

Seven Utopias of Mid-Nineteenth-Century New England

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PART I

COMMUNITY associations in New England during the mid-nineteenth century originated in a recognition that man is in need of improvement which he cannot totally effect as an individual. Unrest due to the Industrial Revolution, an economic recession, and the need for educational and religious reforms urged the fringe groups of the general populace toward utopian associations. These utopians were zealots, fanatics, and visionaries who knew what they wanted and were determined to establish communities which were essentially economic endeavors with distinctive philosophies to which the members subscribed. Along with Owenites, Shakers, Fourierites, Mormans, and other groups throughout America, New England was the home of seven fascinating spiritual communities during the mid-nineteenth century including Brook Farm, the most famous, Hopedale, Northampton, Fruitlands, the Putney Corporation, Wallingford, and the Come-Outers.

Brook Farm

Brook Farm was immediately accepted by the intellectuals as a better place for perfecting the species; for implementing philosophical living where dreams become reality; and for organizing a cooperative community upon a private-property basis. This philosophy

was Transcendental, a reaction against eighteenth-century materialism, stressing growth of soul, mind over matter, power of the will; stressing presence of ideas, realities, forces outside of and superior to the sensory factors.

These purposes along with the belief that the laborer owned the value of his labor; that all should labor as an honorable part of life; that there should be no religious creed adopted; no social rank; that education, medical attention, library services, public or recreational rooms and baths would be free for all; that the aged, ill and children under ten be provided for; and that truth, justice and order would be the governing principles of the society, were stated in the "Articles of Association." Emphasis was upon the school, which was well situated, well staffed, and operated upon Pestalozzian principles.

Brook Farm (April, 1841–September, 1847), called in the articles "The Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Education," then renamed the "Brook Farm Association for Industry and Education," and finally reorganized as the Brook Farm Phalanx, was located at West Roxbury, Massachusetts, then in Norfolk County, now in Suffolk County and within the city limits of Boston. It was a pleasant place with a brook and meadows, varied in contour with pine

woods close at hand and the Charles River nearby, comprised of approximately two hundred acres. Sand and gravel subsoil did not lend itself to farming but landscaping was achieved around the buildings. There was in the beginning only a farmhouse, "The Hive." A small square wooden building "The Eyrie" was built next on the highest point. Then a large double or twin house named "Pilgrim House." There was also a two-story workshop, sixty by forty, begun in 1843, that had an engine in the cellar and the printing press on the top floor. A barn, greenhouse, and Mrs. Alvord's small, gabled cottage of wood, together with the renting of a neighboring farmhouse called the "Nest" completed the community. The never-completed "Phalanstery" was built during the Brook Farm Phalanx period and burnt before occupancy. It was built as the unitary, wooden building, 175 feet long, three stories high, with kitchen, dining hall for 400, hall, lecture room and two public saloons in the basement; with a church or chapel, public halls and salons on the first; a hundred rooms for both single and double occupants on the second; and a spacious attic.

Founded by the Reverend George Ripley and his wife, Sophia Willard Ripley, with an initial membership of twenty growing to over 115, Brook Farm had among its more prominent members Charles A. Dana, John S. Dwight, Nathaniel Hawthorne (who would write his famous fictional account, *Blithedale Romance*), Warren Burton and Charles K. Newcomb, George P. Bradford, Minot Pratt, John Orvis and John Allen. People of lesser renown but of utmost value were Colson the cobbler; Lewis Ryckman, cordwainer; Peter

Baldwin, baker; Thomas Blake, handi-man; Frederick S. Cabot, clerk and bookkeeper; Ephraim Capen; John Glover Drew; Jean Pallisse; J. Homer Doucet; and among the women were Abby Morton, Georgianna Bruce, Marianne Ripley, Mrs. Almira Barlow.

Never members but often among the visitors were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Amos Bronson Alcott, Orestes A. Brownson, Horace Greeley, Albert Brisbane, James Russell Lowell, T. W. Higginson, Theodore Parker, George R. Russell and Francis G. Shaw, Margaret Fuller and Henry Thoreau, William Henry Channing, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Christopher Pearse Cranch, Isaac Hecker, and from overseas Robert Owen, Sir John Caldwell, and Charles Lane.

