cases of controversy between member and member, and between members and officers of the Community," all of its decisions being subject to appeal to the community itself. Its five members always included two or three women, generally the leading wives of the community like Lucy Ballou and Anna Draper; Mrs. Draper served for five of its seven years.33

The council gave special attention to the children of the village, posting rules to regulate youthful behavior and lecturing parents on their responsibility for governing the development of their offspring. In one case it also intervened on behalf of a woman abused by her drunken husband, threatening him with expulsion unless he changed. In theory, it could delve into every corner of life: "We think it proper to remind you," it declared in 1854, "that we are not here in this community, as mere neighbors. . . . But we are here as a great family of brothers and sisters bound together by a common interest, pursuing together, a common end. . . . We ought to feel free to advise, counsel, and admonish each other as we would if bound together by ties of consanguinity."34 In the communal family there were to be no secrets.

This new moral regime did not please all. Indeed, it was a factor in the decision of several members to leave the community in the early 1850s in protest against what one called an excess of "governmentalism." Two, Clement Reed and Horatio Edson, had joined in the mid 1840s, but another was one of the original stalwarts of the Fraternal Communion, Daniel Whitney, whose departure left only William Henry Fish among those ministers who had helped Ballou formulate the Standard of Practical Christianity. Although Ballou accepted Whitney's resignation with some bitterness and much regret, he took pride in his old friend's later career as a reformer, particularly his "manly" advocacy of woman's suffrage at the state constitutional convention in 1853.35

There was neither pride nor regret involved in another departure from the new moral order: in April 1853 the community expelled Matthew Sutcliffe on the grounds that for five years he had aggressively refused to abide by its rules, proving thereby that he was "out of all real fellowship with its principles, polity, discipline, authori-
ties and brotherhood.” The English-born Sutcliffe, who told the
United States census taker in 1850 that he had no occupation, was
troublesome not least because he owned Hopedale’s only boarding-
house for permitted workers; one charge against him was that he
had acted in “a tyrannical and vexatious manner” toward his ten-
ants, even threatening to use physical force. The experience with
Sutcliffe was undoubtedly one reason why the council in 1854 urged
the community to be more careful in its admission of new mem-
bers: “Better . . . that we should remain for a long time exceedingly
small in numbers than that we encourage the dangers of amalga-
mating with the old order of society by voluntarily lowering our
Standard.”

Sutcliffe was only the lesser of two shocks to moral order experi-
enced in 1853, a far greater one coming from perhaps the oldest
threat to earthly paradise, human sexuality. In line with his empha-
sis on a rational morality, Ballou in some respects took an enlight-
ened view of sex; he said in 1854 that no man or woman should
marry “without a tolerable knowledge of that part of human physi-
ology which treats of the sexual peculiarities, functions, relation-
ships and necessities, as existing both in male and female.” He was
also ready to accept the idea that sexual intercourse, beyond its re-
productive side, helped strengthen, albeit in a minor way, the mar-
itual relationship. He was unbending, however, in his insistence that
nothing violate “the dictates of pure chastity.” For him, there was
to be no sexual intimacy outside marriage, nor was there to be any
unbridled sexuality within marriage, since he believed that a reck-
less sensuality did far more to destroy than to sustain a loving, con-
siderate relationship between husband and wife. Marriage was a
permanent relationship, a “sacred union” to be formed only with
care and to be broken only by marital infidelity.

Ballou reserved his harshest judgments for “free-love,” a doctrine
all too fashionable among outside progressives, which he believed
was no more than a screen for sexual promiscuity: “It deceives the
understanding, perverts the conscience, vitiates the affections, ul-
timates in sin, destroys domestic happiness, and tends to universal
disorder.” Since Hopedale took pride in its openness to progressive
ideas, the defenders of its moral order were especially concerned
about the possible intrusion of the free-love doctrine, and in 1853
they were given reason for their concern by one of their more prominent members, Henry Fish (no relation to William Henry Fish), the auditor of the community during its early days and later the head of the Hopedale nursery.

