

Hopedale Lesson Plan – Background Information

Hopedale

Hopedale is a small Massachusetts town located in the Blackstone Valley. Before it became a bedroom community, or even a company town, it was a commune.

The Hopedale Community of Practical Christians, called Fraternal Order #1, lasted 14 years, from 1842 to 1856.

During the antebellum period (the decades preceding the Civil War) Hopedale was founded as a Christian socialist utopian community. The commune was led by the radical abolitionist, minister, and theologian Adin Ballou. Though fairly obscure today, Ballou was called “the foremost American writer” by philosopher Leo Tolstoy.

In the years leading up to the creation of the commune, Ballou and others published *The Standard of Practical Christianity*. This document includes the following declaration, which outlines the principles of Practical Christianity for the Community: “we declare our utter abhorrence of war, slavery, intemperance, licentiousness, covetousness, and worldly ambition in all their forms. We cannot partake in these sins nor apologize for them, nor remain neutral concerning them, nor refrain from rebuking their various manifestations; but must forever abstain from and oppose them.”

The members of the commune in Hopedale governed themselves based on a set of shared principles. People in Hopedale had to agree to live according to a set of values including peace, equality, moderation, faith, and brotherhood. Many identified as abolitionists, people against the practice of slavery.

Abolition

Adin Ballou was heavily involved in abolitionist circles. He befriended many other activists, including William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Burleigh, Samuel May, and Frederick Douglass. Ballou attended anti-slavery conventions and held officer positions in branches of the New England Anti-Slavery Society. But the work of Ballou and the Hopedale Community did not stop there when it came to abolition.

On the anniversary of the Emancipation of the West Indies, Hopedale residents held an annual gathering in a place called Nelson’s Grove (where the Sacred Heart Church stands today). This celebration served as a vehicle to further the cause of abolition in the United States. The gathering attracted both well-known and unknown abolitionists and fugitives from across the country, who came to listen, share ideas, and give speeches to the attendants. Participants included Charles Burleigh, Henry Wright, Anna Dickinson, Parker Pillsbury, Wendell Phillips, Lucy Stone Blackwell, Abby Kelley Foster, Henry “Box Brown”, Isaac Hopper, Samuel May, Abby Hills Price, Jonathan Walker, Frederick Douglass, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, William Lloyd Garrison, and Sojourner Truth. This annual gathering was “visited by not less than a thousand” according to Adin Ballou.

Some members of the Community also housed fugitives freeing themselves from slavery. The noted abolitionist Frederick Douglass sent at least one fugitive, a woman named Rosetta Hall, to Hopedale. Douglass and May also sent their sons to the Hopedale Home School to be educated by members of the Community.

During the Civil War, Ballou preached on abolition and encouraged the remaining Practical Christians to continue supporting the cause. The women-run Sewing Circle fundraised during the war, and made clothes for the fugitives at Port Royal, SC.

Other Conflict

While Hopedale was home to many radical abolitionists, this was not the only cause important to Community members.

Many, like Ballou, were anti-slavery because of their other morals; specifically, they were against all forms of violence and oppression. In the years immediately preceding the Civil War, Ballou became more outspoken against the use of violence for the cause of abolition. He believed that the use of violence as a means to end slavery was immoral. Ballou found himself at odds with many other abolitionists, including his friend William Lloyd Garrison, because of his pacifist views.

For more information, see:

- Adin Ballou et. al, *The Standard of Practical Christianity* (1839)
- Adin Ballou, *Autobiography of Adin Ballou: Annotated Edition* (2018)
- Anna Thwing Field et. al, *Hopedale Reminiscences* (1910)
- Linda Hixon, *Following the Threads: The Hopedale Sewing Circle, 1874-1924* (2020)