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Hopedale

"The Hopedale Community was a systematic attempt to establish an order of Human Society based upon sublime ideas of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, as taught and illustrated in the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Thus the Reverend Adin Ballou, founder of Hopedale, explains the purpose of this community.

One of the best-organized and best-managed of all Utopian communities, Hopedale was established under the name of Fraternal Community No. 1 in January of 1841. Within a year the thirty original members purchased about five hundred acres of land near Milford, Massachusetts. The name was changed to Hopedale—a combining of the "hopes" the members had for their community with the "Dale" that had at one time been the name for this land.

Within a short time some thirty families settled at Hopedale, each having its own house and garden. Also included in the village were a chapel (used for educational purposes during the week), three mechanics' buildings, barns and other types of sheds. At the peak of

its seventeen-years existence Hopedale boasted 175 members.

Listed among the more prominent members who resided at one time or another at Hopedale include Adin Ballou and his wife, Daniel Whitney, William and Abigail Draper Cook, Samuel and Barbara Colburn, Charles and Ruth Gladding, William and Ann Fish, Levi Tower, Henry Lillie, Nathan and Martha Harris, Anna Thwing Draper, Ebenezer Daggett Draper, and David and Mary Lamson.

Like many other Utopian communities of this time, Hopedale had its rules and standards by which its members lived. Each member was required to make a pledge to Christ. Faith, temperance, and nonresistance were the guidelines. According to its founder, the peculiarities of Hopedale were as follows:

1. It is a church of Christ . . . based on a simple declaration of faith in the religion of Jesus Christ . . . according to the scriptures of the New Testament. . . .
2. It is a Civil State, a miniature Christian Republic, existing within, peaceably subject to, and tolerated by the government of Massachusetts and the United States, but otherwise a commonwealth complete within itself. . . .
3. It is a universal religious, moral, philanthropic, and social reform Association. . . .

Ballou also listed the advantages of Hopedale to its members:

1. It affords a theoretical and practical illustration of the way whereby all human beings, willing to adopt it, may become individually and socially happy. . . .
2. It guarantees to all its members and dependents employment, at least adequate to a comfortable subsistence; relief in want, sickness or distress; decent opportunities . . . an orderly, well-regulated neighborhood . . . and a suitable sphere of individual enterprise and responsibility, in which each

one may, by due self-exertion, elevate himself to the highest point of his capabilities. . . .

3. It solves the problem which has so long puzzled Socialists, the harmonization of just individual freedom with social cooperation. . . .
4. It affords a peaceful and congenial home for all conscientious persons, of whatsoever religious sect, class or description heretofore, who now embrace practical Christianity. . . .
5. It affords a most desirable opportunity for those who mean to be practical Christians in the use of property, talent, skill or productive industry, to invest them. . . .
6. It affords small scope, place or encouragement for the unprincipled, corrupt, supremely selfish, proud, ambitious . . . idle, vicious, envious and mischiefmaking. . . .
7. It affords a beginning, a specimen and a presage of a new and glorious social Christendom—a grand confederation of similar Communities—a world ultimately regenerated and Edenized. . . .

In the literary field the greatest accomplishment of Hopedale was the *Practical Christian Communism, a Conversational Exposition of the True System of Human Society*. This 655-page volume written by Adin Ballou reviews the social reorganization theories which were experimented in the United States, comparing them with the Hopedale community.

Four years later, in 1858, the community of Hopedale came to an end—a rather interesting end. One of the members—Ebenezer Daggett Draper—took the chair of Presidency after Adin Ballou. Although an avid backer of the Hopedale community and its purpose, Ebenezer's

brother George felt the whole idea ridiculous. These two brothers were partners in a business outside the Hopedale operations, and gradually Ebenezer became more and more in these outside operations as he became more and more wealthy from them. Consequently he lost interest in Hopedale, although he bought three-fourths of the joint stock of Hopedale. One day Ebenezer informed Mr. Ballou that Hopedale could no longer exist, and the matter was settled immediately—with one condition; Ebenezer was to pay any debts of the community. This he did, and this ended the seventeen-year-old Utopian community of Hopedale.

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To be continued.