Sometime in the early 1850s Henry Fish had become interested in the welfare of a Mrs. Seaver, a new member whom he had taken into his home probably as an act of charity, since she was described as “a great sufferer from domestic troubles, diseased bodily and mentally.” Eventually, his interest in Mrs. Seaver became too deep for his wife, who complained to the Council of Religion, Conciliation and Justice. An investigation convinced the council that there was fire to the smoke, and it reprimanded the guilty twosome. The incident might have ended there if they had not then defended their relationship on the basis of the free-love doctrine, an open defiance of their pledge to uphold pure chastity and an immediate cause for their dismissal from the community.39

Unfortunately for everyone, the affair also cost Hopedale one of its most talented members, Abby Price. According to her own account, Mrs. Price had tried to prevent what she took to be an innocent relationship from becoming a public scandal, only to be charged by the council “with knowing too much to keep dark.” Offended by the reprimand, she left the community for the Raritan Bay Union, an experiment with a tamed version of Fourierism in New Jersey, of which Clement Reed was originally the Treasurer; the Raritan Bay community eventually failed, but neither Price nor Reed returned to their old friends, even though Reed had buried three of his children in the Hopedale cemetery. Abby Price, whom Ballou long remembered as “an intelligent woman, with a literary and poetic genius,” died at Red Bank, New Jersey, in 1878 at the age of sixty-four.40

The incident was a major crisis for the small community. Hopedale responded by adopting ten resolutions “unequivocally” affirming pure chastity. The first resolution defined chastity as prohibiting “adultery, fornication, self-pollution, and lasciviousness, not only in external act, but also in purpose and in cherished desire.” The last expressed abhorrence of free-love theories and practices in any form, including “social refinement, individual sovereignty, physiological research, and philosophical progress.” The community also
issued a list of fifteen regulations intended to tighten control over the behavior of residents, especially of children, who were prohibited from being on the streets after nine o’clock and from playing except at designated times. Perhaps because it was anxious to keep out the wrong people, Hopedale made no attempt to conceal its tightened moral controls. “There was nothing so public and general, nothing so private and personal,” said the Practical Christian in 1854, “that it may claim exemption from criticism and judgment” in a society where religion was expected to “cover the whole field of human thought, feeling, and effort.”

These restrictions could be defended as required by Hopedale’s mission “to bring order out of confusion and beauty out of deformity.” They also had the effect of distorting Hopedale’s character in the eyes of outside observers. Early in 1854 one journal associated with free love took note of the prosperity and general progress of the village only to condemn it for its lack of freedom:

The most puritanical blue laws that ever disgraced the statutes of ‘the land of steady habits’ were not more oppressive and destructive of all spiritual and affectional growth and enjoyment than the rules and regulations, espionage, scandal, and tyranny of the directors of this association. . . . This petty, miserable, pervading social tyranny, felt more or less in all our society, culminates at Hopedale.

Ballou republished this attack in the Practical Christian with little comment except to urge all those who wanted sexual freedom to stay away from the community.

Such criticism, unfortunately, had a point. Efforts to regulate conduct did not square well with an experiment founded on the voluntary commitment of its members, a matter that Abby Price had touched on in 1852 before the scandal when, after praising the “improvement in moral discipline” made in the previous year, she said that the community gave too much attention to outward conformity and too little to “the spiritual element, that earnest faith, that enthusiasm, which would increase our power . . . over the world.” Hopedale’s prosperity, the turnover in its membership, and the ebb of the religious enthusiasm that had inspired it had begun to create an atmosphere in which conformity was easier to expect than true
moral commitment. Thus was Ballou's miniature Christian republic of devout Christian moralists becoming a society, recapitulating in little more than a decade the fate of every inspired social innovation.

In its own miniature way, however, it remained an extraordinary thing, a distinct creation set apart from the world and at least a little closer to heaven. If it was drifting from the moral enthusiasm of its primitive years, it was also reaching a time when its members could begin to reap the promised benefits of their toil, not only material benefits but the promise of one of their hymns:

May every year but draw more near
The time when strife shall cease
And Truth and Love all hearts shall move
To live in joy and peace.

Its religious commitments may have softened, but it had, even with its restraints, created conditions that allowed its members greater freedom to develop than they could have found outside. In its constitution Hopedale had bound itself to create a state "in which no individual shall suffer the evils of oppression, poverty, ignorance, or vice through the influence or neglect of others." If in 1853 it seemed preoccupied with vice, it had not forgotten the rest of this pledge.