

Draper Corporation Headquarters Local Historic District

In many ways, the history of the Draper Corporation is the history of Hopedale. Ebenezer Draper was an early follower of Adin Ballou, considered to be the founder of Hopedale, and came to Hopedale with those first Practical Christian Community members. Ebenezer had inherited the patent to a weaving temple from his father, Ira Draper; the device stretches cloth width-wise on the loom, making it more quickly and evenly woven. Because the Community rejected communism as a founding principle, individual businesses like Ebenezer's were able to grow and, in some cases, thrive.

A true Practical Christian who believed in sharing the profits of his business, Ebenezer Draper was not necessarily the best of businessmen. He used the extra revenue from the weaving temple production to shore up the community by purchasing shares of community stock. Ebenezer's brother, George, joined the Community in 1855. As the eldest son, Ebenezer held his father's patent, but George wanted to expand what would become a family business.

Unlike his brother, George Draper was an intelligent businessman. He had already formed a partnership with Warren Dutcher, buying his patent on an improved temple, and enticing Dutcher to come to town to manufacture the product. George Draper was not content to be a simple machinist or even business owner in this Practical Christian socialist community, as Edward K. Spann wrote in his history of Hopedale: "Ballou had envisioned a society in which everyone would be content with rewards for their talents within the limits acceptable to a small-town middle class, but the idea of limiting income to the wages of a first-class operative and dividends to 4 percent was intolerable to Draper."

When the Community hit a financial rough patch in 1856 while Ebenezer was president, the Drapers decided to help the members by essentially taking over. By that time, the brothers owned three-quarters of the joint stock in the town, and their intervention seemed providential. Adin Ballou wrote about the takeover later in his autobiography, describing George Draper as having "only dubious faith in Community life. He was a natural born man of the world, given to money-making, impatient of high ideals, but thoroughly honest in his opinions, upright in his dealings, and of unquestioned integrity and honor. He was moreover inflexible of will and purpose, and when once determined upon an object, he pursued it without hesitation or prevarication."

The move positioned George Draper to build what would become New England's largest textile machinery company in a town he and his company controlled, right down to the simplest detail. "Overseeing development was a single enterprise; all factories, houses, and community facilities were built to serve the company and its work force," John S. Garner wrote in *The Model Company Town* in 1984. "As if to ensure residential expansion and permanence, streets and sidewalks were singled out for special attention. They presented the image of a well-cared-for town and were often cited by visitors for their outstanding condition."

The creation of Hopedale was deliberate. The Draper Company, which would later become Draper Corporation, began building housing for its workers. Those houses could have been slap-dash or cheaply constructed, but George Draper was creating a town that would reflect his company and attract the best and brightest workers to the area. "Draper insisted upon building well-constructed streets, factories, and houses, and thus quality design followed in turn from the product to the town," Garner

noted. And that opinion is reflected in the writings of the period. An article from the *Boston Herald* stated in 1887, "The Messers. Draper leave no stone unturned in their endeavors to make the lives of their employees a happy lot. Good and remunerative wages are paid, and the employment is steady and reliable. A faithful and skilled workman is assured of a life situation, and thus he can have no apprehensions with regard to his latter days."

Even the next generation wanted to continue the perfection that became Hopedale. William F. Draper, George's son, did not even allow street signs to clutter the beauty of the town. According to Garner, William wanted so much to showcase the "natural setting with wide vistas that he refused to place distracting numbers or addresses on company houses. Not until after the turn of the century was mail delivered to an individual's home. The result of site protection enabled Hopedale to maintain as much as possible the naturalness of its environment and to avoid all the ugly man-made obstacles that normally obstruct yards and streets."

The Draper vision worked, and the town and the corporation grew. The remaining existing Draper plant buildings have fallen into disrepair through years of vacancy and neglect, but the Draper main corporate office is another matter. Built between 1910 and 1911 and designed by Milford architect Robert Allen Cook, the building at 25 Hopedale Street looks almost exactly as it did over a century ago. Standing directly across from the employee entrance to the erecting shop, which still fronts at 24 Hopedale Street, Kathy Kelley Broomer wrote about the beauty of this corporate office for the 2002 National Register of Historic Places nomination. "Details include rustication of the basement level, splayed windows, a parapet and cornice, and door surrounds, string courses, and oversized keystones executed in red terra cotta. The Main Office building remains an imposing presence in the streetscape of the historic district and, with the erecting shop directly across the street, contributes to the 'canyon' effect created by large corporate buildings in this block of Hopedale Street." The building was sympathetically re-developed in 1998, retaining much of its original character with only slight changes to the façade and a new main entrance at the back. Now Atria Draper Place, an assisted living facility for the elderly, this building is an already an example of what a Local Historic District can achieve.

"Hopedale would never have developed into a model company town had it not been for the personal attachment and benevolent supervision of the Draper family," Garner wrote. The visual appearance of Hopedale would change beyond recognition without the face of the remaining buildings of the Draper Corporation, and most importantly without the beautiful restoration of the Draper Corporation Headquarters at 25 Hopedale Street.